COMPOSING OURSELVES AND OUR WORLD



Elizabeth Burrows, Angela Fowler, Heath Fowler, and Amy Locklear
Auburn University at Montgomery

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Composing Ourselves and our World

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About this Book

This textbook is meant for first year English Composition Courses. The text covers the essentials of composition and rhetoric in a recursive manner and introduces research skills.

When you are eager to get started on the coursework in your major that will prepare you for your career, getting excited about an introductory college writing course can be difficult. However, regardless of your field of study, honing your writing skills—and your reading and critical-thinking skills—gives you a more solid academic foundation.

In college, academic expectations change from what you may have experienced in high school. The quantity of work you are expected to do is increased. When instructors expect you to read pages upon pages or study hours and hours for one particular course, managing your work load can be challenging.

The quality of the work you do also changes. It is not enough to understand course material and summarize it on an exam. You will also be expected to seriously engage with new ideas by reflecting on them, analyzing them, critiquing them, making connections, drawing conclusions, or finding new ways of thinking about a given subject. Educationally, you are moving into deeper waters. A good introductory writing course will help you swim.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

Part I: The Composition Process

The Composition Process at the college level is about expanding your writing abilities. The first course in a series of first-year writing courses focuses on introducing students to the concepts and practices of rhetoric and composition. The course prepares students to compose texts in a variety of genres for various purposes, audiences, and contexts, including digital environments. The course emphasizes analytical and critical skills: rhetorical analysis, critical thinking, argument, and reflection. Students use writing processes to draft, peer review, revise, edit, and reflect on their work. The course assignments and projects prepare students for varied writing contexts at the university and in their future professional career. This text contains readings and assignments that prepare students for success.

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1: The Composing Process

1.1 Writing for College
1.2 What is Academic Writing
1.3 Your Role as a Learner



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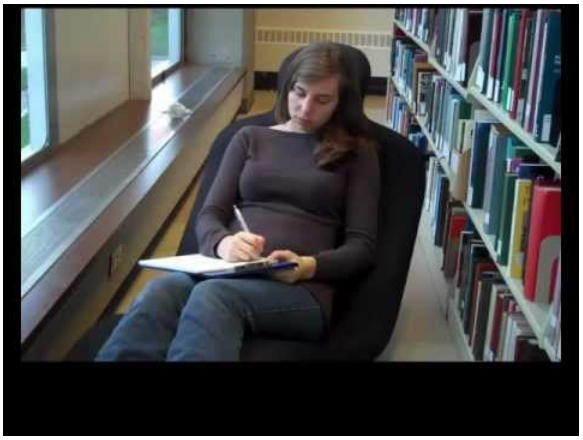
1.1: Writing for College

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.



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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 *sentence* 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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1.2: What is Academic Writing

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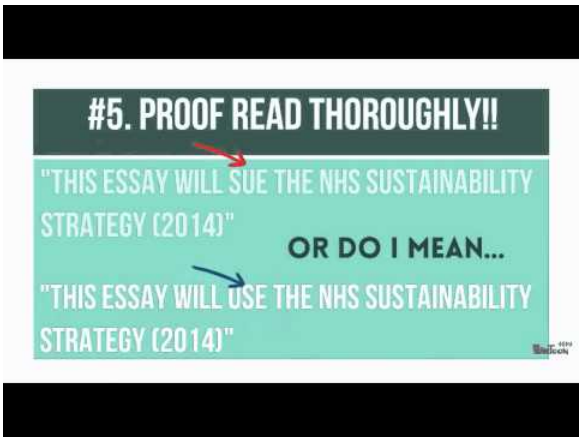
“What Is ‘Academic’ Writing?” by L. Lennie Irvin

“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."

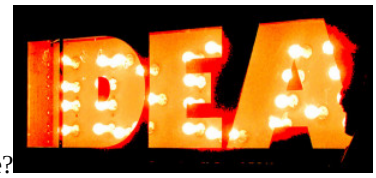
1. It is an argument, persuasion essay that in its broadest sense MAKES A POINT and SUPPORTS IT. (We have already discussed this argumentative nature of academic writing at length.)
2. The point ("claim" or "thesis") of a critical essay is interpretive in nature. That means the point is debatable and 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.

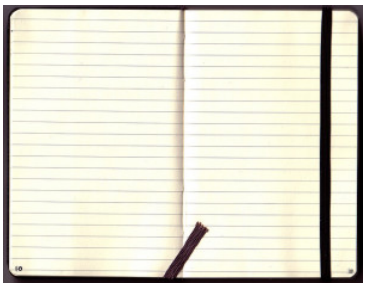
We respect the writings of experts. And, guess what; you are an expert! You are the best expert of all on one subject—*your own life experiences*. So when we write personal essays, we research our own life experiences and describe those experiences with rich and compelling language to convince our reader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

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

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).

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.

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

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.

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.

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?

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.

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 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.

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.

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

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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1.3: 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, *some*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: Critical Concepts

2.1 Rhetoric / Rhetorical	 [1]

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2.1: Rhetoric / Rhetorical

Article Links:

“Rhetorical Context” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

- Define the three factors of rhetorical context: purpose, author, and audience.
- Identify ways the audience analysis helps you make effective writing decisions.

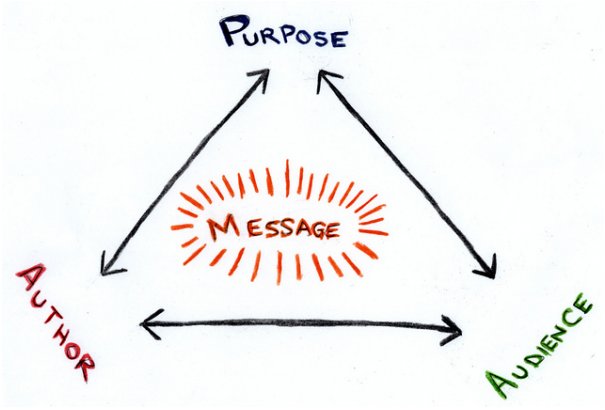


A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=45

Rhetorical Context

provided by Lumen Learning

Any piece of writing is shaped by external factors before the first word is ever set down on the page. These factors are referred to as the **rhetorical situation**, or **rhetorical context**, and are often presented in the form of a pyramid.



The three key factors–purpose, author, and audience–all work together to influence what the text itself says, and how it says it. In this chapter, we will examine these along with the writing process and writing for transfer.

Purpose

Purpose will sometimes be given to you (by a teacher, for example), while other times, you will decide for yourself. As the author, it’s up to you to make sure that purpose is clear not only for yourself, but also–especially–for your audience. If your purpose is not

clear, your audience is not likely to receive your intended message.

There are, of course, many different reasons to write (e.g., to inform, to entertain, to persuade, to ask questions), and you may find that some writing has more than one purpose. When this happens, be sure to consider any conflict between purposes, and remember that you will usually focus on one main purpose as primary.

Bottom line: Thinking about your purpose before you begin to write can help you create a more effective piece of writing.

Why Purpose Matters

- If you've ever listened to a lecture or read an essay and wondered "so what" or "what is this person talking about," then you know how frustrating it can be when an author's purpose is not clear. By clearly defining your purpose before you begin writing, it's less likely you'll be that author who leaves the audience wondering.
- If readers can't identify the purpose in a text, they usually quit reading. You can't deliver a message to an audience who quits reading.
- If a teacher can't identify the purpose in your text, they will likely assume you didn't understand the assignment and, chances are, you won't receive a good grade.

Audience

In order for your writing to be maximally effective, you have to think about the audience you're writing for and adapt your writing approach to their needs, expectations, backgrounds, and interests. Being aware of your audience helps you make better decisions about what to say and how to say it. For example, you have a better idea if you will need to define or explain any terms, and you can make a more conscious effort not to say or do anything that would offend your audience.

Sometimes you know who will read your writing – for example, if you are writing an email to your boss. Other times you will have to guess who is likely to read your writing – for example, if you are writing a newspaper editorial. You will often write with a primary audience in mind, but there may be secondary and tertiary audiences to consider as well.

What to Think About

When analyzing your audience, consider these points. Doing this should make it easier to create a profile of your audience, which can help guide your writing choices.

Background-knowledge or Experience — In general, you don't want to merely repeat what your audience already knows about the topic you're writing about; you want to build on it. On the other hand, you don't want to talk over their heads. Anticipate their amount of previous knowledge or experience based on elements like their age, profession, or level of education.

Expectations and Interests — Your audience may expect to find specific points or writing approaches, especially if you are writing for a teacher or a boss. Consider not only what they *do* want to read about, but also what they *do not* want to read about.

Attitudes and Biases — Your audience may have predetermined feelings about you or your topic, which can affect how hard you have to work to win them over or appeal to them. The audience's attitudes and biases also affect their expectations – for example, if they expect to disagree with you, they will likely look for evidence that you have considered their side as well as your own.

Demographics — Consider what else you know about your audience, such as their age, gender, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, political preferences, religious affiliations, job or professional background, and area of residence. Think about how these demographics may affect how much background your audience has about your topic, what types of expectations or interests they have, and what attitudes or biases they may have.

Useful Questions

Consider how the answers to the following questions may affect your writing:

- What is my primary purpose for writing? How do I want my audience to think, feel, or respond after they read my writing?
- Do my audience's expectations affect my purpose? Should they?
- How can I best get my point across (e.g., tell a story, argue, cite other sources)?
- Do I have any secondary or tertiary purposes? Do any of these purposes conflict with one another or with my primary purpose?

Applying Your Analysis to Your Writing

Here are some general rules about writing, each followed by an explanation of how audience might affect it. Consider how you might adapt these guidelines to your specific situation and audience. (Note: This is not an exhaustive list. Furthermore, you need not follow the order set up here, and you likely will not address all of these approaches.)[1]

Add information readers need to understand your document / omit information readers don't need. Part of your audience may know a lot about your topic, while others don't know much at all. When this happens, you have to decide if you should provide explanation or not. If you don't offer explanation, you risk alienating or confusing those who lack the information. If you offer explanation, you create more work for yourself and you risk boring those who already know the information, which may negatively affect the larger view those readers have of you and your work. In the end, you may want to consider how many people need an explanation, whether those people are in your primary audience (rather than a secondary audience), how much time you have to complete your writing, and any length limitations placed on you.

Change the level of the information you currently have. Even if you have the right information, you might be explaining it in a way that doesn't make sense to your audience. For example, you wouldn't want to use highly advanced or technical vocabulary in a document for first-grade students or even in a document for a general audience, such as the audience of a daily newspaper, because most likely some (or even all) of the audience wouldn't understand you.

Add examples to help readers understand. Sometimes just changing the level of information you have isn't enough to get your point across, so you might try adding an example. If you are trying to explain a complex or abstract issue to an audience with a low education level, you might offer a metaphor or an analogy to something they are more familiar with to help them understand. Or, if you are writing for an audience that disagrees with your stance, you might offer examples that create common ground and/or help them see your perspective.

Change the level of your examples. Once you've decided to include examples, you should make sure you aren't offering examples your audience finds unacceptable or confusing. For example, some teachers find personal stories unacceptable in academic writing, so you might use a metaphor instead.

Change the organization of your information. Again, you might have the correct information, but you might be presenting it in a confusing or illogical order. If you are writing a paper about physics for a physics professor who has his or her PhD, chances are you won't need to begin your paper with a lot of background. However, you probably would want to include background information in the beginning of your paper if you were writing for a fellow student in an introductory physics class.

Strengthen transitions. You might make decisions about transitions based on your audience's expectations. For example, most teachers expect to find topic sentences, which serve as transitions between paragraphs. In a shorter piece of writing such as a memo to co-workers, however, you would probably be less concerned with topic sentences and more concerned with transition words. In general, if you feel your readers may have a hard time making connections, providing transition words (e.g., "therefore" or "on the other hand") can help lead them.

Write stronger introductions – both for the whole document and for major sections. In general, readers like to get the big picture up front. You can offer this in your introduction and thesis statement, or in smaller introductions to major sections within your document. However, you should also consider how much time your audience will have to read your document. If you are writing for a boss who already works long hours and has little or no free time, you wouldn't want to write an introduction that rambles on for two and a half pages before getting into the information your boss is looking for.

Create topic sentences for paragraphs and paragraph groups. A topic sentence (the first sentence of a paragraph) functions much the same way an introduction does – it offers readers a preview of what's coming and how that information relates to the overall document or your overall purpose. As mentioned earlier, some readers will expect topic sentences. However, even if your audience isn't expecting them, topic sentences can make it easier for readers to skim your document while still getting the main idea and the connections between smaller ideas.

Change sentence style and length. Using the same types and lengths of sentences can become boring after awhile. If you already worry that your audience may lose interest in your issue, you might want to work on varying the types of sentences you use.

Use graphics, or use different graphics. Graphics can be another way to help your audience visualize an abstract or complex topic. Sometimes a graphic might be more effective than a metaphor or step-by-step explanation. Graphics may also be an effective choice if you know your audience is going to skim your writing quickly; a graphic can be used to draw the reader's eye to information you want to highlight. However, keep in mind that some audiences may see graphics as inappropriate.

Author

The final unique aspect of anything written down is who it is, exactly, that does the writing. In some sense, this is the part you have the most control over–it's you who's writing, after all! You can harness the aspects of yourself that will make the text most effective to its audience, for its purpose.

Analyzing yourself as an author allows you to make explicit why your audience should pay attention to what you have to say, and why they should listen to you on the particular subject at hand.

Questions for Consideration

- What personal motivations do you have for writing about this topic?
- What background knowledge do you have on this subject matter?
- What personal experiences directly relate to this subject? How do those personal experiences influence your perspectives on the issue?
- What formal training or professional experience do you have related to this subject?
- What skills do you have as a communicator? How can you harness those in this project?
- What should audience members know about you, in order to trust what you have to tell them? How will you convey that in your writing?

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1. (Rules adapted from David McMurrey's online text, *Power Tools for Technical Communication*) ↵

LICENSES AND ATTRIBUTIONS

Important Concepts

rhetorical context

purpose

background-knowledge or experience

expectations and interests

attitudes and biases

demographics

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3: Defining the Composing Process

3.1 Invention As Process
3.2 Brainstorming Techniques



[1]

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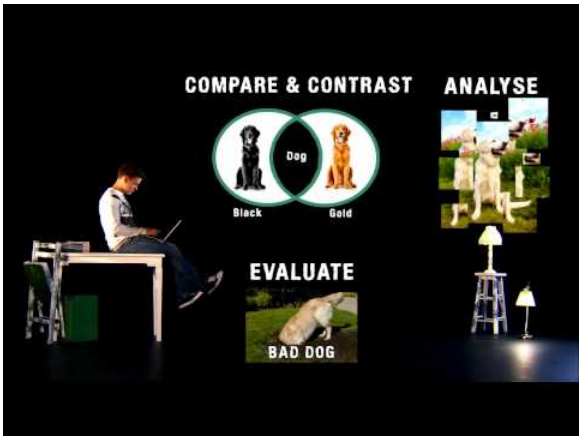
3.1: Invention As Process

Article links:

“Rhetoric and Composition/Analyzing Assignments” provided by Wikibooks

Chapter Preview

- Define the writing process.
- List strategies for analyzing an assignment.
- Identify the differences among the research paper, a narrative, rhetorical analysis, and a summary paper.



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Rhetoric and Composition/Analyzing Assignments

Snowflakes, Fingerprints, and Assignments

Writing assignments in college differ as much as instructors. There is no one guidebook, approach, or set of rules that college teachers will consult when putting together their coursework. Since each assignment will always be unique, it is important to devote time to thoroughly understanding what is being asked of you before beginning. Don’t wait until the night before the work is due to begin asking questions and delving in. The sooner you understand and approach the assignment’s requirements, the less time you will spend second-guessing (and needlessly revising) your writing.

Analyzing an Assignment

You will likely encounter many different kinds of writing assignments in college, and it would be nearly impossible to list all of them. However, regardless of genre, there are some basic strategies one can use to approach these assignments constructively.

- **Read the assignment sheet early and thoroughly.** An assignment sheet may be lengthy, but resist the temptation to skim it. Observe and interpret every detail of the text. Moreover, it is essential to focus on the key words of the subject matter being discussed. It would be unfortunate to hand in an incomplete or misguided assignment because you did not properly read and understand the guidelines. Since you can easily overlook details on the first reading, read the assignment sheet a second time. As you are reading, highlight areas where you have questions, and also mark words you feel are particularly important. Ask yourself why your professor has given this assignment. How does it relate to what you are studying in class? Pay attention to key words, such as *compare*, *contrast*, *analyze*, etc. Who is your audience? Should the paper be written in a formal or informal tone? Is there documentation required? If a specific number of sources are required, how many must be books vs. online sources? What type of citation is called for: APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.? Is there a page or word count minimum/maximum? Are you required to submit a draft before the final copy? Will there be peer review?

- **Get answers to your questions.** After thoroughly reading the assignment sheet, you might not have questions right away. However, after reading it again, either before or or after you try to start the assignment, you might find that you have questions. Don't play a guessing game when it comes to tackling assignment criteria–ask the right person for help: the instructor. Discuss any and all questions with the person who assigned the work, either in person or via email. Visit him or her during office hours or stay after class. Do not wait until the last minute, as doing so puts your grade at risk. Don't be shy about asking your professors questions. Not only will you better your understanding and the outcome of your paper, but professors tend to enjoy and benefit from student inquiry, as questions help them rethink their assignments and improve the clarity of their expectations. You likely are not the only student with a question, so be the one who is assertive and responsible enough to get answers. In the worst case scenario, when you have done all of these things and a professor still fails to provide you with the clarity you are looking for, discuss your questions with fellow classmates.
- **Writing Centers.** Many colleges and universities have a writing center. Tutors are helpful consultants for reviewing writing assignments both before and after you begin. If you feel somewhat confident about what you need to include in your writing assignment, bring your completed outline and/or the first draft of your paper together with your assignment sheet. Tutors can also review your final draft before its submission to your professor. Many writing centers allow you to make appointments online for convenience and may also have "walk-in" availability. It is a good idea to check out the available options a week or so in advance of when you will actually need the appointment, or even longer if it will be during mid-term or finals week.
- **Create a timeline.** Set due dates for yourself, whether they be to have a topic picked or a whole rough draft completed. Procrastination rarely results in a good paper. Some school libraries offer helpful computer programs that can create an effective assignment timeline for you. This is a helpful option for new, inexperienced writers who have not yet learned the art of analyzing assignments, and who are not familiar with the amount of time that is required for the college writing process. Remember, late papers may or may not be accepted by your instructor, and even if they are your grade will likely be reduced. Don't sell yourself short with late submissions.

Prewriting and Brainstorming



Prewriting Analysis

Every writing assignment from every discipline requires the formulation of complex ideas. Thus, once the assignment guidelines have been thoroughly considered, you should begin to explore how you plan structure your work in order to meet them. While this is often considered to be the start of the writing process, it is also an essential part of assignment analysis, as it is here that the assignment is broken down into the most digestible parts. Such a process can be done either individually or in a group, depending on the situation.

- **Sample Assignments**

  As discussed earlier, instructors will come up with any number of assignments, most of which will stress different types of composition. In each section below, there are sample assignment directions and suggestions on how to proceed. What follows is not meant to be a comprehensive list of assignments, but rather a short list of the most common assignments you can expect to see in an introductory English course. Many assignments not listed here are simply creative variations of these basic directives. For example, you could approach a visual analysis the same way you would a rhetorical analysis; an argument paper is similar to a research paper, perhaps with a shorter argument. The techniques you use in writing a narrative can also translate into writing a short story or observational essay.

  Research Paper

For this paper, you will take a position on a topic of either local or national interest. Research the topic thoroughly, making sure you know all sides of the debate, and decide what your position will be.

Your task is to write an 8 to 10 page research paper convincing your audience of your point of view. You are required to use at least 8 sources, 4 of which should be scholarly (peer reviewed). You will use MLA format for your in-text citations and Works Cited page. Remember, the key to a good debate is knowing the opposition. Therefore, some of your sources and paper should be dedicated to such. Use this as an opportunity to show how your viewpoint is conclusive.

You will likely have to write a research paper of a significant length during college. Students are usually overwhelmed by the page count and the struggle to come up with a paper topic. Sometimes, in an attempt to make sure he or she reaches the page minimum, students choose very broad research categories like welfare or the death penalty. Believe it or not, these extensive topics generally do not make for great papers, simply because there is too much information to cover. Narrow topics allow for more in-depth research and writing. Choosing a topic takes time and research, so don't be surprised if your instructor requires your topic ahead of time. This is to make sure you do not leave all of your research until the last minute. Look online for topics that interest you and write down a few notes about what is going on in that field. Since a research paper generally involves an argument, you must pick a topic that has two sides. One-sided, fact-based arguments such as "smoking is bad for your health," are not suitable for research papers.

Look at the assignment sheet for key words. What is the purpose of the paper? To argue. What are your requirements? Not only are there page requirements, but also source requirements. What are scholarly sources? How do you judge the credibility of a source? Are you familiar with MLA?

There is one mistake that is very easy to make: confusing an argumentative research paper with an expository one. Don't let your argumentative research paper become an informational report where you simply list information on a topic (expository writing). Unless explicitly stated, that is not your assignment.

Narrative

A ***narrative*** can be defined as a story or account of an experience or event. Think of a moment or experience that you found to be particularly important, meaningful, humorous, etc., and describe this event. Events do not have to be extraordinary large or dramatic to be important and fun to read–a snapshot of what happened while you were sitting at a stoplight can be just as entertaining as a story about being in a tornado.

Narratives are a favorite first assignment for instructors, as it is assumed that most people find it easiest to write about what they are familiar with. At the same time, the idea of self-reflective writing can be very intimidating. Most students have fantastic stories to tell, but inevitably edit themselves too early by worrying that their stories might not be "important" enough.

However, the assignment clearly states that you should not worry about your narrative concerning a large event. One of the key words is "describe." Therefore, the most important part of the assignment is your use of description ("show, don't tell"). Prewrite and describe a few ideas you might want to talk about. Pick one of them and start writing down as many descriptive details as you can think of about the event. Who were you with? Where were you? What was the weather like? What did the building look like? What were you thinking? How did you feel? What did you learn? Recording these concrete details will help guide you through your narrative. Don't forget to include as many sensory perceptions (taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell) as possible to paint the clearest picture of what you are trying to describe to your reader.

At this point, you still might be worried about the "importance" of the story. While it is true that your story should come to some sort of point, themes usually develop naturally in a story. If you begin your story with an agenda, you'll often find yourself describing the theme and not the event itself. Allow the themes to develop, and do not try to force them unto the page.

Rhetorical Analysis

A ***rhetorical analysis*** calls for students to closely read a text and determine several characteristics about it (author, context, purpose, emotional appeal/effects, etc).

At first, a rhetorical analysis sounds somewhat difficult. However, analyzing just means making a conscious effort to read each word carefully and think about what the author is doing. The first step would be to read the piece, not once, but two or three times. Highlight important passages and take notes. For this assignment, the instructor wanted students to write about ethos,

logos, and pathos, which are rhetorical terms you should become familiar with. Pay attention to specific word choices that may evoke emotion, or any facts the author may have put forward in the text. Look at the background of the author as well as the time period in which he or she was writing. Consider the tone of the piece. Is it formal/informal/serious/humorous? These are all things to keep in mind while reading. Make an ongoing list of the author's rhetorical techniques that you may want to discuss in your paper.

Remember to be mindful of your essay's organization. It is easy to discuss three different topics in one paragraph and jump back and forth from one idea to the next, but this makes it difficult for your reader to follow. Also, do not forget that this is not a reflection. For this assignment, the instructor isn't concerned with your reaction to the text, or your ability to summarize; he or she wants to gauge your analytical skills.

Summary/Response Paper

Read Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Give a brief summary of the article and a response. Cite specific examples and avoid generalizations.

Before writing a summary, it is important to use your critical reading skills. Plan on reading the article at least two, but preferably three times.

- Now you are ready to summarize the article. In a ***summary***, you use *your own words* to describe the *author's main points*. This means that the author's minor ideas will be left out. If you choose to include some of the author's exact words, remember to enclose them in quotation marks. Every summary needs a citation because, while the words are your own, the ideas are not.

  While writing a summary may be a familiar assignment from high school, college instructors will frequently require a response. Writing a response is explaining your reaction to the text. However, statements such as "I did/did not like it" are not sufficient. Not only must you be more thoughtful and academic with your response, but you should also support what you say. For example, if you think that the author did not think sufficiently explain one of his main ideas, find the exact places in the text where the author's writing is weak, incomplete, or confusing. In the same way, describe your positive reactions to the text as well.

  Your summary and response should be in at least two different paragraphs; don't combine the author's ideas and your reactions in a single paragraph. However, your instructor doesn't want two huge paragraphs, so divide the summary and/or the response into multiple paragraphs if necessary. Shorter paragraphs help you, as a writer, stay organized and helps the reader follow your ideas. The summary and response should each be about one page.

  Finishing the Assignment

  Remember, no matter what the assignment, identifying key words in guidelines can help you determine what type of thinking and ability the professor wants you to demonstrate. The following six areas of competencies are from Bloom's Taxonomy. To learn more, visit: http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/style/taxonomy.htm.

  - ***Knowledge***: This becomes evident in how well you remember the subject matter, such as the major ideas, dates, places, events, etc. Questions may begin with: Identify, describe, examine, when, where, who.
  - ***Comprehension***: How well you understand the information presented. Can you describe the information in your own words? Questions may begin with: Interpret, contrast, predict, discuss.
  - ***Application***: Can you use the principles learned to solve other problems in different situations? Questions may begin with: Illustrate, examine, modify, experiment, relate.
  - ***Analysis***: Can you recognize hidden meanings, see patterns, identify the underlying parts? Questions may begin with: Separate, order, connect, classify, divide, explain.
  - ***Synthesis***: Can you relate knowledge from different areas to draw conclusions? Questions may begin with: Modify, rearrange, substitute, design, invent, generalize.
  - ***Evaluation***: This involves verifying the value of the evidence when solving controversies, developing opinions, etc. Questions may begin with: Decide, convince, select, compare, summarize.

  If you need clarification on what your instructor is looking for, do not hesitate to ask. After you have finished your paper, be sure to double-check that you have fulfilled all the requirements. Proofread your paper multiple times before handing in the

final copy.

Important Concepts

keywords

prewriting

diagramming

mapping

brainstorming

narrative

rhetorical analysis

summary

knowledge

comprehension

application

analysis

synthesis

evaluation

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3.2: Brainstorming Techniques

Article links:

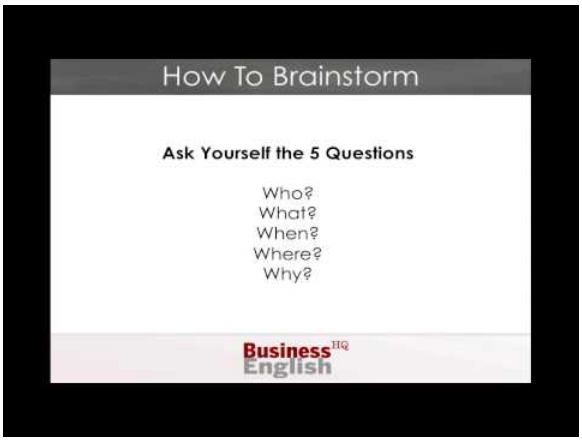
“Idea Mapping” provided by University of Minnesota

“Journalistic Questions” provided by Writing Commons

“Clustering: Spider Maps” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter Preview

- List the benefits of brainstorming.
- Describe the idea mapping method of brainstorming.



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Idea Mapping

provided by University of Minnesota

Idea mapping 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, start with your general topic in a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Then write specific ideas around it and use lines or arrows to connect them together. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of.



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.



Journalistic Questions

provided by Writing Commons

Question		
1. Who?	Who is doing this?	Who will do this?
2. What?	What did they do?	What was it for?
3. Where?	Where did they do it?	Where is it going to happen?
4. Why?	Why are they doing this?	Why are they doing it?
5. When?	When is it happening?	When is it going to happen?
6. How?	How did they do it?	How do they hope to do it?



Clustering: Spider Maps

provided by Writing Commons

Use visual brainstorming to develop and organize your ideas.

Cluster diagrams, spider maps, mind maps–these terms are used interchangeably to describe the practice of ***visually brainstorming*** about a topic. Modern readers love cluster diagrams and spider maps because they enable readers to discern your purpose and organization in a moment.

When Is Clustering/Spider Mapping Useful?

As depicted below, writers use clustering to help sketch out ideas and suggest logical connections. In this way, writers use cluster diagrams and spider maps as an invention tool. When clustering, they do not impose an order on their thinking. Instead, after placing the idea in the center of the page, they then free-associate.

Remembering that the goal is to generate ideas, make the drawing visually attractive, perhaps using color or a variety of geometric shapes and layout formats. Typical cluster and spider maps resemble the following:

- **Branches**: If ideas seem closely related to you, consider using small branches, like tree limbs, to represent their similarities.
- **Arrows**: Use arrows to represent processes or cause and effect relationships.
- **Groupings**: If a number of ideas are connected, go ahead and put a circle around them.
- **Bullets**: List ideas that seem related.

In addition to being a powerful invention strategy, cluster maps and spider maps can also be used to represent complex relationships to readers.

Online Cluster/Spider Maps

1. **Visual thesaurus**: This online software application draws cluster diagrams around words. Plug in a word and watch similar terms spin around it. Give it time and you'll see many interesting associations.
2. **Forest management**: View an example of a hand-drawn cluster map.
3. **Sociograms: Two well-functioning teams**: Social network analysis encourages visual depictions of people's collaborative networks.
4. **Social networks**: Examples of how maps of social networks can be drawn. Evaluating the alcohol environment: Here cluster maps are drawn to show correlations between bars and violent crime.
5. **Crime patterns made clear for Portland, Oregon, citizens via Internet mapping**: This essay provides examples of how crime maps show patterns in criminal be

When Are Clustering/Spider Maps Useful?

- Clustering is a particularly effective strategy during the early part of a writing project when you're working to define the scope and parameters of a project.
- Congue Clustering can help you identify what you do know and what you need to research about a topic.

Important Concepts

idea mapping

visually brainstorming

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4: Rhetorical Invention and Planning

4.1 Reading To Write: What Models and Reading Strategies Can Offer
4.2 The Rhetorical Situation: Analyzing & Composing



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4.1: Reading To Write- What Models and Reading Strategies Can Offer

Article links:

“Why Study Rhetoric? or, What Freestyle Rap Teaches Us about Writing” provided by Writing Commons

“Reading Academic Texts” provided by Lumen Learning

“Active Reading” provided by Writing Commons

“What are New Literacies?” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter Preview

- Explore the purpose of academic reading.
- Explain active reading strategies to use when reading academic texts.



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Why Study Rhetoric? or, What Freestyle Rap Teaches Us about Writing

provided by Writing Commons

The website *eHow* has a page on “How to Freestyle Rap” (“Difficulty: Moderately Challenging”), and I’m trying to figure out what I think about it. On one hand, it seems like it would be against the ethos of an authentic rapper to use a page like this to brush up on freestyle skills. After all, the page is hosted on a corporate website owned by Demand Media, Inc., the same people behind, among other things, a golf site.

But on the other hand, the advice seems solid. The *eHow* page encourages me to follow an easy, seven-step model:

1. “Learn the basics.”
2. “Just start flowing.”
3. “Write down some good rhymes ahead of time.”
4. “Work on your wordplay.”
5. “Practice at home in your spare time.”
6. “Have a rap battle.”
7. “Rap what you know.” (“How to Freestyle Rap”)

The page treats freestyling as an art that can be practiced effectively by anyone, as long as the rapper is willing to research, take risks, spend time developing the craft, practice with a community and for an audience, and stay true to him/herself—i.e., to keep it real.

And here's the thing: I think rhetoric is the same way. That is, it's an art that can be practiced effectively by anyone, as long as the rhetor (the person who is communicating rhetorically) is willing to research, take risks, spend time developing the craft, practice with a community and for an audience, and stay true to him/herself.
You don't hear me though.

***

That's right: rhetoric is an art. But not necessarily art the way we think of it. The ancient Greeks called ***rhetoric*** a *techne*, a word they used to mean "a craft or ability to do something, a creative skill; this can be physical or mental, positive or negative, like that of metalworking or trickery" (Papillion 149).

Other examples of *techne*? Ship-building, for one. You'd better not muddle your way through the art of building a ship, or you'll ruddy well sink.

Rhetoric developed as an oral art, the art of knowing how to give an effective speech—say, in a court, in a law-making session, or at a funeral speech. And if you muddled your way through a speech, not convincing anyone, not moving anyone, looking like a general schmuck in a toga, you'd ruddy well sink there, too.

***

So rhetoric is an art. But of what? The shortest answer: it's an art of communication, whether written, spoken, painted, streamed, or whatever.

But how do you judge when communication has *worked*, when it's effective? In other words, how do you know when someone has used rhetorical skills well?

That's easy: when an *audience* says it's effective. So:

- An anchor on a conservative news show makes a jab at President Obama. Conservative watchers thought the jab was well-deserved and well-timed; it was rhetorically effective for them. Liberal watchers thought it was a cheap shot; it wasn't rhetorically effective for them.
- A student writes an essay arguing that advertisements are so pervasive in the U.S. that he can't even go to the bathroom without seeing Coke's logo. His roommate reads it and doesn't think advertising is a big deal; he's not convinced, so it's not a rhetorically effective essay for him. But his teacher reads it and thinks it's cleverly argued and bitingly true. It works for her; it's rhetorically effective for her.
- Eminem ends a rap battle to raucous applause from the people in the room, but the old grandmother in the back of the club thinks it was all a lot of noise. To her, Eminem's rapping wasn't rhetorically effective.

So rhetoric can't be judged completely objectively. It wouldn't make sense to say that someone's rhetoric was "right" or "wrong" (though it can be "better" or "worse" for specific audiences). It all comes down to the audience.

Also, notice that all of those examples describe situations where the rhetor is being persuasive in one way or another. That's a common definition of rhetoric—that it's the art of *persuasion*. And persuasion is important—we're constantly trying to convince people, either subtly or overtly, to understand our points of view, and people are constantly trying to convince *us* of *their* points of view.

But I like to think of rhetoric as being about more than just persuasion, which starts to sound all bossy and manipulative when I think of that way. Instead, I think rhetoric is the art of making a connection with an audience. It's a series of techniques to help me share the way I see things with someone else. And depending on who I'm sharing with, I'll use different techniques. I wouldn't communicate my views to my wife in the same way that I would to the U.S. president, or to Jay-Z.

***

The best rappers are surprising. You lean over laughing at wordplay that you didn't expect. You smile, get into the groove, listen more carefully, and later you remember how much you enjoyed it. The communication was effective.

***

I read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* in my senior year of high school, but I didn't really get it. The author kept talking about *rhetoric*, and even after I looked up the definition, it didn't make any sense to me.

Looking back, I think that's ironic: the beating, blood-pumping heart of rhetoric is a consideration of audience. Speaking or writing or composing something that *works the way you want it to* for the audience you want it to work for.

But I don't think senior-year me was the intended audience of *Zen*. If I had been, the author was pretty lousy at being rhetorical, because he didn't explain well enough what *rhetoric* even means. The concepts he wanted his audience to be convinced of after reading his book didn't leave me convinced and riveted; instead, I was glassy-eyed and dreaming about angsty 90s rock. He was thoroughly un-rhetorical in his discussion of rhetoric.

I read the book now and I'm moved and touched. He shared his views effectively with me. Without the text changing at all, I became his audience. I get it now. So he was being rhetorical after all. It's both.

***

Why study rhetoric? It's the same as if you asked, "Why study freestyle rap?" Both are a set of skills and techniques that often come naturally, but which people can learn to do better by studying the methods that have proven effective in the past.

"Why study painting?" Because by studying how other people paint, you learn new techniques that make you a more effective painter.

"Why study business?" Because by studying how other people do business, you learn new techniques that make you a more effective businessperson.

Why study ship-building, or basket-weaving, or trickery, or anything else that you might be able to muddle through but which you'd be better at with some training and practice? Isn't it obvious?

It's the same with rhetoric, but in realm of communication. Why not learn some techniques that will increase the chance that your audience will think/feel/believe the way you want them to after hearing/reading/experiencing whatever it is that you're throwing at them?

And that's only thinking about you in the composer's role. What about when you're in the receiving end, hearing/reading/experiencing things that have been carefully crafted so that you'll buy into them? A scary of list of rhetorically effective people: politicians, advertisers, super-villains. (You want rhetoric? Just listen to the slimy words of the Emperor in *Return of the Jedi* or the words Voldemort beams into everyone's brain in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part Two*.) Studying rhetoric has the uncanny effect of opening your eyes to when people are trying to be all rhetorical on you, wielding their communication skills like an evil weapon.

***

My friend to me, the other day: "Ugh. Carrie just wrote something inappropriate on her fiancée's Facebook wall again."

Me: "What'd she say?"

My friend: "I don't even remember. It was something all gushy and uncomfortable. I skimmed back a bit and saw she's been doing that a lot. Doesn't she know that she can write messages that go just to him and not the rest of us? She doesn't have to post that stuff on his wall!"

As I thought about this conversation, I realized that Carrie (not her real name) was in some ways being a rhetorical failure. Yes, her fiancée (one person), who was certainly the primary intended recipient of her message, probably found the wall post very rhetorically effective. That is, he surely felt the gushy emotions that she meant for him to feel. Her message worked. How rhetorical!

But because a Facebook wall is to some extent public, there are others who will read her post too (hundreds of people). What is the intended message for them? If we trust and like Carrie (and if she's lucky), then we may think, "Oh, it's sweet when people are public about their love for each other!" If we're kind of sick of Carrie, we might think, "She just plain doesn't get that we don't care about her digital smooches and hugs." And if we're mad at her, we might think, "She's publicly declaring her love to him because *she wants us to feel bad that we don't have the kind of true love that she has*!" In short, the message to most of us is either A) that's nice, B) oh, gross, or C) that hussy.

Why study rhetoric? Because so many people so often seem to have no no no idea about how to communicate well.

***

We're still beating around the bush when it comes to what rhetorical skills actually look like. Up to this point, you could say, "You keep talking about all these different collections of skills, but besides freestyling, I barely have any idea how to go about *being* effective at this stuff." Fine—pass the mic.

Mic passed. Among lots of other things, some of the skills practiced by rhetors (and composition students) include:

- Basics that effective communicators keep in mind (like discovering the best time and place to communicate, clarifying what the communication is about, and learning about your audience)
- Techniques for deciding the best kinds of ideas and evidence to use for a given audience (like freewriting, open-minded research, and other forms of what we call "invention")
- Techniques for deciding on the best way to organize material for a given audience (like models for organizing information into a business report, or a classical six-part speech, or a thesis-driven research essay)
- Suggestions for how to shape your style in ways that will be both understandable and exciting for your audience (like using rhetorical figures to liven up your sentences or varying sentence length and type)
- Considerations on the best way to get your communication to your audience (like a speech, an essay, a video, a recording, a painting, a sticky note, a letter made from words cut out of a magazine)

Yes, I keep writing the word *audience* over and over. That's because it's the core of any rhetorical endeavor. Remember? All those bullets can be summed up in one sentence: thinking rhetorically means thinking about your audience.

And that means communicating in a way that doesn't make you look stupid, mean, or confusing.

And that means you *should* communicate in a way that makes you look smart, nice, and clear.

It sounds obvious, right? I think so too. But then, why are people so bad at it?

***

The failures of a failed rhetor are those of a failed freestyle rapper, too. He gets up to start a rap battle and seems impressive at first (i.e. he has a strong ethos—a word we use a lot when analyzing communication from a rhetorical angle), but then things go badly when he gets the mic.

He starts out blundering around, looking like he's never done this before. (He should have followed *eHow*'s advice to "Write down some good rhymes ahead of time.")

In desperation, he lashes out at the other guy with attacks that seem like low blows, even for a rap battle. The audience groans; he broke an unspoken rule about how mean to be. Rhetorical failure.

He can tell that he's losing the audience, so he changes his tactics and starts blending together all kinds of words that rhyme. But he fails at this too, since nothing he says makes any sense.

Eventually, he's booed off the stage.

Why study rhetoric? So you can succeed in rap battles. I thought that was obvious.

[1] Thanks to Dr. Debra Jacobs for pointing out this to me.

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Reading Academic Texts

provided by Lumen Learning

Why Evaluate Academic Reading Strategies?

> Reading is fundamental to writing and research at University, but often gets overlooked – lecturers assume that students know how to read, and students assume there's only one way to read – but neither of these things is necessarily true! There are ways to read that can improve information processing, can help with building an argument, and importantly for many students, can save lots of time!! — Academic Literacy Workshops, University of Cape Town, (Hurst Ellen)

The passage above makes an important point: most of us assume we know how to read for school. However, methods that may have been fine in the past (skimming, quick reviews, relying upon class lectures or notes) won't hold up well as we move further into higher education.

Academic reading is a specific category of reading. It's helpful to remember that academic reading is an act of performance. Rather than sitting back and passively receiving information we read in college, we will be asked to directly act upon that information in some way. We will be quizzed or tested. We will be asked to debate, analyze, or critique what we read. We will need to read closely, remember the text accurately, and compare it to other texts for style and content.



Purpose of Academic Reading

Casual reading across genres, from books and magazines to newspapers and blogs, is something students should be encouraged to do in their free time because it can be both educational and fun. In college, however, instructors generally expect students to read resources that have particular value in the context of a course. Why is academic reading beneficial?

- **Information comes from reputable sources**: Web sites and blogs can be a source of insight and information, but not all are useful as academic resources. They may be written by people or companies whose main purpose is to share an opinion or sell you something. ***Academic sources*** such as textbooks and scholarly journal articles, on the other hand, are usually written by experts in the field and have to pass stringent peer review requirements in order to get published.
- **Learn how to form arguments**: In most college classes except for creating writing, when instructors ask you to write a paper, they expect it to be argumentative in style. This means that the goal of the paper is to research a topic and develop an argument about it using evidence and facts to support your position. Since many college reading assignments (especially journal articles) are written in a similar style, you'll gain experience studying their strategies and learning to emulate them.
- **Exposure to different viewpoints**: One ***purpose of assigned academic readings***is to give students exposure to different viewpoints and ideas. For example, in an ethics class, you might be asked to read a series of articles written by medical professionals and religious leaders who are pro-life or pro-choice and consider the validity of their arguments. Such experience can help you wrestle with ideas and beliefs in new ways and develop a better understanding of how others' views differ from your own.

Reading Strategies for Academic Texts

Effective reading requires more engagement than just reading the words on the page. In order to learn and retain what you read, it's a good idea to do things like circling key words, writing notes, and reflecting. Actively reading academic texts can be challenging

for students who are used to reading for entertainment alone, but practicing the following steps will get you up to speed:

- ***Preview***: You can gain insight from an academic text before you even begin the reading assignment. For example, if you are assigned a nonfiction book, read the title, the back of the book, and table of contents. Scanning this information can give you an initial idea of what you'll be reading and some useful context for thinking about it. You can also start to make connections between the new reading and knowledge you already have, which is another strategy for retaining information.
- **Read**: While you read an academic text, you should have a pen or pencil in hand. Circle or highlight key concepts. Write questions or comments in the margins or in a notebook. This will help you remember what you are reading and also build a personal connection with the subject matter.
- ***Summarize***: After you an read academic text, it's worth taking the time to write a short summary—even if your instructor doesn't require it. The exercise of jotting down a few sentences or a short paragraph capturing the main ideas of the reading is enormously beneficial: it not only helps you understand and absorb what you read but gives you ready study and review materials for exams and other writing assignments.
- ***Review***: It always helps to revisit what you've read for a quick refresher. It may not be practical to thoroughly reread assignments from start to finish, but before class discussions or tests, it's a good idea to skim through them to identify the main points, reread any notes at the ends of chapters, and review any summaries you've written.

The following video covers additional active reading strategies readers can use before, during, and after the reading process.

Reading Strategies for Specialized Texts and Online Resources

In college it's not uncommon to experience frustration with reading assignments from time to time. Because you're doing more reading on your own outside the classroom, and with less frequent contact with instructors than you had in high school, it's possible you'll encounter readings that contain unfamiliar vocabulary or don't readily make sense. Different disciplines and subjects have different writing conventions and styles, and it can take some practice to get to know them. For example, ***scientific articles*** follow a very particular format and typically contain the following sections: an abstract, introduction, methods, results, and discussions. If you are used to reading literary works, such as graphic novels or poetry, it can be disorienting to encounter these new forms of writing.

Below are some strategies for making different kinds of texts more approachable.

Get to Know the Conventions

Academic texts, like scientific studies and journal articles, may have sections that are new to you. If you're not sure what an "abstract" is, research it online or ask your instructor. Understanding the meaning and purpose of such conventions is not only helpful for reading comprehension but for writing, too.

Look up and Keep Track of Unfamiliar Terms and Phrases

Have a good college dictionary such as Merriam-Webster handy (or find it online) when you read complex academic texts, so you can look up the meaning of unfamiliar words and terms. Many textbooks also contain glossaries or "key terms" sections at the ends of chapters or the end of the book. If you can't find the words you're looking for in a standard dictionary, you may need one specially written for a particular discipline. For example, a medical dictionary would be a good resource for a course in anatomy and physiology.

If you circle or underline terms and phrases that appear repeatedly, you'll have a visual reminder to review and learn them. Repetition helps to lock in these new words and their meaning get them into long-term memory, so the more you review them the more you'll understand and feel comfortable using them.

Look for Main Ideas and Themes

As a college student, you are not expected to understand every single word or idea presented in a reading, especially if you haven't discussed it in class yet. However, you will get more out of discussions and feel more confident about asking questions if you can identify the main idea or thesis in a reading. The ***thesis statement*** can often (but not always) be found in the introductory paragraph, and it may be introduced with a phrase like "In this essay I argue that . . ." Getting a handle on the overall reason an author wrote something ("to prove X" or "to explore Y," for instance) gives you a framework for understanding more of the details. It's also useful to keep track of any themes you notice in the writing. A ***theme*** may be a recurring idea, word, or image that strikes

you as interesting or important: “This story is about men working in a gloomy factory, but the author keeps mentioning birds and bats and windows. Why is that??”

Get the Most of Online Reading

Reading online texts presents unique challenges for some students. For one thing, you can’t readily circle or underline key terms or passages on the screen with a pencil. For another, there can be many tempting distractions—just a quick visit to amazon.com or Facebook.

While there’s no substitute for old-fashioned self-discipline, you can take advantage of the following tips to make online reading more efficient and effective:

- Where possible, download the reading as a PDF, Word document, etc., so you can read it offline.
- Get one of the apps that allow you to disable your social media sites for specified periods of time.
- Adjust your screen to avoid glare and eye strain, and change the text font to be less distracting (for those essays written in Comic Sans).
- Install an annotation tool in your Web browser so you can highlight and make notes on online text. One to try is hypothes.is. A low-tech option is to have a notebook handy to write in as you read.

Look for Reputable Online Sources

Professors tend to assign reading from reputable print and online sources, so you can feel comfortable referencing such sources in class and for writing assignments. If you are looking for online sources independently, however, devote some time and energy to critically evaluating the quality of the source before spending time reading any resources you find there. Find out what you can about the author (if one is listed), the Website, and any affiliated sponsors it may have. Check that the information is current and accurate against similar information on other pages. Depending on what you are researching, sites that end in “.edu” (indicating an “education” site such as a college, university, or other academic institution) tend to be more reliable than “.com” sites.

Pay Attention to Visual Information

Images in textbooks or journals usually contain valuable information to help you more deeply grasp a topic. ***Graphs and charts***, for instance, help show the relationship between different kinds of information or data—how a population changes over time, how a virus spreads through a population, etc.

Data-rich graphics can take longer to “read” than the text around them because they present a lot of information in a condensed form. Give yourself plenty of time to study these items, as they often provide new and lasting insights that are easy to recall later (like in the middle of an exam on that topic!).



Vocabulary-Building Techniques

Gaining confidence with unique terminology used in different disciplines can help you be more successful in your courses and in college generally. In addition to the suggestions described earlier, such as looking up unfamiliar words in dictionaries, the following are additional vocabulary-building techniques for you to try:

Read Everything and Read Often

Reading frequently both in and out of the classroom will help strengthen your vocabulary. Whenever you read a book, magazine, newspaper, blog, or any other resource, keep a running list of words you don't know. Look up the words as you encounter them and try to incorporate them into your own speaking and writing.

Make Connections to Words You Already Know

You may be familiar with the "looks like . . . sounds like" saying that applies to words. It means that you can sometimes look at a new word and guess the definition based on similar words whose meaning you know. For example, if you are reading a biology book on the human body and come across the word *malignant*, you might guess that this word means something negative or broken if you already know the word *malfunction*, which share the "mal-" prefix.

Make Index Cards

If you are studying certain words for a test, or you know that certain phrases will be used frequently in a course or field, try making flashcards for review. For each key term, write the word on one side of an index card and the definition on the other. Drill yourself, and then ask your friends to help quiz you.

Developing a strong vocabulary is similar to most hobbies and activities. Even experts in a field continue to encounter and adopt new words. The following video discusses more strategies for improving vocabulary.

Words are sneaky, charming, and intriguing. The more complex our vocabularies, the more complex our thoughts are, too.

1. Hurst, Ellen, Ed. *Academic Literacy Workshops: A Handbook for Students and Instructors*. U of Capetown. 2011.

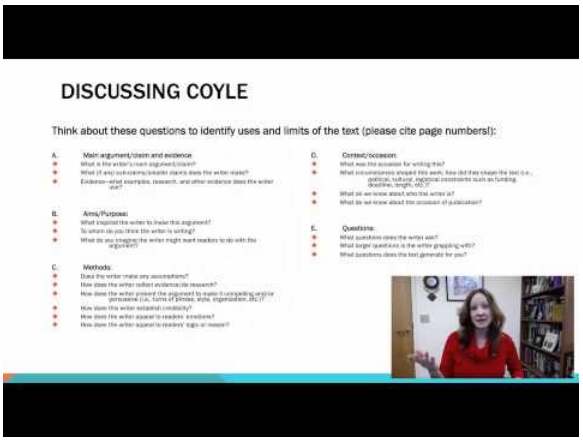
Active Reading

provided by Writing Commons

Mapping the Territory

Reading is an activity integral to the writing process. You may not associate reading with the difficult task of writing a college essay. After all, it seems like a passive activity, something you might do at a café or sitting in an easy chair. But while you can read solely for entertainment, soaking in the plot of a good novel or familiarizing yourself with the latest celebrity gossip, reading also drives the act of writing itself, from the earliest stages onward. Reading can—and will—make you a better writer.

But first, you have to learn how to read in a whole new way, because college-level work requires you to read actively, a skill much different from the kind of reading you have practiced since elementary school. Active reading implies not only attention paid to the text, but also consideration and response. An active reader explores what she reads; she approaches the text as though she has entered an unknown territory with the intention of drawing a map. Indeed, the difference between passive reading and active reading is like the difference between watching a nature documentary and hiking through the wilderness. The film, although entertaining, doesn't require much exertion from the viewer. By contrast, the hiker has to navigate the trail: she must look out for hazards, read trail signs, and make informed decisions, if she hopes to make it back home.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=55

Before you can write a successful essay, you must first understand the territory you're about to explore. Luckily, other writers have already scouted the area and logged reports on the terrain. These missives—the articles and books your professors will ask you to read—sketch their findings. But understanding these documents can be a daunting task, unless you know how to interpret them. The following sections detail the most essential strategies for active reading.

A Two-Way Street: Reading as Conversation

Think of every text your instructor assigns as one half of a conversation between you and the writer. Good conversations achieve a balance between listening and responding. This give-and-take process drives human discourse. While one participant speaks, the other listens. But while the listener appears passive on the surface, he's most likely already preparing his response. He may evaluate what his partner says, testing it for how closely it matches his own ideas, accepting or rejecting part or all of the statement. When he does respond, he expresses his reaction, or asks a question about something he doesn't yet understand. Active reading mirrors this process closely. An active reader "listens" to the text, evaluating what the writer says, checking to see if it matches or differs from his current understanding of the issue or idea. He asks pertinent questions if something remains unclear, looking for answers in subsequent sections of the text. His final goal, of course, is to make a statement of his own, in the form of the essay he will eventually produce.

Retracing Your Steps: Read Every Text (at least) Twice

In fact, reading is in many ways better than conversation, because, like writing, it is recursive: you can revisit a text over and over, whereas the spoken word, unless recorded, disappears into the past, often along with part—or all—of the message the speaker was attempting to convey. When you read, you can move forward and backward in time, making sure you've captured every nuance. You should read the text more than once, first for a general understanding, and then for a detailed analysis; your first read-through may raise questions only a second reading can reveal the answers to.

Marking the Trail: Annotation

An active reader views the text as a living document, always incomplete. She reads with pen in hand, ready to write her observations, her questions, and her tentative answers in the margins. We call this ***annotation***, the act of writing notes to oneself in the blank spaces of the page. It's not the same as underlining or highlighting, neither of which promotes active reading. A simple line underneath a passage contains no information; it merely indicates—vaguely—that you found a certain passage more important than the surrounding text. Annotation, on the other hand, is a record of your active responses to the text during the act of reading. A simple phrase summarizing a paragraph, a pointed question, or an emphatic expression of approval or disbelief all indicate spirited engagement with the text, which is the cornerstone of active reading.

Pace Yourself: Know Your Limitations and Eliminate Distractions

You can't hike the Appalachian Trail in a day. Similarly, you can't expect to sustain active reading longer than your mind and body will allow. Active reading requires energy and attention as well as devotion. Short rest periods between readings allow you to maintain focus and deliberate on what you have learned. If you remain diligent in your reading practice, you'll find that you can

read actively for longer periods of time. But don't push yourself past the point at which you stop paying attention. If your mind begins to wander, take ten minutes away from the text to relax. Ideally, you should read gradually, scheduling an hour or two every day for reading, rather than leaving your assignments until the last minute. You can't hope to gain full or even partial comprehension of a text with a deadline looming overhead.

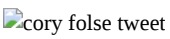
When and where you read can be as important as how long you read. Plan your reading sessions for hours when your mental energy is at its height—usually during daylight hours. Likewise, you should select an optimal location, preferably one free of distractions. Loud music, the flickering of a TV screen, and the din of conversation tend to divert your attention from the task at hand. Even a momentary distraction, like a quick phone call or a friend asking a question, can interrupt the conversation you are having with your assigned text.

What are New Literacies?

provided by Writing Commons

Something seems wrong

A few days ago, I tweeted tweeted something that wasn't particularly funny, but I got this response:[1]



I don't know anyone named Cory Folse, and I don't know who this @jokesallnight person is, either. So I ignored the tweet, kind of glad I had made someone happy, but kind of confused.

But then a couple of days ago, I was still thinking about this weird tweet, so I decided to see who this Cory Folse person was. I clicked on his user name, which showed me a list of his most recent tweets, with the most recent ones on the top:



Ah. Now I see that Cory isn't trying to be my friend at all. He's a spammer, someone (or perhaps a computer program) who is trying to get people to check out the @jokesallnight user. He sends random tweets to random people all the time, trying to compliment people to soften them up and make them more likely not to see through his lousy advertising. (Whatever you do, please don't reward this behavior by looking up @jokesallnight and following that account on Twitter. I reported Cory for spam and blocked him.)

So let's think about the clues that Cory wasn't really my friend. Something seemed wrong in a lot of ways: I didn't know his name, his response didn't make sense in context, and he never uploaded an image to represent his user name. I've used Twitter enough to know that those three things combined often mean that a response-tweet is spam. You could say that I'm "literate" in the ways of Twitter, so I recognize when people act in "illiterate" ways.

I'm sure you know people who seem surprisingly illiterate when working with digital technology. I get forwards all the time that claim Apple or Applebee's will give me $2,000 if I continue the forwarding chain, and others that tell me about all the stupid luxuries Democrats or travel agents have insisted on when flying. Those who are email literate recognize the signs that these things probably aren't true (and a quick search on snopes.com usually clears up any lingering doubts about what's a scam and what isn't). There's even a whole website, literallyunbelievable.org, chronicling people who read the fake news on theonion.com and think it's real.

What's wrong with these email-forwarders and fake-news-believers? I suggest that they're not literate in the ways of new media. They saw something that would be fishy to many readers who are better acquainted with the usual moves made in those contexts, but no alarms went off in their minds.

This article is an exploration of ***new media literacies***, with the end goals of reminding you not to be a sucker who falls for illiterate silliness and encouraging you to rely on your new media literacies when composing with digital technology. To get there, I want us

to think about why we use the word *literacy* to discuss these online issues, how literacy has been expanded in other contexts, and what *new media* has to do with it all.

The Traditional Model of Literacy

We usually think of a particular skill when we hear the word literacy—knowing how to read. When students can barely read, teachers complain, "They're barely literate!" When politicians say, "Kids today are illiterate!" they mean that the kids can't read—or perhaps more subtly, that they can't read very well. That is, they don't understand the complexities and nuances that practiced readers see in a big splattering of words on a page or screen.

The politician's claim reminds us of another aspect of literacy that's usually tied to the reading angle: the ability to write. When politicians rile up crowds by calling kids illiterate, they often mean, "Kids today don't understand complex reading, and they can't produce complex writing, either." So implied in the skill of literacy is also the ability to write. This makes sense; if I can't make sense of a piece of writing's purpose, organization, figures of speech, and rhetorical moves, I probably can't create a piece of writing that uses those aspects of writing in sophisticated ways.

And as you can hear from my examples of the teacher and the politician, literacy is often a word that shows up when people want to describe something that people don't have. I'm unlikely to be praised for my *literacy* when I accurately summarize a tough essay in class, and I'm unlikely to read a particularly nice magazine article and say to the author, "Oh, you were so particularly literate in that piece!" Literacy is usually used more as a base-line for competence, something that we ought to have but that stands out most noticeably when it's not there, like the space where a demolished building used to be, or when we see a person not wearing any pants.

New Models of Literacy

Why go into so much detail about the traditional model of ***literacy***—the skill of knowing how to effectively read and write? Because when literacy is applied to new contexts—as it is all the time—it often retains the baggage of its traditional usage. Even in these new contexts, *literacy* is often used to describe a lack that we wish were filled, just as when we describe people who can't read. Literacy is also often tied to effective reading and effective writing (though sometimes reading and writing are expanded to different forms of *understanding* and *acting*).

For example, I described myself as "literate" at the beginning of this piece because I saw through the Twitter spammer's tricks. That's because I was separating myself from the "illiterate" people who fall for his spam, and because I wanted to emphasize that communicating well on Twitter is tied both to reading and writing tweets effectively.

A quick Google search for *literacy* shows me various other ways that people use the word:

- ***Financial literacy***: the ability to *understand* complex financial information, and the ability to *act* wisely on that financial know-how
- ***Information literacy***: the ability to *find* the right information for a given task, and the ability to *use* that information in the best way (for an essay, work assignment, protest rally, or whatever)
- ***Media literacy***: the ability to *read* or *view* the various tricks used by the media to subtly emphasize one point of view, and the ability to *compose* messages that use media trickery effectively for a given rhetorical situation

In all three of those examples of literacies, I imagine the term developed as people began to realize how illiterate their friends and colleagues seemed to be. (Perhaps most terminology begins this way: as a way for individuals to draw attention to their own strengths in comparison to a rabble of "those other people." I definitely feel kind of cool when I catch a Twitter spammer.) In that framework, financial literacy works as a helpful term because so many people seem to lack basic skills related to budgeting, managing credit cards, and paying off debt. To people who have financial literacy, those who lack it seem to be missing a set of skills so fundamental that to not have them is akin to a reading person's feelings toward someone who can't read. Along the same tack, information literacy works as a term because so many people seem to lack the basic skills necessary to finding the information they need, especially in our increasingly information-centered world. And media literacy is a helpful term because so many people are duped by the political and social messages embedded in the news, movies, and music we consume.

So what happens when we apply these same ideas to new media reading and writing contexts?

Important Concepts

academic reading

academic sources

purpose of assigned academic readings

preview

summarize

review

scientific articles

thesis statement

theme

graphs and charts

data-rich graphics

vocabulary-building techniques

new media literacies

literacy

financial literacy

information literacy

media literacy

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Video 3: Vocabulary Reading Strategies. **Authored by**: Lindsey Thompson. **Located at**: https://youtu.be/nfbY0EK7JEY. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

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Video 5: Active Reading & Writing Teaching Example. **Authored by**: Karen Powers Liebhaber. **Located at**: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_c...&v=Jx3__0bEFm4. **License**: Standard YouTube License

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4.2: The Rhetorical Situation- Analyzing and Composing

Article links:

“Tone, Language, and Appeal” provided by Lumen Learning

“What to Think about When Writing for a Particular Audience” provided by Lumen Learning

“Consider Your Purpose” provided by Lumen Learning

“Consider Your Context” provided by Writing Commons

“Consider Your Media” provided by Writing Commons

“Document Planner” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter Preview

- Define the the basic rhetorical approaches of tone, language, and appeal.
- Describe how to adapt tone, language, and appeal to engage the target audience.
- Describe the importance of context to the writing process.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RgA...ature=youtu.be

Tone, Language, and Appeal

provided by Lumen Learning

You can approach your audience’s needs and build common ground using three basic rhetorical approaches: ***tone***, ***language***, *and* ***appeal***.

Tone

What’s the difference between a formal tone and a conversational tone? What about the difference between writing that’s conversational and writing that’s very rigid? Of the three approaches we cover here, tone may be the most important one: if you choose the wrong tone, you may turn off your audience completely.

Take a look at this example from a student’s proposal to create an infographic for senior citizens:

REAL STUDENT’S WRITING

Based on this senior citizen audience, simplicity and authenticity must be key characteristics of the infographic. Its message, presented mainly through visuals, must not only be clear and easy to understand, but it must also be genuine in nature. Caution must be taken to avoid seeming judgmental towards the audience members’ digital skills and tendencies.

This student wants to make sure the tone of her document builds good will with her audience. If your audience is made up of senior citizens, you would want to make sure that you aren’t patronizing or belittling them about their technical expertise.

Can you think of a situation where your tone didn’t match the audience’s expectations? As you write an essay, you have to consider the audience’s potential reception of your tone. Even if the audience is hypothetical, the only way to ensure that you aren’t “tone deaf” is to pay attention to your tone.

Language

Language is closely related to tone. In fact, if you misjudge the appropriate language for your audience, your tone will suffer, too. If you are writing an article for a scientific journal, obviously you would want to make sure to use the technical language appropriate to your subject.

Language has a lot to do with ***discourse communities***. Imagine that you work in a car assembly plant. You know your job and enough about the process of car assembly in general to talk to anybody else in the plant about their jobs, as well. You probably have a specialized vocabulary that describes your work process. Now, imagine that you walk into an airplane manufacturing plant.

Would you be able to do the same thing? Sure, many of the processes are the same, and you might be able to talk to the workers about the things you have in common. But the vocabulary is different. Workers in the airplane factory talk about different things and have different common knowledge than you do. Each factory is a discourse community. When you write, you are participating in a discourse community, and you should use language that matches the expectations of the audience.

Can you think of a situation where your language didn't match the audience's expectations? If you are an audiologist, for example, you would use different language to explain how a cochlear implant works to the parents of a deaf child than you would to discuss advances in cochlear implant technology with other audiologists.

Appeals

What do these appeals have to do with finding common ground with an audience? Well, the way you balance ethos, pathos, and logos can vary depending on who your audience is. Think about the scenario below:

You are a scientist who studies climate and polar bear mating habits. You have just completed and published a study that tracks the declining polar bear population with the reduction of ice caps in the Arctic Ocean. You believe the results of this study are important, and you need to explain them to three different audiences.

An audience of **scientists** is primarily interested in your credibility (ethos) and your facts (logos). They want to know more about your methods, how your data was collected, and the accuracy of your study. When you are presenting to this group, you should minimize appeals to emotion, as they could turn off your audience.

An audience of **kindergarteners** is primarily interested in big, fluffy polar bears. Thus, you would want to emphasize the appeal to emotion (pathos). Your ethos, or credibility, is important, but in a different way than it is with the scientists. You must express yourself in a way that makes the children feel comfortable with you and makes them trust what you say. Facts are important in every situation, but the kindergarteners aren't going to scrutinize your methods.

An audience of **climate change denialist politicians** would generally be very hostile to what you have to say. Playing up your credibility (ethos) may not be very helpful because they already reject the field in which your credibility is rooted. You have to rely heavily on facts (logos) with this audience and demonstrate that your facts are impossible to deny. You also have to rely on emotion (pathos) but in a different way than you do with the kindergarteners. This hostile audience is already reacting to you with emotion, so it's important for you to receive that emotional energy and make the best of it.

What to Think about When Writing for a Particular Audience

provided by Lumen Learning

Writers must have a clear sense of to whom they are writing (the audience) and what the audience's values and/or opinions related to the topic are**.**

Imagine a history professor who opens her lecture on the Victorian era by asking her undergraduate students, "Did you see the Victorian-era furniture on *Antiques Roadshow* last night?" Can you imagine how many in the class would raise his/her hand? Can you hear the confused silence?

Most of the students in the audience are under the age of thirty, with the majority falling between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. They do not own property and probably have little interest in antiques. The target audience of *Antiques Roadshow*, though, reflects middle-aged and older middle class folks who, most likely, own property and, perhaps, antiques of their own. How effective of an opener was this professor's question given her audience? Not very.

To communicate effectively and persuasively

Writers must have a clear sense of to whom they are writing (the audience) and what the audience's values and/or opinions related to the topic are. When in conversation, we often shift our tone and/or language to adapt to our audience.

Consider how you talk differently to young children than you do to your professors. When communicating with a child, you may use simple language and a playful or enthusiastic tone. With your professors, however, you may try out academic language, using

bigger words and more complex sentences. Your tone may be more professional than casual and more critical than entertaining.

For example . . .

Imagine that you need money. When you craft an email to your parents asking for money, your approach might be different than if you were to ask your roommate for money. Your tone, language, and means of appeal will adapt to who your audience is.

- The **tone** of your email is casual, conversational, and upbeat ("School is great!").
- The **language** that you use is simple, easy to read. Sentences are short and rely mostly on action verbs.
- You **appeal** to your parent first by recalling positive memories of home, as though you know your mom is missing you ("reminds me of home"). This is a tug at the heartstrings (or ***pathos appeal***). By offering specific details about the cost of your chemistry textbook, you make a *logos* appeal (to her sense of logic). You also highlight your responsible nature, which develops an ***ethos appeal***: "I study nearly all the time," "I try to sleep," and "books [more than] I budgeted." Telling your mom that books were more expensive than you imagined links your request for additional cash to your pursuit of an education, something that makes her happy and that adds to your credibility.

For more information about ethos, pathos, and logos, see "Rhetorical Appeals."

- When asking your roommate for cash, the **tone** may remain casual though it will appear less conversational. I mean, after all, you talk to this person every day. Also, noting "I'm totally okay with" buying two rounds of groceries creates a feeling of generosity rather than resentment.
- The **language** gets even simpler. Notice how much shorter the sentences are and how quickly the writer gets to the point; there is less need for "window dressing" your appeal. Colloquial language appears here—"could you spot me some cash"—rather than the more formal request the writer made to his mother, "I'm out of funds for groceries and gas. Can you help?"
- Reminding the roommate that you bought the last two rounds of groceries functions as an **appeal** in two ways: first, it establishes your credibility as a good friend; and second, it appeals to the roommate's sense of logic (of course you need some extra money; you've got a free loader kind of roommate!).

A writing assignment . . .

Your professor asks you to write an academic argument paper on a topic of your choice. Academic writing is usually directed to an educated audience interested in critical, analytical thinking.

Let's imagine you choose to write about adoption rights within the LGBT community. More specifically, you'll argue that stable LGBT couples deserve the opportunity to adopt children just as stable heterosexual couples are allowed to do.

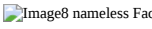
You'll adapt **tone**, **language**, and **appeals** to suit the writing project's

- Audience
- Purpose
- Context
- Medium



Brainstorming and planning

When you write to *all* readers, you, in fact, write to *no one* at all.



Consider Your Purpose

provided by Writing Commons

Identifying the primary reason for writing provides you with the focus you need to write an effective document in less time.

Like an onion that is peeled, revealing multiple layers, a writing document may have multiple purposes. A ***persuasive essay***, for example, may have paragraphs that inform, paragraphs that persuade, paragraphs that threaten, and paragraphs that request information. However, on a more global level, each document must have one primary purpose.

Until you know your primary purpose for writing, you cannot know what information to leave in or leave out or even how to best organize a document. Of course, some academic documents have multiple purposes.

People write documents for countless reasons:

1. **Record**: Keep a record of events or information.
2. **Reflect/Explore**: Write in a journal, attempt to make sense of something or to shape a new idea.
3. **Inform**: Objectively report an event.
4. **Demonstrate Knowledge**: Prove, in school, that you've learned course content.
5. **Summarize**: Report someone else's words, theories, and research in your own words.
6. **Explain**: Help readers understand a difficult concept, theory, or event.
7. **Analyze**: Break down a problem into parts.
8. **Persuade**: Change minds, invoke action.
9. **Theorize**: Speculate on possible causes and effects.
10. **Entertain**: Bring joy, amazement, and thrills.

Textbooks, English instructors, and writers occasionally call the purpose statement the thesis sentence. In school contexts, some instructors require students to place the thesis statement in the introductory paragraphs. Likewise, writers of essays appearing in newspapers, magazines, and books present their thesis up front. The advantage of this deductive approach is that readers immediately know what the topic is and the writer's stance toward the subject. In contexts where the subject isn't likely to result in an emotional reaction from readers, explicit statements of purpose make sense.

When Should You Consider Your Purpose?

Because of the generative nature of the writing process, your sense of the primary purpose for a document will often become clearer once you have written a few drafts. Yet because the effectiveness of a document is chiefly determined by how well you focus on addressing a primary purpose, you can save time by identifying your purpose as early as possible.

1. What is your primary purpose for writing? For instance, are you attempting to analyze a subject, to explain a cause-and-effect relationship, or to persuade an audience about your position?
2. Do you have competing or conflicting purposes for writing this document? If so, should the document be separated into two papers?
3. What crucial information should you emphasize to affect your audience? You may want to shock, educate, or persuade your readers, for instance.
4. How can you organize the document to emphasize key information that suits your purpose?

Consider Your Context

provided by Writing Commons

Identify the circumstances surrounding the writing project. What is going on in the world at large that relates to how you develop and present your project?

Context refers to the occasion, or situation, that informs the reader about why a document was written and how it was written. The way writers shape their texts is dramatically influenced by their context. Writers decide how to shape their sentences by considering

their contexts.

For example, the 9/11 terrorist attack on America changed the context for discussions on terrorism. When Americans talk about terrorism post-9/11, they understand the borders of America are threatened, that terrorism can occur in our homes.

Contexts are sometimes described as formal, semi-formal, or informal. Alternatively, contexts for written documents can be described as school-based projects or work-based projects.

Why Is Context Important?

The context for each document strongly affects how you research your topic, how you organize your context, and what media you employ to deliver your message.

Content/Research

What does your reader know about the topic? Will original research be necessary? Will traditional research suffice? Will your audience be persuaded by personal knowledge? Will they require facts and figures?

For example, if you were writing a report on the possibility that Iraq is amassing weapons of mass destruction and your audience were members of the United Nations, you would want to firmly ground your argument in research.

Media/Design

Should the work be published online or transmitted as a printed report? What colors or pictures are appropriate?

Grammar, Mechanics, Usage

The way you structure your sentences is influenced by how formal or informal your context is. Email, for example, tends to be informal. Lots of emoticons and abbreviated expressions can be used. In contrast, an end-of-the-semester research report may require formal diction.

Context Analysis Questions

- What is going on in the world of the readers that will influence the readers' thoughts and feelings about the document?
- Does the intellectual content of the document rest on the shoulders of other authors? Will your readers expect you to mention particular scholars or researchers who did the original, ground-breaking work on the subject you are exploring?
- What background information can you assume your reader is already familiar with?

Consider Your Media

provided by Writing Commons

Learn how to be more creative about the effective use of media.

Media can refer to how meaning is conveyed. For example, people speak of TV and radio as a kind of media–the mass media. They refer to printed documents distributed by newspapers, magazines, and books as print media. Texts such as databases or multimedia published on the Internet are called ***online media***. The term media is broadly defined, yet two definitions are particularly popular:

- Print Media: Paper essays and reports, magazines, books, hypertext
- Mass Media: Radio, TV, magazines, newspapers
- Digital Media: Works produced and distributed via the Internet
- Spoken Media: Talk, speeches
- Visual Media: Paintings, clip art, animations, interactive media
- Databases, response forums
- Artistic Media: Paintings, sculpture, music, movies
- Video Conferencing Media: NetMeeting, SeeUSeeMe

New technologies are creating new ways of conveying meaning and blurring distinctions across media. The computer is slowly becoming the printing press, the TV, the game console, and the music.

Media Analysis Questions

1. Does the text employ multiple media? What is the ratio of visuals to words?
2. Would an alternative medium be more appropriate for the text's purpose and audience?
3. What additional media could be used to enhance the message?

Document Planner

provided by Writing Commons

Consider the Document Planner to be a living document. It's a snapshot of a fluid process. As you write, your ideas about audience, purpose, media, context, voice, tone, and persona will change, becoming clarified.

1 . **Context**
Beyond fulfilling a course requirement, what motivates you to explore this project? What are the unique elements of this writing situation? Is your context formal, semiformal, informal? Is this a class assignment; a Web site; a workplace document; an online communication; a text for a community, service, or special interest group; an essay for a magazine, newspaper, or journal; a letter to family and friends? How does the context influence what you need to do next?

2 . **Purpose**
What is the specific outcome your writing seeks to achieve–to entertain, inform, evaluate, persuade? Clearly define your purpose in as narrow terms as possible. What is your argument/story?

3 . **Audience**
What do you know about your audience? How can you find out more about them? What do you want your reader to do, understand, or feel? What counterarguments or questions should you anticipate? How interested in the subject or emotionally involved is the reader?

4 . **Media**
What media should you employ–academic writing, an oral presentation, a Web site, email, Instant Messenger, a magazine column, a video documentary? Why?

5 . **Voice, Tone, or Persona**
What voice, tone, and persona should you project as a consequence of your communication situation? For example, should you attempt to appear objective and detached, passionate and angry, or clever and satirical?

6 . **Research**
Can past research inform your writing project? What important texts have been written about the topic, if any? How can past research inform how you narrow your topic? What new ideas can you contribute?

7 . **Length, Format, and Design**
How long should your project be? How can visual language underscore your message? What figures and tables or other formatting techniques are commonly used? What form of documentation is required?

8 . **Schedule**

Complete the following set of due dates.

Important Concepts

tone

language

discourse communities

appeal

pathos appeal

ethos appeal

persuasive essay

context

media/design

grammar, mechanics, usage

media

online media

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5: Composing Strategies

5.1 Assessing Your Rhetorical Situation
5.2 Thesis / Purpose Statements
5.3 Organizing an Essay
5.4 MLA Formatting Conventions
5.5 Introductions & Conclusions



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5.1: Assessing Your Rhetorical Situation

Article links:

“Think Rhetorically” provided by Lumen Learning

“Navigating Genres” by Kerry Dirk

Chapter Preview

- Identify characteristics of a good topic sentence.
- Identify the three parts of a developed paragraph.
- Apply knowledge of topic sentences and parts of a developed paragraph in an assignment.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=61

Think Rhetorically

provided by Lumen Learning

Write more effective documents and save time by considering the audience, purpose, context, and media for a document. Adjust your voice, tone, and persona to accommodate your communication situation.

For every writing project, you can best determine what you want to say and how you want to say it by analyzing the components of your rhetorical situation (which is sometimes called your communication situation). Learning to think rhetorically is one of the most important benefits of an education. Successful leaders and decision makers are capable of making good decisions because they have learned to examine problems from a rhetorical perspective.

Successful writers have learned they can write a more effective document in less time by thinking rhetorically.

Thinking rhetorically can refer to many mental activities—such as focusing on identifying the needs of a particular audience or context.

Navigating Genres

by Kerry Dirk

There’s a joke that’s been floating around some time now that you’ve likely already heard.* It goes something like the following:

Q: What do you get when you rewind a country song?

Q: What do you get when you rewind a country song?
A: You get your wife back, your job back, your dog back . . .

Maybe this joke makes you laugh. Or groan. Or tilt your head to the side in confusion. Because it just so happens that in order to get this joke, you must know a little something about country music in general and in particular country music lyrics. You must, in other words, be familiar with the country music genre.

Let's look into country music lyrics a bit more. Bear with me on this is if you're not a fan. Assuming I want to write lyrics to a country song, how would I figure out what lyrics are acceptable in terms of country songs? Listening to any country station for a short period of time might leave one with the following conclusions about country songs:

- Country songs tend to tell stories. They often have characters who are developed throughout the song.
- Country songs often have choruses that are broad enough to apply to a variety of verses.
- Country songs are often depressing; people lose jobs, lovers, and friends.
- Country songs express pride for the country style and way of life.
- Country songs are often political, responding to wars and economic crises, for example.

Given these characteristics, I would feel prepared to write some new country lyrics. But what would happen if I wanted to write a country song that didn't do any of the above things? Would it still be a country song?

You are probably already familiar with many genres, although you may not know them as such; perhaps your knowledge of genres is limited to types of books, whether mystery, horror, action, etc. Now I'm going to ask you to stick with me while I show you how knowledge of genres goes far beyond a simple discussion of types. My purposes are to expand your definition of genre (or to introduce you to a definition for the first time) and to help you start thinking about how genres might apply to your own writing endeavors. But above all, I hope to give you an awareness of how genres function by taking what is often quite theoretical in the field of rhetoric and composition and making it a bit more tangible. So why was I talking about country songs? I think that using such references can help you to see, in a quite concrete way, how genres function.

When I started writing this essay, I had some ideas of what I wanted to say. But first, I had to determine what this essay might look like. I've written a lot—letters, nonfiction pieces, scholarly articles, rants—but this was my first time writing an essay to you, a composition student. What features, I asked myself, should go into this essay? How personal could I get? What rhetorical moves might I use, effectively or ineffectively? I hoped that a similar type of essay already existed so that I would have something to guide my own writing. I knew I was looking for other essays written directly to students, and after finding many examples, I looked for common features. In particular, I noted the warm, personal style that was prevalent through every essay; the tone was primarily conversational. And more importantly, I noticed that the writer did not talk as an authoritative figure but as a coach. Some writers admitted that they did not know everything (we don't), and others even went so far as to admit ignorance. I found myself doing what Mary Jo Reiff, a professor who studies rhetoric and composition, did when she was asked to write about her experience of writing an essay about teaching for those new to the field of composition. She writes, "I immediately called on my genre knowledge—my past experience with reading and writing similar texts in similar situations—to orient me to the expectations of this genre" (157).

I further acknowledged that it is quite rare that teachers of writing get to write so directly to students in such an informal manner. Although textbooks are directed at students, they are often more formal affairs meant to serve a different purpose than this essay. And because the genre of this essay is still developing, there are no formal expectations for what this paper might look like. In my excitement, I realized that perhaps I had been granted more freedom in writing this essay then is typical of an already established, although never static, genre. As a result, I decided to make this essay a mix of personal anecdotes, examples, and voices from teachers of writing. Such an essay seems to be the most fitting response to this situation, as I hope to come across as someone both informative and friendly. Why am I telling you this? Because it seems only appropriate that given the fact that I am talking about genre awareness, I should make you aware of my own struggles with writing in a new genre.

I will admit that the word ***genre*** used to have a bad reputation and may still make some people cringe. Genre used to refer primarily to form, which meant that writing in a particular genre was seen as simply a matter of filling in the blanks. Anne Freadman, a specialist in genre theory, points out that "it is this kind of genre theory with its failures that has caused the discredit of the very notion of genre, bringing about in turn its disuse and the disrepair many of us found it in" (46). But genre theory has come a long way since then. Perhaps the shift started when the rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer wrote the following:

Due to either the nature of things or convention, or both, some situations recur. The courtroom is the locus for several kinds of situations generating the speech of accusation, the speech of defense, the charge to the jury. From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses; hence rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established. (13)

In other words, Bitzer is saying that when something new happens that requires a response, someone must create that first response. Then when that situation happens again, another person uses the first response as a basis for the second, and eventually everyone who encounters this situation is basing his/her response on the previous ones, resulting in the creation of a new genre. Think about George Washington giving the first State of the Union Address. Because this genre was completely new, he had complete freedom to pick its form and content. All presidents following him now have these former addresses to help guide their response because the situation is now a reoccurring one. Amy Devitt, a professor who specializes in the study of genre theory, points out that "genres develop, then, because they respond appropriately to situations that writers encounter repeatedly" ("Generalizing" 576) and because "if each writing problem were to require a completely new assessment of how to respond, writing would be slowed considerably. But once we recognize a ***recurring situation***, a situation that we or others have responded to in the past, our response to that situation can be guided by past responses" ("Generalizing" 576). As such, we can see how a genre like the State of the Union Address helps for more effective communication between the president and citizens because the president already has a genre with which to work; he/she doesn't have to create a new one, and citizens know what to expect from such an address.

The definition of genre has changed even more since Bitzer's article was written; genres are now viewed as even more than repeating rhetorical situations. Carolyn Miller, a leading professor in the field of technical communication, argues that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered . . . on the action it is used to accomplish" (151). How might this look? These actions don't have to be complex; many genres are a part of our daily lives. Think about genres as tools to help people to get things done. Devitt writes that:

> genres have the power to help or hurt human interaction, to ease communication or to deceive, to enable someone to speak or to discourage someone from saying something different. People learn how to do *smalltalk* to ease the social discomfort of large group gatherings and meeting new people, but advertisers learn how to disguise *sales letters as winning sweepstakes entries. (Writing 1)*

In other words, knowing what a genre is used for can help people to accomplish goals, whether that goal be getting a job by knowing how to write a stellar resume, winning a person's heart by writing a romantic love letter, or getting into college by writing an effective personal statement.

By this point you might realize that you have been participating in many different genres—whether you are telling a joke, writing an email, or uploading a witty status on Facebook. Because you know how these genres function as social actions, you can quite accurately predict how they function rhetorically; your joke should generate a laugh, your email should elicit a response, and your updated Facebook status should generate comments from your online friends. But you have done more than simply filled in the blanks. Possibly without even thinking about it, you were recognizing the rhetorical situation of your action and choosing to act in a manner that would result in the outcome you desired. I imagine that you would probably not share a risqué joke with your mom, send a "Hey Buddy" email to your professor, or update your Facebook status as "X has a huge wart on his foot." We can see that more than form matters here, as knowing what is appropriate in these situations obviously requires more rhetorical knowledge than does filling out a credit card form. Devitt argues that "people do not label a particular story as a joke solely because of formal features but rather because of their perception of the rhetorical action that is occurring" (Writing 11). True, genres often have formulaic features, but these features can change even as the nature of the genre remains (Devitt, Writing, 48). What is important to consider here is that if mastering a form were simply a matter of plugging in content, we would all be capable of successfully writing anything when we are given a formula. By now you likely know that writing is not that easy. Fortunately, even if you have been taught to write in a formulaic way, you probably don't treat texts in such a manner. When approaching a genre for a the first time, you likely view it as more than a simple form: "Picking up a text, readers not only classify it and expect a certain form, but also make assumptions about the text's purposes, its subject matter, its writer, and its expected reader" (Devitt, Writing 12).

We treat texts that we encounter as rhetorical objects; we choose between horror movies and chick flicks not only because we are familiar with their forms but because we know what response they will elicit from us (nail-biting fear and dreamy sighs, respectively). Why am I picking popular genres to discuss? I think I agree with Miller when she argues the following:

> To consider as potential genres such homely discourse as the letter of recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note, the lecture, and the white paper, as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon, is not to trivialize the study of genres; it is to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves. (155)

In other words, Miller is saying that all genres matter because they shape our everyday lives. And by studying the genres that we find familiar, we can start to see how specific choices that writers make result in specific actions on the part of readers; it only follows that our own writing must too be purposefully written.

I like examples, so here is one more. Many of you may be familiar with *The Onion*, a fictitious newspaper that uses real world examples to create humorous situations. Perhaps the most notable genre of *TheOnion* is its headlines. The purpose of these headlines is simple: to make the reader respond by laughing. While many of the articles are also entertaining, the majority of the humor is produced through the headlines. In fact, the headlines are so important to the success of the newspaper that they are tested on volunteers to see the readers' immediate responses. There are no formal features of these headlines besides the fact that they are all quite brief; they share no specific style. But they are a rhetorical action meant to bring about a specific response, which is why I see them as being their own genre. A few examples for those of you unfamiliar with this newspaper would help to explain what I'm saying. Here are a few of my personal favorites (politically charged or other possibly offensive headlines purposefully avoided):

- "Archaeological Dig Uncovers Ancient Race of Skeleton People"
- "Don't Run Away, I'm Not the Flesh-Eating Kind of Zombie"
- "Time Traveler: Everyone In The Future Eats Dippin' Dots"
- "'I Am Under 18' Button Clicked For First Time In History Of Internet"
- "Commas, Turning Up, Everywhere"
- "Myspace Outage Leaves Millions Friendless."
- "Amazon.com Recommendations Understand Area Woman Better Than Husband"
- "Study: Dolphins Not So Intelligent On Land"
- "Beaver Overthinking Dam"
- "Study: Alligators Dangerous No Matter How Drunk You Are"
- "Child In Corner To Exact Revenge As Soon As He Gets Out" (*TheOnion*)

I would surmise with near certainty that at least one of these headlines made you laugh. Why? I think the success lies in the fact that the writers of these headlines are rhetorically aware of whom these headlines are directed toward—college students like you, and more specifically, educated college students who know enough about politics, culture, and U.S. and world events to "get" these headlines.

And now for some bad news: figuring out a genre is tricky already, but this process is further complicated by the fact that two texts that might fit into the same genre might also look extremely different. But let's think about why this might be the case. Devitt points out, "different grocery stores make for different grocery lists. Different law courts make for different legal briefs. And different college classes make for different research papers. Location may not be the first, second, and third most important qualities of writing, as it is for real estate, but location is surely among the situational elements that lead to expect- ed genres and to adaptations of those genres in particular situations" ("Transferability" 218). Think about a time when you were asked to write a research paper. You probably had an idea of what that paper should look like, but you also needed to consider the location of the assignment. In other words, you needed to consider how your particular teacher's expectations would help to shape your assignment. This makes knowing a genre about much more than simply knowing its form. You also need to consider the context in which it is being used. As such, it's important to be aware that the research paper you might be required to write in freshman composition might be completely different than the research paper you might be asked to write for an introductory psychology class. Your goal is to recognize these shifts in location and to be aware of how such shifts might affect your writing. Let's consider a genre with which you are surely familiar: the thesis statement. Stop for a moment and consider what this term means to

you. Ask your classmates. It's likely that you each have your own definition of what a thesis statement should and should not look like.

You may have heard never to start a thesis statement with a phrase like "In this essay." Or you might have been taught that a thesis statement should have three parts, each of which will be discussed in one paragraph of the essay. I learned that many good thesis statements follow the formula "X because Y," where "X" refers to a specific stance, and "Y" refers to a specific reason for taking that stance. For example, I could argue "School uniforms should be required because they will help students to focus more on academics and less on fashion." Now, whether or not this is a good thesis statement is irrelevant, but you can see how following the "X because Y" formula would produce a nicely structured statement. Take this a step further and research "thesis statements" on the Internet, and you'll find that there are endless suggestions. And despite their vast differences, they all fit under the genre of thesis statement. How is this possible? Because it comes back to the particular situation in which that thesis statement is being used. Again, location is everything.

I think it's time to try our hand at approaching a genre with which I hope all of you are only vaguely familiar and completely unpracticed: the ransom note.

A Scenario

I've decided to kidnap Bob's daughter Susie for ransom. I'm behind on the mortgage payments, my yacht payments are also overdue, and I desperately need money. It is well known that Bob is one of the wealthiest people in Cash City, so I've targeted him as my future source of money. I've never met Bob, although one time his Mercedes cut me off in traffic, causing me to hit the brakes and spill my drink; the stain still glares at me from the floor of the car. The kidnapping part has been completed; now I need to leave Bob a ransom note. Let's look at a few drafts I've completed to decide which one would be most appropriate.

Ransom Letter 1:

If you ever want to see your daughter alive again, leave 1 million dollars by the blue garbage can at 123 Ransom Rd. at Midnight. Come alone and do not call the police.

Ransom Letter 2:

Hav daughter. Million $. Blu grbg can 123 Ransom Rd. 12AM. No poliz.

Ransom Letter 3:

Dear Bob,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. You have a lovely house, and I very much enjoyed my recent visit while you were out of town. Unfortunately, I have kidnapped your daughter. As I am currently unable to meet several financial demands, I am graciously turning to you for help in this matter. I am sure that we will be able to come to some mutually beneficial agreement that results in the return of your daughter and the padding of my wallet. Please meet with me at the Grounds Coffee House on First Street so that we may discuss what price is most fitting. Your daughter, meanwhile, remains in safe and competent hands. She is presently playing pool with my son Matt (a possible love connection?), and she says to tell you "Hi."

Yours truly, Jim

P.S. Please order me a skim vanilla latte, should you arrive before I do.

Immediately, you can probably determine that ransom letter one is the best choice. But have you considered why? What does the first letter have that the other two are lacking? Let's first eliminate the most obvious dud—letter number three. Not only does it mimic the friendly, familiar manner of two friends rather than the threatening note of a deranged kidnapper, but it also suggests both that there is no rush in the matter and that the price is negotiable. Letters one and two are closer; they both contain the same information, but letter two fails to be as rhetorically strong as number one. The spelling errors and choppy feel might suggest that the writer of

the note is not intelligent enough to get away with the kidnapping. The first letter is the most rhetorically strong because it is well written and direct. All of these letters would qualify as fitting the genre of ransom letter, but the first one most obviously fits the rhetorical situation.

It may be worthwhile to note some particular challenges you might have to approaching your writing genres as rhetorical situations. Perhaps you have come from a writing background where you learned that certain rules apply to all writing. Just nod if these sound familiar:

- You must have a thesis statement at the end of the introduction.
- Every thesis statement should introduce three points of discussion.
- You cannot use "I" in writing.
- You cannot begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction.
- Every paragraph should start with a topic sentence.

You get the point. These rules are appealing; they tell us exactly what to do and not to do with regard to writing. I remember happily creating introductions that moved from broad to specific (often starting with "In our world"), constructing three-point thesis statements, and beginning paragraphs with "first," "second," and "third." I didn't have to think about the audience, or purpose, or even much about content for that matter. All that really mattered was that essay followed a certain formula that was called good writing. But looking back, what resulted from such formulas was not very good; actually, it was quite bad.

That is, of course, not to say that there aren't rules that come with genres; the difference is that the rules change as the genre changes, that no rules apply to all genres, and that genres require more effort than simply following the rules. Because genres usually come with established conventions, it is risky to choose not to follow such conventions. These similarities within genres help us to communicate successfully; imagine the chaos that would ensue if news broadcasts were done in raps, if all legal briefs were written in couplets, or if your teacher handed you a syllabus and told you that it must first be decoded. In sum, "too much choice is as debilitating of meaning as is too little choice. In language, too much variation results eventually in lack of meaning: mutual unintelligibility" (Devitt, "Genre" 53).

But on a brighter note, genres also help us to make more efficient decisions when writing, as we can see how people have approached similar situations. Creating a new genre each time that writing was required would make the writing process much longer, as we would not have past responses to help us with present ones (Devitt, "Generalizing" 576). As a result, the more you are able to master particular genres, the better equipped you may be to master genres that you later encounter:

> When people write, they draw on the genres they know, their own context of genres, to help construct their rhetorical action. If they encounter a situation new to them, it is the genres they have acquired in the past that they can use to shape their new action. Every genre they acquire, then, expands their genre repertoire and simultaneously shapes how they might view new situations. (Devitt, *Writing* 203)

Taking what Devitt says into account, think back to the previous discussion of the research paper. If you already have some idea of what a research paper looks like, you do not have to learn an entirely new genre. Instead, you just have to figure out how to change that particular genre to fit with the situation, even if that change just comes from having a different teacher.

Learning about genres and how they function is more important than mastering one particular genre; it is this knowledge that helps us to recognize and to determine appropriate responses to different situations—that is, knowing what particular genre is called for in a particular situation. And learning every genre would be impossible anyway, as Devitt notes that "no writing class could possibly teach students all the genres they will need to succeed even in school, much less in the workplace or in their civic lives.

Hence the value of teaching genre awareness rather than acquisition of particular genres" (Writing 205). This approach helps to make you a more effective writer as well, as knowing about genres will make you more prepared to use genres that you won't learn in college. For example, I recently needed to write a letter about removing a late fee on a credit card. I had never written this particular type of letter before, but I knew what action I tried to accomplish. As a result, I did some research on writing letters and determined that I should make it as formal and polite as possible. The body of the letter ended up as follows:

> I have very much enjoyed being a card carrier with this bank for many years. However, I recently had a late fee charged to my account. As you will note from my previous statements, this is the first late fee I have ever acquired. I do remember making this payment on time, as I have all of my previous payments. I hope to remain a loyal customer of this bank for many years to come, so I would very much appreciate it if you would remove this charge from my account.

You can see that this letter does several things. First, I build credibility for myself by reminding them that I have used their card for many years. Second, I ask them to check my records to show further that I am typically a responsible card carrier. And third, I hint that if they do not remove the late fee, I might decide to change to a different bank. This letter is effective because it considers how the situation affects the genre. And yes, the late fee was removed.

Chances are that I have left you more confused than you were before you began this essay. Actually, I hope that I have left you frustrated; this means that the next time you write, you will have to consider not only form but also audience, purpose, and genre; you will, in other words, have to consider the rhetorical effectiveness of your writing. Luckily, I can leave you with a few suggestions:

- First, determine what action you are trying to accomplish. Are you trying to receive an A on a paper? Convince a credit card company to remove a late fee? Get into graduate school? If you don't know what your goal is for a particular writing situation, you'll have a difficult time figuring out what genre to use.
- Second, learn as much as you can about the situation for which you are writing. What is the purpose? Who is the audience?

How much freedom do you have? How does the location affect the genre?

- Third, research how others have responded to similar situations. Talk to people who have written what you are trying to write. If you are asked to write a biology research paper, ask your instructor for examples. If you need to write a cover letter for a summer internship, take the time to find out about the location of that internship.

And finally, ask questions.

Discussion

1. What are some genres that you feel you know well? How did you learn them? What are their common rhetorical features?
2. What rules have you been told to follow in the past? How did they shape what you were writing?
3. How much freedom do you enjoy when writing? Does it help to have a form to follow, or do you find it to be limiting?

Important Concepts

strong paragraph

topic sentence

body

conclusion

genre

recurring situation

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Video 1: License: Standard YouTube License Attribution: The Rhetorical Situation by Kristina Turner.

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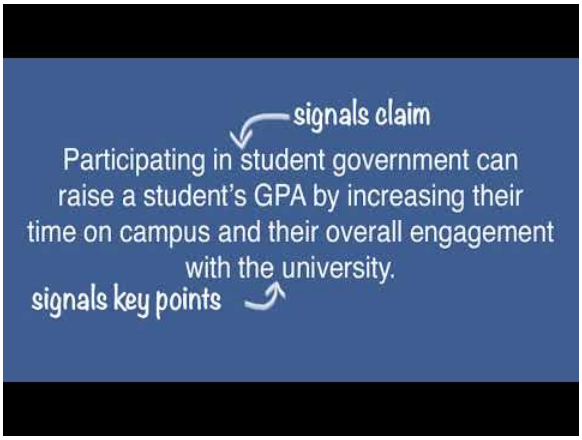
5.2: Thesis / Purpose Statements

Article links:

“Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement” provided by University of Minnesota

Chapter Preview

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



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=63

Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement

provided by University of Minnesota

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.

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.

strong thesis statement. 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.

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.
   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.

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 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. 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 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.



Important Concepts

strong thesis statement

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5.3: Organizing an Essay

Article links:

“Effective Means for Writing a Paragraph” provided by Candela Open Courses

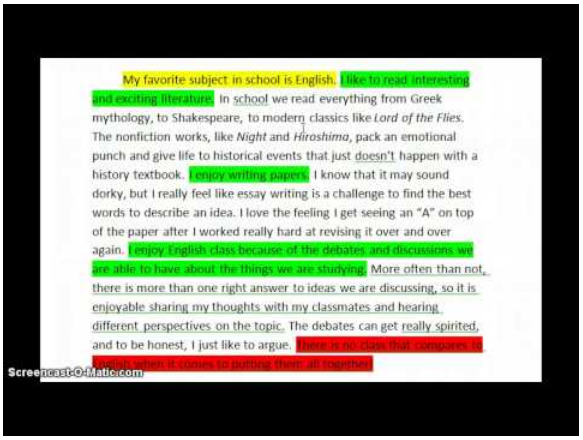
“Writing Effective Paragraphs” provided by the University of Richmond Writing Center

“Transitional Words and Phrases” provided by the University of Richmond Writing Center

“What Logical Plan Informs Your Paper’s Organization?” provided by the Writing Center

Learning Objectives

- Describe how to write a topic sentence.
- Describe how to support a topic sentence with details.
- Describe when to begin a new paragraph.
- List uses for transitional words.
- Describe strategies to assist in organizing a paper.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=65

Effective Means for Writing a Paragraph

provided by Candela Open Courses

Now that you have identified common purposes for writing and learned how to select appropriate content for a particular audience, you can think about the structure of a paragraph in greater detail. Composing an effective paragraph requires a method similar to building a house. You may have the finest content, or materials, but if you do not arrange them in the correct order, then the final product will not hold together very well.

A strong paragraph contains three distinct components:

1. **Topic sentence.** The topic sentence is the main idea of the paragraph.
2. **Body.** The body is composed of the supporting sentences that develop the main point.
3. **Conclusion.** The conclusion is the final sentence that summarizes the main point.

The foundation of a good paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence relates to the thesis, or main point, of the essay (see Chapter 9 “Writing Essays: From Start to Finish” for more information about thesis statements) and guides the reader by signposting what the paragraph is about. All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.

This section covers the major components of a paragraph and examines how to develop an effective topic sentence.

DEVELOPING A TOPIC SENTENCE

Pick up any newspaper or magazine and read the first sentence of an article. Are you fairly confident that you know what the rest of the article is about? If so, you have likely read the topic sentence. An effective topic sentence combines a main idea with the writer's personal attitude or opinion. It serves to orient the reader and provides an indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph. Read the following example.

Creating a national set of standards for math and English education will improve student learning in many states.

This topic sentence declares a favorable position for standardizing math and English education. After reading this sentence, a reader might reasonably expect the writer to provide supporting details and facts as to why standardizing math and English education might improve student learning in many states. If the purpose of the essay is actually to evaluate education in only one particular state, or to discuss math or English education specifically, then the topic sentence is misleading.

TIP

When writing a draft of an essay, allow a friend or colleague to read the opening line of your first paragraph. Ask your reader to predict what your paper will be about. If he or she is unable to guess your topic accurately, you should consider revising your topic sentence so that it clearly defines your purpose in writing.

MAIN IDEA VERSUS CONTROLLING IDEA

Topic sentences contain both a main idea (the subject, or topic that the writer is discussing) and a controlling idea (the writer's specific stance on that subject). Just as a thesis statement includes an idea that controls a document's focus (as you will read about in Chapter 8 "The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?"), a topic sentence must also contain a controlling idea to direct the paragraph. Different writers may use the same main idea but can steer their paragraph in a number of different directions according to their stance on the subject. Read the following examples.

- Marijuana is a destructive influence on teens and causes long-term brain damage.
- The antinausea properties in marijuana are a lifeline for many cancer patients.
- Legalizing marijuana would create a higher demand for Class A and Class B drugs.

Although the main idea—marijuana—is the same in all three topic sentences, the controlling idea differs depending on the writer's viewpoint.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TOPIC SENTENCE

Five characteristics define a good topic sentence:

1. A good topic sentence provides an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.**Weak example.** People rarely give firefighters the credit they deserve for such a physically and emotionally demanding job. (The paragraph is about a specific incident that involved firefighters; therefore, this topic sentence is too general.)**Stronger example.** During the October riots, Unit 3B went beyond the call of duty. (This topic sentence is more specific and indicates that the paragraph will contain information about a particular incident involving Unit 3B.)
2. A good topic sentence contains both a topic and a controlling idea or opinion.**Weak example.** In this paper, I am going to discuss the rising suicide rate among young professionals. (This topic sentence provides a main idea, but it does not present a controlling idea, or thesis.)**Stronger example.** The rising suicide rate among young professionals is a cause for immediate concern. (This topic sentence presents the writer's opinion on the subject of rising suicide rates among young professionals.)
3. A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow.**Weak example.** In general, writing an essay, thesis, or other academic or nonacademic document is considerably easier and of much higher quality if you first construct an outline, of which there are many different types. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but both are buried beneath the confusing sentence structure and unnecessary vocabulary. These obstacles make it difficult for the reader to follow.)**Stronger example.** Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline. (This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow.)
4. A good topic sentence does not include supporting details.**Weak example.** Salaries should be capped in baseball for many reasons, most importantly so we don't allow the same team to win year after year. (This topic sentence includes a supporting

detail that should be included later in the paragraph to back up the main point.)**Stronger example.** Introducing a salary cap would improve the game of baseball for many reasons. (This topic sentence omits the additional supporting detail so that it can be expanded upon later in the paragraph.)

5. A good topic sentence engages the reader by using interesting vocabulary.**Weak example.** The military deserves better equipment. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but the language is bland and unexciting.)**Stronger example.** The appalling lack of resources provided to the military is outrageous and requires our immediate attention. (This topic sentence reiterates the same idea and controlling thesis, but adjectives such as *appalling* and *immediate* better engage the reader. These words also indicate the writer's tone.)

WRITING AT WORK

When creating a workplace document, use the "top-down" approach—keep the topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph so that readers immediately understand the gist of the message. This method saves busy colleagues precious time and effort trying to figure out the main points and relevant details.

Headings are another helpful tool. In a text-heavy document, break up each paragraph with individual headings. These serve as useful navigation aids, enabling colleagues to skim through the document and locate paragraphs that are relevant to them.

DEVELOPING PARAGRAPHS THAT USE TOPIC SENTENCES, SUPPORTING IDEAS, AND TRANSITIONS EFFECTIVELY

Learning how to develop a good topic sentence is the first step toward writing a solid paragraph. Once you have composed your topic sentence, you have a guideline for the rest of the paragraph. To complete the paragraph, a writer must support the topic sentence with additional information and summarize the main point with a concluding sentence.

This section identifies the three major structural parts of a paragraph and covers how to develop a paragraph using transitional words and phrases.

IDENTIFYING PARTS OF A PARAGRAPH

An effective paragraph contains three main parts: a topic sentence, the body, and the concluding sentence. A topic sentence is often the first sentence of a paragraph. This chapter has already discussed its purpose—to express a main idea combined with the writer's attitude about the subject. The body of the paragraph usually follows, containing supporting details. Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence. The concluding sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It reminds the reader of the main point by restating it in different words.

Figure 5.3(1) Paragraph Structure Graphic Organizer



Read the following paragraph. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

After reading the new TV guide this week I had just one thought—why are we still being bombarded with reality shows? This season, the plague of reality television continues to darken our airwaves. Along with the return of viewer favorites, we are to be

cursed with yet another mindless creation. *Prisoner* follows the daily lives of eight suburban housewives who have chosen to be put in jail for the purposes of this fake psychological experiment. A preview for the first episode shows the usual tears and tantrums associated with reality television. I dread to think what producers will come up with next season, but if any of them are reading this blog—stop it! We've had enough reality television to last us a lifetime!

The first sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It tells the reader that the paragraph will be about reality television shows, and it expresses the writer's distaste for these shows through the use of the word *bombarded*.

Each of the following sentences in the paragraph supports the topic sentence by providing further information about a specific reality television show. The final sentence is the concluding sentence. It reiterates the main point that viewers are bored with reality television shows by using different words from the topic sentence.

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

Now take a look at the following paragraph. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

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

The last sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It draws on specific examples (a cat that tracked down its owners and a dog that can predict seizures) and then makes a general statement that draws a conclusion from these examples (animals' senses are better than humans'). In this case, the supporting sentences are placed before the topic sentence and the concluding sentence is the same as the topic sentence.

This technique is frequently used in persuasive writing. The writer produces detailed examples as evidence to back up his or her point, preparing the reader to accept the concluding topic sentence as the truth.

Sometimes, the topic sentence appears in the middle of a paragraph. Read the following example. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

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

In this paragraph, the underlined sentence is the topic sentence. It expresses the main idea—that breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to his main point (breathing exercises can help control anxiety) by using a personal anecdote (how he used to suffer from anxiety). The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The last sentence is the concluding sentence and restates how breathing can help manage anxiety.

Placing a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph is often used in creative writing. If you notice that you have used a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph in an academic essay, read through the paragraph carefully to make sure that it contains only one major topic. To read more about topic sentences and where they appear in paragraphs, see Chapter 8 "The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?".

IMPLIED TOPIC SENTENCES

Some well-organized paragraphs do not contain a topic sentence at all. Instead of being directly stated, the main idea is implied in the content of the paragraph. Read the following example:

Heaving herself up the stairs, Luella had to pause for breath several times. She let out a wheeze as she sat down heavily in the wooden rocking chair. Tao approached her cautiously, as if she might crumble at the slightest touch. He studied her face, like

parchment; stretched across the bones so finely he could almost see right through the skin to the decaying muscle underneath. Luella smiled a toothless grin.

Although no single sentence in this paragraph states the main idea, the entire paragraph focuses on one concept—that Luella is extremely old. The topic sentence is thus implied rather than stated. This technique is often used in descriptive or narrative writing. Implied topic sentences work well if the writer has a firm idea of what he or she intends to say in the paragraph and sticks to it. However, a paragraph loses its effectiveness if an implied topic sentence is too subtle or the writer loses focus.

TIP

Avoid using implied topic sentences in an informational document. Readers often lose patience if they are unable to quickly grasp what the writer is trying to say. The clearest and most efficient way to communicate in an informational document is to position the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph.

SUPPORTING SENTENCES

If you think of a paragraph as a hamburger, the supporting sentences are the meat inside the bun. They make up the body of the paragraph by explaining, proving, or enhancing the controlling idea in the topic sentence. Most paragraphs contain three to six supporting sentences depending on the audience and purpose for writing. A supporting sentence usually offers one of the following:

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

The type of supporting sentence you choose will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you are attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position you should rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples, rather than personal opinions. Read the following example:

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. **(Topic sentence)**

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

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

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

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

“It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said. “The running costs are far lower than previous gas powered vehicles I’ve owned.” **(Supporting sentence 5: quotation)**

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

To find information for your supporting sentences, you might consider using one of the following sources:

- Reference book
- Encyclopedia
- Website
- Biography/autobiography
- Map
- Dictionary
- Newspaper/magazine
- Interview
- Previous experience

- Personal research

TIP

When searching for information on the Internet, remember that some websites are more reliable than others. websites ending in .gov or .edu are generally more reliable than websites ending in .com or .org. Wikis and blogs are not reliable sources of information because they are subject to inaccuracies.

CONCLUDING SENTENCES

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

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

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

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

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

A concluding sentence may do any of the following:

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

TRANSITIONS

A strong paragraph moves seamlessly from the topic sentence into the supporting sentences and on to the concluding sentence. To help organize a paragraph and ensure that ideas logically connect to one another, writers use transitional words and phrases. A transition is a connecting word that describes a relationship between ideas. Take another look at the earlier example:

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

Each of the underlined words is a transition word. Words such as *first* and *second* are transition words that show sequence or clarify order. They help organize the writer's ideas by showing that he or she has another point to make in support of the topic sentence. Other transition words that show order include *third*, *also*, and *furthermore*.

The transition word *because* is a transition word of consequence that continues a line of thought. It indicates that the writer will provide an explanation of a result. In this sentence, the writer explains why hybrid cars will reduce dependency on fossil fuels (because they do not require gas). Other transition words of consequence include *as a result*, *so that*, *since*, or *for this reason*.

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

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

The following chart provides some useful transition words to connect supporting sentences and concluding sentences.

Table 5.3(2) Useful Transitional Words and Phrases

For Supporting Sentences					
above all	but	for instance	in particular	moreover	subsequently
also	conversely	furthermore	later on	nevertheless	therefore
aside from	correspondingly	however	likewise	on one hand	to begin with
at the same time	for example	in addition	meanwhile	on the contrary	
For Concluding Sentences					
after all	all things considered	in brief	in summary	on the whole	to sum up
all in all	finally	in conclusion	on balance	thus	

WRITING AT WORK

Transitional words and phrases are useful tools to incorporate into workplace documents. They guide the reader through the document, clarifying relationships between sentences and paragraphs so that the reader understands why they have been written in that particular order.

For example, when writing an instructional memo, it may be helpful to consider the following transitional words and phrases: *before you begin*, *first*, *next*, *then*, *finally*, *after you have completed*. Using these transitions as a template to write your memo will provide readers with clear, logical instructions about a particular process and the order in which steps are supposed to be completed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A good paragraph contains three distinct components: a topic sentence, body, and concluding sentence.
- The topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph combined with the writer's attitude or opinion about the topic.
- Good topic sentences contain both a main idea and a controlling idea, are clear and easy to follow, use engaging vocabulary, and provide an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.
- Topic sentences may be placed at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph. In most academic essays, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of a paragraph.
- Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence by offering facts, reasons, statistics, quotations, or examples.
- Concluding sentences summarize the key points in a paragraph and reiterate the main idea without repeating it word for word.
- Transitional words and phrases help organize ideas in a paragraph and show how these ideas relate to one another.

Writing Effective Paragraphs

A paragraph should be unified, coherent, and well developed. Paragraphs are unified around a main point and all sentences in the paragraph should clearly relate to that point in some way. The paragraph's main idea should be supported with specific information that develops or discusses the main idea in greater detail.

Creating a Topic Sentence

The topic sentence expresses the main point in a paragraph. You may create your topic sentence by considering the details or examples you will discuss. What unifies these examples? What do your examples have in common? Reach a conclusion and write that "conclusion" first. If it helps, think of writing backwards–from generalization to support instead of from examples to a conclusion.

If you know what your main point will be, write it as clearly as possible. Then, focus on keywords in your topic sentence and try to explain them more fully. Keep asking yourself "How?" or "Why?" or "What examples can I provide to convince a reader?". After you have added your supporting information, review the topic sentence to see if it still indicates the direction of your writing.

Purposes of Topic Sentences

- To state the main point of a paragraph
- To give the reader a sense of direction (indicate what information will follow)
- To summarize the paragraph's main point

Placement of Topic Sentences

- Often appear as the first or second sentences of a paragraph
- Rarely appear at the end of the paragraph

Supporting a Topic Sentence with Details

To support a topic sentence, consider some of the possible ways that provide details. To develop a paragraph, use one or more of these:

- Add examples
- Tell a story that illustrates the point you're making
- Discuss a process
- Compare and contrast
- Use analogies (eg., "X is similar to Y because. . . ")
- Discuss cause and effect
- Define your terms

Reasons for beginning a new paragraph

- To show you're switching to a new idea
- To highlight an important point by putting it at the beginning or end of your paragraph
- To show a change in time or place
- To emphasize a contrast
- To indicate changing speakers in a dialogue
- To give readers an opportunity to pause
- To break up a dense text

Ways of Arranging Information Within or Between Paragraphs

- ***Order of time*** (chronology)
- ***Order of space*** (descriptions of a location or scene)
- ***Order of climax*** (building toward a conclusion)
- ***Order of importance*** (from least to most important or from most to least important)

Transitional Words and Phrases

Provided by the University of Richmond Writing Center

This page only provides a list of transitional words; be certain you understand their meanings before you use them. Often, there exists a slight, but significant, difference between two apparently similar words. Also remember that while ***transitions*** describe relationships between ideas, they do not automatically create relationships between ideas for your reader. Use transitions with enough context in a sentence or paragraph to make the relationships clear.

Example of unclear transition:

The characters in Book A face a moral dilemma. In the same way, the characters in Book B face a similar problem.

Improved transition:

The characters in Book A face a moral dilemma, a contested inheritance. Although the inheritance in Book B consists of an old house and not a pile of money, the nature of the problem is quite similar.

Examples of Transitions:

Illustration

Thus, for example, for instance, namely, to illustrate, in other words, in particular, specifically, such as.

Contrast

On the contrary, contrarily, notwithstanding, but, however, nevertheless, in spite of, in contrast, yet, on one hand, on the other hand, rather, or, nor, conversely, at the same time, while this may be true.

Addition

And, in addition to, furthermore, moreover, besides, than, too, also, both-and, another, equally important, first, second, etc., again, further, last, finally, not only-but also, as well as, in the second place, next, likewise, similarly, in fact, as a result, consequently, in the same way, for example, for instance, however, thus, therefore, otherwise.

Time

After, afterward, before, then, once, next, last, at last, at length, first, second, etc., at first, formerly, rarely, usually, another, finally, soon, meanwhile, at the same time, for a minute, hour, day, etc., during the morning, day, week, etc., most important, later, ordinarily, to begin with, afterwards, generally, in order to, subsequently, previously, in the meantime, immediately, eventually, concurrently, simultaneously.

Space

At the left, at the right, in the center, on the side, along the edge, on top, below, beneath, under, around, above, over, straight ahead, at the top, at the bottom, surrounding, opposite, at the rear, at the front, in front of, beside, behind, next to, nearby, in the distance, beyond, in the forefront, in the foreground, within sight, out of sight, across, under, nearer, adjacent, in the background.

Concession

Although, at any rate, at least, still, thought, even though, granted that, while it may be true, in spite of, of course.

Similarity or Comparison

Similarly, likewise, in like fashion, in like manner, analogous to.

Emphasis

Above all, indeed, truly, of course, certainly, surely, in fact, really, in truth, again, besides, also, furthermore, in addition.

Details

Specifically, especially, in particular, to explain, to list, to enumerate, in detail, namely, including.

Examples

For example, for instance, to illustrate, thus, in other words, as an illustration, in particular.

Consequence or Result

So that, with the result that, thus, consequently, hence, accordingly, for this reason, therefore, so, because, since, due to, as a result, in other words, then.

Summary

Therefore, finally, consequently, thus, in short, in conclusion, in brief, as a result, accordingly.

Suggestion

For this purpose, to this end, with this in mind, with this purpose in mind, therefore.

What Logical Plan Informs Your Paper's Organization?

provided by Writing Commons

Why is it important to organize a paper logically?
Academic writing—like many types of writing—is typically more effective when the writer's ideas are presented logically. For the sake of clarity and cohesiveness, a logical plan should inform the paper's organization from beginning to end at the global (big picture) and local (zoomed in) levels. The target audience is more likely to become engaged, and maintain their engagement, when the conversation is clearly organized and purposefully presented.

Organizational structures that work:

- **Graphic organizers**
  - **Web:** Draw a circle in the middle of a page and write your thesis inside. In a series of circles around the thesis, fill in ideas for the introduction, the main point of each body paragraph, and the conclusion. Then number the circles appropriately.
  - **Cluster or mind map:** Begin with the topic in the center and map out a series of main ideas in connected ovals; continue to draw more ovals and cluster the details around each main idea.
- **Outlines**
  - ***Traditional, formal outline*:** This organizational plan typically begins with a thesis statement and lays out your paper's content in detail, using a standard outline format.
  - ***Working outline:*** This plan generally begins with a working thesis followed by an organized, but less formal, presentation of ideas. Strategic reorganization of the outline takes place as your paper develops.
  - ***Reverse outline*:** Outlining is done after a draft of the paper has been written. The writer extracts the main idea from each paragraph, determines what steps need to be taken to present the ideas logically, and reorganizes appropriately.

What can be done to construct a logical plan?

- Experiment with different organizational structures and choose one that works in harmony with your writing style, as well as the requirements of the assignment.
- Develop a well-organized thesis or working thesis—ideas that are clearly-presented in the thesis generally support clearly-presented ideas in the body of your paper.
- Treat the paper as a living document. Systematically reevaluate the success, or failure, of the organizational plan and reorganize as needed to keep the paper "breathing."

Key Terms

order of time

order of space

order of climax

order of importance:

transitions

traditional, formal outline

working outline

reverse outline

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Video 1: License: Standard YouTube License Attribution: Writing a Perfect Paragraph by Kristin Kneff.

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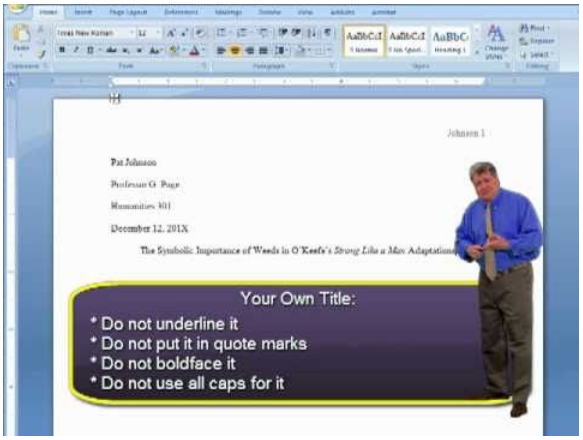
5.4: MLA Formatting Conventions

Article links:

“Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Style” provided by University of Minnesota Libraries

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the major components of a research paper written using MLA style.
2. Apply general Modern Language Association (MLA) style and formatting conventions in a research paper.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=67

Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Style

provided by University of Minnesota Libraries

MLA style provides a format for the manuscript text and parenthetical citations, or in-text citations. It also provides the framework for the works cited area for references at the end of the essay. MLA style emphasizes brevity and clarity. As a student writer, it is to your advantage to be familiar with both major styles, and this section will outline the main points of MLA as well as offer specific examples of commonly used references. Remember that your writing represents you in your absence. The correct use of a citation style demonstrates your attention to detail and ability to produce a scholarly work in an acceptable style, and it can help prevent the appearance or accusations of plagiarism.

If you are taking an English, art history, or music appreciation class, chances are that you will be asked to write an essay in MLA format. One common question goes something like “What’s the difference?” referring to APA and MLA style, and it deserves our consideration. The liberal arts and humanities often reflect works of creativity that come from individual and group effort, but they may adapt, change, or build on previous creative works. The inspiration to create something new, from a song to a music video, may contain elements of previous works. Drawing on your fellow artists and authors is part of the creative process, and so is giving credit where credit is due.

A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be aware of the works that you used to create it. Readers want to examine your sources to see if you know your subject, to see if you missed anything, or if you offer anything new and interesting. Your new or up-to-date sources may offer the reader additional insight on the subject being considered. It also demonstrates that you, as the author, are up-to-date on what is happening in the field or on the subject. Giving credit where it is due enhances your credibility, and the MLA style offers a clear format to use.

Uncredited work that is incorporated into your own writing is considered plagiarism. In the professional world, plagiarism results in loss of credibility and often compensation, including future opportunities. In a classroom setting, plagiarism results in a range of

sanctions, from loss of a grade to expulsion from a school or university. In both professional and academic settings, the penalties are severe. MLA offers artists and authors a systematic style of reference, again giving credit where credit is due, to protect MLA users from accusations of plagiarism.

MLA style uses a citation in the body of the essay that links to the works cited page at the end. The in-text citation is offset with parentheses, clearly calling attention to itself for the reader. The reference to the author or title is like a signal to the reader that information was incorporated from a separate source. It also provides the reader with information to then turn to the works cited section of your essay (at the end) where they can find the complete reference. If you follow the MLA style, and indicate your source both in your essay and in the works cited section, you will prevent the possibility of plagiarism. If you follow the MLA guidelines, pay attention to detail, and clearly indicate your sources, then this approach to formatting and citation offers a proven way to demonstrate your respect for other authors and artists.

Five Reasons to Use MLA Style

1. To demonstrate your ability to present a professional, academic essay in the correct style
2. To gain credibility and authenticity for your work
3. To enhance the ability of the reader to locate information discussed in your essay
4. To give credit where credit is due and prevent plagiarism
5. To get a good grade or demonstrate excellence in your writing

Before we transition to specifics, please consider one word of caution: consistency. If you are instructed to use the MLA style and need to indicate a date, you have options. For example, you could use an international or a US style:

- **International style:** 18 May 1980 (day/month/year)
- **US style:** May 18, 1980 (month/day/year)

If you are going to the US style, be consistent in its use. You'll find you have the option on page 83 of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition. You have many options when writing in English as the language itself has several conventions, or acceptable ways of writing particular parts of speech or information.

Now you may say to yourself that you won't write that term and it may be true, but you will come to a term or word that has more than one way it can be written. In that case, what convention is acceptable in MLA style? This is where the *MLA Handbook* serves as an invaluable resource. Again, your attention to detail and the professional presentation of your work are aspects of learning to write in an academic setting.

Now let's transition from a general discussion on the advantages of MLA style to what we are required to do to write a standard academic essay. We will first examine a general "to do" list, then review a few "do not" suggestions, and finally take a tour through a sample of MLA features. Links to sample MLA papers are located at the end of this section.

General MLA List

1. Use standard white paper (8.5 × 11 inches).
2. Double space the essay and quotes.
3. Use Times New Roman 12-point font.
4. Use one-inch margins on all sides
5. Indent paragraphs (five spaces or 1.5 inches).
6. Include consecutive page numbers in the upper-right corner.
7. Use italics to indicate a title, as in *Writing for Success*.
8. On the first page, place your name, course, date, and instructor's name in the upper-left corner.
9. On the first page, place the title centered on the page, with no bold or italics and all words capitalized.
10. On all pages, place the header, student's name + one space + page number, 1.5 inches from the top, aligned on the right.

Tip

Depending on your field of study, you may sometimes write research papers in either APA or MLA style. Recognize that each has its advantages and preferred use in fields and disciplines. Learn to write and reference in both styles with proficiency.

Title Block Format

You never get a second chance to make a first impression, and your title block (not a separate title page; just a section at the top of the first page) makes an impression on the reader. If correctly formatted with each element of information in its proper place, form, and format, it says to the reader that you mean business, that you are a professional, and that you take your work seriously, so it should, in turn, be seriously considered. Your title block in MLA style contributes to your credibility. Remember that your writing represents you in your absence, and the title block is the tailored suit or outfit that represents you best. That said, sometimes a separate title page is necessary, but it is best both to know how to properly format a title block or page in MLA style and to ask your instructor if it is included as part of the assignment.

Your name

Instructor

Course number

Date

Title of Paper

Paragraphs and Indentation

Make sure you indent five spaces (from the left margin). You'll see that the indent offsets the beginning of a new paragraph. We use paragraphs to express single ideas or topics that reinforce our central purpose or thesis statement. Paragraphs include topic sentences, supporting sentences, and conclusion or transitional sentences that link paragraphs together to support the main focus of the essay.

Tables and Illustrations

Place tables and illustrations as close as possible to the text they reinforce or complement. Here's an example of a table in MLA.

Table 5.4

Sales Figures by Year	Sales Amount ($)
2007	100,000
2008	125,000
2009	185,000
2010	215,000

As we can see in Table 5.4, we have experienced significant growth since 2008.

This example demonstrates that the words that you write and the tables, figures, illustrations, or images that you include should be next to each other in your paper.

Parenthetical Citations

You must cite your sources as you use them. In the same way that a table or figure should be located right next to the sentence that discusses it (see the previous example), parenthetical citations, or citations enclosed in parenthesis that appear in the text, are required. You need to cite all your information. If someone else wrote it, said it, drew it, demonstrated it, or otherwise expressed it, you need to cite it. The exception to this statement is common, widespread knowledge. For example, if you search online for MLA resources, and specifically MLA sample papers, you will find many similar discussions on MLA style. MLA is a style and cannot be copyrighted because it is a style, but the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook* can be copyright protected. If you reference a specific page in that handbook, you need to indicate it. If you write about a general MLA style issue that is commonly covered or addressed in multiple sources, you do not. When in doubt, reference the specific resource you used to write your essay.

Your in-text, or parenthetical, citations should do the following:

- Clearly indicate the specific sources also referenced in the works cited

- Specifically identify the location of the information that you used
- Keep the citation clear and concise, always confirming its accuracy

Works Cited Page

After the body of your paper comes the works cited page. It features the reference sources used in your essay. List the sources alphabetically by last name, or list them by title if the author is not known as is often the case of web-based articles. You will find links to examples of the works cited page in several of the sample MLA essays at the end of this section.

As a point of reference and comparison to our APA examples, let's examine the following three citations and the order of the information needed.

Citation Type	MLA Style	APA Style
Website	Author's Last Name, First Name. Title of the website. Publication Date. Name of Organization (if applicable). Date you accessed the website. <URL>.	Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Date of publication). Title of document. Retrieved from URL
Online article	Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." Title of the website. Date of publication. Organization that provides the website. Date you accessed the website.	Author's Last name, First Initial. (Date of publication). Title of article. *Title of Journal*, *Volume*(Issue). Retrieved from URL
Book	Author's Last Name, First Name. *Title of the Book*. Place of Publication: Publishing Company, Date of publication.	Author's Last Name, First Initial. (Date of publication). *Title of the book*. Place of Publication: Publishing Company.
Note: The items listed include proper punctuation and capitalization according to the style's guidelines.		

Useful Sources of Examples of MLA Style

- Arizona State University Libraries offers an excellent resource with clear examples.
  - http://libguides.asu.edu/content.php?pid=122697&sid=1132964
- Purdue Online Writing Lab includes sample pages and works cited.
  - http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01
- California State University–Sacramento's Online Writing Lab has an excellent visual description and example of an MLA paper.
  - www.csus.edu/owl/index/mla/mla_format.htm
- SUNY offers an excellent, brief, side-by-side comparison of MLA and APA citations.
  - www.sunywcc.edu/LIBRARY/research/MLA_APA_08.03.10.pdf
- Cornell University Library provides comprehensive MLA information on its Citation Management website.
  - http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/mla
- The University of Kansas Writing Center is an excellent resource.
  - www.writing.ku.edu/guides

Key Takeaways

- MLA style is often used in the liberal arts and humanities.
- MLA style emphasizes brevity and clarity.
- A reader interested in your subject wants not only to read what you wrote but also to be informed of the works you used to create it.

- MLA style uses a citation in the body of the essay that refers to the works cited section at the end.
- If you follow MLA style, and indicate your source both in your essay and in the works cited section, you will prevent the possibility of plagiarism.

Key Terms

MLA style

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5.5: Introductions and Conclusions

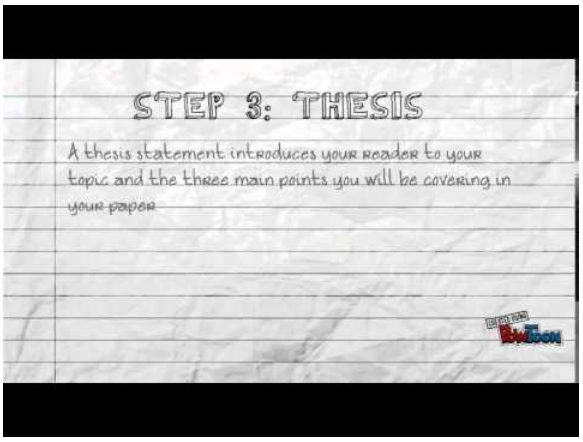
Article links:

“How to Write an Engaging Introduction” provided by Writing Commons

“How to Write a Compelling Conclusion” provided by Writing Commons

Learning Objectives

- Explain how to use a hook, transition, and thesis in an introductory paragraph.
- Explain the purpose of a conclusion paragraph.
- Explain how to use a call to action, a contextualization, a twist, or a suggestion in a conclusion paragraph.



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How to Write an Engaging Introduction

Provided by Writing Commons

In what ways does your opening engage your reader?

Writers who produce engaging openings keep their audience in mind from the very first sentence. They consider the tone, pace, delivery of information, and strategies for getting the reader’s attention. Many teachers generally recommend that students write their introductions last, because oftentimes introductions are the hardest paragraphs to write.

They’re difficult to write first because you have to consider what the reader needs to know about your topic before getting to the thesis. So, I, like other instructors, suggest writing them last—even after the conclusion—though it’s always a good idea to write with a working thesis in mind. Here are some general principles to consider when writing an introduction.

Avoid opening with cosmic statements

Think about the term “cosmic.” What does it mean? “Far out.” Do you want your introductions to be “far out” (in a bad way)? Then avoid beginning your papers with a ***cosmic statement***—a generalization, an overly broad idea. Publishers say that the first one or two sentences make or break a submission: if the first two sentences are poorly written or are uninteresting, they won’t keep reading. Consider what your target audience would think if the first two lines were so broad that they really meant nothing at all. Here is a list of a few phrases that signify cosmic statements and that are often seen in the emerging level of student writing:

- From the beginning of time . . .
- Ever since the dawn of time . . .
- Since man first walked the earth . . .

- There are two sides to every issue.
- There are many controversial issues over which people disagree.

That's just a short list; there are many more cosmic phrases. But you can see from these examples that they preface statements that are so broad they will either lead into an incorrect or bland statement or will disconnect the reader from the real point that you want to make. Let's take the first cosmic phrase from this list and finish it:

From the beginning of time, people have been tattooing each other.

Though the writer might think this is a good broad statement to introduce a paper on tattooing practices, it's too broad—not to mention historically incorrect. How might we revise this cosmic statement so that it's more engaging?

Tattooing practices have widely varied over the past few centuries.

Though still pretty broad, this statement is at least accurate. Consider, though, how we might draw the reader in even more:

Imagine you're in a tattoo parlor, and you're about to get a tattoo for the first time. You look over and see the tattoo artist coming at you with a piece of glass. How would you feel? Well, tattooing practices have only become standardized in the last two centuries.

By incorporating narrative into the introduction, the writer can engage the reader and entice him or her to continue reading. Note that narrative doesn't suit all genres of writing, though. See "Employing Narrative in an Essay" for more information. More formal assignments may ask you to construct an introduction without figurative language or narrative. Think about the requirements of your assignment and your rhetorical situation when crafting your introduction.

Avoid opening with a dictionary definition

Just like it's important to avoid using cosmic statements in your introductions, it's also important to avoid starting your papers with a ***dictionary definition***. If your paper topic is abortion, for instance, your reader doesn't need to know what Merriam Webster considers abortion to be; he or she needs to know what broader idea will lead him or her to your thesis. So don't look to dictionary.com for a snazzy opener; you won't find one there.

Before writing the first line of your introduction, it's a good idea to write out the thesis. You will need to build up to that thesis statement: the purpose of the introduction paragraph is to give the reader the information he or she needs to understand the thesis statement.

Wade your reader into your paper.

Why is it important to gradually move your reader through your introduction toward your thesis? Let's say that you're showing your friend this great new lake you've discovered. When you reach the edge, do you push your friend in or do you wade into the lake with him? Perhaps you'd push your friend in, but you don't want to shove your reader into your paper. You want to wade him or her into your paper, gradually taking him or her to the thesis statement.

If you write your introduction paragraph last, you will be familiar with your argument and its direction. You can then use this knowledge to structure your introduction paragraph, asking yourself questions like, "What details do I include in my body paragraphs (so that I avoid bringing them in to the paper too soon)?" and "What background information, either about the greater conversation surrounding this topic or about the topic's historical context, might my reader need to appreciate my thesis?"

Let's take a look at an example of an introduction paragraph that shoves the reader into the paper:

Tattooing practices have varied widely over the past few centuries. Indeed, tattooing has become much safer. Whereas in the nineteenth century tattooing was performed with sharp instruments like glass in countries such as Africa, in the twenty-first century tattooing is performed with sanitary needles.

This introduction can't really stand on its own as a paragraph, anyway; it's far too short. How might we add material to this paragraph (revise it) so that it gradually brings the reader to the thesis?

Imagine you're in a tattoo parlor, and you're about to get a tattoo for the first time. You look over and see the tattoo artist coming at you with a piece of glass. How would you feel? Well, tattooing practices have only become standardized in the last two centuries. In fact, in the nineteenth century, some tattoo artists used sharp instruments like shards of glass to mark the skin. Yet with the public focus in the modern world on health and healthful practices, tattooing practices have evolved accordingly. Whereas in the

nineteenth century tattooing was performed in unsanitary, dangerous ways, in the twenty-first century tattooing is performed with sanitary needles, demonstrating a shift in ideas regarding health in public opinion.

Whereas the first introduction galloped into the thesis statement, this paragraph wades the reader into the paper. Guiding the reader toward your thesis statement will also help him or her better understand the context for your particular topic, thereby giving him or her a greater stake in your writing.

Ultimately, then, I suggest you practice writing your introduction last. If it doesn't work for you, then switch back to writing it first. But writing it last may help you avoid writing two introduction paragraphs or foregrounding your argument too much. Overall, consider the progression of ideas in your introduction: you should move from global to local, from the general (but not over-generalized) to the specific (your thesis statement).



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How to Write a Compelling Conclusion

provided by Writing Commons

In what manner have you reiterated your ideas? What have you left your reader to think about at the end of your paper? How does your paper answer the "So what?" question?

As the last part of the paper, conclusions often get the short shrift. We instructors know (not that we condone it)—many students devote a lot less attention to the writing of the conclusion. Some students might even finish their conclusion thirty minutes before they have to turn in their papers. But even if you're practicing desperation writing, don't neglect your conclusion; it's a very integral part of your paper.

Think about it: Why would you spend so much time writing your introductory material and your body paragraphs and then kill the paper by leaving your reader with a dud for a conclusion? Rather than simply trailing off at the end, it's important to learn to construct a compelling conclusion—one that both reiterates your ideas and leaves your reader with something to think about.

The Reiteration

In the first part of the conclusion, you should spend a brief amount of time summarizing what you've covered in your paper. This reiteration should not merely be a restatement of your thesis or a collection of your topic sentences but should be a condensed version of your argument, topic, and/or purpose.

Let's take a look at an example reiteration from a paper about offshore drilling:

Ideally, a ban on all offshore drilling is the answer to the devastating and culminating environmental concerns that result when oil spills occur. Given the catastrophic history of three major oil spills, the environmental and economic consequences of offshore drilling should now be obvious.

Now, let's return to the thesis statement in this paper so we can see if it differs from the conclusion:

As a nation, we should reevaluate all forms of offshore drilling, but deep water offshore oil drilling, specifically, should be banned until the technology to stop and clean up oil spills catches up with our drilling technology. Though some may argue that offshore drilling provides economic advantages and would lessen our dependence on foreign oil, the environmental and economic consequences of an oil spill are so drastic that they far outweigh the advantages.

Since the author has already discussed the environmental and economic concerns associated with oil drilling, there's no need to be passive about the assertion; the author thus moves from presenting oil spills as a problem to making a statement that a ban on offshore drilling is the answer to this problem. Moreover, the author provides an overview of the paper in the second sentence of the conclusion, recapping the main points and reminding the reader that he or she should now be willing to acknowledge his or her position as viable. Though you may not always want to take this aggressive of an approach (i.e., saying something should be obvious to the reader), the key is to summarize your main ideas without "plagiarizing" yourself (repeating yourself word for word). Indeed, you may take the approach of rather saying, "The reader can now, given the catastrophic history of three major oil spills, see the environmental and economic consequences of oil drilling." For more information about summary, please refer to the textbook piece on incorporating sourced material into your essays.

As you can thus see, reiteration is not restatement. Summarize your paper in one to two sentences (or even three or four, depending on the length of the paper), and then move on to answering the "So what?" question.

Leaving Your Reader with Something to Think About: Answering the "So what?" Question

The bulk of your conclusion should answer the "***So what?" question***. Have you ever had an instructor write "So what?" at the end of your paper? You might have been offended, but the instructor was not saying that he or she did not care about your paper; rather, he or she was pointing to the fact that your paper leaves the reader with nothing new to think about. You cannot possibly spend an entire paragraph summarizing your paper topic, nor does your reader want to see an entire paragraph of summary, so you should craft something juicy—some new tidbit that serves as an extension of your original ideas.

There are a variety of ways that you can answer the "So what?" question. The following are just a few types of "endnotes":

The Call to Action



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The ***call to action*** can be used at the end of a variety of papers, but it works best for persuasive papers, such as social action papers and Rogerian argument essays (essays that begin with a problem and move toward a solution, which serves as the author's thesis). Any time your purpose in writing an essay is to change your reader's mind or you want to get your reader to do something, the call to action is the way to go. Basically, the call to action asks your reader, after having progressed through a brilliant and coherent argument, to do something or believe a certain way. Following the reiteration at which we previously looked, here comes a call to action:

We have advanced technology that allows deepwater offshore drilling, but we lack the advanced technology that would manage these spills effectively, As such, until cleanup and prevention technology are available we should, as gatekeepers of our coastal

shores and defenders of marine wildlife, ban offshore drilling—or, at the very least, demand a moratorium on all offshore oil drilling.

This call to action requests that the reader—remember, you need to identify your audience/reader before you begin writing—consider a ban on offshore drilling. Whether the author wants the reader to actually enact the ban or just to come to his or her side of the fence, he or she is asking the reader to do or believe something new based upon the information he or she just received.

The Contextualization

The ***contextualization*** places the author's local argument, topic, or purpose in a more global context so that the reader can see the larger purpose for the piece—or where the piece fits into the larger conversation. Whereas writers do research for papers so that they enter into specific conversations, they provide their readers with a contextualization in their conclusions so that they acknowledge the broader dialogue that contains that local conversation. For instance, if we were to return to the paper on offshore drilling, rather than proposing a ban on offshore drilling (a call to action), we might provide the reader with a contextualization:

We have advanced technology that allows deepwater offshore drilling, but we lack the advanced technology that would manage these spills effectively. Thus, one can see the need to place environmental concerns at the forefront of the political arena. Many politicians have already done so, including So-and-so and So-and-so.

Rather than asking the reader to do or believe something, this conclusion answers the "So what?" question by showing the reader why this specific conversation about offshore drilling matters in the larger conversation about politics and environmentalism.

The Twist

The ***twist*** leaves the reader with a contrasting idea to consider. For instance, if I were to write a paper that argued that the media was responsible for the poor body image of adolescent females, I might, in the last few lines of the conclusion, give the reader a twist:

While the media is certainly responsible for the majority of American girls' body image issues, parents sometimes affect the way girls perceive themselves more than the media does.

While this contrasting idea does not negate the writer's original argument (why would you want to do that?), it does present an alternative contrasting idea to weigh against the original argument. The twist is kind of like a cliffhanger, as it's sure to leave the reader saying, "Hmm . . ."

The Suggestion of Possibilities for Future Research

This approach to answering the "So what?" question is best for projects that you want to turn into a larger, ongoing project—or, if you want to suggest possibilities for future research for someone else (your reader) who might be interested in that topic. This approach involves pinpointing various directions which your research may take if someone were to extend the ideas included in your paper. Remember, research is a conversation, so it's important to consider how your piece fits into this conversation and how others might use it in their own conversations. For example, if we were to suggest possibilities for future research based on this recurring example of the paper on offshore drilling, the conclusion might end with something like this:

I have just explored the economic and environmental repercussions of offshore drilling based on the examples we have of three major oil spills over the past thirty years. Future research might uncover more economic and environmental consequences of offshore drilling, as such consequences will become clearer as the effects of the BP oil spill become more pronounced.

Suggesting opportunities for future research involve the reader in the paper, just like the call to action does. Who knows, the reader may be inspired by your brilliant ideas and may want to use your piece as a jumping-off point!

Whether you use a **call to action**, a **twist**, a **contextualization**, or whether you **suggest future possibilities for research**, it's important to answer the "So what?" question so that your reader stays interested in your topic until the very end of the paper. And, perhaps more importantly, leaving your reader with something juicy to consider makes it more likely that the reader will remember your piece of writing. Why write just to end your paper with a dud? Give your conclusion some love: reiterate and then answer the "So what?" question.

Key Terms

cosmic statement

dictionary definition

so what question

call to action

contextualization

twist

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6: Revising and Recomposing

6.1 Revising vs. Proofreading
6.2 Matters of Grammar, Mechanics, and Style
6.3 The Reader’s Role



[1]

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6.1: Revising vs. Proofreading

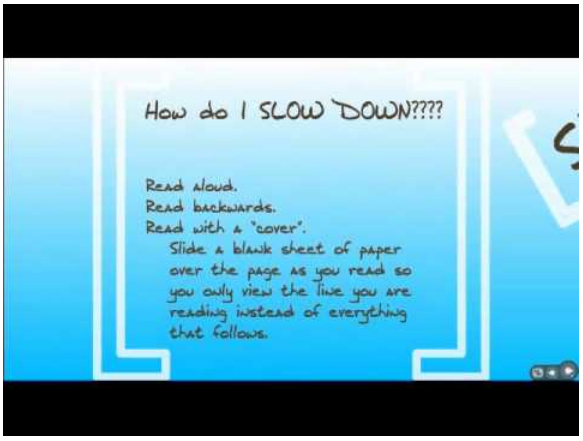
Article links:

“Higher Order Concerns” provided by Lumen Learning

“Reflective Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking?” by Sandra L. Giles

Chapter Preview

- List strategies for proofreading your writing.
- Compare higher-order concerns and lower-order concerns.
- Describe revision strategies for evaluating writing.
- Discuss using the reverse outline as a revision strategy.



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Higher Order Concerns

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Introduction

Regardless of writers’ levels of experience or areas of expertise, many struggle with revision, a component of the writing process that encompasses everything from transformative changes in content and argumentation to minor corrections in grammar and punctuation. Perhaps because revision involves so many forms of modification, it is the focus of most scientific writing guides and handbooks. Revision can be daunting; how does one progress from ***initial drafts*** (called “rough drafts” for good reason) to a polished piece of scholarly writing?

Developing a process for revision can help writers produce thoughtful, polished texts and grow their written communication skills. Consider, then, a systematic approach to revision, including strategies to employ at every step of the process.

A System for Approaching Revision

Generally, revision should be approached in a top-down manner by addressing ***higher-order concerns (HOCs)*** before moving on to ***lower-order concerns (LOCs)***. In writing studies, the term “higher order” is used to denote major or global issues such as thesis, argumentation, and organization, whereas “lower order” is used to denote minor or local issues such as grammar and mechanics.[1] The more analytical work of revising HOCs often has ramifications for the entire piece. Perhaps in refining the argument, a writer will realize that the discussion section does not fully consider the study’s implications. Or, a writer will try a new organizational scheme and find that a paragraph no longer fits and should be cut. Such revisions may have far-reaching implications for the text.

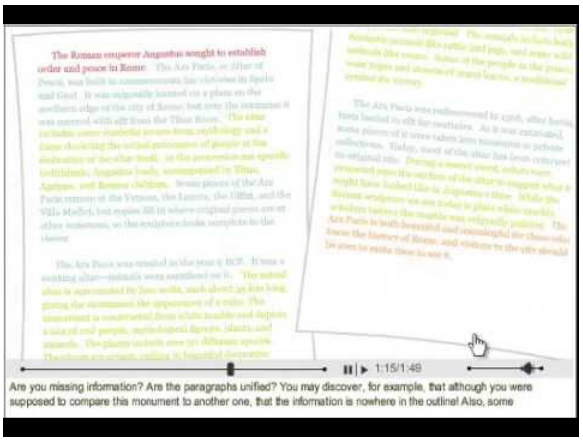
Dedicating time to tweaking wording or correcting grammatical errors is unproductive if the sentence will be changed or deleted. Focusing on HOCs before LOCs allows writers to revise more effectively and efficiently.

Revision Strategies

Bearing in mind the general system of revising from HOCs to LOCs, you can employ several revision strategies.

- **Begin by evaluating how your argument addresses your rhetorical situation**—that is, the specific context surrounding your writing, including the audience, exigence, and constraints.[2]
  - For example, you may write an article describing a new treatment. If the target journal's audience comes from a variety of disciplines, you may need to include substantial background explanation, consider the implications for practitioners and scholars in multiple fields, and define technical terms. By contrast, if you are addressing a highly specialized audience, you may be able to dispense with many of the background explanations and definitions because of your shared knowledge base. You may consider the implications only for specialists, as they are your primary audience. Because this sort of revision affects the entire text, beginning by analyzing your rhetorical situation is effective.
- **Analyze your thesis or main argument for clarity.**
- **Evaluate the global organization of your text by writing a reverse outline.** Unlike traditional outlines, which are written before drafting, reverse outlines reflect the content of written drafts.
  - In a separate document or in your text's margins, record the main idea of each paragraph. Then, consider whether the order of your ideas is logical. This method also will help you identify ideas that are out of place or digressive. You may also evaluate organization by printing the text and cutting it up so that each paragraph appears on a separate piece of paper. You may then easily reorder the paragraphs to test different organizational schemes.

Reverse Outline video



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Reflective Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking?

by Sandra L. Giles

"Reflection" and "reflective writing" are umbrella terms that refer to any activity that asks you to think about your own thinking.* As composition scholars Kathleen Blake Yancey and Jane Bowman Smith explain, reflection records a "student's process of thinking about what she or he is doing while in the process of that doing" (170). In a writing class, you may be asked to think about your writing processes in general or in relation to a particular essay, to think about your intentions regarding rhetorical elements such as audience and purpose, or to think about your choices regarding development strategies such as comparison-contrast, exemplification, or definition. You may be asked to describe your decisions regarding language features such as word choice,

sentence rhythm, and so on. You may be asked to evaluate or assess your piece of writing or your development as a writer in general. Your instructor may also ask you to perform these kinds of activities at various points in your process of working on a project, or at the end of the semester.

A Writer's Experience

The first time I had to perform reflective writing myself was in the summer of 2002. And it did feel like a performance, at first. I was a doctoral student in Wendy Bishop's Life Writing class at Florida State University, and it was the first class I had ever taken where we English majors actually practiced what we preached; which is to say, we actually put ourselves through the various elements of process writing. Bishop led us through invention exercises, revision exercises, language activities, and yes, reflective writings. For each essay, we had to write what she called a "process note" in which we explained our processes of working on the essay, as well as our thought processes in developing the ideas. We also discussed what we might want to do with (or to) the essay in the future, beyond the class. At the end of the semester, we composed a self-evaluative cover letter for our portfolio in which we discussed each of our essays from the semester and recorded our learning and insights about writing and about the genre of nonfiction. My first process note for the class was a misguided attempt at good student-gives-the-teacher-what-she-wants. Our assignment had been to attend an event in town and write about it. I had seen an email announcement about a medium visiting from England who would perform a "reading" at the Unity Church in town. So I went and took notes. And wrote two consecutive drafts. After peer workshop, a third. And then I had to write the process note, the likes of which I had never done before. It felt awkward, senseless. Worse than writing a scholarship application or some other mundane writing task. Like a waste of time, and like it wasn't real writing at all. But it was required.

So, hoop-jumper that I was, I wrote the following: "This will eventually be part of a longer piece that will explore the Foundation for Spiritual Knowledge in Tallahassee, Florida, which is a group of local people in training to be mediums and spirituals healers. These two goals are intertwined." Yeah, right. Nice and fancy. Did I really intend to write a book-length study on those folks? I thought my professor would like the idea, though, so I put it in my note. Plus, my peer reviewers had asked for a longer, deeper piece. That statement would show I was being responsive to their feedback, even though I didn't agree with it. The peer reviewers had also wanted me to put myself into the essay more, to do more with first-person point of view rather than just writing a reporter-style observation piece. I still disagree with them, but what I should have done in the original process note was go into why: my own search for spirituality and belief could not be handled in a brief essay. I wanted the piece to be about the medium herself, and mediumship in general, and the public's reaction, and why a group of snarky teenagers thought they could be disruptive the whole time and come off as superior. I did a better job later—more honest and thoughtful and revealing about my intentions for the piece—in the self-evaluation for the portfolio. That's because, as the semester progressed and I continued to have to write those darned process notes, I dropped the attitude. In a conference about my writing, Bishop responded to my note by asking questions focused entirely on helping me refine my intentions for the piece, and I realized my task wasn't to please or try to dazzle her. I stopped worrying about how awkward the reflection was, stopped worrying about how to please the teacher, and started actually reflecting and thinking. New habits and ways of thinking formed. And unexpectedly, all the hard decisions about revising for the next draft began to come more easily.

And something else clicked, too. Two and a half years previously, I had been teaching composition at a small two-year college. Composition scholar Peggy O'Neill taught a workshop for us English teachers on an assignment she called the "Letter to the Reader." That was my introduction to reflective writing as a teacher, though I hadn't done any of it myself at that point. I thought, "Okay, the composition scholars say we should get our students to do this." So I did, but it did not work very well with my students at the time. Here's why: I didn't come to understand what it could do for a writer, or how it would do it, until I had been through it myself.

After Bishop's class, I became a convert. I began studying reflection, officially called metacognition, and began developing ways of using it in writing classes of all kinds, from composition to creative nonfiction to fiction writing. It works. Reflection helps you to develop your intentions (purpose), figure out your relation to your audience, uncover possible problems with your individual writing processes, set goals for revision, make decisions about language and style, and the list goes on. In a nutshell, it helps you develop more insight into and control over composing and revising processes. And according to scholars such as Chris M. Anson, developing this control is a feature that distinguishes stronger from weaker writers and active from passive learners (69–73).

My Letter to the Reader Assignment

Over recent years, I've developed my own version of the Letter to the Reader, based on O'Neill's workshop and Bishop's class assignments. For each essay, during a revising workshop, my students first draft their letters to the reader and then later, polish them to be turned in with the final draft. Letters are composed based on the following instructions:

This will be a sort of cover letter for your essay. It should be on a separate sheet of paper, typed, stapled to the top of the final draft. Date the letter and address it to "Dear Reader." Then do the following in nicely developed, fat paragraphs:

1. Tell the reader what you intend for the essay to do for its readers. Describe its purpose(s) and the effect(s) you want it to have on the readers. Say who you think the readers are.

• Describe your process of working on the essay. How did you narrow the assigned topic? What kind of planning did you do? What steps did you go through, what changes did you make along the way, what decisions did you face, and how did you make the decisions?

• How did comments from your peers, in peer workshop, help you? How did any class activities on style, editing, etc., help you?

2. Remember to sign the letter. After you've drafted it, think about whether your letter and essay match up. Does the essay really do what your letter promises? If not, then use the draft of your letter as a revising tool to make a few more adjustments to your essay. Then, when the essay is polished and ready to hand in, polish the letter as well and hand them in together.

Following is a sample letter that shows how the act of answering these prompts can help you uncover issues in your essays that need to be addressed in further revision. This letter is a mock-up based on problems I've seen over the years. We discuss it thoroughly in my writing classes:

Dear Reader,

This essay is about how I feel about the changes in the financial aid rules. I talk about how they say you're not eligible even if your parents aren't supporting you anymore. I also talk a little bit about the HOPE scholarship. But my real purpose is to show how the high cost of books makes it impossible to afford college if you can't get on financial aid. My readers will be all college students. As a result, it should make students want to make a change. My main strategy in this essay is to describe how the rules have affected me personally.

I chose this topic because this whole situation has really bugged me. I did freewriting to get my feelings out on paper, but I don't think that was effective because it seemed jumbled and didn't flow. So I started over with an outline and went on from there. I'm still not sure how to start the introduction off because I want to hook the reader's interest but I don't know how to do that. I try to include many different arguments to appeal to different types of students to make the whole argument seem worthwhile on many levels.

I did not include comments from students because I want everyone to think for themselves and form their own opinion. That's my main strategy. I don't want the paper to be too long and bore the reader. I was told in peer workshop to include information from

other students at other colleges with these same financial aid problems. But I didn't do that because I don't know anybody at another school. I didn't want to include any false information.

Thanks, (signature)

Notice how the letter shows us, as readers of the letter, some problems in the essay without actually having to read the essay. From this (imaginary) student's point of view, the act of drafting this letter should show her the problems, too. In her first sentence, she announces her overall topic. Next she identifies a particular problem: the way "they" define whether an applicant is dependent on or independent of parents. So far, pretty good, except her use of the vague pronoun "they" makes me hope she hasn't been that vague in the essay itself. Part of taking on a topic is learning enough about it to be specific. Specific is effective; vague is not. Her next comment about the HOPE scholarship makes me wonder if she's narrowed her topic enough. When she said "financial aid," I assumed federal, but HOPE is particular to the state of Georgia and has its own set of very particular rules, set by its own committee in Atlanta. Can she effectively cover both federal financial aid, such as the Pell Grant for example, as well as HOPE, in the same essay, when the rules governing them are different? Maybe. We'll see. I wish the letter would address more specifically how she sorts that out in the essay. Then she says that her "real purpose" is to talk about the cost of books. Is that really her main purpose? Either she doesn't have a good handle on what she wants her essay to do or she's just throwing language around to sound good in the letter. Not good, either way.

When she says she wants the readers to be all college students, she has identified her target audience, which is good. Then this: "As a result, it should make students want to make a change." Now, doesn't that sound more in line with a statement of purpose? Here the writer makes clear, for the first time, that she wants to write a persuasive piece on the topic. But then she says that her "main strategy" is to discuss only her own personal experience. That's not a strong enough strategy, by itself, to be persuasive.

In the second section, where she discusses process, she seems to have gotten discouraged when she thought that freewriting hadn't worked because it resulted in something "jumbled." But she missed the point that freewriting works to generate ideas, which often won't come out nicely organized. It's completely fine, and normal, to use freewriting to generate ideas and then organize them with perhaps an outline as a second step. As a teacher, when I read comments like this in a letter, I write a note to the student explaining that "jumbled" is normal, perfectly fine, and nothing to worry about. I'm glad when I read that sort of comment so I can reassure the student. If not for the letter, I probably wouldn't have known of her unfounded concern. It creates a teaching moment.

Our imaginary student then says, "I'm still not sure how to start the introduction off because I want to hook the reader's interest but don't know how to do that." This statement shows that she's thinking along the right lines—of capturing the reader's interest. But she hasn't quite figured out how to do that in this essay, probably because she doesn't have a clear handle on her purpose. I'd advise her to address that problem and to better develop her overall strategy, and then she would be in a better position to make a plan for the introduction. Again, a teaching moment. When she concludes the second paragraph of the letter saying that she wants to include "many different arguments" for "different types of students," it seems even more evident that she's not clear on purpose or strategy; therefore, she's just written a vague sentence she probably thought sounded good for the letter.

She begins her third paragraph with further proof of the problems. If her piece is to be persuasive, then she should not want readers to "think for themselves and form their own opinion." She most certainly should have included comments from other students, as her peer responders advised. It wouldn't be difficult to interview some fellow students at her own school. And as for finding out what students at other schools think about the issue, a quick search on the Internet would turn up newspaper or newsletter articles, as well as blogs and other relevant sources. Just because the official assignment may not have been to write a "research" paper doesn't mean you can't research. Some of your best material will come that way. And in this particular type of paper, your personal experience by itself, without support, will not likely persuade the reader. Now, I do appreciate when she says she doesn't want to include any "false information." A lot of students come to college with the idea that in English class, if you don't know any information to use, then you can just make it up so it sounds good. But that's not ethical, and it's not persuasive, and just a few minutes on the Internet will solve the problem.

This student, having drafted the above letter, should go back and analyze. Do the essay and letter match up? Does the essay do what the letter promises? And here, does the letter uncover lack of clear thinking about purpose and strategy? Yes, it does, so she should now go back and address these issues in her essay. Without having done this type of reflective exercise, she likely would have thought her essay was just fine, and she would have been unpleasantly surprised to get the grade back with my (the teacher's) extensive commentary and critique. She never would have predicted what I would say because she wouldn't have had a process for thinking through these issues—and might not have known how to begin thinking this way. Drafting the letter should help her develop more insight into and control over the revising process so she can make more effective decisions as she revises.

How It Works

Intentions—a sense of audience and purpose and of what the writer wants the essay to do—are essential to a good piece of communicative writing. Anson makes the point that when an instructor asks a student to verbalize his or her intentions, it is much more likely that the student will have intentions (qtd. in Yancey and Smith 174). We saw this process in mid-struggle with our imaginary student's work (above), and we'll see it handled more effectively in real student examples (below). As many composition scholars explain, reflective and self-assessing activities help writers set goals for their writing. For instance, Rebecca Moore Howard states that "writers who can assess their own prose can successfully revise that prose" (36). This position is further illustrated by Xiaoguang Cheng and Margaret S. Steffenson, who conducted and then reported a study clearly demonstrating a direct positive effect of reflection on student revising processes in "Metadiscourse: A Technique for Improving Student Writing." Yancey and Smith argue that self-assessment and reflection are essential to the learning process because they are a "method for assigning both responsibility and authority to a learner" (170). Students then become independent learners who can take what they learn about writing into the future beyond a particular class rather than remaining dependent on teachers or peer evaluators (171). Anson echoes this idea, saying that reflection helps a writer grow beyond simply succeeding in a particular writing project: "Once they begin thinking about writing productively, they stand a much better chance of developing expertise and working more successfully in future writing situations" (73).

Examples from Real Students

Let's see some examples from actual students now, although for the sake of space we'll look at excerpts. The first few illustrate how reflective writing helps you develop your intentions. For an assignment to write a profile essay, Joshua Dawson described his purpose and audience: "This essay is about my grandmother and how she overcame the hardships of life. [. . .] The purpose of this essay is to show how a woman can be tough and can take anything life throws at her. I hope the essay reaches students who have a single parent and those who don't know what a single parent goes through." Joshua showed a clear idea of what he wanted his essay to do. For a cultural differences paper, Haley Moore wrote about her mission trip to Peru: "I tried to show how, in America, we have everything from clean water to freedom of religion and other parts of the world do not. Also, I would like for my essay to inspire people to give donations or help in any way they can for the countries that live in poverty." Haley's final draft actually did not address the issue of donations and focused instead on the importance of mission work, a good revision decision that kept the essay more focused.

In a Composition II class, Chelsie Mathis wrote an argumentative essay on a set of controversial photos published in newspapers in the 1970s which showed a woman falling to her death during a fire escape collapse. Chelsie said,

The main purpose of this essay is to argue whether the [newspaper] editors used correct judgment when deciding to publish such photos. The effect that I want my paper to have on the readers is to really make people think about others' feelings and to make people realize that poor judgment can have a big effect. [. . .] I intend for my readers to possibly be high school students going into the field of journalism or photojournalism.

Chelsie demonstrated clear thinking about purpose and about who she wanted her essay to influence. Another Comp II student, Daniel White, wrote, "This essay is a cognitive approach of how I feel YouTube is helping our society achieve its dreams and desires of becoming stars." I had no idea what he meant by "cognitive approach," but I knew he was taking a psychology class at the same time. I appreciated that he was trying to integrate his learning from that class into ours, trying to learn to use that vocabulary. I was sure that with more practice, he would get the hang of it. I didn't know whether he was getting much writing practice at all in psychology, so I was happy to let him practice it in my class. His reflection showed learning in process.

My students often resist writing about their ***composing processes***, but it's good for them to see and analyze how they did what they did, and it also helps me know what they were thinking when they made composing decisions. Josh Autry, in regards to his essay on scuba diving in the Florida Keys at the wreck of the Spiegel Grove, said, "Mapping was my preferred method of outlining. It helped me organize my thoughts, go into detail, and pick the topics that I thought would be the most interesting to the readers." He also noted, "I choose [sic] to write a paragraph about everything that can happen to a diver that is not prepared but after reviewing it I was afraid that it would scare an interested diver away. I chose to take that paragraph out and put a few warnings in the conclusion so the aspiring diver would not be clueless." This was a good decision that did improve the final draft. His earlier draft had gotten derailed by a long discussion of the dangers of scuba diving in general. But he came to this realization and decided to correct it without my help—except that I had led the class through reflective revising activities. D'Amber Walker wrote, "At first my organization was off because I didn't know if I should start off with a personal experience which included telling a story or start with a statistic." Apparently, a former teacher had told her not to include personal experiences in her essays. I reminded her that in our workshop on introductions, we had discussed how a personal story can be a very effective hook to grab the reader's attention. So once again, a teaching moment. When Jonathan Kelly said, "I probably could have given more depth to this paper by interviewing a peer or something but I really felt unsure of how to go about doing so," I was able to scold him gently. If he really didn't know how to ask fellow students their opinions, all he had to do was ask me. But his statement shows an accurate assessment of how the paper could have been better. When Nigel Ellington titled his essay "If Everything Was Easy, Nothing Would Be Worth Anything," he explained, "I like this [title] because it's catchy and doesn't give too much away and it hooks you." He integrated what he learned in a workshop on titles. Doing this one little bit of reflective thinking cemented that learning and gave him a chance to use it in his actual paper.

How It Helps Me (the Instructor) Help You

Writing teachers often play two roles in relation to their students. I am my students' instructor, but I am also a fellow writer. As a writer, I have learned that revision can be overwhelming. It's tempting just to fiddle with words and commas if I don't know what else to do. Reflection is a mechanism, a set of procedures, to help me step back from a draft to gain enough distance to ask myself, "Is this really what I want the essay (or story or poem or article) to do? Is this really what I want it to say? Is this the best way to get it to say that?" To revise is to re-vision or re-see, to re-think these issues, but you have to create a critical distance to be able to imagine your piece done another way. Reflection helps you create that distance. It also helps your instructor better guide your work and respond to it.

The semester after my experience in Bishop's Life Writing Class, I took a Fiction Writing Workshop taught by Mark Winegardner, author of *The Godfather Returns* and *The Godfather's Revenge*, as well as numerous other novels and short stories. Winegardner had us create what he called the "process memo." As he indicated in an interview, he uses the memo mainly as a tool to help the

workshop instructor know how to respond to the writer's story. If a writer indicates in the memo that he knows something is still a problem with the story, then the instructor can curtail lengthy discussion of that issue's existence during the workshop and instead prompt peers to provide suggestions. The instructor can give some pointed advice, or possibly reassurance, based on the writer's concerns that, without being psychic, the instructor would not otherwise have known about. Composition scholar Jeffrey Sommers notes that reflective pieces show teachers what your intentions for your writing actually are, which lets us respond to your writing accurately, rather than responding to what we think your intentions might be ("Enlisting" 101–2). He also points out that we can know how to reduce your anxiety about your writing appropriately ("Behind" 77). Thus, without a reflective memo, your teacher might pass right over the very issue you have been worried about.

The Habit of Self-Reflective Writing

One of the most important functions of reflective writing in the long run is to establish in you, the writer, a habit of ***self-reflective thinking***. The first few reflective pieces you write may feel awkward and silly and possibly painful. You might play the teacher-pleasing game. But that's really not what we want (see Smith 129). Teachers don't want you to say certain things, we want you to think in certain ways. Once you get the hang of it and start to see the benefits in your writing, you'll notice that you've formed a habit of thinking reflectively almost invisibly. And not only will it help you in writing classes, but in any future writing projects for biology class, say, or even further in the future, in writing that you may do on the job, such as incident reports or annual reports for a business. You'll become a better writer. You'll become a better thinker. You'll become a better learner. And learning is what you'll be doing for the rest of your life. I recently painted my kitchen. It was a painful experience. I had a four-day weekend and thought I could clean, prep, and paint the kitchen, breakfast nook, and hallway to the garage in just four days, not to mention painting the trim and doors white. I pushed myself to the limit of endurance. And when I finished the wall color (not even touching the trim), I didn't like it. The experience was devastating. A very similar thing had happened three years before when I painted my home office a color I now call "baby poop." My home office is still "baby poop" because I got so frustrated I just gave up. Now, the kitchen was even worse. It was such a light green it looked like liver failure and didn't go with the tile on the floor. Plus, it showed brush marks and other flaws. What the heck?

But unlike three years ago, when I had given up, I decided to apply reflective practices to the situation. I decided to see it as time for ***revision-type thinking***. Why had I wanted green to begin with? (Because I didn't want blue in a kitchen. I've really been craving that hot dark lime color that's popular now. So yes, I still want it to be green.) Why hadn't I chosen a darker green? (Because I have the darker, hotter color into the room with accessories. The lighter green has a more neutral effect that I shouldn't get sick of after six months. Perhaps I'll get used to it, especially when I get around to painting the trim white.) What caused the brush strokes? (I asked an expert. Two factors: using satin finish rather than eggshell, and using a cheap paintbrush for cut-in-areas.) How can they be fixed? (Most of the brush strokes are just in the cut-in areas and so they can be redone quickly with a better quality brush. That is, if I decide to keep this light green color.) Is the fact that the trim is still cream-colored rather than white part of

the problem? (Oh, yes. Fix that first and the other problems might diminish.) What can I learn about timing for my next paint project? (That the cleaning and prep work take much longer than you think, and that you will need two coats, plus drying time. And so what if you didn't finish it in four days? Relax! Allow more time next time.) Am I really worried about what my mother will say? (No, because I'm the one who has to look at it every day.) So the solution? Step one is to paint the trim first and then re-evaluate. Using a method of reflection to think back over my "draft" gives me a method for proceeding with "revision." At the risk of sounding like a pop song, when you stop to think it through, you'll know what to do.

Revision isn't just in writing. These methods can be applied any time you are working on a project—of any kind—or have to make decisions about something. Establishing the habit of reflective thinking will have far-reaching benefits in your education, your career, and your life. It's an essential key to success for the life-long learner.

Important Concepts

initial drafts

higher-order concerns (HOCs)

lower-order concerns (LOCs)

composing processes

writing teachers

self-reflective thinking

revision-type thinking

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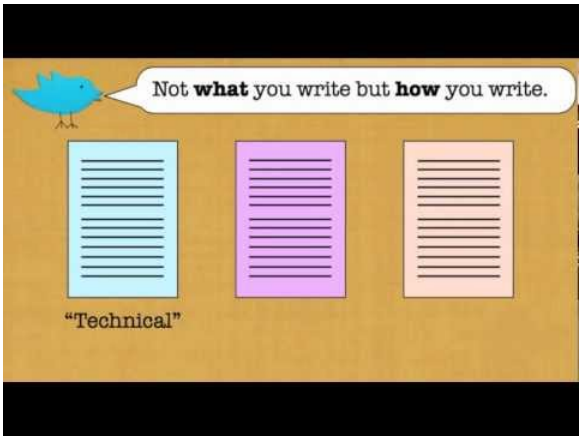
6.2: Matters of Grammar, Mechanics, and Style

Article links:

“Style” provided by Writing Commons

Learning Objectives

- Discuss components of style in writing.
- Explore the use of voice, sentence structure, point of view, grammar, and punctuation in writing.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=75

Style

Although characterized as a “local concern,” ***style*** is an incredibly important aspect of writing. In this section, you will learn how to craft engaging, dynamic prose and how to best communicate your information and purpose as a writer. This section includes links to information on Writing Commons.

Voice

Learn how to negotiate between formal academic writing and conversational prose by maintaining an academic tone while staying true to your own voice in Making Sure Your Voice is Present.

Sentence Structure

Reusing the same sentence pattern in your writing makes for monotonous reading. Learn to engage your readers by experimenting with different sentence patterns in Select an Appropriate Sentence Pattern. Then focus on individual sentences with the Sentence-Level Exercise.

Active Voice

Whereas writers in the sciences tend to use passive voice in research reports, writers in other fields such as the humanities emphasize the importance of active voice. Learn to revise sentences to make them active and more engaging in Use the Active Voice. Another key to crafting engaging prose is to maintain a high verb-to-noun ratio.

Point of View

Different genres call for different points of view. Most students assume that academic papers should be written in the third person, but the first person has become increasingly accepted in more formal genres. Learn when the first person is an appropriate choice and how to successfully use first-person pronouns in Use the First Person, The First Person, and Using the First Person in

Academic Writing: When is It Okay? To better understand why second-person pronouns should not be used in academic writing, read Understanding Second Person Point of View: Wizard Activity.

Description

When detailing their own ideas or the ideas of other scholars, successful writers communicate information in a clear and concrete manner. Learn how to craft concrete sentences in Avoid Vagueness and how to write clear, concise sentences in Write with Clarity. When appropriate, writers include figurative language in their texts. Learn why they do this and how to successfully employ figurative language in Incorporate Figurative Language into Your Paper.

Grammar

Being able to identify and address grammatical mistakes is important because those errors can not only make your draft appear sloppy, but they can also change the meaning of your sentences and confuse your reader. Enhance your understanding of grammatical principles by reading Subject-Verb Agreement, Subject-Pronoun Agreement, and Avoid Vague Pronoun References.

Punctuation

Learn how to use proper punctuation.

Below is a summary of how to punctuate different sentence patterns and how to analyze the likely effect of different syntactical forms on readers' comprehension.

- Commas: Understand conventions for using commas and appreciate the likely effects of particular sentence lengths and patterns on reading comprehension.
- Dashes: Create emphasis and define terms by interrupting the flow of a sentence using a dash; know when the dash must be used as opposed to the comma.
- Colons: Use the colon when the first sentence anticipates the second sentence or phrase, thereby creating an emphatic tone.
- Semicolons: Use a semicolon to join two sentences or to punctuate a series or list of appositives that already include commas.

Key Terms

style

commas

dashes

colons

semicolons

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6.3: The Reader's Role

Article Links:

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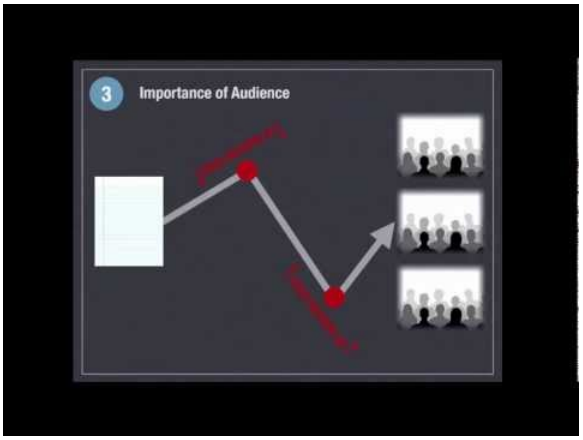
"Reflect on What You've Learned" provided by Writing Commons

"Navigate Reader Suggestions Wisely" provided by Writing Commons

"Reflect on Your Writing by Joe Moxley" and provided by Writing Commons

Chapter Preview

- Identify the value of the peer review process.
- Discuss the reflection process after a peer review.



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In-class Peer Review

provided by Writing Commons

So there is this student who has just written a draft for one of the projects assigned to him in his composition class. He is walking to class with a copy of the draft in his hand, knowing that today the instructor has an in-class peer review session planned, and his stomach drops.

He begins more and more to think about the prospect of his own peers reading his work and becomes anxious. He starts thinking that perhaps today is the perfect time to take one of those "free" days that each student gets for absences. He thinks, This isn't a "real" class, anyway—I'm not going to miss anything . . . . Why is my instructor making me share my writing with people I just met a few weeks ago? Is she trying to ruin my life? This is going to be so awkward. I mean, this draft isn't even meant to be read yet! I only spent an hour or so on it, and the ink is not even dry yet . . . . Isn't writing supposed to be a solitary activity, anyways, where strange and artistic people lock themselves up in a dark room or sit under a tree somewhere? Why do people need to read my writing in front of me, judging me and thinking I'm dumb!? I don't care what they think—having my instructor read my drafts is punishment enough. Ugh.

Meanwhile, already inside the classroom is another student, also with a draft in hand, patiently awaiting for the class and more specifically the in-class peer review session to begin. He has been waiting for this day, this glorious day, where he can finally show his peers what a great writer he thinks he is. He too does not fully understand the purpose of in-class peer review, but he is not anxious like his classmate above. He is excited and thinks, Man, I don't belong here. I'm a great writer—I've been told so by so many people! What a waste of time this will be for me. I mean, I'm pumped to show these people how good of a writer I am, but

this peer review actually cannot improve my writing. These people are lower writers than I am. I've seen their discussion board posts. What can they possibly have to tell me about my writing that will improve it? I mean, please.

Are these two students caricatures? Maybe. But they represent the extremes, and perhaps more importantly, they represent the fact that each and every student comes to in-class peer review sessions with entirely different perspectives and experiences. Sharing your writing online is much different than sharing your writing in face-to-face settings. There are so many more social factors that are involved when you are physically present. There are feelings that might get hurt, people that might not get along, and moments of sharing feedback that might get awkward. Yet all of these factors must be put aside, in whichever way you see fit, because the purpose of in-class peer review is not to make friends, get embarrassed, or feel punished—it is to improve your writing and the writing of your peers. So whether or not you identify more with the anxious student or the confident student, it really does not matter. Neither of them share the proper approach to in-class peer review as a time when meaningful collaboration happens. As such, and because other sections in this reader give you specific questions to answer about your peers' writing and also convince you about the importance and effectiveness of collaboration in the writing process, the remainder of this section focuses on how you can begin to attain a proper approach to this strange activity called in-class peer review.

Paradigm Shift: Mustard Face

Let's begin with a deep, philosophical question: If the person sitting next to you in class has leftover mustard on his face from your lunch at Subway together, would you tell him? Although you might want to know more specifics about the situation (i.e., Am I his friend? What type of person is he?), ultimately it comes down to a negotiation between what is good for the person and what is awkward for you. Some people would not hesitate to inform their peer about the mustard, convincing themselves that a little embarrassment now is better than continued embarrassment for that person throughout the day. Other people would avoid this situation entirely and perhaps would even convince themselves that if that person really cared about how they looked, he would have seen the mustard by now. To what extent do we as people have a responsibility to overcome awkward situations for the betterment of other people's circumstances?

In the writing classroom, you will be faced with similar situations all the time. Except in this setting, the mustard is a thesis and the face is a draft of a project. Regardless of whether or not you have social anxieties, know the person well, or find yourself slowly falling in love with the classmate sitting next to you, as an academic writer gaining authority in an academic context you have the responsibility to provide critical feedback to the fellow writers in your class. This is difficult to do in face-to-face settings, but it gets much easier as you progressively begin to think of in-class peer review as something that is expected of you as a growing writer. The acts of informing your classmate that you think his introduction is too vague or the conclusion ends abruptly are not acts of attack but acts of care. They are not acts of pretentiousness or of snobbishness but acts of collaboration and genuine concern.

If you are a person who would not tell your classmate that he has mustard on his face, then to be consistent you should be entirely comfortable knowing that for the rest of the day hundreds of people will see this person with mustard on his face and that, in fact, it might be your fault that the student is now infamously known as "mustard face." Joking aside, what you tell someone about his or her writing might be awkward and uncomfortable, but at the same time it has the potential to really help that writer's reputation in the future.

This is (Not) Personal: Feedback Sandwiches

Now, of course, just as there are proper ways to tell someone he has mustard on his face, so too are there proper ways to tell someone that her thesis is lacking focus. When you are asked to answer a question about your peers' work (such as, "Is the writer's thesis focused?"), which of the following two ways do you think would be more beneficial for the purposes of in-class peer review? Circle only one.

- "Hmmmm . . . yep, just what I thought—your thesis is really vague, just like Professor Kessel said we shouldn't do it. I thought he made that pretty clear. You should definitely re-write it because it seems like a pretty dumb thing to do. If I were you, I would definitely not want to come across that way."
- "Mikhail, I really like how the introduction leads into the thesis, explaining the topic in detail before getting to the argument. About the thesis, though, I would consider making the argument more clear, because I am having a hard time nailing down exactly what the thesis is trying to say. Maybe being more specific about which side the paper is taking would help me understand it better. But keep the word 'vociferous' in the description of English majors. Good word use there."

Okay. So the more appropriate choice might be rather obvious, but it is important to know why.

- The first thing that should stick out to you is the tone of the people speaking. Speaker 1's tone is almost dismissive, speaking to her peer as though the mistake she made is the most obvious thing in the world. Speaker 2's tone is more supportive because she places herself not as someone who knows everything but as someone who is there to help the writer work through some issues in her writing.
- Secondly, Speaker 1 frames her response almost as a personal attack. She uses "you" and "your" throughout her response and even at one point claims that having a vague thesis is a "pretty dumb thing to do." This speaker shows little attentiveness to the feelings of the writer and comes across as rather aggressive in her feedback. It would be easy for the writer to take what she said very personally, which is not something that we want. As a way to avoid this, consider providing feedback in the manner in which Speaker 2 does. In her response, she does not provide feedback with "you" statements but rather speaks of the paper as something separate from the person (i.e., she calls it "the thesis," and not "your thesis"). Sometimes this can be a helpful way to learn how to give productive feedback in a way that makes the writer take your concerns less personally.

Again, not taking things personally is easier said than done. Even if we all speak of our writing as separate entities from ourselves, at the end of the day you are going to leave class (hopefully) with a paper that is covered in feedback that articulates room for improvement in your writing. Speaker 2 seems to acknowledge this point by responding to her peer in the form of a "feedback sandwich": keep, fix, keep. She places her "fix this" feedback (thesis) in between two very positive statements about her peer's writing (introduction and word choice). Not only is this useful for the reader in finding positive things about the paper, it is also very useful in keeping the writer's confidence high at a time when it is particularly vulnerable.

All In This Together

This portion, which is really short and to the point, is aimed solely at trying to calm your nerves: Try and take some solace in the fact that at the exact same time that you are worrying about having your writing judged, assessed, torn apart, or ridiculed, there are about twenty-something other students in your classroom that are more than likely thinking the exact same thing. Everybody on campus, regardless of what field, discipline, or area her or she is studying, must have his or her writing read at one point or another at various stages in the writing process. The quicker you become comfortable with and realize the benefits of peer review, the better off you will be in your academic and non-academic lives. The more comfortable and open you are with peer review (whether it's in FYC or not), the more feedback you will receive; the more feedback you receive, the better your product gets. Acknowledge this fact. Live it. Get used to it.

Return of Mustard Face: Listen To Your Peers

Of course, none of this work to become successful contributors to in-class peer review means anything if the person receiving the feedback does not take into account what their peers are saying. Whether or not you believe you can learn and improve your writing from peer feedback, the fact of the matter is that a significant chunk of time in this class is devoted to peer review so you might as well fully invest into the time you have to share your writing. Think about "mustard face." Think about the risk he would have been taking if he chose to ignore the feedback of his peer—the job interview later that day, that run-in with his crush, that time spent chatting during his professor's office hours. All instances of negative future encounters could have been avoided if only he listened to his peer. Sigh.

Now, it is not expected that you change every last detail that your peers suggest that you change; but, it is expected that you at least take into consideration every last detail your peers suggest that you change. Your peers are your readers, and as such, every thing they say means something. Every single word they utter to you about your writing means that at some point their brain was thinking about your writing. This is valuable. Period. Whether you think it is or not. And you need to acknowledge that the fact that having a group of peers willing to give you feedback on a piece of writing that is a high percentage of your grade is not an inexhaustible commodity. Take advantage of this resource while you can, and do yourself a favor by listening carefully, critically, and compassionately to the words of others as they pertain to your own writing.

We all have mustard on our face. What separates committed from careless writers is whether or not we choose to acknowledge the mustard and thank our friends for pointing it out.

Reflect on What You've Learned

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Instructions: once you receive feedback from readers, take a moment to reflect on the nature of any problems your readers identified with your work.

1. **Time Management**: (for additional information, see Managing)
   - Did you manage your time well? What can you do to improve your time management?
2. **Purpose**: (for additional information, see Consider Your Purpose)
   - Were you able to stay focused on one topic or did your work wander? How well are you following instructions?
3. **Audience**: (for additional information, see Consider Your Audience)
   - Did you provide the examples your audience needed?
4. **Persona or Tone**: (for additional information, see Voice, Tone, and Persona)
   - What did you readers think of your tone and persona?
5. **Collaborating, Revising, and Editing**: (for additional information, see Collaborating, Revising, and Editing)
   - Did your peers evaluate a draft of your document? If so, did their responses help you in a meaningful way?
6. **Editing**: Did you consistently violate any rules of standard English? (See Grammar Resources for problems with standard English.) What grammar and punctuation rules or principles are you having difficulties with?



Navigate Reader Suggestions Wisely

provided by Writing Commons

Develop a "thick skin" and learn how to distinguish between useful and useless criticism.

Responding to your own or someone else's writing is a complex, subjective process. Evaluating your work, your peers' work, and published writing can be extraordinarily difficult. Unlike a math question that has a single correct answer, the criteria for excellence in writing vary according to your communication situation.

What constitutes excellence depends in large part on the writer's audience, purpose, voice, and media. For example, you would use different standards to judge the success of an editorial on the plight of the homeless, a love letter, or a final exam essay for a course on economic theory. Plus, sometimes a document has many problems and you need to be careful that you prioritize your critique, emphasizing major problems with logic and content development, for example, rather than sentence-level issues.

Because the criteria that readers will use to evaluate your work shift according to changes in your communication situation, no ideal standards of excellence can be defined. As a result, your instructors cannot provide you with prose models or formulas that will help you write in all situations. There are no perfect essays that you can mimic.

The Subjective Nature of Reading and Interpreting

The process of evaluating manuscripts is doubly complicated by the subjective nature of reading and interpretation. As you have probably noticed when you share your work with teachers and friends, different readers often draw conflicting conclusions about a text's purpose or quality. (Editors of professional journals and magazines often ask three critics to examine a manuscript for publication because they need a third vote to break the tie.) For example, a reader who likes the persona that you project in your prose and who agrees with your opinion on the subject may look for the best in your papers, whereas a reader who disagrees with your thesis or who finds your tone in an essay to be pedantic or condescending may be more inclined to note places where you have failed to provide sufficient evidence. If your ideas are based on theories that your readers hold as self-evident truths, then those readers are likely to think of you as remarkably commonsensical. In turn, readers who have a different theoretical base may be more inclined to dismiss you and your work as misguided.

Regardless of whether they use the input of others before writing, all serious writers share their drafts and completed products with critics. For most writers, accepting criticism is a way of life. Seasoned writers learn to appreciate tough criticism because they know a thorough evaluation means that they are being treated with professional respect.

At first, you may find it painful to receive criticisms of your manuscripts from your peers or instructor, but with practice you will learn what every writer knows: You can develop more original ideas and produce more effective documents by sharing your work with others. With practice, you will learn not to be emotionally distressed by what may seem to be unkind remarks. Remember that constructive criticism is not a personal attack even though it may seem that way when you first hear it. Instead of immediately dismissing people's suggestions or trying to argue with them, thank your readers for being honest and conscientious enough to seriously evaluate your work. With even more practice, you will learn to respond to and benefit from tough criticism.

Of course, sometimes you will need to reject a reviewer's comments. Though well intended, some people just miss the mark when reviewing your work, and others are so overly critical that you are too overwhelmed and defensive to consider their comments seriously. While you should always contemplate the advice of your critics, you need not agree with all of their comments.

Reflect on Your Writing

by Joe Moxley and provided by Writing Commons

Learn how to use self-reflection and responses from readers to improve your writing.

Historians and philosophers are fond of saying that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. This observation is equally valid in regard to your development as a writer. Rather than putting yourself down for making errors, remember that you are in school to learn. Focus on the most important shortcomings your readers find in your texts and then work to overcome these problems in the future.

The Element of Reflection

Reflecting involves examining how you compose and questioning whether you can overcome obstacles to research and writing by experimenting with new composing strategies. Reflecting involves incorporating feedback from critics. Reflecting involves considering how you can apply what you read about writing to your own composing processes.

The final writing activity for many people involves submitting their work to clients, co-workers, or supervisors. For students, primary audiences tend to be instructors or other students. Whether you're writing for an instructor or a client, criticism can often be painful, so it is understandable that many of us try to avoid hearing or thinking much about our critics' comments. Nevertheless, your growth as a writer is largely dependent on your ability to learn from past mistakes and to improve drafts in response to readers' comments.

Important Concepts

peer review

revision

reflecting

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7: Publishing / Circulation- Media Matters

7.1 Composing in Digital Spaces: Things To Consider	

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7.1: Composing in Digital Spaces- Things To Consider

Article links:

"Writing Spaces Web Writing Style Guide" provided by Writing Spaces

Chapter Preview

- Compare writing for publications to writing for the virtual world.
- Identify the web tools and features that enhance writing for the web.



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Writing Spaces Web Writing Style Guide

provided by Writing Spaces

Introduction

Who is this style guide for?

You!

Well, to be more specific, it's for anyone interested in learning more about web writing. It's not intended to be a general book about writing—we're focused here on the type of writing people do in social media sites such as blogs, wikis, Twitter, and more. We also have a section about the issues you face when you create web pages, whether on your blog, your wiki, or your own website. We're tailoring it for college students, so we're not using terms like "deconstruction" or "hybrid narrative" here. Nor will we tell you much about how to do things with software. Our focus is on the rhetoric of writing on the web—how to write things that people will actually want to read. We had fun writing this, and we hope you'll have fun reading it. Enjoy!

I Know How to Write Papers. Does Any of That Stuff Apply Online?

Oh, my God! Are all my English and composition classes now worthless?

Yup. Prepare to un-learn everything you know about writing.

Not! LOL!

Contrary to doomsayers and web-critical pundits, most people who read things online still appreciate good writing and editing. Although we often hear scary predictions about the dumbing down of our culture by texting and "internet speak," there will always be a demand for skilled writers who clearly communicate their thoughts. Beyond that, even if you're just sending short text messages, the rhetorical concepts you learned in college will help you craft better messages, communicate more effectively, and be

more persuasive. Finally, people will take you more seriously, even on public message boards, if you write with good syntax, present clear ideas, and take care to acknowledge your sources of information.

Let's take a look at how writing for the Web compares to writing for print.

What's the Same When Writing for the Web?

Coherence, organization, grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and spelling. Just like any game you play, these are the rules by which you are expected to play. Although people might tell you that nobody cares about this stuff online, unless you're talking to your closest friends and family, your audience will expect or at least appreciate it if you put some effort into your writing.

Think of it this way: it takes time for someone to read what you write. Why not respect your readers' time and intelligence by making sure your text is clear and free of obvious errors? You will look smarter, worth taking seriously. It's your ethos, (your English teacher/professor might have told you about this), the way you come across to your reader, the face you put forward to the virtual world. Better good than bad. Better thoughtful than thoughtless.

If readers know that you respect their time and attention, they'll be a lot more likely to read your stuff carefully and respond to it. Don't waste their time, and they'll be more likely to give it to you.

Writing for the Web: What's Different?

When ***writing for the web***, focus on the things that the web does better than print:

Use links to direct readers to related articles, background information, and the source of your information. Why settle for including only a small quotation when you can send your readers to the entire article? Clicking a link is a lot easier than driving down to the library to find the book or article in question. You can also use internal links, which make it easier to move through a single document or connect to other pages within your website. Google Docs, for instance, has a table of contents feature that will link together all the parts of your doc. If you have a blog, you can link to earlier posts that are relevant to what you're talking about.

Writing for the web means thinking about all of the different contexts in which your stuff can be found. That's why it's important to 4 Web Writing Style Guide always title your work. In addition, once people arrive at your pages, you have broken big chunks of text into smaller sections, with section headings, so they can find what they want quickly. Anything that takes longer than 10 minutes for the average person to read should be broken up into multiple posts or sections. Instead of thinking in terms of articles or essays, try to think more about paragraphs (blogs) and sentences (tweets).

Writing for the web also means that you are part of an information ecology. Other people may find your writing through a search engine or an RSS feed. They can easily search your text for keywords or zip
instantly to a chapter or section.

Writing for the web also has built-in community features—it's a lot faster and easier to get feedback from your readers and have discussions about your texts when you put them online. ***Communities*** are what make writing for the web so much fun! Before, authors had to wait weeks, if not months (or even years!), to get feedback on their work. By that time it was old news. Now writers can post a blog and get comments in only a few hours or less. Interacting with your audience will help you tailor your writing style and topics to better suit them, so pay attention to what they say.

Writing for the web also means writing with media. You can include color, images, and videos with your texts. You can include animation and sound. You can write with the white space around words and play with designs to better show off your stuff. You are no longer turning in grey pages of text to a professor; you are writing to a real audience, and you need to use all the tools available to connect with that audience and show them that you share their values.

In addition, the web is no longer accessed only on desktop computers and laptops. Visitors to your site may be using a mobile phone's smaller screen, which means they will have different needs than readers using a full-size monitor. Conversely, Internet TVs are becoming more common, and before long, many people will use iPads or Android tablets as their primary device for reading the web. With such variety in screen sizes and resolution, the challenge becomes making sure your content looks good across multiple web browsers, platforms, and devices. Since you can't be sure how people will access your stuff, keep the design elements simple so that browsers can accommodate it.

Access the "Writing Spaces Web Writing Style Guide" PDF. (URL: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=books)

Access the "Writing Spaces Web Writing Style Guide" website. (URL: https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/writing-spaces-web-writing-style-guide)



Important Concepts

writing for the web

communities

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- Video 1: Elyse Eidman-Aadahl on Writing in the Digital Age (Big Thinkers Series) byEdutopia. Licensed: Creative Commons Attribution license (reuse allowed)

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8: ePortfolio

8.1 ePortfolio	

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8.1: ePortfolio

Article links:

“Electronic Portfolio” provided by Wikipedia

“Building a Blackboard Portfolio” website provided by Elizabeth Burrows

Chapter Preview

- Define the purpose an ePortfolio.
- List the types of artifacts an ePortfolio can contain.



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Electronic Portfolio

provided by Wikipedia

An ***electronic portfolio (e-portfolio)*** is an electronic collection of selected work that you’ve completed. The purpose of compiling this e-portfolio is to showcase your performance and progress as a student writer in a productive way that help you reflect on what you’ve learned and how you can take that learning beyond the course.

An ePortfolio may include input text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. E-portfolios are both demonstrations of the user’s abilities and platforms for self-expression. If they are online, users can maintain them dynamically over time.

One can regard an e-portfolio as a type of learning record that provides actual evidence of achievement. ***Learning records*** are closely related to the learning plan, an emerging tool which individuals, teams, communities of interest, and organizations use to manage learning. To the extent that a ***personal learning environment*** captures and displays a learning record, it may also operate as an electronic portfolio.

E-portfolios, like traditional portfolios, can facilitate students’ reflection on their own learning, leading to more awareness of learning strategies and needs.[2] Comparative research by M. van Wesel and A. Prop between paper-based portfolios and electronic portfolios in the same setting tentatively suggests that use of an electronic portfolio may lead to better learning outcomes.[3]

For English ePortfolios we focus on writing. Composing, genre, rhetorical situation, and audience all play an important role in crafting a successful portfolio.

There are three main types of e-portfolios, although they may be referred to using different terms:

- developmental (e.g., working)

- assessment
- showcase

A ***developmental e-portfolio*** can show the advancement of skill over a period of time. The main purpose is to provide an avenue for communication between student and instructor. An ***assessment portfolio*** will demonstrate skill and competence in a particular domain or area. A ***showcase portfolio*** highlights stellar work in a specific area, it is typically shown to potential employers to gain employment. When it is used for job application it is sometimes called ***career portfolio***. Most e-portfolios are a mix of the three main typesthree main types of portfolios, development, assessment, and showcase, to create a ***hybrid portfolio***.



Building a Blackboard Portfolio website by Elizabeth Burrows

- Building a Portfolio page
- Helpful Videos page



Important Concepts

electronic portfolio (e-portfolio)

learning records

personal learning environment

developmental e-portfolio

assessment portfolio

showcase portfolio

career portfolio

hybrid portfolio

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Video 1: What is an ePortfolio? by AuburnWrites License: Standard YouTube license.

1. *Zimmerman, Eilene (30 June 2012). "Career couch: Showcasing Your Work, in an Online Portfolio". The New York Times. Retrieved 7 June 2014.*
2. **Jump up^** *Moon, Jenny. "Guide for Busy Academics No. 4: Learning through reflection". The Higher Education Academy. Retrieved 7 June 2014.*
3. **Jump up^** *M. van Wesel & A. Prop (2008). "The influence of Portfolio media on student perceptions and learning outcomes" (PDF). Maastricht University. Archived from the original (PDF) on February 29, 2012.*

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9: Narrative

9.1 The Literacy Narrative Assignment	

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9.1: The Literacy Narrative Assignment

"Literacy Narrative" by the authors

"Reflective Writing Prompts: Narrative Assignment" by the authors

Chapter Preview

- Describe the components of a narrative essay.
- Identify a focus for writing projects.
- Discuss a discourse community.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=89

Literacy Narrative

by the authors

This section discusses an "I-centered" essay: a literacy (or literacies) narrative. The traditional ***literacy narrative*** essay is an account of a situation that helped you develop as a writer or a reader. (For example, how the actions of a parent or teacher; a particular location or object; or a formative experience had a significant effect on how you feel about reading and/or writing today.) However, there are actually multiple forms of literacy (multi-literacies), not just reading and writing alphabetic texts. So, depending on the specific guidelines provided by your teacher, this assignment might broaden the definition of literacy to consider experiences that somehow play a role in defining your identity (or membership) within a ***discourse community*** (loosely defined as a group of people with shared goals who use communication to achieve those goals).

As you choose your subject, look for some experience that helped you develop or discover a literacy, some ability or process that has produced growth in some significant-to-you learning process that gave you a greater understanding of yourself as an individual.

One of the goals of this essay is to develop ***composing strategies*** that will help you best communicate to your readers the "how and why" of a significant literacy experience (good or not-so-good). As important, you should develop your ***reflection abilities*** by considering and explaining some new understanding, meaning, or insight that might help your audience understand why this is so significant to you.

Important Concepts

literacy narrative

discourse community

composing strategies

reflection abilities

Reflective Writing Prompts

Reflection * Genre * Purpose * Rhetorical Situation * **Audience**

These are four important concepts that will help develop your writing.

These reflective writings really help you figure out what you have learned and are learning and how you can hopefully apply those concepts to writing in any number of writing situations.

Develop a 300-word (minimum) response that addresses ALL of the questions in the list below. To focus your response, we would like to focus specifically on Audience and Reflection. An effective response will likely include examples from such sources as your own writing, classroom discussions, assignment guides, and material from the text. Be sure to take time to explain your thinking.

- What did you learn about your own writing habits and yourself as a writer while doing this writing project?
- Name one thing from one of our reading assignments for this project that (1) helped you OR (2) got in your way? Or both? Use details and explain why.
- What is a writing strategy you have read that you used to help you write? Explain why you chose this one and why you think it was so effective in completing your writing assignment. Point to examples from your own paper to help support and explain your point.
- What has focusing on audience consideration taught you about writing? How can you apply this to future academic or non-academic writing situations?
- What has reflecting on and writing about a past experience taught you about writing and about yourself as a writer? How can you apply this to future academic or non-academic writing situations?

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10: Analysis and Evaluation

10.1 The Analysis and Evaluation Assignment	

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10.1: The Analysis and Evaluation Assignment

Article links:

"Analysis/Evaluation" provided by the authors

"Reflective Writing Prompt: Analysis and Evaluation Assignment" by the authors

Chapter Preview

- Explain the components of an analysis and evaluation essay.
- Recognize reasons to engage in evaluative writing.



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Analysis/Evaluation

provided by the authors

Evaluative writing is a specific genre that analyzes a subject in order to make and support a "judgment call," a judgment that is based on specific, clear criteria. That judgment – which is your reasoned opinion – becomes the heart of the essay's thesis, clearly stating whether the subject is successful or not based on how it meets established criteria.

You might engage in this type of writing in order to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of one item or as a way of comparing two or more similar items in order to make a decision: which is more effective, which does a better job? To fully answer those questions requires practicing close reading to understand the text's ***rhetorical situation*** (audience, purpose, genre) using analysis to select criteria (or standards) to form a judgment (evaluation). That judgment must be supported by specific details drawn from the subjects, and thoroughly explained to justify your conclusion.

Important Concepts

evaluative writing

rhetorical situation

Reflective Writing Prompt

ANALYSIS Reflection Assignment

Develop a 300-word (minimum) response that addresses ALL of the questions in the list below. To focus your response, we would like to focus specifically on Genre and Rhetorical Situation. An effective response will likely include examples from such sources as your own writing, classroom discussions, assignment guides, and class readings. Be sure to take time to explain your thinking.

What did you learn about your own writing habits and yourself as a writer while doing this writing project? Name one thing from one of other reading assignments for this project that (1) helped you OR (2) got in your way? Or both? Use details and explain why. What is a writing strategy we've talked about that you used to help you write? Explain why you chose this one and why you think it was so effective in completing your writing assignment. Point to examples from your own paper to help support and explain your point. What has learning to focus on the rhetorical situation taught you about writing? How can you apply this to future academic or non-academic writing situations? What has looking at analysis as a genre taught you about writing and about yourself as a writer? How can you apply this to future academic or non-academic writing situations?

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11: Argument

11.1 The Argument Assignment	

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11.1: The Argument Assignment

Article links:

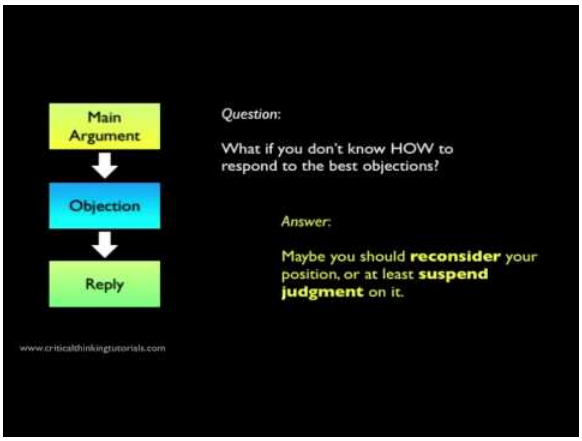
“Argument” provided by the authors

“Handout: How to Make an Effective Argument” provided by Lumen Learning

“Reflective Writing Prompt: Argument Assignment” by the authors

Chapter Preview

- Explain the five-part structure of an argument essay.
- Recognize key questions for developing an argument essay.



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Argument

provided by the authors

Now that you have learned and practiced with rhetorical tools to analyze and evaluate arguments, you are now ready to create your own argument about a topic. Note that this will not be a “formal” researched argument – that’s the realm of English Composition II. However, this project will prepare you by asking you to analyze your own views on an issue, then craft an argument that might sway an audience on that issue.

The purpose of this assignment is for you to reflect on and apply your newly gained understanding of composing strategies, genre, audience, and rhetorical situation to create an argument for a public source. Crafting an argument in this way prepares you to write an argument in any context, not just academic. This is not a research essay – you will be using your own knowledge, observations, and experiences.

Aside from reflecting carefully on your own stance within the argument, you will need to reflect back on the rhetorical tools we have been cultivating, to create an audience-centered argument. As you compose, you will need to continually consider how you can best persuade your audience to consider (or perhaps even agree with) your views.

Handout: How to Make an Effective Argument

provided by Lumen Learning

Think through the issue.

- What's the problem?
- Who's involved?
- What's at stake for the people involved?
- Have other people examined the problem? What solutions have they come up with?
- Are those solutions valid or not in the situation you are involved in? Why or why not? Are you taking an objective (arm's length) view of the problem or are you taking it personally and subjectively?

Think about what life would be like for you and the people involved in this problem if it didn't exist.

- What do you think could and should be done to solve the problem?
- Who else has worked to solve the problem? Have their solutions been effective or not? How? Why? Could you use their solutions in your own situation?

Who should you be talking to about this problem?

- Reflect again on the ***stakeholders***. Get a clear picture of them.
- How can you use the arguments that others have made to solve the problem that you're seeing? What's the good stuff from them that you can use solve the problem?
- What will those stakeholders respect? What authorities will they listen to?
- Focus on who you're arguing with and use sources appropriate to your audience.

What kind of credible, ***authoritative sources*** should you use?

- Ivy Tech Library databases: keyword search, limit to the last five years, full-text published articles authored by credible writers who are knowledgeable in their field. Articles should have references.
- Online databases: must be published in reputable newspapers or professional journals. Articles must be authored by credible writers who are knowledgeable in their field. Articles should have references.

Important Concepts

e ffective argument

stakeholders

authoritative sources

Reflective Writing Prompt

> **Argument Assignment**
>
> For this reflective assignment, you will write a letter to yourself about your argument paper with a particular emphasis on those key terms and the way you think about writing may have changed. Write this letter as though you are giving advice to yourself as a writer. Your letter should be 600 – 700 words.
>
> Your letter should include some discussion of How your awareness and perception of your audience contributed to your writing. (For example, did you have a real-world audience in mind or did you have to "imagine" an audience? How did that audience's possible stances, values, knowledge, etc. affect your approach to supporting your argument?)
>
> and
>
> How your experiences with the previous papers this semester affected your writing and your writing process for this paper. (For example, what did you bring with you from those papers that you found helpful – or perhaps unhelpful – for this one? What might you use or not use in the future?)
>
> Use examples from this text and your last paper to support your discussion of the above two points.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

Part II: Research Writing

The second course in a first-year series is a writing course that focuses on developing academic research writing skills that students will utilize in their academic and professional contexts. The course introduces students to the methods, strategies, and skills required to conduct an informed inquiry: critical reading, critical analysis, synthesis, constructing a research-based argument, and reflection. The course is themed, and students formulate their research questions around that theme. Students also learn how to evaluate academic and non-academic sources and proper citation and documentation of sources. The course also focuses on improving oral communication skills to prepare students to share their research with various audiences.

12: Research Proposal

12.1: The Topic Proposal Assignment

13: Annotated Bibliography

13.1: The Annotated Bibliography Assignment

14: Research Paper and Presentation

14.1: The Research Paper and Presentation Assignment
14.2: Alternate Ways to Present Research

15: Entering the Discourse Community

15.1: Identifying a Conversation
15.2: What is a Research Paper
15.3: Identifying and Understanding Your Audience and Purpose
15.4: Research Writing in the Academic Disciplines
15.5: Develop a Research Proposal
15.6: Topic, Thesis, and Research Proposal
15.7: Mapping Your Topic

16: Researching- How, What, When, Where, and Why

16.1: What are Sources?
16.2: Finding Your Sources
16.3: Recording and Organizing Your Research

17: Reviewing and Analyzing Your Sources

17.1: Critical Reading
17.2: Evaluating Your Sources
17.3: Developing an Annotated Bibliography

18: Writing the Research Paper

18.1: Creating Your Argument
18.2: Synthesis
18.3: Drafting
18.4: Using Sources Creatively

19: Citing Your Sources

19.1: In-text Citation

19.2: Works Cited Entries

19.3: Standard Style and Documentation Systems

20: Revising Your Research Project

20.1: Revising Your Research Paper

21: Planning Your Presentation

21.1: Turning Your Paper into an Oral Presentation

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12: Research Proposal

12. 1 The Topic Proposal Assignment	 [1]

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12.1: The Topic Proposal Assignment

Article links:

“Topic Exploration and Research Proposal” provided by the authors

“Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age” provided by Penn State

“Reflective Writing Prompt: Topic Proposal” by the authors

Chapter Preview

- Describe the process of selecting a research topic.
- Describe the research proposal writing process.



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Topic Exploration and Research Proposal

provided by the authors

For English Composition II courses you are expected to conduct a research project, where you explore, research, and then create an argument about a topic of your choosing. For this assignment, you’re going to take the first step in exploring your topic through preliminary research and proposing what further research you’re going to conduct.

This assignment is usually divided into two parts. The first section is the topic exploration, in which you will explore the discourse community surrounding your chosen topic. This might involve giving an overview of the topic, discussing major advances or timely news items, or exploring the problems and controversies within that topic. In order to do this, you’ll need to present sources from your informal preliminary research. In discussing these sources, think about how the sources speak to each other, give different viewpoints of the same topic, or show the complexity of the discourse community attached to that topic. The purpose of the idea exploration is 1) to show that you’ve done your homework and 2) to give your readers an understanding of the conversation you’re entering with your research project.

The second part is the ***research proposal***, where you’ll propose what you expect to accomplish with your research project and how you expect to conduct your research. The purpose is to establish the exigence of your project: questions you want to answer, the problems you want to solve, viewpoints you want to support, etc. You may get as specific as possible with your research plans and goals, with the understanding that you’ll become more informed as you conduct your formal research, and you may even change your opinions and viewpoints.

Remember that this paper is not an essay, with an ***argumentative thesis*** that you have to prove with evidence. It’s also not just an informative report on the topic. Think of it more as a reflection and exploration. When writing the idea exploration and research

proposal, you should imagine that your audience is a group of students or scholars who would be interested in your topic, but might not have more than passing familiarity with it. So your purpose should be to give a good overview of the topic. It should also be to tell where your research is going, and to get your audience interested and excited about your research.

The following are important concepts that relate to the Reflective Writing Prompt:

Exigence, "is the circumstance or condition that invites a response"

Discourse Community: is a social group that communicates at least in part via written texts and shares common goals, values, and writing standards, a specialized vocabulary and specialized genres."

Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age

provided by Penn State

In the working world, you will often be in the position of writing a proposal, usually to try to solve a problem or receive approval or funding for a project. Such proposals must be prepared to exact specifications and must strike an artful balance between your own needs and those of your audience. Recently, I worked closely with a professor as she prepared a proposal for some vital funding for her research, and her revisions during our discussion were effective because they were completely audience-centered and goal-oriented, even to the point that she revised tentative-sounding phrases into positive affirmations, shortened paragraphs and provided more transitions so that her sentences were easier to read and reread, and changed certain past-tense verbs to present tense to establish a stronger sense of immediate relevance.

Topic Proposals

In your courses, your professor may simply ask you to write a short topic proposal for his or her approval, or you may be asked to write an extensive proposal as a warm-up for a term paper or lengthy writing project. The advice that follows will help you prepare an extensive proposal.

Self-Study

For more ideas on writing research paper proposals, try out these URLs:

"Research Paper Proposal" article from George Mason University

"Steps to Writing a Research Paper" article from Rio Salado College Online

Pitfalls of Proposals

When you are faced with the task of preparing a proposal for a paper, consider your audience's position first. Believe me, when a professor asks you to write a proposal, what he or she wants to do is read and understand it rapidly, give some feedback, and then grant speedy approval to someone who is clearly prepared to begin writing a paper. Empty phrases, vague detail, apparent self-absorption, cockiness, or a lack of confidence on your part just get in the way of all that. I once reviewed a batch of paper proposals in which the following sentences appeared verbatim:

Another aspect in which I will ultimately show there is some importance here is . . .

Currently I am working hard at gathering more information and reviewing all my present information, maps, and resources that I have etc., etc., etc.

At this point in time my proposed topic that I have chosen is . . .

By the deadline of this paper I will have expected myself to have gone far more into depth about this interesting topic and would have all of the required information.

In the nearly 90 words above, there is nothing of use to the reader of the proposal, who wants specifics, not fluff. Empty phrases merely waste the reader's time and even breed suspicion that the writer has no real specifics to report. If you complicate what should be simple with such bloated, undigestible, and unswallowable phrases, your poor professor only winds up with a headache and heartburn.

Style for Proposals

As you compose your proposal, follow these stylistic tips:

- Try out a title, seeing it as a window into your introduction.
- Include an immediately relevant introduction that briefly and professionally sets the context. Do not bother with such silliness as “Hi!!! Happy to be in your class. My name is Joseph. My social security number is . . . .”
- Have a premise, objective, or rationale clearly stated. Label it as such.
- Use brief, logical, concrete section headings to orient yourself and your reader.
- Take advantage of enumeration or formatting so that your important points stand out. Consider some sort of outline form where appropriate, even if only for one section of the proposal. Make it easy to scan.
- Do not waste any time at all. No verbal drumrolls.
- In general, do not hesitate to use “I,” but do not overuse it. Sound like a person, even if it means taking a tiny stab at something that feels creative or bold. You may strike just the right humanizing chord and be invited to do so in your paper as well.
- Pose questions. Actively speculate. Be thinking on the page.
- Remember that a proposal is not an unbreakable covenant, but a thoughtful plan. Be specific about the work that you have not yet done as well as the work that you have. For example: “I am still speculating about how best to define the general characteristics of particle systems, and I know that I need to find more information on particle interactions, mechanics, and processing.” Such a comment might inspire a helpful professor to jot you a concrete note about where to find the needed information.
- Cite sources in your proposal, using the same citation style that you will use in the paper. You may be expected to give an annotated bibliography, but even if not, consider giving a sentence or so of description about your sources to establish your credibility, show the relevance of your initial research, and begin to spark the thoughts that the sources will help you to generate.
- Proofread the proposal with care, just as you should the final product.

Important Concepts

research proposal

argumentative thesis

exigence

discourse community

Reflective Writing Prompt

Topic Proposal

In an informal memo to a specific audience (for example your high school English teacher or other favorite teacher from high school), write a short reflection on your first assignment for English 1020. In your response, develop your response to address the following questions:

Part 1: 300-400 words = How has this essay helped you better understand the type of thinking and writing expected in a research proposal (a genre)? In your response, address the following questions:

1. What specific kinds of rhetorical knowledge and writing skills did you discover and see yourself using to accomplish this task? In other words, what types of knowledge that you possessed before (as a result of what you learned in high school and/or ENGL 1010) did you find yourself building on or refining in some way as part of completing this assignment?
2. As an example, describe how your understanding of audience helped you choose what to include or what to exclude.

Part 2: 300-400 words = Describe one way you’ll use what you learned in this project in another class you’re taking or in future courses that will require research and writing. Draw upon specific details and examples from your own assignment and explain why they are going to be useful and adaptable to other writing contexts and discourse communities.

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13: Annotated Bibliography

13.1 The Annotated Bibliography Assignment	

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13.1: The Annotated Bibliography Assignment

Article links:

“Annotated Bibliography” provided by the authors

“Reflective Writing Prompt: Annotated Bibliography” by the authors

Chapter Preview

- Describe the citation and annotation of an annotated bibliography.



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Annotated Bibliography

provided by the authors

Earlier in the text, you explored a topic that you want to further research. in this section, you’re going to find sources using formal scholarly research, evaluate and write annotations for those sources, and use MLA citation to create works cited entries.

This second major assignment for English Composition II courses is called an ***annotated bibliography***. For this assignment you’ll find a number of sources (some of which will be scholarly, peer-reviewed and compose works cited entries and annotations for these sources. The purpose of the annotated bibliography is to give a review of the most important research you’ve found and evaluate their worthiness to be included in your research project. Your instructor will have specific guidelines for the number and types of sources to be included in this assignment.

The ***annotations*** are divided into three parts: a summary, an evaluation, and a plan to use the source. The ***summary*** should give a quick, objective description of the source, usually involving the thesis and context for the source. After that, the bulk of the annotation should be an ***evaluation***, which you’ll conduct a critical analysis of the source, judging its credibility, accuracy, and authority as a source. You’ll end the annotation with a ***plan to use the source*** in your own research project, telling how this source can support your argument and purpose.

The annotated bibliography as a whole will be formatted using MLA 8 citation. Each source will have a works cited entry followed immediately by the annotation.

For this section we focus on critical analysis and knowledge. ***Critical Analysis***: “critical analysis is a careful examination and evaluation of a text, image, or other work or performance…[to] help us understand the interaction of the particular elements that contribute to a work’s power and effectiveness” (Richard Nordquist). ***Knowledge*** is “facts or ideas acquired by study, observation, or experience” (Merriam-Webster)

Context

Context is the circumstances surrounding an issue that the rhetorician must consider in discussing the issue. In other words, before we begin writing an argumentative research essay, we must first consider who needs to hear our message (**audience**), why they need to hear our message (**exigence**), and with whom we wish to confer in order to exchange ideas and information to form a solid foundation for our argument (**discourse community**).

Important Concepts

annotated bibliography

annotations

summary

evaluation

plan to use the source

context

Reflective Writing Prompt

> **Annotated Bibliography**
>
> In a two-part response OR [In the format of a dialogue, create a conversation that includes you and several (2 – 3)] of your sources you selected for your Annotated Bibliography. Create a conversation] that demonstrates how you learned from your sources specific knowledge about the topic itself and the writing assignment. Use some of the following questions to guide your thinking:
>
> Part 1: In 300-400 words: what did you learn about writing with sources from constructing this Annotated Bibliography? What kinds of rhetorical knowledge and critical analysis skills did you draw on to produce this project? Using specific details from your own writing, explain how your understanding of context contributed to your final decisions.
>
> Part 2: In 300-400 words, which of the key terms did you use to form the basis of your theory of writing? For example, how did you draw upon an understanding of audience awareness or genre (both important features of context) in your selection of source materials? How do you see opportunities to apply this in other courses when asked to write a research project?

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14: Research Paper and Presentation

14.1 The Research Paper & Presentation Assignment
14.2 Alternate Ways to Present Research



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14.1: The Research Paper and Presentation Assignment

Article links:

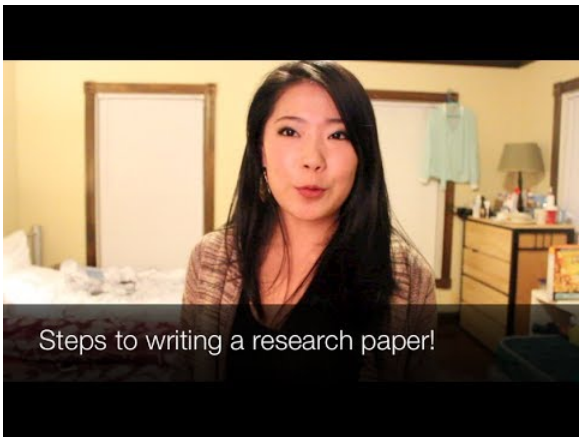
“Creating a Rough Draft for a Research Paper” by University of Minnesota

“Critical Thinking and Research Applications” by University of Minnesota

“Reflective Writing Prompt: Research Paper & Presentation” by the authors

Chapter Preview

1. Describe the structure of the introduction paragraph for a research paper.
2. Identify a variety of introductory approaches to a research paper.
3. Describe the value of making connections between sources in a research paper.



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Creating a Rough Draft for a Research Paper

by University of Minnesota

We might think of writing a ***research paper*** as joining a conversation, wherein we quote, paraphrase, or summarize the ideas and arguments of other rhetoricians; compare and contrast these texts to one another, and respond to these texts with our own ideas and arguments, thus adding to an ongoing conversation.

The Structure of a Research Paper

Research papers generally follow the same basic structure: an introduction that presents the writer’s thesis, a body section that develops the thesis with supporting points and evidence, and a conclusion that revisits the thesis and provides additional insights or suggestions for further research.

Your writing voice will come across most strongly in your introduction and conclusion, as you work to attract your readers’ interest and establish your thesis. These sections usually do not cite sources at length. They focus on the big picture, not specific details. In contrast, the body of your paper will cite sources extensively. As you present your ideas, you will support your points with details from your research.

Writing Your Introduction

There are several approaches to writing an introduction, each of which fulfills the same goals. The introduction should get readers’ attention, provide background information, and present the writer’s thesis. Many writers like to begin with one of the following catchy openers:

- A surprising fact
- A thought-provoking question
- An attention-getting quote
- A brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept
- A connection between your topic and your readers' experiences

The next few sentences place the opening in context by presenting background information. From there, the writer builds toward a thesis, which is traditionally placed at the end of the introduction. Think of your thesis as a signpost that lets readers know in what direction the paper is headed.

Jorge decided to begin his research paper by connecting his topic to readers' daily experiences. Read the first draft of his introduction. The thesis is underlined. Note how Jorge progresses from the opening sentences to background information to his thesis.

Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carb Diets

I. Introduction

Over the past decade, increasing numbers of Americans have jumped on the low-carb bandwagon. Some studies estimate that approximately 40 million Americans, or about 20 percent of the population, are attempting to restrict their intake of food high in carbohydrates (Sanders and Katz, 2004; Hirsch, 2004). Proponents of low-carb diets say they are not only the most effective way to lose weight, but they also yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Meanwhile, some doctors claim that low-carb diets are overrated and caution that their long-term effects are unknown. Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

Writing Your Conclusion

In your introduction, you tell readers where they are headed. In your conclusion, you recap where they have been. For this reason, some writers prefer to write their conclusions soon after they have written their introduction. However, this method may not work for all writers. Other writers prefer to write their conclusion at the end of the paper, after writing the body paragraphs. No process is absolutely right or absolutely wrong; find the one that best suits you.

No matter when you compose the conclusion, it should sum up your main ideas and revisit your thesis. The conclusion should not simply echo the introduction or rely on ***bland summary statements***, such as "In this paper, I have demonstrated that…." In fact, avoid repeating your thesis verbatim from the introduction. Restate it in different words that reflect the new perspective gained through your research. That helps keep your ideas fresh for your readers. An effective writer might conclude a paper by asking a new question the research inspired, revisiting an anecdote presented earlier, or reminding readers of how the topic relates to their lives.

Tip

Writers often work out of sequence when writing a research paper. If you find yourself struggling to write an engaging introduction, you may wish to write the body of your paper first. Writing the body sections first will help you clarify your main points. Writing the introduction should then be easier. You may have a better sense of how to introduce the paper after you have drafted some or all of the body.

Critical Thinking and Research Applications

by University of Minnesota

Synthesizing and Organizing Information

By now your thinking on your topic is taking shape. You have a sense of what major ideas to address in your paper, what points you can easily support, and what questions or subtopics might need a little more thought. In short, you have begun the process of synthesizing information—that is, of putting the pieces together into a coherent whole.

It is normal to find this part of the process a little difficult. Some questions or concepts may still be unclear to you. You may not yet know how you will tie all of your research together. Synthesizing information is a complex, demanding mental task, and even

experienced researchers struggle with it at times. A little uncertainty is often a good sign! It means you are challenging yourself to work thoughtfully with your topic instead of simply restating the same information. ***Circulation*** is the synthesis of many different texts, and the exchange of ideas that occurs as a result of this synthesis.

Find Connections between Your Sources

As you find connections between your ideas and information in your sources, also look for information that connects your sources. Do most sources seem to agree on a particular idea? Are some facts mentioned repeatedly in many different sources? What key terms or major concepts come up in most of your sources regardless of whether the sources agree on the finer points? Identifying these connections will help you identify important ideas to discuss in your paper.

Look for subtler ways your sources complement one another, too. Does one author refer to another's book or article? How do sources that are more recent build upon the ideas developed in earlier sources?

Be aware of any ***redundancies in your sources***. If you have amassed solid support from a reputable source, such as a scholarly journal, there is no need to cite the same facts from an online encyclopedia article that is many steps removed from any primary research. If a given source adds nothing new to your discussion and you can cite a stronger source for the same information, use the stronger source.

Determine how you will address any contradictions found among different sources. For instance, if one source cites a startling fact that you cannot confirm anywhere else, it is safe to dismiss the information as unreliable. However, if you find significant disagreements among reliable sources, you will need to review them and evaluate each source. Which source presents a sounder argument or more solid evidence? It is up to you to determine which source is the most credible and why.

Finally, do not ignore any information simply because it does not support your thesis. Carefully consider how that information fits into the big picture of your research. You may decide that the source is unreliable or the information is not relevant, or you may decide that it is an important point you need to bring up. What matters is that you give it careful consideration.

Important Concepts

research paper

circulation

bland summary statements

redundancies in your sources

Reflective Writing Prompt

> **Research Paper & Presentation**
>
> Write a 600-800 reflection in which you consider the ways in which the argumentative research essay and accompanying multimodal presentation helped you to strengthen your grasp on the aforementioned key terms as well as how it helped you further develop your understanding of previously discussed keywords. In what ways did this assignment build upon the skills you have previously learned, both in English Comp I and in the first sections of English Comp II? How do you see yourself transferring these skills beyond English Composition—in writing-intensive courses in your major, into your profession, and beyond?
>
> Remember that we are not just focusing on essays or written texts. Include in your reflection a discussion of how you were able to adapt to different genres and rhetorical situations (as well as different media, such as a traditional essay versus a multimodal presentation), and how you can use those skills in future situations. In writing this reflection, your purpose is not just to answer these questions, tell what you did wrong, etc. Your purpose is to build your own theory of writing and research. Think back to all the reflections you've done in the past in 1010 and 1020, and tell how you've adapted and transferred your own composition style and theory to a larger research project.

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14.2: Alternate Ways to Present Research

Article links:

“Alternative Ways to Present Your Research” by Steven D. Krause

Chapter Preview

- Compare the traditional essay form, a research portfolio, a web-based research project, and a poster session for presenting research.
- List the pros and cons of a web-based research project.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=115

Alternative Ways to Present Your Research

by Steven D. Krause

Not All Research Comes in “Papers” or Essays”

While research essay writing tasks vary quite a bit, there are some general guidelines that you will want to consider when you are asked by a college professor to write a “research paper” or “research essay.”

Of course, the ***traditional essay form*** (typed, double-spaced, thesis-driven, written in a linear “from beginning to end” style) is still the most common writing assignment in college classrooms, and this will probably remain the case for some time to come. Increasingly however, college teachers are considering alternatives to this form. Some of these alternatives have actually been common in composition classes for a while now– for example, the “I-Search” research essay (which was pioneered by Ken Macrorie in the late 1980s) and portfolio-based writing projects and assessments.

Others alternatives are more recent. The increased power and availability of computer technology has played a significant role in presenting research in a way that is different from the conventional essay. For example, the ***World Wide Web allows (some might even say requires)*** writers to publish documents that include graphics and photographs, and even audio and video files.

After all, you are still trying to convince and inform an audience about a particular point, and you do this with your use and interpretation of evidence. In other ways, presenting your research in an alternative fashion and with alternative sorts of evidence change in interesting ways the role and place in research in both academic and non-academic settings. Besides that, writing about your research in a “non-traditional” way might shed a different and informative light on your topic, and it might even be fun.

Obviously, there is no limit to the number of alternatives and variations to the traditional research essay. In this chapter, I will describe three ways of approaching research writing differently: The research portfolio/narrative essay, the Web-based research

project, and the poster session project. These projects could be completed either along with or instead of a more traditional research essay, and I would also encourage you to experiment and explore other alternatives and combinations of projects.

The Research Portfolio/Narrative Essay

A "***research portfolio***" is a collection of writing you've done in the process of completing your research. Of course, the details about what is included in this portfolio will vary based on the class assignments.

A research portfolio might also include your work on some of the various exercises in The Process of Research Writing and other assignments given to you from your teacher. The goal of the exercises is to help you work through the process of research writing, and to help you write an essay.

This project, "The Research Portfolio/Narrative Essay" is similar to a more conventional research essay in that the writer uses cited evidence to support the point exemplified in a working thesis. However, it is different in that the writer focuses on the process of researching his topic, a narrative about how he developed and explored the working thesis.

A Student Example:

"The Story of My Working Thesis Malfunction" by Amanda Kenger

Amanda said that she originally chose to write a portfolio/narrative essay because "I thought it would be a piece of cake. I was wrong." She soon realized that this assignment required her to think carefully about how to present her research to her readers, and it required her to follow an approach that was different from her previous academic writing experiences. Overall, Amanda was glad she chose this writing option "because it gave me an opportunity to do something out of the ordinary."

The Story of My Working Thesis Malfunction

When we were fist given the assignment for the final research project, I was sure that I was going to write a traditional research paper. I have done all of the research, written out the annotated bibliography, and have created a fairly decisive working thesis. However, I finally decided to work through the research portfolio essay option after looking at the work I created during the semester and realizing how much things have changed from start to finish.

I wrote four essays that examine my thesis and my sources and my working thesis changed with each essay. It transformed from my original idea that three events in history changed television censorship to my final working thesis, "Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl wardrobe malfunction has changed the way that Americans view television."

Each of the essays I wrote has had an effect on my final working thesis. This is especially surprising for me because previously, when I came up with an idea or a thesis, my mind is usually made up. But I think that story of working through the different exercises this semester shows how much my original working thesis changed.

I first decided on the idea for my original working thesis through writing my topic proposal essay. This essay got me thinking about the evolution of television censorship from shows like I Love Lucy to Desperate Housewives. I began to think of events in television history that would have caused a domino effect in censorship. So in my topic proposal essay, I said that there were three events in TV history that drastically changed the way that television was censored. The first of these three events was Elvis on The Ed Sullivan Show. His sexual dance moves sent shockwaves through conservative America. For the second event, I chose George Carlin's classic comedy skit "Filthy Words." The skit included "seven words you can never say on television" and was played over the radio by a small town DJ. The controversy surrounding the skit eventually snowballed into a lawsuit, and finally a Supreme Court case. For the third event I chose Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl halftime show performance. Her "wardrobe malfunction" on live television became grounds for the institution of a delay on all live broadcasts.

One of the reasons that I decided to choose three events was because I wanted to trace some longer trends in television, and also because I was worried about not having enough evidence to support my thesis in a research essay. I can see now though that I had too much going on in my original thesis. I was going to have far too much information and my paper would probably lose its focus. Also, when I look back at my topic proposal essay now, I see that I only cited one reference each for Presley and Carlin, and I wrote that I found, "hundreds of articles on several databases and on the World Wide Web" about Jackson. That should have been my first red flag that the bulk of the information available to me was going to be on Jackson.

Regardless, when I completed my topic proposal essay, my working thesis was, “Three main events in history have changed censorship: Elvis on The Ed Sullivan Show, George Carlin’s Supreme Court case, and Janet Jackson on the 2004 Super Bowl.”

My evaluation of my own working thesis continued throughout my critique essay. For this essay, I chose to critique an article called “The New Puritanism” by Eric Gillin and Greg Lindsay, published in Advertising Age and accessed electronically through the Wilson Select database. This article investigated the consequences of Jackson’s Super Bowl stunt and, to my surprise, these consequences were not only felt in television. The wave of conservatism that Jackson created was felt strongly in the world of advertising and big business. The article poses the seemingly unanswerable question of how to make everyone content with mass media content.

Gillin and Lindsay lean towards the idea that the conflict that lies in censorship is a generational one. They write “74% of consumers ages 12 to 20 said CBS overreacted in its response”. They also describe some of the possible solutions that have been proposed to solve the censorship conflict. Some of these suggestions include running parallel ad campaigns with designated ratings.

This article finally caused me to realize the seriousness of Jackson’s actions. “The New Puritanism” pointed out several ways in which advertising companies and big businesses like Wal-Mart altered their campaigns and content after the incident. For example, Wal-Mart pulled Maxim magazine off of their shelves and Budweiser pulled some of their commercials off of the air. Gillin and Lindsay describe an impossible situation in both television and advertising, and warn, “sex or violence… may be off the mainstream for good” (6).

Gillin’s and Lindsay’s article first got me thinking about the fusion of academic culture and popular culture. Going into this project, I assumed that every academic article was going to take the side of the FCC. Much to my surprise, almost all the academic articles I found carried warnings of the FCC’s over-involvement in the media.

This article also made me look once again at my working thesis. When I was searching for an article to critique, I could not find any on Carlin or Elvis. The sources that I had for the Carlin and Elvis consisted mostly of websites or page long narratives. I found it very difficult to locate any article that I would be able to use in my critique essay. Another red flag. However, after my critique essay, I felt more confident in stating that Jackson’s halftime show changed media censorship.

When it came time for me to write my antithesis essay, I was really worried. Almost all of the articles I found warned about the dangers of the FCC’s power. I was concerned that I would not be able to find any evidence that supported my antithetical arguments. I finally found my answer on a website created by United States Senator Sam Brownback. Senator Brownback served as one of the sponsors for the Broadcast Decency Act of 2004. He wants stronger regulations from the FCC and other parts of the government. On his website, Brownback stated that Jackson’s halftime show “is just the most memorable example of the growing volume of inappropriate material that is broadcast…” He argues that Jackson’s halftime show did not serve as an important event in censorship history, only the most recognizable. Brownback goes on:

We live in a nation where we hold the First Amendment in high regard. In an effort to maintain the free exchange of information, thoughts, and opinions, we strive to avoid government involvement in communications content. At the same time, we are nation raising children. With the turning of a tuning knob, or a click of the remote, Americans are presented with the content of the public airwaves and the culture it generates. Broadcasters can express any viewpoint and idea they want, but they have a legal and moral duty to ensure that viewers, especially minors, are not presented with explicit material.

In response to this, I found an article on the website “Intellectual Conservative Politics and Philosophy” by Wendy McElroy titled “Censorship is Not a Solution for Trashy TV.” She directly challenges Brownback and says that the consequences of the Broadcast Decency Act “may be far worse than a bit of trashy exhibitionism on TV.” McElroy’s article defended my idea that Jackson’s halftime show changed censorship in that it propelled the Broadcast Decency Act into the public interest.

Critic Tom Shales, writing for Television Week, agrees. In an article I found via the Wilson Select database titled “The Real Indecency Is The Show In Washington,” Shales said:

Clearly the saddest and most infuriating irony of the whole mess is that Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell is demagoguing this “issue” into a national frenzy, or at least a federal frenzy, about indecency in the media, thus distracting attention from his attempt to impose a radical relaxation of media ownership rules on the country.

When I wrote my antithesis paper I was still thinking of using Carlin's Supreme Court case in my thesis. I included a paragraph arguing that Carlin's "filthy words" are still filthy by today's standards. I still believe this to be true, and I think I made a solid argument defending my thesis. The problem was that I did not include any citations to back up my argument. My main reason for holding onto Carlin in my thesis was to make sure that I had enough research in my essay. However, the antithesis paper reaffirmed for me that Jackson "wardrobe malfunction" incident was a good subject for my essay. The antithesis essay put my doubts to rest by showing me that there were people that disagreed with my thesis and also that I could argue my position.

It was because of the categorization essay that I was finally able to decide on my thesis. After I put all of my sources into credible and non-credible categories, I discovered that most of the non-credible sources were on Elvis or Carlin. I simply did not have credible sources on either of the two and made the final decision to cut them completely out of my working thesis. I also divided my citations into sources that were for the FCC and sources that were against the FCC. Again I saw the reoccurring theme that most of my sources were against the FCC and its involvement in mass media. In "The Darker Reaches of the Government," Anthony Mathews warns that if the FCC and the United States government continue to control our television media, "no constitutional guarantee of basic freedoms will exist"(243). It seemed that most of my research made a similar point about the importance of keeping our First Amendment rights intact.

Even though the categorization exercise was by far the most difficult for me to complete, I learned the most about my working thesis by doing it. The essay made me think more seriously about my sources. In a way, it only makes sense that most of my articles were against the FCC's involvement in media because the articles are part of the media. Why would a journalist, author or any writer suggest that the FCC should censor mass media when their articles, journals and books could be just as easily censored?

Our First Amendment rights are not limited to television and other technologies, a point that I neglected to consider at the beginning of the semester. Also it proved challenging to put my sources into credible and non-credible categories. I would not cite People as a credible source if I was writing about pharmaceuticals, but I felt that I had to consider the magazine an expert on my subject of Janet Jackson. In other words, it seems to me that credible and non-credible sources can differ depending on the subject matter.

I wish that I could have done the categorization and evaluation exercise earlier in the semester. After taking one look at my notes and prewriting for that exercise, I realized that I had more than enough information on Jackson to write an essay. If I had categorized my sources sooner I would have revised my working thesis much earlier in the semester. And beyond that, I think that this was the exercise where I learned the most about research writing. I plan on working through some of the categorizing exercises the next time I have to write a research essay, especially making a chart to help me sort through my evidence. Perhaps by doing so I will be able to see more clearly what sources will work in my essay and what points I can include in my working thesis.

Even though my working thesis has changed drastically throughout the duration of the semester, I feel that I am now finally happy with my thesis: "Janet Jackson's 2004 Super Bowl wardrobe malfunction has changed the way that Americans view television." I have good evidence supporting my thesis, I can defend my thesis against an antithetical argument and I know where my own opinion lies. I don't know if I will ever use my knowledge of Jackson's wardrobe malfunction in my everyday life, though if it does come up in conversation, I'll have my answer. But I do think that the skills I learned through revising my working thesis and writing these essays will prove useful in many future essays to come.

Web-Based Research Project

Most academics—students and teachers alike—have become comfortable with using the Internet for at least a part of their research. You have to be cautious when using many web-based sources because they aren't necessarily as credible as other popular and academic sources. Nonetheless, the Web still represents a great place to find information on a wide variety of topics, and it is a great place for you to publish research on almost any topic.

The Advantages of the Web-Based Research Project

There are many advantages to creating Web sites that have nothing to do with writing research projects. Making Web pages is fun—the Internet is a great place to post pictures of your friends and pets, and it's a good way to share your writing with others

through blogging or posting your poetry or short stories. But for the purposes of publishing academic research, I believe the ***Web has three main advantages over more traditional "paper" outlets***.

• The Web allows you to present your research with graphics, with multimedia, and/or as a "hypertext."

While paper-based research projects limit you to black-and-white typed text on a page (with perhaps a few graphic elements here and there), Web-based research projects will almost certainly include colors and graphics to enhance the effectiveness of the site. It's also possible to include some simple multimedia elements into your research project—sound clips, short video clips, or animation, for example.

The Web also makes it possible to present your research project not as a linear "beginning to end" essay but as a "***hypertext***," a type of text that allows for—even encourages—different approaches and readings. I discuss this in a bit more detail later on in this chapter.

• Your research project can become available to a broad, diverse, and international audience.

Traditional paper-based research projects usually only reach a small audience—your classmates, your teacher, and perhaps other friends and colleagues. Web-based research projects are available to any of the tens of millions of people all over the world who spend at least some time surfing the Web.

Now, let's be realistic: your Web site is not going to have as many readers as popular sites like Yahoo! or the CNN web site. Just as is the case with traditional publishing, simply making your writing available is no guarantee that you will attract a large audience of readers.

However, the potential reach of your Web-based research project is enormous, certainly much larger than the potential audience of a more traditional research project. Further, if you register your site with various search engines and search directories (and most of them provide information on how to do this), your site will eventually show up on the searches that other researchers conduct.

• The *Web Facilitates Collaboration*

Chances are, you are already familiar with one of the Web's most powerful features, the "link:" the highlighted element of text that a Web reader clicks on in order to go to another Web page. The ability to link your Web page to just about any other Web page out there allows you to make a lot of very literal connections to other writers and publications, which is in itself a form of collaboration.

But in a more concrete sense, the Web facilitates collaboration with your colleagues since you can build links to each others' Web sites. This allows writers to work simultaneously on different parts of the same document, and to link to each other when it comes time to put the research project together. In my experiences as writer and a teacher, this approach is an excellent balance between the two extremes of collaboration I describe in Chapter Four ("How to Collaborate and Write With Others").

The Disadvantages of the Web-Based Research Project

While the advantages of creating Web sites for your research are significant, the disadvantages are significant as well. So before you commit yourself and your colleagues to Web-based research project, you need to take a moment to consider some of the challenges you'll face in making your Web site and your abilities to cope with these potential problems.

• Computer hardware and software access

To make a Web page, you obviously need to have easy access to a personal computer connected to the Internet, either one you own, one where you live, or one at your school that you can use on a fairly regular basis. You will also need to have at least some basic software to create and edit your Web site and to manipulate graphics. Last, and far from least, you need to have access to a server, which is a computer on a network that delivers (or serves) Web pages to users. I discuss all of these issues in more detail later in this chapter.

For some students and teachers, these access issues are very difficult to overcome. For example, at the university where I teach, students don't have "easy access" to a server where they can publish their Web sites. While this is a state of affairs that is changing, it means that it is quite challenging for my students to publish their Web sites, even though most of them have access to a personal computer.

• Learning about HTML and other computer literacy skills

Making web pages using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and HTML editing software is actually surprisingly easy. Making a basic Web site—made up of individual Web pages that are just text, links, and simple graphics— is not "computer programming" in the sense that it requires special computer skills or training.

However, making a Web site does require a degree of computer skill and literacy that many of my students and fellow English teachers have not quite achieved. In other words, while you don't have to be a "computer geek" to make a simple Web site, you do need to be relatively "computer literate" to learn how to make a Web site.

• Time, time, and time!

Creating, uploading, trouble-shooting, and editing Web sites simply takes time, certainly more time than simply typing an essay with a word processor. You are already probably spending a lot of time researching and writing about your research project; given the time it takes to learn how to make Web pages and then to actually make them, it might be logistically impossible for you and your classmates to put together Web-based research projects in an academic term.

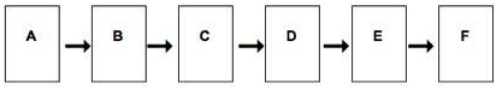
But it is also more time consuming because when you create a web site—even a simple one as a class project—you are moving from the role of "academic writer" to "Web publisher." And as a Web publisher, you need to concern yourself with things like layout, colors, links, and graphics. So if you and your classmates decide to present your research on the Web, you should probably budget more time for completing the final version of your web site than you would if you were writing an essay or creating a research portfolio.

Web Publishing versus Hypertext

After considering the advantages and disadvantages of creating a research-based Web site in the first place, the next step is to decide if you want to merely publish your research essay on the Web, or if you want to develop a hypertext version of your research project.

By merely "publish," I mean the process where you take your research essay as it exists on paper, convert it into an "HTML file" or as a "PDF file" (Portable Document Format) and then upload it to the Web. By hypertext, I mean the process where you create a series of HTML files that contain the text to your research project and that contain highlighted words, phrases, or images that allow potential readers to explore and read your research in nonsequential ways.

A ***Web published research essay*** is really no different than the sort of traditional research essay project, except that it is available on the World Wide Web. If we were to map this essay, it might look something like this:



With Web published research essay projects, you are expecting your readers to read in a particular order, from beginning to end, from "A" to "F." In fact, each of these different parts of your research essay project could be part of one text file, available to your reader to scroll through or print and read later. And of course, if you decide to publish your research essay as a PDF, then readers will have to either print your essay or use software like Adobe Acrobat Reader to read your essay.

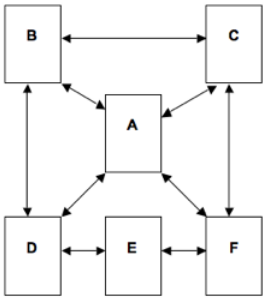
There are two advantages to web publishing your essays like this:

• It is easy to do. Since most word processing software allows users to convert files into HTML or PDFs, publishing a paper-based research project is simply a matter of saving in a different format and uploading to a server.

• Web publishing preserves the order and "feel" of a paper-based research project. This is especially true of PDFs.

The main disadvantage of Web publishing like this is it isn't as dynamic or as flexible as a hypertextual research project. This depends on the audience of course, but often times, web readers are more likely to read and use your web site if it is presented as hypertext intended to be read on the screen.

A "hypertextual" research project might be mapped like this:



In this example, each of the boxes represents a different part of the Web site, and thus a different file—instead of scrolling from one part of the Web site to the next, readers have to follow links to other parts of the site. While most hypertext Web sites begin with some starting point (often a sort of "table of contents" page), they are written and designed in a way that allows for multiple ways of reading. Readers could as easily read from point "D" to point "F" as they can read from point "A" to point "B," and, if the hypertext is effectively presented, both readings will be informative to the reader.

The main advantage of presenting a research project as a hypertext is basically the opposite of simply "Web publishing" a research essay: ***hypertexts*** are dynamic and more interactive than traditional essays presented on the Web, and readers they give readers more and different opportunities to interact with them.

Think of your own reading habits when it comes to the World Wide Web: chances are, you are more likely to read through a site that presents text in small chunks and that allows you to select links to the part of the site that interests you. Further, if you are a typical Web reader, you are less likely to read through a site if you have to scroll down the page or print out the site to read it.

Along these lines, the main disadvantages of research projects presented as hypertexts are the opposite of Web published research essays:

• **They aren't as easy to make.** For one thing, it might take a considerable amount of work to divide up the parts of your research project into different parts of a hypertext. For another, each separate part or "page" of your Web site (represented here by the different lettered boxes) is a separate HTML document that you need to create and maintain. While this isn't difficult to do, it does take some time and effort, certainly more so than if you were to simply convert a word-processed file into a Web page.

• **Hypertextual research projects can't preserve the order of presentation.** After all, one of the points of a hypertext is to give your reader options in how they want to read it. While you can create hypertexts that give readers the option of reading the project straight through, your readers might not choose to read that way, which can cause some confusion.

A Web Writing Recipe: What You Need to Get Started, and Where You Can Go To Get Help

If you want to publish your research writing on the web, you will need to learn a few basic computer skills, you'll need some modest computer hardware and software, and you'll need to have access to computer server space that can host your web sites. Here is a basic "Web Writing recipe" to get you started.

A little knowledge of HTML. ***Hypertext Markup Language*** is the basic coding system that makes the Web work. Technically, you don't have to use HTML to make your web sites, but not knowing anything about HTML can be very confusing.

Fortunately, HTML is fairly easy to learn. There are many guides to HTML available for free on the Web (and the The Process of Research Writing Catalyst Web site links to some of them), and there are also many books available that provide basic instruction in working with HTML.

Some basic computer hardware and software. Most personal computers connected to the Internet can be used to make Web pages. However, not all personal computers have the basic software needed to make Web pages.

You can make a Web page with just about any text editing program, even something as simple as "Note Pad," which comes on all Windows-based personal computers. However, you will probably want to use a software application specifically designed for making Web pages. There are a variety of free applications that can help you, and there are links to some of these programs at the The Process of Research Writing Catalyst Web site, though the best programs are commercial products. Currently, the two best

known products for making Web sites are Microsoft's FrontPage and Macromedia's Dreamweaver. You may want to ask the Information Technology specialists at school about the availability of this software on your campus.

Finally, since you will probably want to include some graphics and photographic images with your Web site, you will also need software that handles graphics and photographs. Again, some of these products are free (though the best ones are not), and you may want to ask the Information Technology specialists at school about the availability of this software.

Access to a web server. In order to make your Web site available to other readers, you need to upload your Web site (the HTML files and any of the graphics accompany your site) to a ***Web server***. A server "serves" files to Web readers (usually known as "clients" or "users") when they request a particular Web site by entering in a specific web address.

Increasingly, many colleges and universities are providing web server space to the academic community so that they can publish their work on the World Wide Web. Ask your local Information Technology specialist for information. There are also numerous other ways to make your Web site available on a server, both for a modest cost or for free.

Poster Session

At many academic conferences in a variety of different disciplines, faculty and student participants often have the option to present their research to other conference participants in a "***Poster Session***." It's similar in some ways to a science fair of the sort you might remember from junior high school: participants literally make a poster or some other sort of multi-media presentation (photographs, charts, sound recordings, video) that represent the presenter's research.

The poster session project is different from the other alternatives to the traditional research paper I've discussed in this chapter because it is a supplement rather than a replacement for other research writing projects. But poster sessions are important supplements to other writing projects because they provide a different way for researchers to interact with each other and their projects, and they can work well for students in composition courses, too.

Important Concepts

traditional essay form

World Wide Web allows (some might even say requires)

research portfolio

Web has three main advantages over more traditional "paper" outlets

web published research essay

hypertexts

Hypertext Markup Language

Web server

poster session

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15: Entering the Discourse Community

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15.2 What is a Research Paper
15.3 Identifying and Understanding Your Audience and Purpose
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15.1: Identifying a Conversation

Article links:

“Identifying a Conversation” by Jason Carabelli

Chapter Preview

- Define conversations and discourse communities within the context of academic research.
- Explain the importance of exigence, audience, and constraints within a rhetorical situation.



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Identifying a Conversation

by Jason Carabelli

An important part of research writing (and many other kinds of writing) is identifying when sources are “speaking” to each other. When researching a particular topic, you will likely collect many sources that seem to discuss the same thing. Sometimes the authors of these sources will explicitly know about each other and reference one another in their own texts. This is common in academic writing, where explicit conversations between different scholars are expected and valued. A long works cited page in an academic article might indicate that the author is having a long conversation with many other authors of other sources, some of whom might not still be publishing. For instance, there are many scholars over many generations who have conversed with each other in print about *Hamlet*, and each new author adds a unique perspective to the conversation, even though some of the speakers can no longer respond. However, not all conversations in which sources “speak” to each other can be identified so easily, and instead might be seen as “speaking” to each other indirectly. Sometimes it is up to a researcher who is reading all of these sources that seem to talk about the same thing to identify when that is happening and to explain it to an audience. This is one of the primary goals of academic research—to identify conversations between sources and to show how they might interact with each other.

Many Speakers and Conversations

When writers mention “conversations” and sources “speaking” to one another, they are referring to the ways that many voices shape how communities see a topic. For instance, there are many writers today who are having a conversation about the topic of global warming, even if they don’t actually know all the other writers who are part of the conversation. Climatologists, meteorologists, ecologists, sociologists, politicians, bloggers, priests, and corporate CEOs are all kinds of people involved in a written conversation on the topic of global warming. Of course, there are many smaller textual conversations within this larger one, as well as smaller groups or communities of speakers within this larger group. The climatologists, meteorologists, ecologists, and sociologists might be said to encompass part of an academic community conversing about global warming through scientific research, while the others might make up different groups. Even further, the climatologists, meteorologists, and ecologists might be

said to encompass a certain kind of scientific conversation group more interested in the natural processes of the Earth, while the sociologists might be part of a different kind of academic group that focuses on human activity. Because of this fracturing of conversation groups—called "***discourse communities***"—and the many mini-conversations going on, it is sometimes the goal of a researcher like yourself to bring them together in one written work that puts them "in conversation" with each other.

For example, if you were interested in writing a paper about workplace inequalities between men and women, you would have many different speakers and conversations to look at. For instance, you might find that newspaper reporters, lawyers, psychologists, and government researchers all published various documents (stories, court proceedings, research, reports, etc.) about this topic. And, since writing can be preserved over long periods (unlike a face-to-face conversation), you are also dealing with speakers from across time. You might, for instance, want to discuss the ways different scientific writers saw the role of women in America in the 1950's and today. Scientific research on gender in the 1950's, as we know, is not the same as it is today. As a researcher, you might imagine yourself putting an author of a source on gender from the 1950's and an author of a source on gender from today in a room together. They would have different things to say about gender and the workplace, to be sure. The researcher from today might complicate the work of the researcher from the 1950's, or build on it, or disregard it. In addition to different speakers in the conversation, there would also be many different smaller conversations going on within the larger one of gender inequalities in the workplace. For example, some authors might write about salary inequalities in higher education, while others might focus more on cases of sexual harassment at work. Although both topics are related to the conversation of gender inequalities in the workplace, your paper might not need to address both subtopics (or mini-conversations).

Putting It All Together

Sometimes your role as a researcher is to figure out when and how sources seem to be dealing with the same thing, and decide how that changes what you know about the topic. When what you know about a topic changes because of how two sources talk about the same thing, writers might refer to that as a "conversation" between the two authors that you read. That change can be explained for your audience to show a "conversation"—an interaction—between two sources that might be separated by decades, miles, discourse communities, or even languages.

There are many ways to put sources together to make a conversation. You might think of it like a puzzle, except that you have some control over how the pieces are shaped. The above example of a research paper on gender inequalities only puts two sources in conversation, and they are both scientific puzzle pieces. However, there are many other voices in the conversation on gender that might fit into the puzzle. Deciding what kinds of sources are speaking to each other about a topic dictates the kind of puzzle you are building. Since it is probably impossible to identify all the conversations on a topic, you must make decisions about which ones are pieces in your puzzle, and which ones aren't. As a rule of thumb, you'll probably want to look for speakers whose topics are very closely related. However, you may also want to keep in mind that as a researcher you have the ability to build a puzzle that mobilizes science, art, history, and your aunt Jean into a new kind of conversation about a topic. As long as you can show your audience how each speaker changes what you know about a topic—as long as you can show the "conversation" between them—the puzzle is yours to design. Your audience, though, will determine its credibility, and so you will want to make sure you consider how they would build the puzzle themselves. If, for instance, you ignore in your research paper (your puzzle) a long conversation between many respected authorities on your topic, you should have a good reason for doing so, or your audience may find you lacking credibility.

It is important to remember that some authors have already put themselves into conversation with other sources, and some have not. When authors refer to other works, they are building a conversation puzzle in their own writing. Many times, this should act as a signpost to you as a researcher, directing you towards a conversation going on between sources. Other times, though, some sources will discuss the same topic and have never heard of each other. This happens often in large conversations where many different discourse communities with many different values all talk about the same thing. For instance, a scientific researcher might not be interested in responding to a blogger on the effects of global warming, since they might value different things or belong to communities that only want to talk to other members of that community. As a researcher, you might identify all of the conversations within one discourse community—for instance all of the scholarly discourse about Hamlet—or show how many communities all say something about a given topic—say, global warming. Identifying which sources are in conversation with each other is not enough though. As a researcher, you will also have to explain how they are in conversation. Do they challenge each other? Complicate? Extend? Ignore? Support? These are the kinds of questions you should seek to answer when putting your

puzzle together. Deciding on these questions will require that you are familiar with many works on your given topic, and how they are all voices in a conversation that is taking place in your research.

Three constituent parts make up any rhetorical situation.

1. The first is the ***exigence***, or a problem existing in the world. Exigence is not rhetorical when it cannot be changed by human interaction, such as a natural disaster or death. However, exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when that positive modification calls for the act of persuasion.
2. The second constituent part Bitzer speaks of is audience. Rhetorical discourse promotes change through its influence of an audience's decision and actions.
3. The third constituent part is the set of constraints. ***constraints*** are made up of persons, events, objects, and relations that limit decisions and action. Theorists influenced by Marx would additionally discuss ideological constraints, which produce unconscious limitations for subjects in society, including the social constraints of gender, class, and race. The speaker also brings about a new set of constraints through the image of his or her personal character (ethos), the logical proofs (logos), and the use of emotion (pathos).

Important Concepts

discourse community

exigence

constraints

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

- Video 1: License: Standard YouTube License Attribution: Writing on Fleek: The (On)line Between Academic and Social Discourses by Frankie Victoria

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15.2: What is a Research Paper

Article links:

“What Is Research Writing?” provided by Lumen Learning

“Why Write Research Projects” by Steven D. Krause

“Managing Your Research Project” provided by Lumen Learning

“The Seven Steps of the Research Process” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

1. Identify reasons for outlining the scope and sequence of a research project.
2. Recognize the steps of the research writing process.
3. Develop a plan for managing time and resources to complete the research project on time.
4. Identify organizational tools and strategies to use in managing the project.

https://youtu.be/NMp_QRl92Uo

What Is Research Writing?

provided by Lumen Learning

The essential components or building blocks of research writing are the same no matter what kind of question you are answering or what kind of reader you are assuming as you share your answer. ***Research*** = the physical process of gathering information + the mental process of deriving the answer to your question from the information you gathered. ***Research writing*** = the process of sharing the answer to your research question along with the evidence on which your answer is based, the sources you used, and your own reasoning and explanation.

The Essential Building Blocks of Research Writing

1. **Do real research**
    1. Begin from a question to which you don’t know the answer and that can’t be answered just by going to the appropriate reference source. That is, begin from a research question, not a homework question.
    2. Decide what kind of information or data will be needed in order to build the answer to the question.
    3. Gather information and/or collect data.
    4. Work with the information/data to derive or construct your answer.

    This is the *research process*, and it happens before you begin to write your paper. No research, no research writing, so don’t shortchange this part of the process.
2. **Create a one-sentence answer to your research question.**
    1. This will be the thesis statement/main point/controlling idea of your research paper.
3. **Share your answer to research questions in a way that make it believable, understandable, and usable for your readers.** To do this
    1. Include plentiful and well-chosen examples from the data/information you gathered
    2. Indicate the validity of your data by accurately reporting your research method (field or lab research)
    3. Indicate the quality of your information by accurately citing your sources (source-based research)
    4. Provide the reasoning and explanation that will let your readers completely understand how the evidence adds up to your answer.



Why Write Research Projects?

by Steven D. Krause

Introduction

A lot of times, instructors and students tend to separate “thinking,” “researching,” and “writing” into different categories that aren’t necessarily very well connected. First you think, then you research, and then you write.

The reality is though that the possibilities and process of research writing are more complicated and much richer than that. We think about what it is we want to research and write about, but at the same time, we learn what to think based on our research and our writing. The goal of this book is to guide you through this process of research writing by emphasizing a series of exercises that touch on different and related parts of the research process.

But before going any further, you need to be aware of two important points about this book:

- You will keep learning about academic writing and research after this class is over. You may have to take other writing classes where you will learn different approaches to the writing process, perhaps one where you will learn more about research writing in your discipline. However, even if this is your one and only “writing class” in your college career, you will have to learn more about academic writing for every class and every new academic writing project. Learning how to write well is not something that ends when the class ends. Learning how to write is an on-going, life-long process.
- Academic writing is not the only kind of writing worth learning about, and it is not the only potential use for this book or this class. The focus of The Process of Research Writing is the important, common, and challenging sort of writing students in a variety of disciplines tend to do, projects that use research to inform an audience and make some sort of point; specifically, academic research writing projects. But clearly, this is not the only kind of writing writers do.

Sometimes, students think introductory college writing courses are merely an extension of the writing courses they took in high school. This is true for some, but for the majority of new college students, the sort of writing required in college is different from the sort of writing required in high school.

College writing tends to be based more on research than high school writing. Further, college-level instructors generally expect a more sophisticated and thoughtful interpretation of research from student writers. It is not enough to merely use more research in your writing; you also have to be able to think and write about the research you’ve done.

Besides helping you write different kinds of projects where you use research to support a point, the concepts about research you will learn from this course and The Process of Research Writing will help you become better consumers of information and research. And make no mistake about it: information that is (supposedly) backed up by research is everywhere in our day-to-day lives. News stories we see on television or read in magazines or newspapers are based on research. Legislators use research to argue for or against the passage of the laws that govern our society. Scientists use research to make progress in their work.

Even the most trivial information we all encounter is likely to be based on something that at least looks like research. Consider advertising: we are all familiar with “research-based” claims in advertising like “four out of five dentists agree” that a particular brand of toothpaste is the best, or that “studies show” that a specific type of deodorant keeps its wearers “fresh” longer. Advertisers use research like this in their advertisements for the same reason that scientists, news broadcasters, magazine writers, and just about anyone else trying to make a point uses research: it’s persuasive and convinces consumers to buy a particular brand of toothpaste.

This is not to say that every time we buy toothpaste we carefully mull over the research we've heard mentioned in advertisements. However, using research to persuade an audience must work on some level because it is one of the most commonly employed devices in advertising.

One of the best ways to better understand how we are affected by the research we encounter in our lives is to learn more about the process of research by becoming better and more careful critical readers, writers, and researchers. Part of that process will include the research-based writing you do in this course. In other words, this book will be useful in helping you deal with the practical and immediate concern of how to write essays and other writing projects for college classes, particularly ones that use research to support a point. But perhaps more significantly, these same skills can help you write and read research-based texts well beyond college.

Academic Research Writing: What Is It?

Writing That Isn't "Research Writing"

Not all useful and valuable writing automatically involves research or can be called "academic research writing."

• While poets, playwrights, and novelists frequently do research and base their writings on that research, what they produce doesn't constitute academic research writing. The film Shakespeare in Love incorporated facts about Shakespeare's life and work to tell a touching, entertaining, and interesting story, but it was nonetheless a work of fiction since the writers, director, and actors clearly took liberties with the facts in order to tell their story. If you were writing a research project for a literature class which focuses on Shakespeare, you would not want to use Shakespeare in Love as evidence about how Shakespeare wrote his plays.

• Essay exams are usually not a form of research writing. When an instructor gives an essay exam, she usually is asking students to write about what they learned from the class readings, discussions, and lecturers. While writing essay exams demand an understanding of the material, this isn't research writing because instructors aren't expecting students to do additional research on the topic.

• All sorts of other kinds of writing we read and write all the time—letters, emails, journal entries, instructions, etc.—are not research writing. Some writers include research in these and other forms of personal writing, and practicing some of these types of writing—particularly when you are trying to come up with an idea to write and research about in the first place—can be helpful in thinking through a research project. But when we set about to write a research project, most of us don't have these sorts of personal writing genres in mind.

So, what is "research writing"?

Research writing is writing that uses evidence (from journals, books, magazines, the Internet, experts, etc.) to persuade or inform an audience about a particular point.

Research writing exists in a variety of different forms. For example, academics, journalists, or other researchers write articles for journals or magazines; academics, professional writers and almost anyone create web pages that both use research to make some sort of point and that show readers how to find more research on a particular topic. All of these types of writing projects can be done by a single writer who seeks advice from others, or by a number of writers who collaborate on the project.

Academic research writing

The specific focus of The Process of Research Writing and the sort of writing project you will probably need to write in this class—is a form of research writing. How is academic research writing different from other kinds of writing that involve research? The goal of this textbook is to answer that question, and academic research projects come in a variety of shapes and forms. (In fact, you may have noticed that The Process of Research Writing purposefully avoids the term "research paper" since this is only one of the many ways in which it is possible to present academic research). But in brief, academic research writing projects are a bit different from other kinds of research writing projects in three significant ways:

Thesis: Academic research projects are organized around a point or a "thesis" that members of the intended audience would not accept as "common sense." What an audience accepts as "common sense" depends a great deal on the audience, which is one of the many reasons why what "counts" as academic research varies from field to field. But audiences want to learn something new either

by being informed about something they knew nothing about before or by reading a unique interpretation on the issue or the evidence.

Evidence: Academic research projects rely almost exclusively on evidence in order to support this point. Academic research writers use evidence in order to convince their audiences that the point they are making is right. Of course, all writing uses other means of persuasion—appeals to emotion, to logic, to the credibility of the author, and so forth. But the readers of academic research writing projects are likely to be more persuaded by good evidence than by anything else.

"Evidence," the information you use to support your point, includes readings you find in the library (journal and magazine articles, books, newspapers, and many other kinds of documents); materials from the Internet (web pages, information from databases, other Internet-based forums); and information you might be able to gather in other ways (interviews, field research, experiments, and so forth).

Academic research projects use a detailed citation process in order to demonstrate to their readers where the evidence that supports the writer's point came from. Unlike most types of "non-academic" research writing, academic research writers provide their readers with a great deal of detail about where they found the evidence they are using to support their point. This processes is called citation, or "citing" of evidence. It can sometimes seem intimidating and confusing to writers new to the process of academic research writing, but it is really nothing more than explaining to your reader where your evidence came from.

Research Writing with Computers and the Internet

There are good reasons for writing with computers. To name just a few, computers help writers:

• Revise more easily, since you don't need to retype an entire draft
• Share their writing with others, either electronically (on disk or via email) or in "hard copy" since the writer only needs to print additional copies;
• Store and organize files, since papers that might get lost or take up a lot of room can all fit onto a computer hard drive or a floppy diskette;
• Make correct and "nice looking" drafts with the use of features like spelling and grammar checkers, and with design features that allow you to select different fonts and layouts.

Chances are, you already know these things.

If you are not using computers or the Internet in your academic research writing process, you need to try and learn more about the possibilities. It can be intimidating and time-consuming to begin effectively using a computer, but there are few things that will be as rewarding for your academic writing career.

No essay, story, or book (including this one) simply "appeared" one day from the writer's brain; rather, all writings are made after the writer, with the help of others, works through the process of writing.

Generally speaking, the process of writing involves:

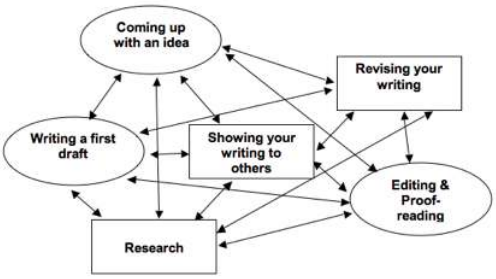
• Coming up with an idea (sometimes called brainstorming, invention or "pre-writing");
• Writing a rough draft of that idea;
• Showing that rough draft to others to get feedback (peers, instructors, colleagues, etc.);
• Revising the draft (sometimes many times); and

• Proof-reading and editing to correct minor mistakes and errors.

An added component in the writing process of research projects is, obviously, research. Rarely does research begin before at least some initial writing (even if it is nothing more than brainstorming or pre-writing exercises), and research is usually not completed until after the entire writing project is completed. Rather, research comes in to play at all parts of the process and can have a dramatic effect on the other parts of the process. Chances are you will need to do at least some simple research to develop an idea to write about in the first place. You might do the bulk of your research as you write your rough draft, though you will almost certainly have to do more research based on the revisions that you decide to make to your project.

There are two other things to think about within this simplified version of the process of writing. First, the process of writing always takes place for some reason or purpose and within some context that potentially change the way you do these steps. The process that you will go through in writing for this class will be different from the process you go through in responding to an essay question on a Sociology midterm or from sending an email to a friend. This is true in part because your purposes for writing these different kinds of texts are simply different.

Second, the process of writing isn't quite as linear and straight-forward as my list might suggest. Writers generally have to start by coming up with an idea, but writers often go back to their original idea and make changes in it after they write several drafts, do research, talk with others, and so on. The writing process might be more accurately represented like this:



Seem complicated? It is, or at least it can be.

So, instead of thinking of the writing process as an ordered list, you should think of it more as a "web" where different points can and do connect with each other in many different ways, and a process that changes according to the demands of each writing project. While you might write an essay where you follow the steps in the writing process in order (from coming up with an idea all the way to proofreading), writers also find themselves following the writing process out of order all the time. That's okay. The key thing to remember about the writing process is that it is a process made up of many different steps, and writers are rarely successful if they "just write."

Managing Your Research Project

provided by Lumen Learning

The prewriting you have completed so far has helped you begin to plan the content of your research paper—your topic, research questions, and preliminary thesis. It is equally important to plan out the process of researching and writing the paper. Although some types of writing assignments can be completed relatively quickly, developing a good research paper is a complex process that takes time. Breaking it into manageable steps is crucial. Review the steps outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Steps to Writing a Research Paper

1. Choose a topic.
2. Schedule and plan time for research and writing.
3. Conduct research.
4. Organize research
5. Draft your paper.
6. Revise and edit your paper.

You have already completed step 1. In this section, you will complete step 2. The remaining steps fall under two broad categories—the research phase of the project (steps 3 and 4) and the writing phase (steps 5 and 6). Both phases present challenges. Understanding the tasks involved and allowing enough time to complete each task will help you complete your research paper on time with a minimal amount of stress.

Planning Your Project

Each step of a research project requires time and attention. Careful planning helps ensure that you will keep your project running smoothly and produce your best work. Set up a project schedule that shows when you will complete each step. Think about *how* you will complete each step and what project resources you will use. Resources may include anything from library databases and word-processing software to interview subjects and writing tutors.

To develop your schedule, use a calendar and work backward from the date your final draft is due. Generally, it is wise to divide half of the available time on the research phase of the project and half on the writing phase. For example, if you have a month to work, plan for two weeks for each phase. If you have a full semester, plan to begin research early and to start writing by the middle of the term. You might think that no one really works that far ahead, but try it. You will probably be pleased with the quality of your work and with the reduction in your stress level.

As you plan, break down major steps into smaller tasks if necessary. For example, step 3, conducting research, involves locating potential sources, evaluating their usefulness and reliability, reading, and taking notes. Defining these smaller tasks makes the project more manageable by giving you concrete goals to achieve.

Jorge had six weeks to complete his research project. Working backward from a due date of May 2, he mapped out a schedule for completing his research by early April so that he would have ample time to write. Jorge chose to write his schedule in his weekly planner to help keep himself on track.

Review Jorge's schedule. Key target dates are shaded. Note that Jorge planned times to use available resources by visiting the library and writing center and by meeting with his instructor.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
March 20	21	22 Choose Topic	23 Preliminary research	24 Write research questions and working thesis	25 Write research proposal	26
27	28 Research proposal due	29 Look for sources online	30 Library	31 Evaluate sources; make source cards	April 1 Take notes →	2
3 →	4 →	5 Finish note cards	6 Organize notes →	7 →	8 Write outline	9 →
10	11 Outline due	12 Write draft →	13 →	14 →	15 *Off - Trip to NYC*	16 *Off - Trip to NYC*
17	18 Conference with Prof. Habib 2:00	19 Finish writing draft	20	21 Revise draft →	22 →	23 Library?
24	25	26 Finish revising draft	27 Edit draft	28 Writing Center 4:30	29 Finish editing draft	30 Create Works Cited page
May 1	2 Final draft due	3	4	5	6	7

TIP

Plan your schedule realistically, and consider other commitments that may sometimes take precedence. A business trip or family visit may mean that you are unable to work on the research project for a few days. Make the most of the time you have available. Plan for unexpected interruptions, but keep in mind that a short time away from the project may help you come back to it with

renewed enthusiasm. Another strategy many writers find helpful is to finish each day's work at a point when the next task is an easy one. That makes it easier to start again.

When you create a project schedule at work, you set target dates for completing certain tasks and identify the resources you plan to use on the project. It is important to build in some flexibility. Materials may not be received on time because of a shipping delay. An employee on your team may be called away to work on a higher-priority project. Essential equipment may malfunction. You should always plan for the unexpected.

Staying Organized

Although setting up a schedule is easy, sticking to one is challenging. Even if you are the rare person who never procrastinates, unforeseen events may interfere with your ability to complete tasks on time. A self-imposed deadline may slip your mind despite your best intentions. Organizational tools—calendars, checklists, note cards, software, and so forth—can help you stay on track.

Throughout your project, organize both your time and your resources systematically. Review your schedule frequently and check your progress. It helps to post your schedule in a place where you will see it every day. Both personal and workplace e-mail systems usually include a calendar feature where you can record tasks, arrange to receive daily reminders, and check off completed tasks. Electronic devices such as smartphones have similar features.

Organize project documents in a binder or electronic folder, and label project documents and folders clearly. Use note cards or an electronic document to record bibliographical information for each source you plan to use in your paper. Tracking this information throughout the research process can save you hours of time when you create your references page.

Anticipating Challenges

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? You have identified a book that would be a great resource for your project, but it is currently checked out of the library. You planned to interview a subject matter expert on your topic, but she calls to reschedule your meeting. You have begun writing your draft, but now you realize that you will need to modify your thesis and conduct additional research. Or you have finally completed your draft when your computer crashes, and days of hard work disappear in an instant.

These troubling situations are all too common. No matter how carefully you plan your schedule, you may encounter a glitch or setback. Managing your project effectively means anticipating potential problems, taking steps to minimize them where possible, and allowing time in your schedule to handle any setbacks.

Many times a situation becomes a problem due only to lack of planning. For example, if a book is checked out of your local library, it might be available through interlibrary loan, which usually takes a few days for the library staff to process. Alternatively, you might locate another, equally useful source. If you have allowed enough time for research, a brief delay will not become a major setback.

You can manage other potential problems by staying organized and maintaining a take-charge attitude. Take a minute each day to save a backup copy of your work on a portable hard drive. Maintain detailed note cards and source cards as you conduct research—doing so will make citing sources in your draft infinitely easier. If you run into difficulties with your research or your writing, ask your instructor for help, or make an appointment with a writing tutor.

Writing at Work

In the workplace, documents prepared at the beginning of a project often include a detailed plan for risk management. When you manage a project, it makes sense to anticipate and prepare for potential setbacks. For example, to roll out a new product line, a software development company must strive to complete tasks on a schedule in order to meet the new product release date. The project manager may need to adjust the project plan if one or more tasks fall behind schedule.

The Seven Steps of the Research Project

provided by Lumen Learning

The Seven Steps of the Research Process

The following seven steps outline a simple and effective strategy for finding information for a research paper and documenting the sources you find. Depending on your topic and your familiarity with the library, you may need to rearrange or recycle these steps. Adapt this outline to your needs.

Step 1: Identify and Develop Your Topic

State your topic idea as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, “What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?” Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question. In this case they are alcoholic beverages, health, and college students.

Step 2: Find Background Information

After you identify your research topic and some keywords that describe it, find and read articles in subject encyclopedias, dictionaries, and handbooks. These articles will help you understand the context (historical, cultural, disciplinary) of your topic. They are the foundation supporting further research. The most common background sources are subject encyclopedias and dictionaries from our print and online reference collection. Class textbooks also provide definitions of terms and background information.

Look up your keywords in the indexes to subject encyclopedias. Read articles in these encyclopedias to set the context for your research. Note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopedia articles. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and reserve readings.

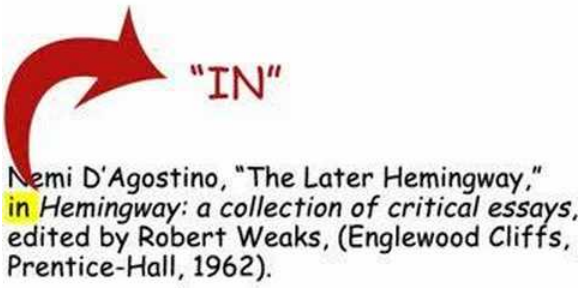
TIP: EXPLOIT BIBLIOGRAPHIES

- Read the background information and note any useful sources (books, journals, magazines, etc.) listed in the bibliography at the end of the encyclopedia article or dictionary entry. The sources cited in the bibliography are good starting points for further research.
- Look up these sources in our catalogs and periodical databases. Check the subject headings listed in the subject field of the online record for these books and articles. Then do subject searches using those subject headings to locate additional titles.
- Remember that many of the books and articles you find will themselves have bibliographies. Check these bibliographies for additional useful resources for your research.

By using this technique of routinely following up on sources cited in bibliographies, you can generate a surprisingly large number of books and articles on your topic in a relatively short time.

Step 3: Use Catalogs to Find Books and Media

Use guided keyword searching to find materials by topic or subject. Print or write down the citation (author, title,etc.) and the location information (call number and library). Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, scan the bibliography for additional sources. Watch for book-length bibliographies and annual reviews on your subject; they list citations to hundreds of books and articles in one subject area.



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Step 4: Use Indexes to Find Periodical Articles

Use periodical indexes and abstracts to find citations to articles. The indexes and abstracts may be in print or computer-based formats or both. Choose the indexes and format best suited to your particular topic; ask at the reference desk of your library if you

need help figuring out which index and format will be best.

You can find periodical articles by the article author, title, or keyword by using periodical indexes. If the full text is not linked in the index you are using, write down the citation from the index and search for the title of the periodical in your library's catalog.

Step 5: Find Internet Resources

Use search engines. Check to see if your class has a bibliography or research guide created by librarians. Some search tools include:

(These links date back to 2016 when this book written)

- Search Engines – Comparison table of recommended search engines; how search engines work
- Subject Directories – Table comparing some of the best human-selected collections of web pages
- Meta-Search Engines – Use at your own risk: not recommended as a substitute for directly using search engines
- Invisible Web – What it is, how to find it, and its inherent ambiguity (searchable databases on the Web)

Step 6: Evaluate What You Find

Critically Analyzing Information Sources

Initial Appraisal

Author

1. What are the author's credentials–institutional affiliation (where he or she works), educational background, past writings, or experience? Is the book or article written on a topic in the author's area of expertise? You can use the various *Who's Who* publications for the U.S. and other countries and for specific subjects and the biographical information located in the publication itself to help determine the author's affiliation and credentials.
2. Has your instructor mentioned this author? Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies? Respected authors are cited frequently by other scholars. For this reason, always note those names that appear in many different sources.
3. Is the author associated with a reputable institution or organization? What are the basic values or goals of the organization or institution?

Date of Publication

1. When was the source published? This date is often located on the face of the title page below the name of the publisher. If it is not there, look for the copyright date on the reverse of the title page. On Web pages, the date of the last revision is usually at the bottom of the home page, sometimes every page.
2. Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Topic areas of continuing and rapid development, such as the sciences, demand more current information. On the other hand, topics in the humanities often require material that was written many years ago. At the other extreme, some news sources on the Web now note the hour and minute that articles are posted on their site.

Edition or Revision

Is this a first edition of this publication or not? Further editions indicate a source has been revised and updated to reflect changes in knowledge, include omissions, and harmonize with its intended reader's needs. Also, many printings or editions may indicate that the work has become a standard source in the area and is reliable. If you are using a Web source, do the pages indicate revision dates?

Publisher

Note the publisher. If the source is published by a university press, it is likely to be scholarly. Although the fact that the publisher is reputable does not necessarily guarantee quality, it does show that the publisher may have high regard for the source being published.

Title of Journal

Is this a scholarly or a popular journal? This distinction is important because it indicates different levels of complexity in conveying ideas. If you need help in determining the type of journal, see *Distinguishing Scholarly from Non-Scholarly Periodicals.* Or you

may wish to check your journal title in the latest edition of *Katz's Magazines for Libraries* (Olin Ref Z 6941 .K21, shelved at the reference desk) for a brief evaluative description.

Critical Analysis of the Content

Content Analysis

Having made an initial appraisal, you should now examine the body of the source. Read the preface to determine the author's intentions for the book. Scan the table of contents and the index to get a broad overview of the material it covers. Note whether bibliographies are included. Read the chapters that specifically address your topic. Reading the article abstract and scanning the table of contents of a journal or magazine issue is also useful. As with books, the presence and quality of a bibliography at the end of the article may reflect the care with which the authors have prepared their work.

Intended Audience

What type of audience is the author addressing? Is the publication aimed at a specialized or a general audience? Is this source too elementary, too technical, too advanced, or just right for your needs?

Objective Reasoning

1. Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda? It is not always easy to separate fact from opinion. Facts can usually be verified; opinions, though they may be based on factual information, evolve from the interpretation of facts. Skilled writers can make you think their interpretations are facts.
2. Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence? Assumptions should be reasonable. Note errors or omissions.
3. Are the ideas and arguments advanced more or less in line with other works you have read on the same topic? The more radically an author departs from the views of others in the same field, the more carefully and critically you should scrutinize his or her ideas.
4. Is the author's point of view objective and impartial? Is the language free of emotion-arousing words and bias?

Coverage

1. Does the work update other sources, substantiate other materials you have read, or add new information? Does it extensively or marginally cover your topic? You should explore enough sources to obtain a variety of viewpoints.
2. Is the material primary or secondary in nature? Primary sources are the raw material of the research process. Secondary sources are based on primary sources. For example, if you were researching Konrad Adenauer's role in rebuilding West Germany after World War II, Adenauer's own writings would be one of many primary sources available on this topic. Others might include relevant government documents and contemporary German newspaper articles. Scholars use this primary material to help generate historical interpretations–a secondary source. Books, encyclopedia articles, and scholarly journal articles about Adenauer's role are considered secondary sources. In the sciences, journal articles and conference proceedings written by experimenters reporting the results of their research are primary documents. Choose both primary and secondary sources when you have the opportunity.

Writing Style

Is the publication organized logically? Are the main points clearly presented? Do you find the text easy to read, or is it stilted or choppy? Is the author's argument repetitive?

Evaluative Reviews

1. Locate critical reviews of books in a reviewing source, such as Summon's Advanced Search, *Book Review Index*, *Book Review Digest*, and *ProQuest Research Library*. Is the review positive? Is the book under review considered a valuable contribution to the field? Does the reviewer mention other books that might be better? If so, locate these sources for more information on your topic.
2. Do the various reviewers agree on the value or attributes of the book or has it aroused controversy among the critics?
3. For Web sites, consider consulting one of the evaluation and reviewing sources on the Internet.

Video: How to Identify Scholarly Articles



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Video: How to Identify Substantive News Articles



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Step 7: Cite What You Find Using a Standard Format

Give credit where credit is due; cite your sources.

Citing or documenting the sources used in your research serves two purposes, it gives proper credit to the authors of the materials used, and it allows those who are reading your work to duplicate your research and locate the sources that you have listed as references. Knowingly representing the work of others as your own is plagiarism. Use one of the styles listed below or another style approved by your instructor.

Modern Language Association (MLA)

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 7th ed. New York: MLA, 2009.

This handbook is intended as an aid for college students writing research papers. Included here is information on selecting a topic, researching the topic, note taking, the writing of footnotes and bibliographies, as well as sample pages of a research paper. Useful for the beginning researcher.

American Psychological Association (APA)

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. 6th ed. Washington: APA, 2010

The authoritative style manual for anyone writing in the field of psychology. Useful for the social sciences generally. Chapters discuss the content and organization of a manuscript, writing style, the American Psychological Association citation style, and typing, mailing and proofreading.

RESEARCH TIPS

- Work from the general to the specific. Find background information first, then use more specific and recent sources.
- Record what you find and where you found it. Record the complete citation for each source you find; you may need it again later.
- Translate your topic into the subject language of the indexes and catalogs you use. Check your topic words against a thesaurus or subject heading list.

Important Concepts

research

research writing

process of research writing

objective reasoning

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association

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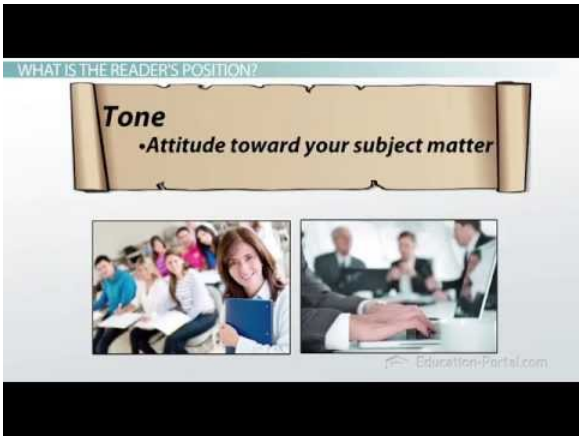
15.3: Identifying and Understanding Your Audience and Purpose

Article links:

"Audience Awareness" provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

- Identify questions for analyzing your audience.
- Identify ways to address a diverse audience.



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Audience Awareness

provided by Lumen Learning

Knowing your audience—whether readers or listeners—will help you determine what information to include in a document or presentation, as well as how to convey it most effectively. You should consider your audience when choosing your tone, content, and language—or else your message may seem unfocused or inappropriate.

In the classroom, your audience is often your professor. However, some assignments are designed so that you are addressing a secondary audience such as an expert in the field or the general public. Even when your audience is your instructor, tailor your communication to meet expectations. For example, your professor may expect you to demonstrate critical thinking or to employ an academic style.

Audience Awareness in the Composing Process

You should consider your audience early in the course of writing documents or speeches, but not necessarily as the first step. Worrying too much about accommodating an audience can inhibit early stages of composition. Do some research and prewriting first. Once you're knowledgeable about the topic and confident you have something to say about it, consider how to make it interesting and significant for specific readers or listeners.

Here are some questions to ask when analyzing your audience:

- How much does the audience know about the subject? The level and type of knowledge your audience already has determines how much background you need to provide, which terms will need definition or explanation, and whether you'll use an academic or familiar tone.
- How does the audience feel about your topic? You may need to convince a skeptical audience that your views have merit. If the ***audience is biased against your stance***, you'll have to find ways to bring them around to your viewpoint. In that case, finding common ground might be a good place to start.

- What new information can you provide? Consider why your topic is important to your audience and what they can gain by giving you their attention. Can you motivate them to think more about your issue? To take action?
- What is your relationship to the audience? Are you giving orders, suggestions, or advice? Your tone may be more personal with a peer. If you're an authority, you need to sound sure of yourself; if you're a subordinate, you need to show respect.

The Effect of Audience on Style

Your style is determined in part by your audience. Together, the following elements constitute style; adjust them to reach your intended audience:

- Message. What does the audience care about, or what are they likely to act upon? What do they need to know from you?
- Argument/Content. What sort of evidence would convince them? What would they need to hear to agree with your argument? Would they appreciate a story or find it distracting?
- Word choice. Should you use jargon and slang? Formal or informal words? Contractions?
- Sentence type and length. Should you use long, complex sentences or short, simple ones? Can you use fragments?
- Tone. Should it be personal or distanced, humorous or serious, formal or informal?

Reaching Out to the Audience in the Introduction

The introduction helps the audience decide if a text is worth reading or a speech is worth their attention. Consider the choices the author makes in the following introduction:

Example 1

Natalie, 11, is a timid kid, and her parents, though possessing the best of intentions, aren't making it any easier for her. The Portland, Maine, sixth grader says, "I hate it when Mom and Dad get all supercheery and say, 'Don't be shy. See how your sister Tracy does it? Just go up to that kid and say hi.' But I'm *not* Tracy. It's really hard for me. I feel like everyone is watching me and waiting for me to mess up."

The above is from a Good Housekeeping article, "10 Smart Ways to Help a Shy Child" by Beth Johns (March 2001, page 89). The intended audience is middle- class American women with at least a high school education. The readers have children and know ways to deal with them, but are looking for something new. The writer presents herself as a peer and draws interest immediately by using a human interest story about a particular child to introduce the topic. Her tone is informal and her language is casual: "kid" instead of "child," a contraction for "are not," and slang ("supercheery"). She uses active voice and short sentences. Compare Johns' introduction with "An Ambulatory Physiological Monitor for Animal Welfare Studies" in the scholarly journal Computers and Electronics in Agriculture (2001, Volume 32, pages 181-194):

Example 2

A fundamental problem in recording continuous and rapidly varying physiological signals such as the electrocardiogram (ECG), electromyogram (EMG), or electroencephalogram (EEG) from freely-moving subjects over extended periods of time is the large volume of data that must be collected. This problem is further exacerbated when a number of signals and/or subjects are monitored simultaneously. In animal welfare studies, researchers often wish to record multiple signals from multiple animals while the animals are subjected to various stressors over periods of several weeks (Krantz and Falconer, 1995; Rollin, 1997).

Phillip J. Harris, Peter N. Schaare, Christian J. Cook, and Jon D. Henderson, the research team who wrote this, are clearly addressing fellow researchers who want to gain detailed knowledge on a topic they're familiar with. Because these readers expect that the authors have read the most current literature on the topic, careful documentation is provided within parentheses. The authors use formal language, passive voice ("data must be collected"), jargon ("stressors"), and acronyms ("ECG"). Sentences tend to be long and use many modifiers. For example, the opening sentence has 26 words separating the subject from the predicate.

Addressing a Diverse Audience

An additional but important factor to consider when writing a document or preparing a speech is the differences that exist in our diverse society. Your goal should be to not only address your audience accurately and clearly, but also in a socially acceptable and professional manner. The following are suggestions to help you adapt your document or speech to meet this goal:

- Recognize your cultural filter. Cultures are not monolithic, but are formed from many factors such as class, gender, generation, religion, or education. Your cultural filter shapes how you view the world and can at times prevent understanding different

backgrounds.

- Avoid ethnocentrism. Assuming that your culture's values, customs, or beliefs are superior to another's is ethnocentrism. It's an attitude that can alienate your audience. Be careful not to assume that all cultural practices are shared. Suspend any judgments or cultural stereotypes. An example of an ethnocentric attitude is assuming that everyone in your audience believes capitalism is the best economic system just because that's the system you live under.
- Be aware of gestures when speaking. In many cultures, different gestures have different meanings. For example, in North America, eye contact is a sign of respect. However, in Japan and Korea, the same eye contact is considered intimidating. Some gestures (sitting cross-legged, folding your arms) might be acceptable in one culture, but may appear rude or defensive in another. When giving a speech, consider whether your audiences might misconstrue any gestures you're likely to make.
- Distinguish between people and their abilities. When referring to an individual with a disability, always use people-first language. For example, instead of "the blind woman," write "the woman who is blind." This will ensure the person is the focus of your message and not the disability. Also, avoid outdated terms ("handicapped," "crippled") and never identify someone solely by that person's disability ("a quadriplegic," "an epileptic.").
- Adopt bias-free language. Biased language privileges one group or leaves out other groups or individuals and often makes unwarranted assumptions. For example, using the term "flesh-colored" assumes that every reader will have the same skin color —or that one color of skin is better than another. Don't write "the male lawyer" when it is unnecessary to signify the lawyer's gender. Avoid mentioning a person's sex, gender, ethnic background, religion, disability, or physical characteristics without a sufficient reason for doing so.
- Avoid sexist language and gender-specific terms. Sexist language creates stereotypes that assume one gender is the norm. Nonsexist language refrains from addressing sex at all when it's irrelevant. Gender-specific words (policeman) stress one sex, excluding the other. Consider substituting gender-neutral words (police officer).
- Acknowledge issues of oppression. Similar to ethnocentrism, the language we write or speak might convey a negative bias towards individuals or groups. If your message stereotypes a group, even unconsciously, you risk offending your audience. Examples of discriminating language to avoid include:
    - ***Racism*** – Your audience will be diverse. By recognizing that there are many cultural frames of reference, you'll reach each reader or listener effectively. Unless it is necessary, avoid references to ethnicity.
    - ***Heterosexism*** – If your essay or speech depicts a relationship, don't assume that each member of your audience is heterosexual.
    - ***Ageism*** – Many pervasive stereotypes exist with regard to the age of individuals. If you write or speak about an elderly person, challenge discriminating ideas such as "old people are feeble" or "teenagers lack wisdom."
    - ***Sexism*** – While sexist language assumes one term for both genders, sexism suggests one sex or gender is inferior to the other. To suggest that females are emotional and men are logical privileges one sex over the other, while stereotyping that all of one sex have the same traits or characteristics.

Important Concepts

audience is biased against your stance

racism

heterosexism

ageism

sexism

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15.4: Research Writing in the Academic Disciplines

Article links

“Research Writing in the Academic Disciplines” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

- Identify the key principles of source-based writing which span different academic disciplines and professions.
- Describe the collaborative and social process of knowledge-making in modern society.
- Describe the concept of discourse communities related to research writing.



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English Composition 2

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Research Writing in the Academic Disciplines

Introduction

Regardless of the academic discipline in which you conduct research and write, and the heart of the research and writing processes lie the same principles. These principles are critical reading and writing, active and creative interpretation of research sources and data, and writing rhetorically. At the same time, as a college writer, you probably know that research and writing assignment differ from one academic discipline to another. For example, different academic disciplines require researchers to use different research methods and techniques. Writers in different disciplines are also often required to discuss the results of their research differently. Finally, as you probably know, the finished texts look different in different disciplines. They often use different format and organizational structure and use different citation and documentation systems to acknowledge research sources. All these differences are rhetorical in nature.

Researchers and writers in different academic disciplines do what they do because they have a certain rhetorical purpose to fulfill and a certain audience to reach. In order to make their research understood and to enable others in their intellectual ***community*** to follow their ideas and theories, academic writers conform to the expectations of their readers. They follow the research methods and procedures as well as the conventions of presenting that research established by their academic community. As a college student, you have probably noticed that your professors in different classes will give you different assignments and expect different things from you as a researcher and a writer.

Researching this chapter, I looked for the types of writing and research assignments that professors of different academic disciplines assign to students at the university where I work, by browsing websites of its different departments. As I expected, there

was a considerable variety of purposes, audience, and research methods. I saw assignments ranging from annual accounting reports assigned in a business class, to studies of various countries' political systems in a political science course, to a web search for information on cystic fibrosis in a cell biology class. All these assignments had different parameters and expected writers to do different things because they reflected the peculiarities of research and writing in the disciplines in which they were assigned. This variety of assignments, methods, and approaches is universal.

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

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

So, while one chapter or even a whole book cannot cover all the nuances and conventions of research and writing in every academic discipline. My purpose in this chapter is different. I would like to explore, together with you, the fundamental rhetorical and other principles and approaches that govern research writing across all academic disciplines. This chapter also offers activities and projects which, I hope, will make you more aware of the peculiar aspects of researching and writing in different academic disciplines. My ultimate goal in this chapter is to enable my readers to become active and critical investigators of the disciplinary differences in research and writing. Such an active approach will enable you to find out what I cannot cover here by reading outside of this book, by talking to your professors, and by practicing research and writing across disciplines.

Intellectual and Discourse Communities

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

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

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

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

The Making of Knowledge in Academic Disciplines

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

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

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

Gradually, then, existing paradigms are re-examined and revised, and new ones are established. When this happens, old knowledge gets discarded and substituted by new knowledge. In other words, an older version of reality is replaced by a newer version. To illustrate his theory, Kuhn uses the paradigm shift started by the astronomer Copernicus and his theory that the Earth revolves around the Sun. I have also used this example in the chapter of this book dedicated to rhetoric to show that even scientific truths that seem constant and unshakable are subject to revision and change. To an untrained eye it may seem that all scientists and other researchers do is explain and describe reality which is unchangeable and stable. However, when an intellectual community is working within the confines of the current paradigm, such as a scientific theory or a set of research methods, their interpretations of this reality are limited by the capabilities and limitations of that paradigm. In other words, the results of their research are only as good as the system they use to obtain those results.

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

Application of the Concept of Discourse Communities to Research Writing

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

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

In college writing, such a theory of fact and opinion has very tangible consequences. It often results in writing in which the author is either too afraid to commit to a theory or points of view because he or she is afraid of being labeled subjective or biased. Consequently, such writers create little more than summaries of available sources. Other inexperienced writers may take the opposite route, writing exclusively or almost exclusively from their current understanding of their topics, or from their current

opinions. Since “everyone is entitled to their own opinion,” they reason, no one can question what they have written even if that writing is completely unpersuasive. In either case, such writing fails to fulfill the main purpose of research, which is to learn.

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

Chances are that during your research, you saw some significant developments and shifts in the ways in which your academic discipline has understood and talked about the issues and topic that interest its members.

To illustrate the process of historical investigation of an academic subject, let us look at the hot issue of cloning. What began as a scientific debate years ago has transcended the boundaries of the academic world and is not interesting to various people from various walks of life, and for various reasons. The issue of cloning is debated not only from the scientific, but also from the ethical and legal points of view, to name just a few.

Cloning: Current Perspectives and Discussions

Since I am not a scientist, my interest in the subject of cloning is triggered by an article on stem cell research that I read recently in the popular magazine Scientific American. I know that stem cell research is a controversial subject, related to the subject of human cloning. My interest in stem cell research was further provoked by the impassioned speech made by Ron Regan, the son of the late President Ronald Regan, at the Democratic Party’s National Convention in the summer of 2004. Regan was trying to make a case for more stem cell research by arguing that it could have helped his father who had died of Alzheimer’s disease. I conducted a quick search of my university library using the keywords “human cloning.” The search turned up eighty-seven book titles that told me that the topic is fairly important for the academic community as well as for the general public.

I noticed that the most recent book on cloning in my library’s collection was published this year while the oldest one appeared in 1978. There seemed to be an explosion of interest in the topic beginning in the 1990s with the majority of the titles appearing between then and 2004. Next, I decided to search two online databases, which are also accessible from my university library’s website. I was interested in both scientific and legal aspects of cloning, so I searched the health science database PubMed (my search turns up 2549 results). Next, I search the database LexisNexis Congressional that gave me access to legislative documents related to human cloning. This search left me with over a hundred documents. I was able to find many more articles on human cloning in popular magazines and newspapers. By reading across these publications, I would probably be able to get a decent idea about the current state of the debate on cloning.

Cloning: A Historical Investigation

Dolly the sheep was cloned in 1996 by British scientists and died in 2003. According to the website Science Museum (www.sciencemuseum.org.uk), “Dolly the sheep became a scientific sensation when her birth was announced in 1997. Her relatively early death in February 2003 fuels the debate about the ethics of cloning research and the long-term health of clones.” I am tempted to start my search with Dolly because it was her birth that brought the issue of cloning to broad public’s attention. But then I recall the homunculus—a “test tube” human being that medieval alchemists often claimed to have created. It appears that my search into the history of cloning debate will have to go back much further than 1996 when Dolly was cloned.

Cloning: Signs of Paradigm Shifts

Living in the 21st century, I am skeptical towards alchemists’ claims about creating a homunculus out of a bag of bones, skin, and hair. Their stories may have been believable in the middle-ages, though, and may have represented the current paradigm of thinking about the possibility of creating living organisms is a lab. So, I turned to Dolly in an attempt to investigate what the paradigm of thinking about cloning was in the second half of the 1990s and how the scientific community and the general public received the news of Dolly’s birth. Therefore, I went back to my university library’s web page and searched the databases for articles on Dolly and cloning published within two years of Dolly’s birth in 1996. After looking through several publications, both from scientific and popular periodicals, I sense the excitement, surprise, skepticism, and a little concern about the future implications of our ability to close living creatures. Writing for The Sunday Times, in 1998, Steve Connor says that Dolly would undergo texts to prove that

she is, indeed, the clone of her mother. In his article, Connor uses such words as “reportedly” which indicates skepticism (The Sunday Times, Feb 8, 1998, p. 9). In a New Scientist article published in January 1998, Philip Cohen writes that in the future scientists are likely to establish human cloning techniques. Cohen is worried that human cloning would create numerous scientific, ethical, and legal problems. (New Scientist, Jan 17, 1998 v157 n2117 p. 4(2))

Let’s now fast-forward to 2003 and 2004. Surprisingly, at the top of the page of search results are the news that the British biotech company whose employees cloned Dolly. Does this mean that cloning is dead, though? Far from it! My research shows debates about legal and ethical aspects of cloning. The ability of scientists to clone living organisms is not in doubt anymore. By now, political and ideological groups have added their agendas and their voices to the cloning and stem cell research debate, and the US Congress has enacted legislation regulating stem cell research in the US. The current paradigm of discussions of human cloning and the related subject of stem cell research is not only scientific but also political, ethical, legal, and ideological in nature.

The historical study project, as well as my illustration of how such an investigation could be completed, should illustrate two things. Firstly, if you believe that something about human cloning or any other topic worth investigating is an indisputable fact, chances are that some years ago it was “only” someone’s opinion, or, in Kuhn’s words, an “***anomaly***” which the current system of beliefs and the available research methods could not explain. Secondly, academic and social attitudes towards any subject of discussion and debate are formed and changed gradually over time. Both internal, discipline-specific factors, and external, social ones, contribute to this change. Such internal factors include the availability of new, more accurate research techniques or equipment. The external factors include, but are not limited to, the general cultural and political climate in the country and in the world. Academic research and academic discussions are, therefore, rhetorical phenomena which are tightly connected not only to the state of an academic discipline at any given time, but also to the state of society as a whole and to the interests, beliefs, and convictions of its members.

Establishing Authority in Academic Writing by Taking Control of Your Research Sources

Good writing is authoritative. It shows that the author is in control and that he or she is leading the readers along the argument by skillfully using research sources, interpreting them actively and creatively, and placing the necessary signposts to help the readers anticipate where the discussion will go next. ***Authoritative writing*** has its writing and its writer’s voice present at all times. Readers of such writing do not have to guess which parts of the paper they are reading come from an external source and which come from the author him or herself.

The task of conveying authority through writing faces any writer since it is one of the major components of the rhetorical approach to composing. However, it is especially relevant to academic writing because of the context in which we learn it and in which it is read and evaluated. We come to academic writing as apprentices not only in the art of composing but also in the academic discipline which are studying. We face two challenges at the same time. On the one hand, we try to learn to become better writers. On the other, we study the content of our chosen academic disciplines that will become the content of our academic writing itself. Anyone entering college, either as an undergraduate or a graduate student, has to navigate the numerous discourse conventions of their academic discipline. We often have too little time for such navigation as reading, writing, and research assignments are handed to us soon after our college careers begin. In these circumstances, we may feel insecure and unsure of our previous knowledge, research, and writing expertise.

In the words of writing teacher and writer David Bartholomae, every beginning academic writer has to “***invent the university***.” What Bartholomae means by this is, when becoming a member of an academic community, such as a college or a university, each student has to understand what functioning in that community will mean personally for him or her and what conventions of academic reading, writing, and learning he or she will be expected to fulfill and follow. Thus, for every beginning academic writing, the process of learning its conventions is akin to inventing his or her own idea of what university intellectual life is like and how to join the university community.

Beginning research and academic writers let their sources control their writing too often. I think that the cause of this is the old idea, inherent in the traditional research paper assignment, that researched writing is supposed to be a compilation of external sources first and a means for the writer to create and advance new knowledge second, if at all. As a result, passages, and sometimes whole papers written in this way lack the writer’s presence and, as a consequence, they lack authority because all they do is re-tell the information presented in sources. Consider, for example, the following passage from a researched argument in favor of curbing

video game violence. In the paper, the author is trying to make a case that a connection exists between violence on the video game screen and in real life. The passage below summarizes some of the literature.

> The link between violence in video games and violence in real life has been shown many times (Abrams 54). Studies show that children who play violent video games for more than two hours each day are more likely to engage in violent behavior than their counterparts who do not (Smith 3). Axelson states that some video games manufacturers have recognized the problems by reducing the violence in some of their titles and by rating their games for different age groups (157). The government has instituted a rating system for videogames similar to the one used by the movie industry in an effort to protect your children from violence on the screen (Johnson 73). Alberts and Cohen say that we will have to wait and see whether this rating system will prove to be effective in curbing violence (258).

This passage lacks authority because every sentence in it is taken from an external source. Where is the writer in this paragraph? Where are the writer's voice and interpretations of the research data? What new insights about the possible connection between video game and real life violence do we get from this author? Is there anything in this passage that we could not have learned by reading the sources mentioned in this paper? This writer has let external sources control the writing by composing an entire paragraph (and the rest of the paper is written in the same way) out of external source segments and nowhere in this passage do we see the author's own voice, persona, or authority. So, how can the problem of writing without authority and without voice be solved? There are several ways, and the checklist below provides you with some suggestions.

- Always remember to use research for a rhetorical purpose—to create new knowledge and convey it to your readers. Except in rare cases, writers are not compilers of existing information. Resist the urge to limit your research to simply summarizing and quoting external sources. Therefore, your ultimate purpose is to create and express your own theories and opinions about your topic.
- Talk to academics or professionals to find out what constitutes authoritative writing in their field. It could be the presence of a strong voice, or the use f particular research methods and techniques, or a certain way to present the results of your research. Later on in the chapter, you are offered an interview project designed to help you do that.
- Create annotated bibliographies to make sense of your research and make the ideas and theories you read about, your own. Try the annotated bibliography activity later on in the chapter.
- Use only reliable sources.

Integrating Sources into Your Own Writing

One of the most difficult tasks facing students of research writing is learning how to seamlessly integrate the information they find in the research sources into their own writing. In order to create a rhetorically effective researched text, a writer needs to work out a way of combining the research data, the voices and theories of research sources' authors on the one hand and his or her ideas, voice, and tone on the other. The following techniques of integrating source material into your own writing are, of course, relevant not only for academic research. However, it is when faced with academic research papers that many beginning researchers face problems with the integration of sources. Therefore, I am placing the discussion of these methods into the chapter of the book dedicated to academic research. Typically, researching writers use the following methods of integrating information from research sources into their writing:

Direct quoting

Quoting from a source directly allows you to convey not only the information contained in the research source, but also the voice, tone, and "feel" of the original text. By reading direct quotes, your readers gain first-hand access to the language and the spirit of the original source.

How Much to Quote

Students often ask me how much of their sources they should quote directly in their papers. While there is no hard and fast rule about it, I usually reply that they should quote only when they feel it necessary to put their readers in direct contact with the text of the source. Quote if you encounter a striking word, sentence, or passage, one that you would be hard pressed to convey the same information and the same emotions and voice better than the original source. Consider, for example the following passage from a paper written by a student. In the paper, the writer analyzes a 19th-century slave narrative written by a man named J. D. Green:

> The most important event of Green's early life was the sale of his mother to another owner at the young age of twelve years old. In response to this Green dropped to his knees and [shouted] at the heavens, "Oh! How dreadful it is to be black! Why was I born black? It would have been better had I not been born at all" (Green 5). It is this statement that communicates the message of Green's story. [None of] the atrocities told in the later portions of the narrative…elicit the same level of emotion and feeling from Green. For the remainder of the story, [he] is very reserved and treats each increasingly horrendous crime as if it was of no particular importance.

The direct quote works well here because it conveys the emotion and the voice of the original better than a paraphrase or summary would. Notice also the author of the paper quotes sparingly and that the borrowed material does not take over his own ideas, voice, and tone. Out of roughly ten lines in this passage, only about two are quoted, and the rest is the author's own interpretation of the quote or explanation for why the quote is necessary here.

If, after writing a preliminary draft of a paper, you feel that you have too many quotes and not enough of your own material, try the following simple troubleshooting method. This activity was suggested to me by my colleague Michael Moghtader. Both my students and I have found it effective. Take a pen or a highlighter and mark all direct quotes in your paper. Make sure that the amount of quoted material does not exceed, or even equal the amount of your own writing. A good ratio of your own writing to quoted material would be 70% to 30% or even 80% to 20%. By keeping to these numbers, you will ensure that your work is not merely a regurgitation of writing done by others, but that it makes a new and original contribution to the treatment of your topic.

Summarizing

A summary is a shortened version of the original passage, expressed in the writer's own words. The key to creating a good and useful summary of a source is preserving all the information and arguments contained in the original while condensing original to a small size. According to Bruce Ballenger, the author of the book The Curious Researcher (2001), ***summarizing*** "…requires careful thought , since you are the one doing the distilling [of the original], especially if you are trying to capture the essence of the whole movie, article, or chapter, that's fairly complex" (128). Purely and simply, then, a good summary manages to capture the essence of the original passage without losing any important information. Consider the following example. The original passage comes from an article exploring manifestation of the attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) not only in children but also in adults.

Original passage:

> Perhaps the clearest picture of adult ADHD comes from studies of people originally diagnosed with ADHD in grade school and followed by researchers through adolescence and young adulthood. These studies vary widely in their estimates of ADHD prevalence, remission rates, and relationship to other psychiatric disorders. But over all, they show a high percentage — 80% in several studies –of ADHD children growing into ADHD adolescents. Such individuals have continual trouble in school, at home, on the job, with the law in general, and with substance abuse in particular. Compared with control groups, ADHD adolescents are more likely to smoke, to drop out of school, to get fired, to have bad driving records, and to have difficulties with sexual relationships. "There's a great deal of continuity from the child to the adult form," says Russell Barkley, a researcher at the Medical University of South Carolina. "We're not seeing anything that suggests a qualitative change in the disorder. What's changing for adults is the broadening scope of impact. Adults have more things they've got to do. We're especially seeing problems with time, with self-control, and with planning for the future and being able to persist toward goals. In adults, these are major problems." Poor time management is a particularly treacherous area. As Barkley observes, "With a five-year-old, time management isn't relevant. With a 30-year-old, it's highly relevant. You can lose your job over that. You can lose a relationship over it."

Summary:

> According to the authors of the article "A Lifetime of Distraction," studies show that about 80% of children with ADHD grown into ADHD adolescents. Such people may have trouble in school, at work, and even with the law. Poor time management by adults with ADHD is of particular concern (1).

When ***summarizing*** the lengthy original passage, I looked for information struck me as new, interesting, and unusual and that might help me with my own research project. After reading the original text, I discovered that ADHD can transfer into adulthood—something I had not known before. That claim is the main focus of the passage and I tried to reflect it in my summary.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means rewriting original passages in your own words and in roughly the same length. Skillful paraphrasing of your sources can go a long way in helping you achieve two goals. Firstly, when you paraphrase you are making sense of your sources, increasing your "ownership" of the ideas expressed in them. This allows you to move a little closer to creating your own viewpoint, your own theory about the subject of your research. Paraphrasing is a great alternative to direct quoting (especially excessive quoting) because it allows you to recast the ideas of the original into your own language and voice. Secondly, by carefully paraphrasing source material, you are helping yourself to avoid unintentionally plagiarizing your sources. There is more discussion on how to avoid plagiarism in Chapter 12. For now, consider this passage, taken from the article "Fighting the Images Wars", by Steven Heller.

Original:

> Such is the political power of negative imagery that, during World War II, American newspapers and magazines were prohibited from publishing scenes of excessively bloody battles, and drawings done by official "war artists" (at least those that were made public) eschewed overly graphic depictions. It wasn't easy, but U.S. military propaganda experts sanitized the war images, with little complaint from the media. While it was acceptable to show barbaric adversaries, dead enemy soldiers, and even bedraggled allies, rare were any alarming representations of our own troops in physical peril, such as the orgy of brutal violence during the D-Day landings.

Paraphrase:

> In his article "Fighting the Image Wars," writer Steven Heller argues that the US government tries to limit the power of the media to publish disturbing images of war and conflict. According to Heller, during World War II and during the Korean War, American media were not allowed to publish images of disturbing war scenes (176). Heller further states that while it was often OK to show the enemies of the US as "barbaric" by displaying images of the atrocities committed by them, media rarely showed our own killed or wounded troops (176).

While the paraphrase is slightly shorter than the original, it captures the main information presented in the original. Notice the use in the paraphrase of the so-called "signal phrases." The paraphrase opens with the indication that what is about to come is taken from a source. The first sentence of the paraphrased passage also indicates the title of that source and the name of its author. Later on in the paragraph, the signal phrase "According to Heller" is used in order to continue to tell the reader that what he or she is reading is the author's rendering of external source material.

How to Quote, Paraphrase, and Summarize Effectively

One of the reasons why so many of us do not like the traditional research paper assignment is because we often feel that it requires us to collect and compile information without much thought about why we do it. In such assignments, there is often not enough space for the writer to express and explore his or her own purpose, ideas, and theories. ***Direct quoting*** is supposed to help you make your case, explain or illustrate something. The quote in the passage above also works well because it is framed by the author's own commentary and because it is clear from why the author needs it. He needs it in order to show the utter horror of J.D. Green at the sale of his mother and his anguish at being black in a slave-holding society. The quote is preceded by statement claiming that the loss of his mother was a terrible event for Green (something that the quote eloquently illustrates). After quoting from the source, the writer of the paper prepares his readers for what is to come later in the paper. Therefore, the quote in the passage above fulfills a rhetorical purpose. It illustrates a key concept that will be seen throughout the rest of the work and sets up the remaining portion of the argument.

Every direct quotation from a source should be accompanied by your own commentary. Incorporating source material into your writing effectively is similar to weaving a thread of one color into a carpet or blanket of another. In combination, the two colors can create a beautiful pattern. Try to follow this sequence:

> Introduce the source and explain why you are using it
>
> **Quote**
>
> Comment on the source material and set up the next use of a source
>
> **Quote**
>
> Continue using the steps in the same or similar order for each source.

Such variation of your own ideas, commentary, and interpretation on the one hand and source material on the other creates a smooth flow of the text and can be used not only for work with direct quotes but also with source summaries and paraphrases.

Quick Reference: Using Signal Phrases

When using external source material, whether by direct quoting, summarizing or paraphrasing, it is important to guide your readers through it in such a way that they always understand clearly where it is you, the author of the paper speaking and where you are working with external sources. To indicate this, signal phrases are used. ***Signal phrases*** introduce quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material to the reader.

Here are some popular signal phrases:

"According to [author's name or work's title]…"

"[Author's name] argues that…"

"[Author's name] states that…"

"[Author's name] writes that…"

"[Author's name] contends that…"

There are many other variations of these. When writing your own papers, play with these phrases, modify them to suit your needs, and see how that does to your writing. Remember that your readers need to be prepared for every quote, summary, or paraphrase. They need to know what is coming and why. Using signal phrases will help you prepare them.

Process

Begin a research project by collecting and annotating possible sources. Remember that not all the sources which your annotated bibliography will include may end up in your final paper. This is normal since researchers cast their nets much wider in the beginning of a project than the range of sources which they eventually include in their writing. The purpose of creating an annotated bibliography is to learn about the available resources on your subject and to get an idea how these resources might be useful for your particular writing project. As you collect your sources, write short summaries of each of them. Also try to apply the content of these sources to the project you are working on Don't worry about fitting each source exactly into what you think your project will be like. Remember that, in the process of research, you are learning about your subject, and that you never really know where this learning process takes you.

Conclusions

As a college student, you are probably taking four, five, or even six classes simultaneously. In many, if not all of those classes you are probably required to conduct research and produce research-based writing. So far in this chapter, we have discussed some general principles of academic research and writing which, I hope, will help you improve as an academic researcher and writer regardless of your major or academic discipline in which you work. In this segment of the chapter, I would like to offer a practical checklist of approaches, strategies, and methods that you can use for academic research and writing.

- Approach each research writing assignment rhetorically. Learn to recognize its purpose, intended audience, the context in which you are writing and the limitations that this context will impose on you as a writer. Also treat the format and structural requirements, such as the requirement to cite external sources, as rhetorical devices which will help you to make a bigger impact on your readers.
- Try to understand each research and writing assignment as best as you can. If you receive a written description of the assignment, read it several times and discuss it with your classmates and your instructor. If in doubt about some aspect of the assignment, ask your instructor.
- Develop and use a strong and authoritative voice. Make your sources work for you, not control you. When you write, it is your theories and your voice that counts. Research helps you form and express those opinions.
- Becoming a good academic researcher and writer takes time, practice, and rhetorical sensitivity. It takes talking to professionals in academic fields, such as your college professors, reading a lot of professional literature, and learning to understand the research and writing conventions of each academic discipline. To learn to function as a researcher and writer in your chosen academic discipline or profession, it is necessary to understand that research and writing are governed by discourse and community conventions and not by rigid and artificial rules.

Important Concepts

source-based writing:

knowledge-making process in modern society

community

accepted paradigm, or standard of the discipline

phenomena anomalies

anomaly

authoritative writing

invent the university

summarizing

paraphrasing

direct quoting

signal phrases

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Video 1: License: Standard YouTube License Attribution: What is academic writing? by Akademiskt skrivande/Academic Writing

Works Cited:

Kuhn, Thomas. 1962. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois. Melzer, Dan. 2003. “Assignments Across the Curriculum: A Survey of College Writing.” Language and Learning Across the Disciplines. (6.1): 86- 110.

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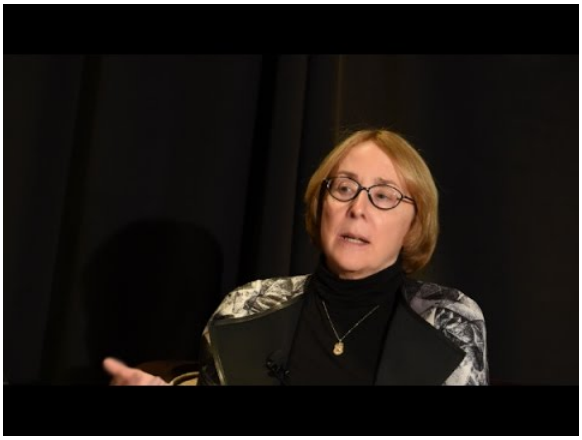
15.5: Develop a Research Proposal

Article links:

“Steps in Developing a Research Proposal” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

1. Identify the steps in developing a research proposal.
2. Choose a topic and formulate a research question and working thesis.
3. Develop a research proposal.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=127

Steps in Developing a Research Proposal

provided by Lumen Learning

Steps in Developing a Research Proposal

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

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

Choosing a Topic

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

Writers understand the importance of choosing a topic that fulfills the assignment requirements and fits the assignment’s purpose and audience. (For more information about purpose and audience,

Choosing a topic that interests you is also crucial. You instructor may provide a list of suggested topics or ask that you develop a topic on your own. In either case, try to identify topics that genuinely interest you.

After identifying potential topic ideas, you will need to evaluate your ideas and choose one topic to pursue. Will you be able to find enough information about the topic? Can you develop a paper about this topic that presents and supports your original ideas? Is the

topic too broad or too narrow for the scope of the assignment? If so, can you modify it so it is more manageable? You will ask these questions during this preliminary phase of the research process.

Identifying Potential Topics

Sometimes, your instructor may provide a list of suggested topics. If so, you may benefit from identifying several possibilities before committing to one idea. It is important to know how to narrow down your ideas into a concise, manageable thesis. You may also use the list as a starting point to help you identify additional, related topics. Discussing your ideas with your instructor will help ensure that you choose a manageable topic that fits the requirements of the assignment.

In this chapter, you will follow a writer named Jorge, who is studying health care administration, as he prepares a research paper. You will also plan, research, and draft your own research paper.

Jorge was assigned to write a research paper on health and the media for an introductory course in health care. Although a general topic was selected for the students, Jorge had to decide which specific issues interested him. He brainstormed a list of possibilities.

TIP

If you are writing a research paper for a specialized course, look back through your notes and course activities. Identify reading assignments and class discussions that especially engaged you. Doing so can help you identify topics to pursue.

Possible topics

1. Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) in the news
2. Sexual education programs
3. Hollywood and eating disorders
4. Americans' access to public health information
5. Media portrayal of the health care reform bill
6. Depictions of drugs on television
7. The effect of the Internet on mental health
8. Popularized diets (such as low-carbohydrate diets)
9. Fear of pandemics (bird flu, H1N1, SARS)
10. Electronic entertainment and obesity
11. Advertisements for prescription drugs
12. Public education and disease prevention

Narrowing Your Topic

Once you have a list of potential topics, you will need to choose one as the focus of your essay. You will also need to narrow your topic. Most writers find that the topics they listed during brainstorming or idea mapping are broad—too broad for the scope of the assignment. Working with an ***overly broad topic***, such as sexual education programs or popularized diets, can be frustrating and overwhelming. Each topic has so many facets that it would be impossible to cover them all in a college research paper. However, more specific choices, such as the pros and cons of sexual education in kids' television programs or the physical effects of the South Beach diet, are specific enough to write about without being too narrow to sustain an entire research paper.

A ***good research paper provides*** focused, in-depth information and analysis. If your topic is too broad, you will find it difficult to do more than skim the surface when you research it and write about it. Narrowing your focus is essential to making your topic manageable. To narrow your focus, explore your topic in writing, conduct preliminary research, and discuss both the topic and the research with others.

Exploring Your Topic in Writing

"How am I supposed to narrow my topic when I haven't even begun researching yet?" In fact, you may already know more than you realize. Review your list and identify your top two or three topics. Set aside some time to explore each one through freewriting. (For more information about freewriting, Simply taking the time to focus on your topic may yield fresh angles.

Jorge knew that he was especially interested in the topic of diet fads, but he also knew that it was much too broad for his assignment. He used freewriting to explore his thoughts so he could narrow his topic. Read Jorge's ideas.

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

Conducting Preliminary Research

Another way writers may focus a topic is to conduct preliminary research. Like freewriting, ***exploratory reading*** can help you identify interesting angles. Surfing the web and browsing through newspaper and magazine articles are good ways to start. Find out what people are saying about your topic on blogs and online discussion groups. Discussing your topic with others can also inspire you. Talk about your ideas with your classmates, your friends, or your instructor.

Jorge's freewriting exercise helped him realize that the assigned topic of health and the media intersected with a few of his interests —diet, nutrition, and obesity. Preliminary online research and discussions with his classmates strengthened his impression that many people are confused or misled by media coverage of these subjects.

Jorge decided to focus his paper on a topic that had garnered a great deal of media attention—low-carbohydrate diets. He wanted to find out whether low-carbohydrate diets were as effective as their proponents claimed.

Writing at Work

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

TIP

The reliability of online sources varies greatly. In this exploratory phase of your research, you do not need to evaluate sources as closely as you will later. However, use common sense as you refine your paper topic. If you read a fascinating blog comment that gives you a new idea for your paper, be sure to check out other, more reliable sources as well to make sure the idea is worth pursuing.

A Plan for Research

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

Formulating a Research Question

In forming a research question, you are setting a goal for your research. Your main research question should be substantial enough to form the guiding principle of your paper—but focused enough to guide your research. A strong research question requires you not only to find information but also to put together different pieces of information, interpret and analyze them, and figure out what you think. As you consider potential research questions, ask yourself whether they would be too hard or too easy to answer.

To determine your research question, review the freewriting you completed earlier. Skim through books, articles, and websites and list the questions you have. Include simple, factual questions and more complex questions that would require analysis and interpretation. Determine your main question—the primary focus of your paper—and several subquestions that you will need to research to answer your main question.

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

Topic: Low-carbohydrate diets

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

Subquestions:

Who can benefit from following a low-carbohydrate diet?

What are the supposed advantages of following a low-carbohydrate diet?

When did low-carb diets become a "hot" topic in the media?

Where do average consumers get information about diet and nutrition?

Why has the low-carb approach received so much media attention?

How do low-carb diets work?

Constructing a Working Thesis

A ***working thesis*** concisely states a writer's initial answer to the main research question. It does not merely state a fact or present a subjective opinion. Instead, it expresses a debatable idea or claim that you hope to prove through additional research. Your working thesis is called a working thesis for a reason—it is subject to change. As you learn more about your topic, you may change your thinking in light of your research findings. Let your working thesis serve as a guide to your research, but do not be afraid to modify it based on what you learn.

Jorge began his research with a strong point of view based on his preliminary writing and research. Read his working thesis statement, which presents the point he will argue. Notice how it states Jorge's tentative answer to his research question.

Main research question: Are low-carb diets as effective as they have sometimes been portrayed to be by the mass media?

Working thesis statement: Low-carb diets do not live up to the media hype surrounding them.

TIP

One way to determine your working thesis is to consider how you would complete sentences such as *I believe* or *My opinion is*. However, keep in mind that academic writing generally does not use first-person pronouns. These statements are useful starting points, but formal research papers use an objective voice.

Creating a Research Proposal

A ***research proposal*** is a brief document—no more than one typed page—that summarizes the preliminary work you have completed. Your purpose in writing it is to formalize your plan for research and present it to your instructor for feedback. In your research proposal, you will present your main research question, related subquestions, and working thesis. You will also briefly discuss the value of researching this topic and indicate how you plan to gather information.

When Jorge began drafting his research proposal, he realized that he had already created most of the pieces he needed. However, he knew he also had to explain how his research would be relevant to other future health care professionals. In addition, he wanted to form a general plan for doing the research and identifying potentially useful sources. Read Jorge's research proposal.

Jorge Ramirez

March 28, 2011

Health Care 101

Professor Habib

Research Proposal

In recent years, topics related to diet, nutrition, and weight loss have been covered extensively in the popular media. Different experts recommend various, often conflicting strategies for maintaining a healthy weight. One highly recommended approach, which forms the basis of many popular diet plans, is to limit consumption of carbohydrates. Yet experts disagree on the effectiveness and health benefits of this approach. What information should consumers consider when evaluating diet plans?

In my research, I will explore the claims made by proponents of the "low-carbohydrate lifestyle." My primary research question is: Are low-carbohydrate diets as effective for maintaining a healthy weight as they are portrayed to be? My secondary research questions are:

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

My working thesis is that low-carbohydrate diets do not live up to the media hype surrounding them. For this assignment, I will review general-interest and scholarly articles that discuss the relationship between low-carbohydrate diets, weight loss, and long-term health outcomes.

Writing at Work

Before you begin a new project at work, you may have to develop a project summary document that states the purpose of the project, explains why it would be a wise use of company resources, and briefly outlines the steps involved in completing the project. This type of document is similar to a research proposal. Both documents define and limit a project, explain its value, discuss how to proceed, and identify what resources you will use.

Writing Your Own Research Proposal

Now you may write your own research proposal, if you have not done so already. Follow the guidelines provided in this lesson.

Key Terms

choosing a topic that interests you

overly broad topic

good research paper provides

working thesis

research proposal

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Video 1: License: Standard YouTube License Attribution: How to Develop a Successful Research Proposal by Center for Audit Quality

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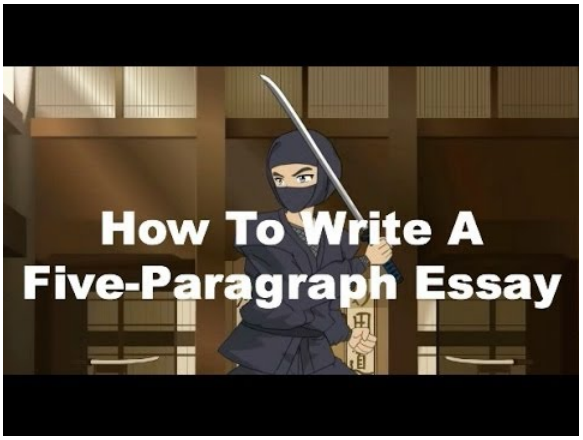
15.6: Topic, Thesis, and Research Proposal

Article links:

“Constructing the Thesis and Argument—From the Ground Up” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

- List the elements of a five-paragraph theme.
- Compare the five-paragraph theme with the organically structured paper.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=129

Constructing the Thesis and Argument—From the Ground Up

provided by Lumen Learning

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*. The essay portion of the SAT is 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.

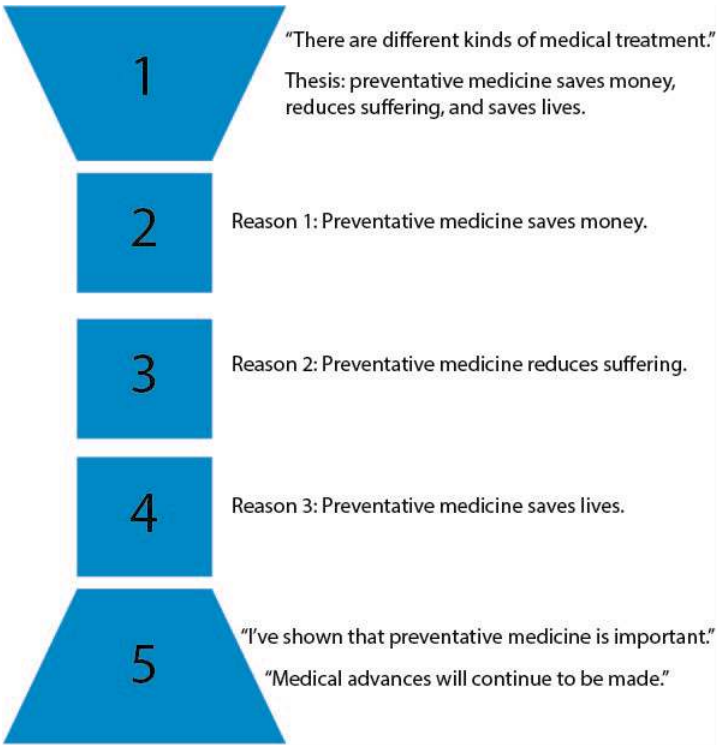


Figure 3.1, The five-paragraph "theme"

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.

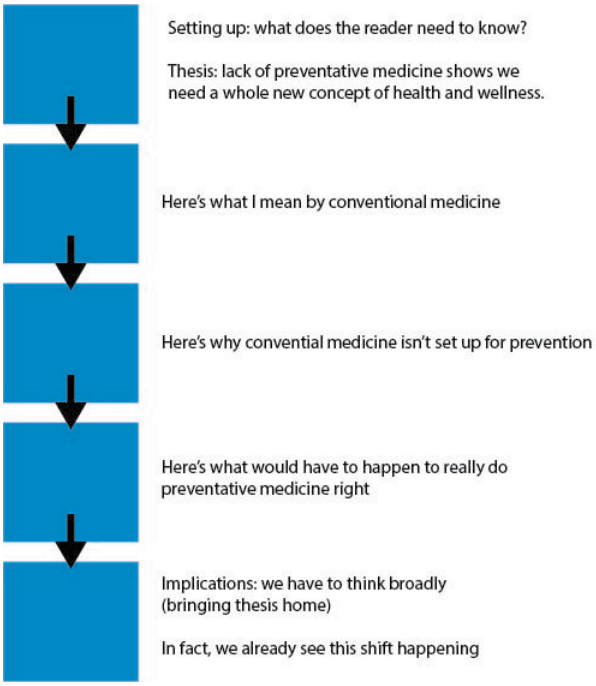


Figure 3.2, The organic college paper

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.

The Three-Story Thesis: From The Ground Up

You have no doubt been drilled on the need for a thesis statement and its proper location at the end of the introduction. And you also know that all of the key points of the paper should clearly support the central driving thesis. Indeed, the whole model of the five-paragraph theme hinges on a clearly stated and consistent thesis. However, some students are surprised—and dismayed—when some of their early college papers are criticized for not having a good thesis. Their professor might even claim that the paper doesn't have a thesis when, in the author's view it clearly does. So, what makes a good thesis in college?

1. *A good thesis is non-obvious*. High school teachers needed to make sure that you and all your classmates mastered the basic form of the academic essay. Thus, they were mostly concerned that you had a clear and consistent thesis, even if it was something obvious like "sustainability is important." A thesis statement like that has a wide-enough scope to incorporate several supporting points and concurring evidence, enabling the writer to demonstrate his or her mastery of the five-paragraph form. Good enough! When they can, high school teachers nudge students to develop arguments that are less obvious and more engaging. College instructors, though, fully expect you to produce something more developed.
2. *A good thesis is arguable*. In everyday life, "arguable" is often used as a synonym for "doubtful." For a thesis, though, "arguable" means that it's worth arguing: it's something with which a reasonable person might disagree. This arguability criterion dovetails with the non-obvious one: it shows that the author has deeply explored a problem and arrived at an argument that legitimately needs 3, 5, 10, or 20 pages to explain and justify. In that way, a good thesis sets an ambitious agenda for a paper. A thesis like "sustainability is important" isn't at all difficult to argue for, and the reader would have little intrinsic motivation to read the rest of the paper. However, an arguable thesis like "sustainability policies will inevitably fail if they do not incorporate social justice," brings up some healthy skepticism. Thus, the arguable thesis makes the reader want to keep reading.
3. *A good thesis is well specified*. Some student writers fear that they're giving away the game if they specify their thesis up front; they think that a purposefully vague thesis might be more intriguing to the reader. However, consider movie trailers: they

always include the most exciting and poignant moments from the film to attract an audience. In academic papers, too, a well specified thesis indicates that the author has thought rigorously about an issue and done thorough research, which makes the reader want to keep reading. Don't just say that a particular policy is effective or fair; say what makes it is so. If you want to argue that a particular claim is dubious or incomplete, say why in your thesis.

4. *A good thesis includes implications*. Suppose your assignment is to write a paper about some aspect of the history of linen production and trade, a topic that may seem exceedingly arcane. And suppose you have constructed a well supported and creative argument that linen was so widely traded in the ancient Mediterranean that it actually served as a kind of currency.[2]That's a strong, insightful, arguable, well specified thesis. But which of these thesis statements do you find more engaging?

Version A:
Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of trade.

Version B:
Linen served as a form of currency in the ancient Mediterranean world, connecting rival empires through circuits of trade. The economic role of linen raises important questions about how shifting environmental conditions can influence economic relationships and, by extension, political conflicts.

Putting your claims in their broader context makes them more interesting to your reader and more impressive to your professors who, after all, assign topics that they think have enduring significance. Finding that significance for yourself makes the most of both your paper and your learning.

How do you produce a good, strong thesis? And how do you know when you've gotten there? Many instructors and writers find useful a metaphor based on this passage by Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.:[3]

There are one-story intellects, two-story intellects, and three-story intellects with skylights. All fact collectors who have no aim beyond their facts are one-story men. Two-story men compare, reason, generalize using the labor of fact collectors as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine, predict—their best illumination comes from above the skylight.

One-story theses state inarguable facts. ***Two-story theses*** bring in an arguable (interpretive or analytical) point. ***Three-story theses*** nest that point within its larger, compelling implications. [4]

The biggest benefit of the three-story metaphor is that it describes a process for building a thesis. To build the first story, you first have to get familiar with the complex, relevant facts surrounding the problem or question. You have to be able to describe the situation thoroughly and accurately. Then, with that first story built, you can layer on the second story by formulating the insightful, arguable point that animates the analysis. That's often the most effortful part: brainstorming, elaborating and comparing alternative ideas, finalizing your point. With that specified, you can frame up the third story by articulating why the point you make matters beyond its particular topic or case.

Thesis: that's the word that pops at me whenever I write an essay. Seeing this word in the prompt scared me and made me think to myself, "Oh great, what are they really looking for?" or "How am I going to make a thesis for a college paper?" When rehearing that I would be focusing on theses again in a class, I said to myself, "Here we go again!" But after learning about the three story thesis, I never had a problem with writing another thesis. In fact, I look forward to being asked on a paper to create a thesis.

Timothée Pizarro

For example, imagine you have been assigned a paper about the impact of online learning in higher education. You would first construct an account of the origins and multiple forms of online learning and assess research findings about its use and effectiveness. If you've done that well, you'll probably come up with a well considered opinion that wouldn't be obvious to readers who haven't looked at the issue in depth. Maybe you'll want to argue that online learning is a threat to the academic community. Or perhaps you'll want to make the case that online learning opens up pathways to college degrees that traditional campus-based learning does not. In the course of developing your central, argumentative point, you'll come to recognize its larger context; in this example, you may claim that online learning can serve to better integrate higher education with the rest of society, as online learners bring their educational and career experiences together. To outline this example:

- *First story*: Online learning is becoming more prevalent and takes many different forms.
- *Second story*: While most observers see it as a *transformation* of higher education, online learning is better thought of an *extension* of higher education in that it reaches learners who aren't disposed to participate in traditional campus-based

education.

- *Third story*: Online learning appears to be a promising way to better integrate higher education with other institutions in society, as online learners integrate their educational experiences with the other realms of their life, promoting the freer flow of ideas between the academy and the rest of society.

Here's another example of a three-story thesis:[5]

- *First story*: Edith Wharton did not consider herself a modernist writer, and she didn't write like her modernist contemporaries.
- *Second story*: However, in her work we can see her grappling with both the questions and literary forms that fascinated modernist writers of her era. While not an avowed modernist, she did engage with modernist themes and questions.
- *Third story*: Thus, it is more revealing to think of modernism as a conversation rather than a category or practice.

Here's one more example:

- *First story*: Scientists disagree about the likely impact in the U.S. of the light brown apple moth (LBAM), an agricultural pest native to Australia.
- *Second story*: Research findings to date suggest that the decision to spray pheromones over the skies of several southern Californian counties to combat the LBAM was poorly thought out.
- *Third story*: Together, the scientific ambiguities and the controversial response strengthen the claim that industrial-style approaches to pest management are inherently unsustainable.

A thesis statement that stops at the first story isn't usually considered a thesis. A two-story thesis is usually considered competent, though some two-story theses are more intriguing and ambitious than others. A thoughtfully crafted and well informed three-story thesis puts the author on a smooth path toward an excellent paper.

The concept of a three-story thesis framework was the most helpful piece of information I gained from the writing component of DCC 100. The first time I utilized it in a college paper, my professor included "good thesis" and "excellent introduction" in her notes and graded it significantly higher than my previous papers. You can expect similar results if you dig deeper to form three-story theses. More importantly, doing so will make the actual writing of your paper more straightforward as well. Arguing something specific makes the structure of your paper much easier to design.

Peter Farrell

Three-Story Theses And The Organically Structured Argument

The three-story thesis is a beautiful thing. For one, it gives a paper authentic momentum. The first paragraph doesn't just start with some broad, vague statement; every sentence is crucial for setting up the thesis. The body paragraphs build on one another, moving through each step of the logical chain. Each paragraph leads inevitably to the next, making the transitions from paragraph to paragraph feel wholly natural. The conclusion, instead of being a mirror-image paraphrase of the introduction, builds out the third story by explaining the broader implications of the argument. It offers new insight without departing from the flow of the analysis.

I should note here that a paper with this kind of momentum often reads like it was knocked out in one inspired sitting. But in reality, just like accomplished athletes and artists, masterful writers make the difficult thing look easy. As writer Anne Lamott notes, reading a well written piece feels like its author sat down and typed it out, "bounding along like huskies across the snow." However, she continues,

> This is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much.[6]

Experienced writers don't figure out what they want to say and then write it. They write in order to figure out what they want to say.

Experienced writers develop theses in dialog with the body of the essay. An initial characterization of the problem leads to a tentative thesis, and then drafting the body of the paper reveals thorny contradictions or critical areas of ambiguity, prompting the writer to revisit or expand the body of evidence and then refine the thesis based on that fresh look. The revised thesis may require that body paragraphs be reordered and reshaped to fit the emerging three-story thesis. Throughout the process, the thesis serves as an anchor point while the author wades through the morass of facts and ideas. The dialogue between thesis and body continues

until the author is satisfied or the due date arrives, whatever comes first. It's an effortful and sometimes tedious process. Novice writers, in contrast, usually oversimplify the writing process. They formulate some first-impression thesis, produce a reasonably organized outline, and then flesh it out with text, never taking the time to reflect or truly revise their work. They assume that revision is a step backward when, in reality, it is a major step forward.

Everyone has a different way that they like to write. For instance, I like to pop my earbuds in, blast dubstep music and write on a white board. I like using the white board because it is a lot easier to revise and edit while you write. After I finish writing a paragraph that I am completely satisfied with on the white board, I sit in front of it with my laptop and just type it up.

Kaethe Leonard

Another benefit of the three-story thesis framework is that it demystifies what a "strong" argument is in academic culture. In an era of political polarization, many students may think that a strong argument is based on a simple, bold, combative statement that is promoted it in the most forceful way possible. "Gun control is a travesty!" "Shakespeare is the best writer who ever lived!" When students are encouraged to consider contrasting perspectives in their papers, they fear that doing so will make their own thesis seem mushy and weak. However, in academics a "strong" argument is comprehensive and nuanced, not simple and polemical. The purpose of the argument is to explain to readers why the author—through the course of his or her in-depth study—has arrived at a somewhat surprising point. On that basis, it has to consider plausible counter-arguments and contradictory information. Academic argumentation exemplifies the popular adage about all writing: show, don't tell. In crafting and carrying out the three-story thesis, you are showing your reader the work you have done.

The model of the organically structured paper and the three-story thesis framework explained here is the very foundation of the paper itself and the process that produces it. The subsequent chapters, focusing on sources, paragraphs, and sentence-level wordsmithing, all follow from the notion that you are writing to think and writing to learn as much as you are writing to communicate. Your professors assume that you have the self-motivation and organizational skills to pursue your analysis with both rigor and flexibility; that is, they envision you developing, testing, refining and sometimes discarding your own ideas based on a clear-eyed and open-minded assessment of the evidence before you.

Important Concepts

five-paragraph theme

organically structured paper

one-story theses

two-story theses

three-story theses

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

- Video 1: License: Standard YouTube License Attribution: Writing Ninjas: How To Write A Five-Paragraph Essay by InkwellMedia

Works Cited:

[1] “Organic” here doesn’t mean “pesticide-free” or containing carbon; it means the paper grows and develops, sort of like a living thing.

[2] For more see Fabio Lopez-Lazaro “Linen.” In Encyclopedia of World Trade from Ancient Times to the Present. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2005.

[3] Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., The Poet at the Breakfast Table (New York: Houghton & Mifflin, 1892),

[4] The metaphor is extraordinarily useful even though the passage is annoying. Beyond the sexist language of the time, I don’t appreciate the condescension toward “fact-collectors.” which reflects a general modernist tendency to elevate the abstract and denigrate the concrete. In reality, data-collection is a creative and demanding craft, arguably more important than theorizing.

[5] Drawn from Jennifer Haytock, Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary Modernism (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2008).

[6] Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 21.

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15.7: Mapping Your Topic

Article links:

“Research and the Writing Process” provided by Lumen Learning

“The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?” provided by Lumen Learning

Writing for Success “Steps in Developing a Research Proposal” by University of Minnesota

Chapter Preview

- Describe the process of brainstorming.



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Research and the Writing Process

provided by Lumen Learning

Now that you have developed your topic, research question, and thesis, it is time to develop a framework for your entire paper. At this point, you have not started your research in earnest, but your ***outline*** will help guide your research and ensure that you find the resources that will help you prove your thesis.

The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?

provided by Lumen Learning

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is similar to list making. 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 document) 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:



Writing for Success

by University of Minnesota

Exploring Your Topic in Writing

"How am I supposed to narrow my topic when I haven't even begun researching yet?" In fact, you may already know more than you realize. Review your list and identify your top two or three topics. Set aside some time to explore each one through freewriting. (For more information about freewriting, see Chapter 8 "The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?".) Simply taking the time to focus on your topic may yield fresh angles.

Jorge knew that he was especially interested in the topic of diet fads, but he also knew that it was much too broad for his assignment. He used freewriting to explore his thoughts so he could narrow his topic. Read Jorge's ideas.

Our instructors are always saying that accurate, up-to-date information is crucial in encouraging people to make better choices about their health. I don't think the media does a very good job of providing that, though. Every time I go on the Internet, I see tons of ads for the latest "miracle food." One week it's acai berries, the next week it's green tea, and then six months later I see a news

story saying all the fabulous claims about acai berries and green tea are overblown! Advice about weight loss is even worse. Think about all the diet books that are out there! Some say that a low-fat diet is best; some say you should cut down on carbs; and some make bizarre recommendations like eating half a grapefruit with every meal. I don't know how anyone is supposed to make an informed decision about what to eat when there's so much confusing, contradictory information. I bet even doctors, nurses, and dietcians have trouble figuring out what information is reliable and what is just the latest hype.

Writing at Work

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

Tip

The reliability of online sources varies greatly. In this exploratory phase of your research, you do not need to evaluate sources as closely as you will later. However, use common sense as you refine your paper topic. If you read a fascinating blog comment that gives you a new idea for your paper, be sure to check out other, more reliable sources as well to make sure the idea is worth pursuing.

Important Concepts

outline

brainstorming

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Writing for Success by University of Minnesota

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1 Webbing. **Provided by**: Saylor Academy. **Located at**: http://youtu.be/rhuoarTozf8. **License**: *All Rights Reserved*. **License Terms**: Standard YouTube License

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16: Researching- How, What, When, Where, and Why

16.1 What are Sources?
16.2 Finding Your Sources
16.3 Recording and Organizing Your Research



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16.1: What are Sources?

Article links:

“Reviewing and Analyzing Your Sources” provided by Lumen Learning

“Thinking Critically About Research” by Steven D. Krause

“Survey Academic Research Communities” by Joe Moxley

“Demystify Research Methods” by Joe Moxley

“Understand Opposing Research Ideologies” by Joe Moxley

“Textual Research” by Joe Moxley

Chapter Preview

- Discuss the elements of a well-constructed argument.
- Recognize the thinkers of the Classical age and their contributions.
- Explain the beliefs of postpositivists.
- List the misconceptions about where research is done and what it entails.



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Reviewing and Analyzing Your Sources

provided by Lumen Learning

Introduction to Reviewing and Analyzing Your Sources

A successful research paper is more than a ***well-constructed argument*** supplemented by facts, figures, and quotations. Like the good writing that it supports, successful research involves planning, careful analysis, and reflection. Before you can incorporate an outside source into your work, you must take some time to think about more than just the facts and ideas that you have uncovered. Is the source authoritative? Is the information substantiated fact, or is it primarily opinion? Is it up-to-date? Is it accurate and complete? These are just some of the essential questions you must ask about each piece of source information that you discover.

In this section, you will take an in-depth look at some techniques for analyzing and evaluating the information that you locate. As you review critical reading as a research strategy, you will look very closely at techniques for evaluating and comparing information that you find on the Internet and in print. You will learn some well-established techniques for determining whether a source is reputable and authoritative, and you will acquire some tools for discerning fact and opinion.

By the time you have completed this section, you should be more confident about how and when to use the sources you have identified, and you should have a basic understanding of how to use your research to effectively and clearly support a well-developed academic paper. You will also be ready to complete your research.

Research and Critical Reading

Introduction

Good researchers and writers examine their sources critically and actively. They do not just compile and summarize these research sources in their writing, but use them to create their own ideas, theories, and, ultimately, their own, new understanding of the topic they are researching. Such an approach means not taking the information and opinions that the sources contain at face value and for granted, but to investigate, test, and even doubt every claim, every example, every story, and every conclusion. It means not to sit back and let your sources control you, but to engage in active conversation with them and their authors. In order to be a good researcher and writer, one needs to be a critical and active reader.

This chapter is about the importance of critical and active reading. It is also about the connection between critical reading and active, strong writing. Much of the discussion you will find in this chapter in fundamental to research and writing, no matter what writing genre, medium, or academic discipline you read and write in. Every other approach to research writing, every other research method and assignment offered elsewhere in this book is, in some way, based upon the principles discussed in this chapter.

Reading is at the heart of the research process. No matter what kinds of research sources and, methods you use, you are always reading and interpreting text. Most of us are used to hearing the word “reading” in relation to secondary sources, such as books, journals, magazines, websites, and so on. But even if you are using other research methods and sources, such as interviewing someone or surveying a group of people, you are reading. You are reading their subjects‟ ideas and views on the topic you are investigating. Even if you are studying photographs, cultural artifacts, and other non-verbal research sources, you are reading them, too by trying to connect them to their cultural and social contexts and to understand their meaning. Principles of critical reading which we are about to discuss in this chapter apply to those research situations as well.

I like to think about reading and writing as not two separate activities but as two tightly connected parts of the same whole. That whole is the process of learning and making of new meaning. It may seem that reading and writing are complete opposite of one another. According to the popular view, when we read, we “consume” texts, and when we write, we “produce” texts. But this view of reading and writing is true only if you see reading as a passive process of taking in information from the text and not as an active and energetic process of making new meaning and new knowledge. Similarly, good writing does not come from nowhere but is usually based upon, or at least influenced by ideas, theories, and stories that come from reading. So, if, as a college student, you have ever wondered why your writing teachers have asked you to read books and articles and write responses to them, it is because writers who do not read and do not actively engage with their reading, have little to say to others.

We will begin this chapter with the definition of the term “critical reading.” We will consider its main characteristics and briefly touch upon ways to become an active and critical reader. Next, we will discuss the importance of critical reading for research and how reading critically can help you become a better researcher and make the research process more enjoyable. Also in this chapter, a student-writer offers us an insight into his critical reading and writing processes. This chapter also shows how critical reading can and should be used for critical and strong writing. And, as all other chapters, this one offers you activities and projects designed to help you implement the advice presented here into practice.

What Kind of Reader Are You?

You read a lot, probably more that you think. You read school textbooks, lecture notes, your classmates‟ papers, and class websites.When school ends, you probably read some fiction, magazines. Butyoualsoreadothertexts.These may include CD liner notes, product reviews, grocery lists, maps, driving directions, road signs, and the list can go on and on. And you don‟t read all these texts in the same way. You read them with different purposes and using different reading strategies and techniques. The first step toward becoming a critical and active reader is examining your reading process and your reading preferences.

Having answered the questions above, you have probably noticed that your reading strategies differed depending on the reading task you were facing and on what you planned to do with the results of the reading. If, for example, you read lecture notes in order to pass a test, chances are you “read for information,” or “for the main” point, trying to remember as much material as possible and anticipating possible test questions. If, on the other hand, you read a good novel, you probably just focused on following the story.

Finally, if you were reading something that you hoped would help you answer some personal question or solve some personal problem, it is likely that you kept comparing and contrasting the information that you read your own life and your own experiences.

You may have spent more time on some reading tasks than others. For example, when we are interested in one particular piece of information or fact from a text, we usually put that text aside once we have located the information we were looking for. In other cases, you may have been reading for hours on end taking careful notes and asking questions.

If you share the results of your investigation into your reading habits with your classmates, you may also notice that some of their reading habits and strategies were different from yours. Like writing strategies, approaches to reading may vary from person to person depending on our previous experiences with different topics and types of reading materials, expectations we have of different texts, and, of course, the purpose with which we are reading.

Life presents us with a variety of reading situations which demand different reading strategies and techniques. Sometimes, it is important to be as efficient as possible and read purely for information or "the main point." At other times, it is important to just "let go" and turn the pages following a good story, although this means not thinking about the story you are reading. At the heart of writing and research, however, lies the kind of reading known as critical reading. Critical examination of sources is what makes their use in research possible and what allows writers to create rhetorically effective and engaging texts.

Key Features of Critical Reading

Critical readers are able to interact with the texts they read through carefully listening, writing, conversation, and questioning. They do not sit back and wait for the meaning of a text to come to them, but work hard in order to create such meaning. Critical readers are not made overnight. Becoming a critical reader will take a lot of practice and patience. Depending on your current reading philosophy and experiences with reading, becoming a critical reader may require a significant change in your whole understanding of the reading process. The trade-off is worth it, however. By becoming a more critical and active reader, you will also become a better researcher and a better writer. Last but not least, you will enjoy reading and writing a whole lot more because you will become actively engaged in both.

One of my favorite passages describing the substance of critical and active reading comes from the introduction to their book Ways of Reading whose authors David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky write:

"Reading involves a fair measure of push and shove. You make your mark on the book and it makes its mark on you. Reading is not simply a matter of hanging back and waiting for a piece, or its author, to tell you what the writing has to say. In fact, one of the difficult things about reading is that the pages before you will begin to speak only when the authors are silent and you begin to speak in their place, sometimes for them—doing their work, continuing their projects—and sometimes for yourself, following your own agenda" (1).

Notice that Bartholomae and Petrosky describe reading process in pro-active terms. Meaning of every text is "made," not received. Readers need to "push and shove" in order to create their own, unique content of every text they read. It is up the you as a reader to make the pages in front of you "speak" by talking with and against the text, by questioning and expanding it.

Critical reading, then, is a two-way process. As reader, you are not a consumer of words, waiting patiently for ideas from the printed page or a web-site to fill your head and make you smarter. Instead, as a critical reader, you need to interact with what you read, asking questions of the author, testing every assertion, fact, or idea, and extending the text by adding your own understanding of the subject and your own personal experiences to your reading.

The following are key features of the critical approach to reading:

- No text, however well written and authoritative, contains its own, pre-determined meaning.
- Readers must work hard to create meaning from every text.
- Critical readers interact with the texts they read by questioning them, responding to them, and expanding them, usually in writing.
- To create meaning, critical readers use a variety of approaches, strategies, and techniques which include applying their personal experiences and existing knowledge to the reading process.
- Critical readers seek actively out other texts, related to the topic of their investigation.

The following section is an examination of these claims about critical reading in more detail.

Texts Present Ideas, Not Absolute Truths

In order to understand the mechanisms and intellectual challenges of critical reading, we need to examine some of our deepest and long-lasting assumptions about reading. Perhaps the two most significant challenges facing anyone who wants to become a more active and analytical reader is understanding that printed texts doe not contain inarguable truths and learning to questions and talk back to those texts. Students in my writing classes often tell me that the biggest challenge they face in trying to become critical readers is getting away from the idea that they have to believe everything they read on a printed page. Years of schooling have taught many of us to believe that published texts present inarguable, almost absolute truths. The printed page has authority because, before publishing his or her work, every writer goes through a lengthy process of approval, review, revision, fact-checking, and so on. Consequently, this theory goes, what gets published must be true. And if it is true, it must be taken at face value, not questioned, challenged, or extended in any way.

Perhaps, the ultimate authority among the readings materials encountered by college belongs to the textbook. As students, we all have had to read and almost memorize textbook chapters in order to pass an exam. We read textbooks “for information,” summarizing their chapters, trying to find “the main points” and then reproducing these main points during exams. I have nothing against textbook as such, in fact, I am writing one right now. And it is certainly possible to read textbooks critically and actively. But, as I think about the challenges which many college students face trying to become active and critical readers, I come to the conclusion that the habit to read every text as if they were preparing for an exam on it, as if it was a source of unquestionable truth and knowledge prevents many from becoming active readers.

Treating texts as if they were sources of ultimate and unquestionable knowledge and truth represents the view of reading as consumption. According to this view, writers produce ideas and knowledge, and we, readers, consume them. Of course, sometimes we have to assume this stance and read for information or the “main point” of a text. But it is critical reading that allows us to create new ideas from what we read and to become independent and creative learners.

Critical reading is a collaboration between the reader and the writer. It offers readers the ability to be active participants in the construction of meaning of every text they read and to use that meaning for their own learning and self-fulfillment. Not even the best researched and written text is absolutely complete and finished. Granted, most fields of knowledge have texts which are called “definitive.” Such texts usually represent our best current knowledge on their subjects. However, even the definitive works get revised over time and they are always open to questioning and different interpretations.

Reading is a Rhetorical Tool

To understand how the claim that every reader makes his or her meaning from texts works, it is necessary to examine what is know as the rhetorical theory of reading. The work that best describes and justifies the rhetorical reading theory is Douglas Brent‟s 1992 book Reading as Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-Based Writing. I like to apply Brent‟s ideas to my discussions of critical reading because I think that they do a good job demystifying critical reading‟s main claims. Brent‟s theory of reading is a rhetorical device puts significant substance behind the somewhat abstract ideas of active and critical reading, explaining how the mechanisms of active interaction between readers and texts actually work.

Briefly explained, Brent treats reading not only as a vehicle for transmitting information and knowledge, but also as a means of persuasion. In fact, according to Brent, knowledge equals persuasion because, in his words, “Knowledge is not simply what one has been told. Knowledge is what one believes, what one accepts as being at least provisionally true.” (xi). This short passage contains two assertions which are key to the understanding of mechanisms of critical reading. Firstly, notice that simply reading “for the main point” will not necessarily make you “believe” what you read. Surely, such reading can fill our heads with information, but will that information become our knowledge in a true sense, will we be persuaded by it, or will we simply memorize it to pass the test and forget it as soon as we pass it? Of course not! All of us can probably recall many instances in which we read a lot to pass a test only to forget, with relief, what we read as soon as we left the classroom where that test was held. The purpose of reading and research, then, is not to get as much as information out of a text as possible but to change and update one‟s system of beliefs on a given subject (Brent 55-57).

Brent further states:

“The way we believe or disbelieve certain texts clearly varies from one individual to the next. If you present a text that is remotely controversial to a group of people, some will be convinced by it and some not, and those who are convinced will be convinced in

different degrees. The task of a rhetoric of reading is to explain systematically how these differences arise— how people are persuaded differently by texts" (18).

Critical and active readers not only accept the possibility that the same texts will have different meanings for different people, but welcome this possibility as an inherent and indispensable feature of strong, engaged, and enjoyable reading process. To answer his own questions about what factors contribute to different readers‟ different interpretations of the same texts, Brent offers us the following principles that I have summarized from his book:

- Readers are guided by personal beliefs, assumptions, and pre-existing knowledge when interpreting texts. You can read more on the role of the reader‟s pre-existing knowledge in the construction of meaning later on in this chapter.
- Readers react differently to the logical proofs presented by the writers of texts.
- Readers react differently to emotional and ethical proofs presented by writers. For example, an emotional story told by a writer may resonate with one person more than with another because the first person lived through a similar experience and the second one did not, and so on.

The idea behind the rhetorical theory of reading is that when we read, we not only take in ideas, information, and facts, but instead we "update our view of the world." You cannot force someone to update their worldview, and therefore, the purpose of writing is persuasion and the purpose of reading is being persuaded. Persuasion is possible only when the reader is actively engaged with the text and understands that much more than simple retrieval of information is at stake when reading.

One of the primary factors that influence our decision to accept or not to accept an argument is what Douglas Brent calls our "repertoire of experience, much of [which] is gained through prior interaction with texts" (56). What this means is that when we read a new text, we do not begin with a clean slate, an empty mind. However unfamiliar the topic of this new reading may seem to us, we approach it with a large baggage of previous knowledge, experiences, points of view, and so on. When an argument "comes in" into our minds from a text, this text, by itself, cannot change our view on the subject. Our prior opinions and knowledge about the topic of the text we are reading will necessarily "filter out" what is incompatible with those views (Brent 56-57). This, of course, does not mean that, as readers, we should persist in keeping our old ideas about everything and actively resist learning new things. Rather, it suggests that the reading process is an interaction between the ideas in the text in front of us and our own ideas and preconceptions about the subject of our reading. We do not always consciously measure what we read according to our existing systems of knowledge and beliefs, but we measure it nevertheless. Reading, according to Brent, is judgment, and, like in life where we do not always consciously examine and analyze the reasons for which we make various decisions, evaluating a text often happens automatically or subconsciously (59).

Applied to research writing, Brent‟s theory or reading means the following:

- The purpose of research is not simply to retrieve data, but to participate in a conversation about it. Simple summaries of sources is not research, and writers should be aiming for active interpretation of sources instead
- There is no such thing as an unbiased source. Writers make claims for personal reasons that critical readers need to learn to understand and evaluate.
- Feelings can be a source of shareable good reason for belief. Readers and writers need to use, judiciously, ethical and pathetic proofs in interpreting texts and in creating their own.
- Research is recursive. Critical readers and researchers never stop asking questions about their topic and never consider their research finished.

Active Readers Look for Connections Between Texts

Earlier on, I mentioned that one of the traits of active readers is their willingness to seek out other texts and people who may be able to help them in their research and learning. I find that for many beginning researchers and writers, the inability to seek out such connections often turns into a roadblock on their research route. Here is what I am talking about.

Recently, I asked my writing students to investigate some problem on campus and to propose a solution to it. I asked them to use both primary (interviews, surveys, etc.) and secondary (library, Internet, etc.) research. Conducting secondary research allows a writer to connect a local problem he or she is investigating and a local solution he or she is proposing with a national and even global context, and to see whether the local situation is typical or atypical.

One group of students decided to investigate the issue of racial and ethnic diversity on our campus. The lack of diversity is a “hot” issue on our campus, and recently an institutional task force was created to investigate possible ways of making our university more diverse.

The students had no trouble designing research questions and finding people to interview and survey. Their subjects included students and faculty as well as the university vice-president who was charged with overseeing the work of the diversity task force. Overall, these authors have little trouble conducting and interpreting primary research that led them to conclude that, indeed, our campus is not diverse enough and that most students would like to see the situation change.

The next step these writers took was to look at the websites of some other schools similar in size and nature to ours, to see how our university compared on the issue of campus diversity with others. They were able to find some statistics on the numbers of minorities at other colleges and universities that allowed them to create a certain backdrop for their primary research that they had conducted earlier.

But good writing goes beyond the local situation. Good writing tries to connect the local and the national and the global. It tries to look beyond the surface of the problem, beyond simply comparing numbers and other statistics. It seeks to understand the roots of a problem and propose a solution based on a local and well as a global situation and research. The primary and secondary research conducted by these students was not allowing them to make that step from analyzing local data to understanding their problem in context. They needed some other type of research sources.

At that point, however, those writers hit an obstacle. How and where, they reasoned, would we find other secondary sources, such as books, journals, and websites, about the lack of diversity on our campus? The answer to that question was that, at this stage in their research and writing, they did not need to look for more sources about our local problem with the lack of diversity. They needed to look at diversity and ways to increase it as a national and global issue. They needed to generalize the problem and, instead of looking at a local example, to consider its implications for the issue they were studying overall. Such research would not only have allowed these writers to examine the problem as a whole but also to see how it was being solved in other places. This, in turn, might have helped them to propose a local solution.

Critical readers and researchers understand that it is not enough to look at the research question locally or narrowly. After conducting research and understanding their problem locally, or as it applies specifically to them, active researchers contextualize their investigation by seeking out texts and other sources which would allow them to see the big picture.

Sometimes, it is hard to understand how external texts which do not seem to talk directly about you can help you research and write about questions, problems, and issues in your own life. In her 2004 essay, “Developing „Interesting Thoughts‟: Reading for Research,” writing teacher my former colleague Janette Martin tells a story of a student who was writing a paper about what it is like to be a collegiate athlete. The emerging theme in that paper was that of discipline and sacrifice required of student athletes. Simultaneously, that student was reading a chapter from the book by the French philosopher Michel Foucault called Discipline and Punish. Foucault‟s work is a study of the western penitentiary system, which, of course, cannot be directly compared to experiences of a student athlete. At the same time, one of the leading themes in Foucault‟s work is discipline. Martin states that the student was able to see some connection between Foucault and her own life and use the reading for her research and writing (6). In addition to showing how related texts can be used to explore various aspects of the writer‟s own life, this example highlights the need to read texts critically and interpret them creatively. Such reading and research goes beyond simply comparing of facts and numbers and towards relating ideas and concepts with one another.

From Reading to Writing

Reading and writing are the two essential tools of learning. Critical reading is not a process of passive consumption, but one of interaction and engagement between the reader and the text. Therefore, when reading critically and actively, it is important not only to take in the words on the page, but also to interpret and to reflect upon what you read through writing and discussing it with others.

Critical Readers Understand the Difference Between Reacting and Responding to A Text

As stated earlier in this chapter, actively responding to difficult texts, posing questions, and analyzing ideas presented in them is the key to successful reading. The goal of an active reader is to engage in a conversation with the text he or she is reading. In order to fulfill this goal, it is important to understand the difference between reacting to the text and responding to it.

Reacting to a text is often done on an emotional, rather than on an intellectual level. It is quick and shallow. For example, if we encounter a text that advances arguments with which we strongly disagree, it is natural to dismiss those ideas out of hand as not wrong and not worthy of our attention. Doing so would be reacting to the text-based only on emotions and on our pre-set opinions about its arguments. It is easy to see that reacting in this way does not take the reader any closer to understanding the text. A wall of disagreement that existed between the reader and the text before the reading continues to exist after the reading.

Responding to a text, on the other hand, requires a careful study of the ideas presented and arguments advanced in it. Critical readers who possess this skill are not willing to simply reject or accept the arguments presented in the text after the first reading right away. To continue with our example from the preceding paragraph, a reader who responds to a controversial text rather than reacting to it might apply several of the following strategies before forming and expressing an opinion about that text.

- Read the text several times, taking notes, asking questions, and underlining key places.
- Study why the author of the text advances ideas, arguments, and convictions, so different from the reader‟s own. For example, is the text‟s author advancing an agenda of some social, political, religious, or economic group of which he or she is a member?
- Study the purpose and the intended audience of the text.
- Study the history of the argument presented in the text as much as possible. For example, modern texts on highly controversial issues such as the death penalty, abortion, or euthanasia often use past events, court cases, and other evidence to advance their claims. Knowing the history of the problem will help you to construct meaning of a difficult text.
- Study the social, political, and intellectual context in which the text was written. Good writers use social conditions to advance controversial ideas. Compare the context in which the text was written to the one in which it is read. For example, have social conditions changed, thus invalidating the argument or making it stronger?
- Consider the author‟s (and your own) previous knowledge of the issue at the center of the text and your experiences with it. How might such knowledge or experience have influenced your reception of the argument?

Taking all these steps will help you to move away from simply reacting to a text and towards constructing informed and critical response to it.

Critical Readers Resist Oversimplified Binary Responses

Critical readers learn to avoid simple “agree-disagree” responses to complex texts. Such way of thinking and arguing is often called “binary” because is allows only two answers to every statement and every questions. But the world of ideas is complex and, a much more nuanced approach is needed when dealing with complex arguments.

When you are asked to “critique” a text, which readers are often asked to do, it does not mean that you have to “criticize” it and reject its argument out of hand. What you are being asked to do instead is to carefully evaluate and analyze the text‟s ideas, to understand how and why they are constructed and presented, and only then develop a response to that text. Not every text asks for an outright agreement or disagreement. Sometimes, we as readers are not in a position to either simply support an argument or reject it. What we can do in such cases, though, is to learn more about the text‟s arguments by carefully considering all of their aspects and to construct a nuanced, sophisticated response to them. After you have done all that, it will still be possible to disagree with the arguments presented in the reading, but your opinion about the text will be much more informed and nuanced than if you have taken the binary approach from the start.

Two Sample Student Responses

To illustrate the principles laid out in this section, consider the following two reading responses. Both texts respond to a very well known piece, “A Letter from Birmingham Jail,” by Martin Luther King, Jr. In the letter, King responds to criticism from other clergymen who had called his methods of civil rights struggle “unwise and untimely.” Both student writers were given the same response prompt:

“After reading King‟s piece several times and with a pen or pencil in hand, consider what shapes King‟s letter. Specifically, what rhetorical strategies is he using to achieve a persuasive effect on his readers? In making your decisions, consider such factors as background information that he gives, ways in which he addresses his immediate audience, and others. Remember that your goal is to explore King‟s text, thus enabling you to understand his rhetorical strategies better.”

Student “A”

Martin Luther King Jr's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is a very powerful text. At the time when minorities in America were silenced and persecuted, King had the courage to lead his people in the struggle for equality. After being jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, King wrote a letter to his "fellow clergymen" describing his struggle for civil rights. In the letter, King recounts a brief history of that struggle and rejects the accusation that it is "unwise and untimely." Overall, I think that King's letter is a very rhetorically effective text, one that greatly helped Americans to understand the civil rights movement.

Student "B"

King begins his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by addressing it to his "fellow clergymen." Thus, he immediately sets the tone of inclusion rather than exclusion. By using the word "fellow" in the address, I think he is trying to do two things. First of all, he presents himself as a colleague and a spiritual brother of his audience. That, in effect, says "you can trust me," "I am one of your kind." Secondly, by addressing his readers in that way, King suggests that everyone, even those Americans who are not directly involved in the struggle for civil rights, should be concerned with it. Hence the word "fellow." King's opening almost invokes the phrase "My fellow Americans" or "My fellow citizens" used so often by American Presidents when they address the nation.

King then proceeds to give a brief background of his actions as a civil rights leader. As I read this part of the letter, I was wondering whether his readers would really have not known what he had accomplished as a civil rights leader. Then I realized that perhaps he gives all that background information as a rhetorical move. His immediate goal is to keep reminding his readers about his activities. His ultimate goal is to show to his audience that his actions were non-violent but peaceful. In reading this passage by King, I remembered once again that it is important not to assume that your audience knows anything about the subject of the writing. I will try to use this strategy more in my own papers.

In the middle of the letter, King states: "The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation." This sentence looks like a thesis statement and I wonder why he did not place it towards the beginning of the text, to get his point across right away. After thinking about this for a few minutes and re-reading several pages from our class textbook, I think he leaves his "thesis" till later in his piece because he is facing a not-so-friendly (if not hostile) audience. Delaying the thesis and laying out some background information and evidence first helps a writer to prepare his or her audience for the coming argument. That is another strategy I should probably use more often in my own writing, depending on the audience I am facing.

Reflecting on the Responses

To be sure, much more can be said about King‟s letter than either of these writers have said. However, these two responses allow us to see two dramatically different approaches to reading. After studying both responses, consider the questions below.

- Which response fulfills the goals set in the prompt better and why?
- Which responses shows a deeper understanding of the texts by the reader and why?
- Which writer does a better job at avoiding binary thinking and creating a sophisticated reading of King‟s text and why?
- Which writer is more likely to use the results of the reading in his or her own writing in the future and why?
- Which writer leaves room for response to his text by others and why?

Critical Readers Do not Read Alone and in Silence

One of the key principles of critical reading is that active readers do not read silently and by themselves. By this I mean that they take notes and write about what they read. They also discuss the texts they are working with, with others and compare their own interpretations of those texts with the interpretations constructed by their colleagues.

As a college student, you are probably used to taking notes of what you read. When I was in college, my favorite way of preparing for a test was reading a chapter or two from my textbook, then closing the book, then trying to summarize what I have read on a piece of paper. I tried to get the main points of the chapters down and the explanations and proofs that the textbooks‟ authors used. Sometimes, I wrote a summary of every chapter in the textbook and then studied for the test from those summaries rather than from the textbook itself. I am sure you have favorite methods of note taking and studying from your notes, too.

But now it strikes me that what I did with those notes was not critical reading. I simply summarized my textbooks in a more concise, manageable form and then tried to memorize those summaries before the test. I did not take my reading of the textbooks any further than what was already on their pages. Reading for information and trying to extract the main points, I did not talk back to the texts, did not question them, and did not try to extend the knowledge which they offered in any way. I also did not try to

connect my reading with my personal experiences or pre-existing knowledge in any way. I also read in silence, without exchanging ideas with other readers of the same texts. Of course, my reading strategies and techniques were dictated by my goal, which was to pass the test.

Critical reading has other goals, one of which is entering an on-going intellectual exchange. Therefore it demands different reading strategies, approaches, and techniques. One of these new approaches is not reading in silence and alone. Instead, critical readers read with a pen or pencil in hand. They also discuss what they read with others.

Strategies for Connecting Reading and Writing

If you want to become a critical reader, you need to get into a habit of writing as you read. You also need to understand that complex texts cannot be read just once. Instead, they require multiple readings, the first of which may be a more general one during which you get acquainted with the ideas presented in the text, its structure and style. During the second and any subsequent readings, however, you will need to write, and write a lot. The following are some critical reading and writing techniques which active readers employ as they work to create meanings from texts they read.

Underline Interesting and Important Places in the Text

Underline words, sentences, and passages that stand out, for whatever reason. Underline the key arguments that you believe the author of the text is making as well as any evidence, examples, and stories that seem interesting or important. Don‟t be afraid to “get it wrong.” There is no right or wrong here. The places in the text that you underline may be the same or different from those noticed by your classmates, and this difference of interpretation is the essence of critical reading.

Take Notes

Take notes on the margins. If you do not want to write on your book or journal, attach post-it notes with your comments to the text. Do not be afraid to write too much. This is the stage of the reading process during which you are actively making meaning. Writing about what you read is the best way to make sense of it, especially, if the text is difficult.

Do not be afraid to write too much. This is the stage of the reading process during which you are actively making meaning. Writing about what you read will help you not only to remember the argument which the author of the text is trying to advance (less important for critical reading), but to create your own interpretations of the text you are reading (more important).

Here are some things you can do in your comments

- Ask questions.
- Agree or disagree with the author.
- Question the evidence presented in the text
- Offer counter-evidence
- Offer additional evidence, examples, stories, and so on that support the author‟s argument
- Mention other texts which advance the same or similar arguments
- Mention personal experiences that enhance your reading of the text

Write Exploratory Responses

Write extended responses to readings. Writing students are often asked to write one or two page exploratory responses to readings, but they are not always clear on the purpose of these responses and on how to approach writing them. By writing reading responses, you are continuing the important work of critical reading which you began when you underlined interesting passages and took notes on the margins. You are extending the meaning of the text by creating your own commentary to it and perhaps even branching off into creating your own argument inspired by your reading. Your teacher may give you a writing prompt, or ask you to come up with your own topic for a response. In either case, realize that reading responses are supposed to be exploratory, designed to help you delve deeper into the text you are reading than note-taking or underlining will allow.

When writing extended responses to the readings, it is important to keep one thing in mind, and that is their purpose. The purpose of these exploratory responses, which are often rather informal, is not to produce a complete argument, with an introduction, thesis, body, and conclusion. It is not to impress your classmates and your teacher with “big” words and complex sentences. On the contrary, it is to help you understand the text you are working with at a deeper level. The verb “explore” means to investigate something by looking at it more closely. Investigators get leads, some of which are fruitful and useful and some of which are dead-

ends. As you investigate and create the meaning of the text you are working with, do not be afraid to take different directions with your reading response. In fact, it is important resist the urge to make conclusions or think that you have found out everything about your reading. When it comes to exploratory reading responses, lack of closure and presence of more leads at the end of the piece is usually a good thing. Of course, you should always check with your teacher for standards and format of reading responses.

Try the following guidelines to write a successful response to a reading:

Remember your goal—exploration. The purpose of writing a response is to construct the meaning of a difficult text. It is not to get the job done as quickly as possible and in as few words as possible.

As you write, "talk back to the text." Make comments, ask questions, and elaborate on complex thoughts. This part of the writing becomes much easier if, prior to writing your response, you had read the assignment with a pen in hand and marked important places in the reading.

If your teacher provides a response prompt, make sure you understand it. Then try to answer the questions in the prompt to the best of your ability. While you are doing that, do not be afraid of bringing in related texts, examples, or experiences. Active reading is about making connections, and your readers will appreciate your work because it will help them understand the text better.

While your primary goal is exploration and questioning, make sure that others can understand your response. While it is OK to be informal in your response, make every effort to write in a clear, error-free language.

Involve your audience in the discussion of the reading by asking questions, expressing opinions, and connecting to responses made by others.

Use Reading for Invention

Use reading and your responses to start your own formal writing projects. Reading is a powerful invention tool. While preparing to start a new writing project, go back to the readings you have completed and your responses to those readings in search for possible topics and ideas. Also look through responses your classmates gave to your ideas about the text. Another excellent way to start your own writing projects and to begin research for them is to look through the list of references and sources at the end of the reading that you are working with. They can provide excellent topic-generating and research leads.

Keep a Double-Entry Journal

Many writers like double-entry journals because they allow us to make that leap from summary of a source to interpretation and persuasion. To start a double-entry journal, divide a page into two columns. As you read, in the left column write down interesting and important words, sentences, quotations, and passages from the text. In the right column, right your reaction and responses to them. Be as formal or informal as you want. Record words, passages, and ideas from the text that you find useful for your paper, interesting, or, in any, way striking or unusual. Quote or summarize in full, accurately, and fairly. In the right-hand side column, ask the kinds of questions and provide the kinds of responses that will later enable you to create an original reading of the text you are working with and use that reading to create your own paper.

Don't Give Up

If the text you are reading seems too complicated or "boring," that might mean that you have not attacked it aggressively and critically enough. Complex texts are the ones worth pursuing and investigating because they present the most interesting ideas. Critical reading is a liberating practice because you do not have to worry about "getting it right." As long as you make an effort to engage with the text and as long as you are willing to work hard on creating a meaning out of what you read, the interpretation of the text you are working with will be valid.

IMPORTANT: So far, we have established that no pre-existing meaning is possible in written texts and that critical and active readers work hard to create such meaning. We have also established that interpretations differ from reader to reader and that there is no "right" or "wrong" during the critical reading process. So, you may ask, does this mean that any reading of a text that I create will be a valid and persuasive one? With the exception of the most outlandish and purposely-irrelevant readings that have nothing to do with the sources text, the answer is "yes." However, remember that reading and interpreting texts, as well as sharing your interpretations with others are rhetorical acts. First of all, in order to learn something from your critical reading experience, you, the reader, need to be persuaded by your own reading of the text. Secondly, for your reading to be accepted by others, they need to be persuaded by it, too. It does not mean, however, that in order to make your reading of a text persuasive, you simply have to find

"proof" in the text for your point of view. Doing that would mean reverting to reading "for the main point," reading as consumption. Critical reading, on the other hand, requires a different approach. One of the components of this approach is the use of personal experiences, examples, stories, and knowledge for interpretive and persuasive purposes. This is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

One Critical Reader"s Path to Creating a Meaning: A Case Study

Earlier on in this chapter, we discussed the importance of using your existing knowledge and prior experience to create new meaning out of unfamiliar and difficult texts. In this section, I"d like to offer you one student writer"s account of his meaning-making process. Before I do that, however, it is important for me to tell you a little about the class and the kinds of reading and writing assignments that its members worked on.

All the writing projects offered to the members of the class were promoted by readings, and students were expected to actively develop their own ideas and provide their own readings of assigned texts in their essays. The main text for the class was the anthology Ways of Reading edited by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky that contains challenging and complex texts. Like for most of his classmates, this approach to reading and writing was new to Alex who had told me earlier that he was used to reading "for information" or "for the main point".

In preparation for the first writing project, the class read Adrienne Rich"s essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision." In her essay, Rich offers a moving account of her journey to becoming a writer. She makes the case for constantly "revising" one"s life in the light of all new events and experiences. Rich blends voices and genres throughout the essay, using personal narrative, academic argument, and even poetry. As a result, Rich creates the kind of personal-public argument which, on the one hand, highlights her own life, and on the other, illustrates that her Rich"s life is typical for her time and her environment and that her readers can also learn from her experiences.

To many beginning readers and writers, who are used to a neat separation of "personal" and "academic" argument, such a blend of genres and styles may seem odd. In fact, on of the challenges that many of the students in the class faced was understanding why Rich chooses to blend personal writing with academic and what rhetorical effects she achieves by doing so. To After writing informal responses to the essay and discussing it in class, the students were offered the following writing assignment:

Although Rich tells a story of her own, she does so to provide an illustration of an even larger story—one about what it means to be a woman and a writer. Tell a story of your own about the ways you might be said to have been named or shaped or positioned by an established or powerful culture. Like Rich (and perhaps with similar hesitation), use your own experience as an illustration of both your own situation and the situation of people like you. You should imagine that the assignment is a way for you to use (and put to the test) some of Rich"s terms, words like "re-vision," "renaming," and "structure." (Bartholomae and Petrosky 648).

Notice that this assignment does not ask students to simply analyze Rich"s essay, to dissect its argument or "main points." Instead, writers are asked to work with their own experiences and events of their own lives in order to provide a reading of Rich which is affected and informed by the writers" own lives and own knowledge of life. This is critical reading in action when a reader creates his or her one"s own meaning of a complex text by reflecting on the relationship between the content of that text and one"s own life.

In response to the assignment, one of the class members, Alex Cimino-Hurt, wrote a paper that re-examined and re- evaluated his upbringing and how those factors have influenced his political and social views. In particular, Alex was trying to reconcile his own and his parents" anti-war views with the fact than a close relative of his was fighting in the war in Iraq as he worked on the paper. Alex used such terms as "revision" and "hesitation" to develop his piece.

Like most other writers in the class, initially Alex seemed a little puzzled, even confused by the requirement to read someone else"s text through the prism of his own life and his own experiences. However, as he drafted, revised, and discussed his writing with his classmates and his instructor, the new approach to reading and writing became clearer to him. After finishing the paper, Alex commented on his reading strategies and techniques and on what he learned about critical reading during the project:

On Previous Reading Habits and Techniques

Previously when working on any project whether it be for a History, English, or any other class that involved reading and research, there was a certain amount of minimalism. As a student I tried to balance the least amount of effort with the best grade. I distinctly remember that before, being taught to skim over writing and reading so that I found "main" points and highlighted them. The value

of thoroughly reading a piece was not taught because all that was needed was a shallow interpretation of whatever information that was provided followed by a regurgitation. [Critical reading] provided a dramatic difference in perspective and helped me learn to not only dissect the meaning of a piece, but also to see why the writer is using certain techniques or how the reading applies to my life.

On Developing Critical Reading Strategies

When reading critically I found that the most important thing for me was to set aside a block of time in which I wouldn‟t have to hurry my reading or skip parts to “Get the gist of it”. Developing an eye for…detail came in two ways. The first method is to read the text several times, and the second is to discuss it with my classmates and my teacher. It quickly became clear to me that the more I read a certain piece, the more I got from it as I became more comfortable with the prose and writing style. With respect to the second way, there is always something that you can miss and there is always a different perspective that can be brought to the table by either the teacher or a classmate.

On Reading Rich’s Essay

In reading Adrienne Rich‟s essay, the problem for me wasn‟t necessarily relating to her work but instead just finding the right perspective from which to read it. I was raised in a very open family so being able to relate to others was learned early in my life. Once I was able to parallel my perspective to hers, it was just a matter of composing my own story. Mine was my liberalism in conservative environments—the fact that frustrates me sometimes. I felt that her struggle frustrated her, too. By using quotations from her work, I was able to show my own situation to my readers.

On Writing the Paper

The process that I went through to write an essay consisted of three stages. During the first stage, I wrote down every coherent idea I had for the essay as well as a few incoherent ones. This helped me create a lot of material to work with. While this initial material doesn’t‟t always have direction it provides a foundation for writing. The second stage involved rereading Rich‟s essay and deciding which parts of it might be relevant to my own story. Looking at my own life and at Rich‟s work together helped me consolidate my paper. The third and final stage involved taking what is left and refining the style of the paper and taking care of the mechanics.

Advice for Critical Readers

The first key to being a critical and active reader is to find something in the piece that interests, bothers, encourages, or just confuses you. Use this to drive your analysis. Remember there is no such thing as a boring essay, only a boring reader.

- Reading something once is never enough so reading it quickly before class just won‟t cut it. Read it once to get yourbraincomfortablewiththework,thenreaditagainandactuallytrytounderstandwhat‟sgoingoninit. You can‟t read it too many times.
- Ask questions. It seems like a simple suggestion but if you never ask questions you‟ll never get any answers. So, while you‟re reading, think of questions and just write them down on a piece of paper lest you forget them after about a line and a half of reading.

Conclusion

Reading and writing are rhetorical processes, and one does not exist without the other. The goal of a good writer is to engage his or her readers into a dialog presented in the piece of writing. Similarly, the goal of a critical and active reader is to participate in that dialog and to have something to say back to the writer and to others. Writing leads to reading and reading leads to writing. We write because we have something to say and we read because we are interested in ideas of others.

Reading what others have to say and responding to them help us make that all-important transition from simply having opinions about something to having ideas. Opinions are often over-simplified and fixed. They are not very useful because, if different people have different opinions that they are not willing to change or adjust, such people cannot work or think together. Ideas, on the other hand, are ever evolving, fluid, and flexible. Our ideas are informed and shaped by our interactions with others, both in person and through written texts. In a world where thought and action count, it is not enough to simply “agree to disagree.” Reading and writing, used together, allow us to discuss complex and difficult issues with others, to persuade and be persuaded, and, most importantly, to act.

Reading and writing are inextricably connected, and I hope that this chapter has shown you ways to use reading to inform and enrich you writing and your learning in general. The key to becoming an active, critical, and interested reader is the development of varied and effective reading techniques and strategies. I"d like to close this chapter with the words from the writer Alex Cimino-Hurt: “Being able to read critically is important no matter what you plan on doing with your career or life because it allows you to understand the world around you.”

Critical Thinking and Research Applications

At this point in your project, you are preparing to move from the research phase to the writing phase. You have gathered much of the information you will use, and soon you will be ready to begin writing your draft. This section helps you transition smoothly from one phase to the next.

Beginning writers sometimes attempt to transform a pile of note cards into a formal research paper without any intermediary step. This approach presents problems. The writer’s original question and thesis may be buried in a flood of disconnected details taken from research sources. The first draft may present redundant or contradictory information. Worst of all, the writer’s ideas and voice may be lost.

An effective research paper focuses on the writer’s ideas—from the question that sparked the research process to how the writer answers that question based on the research findings. Before beginning a draft, or even an outline, good writers pause and reflect. They ask themselves questions such as the following:

- How has my thinking changed based on my research? What have I learned?
- Was my working thesis on target? Do I need to rework my thesis based on what I have learned?
- How does the information in my sources mesh with my research questions and help me answer those questions? Have any additional important questions or subtopics come up that I will need to address in my paper?
- How do my sources complement each other? What ideas or facts recur in multiple sources?
- Where do my sources disagree with each other, and why?

In this section, you will reflect on your research and review the information you have gathered. You will determine what you now think about your topic. You will synthesize, or put together, different pieces of information that help you answer your research questions. Finally, you will determine the organizational structure that works best for your paper and begin planning your outline.

Selecting Useful Information

At this point in the research process, you have gathered information from a wide variety of sources. Now it is time to think about how you will use this information as a writer.

When you conduct research, you keep an open mind and seek out many promising sources. You take notes on any information that looks like it might help you answer your research questions. Often, new ideas and terms come up in your reading, and these, too, find their way into your notes. You may record facts or quotations that catch your attention even if they did not seem immediately relevant to your research question. By now, you have probably amassed an impressively detailed collection of notes.

You will not use all of your notes in your paper.

Good researchers are thorough. They look at multiple perspectives, facts, and ideas related to their topic, and they gather a great deal of information. Effective writers, however, are selective. They determine which information is most relevant and appropriate for their purpose. They include details that develop or explain their ideas—and they leave out details that do not. The writer, not the pile of notes, is the controlling force. The writer shapes the content of the research paper.

While working through Chapter 11 “Writing from Research: What Will I Learn?”, Section 11.4 “Strategies for Gathering Reliable Information”, you used strategies to filter out unreliable or irrelevant sources and details. Now you will apply your critical-thinking skills to the information you recorded—analyzing how it is relevant, determining how it meshes with your ideas, and finding how it forms connections and patterns.

Writing at Work

When you create workplace documents based on research, selectivity remains important. A project team may spend months conducting market surveys to prepare for rolling out a new product, but few managers have time to read the research in its entirety.

Most employees want the research distilled into a few well-supported points. Focused, concise writing is highly valued in the workplace.

Identify Information That Supports Your Thesis

The process of writing informally helped you see how you might begin to pull together what you have learned from your research. Do not feel anxious, however, if you still have trouble seeing the big picture. Systematically looking through your notes will help you.

Begin by identifying the notes that clearly support your thesis. Mark or group these, either physically or using the cut-and-paste function in your word-processing program. As you identify the crucial details that support your thesis, make sure you analyze them critically. Ask the following questions to focus your thinking:

- **Is this detail from a reliable, high-quality source? Is it appropriate for me to cite this source in an academic paper?** The bulk of the support for your thesis should come from reliable, reputable sources. If most of the details that support your thesis are from less-reliable sources, you may need to do additional research or modify your thesis.
- **Is the link between this information and my thesis obvious—or will I need to explain it to my readers?** Remember, you have spent more time thinking and reading about this topic than your audience. Some connections might be obvious to both you and your readers. More often, however, you will need to provide the analysis or explanation that shows how the information supports your thesis. As you read through your notes, jot down ideas you have for making those connections clear.
- **What personal biases or experiences might affect the way I interpret this information?** No researcher is 100 percent objective. We all have personal opinions and experiences that influence our reactions to what we read and learn. Good researchers are aware of this human tendency. They keep an open mind when they read opinions or facts that contradict their beliefs.

Tip

It can be tempting to ignore information that does not support your thesis or that contradicts it outright. However, such information is important. At the very least, it gives you a sense of what has been written about the issue. More importantly, it can help you question and refine your own thinking so that writing your research paper is a true learning process.

Find Connections between Your Sources

As you find connections between your ideas and information in your sources, also look for information that connects your sources. Do most sources seem to agree on a particular idea? Are some facts mentioned repeatedly in many different sources? What key terms or major concepts come up in most of your sources regardless of whether the sources agree on the finer points? Identifying these connections will help you identify important ideas to discuss in your paper.

Look for subtler ways your sources complement one another, too. Does one author refer to another’s book or article? How do sources that are more recent build upon the ideas developed in earlier sources?

Be aware of any redundancies in your sources. If you have amassed solid support from a reputable source, such as a scholarly journal, there is no need to cite the same facts from an online encyclopedia article that is many steps removed from any primary research. If a given source adds nothing new to your discussion and you can cite a stronger source for the same information, use the stronger source.

Determine how you will address any contradictions found among different sources. For instance, if one source cites a startling fact that you cannot confirm anywhere else, it is safe to dismiss the information as unreliable. However, if you find significant disagreements among reliable sources, you will need to review them and evaluate each source. Which source presents a sounder argument or more solid evidence? It is up to you to determine which source is the most credible and why.

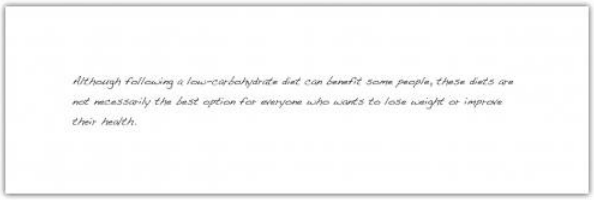
Finally, do not ignore any information simply because it does not support your thesis. Carefully consider how that information fits into the big picture of your research. You may decide that the source is unreliable or the information is not relevant, or you may decide that it is an important point you need to bring up. What matters is that you give it careful consideration.

As Jorge reviewed his research, he realized that some of the information was not especially useful for his purpose. His notes included several statements about the relationship between soft drinks that are high in sugar and childhood obesity—a subtopic that was too far outside of the main focus of the paper. Jorge decided to cut this material.

Reevaluate Your Working Thesis

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

Jorge realized that his working thesis oversimplified the issues. He still believed that the media was exaggerating the benefits of low-carb diets. However, his research led him to conclude that these diets did have some advantages. Read Jorge's revised thesis.



Synthesizing and Organizing Information

By now your thinking on your topic is taking shape. You have a sense of what major ideas to address in your paper, what points you can easily support, and what questions or subtopics might need a little more thought. In short, you have begun the process of synthesizing information—that is, of putting the pieces together into a coherent whole.

It is normal to find this part of the process a little difficult. Some questions or concepts may still be unclear to you. You may not yet know how you will tie all of your research together. Synthesizing information is a complex, demanding mental task, and even experienced researchers struggle with it at times. A little uncertainty is often a good sign! It means you are challenging yourself to work thoughtfully with your topic instead of simply restating the same information.

Use Your Research Questions to Synthesize Information

You have already considered how your notes fit with your working thesis. Now, take your synthesis a step further. Analyze how your notes relate to your major research question and the subquestions you identified in Chapter 11 "Writing from Research: What Will I Learn?", Section 11.2 "Steps in Developing a Research Proposal". Organize your notes with headings that correspond to those questions. As you proceed, you might identify some important subtopics that were not part of your original plan, or you might decide that some questions are not relevant to your paper.

Categorize information carefully and continue to think critically about the material. Ask yourself whether the sources are reliable and whether the connections between ideas are clear.

Remember, your ideas and conclusions will shape the paper. They are the glue that holds the rest of the content together. As you work, begin jotting down the big ideas you will use to connect the dots for your reader. (If you are not sure where to begin, try answering your major research question and subquestions. Add and answer new questions as appropriate.) You might record these big ideas on sticky notes or type and highlight them within an electronic document.

Jorge looked back on the list of research questions that he had written down earlier. He changed a few to match his new thesis, and he began a rough outline for his paper.



Topic: Low-carbohydrate diets
Main question: Are low-carbohydrate diets as effective as they have been portrayed to be by media sources?
Thesis: Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.
Main points:
How do low-carb diets work?
Low-carb diets cause weight loss by lowering insulin levels, causing the body to burn stored fat.
When did low-carb diets become a "hot" topic in the media?
The Atkins diet was created in 1972 by Richard Atkins, but it didn't gain wide-scale attention until 2003. The South Beach diet and other low-carb diets became popular around the same time, and led to a low-carb craze in America from 2003 to 2004.
What are the supposed advantages to following a low-carbohydrate diet?
They are said to help you lose weight faster than other diets and allow people to continue to eat protein and fats while dieting.
What are some of the negative effects of a low-carb diet?
Eating foods high in saturated fats can increase your cholesterol levels and lead to heart disease. Incomplete fat breakdown can lead to a condition called ketosis, which puts a strain on the liver and can be fatal.

You may be wondering how your ideas are supposed to shape the paper, especially since you are writing a research paper based on your research. Integrating your ideas and your information from research is a complex process, and sometimes it can be difficult to separate the two.

Some paragraphs in your paper will consist mostly of details from your research. That is fine, as long as you explain what those details mean or how they are linked. You should also include sentences and transitions that show the relationship between different facts from your research by grouping related ideas or pointing out connections or contrasts. The result is that you are not simply presenting information; you are synthesizing, analyzing, and interpreting it.

Plan How to Organize Your Paper

The final step to complete before beginning your draft is to choose an organizational structure. For some assignments, this may be determined by the instructor's requirements. For instance, if you are asked to explore the impact of a new communications device, a cause-and-effect structure is obviously appropriate. In other cases, you will need to determine the structure based on what suits your topic and purpose. For more information about the structures used in writing, see Chapter 10 "Rhetorical Modes".

The purpose of Jorge's paper was primarily to persuade. With that in mind, he planned the following outline.



I. Introduction
A. Background
B. Thesis
II. Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets
A. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition guidelines
B. Potential flaws in USDA nutrition guidelines
1. Effects of carbohydrates on blood sugar, insulin
2. Relationship to metabolism and obesity
III. Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss
A. Short-term effectiveness for weight-loss
B. Long-term effectiveness not established
IV. Other Long-Term Health Outcomes
A. Cholesterol and heart disease
B. Blood pressure
C. Diabetes
V. Conclusion

Writing at Work

The structures described in this section can help you organize information in different types of workplace documents. For instance, medical incident reports and police reports follow a chronological structure. If the company must choose between two vendors to provide a service, you might write an e-mail to your supervisor comparing and contrasting the choices. Understanding when and how to use each organizational structure can help you write workplace documents efficiently and effectively.

Thinking Critically About Research

by Steven D. Krause

What is "Research" and Why Should I Use It?

Research always begins with the goal of answering a question. In your quest to answer basic research questions, you turn to a variety of different sources for evidence: reference resources, people, evaluative and opinionated articles, and other sources. All along the way, you continually evaluate and re-evaluate the credibility of your sources.

For example, if you wanted to find out where you could buy the best computer within your budget, your question might be "what kind of computer should I buy and where should I buy it?" To answer your questions about computers, the first research tool you might use is the phone book, where you would look up "Computer retailers" in the yellow pages. You might also ask friends where they got their computers and what they thought were the best (and worst) stores to go to. You would probably also talk to your friends about the kind of computer they bought: a Windows-based PC versus a Macintosh computer, or a desktop versus a laptop computer, for example. You could go to a computer store and ask the salespeople for their advice, though you would perhaps be more critical of what they tell you since they are biased. After all, salespeople are trying to sell you a computer that they sell in their stores, not necessarily the "best" computer for the amount of money you want to spend. To get the opinions of computer experts, you might do research in computer magazines or web sites, looking for reviews and ratings of different models of computers in your price range.

Of course, you could skip this research process entirely. You could simply go to a store and buy the first computer in your budget based on nothing more than a "gut feeling" or based on some criteria that has little to do with the quality of the computer—the color, for example.

Who knows? By just guessing like this, you might actually end up with a computer as good as you would have ended up with after your research. After all, researchers can never be certain that the evidence they find to answer their research questions is entirely correct, and the fact that there are different kinds of computers available suggests it is possible for people to look at the research and reach different conclusions about what is the "best computer." Talk to loyal Macintosh computer owners and you will get a very different answer about "the best" kind of computer than you will from loyal Windows PC owners!

Nonetheless, the likelihood is quite high that the computer you bought after careful research is a better choice than the computer you would have bought after conducting no research at all. Most of us would agree that you have a better chance of being "right" about your choice of computer (and just about anything else) if that choice is informed by research.

What's Different about Academic Research?

The reasons academics and scholars conduct research are essentially the same as the reasons someone does research on the right computer to buy: to find information and answers to questions with a method that has a greater chance of being accurate than a guess or a "gut feeling." College professors in a history department, physicians at a medical school, graduate students studying physics, college juniors in a literature class, students in an introductory research writing class—all of these people are members of the academic community, and they all use research to find answers to their questions that have a greater chance of being "right" than making guesses or betting on feelings.

Students in an introductory research writing course are "academics," the same as college professors? Generally speaking, yes. You might not think of yourself as being a part of the same group as college professors or graduate students, but when you enter a college classroom, you are joining the academic community in the sense that you are expected to use your research to support your ideas and you are agreeing to the conventions of research within your discipline. Another way of looking at it: first-year college students and college professors more or less follow the same "rules" when it comes to making points supported by research and evidence.

Primary Research Versus Secondary Research

Before you begin to answer your questions, you'll need to know about two types of research: primary research and secondary research. And, you'll need to learn about the differences between them.

Primary research is usually the "raw stuff" of research—the materials that researchers gather on their own and then analyze in their writing. For example, primary research would include the following:

- The experiments done by chemists, physicists, biologists, and other scientists.
- Researcher-conducted interviews, surveys, polls, or observations.
- The particular documents or texts (novels, speeches, government documents, and so forth) studied by scholars in fields like English, history, or political science.

Secondary research is usually considered research from texts where one researcher is quoting someone else to make a point. For example, secondary research would include the following:

- An article in a scientific journal that reported on the results of someone else's experiment.
- A magazine or newspaper account of an interview, survey, or poll done by another researcher.
- An article in a scholarly journal or a book about a particular novel or speech.

When you quote from another article in your research project, your writing becomes an example of secondary research. When other researchers quote information from your research project in their research project, your research project is considered a secondary source for them. And if a researcher decides to write about you (a biography, for example) and if that researcher examines and quotes from some of the writings you did in college– like the research project you are working on right now– then your project would probably be considered a primary source.

Obviously, the divisions between primary and secondary research are not crystal-clear. But even though these differences between primary and secondary research are somewhat abstract, the differences are good ones to keep in mind as you consider what to research and as you conduct your research. For example, if you were writing a research project on the connection between pharmaceutical advertising and the high cost of prescription drugs, it would be useful and informative to consider the differences between primary research on the subject (an article where the researcher documents statistical connections) and the secondary research (an essay where another researcher summarizes a variety of studies done by others).

Of course, the term "secondary" research has nothing to do with the quality or value of the research; it just means that to answer the questions of your research project and to support your point, you are relying in great part on the observations and opinions of others.

Most research projects completed by students in writing classes are based almost exclusively in secondary research because most students in introductory writing classes don't have the time, resources, or expertise to conduct credible primary research. However, sometimes some modest primary research is a realistic option. For example, if you were writing about the dangers of Internet-based computer crime and someone on your campus was an expert in the subject and was available for an interview, your interview of her would be primary research. If you were writing about the problems of parking on your campus, you might conduct some primary research in the form of observations, surveys of the students that drive and try to park on campus, interviews of the campus officials in charge of parking, and so forth.

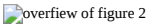
Survey Academic Research Communities

by Joe Moxley

Analyze research practices from a community perspective, and learn about the methodological assumptions of scholars, surveyors, scientists, formalists, clinicians, and ethnographers.

Researchers in workplace and academic settings have diverse and sometimes opposing ways of researching and making knowledge claims. In general, researchers in the natural sciences tend to prefer ***positivistic methodologies*** and researchers in social and

behavioral sciences have increasingly used postpositivistic methods. Knowledge-makers in the humanities—history, philosophy, religious studies, English, and modern languages—prefer to articulate their research as "***scholarship***."


overfiew of figure 2

What are the Most Common Methodologies?

Figure Two provides a graphical representation of the methodologies that inform positivistic, postpositivistic, and scholarly knowledge.

The Scholars

Scholars trace their methodological roots back to the origins of Western civilization. Like ***Plato, Aristotle, Socrates***, and other thinkers of the Classical age, modern scholars engage in the intellectual process of speculation and reflection to generate knowledge. While ***researchers*** (both positivists and postpositivists) look outward for evidence from which to make knowledge, scholars look inward to the power of logic and rational thinking. They depend upon dialectic—the process of reasoning correctly—to generate, test, and defend the knowledge they generate.

Since the ***dialectic process***—the process of reasoning correctly— derives its authority from the deliberate confrontation of opposing views, scholars are engaged in an endless, on-going "great debate," a cycle of interpretation, critique, and reinterpretation. In this dialectic system, no idea is unassailable and nothing is ever settled once and for all. Since scholars must defend the sufficiency, accuracy, and credibility of their knowledge claims and challenge the claims of others, publication assumes methodological importance.

In practice, scholars do not create knowledge from intellectual thin air. Rather, ***scholarly inquiry*** is essentially text-based. That is, scholars are engaged in establishing the authenticity or significance of a set of texts and in devising theories of interpretation that can be applied to those texts. But while most scholars make knowledge by critiquing texts, scholars can also make meaning by applying critical, political, or social theories—such as Feminism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Behaviorism—to interpret events or ideas.

The Surveyors

Surveys are used in many forms of research, including clinical, scientific, formalist, and ethnographic research. Because surveys are so often combined with other methods, it is difficult to define them as a distinctive methodology. In general terms, though, ***surveyors*** are positivists who rely on the power of probability statistics to generalize the data they collect from a small sample of subjects to a larger population.

In order to produce convincing results, surveyors must follow rigorous procedures for selecting their sample, gathering their data, and calculating the reliability and validity of their results. These operations require more specialized knowledge and statistical sophistication than most non-technically trained researchers possess. On the other hand, a carefully designed and constructed survey can produce convincing and useful information about a wide variety of practical issues.

The Scientists

Scientists are puzzle builders who seek the broad, general patterns that explain human behavior and other features of the natural world. In this regard, scientists ascribe to the tenets of positivism. Scientists employ "the Scientific Method" to put the puzzle together. Simply put, the scientific method involves making observations, identifying patterns, developing hypotheses (i.e., making guesses about how something works), and then conducting experiments to test these predictions. The scientific method proceeds inductively, moving from one discrete experiment to the next with each scientist contributing a piece to the gigantic puzzle—the explanation of how the universe works.


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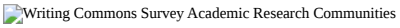
When they design their experiments, scientists formulate their hypotheses as questions that require a "yes" or "no" response. But even when an hypothesis is affirmed, this does not mean that an absolute truth has been discovered. Instead, before the scientific community is prepared to believe that a part of the paradigmatic structure of the universe has been discovered, other scientists must replicate (and re-replicate) the study to verify its results.

Even after countless replications, scientists can still not claim that they have uncovered an absolute truth. While each hypothesis-affirming replication increases the probability that the hypothesis is true, that prediction can never be proved absolutely. For example, while Isaac Newton's general laws of motion and the law of universal gravitation have been verified by millions of experiments, scientists must still assume that "every law of nature is subject to change, based on new observations."

To bolster the strength of their investigative powers, scientists have harnessed the power of probability statistics. Statistical measures give scientists greater control over variables and allow them to say that an ***hypothesis*** can be rejected or affirmed with a certain degree of certainty. Ultimately, though, knowledge produced by this method, no matter how carefully tested, can only be expressed in terms of probability, never affirmed as discoveries of absolute truths.

The Formalists

Formalists are model-builders. Working by analogy, they construct models that correspond to some phenomenon in the real world. Instead of proceeding inductively—that is, moving from one experiment to another in hopes of solving the master puzzle—formalists begin with the big picture. This big picture, represented as a model, is based on their best guess, which they make after a long thoughtful analysis of the phenomenon being studied.

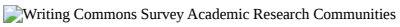

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After constructing a model, formalists test it to establish its correspondence with the empirical phenomenon it purports to represent. Using pre-established rules of interrelation, they evaluate how closely their model accounts for the phenomenon under investigation. Then, working in the opposite direction of their cousins, the scientists, formalists re-imagine the model, correcting and improving it (ideally) with each subsequent experiment.

According to North and Diesing, the advantage of ***formalist models*** is that they provide a powerful metaphor for what we do and do not understand. The limitation of this methodology is that, while each model may appear to be completely logical—a complete tautological whole—the model may distort or falsely represent the empirical phenomenon it is trying to depict.

The Clinicians

Clinicians conduct case studies—that is, in-depth studies of a single individual or of a small set of individuals (such as superb teachers, happily married couples, unusually successful people). Unlike the surveyors, scientists, and formalists, who seek to identify the broad, general patterns in human behavior, clinicians are primarily interested in specific cases or examples. That is, clinicians value their results for what they tell us about the individual cases studied, not for what they may predict about the general population.


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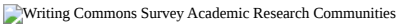
Although clinical studies focus on particular cases rather than general patterns, most clinicians are positivists. They tend to see the results of their narrow, in-depth observations as "the manifestation of general laws in particular instances" (North 200). In other words, while clinical results may be too specific to be generalized to larger populations, clinical results still reflect general laws of behavior.

Unlike other positivist researchers, instead of using statistics to generalize the results of their studies to larger populations, clinicians build knowledge about individual cases into a coherent account of the whole by accretion. Clinicians study phenomena over and over again, each time from a slightly different angle or perspective, accumulating results into a canon of clinical studies that, taken together, produce a picture of the behavior being studied.

The Ethnographers

Like scientists, surveyors, and clinicians, ***ethnographers*** observe behavior, but their assumptions about what their observations mean distinguish them from the other researchers. In simple terms, ethnographers are story tellers. They enter a community, observe the activities of the community, and "inscribe" or write down their observations. But rather than claiming to literally "transcribe" everything the community says and does, ethnographers seek to capture the meaning of what has been said and done.

Because no two observers will ascribe exactly the same meaning to their observations, ethnographers' accounts are much closer to stories than observations.



Ethnographers are usually postpositivist researchers. They assume that their results—the accounts they produce—are constructed not discovered. Ethnographic accounts are unique and specific to their context, and they cannot be replicated or generalized to any other population. Thus, ethnographic knowledge cannot accumulate in the same way as positivist research. The value of ***ethnographic knowledge*** is not to confirm our notions about a universal pattern but to offer alternative versions of reality. Ethnographies expand our experience, disrupt and enlarge our previous understandings, and suggest new and fresh meanings for experience. To achieve these results, ethnographers have developed methods that allow them to participate in the community as insiders rather than outside observers.

Understand Opposing Research Ideologies

by Joe Moxley

Learn about three opposing assumptions about knowledge that underlie contemporary methodologies: Positivism, Postpositivism, and Scholarship.

Different ideologies underlie research methodologies. In other words, different research communities have opposing ideas about what knowledge is and how it is produced. Scholars produce scholarly knowledge by participating in the never-ending debate. Surveyors, scientists, formalists and most clinicians hope to produce positivistic knowledge. Ethnographers and some clinicians focus on producing postpositivistic knowledge.

Understand the different languages of explorers

You will get the most out of your research journey if you learn the languages and customs of native speakers. Before embarking on your research journey, you are wise to pick up a phrase book. Before interviewing authorities or seeking information via the Internet, media, or Library, you can enrich your journey by familiarizing yourself with key research terms and concepts.

Researchers are curious about the world, and they undertake research projects in order to generate new knowledge about the world they are investigating. Their results—what they can claim to know as a result of their research—are important. But, how they can claim to know what they know—their research methodology—is equally important. Whether your research results are understood and appreciated will depend to a great extent on whether you have selected an appropriate methodology for your subject and your audience.

The importance of methodology is not all that surprising or difficult to understand. You consider methodology when you make judgments about knowledge claims every day. You would, for example, probably take your doctor's diagnosis of a life-threatening disease more seriously than a fortune teller's prediction of an early death. What distinguishes a physician's prognosis from a fortune teller's prophesy is their methodology. How you choose to respond to each of these claims will be determined by your evaluation of the methodologies on which they are based.

Since different methodologies produce different kinds of knowledge and appeal to different audiences, you will need to consider what methodology is appropriate for your rhetorical situation. Obviously, your choice of methodology will be influenced by what kind of knowledge you want to produce and by your readers' preferences. But your selection will also be determined by your beliefs about what is important, about what can be known, and about what you can do best. These choices will become much easier to make when you understand more about how methodologies operate.

What are the Three Most Widely-Accepted Ideologies that Inform Contemporary Research Practices?

The task of selecting an appropriate methodology would be impossible if every reader's preferences were different. Fortunately, although we each develop our own individual ideologies, we also tend to share important fundamental beliefs about knowledge and knowledge-making. These shared beliefs define ideological communities. That is, just as people with similar religious beliefs,

political loyalties, or cultural practices can be said to make up a community—even though they have never met—those with shared ideologies can constitute an ideological community.



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What is Positivism?

Comte De Saint-Simon introduced the term "***positivism***" in the 19th century to describe the set of beliefs that underlies modern scientific inquiry. Early positivists rejected inquiry based on subjective experience or intellectual speculation. Instead, they argued that sense perceptions are the only admissible basis for knowledge. That is, positivists argue that knowledge developed by carefully controlled observation is more valuable than knowledge that is derived from intuition or logic.

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Stephen North identifies three assumptions that support positivists' reliance on sensory perception as the best means to knowledge:

- A nonrandom order of causes and effects exists.
- This nonrandom order exists independent of our experience of it.
- Researchers can use objective methods to discover the nonrandom order.

Since they are interested in discovering the laws and general principles that regulate the universe, positivists use the data they collect, not to explain any particular individual or event, but as evidence concerning the universe at large. Ultimately, positivists hope to construct a paradigm—a consistent, general concept or framework—that explains the phenomena they study. Positivists, then, work like puzzle-solvers, solving the puzzle of the universe one piece at a time.

A nonrandom order of the universe exists. Positivists assume that the universe is an orderly place. That is, they believe that events have causes and occur in regular patterns that can be determined through observation. Positivists conduct observational studies to uncover these regular, nonrandom patterns and the relationships among the patterns. Working collaboratively and inductively, positivists sort through a multitude of relationships, seeking to discover the rules or principles that govern the way things work in the natural universe.

This nonrandom order of the universe exists independently of our experience of it. Positivists assume that, not only is the universe an orderly place governed by laws and principles, but that this order exists whether or not we are aware of it. That is, positivists have faith in the "objective" nature of knowledge. They view knowledge as "external" to human experience and proceed as though knowledge is somewhere "out there" waiting to be discovered.

The ***natural sciences*** provide the best examples of the kinds of knowledge generated by positivistic methods. From a positivist's perspective, the rules of gravity operated efficiently long before we understood them. Likewise, the principles that govern the reproduction of genetic traits in fruit flies or hundreds of other natural phenomena are unaffected by our understanding of them. In positivistic research, the observer's role is passive, and the researcher discovers rather than creates knowledge about the phenomena under study.

Positivists assume that researchers can employ objective methods to discover the nonrandom order. This third assumption follows logically from the first two. That is, positivists reason that if the universe is governed by nonrandom laws and principles that exist independently of human experience, then these patterns must be accessible to the right kinds of investigation. Exactly what method provides the best access depends upon the specific phenomenon being studied and the circumstances under which it is studied. But while positivists differ in how they seek access to these universal patterns, they share the conviction that the patterns are discoverable and describable.

Positivists have developed a variety of methods for conducting objective observations, for verifying their findings, and for generalizing their observations to the universe at large. Often positivistic research is conducted in laboratory settings where variables can be carefully controlled, but it may also be carried out in more natural settings. But because positivists rely on sensory perception rather than intuition or speculation, careful, objective observation is essential to their methodology regardless of the setting.

What is Postpositivism?

While positivism dominated research in the 19th century, by the early 20th century knowledge-makers in several academic fields were becoming disillusioned with this approach. The positivistic methods that had been so successful in advancing knowledge in the natural sciences— physics, chemistry, biology—were proving to be much less successful in social science research. Particularly in the fields of anthropology and psychology, researchers were frustrated in their attempts to identify universal patterns and construct paradigms that could adequately account for the complexities of human behavior. In the first half of the 20th century, two intellectual movements swept across Europe and eventually made their way to America, changing the way knowledge is defined and produced.

In the early decades of this century, structuralism—the notion that culture and other subjects could be studied as a system of signs —offered knowledge-makers an attractive alternative to the methods of science. Influenced by the work of French semiotician Ferdinand Saussure, French linguist Claude Lévi-Strauss began applying structural theory to the study of kinship patterns, myths, magic, and culture in general. Soon French structuralists were using structural theory to study cultural anthropology, psychology, mathematics, and biology.

Initially, structuralism was enthusiastically accepted as a “scientific” method that avoided the limitations of positivism. About the time of the 1968 student protests in Paris, however, structuralism’s influence began to wane. During this period of turmoil, French intellectuals recognized the inherent limitations in structural theories and began the shift away from structuralism to poststructuralism. This shift in thought was part of the global movement called postmodernism. In the arena of research methods, this change in thinking provided the theoretical basis for new, postpositivistic methods.

The intellectual movement that resulted from the shift away from positivism and structuralism is difficult to define, partly because postpositivism sought to avoid the kind of rational, orderly, patterned thought that makes tidy conceptual boundaries possible. In general, though, postpositivism represents a reaction against the “certainty” that forms the foundation for positivism. While it is difficult to pin postpositivism to a set of specific assumptions, ***postpositivists tend to share the following beliefs***:

- Difference should be celebrated not suppressed.
- Knowledge is subjective and negotiated by people within discourse communities.
- Making knowledge is an interpretive act

Their focus on difference leads postpositivists into areas unexplored by positivists. Instead of searching for broad patterns and general principles, postpositivistic researchers seek out what is unique. By specifying what is different and individual, they expand our understanding of ourselves as well as the subjects of their studies. They do not try to account for the behavior they observe or to generalize their data to the universe at large, but rather seek to enlarge our experience by exposing us to diversity and complexity.

Difference should be celebrated not suppressed. Postpositivists reject positivism’s preoccupation with general principles and paradigm building. Instead, postpositivists argue that patterns suppress the differences that characterize the human condition and define our existence. In fact, postpositivists see difference as key to all meaning. That is, we can make meaning only by distinguishing one thing from another in an endless cycle of comparisons and contrasts. These distinctions provide the stuff from which we define our selves and our world.

Knowledge is subjective. Postpositivism assumes that any attempt to ground knowledge outside human consciousness is futile. While postpositivists do not, of course, deny the existence of a physical world, they argue that all knowledge about that world is constructed by human consciousness through language. Because we make meaning by naming things, postpositivists understand the power of language to shape and control our understanding of the world. They tend to view knowledge-making as a rhetorical activity and are interested in the social and cultural forces that cause knowledge to be accepted or rejected.

If knowledge is subjectively experienced and socially constructed, then considerations of history and context are essential to knowledge-making activities. Postpositivists recognize that prior experience and current social contexts influence our perceptions and shape our consciousness. They point out, for example, that two witnesses to an event rarely see it in precisely the same way and that what is true in one situation may not be true in another. Postpositivists believe that other researchers are foolhardy when they attempt to "strip meaning from a context"—that is, take results from one community or case study and assume that these results can predict behavior in other communities and case studies.

Making knowledge is an interpretive act. If knowledge is constructed out of individual experience and consciousness, then knowledge-making is an act of interpretation rather than an act of discovery. Postpositivistic research, then, is not a search for some objective knowledge waiting "out there" to be discovered. For the postpositivist, research is a quest for new understandings, and the results of this quest are tentative, provisional, and contingent upon the experience and language of the researcher.

By casting knowledge-making as an interpretive act, postpositivism acknowledges the researcher's proactive role in the research project. Decisions about what they will study, how they will study it, what constitutes evidence, and what data mean are all filtered through the researchers' consciousness. Rather than claiming emotional objectivity, postpositivist researchers are likely to be self-conscious about their role in the research process. Postpositivists consider what effects the researcher's presence may have on the subjects being studied and how research subjects are changed by the research project. Postpositivistic methods reject statistical measures of validity and reliability and rely instead on rich, detailed descriptions and strongly-voiced writing to persuade readers of the authenticity of their observations.

What is Scholarship?

Unlike positivists, scholars are not concerned with identifying a nonrandom order of causal relationships. They do not got out into the field or even into the laboratory to conduct objective observations. And, unlike the postpositivists, scholars are not concerned with observing behavior or with celebrating differences. Instead, scholars are concerned with texts and with dialectic—the process of reasoning correctly—to generate, test, and defend the knowledge they generate. Rather than looking outward for evidence from which to make knowledge, scholars look inward to the power of logic and rational thinking.



Demystify Research Methods

by Joe Moxley

Critique research myths that may be impairing your ability to locate, evaluate, and use information.

If you are like most people, you have some definite ideas about what research is. You may envision a pale figure in a white lab coat bent over a microscope or a beaker of bubbling liquid. Perhaps you imagine this isolated and humorless figure engaged in tedious procedures, carefully recorded on graph paper or reduced to inscrutable formulas scrawled in notebooks. Given a few moments, you might expand this vision of research to include a khaki-clad archaeologist digging for relics in the desert or a tweed-jacketed professor studying musty manuscripts in a dusty corner of the library.

These visions of imaginary researchers probably seem disconnected from your personal experience with research. Your first encounter with the term "research" may have been in the form of an English class assignment that required you to write a paper of a specified number of words in which you referenced a minimum number of sources using correct bibliographic citations. You may have spent a few uncomfortable hours in the library searching for material that had some bearing on the topic of your paper, then tried to collect bits and pieces from these sources into a more-or-less coherent whole without committing an obvious act of

plagiarism. As you struggled with the apparently contradictory requirements to base your paper on the work of others but say something new, you probably wondered what this assignment had to do with "research."

Five Misconceptions About Research

None of these visions accurately represent the research process. Most people have a distorted picture of what researchers do. They tend to view research as tedious, repetitious, dull, and irrelevant to most of our immediate practical concerns. In fact, research should be the opposite. In order to envision research as interesting, exciting, and fun, you may need to dispel some common ***misconceptions about where research is done, who does it, and what it entails***.

- **Misconception #1**: Research is conducted in a laboratory.
- **Misconception #2**: Research is for eggheads.
- **Misconception #3:** Research has little to do with everyday life.
- **Misconception #4:** Researchers across disciplines agree about what constitutes effective research.
- **Misconception #5:** Researchers think, research, and then write.

Misconception #1: Research Is Conducted In A Laboratory

Whether we realize it or not, most of us have acquired our understanding of research from the images presented by popular culture. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for example, has provided one of the most dramatic and enduring representations of laboratory research. Contemporary films like *Outbreak* suggest an updated version of the researcher, still white-coated but now isolated from normal social contact by the need for extraordinary anticontamination precautions. Perhaps because it is unfamiliar and, therefore, potentially dangerous, the laboratory offers a more dramatic setting for fictional accounts than other, more accessible research environments.

Of course, some kinds of research require the controlled environments that laboratories provide. The medical research that developed the antibiotics and pain relievers your doctor prescribed that last time you had the flu was conducted in a laboratory. And most of the commercially produced consumer products you use every day–from paint to cereal to hand lotion–undergo testing and refining in some sort of laboratory. But laboratory research is only one particular kind of research.

In reality, research is conducted everywhere. You may have noticed an amiable young person with a clipboard stopping shoppers in the local mall to ask questions about their buying preferences. That person was conducting research. The best-selling account of Lewis and Clark's explorations is the result of research, as is the Thursday night lineup of your favorite TV shows, the design of your computer desk, the pattern of the traffic flow through your neighborhood, and the location of the nearest restaurant. None of the research that produced these results was conducted in a laboratory.

If, for example, you are interested in investigating how people behave in natural situations and under normal conditions, you cannot expect to gather information in a laboratory. In other words, the questions researchers are trying to answer and the methods they select for answering these questions will determine where the research is conducted. Research is carried out wherever researchers must go to collect the information they need.

Misconception #2: Research Is for Eggheads

Just as images from popular culture have influenced our ideas about where research is conducted, pop culture has also created some persistent stereotypes of researchers. In addition to the rather demonic Dr. Frankenstein, you may also think of friendlier, if slightly addled eggheads like the professor on Gilligan's Island, the Jerry Lewis or Eddie Murphy version of *The Nutty Professor*, or the laughable Disney character, Professor Ludwig von Drake. These images all reinforce the notion of researchers as absentminded eccentrics, engrossed in highly technical, specialized projects that most of us cannot understand.

However, just as research can be carried out almost anywhere, anyone can be a researcher. Asking questions about your friend's new romance, gathering evidence of who she was seen with, making deductions based on her new style of dress, and spreading the word about your conclusions is a form of research. These activities don't sound like research to most people because they have not been expressed in academic language. But what if the activities were organized into a research project titled "The Psychosocial Determinants of Gender Relations in Postmodern Dating Culture: A Psychoanalytic Approach"? The point, of course, is not to suggest that gossip qualifies as legitimate research but rather that everyone employs the investigative and exploitative elements of research to make sense of their lives. Research is not just for "eggheads."

Misconception #3: Research Has Little to Do with Everyday Life

While the first two misconceptions concern where research is done and who does it, the third misconception misrepresents the subject matter of research. Because some research focuses on very narrow questions and relies on highly technical knowledge, people often assume that all research must be hard to understand and unrelated to everyday concerns.

However, research need not be difficult to understand, and research is an activity that is defined by its method, not by its subject. In other words, it is true that some significant research is difficult for nonspecialists to understand. Yet all research is valuable to the extent that it affects everyday life.

Research takes many forms, but it always entails a search, conducted carefully and diligently, aimed at the discovery and interpretation of new knowledge. Thus, how you go about gathering information, analyzing data, drawing conclusions, and sharing results determines whether your activities qualify as research. Sometimes these activities will be informal, spontaneous, and intuitive, as when you infer that your friend has a new romance or when you read reviews in a computer magazine before purchasing new software. In school and in the workplace, where results are disseminated and evaluated by others, research is likely to be more formal. Regardless of its final form, however, whenever you systematically gather information for the purpose of generating new knowledge, you are conducting research.



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Misconception #4: Researchers Across Disciplines Agree About What Constitutes Effective Research

Academic disciplines—for example, mathematics, psychology, physics, engineering, or business—have different ways of conducting and evaluating research. An anthropologist's account of kinship patterns in a tribe of Native Americans bears almost no resemblance to a cognitive psychologist's investigation of sensory responses to light stimuli. Even within a particular academic discipline, researchers may disagree over what makes good research.

Not only do people disagree about appropriate methods of research, but their ideas may change over time. Conceptions about knowledge, available technologies, and research practices influence each other and change constantly. For example, capturing gorillas and studying them in cages might have been considered good research in the 1920s. The work of later researchers like Dian Fossey, however, demonstrated how animals might be better understood in their natural environment. Today, research based on observations of wild animals in captivity would gain little support or interest.

Because no one way of doing research is equally acceptable to all researchers in all academic disciplines, researchers must select the methodology that will be most persuasive to their readers.

Misconception #5: Researchers Think, Research, and Then Write

When you first begin a research project, you are wise to integrate writing activities with research activities. Unfortunately, many people wrongly separate the research process from the writing process. They naively assume they should first think about a topic, identify a research question, research it, and then—after all of the excitement is drained from the project—write it up. Rather than using the generative power of writing (that is, our ability to generate new ideas by writing) to help define and energize a research

project, some people delay writing until after they have completed the research. Waiting to write about a research project until you're done researching may waste your time and can result in dull, listless prose.

You can save time and ensure that your research is focused by writing summaries of others' research, by writing drafts of your research goals, and by writing about the results you hope to find before you find them. In the process, you will eliminate vague or contradictory ideas you may have about your project.

Incorporating writing into your research activities helps you identify your rhetorical situation and define your readers' priorities. Writing about your project in its early stages gives you time to develop ways of describing your research that are comprehensible and interesting to your audience. As you redraft and revise, your writing—and your thinking—will become clearer, more precise, and thus more credible.

We can all take a lesson in the importance of making your research your own from Gary Starkweather, who built a laser printer that made billions of dollars for Xerox and helped change the way business is done all over the world. The experience taught him several things:

It's better to try and fail than to decide something can't be done and not try at all. Research is a place where failure should be, if not encouraged, at least viewed as a sign that something's happening. Uncertainty is bad for manufacturing, but essential for research.

Believe in your own ideas and don't trim your sails just to be popular with your colleagues. Howard Aiken, inventor of the first digital computer, said: "If it's truly a good idea, you'll have to jam it down their throats."

Be open to suggestion. Often someone who hasn't stared at a problem until they went cross-eyed has the fresh view that can solve it. The best way to a breakthrough is constant small improvement — those waiting for the big break are just lazy; they're waiting to be teleported to the top of the hill instead of walking.

Source: Gary Starkweather Profile

You might want to try some of the following:

In a couple of paragraphs describe a research project or a paper you have written in the past that you felt was interesting, fun, or successful. Try to identify what made the project appealing. Why did it spark your interest? Did you develop the idea yourself, did someone help you, or was it assigned? How did your readers respond to your work? Why do you think they acted that way? Do you feel it might be worthwhile to build on the work you completed earlier by digging deeper into the subject? In what ways did your attitude influence the way you conducted and wrote your research? How can you take advantage of your experience in order to enjoy future projects? What additional misconceptions about research can you identify?

To develop a better understanding of the research process, maintain a journal of your activities and thoughts while you conduct a research project.

Textual Research

by Joe Moxley

Research is defined by many academic disciplines, such as English or History, as primarily a textual process. In other words, some researchers (commonly called "scholars") focus on texts—that is, on responding to them, critiquing them, or in rereading them with a particular theory in mind, such as Capitalism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Behaviorism, Deconstruction, Modernism, Postmodernism. Additionally, scholars can develop their work in response to everyday experiences, issues in the popular culture, the media, and the Internet. Beyond debate and logic, scholars lack a way to prove one idea or approach is superior to any other.

Trained in the traditions and methods of Western humanism, ***scholars rely on*** dialectic, seeking knowledge via the deliberate confrontation of opposing viewpoints. This emphasis on dialectic is sometimes referred to as the ceaseless debate, a cycle of interpretation and reinterpretation. The knowledge scholars generate is often about the meaning of texts, derived from the act of reading, articulated as critical analysis, and refined by dialectic. For example, historians argue about the best ways to interpret a

body of texts. Critics argue about which theory provides the most worthwhile reading of the canon—that is, a privileged set of texts. Philosophers argue about a philosopher's ideas or about a body of texts that advocate a particular philosophical position.



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In addition to focusing on texts—what they mean, how they should be read—scholars develop ideas by responding to, and drawing on, their personal experiences as well as ideas found in the media. In other words, scholars can address topics that emerge from their everyday experiences as a member of a culture. Rather than relying on observations of the empirical world and developing or testing hypotheses, scholars are engaged in the great debate—a never-ending dialectic about ideas. Unlike the methodologies informed by Positivism, scholars lack a way to prove or disprove their positions. Ultimately, scholars are more concerned with participating in the great debate, the scholarly exchange of ideas, as opposed to presuming that truth will one day be found so the debate will need to come to an end. Scholars make meaning by discussing texts and by applying theories to create new readings of texts.

At modern research universities, scholars tend to reside in departments in such departments as English, American Studies, Philosophy, and History. However, all disciplines rely on a scholarly methodology when they conduct debates about ideas, texts, and events. Additionally, some of the activities of scholars appear within the methodologies of other research communities that appear within writingcommons.com — especially the ability to summarize and paraphrase the work of others and the ability to dissect and critique the reasoning of other writers.

Across academic disciplines, scholars have developed unique ways to contribute knowledge. Historians, for example, practice a different version of scholarship than philosophers or critics. Historians tend to use a narrative structure, while philosophers and critics prefer an argumentative structure. In contrast to historians and philosophers, critics are concerned with establishing a body of texts (i.e. a canon) for interpretation, interpreting those texts, and generating theories about both of these activities.

Important Concepts

well-constructed argument

research always begins with the goal of answering a question

primary research

secondary research

most research projects completed by students in writing classes

positivistic methodologies

scholarship

Plato, Aristotle, Socrates

researchers

dialectic process

scholarly inquiry

surveys

surveyors

scientists

formalists

clinicians

ethnographers

ethnographic knowledge

positivism

natural sciences

postpositivists tend to share the following beliefs:

making knowledge

misconceptions about where research is done, who does it, and what it entails

academic disciplines

research

scholars rely on

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The Process of Research Writing | Steven D. Krause | Spring 2007 | **Located** Home

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16.2: Finding Your Sources

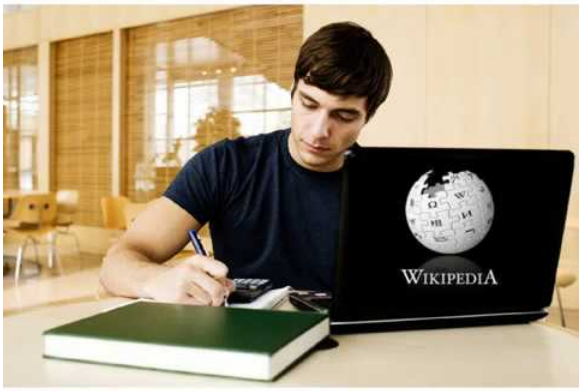
Article links:

“Wikipedia Is Good for You!?” by James P. Purdy

“Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills” by Randall McClure

Chapter Preview

- Identify reasons for research-based writing in college.
- Describe the role information literacy plays in society.



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Wikipedia Is Good for You!?

by James P. Purdy

> *“I actually do think Wikipedia is an amazing thing. It is the first place I go when I’m looking for knowledge. Or when I want to create some.”*
>
> *—Stephen Colbert*

You may not realize it, but ***creating knowledge*** is one reason you are asked to do research-based writing1 in college.* And a popular resource you may already use can help you with this task—though perhaps not in the way you might initially think. ***Wikipedia***, the free wiki “encyclopedia,”2 can provide information to assist you with and model some of the activities frequently characteristic of college-level research-based writing. As with any resource you use, your success with Wikipedia depends on how and why you use it. The goal of this chapter is to show you how and why you might use Wikipedia to help you complete research-based writing tasks for your first year composition class. It offers suggestions for two ways to use—and not to use—Wikipedia. The first is as a source. The second is as a process guide.

My premise for the first is that you are going to use Wikipedia as a source for writing assignments regardless of cautions against it, so it is more helpful to address ways to use it effectively than to ignore it (and ignoring it precludes some potentially beneficial uses of Wikipedia anyway). My premise for the second is that, as I argue elsewhere, Wikipedia can reinforce approaches to research-based writing that many composition teachers support. Wikipedia, that is, can help to illustrate (1) recursive revision based on idea development, (2) textual production based on participation in a conversation rather than isolated thinking, and (3) research based on production rather than only critique (Purdy). The process of successfully contributing to a Wikipedia article, in other words, parallels the process of successfully creating a piece of research-based writing. Both involve putting forth ideas in writing and

developing them in response to feedback based on audience members' perceptions of the usefulness, accuracy, and value of those ideas.

I offer two caveats before I proceed. All first year writing instructors teach research-based writing differently and ask you to produce different kinds of texts for assignments, so you will need to adapt the suggestions offered in this essay for your particular course and assignment. My goal is not to mandate one correct, universally applicable process of research-based writing. There is none. Nor is it to claim that products of research-based writing should look like a Wikipedia article. They should not. Wikipedia articles are a different genre than academic research-based writing. Wikipedia seeks to emulate an encyclopedia (that's where the "pedia" part of the name comes from) and, thereby, requires that articles be written in what it calls "***NPOV*****," *or neutral point of view***; articles are intended to represent all significant sides of a topic rather than to persuade readers to believe one is correct (Bruns 113–114, "Wikipedia:Neutral"). ***Research-based writing assignments*** in first year composition commonly ask you to advance and develop your own argument on a topic by drawing on and responding to relevant outside sources. While you may be asked to represent multiple views on a topic for such an assignment, you will frequently be asked to argue for one, so your writing will likely be more overtly persuasive than a Wikipedia article.

Despite these important differences, I believe that some of the practices often involved in successfully writing a Wikipedia article are also often involved in successfully writing a research-based text for college classes: reviewing, conversing, revising, and sharing. As Australian scholar Axel Bruns asserts, "Wikipedia . . . is closely aligned with the live processes of academic exchanges of knowledge" (208, italics in original). Thus, this chapter proceeds with the assumption that it is useful to consider Wikipedia as both a product (i.e., a source) and a representation of process (i.e., a guide to practices).

Using Wikipedia as a Source

The first way you may think to use Wikipedia is as a source—that is, as a text you can quote or paraphrase in a paper. After all, Wikipedia is easy to access and usually pretty easy to understand. Its articles are often current and frequently provide interesting facts and information that can support your ideas. What's not to like?

Usually teachers do not like two primary aspects of Wikipedia. The first is its open participation: anyone, regardless of background, qualifications, or expertise, can write Wikipedia articles. As a result, articles can display incorrect information. There are many examples of such incorrect information on Wikipedia. Perhaps the most infamous involves the Wikipedia article on John Seigenthaler (former journalist, political advisor, and father of the reporter of the same name on NBC news). Brian Chase changed the article to indicate that Seigenthaler played a role in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. This untrue contribution lasted for 132 days (Page, "Wikipedia Biography"). Seigenthaler was understandably upset, which he reported vociferously in an article in *USA Today* (Seigenthaler). Were someone to take Wikipedia's John Seigenthaler3 article at face value during this time, she or he would come to the wrong conclusion about Seigenthaler. If you quote or paraphrase a Wikipedia article as an authoritative source, then, you are potentially making a claim based on wrong information, and using incorrect information is not a good way to make a convincing argument. Of course, misinformation isn't limited to Wikipedia. As Jim Giles reports in *Nature*, Encyclopaedia Britannica has errors in some of its articles, too; he claims that Wikipedia is almost as accurate as Britannica for a series of articles on science topics (900–901; see also Bruns 127–133, Levinson 93). You should, therefore, read critically all sources, not just Wikipedia articles. It's always a good idea to verify information in multiple sources. To ensure a better chance of accuracy, though, college-level research- based writing assignments generally ask you to use sources written by academic professionals and recognized experts.

The second aspect of Wikipedia that many teachers do not like is its changeability: Wikipedia articles do not remain the same over time. The *Michael Jackson* article makes this explicit. Its 19:35, 27 June 2009 version begins with a header: "This article is **about a person who has recently died**. Some information, such as that pertaining to the circumstances of the person's death and surrounding events, may change rapidly as more facts become known" (emphasis in original). As this notice implies, the article didn't stay the same for long given the unfolding details of Jackson's death. As a result of such change- ability, Wikipedia articles are unreliable; the article you cite today may not exist in that form tomorrow. This variability challenges prevailing understanding of how published texts work so causes some anxiety. Because print texts are (relatively) stable, we expect texts we read (and cite) to be the same when we go back to them later. Even Wikipedia contributors express worry about the implications of article changeability for citation:

> Among other problems . . . if several authors cite the same Wikipedia article, they may all cite different versions, leading to complete confusion. That just linking to the article sans version information is not enough can be seen by those Wikipedia articles themselves which refer to others, where it is clear from following the link that a different version was referred to (and there is no clue which of the many versions in the history was actually read by the person who cited it). ("Why Wikipedia Is Not So Great")

As ***Wikipedians*** explain, article variability makes citing hard because it is difficult for readers to know which version of a Wikipedia article an author cited. And academic audiences like to be able to return to the texts you cite to verify the conclusions you draw from them. If the texts you cite don't exist anymore, they cannot do that.

Teachers have concerns about you using Wikipedia as a source for another reason—one that has less to do with Wikipedia itself and more to do with the kinds of texts you are expected to use in research-based writing. Most ***college-level writing*** asks you to engage more deeply with a subject than does an encyclopedia, and doing so entails reading more than the general overview of a topic that encyclopedia articles provide.4 So articles from any encyclopedia are not usually good sources to quote, paraphrase, or summarize in your writing. Indeed, in response to Middlebury College's history department officially banning students from using Wikipedia as a source in their papers, Sandra Ordonez, a spokesperson for Wikipedia, and Roy Rosenzweig, Director of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, agreed "the real problem is one of college students using encyclopedias when they should be using more advanced sources" (Jaschikn. pag.). If you wouldn't cite an encyclopedia article in a project, then citing a Wikipedia article likely isn't a good idea either.

Because of their open participation, unreliability, and (potentially) shallow topic coverage, you generally should not cite Wikipedia articles as authoritative sources in college-level writing. This does not mean that Wikipedia is not useful, or that you cannot read it, or that you should not cite it if you do use it. It does mean that Wikipedia is better used in other ways.

Using Wikipedia as a Starting Place

There are productive ways to use Wikipedia. In fact, Wikipedia can be a good source in three different ways. Rather than a source to cite, it can be a source of (1) ideas, (2) links to other texts, and (3) search terms.

To use Wikipedia as a source of ideas, read the Wikipedia article on your topic when you begin a research-based writing project to get a sense of the multiple aspects or angles you might write about. Many Wikipedia articles include a table of contents and headings that provide multiple lenses through which you might frame an argument (e.g., origins, history, economics, impact, production). Looking at the table of contents and headings can help you view your topic from vantage points you might not otherwise consider and can give you directions to pursue and develop in your writing.

You can also use Wikipedia as a gateway to other texts to consult for your research. ***Wikipedia's Verifiability Policy*** requires that material posted to articles be verifiable—that is, be cited (Bruns 114, "Wikipedia: Verifiability")—so articles include bibliographies, as shown in figure 1. They also frequently include "further reading," "external link," or "see also" lists, as shown in figure 2. These lists provide the names of—and often direct links to—other sources. Take advantage of these leads. When you have decided on a topic and are searching for sources to develop and support your thinking, look at these references, external links, and further reading lists. Wikipedia's Verifiability Policy, however, does not stipulate what kinds of sources contributors must cite to verify the information they post, so these reference and further reading lists do not necessarily provide connections to trustworthy, valid texts appropriate for citing in an academic paper (but, then again, neither do other sources). You still need to evaluate a source to determine if it is suitable for use.


References

Figure 1. References section from Wikipedia's *Web 2.0* article 5



Figure 2. Further reading section from Wikipedia's *Writing* article

Utilizing Wikipedia as a gateway to other sources should not replace going to the library or using your library's online databases. In fact, reviewing the Wikipedia article on your topic can help you better discover sources in your school's library. You might read Wikipedia articles to help you generate search terms to use for finding sources in your school library's catalog and online databases. Ashley Gill (who, like all students quoted in this essay, consented to the use of her real name) explains how she used Wikipedia in this way for an award- winning research project for her school's first year composition class:

For this project, I began on Wikipedia, knowing that results were not accurate, but also knowing I could find useful search terms there. I was only slightly familiar with the psychology angle I was using for my paper, and so Wikipedia gave me a rough sketch of the general background. From here, I used the information I gained from Wikipedia to search for books form [*sic*] the . . . Library. ("Research" 2–3)

Gill acknowledges Wikipedia's problem with accuracy but outlines ways in which Wikipedia was still really useful in helping her get some general background information to determine search terms to use to find sources through the library. You might find Wikipedia similarly useful.

Using Wikipedia as a Process Guide

Not only is Wikipedia potentially useful for generating ideas, finding sources, and determining search terms, but it is also potentially useful for remembering and understanding some of the tasks that are frequently part of good research-based writing: reviewing, conversing, revising, and sharing. To be clear, I am not suggesting that all types of research-based writing ask you to do these tasks in exactly the same way or that your writing should emulate a Wikipedia article. However, some of what happens in making successful contributions to Wikipedia parallels some of what happens in producing effective research-based writing. Looking at Wikipedia can help to demystify these practices. These practices happen recursively—that is, they repeat—so the order in which I present them here is not necessarily the best or correct one. While you do not need to move through these practices in a specific order, you will want to engage in these activities for many research-based writing assignments.

The Wikipedia Interface

Before proceeding, let me offer an overview of the Wikipedia interface so that the following discussion, which points to specific aspects of the interface, makes sense. A Wikipedia article's interface has four tabs, as shown in figure 3. These tabs are labeled "article," "discussion," "edit this page," and "history." The "article" tab contains the content of the article. This content is what displays automatically when you open an article in Wikipedia. The "discussion" tab provides access to the conversation surrounding the article, how it is being written, and the topic being written about. On this page users can, among other things, suggest changes to an article, justify changes they made to an article, and ask why other users made changes to an article. You can participate in this conversation. The "edit this page" tab provides a space for users to add, delete, or revise content of an article. This page is where people write the content that is displayed on the "article" page. You can make these changes. Finally, the "history" tab lists all the versions of the article, when they were written, who updated them, and what changes each user made (each author can provide a summary of his or her changes). On the "history" tab users can also compare and contrast selected article versions.



Figure 3. A Wikipedia article interface's four tabs as shown for the Web 2.0 article

Each of the sections below is devoted to a practice common to both successful Wikipedia contributions and research-based writing. In each, I explain how Wikipedia authors engage in that practice, outline how you can learn from what Wikipedians do to engage in that practice for your research-based writing, and finally provide a specific way you can use Wikipedia for help with that practice.

Reviewing

Examining the role of reviewing in contributing to a Wikipedia article can help you understand the role of reviewing in research-based writing. To make a successful contribution to Wikipedia, authors must review what other contributors have already written about the topic. They don't want to include information that the community of people interested in and knowledgeable about the topic has determined to be inappropriate, off topic, or unimportant, or to simply repeat information already published. Such contributions will be deleted—usually quickly—because they do not offer anything new to people's understanding of the topic.

To do this review, successful Wikipedia contributors read texts in and outside of Wikipedia. They look at previous versions of an article on the history page, including the change summaries provided by authors, and read the discussion surrounding an article on the discussion page. To show that they have reviewed other texts published on the topic of the article they are contributing to, Wikipedians also provide citations for material they post. As I indicate above, Wikipedia requires that material posted to articles be verifiable (Bruns 114, "Wikipedia: Verifiability"), so contributors need to demonstrate that they can verify material they post by citing its source. As shown in figure 4, an absence of citations often results in a warning that someone needs to cite a source to support what is written or the text will be removed.

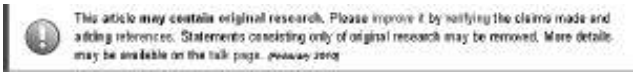


Figure 4. Wikipedia's warning to provide citations to verify claims from the research article

This process parallels what you can do for research-based writing assignments. Review what other contributors have already published about your topic so you avoid writing something that is inappropriate, off topic, or repetitive. Doing this review in formal course writing is somewhat different than doing it in Wikipedia, though. You need to acknowledge in the texts you write that you have reviewed what others have previously published by doing what is called a literature review. A literature review entails summarizing main points from your sources, identifying their insights and/or limitations, and situating these texts in relation to one another and your writing.

Let's look at an example. Gill provides a literature review in her essay "The Analogical Effects of Neural Hemispheres in 'The Purloined Letter'":

> There are approaches to cognitive, and consequently behavioral, functioning that stem from ideas that each side of the brain thinks differently. Michael Grady asserts that a person who thinks with one side of his brain will differ greatly than a person who thinks with the opposite side (20–21). According to Thomas Regelski, the left side is said to think in the following ways: "linear, sequential, logical, analytical, verbal, fragmenting, differentiating, convergence (seeks closure) . . . conventional symbols, facts (objective, impersonal, confirmable), precision, explicit, Scientific Empiricism/Logical Positivism/certitude/ surety" (30). Conversely, Regelski establishes that the right side is responsible for thinking in the subsequent ways, which seemingly oppose the first set of thinking methods: "circular, simultaneous, para- doxical, combinative, holistic, divergence (content with open-endedness) . . . expressive, vague, implicit . . . Immanence/ Introspectionism/ Intuitionism/ Intuitive Cognition/ indwelling/insight/intuition" (30). Sally Springer and Georg Deutsch assert in their book *Left Brain, Right Brain*

> that the human brain is divided in this model, and an easier way to interpret this model is "the left hemisphere is something like a digital computer, the right like an analog computer" (185), and that depending on which hemisphere the individual uses most primarily, the individual will think and therefore act in accord with said attributed qualities (186). Poe incorporates many of these characteristics into his characters['] methods during the investigation. The Prefect exemplifies the left side thinking with his systematic and complex approach to finding the purloined letter, while the Minister and Dupin utilize both right and left side attributes, thinking about the cognitions of the other and acting accordingly. (12–13)

Here Gill shows that she has reviewed the work of Grady, Regelski, and Springer and Deutsch by over-viewing their claims about brain function and then connecting those claims to her argument about "The Purloined Letter." Like a successful Wikipedia contributor, she also offers citations, though the form of these citations is different than in Wikipedia. Wikipedia generally uses hyperlinked endnotes, while the most popular academic citation styles from the American Psychological Association (APA) and Modern Language Association (MLA), which Gill uses here, require in-text parenthetical citations and reference and works cited lists, respectively. Despite these differences, the larger idea is the same: in your research-based writing you need to show you have reviewed other relevant texts to demonstrate conversance with appropriate source material and to allow readers to verify your conclusions.

I end this section suggesting a way you can use Wikipedia to help you with this reviewing process. My intention here is to not to prepare you to contribute to a Wikipedia article itself, but rather to use Wikipedia to prepare you to do the reviewing that is part of successful research-based writing. When you are beginning a research-based writing assignment, read the discussion page for the Wikipedia article on the topic you are writing about and identify the debates, questions, and absences that you find. In other words, list what contributors (1) argue about (i.e., what ideas are contentious), (2) have questions about, and (3) think is missing from and should be included in coverage of that topic. Then identify these debates, questions, and absences for the published literature (i.e., books, articles) on your topic. Review what other authors have written about them. Looking at the discussion page first allows you to enact on a smaller scale what you need to do with a wider range of sources for a literature review in a research-based writing project.

Let's consider an example. If you read the discussion page for the Wikipedia article *History of the board game Monopoly*, a section of which is shown in figure 5, you will find that contributors argue about when the game originated and the role Elizabeth Magie played in its creation; they ask questions about the rules for players selling property to one another; and they think information on the volume of game sales, McDonald's Monopoly games/promotions, and the World Monopoly Championships is missing and should be addressed more fully. Were you to write about the history of the board game Monopoly, you now have several avenues (no pun intended!) to read about and know what you might need to review in making an argument on the topic.


The First Paragraph [edit]

Figure 5. Section of the discussion page from Wikipedia's *History of the board game Monopoly* article

Conversing

A second practice successful Wikipedia contributors engage in that reflects a successful practice of research-based writing is conversing. Productive Wikipedia authors situate their contributions to an article in relation to those of past authors, recognizing that making a contribution to an article is like stepping into an ongoing conversation. Wikipedia authors engage in this practice by posting to the discussion page—for example, by asking questions of and responding to other contributors and by arguing for why they made certain changes—and by providing change summaries for their contributions when they edit an article, particularly change summaries that identify briefly why they made a certain change—for example, "corrected factual errors in introduction," "deleted irrelevant information to maintain article focus."

As with reviewing, ***conversing*** is another practice frequently characteristic of successful research-based writing. You should respond to the sources you use rather than just report on or parrot them. While Wikipedia contributors can literally insert themselves into a conversation on a Wikipedia article discussion page, you can engage in conversation with sources in research-based writing by quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing them; by indicating agreements, disagreements, and connections among them and you; and by showing their insights, limitations, and applications.

Consider the following example. In a paragraph from "Literacy," an award-winning first year composition essay on the need to "broad- en the range of serious reading material for youth to include comic books and the [I]nternet" (16), Lindsey Chesmar acknowledges what two other sources, Bob Hoover (italicized below) and Janell D. Wilson and Linda H. Casey (bolded below), have written about youth reading behaviors and inserts what she wishes to say in response to them (unformatted text below):

> *The NEA report, "To Read or Not to Read,"* [sic] *shows "the startling declines, in how much and how well Americans read" (Hoover 1).* Although many people could have already guessed, this NEA report officially states what has been on the decline since the early 1990s. However, it seems as though the NEA left out some important data when conducting their study. **According to Wilson and Casey, "comic books have been at the top of the student preference list for sometime, yet it seems that they may not count as 'serious' reading material" (47). Children and young adults have been reading comics and comic books since their beginning. Some educators also use comics in class as a way to interest students who would be otherwise unwilling to read (Wilson and Casey 47).** However, literary studies rarely include comic books in their questions and surveys of youth. If a young adult spends 3 hours a week reading comic books, the study will not include that in their overall findings. It is as if that time the young adult spends reading means nothing. *The NEA itself did not include the " double-digit growth in recent years" in sales of books aimed at teens (Hoover 1).* This statistic leads me to believe that teens are actually reading more than what the recent studies suggest. Leaving out some young adults' reading time and the growing popularity of young adult books could lead to misrepresentations in the results of the overall literacy studies. This also may lead the young adult to believe that what they are reading is not worthy enough, or "serious" enough, to count towards anything. They may feel discouraged and give up reading all together after finding out the things they like to read are not valid in the literary and educational worlds. (17, italics and boldface added)

In this paragraph, Chesmar makes clear that she knows important components of the ongoing conversation about literacy and reading: the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a study that reports reading (amount and proficiency) has declined in the United States and, though popular among young adults, comic books did not count as reading material for the study. She puts sources discussing these ideas into conversation; note the back and forth between the bold, italics, and unformatted text. She then responds to these sources, writing, "This statistic leads me to believe that teens are actually reading more than what the recent studies suggest" (17). Chesmar thereby establishes her role in the conversation: she thinks the NEA report provides misleading results because it ignores certain types of reading material, which, for her, can have some troubling consequences.

Again, I end this section offering a suggestion for how you can use Wikipedia to help you with the research-based writing process—in this case, by putting your sources into conversation with one another and with you. One way to engage in a conversation like Chesmar does is to construct a dialogue between your sources like the dialogue on a Wikipedia article discussion page. Identify topics your sources address and create headings for them (e.g., concerns, benefits, history). Then quote and paraphrase relevant material from your sources and group it under the appropriate heading. Finally, situate these quotes and paraphrases in relation to one another and add yourself to the discussion. Literally construct a dialogue between them and you. The idea is to see yourself as a participant with a voice in the conversation.

Revising

Another practice that is part of successful Wikipedia and research-based writing is revising. Effective Wikipedia contributors revise articles frequently. They take advantage of the wiki capability to edit the articles they read. To be successful, they do not give up when other people delete or change their contributions but instead revise in response to the feedback they receive (be that from posts to the discussion page, change summaries on the history page, or administrator explanations for why something was removed). The history page for nearly any Wikipedia article provides evidence of how frequently Wikipedians revise. Figure 6, for instance, shows that authors made eleven revisions to the *Michael Jackson* article in one hour on 28 June 2009. As this page illustrates, making an enduring contribution to a Wikipedia article is an ongoing process of negotiation with the reading audience. Moreover, those contributors who revise the most and have their article contributions last for a long time can gain in status among

the Wikipedia community and be promoted to administrators. It is, in other words, through revising that Wikipedia contributors earn respect.



Figure 6. Section of the history page from Wikipedia's *Michael Jackson* article.

To succeed at research-based writing, you, like a successful Wikipedian, should also revise your texts multiple times in response to feedback you receive. You might receive such feedback from teachers, peers, writing center consultants, roommates, and friends who offer advice and suggestions rather than from strangers who change the text itself, as is the case for Wikipedia contributors. But the larger idea re- mains: creating an effective text involves multiple iterations of recursive revision. You need to write a draft, get some feedback, respond to that feedback in your next draft, and repeat the process. Good writing entails thinking through your ideas on the page or screen. Rarely do people record perfectly what they think the first time they write it down. Indeed, you often don't know what you think until you write it down. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find at the end of your first draft the thesis to develop in your second. That's okay! Knowledge production through writing is an ongoing process.

One way to use Wikipedia to help with revising a course assignment is to post a change to a Wikipedia article based on a draft you are writing, see how others respond and analyze those responses. In other words, give your idea a test drive with a public audience. If you aren't comfortable posting directly to an article or are afraid your contribution might get taken down, suggest a change on the discussion page and likewise chronicle the responses. Then revise your draft based on the feedback and responses you receive. The point of this activity isn't just to revise the Wikipedia article itself (though you might chose to do that later), but to use responses and what you learn by posting to Wikipedia to help you revise your research-based writing for class.

Sharing

A final practice successful Wikipedians engage in that reflects a successful practice of research-based writing is sharing. To get feedback, Wikipedia contributors share their writing; they post it for public viewing by editing an article and/or contributing to the discussion page for that article. Otherwise, they do not get feedback, their writing cannot have an impact on others' understanding of a topic, and they cannot gain in status among the Wikipedia community. To more fully participate in this sharing, they might even register and create a profile so other contributors and readers know who they are and can contact them. Professor Mark A. Wilson, for example, identifies contact with other people as a beneficial outcome of sharing his writing and photographs on the *Great Inagua Island* Wikipedia article. He was even invited to speak at the school of someone who saw what he shared.

You also need to share your writing to be successful. While this may seem obvious on some level, sharing involves more than turning in a final draft to a teacher. You have to be willing and prepared to share your writing earlier in your writing process. You can share by taking your writing to the writing center,6 giving it to a classmate for a peer workshop, or reviewing it in a conference with an instructor. This sharing is clearly less public than posting to a widely accessible website like Wikipedia, but it still entails making written work avail- able to a reading audience and is a critical part of the learning process. Key is that in order to get the most benefit from sharing—that is, to get feedback to which you can respond—you need to be prepared to share your writing prior to its due date. In other words, you cannot procrastinate.

Using Wikipedia as I suggest above in the revising section is also a good way to share your writing. After all, a goal of sharing is to get feedback to revise. You can, however, use wiki technology in another way to share your writing. You can record in a course wiki (or another wiki you create) your writing of a text, provide change summaries for all of the different versions along the way, and ask others to review your progress. Using a wiki in this way allows you to reflect on what you are doing and provides an accessible venue for you to share your work—one where your peers and your teacher can respond.

Conclusion

Understanding how to use (and not to use) Wikipedia as a source can help you avoid relying on Wikipedia in unproductive ways and can help you see sources as more than static products to plunk into your writing. In other words, looking at Wikipedia as a starting place (for ideas, sources, search terms, etc.) shows the importance of engaging with rather than ventriloquizing sources—of viewing sources as means to spur and develop your thinking rather than as means to get someone else to do your thinking for you.

Doing research-based writing can also be less daunting—and more fulfilling and fun—when you understand the practices involved and realize that these activities are an important part of knowledge creation. No one assigned Wikipedia contributors to proceed as they do. Since their goal, however, is to add to our understanding of a topic— the very same goal you have for the research-based writing you do in first year composition—they engage in certain activities: reviewing, conversing, revising, and sharing. Not all Wikipedians perform these practices in the same order in the same way, but successful Wikipedians do them. And the most dedicated contributors stay involved even after their text is shared: they read, respond, and revise, over and over again. The process doesn't stop when their writing is made public. That's just the beginning. If you approach your research-based writing in a similar fashion, it'll likely be the beginning of a journey of knowledge creation for you, too.

Notes

1. You may be familiar with the term *research paper* and may have been asked to write one for some of your classes. I don't use that term here, however. There are two primary reasons: (1) Research "papers" need not be papers anymore. That is, what you write need not be in the form of a print document. It might be a website or a video or a poster or some other multimedia form. The term *research paper* doesn't encapsulate all these possibilities. (2) Research papers are often associated with presentations of what other people have written about a topic. When people hear *research paper*, in other words, they often think of compiling what other authoritative, smart people have to say about a topic and calling it a day. The kind of writing you are asked to do in college, however, requires more than that. It asks for your response to and application of what others have written. You need to do something with the sources you read (other than just string together quotes from them in your paper). So instead of *research paper*, I use *research-based writing*. This term emphasizes the activity (writing) rather than the medium (paper). This term also presents research as the basis (research-based), a beginning rather than an end.

2. I put the word "encyclopedia" in quotation marks because I argue that calling Wikipedia an encyclopedia and evaluating it based on the standards of print-based encyclopedias misrepresents the way it works (see Purdy W352, W357, W365).

3. For clarity, I italicize the names of Wikipedia articles in this chapter.

4. That Wikipedia provides the same shallow coverage as other encyclopedias, or even that it should be considered an encyclopedia, is debatable (Bruns 101–133, Levinson 95–98). Nonetheless, its prevailing classification as an encyclopedia raises concern.

5. This image, like all the images in this chapter, comes from the English version of Wikipedia (en.Wikipedia.org/) and, like all Wikipedia content (except the logo, which Wikipedia does not allow to be reproduced), is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike (http:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0) and GNU Free Documentation License (www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html), which permit reproduction of content with attribution for non-commercial purposes, as explained by Wikipedia's official policy on reusing Wikipedia content ("Wikipedia:Reusing Wikipedia Content").

6. See Ben Rafoth's "Why Visit Your Campus Writing Center?" chapter in this *Writing Spaces* volume.

Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills

by Randall McClure

Introduction

The ways in which most writers find, evaluate, and use information have changed significantly over the past ten years.* A recent study, for example, has shown that as many as nine out of every ten students begin the process of searching for information on the Web, either using a search engine, particularly Google, or an online encyclopedia, notably Wikipedia (Nicholas, Rowlands and Huntington 7). I believe this finding is true of most writers, not just students like you; the Web is our research home.

To illustrate for you how the Web has changed the nature of research and, as a result, the shape of research-based writing, I trace in this chapter the early research decisions of two first year composition students, Susan and Edward, one who begins research in Google and another who starts in Wikipedia. Part narrative, part analysis, part reflection, and part instruction, this chapter blends the voices of the student researchers with me, in the process of seeking a new way to research.

Please understand that I do not plan to dismiss the use of what I call "***Googlepedia***" in seeking information. As James P. Purdy writes in his essay on Wikipedia in Volume 1 of *Writing Spaces*, "[Y]ou are going to use [Google and] Wikipedia as a source for writing assignments regardless of cautions against [them], so it is more helpful to address ways to use [them] than to ignore [them]" (205). Therefore, my goal in this chapter is to suggest a blended research process that begins with the initial tendency to use Google and Wikipedia and ends in the university library. While Susan and Edward find Googlepedia to be "good enough" for conducting research, this chapter shows you why that's not true and why the resources provided by your school library are still much more effective for conducting research. In doing so, I include comments from Susan and Edward on developing their existing information behaviors into academic research skills, and I offer questions to help you consider your own information behaviors and research skills.

Understanding Information Literacy

Before I work with you to move your information behaviors inside the online academic library, you need to understand the concept of information literacy. The American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) define information literacy "a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association). The ACRL further acknowledges that ***information literacy*** is "increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources. Because of the escalating complexity of this environment, individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices" (Association of College and Research Libraries). In short, information literacy is a set of skills you need to understand, find, and use information.

I am certain that you are already familiar with conducting research on the Web, and I admit that finding information quickly and effortlessly is certainly alluring. But what about the reliability of the information you find? Do you ever question if the information you find is really accurate or true? If you have, then please know that you are not alone in your questions. You might even find some comfort in my belief that conducting sound academic research is more challenging now than at any other time in the history of the modern university.

Writing in a Googlepedia World

Teachers Tiffany J. Hunt and Bud Hunt explain that the web-based encyclopedia Wikipedia is not just a collection of web pages built on *wiki* technology1, it is a web-based community of readers and writers, and a trusted one at that. Whereas most student users of Wikipedia trust the community of writers that contribute to the development of its pages of information, many teachers still criticize or disregard Wikipedia because of its open participation in the writing process, possible unreliability, and at times shallow coverage (Purdy 209), since "anyone, at any time, can modify by simply clicking on an 'edit this page' button found at the top of every Web entry" (Hunt and Hunt 91). However, the disregard for Wikipedia appears to be on the decline, and more and more users each day believe the "information is trustworthy and useful because, over time, many, many people have contributed their ideas, thoughts, passions, and the facts they learned both in school and in the world" (91). Wikipedia and Google are so much a part of the research process for writers today that to ignore their role and refuse to work with these tools seems ludicrous.

Still, the accuracy and verifiability of information are not as clear and consistent in many sources identified through Wikipedia and Google as they are with sources found in most libraries. For this reason, I am sure you have been steered away at least once from information obtained from search engines like Yahoo and Google as well as online encyclopedias like Answers.com and Wikipedia. Despite the resistance that's out there, Alison J. Head and Michael Eisenberg from *Project Information Literacy* report from their interviews with groups of students on six college campuses that "Wikipedia was a unique and indispensable research source for students . . . there was a strong consensus among students that their research process began with [it]" (11). The suggestion by Head and Eisenberg that many students go to Google and Wikipedia first, and that many of them go to these websites in order to get a sense of the big picture (11), is confirmed in the advice offered by Purdy when he writes that Wikipedia allows you to "get a sense of the multiple aspects or angles" on a topic (209). Wikipedia brings ideas together on a single page as well as provides an accompanying narrative or summary that writers are often looking for during their research, particularly in the early stages of it.

Head and Eisenberg term this Googlepedia-based information behavior "***presearch***," specifically pre-researching a topic before moving onto more focused, serious, and often library-based research.

The concept of presearch is an important one for this chapter; Ed- ward's reliance on Wikipedia and Susan's reliance on Google are not research crutches, but useful presearch tools. However, Edward and Susan admit they would not have made the research move into the virtual library to conduct database-oriented research without my intervention in the research process. Both students originally viewed this move like many students do, as simply unnecessary for most writing situations.

Talkin' Bout This Generation

Wikipedia might be the starting point for some writers; however, Google remains the starting point for most students I know. In fact, one group of researchers believes this information behavior—students' affinity for all things "search engine"—is so prominent that it has dubbed the current generation of students "the Google Generation." Citing not only a 2006 article from *EDUCAUSE Review* but also, interestingly enough, the Wikipedia discussion of the term, a group of researchers from University College London (UCL) note the "first port of call for knowledge [for the Google Generation] is the [I]nter- net and a search engine, Google being the most popular" (Nicholas, Rowlands and Huntington 7). In other words, the UCL researchers argue that "students have already developed an ingrained coping be- havior: they have learned to 'get by' with Google" (23). I believe we all are immersed and comfortable in the information world created by Googlepedia, yet there is much more to research than this.

Despite the fact that it would be easy and understandable to dismiss your information behaviors or to just tell you never to use Google or Wikipedia, I agree with teacher and author Troy Swanson when he argues, "We [teachers] need to recognize that our students enter our [college] classrooms with their own experiences as users of information" (265). In my attempt though to show you that research is more than just a five-minute stroll through Googlepedia, I first acknowledge what you already do when conducting research. I then use these behaviors as part of a process that is still quick, but much more efficient. By mirroring what writers do with Googlepedia and building on that process, this essay will significantly improve your research skills and assist you with writing projects in college and your professional career.

The Wikipedia Hoax

At this point in the chapter, let me pause to provide an example of why learning to be information literate and research savvy is so important. In his discussion of the "Wikipedia Hoax," Associated Press writer Shawn Pogatchnik tells the story of University College Dublin student Shane Fitzgerald who "posted a poetic but phony" quote supposedly by French composer Maurice Jarre in order to test how the "Internet-dependent media was upholding accuracy and accountability." Fitzgerald posted his fake quote on Wikipedia within hours of the composer's death, and later found that several newspaper outlets had picked up and published the quote, even though the administrators of Wikipedia recognized and removed the bogus post. The administrators removed it quickly, "but not quickly enough to keep some journalists from cutting and pasting it first."

It can safely be assumed these journalists exhibited nearly all of the information behaviors that most teachers and librarians find disconcerting:

- searching in Wikipedia or Google
- power browsing quickly through websites for ideas and quotes
- cutting-and-pasting information from the Web into one's own writing without providing proper attribution for it
- viewing information as free, accurate, and trustworthy
- treating online information as equal to print information

Of course, it is impossible to actually prove the journalists used these behaviors without direct observation of their research processes, but it seems likely. In the end, their Googlepedia research hurt not only their writing, but also their credibility as journalists.

Edward, Susan, and Googlepedia

Edward and Susan are two students comfortable in the world of Googlepedia, beginning and, in most cases, ending their research with a search engine (both students claimed to use Google over any other search engine) or online encyclopedia (both were only aware of Wikipedia). Interestingly, Edward and Susan often move between Google and Wikipedia in the process of conducting their research, switching back and forth between the two sources of information when they believe the need exists.

For an upcoming research writing project on the topic of outsourcing American jobs, Susan chooses to begin her preliminary research with Google while Edward chooses to start with Wikipedia. The students engage in preliminary research, research at the beginning of the research writing process; yet, they work with a limited amount of information about the assignment, a situation still common in many college courses. The students know they have to write an argumentative essay of several pages and use at least five sources of information, sources they are required to find on their own. The students know the research-based essay is a major assignment for a college course, and they begin their searches in Googlepedia despite the sources available to them through the university library.

Edward

Edward begins his research in Wikipedia, spending less than one minute to find and skim the summary paragraph on the main page for "outsourcing." After reading the summary paragraph2 to, in Edward's words, "make sure I had a good understanding of the topic," and scanning the rest of the main page (interestingly) from bottom to top, Edward focuses his reading on the page section titled "criticism." Edward explains his focus,

> Since I am writing an argumentative paper, I first skimmed the whole page for ideas that stood out. I then looked at the references for a clearly opinionated essay to see what other people are talking about and to compare my ideas [on the subject] to theirs,' preferably if they have an opposing view.

This search for public opinion leads Edward to examine polls as well as skim related web pages linked to the Wikipedia page on outsourcing, and Edward quickly settles on the "reasons for outsourcing" in the criticism section of the Wikipedia page. Edward explains, "I am examining the pros of outsourcing as I am against it, and it seems that companies do not want to take responsibility for [outsourcing]."

It is at this point, barely fifteen minutes into his research, that Edward returns to the top of the Wikipedia main page on outsourcing to re-read the opening summary on the topic, as I stop him to discuss the thesis he is developing on corporate responsibility for the outsourcing problem. We discuss what I make of Edward's early research; Edward relies on Wikipedia for a broad overview, to verify his understanding on a subject.

> *Presearch into Research*
>
> *Analysis:* Some teachers and librarians might argue against it, but I believe starting a search for information in Wikipedia has its benefits. It is difficult enough to write a college-level argumentative essay on a topic you know well. For a topic you know little about, you need to first learn more about it. Getting a basic understanding of the topic or issue through an encyclopedia, even an online one, has been a recommended practice for decades. Some librarians and teachers question the reliability of online encyclopedias like Wikipedia, but this is not the point of the instruction I am offering to you. I want you to keep going, to not stop your search after consulting Wikipedia. To use it as a starting point, not a final destination.
>
> *Recommendation:* Deepen your understanding. Formulate a working thesis. Reread the pages as Edward has done here. This is recursive preliminary research, a process that will strengthen your research and your writing.

After our brief discussion to flush out his process in conducting research for an argumentative essay, I ask Edward to continue his research. Though he seems to identify a research focus, corporate responsibility, and working thesis—that American corporations should be held responsible for jobs they ship overseas—Edward still chooses to stay on the outsourcing page in Wikipedia to search for additional information.

He then searches the Wikipedia page for what he believes are links to expert opinions along with more specific sources that interest him and, in his approach to argumentative writing, contradict his opinion on the subject. Unlike Susan who later chooses to side with the majority opinion, Edward wants to turn his essay into a debate, regardless of where his ideas fall on the spectrum of public opinion.

> *Research and Critical/Creative Thinking*

Analysis: Edward's reliance on Wikipedia at this point is still not a concern. He is starting to link out to other resources, just as you should do. I, however, suggest that you spend more time at this point in your research to build your knowledge founda- tion. Your position on the issue should become clearer with the more you read, the more you talk to teachers and peers, and the more you explore the library and the open Web.

Recommendation: Keep exploring and branching out. Don't focus your research at this point. Let your research help focus your thinking.

Staying in Wikipedia leads Edward to texts such as "Outsourcing Bogeyman" and "Outsourcing Job Killer." Edward explains that his choices are largely based on the titles of the texts (clearly evident from these examples), not the authors, their credentials, the websites or sources that contain the texts, the URLs, or perhaps their domain names (e.g. .org, .edu, .net, .com)—characteristics of Web-based sources that most academic researchers consider. Even though Edward acknowledges that the source of the "Bogeyman" text is the journal *Business Week*, for example, he admits selecting the text based on the title alone, claiming "I don't read [*Business Week*], so I can't judge the source's quality."

Research and Credibility

Analysis: Understanding the credentials of the author or source is particularly important in conducting sound academic re- search and especially during the age of the open Web. We live a world where most anyone with an Internet connection can post ideas and information to the Web. Therefore, it is always a good idea to understand and verify the sources of the information you use in your writing. Would you want to use, even unintentionally, incorrect information for a report you were writing at your job? Of course not. Understanding the credibility of a source is a habit of mind that should be practiced in your first year composition course and has value way beyond it.

Recommendation: Take a few minutes to establish the credibility of your sources. Knowing who said or wrote it, what credentials he or she has, what respect the publication, website, or source has where you found the ideas and information, and discussing these concepts with your peers, librarian, and writing teacher should dramatically improve the essays and reports that result from your research.

What Edward trusts are the ideas contained in the text, believing the writer uses trustworthy information, thereby deferring source evaluation to the author of the text. For example, Edward comments of the "Job Killer" text, "After reading the first three paragraphs, I knew I was going to use this source." Edward adds that the convincing factor is the author's apparent reliance on two studies conducted at Duke University, each attempting to validate a different side of the outsourcing debate and the roles of corporations in it. From Edward's statement, it is clear he needs help to better understand the criteria most scholars use for evaluating and selecting Web-based sources:

- Check the purpose of the website (the extension ".edu," ".org," ".gov," ".com" can often indicate the orientation or purpose of the site).
- Locate and consider the author's credentials to establish credibility.
- Look for recent updates to establish currency or relevancy.
- Examine the visual elements of the site such as links to establish relationships with other sources of information. (Clines and Cobb 2)

A Text's Credibility Is Your Credibility

Analysis: Viewed one way, Edward is trying to establish the credibility of his source. However, he doesn't dig deep enough or perhaps is too easily convinced. What if the studies at Duke, for instance, were conducted by undergraduate students and not faculty members? Would that influence the quality of the research projects and their findings?

Recommendation: Know as much as you can about your source and do your best to present his or her credentials in your writing. As I tell my own students, give "props" to your sources when and where you can in the text of your essays and reports that incorporate source material. Lead-ins such as "Joe Smith, Professor of Art at Syracuse University, writes that . . ." are especially helpful in giving props. Ask your teacher for more strategies to acknowledge your sources.

Edward's next step in his research process reveals more understanding than you might think. Interested in the Duke University studies cited in the "Job Killer" text, Edward moves from Wikipedia to Google in an attempt to find, in his words, "the original source and all its facts." This research move is not for the reason that I would have searched for the original text (I would be

looking to verify the studies and validate their findings); still, Edward indicates that he always searches for and uses the original texts, what many teachers would agree is a wise decision. Finding the original studies in his initial Google query, Edward's research move here also reminds us of a new research reality: many original sources previously, and often only, available through campus libraries are now available through search engines like Google and Google Scholar.

After only thirty minutes into his preliminary research, it's the appropriate time for Edward to move his Googlepedia-based approach significantly into the academic world, specifically to the online library. Before working with Edward to bring his Googlepedia-based research process together with a more traditional academic one, I ask Edward about library-based sources, particularly online databases. His response is the following: "I am more familiar with the Internet, so there is no reason [to use the library databases]. It is not that the library and databases are a hassle or the library is an uncomfortable space, but I can get this research done in bed." Edward's response is interesting here as it conflicts with the many reports that students often find the college library to be an intimidating place. Edward doesn't find the library to be overwhelming or intimidating; he finds the information in it *unnecessary* given the amount of information available via Googlepedia.

But what if researching in the online library could be a more reliable and more efficient way to do research?

Susan

Susan begins her research where most students do, on Google. Interestingly, Susan does not start with the general topic of outsourcing, opting instead to let the search engine recommend related search terms. As Susan types in the term "outsourcing," Google as a search engine builds on character recognition software providing several "suggestions" or related search terms, terms that Susan expects to be provided for her, and one—"outsourcing pros and cons"—quickly catches her attention. Commenting on this choice instead of searching by the general concept of outsourcing, Susan notes, "I would have to sort through too much stuff [on Google] before deciding what to do." She selects "pros and cons" from the many related and limiting search terms suggested to her; Susan states, "I want both sides of the story because I don't know much about it."

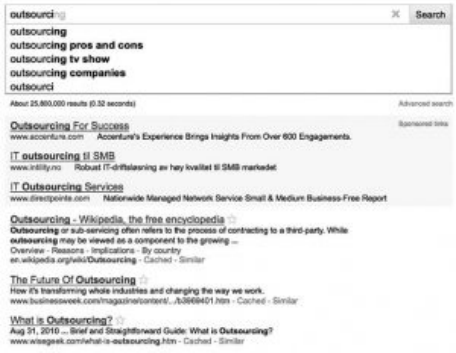


Fig. 1. Outsourcing suggestions from Google.

Susan next moves into examining the top ten returns provided on the first page of her Google search for outsourcing pros and cons. Doing what is now common practice for most Web users, Susan immediately selects the link for the first item returned in the query. I believe most search engine users are wired this way, even though they are likely familiar with the emphasis given to commercial sites on Google and other search engines. Quickly unsatisfied with this source, Susan jumps around on the first page of returns, stopping on the first visual she encounters on a linked page: a table illustrating pros and cons. Asked why she likes the visual, Susan responds that she is trying to find out how many arguments exist for and against outsourcing. On this page, Susan notes the author provides seven pros and four cons for outsourcing. This finding leads Susan to believe that more pros likely exist and that her essay should be in support of outsourcing.

"Visual" Research

Analysis: There are at least two points worthy of your attention here. First, Susan's information behavior shows how attracted we all are to visuals (maps, charts, tables, diagrams, photos, images, etc.), particularly when they appear on a printed page or screen. Second, she fails to acknowledge a basic fact of research—that visual information of most any kind can be misleading. In the above example, Susan quickly deduces that more (7 pros vs. 4 cons) means more important or more convincing. Couldn't it be possible that all or even any one of the cons is more significant than all of the pros taken together?

Recommendation: Consider using visuals as both researching and writing aids. However, analyze them as closely as you would a printed source. Also, examine the data for more than just the numbers. It might be a truism that numbers don't lie, but it is up to you, as a writer, to explain what the numbers really mean.

Like Edward, Susan is not (initially) concerned about the credibility of the text (author's credentials, source, sponsoring/hosting website, URL or domain, etc.); she appears only concerned with the information itself. When prodded, Susan mentions the text appears to be some form of press release, the URL seems legitimate, and the site appears credible. She fails to mention that the author's information is not included on the text, but Susan quickly dismisses this: "The lack of author doesn't bother me. It would only be a name anyway." Susan adds that her goal is to get the research done "the easiest and fastest way I can." These attitudes—there is so much information available in the Googlepedia world that the information stands on its own and the research process itself doesn't need to take much time—appear to be a common misconception among students today, and the behaviors that result from them could possibly lead to flimsy arguments based on the multiplicity rather than the quality of information.

Research and CRAAP

Analysis: I have referenced criteria for evaluating sources throughout this chapter. If you do not fully understand them, you should consult the resources below and talk with your teacher or a reference librarian.

Recommendation: Learn to put your sources to the ***CRAAP test*** (easy to remember, huh?):

- "*Currency:* The timeliness of the information."
- "*Relevance:* The importance of the information for your needs."
- "*Authority:* The source of the information."
- "*Accuracy:* The reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the informational content."
- "*Purpose:* The reason the information exists." (Meriam Library)
- For specific questions to pose of your sources to evaluate each of these, visit the website for the developers of the CRAAP test at www.csuchico.edu/lins/handouts/evalsites.html. Another useful site is www.gettysburg.edu/library/research/tips/webeval/index.dot.

Unlike Edward, Susan is not concerned with engaging in a debate on the subject of outsourcing, regardless of her opinions on it. Susan views the assignment as I think many students would, another "get it done" research paper. Further, she believes the majority opinion, at least as it is discussed in the initial source she locates, should be *her* opinion in her essay. Susan explains, "I tend to take the side that I think I can make the stronger argument for . . . If it was a personal issue or an issue I was really interested in, like abortion, I wouldn't do this. This topic doesn't affect me though."

Good Search Terms=Good Research Options

Analysis: Susan needs to understand why being overly reliant on sources uncovered early on in the research process is a problem (particularly here where the search term pros comes before the search term cons likely leading to the results Susan has received). I hope you also share my concerns with the working thesis she appears to be constructing, though I recognize that many students approach research papers just this way.

Recommendation: Improve your research by attempting at least a handful of Web searches using different key terms. If necessary, work with the search phrases and terms provided by the search engine. Also, place your search terms inside quotes on occasion to help vary and focus your search returns. Looking at the subject from different perspectives should help you gain a better sense of the topic and should lead you to a thesis and the development of an essay that is more convincing to your readers.

To her credit, Susan understands the need to validate the information provided by her first source, and she examines the original ten search returns for another text that might indicate the number of advantages and disadvantages to outsourcing. This search behavior of relying on the first page of returns provided by a search engine query has been widely documented, if nowhere else but in the experience of nearly every computer user. When was the last time you went to say the fourth or fifth page of returns on Google? Such a research move contradicts the power browsing nature of most of today's computer users, teachers and students alike. As Susan (perhaps, to some degree, rightly) explains, "The farther away from the first page, the less topic appropriate the articles become." I would contend this might be true of the thirty-seventh page of returns; yet, please understand that you should explore

beyond the first page of returns when seeking out information via a search engine. Google your own name (last name first as well) some day to see just how curiously search returns are prioritized.

Next, Susan identifies a subsequent source, www.outsource2india.com. This website provides the confirmation that Susan is looking for, noting sixteen pros and only twelve cons for outsourcing. At this point, Susan confirms her process for gathering source material for argumentative essays: she looks for two to three web-based articles that share similar views, particularly views that provide her with arguments, counterarguments, and rebuttals. Once she has an adequate list of points and has determined which side of a debate can be more effectively supported, Susan refines her Google search to focus only on that side of the debate.

Don't Rush to Argument

Analysis: There are two concerns with Susan's research at this point: (1) her rush to research and (2) her rush to judgment.

Recommendation: In addition to reworking your research process with the help of the ideas presented in this chapter, consider building your understanding of writing academic arguments. In addition to your writing teacher and com- position textbook, two sources to consult are www. dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/ac_paper/what. shtml#argument and www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/hand- outs/argument.html#2.

Similar to the way she began searching for information only fifteen minutes earlier, Susan uses Google's "suggestions" to help her identify additional sources that support the side of the debate she has chosen to argue. As she types in "pros outsourcing," Susan identifies and selects "pro outsourcing statistics" from the recommended list of search- es provided by Google in a drop-down menu. Like Edward, Susan is interested in validating the points she wants to use in her essay with research studies and scientific findings. Susan comments, "Statistics. Data. Science. They all make an argument stronger and not just opinion." Susan again relies on the first page of search results and focuses on title and URL to make her selections. As she finds information, she copies and pastes it along with the URL to a Word document, noting once she has her five sources with a blend of ideas and statistics together in a Word file that she will stop her research and start her writing.

Track Your Research/Give Props

Analysis: Susan demonstrates here the common information behavior of cutting-and-pasting text or visuals from Web pages. She also demonstrates some understanding of the value of quantitative research and scientific proof. She also appears to use Word to create a working bibliography. These behaviors are far from perfect, but they can be of some help to you.

Recommendation: Learn to use an annotated bibliography. This type of research document will help you with both remembering and citing your sources. For more information on building an annotated bibliography, visit http://www.ehow.com/ how_4806881_construct-annotated-bibliography.html. There are also many software and online applications such as Zotero and Ref Works that can help you collect and cite your sources. Next, make sure to do more than just cut-and-paste the ideas of others and the information you find on the Web into an essay or report of yours.3 Learn to use paraphrases and summaries in addition to word-for-word passages and quotes. The Purdue OWL, a great resource for all things research and writing, ex- plains options for incorporating research into your own writing: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/. Finally, re- alize the value and limitations of statistics/numerical data and scientific findings. This type of research can be quite convinc- ing as support for an argument, but it takes your explanations of the numbers and findings to make it so. You need to explain how the ideas of others relate to your thesis (and don't forget to give props).

Edward and Susan: Remix

As you know by now, I certainly have concerns with Susan's and Edward's research process; however, I recognize that the process used by each of these students is not uncommon for many student researchers. More importantly, each process includes strategies which could be easily reworked in the digital library.

Yes, I am concerned that Susan doesn't recognize that you can find two or three sources on the Web that agree on just about anything, no matter how crazy that thing might be. Yes, I am concerned that Susan opts out of forming an argument that she truly believes in. Yes, I am concerned that both Susan and Edward trust information so quickly and fail to see a need to question their sources. Despite my concerns, and perhaps your own, their Googlepedia-based research process can provide the terms they need to complete the research in more sound and productive ways, and the process can be easily replicated in an online library.

Based on their Googlepedia research to this point, I suggest to Ed- ward that he construct his essay as a rebuttal argument and that he use the search terms “outsourcing” and “corporate responsibility” to explore sources available to him from the library. For Susan, I suggest that she too construct a rebuttal argument and that she use the search string “outsourcing statistics” to explore sources in the university’s virtual library. (For more information on writing rebuttal arguments, visit www.engl.niu.edu/wac/rebuttal.html.)

Given the influence and value of using search engines like Google and online encyclopedias like Wikipedia in the research process, I recommend the following eight step research process to move from relying on instinctive information behaviors to acquiring solid research skills:

1. Use Wikipedia to get a sense of the topic and identify additional search terms.
2. Use Google to get a broader sense of the topic as well as verify information and test out search terms you found in Wikipedia.
3. Search Google again using quotation marks around your “search terms” to manage the number of results and identify more useful search terms.
4. Search Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) to apply the search terms in an environment of mostly academic and professional resources.
5. Do a limited search of “recent results or “since 2000” on Google Scholar to manage the number of results and identify the most current resources.
6. Search your college’s library research databases using your college library’s web portal: to apply the search terms in an environment of the most trusted academic and professional resources.
7. Focus your search within at least one general academic database such as Academic Search Premier, Proquest Complete, Lexis/Nexis Academic Universe, or CQ Researcher to apply the search terms in a trusted environment and manage the number of results.
8. Do a limited search by year and “full text” returns using the same general academic database(s) you used in step 7 to reduce the number of results and identify the most current resources.

I admit that this process will certainly seem like a lot of work to you, but I want to emphasize that Edward and Susan completed this sequence in less than thirty minutes. After doing so, Edward even commented, “If someone had shown me this in high school, I wouldn’t be going to Wikipedia and Google like I do.” Susan added that even with her search terms, Google still presented challenges in terms of the number of potential sources: “Google had thousands of hits while Galileo might have less than 100.” For students who value speed and ease, this remixed process resonated with them, and I believe it will with you.

More importantly, the remixed process addresses some of the concerns that could have hindered the research and writing of both students if they only worked with Googlepedia. By remixing and sequencing research this way, they worked with issues of currency, credibility, accuracy and bias among others, criteria vital to conducting sound research. This is not to say that Susan and Edward failed to understand or could not apply these concepts, particularly given that our research time was limited to sixty minutes total (thirty minutes researching alone plus thirty minutes for cooperative research). However, any student who makes this research move will find a more viable and valuable research path. As Edward said, “[The library sources] produced a narrowed search pattern and created less results based on a more reliable pool from which to pull the information.”

The research approach I am suggesting can be quick and easy, and it can also be more connected to the values of researchers and the skills of adept information users. Don’t take just my word for it though. Consider Susan’s closing comment from the questionnaire she completed after our research session:

> I really hadn’t ever thought of using library sources in looking up information because I’ve always used open Web resources. I now know the benefits of using library sources and how they can simplify my search. I found being able to categorize articles by date and relevancy very helpful . . . I am inclined to change the way I research papers from using the open Web to using library sources because they are more valid and it’s as easy to use as Google.

In just a single one-hour-long preliminary research session, Susan and Edward were able to utilize the research behaviors they were comfortable with, were encouraged to continue starting their research in Googlepedia, and learned to remix their behaviors inside the online library. Working on your own or with a teacher or librarian to make the research move from Googlepedia to the library, as I suggest in this chapter, should help to improve the quality of your research and your writing based upon it.

Conclusion

Susan Blum notes that "if we want to teach students to comply with academic norms of [research], it may be helpful to contrast their ordinary textual practices—rich, varied, intersecting, constant, ephemeral, speedy—with the slower and more careful practices required in the academy" (16). Working through the research process as we have in this chapter, we are moving away from *the* research process to a combination of *our* process, as librarians and teachers, with *your* process—a process that blends technological comfort and savvy with academic standards and rigor. I believe this combination makes for an intellectual, real, and honest approach for researching in the digital age. Blum comments, "By the time we punish students, we have failed. So let's talk. These text-savvy students may surprise us" (16). Susan and Edward have done just that for me, and I hope you have learned a little from them, too.

Key Terms

creating knowledge

Wikipedia

NPOV," or neutral point of view

Research-based writing assignments

Wikipedians

college-level writing

Wikipedia's Verifiability Policy

conversing

Googlepedia

information literacy

CRAAP test

Notes

1. Wikis are websites that allow a user to add new web pages or edit any page and have the changes he or she makes integrated into that page.
2. See pages 209–211 in Purdy for more discussion on the value of Wikipedia in preliminary research.
3. See pages 217–218 in Purdy for an example of a student engaging in written conversation with her sources rather than just "parroting" them.

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This chapter contains Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills written by Randall McClure.This essay is a chapter in Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing,
Volume 1, a peer-reviewed open textbook series for the writing classroom, and is published through Parlor Press. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0

MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

- Video 1: https://youtu.be/aiPbHGqqUHg

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16.3: Recording and Organizing Your Research

Article links:

“Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews” by Dana Lynn Driscoll

Chapter Preview

- Compare primary and secondary research.
- Explain the process of creating a research question.
- Identify the ways to observe research participants.
- Describe the three commonly used methods of primary research.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=149

Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews

by Dana Lynn Driscoll

Primary Research: Definitions and Overview

How research is defined varies widely from field to field, and as you progress through your college career, your coursework will teach you much more about what it means to be a researcher within your field.For example, engineers, who focus on applying scientific knowledge to develop designs, processes, and objects, conduct research using simulations, mathematical models, and a variety of tests to see how well their designs work. Sociologists conduct research using surveys, interviews, observations, and statistical analysis to better understand people, societies, and cultures. Graphic designers conduct research through locating images for reference for their artwork and engaging in background research on clients and companies to best serve their needs. Historians conduct research by examining archival materials newspapers, journals, letters, and other surviving texts and through conducting oral history interviews.

Research is not limited to what has already been written or found at the library, also known as ***secondary research***. Rather, individuals conducting research are producing the articles and reports found in a library database or in a book. ***Primary research***, the focus of this essay, is research that is collected firsthand rather than found in a book, database, or journal.

Primary research is often based on principles of the ***scientific method***, a theory of investigation first developed by John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century in his book Philosophy of the Scientific Method. Although the application of the scientific method varies from field to field, the general principles of the scientific method allow researchers to learn more about the world and observable phenomena. Using the scientific method, researchers develop research questions or hypotheses and collect data on events, objects,

or people that are measurable, observable, and replicable. The ultimate goal in conducting primary research is to learn about something new that can be confirmed by others and to eliminate our own biases in the process.

Essay Overview and Student Examples

The essay begins by providing an overview of ethical considerations when conducting primary research, and then covers the stages that you will go through in your primary research: planning, collecting,
analyzing, and writing. After the four stages comes an introduction to three common ways of conducting primary research in first year writing classes:

- ***Observations***. Observing and measuring the world around you, including observations of people and other measurable events.
- ***Interviews***. Asking participants questions in a one-on-one or small group setting.
- ***Surveys***. Asking participants about their opinions and behaviors through a short questionnaire.

In addition, we will be examining two student projects that used substantial portions of primary research:

Derek Laan, a nutrition major at Purdue University, wanted to learn more about student eating habits on campus. His primary research included observations of the campus food courts, student behavior
while in the food courts, and a survey of students' daily food intake. His secondary research included looking at national student eating trends on college campuses, information from the United States
Food and Drug Administration, and books on healthy eating.

Jared Schwab, an agricultural and biological engineering major at Purdue, was interested in learning more about how writing and communication
took place in his field. His primary research included interviewing a professional engineer and a student who was a senior majoring in engineering. His secondary research included examining journals, books, professional organizations, and writing guides within the field of engineering.

Ethics of Primary Research

Both projects listed above included primary research on human participants; therefore, Derek and Jared both had to consider research ethics throughout their primary research process. As Earl Babbie writes in
The Practice of Social Research, throughout the early and middle parts of the twentieth century researchers took advantage of participants and treated them unethically. During World War II, Nazi doctors
performed heinous experiments on prisoners without their consent, while in the U.S., a number of medical and psychological experiments on caused patients undue mental and physical trauma and, in some
cases, death. Because of these and other similar events, many nations have established ethical laws and guidelines for researchers who work with human participants. In the United States, the guidelines for the
ethical treatment of human research participants are described in The Belmont Report, released in 1979. Today, universities have Institutional Review Boards (or IRBs) that oversee research. Students conducting
research as part of a class may not need permission from the university's IRB, although they still need to ensure that they follow ethical guidelines in research. The following provides a brief overview of ethical
considerations:

Voluntary participation. The Belmont Report suggests that, in most cases, you need to get permission from people before you involve them in any primary research you are conducting. If you are doing a survey or interview, your participants must first agree to fill out your survey or to be interviewed. Consent for observations can be more complicated, and is discussed later in the essay. 156 Dana Lynn Driscoll

Confidentiality and anonymity. Your participants may reveal embarrassing or potentially damaging information such as racist comments or unconventional behavior. In these cases, you should keep your participants' identities anonymous when writing your results. An easy way to do this is to create
a "pseudonym" (or false name) for them so that their identity is protected.

Researcher bias. There is little point in collecting data and learning about something if you already think you know the answer! Bias might be present in the way you ask questions, the way you take notes, or the conclusions you draw from the

data you collect. The above are only three of many considerations when involving human participants in your primary research. For a complete understanding of ethical considerations please refer to The Belmont Report. Now that we have considered the ethical implications of research, we will examine how to formulate research questions and plan your primary research project.

Planning Your Primary Research Project

The primary research process is quite similar to the writing process, and you can draw upon your knowledge of the writing process to understand the steps involved in a primary research project. Just like in the writing process, a successful primary research project begins with careful planning and background research. This section first describes how to create a research timeline to help plan your research. It then walks you through the planning stages by examining when primary research is useful or appropriate for your first year composition course, narrowing down a topic, and developing research questions.

The Research Timeline

When you begin to conduct any kind of primary research, creating a timeline will help keep you on task. Because students conducting primary research usually focus on the collection of data itself, they often overlook the equally important areas of planning (invention), analyzing data, and writing. To help manage your time, you should create a research timeline, such as the sample timeline presented here.



Fig. 1: The Research Process


Fig. 2: A sample timeline for Jared's research project.

When Primary Research Is Useful or Appropriate

In *Evaluating Scientific Research: Separating Fact from Fiction*, Fred Leavitt explains that primary research is useful for questions that can be answered through asking others and direct observation. For first year writing courses, primary research is particularly useful when you want to learn about a problem that does not have a wealth of published information. This may be because the problem is a recent event or it is something not commonly studied. For example, if you are writing a paper on a new political issue, such as changes in tax laws or healthcare, you might not be able to find a wealth of peer-reviewed research because the issue is only several weeks old. You may find it necessary to collect some of your own data on the issue to supplement what you found at the library. Primary research is also useful when you are studying a local problem or learning how a larger issue plays out at the local level. Although you might be able to find information on national statistics for healthy eating, whether or not those statistics are representative of your college campus is something that you can learn through primary research.

However, not all research questions and topics are appropriate for primary research. As Fred Leavitt writes, questions of an ethical, philosophical, or metaphysical nature are not appropriate because these questions are not testable or observable. For example, the question “Does an afterlife exist?” is not a question that can be answered with primary research. However, the question “How many people in my community believe in an afterlife?” is something that primary research can answer.

Narrowing Your Topic

Just like the writing process, you should start your primary research process with secondary (library) research to learn more about what is already known and what gaps you need to fill with your own data. As

you learn more about the topic, you can narrow down your interest area and eventually develop a research question or hypothesis, just as you would with a secondary research paper.

Developing Research Questions or Hypotheses

As John Stuart Mill describes, primary research can use both inductive and deductive approaches, and the type approach is usually based on the field of inquiry. Some fields use ***deductive reasoning***, where researchers start with a hypothesis or general conclusion and then collect specific data to support or refute their hypothesis. Other fields use ***inductive reasoning***, where researchers start with a question and collect
information that eventually leads to a conclusion.

Once you have spent some time reviewing the secondary research on your topic, you are ready to write a primary research question or hypothesis. A ***research question or hypothesis*** should be something
that is specific, narrow, and discoverable through primary research methods. Just like a thesis statement for a paper, if your research question or hypothesis is too broad, your research will be unfocused and
your data will be difficult to analyze and write about. Here is a set of sample research questions:

Poor Research Question: What do college students think of politics and the economy?

Revised Research Question: What do students at Purdue University believe about the current economic crisis in terms of economic recoverability?

The poor research question is unspecific as to what group of students the researcher is interested in—i.e. students in the U.S.? In a particular state? At their university? The poor research question was also too
broad; terms like “politics” and the “economy” cover too much ground for a single project. The revised question narrows down the topic to students at a particular university and focuses on a specific issue related
to the economy: economic recoverability. The research question could also be rephrased as a testable hypothesis using deductive reasoning:

“Purdue University college students are well informed about economic recoverability plans.” Because they were approaching their projects in an exploratory, inductive manner, both Derek and Jared
chose to ask research questions:

Derek: Are students’ eating habits at Purdue University healthy or unhealthy? What are the causes of students’ eating behavior?
Jared: What are the major features of writing and communication in agricultural and biological engineering? What are the major controversies?

A final step in working with a research question or hypothesis is determining what key terms you are using and how you will define them. Before conducting his research, Derek had to define the terms “healthy” and “unhealthy”; for this, he used the USDA’s Food Pyramid as a guide. Similarly, part of what Jared focused on in his interviews was learning more about how agricultural and biological engineers defined terms like “writing” and “communication.” Derek and Jared thought carefully about the terms within their research questions and how these terms might be measured.

Choosing a Data Collection Method

Once you have formulated a research question or hypothesis, you will need to make decisions about what kind of data you can collect that will best address your research topic. Derek chose to examine eating
habits by observing both what students ate at lunch and surveying students about eating behavior. Jared decided that in-depth interviews with experienced individuals in his field would provide him with the
best information.

To choose a data collection method for your research question, read through the next sections on observations, interviews, and surveys.

Observations

Observations have led to some of the most important scientific discoveries in human history. Charles Darwin used observations of the animal and marine life at the Galapagos Islands to help him formulate

his theory of evolution that he describes in On the Origin of Species. Today, social scientists, natural scientists, engineers, computer scientists, educational researchers, and many others use observations as a primary research method.

Observations can be conducted on nearly any subject matter, and the kinds of observations you will do depend on your research question. You might observe traffic or parking patterns on campus to get a sense of what improvements could be made. You might observe clouds, plants, or other natural phenomena. If you choose to observe people, you will have several additional considerations including the manner in which you will observe them and gain their consent.

If you are observing people, you can choose between two common ways to observe: participant observation and unobtrusive observation. ***Participant observation*** is a common method within ethnographic research in sociology and anthropology. In this kind of observation, a researcher may interact with participants and become part of their community. Margaret Mead, a famous anthropologist, spent extended periods of time living in, and interacting with, communities that she studied. Conversely, in ***unobtrusive observation***, you do not interact with participants but rather simply record their behavior. Although in most circumstances people must volunteer to be participants in research, in some cases it is acceptable to not let participants know you are observing them. In places that people perceive as public, such as a campus food court or a shopping mall, people do not expect privacy, and so it is generally acceptable to observe without participant consent. In places that people perceive as private, which can include a church, home, classroom, or even an intimate conversation at a restaurant, ***participant consent should be sought***.

The second issue about participant consent in terms of unobtrusive observation is whether or not getting consent is feasible for the study. If you are observing people in a busy airport, bus station, or campus food court, getting participant consent may be next to impossible. In Derek's study of student eating habits on campus, he went to the campus food courts during meal times and observed students purchasing food. Obtaining participant consent for his observations would have been next to impossible because hundreds of students were coming through the food court during meal times. Since Derek's research was in a place that participants would perceive as public, it was not practical to get their consent, and since his data was anonymous, he did not violate their privacy.

Eliminating Bias in Your Observation Notes

The ethical concern of being unbiased is important in recording your observations. You need to be aware of the difference between an observation (recording exactly what you see) and an interpretation (making
assumptions and judgments about what you see). When you observe, you should focus first on only the events that are directly observable. Consider the following two example entries in an observation log:

1. The student sitting in the dining hall enjoys his greasy, oilsoaked pizza. He is clearly oblivious of the calorie content and damage it may do to his body.
2. The student sits in the dining hall. As he eats his piece of pizza, which drips oil, he says to a friend, "This pizza is good."

The first entry is biased and demonstrates judgment about the event. First, the observer makes assumptions about the internal state of the student when she writes "enjoys" and "clearly oblivious to the calorie
content." From an observer's standpoint, there is no way of ascertaining what the student may or may not know about pizza's nutritional value nor how much the student enjoys the pizza. The second entry
provides only the details and facts that are observable.

To avoid bias in your observations, you can use something called a "double-entry notebook." This is a type of observation log that encourages you to separate your observations (the facts) from your feelings and judgments about the facts. Observations are only one strategy in collecting primary research. You may also want to ask people directly about their behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes—and for this you will need to use surveys or interviews.

Observations	Thoughts
The student sits in the dining hall. As he eats his piece of pizza, which drips oil, he says to a friend, "This pizza is good."	It seems like the student really enjoys the high-calorie content pizza.
I observed cash register #1 for 15 minutes. During that time 22 students paid for meals. Of these 22 students, 15 grabbed a candy bar or granola bar. 3 of the 22 students had a piece of fruit on their plate.	Fruit is less accessible than candy bars (it is further back in the dining court). Is this why more students are reaching for candy bars?

Figure 3: Two sample entries from a double-entry notebook.

Surveys and Interviews: Question Creation

Sometimes it is very difficult for a researcher to gain all of the necessary information through observations alone. Along with his observations of the dining halls, Derek wanted to know what students ate in a typical day, and so he used a survey to have them keep track of their eating habits. Likewise, Jared wanted to learn about writing and communication in engineering and decided to draw upon expert knowledge by asking experienced individuals within the field.

Interviews and surveys are two ways that you can gather information about people's beliefs or behaviors. With these methods, the information you collect is not first-hand (like an observation) but rather "self-reported" data, or data collected in an indirect manner. William Shadish, Thomas Cook, and Donald Campbell argued that people are inherently biased about how they see the world and may report their own actions in a more favorable way than they may actually behave. Despite the issues in self-reported data, surveys and interviews are an excellent way to gather data for your primary research project.

Survey or Interview?

How do you choose between conducting a survey or an interview? It depends on what kind of information you are looking for. You should use surveys if you want to learn about a general trend in people's opinions, experiences, and behavior. Surveys are particularly useful to find small amounts of information from a wider selection of people in the hopes of making a general claim. Interviews are best used when you want to learn detailed information from a few specific people. Interviews are also particularly useful if you want to interview experts about their opinions, as Jared did. In sum, use interviews to gain details from a few people, and surveys to learn general patterns from many people.

Writing Good Questions

One of the greatest challenges in conducting surveys and interviews is writing good questions. As a researcher, you are always trying to eliminate bias, and the questions you ask need to be unbiased and clear. Here are some suggestions on writing good questions:

Ask about One Thing at a Time

A poorly written question can contain multiple questions, which can confuse participants or lead them to answer only part of the question you are asking. This is called a "double-barreled question" in journalism. The following questions are taken from Jared's research:

> Poor question: What kinds of problems are being faced in the field today and where do you see the search for solutions to these problems going?
>
> Revised question #1 : What kinds of problems are being faced in the field today?
>
> Revised question #2: Where do you see the search for solutions to these problems going?

Avoid Leading Questions

A leading question is one where you prompt the participant to respond in a particular way, which can create bias in the answers given:

> Leading question: The economy is clearly in a crisis, wouldn't you agree?
>
> Revised question: Do you believe the economy is currently in a crisis? Why or why not?

Understand When to Use Open and Closed Questions

Closed questions, or questions that have yes/no or other limited responses, should be used in surveys. However, avoid these kinds of questions in interviews because they discourage the interviewee from going into depth. The question sample above, "Do you believe the economy currently is in a crisis?" could be answered with a simple yes or no, which could keep a participant from talking more about the issue. The "why or why not?" portion of the question asks the participant to elaborate. On a survey, the question "Do you believe the economy currently is in a crisis?" is a useful question because you can easily count the number of yes and no answers and make a general claim about participant responses.

Write Clear Questions

When you write questions, make sure they are clear, concise, and to the point. Questions that are too long, use unfamiliar vocabulary, or are unclear may confuse participants and you will not get quality responses.

Now that question creation has been addressed, we will next exam- ine specific considerations for interviews and surveys.

Interviews

Interviews, or question and answer sessions with one or more people, are an excellent way to learn in-depth information from a person for your primary research project. This section presents information on how to conduct a successful interview, including choosing the right person, ways of interviewing, recording your interview, interview locations, and transcribing your interview.

Choosing the Right Person

One of the keys to a successful interview is choosing the right person to interview. Think about whom you would like to interview and whom you might know. Do not be afraid to ask people you do not know for interviews. When asking, simply tell them what the interview will be about, what the interview is for, and how much time it will take. Jared used his Purdue University connection to locate both of the individuals that he ended up interviewing—an advanced Purdue student and a Purdue alum working in an Engineering firm.

Face-to-Face and Virtual Interviews

When interviewing, you have a choice of conducting a traditional, face-to-face interview or an interview using technology over the Internet. Face-to-face interviews have the strength that you can ask follow-up questions and use non-verbal communication to your advantage. Individuals are able to say much more in a face-to-face interview than in an email, so you will get more information from a face-to-face interview. However, the Internet provides a host of new possibilities when it comes to interviewing people at a distance. You may choose to do an email interview, where you send questions and ask the person to respond. You may also choose to use a video or audio conferencing program to talk with the person virtually. If you are choosing any Internet-based option, make sure you have a way of recording the interview. You may also use a chat or instant messaging program to interview your participant —the benefit of this is that you can ask follow-up questions during the interview and the interview is already transcribed for you. Because one of his interviewees lived several hours away, Jared chose to interview the Purdue student face- to-face and the Purdue alum via email.

Finding a Suitable Location

If you are conducting an in-person interview, it is essential that you ***find a quiet place for your interview***. Many universities have quiet study rooms that can be reserved (often found in the university library). Do not try to interview someone in a coffee shop, dining hall, or other loud area, as it is difficult to focus and get a clear recording.

Recording Interviews

One way of eliminating bias in your research is to record your interviews rather than rely on your memory. ***Recording interviews*** allows you to directly quote the individual and re-read the interview when you are writing. It is recommended that you have two recording devices for the interview in case one recording device fails. Most computers, MP3 players, and even cell phones come with recording equipment built in. Many universities also offer equipment that students can check out and use, including computers and recorders. Before you record any interview, be sure that you have permission from your participant.

Transcribing Your Interview

Once your interview is over, you will need to ***transcribe your interview*** to prepare it for analysis. The term transcribing means creating a writ- ten record that is exactly what was said—i.e. typing up your interviews. If you have conducted an email or chat interview, you already have a transcription and can move on to your analysis stage.

Surveys

Other than the fact that they both involve asking people questions, interviews and surveys are quite different data collection methods. Creating a survey may seem easy at first, but developing a quality survey can be quite challenging. ***When conducting a survey, you need to focus on the following areas: survey creation, survey testing, survey sampling, and distributing your survey.***

Survey Creation: Length and Types of Questions

One of the ***keys to creating a successful survey is to keep your survey short and focused***. Participants are unlikely to fill out a survey that is lengthy, and you'll have a more difficult time during your analysis if your survey contains too many questions. In most cases, you want your survey to be something that can be filled out within a few minutes. The target length of the survey also

depends on how you will distribute the survey. If you are giving your survey to other students in your dorm or classes, they will have more time to complete the survey. Therefore, five to ten minutes to complete the survey is reasonable. If you are asking students as they are walking to class to fill out your survey, keep it limited to several questions that can be answered in thirty seconds or less. Derek's survey took about ten minutes and asked students to describe what they ate for a day, along with some demographic information like class level and gender.

Use closed questions to your advantage when creating your survey. A closed question is any set of questions that gives a limited amount of choices (yes/no, a 1–5 scale, choose the statement that best describes you). When creating closed questions, be sure that you are accounting for all reasonable answers in your question creation. For example, asking someone "Do you believe you eat healthy?" and providing them only "yes" and "no" options means that a "neutral" or "undecided" option does not exist, even though the survey respondent may not feel strongly either way. Therefore, on closed questions you may find it helpful to include an "other" category where participants can fill in an answer. It is also a good idea to have a few open-ended questions where participants can elaborate on certain points or earlier responses. How- ever, open-ended questions take much longer to fill out than closed questions.

Survey Creation: Testing Your Survey

To make sure your survey is an appropriate length and that your questions are clear, you can "pilot test" your survey. Prior to administering your survey on a larger scale, ask several classmates or friends to fill it out and give you feedback on the survey. Keep track of how long the survey takes to complete. Ask them if the questions are clear and make sense. Look at their answers to see if the answers match what you wanted to learn. You can revise your survey questions and the length of your survey as necessary.

Sampling and Access to Survey Populations

"***Sampling***" is a term used within survey research to describe the subset of people that are included in your study. Derek's first research question was: "Are students' eating habits at Purdue University healthy or unhealthy?" Because it was impossible for Derek to survey all 38,000 students on Purdue's campus, he had to choose a representative sample of students. Derek chose to survey students who lived in the dorms because of the wide variety of student class levels and majors in the dorms and his easy access to this group. By making this choice, how- ever, he did not account for commuter students, graduate students, or those who live off campus. As Derek's case demonstrates, it is very challenging to get a truly representative sample.

Part of the reason that sampling is a challenge is that you may find difficulty in finding enough people to take your survey. In thinking about how get people to take your survey, consider both your everyday surroundings and also technological solutions. Derek had access to many students in the dorms, but he also considered surveying students in his classes in order to reach as many people as possible. Another possibility is to conduct an online survey. Online surveys greatly increase your access to different kinds of people from across the globe, but may decrease your chances of having a high survey response rate. An email or private message survey request is more likely to be ignored due to the impersonal quality and high volume of emails most people receive.

Analyzing and Writing About Primary Research

Once you collect primary research data, you will need to analyze what you have found so that you can write about it. The purpose of analyzing your data is to look at what you collected (survey responses,
interview answers to questions, observations) and to create a cohesive, systematic interpretation to help answer your research question or examine the validity of your hypothesis.

When you are analyzing and presenting your findings, remember to work to eliminate bias by being truthful and as accurate as possible about what you found, even if it differs from what you expected to find. You should see your data as sources of information, just like sources you find in the library, and you should work to represent them accurately.

The following are suggestions for analyzing different types of data.

Observations

If you've counted anything you were observing, you can simply add up what you counted and report the results. If you've collected descriptions using a double-entry notebook, you might work to write
thick descriptions of what you observed into your writing. This could include descriptions of the scene, behaviors you observed,

and your overall conclusions about events. Be sure that your readers are clear on
what were your actual observations versus your thoughts or interpretations of those observations.

Interviews

If you've interviewed one or two people, then you can use your summary, paraphrasing, and quotation skills to help you accurately describe what was said in the interview. Just like in secondary research when working with sources, you should introduce your interviewees and choose clear and relevant quotes from the interviews to use in your writing. An easy way to find the important information in an interview
is to print out your transcription and take a highlighter and mark the important parts that you might use in your paper. If you have conducted a large number of interviews, it will be helpful for you to create
a spreadsheet of responses to each question and compare the responses, choosing representative answers for each area you want to describe.

Surveys

Surveys can contain ***quantitative (numerical)*** and ***qualitative (written answers/descriptions)*** data. Quantitative data can be analyzed using a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel to calculate the mean (average) answer or to calculate the percentage of people who responded in a certain way. You can display this information in a chart or a graph and also describe it in writing in your paper. If you have qualitative
responses, you might choose to group them into categories and/or you may choose to quote several representative responses.

Writing about Primary Research

In formal research writing in a variety of fields, it is common for research to be presented in the following format: introduction/background; methods; results; discussions; conclusion. Not all first year writing classes will require such an organizational structure, although it is likely that you will be required to present many of these elements in your paper. Because of this, the next section examines each of these
in depth.

Introduction (Review of Literature)

The purpose of an introduction and review of literature in a research paper is to provide readers with information that helps them understand the context, purpose, and relevancy of your research. The introduction is where you provide most of your background (library) research that you did earlier in the process. You can include articles, statistics, research studies, and quotes that are pertinent to the issues
at hand. A second purpose in an introduction is to establish your own credibility (ethos) as a writer by showing that you have researched your topic thoroughly. This kind of background discussion is required in
nearly every field of inquiry when presenting research in oral or written formats.

Derek provided information from the Food and Drug Administration on healthy eating and national statistics about eating habits as part of his background information. He also made the case for healthy
eating on campus to show relevancy:

> Currently Americans are more overweight than ever. This is coming at a huge cost to the economy and government. If current trends in increasing rates of overweight and obesity continue it is likely that this generation will be the first one to live shorter lives than their parents did. Looking at the habits
> of university students is a good way to see how a new generation behaves when they are living out on their own for the first time.

Describing What You Did (Methods)

When writing, you need to provide enough information to your readers about your primary research process for them to understand what you collected and how you collected it. In formal research papers, this
is often called a methods section. Providing information on your study methods also adds to your credibility as a writer. For surveys, your methods would include describing who you surveyed, how many surveys you collected, decisions you made about your survey sample, and relevant demographic information about your participants (age, class level, major). For interviews,

introduce whom you interviewed and any other relevant information about interviewees such as their career or expertise area. For observations, list the locations and times you observed and how you recorded your observations (i.e. double-entry notebook). ***For all data types, you should describe how you analyzed your data***.

The following is a sample from Jared about his participants:

> In order to gain a better understanding of the discourse community in environmental and resource engineering, I interviewed Anne Dare, a senior in environmental and natural resource engineering, and Alyson Keaton an alumnus of Purdue University. Alyson is a current employee of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), which is a division of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Here is a sample from Derek's methods section:

> I conducted a survey so that I could find out what students at Purdue actually eat on a typical day. I handed out surveys asking students to record what they ate for a day . . . I received 29 back and averaged the results based on average number of servings from each food group on the old food guide pyramid. The group included students from the freshman to the graduate level and had 8 women and 21 men respond.

Describing Your Study Findings (Results)

In a formal research paper, the results section is where you describe what you found. The results section can include charts, graphs, lists, direct quotes, and overviews of findings. Readers find it helpful if you
are able to provide the information in different formats. For example, if you have any kind of numbers or percentages, you can talk about them in your written description and then present a graph or chart
showing them visually. You should provide specific details as supporting evidence to back up your findings. These details can be in the form of direct quotations, numbers, or observations.

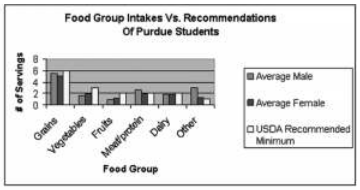


Fig. 4: Graphic from Derek's results section.

Jared describes some of his interview results:

Alyson also mentioned the need for phone conversation. She stated, "The phone is a large part of my job. I am communicating with other NRCS offices daily to find out the status of our jobs." She needs to be in constant contact in order to insure that everything is running smoothly. This is common with those overseeing projects. In these cases, the wait for a response to an email or a memo can be too long to be effective.

Interpreting What You Learned (Discussion)

In formal research papers, the discussion section presents your own interpretation of your results. This may include what you think the results mean or how they are useful to your larger argument. If you are making a proposal for change or a call to action, this is where you make it. For example, in Derek's project about healthy eating on campus, Derek used his primary research on students' unhealthy eating and observations of the food courts to argue that the campus food courts needed serious changes. Derek writes, "Make healthy food options the most accessible in every dining hall while making unhealthy foods the least. Put nutrition facts for everything that is served in the dining halls near the food so that students can make more informed decisions on what to eat."

Jared used the individuals he interviewed as informants that helped him learn more about writing in agricultural and biological engineering. He integrated the interviews he conducted with secondary research
to form a complete picture of writing and communication in agricultural and biological engineering.

He concludes:

Writing takes so many forms, and it is important to know about all these forms in one way or another. The more forms of writing you can achieve, the more flexible you can be. This ability to be flexible can make all the difference in writing when you are dealing with a field as complex as engineering.

Primary Research and Works Cited or References Pages

The last part of presenting your primary research project is a works cited or references page. In general, since you are working with data you collected yourself, there is no source to cite an external source.
Your methods section should describe in detail to the readers how and where the data presented was obtained. However, if you are working with interviews, you can cite these as “personal communication.” The MLA and APA handbooks both provide clear listings of how to cite personal communication in a works cited/references page.

Conclusion

This essay has presented an overview to ***three commonly used methods of primary research in first year writing courses: observations, interviews, and surveys.*** By using these methods, you can learn more
about the world around you and craft meaningful written discussions of your findings.

Examples

secondary research

primary research

scientific method

observations

interviews

surveys

voluntary participation

confidentiality and anonymity

researcher bias

deductive reasoning

research question or hypothesis

participant observation

unobtrusive observation

participant consent should be sought

find a quiet place for your interview

recording interviews

transcribe your interview

when conducting a survey, you need to focus on the following areas: survey creation, survey testing, survey sampling, and distributing your survey

keys to creating a successful survey is to keep your survey short and focused

sampling

quantitative (numerical)

qualitative (written answers/descriptions)

for all data types, you should describe how you analyzed your data

three commonly used methods of primary research in first year writing courses: observations, interviews, and surveys

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17: Reviewing and Analyzing Your Sources

17.1 Critical Reading
17.2 Evaluating Your Sources
17.3 Developing an Annotated Bibliography



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17.1: Critical Reading

Article links:

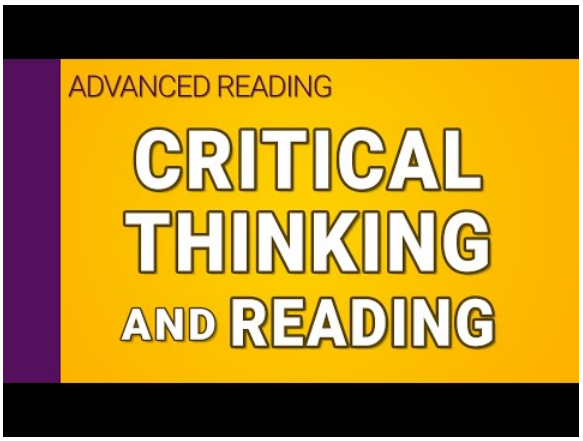
“The Critique Exercise” by Steven D. Krause

“Reading Games: Strategies for Reading Scholarly Source” by Karen Rosenberg

“Double-Entry Response Format” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter Preview

- Explain critiques and their purpose.
- Discuss the social aspect of academic reading.
- Identify the main argument of a text.
- Recognize implications that you should be aware of if you are not the primary audience for a text.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=153

The Critique Exercise

by Steven D. Krause

What’s a Critique and Why Does it Matter?

Critiques evaluate and analyze a wide variety of things (texts, images, performances, etc.) based on reasons or criteria. Sometimes, people equate the notion of “critique” to “criticism,” which usually suggests a negative interpretation. These terms are easy to confuse, but I want to be clear that critique and criticize don’t mean the same thing. A negative critique might be said to be “criticism” in the way we often understand the term “to criticize,” but critiques can be positive too.

We’re all familiar with one of the most basic forms of critique: reviews (film reviews, music reviews, art reviews, book reviews, etc.). Critiques in the form of reviews tend to have a fairly simple and particular point: whether or not something is “good” or “bad.”

Academic critiques are similar to the reviews we see in popular sources in that critique writers are trying to make a particular point about whatever it is that they are critiquing. But there are some differences between the sorts of critiques we read in academic sources versus the ones we read in popular sources.

- **The subjects of academic critiques tend to be other academic writings and they frequently appear in scholarly journals.**
- **Academic critiques frequently go further in making an argument beyond a simple assessment of the quality of a particular book, film, performance, or work of art.**

- **Academic critique writers will often compare and discuss several works that are similar to each other to make some larger point. In other words, instead of simply commenting on whether something was good or bad, academic critiques tend to explore issues and ideas in ways that are more complicated than merely "good" or "bad."**

The main focus of this chapter is the value of writing critiques as a part of the research writing process. Critiquing writing is important because in order to write a good critique you need to critically read: that is, you need to closely read and understand whatever it is you are critiquing, you need to apply appropriate criteria in order evaluate it, you need to summarize it, and to ultimately make some sort of point about the text you are critiquing.

These skills– critically and closely reading, summarizing, creating and applying criteria, and then making an evaluation– are key to ***The Process of Research Writing***, and they should help you as you work through the process of research writing.

In this chapter, I've provided a "step-by-step" process for making a critique. I would encourage you to quickly read or skim through this chapter first, and then go back and work through the steps and exercises describe.

Selecting the right text to critique

The first step in writing a critique is selecting a text to critique. For the purposes of this writing exercise, you should check with your teacher for guidelines on what text to pick.

Short and simple newspaper articles, while useful as part of the research process, can be difficult to critique since they don't have the sort of detail that easily allows for a critical reading. On the other hand, critiquing an entire book is probably a more ambitious task than you are likely to have time or energy for with this exercise. Instead, consider critiquing one of the more fully developed texts you've come across in your research: an in-depth examination from a news magazine, a chapter from a scholarly book, a report on a research study or experiment, or an analysis published in an academic journal. These more complex essays usually present more opportunities for issues to critique.

Depending on your teacher's assignment, the "text" you critique might include something that isn't in writing: a movie, a music CD, a multimedia presentation, a computer game, a painting, etc. As is the case with more traditional writings, you want to select a text that has enough substance to it so that it stands up to a critical reading.

Starting with a "Close Reading"

The next and most important step in the process of critique writing is reading very carefully whatever it is you are going to critique. The type of "close reading" that is essential to the process of writing a good critique should not be confused with the sort of casual reading we do when reading the newspaper in the morning over coffee or surfing the Internet (?) or browsing through a magazine.

Close reading is a type of reading where the reader critically engages with the text in order to understand it, question it, evaluate it, and form an opinion about it. This is a method of reading where the reader has to slow down and think along each step of the way. The reader furthers her understanding of the text by writing as she reads and by stopping to look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary. Ultimately, once done with a close reading of a text, the reader has begun to form an opinion about the text and is ready to make an evaluation of it.

Close reading is not difficult to do, but it is an academic skill that can be challenging, time-consuming, and even exhausting to those who aren't used to doing it. Learning to closely read is challenging at first, similar in many ways to the experience many of us have when we first start an exercise program. If you have not previously trained as a runner and are not in good physical condition from some other sort of athletic training, you would find it challenging if not impossible to run five miles. But if you start small, keep training, and learn and practice good habits, chances are that what once was impossible (running five miles) is now within your grasp.

The same is true with close reading: it can be a difficult and frustrating process, but with practice and patience, anyone can become a good close reader.

Here are some basic steps to help you in your close reading:

- **Write while you read.** This is the most essential part of closely reading.

Writing and reading are closely related activities, and when you write about your reading as you are reading (even in what you are reading), you inevitably understand what you are reading better than you do if you read without writing.

Close reading includes taking notes: writing down the most important points of the text, paraphrasing, summarizing, and so forth. Note taking is also an important part of the process of creating and maintaining an annotated bibliography and as part of the overall process of writing research.

But mostly, what I mean when I suggest you write as you read is much messier and less systematic than note taking. I'm thinking of activities where you write in what you are reading by writing in the margins, underlining key sentences and phrases, starring and circling text, and so forth.

What sort of things should you underline as you read and what sorts of things should you write "in" your reading? Generally speaking, you should underline key sentences and phrases and write comments in the margins that clarify the passage for you, that raise questions, that remind you that a passage contains a particularly important quote or idea, or that points out where you might agree or disagree with the text.

- **Explain the main points of the text in your own words.** When you put something in your own words, what you are essentially doing is "translating" the text you are critiquing into your own language and your own way of understanding something. This is an especially useful technique when you are closely reading complex and long texts—books or more complicated academic articles that you are having a hard time understanding. You might want to put the main points in your own words on a separate sheet of paper. Using a separate sheet of paper makes it easier to note questions or other points about the text as you read.

As well as helping you better understand a complex text, explaining the main points in your own words can create a sort of outline of the text you are critiquing, which is another way of understanding the text. I'm not suggesting you create what I would call a "formal" outline, complete with Roman numerals and appropriate letters underneath each heading. But if you put down on a separate sheet of paper a few sentences for the main points of the text, you will automatically have an outline of sorts, with each sentence describing the subject of a particular part of the reading.

- **Use a dictionary.** Chances are, you have had teachers tell you to do this all throughout your schooling. And if you are anything like me, you resisted using a dictionary while you read something for years because it slowed you down, because you couldn't take a dictionary wherever you wanted to go, and because it just seemed like tedious busy work. But trust me: using a dictionary (even a small, paperback one) can be really useful in close reading because it can help you understand key words and phrases, especially words you can't get from context.

Sometimes, I look up complex or abstract words (ideology, justice, democracy, etc.) in the dictionary, even if I know what they mean, because dictionary definitions will often expand or even change the way that I understand the term. If it's a particularly important or puzzling word, I will even go so far as to look it up in different dictionaries. The slight differences in definitions can often help create a more full understanding of a term.

- **Form an opinion as you read.** The two main goals of a close reading are to fully understand what the text means and to form an opinion about whatever it is you are closely reading. If you follow the steps for close reading I outline here, you will inevitably end up with a more informed opinion about the text that can be a starting point toward writing critically about the text.

Certainly you don't need to have a completely and neatly formed and complete opinion after you finish closely reading. But if you find yourself completing a close reading but still having no opinion about what it is you are closely reading, or if you have a vague and somewhat weak opinion about what it is you are closely reading ("it's okay," "there were some good points," "I liked his main idea," and so forth), then you probably have not read closely enough.

- **Keep questioning the text.** As you go along in your close reading, keep asking questions about the text: what is the point? do I agree or disagree with the text? why? what parts of the text are you confused about? how can you find answers to the questions you have? and how do you see it fitting into your research project? Keep asking these kinds of questions as you read and you will soon understand the text you are critiquing a lot better.If you do a thorough close reading of your text (taking notes, writing things in the margins, highlighting key points, looking up things in the dictionary, etc.), then you will start to develop opinions about the text, and you will obviously have reasons for these opinions. In the most basic sense, the reasons you have for forming your opinion is the criteria you are using to form your evaluation.***Criteria*** are systems or standards for evaluation, rules or tests we use to make a judgment. We use criteria all the time. Take the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA)

rating system, for example: films are assigned ratings of G, PG, PG-13, etc., by an MPAA board based on specific criteria (violence, language, adult themes, sexual content, etc.).In many college courses, students are asked to evaluate texts based on more or less predetermined criteria. For an example, an essay test question that asks you to critique a novel based on its depiction of women and children within the given historical contexts more or less has created criteria for you. If you decided instead to evaluate this novel based on some other criteria, your teacher might be interested in your reading, but he might also be disappointed in your response, especially given that it was a question on a test.More often than not though (and probably for your purposes here), writers choose their own criteria to the extent that they are appropriate for the text being critiqued. Suggesting that an article in an academic source is “bad” because it goes into too much detail, is written for a specialized audience, and doesn’t include any glossy pictures would be unfair, because, these criteria are not usually part of the goals or purposes of academic articles. The same could be true of an article you found in a popular magazine. Suggesting it was “bad” because it seemed directed at too general of an audience and it simplified certain details about the topic would be unfair as well.So, if there are no definite standard criteria to consider in a critique, how do you come up with criteria? Well, most of the questions suggested in chapter one on testing the credibility and reliability of your evidence might be used as criteria for your critique:

- Who wrote the text and what are their qualifications?
- What do you think motivated the writer to write the text?
- Is the information in the text accurate and specific?
- Has the author interpreted the material fairly?
- Has the author defined terms clearly?
- Does the writer seem to support her point with good research and reasoning?
- Where was the text published?
- When was it published?

Summarizing Your Research

Critiques usually include one other important component: a summary of the text being critiqued. As I discussed in chapters two and six, the most obvious reason to summarize the text you are critiquing is your readers are probably not familiar with it. After all, one of the main reasons why potential readers (your classmates, your teacher, and other readers interested in your topic) might read your critique is to find out what it is you (the writer) think about the text being critiqued so the reader can decide whether or not to read it themselves.

When writing your summary, keep in mind:

- Summaries don’t contain your opinion or feelings about whatever it is you are summarizing. Explain the key points and ideas of whatever it is you are summarizing, but save your opinions and reactions to your subject for the other parts of your critique.
- Generally, summaries don’t include quotes from the original source. The goal of the summary is to explain the key points in your own words. However, you will want to use the quotes from the original in your critique to support your own opinion of whatever it is you are critiquing.
- Summaries are short. Like this item.

Figuring out how much summary to provide in a critique can be tricky because it depends on factors like the text you are critiquing, your purposes in your critique, how much you can expect your readers to know about whatever it is you are summarizing, and so forth.

But keep in mind that the goal of almost any summary (in a critique or in other types of writing) is to get your reader familiar enough with whatever it is you are talking about so that you can go on to make your point.

Assignment: Writing a Critique Essay

As you work on the writing assignment for this chapter, put to work your new knowledge of the process of critiquing.

Critique a selection of writing you have found in your research as part of the ongoing research project. The main goal of this critique is to provide a detailed review of the particular selection of writing that will help your audience learn about your

position on the writing selection and also to help your audience decide for themselves whether or not the writing selection is something they might be interested in reading.

Questions to consider as you write your first draft:

- If you are asked to choose your own text to critique, did you spend some time carefully considering possibilities? Why did you select the text that you did? Why did you rule out others?
- As part of your close reading, did you write both about and "in" the text that you are critiquing? What sort of marginal notes did you make? What are some of the key phrases or ideas that seemed important to you as you read that you underlined or noted with post-it notes in the margins? What kinds of questions about your reading did you write down as you read?
- How did you explain the main points of the text you closely read? What do you see as the main points of the text?
- Did you use a dictionary to look up words that you didn't understand and couldn't understand in context? Did you look up any complex or abstract terms? Did the dictionary definition of those terms help further your understanding of the word and the context where they occurred? Did you look up any terms that you saw as particularly important in different dictionaries? Did you learn anything from the different definitions?
- When you finished your close reading, what was your opinion of the text you closely read? Beyond a simple "good" or "bad" take on the reading, what are some of the reasons for your initial opinion about your reading?
- What criteria seem most appropriate for the text you are critiquing? Why? What would be an example of a criteria that would probably be inappropriate for this text? Did you consider some of the criteria that are similar to the tests for evidence I suggest in chapter one?
- Have you explained for the reader somewhere in the first part of the essay what your main point is? In other words, do you introduce the criteria you will be using to critique your text early on in your essay?
- Have you noted key quotes and passages that would serve as evidence in order to support your criteria? What passages are you considering quoting instead of paraphrasing? Are there other reasons you are turning to as support for your criteria?
- Have you written a summary of your text? How familiar do you think your audience is with whatever it is you are critiquing? How has that effected your summary?

Review and Revision

Considering the recommendations of classmates in a ***peer review group*** and of other readers is especially important for this project. After all, if the goal of a critique essay is to give readers an idea about what it is you think of a particular reading, their direct feedback can help ensure that you are actually accomplishing these goals.

Here are some questions you and your classmates want to consider as you revise your critique essays (of course, you and your teachers might have other ideas and questions to ask in review too!):

- Do your readers understand (generally speaking) the text that you are critiquing? Of course, how much your readers understand the essay you are critiquing will depend on how familiar they are with it, and as the writer of the critique, you will probably know and understand the text better than your readers. But do they understand enough about the text to make heads or tails of the critique?
- Is there too much summary and not enough critique? That is, do the comments you are receiving from your readers suggest that they do fully understand the article you are critiquing, but they are not clear on the point you are trying to make with your critique? Have you considered where you are including summary information in different parts of your essay?
- Do your readers understand the main point you are trying to make in your criteria? Have you provided some information and explanation about your criteria in the beginning part of your essay?
- Do your readers seem to agree with you that your criteria are appropriate for whatever it is you are critiquing? Do they have suggestions that might help clarify your criteria? Do your readers have suggestions about different or additional criteria?
- Are you quoting and paraphrasing the text you are critiquing effectively? Are there places where your readers have indicated they need more information from the critiqued text? Are there places where your readers think you might be relying too heavily on quotes or paraphrases from the critiqued text and wish they could read more about your opinion?
- As your readers understand the article you are critiquing and the points you are making about it, do you think you have created any interest in your readers in actually reading the article themselves?

A Student Example:

“A Critique of ‘Self-Report of ADHD Symptoms in University Students” by Ashley Nelson

The assignment for this student was similar to the one described earlier in this chapter, to write a brief critique essay about an important piece of research. Ashley’s topic was on the use (and misuse) of drugs to treat attention deficit disorders in adult-aged patients. Ashley’s essay begins with an introduction that explains how this exercise fits into her overall research project and a brief summary of the article she is critiquing. But most of her essay focuses on her critique of the article.

A Critique of “Self-Report of ADHD Symptoms in University Students: Cross-Gender and Cross-National Prevalence,” by George J. DuPaul, Elizabeth A. Schaughency, Lisa L. Weyandt, Gail Tripp, Jeff Kiesner, Kenji Ota, and Heidy Stanish

While researching my topic, I came across many article that were interesting and that I thought could be useful for me with my research topic. When I read “Self-Report of ADHD Symptoms in University Students: Cross-Gender and Cross-National Prevalence,” by George J. DuPaul et al, I knew it would be a good article to critique, too.

The article explains the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and describes an experiment with university students in the United States, New Zealand, and Italy. 1,209 students took two different self-reported surveys. The goal of the survey was to examine the percentage of students who have ADHD symptoms, if symptoms vary between gender and country, and also to find out if symptom patterns agree with the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The DSM creates the criteria to diagnose ADHD in young children. Most of the research on ADHD has been conducted with young children; therefore understanding the symptoms in college students has not been widely studied (370).

The results showed that gender was not a big factor in the United States. However, in Italy and New Zealand women had about a ten percent increase in the hyperactive-impulsive category. The results also proved that using the age adjusted diagnostic criteria, compared to the DSM, more college students reported having either one symptom or both.

I think this article is good for several reasons. DuPaul and his colleagues explain what ADHD is and why it is important for college students to be diagnosed with the right criteria. The authors are also clearly experts in their fields. I also liked this article because the authors provide very good details about the results of their study.

DuPaul et al explain that ADHD “is characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention and impulsivity, and motor activity” (370). ADHD begins usually in early childhood. If a child is not treated for the disease, the symptoms will still appear in adulthood. These factors lead to “university students being at a higher risk for academic impairment and underachievement relative to their counterparts without ADHD” (370). Despite the risks to college students, according to DuPaul et al, most of the research on ADHD has focused on children, which is one of the motivations for this study in the first place.

The authors of this article were clearly qualified to conduct this study, too. Most of the researchers are college professors in psychology departments around the country and around the world. Further, most of the researchers specialize in issues having to do with ADHD (370). I think the authors’ qualifications show that they are all motivated and dedicated to help people with this disease. This experience and dedication makes me believe that these writers conducted a credible study.

I also like this article because the authors do a good job of explaining their research and the results. They provide lots of information about the results throughout the article, and they also provide a number of useful tables, too. The authors believe that the DSM’s standards of criteria for what counts as ADHD are wrong for young adults because it was created for children. So the researchers constructed a 24 item survey called the Young Adult Rating Scale that was based on traditional ADHD symptoms and on symptoms that would appear in college-aged young people (372).

The researchers point out that there were a variety of limitations with their study. For example, the students who participated in the survey were only from five different universities. In addition, the students were not asked any personal questions that could have effected the outcome of the survey (378). However, DuPaul and his colleagues believe that this study helps to pave the way for future students which “would provide a better understanding of the age-related changes associated with ADHD symptoms and the relevance of these changes to diagnostic criteria for ADHD in university students and other adults” (378).

I think that “Self-Report of ADHD Symptoms in University Students” is an informative and interesting article, one I would certainly recommend to anyone interested in learning more about ADHD in young adults. DuPaul and his colleagues explained and interpreted the results of their survey very effectively.

Reading Games: Strategies for Reading Scholarly Source

by Karen Rosenberg

If at First You Fall Asleep . . .

During my first year in college, I feared many things: calculus, cafeteria food, the stained, sweet smelling mattress in the basement of my dorm. But I did not fear reading. I didn't really think about reading at all, that automatic making of meaning from symbols in books, newspapers, on cereal boxes. And, indeed, some of my coziest memories of that bewildering first year involved reading. I adopted an overstuffed red chair in the library that enveloped me like the lap of a department store Santa. I curled up many evenings during that first, brilliant autumn with my English homework: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*. I'd read a gorgeous passage, snuggle deeper into my chair, and glance out to the sunset and fall leaves outside of the library window. This felt deeply, unmistakably collegiate.

But English was a requirement—I planned to major in political science. I took an intro course my first semester and brought my readings to that same chair. I curled up, opened a book on the Chinese Revolution, started reading, and fell asleep. I woke up a little drooly, surprised at the harsh fluorescent light, the sudden pitch outside. Not to be deterred, I bit my lip and started over. I'd hold on for a paragraph or two, and then suddenly I'd be thinking about my classmate Joel's elbows, the casual way he'd put them on the desk when our professor lectured, sometimes resting his chin in his hands. He was a long limbed runner and smelled scrubbed—a mixture of laundry detergent and shampoo. He had black hair and startling blue eyes. Did I find him sexy?

Crap! How many paragraphs had my eyes glazed over while I was thinking about Joel's stupid elbows? By the end of that first semester, I abandoned ideas of majoring in political science. I vacillated between intense irritation with my assigned readings and a sneaking suspicion that perhaps the problem was me—I was too dumb to read academic texts. Whichever it was—a problem with the readings or with me—I carefully chose my classes so that I could read novels, poetry, and plays for credit. But even in my English classes, I discovered, I had to read dense scholarly articles. By my Junior year, I trained myself to spend days from dawn until dusk hunkered over a carrel in the library's basement armed with a dictionary and a rainbow of highlighters. Enjoying my reading seemed hopelessly naïve—an indulgence best reserved for beach blankets and bathtubs. A combination of obstinacy, butt-numbingly hard chairs, and caffeine helped me survive my scholarly reading assignments. But it wasn't fun.

Seven years later I entered graduate school. I was also working and living on my own, cooking for myself instead of eating off cafeteria trays. In short, I had a life. My days were not the blank canvas they had been when I was an undergraduate and could sequester myself in the dungeon of the library basement. And so, I finally learned how to read smarter, not harder. Perhaps the strangest part of my reading transformation was that I came to *like* reading those dense scholarly articles; I came to crave the process of sucking the marrow from the texts. If you can relate to this, if you also love wrestling with academic journal articles, take joy in arguing with authors in the margins of the page, I am not writing for you.

However, if your reading assignments confound you, if they send you into slumber, or you avoid them, or they seem to take you *way* too long, then pay attention. Based on my experience as a frustrated student and now as a teacher of reading strategies, I have some insights to share with you designed to make the reading process more productive, more interesting, and more enjoyable.

Joining the Conversation1

Even though it may seem like a solitary, isolated activity, ***when you read a scholarly work***, you are participating in a conversation. Academic writers do not make up their arguments off the top of their heads (or solely from creative inspiration). Rather, they look at how others have approached similar issues and problems. Your job—and one for which you'll get plenty of help from your professors and your peers—is to locate the writer and yourself in this larger conversation. ***Reading academic texts*** is a deeply social activity; talking with your professors and peers about texts can not only help you understand your readings better, but it can push your thinking and clarify your own stances on issues that really matter to you.

In your college courses, you may have come across the term "rhetorical reading."2 Rhetoric in this context refers to how texts work to persuade readers—a bit different from the common connotation of empty, misleading, or puffed up speech. ***Rhetorical reading*** refers to a set of practices designed to help us understand how texts work and to engage more deeply and fully in a conversation that extends beyond the boundaries of any particular reading. Rhetorical reading practices ask us to think deliberately about the role and relationship between the writer, reader, and text.

When thinking about the writer, we are particularly interested in clues about the writer's motivation and agenda. If we know something about what the writer cares about and is trying to accomplish, it can help orient us to the reading and understand some of the choices the writer makes in his or her work.

As readers, our role is quite active. We pay attention to our own motivation and agenda for each reading. On one level, our motivation may be as simple as wanting to do well in a class, and our agenda may involve wanting to understand as much as necessary in order to complete our assignments. In order to meet these goals, we need to go deeper, asking, "Why is my professor asking me to read this piece?" You may find clues in your course syllabus, comments your professor makes in class, or comments from your classmates. If you aren't sure why you are being asked to read something, ask! Most professors will be more than happy to discuss in general terms what "work" they want a reading to do—for example, to introduce you to a set of debates, to provide information on a specific topic, or to challenge conventional thinking on an issue.

Finally, there is the text—the thing that the writer wrote and that you are reading. In addition to figuring out *what* the text says, rhetorical reading strategies ask us to focus on *how* the text delivers its message. In this way of thinking about texts, there is not one right and perfect meaning for the diligent reader to uncover; rather, interpretations of the reading will differ depending on the questions and contexts readers bring to the text.

Strategies for Rhetorical Reading

Here are some ways to approach your reading that better equip you for the larger conversation. First, consider the **audience**. When the writer sat down to write your assigned reading, to whom was he or she implicitly talking? Textbooks, for the most part, have students like you in mind. They may be boring, but you've probably learned what to do with them: pay attention to the goals of the chapter, check out the summary at the end, ignore the text in the boxes because it's usually more of a "fun fact" than something that will be on the test, and so on. Magazines in the checkout line at the supermarket also have you in mind: you can't help but notice headlines about who is cheating or fat or anorexic or suicidal. Writers of scholarly sources, on the other hand, likely don't think much about you at all when they sit down to write. Often, academics write primarily for other academics. But just because it's people with PhDs writing for other people with PhDs doesn't mean that you should throw in the towel. There's a formula for these types of texts, just like there's a formula for all the *Cosmo* articles that beckon with titles that involve the words "hot," "sex tips," "your man," and "naughty" in different configurations.

It's just that the formula is a little more complicated.

The formula also changes depending on the flavor of study (physics, management, sociology, English, etc.) and the venue. However, if you determine that the audience for your reading is other academics, recognize that you are in foreign territory. You won't understand all of the chatter you hear on street corners, you may not be able to read the menus in the restaurants, but, with a little practice, you will be able to find and understand the major road signs, go in the right direction, and find your way.

How can you figure out the primary audience? First, look at the publication venue. (Here, to some extent, you can judge a book by its cover). If the reading comes from an academic journal, then chances are good that the primary audience is other academics. Clues that a journal is academic (as opposed to popular, like *Time* or *Newsweek*) include a citation format that refers to a volume number and an issue number, and often this information appears at the top or bottom of every page. Sometimes you can tell if a reading comes from an academic journal based on the title—e.g., do the *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* or *Qualitative Research in Psychology* sound like they are written for a popular audience? What if

you're still not sure? Ask your reference librarians, classmates, your instructor, or friends and family who have more experience with these types of readings than you do.

There are ***two implications that you should be aware of if you are not the primary audience for a text***. First, the author will assume prior knowledge that you likely don't have. You can expect sentences like "as Durkheim has so famously argued . . ." or "much ink has been spilled on the implications of the modernization hypothesis" where you have no idea who Durkheim is or what the modernization hypothesis says. That's OK. It might even be OK to not look these things up at all and still get what you need from the reading (but you won't know that yet). In the first reading of an article, it's smart to hold off on looking too many things up. Just be prepared to face a wall of references that don't mean a whole lot to you.

Second, if you're not the primary audience, don't be surprised if you find that the writing isn't appealing to you. Whereas a novelist or a magazine writer works hard to draw us in as readers, many academic authors don't use strategies to keep us hooked. In fact, many of these strategies (use of sensory language, suspense, etc.) would never get published in academic venues. By the same token, you'll use very different strategies to read these scholarly texts.

You may be wondering, if you're not the intended audience for the text, why do you have to read it in the first place? This is an excellent question, and one that you need to answer before you do your reading. As I mentioned earlier in the discussion of the role of the reader, you may need to do a little sleuthing to figure this out. In addition to the suggestions I provided earlier, look to your course notes and syllabus for answers. Often professors will tell you why they assign specific readings. Pay attention—they will likely offer insights on the context of the reading and the most important points. If after all of this, you still have no idea why you're supposed to read six articles on the history of Newtonian physics, then ask your professor. Use the answers to help you focus on the really important aspects of the texts and to gloss over the parts that are less relevant to your coursework. If you remain confused, continue to ask for clarification. Ask questions in class (your classmates will be grateful). Go to office hours. Most faculty love the opportunity to talk about readings that they have chosen with care.

Once you have an idea who the intended audience is for the article and why you are assigned to read it, don't sit down and read the article from start to finish, like a good mystery. Get a lay of the land before you go too deep. One way to do this is to study the architecture of the article. Here are some key components to look for:

The title. As obvious as it sounds, pay attention to the title because it can convey a lot of information that can help you figure out how to read the rest of the article more efficiently. Let's say that I know my reading will be about the Russian Revolution. Let's say I even know that it will be about the role of music in the Russian Revolution. Let's say the title is "'Like the beating of my heart': A discourse analysis of Muscovite musicians' letters during the Russian Revolution." This tells me not only the subject matter of the article (something about letters Russian musicians wrote during the Revolution) but it also tells me something about the ***methodology***, or the way that the author approaches the subject matter. I might not know exactly what discourse analysis is, but I can guess that you can do it to letters and that I should pay particular attention to it when the author mentions it in the article. On the other hand, if the title of the article were "Garbage cans and metal pipes: Bolshevik music and the politics of proletariat propaganda" I would know to look out for very different words and concepts. Note, also, that the convention within some academic disciplines to have a pretty long title separated by a colon usually follows a predictable pattern. The text to the left of the colon serves as a teaser, or as something to grab a reader's attention (remember that the author is likely not trying to grab your attention, so you may not find these teasers particularly effective—though it is probably packed with phrases that would entice someone who already studies the topic). The information to the right of the colon typically is a more straightforward explanation of what the article is about.

The abstract. Not all of your readings will come with abstracts, but when they do, pay close attention. An ***abstract*** is like an executive summary. Usually one paragraph at the beginning of an article, the abstract

serves to encapsulate the main points of the article. It's generally a pretty specialized summary that seeks to answer specific questions. These include: the main problem or question, the approach (how did the author(s) do the work they write about in the article?), the shiny new thing that this article does (more on this later, but to be published in an academic journal you often need to argue that you are doing something that has not been done before), and why people who are already invested in this field should care (in other words, you should be able to figure out why another academic should find the article important). The abstract often appears in database searches, and helps scholars decide if they want to seek out the full article.

That's a whole lot to accomplish in one paragraph.

As a result, authors often use specialized jargon to convey complex ideas in few words, make assumptions of prior knowledge, and don't worry much about general readability. Abstracts, thus, are generally dense, and it's not uncommon to read through an abstract and not have a clue about what you just read. This is a good place to re-read, highlight, underline, look up what you don't know. You still may not have a firm grasp on everything in the abstract, but treat the key terms in the abstract like parts of a map when you see them in the main text, leading you to treasure: understanding the main argument.

The introduction. The introduction serves some of the same functions as the abstract, but there is a lot more breathing room here. When I started reading academic texts, I'd breeze through the introduction to get to the "meat" of the text. This was exactly the wrong thing to do. I can't remember how many times I'd find myself in the middle of some dense reading, perhaps understanding the content of a particular paragraph, but completely unable to connect that paragraph with the overall structure of the article. I'd jump from the lily pad of one paragraph to the next, continually fearful that I'd slip off and lose myself in a sea of total confusion (and I often did slip).

If the author is doing her/his job well, the introduction will not only summarize the whole piece, present the main idea, and tell us why we should care, but it will also often offer a road map for the rest of the article. Sometimes, the introduction will be called "introduction," which makes things easy. Sometimes, it's not. Generally, treat the first section of an article as the introduction, regardless if it's explicitly called that or not.

There are times where your reading will have the introduction chopped off. This makes your work harder. The two most common instances of introduction-less readings are assigned excerpts of articles and lone book chapters. In the first case, you only have a portion of an article so you cannot take advantage of many of the context clues the writer set out for readers. You will need to rely more heavily on the context of your course in general and your assignment in particular to find your bearings here. If the reading is high stakes (e.g., if you have to write a paper or take an exam on it), you may want to ask your professor how you can get the whole article. In the second case, your professor assigns a chapter or two from the middle of an academic book. The chapter will hopefully contain some introductory material (and generally will include much more than the middle of a journal article), but you will likely be missing some context clues that the author included in the introduction to the whole book. If you have trouble finding your footing here, and it's important that you grasp the meaning and significance of the chapter, seek out the book itself and skim the introductory chapter to ground you in the larger questions that the author is addressing. Oddly, even though you'll be doing more reading, it may save you time because you can read your assigned chapter(s) more efficiently.

Roadmaps included in the introduction are often surprisingly straightforward. They often are as simple as "in the first section, we examine . . . in the second section we argue . . ." etc. Search for these maps. Underline them. Highlight them. Go back to them when you find your comprehension slipping.

Section headings. A ***section heading*** serves as a title for a particular part of an article. Read all of these to get a sense of the trajectory of the text before delving into the content in each section (with the exception of the introduction and the conclusion

which you should read in detail). Get a passing familiarity with the meanings of the words in the section headings—they are likely important to understanding the main argument of the text.

Conclusion. When writing papers, you've likely heard the cliché "in the introduction, write what you will say, then say it, then write what you just said." With this formula, it would seem logical to gloss over the conclusion, because, essentially, you've already read it already. However, this is not the case. Instead, pay close attention to the conclusion. It can help you make sure you understood the introduction. Sometimes a slight re-phrasing can help you understand the author's arguments in an important, new way. In addition, the conclusion is often where authors indicate the limitations of their work, the unanswered questions, the horizons left unexplored. And this is often the land of exam and essay questions . . . asking you to extend the author's analysis beyond its own shores.

At this point, you have pored over the title, the introduction, the section headings, and the conclusion. You haven't really read the body of the article yet. Your next step is to see if you can answer the question: what is the **main argument or idea** in this text?

Figuring out the main argument is *the* key to reading the text effectively and efficiently. Once you can identify the main argument, you can determine how much energy to spend on various parts of the reading. For example, if I am drowning in details about the temperance movement in the United States in the 19th Century, I need to know the main argument of the text to know if I need to slow down or if a swift skim will do. If the main argument is that women's organizing has taken different forms in different times, it will probably be enough for me to understand that women organized against the sale and consumption of alcohol. That might involve me looking up "temperance" and getting the gist of women's organizing. However, if the main argument were that scholars have misunderstood the role of upper class white women in temperance organizing in Boston from 1840–1865, then I would probably need to slow down and pay closer attention.

Unless the reading is billed as a review or a synthesis, the only way that an academic text can even get published is if it claims to argue something new or different. However, unlike laundry detergent or soft drinks, academic articles don't advertise what makes them new and different in block letters inside cartoon bubbles. In fact, finding the main argument can sometimes be tricky. Mostly, though, it's just a matter of knowing where to look. The abstract and the introduction are the best places to look first. With complicated texts, do this work with your classmates, visit your campus writing center (many of them help with reading assignments), or drag a friend into it.

Once you understand the different parts of the text and the writer's main argument, use this information to see how and where you can enter the conversation. In addition, keep your own agenda as a reader in mind as you do this work.

Putting It All Together

Collectively, these suggestions and guidelines will help you read and understand academic texts. They ask you to bring a great deal of awareness and preparation to your reading—for example, figuring out who the primary audience is for the text and, if you are not that audience, why your professor is asking you to read it anyway. Then, instead of passively reading the text from start to finish, my suggestions encourage you to pull the reading into its constituent parts—the abstract, the introduction, the section headings, conclusion, etc.—and read them unevenly and out of order to look for the holy grail of the main argument. Once you have the main argument you can make wise decisions about which parts of the text you need to pore over and which you can blithely skim. The final key to reading smarter, not harder is to make it social. When you have questions, ask. Start conversations with your professors about the reading. Ask your classmates to work with you to find the main arguments. Offer a hand to your peers who are drowning in dense details. Academics write to join scholarly conversations. Your professors assign you their texts so that you can join them too.

Notes:

1. In this discussion, I draw on Norgaard's excellent discussion of reading as joining a conversation (1–28). By letting you, the reader, know this in a footnote, I am not only citing my source (I'd be plagiarizing if I didn't mention this somewhere), but I'm also showing how I enter this conversation and give you a trail to follow if you want to learn more about the metaphor

of the conversation. Following standard academic convention, I put the full reference to Norgaard's text at the end of this article, in the references.

2. I draw on—and recommend—Rounsaville et al.'s discussion of rhetorical sensitivity, critical reading and rhetorical reading (1–35).



Double-Entry Response Format

provided by Writing Commons

Use a double-entry format to extend your thinking on a topic or to critique an author's presentation.

One very effective technique for avoiding note-bound prose is to respond to powerful quotations in what writing theorist Ann Berthoff calls the double-entry notebook form. The double-entry form shows the direct quotation on the left side of the page and your response to it on the right. There are two advantages to this technique: First, it helps you think about your subject; second, it helps you step away from your sources and discover your own approach and voice.

Double-Entry Example: Extending Thinking

They [i.e., creative ideas] may indeed occur at times of relaxation, or in fantasy, or at other times when we alternate play with work. But what is entirely clear is that they pertain to those areas in which the person consciously has worked laboriously and with dedication. Purpose in the human being is a much more complex phenomenon than what used to be called will power. Purpose involves all levels of experience. We cannot will to have insights. We cannot will creativity. But we can will to give ourselves to the encounter with intensity of dedication and commitment. The deeper aspects of awareness are activated to the extent that the person is committed to the encounter. (Rollo May, The Courage to Create, 46)	I'm absolutely certain that Rollo May is right: Total involvement in the "encounter" of the creative process is crucial for the emergence of the Eureka moment. Unfortunately, I think, too many people are too uncomfortable about the intrusion of the disruptive "right brain" or "unconscious." They dislike the creative process because of the fear of chaos and of failure. How, then, can we encourage people to "submerge" themselves, to lose themselves in an idea or feeling, long enough to experience the Gestalt, the felt sense, the joy, the bliss, the jouissance? If students could only experience this passion for the creative process, they would learn that writing is not a boring, mechanical process of filling in completed thoughts into pre-established modes of discourse.

Double-Entry Example: Critique a Passage

Below is an example of how a double-entry format can be used to critique a document. When reading the following excerpt on the greenhouse effect, what questions do you believe a skilled reader would raise?

The greenhouse effect is likely to change rainfall patterns, raise sea levels 4 to 7 feet by the year 2100, and increase the world's mean temperature 2.7 to 8 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2050 (Brown and Flavin 6, 16). Everyone will suffer as irrigation and drainage systems become useless and agriculture faces its first changes in a "global climatic regime" that has changed little since farming began (Brown annd Flavin 16). Some places will cease to be productive, such as the North American heartland and the Soviet Union's grain belt (Brown and Flavin 17). Although some areas, previously unproductive, will suddenly become good farmland, scientists say these climate shifts could occur so abruptly that agricultural losses would be hard to readily adjust for (Brown and Flavin 16).	On what evidence is this information based? According to the Works Cited section, this information appears in the following source: Brown, Lester R., and Christopher Flavin. "The Earth's Vital Signs." State of the World (1988): 5-7, 16-17. Critical readers would probably question the reliability of this source because the claims are so controversial and because they are not familiar with the journal. The credibility of this information could be significantly improved by "power quoting." Brown and Flavin may be correct in their dire predictions. However, chances are that critical readers such as your instructors would be more likely to believe these predictions if additional information about the authors and their research were provided or if the authors could "power quote"—that is, cite numerous other studies that reached similar conclusions.

Important Concepts

critiques

academic critiques

the process of research writing

close reading

criteria

peer review group

when you read a scholarly work

reading academic texts

rhetorical reading

two implications that you should be aware of if you are not the primary audience for a text

methodology

abstract

roadmaps

section heading

figuring out the main argument

Use a double-entry format to extend your thinking on a topic or to critique an author's presentation

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YouTube Video: Critical thinking and reading, Marc Franco, PhD, Snap Lauguage eLearning Platform, published April 8, 2016

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The Process of Research Writing, by Steven D. Krause, Eastern Michigan University Version 1.0,Spring 2007. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License

Reading Games: Strategies for Reading Scholarly Sources by Karen Rosenberg * This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution- Noncommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License

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Rounsaville, Angela, Rachel Goldberg, Keith Feldman, Cathryn Cabral, and Anis Bawarshi, eds. Situating Inquiry: An Introduction to Reading, Research, and Writing at the University of Washington. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008. Print.

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17.2: Evaluating Your Sources

Article links:

CRAAP Test: “CRAAP Test” provided by UTA Libraries

“Secondary Sources in Their Natural Habitats” provided by Lumen Learning

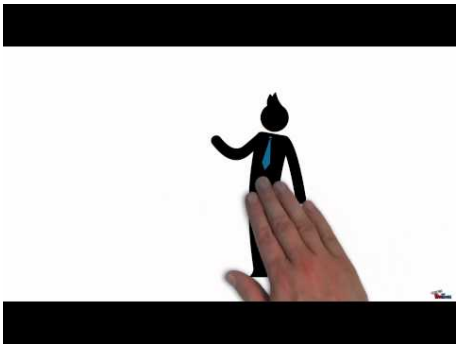
“Listening to Sources, Talking to Sources” provided by Lumen Learning

“Understanding Bias” provided by Lumen Learning

“Questions to Evaluate the Authority of the Researcher’s Methods” by Joe Moxley

Chapter Preview

- List the reasons educators are fond of research papers.
- Identify three categories that academic books fall into.
- Recall the uses for Google Scholar.
- Descibe the They Say/I Say process.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=157

CRAAP Test: CRAAP Test

provided by UTA Libraries



Evaluating Information – CRAAP Test
(Yes, that’s the name of this useful tool we will be using to determine if the source you found is *reliable* and *valid*.)

CURRENCY – timeliness of information

- When was the information published?
- Is the information current and up-to-date?
- Has it been revised or updated? When? Should it have been updated?
- *If online*: are the links functional?

RELEVANCE – uniqueness of information and importance to research needs

- Does the information relate to your topic?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e. too elementary or too advanced)?
- Can you find the same or better information in another source?

AUTHORITY – source of information

- Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?
- What are the author’s credentials? Any organizational affiliations?
- Is this author qualified to write on the topic?
- *If online:* examine the domain (.gov, .edu, or .com). Can you find the author’s contact information?

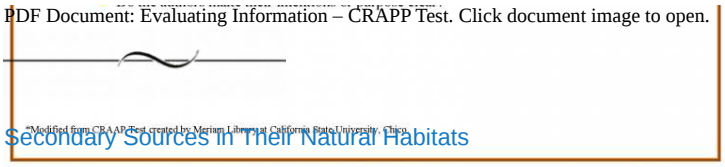
ACCURACY – reliability and correctness of information

- Is the information supported by evidence? Can you verify it from another source?
- Has the information been peer reviewed or refereed?
- Does the language seem biased? Is the tone free of emotion?
- Are there any typos, spelling, or grammatical errors?

PURPOSE – presence of bias, reason the information exists

- What is the purpose of the information: to inform, teach, sell, entertain, etc.?
- Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?
- Is the point-of-view objective and impartial?
- Do the authors make their intentions or purpose clear?

PDF Document: Evaluating Information – CRAPP Test. Click document image to open.



Secondary Sources in Their Natural Habitats

provided by Lumen Learning

Ah, The Research Paper

Such exhilaration! Such consternation! ***Educators are fond of research papers*** because they require you to find your own sources, confront conflicting evidence, and synthesize diverse information and ideas—all skills required in any professional leadership role. Research papers also allow students to pursue their own topic of interest; your professors have to assume that you are genuinely interested in at least some major part of the course.[1] The open-endedness of research papers sets you up to do your best work as a self-motivated scholar.

Research papers are, by far, the best kind of papers! If you have an original twist to an old idea and about five good sources, you pretty much have a research paper. Most of the hard work is done for you already! If I can give you one piece of advice for research papers, it would be to know what you're looking for in an article. If you want statistics, skim for statistics. Knowing what you want will cut down the time it takes you to find sources.

Kaethe Leonard

This chapter is about secondary sources: what they are, where to find them, and how to choose them.[2] Recall the distinction between primary and secondary sources. ***Primary sources*** are original documents, data, or images: the law code of the Le Dynasty in Vietnam, the letters of Kurt Vonnegut, data gathered from an experiment on color perception, an interview, or Farm Service Administration photographs from the 1930s.[3] ***Secondary sources*** are produced by analyzing primary sources. They include news articles, scholarly articles, reviews of films or art exhibitions, documentary films, and other pieces that have some descriptive or analytical purpose. Some things may be primary sources in one context but secondary sources in another. For example, if you're using news articles to inform an analysis of a historical event, they're serving as secondary sources. If you're counting the number of times a particular newspaper reported on different types of events, then the news articles are serving as primary sources because they're more akin to raw data.

Some Sources Are Better Than Others

You probably know by now that if you cite Wikipedia as an authoritative source, the wrath of your professor shall be visited upon you. Why is it that even the most informative Wikipedia articles are still often considered illegitimate? And what are good sources to use? The table below summarizes types of secondary sources in four tiers. All sources have their legitimate uses, but the top-tier ones are preferable for citation.

Tier	Type	Content	Uses	How to find them
1	Peer-reviewed academic publications	Rigorous research and analysis	Provide strong evidence for claims and references to other high-quality sources	Google Scholar, library catalogs, and academic article databases
2	Reports, articles, and books from credible non-academic sources	Well researched and even-handed descriptions of an event or state of the world	Initial research on events or trends not yet analyzed in the academic literature; may reference important Tier 1 sources	Websites of relevant agencies, Google searches using (site: *.gov or site: *.org), academic article databases
3	Short pieces from newspapers or credible websites	Simple reporting of events, research findings, or policy changes	Often point to useful Tier 2 or Tier 1 sources, may provide a factoid or two not found anywhere else	Strategic Google searches or article databases including newspapers and magazines
4	Agenda-driven or uncertain pieces	Mostly opinion, varying in thoughtfulness and credibility	May represent a particular position within a debate; more often provide keywords and clues about higher quality sources	Non-specific Google searches

Tier 1: Peer-reviewed academic publications

These are sources from the mainstream academic literature: books and scholarly articles. ***Academic books generally fall into three categories***: (1) textbooks written with students in mind, (2) monographs which give an extended report on a large research project, and (3) edited volumes in which each chapter is authored by different people. Scholarly articles appear in academic journals, which are published multiple times a year in order to share the latest research findings with scholars in the field. They're usually sponsored by some academic society. To get published, these articles and books had to earn favorable anonymous evaluations by qualified scholars. Who are the experts writing, reviewing, and editing these scholarly publications? Your professors. I describe this process below. Learning how to read and use these sources is a fundamental part of being a college student.

Tier 2: Reports, articles and books from credible non-academic sources

Some events and trends are too recent to appear in Tier 1 sources. Also, Tier 1 sources tend to be highly specific, and sometimes you need a more general perspective on a topic. Thus, Tier 2 sources can provide quality information that is more accessible to non-academics. There are three main categories. First, official reports from government agencies or major international institutions like the World Bank or the United Nations; these institutions generally have research departments staffed with qualified experts who seek to provide rigorous, even-handed information to decision-makers. Second, feature articles from major newspapers and magazines like the

New York Times, Wall Street Journal, London Times, or The Economist are based on original reporting by experienced journalists (not press releases) and are typically 1500+ words in length. Third, there are some great books from non-academic presses that cite their sources; they're often written by journalists. All three of these sources are generally well researched descriptions of an event or state of the world, undertaken by credentialed experts who generally seek to be even-handed. It is still up to you to judge their credibility. Your instructors and campus librarians can advise you on which sources in this category have the most credibility.

Tier 3. Short pieces from periodicals or credible websites

A step below the well-developed reports and feature articles that make up Tier 2 are the short tidbits that one finds in newspapers and magazines or credible websites. How short is a short news article? Usually, they're just a couple paragraphs or less, and they're often reporting on just one thing: an event, an interesting research finding, or a policy change. They don't take extensive research and analysis to write, and many just summarize a press release written and distributed by an organization or business. They may describe things like corporate mergers, newly discovered diet-health links, or important school-funding legislation. You may want to cite Tier 3 sources in your paper if they provide an important factoid or two that isn't provided by a higher-tier piece, but if the Tier 3 article describes a particular study or academic expert, your best bet is to find the journal article or book it is reporting on and use that Tier 1 source instead. If the article mentions which journal the study was published in, you can go right to that journal through your library website. Sometimes you can find the original journal article by putting the scholar's name and some keywords into Google Scholar.

What counts as a credible website in this tier? You may need some guidance from instructors or librarians, but you can learn a lot by examining the person or organization providing the information (look for an "About" link). For example, if the organization is clearly agenda-driven or not up-front about its aims and/or funding sources, then it definitely isn't something you want to cite as a neutral authority. Also look for signs of expertise. A tidbit about a medical research finding written by someone with a science background carries more weight than the same topic written by a policy analyst. These sources are sometimes uncertain, which is all the more reason to follow the trail to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 source whenever possible.

Personally, research papers are my thing! They give me a chance to further explore a topic that I usually am genuinely interested in, and it gives me the opportunity to write down everything I know. Sources are easy to find; they're everywhere. Unfortunately, the useful ones you have to put in a little more effort to find. As much as I love Wikipedia, if I'm going to take the time to write a paper, I want it to be taken seriously. There are so many resources out there to help students find scholarly information. The better the source, the more supported your paper will be. But it doesn't matter how well supported or amazing your paper is if you don't cite your sources! A citing mistake could definitely get you a big fat zero on the paper you worked so hard on, and maybe even kicked out of school. Utilize resources like www.easybib.com for a quick works cited, and Purdue's OWL (english.purdue.edu/owl) for a complete and easy explanation on APA and MLA citing formats.

Aly Button

Tier 4. Agenda-driven or pieces from unknown sources

This tier is essentially everything else, including Wikipedia.[4] These types of sources—especially Wikipedia—can be hugely helpful in identifying interesting topics, positions within a debate, keywords to search on, and, sometimes, higher-tier sources on the topic. They often play a critically important role in the early part of the research process, but they generally aren't (and shouldn't be) cited in the final paper. Throwing some keywords into Google and seeing what you get is a fine way to get started, but don't stop there. Start a list of the people, organizations, sources, and keywords that seem most relevant to your topic. For example, suppose you've been assigned a research paper about the impact of linen production and trade on the ancient world. A quick Google search reveals that (1) linen comes from the flax plant, (2) the scientific name for flax is *Linum usitatissimum*, (3) Egypt dominated linen production at the height of its empire, and (4) Alex J. Warden published a book about ancient linen trade in 1867. Similarly, you found some useful search terms to try instead of "ancient world" (antiquity, Egyptian empire, ancient Egypt, ancient Mediterranean) and some generalizations for linen (fabric, textiles, or weaving). Now you've got a lot to work with as you tap into the library catalog and academic article databases.

Origins And Anatomy Of A Journal Article

Most of the ***Tier 1 sources*** available are academic articles, also called scholarly articles, scholarly papers, journal articles, academic papers, or peer-reviewed articles. They all mean the same thing: a paper published in an academic periodical after being scrutinized anonymously and judged to be sound by other experts in the subfield. Their origin explains both their basic structure and the high esteem they have in the eyes of your professors.

Many journals are sponsored by academic associations. Most of your professors belong to some big, general one (such as the Modern Language Association[5], the American Psychological Association[6], the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, or the American Physical Society) and one or more smaller ones organized around particular areas of interest and expertise (such as the Association for the Study of Food and Society, the International Association for Statistical Computing, or the Slavic and East European Folklore Association). There are also generalist organizations organized by region of the country or state, such as the Eastern Sociological Society or the Southern Management Association. Each of these associations exists to promote the exchange of research findings and collaboration in their disciplines. Towards this end, they organize conferences, sponsor working groups, and publish one or more academic journals. These journals are meant to both publicize and archive the most interesting and important findings of the field.

Academic papers are essentially reports that scholars write to their peers—present and future—about what they've done in their research, what they've found, and why they think it's important. Thus, in a lot of fields they often have a structure reminiscent of the lab reports you've written for science classes:

1. *Abstract*: A one-paragraph summary of the article: its purpose, methods, findings, and significance.
2. *Introduction*: An overview of the key question or problem that the paper addresses, why it is important, and the key conclusion(s) (i.e., thesis or theses) of the paper.
3. *Literature review*: A synthesis of all the relevant prior research (the so-called "academic literature" on the subject) that explains why the paper makes an original and important contribution to the body of knowledge.
4. *Data and methods*: An explanation of what data or information the author(s) used and what they did with it.
5. *Results*: A full explanation of the key findings of the study.
6. *Conclusion/discussion*: Puts the key findings or insights from the paper into their broader context; explains why they matter.

Not all papers are so "sciencey." For example, a ***historical or literary analysis*** doesn't necessarily have a "data and methods" section; but they do explain and justify the research question, describe how the authors' own points relate to those made in other relevant articles and books, develop the key insights yielded by the analysis, and conclude by explaining their significance. Some academic papers are review articles, in which the "data" are published papers and the "findings" are key insights, enduring lines of debate, and/or remaining unanswered questions.

Scholarly journals use a peer-review process to decide which articles merit publication. First, hopeful authors send their article manuscript to the journal editor, a role filled by some prominent scholar in the field. The editor reads over the manuscript and decides whether it seems worthy of peer-review. If it's outside the interests of the journal or is clearly inadequate, the editor will reject it outright. If it looks appropriate and sufficiently high quality, the editor will recruit a few other experts in the field to act as anonymous peer reviewers. The editor will send the manuscript (scrubbed of identifying information) to the reviewers who will read it closely and provide a thorough critique. Is the research question driving the paper timely and important? Does the paper sufficiently and accurately review all of the relevant prior research? Are the information sources believable and the research methods rigorous? Are the stated results fully justified by the findings? Is the significance of the research clear? Is it well written? Overall, does the paper add new, trustworthy, and important knowledge to the field? Reviewers send their comments to the editor who then decides whether to (1) reject the manuscript, (2) ask the author(s) to revise and resubmit the manuscript[7], or (3) accept it for publication. Editors send the reviewers' comments (again, with no identifying information) to authors along with their decisions. A manuscript that has been revised and resubmitted usually goes out for peer-review again; editors often try to get reviews from one or two first-round reviewers as well as a new reviewer. The whole process, from start to finish, can easily take a year, and it is often another year before the paper appears in print.

Understanding the academic publication process and the structure of scholarly articles tells you a lot about how to find, read and use these sources:

1. *Find them quickly*. Instead of paging through mountains of dubious web content, go right to the relevant scholarly article databases in order to quickly find the highest quality sources.
2. *Use the abstracts*. Abstracts tell you immediately whether or not the article you're holding is relevant or useful to the paper you're assigned to write. You shouldn't ever have the experience of reading the whole paper just to discover it's not useful.
3. *Read strategically*. Knowing the anatomy of a scholarly article tells you what you should be reading for in each section. For example, you don't necessarily need to understand every nuance of the literature review. You can just focus on why the authors claim that their own study is distinct from the ones that came before.
4. *Don't sweat the technical stuff*. Not every social scientist understands the intricacies of log-linear modeling of quantitative survey data; however, the reviewers definitely do, and they found the analysis to be well constructed. Thus, you can accept the findings as legitimate and just focus on the passages that explain the findings and their significance in plainer language.
5. *Use one article to find others*. If you have one really good article that's a few years old, you can use article databases to find newer articles that cited it in their own literature reviews. That immediately tells you which ones are on the same topic and offer newer findings. On the other hand, if your first source is very recent, the literature review section will describe the other papers in the same line of research. You can look them up directly.

Research papers, amongst others, are the most common papers a college student will ever write, and as difficult as it may sound, it is not impossible to complete. Research papers are my favorite kind of papers because of sourcing, paraphrasing, and quoting. Naturally as you would in other papers, your own paper should come from yourself, but when you are proving a point about a specific area of your topic, it is always ok to have a credible source explain further. In college, sources are very important for most, if not all papers you will have, and citing those sources is important as well. After you are able to familiarize yourself with citations, it will come natural like it has for many students.

Timothée Pizarro

Students sometimes grumble when they're ordered to use scholarly articles in their research. It seems a lot easier to just Google some terms and find stuff that way. However, academic articles are the most efficient resource out there. They are vetted by experts and structured specifically to help readers zero in on the most important passages.

Finding Tier 1 Sources: Article Databases

Your campus library pays big money to subscribe to databases for Tier 1 articles. Some are general purpose databases that include the most prominent journals across disciplines[8], and some are specific to a particular discipline.[9] Often they have the full-text of the articles right there for you to save or print. We won't go over particular databases here because every campus has different offerings. If you haven't already attended a workshop on using the resources provided by your library, you should. A one-hour workshop will save you many, many hours in the future. If there aren't any workshops, you can always seek advice from librarians and other library staff on the best databases for your topic. Many libraries also have online research guides that point you to the best databases for the specific discipline and, perhaps, the specific course. Librarians are eager to help you succeed with your research—it's their job and they love it!—so don't be shy about asking.

An increasingly popular article database is ***Google Scholar***. It looks like a regular Google search, and it aspires to include the vast majority of published scholarship. Google doesn't share a list of which journals they include or how Google Scholar works, which limits its utility for scholars. Also, because it's so wide-ranging, it can be harder to find the most appropriate sources. However, if you want to cast a wide net, it's a very useful tool.

Here are three tips for using Google Scholar effectively:

1. *Add your field (economics, psychology, French, etc.) as one of your keywords*. If you just put in "crime," for example, Google Scholar will return all sorts of stuff from sociology, psychology, geography, and history. If your paper is on crime in French literature, your best sources may be buried under thousands of papers from other disciplines. A set of search terms like "crime French literature modern" will get you to relevant sources much faster.
2. *Don't ever pay for an article*. When you click on links to articles in Google Scholar, you may end up on a publisher's site that tells you that you can download the article for $20 or $30. Don't do it! You probably have access to virtually all the published academic literature through your library resources. Write down the key information (authors' names, title, journal title, volume, issue number, year, page numbers) and go find the article through your library website. If you don't have immediate full-text access, you may be able to get it through inter-library loan.
3. *Use the "cited by" feature*. If you get one great hit on Google Scholar, you can quickly see a list of other papers that cited it. For example, the search terms "crime economics" yielded this hit for a 1988 paper that appeared in a journal called *Kyklos*:

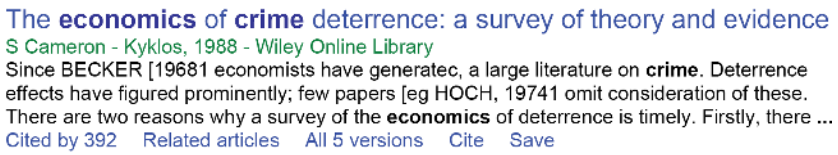


Figure 4.1, Google Scholar

1988 is nearly 30 years ago; for a social-science paper you probably want more recent sources. You can see that, according to Google, this paper was cited by 392 other sources. You can click on that "Cited by 392" to see that list. You can even search within that list of 392 if you're trying to narrow down the topic. For example, you could search on the term "cities" to see which of those 392 articles are most likely to be about the economic impact of crime on cities.

Library Research As Problem-Solving

You'll probably engage the subscription article databases at different points in the process. For example, imagine you've been assigned a research paper that can focus on any topic relevant to the course. Imagine further that you don't have a clue about where to start and aren't entirely sure what counts as an appropriate topic in this discipline. A great approach is to find the top journals in the specific field of your course and browse through recent issues to see what people are publishing on. For example, when I assign an open-topic research paper in my Introduction to Sociology course, I suggest that students looking for a topic browse recent issues of *Social Problems* or *American Journal of Sociology* and find an article that looks interesting. They'll have a topic and—booyah!—their first source. An instructor of a class on kinesiology might recommend browsing *Human Movement Science*, the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, or *Perceptual and Motor Skills*.

When you have a topic and are looking for a set of sources, your biggest challenge is finding the right keywords. You'll never find the right sources without them. You'll obviously start with words and phrases from the assignment prompt, but you can't stop there. As explained above, lower tier sources (such as Wikipedia) or the top-tier sources you already have are great for identifying alternative keywords, and librarians and other library staff are also well practiced at finding new approaches to try. Librarians can also point you to the best databases for your topic as well.

As you assess your evidence and further develop your thesis through the writing process, you may need to seek additional sources. For example, imagine you're writing a paper about the added risks adolescents face when they have experienced their parents' divorce. As you synthesize the evidence about negative impacts, you begin to wonder if scholars have documented some positive impacts as well.[10] Thus you delve back into the literature to look for more articles, find some more concepts and keywords (such as "resiliency"), assess new evidence, and revise your thinking to account for these broader perspectives. Your instructor may have asked you to turn in a bibliography weeks before the final paper draft. You can check with your professor, but he or she is probably perfectly fine with you seeking additional sources as your thinking evolves. That's how scholars write.

Finding good sources is a much more creative task than it seems on the face of it. It's an extended problem-solving exercise, an iterative cycle of questions and answers. Go ahead and use Wikipedia to get broadly informed if you want. It won't corrupt your brain. But use it, and all other sources, strategically. You should eventually arrive at a core set of Tier 1 sources that will enable you to make a well informed and thoughtful argument in support of your thesis. It's also a good sign when you find yourself deciding that some of the first sources you found are no longer relevant to your thesis; that likely means that you have revised and specified your thinking and are well on your way to constructing the kind of self-driven in-depth analysis that your professor is looking for.

OTHER RESOURCES

1. The Online Writing Laboratory (OWL) at Purdue University provides this list of links to freely available article databases.
2. Google provides some great tips for getting the most out of Google Scholar.
3. This resource from Bowling Green State University explains how searching subject headings in a database (compared to key words) can more quickly bring you to relevant sources.

Notes

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[1] If you aren't actually interested in anything relating to the course, you'd do well to keep that information to yourself.

provided by Lumen Learning

Ah, The Research Paper

[2] Obviously, not all writing assignments require you to find and use secondary sources. This chapter is relevant to those that do.

[3] Bored? Browse these images and other collections of the Library of Congress' American Memory Project: memory.loc.gov. Fascinating!

[4] Wikipedia is a conundrum. There are a lot of excellent articles on there, and I, like many other professors, embrace the open-access values that embody things like Wikipedia and this very textbook. It's not that Wikipedia is crap; it's just that there are much more solid alternatives.

[5] Where MLA citation style comes from.

[6] Where APA citation style comes from.

[7] From an author's perspective, a verdict of "revise and resubmit"—colloquially called an "R & R"—is a cause for celebration. In many fields, most papers are revised and resubmitted at least once before being published.

[8] Examples include Academic Search Premier (by EBSCO), Academic Search Complete (by EBSCO), Academic OneFile (by Cengage), General OneFile (by Cengage), ArticleFirst (by OCLC), and JSTOR (by ITHAKA).

[9] Some examples: PsycINFO (for psychology), CINAHL (for nursing), Environment Complete (for environmental science), Historical Abstracts (for history).

[10] One fairly recent article is Ilana Sever, Joseph Gutmann, and Amnon Lazar, "Positive Consequences of Parental Divorce Among Israeli Young Adults", Marriage and Family Review 42, no. 4 (2007): 7-28

Listening to Sources, Talking to Sources

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Theses And Sources

Everyone knows that a ***thorough analysis and persuasive argument*** needs strong evidence. The credibility of sources, is one key element of strong evidence, but it also matters how sources are used in the text of the paper. Many students are accustomed to thinking of sources simply as expert corroboration for their own points. As a result, they tend to comb texts to find statements that closely parallel what they want to say and then incorporate quotes as evidence that a published author agrees with them. That's one way to use sources, but there is a lot more to it.

Recall from prior chapters that writing academic papers is about joining a conversation. You're contributing your own original thinking to some complex problem, be it interpretive, theoretical, or practical. Citing sources helps situate your ideas within that ongoing conversation. Sometimes you're citing a research finding that provides strong evidence for your point; at other times you're summarizing someone else's ideas in order to explain how your own opinion differs or to note how someone else's concept applies to a new situation. 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.

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/archive/26_03/26_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.

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:

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.

OTHER RESOURCES

1. Graff and Birkenstein's little book, They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2009) is a gem and well worth reading. They offer a series of templates that can help you visualize new ways of relating to sources and constructing arguments.
2. Another excellent resource is Gordon Harvey's Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), In it, he discusses the key principles for incorporating sources, the stylistic conventions for quoting and paraphrasing, and the basics of common citation styles. That's all information you want to have at the ready.
3. Many university writing centers have nicely concise on-line guides to summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting. I found some especially good ones at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Washington, and, as always, the Purdue Online Writing Laboratory.

Understanding Bias

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Bias



Bias means presenting facts and arguments in a way that consciously favors one side or other in an argument. Is bias bad or wrong?

No! Everyone who argues strongly for something is biased. So it's not enough, when you are doing a language analysis, to merely spot some bias and say…"This writer is biased" or "This speaker is biased."

Let's begin by reading a biased text.

Hypocrites gather to feed off Daniel's tragic death

The death of two-year-old Daniel Valerio at the hands of his step-father brought outrage from the media.

Daniel suffered repeated beatings before the final attack by Paul Alton, who was sentenced in Melbourne in February to 22 years jail.

Rupert Murdoch's Herald-Sun launched a campaign which included a public meeting of hundreds of readers. Time magazine put Daniel on its front cover. The Herald-Sun summed up their message:

The community has a duty to protect our children from abuse – if necessary by laws that some people regard as possibly harsh or unnecessary.

But laws – like making it compulsory for doctors and others to report suspected abuse – cannot stop the violence.

Last year, 30 children were murdered across Australia. Babies under one are more likely to be killed than any other social group.

Daniel's murder was not a horrific exception but the product of a society that sends some of its members over the edge into despairing violence.

The origin of these tragedies lies in the enormous pressures on families, especially working class families.

The media and politicians wring their hands over a million unemployed. But they ignore the impact that having no job, or a stressful poorly paid job, can have.

Child abuse can happen in wealthy families. But generally it is linked to poverty.

A survey in 1980 of "maltreating families" showed that 56.5 per cent were living in poverty and debt. A further 20 per cent expressed extreme anxiety about finances.

A study in Queensland found that all the children who died from abuse came from working class families.

Police records show that school holidays – especially Xmas – are peak times for family violence. "The sad fact is that when families are together for longer than usual, there tends to be more violence", said one Victorian police officer.

Most people get by. Family life may get tense, but not violent.

But a minority cannot cope and lash out at the nearest vulnerable person to hand – an elderly person, a woman, or a child.

Compulsory reporting of child abuse puts the blame on the individual parents rather than the system that drives them to this kind of despair.

Neither is it a solution. Daniel was seen by 21 professionals before he was killed. Nonetheless, the Victorian Liberal government has agreed to bring it in.

Their hypocrisy is breathtaking.

This is the same government that is sacking 250 fire-fighters, a move that will lead to more deaths.

A real challenge to the basis of domestic violence means a challenge to poverty.

Yet which side were the media on when Labor cut the under-18 dole, or when Jeff Kennett[1] added $30 a week to the cost of sending a child to kindergarten?

To really minimise family violence, we need a fight for every job and against every cutback.

– by David Glanz, *The Socialist*, April 1993

There are good and bad aspects of bias.

1. It is good to be open about one's bias. For example, the article about Daniel Valerio's tragic death is written for *The Socialist* newspaper. Clearly ***socialists*** will have a bias against arguments that blame only the individual for a crime when it could be argued that many other factors in society contributed to the crime and need to be changed. Focusing on the individual, from the socialist's point of view, gets "the system" off the hook when crimes happen. The socialist's main reason for writing is to criticise the capitalist system. So David Glanz is not pretending to not be biased, because he has published his article in a partisan[2] newspaper.
    - Here are some ways to be open about your bias, but still be naughty.
        - (a) Deliberately avoid mentioning any of the opposing arguments.
        - (b) Deliberately avoid mentioning relevant facts or information that would undermine your own case.
        - (c) Get into hyperbole.
        - (d) Make too much use of emotive language.
        - (e) Misuse or distort statistics.
        - (f) Use negative adjectives when talking about people you disagree with, but use positive adjectives when talking about people you agree with.
        - Can you find examples of any of these "naughty" ways to be biased in Glaz's article?
2. You mustn't assume that because a person writes with a particular bias he/she is not being sincere, or that he/she has not really thought the issue through. The person is not just stating what he/she thinks, he/she is trying to persuade you about something.

Bias can result from the way you have organised your experiences in your own mind. You have lumped some experiences into the 'good' box and some experiences into the 'bad' box. Just about everybody does this[3]. The way you have assembled and valued experiences in your mind is called your ***Weltanschauung (Velt–arn-shao-oong)***. If through your own experience, plus good thinking about those experiences, you have a better understanding of something, your bias is indeed a good thing.

For example, if you have been a traffic policeman, and have seen lots of disasters due to speed and alcohol, it is not 'wrong' for you to biased against fast cars and drinking at parties and pubs. Your bias is due to your better understanding of the issue, *but you still have to argue logically*.

Really naughty bias

4. If you pretend to be objective, to not take sides, but actually use techniques that tend to support one side of an argument, in that case you are being naughty. There are subtle ways to do this.

(a) If the support for one side of the argument is mainly at the top of the article, and the reasons to support the opposite side of the issue are mainly at the bottom end of the article; that might be subtle bias – especially if it was written by a journalist. Journalists are taught that many readers only read the first few paragraphs of an article before moving on to reading another article, so whatever is in the first few paragraphs will be what sticks in the reader's mind.

(b) Quotes from real people are stronger emotionally than just statements by the writer. This is especially true if the person being quoted is an 'authority' on the subject, or a 'celebrity'. So if one side of the issue is being supported by lots of quotes, and the other side isn't, that is a subtle form of bias.

(c) If when one person is quoted as saying X, but the very next sentence makes that quote sound silly or irrational, that is a subtle form of bias too.

Common sense tells us that if someone is making money out of something, he/she will be biased in favour of it.

For example, a person who makes money out of building nuclear reactors in Europe or China could be expected to support a change in policy in Australia towards developing nuclear energy.



A manufacturer of cigarettes is unlikely to be in favor of health warnings on cigarette packets or bans on smoking in pubs.

Nonetheless, logically speaking, **we cannot just assume** a person who is making money out of something will always take sides with whomever or whatever will make him/her more money.

We have to listen to the arguments as they come up. **Assuming** someone is biased is not logically okay. You have to **show** that someone is biased and use **evidence** to support your assertion that he/she is biased.

[1] Jeff Kennett was the leader of the Liberal party in Victoria at that time.

[2] When you are a **partisan** you have **taken sides** in an argument, or a battle, or a war.

[3] Learning critical thinking (which is what you are learning in Year 11 and 12 English) is aimed at getting you to do more, and better, thinking than that.

Questions to Evaluate the Authority of the Researcher's Methods

by Joe Moxley

Here are some of the standard questions that academic readers ask when reviewing research reports:

1. Is the source a first-hand or second-hand account? That is, are the authors reporting results of their own research or reviewing someone else's work?
2. Is the source of publication credible? (For example, an essay in the *New England Journal of Medicine* would influence most physicians' opinions about a surgical procedure far more easily than an essay in a biweekly community newspaper.)
3. Do the authors work for research institutes, publications, private companies, or universities? Are they well-known authorities? Can you identify any hidden agendas?
4. Have the authors followed traditional research methods?
5. Choose a research topic, enter it into Google and then into Google Scholar, and compare your results. Some topics you could try: college athletes and academics, antibiotic resistance, Ptolemaic dynasty.
6. Using various databases, find one source in each of the four tiers for a particular topic.
7. Enter a topic into a general subscription database that has both scholarly and non-scholarly sources (such as Academic Search Complete or Academic OneFile); browse the first few hits and classify each one as scholarly or not-scholarly. Look at the structure of the piece to make your determination.
8. Here is a passage from a world history textbook:[14]
   Like so many things desired by Europeans and supplied by Asians—at first luxury items for the elite such as silk or porcelain, but increasingly products like tea from China for the mass market—cotton textiles were produced well and cheaply in India. The British textile manufacturers focused on the "cheap" part and complained that with relatively higher wages, British manufacturers could not compete. India had a competitive advantage in the eighteenth century, being able to undersell in the world market virtually any other producer of textiles. Some thought the reason for cheap Indian textiles was because of a low living standard, or a large population earning depressed wages, but all of those have been shown to not be true: Indian textile workers in the eighteenth century had just as high a standard of living as British workers. So, if it was not a low standard of living that gave India its competitive advance, what did?
   In a word: agriculture. Indian agriculture was so productive that the amount of food produced, and hence its cost, was significantly lower than in Europe. In the preindustrial age, when working families spent 60-80 percent of their earnings on food, the cost of food was the primary determinant of their real wages (i.e. how much a pound, dollar, a real, or a pagoda could buy). In India (and China and Japan as well), the amount of grain harvested from a given amount of seed was in the ration of 20:1 (e.g., twenty bushels of rice harvested for every one planted), whereas in England it was at best 8:1. Asian agriculture thus was more than twice as efficient as British (and by extension European) agriculture, and food—the major component in the cost of living—cost less in Asia.

Drawing on this passage, try out different quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing options:

a. Quote a key phrase or part of a sentence, naming the source and incorporating the quote within your own logic.

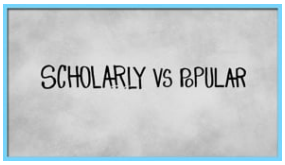
b. Quote an entire sentence or two, providing context and incorporating the quote within your own logic.

c. Construct an unacceptable paraphrase of part of the passage; copying a couple sentences and change just a few of the key words.

d. Construct a successful paraphrase of part of the passage; describing it in your own words.

e. Write a sentence, with a citation, that summarizes the general point of the passage.

9. Rewrite your responses to 8a and 8b, above, changing the verbs of attribution. How do the new verbs change the meaning or tone of your sentence?



A Vimeo element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=157

Important Concepts

educators are fond of research papers

primary sources

secondary sources

academic books generally fall into three categories

tier 1 sources

historical or literary analysis

google scholar

thorough analysis and persuasive argument

they say/i say process

bias

socialists

weltanschauung (Velt- arn–shao–oong)

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- Secondary Sources in Their Natural Habitats provided by Lumen Learning.
-

Listening to Sources, Talking to Sources provided by Lumen Learning.

-

Understanding Bias. provided by Lumen Learning.

- Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence. **Authored by**: Amy Guptill. **Provided by**: The College of Brockport, SUNY. **Located at**: http://textbooks.opensuny.org/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/. **Project**: Open SUNY Textbooks. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
- MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED
- Video1 : How Library Stuff Works: How to Evaluate Resources (the CRAAP Test) located at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=_M1-aMCJHFg
- Bias. **Authored by**: nenifoofer. **Located at**: http://www.docstoc.com/docs/4644737/Understanding%20Bias. **License**: *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*
- Image of Bias. **Authored by**: Franco Folini. **Located at**: https://flic.kr/p/jFQwC. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*
- Image of Assume Nothing. **Authored by**: David Gallagher. **Located at**: https://flic.kr/p/5wZECN. **License**: *CC BY-NC: Attribution-NonCommercial*
- Located within the Exercises, Scholarly Sources vs Popular Sources video from the Kimel Library. Located at: vimeo.com/13186317

Works Cited

[1] If you aren't actually interested in anything relating to the course, you'd do well to keep that information to yourself.

[2] Obviously, not all writing assignments require you to find and use secondary sources. This chapter is relevant to those that do.

[3] Bored? Browse these images and other collections of the Library of Congress' American Memory Project: memory.loc.gov. Fascinating!

[4] Wikipedia is a conundrum. There are a lot of excellent articles on there, and I, like many other professors, embrace the open-access values that embody things like Wikipedia and this very textbook. It's not that Wikipedia is crap; it's just that there are much more solid alternatives.

[5] Where MLA citation style comes from.

[6] Where APA citation style comes from.

[7] From an author's perspective, a verdict of "revise and resubmit"—colloquially called an "R & R"—is a cause for celebration. In many fields, most papers are revised and resubmitted at least once before being published.

[8] Examples include Academic Search Premier (by EBSCO), Academic Search Complete (by EBSCO), Academic OneFile (by Cengage), General OneFile (by Cengage), ArticleFirst (by OCLC), and JSTOR (by ITHAKA).

[9] Some examples: PsycINFO (for psychology), CINAHL (for nursing), Environment Complete (for environmental science), Historical Abstracts (for history).

[10] One fairly recent article is Ilana Sever, Joseph Gutmann, and Amnon Lazar, "Positive Consequences of Parental Divorce Among Israeli Young Adults", Marriage and Family Review 42, no. 4 (2007): 7-28.

Notes

[1] Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2009).

[2] Recommended read: Siddhartha Mukherjee's The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer(New York, Scribner, 2010).

[3] The sources cited in this example: Daniel T. Willingham, "Can teachers increase students' self control?" American Educator 35, no. 2 (2011): 22-27. Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow. Suzanne Perkins and Sandra Graham-Bermann, "Violence exposure and the development of school-related functioning: mental health, neurocognition, and learning," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17, no. 1(2012): 89-98.David William Putwain and Natalie Best, "Fear appeals in the primary classroom: Effects on test anxiety and test grade," *Learning and Individual Differences* 21, no. 5 (2011): 580-584.

[4] A side note: You may have noticed that the verbs used in referencing tend to be in present tense: so-and-so "writes" or "claims" or "argues". That's what academic writers do, even if the piece and author are from far in the past. It's called "the historical present" and it's just one convention of academic writing.

[5] Jennifer C. Lee, J.C. and Jeremy Staff, "When Work Matters: The Varying Impact of Work Intensity on High School Drop Out," *Sociology of Education* 80, no. 2 (2007): 158-178.

[6]Ibid., 159.

[7] It took me a long time to stop abusing block quotes. They made me feel like my paper was an unassailable fortress of citation! With the friendly but pointed feedback of my professors, I gradually came to see how they took too much space away from my own argument.

[8] Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow, 416-7.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11]Ibid, 416.

[12]Ibid, 417.

[13] Google “verbs of attribution” to find other suggestions.

[14] Robert B. Marks, The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-first Century (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 95.

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17.3: Developing an Annotated Bibliography

Article links:

“Annotated Bibliographies” provided by Lumen Learning

“How to Write a Summary” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

- Describe an annotated bibliography.
- Discuss what it takes to summarize source material.

https://youtu.be/jV5nSXdMB60

Annotated Bibliographies

provided by Lumen Learning

Many professors ask you to write ***annotated bibliographies***—bibliographic information about your primary sources and a short description of each—as preparation for writing a paper. Often, these bibliographies are no more than a page or two in length, but they are important because they force you to get your teeth into the source material and they give your professor the opportunity to comment on your use of sources and suggest some that you may have overlooked.

Style for Annotated Bibliographies

When you write an annotated bibliography for a course or in preparation for a thesis advisor, consider that the professionalism of the product is a direct reflection of the quality of the paper that will result. Therefore, be stylistically conscientious, following these tips:

- Begin by listing complete bibliographic information (author, year, source name, publisher, etc.) just as you would on the References page at the end of a paper.
- Provide a sentence or two describing the contents of the source.
- Summarize the various relevant topic areas that the source discusses.
- Avoid vague phrasing and empty sentences. Weed out any generic sentences such as “This source is very useful because it has tons of really good information.”
- Use present tense and future tense verbs to facilitate the immediacy of the information and the actual future use of sources.
- Discuss the exact way that you will use the source (e.g., for background information, data, graphics, as a bibliographic tool).
- Carefully judge the value of the source, considering, for example, its level of detail, bias, or the timeliness of its data.
- Note if the source’s text or bibliography will lead you to other sources.
- Comment on anything that you find especially noteworthy about a source—is it controversial? definitive? political? new?
- Format the annotated bibliography so that each description is clearly associated with the proper source.

How to Write a Summary

provided by Lumen Learning

Summarizing consists of two important skills:

1. identifying the important material in the text, and
2. restating the text in your own words.

Since writing a summary consists of omitting minor information, it will always be shorter than the original text.



How to Write a Summary

- A summary begins with an ***introductory sentence*** that states the text's title, author and main thesis or subject.
- A summary contains the main *thesis* (or main point of the text), restated in your own words.
- A summary is *written in your own words*. It contains few or no quotes.
- A summary is *always shorter than the original text*, often about 1/3 as long as the original. It is the ultimate "fat-free" writing. An article or paper may be summarized in a few sentences or a couple of paragraphs. A book may be summarized in an article or a short paper. A very large book may be summarized in a smaller book.
- A summary should *contain all the major points* of the original text, but should *ignore most of the fine details*, examples, illustrations or explanations.
- The backbone of any summary is formed by ***critical information*** (key names, dates, places, ideas, events, words and numbers). A summary must never rely on vague generalities.
- If you quote anything from the original text, even an unusual word or a catchy phrase, you need to put whatever you quote in quotation marks ("").
- A ***summary must contain only the ideas of the original text***. *Do not insert* any of *your own opinions, interpretations, deductions or comments* into a summary.
- A summary, like any other writing, has to have a specific audience and purpose, and you must carefully write it to serve that audience and fulfill that specific purpose.

Important Concepts

annotated bibliographies

summarizing consists of two important skills

introductory sentence

summary must contain only the ideas of the original text

LICENSES AND ATTRIBUTIONS

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1: MLA annotated bibliography & online sources. **Authored by mistersato411.** License: Standard YouTube License

Image 1: Image of two hands. **Authored by**: isado. **Located at**: https://flic.kr/p/4c9cZA. **License**: *CC BY-ND: Attribution-NoDerivatives*

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18: Writing the Research Paper

18.1 Creating Your Argument
18.2 Synthesis
18.3 Drafting
18.4 Using Sources Creatively



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18.1: Creating Your Argument

Article links:

“Five Ways of Looking at a Thesis” provided by Lumen Learning

“The Working Thesis Exercise” by Steven D. Krause

“On the Other Hand: The Role of Antithetical Writing in First Year Composition Courses” by Steven D. Krause

“Finding the Good Argument OR Why Bother With Logic?” by Rebecca Jones

Chapter Preview

- Describe what it means to think critically about the idea of research.
- Develop a working thesis.
- List the ways to develop an antithetical argument.
- Compare inductive and deductive reasoning.
- Explain logos, ethos, and pathos.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=164

5 Ways of Looking at a Thesis

provided by Lumen Learning

1. A thesis says something a little strange.

Consider the following examples:

A: By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup’s triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.



B: Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks—baseball bats, tree branches, and swords—link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being

trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

I would argue that both of these statements are perfectly correct, but they are not both strange. Only the second one says something, well, weird. Weird is good. Sentence A encourages the paper to produce precisely the evidence that The Princess Bride presents explicitly; sentence B ensures that the paper will talk about something new.

Romeo and Juliet concerns the dangers of family pride, *Frankenstein* the dangers of taking science too far. Yup. How can you make those things unusual? Good papers go out on a limb. They avoid ugly falls by reinforcing the limb with carefully chosen evidence and rigorous argumentation.

2. A thesis creates an argument that builds from one point to the next, giving the paper a direction that your reader can follow as the paper develops.

This point often separates the best theses from the pack. A good thesis can prevent the two weakest ways of organizing a critical paper: the pile of information and the plot summary with comments. A paper that presents a pile of information will frequently introduce new paragraphs with transitions that simply indicate the addition of more stuff. ("Another character who exhibits these traits is X," for instance.) Consider these examples:

A: The Rules and Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey both tell women how to act.

B: By looking at The Rules, a modern conduct book for women, we can see how Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey is itself like a conduct book, questioning the rules for social success in her society and offering a new model.

Example A would almost inevitably lead to a paper organized as a pile of information. A plot summary with comments follows the chronological development of a text while picking out the same element of every segment; a transition in such a paper might read, "In the next scene, the color blue also figures prominently." Both of these approaches constitute too much of a good thing. Papers must compile evidence, of course, and following the chronology of a text can sometimes help a reader keep track of a paper's argument. The best papers, however, will develop according to a more complex logic articulated in a strong thesis. Example B above would lead a paper to organize its evidence according to the paper's own logic.

3. A thesis fits comfortably into the *Magic Thesis Sentence (MTS)*.

The MTS: By looking at _____, we can see _____, which most readers don't see; it is important to look at this aspect of the text because _____.

Try it out with the examples from the first point:

A: By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup's triumph over evil, The Princess Bride affirms the power of true love.

B: Although the main plot of The Princess Bride rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

Notice that the MTS adds a new dimension to point number one above. The first part of the MTS asks you to find something strange ("which most readers don't see"), and the second part asks you to think about the importance of the strangeness. Thesis A would not work at all in the MTS; one could not reasonably state that "most readers [or viewers] don't see" that film's affirmation of true love, and the statement does not even attempt to explain the importance of its claim. Thesis B, on the other hand, gives us a way to complete the MTS, as in "By looking at the way fighting sticks link the plot and frame of *The Princess Bride*, we can see the way the grandson is trained in true love, which most people don't see; it is important to look at this aspect of the text because unlike the rest of the film, the fighting sticks suggest that love is not natural but socialized." One does not need to write out the MTS in such a neat one-sentence form, of course, but thinking through the structure of the MTS can help refine thesis ideas.

4. A thesis says something about the text(s) you discuss exclusively.

If your thesis could describe many works equally well, it needs to be more specific. Let's return to our examples from above:

A: By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup's triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.

B: Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

Try substituting other works:

A: By telling the story of Darcy and Elizabeth's triumph over evil, *Pride and Prejudice* affirms the power of true love.

Sure, that makes sense. Bad sign.

B: Although the main plot of *Pride and Prejudice* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that it is not natural but socialized.



Um, nope. Even if you have never read *Pride and Prejudice*, you can probably guess that such a precise thesis could hardly apply to other works. Good sign.

5. A thesis makes a lot of information irrelevant.

If your thesis is specific enough, it will make a point that focuses on only a small part of the text you are analyzing. You can and should ultimately apply that point to the work as a whole, but a thesis will call attention to specific parts of it. Let's look at those examples again. (This is the last time, I promise.)

A: By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup's triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.

B: Although the main plot of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks–baseball bats, tree branches, and swords–link the frame story to the romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that love is not natural but socialized.

One way of spotting the problem with example A is to note that a simple plot summary would support its point. That is not of true example B, which tells the reader exactly what moments the paper will discuss and why.

If you find that your paper leads you to mark relevant passages on virtually every page of a long work, you need to find a thesis that helps you focus on a smaller portion of the text. As the MTS reminds us, the paper should still strive to show the reader something new about the text as a whole, but a specific area of concentration will help, not hinder, that effort.

The Working Thesis Exercise

by Steven D. Krause

The process of finding something to write about is complicated. In many ways, you need ***to think critically about the idea of research***, you need to go to the library or the internet and conduct research, and you need to formulate a question or thesis to research all at the same time.

Sometimes, the subject of your research is called a "research question" or "problem statement." I've decided to call this process "***the working thesis***" exercise to emphasize the idea that embarking on a research writing project involves making "a point" that is also a continually revised "work" in progress. A working thesis is tentative in that it will inevitably change as you go through the process of writing and researching. But if you're more comfortable thinking of the starting point of your research project as being about asking the right questions or finding the right problem, that's okay too.

Working With Assigned Topics

Many times, starting an academic writing assignment is easy: you write about the topic as assigned by the instructor. Of course, it is never a good idea to simply repeat what the instructor says about a particular topic. But in many college classes, the topic of your writing projects will be determined by the subject matter of the class and the directions of the instructor. If you are required to write a research paper for your political science class that focuses on the effects of nationalism, chances are an essay on the relaxation benefits of trout fishing would not be welcomed.

So, how do you write about topics assigned by the instructor? The answer to this question depends on the specific assignment and the class, but here are a few questions you should ask yourself and your instructor as you begin to write:

• What is the purpose and who is the audience for the essay you are being asked to write? In other words, what do you understand to be the instructor's and your goals in writing? Is the instructor's assignment designed to test your understanding and comprehension of class lectures, discussions, and readings? Is the instructor asking you to reflect and argue about some aspect of the class activities? Is the intended audience for the essay only the instructor, or is the assignment more broadly directed to other students or to a "general reader"?

• What do you think about the topic? What's your opinion about the topic assigned by the instructor? If it is a topic that asks you to pick a particular "side," what side are you on? And along these lines: to what extent would it be appropriate for you to incorporate your own feelings and opinions about the topic into your writing?

• How much "room" is there within the assigned topic for more specialized focuses? Most assigned topics which at first appear limiting actually allow for a great deal of flexibility. For example, you might think that an assigned topic about the "fuel economy and SUVs" would have little room for a variety of approaches. But the many books and articles about fuel efficient vehicles suggest the topic is actually much larger than it might at first appear.

• Does the assignment ask students to do additional research, or does it ask students to focus on the readings assigned in class? Assignments that ask students to do additional library and Internet research are potentially much broader than assignments that ask students to focus on class readings.

Coming up with your own idea

At other times, instructors allow students to pick a topic for their research-based writing projects. However, rarely do instructors allow their students to write research-based essays on anything for a lot of good reasons. For example, your composition and rhetoric course might be structured around a particular theme that you are exploring with your other reading assignments, your discussions, and your writing.

Other ideas and topics don't really lend themselves to academic research writing. You probably have a special person in your life worth writing about (a parent, a grandparent, a boyfriend or girlfriend, etc.), but it is usually difficult to write a research-based essay on such a person. Some potential topics are too divisive or complex to write about in a relatively short academic research-based essay, or some are topics that have become so overly-discussed that they have become clichés.

Besides the general theme of the course and other potential limitations to ideas for research, you also need to carefully consider your own interests in the ideas you are thinking about researching.

If you are allowed to choose your own research project topic, be sure to choose carefully, especially if it is a topic you will be working with throughout the term. Don't pick a topic simply because it is the first idea that comes to mind or because you imagine it will be "easy" to research. Focus instead on an idea that meets the goals of the assignment, is researchable, and, most importantly, is a topic that you are interested in learning more about.

Taking the time to develop a good research topic at the beginning of the research writing process is critical. Planning ahead can be difficult and time-consuming, and it can be tempting to seize on the first idea that seems "easy." But all too often, these "easy" first ideas end up being time-consuming and difficult projects. In other words, the time you spend turning your research idea into a topic and then a working thesis will pay off when it comes time to actually write the research project assignment.

Brainstorming for Ideas

Whether you are assigned a particular topic or are allowed to choose your own topic within certain guidelines, the next step is to explore the ideas that you might write about in more detail. This process is called "brainstorming," though some instructors and

textbooks might refer to similar techniques as “invention” or “pre-writing.” Regardless of what it’s called, the goal is the same: to lay the foundation for focusing in on a particular topic and the working thesis of a research-writing project.

I recommend you keep three general concepts in mind when trying any approach to brainstorming with your writing:

• Not all of these approaches to brainstorming will work equally well for everyone or work equally well for all topics. Your results will vary and that’s okay. If one of these techniques doesn’t work for you, try another and see how that goes.
• When trying any of these techniques, you can’t censor yourself. Allow yourself the freedom to brainstorm about some things that you think are bad or even silly ideas. Getting out the “bad” or “silly” ideas has a way of allowing the good ideas to come through. Besides, you might be surprised about how some topics that initially seem bad or silly turn out to actually be good with a little brainstorming.

• Even if you know what topic you want to write about, brainstorm. Even if you know you want to write about a particular topic, you should try to consider some other topics in brainstorming because you never know what other things you could have written about if you don’t consider the possibilities. Besides, you still should do some brainstorming to shape your idea into a topic and then focus it into a working thesis.

Freewriting

One of the most common and effective brainstorming techniques for writing classes, freewriting, is also easy to master. All you do is write about anything that comes into your head without stopping for a short time—five minutes or so. The key part of this activity though is you cannot stop for any reason! Even if you don’t know what to write about, write “I don’t know what to write about” until something else comes to mind. And don’t worry—something else usually does come to mind.

Looping or Targeted Freewriting

Looping is similar to freewriting in that you write without stopping, but the difference is you are trying to be more focused in your writing. You can use a more specific topic to “loop” back to if you would like, or, if you do the more open-ended freewriting first, you can do a more targeted freewriting about one of the things you found to be a potentially workable idea. For example, you might freewrite with something general and abstract in mind, perhaps the question “what would make a good idea for a research project?” For a more targeted freewriting exercise, you would consider a more specific questions, such as “How could I explore and write about the research idea I have on computer crime?”

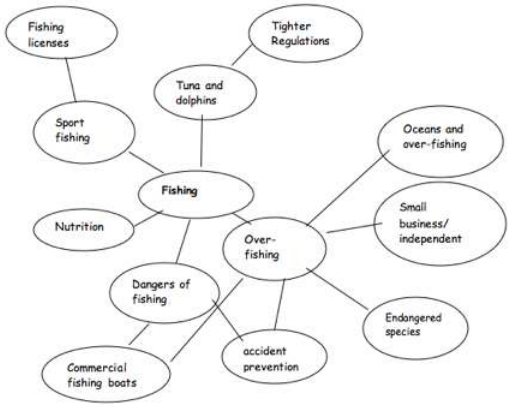
Group Idea Bouncing

One of the best ways we all get different ideas is to talk with others. The same is true for finding a topic for research: sometimes, “bouncing” ideas off of each other in small groups is a great place to start, and it can be a lot of fun.

Here’s one way to do it: name someone in a small group as the recorder. Each person in turn should give an idea for a potential topic, and the recorder should write it down. Every person should take a turn quickly “bouncing” an idea out for the others—no “I don’t know” or “come back to me!” Remember: no ideas are bad or silly or stupid at this point, so do not censor yourself or your group members.

Clustering

Clustering is a visual technique that can often help people see several different angles on their ideas. It can be an especially effective way to explore the details of a topic idea you develop with freewriting or looping. On a blank sheet of paper, write a one or two word description of your idea in the middle and circle it. Around that circle, write down one or two word descriptions of different aspects or characteristics of your main idea. Draw circles around those terms and then connect them to the main idea. Keep building outward, making “clusters” of the main idea as you go. Eventually, you should get a grouping of clusters that looks something like the illustration below.



Journalist Questions

One of the key elements of journalistic style is that journalists answer the basic questions of "What?" "Who?" "Where?" "When?" "How?" and "Why?" These are all good questions to consider in brainstorming for your idea, though clearly, these questions are not always equally applicable to all ideas. Here are some examples of the sort of journalistic questions you might want to ask yourself about your idea:

• What is my idea? What are the key terms of my idea?

• Who are the people involved in my idea? Who is performing the action of my topic? Who are the people affected by my idea?

• Where does my idea take place? Where did it come from? Is it restricted to a particular time and place?

• When did my idea happen? How does it relate to the other events that might have taken place at a similar time? Are there events that happened before or after my idea that might have effected it?

• How did my idea happen, or how is it still happening?

• Why did my idea happen, or why is it still happening?

Brainstorming with Computers

Computers are a great tool for fostering these and other collaborative brainstorming techniques. For example, group idea bouncing can be used effectively with Internet "chat rooms," with instant messaging software, or with local area network discussion tools.

You can also collaborate on your brainstorming activities with computers with little more than simple word processing or email; Here are three variations on a similar theme:

• Email exchange: This exercise is conducted as an exchange over email. Each person in a small group does a looping/targeted freewriting to discover ideas for things she is interested in doing more research about. Then, each person in the group can post his looping/targeted freewriting to all of the other members of the group simultaneously. Email also allows for members of the group to collaborate with each other while not being in the same place–after all, email messages can be sent over great distances–and not at the same time.

• "**Musical computers**:" This approach is similar to the previous two exercises, but instead of exchanging diskettes or email messages, members of a group of students exchange computer stations in a computer lab. Here's how it works: a group (up to an entire class of students) does a looping/targeted freewriting at a computer station for a set period of time. When time is up, everyone needs to find a different computer in the fashion of the children's game "musical chairs." Once at the new computer station, the new writer comments on the original freewriting exercise. The process can be repeated several times until everyone has had a chance to provide feedback on four or five different original freewritings.

Moving From Ideas to Topics With the Help of the Library and the World Wide Web Coming up with an idea, especially using these brainstorming techniques, is not that hard to do. After all, we are surrounded by potential ideas and things that could be researched: teen violence, computer crime, high-fat diets, drugs, copyright laws, Las Vegas, dangerous toys. But it can be a little more tricky to figure out how ideas can be more specific and researchable topics. Ideas are general, broad, and fairly easy for all of us to grasp. Topics, on the other hand, are more specific, narrow, and in need of research.

For example:

“Idea” “Topics”

Computer Crime

Terrorism and the ‘net, credit card fraud, computer stalking, “helpful” hackers

High-fat diets Health risks, obesity, cholesterol, heart disease, health benefits of, weight loss from

Pharmaceutical Drugs Cost of prescriptions, medical advances, advertising, disease prevention

In other words, a topic is a step further in the process of coming up with a researchable project for academic writing.

Chances are, your brainstorming activities have already helped you in the process of developing your idea into a topic. But before you move onto the next step of developing a working thesis, you should consider two more helpful topic developing techniques: a quick library subject search and a Web engine search.

A quick library subject search is just what it sounds like: using the computerized catalog system for your library, you can get a sense about the sort of ways other researchers have already divided up your idea into different topics.

For example, imagine your brainstorming has led you to the general idea “fisheries” and the potential problem of over-fishing in some part of the world. While this seems like it might be a potentially good and interesting thing to write about and to research, “fisheries” is an idea that could be narrowed down. If you conduct a subject search on your library’s book catalog for “fisheries,” you might find the library keeps track of different books in several categories.

Some examples of these categories include:

• Fisheries, Atlantic Ocean.

• Fisheries, Canada.

• Fisheries, Environmental Aspects.

You might also want to use your library’s periodical databases for some quick keyword searches. For example, a keyword search for “computer crime” in a periodical database returns article titles like “Demands for coverage increase as cyber-terrorism risk is realized” and “Making sense of cyber-exposures” (which are both articles about the concern businesses and insurance companies have about cyber crime), and also articles like “Meet the Hackers,” an insider’s view of computer hacking that disputes it being a “crime.” At this point in the research process, you don’t need to look up and read the sources you find, though you will probably want to keep track of them in case you end up needing them later for your research project.

Another great place to go to brainstorm ideas into topics is one of the many search engines on the World Wide Web, and you are probably already familiar with these services such as Google, Yahoo!, or alltheweb.com.

Like a quick library keyword search, doing a quick keyword search on the Web can give you some good direction about how to turn your idea into a topic. However, keep these issues in mind when conducting your Web searches:

• Search engine searches are done by computer programs, which means that they will not sort out for you what is “relevant” from what is “irrelevant” for your search.

• Most search engines and search directories offer an “advanced search” option that explains how to do a “smarter” search. Read these instructions and you will be on your way to better searches.

• Different search engines index and collect information in different ways. Therefore, you should do keyword searches with the same phrase with a few different search engines. You might be surprised how your results will differ.

• If you aren’t having much luck with the keywords of your general idea, try a couple of synonyms. For example, with “computer crime,” you might want to try “Internet crime,” or a related term such as “computer hacking.”

Writing a Working Thesis

The next step, developing a “working thesis,” can be a difficult and time-consuming process. However, as was the case when considering different ideas for research in the first place, spending the time now on devising a good working thesis will pay off later.

For our purposes here (and for most college classes), ***a thesis advocates a specific and debatable issue***. In academic writing (including the writing done by your professors), the thesis is often stated fairly directly in the first third or so of the writing, though not usually at the end of the first paragraph where students are often told to place it. The sentence or two that seems to encapsulate the issue of the essay is called a "thesis statement."Frequently, theses are implied—that is, while the piece of writing clearly has a point that the reader understands, there may not be a specific sentence or two that can easily be identified as the "thesis statement." For example, theses are often implied in newspapers and magazines, along with a lot of the writing that appears on Web pages.

The point is a thesis is a point. Theses are not statements of facts, simple questions, or summaries of events. They are positions that you as the writer take on and "defend" with evidence, logic, observations, and the other tools of discourse. Most kinds of writing—and particularly academic writing—have a thesis, directly stated or implied. Even most of the writing we largely think of as "informational" has a directly stated or implied thesis.

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

Now, a working thesis is more or less a temporary thesis you devise in the beginning of the research process in order to set some direction in your research.

Your working thesis is temporary and should change as you research, write, and learn more about your topic.

Think of the working thesis as the scaffolding and bracing put up around buildings when they are under construction: these structures are not designed to forever be a part of the building. Just the opposite. But you couldn't build the building in the first place if you didn't have the scaffolding and bracing that you inevitably have to tear away from the finished building.

Here's another way of thinking of it: while the journey of 1000 miles begins with just one step (so the saying goes), you still have to pick some kind of direction in the beginning. That's the purpose of a working thesis. You might change your mind about the direction of your research as you progress through the process, but you've got to start somewhere.

What does a working thesis look like? Before considering some potentially "good" examples of working theses, read through these BAD examples of statements, ones that ARE NOT theses, at least for the purposes of academic writing:

• Computer crime is bad.

• Fisheries around the world are important.

• The Great Gatsby is an American novel.

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

These statements ARE NOT really theses either:

• There are many controversial ways of dealing with computer crime.

• There are many things that could be done to preserve fisheries around the world.

• The Great Gatsby is a wonderful novel for several different reasons.

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

While this next group of statements is yet another step closer, these statements ARE NOT really good working theses either:

• This essay will be about the role computer hackers play in computer crime committed on the Internet.

• This essay will discuss some of the measures the international community should take in order to preserve fisheries around the world.

• My essay is about the relevance today of The Great Gatsby's depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream.

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

Now, these revised statements ARE examples of possible working theses:

• While some computer hackers are harmless, most of them commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem.

• The international community should enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries and save endangered fish species around the world.

• The Great Gatsby's depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream is still relevant today.

If you compare these possible working theses with the statements at the beginning of this section, you will hopefully see the differences between the "bad" and "good" working theses, and hopefully, you can see the characteristics of a viable working thesis.

Each of the "good" working thesis statements:

• takes a stand that is generally not considered a "fact;"

• is specific enough to give the writer and potential reader some idea as to the direction the writing will take; and offers an initial position on the topic that takes a stand.

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

Assignment: Writing a Working Thesis Essay

The process of writing a working thesis essay can take many forms. Sometimes, topic proposals are formal essays written according to fairly strict guidelines and offering exhaustive detail. At other times, your writing about your topic might be more personal and brief in form. Here is an example of a working thesis essay assignment:

Write a brief narrative essay where you discuss the topic you have decided to research and write about. Tell your audience, your fellow classmates and your instructor how you arrived at this topic, some of the other ideas you considered in your brainstorming activities, and the working thesis you have settled on for the start of your project. Also, be sure to let us know about some of the initial library research you have conducted.

Questions to consider as you write your first draft

• Is the research topic one assigned by the instructor? Is it focused on a specific group of texts, questions, or ideas that have to do with a specific class?

• Are you expected to come up with your own idea for research? Since it is unlikely you will be able to write about just anything, what are some of the guidelines given to you by your instructor for what you can and can't write about?

• What are some of the ideas for research that you rejected as possibilities? Why did you reject some of these ideas?

• What ideas did you decide to brainstorm about? Remember! Be sure to brainstorm about more than one idea! What brainstorming techniques did you use to explore these ideas? Which ones seemed to work the best?

• What are some of the research topics that make up your research idea? In other words, when you begin to narrow your idea into different topics, what are some of the different research topics that interest you?

• What results did you get from a quick library keyword search? Be sure the keyword search you do of your library's databases examines books, periodicals, and newspapers to see a full range of possibilities for research. Also, be sure to consider as many synonyms as possible for the keyword terms you are using for your research topic.

• What results did you get from a keyword search on the World Wide Web? Be sure to conduct a keyword search using more than one search engine since different services compile their data in different ways. Also, as was also the case with your library keyword search, be sure to consider as many synonyms as possible.

• Given these steps in the process, what is your working thesis? What variations of your working thesis did you consider along the way?

Review and Revision

As you will read again and again in this book, the first draft is only the beginning, the "raw materials" you create in order to really write your essay. That's because the most important step in the process of writing is showing your work to others—your instructor, your classmates, readers you trust, your friends, and so forth—and making changes based on your impressions of their feedback.

When you have a first draft complete and you are ready to show it to readers, ask them to think about these sorts of questions as they give you feedback on your writing:

• Is the topic of the topic proposal essay clear and reasonable to your readers?

• What's the working thesis? What sort of suggestions does your reader have to make the working thesis clearer? Is it clear to your readers that your working thesis is about a debatable position? Who might disagree with the your position? What do you think are some of the arguments against your position?

• What do your readers think is your main goal as a writer in pursuing this research project? Do your readers think you have made your purposes in writing this topic proposal and research project clear?

• Do your readers understand what library and Internet research you have already done on your topic? Are there particular examples of the library and Internet-based research that your readers think seem particularly useful or important?

Be careful to not limit your ideas for change to the things that are "easy" to fix (spelling, incomplete sentences, awkward phrases, and so forth). If you begin your process of revision by considering the questions suggested here (and similar questions you, your classmates, other readers, and your instructor might have), many of these "easy fix" problems will be fixed along the way. So as you go through the process of revision, think about it as a chance to really "re-see" and "re-imagine" what the whole writing project could look like.

A Student Example:

"Preventing Drunk Driving by Enforcement" by Daniel Marvins

The assignment that was the basis for this essay asked students to write a "first person narrative" about the research project they would be working on for the semester. "It was really important to me think about a lot of different ideas and topics because I was worried that I might not be able to find enough research or stick with it," Marvins said. "This project helped me think this through."

Preventing Drunk Driving by Enforcement

Despite the fact that Americans are more aware of the problems of drunk driving than we were in the past, it is still a serious problem in the U.S. While educating everyone about the dangers of drunk driving is certainly important, I am interested in researching and writing about different ways to more strictly enforce drunk driving laws.

My working thesis for my research project is "While stronger enforcement measures to control drunk driving might be controversial and a violation of individual rights, they have to be enacted to stop drunk driving deaths." By "stronger enforcement measures," I mean things like police check points, lower legal levels of blood-alcohol, required breathalyzer tests, less control on police searching cars, and stronger jail sentences.

I got the idea to focus on this topic by working on some of the different brainstorming techniques we talked about in class. I tried several different brainstorming techniques including freewriting and clustering. For me, the most useful technique was making a list of ideas and then talking it over with the other students in my group.

We all agreed that drunk driving would be a good topic, but I thought about writing about other topics too. For example, I think it would also be interesting to write about gun control laws, especially how they might effect deaths with kids and guns. I also thought it might be interesting to do research on the tobacco business and the lawsuits different states are conducting against them.

But I am more interested in exploring issues about drunk driving for a couple of different reasons. First, I think drunk driving is an issue that a lot of people can relate to because most people know that it is dangerous and it is a bad idea. For example, we hear and read messages about not driving drunk in a lot of different advertisements. Still, even though everyone knows it is a bad idea, there are still a lot of deaths and injuries that result from drunk driving.

Second, I'm interested in doing research on stronger enforcement of drunk driving laws because I am not sure I have made my own mind up about it. Like everyone else, I of course think drunk driving is bad and police and society should do everything they can do to prevent people from driving drunk. On the other hand, I also think it's bad for police to pull over everyone they think might be drunk even when they don't know for sure. Strong enforcement might stop a lot of drunk driving, but it also gives police more chances to violate individual liberties and rights.

I have done a little bit of research already and I don't think I'm going to have any problem finding evidence to support my topic. Drunk driving seems to be a pretty common topic with a lot of different things written about it. I did a quick search of the library's databases and the World Wide Web and I found thousands of different articles. I skimmed the titles and it seemed like a lot of them would be very relevant and useful for my subject.

Drunk driving is a serious problem and everyone agrees that we should do something about it. The question is what should "it" be? My hope is that through my research, I will learn more about how stronger enforcement of drunk driving laws can curtail drunk driving, and I hope to be able to convince my readers of this, too.

On the Other Hand: The Role of Antithetical Writing in First Year Composition Courses

by Steven D. Krause

Besides my own experiences as a student many years ago in courses similar to the ones you and your classmates are in now, I think the most important influence on how I have approached research and argumentative writing came from academic debate.* Debate taught me at least two ways to approach an argument that were not part of my formal schooling. First, academic policy debate taught me that argumentation is a contest—a sport, not at all different from tennis or basketball or figure skating or gymnastics, an activity where you have to work with a team, you have to practice, and the goal is to "win." And winning in academic debate happens: while it is a sport that is judged, it is an activity, like gymnastics or figure skating, where the rules for judging are surprisingly well codified. I will admit that seeing a debate or argument as something "to be won" has not always served me well in life, for there are any number of situations in which the framework for an argument is perhaps better perceived as an opportunity to listen and to compromise than to score points.

Second, because of the way that academic debate is structured, I learned quickly the importance of being able to perceive and argue multiple and opposing views on the same issue. Not unlike other sports where players play both offense and defense—baseball and basketball immediately come to mind—debaters have to argue both for and against the year's resolution, which was the broad proposition that framed all of the particular cases debate teams put forward for the entire season. In fact, it was not at all uncommon for a team to strenuously advocate for a controversial position one round—"the U.S. should engage in one-on-one talks with North Korea"—only to strenuously argue the opposite position—"the U.S. should *not* engage in one-on-one talks with North Korea"—the very next round. Seeing "multiple positions" was not simply a good idea; it was one of the rules of the game.

I've brought these past experiences into my current teaching in a number of ways, including one of the exercises I am discussing here, what my students and I call antithesis writing. These exercises will help you gain a better understanding of how to shape an argument, how to more fully explore a topic, and how to think more carefully about your different audiences.

Thesis Is Not Doesn't Have to Be a Bad Thing (Or Why Write Antithesis Essays in the First Place)

Somewhere along the way, "thesis" became a dirty word in a lot of writing courses, inherently bound up and attached to all that is wrong with what composition historians and the writing scholars call the ***"Current-Traditional" paradigm of writing instruction.*** Essentially, this approach emphasizes the product and forms of writing (in most nineteenth century American rhetoric textbooks, these forms were Exposition, Description, Narration, and Argument), issues of syntax and grammar, correctness, and so forth. It didn't matter so much what position a writer took; what mattered most was that the writer got the form correct."Thesis" is often caught in/lumped into this current-traditional paradigm, I think mainly because of the rigid role and placement of a thesis in the classic form of the five-paragraph essay. Most of you and your classmates already know about this: in the five-paragraph formula, the thesis is the last sentence of the introduction, is divided into three parts, and it rigidly controls the structure of the following four paragraphs. Certainly this overly prescriptive and narrow definition of thesis is not useful. Jasper Neel describes this sort of formula in his book *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* as "anti-writing," and I think that Sharon Crowley is correct in arguing that the kind of teaching exemplified by the five-paragraph essay is more akin to filling out a form than it is to actual "writing."

But when I discuss "thesis" here, I mean something much more broad and organic. I mean an initial direction that every research-writing project must take. A thesis advocates a specific and debatable position, is not a statement of fact nor a summary of events, and it answers the questions "what's your point?" and "why should I care?" You should begin with a working thesis that attempts to answer these questions simply as a way of getting your research process started. True, these initial working theses are usually broad and unwieldy, but the emphasis here is on *working*, because as you research and think more carefully, you will inevitably change your thesis. *And this is good*— change is the by-product of learning, and seeing a working thesis differently is both the purpose and the opportunity of the antithesis exercise.

So, I think the first and probably most important reason to consider antithesis writing is to test and strengthen the validity of the working thesis. After all, there isn't much "debatable" about a working thesis like "crime is bad" or "cleaning up the environment is good," which suggests that there probably isn't a viable answer to the questions "what's your point?" and "why should I care?" Considering opposing and differing views can help you find the path to make a vague generalization like "crime is bad" into a more pointed, researchable, and interesting observation.

The second general value for antithesis exercises is to raise more awareness of your audience—the potential readers who would disagree with your working thesis, along with readers who are more favorable to your point. Sometimes, readers won't be convinced no matter what evidence or logic a writer presents; but it seems to me that writers have an obligation to at least try.

Generating Antithetical Points in Five Easy Steps

Step 1: **Have a Working Thesis and Make Sure You Have Begun the Research Process.**

Developing a good antithetical argument is not something you can do as a "first step" in the research process. Generally, you need to have already developed a basic point and need some evidence and research to develop that point. In other words, the process of developing an antithetical position has to come *after* you develop an initial position in the first place.

Step 2: Consider the Direct Opposite of Your Working Thesis.

This is an especially easy step if your working thesis is about a controversial topic:

Working thesis ***:***To prevent violence on campus, students, staff, and faculty should not be allowed to carry concealed weapons.**Antithesis*:***To prevent violence on campus, students, staff, and faculty should be allowed to carry concealed

weapons.**Working thesis*:*** Drug companies should be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television.**Antithesis*:*** Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television.

This sort of simple change of qualifiers also exposes weak theses, because, generally speaking, the opposite position of a proposition that everyone accepts as true is one that everyone easily accepts as false. For example, if you begin with a working thesis like "Drunk driving is bad" or "Teen violence is bad" to their logical opposites, you end up with an opposite that is ridiculous—"Drunk driving is good" or "Teen violence is good." What that signals is that it is probably time to revisit your original working thesis.

Usually though, considering the opposite of a working thesis is a little more complicated.

For example: **Working Thesis*:*** Many computer hackers commit serious crimes and represent a major expense for internet-based businesses.**Antitheses*:*** Computer hackers do not commit serious crimes. Computer hacking is not a major expense for internet-based businesses.

Both of the antithetical examples are the opposite of the original working theses, but each focuses on different aspects of the working thesis.

Step 3: Ask "Why" about Possible Antithetical Arguments.

Creating antitheses by simply changing the working thesis to its opposite typically demands more explanation. The best place to develop more details with your antithesis is to ask "why."

For example: Why should drug companies not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs? Because the high cost of television advertising needlessly drives up the costs of prescriptions. Advertisements too often confuse patients and offer advice that contradicts the advice of doctors. Why are the crimes committed by computer hackers not serious? Because . . . They are usually pranks or acts of mischief. Computer hackers often expose problems for Internet businesses before serious crimes result.

The point here is to dig a little further into your antithetical argument. Asking "why" is a good place to begin that process.

Step 4: Examine Alternatives to Your Working Thesis.

Often, the best antithetical arguments aren't about "the opposite" so much as they are about alternatives. For example, the working thesis "To prevent violence on campus, students, staff, and faculty should not be allowed to carry concealed weapons" presumes that a serious potential cause for violence on campuses is the presence of guns. However, someone could logically argue that the more important cause of violence on college campuses is alcohol and drug abuse. Certainly the number of incidents involving underage drinking and substance abuse outnumber those involving firearms on college campuses, and it is also probably true that many incidents of violence on college campuses involve drinking or drugs.

Now, unlike the direct opposite of your working thesis, the alternatives do not necessarily negate your working thesis. There is no reason why a reader couldn't believe that *both* concealed weapons *and* alcohol and substance abuse contribute to violence on campuses. But in considering alternatives to your working thesis, the goal is to "weigh" the positions against each other. I'll return to this matter of "weighing your position" later

Step 5: Imagine Hostile Audiences.

Whenever you are trying to develop a clearer understanding of the antithesis of your working thesis, you need to think about the kinds of audiences who would disagree with you. By thinking about the opposites and alternatives to your working thesis, you are already starting to do this because the opposites and the alternatives are what a hostile audience might think.

Sometimes, potential readers are hostile to a particular working thesis because of ideals, values, or affiliations they hold that are at odds with the point being advocated by the working thesis. For example, people who identify themselves as being "pro-choice" on

the issue of abortion would certainly be hostile to an argument for laws that restrict access to abortion; people who identify themselves as being "pro- life" on the issue of abortion would certainly be hostile to an argument for laws that provide access to abortion.

At other times, audiences are hostile to the arguments of a working thesis because of more crass and transparent reasons. For example, the pharmaceutical industry disagrees with the premise of the working thesis "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV" because they stand to lose billions of dollars in lost sales. Advertising companies and television broadcasters would also be against this working thesis because they too would lose money. You can probably easily imagine some potential hostile audience members who have similarly selfish reasons to oppose your point of view.

Of course, some audiences will oppose your working thesis based on a different interpretation of the evidence and research. This sort of difference of opinion is probably most common with research projects that are focused on more abstract and less definitive subjects. But there are also different opinions about evidence for topics that you might think would have potentially more concrete "right" and "wrong" interpretations. Different researchers and scholars can look at the same evidence about a subject like gun control and arrive at very different conclusions.

Regardless of the reasons why your audience might be hostile to the argument you are making with your working thesis, it is helpful to try to imagine your audience as clearly as you can. What sort of people are they? What other interests or biases might they have? Are there other political or social factors that you think are influencing their point of view? If you want to persuade at least some members of this hostile audience that your point of view and your interpretation of the research is correct, you need to know as much about your hostile audience as you possibly can.

Strategies for Answering Antithetical Arguments

It might not seem logical, but directly acknowledging and addressing positions that are different from the one you are holding in your research can actually make your position stronger. When you take on the antithesis in your research project, it shows you have thought carefully about the issue at hand and you acknowledge that there is no clear and easy "right" answer. There are many different ways you might incorporate the antithesis into your research to make your own thesis stronger and to address the concerns of those readers who might oppose your point of view. For now, focus on three basic strategies: directly refuting your opposition, weighing your position against the opposition, and making concessions.

Directly Refuting Your Opposition

Perhaps the most obvious approach, ***one way to address those potential readers who might raise objections to your arguments***, is to simply refute their objections with better evidence and reasoning. Of course, this is an example of yet another reason why it is so important to have good research that supports your position: when the body of evidence and research is on your side, it is usually a lot easier to make a strong point.

Answering antithetical arguments with research that supports your point of view is also an example of where you as a researcher might need to provide a more detailed evaluation of your evidence. The sort of questions you should answer about your own research—who wrote it, where was it published, when was it published, etc.—are important to raise in countering antithetical arguments that you think come from suspicious sources.

Weighing Your Position Against the Opposition

Readers who oppose the argument you are trying to support with your research might do so because they value or "weigh" the implications of your working thesis differently than you do. For example, those opposed to a working thesis like "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV" might think this because they think the advantages of advertising

drugs on television—increased sales for pharmaceutical companies, revenue for advertising agencies and television stations, and so forth—are more significant than the disadvantages of advertising drugs on television.

Besides recognizing and acknowledging the different ways of comparing the advantages and disadvantages suggested by your working thesis, the best way of answering these antithetical arguments in your own writing is to clearly explain how you weigh and compare the evidence. This can be a challenging writing experience because it requires a subtle hand and a broad understanding of multiple sides of your topic. But if in acknowledging to your readers that you have carefully considered the reasons against your working thesis and you can demonstrate your position to be more persuasive, then this process of weighing positions can be very effective.

Making Concessions

In the course of researching and thinking about the antithesis to your working thesis and its potentially hostile audiences, it may become clear to you that these opposing views have a point. When this is the case, you may want to consider revising your working thesis or your approach to your research to make some concessions to these antithetical arguments.

Sometimes, my students working on this exercise "make concessions" to the point of changing sides on their working thesis—that is, in the process of researching, writing, and thinking about their topic, a researcher moves from arguing for their working thesis to arguing for their antithesis. This might seem surprising, but it makes perfect sense when you remember the purpose of research in the first place. When we study the evidence on a particular issue, we often realize that our initial and uninformed impression or feelings on an issue were simply wrong. That's why we research: we put more trust in opinions based on research than in things based on gut instinct or feelings.

But usually, most concessions to antithetical perspectives are less dramatic and can be accomplished in a variety of ways. You might want to employ some qualifying terms to hedge a bit. For example, the working thesis "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV" might be qualified to "Drug companies *should be closely regulated* about what they are allowed to advertise in TV." I think this is still a strong working thesis, but the revised working thesis acknowledges the objections some might have to the original working thesis.

Of course, you should use these sorts of concessions carefully. An over-qualified working thesis can be just as bad as a working thesis about something that everyone accepts as true: it can become so watered-down as to not have any real significance anymore. A working thesis like "Drug company television advertising is sometimes bad and sometimes good for patients" is over-qualified to the point of taking no real position at all.

But You Still Can't Convince Everyone . . .

I'd like to close by turning away a bit from where I started this essay, the influence of competitive debate on my early education about the argument. In a ***debate***, an argument is part of the game, the catalyst or the beginning of a competition. The same is often true within college classrooms. Academic arguments are defined in terms of their hypothetical nature; they aren't actually real but rather merely an intellectual exercise.

But people in the real world do hold more than hypothetical positions, and you can't always convince everyone that you're right, no matter what evidence or logic you might have on your side. You probably already know this. We have all been in conversations with friends or family members where, as certain as we were that we were right about something and as hard as we tried to prove we were right, our friends or family were simply unwilling to budge from their positions. When we find ourselves in these sorts of deadlocks, we often try to smooth over the dispute with phrases like "You're entitled to your opinion" or "We will have to agree to disagree," and then we change the subject. In polite conversation, this is a good strategy to avoid a fight. But in academic contexts, these deadlocks can be frustrating and difficult to negotiate.

A couple of thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher and rhetorician Aristotle said that all of us respond to arguments based on three basic characteristics or appeals: logos or logic, pathos or emotional character, and ethos, the writer's or speaker's perceived character. Academic writing tends to rely most heavily on logos and ethos because academics tend to highly value arguments based on logical research and arguments that come from writers with strong character-building qualifications—things like education, experience, previous publications, and the like. But it's important to remember that pathos is always there, and particularly strong emotions or feelings on a subject can obscure the best research.

Most academic readers have respect for writers when they successfully argue for positions that they might not necessarily agree with. Along these lines, most college writing instructors can certainly respect and give a positive evaluation to a piece of writing they don't completely agree with as long as it uses sound logic and evidence to support its points.However, all readers—students, instructors, and everyone else—come to your research project with various preconceptions about the point you are trying to make. Some of them will already agree with you and won't need much convincing. Some of them will never completely agree with you, but will be open to your argument to a point. And some of your readers, because of the nature of the point you are trying to make and their own feelings and thoughts on the matter, will never agree with you, no matter what research evidence you present or what arguments you make. So, while you need to consider the antithetical arguments to your thesis in your research project to convince as many members of your audience as possible that the point you are trying to make is correct, you should remember that you will likely not convince all of your readers all of the time.

Note 1. Explaining "academic policy debate" is not my goal in this essay. But I will say that academic debate bears almost no resemblance to "debates"between political candidates or to the stereotypical way debate tends to be depicted on television shows or in movies. Certainly debate involves a certain intellectual prowess; but I think it's fair to say that debate is a lot closer to a competitive sport than a classroom exercise. Two excellent introductions to the world of academic debate are the Wikipedia entry for "Policy Debate" (http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Policy_debate) and the 2007 documentary movie Resolved.

Finding the Good Argument OR Why Bother With Logic?

by Rebecca Jones

Even when we write an academic "argument paper," we imagine our own ideas battling others. Linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain that the ***controlling metaphor*** we use for argument in western culture is war: It is important to see that we don't just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we *do* in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. (4) If we follow the war metaphor along its path, we come across other notions such as, "all's fair in love and war." If all's fair, then the rules, principles, or ethics of an argument are up for grabs. While many warrior metaphors are about honor, the "all's fair" idea can lead us to arguments that result in propaganda, spin, and, dirty politics. The war metaphor offers many limiting assumptions: there are only two sides, someone must win decisively, and compromise means losing. The metaphor also creates a false opposition where argument (war) is action and its opposite is peace or inaction.

Finding better arguments is not about finding peace—the opposite of antagonism. Quite frankly, getting mad can be productive. Ardent peace advocates, such as Jane Addams, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., offer some of the most compelling arguments of our time through concepts like civil disobedience that are hardly inactive. While "argument is war" may be the default mode for Americans, it is not the only way to argue. Lakoff and Johnson ask their readers to imagine something like "argument is dance" rather than "argument is war" (5). While we can imagine many alternatives to the war metaphor, concepts like argument as collaboration are more common even if they are not commonly used. Argument as collaboration would be more closely linked to words such as *dialogue* and *deliberation*, cornerstone concepts in the history of American democracy.

However, argument as collaboration is not the prevailing metaphor for public argumentation we see/hear in the mainstream media. One can hardly fault the average American for not being able to imagine argument beyond the war metaphor. Think back to the coverage of the last major election cycle in 2008. The opponents on either side (demo-crat/republican) dug in their heels and defended every position, even if it was unpopular or irrelevant to the conversation at hand. The political landscape divided into two sides with no alternatives. In addition to the entrenched positions, blogs and websites such as FactCheck.org flooded us with lists of inaccuracies, missteps, and plain old fallacies that riddled the debates. Unfortunately, the "debates" were more like speeches given to a camera than actual arguments deliberated before the public. These important moments that fail to offer good models lower the standards for public argumentation.

On an average news day, there are entire websites and blogs dedicated to noting ethical, factual, and legal problems with public arguments, especially on the news and radio talk shows. This is not to say that all public arguments set out to mislead their audiences, rather that the discussions they offer masquerading as arguments are often merely opinions or a spin on a particular topic and not carefully considered, quality arguments. What is often missing from these discussions is research, consideration of multiple vantage points, and, quite often, basic logic.

On news shows, we encounter a version of argument that seems more like a circus than a public discussion. Here's the visual we get of an "argument" between multiple sides on the average news show.

While all of the major networks use this visual format, multiple speakers in multiple windows like *The Brady Bunch* for the news, it is rarely used to promote ethical deliberation. These talking heads offer a simulation of an argument. The different windows and figures pictured in them are meant to represent different views on a topic, often "liberal" and "conservative." This is a good start because it sets up the possibility for thinking through serious issues in need of solutions. Unfortunately, the people in the windows never actually engage in an argument (see Thinking Outside the Text). As we will discuss below, one of the rules of good argument is that participants in an argument agree on the primary standpoint and that individuals are willing to concede if a point of view is proven wrong. If you watch one of these "arguments," you will see a spectacle where prepared speeches are hurled across the long distances that separate the participants. Rarely do the talking heads respond to the actual ideas/arguments given by the person pictured in the box next to them on the screen unless it is to contradict one statement with another of their own.Even more Finding the Good Argument 159 troubling is the fact that participants do not even seem to agree about the point of disagreement. For example, one person might be arguing about the congressional vote on health care while another is discussing the problems with Medicaid. While these are related, they are different issues with different premises. This is not a good model for argumentation despite being the predominant model we encounter.

These shallow public models can influence argumentation in the classroom. One of the ways we learn about argument is to think in terms of pro and con arguments. This replicates the liberal/conservative dynamic we often see in the papers or on television (as if there are only two sides to health care, the economy, war, the deficit). This either/or fallacy of public argument is debilitating. You are either for or against gun control, for or against abortion, for or against the environment, for or against everything. Put this way, the absurdity is more obvious. For example, we assume that someone who claims to be an "environmentalist" is pro every part of the green movement. However, it is quite possible to develop an environmentally sensitive argument that argues against a particular recycling program. While many pro and con arguments are valid, they can erase nuance, negate the local and particular, and shut down the very purpose of having an argument: the possibility that you might change your mind, learn something new, or solve a problem. This limited view of argument makes argumentation a shallow process. When all angles are not explored or fallacious or incorrect reasoning is used, we are left with ethically suspect public discussions that cannot possibly get at the roots of an issue or work toward solutions.

Rather than an either/or proposition, argument is multiple and complex. An argument can be logical, rational, emotional, fruitful, useful, and even enjoyable. As a matter of fact, the idea that argument is necessary (and therefore not always about war or even about winning) is an important notion in a culture that values democracy and equity. In America, where nearly everyone you encounter has a different background and/or political or social view, skill in

arguing seems to be paramount, whether you are inventing an argument or recognizing a good one when you see it.

The remainder of this chapter takes up this challenge—inventing and recognizing good arguments (and bad ones). From classical rhetoric, to Toulmin's model, to contemporary pragmadialectics, this chapter presents models of argumentation beyond pro and con. Paying more addition to the details of an argument can offer a strategy for developing sound, ethically aware arguments.

What Can We Learn from Models of Argumentation?

So far, I have listed some obstacles to good argument. I would like to discuss one other. Let's call it the mystery factor. Many times I read an argument and it seems great on the surface, but I get a strange feeling- ing that something is a bit off. Before studying argumentation, I did not have the vocabulary to name that strange feeling. Additionally, when an argument is solid, fair, and balanced, I could never quite put my finger on what distinguished it from other similar arguments. The models for argumentation below give us guidance in revealing the mystery factor and naming the qualities of a logical, ethical argument.

Classical Rhetoric

In James Murphy's translation of Quintilian's *InstitutioOratoria*, he explains that "Education for Quintilian begins in the cradle, and ends only when life itself ends" (xxi). The result of a life of learning, for Quintilian, is a perfect speech where "the student is given a statement of a problem and asked to prepare an appropriate speech giving his solution" (Murphy xxiii). In this version of the world, a good citizen is always a PUBLIC participant. This forces the good citizen to know the rigors of public argumentation: "Rhetoric, or the theory of effective communication, is for Quintilian merely the tool of the broadly educated citizen who is capable of analysis, reflection, and powerful action in public affairs" (Murphy xxvii). For Quintilian, learning to argue in public is a lifelong affair. He believed that the "perfect orator. . . cannot exist unless he is above all a good man" (6). Whether we agree with this or not, the hope for ethical behavior has been a part of public argumentation from the beginning.

The ancient model of rhetoric (or public argumentation) is complex. As a matter of fact, there is no single model of ancient argumentation. Plato claimed that the Sophists, such as Gorgias, were spin doctors weaving opinion and untruth for the delight of an audience and to the detriment of their moral fiber. For Plato, at least in the Phaedrus, public conversation was only useful if one applied it to the search for truth. In the last decade, the work of the Sophists has been redeemed. Rather than spin doctors, Sophists like Isocrates and even Gorgias, to some degree, are viewed as arbiters of democracy because they believed that many people, not just male, property holding, Athenian citizens, could learn to use rhetoric effectively in public.

Aristotle gives us a slightly more systematic approach. He is very concerned with logic. For this reason, much of what I discuss below comes from his work. Aristotle explains that most men participate in public argument in some fashion. It is important to note that by "men," Aristotle means citizens of Athens: adult males with the right to vote, not including women, foreigners, or slaves. Essentially this is a homogenous group by race, gender, and religious affiliation. We have to keep this in mind when adapting these strategies to our current heterogeneous culture. Aristotle explains,

> . . . for to a certain extent all men attempt to discuss statements and to maintain them, to defend themselves and to attack others. Ordinary people do this either at random or through practice and from ac- quired habit. Both ways being possible, the subject can plainly be handled systematically, for it is possible to inquire the reason why some speakers suc- ceed through practice and others spontaneously; and every one will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of an art. (Honeycutt, "Aristotle's *Rheto-ric*" 1354a I i)

For Aristotle, inquiry into this field was artistic in nature. It required both skill and practice (some needed more of one than the other). Important here is the notion that public argument can be systematically learned.

Aristotle did not dwell on the ethics of an argument in *Rhetoric* (he leaves this to other texts). He argued that "things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites" and finally that " . . . things that are true and things that are better are, by their nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in" (Honeycutt, "Aristotle's Rhetoric"

1355a I i). As a culture, we are skeptical of this kind of position, though I think that we do often believe it on a personal level. Aristotle admits in the next line that there are people who will use their skills at rhetoric for harm. As his job in this section is to defend the use of rhetoric itself, he claims that everything good can be used for harm, so rhetoric is no different from other fields. If this is true, there is even more need to educate the citizenry so that they will not be fooled by unethical and untruthful arguments.

For many, logic simply means reasoning. To understand a person's logic, we try to find the structure of their reasoning. Logic is not synonymous with fact or truth, though facts are part of evidence in logical argumentation. You can be logical without being truthful. This is why more logic is not the only answer to better public argument.

Our human brains are compelled to categorize the world as a survival mechanism. This survival mechanism allows for quicker thought.

Two of the most basic logical strategies include inductive and deductive reasoning. ***Deductive reasoning*** starts from a premise that is a generalization about a large class of ideas, people, etc. and moves to a specific conclusion about a smaller category of ideas or things

(All cats hate water; therefore, my neighbor's cat will not jump in our pool). While the first premise is the most general, the second premise is a more particular observation. So the argument is created through common beliefs/observations that are compared to create an argument.

For example:

People who burn flags are unpatriotic. **Major Premise** Sara burned a flag. **Minor Premise** Sara is unpatriotic. **Conclusion** The above is called a syllogism.

The above is called a syllogism. As we can see in the example, the major premise offers a general belief held by some groups and the minor premise is a particular observation. The conclusion is drawn by comparing the premises and developing a conclusion. If you work hard enough, you can often take a complex argument and boil it down to a syllogism. This can reveal a great deal about the argument that is not apparent in the longer more complex version.

Stanley Fish, professor and New York Times columnist, offers the following syllogism in his July 22, 2007, blog entry titled "Democracy and Education": "The syllogism underlying these comments is (1) America is a democracy(2) Schools and universities are situated within that democracy (3) Therefore schools and universities should be ordered and administrated according to democratic principles."

Fish offered the syllogism as a way to summarize the responses to his argument that students do not, in fact, have the right to free speech in a university classroom. The responses to Fish's standpoint were vehemently opposed to his understanding of free speech rights and democracy. The responses are varied and complex. However, boiling them down to a single syllogism helps to summarize the primary rebuttal so that Fish could then offer his extended version of his standpoint.

Inductive reasoning moves in a different direction than deductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning starts with a particular or local statement and moves to a more general conclusion. I think of inductive reasoning as a stacking of evidence. The more particular examples you give, the more it seems that your conclusion is correct.

Inductive reasoning is a common method for arguing, especially when the conclusion is an obvious probability. Inductive reasoning is the most common way that we move around in the world. If we experience something habitually, we reason that it will happen again. For example, if we walk down a city street and every person smiles, we might reason that this is a "nice town." This seems logical. We have taken many similar, particular experiences (smiles) and used them to make a general conclusion (the people in the town are nice).

Most of the time, this reasoning works. However, we know that it can also lead us in the wrong direction. Perhaps the people were smiling because we were wearing inappropriate clothing (country togs in a metropolitan city), or perhaps only the people living on that particular street are "nice" and the rest of the town is unfriendly. Research papers sometimes rely too heavily on this logical method. Writers assume that finding ten versions of the same argument somehow prove that the point is true.

Here is another example. In Ann Coulter's most recent book, Guilty: Liberal "Victims" and Their Assault on America, she makes her (in)famous argument that single motherhood is the cause of many of America's ills. She creates this argument through a piling

of evidence. She lists statistics by sociologists, she lists all the single moms who killed their children, she lists stories of single mothers who say outrageous things about their life, children, or marriage in general, and she ends with a list of celebrity single moms that most would agree are not good examples of motherhood. Through this list, she concludes, “Look at almost any societal problem and you will find it is really a problem of single mothers” (36). While she could argue, from this evidence, that being a single mother is difficult, the generalization that single motherhood is the root of social ills in America takes the inductive reasoning too far. Despite this example, we need inductive reasoning because it is the key to analytical thought.

Most academic arguments in the humanities are inductive to some degree. When you study humanity, nothing is certain. When observing or making inductive arguments, it is important to get your evidence from many different areas, to judge it carefully, and acknowledge the flaws. Inductive arguments must be judged by the quality of the evidence since the conclusions are drawn directly from a body of compiled work.

The Appeals

“The appeals” offer a lesson in rhetoric that sticks with you long after the class has ended. Perhaps it is the rhythmic quality of the words (ethos, logos, pathos) or, simply, the usefulness of the concept. Aristotle imagined logos, ethos, and pathos as three kinds of artistic proof. Essentially, they highlight ***three ways to appeal to or persuade an audience***: “(1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in its various forms, (3) to understand emotions” (Honeycutt, Rhetoric 1356a)

While Aristotle and others did not explicitly dismiss emotional and character appeals, they found the most value in logic. Contemporary rhetoricians and argumentation scholars, however, recognize the power of emotions to sway us. Even the most stoic individuals have some emotional threshold over which no logic can pass. For example, we can seldom be reasonable when faced with a crime against a loved one, a betrayal, or the face of an adorable baby.

The easiest way to differentiate the appeals is to imagine selling a product based on them. Until recently, car commercials offered a prolific source of logical, ethical, and emotional appeals.

Logos: Using logic as proof for an argument. For many students this takes the form of numerical evidence. But as we have discussed above, logical reasoning is a kind of argumentation.

Car Commercial: (Syllogism) Americans love adventure—Ford Escape allows for off road adventure— Americans should buy a Ford Escape. OR The Ford Escape offers the best financial deal.

***Ethos*:** Calling on particular shared values (patriotism), respected fig- ures of authority (MLK), or one’s own character as a method for appealing to an audience.

Car Commercial: Eco-conscious Americans drive a Ford Escape.OR[Insert favorite movie star] drives a Ford Escape.

***Pathos*:** Using emotionally driven images or language to sway your audience.

Car Commercial:

Images of a pregnant women being safely rushed to a hospital. Flash to two car seats in the back seat. Flash to family hopping out of their Ford Escape and witnessing the majesty of the Grand Canyon.

OR

After an image of a worried mother watching her sixteen year old daughter drive away: “Ford Escape takes the fear out of driving.”

The appeals are part of everyday conversation, even if we do not use the Greek terminology (see Activity: Developing Audience Awareness). Understanding the appeals

helps us to make better rhetorical choices in designing our arguments. If you think about the appeals as a choice, their value is clear.

Toulmin: Dissecting the Everyday Argument

Philosopher Stephen Toulmin studies the arguments we make in our everyday lives. He developed his method out of frustration with ***logicians*** (philosophers of argumentation) that studied argument in a vacuum or through mathematical formulations:

All A are B. All B are C. Therefore, all A are C. (Eemeren, et al. 131)

Instead, Toulmin views argument as it appears in a conversation, in a letter, or some other context because real arguments are much more complex than the syllogisms that make up the bulk of Aristotle's logical program. Toulmin offers the contemporary writer/reader a way to map an argument. The result is a visualization of the argument process. This map comes complete with vocabulary for describing the parts of an argument. The vocabulary allows us to see the contours of the landscape—the winding rivers and gaping caverns. One way to think about a "good" argument is that it is a discussion that hangs together, a landscape that is cohesive (we can't have glaciers in our desert valley). Sometimes we miss the faults of an argument because it sounds good or appears to have clear connections between the statement and the evidence, when in truth the only thing holding the argument together is a lovely sentence or an artistic flourish.

For Toulmin, argumentation is an attempt to justify a statement or a set of statements. The better the demand is met, the higher the audience's appreciation. Toulmin's vocabulary for the study of argument offers labels for the parts of the argument to help us create our map.

Claim: The basic standpoint presented by a writer/ speaker.
Data: The evidence which supports the claim.
Warrant: The justification for connecting particular data to a particular claim. The warrant also makes clear the assumptions underlying the argument.
Backing: Additional information required if the warrant is not clearly supported.
Rebuttal: Conditions or standpoints that point out flaws in the claim or alternative positions.
Qualifiers: Terminology that limits a standpoint. Examples include applying the following terms to any part of an argument: sometimes, seems, occasionally, none, always, never, etc. The following paragraphs come from an article reprinted in UTNE magazine by Pamela Paxton and Jeremy Adam Smith titled: "Not Everyone Is Out to Get You." Charting this excerpt helps us to understand some of the underlying assumptions found in the article.

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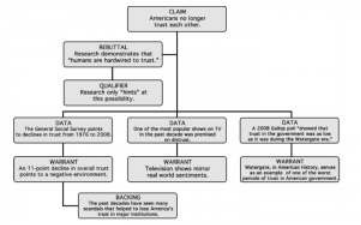
"Trust No One"

That was the slogan of The X-Files, the TV drama that followed two FBI agents on a quest to uncover a vast government conspiracy. A defining cultural phenomenon during its run from 1993–2002, the show captured a mood of growing distrust in America.

Since then, our trust in one another has declined even further. In fact, it seems that "Trust no one" could easily have been America's motto for the past 40 years—thanks to, among other things, Vietnam, Watergate, junk bonds, Monica Lewinsky, Enron, sex scandals in the Catholic Church, and the Iraq war.

> The General Social Survey, a periodic assessment of Americans' moods and values, shows an 11-point decline from 1976–2008 in the number of Americans who believe other people can generally be trusted. Institutions haven't fared any better. Over the same period, trust has declined in the press (from 29 to 9 percent), education (38–29 percent), banks (41 percent to 20 percent), corporations (23–16 percent), and organized religion (33–20 percent). Gallup's 2008 governance survey showed that trust in the government was as low as it was during the Watergate era.
>
> The news isn't all doom and gloom, however. A growing body of research hints that humans are hardwired to trust, which is why institutions, through reform and high performance, can still stoke feelings of loyalty, just as disasters and mismanagement can inhibit it. The catch is that while humans want, even need, to trust, they won't trust blindly and foolishly.

Figure 5 demonstrates one way to chart the argument that Paxton and Smith make in "Trust No One." The remainder of the article offers additional claims and data, including the final claim that there is hope for overcoming our collective trust issues. The chart helps us to see that some of the warrants, in a longer research project, might require additional support. For example, the warrant that TV mirrors real life is an argument and not a fact that would require evidence.



Charting your own arguments and others helps you to visualize the meat of your discussion. All the flourishes are gone and the bones revealed. Even if you cannot fit an argument neatly into the boxes, the attempt forces you to ask important questions about your claim, your warrant, and possible rebuttals. By charting your argument you are forced to write your claim in a succinct manner and admit, for example, what you are using for evidence. Charted, you can see if your evidence is scanty, if it relies too much on one kind of evidence over another, and if it needs additional support. This charting might also reveal a disconnect between your claim and your warrant or cause you to reevaluate your claim altogether.

Pragma-Dialectics: A Fancy Word for a Close Look at Argumentation

The field of rhetoric has always been interdisciplinary and so it has no problem including argumentation theory. Developed in the Speech Communication Department at the University of Amsterdam, ***pragmadialectics*** is a study of argumentation that focuses on the ethics of one's logical choices in creating an argument. *In Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments*, Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst describe argumentation, simply, as "characterized by the use of language for resolving a difference of opinion" (275). While much of this work quite literally looks at actual speech situations, the work can easily be applied to the classroom and to broader political situations.

While this version of argumentation deals with everything from ethics to arrangement, what this field adds to rhetorical studies is a new approach to argument fallacies. Fallacies are often the cause of the mystery feeling we get when we come across faulty logic or missteps in an argument.

What follows is an adaptation of Frans van Eemeren, Rob Groot- endorst, and Francesca Snoeck Henkemans' "violations of the rules for critical engagement" from their book Argumentation: Analysis, Evaluation, Presentation (109). Rather than discuss rhetorical fallacies in a list (ad hominem, straw man, equivocation, etc.), they argue that there should be rules for proper argument to ensure fairness, logic, and a solution to the problem being addressed. Violating these rules causes a fallacious argument and can result in a standoff rather than a solution.

While fallacious arguments, if purposeful, pose real ethical problems, most people do not realize they are committing fallacies when they create an argument. To purposely attack someone's character rather than their argument (ad hominem) is not only unethical, but demonstrates lazy argumentation. However, confusing cause and effect might simply be a misstep that needs fixing.

It is important to admit that many fallacies, though making an argument somewhat unsound, can be rhetorically savvy. While we know that appeals to pity (or going overboard on the emotional appeal) can often demonstrate a lack of knowledge or evidence, they often work. As such, these rules present argumentation as it would play out in a utopian world where everyone is calm and logical, where everyone cares about resolving the argument at hand, rather than winning the battle, and where everyone plays by the rules. Despite the utopian nature of the list, it offers valuable insight into argument flaws and offers hope for better methods of deliberation.

What follows is an adaptation of the approach to argumentation. The rule is listed first, followed by an example of how the rule is often violated.

1. The Freedom Rule“

Parties must not prevent each other from putting forward standpoints or casting doubt on standpoints” (110). There are many ways to stop an individual from giving her own argument. This can come in the form of a physical threat but most often takes the form of a misplaced critique. Instead of focusing on the argument, the focus is shifted to the character of the writer or speaker (***ad hominem***) or to making the argument (or author) seem absurd (***straw man***) rather than addressing its actual components. In the past decade, “Bush is stupid” became a common ad hominem attack that allowed policy to go unaddressed. To steer clear of the real issues of global warming, someone might claim “Only a fool would believe global warming is real” or “Trying to suck all of the CO2 out of the atmosphere with giant greenhouse gas machines is mere science fiction, so we should look at abandoning all this green house gas nonsense.”

2. The Burden-of-Proof Rule“

A party who puts forward a standpoint is obliged to defend it if asked to do so” (113).

This is one of my favorites. It is clear and simple. If you make an argument, you have to provide evidence to back it up. During the 2008 Presidential debates, Americans watched as all the candidates fumbled over the following question about healthcare: “How will this plan actually work?” If you are presenting a written argument, this requirement can be accommodated through quality, researched evidence applied to your standpoint.

3. The Standpoint Rule“

A party’s attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party” (116).Your standpoint is simply your claim, your basic argument in a nutshell. If you disagree with another person’s argument or they disagree

with yours, the actual standpoint and not some related but more easily attacked issue must be addressed. For example, one person might argue that the rhetoric of global warming has created a multi-million dollar green industry benefiting from fears over climate change. This is an argument about the effects of global warming rhetoric, not global warming itself. It would break the standpoint rule to argue that the writer/speaker does not believe in global warming. This is not the issue at hand.

4. The Relevance Rule

“A party may defend his or her standpoint only by advancing argumentation related to that standpoint” (119). Similar to #3, this rule assures that the evidence you use must actually relate to your standpoint. Let’s stick with same argument: global warming has created a green industry benefiting from fears over climate change. Under this rule, your evidence would need to offer examples of the rhetoric and the resulting businesses that have developed since the introduction of green industries. It would break the rules to simply offer attacks on businesses who sell “eco-friendly” products.

5. The Unexpressed Premise Rule

“A party may not falsely present something as a premise that has been left unexpressed by the other party or deny a premise that he or she has left implicit” (121).

This one sounds a bit complex, though it happens nearly every day. If you have been talking to another person and feel the need to say, “That’s NOT what I meant,” then you have experienced a violation of the unexpressed premise rule. Overall, the rule attempts to keep the argument on track and not let it stray into irrelevant territory. The first violation of the rule, to falsely present what has been left unexpressed, is to rephrase someone’s standpoint in a way that redirects the argument. One person might argue, “I love to go to the beach,” and another might respond by saying “So you don’t have any appreciation for mountain living.” The other aspect of this rule is to camouflage an unpopular idea and deny that it is part of your argument. For example, you might argue that “I have nothing against my neighbors. I

just think that there should be a noise ordinance in this part of town to help cut down on crime." This clearly shows that the writer does believe her neighbors to be criminals but won't admit it.

6. The Starting Point Rule

" No party may falsely present a premise as an accepted starting point, or deny a premise representing an accepted starting point" (128).

Part of quality argumentation is to agree on the opening standpoint. According to this theory, argument is pointless without this kind of agreement. It is well known that arguing about abortion is nearly pointless as long as one side is arguing about the rights of the unborn and the other about the rights of women. These are two different starting points.

7. The Argument Scheme Rule

"A standpoint may not be regarded as conclusively defended if the defense does not take place by means of an appropriate argument scheme that is correctly applied" (130).

This rule is about argument strategy. Argument schemes could take up another paper altogether. Suffice it to say that schemes are ways of approaching an argument, your primary strategy. For example, you might choose emotional rather than logical appeals to present your position. This rule highlights the fact that some argument strategies are simply better than others. For example, if you choose to create an argument based largely on attacking the character of your opponent rather than the issues at hand, the argument is moot. Argument by analogy is a popular and well worn argument strategy (or scheme). Essentially, you compare your position to a more commonly known one and make your argument through the comparison. For example, in the "Trust No One" argument above, the author equates the Watergate and Monica Lewinsky scandals. Since it is common knowledge that Watergate was a serious scandal, including Monica Lewinsky in the list offers a strong argument by analogy: the Lewinsky scandal did as much damage as Watergate. To break this rule, you might make an analogy that does not hold up, such as com-
paring a minor scandal involving a local school board to Watergate. This would be an exaggeration, in most cases.

8. The Validity Rule

"The reasoning in the argumentation must be logically valid or must be capable of being made valid by making explicit one or more unexpressed premises" (132).

This rule is about traditional logics. Violating this rule means that the parts of your argument do not match up. For example, your cause and effect might be off: If you swim in the ocean today you will get stung by a jellyfish and need medical care. Joe went to the doctor today. He must have been stung by a jellyfish. While this example is obvious (we do not know that Joe went swimming), many argument problems are caused by violating this rule.

9. The Closure Rule

"A failed defense of a standpoint must result in the protagonist retract- ing the standpoint, and a successful defense of a standpoint must result in the antagonist retracting his or her doubts" (134). This seems the most obvious rule, yet it is one that most public arguments ignore. If your argument does not cut it, admit the faults and move on. If another writer/speaker offers a rebuttal and you clearly counter it, admit that the original argument is sound. Seems simple, but it's not in our public culture. This would mean that George W. Bush would have to have a press conference and say, "My apologies, I was wrong about WMD," or for someone who argued fervently that Americans want a single payer option for healthcare to instead argue something like, "The polls show that American's want to change healthcare, but not through the single payer option. My argument was based on my opinion that single payer is the best way and not on public opinion." Academics are more accustomed to retraction because our arguments are explicitly part of particular conversations. Rebuttals and renegotiations are the norm. That does not make them any easier to stomach in an "argument is war" culture.

10. The Usage Rule

"Parties must not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they must interpret the formulations of the other party as carefully and accurately as possible" (136). While academics are perhaps the worst violators of this rule, it is an important one to discuss. Be clear. I notice in both student and professional academic writing that a confusing concept often means confusing prose, longer sentences, and more letters in a word. If you cannot say it/write it clearly, the concept might not yet be clear to you. Keep working. Ethical violations of this rule happen when someone is purposefully ambiguous so as to confuse the issue. We can see this on all the "law" shows on television or though deliberate propaganda.

Food for thought:

The above rules offer one way to think about shaping an argument paper. Imagine that the argument for your next paper is a dialogue between those who disagree about your topic. After doing research, write out the primary standpoint for your paper.

For example: organic farming is a sustainable practice that should be used more broadly. Next, write out a standpoint that might offer a refutation of the argument.

For example: organic farming cannot supply all of the food needed by the world's population. Once you have a sense of your own argument and possible refutations, go through the rules and imagine how you might ethically and clearly provide arguments that support your point without ignoring the opposition.

Even though our current media and political climate do not call for good argumentation, the guidelines for finding and creating it abound. There are many organizations such as America Speaks (www.americaspeaks.org) that are attempting to revive quality, ethical deliberation.

On the personal level, each writer can be more deliberate in their argumentation by choosing to follow some of these methodical approaches to ensure the soundness and general quality of their argument.
The above models offer the possibility that we can imagine modes of argumentation other than war. The final model, pragma-dialectics, especially, seems to consider argument as a conversation that requires constant vigilance and interaction by participants.

Argument as conversation, as new metaphor for public deliberation, has possibilities.

There are many organizations such as America Speaks (www. americaspeaks.org) that are attempting to revive quality, ethical deliberation. On the personal level, each writer can be more deliberate in their argumentation by choosing to follow some of these methodical approaches to ensure the soundness and general quality of their argument. The above models offer the possibility that we can imagine modes of argumentation other than war. The final model, pragma-di-alectics, especially, seems to consider argument as a conversation that requires constant vigilance and interaction by participants. ***Argument as conversation***, as new metaphor for public deliberation, has possibilities.

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Important Concepts

magic thesis sentence (MTS)

to think critically about the idea of research

the working thesis

looping

a thesis advocates a specific and debatable issue

current-traditional paradigm of writing instruction

developing a good antithetical argument

one way to address those potential readers who might raise objections to your arguments

debate

controlling metaphor

finding better arguments is not about finding peace

deductive reasoning

inductive reasoning

three ways to appeal to or persuade an audience

logos

ethos

pathos

logicians

pragmadialectics

ad hominem

straw man

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1 https://youtu.be/DmKGMOFON0g

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18.2: Synthesis

Article links:

“Incorporating Evidence into a Research Paper” by Jennifer Janechek

“Connecting Source Material to Claims” by Eir-Anne Edgar

“Synthesizing Your Research Findings” by Christine Photinos

“Synthesis Notes: Working With Sources To Create a First Draft” by Erika Szymanski

“Introduce Evidence” by Jennifer Janechek

“Analyzing Evidence” by Jennifer Janechek

“Provide Additional Support for This Point” provided by Writing Commons

“Avoid the Use of Unsupported Opinions as Evidence” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter Preview

- Describe how evidence can bolsters a writer’s argument.
- Identify the kinds and ways sources that should be used in a paper.
- Explain how opinions should be expressed in writing.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=166

Incorporating Evidence into a Research Paper

by Jennifer Janechek

When you think of the term “evidence,” what comes to mind? *CSI*? *Law and Order*? *NCIS*? Certainly, detectives and law enforcement officers use evidence to prove that a criminal is guilty. What’s more, they use different types of evidence to find and convict the offending person(s), such as eyewitness accounts, DNA, fingerprints, and material evidence.

Just as detectives use various types of evidence, writers incorporate evidence to prove their points—and they also use different types of evidence, depending upon which form is most useful and relevant to their points. These different types of evidence include —but are not limited to—quotes, paraphrases, summaries, anecdotes, and hypothetical examples.

Regardless of the type used, all ***evidence*** serves the same general function: it bolsters a writer’s argument. The trick is to determine, during the composition process, what type of evidence will most help your point. This section is designed to help you choose the best type of support to use in your writing; in addition, it will provide you with the tools necessary to successfully integrate

evidence into your papers. By acquiring these skills, you will become a more convincing writer, as you will be able to back up your claims in a way that makes sense to your readers.

Students often confuse evidence with research; the two do not mean the same thing. Whereas "evidence" refers to a something that supports a claim, "research" is something much more: it's a conversation. Take a look at Kenneth Burke's famous "Unending Conversation" metaphor:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. [1]

Research begets evidence, but performing research should not just point you, as a writer, to useful quotes that you can use as support for claims in your writing; research should tell you about a conversation, one that began before you decided upon your project topic. When you incorporate research into a paper, you are integrating and responding to previous claims about your topic made by other writers. As such, it's important to try to understand the main argument each source in a particular conversation is making, and these main arguments (and ensuing sub claims) can then be used as evidence—as support for your claims—in your paper.

> Let's say for a bibliographic essay you decide to write about the Indian Mutiny. Well, as the Indian Mutiny began around 1857, people have been writing about the Mutiny since that time. Thus, it's important to realize that by writing about the Indian Mutiny now, you're contributing to an ongoing conversation. By doing research, you can see what's already been said about this topic, decide what specific approach to the topic might be original and insightful, and determine what ideas from other writers provide an opening for you to assert your own claims.

The pieces in this section focus on incorporating various types of evidence into your paper, but the main idea to keep in the back of your head is that research is much larger than your paper. Your writing is a part of a larger conversation. Do other authors justice: critically read their pieces so you understand their major claims and do not misrepresent them, choose ideas that work with yours—or that contrast with yours, so you have a jumping-off point for your argument. Doing so is critical to constructing arguments and to realizing your agency as a writer.

Connecting Source Material to Claims

by Eir-Anne Edgar

One of the three sides of the rhetorical triangle is ethos. ***Ethos*** refers to the writer's credibility and authority as perceived by readers. (For more information about this rhetorical appeal, please see "Ethos.") Using sources to support the claims you make strengthens your authority as a writer. Sources also show your readers that you've "done your homework," that is, that you are able to make arguments about your topic because you have read other credible and significant writers who have contributed to the ongoing conversation about your topic. To be a scholarly writer is to respond to other writers who have already discussed certain aspects of the topic you are investigating. This ongoing conversation is one that you will contribute your original ideas to as well as a conversation that other writers will continue to respond to in the future. You should start your research by looking at the most current information on your topic. If you were to engage with others in a conversation, you would not try to refer back to something that was said hours ago, instead you would respond to what is being said at that particular moment. Using sources also shows your readers where you fit in with other writers in the larger conversation about your topic. Though your work may not yet be as famous as other writers, when you refer to writers like Freud, you can show your readers where your ideas derive from or even complicate other writers' arguments.

Writers should utilize the latest, most significant and credible sources that engage with the topic at hand. For example, if you were to read a scientific study that only included sources that are thirty years old, the argument of the study might look outdated and untrustworthy. It is important to remember that writing (about almost any topic) is an ongoing conversation. You are not the first to write, and you certainly will not be the last. Use sources that show your readers you are up to date and knowledgeable about your topic. Sources that come from peer-reviewed journals or scholarly organizations are examples of credible sources. Avoid sources that do not utilize sources; it is difficult to verify where writers may have gotten the information in the article. One tip for finding sources is to look at the works cited page of a credible source; this can provide you with leads in developing a list for reading further on your topic.

It is very important to make connections to the sources that you include in your writing. First, remember that your essay is your opportunity to showcase your ideas and arguments. Avoid using an excessive amount of source material; doing so can take your readers' focus away from your original arguments. Going back to the notion that writing is engaging in conversation, think of engaging with your source material as if you are having a conversation with the writers themselves. You can use source material to lend support, to complicate, or even to argue against previous ideas. Here is one example of engaging with source material in a conversational mode:

> Tom Smith writes, "Most ponies enjoy skateboarding on Saturday nights" (8). Though my findings support Smith's claims that most ponies do enjoy skateboarding, however, my research shows that ponies tend to skate on Sunday afternoons. The differences in our findings may come from the recent changes in skateboarding laws, which are not applicable on Sundays because skateboarding officials have the day off.

In this example, the writer responds to the source material by comparing and contrasting the source's ideas with his or her own. The source material is the section of the sentence that appears between the quotation marks. This sentence comes from page 8 of Tom Smith's book; this is indicated by the number 8 that appears between the parentheses. If the writer and Tom Smith were at a party together, their conversation would be interesting and vibrant. Here is one example of unsuccessful source engagement:

> Tom Smith writes, "Most ponies enjoy skateboarding on Saturday nights" (8). I agree.

In this example, we see no engagement with the source material. If the writer and Tom Smith were talking at a party, it would be a boring conversation that does not go anywhere. Simply agreeing or disagreeing does not continue the conversation, nor does it highlight the importance of your findings. Another way of thinking about source engagement is a three-step process: explain, engage, and discuss.

- Explaining requires that you explain what the author in the source is talking about and why it is important. Do not take it for granted that readers will know why the source material you use is important or significant.
- The second step, engage, requires you to talk back to the source
- Finally, discuss the implications of your response. Here is an example of this process:

> The latest study from Bird University found that "parrots tend to sleep all day on Sundays" (1). This finding is significant because it supports my hypothesis that Sunday is the official day of rest for parrots. Further research on this topic is necessary; it could be significant to many other fields of study if other varieties of birds also rest on Sundays.

Connecting your claims to source material is an important facet of structuring a strong argument. Scholarly and up to date sources give your ideas credibility and authority, just be sure to prioritize your own thoughts over those of your sources.

Synthesizing Your Research Findings

by Christine Photinos

Synthesis is something you already do in your everyday life. For example, if you are shopping for a new car, the research question you are trying to answer is, "Which car should I buy"? You explore available models, prices, options, and consumer reviews, and you make comparisons. For example: Car X costs more than car Y but gets better mileage. Or: Reviewers A, B, and C all prefer Car

X, but their praise is based primarily on design features that aren't important to you. It is this analysis *across* sources that moves you towards an answer to your question.

Early in an academic research project you are likely to find yourself making initial comparisons—for example, you may notice that Source A arrives at a conclusion very different from that of Source B—but the task of synthesis will become central to your work when you begin drafting your research paper or presentation.

Remember, when you synthesize, you are not just compiling information. You are organizing that information around a specific argument or question, and this work—your own intellectual work—is central to research writing.

Below are some questions that highlight ways in which the act of synthesizing brings together ideas and generates new knowledge.

How do the sources speak to your specific argument or research question?

Your argument or research question is the main unifying element in your project. Keep this in the forefront of your mind when you write about your sources. Explain how, specifically, each source supports your central claim/s or suggests possible answers to your question. For example: Does the source provide essential background information or a definitional foundation for your argument or inquiry? Does it present numerical data that supports one of your points or helps you answer a question you have posed? Does it present a theory that might be applied to some aspect of your project? Does it present a recognized expert's insights on your topic?

How do the sources speak to each other?

Sometimes you will find explicit dialogue between sources (for example, Source A refutes Source B by name), and sometimes you will need to bring your sources into dialogue (for example, Source A does not mention Source B, but you observe that the two are advancing similar or dissimilar arguments). Attending to ***interrelationships among sources*** is at the heart of the task of synthesis.

Begin by asking: What are the points of agreement? Where are there disagreements?

But be aware that you are unlikely to find your sources in pure positions of "for" vs. "against." You are more likely to find agreement in some areas and disagreement in other areas. You may also find agreement but for different reasons—such as different underlying values and priorities, or different methods of inquiry.

Where are there, or aren't there, information gaps?

Where is the available information unreliable (for example, it might be difficult to trace back to primary sources), or limited, (for example, based on just a few case studies, or on just one geographical area), or difficult for non-specialists to access (for example, written in specialist language, or tucked away in a physical archive)?

Does your inquiry contain sub-questions that may not at present be answerable, or that may not be answerable without additional primary research—for example, laboratory studies, direct observation, interviews with witnesses or participants, etc.?

Or, alternatively, is there a great deal of reliable, accessible information that addresses your question or speaks to your argument or inquiry?

In considering these questions, you are engaged in synthesis: you are conducting an overview assessment of the field of available information and in this way generating composite knowledge.

Remember, synthesis is about pulling together information from a range of sources in order to answer a question or construct an argument. It is something you will be called upon to do in a wide variety of academic, professional, and personal contexts. Being able to dive into an ocean of information and surface with meaningful conclusions is an essential life skill.Synthesis Notes: Working With Sources To Create a First Draft



Synthesis Notes: Working With Sources To Create a First Draft

by Erika Szymanski

Synthesis notes are a strategy for taking and using reading notes that bring together—synthesize—what we read with our thoughts about our topic in a way that lets us integrate our notes seamlessly into the process of writing a first draft. Six steps will take us

from reading sources to a first draft.

When we read, it is easy to take notes that don't help us build our own arguments when we move from note-taking to writing. In high school, most of us learned to take notes that summarize readings. Summarizing works well when the purpose of our notes is to help us memorize information quickly for a test. When we read in preparation for writing a research-supported argument, however, summarizing is inefficient because our notes don't reflect how our sources fit into our argument. We have to return to our sources and try to recall why and how we saw them contribute to our thinking.

Thinking through your sources

Step 1: As you read, keep in mind your purpose. Why are you reading this source? About what will you be writing? Write down your thoughts on how the text fits in with what you are currently thinking about your topic; if you did not begin your research with ideas, start thinking and building as you read. Try to make complete sentences. Often, you may summarize or paraphrase a bit of what the text is saying as you refer to it in the context of your own thinking, but do not just summarize what the text says. Capture what you think as you read: your reactions, how it is helpful, how it is relevant. Incorporate any quotes you find especially helpful, but rather than simply copying the quote, write about and around the quote.

Repeat step 1 for each source you think you may use to build your argument.

Identifying your thesis*:* Whether or not you began with firm ideas about your topic, your reading – and, more precisely, your thinking as you read – will be the source of new ideas. Your thesis, then, will emerge during your reading as the product of how all of your reading and thinking comes together to create a position you can support, with your sources and with your own well-informed argumentation. Even if you began your research holding a clear position on your topic, give your thesis permission to change as you read. Not doing so limits your capacity to learn and grow through your reading and, moreover, risks leaving you unable to support your thesis with your sources.

When you feel as though you have read and thought enough to develop a position on your topic that your sources can support, and that you can stand behind, take note of that position as your thesis. Know, though, that your thesis may still grow and change as you continue to read, think, and draft if you find your sources leading you to support a different position.

Elaborating on your ideas

Step 2: When you are ready to begin writing, refer back to your synthesis notes. Look at the first point and write a short paragraph about that thought or observation. If your synthesis notes are in complete sentences, you may cut and paste those sentences into your new paragraphs or revise and build from them to reflect how your thinking has changed and grown. Then move to the next note and, again, write a short paragraph about that observation. These sections of writing do not need to be connected; that will come later. Do not worry about writing a coherent paper; just focus on one idea or observation at a time.

If you get stuck – if you cannot figure out how a particular note fits into your argument or if it no longer fits—skip that note and move to the next one. You can return to these unused notes later when you may find that you now have something to say about them or that they simply are not part of your argument.

You may find it helpful to color-code your synthesis notes to remind yourself of what material you have and have not used. Remember, too, to include in-text citations to your original source material as you write. (look here for guidelines on when citation is necessary).

When you reach the end of your notes, you should have a list of short paragraphs constituting much of your argument.

Finding the essence of your argument

Step 3: Read back through your short paragraphs and, in a separate document or on a separate sheet of paper, summarize each paragraph in a single phrase or sentence. If you cannot summarize a paragraph with a single phrase, try to revise the paragraph so that it focuses on just one idea. Give each paragraph and its corresponding summary phrase a number so that you can match the paragraph to its summary phrase.

Organizing your ideas

Step 4: Now we will organize the writing we did in step 2. Looking only at the list of summary phrases, rearrange them until they can be read as a logical, coherent paragraph from top to bottom. This paragraph should summarize your argument. If you find that a

phrase fails to fit, set it aside. If you find a gap where you need an additional sentence to provide a logical connection between two of your phrases, write in that sentence.

Organizing your writing

Step 5: Return to your short paragraphs and rearrange them so that they match the order of the summary phrases that you have just organized. If you set aside any phrases, set aside their corresponding paragraphs—you may not end up using those paragraphs. If you had to write any new phrases, add those phrases in their place in-between paragraphs; you can expand these phrases into full paragraphs in the next step.

Shaping and structuring your argument

Step 6: Now, take these organized paragraphs and bring them together into a coherent argument. When you read your organized paragraphs, the ideas from each paragraph should flow logically into the next. Add transitions to make those connections explicit. Revise your paragraphs to make the logic of your argument more clear. Delete sentences that are no longer relevant in their new context or add sentences if you need to more fully explain an idea. Expand any added phrases into more complete connecting paragraphs.

At this stage, you may need to refer back to your source material to flesh out any gaps in your argument, or you may find that you need to consult new source material for the same purpose, but your draft should make clear what additional information you need and where it goes. You will also want to add an introduction and conclusion summarizing and drawing out the main points of your argument. Nevertheless, you have produced a first draft from your reading notes without ever going through the painful steps of wondering where and how to begin writing.



Introduce Evidence

by Jennifer Janechek

Can the reader distinguish between your ideas and those of your sources?

You don't want to take credit for the ideas of others (that would be plagiarism), and you certainly don't want to give outside sources the credit for your own ideas (that would be a waste of your time and effort). So, as a writer, you should distinguish between your ideas and those of your sources before quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing.

In order to help the reader see who's writing what, it's important to introduce your evidence. Here are some helpful hints to consider when introducing your sourced material (note that while MLA style is used in these examples, you should use whatever formatting style is required by your instructor):

When incorporating a source into your paper for the first time, reference not only the author's full name (if provided) but also the title of the publication.

For instance, if I wanted to use a quote from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* and I had not referenced this source yet in my paper, I would want to give it a full introduction:

> In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha discusses the effect of mimicry upon the cultural hybrid, claiming that mimicry renders "the colonial subject . . . a 'partial' presence" (123).[2]

Before quoting, the author provides the reader with both the author (Homi Bhabha) and the title of the publication (*The Location of Culture*). That way, going forth, unless the author introduces a different book or article, the reader knows that all references to Bhabha come from *The Location of Culture*.

When incorporating a source into your paper for the second time (or any other time following the initial introduction of that source), provide the reader with only the author's last name.

For instance, if I'm still working with Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, I might do something like this:

> As Bhabha writes, "[Mimicry] is a form of colonial discourse that . . . [exists] at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed" (128).

Since you've already provided the reader with Bhabha's full name (Homi Bhabha), there's no need to give it again. All later references thus only require Bhabha's last name. If pulling material from a different work of Bhabha's, though, you'll need to introduce the quote (or paraphrase or summary) by specifying this new title (though you'll still only need to provide Bhabha's last name).

Side note: Never refer to an author by his or her first name. Either reference the author by his or her full name or by his or her last name, depending upon whether or not you've previously mentioned the author's full name in your piece of writing.

When incorporating a source into your paper for the second time (or any other time following the initial introduction of that source), you may want to place the idea or direct quote within one of your sentences; if so, provide the author's last name and a page number or page range for the referenced material in an in-text citation.

> This method can be quite tricky, because you don't want your quote to appear "dropped in." Here are a few ideas about how to effectively incorporate quotes into sentences:

- **You may choose to use a dash (two hyphens) or a colon to introduce the quoted material:**

  > The child crosses this bar when he enters into language, as he can never again access the Real—a realm that now may "only [be] approach[ed] through language" (Price Herndl 53).
  >
  > This can be tricky, depending upon the excerpt you're using, because you may have to rework the wording within the quote to suit the sentence structure.
  >
  > *Side note: Whenever you change or add/delete anything—anything at all, even a capitalization—within a quote, you must bracket [ ] the change, addition, or deletion.*

You may choose to change the wording within a quote (and bracket accordingly) so that it works within your sentence structure:

> The child crosses this bar when he enters into language, as he can never again access the Real, for "[he] can only approach it through language" (Price Herndl 53) [3].

Note that the excerpted material must make sense within the context of your sentence, and the reader still must be able to distinguish between your ideas and those of your source.

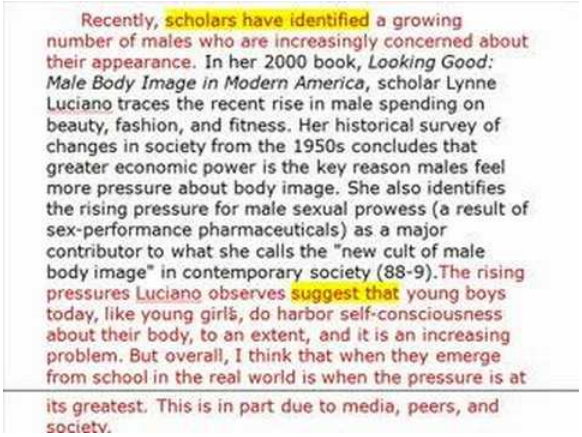


Analyzing Evidence

by Jennifer Janechek

How is this source relevant to your thesis and purpose?

Many emerging writers struggle with connecting sourced material to their claims and to their thesis. Oftentimes, this is because they're too close to their work and think that the connection between claim and evidence is completely apparent to the reader. Even if the connection is readily visible, authors should still follow up a piece of sourced material with an explanation of its relevance to the author's point, purpose, and/or thesis. Such connections ("analysis") should be made directly following the sourced material.


Recently, scholars have identified a growing number of males who are increasingly concerned about their appearance. In her 2000 book, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America*, scholar Lynne Luciano traces the recent rise in male spending on beauty, fashion, and fitness. Her historical survey of changes in society from the 1950s concludes that greater economic power is the key reason males feel more pressure about body image. She also identifies the rising pressure for male sexual prowess (a result of sex-performance pharmaceuticals) as a major contributor to what she calls the "new cult of male body image" in contemporary society (88-9).The rising pressures Luciano observes suggest that young boys today, like young girls, do harbor self-consciousness about their body, to an extent, and it is an increasing problem. But overall, I think that when they emerge from school in the real world is when the pressure is at its greatest. This is in part due to media, peers, and society.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=166

Let's say that I'm writing a research paper that suggests offshore drilling should be banned, and my thesis is as follows:

Though some may argue that offshore drilling provides economic advantages and would lessen our dependence on foreign oil, the environmental and economic consequences of an oil spill are so drastic that they far outweigh the advantages.

Following this thesis come body paragraphs relating my main points: (1) the known economic impact of past oil spills, (2) the known environmental impact of past oil spills, (3) the potential impact of oil spills on marine and human life, (4) a comparison between advantages and disadvantages of offshore drilling, and (5) a response to potential counterarguments. My conclusion would then include a proposal to ban offshore drilling.

So, for instance, in my fifth body paragraph I include the following claim (in my topic sentence) and also provide the following support:

> Others argue that the US needs to end its dependence on foreign oil from unstable regions necessitates domestic oil production. During an April 2010 speech to the Southern Republican conference, Sarah Palin responded to the ongoing debate about offshore drilling and insists that "relying on foreign regimes to meet our energy needs makes us less secure and makes us more beholden to these countries" (Malcom). [4]

I can't, as a writer, just stop there, because my reader would not necessarily know the connection between my point and the quote. As such, I must make the connection for my reader.

Such a connection may take the form of explaining what the sourced material is saying (breaking down ideas):

> Palin's assertion implies that the majority of our oil comes from unstable regimes in antidemocratic regions. Although I understand her concerns about providing such regimes with a measure of economic power over the United States, I believe that offshore drilling poses a greater threat to the stability of our economy.

Or, a connection may point the reader back to the thesis:

> Though Palin's argument is representative of a group that views offshore drilling as a necessity, it fails to acknowledge that America's largest petroleum trading partners are not countries with unstable regimes.

Or, a connection may point the reader back to the paragraph's main point:

> Palin's argument is representative of a cohort that believes in the importance of domestic oil production.

Even still, a connection may point the reader to the author's purpose:

> Despite Palin's (and Republicans') protests, I argue that offshore drilling presents a more real threat to American security than do foreign regimes.

Thus, depending on where you want to go in the paragraph, you have many options for ways to make connections for your reader. Remember, your reader is not in your brain; and as smart as he or she may be, you still need to make connections that explain the relevance or purpose of included sourced material.

Provide Additional Support for This Point

provided by Writing Commons

Why is it important to provide reliable support for a point?

When a writer makes a point or claim, his or her position should be supported by evidence from one or more reliable sources. ***Evidence from reliable sources*** can make an argument more convincing and build the credibility of the writer. In contrast, unsupported points or points supported by unreliable sources can compromise the integrity of the paper and the writer.

What kind of additional support can be added?

- ***Quantitative data*, such as statistics**
  - **Example:** Present the percentage of a specific ethnic population in low-income housing units when making a claim related to racial poverty.
- ***Empirical evidence* from scientific research**
  - **Example:** Provide data from qualitative research when comparing the effectiveness of different methods for teaching young children to read.
- **Quotes, paraphrases, and summaries from experts and specialists**
  - **Example:** Use a quote from General Petraeus of the U.S. Army when discussing the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.
- **Anecdotal evidence and relevant narrative**
  - **Example:** Interview a health food store owner to learn more about his or her experience with vegetarian food choices; include relevant narrative about personal experience with choosing a vegetarian lifestyle.

What actions can be taken to locate additional support?

- **Search reputable academic databases:** These databases, such as *Academic Search Premier* and *JSTOR*, include searchable collections of scholarly works, academic journals, online encyclopedias, and helpful bibliographies that can usually be accessed through a college library website.
- **Search credible news sources:** Databases, such as *Access World News*, can be used to locate news articles from around the world. Articles from reputable news sources may also be found through careful Internet searches.
- **Search academic peer-reviewed journals:** Journal articles that have been peer-reviewed are generally considered reliable because they have been examined by experts in their field for accuracy and quality.
- **Search Google scholar:** This Internet search engine helps the user locate scholarly literature in the form of articles and books, professional societies' websites, online academic websites, and more.
- **Ask for help at the library research desk:** Library staff can provide useful services, such as assistance with the use of library research tools, guidance with identifying credible and non-credible sources, and personalized assistance with the selection of reliable sources.

Avoid the Use of Unsupported Opinions as Evidence

provided by Writing Commons

Why is it important to avoid the use of unsupported opinions as evidence?*

- ***Unsupported opinions*** can weaken the credibility of the writer because the reader may lose their trust in the writer.
- ***Strong opinions*** may offend the reader, who may feel differently about the issue or have a personal connection to the opposing view.

- ***Opinions without supporting evidence*** can compromise the strength and perceived validity of the paper's argument because such opinions may overshadow other trustworthy evidence.

When should an opinion be left out?

An opinion should be left out of an academic paper when it:

- cannot be supported by credible sources or reliable research.
- is informed only by personal experiences, religious beliefs, or strong emotions and not by relevant date.
- can be replaced with a more compelling point.

How can an opinion be properly stated and supported?

- **Identify the root of your opinion:** What is your opinion based on? If the answer is related only to personal experiences, religious beliefs, or strong emotions, you will need to do some research to ensure that credible sources are available to back your opinion.
- **Locate credible evidence that supports your opinion:** Look for specific evidence in your research that supports your opinion. Citing an authority in conjunction with communicating your opinion will help strengthen the credibility of your claim.
- **Establish a connection between your opinion and reliable evidence:** Demonstrate to your reader that an opinion used to support a point has been informed by research and credible sources. Connect relevant research to the opinion as clearly as possible.

Let's look at an example:

Unsupported opinion: I believe that the current 'anti-bullying' campaigns aimed at today's adolescents are useless and will only create a future society that is full of wimps.

Supported opinion: 'Anti-bullying' campaigns targeting today's adolescents may create a future society that is unprepared to cope with conflict. In support of this idea, noted psychologist Peter Smith explains that while reports of bullying decrease with age, the frequency of bullying remains the same across different age groups. He attributes this decline in reported bullying incidents to the fact that older victims have developed valuable coping mechanisms to help deal with bullying (Smith 336). Smith's idea suggests that bullying may not always be detrimental to the victim, since building coping skills during adolescence may contribute to greater resiliency in adulthood. [5]

Important Concepts

evidence

ethos

writers should utilize the latest, most significant and credible sources

interrelationships among sources

synthesis notes

identifying your thesis

evidence from reliable sources

quantitative data

empirical evidence

unsupported opinions

strong opinions

opinions without supporting evidence

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1: Crime Scene Evidence | National Geographic. **Authored by**: National Geographic **License**: Standard YouTube License.

Video 2: Using Evidence to Support Claims. Authored by: markobooko License Standard YouTube License.

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18.3: Drafting

Article links:

“The Research Essay” by Steven D. Krause

“Intros and Outros” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

- Define purpose and audience as they apply to research.
- Compare a formal and working outline.
- Discuss ways to move beyond the five-paragraph format.
- Recognize the challenges presented by creating a good conclusion.

https://youtu.be/myHkqdkhBYg

The Research Essay

by Steven D. Krause

A “Research Essay” or a “Research Project” instead of a “Research Paper”

First, while teachers assign and students write essays in college classes that are commonly called “research papers,” there is no clear consensus on the definition of a research paper. This is because the definition of “research” differs from field to field, and even between instructors within the same discipline teaching the same course.

Second, while the papers we tend to call “research papers” do indeed include research, most other kinds of college writing require at least some research as well.

A third reason has to do with the connotations of the word “paper” versus the word “essay.” For me, “paper” suggests something static, concrete, routine, and uninteresting—think of the negative connotations of the term bureaucratic “paperwork,” or the policing mechanism of “showing your papers” to the authorities. On the other hand, the word “***essay***” has more positive connotations: dynamic, flexible, unique, and creative. The definitions of essay in dictionaries I have examined include terms like “attempt,” “endeavor,” and “a try.” As a writer, I would much rather work on something that was a dynamic and creative endeavor rather than a static and routine document. My hope is that you, as a student and a writer, feel the same way.

This chapter is about writing a research essay. While I cannot offer you *exact* guidelines of how to do this for each and every situation where you will be asked to write such a paper or essay, I can provide you with the general guidelines and advice you’ll need to successfully complete these sorts of writing assignments.

Getting Ready: Questions to Ask Yourself About Your Research Essay

By this point, you probably have done some combination of the following things:

- Thought about different kinds of evidence to support your research;
- Been to the library and the internet to gather evidence;
- Developed an annotated bibliography for your evidence;
- Written and revised a working thesis for your research;
- Critically analyzed and written about key pieces of your evidence;
- Considered the reasons for disagreeing and questioning the premise of your working thesis; and
- Categorized and evaluated your evidence.

In other words, you already have been working on your research essay through the process of research writing.

But before diving into writing a research essay, you need to take a moment to ask yourself, your colleagues, and your teacher some important questions about the nature of your project.

- **What is the specific assignment?**

It is crucial to consider the teacher's directions and assignment for your research essay. The teacher's specific directions will in large part determine what you are required to do to successfully complete your essay, just as they did with the exercises you completed in part two of this book.

If you have been given the option to choose your own research topic, the assignment for the research essay itself might be open-ended. For example:

> Write a research essay about the working thesis that you have been working on with the previous writing assignments. Your essay should be about ten pages long, it should include ample evidence to support your point, and it should follow MLA style.

Some research writing assignments are more specific than this, of course. For example, here is a research writing assignment for a poetry class:

> Write a seven to ten page research essay about one of the poets discussed in the last five chapters of our textbook and his or her poems. Besides your analysis and interpretation of the poems, be sure to cite scholarly research that supports your points. You should also include research on the cultural and historic contexts the poet was working within. Be sure to use MLA documentation style throughout your essay.

Obviously, you probably wouldn't be able to write a research project about the problems of advertising prescription drugs on television in a History class that focused on the American Revolution.

- **What is the main purpose of your research essay?**

Has the goal of your essay been to answer specific questions based on assigned reading material and your research? Or has the purpose of your research been more open-ended and abstract, perhaps to learn more about issues and topics to share with a wider audience? In other words, is your research essay supposed to answer questions that indicate that you have learned about a set and defined subject matter (usually a subject matter which your teacher already more or less understands), or is your essay supposed to discover and discuss an issue that is potentially unknown to your audience, including your teacher.

The "demonstrating knowledge about a defined subject matter" ***purpose for research*** is quite common in academic writing. For example, a political science professor might ask students to write a research project about the Bill of Rights in order to help her students learn about the Bill of Rights and to demonstrate an understanding of these important amendments to the U.S. Constitution. But presumably, the professor already knows a fair amount the Bill of Rights, which means she is probably more concerned with finding out if you can demonstrate that you have learned and have formed an opinion about the Bill of Rights based on your research and study.

"Discovering and discussing an issue that is potentially unknown to your audience" is also a very common assignment, particularly in composition courses. The subject matter for research essays that are designed to inform your audience about something new is almost unlimited.

Even if all of your classmates have been researching a similar research idea, chances are your particular take on that idea has gone in a different direction. For example, you and some of your classmates might have begun your research by studying the effect on children of violence on television, either because that was a topic assigned by the teacher or because you simply shared an interest in the general topic. But as you have focused and refined this initially broad topic, you and your classmates will inevitably go into different directions, perhaps focusing on different genres (violence in cartoons versus live-action shows), on different age groups (the effect of violent television on pre-schoolers versus the effect on teen-agers), or on different conclusions about the effect of television violence in the first place (it is harmful versus there is no real effect).

- **Who is the main audience for your research writing project?**

Besides your teacher and your classmates, who are you trying to reach with your research? Who are you trying to convince as a result of the research you have done? What do you think is fair to assume that this audience knows or doesn't know about the topic of your research project? ***Purpose and audience are obviously closely related*** because the reason for writing something has a lot to do with who you are writing it for, and who you are writing something for certainly has a lot to do with your purposes in writing in the first place.

In composition classes, it is usually presumed that your audience includes your teacher and your classmates. After all, one of the most important reasons you are working on this research project in the first place is to meet the requirements of this class, and your teacher and your classmates have been with you as an audience every step of the way.

Contemplating an audience beyond your peers and teachers can sometimes be difficult, still, it might be useful for you to try to be even more specific about your audience as you begin your research essay. Do you know any "real people" (friends, neighbors, relatives, etc.) who might be an ideal reader for your research essay? Can you at least imagine what an ideal reader might want to get out of reading your research essay?

I'm not trying to suggest that you ought to ignore your teacher and your classmates as your primary audience. But research essays, like most forms of writing, are strongest when they are intended for a more specific audience, either someone the writer knows or someone the writer can imagine. Teachers and classmates are certainly part of this audience, but trying to reach an audience of potential readers beyond the classroom and the assignment will make for a stronger essay.

- **What sort of "voice" or "authority" do you think is appropriate for your research project?**

Do you want to take on a personal and more casual tone in your writing, or do you want to present a less personal and less casual tone? Do you want to use first person, the "I" pronoun, or do you want to avoid it?

My students are often surprised to learn that it is perfectly acceptable in many types of research and academic writing for writers to use the first person pronoun, "I." It is the tone I've taken with this textbook, and it is an approach that is very common in many fields, particularly those that tend to be grouped under the term "the humanities.

For example, consider this paragraph from Kelly Ritter's essay "The Economics of Authorship: Online Paper Mills, Student Writers, and First-Year Composition," which appeared in June 2005 issue of one of the leading journals in the field of composition and rhetoric, *College Composition and Communication*:

> When considering whether, when, and how often to purchase an academic paper from an online paper-mill site, first-year composition students therefore work with two factors that **I** wish to investigate here in pursuit of answering the questions posed above: the negligible desire to do one's own writing, or to be an author, with all that entails in this era of faceless authorship vis-á-vis the Internet; and the ever-shifting concept of "integrity," or responsibility when purchasing work, particularly in the anonymous arena of online consumerism. (603, emphasis added)

Throughout her thoughtful and well-researched essay, Ritter uses first person pronouns ("I" and "my," for example) when it is appropriate: "I think," "I believe," "my experiences," etc.

This sort of use of the personal pronoun is not limited to publications in English studies. This example comes from the journal *Law and Society Review* (Volume 39, Issue 2, 2005), which is an interdisciplinary journal concerned with the connections between society and the law. The article is titled "Preparing to Be Colonized: Land Tenure and Legal Strategy in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii" and it was written by law professor Stuart Banner:

> The story of Hawaii complicates the conventional account of colonial land tenure reform. Why did the land tenure reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries receive its earliest implementation in, of all places, Hawaii? Why did the Hawaiians do this to themselves? What did they hope to gain from it? This article attempts to answer these questions. At the end, **I** briefly suggest why the answers may shed some light on the process of colonization in other times and places, and thus why the answers may be of interest to people who are not historians of Hawaii. (275, emphasis added)

Banner uses both "I" and "my" throughout the article, again when it's appropriate.

Even this cursory examination of the sort of writing academic writers publish in scholarly journals will demonstrate my point: ***academic journals routinely publish*** articles that make use of the first person pronoun. Writers in academic fields that tend to be called "the sciences" (chemistry, biology, physics, and so forth, but also more "soft" sciences like sociology or psychology) are more likely to avoid the personal pronoun or to refer to themselves as "the researcher," "the author," or something similar. But even in these fields, "I" does frequently appear.

The point is this: using "I" is not inherently *wrong* for your research essay or for any other type of academic essay. However, you need to be aware of your choice of first person versus third person and your role as a writer in your research project.

Generally speaking, the use of the first person ***"I" pronoun*** creates a greater closeness and informality in your text, which can create a greater sense of intimacy between the writer and the reader. This is the main reason I've used "I" in *The Process of Research Writing:* using the first person pronoun in a textbook like this lessens the distance between us (you as student/reader and me as writer), and I think it makes for easier reading of this material.

If you do decide to use a first person voice in your essay, make sure that the focus stays on your research and does not shift to you the writer. When teachers say "don't use I," what they are really cautioning against is the *overuse* of the word "I" such that the focus of the essay shifts from the research to "you" the writer. While mixing autobiography and research writing can be interesting (as I will touch on in the next chapter on alternatives to the research essay), it is not the approach you want to take in a traditional academic research essay.

The ***third person pronoun*** (and avoidance of the use of "I") tends to have the opposite effect of the first person pronoun: it creates a sense of distance between writer and reader, and it lends a greater formality to the text. This can be useful in research writing because it tends to emphasize research and evidence in order to persuade an audience.

(I should note that much of this textbook is presented in what is called second person voice, using the ***"you" pronoun***. Second person is very effective for writing instructions, but generally speaking, I would discourage you from taking this approach in your research project.)

In other words, "first person" and "third person" are both potentially acceptable choices, depending on the assignment, the main purpose of your assignment, and the audience you are trying to reach. Just be sure to consistent—don't switch between third person and first person in the same essay.

- **What is your working thesis and how has it changed and evolved up to this point?**

You already know how important it is to have an evolving working thesis. Remember: a ***working thesis*** is one that changes and evolves as you write and research. It is perfectly acceptable to change your thesis in the writing process based on your research.

Once you have some working answers to these basic questions, it's time to start thinking about actually writing the research essay itself. For most research essay projects, you will have to consider at least most of these components in the process:

- The Formal Outline
- The Introduction
- Background Information
- Evidence to Support Your Points
- Antithetical Arguments and Answers
- The Conclusion
- Works Cited or Reference Information

The rest of this chapter explains these parts of the research essay and it concludes with an example that brings these elements together.

Creating and Revising a Formal Outline

Frequently, research essay assignments will also require you to include a formal outline, usually before the essay begins following the cover page. Formal outlines are sort of table of contents for your essay: they give the reader a summary of the main points and sub-points of what they are about to read.

The standard format for an outline looks something like this:

I. First Major Point

A. First sub-point of the first major point

1. First sub-point of the first sub-point

2. Second sub-point of the first sub-point

B. Second sub-point of the first major point

II. Second Major point

And so on. Alternatively, you may also be able to use a decimal outline to note the different points. For example:

1. First Major point

1.1. First sub-point of the first major point

1.1.1 First sub-point of the first sub-point

1.1.2 Second sub-point of the first sub-point

1.2. Second sub-point of the first major point

2. Second Major point

Sometimes, teachers ask student writers to include a "thesis statement" for their essay at the beginning of the outline.

Generally speaking, if you have one "point," be it a major point or a sub-point, or sub-point of a sub-point (perhaps a sub-sub-point!), you need to have at least a second similar point. In other words, if you have a sub-point you are labeling "A.," you should have one labeled "B." The best rule of thumb I can offer in terms of the grammar and syntax of your various points is to keep them short and consistent.

Now, while the formal outline is generally the first thing in your research essay after the title page, writing one is usually the **last** step in the writing process. Don't start writing your research essay by writing a formal outline first because it might limit the changes you can make to your essay during the writing process.

Of course, a ***formal outline*** is quite different from a ***working outline***, one where you are more informally writing down ideas and "sketching" out plans for your research essay before or as you write. There are no specific rules or methods for making a working outline– it could be a simple list of points, it could include details and reminders for the writer, or anything in-between.

Making a working outline is a good idea, particularly if your research essay will be a relatively long and complex one. Just be sure to not confuse these two very different outlining tools.

The Introduction

Research essays have to begin somewhere, and this somewhere is called the "introduction." By "beginning," I don't necessarily mean *only* the first paragraph—introductions in traditional research essays are frequently several paragraphs long. Generally speaking though, the introduction is about 25 percent or less of the total essay; in other words, in a ten-page, traditional research essay, the introduction would rarely be longer than two and a half pages.

Introductions have two basic jobs to perform:

- To get the reader's attention; and
- To briefly explain what the rest of the essay will be about.

What is appropriate or what works to get the reader's attention depends on the audience you have in mind for your research essay and the sort of voice or authority you want to have with your essay. Frequently, it is a good idea to include some background material on the issue being discussed or a brief summary of the different sides of an argument. If you have an anecdote from either your own experience or your research that you think is relevant to the rest of your project or will be interesting to your readers, you might want to consider beginning with that story. Generally speaking, you should avoid mundane or clichéd beginnings like "This research essay is about…" or "In society today…"

The second job of an introduction in a traditional research essay is to explain to the reader what the rest of the essay is going to be about. This is frequently done by stating your "thesis statement," which is more or less where your working thesis has ended up after its inevitable changes and revisions.

A thesis statement can work in a lot of different places in the introduction, not only as the last sentence at the end of the first paragraph. It is also possible to let your readers know what your thesis is without ever directly stating it in a single sentence. This approach is common in a variety of different types of writing that use research, though traditionally, most academic research essays have a specific and identifiable thesis statement.

Let's take a look at this example of a **WEAK** introductory paragraph:

In our world today, there are many health problems, such as heart disease and cancer. Another serious problem that affects many people in this country is diabetes, particularly Type II diabetes. Diabetes is a disease where the body does not produce enough insulin, and the body needs insulin to process sugars and starches. It is a serious disease that effects millions of people, many of whom don't even know they have the disease. In this essay, I will discuss how eating sensibly and getting plenty of exercise are the most important factors in preventing Type 2 Diabetes.

The first two sentences of this introduction don't have much to do with the topic of diabetes, and the following sentences are rather vague. Also, this introduction doesn't offer much information about what the rest of the essay will be about, and it certainly doesn't capture the reader's attention.

Now, consider this revised and **BETTER** introductory paragraph:

> Diabetes is a disease where the body does not produce enough of insulin to process starches and sugars effectively. According to the American Diabetes Association web site, over 18 million Americans have diabetes, and as many as 5.2 million of these people are unaware that they have it. Perhaps even more striking is that the most common form of diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes, is largely preventable with a sensible diet and exercise.

This introduction is much more specific and to the point, and because of that, it does a better job of getting the reader's attention. Also, because it is very specific, this introduction gives a better sense to the reader where the rest of the essay will be leading.

While the introduction is of course the first thing your readers will see, **make sure it is one of the last things you decide to revise in the process of writing your research essay.** You will probably start writing your essay by writing an introduction—after all, you've got to start somewhere. But it is nearly impossible to write a very effective introduction if the rest of the essay hasn't been written yet, which is why you will certainly want to return to the introduction to do some revision work after you've written your essay.

Background Information (or Helping Your Reader Find a Context)

It is always important to explain, contextualize, and orientate your readers within any piece of writing. Your research essay is no different in that you need to include background information on your topic in order to create the right context for the project.

In one sense, you're giving your reader important background information every time you fully introduce and explain a piece of evidence or an argument you are making. But often times, research essays include some background information about the overall topic near the beginning of the essay. Sometimes, this is done briefly as part of the introduction section of the essay; at other times, this is best accomplished with a more detailed section after the introduction and near the beginning of the essay.

How much background information you need to provide and how much context you need to establish depends a great deal on how you answer the "Getting Ready" questions at the beginning of this chapter, particularly the questions in which you are asked to consider you ***purpose*** and your ***audience.*** If one of the purposes of your essay is to convince a primary audience of readers who know little about your topic or your argument, you will have to provide more background information than you would if the main purpose of your essay was to convince a primary audience that knows a lot about your topic. But even if you can assume your audience is as familiar with the topic of your essay as you, it's still important to provide at least some background on your specific approach to the issue in your essay.

It's almost always better to give your readers "too much" background information than "too little." In my experience, students too often assume too much about what their readers (the teacher included!) knows about their research essay. There are several reasons why this is the case; perhaps it is because students so involved in their research forget that their readers haven't been doing the same kind of research. The result is that sometimes students "cut corners" in terms of helping their audience through their essay. I think that the best way to avoid these kinds of misunderstandings is for you to always remember that your readers don't know as much about your specific essay as you do, and part of your job as a writer is to guide your reader through the text.

In Casey Copeman's research essay at the end of this chapter, the context and background information for the subject matter after the introduction; for example:

> The problems surrounding corruption in university athletics have been around ever since sports have been considered important in American culture. People have emphasized the importance of sports and the significance of winning for a long time. According to Jerome Cramer in a special report published in Phi Delta Kappan, "Sports are a powerful experience, and America somehow took this belief of the ennobling nature of sports and transformed it into a quasi-religion" (Cramer K1).

Casey's subject matter, college athletics, was one that she assumed most of her primary audience of fellow college students and classmates were familiar with. Nonetheless, she does provide some basic information about the importance of sports team in society and in universities in particular.

Weaving in Evidence to Support Your Point

Throughout your research essay, you need to include evidence that supports your points. There is no firm rule as to "how much" research you will want or need to include in your research essay. Like so many other things with research writing, it depends on your purpose, the audience, the assignment, and so forth. **But generally speaking, you need to have a piece of evidence in the form of a direct quote or paraphrase every time you make a claim that you cannot assume your audience "just knows."**

Stringing together a series of quotes and paraphrases from different sources might show that you have done a lot of research on a particular topic, but your audience wants to know your ***interpretation*** of these quotes and paraphrases, and your reader wants and needs to be guided through your research. To do this, you need to work at explaining the significance of your evidence throughout your essay.

For example, this passage does a **BAD** job of introducing and weaving in evidence to support a point.

> In America today, the desire to have a winning team drives universities to admit academically unqualified students. "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive by championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191).

The connection between the sentence and the evidence is not as clear as it could be. Further, the quotation is simply "dropped in" with no explanation. Now, compare it with this revised and **BETTER** example:

> The desire to always have a winning team has driven many universities to admit academically unqualified student athletes to their school just to improve their sports teams. According to James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, the corruption of university athletics usually begins with the process of recruiting and admitting student athletes. He states that, "At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive but championship-winning teams" (Duderstadt 191).

Remember: the point of using research in writing (be it a traditional research essay or any other form of research writing) is not merely to offer your audience a bunch of evidence on a topic. Rather, the point of research writing is to interpret your research in order to persuade an audience.

Antithetical Arguments and Answers

Most research essays anticipate and answer antithetical arguments, the ways in which a reader might disagree with your point. Besides demonstrating your knowledge of the different sides of the issue, acknowledging and answering the antithetical arguments in your research essay will go a long way toward convincing some of your readers that the point you are making is correct.

Antithetical arguments can be placed almost anywhere within a research essay, including the introduction or the conclusion. However, you want to be sure that the antithetical arguments are accompanied by "answering" evidence and arguments. After all, the point of presenting antithetical arguments is to explain why the point you are supporting with research is the correct one.

In the essay at the end of this chapter, Casey brings up antithetical points at several points in her essay. For example:

> To be fair, being a student-athlete isn't easy. They are faced with difficult situations when having to juggle their athletic life and their academic life at school. As Duderstadt said, "Excelling in academics is challenging enough without the additional pressures of participating in highly competitive athletic programs" (Duderstadt 190). So I can see why some athletes might experience trouble fitting all of the studying and coursework into their busy schedules.

The Conclusion

As research essays have a beginning, so do they have an ending, generally called a conclusion. While the main purpose of an introduction is to get the reader's attention and to explain what the essay will be about, the goal of a conclusion is to bring the reader to a satisfying point of closure. In other words, a good conclusion does not merely "end" an essay; it wraps things up.

It is usually a good idea to make a connection in the conclusion of your essay with the introduction, particularly if you began your essay with something like a relevant anecdote or a rhetorical question. You may want to restate your thesis, though you don't

necessarily have to restate your thesis in exactly the same words you used in your introduction. It is also usually not a good idea to end your essay with obvious concluding cues or clichéd phrases like “in conclusion.”

Conclusions are similar to introductions on a number of different levels. First, like introductions, they are important since they leave definite “impressions” on the reader—in this case, the important “last” impression. Second, conclusions are almost as difficult to write and revise as introductions. Because of this, be sure to take extra time and care to revise your conclusion.

Here’s the conclusion of Casey Copeman’s essay, which is included at the end of this chapter:

As James Moore and Sherry Watt say in their essay “Who Are Student Athletes?”, the “marriage between higher education and intercollegiate athletics has been turbulent, and always will be” (7). The NCAA has tried to make scholarly success at least as important as athletic success with requirements like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16. But there are still too many cases where under-prepared students are admitted to college because they can play a sport, and there are too still too many instances where universities let their athletes get away with being poor students because they are a sport superstar. I like cheering for my college team as much as anyone else, but I would rather cheer for college players who were students who worried about learning and success in the classroom, too.

“Works Cited” or “Reference” Information

If I were to give you one and only one “firm and definite” rule about research essay writing, it would be that you **must** have a section following the conclusion of your essay that explains to the reader where the evidence you cite comes from. This information is especially important in academic essays since academic readers are keenly interested in the evidence that supports your point.

If you’re following the Modern Language Association rules for citing evidence, this last section is called “Works Cited.” If you’re following the American Psychological Association rules, it’s called “References.” In either case, this is the place where you list the full citation of all the evidence you quote or paraphrase in your research essay. **Note that for both MLA and APA style, research you read but didn’t actually use in your research essay is not included.** Your teacher might want you to provide a “bibliography” with your research essay that does include this information, but this is not the same thing.

Frankly, one of the most difficult aspects of this part of the research essay is the formatting—alphabetizing, getting the spacing right, underlining titles or putting them in quotes, periods here, commas there, and so forth. Again, see the appendix for information on how to do this. But if you have been keeping and adding to an annotated bibliography as you have progressed through the process of research (as discussed in chapter six), this part of the essay can actually be merely a matter of checking your sources and “copying” the citation information from the word processing file where you have saved your annotated bibliography and “pasting” it into the word processing file where you are saving your research essay.

Examples

A Student Example:

“The Corruption Surrounding University Athletics” by Casey K. Copeman

The assignment that Casey Copeman followed to write this research essay is similar to the assignment described earlier in this chapter:

> Write a research essay about the working thesis that you have been working on with the previous writing assignments. Your essay should be about ten pages long, it should include ample evidence to support your point, and it should follow MLA style.

Of course, it’s also important to remember that Casey’s work on this project began long before she wrote this essay with the exercises she worked through to develop her working thesis, to gather evidence, and to evaluate and categorize it.

The Corruption Surrounding University Athletics

By Casey Copeman

Outline

I. Introduction

II. Origins and description of the problem

A. The significance of sports in our society

B. The drive and pressure for universities to win leads to admitting academically unqualified student athletes

III. The Eligibility Rules Proposition 48 and Proposition 16

A. Proposition 48 explained

B. Proposition 16 explained

C. Proposition 16 challenged but upheld in the courts

D. Academic eligibility rules still broken

IV. Rules Broken At School

A. The pressures faced by athletes and universities

1. The pressures of being a student athlete

2. The pressures put on universities to recruit “good players”

B. “Athletics” emphasized over studies indirectly and directly

1. The indirect message is about sports above academics

2. Occasionally, the message to emphasize sports is direct

3. Student-athletes often steered into “easy” classes

C. Good student athletes, mostly in sports other than football and men’s basketball, get a bad name

V. Conclusion

Most young people who are trying to get into college have to spend a lot of time studying and worrying. They study to get good grades in high school and to get good test scores, and they worry about whether or not all of the studying will be enough to get them into the college of their choice. But there is one group of college students who don’t have to study and worry as much, as long as they are outstanding football or basketball players: student athletes.

Issues involving student athletes with unsatisfactory test scores, extremely low grade point averages, special privileges given to them by the schools, and issues concerning their coaches’ influence on them academically, have all been causes of concern with university athletics. The result is a pattern where athletics at the university level are full of corruption surrounding the academic standards and admittance policy that are placed upon some university athletes. In this essay, I will explain what I see as the source of this corruption and the ways in which academic standards are compromised in the name of winning.

The problems surrounding corruption in university athletics have been around ever since sports have been considered important in American culture. People have emphasized the importance of sports and the significance of winning for a long time. According to Jerome Cramer in a special report published in Phi Delta Kappan, “Sports are a powerful experience, and America somehow took this belief of the ennobling nature of sports and transformed it into a quasi-religion” (Cramer K1). Cramer also says,

> “The original sin of sports in United States society seems to have been committed when we allowed our games to assume too much of our lives. It was as if we could measure our moral fiber by the won/lost record of our local team. Once schools began to organize sports, winning became a serious institutional consideration. Our innocence vanished when we refused to accept losing” (Cramer K1).

This importance of sports and winning in the United States today is what has led to this corruption that we now see in our top universities when it comes to athletes and how they are treated by their schools.

The desire to always have a winning team has driven many universities to admit academically unqualified student athletes to their school just to improve their sports teams. According to James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan, the corruption of university athletics usually begins with the process of recruiting and admitting student athletes. He states that, “At many universities, the tradition of athletic success requires coaches to produce not only competitive but championship-winning teams” (Duderstadt 191). This, in turn, “puts enormous pressure to recruit the most outstanding high school athletes each year, since this has become the key determinant of competitive success in major college sports”(Duderstadt 192).

According to Duderstadt, “Coaches and admissions officers have long known that the pool of students who excel at academics and athletics is simply too small to fill their rosters with players who meet the usual admissions criteria” (Duderstadt 193). This pressure put on coaches to recruit the best athletes “leads them to recruit athletes who are clearly unprepared for college work or who have little interest in a college education” (Duderstadt 193). This obviously leads to a problem because although most universities have standards that must be met for students to be admitted, “in all too many cases, recruited athletes fail to meet even these minimum standards” (Duderstadt 193).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) set some minimum standards for admission in January of 1986. They had decided that “the time had come to make sure that college athletes were not only athletically qualified, but that they also were academically competent to represent schools of higher learning” (Cramer K4). Proposition 48 required that “all entering athletes score a minimum of 700 on their Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and achieve a minimum high school grade point average in core academic courses of 2.0, or sit out their first year” (Duderstadt 194). This seemed like a fairly reasonable rule to most universities around the country, and some even thought, “a kid who can not score a combined 700 and keep a C average in high school should not be in college in the first place” (Cramer K4).

In 1992, the NCAA changed these requirements slightly with the introduction of proposition 16. According to the document “Who Can Play? An Examination of NCAA’s Proposition 16,” which was published on the National Center for Educational Statistics in August 1995, Proposition 16 requirements are “more strict than the current Proposition 48 requirements. The new criteria are based on a combination of high school grade point average (GPA) in 13 core courses and specified SAT (or ACT) scores.”

Some coaches and college athletes have argued against proposition 48 and proposition 16 because they claim that they unfairly discriminate against African-American students. According to Robert Fullinwider’s web-based article “Academic Standards and the NCAA,” some “black coaches were so incensed that they toyed with the idea of boycotting NCAA events.” Fullinwider goes on:

> John Thompson, then-coach of Georgetown University’s basketball team, complained that poor minority kids were at a disadvantage taking the “mainstream-oriented” SAT. “Certain kids,” he noted just after the federal court’s decision, “require individual assessment. Some urban schools cater to poor kids, low-income kids, black and white. To put everybody on the same playing field [i.e., to treat them the same in testing] is just crazy.”

Fullinwider writes that the legality of Proposition 16 was challenged in March 1999 on the basis that it was discriminatory to African-American student athletes. However, in its summary of the case Cureton v. NCAA, the Marquette University Law School You Make the Call web site explains that the federal courts ultimately decided that Proposition 16 was not a violation of students’ civil rights and could be enforced by the NCAA.

With rules like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16, “the old practice of recruiting athletes who are clearly unqualified for admission with the hope that their contributions on the field will be sufficient before their inadequacy in the classroom, slowed somewhat” (Duderstadt 195). However, as facts show today, it seems as if these rules are harder to enforce in some universities than the NCAA originally thought.

There have been many documented instances of athletes being admitted to a university without even coming close to meeting the minimum requirements for academic eligibility set by the NCAA. One such instance happened just one year after Proposition 48 was enacted. North Carolina State University signed Chris Washburn, “one of the most highly recruited high school seniors in the nation” (Cramer K4). Although Washburn proved to be valuable to the team, it was later found out that “his combined score on the SAT was a whopping 470,” and that he had “an abysmal academic record in high school” (Cramer K4). Both his SAT score and his poor grades in high school all fell much lower than the standards set by the NCAA.

According to Art Padilla, former vice president for academic affairs at the University of North Carolina System, student athletes like Chris Washburn are not uncommon at most universities (Cramer K5). He states, “Every major college sports institution has kids with that kind of academic record, and if they deny it, they are lying” (Cramer K5).

The admitting of unqualified students is not the only place where colleges seem to step out of bounds though. Once the athlete has been admitted and signed with the university, for some, a long list of corruption from the university is still to follow when it comes to dealing with their academics.

Furthermore, many universities face a lot of pressure to recruit good players to their schools regardless of their academic skills. Debra Blum reported in 1996 about the case of a star basketball player who wanted to attend Vanderbilt University. As Blum

writes, “Vanderbilt denied him (basketball player Ron Mercer) admission, describing his academic record as not up to snuff. So he enrolled at Kentucky, where he helped his team to a national championship last season” (A51). The case of Vanderbilt losing Mercer caused a lot of “soul searching” at Vanderbilt, in part because there was a lot of pressure from “other university constituents, particularly many alumni … to do what it takes to field more-competitive teams, especially in football and men’s basketball” (A51).

But these pressures are also the point where school officials are tempted to break the rules. As John Gerdy wrote in his article “A Suggestion For College Coaches: Teach By Example,” in universities where the purpose of recruiting a great athlete is to improve the team, they often claim, “intercollegiate athletics are about education, but it is obvious that they are increasingly about entertainment, money, and winning” (28).

Mixed messages are sent when some student-athletes “are referred to as “players” and “athletes” rather than “students” and “student-athletes” (Gerdy 28). It is clear that these student-athletes are sometimes only wanted for their athletic ability, and it is also clear that there are sometimes many pressures to recruit such students. As Austin C. Wherwein said, many student athletes “are given little incentive to be scholars and few persons care how the student athlete performs academically, including some of the athletes themselves” (Quoted in Thelin 183).

In some cases, coaches directly encourage students to emphasize their athletic career instead of their studies. One such instance, reported in Sports Illustrated by Austin Murphy, involves an Ohio State tailback, Robert Smith, who quit the football team “saying that coaches had told him he was spending too much time on academics” (Murphy 9). Smith claims that offensive coordinator Elliot Uzelac “encouraged him to skip a summer-school chemistry class because it was causing Smith, who was a pre-med student, to miss football practice” (Murphy 9). Smith did not think this was right so he walked off the team (Murphy 9). Supposedly, “the university expressed support for Uzelac, who denied Smith’s allegations” (Murphy 9).

Another way some universities sometimes manage the academic success of their student-athletes is to enroll them in easier classes, particularly those set up specifically for student-athletes. The curriculum for some of these courses is said to be “less than intellectually demanding”(Cramer K2). Jan Kemp, a remedial English professor at the University of Georgia who taught a class with just football players for students, was “troubled by the fact that many of her students seemed incapable of graduating from college” (Cramer K2). This seems surprising, but in fact some athletes from the University of Georgia “were described as being given more than four chances to pass developmental studies classes” without ever being successful (Cramer K2). Also, “school records show that in an effort to keep athletes playing, several were placed in the regular academic curriculum without having passed even the watered-down classes” (Cramer K2). Although this particular story comes from the University of Georgia, it is not just unique to that school. Many universities have been guilty of doing such things for their athletes just so they could continue to play on the team.

Of course, not all student-athletes are bad students. Many student-athletes actually do well in school and excel both athletically and academically. But although these true “student-athletes” do exist, they are often overshadowed by those negative images of athletes who do not do as well in school. And while all sorts of different sports have had academic problems with their athletes, the majority of corruption at the university level exists in football and basketball teams (Cramer K3). According to Duderstadt, “football and basketball are not holding their own when it comes to student academic honors” (Duderstadt 190). He says “Football and basketball have developed cultures with low expectations for academic performance. For many student-athletes in these sports, athletics are clearly regarded as a higher priority than their academic goals” (Duderstadt 191). So although this label of the bad student-athlete does not even come close to applying to all athletes, some universities are still considered, as John Thelin wrote in his book Games Colleges Play, “academically corrupt and athletically sound” (199).

As James Moore and Sherry Watt say in their essay “Who Are Student Athletes?”, the “marriage between higher education and intercollegiate athletics has been turbulent, and always will be” (7). The NCAA has tried to make scholarly success at least as important as athletic success with requirements like Proposition 48 and Proposition 16. But there are still too many cases where under-prepared students are admitted to college because they can play a sport, and there are too still too many instances where universities let their athletes get away with being poor students because they are a sport superstar. I like cheering for my college team as much as anyone else, but I would rather cheer for college players who were students who worried about learning and success in the classroom, too.

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Intros and Outros

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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***. 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 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

In Conclusion …

I confess that I still find conclusions hard to write. By the time I'm finalizing a conclusion, I'm often fatigued with the project and struggling to find something new to say that isn't a departure into a whole different realm. I also find that I have become so immersed in the subject that it seems like anything I have to say is absurdly obvious.4 ***A good conclusion is a real challenge***, one that takes persistent work and some finesse.

Strong conclusions do two things: they bring the argument to a satisfying close and they explain some of the most important implications. You've probably been taught to re-state your thesis using different words, and it is true that your reader will likely appreciate a brief summary of your overall argument: say, two or three sentences for papers less than 20 pages. It's perfectly fine to use what they call "***metadiscourse***" in this summary; metadiscourse is text like, "I have argued that …" or "This analysis reveals that … ." Go ahead and use language like that if it seems useful to signal that you're restating the main points of your argument. In shorter papers you can usually simply reiterate the main point without that metadiscourse: for example, "What began as a protest about pollution turned into a movement for civil rights." If that's the crux of the argument, your reader will recognize a summary like that. Most of the student papers I see close the argument effectively in the concluding paragraph.

The second task of a conclusion—situating the argument within broader implications—is a lot trickier. A lot of instructors describe it as the **"So what?"** challenge. You've proven your point about the role of agriculture in deepening the Great Depression; so what? I don't like the "so what" phrasing because putting writers on the defensive seems more likely to inhibit the flow of ideas than to draw them out. Instead, I suggest you imagine a friendly reader thinking, "OK, you've convinced me of your argument. I'm interested to know what you make of this conclusion. What is or should be different now that your thesis is proven?" In that sense, your reader is asking you to take your analysis one step further. That's why a good conclusion is challenging to write. You're not just coasting over the finish line.

So, how do you do that? The third story of a three-story thesis situates an arguable claim within broader implications. If you've already articulated a thesis statement that does that, then you've already mapped the terrain of the conclusion. Your task then is to explain the implications you mentioned: if environmental justice really is the new civil rights movement, then how should scholars and/or activists approach it? If agricultural trends really did worsen the Great Depression, what does that mean for agricultural policy today? If your thesis, as written, is a two-story one, then you may want to revisit it after you've developed a conclusion you're satisfied with and consider including the key implication in that thesis statement. Doing so will give your paper even more momentum.

Let's look at the concluding counterparts to the excellent introductions that we've read to illustrate some of the different ways writers can accomplish the two goals of a conclusion:

Victor Seet on religious embodiment:[5]

Embodiment is fundamental to bridging reality and spirituality. The concept demonstrates how religious practice synthesizes human experience in reality—mind, body, and environment—to embed a cohesive religious experience that can recreate itself. Although religion is ostensibly focused on an intangible spiritual world, its traditions that eventually achieve spiritual advancement are grounded in reality. The texts, symbols, and rituals integral to religious practice go beyond merely distinguishing one faith from another; they serve to fully absorb individuals in a culture that sustains common experiential knowledge shared by millions. It is important to remember that human senses do not merely act as sponges absorbing external information; our mental models of the world are being constantly refined with new experiences. This fluid process allows individuals to gradually accumulate a wealth of religious multimodal information, making the mental representation hyper-sensitive, which in turn contributes to religious experiences. However, there is an important caveat. Many features of religious visions that are attributed to embodiment can also be explained through less complex cognitive mechanisms. The repetition from religious traditions exercised both physically and mentally, naturally inculcates a greater religious awareness simply through familiarity. Religious experiences are therefore not necessarily caused by embedded cues within the environment but arise from an imbued fluency with religious themes. Embodiment proposes a connection between body, mind, and the environment that attempts to explain how spiritual transcendence is achieved through physical reality. Although embodied cognition assuages the conflict between science and religion, it remains to be seen if this intricate scientific theory is able to endure throughout millennia just as religious beliefs have.

The paragraph first re-caps the argument, then explains how embodiment relates to other aspects of religious experience, and finally situates the analysis within the broader relationship between religion and science.

From Davis O'Connell:[6]

Looking at Abelard through the modern historical lens, it appears to many historians that he did not fit the 12th-century definition of a heretic in the sense that his teachings did not differ much from that of the church. Mews observes that Abelard's conception of the Trinity was a continuation of what earlier Christian leaders had already begun to ponder. He writes: "In identifying the Son and Holy Spirit with the wisdom and benignity of God, Abelard was simply extending an idea (based on Augustine) that had previously been raised by William of Champeaux." St. Augustine was seen as one of the main Christian authorities during the Middle Ages and for Abelard to derive his teachings from that source enhances his credibility. This would indicate that although Abelard was not

necessarily a heretic by the church's official definition, he was branded as one through all of the nontheological social and political connotations that "heresy" had come to encompass.

O'Connell, interestingly, chooses a scholarly tone for the conclusion, in contrast to the more jocular tone we saw in the introduction. He doesn't specifically re-cap the argument about Abelard's deviance from social norms and political pressures, but rather he explains his summative point about what it means to be a heretic. In this case, the implications of the argument are all about Abelard. There aren't any grand statements about religion and society, the craft of historiography, or the politics of language. Still, the reader is not left hanging. One doesn't need to make far-reaching statements to successfully conclude a paper.

From Logan Skelly:7

Considering the hundreds of millions of years that *S. aureus* has been evolving and adapting to hostile environments, it is likely that the past seventy years of human antibiotic usage represents little more than a minor nuisance to these bacteria. Antibiotic resistance for humans, however, contributes to worldwide health, economic, and environmental problems. Multi-drug resistant *S. aureus* has proven itself to be a versatile and persistent pathogen that will likely continue to evolve as long as selective pressures, such as antibiotics, are introduced into the environment. While the problems associated with *S. aureus* have received ample attention in the scientific literature, there has been little resolution of the problems this pathogen poses. If these problems are to be resolved, it is essential that infection control measures and effective treatment strategies be developed, adopted, and implemented in the future on a worldwide scale—so that the evolution of this pathogen's virulence can be curtailed and its pathogenicity can be controlled.

Skelly's thesis is about the need to regulate antibiotic usage to mitigate antibiotic resistance. The concluding paragraph characterizes the pathogens evolutionary history (without re-capping the specifics) and then calls for an informed, well planned, and comprehensive response.

All three conclusions above achieve both tasks—closing the argument and addressing the implications—but the authors have placed a different emphasis on the two tasks and framed the broader implications in different ways. Writing, like any craft, challenges the creator to make these kinds of independent choices. There isn't a standard recipe for a good conclusion.

Form And Function

As I've explained, some students mistakenly believe that they should avoid detail and substance in the introductions and conclusions of academic papers. Having practiced the five-paragraph form repeatedly, that belief sometimes gets built into the writing process; students sometimes just throw together those paragraphs thinking that they don't really count as part of the analysis. Sometimes though, student writers know that more precise and vivid intros and outros are ideal but still settle on the vague language that seems familiar, safe, and do-able. Knowing the general form of academic writing (simplified in the five-paragraph theme) helps writers organize their thoughts; however, it leads some student writers to approach papers as mere fill-in-the-blank exercises.

I hope you will instead envision paper-writing as a task of working through an unscripted and nuanced thought process and then sharing your work with readers. When you're engaged with the writing process, you'll find yourself deciding which substantive points belong in those introductory and concluding paragraphs rather than simply filling those paragraphs out with fluff. They should be sort of hard to write; they're the parts of the paper that express your most important ideas in the most precise ways. If you're struggling with intros and conclusions, it might be because you're approaching them in exactly the right way. Having a clear, communicative purpose will help you figure out what your reader needs to know to really understand your thinking.

OTHER RESOURCES

1. **Writing in College**, a guide by Joseph L. Williams (the co-author of *Style*) and Lawrence McEnerney for the University of Chicago, offers some excellent advice on *drafting* and **revising** introductions and conclusions.
2. **The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina** also offers excellent advice on writing **introductions** and **conclusions**.

3. **Discoveries** is a journal published by Cornell University from which the excellent examples in this chapter were drawn. It's a great source of inspiration.

Important Concepts

essay

purpose for research

purpose and audience are obviously closely related

academic journals routinely publish articles that make use of the first person pronoun

"I" pronoun

third person pronoun

"you" pronoun

formal outline

working outline

purpose

audience

interpretation

misconception about introductions: that they shouldn't really say anything substantive

five-paragraph format

vague introductory paragraph

a good conclusion is a real challenge

metadiscourse

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Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence. **Authored by**: Amy Guptill. **Provided by**: The College of Brockport, SUNY. **Located at**: http://textbooks.opensuny.org/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/. **Project**: Open SUNY Textbooks. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*

MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1: How to Plan and Write a Paper: How to Draft, University of Maryland, Baltimore Writing Center License: Standard YouTube License

[1] This example is slightly adapted from a student-authored essay: Victor Seet, "Embodiment in Religion," Discoveries, 11 (2012). Discoveries is an annual publication of the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines of Cornell University which publishes excellent papers written by Cornell undergraduates.

[2] Davis O'Connell, "Abelard: A Heretic of a Different Nature," *Discoveries* 10 (2011): 36-41.

[3] Logan Skelly, "Staphylococcus aureus: The Evolution of a Persistent Pathogen," *Discoveries* 10 (2011): 89-102.

[4] A lot of people have that hang-up: “If I thought of it, it can’t be much of an insight.” It’s another good reason to get others to read your work. They’ll remind you that your points are both original and interesting.

[5] Seet, “Embodiment in Religion.”

[6] O’Connell, “Abelard,” 40.

[7] Skelly, “Stapholococcus aureus,” 97.

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18.4: Using Sources Creatively

Article links:

“Walk, Talk, Cook, Eat: A Guide to Using Sources” by Cynthia R. Haller

“Annoying Ways People Use Sources” by Kyle D. Stedman

“The Antithesis Exercise” by Steven D. Krause

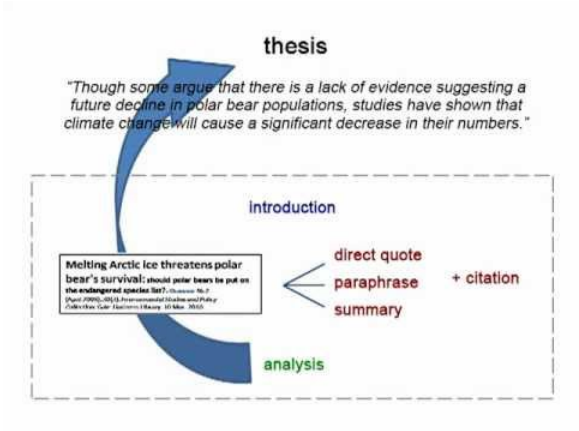
Chapter Preview

Recognize sources of meaning.

Apply effective ways to insert quotations.

Develop elements of an Antithesis.





A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=170

Walk, Talk, Cook, Eat: A Guide to Using Sources

by Cynthia R. Haller

*Marvin, a college student at Any University, sits down at his computer. * He logs in to the “Online Professor,” an interactive advice site for students. After setting up a chat, he begins tapping the keys.*

Marvin: Hi. I’m a student in the physician assistant program. The major paper for my health and environment class is due in five weeks, and I need some advice. The professor says the paper has to be 6–8 pages, and I have to cite and document my sources.

O-Prof: Congratulations on getting started early! Tell me a bit about your assignment. What’s the purpose? Who’s it intended for?

Marvin: Well, the professor said it should talk about a health problem caused by water pollution and suggest ways to solve it. We’ve read some articles, plus my professor gave us statistics on groundwater contamination in different areas.

O-Prof: What’s been most interesting so far?

Marvin: I’m amazed at how much water pollution there is. It seems like it would be healthier to drink bottled water, but the plastic bottles hurt the environment.

O-Prof: Who else might be interested in this?

Marvin: Lots of people are worried about bad water. I might even get questions about it from my clients once I finish my program.

O-Prof: OK. So what information do you need to make a good recommendation?

M a rvin t h inks f o r a moment.

Marvin: I don't know much about the health problems caused by contaminated drinking water. Whether the tap water is safe depends on where you live, I guess. The professors talked about arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh, but what about the water in the U.S.? For my paper, maybe I should focus on a particular location? I also need to find out more about what companies do to make sure bottled water is pure.

O-Prof: Good! Now that you know what you need to learn, you can start looking for sources.

Marvin: When my professors talk about sources, they usually mean books or articles about my topic. Is that what you mean?

O-Prof: Books and articles do make good sources, but you might think about ***sources*** more generally as "forms of meaning you use to make new meaning." It's like your bottled water. The water exists already in some location but is processed by the company before it goes to the consumer. Similarly, a source provides information and knowledge that you process to produce new meaning, which other people can then use to make their own meaning.

A bit confused, Marvin scratches his head.

Marvin: I thought I knew what a source was, but now I'm not so sure.

O-Prof: Think about it. ***Sources of meaning*** are literally every- where—for example, your own observations or experiences, the content of other people's brains, visuals and graphics, experiment results, TV and radio broadcasts, and written texts. And, there are many ways to make new meaning from sources. You can give an oral presentation, design a web page, paint a picture, or, as in your case, write a paper.

Marvin: I get it. But how do I decide which sources to use for my paper?

O-Prof: It depends on the meaning you want to make, which is why it's *so* important to figure out the purpose of your paper and who will read it. You might think about using sources as *walking, talking, cooking, and eating.* These aren't the only possible metaphors, but they do capture some important things about using sources.

Marvin: Hey! I thought we were talking about writing!

O-Prof: We are, but these metaphors can shed some light on writing with sources. Let's start with the first one: *walking.* To use sources well, you first have to go where they are. What if you were writing an article on student clubs for the school newspaper? Where would you go for information?

Marvin: I'd probably walk down to the Student Activities office and get some brochures about student clubs. Then I'd attend a few club meetings and maybe interview the club leaders and some members about their club activities.

O-Prof: OK, so you'd *walk* to where you could find relevant information for your article. That's what I mean by *walking.* You have to get to the sources you need.

Marvin: Wait a minute. For the article on student clubs, maybe I could save some walking. Maybe the list of clubs and the club descriptions are on the Student Activities web page. That'd save me a trip.

O-Prof: Yes, the Internet has cut down on the amount of physical walking you need to do to find sources. Before the Internet, you had to either travel to a source's physical location, or bring that source to your location. Think about your project on bottled water. To get information about the quality of a city's tap water in the 1950's, you would have had to figure out who'd have that information, then call or write to request a copy or *walk* to wherever the information was stored. Today, if you type "local water quality" into Google, the Environmental Protection Agency page comes up as one of the first hits. Its home page links to water quality reports for local areas.

M a rvin p a us e s f o r a second before responding, thinking he's found a good short cut for his paper.

Marvin: So can I just use Google or Bing to find sources?

O-Prof: Internet search engines can help you find sources, but they aren't always the best route to getting to a good source. Try entering the search term "bottled water quality" into Google, without quotation marks around the term. How many hits do you get?

M a rvin typ e s it i n.

Marvin: 5,760,000. That's pretty much what I get whenever I do an Internet search. Too many results.

O-Prof: Which is one of the drawbacks of using only Internet search engines. The Internet may have cut down on the physical *walking* needed to find good sources, but it's made up for the time savings by pointing you to more places than you could possibly go! But there are some ways you can narrow your search to get fewer, more focused results.

Marvin: Yeah, I know. Sometimes I add extra words in and it helps weed down the hits.

O-Prof: By combining search terms with certain words or symbols, you can control what the search engine looks for. If you put more than one term into a Google search box, the search engine will only give you sites that include both terms, since it uses the Boolean operator AND as the default for its search- es. If you put OR between two search terms, you'll end up getting even more results, because Google will look for all websites containing either of the terms. Using a minus sign in front of a term eliminates things you're not interested in. It's the Google equivalent of the Boolean operator NOT. Try entering bottled water quality health -teeth.

M a rvin typ e s in t he w o r d s, r ememb ering su dd enly t ha t he has t o make a n a pp o int m ent w i t h t he d entist.

Marvin: 329,000 hits.

O-Prof: Still a lot. You can also put quotation marks around groups of words and the search engine will look only for sites that contain all of those words in the exact order you've given. And you can combine this strategy with the other ways of limiting your search. Try "bottled water quality" (in quota- tion marks) health teeth.

Marvin: Only 333. That's more like it.

O-Prof: Yes, but you don't want to narrow it so far that you miss use- ful sources. You have to play around with your search terms to get to what you need. A bigger problem with Internet search engines, though, is that they won't necessarily lead you to the sources considered most valuable for college writing.

Marvin: My professor said something about using peer-reviewed articles in scholarly journals.

O-Prof: Professors will often want you to use such sources. Articles in scholarly journals are written by experts; and if a journal's ***peer-reviewed***, its articles have been screened by other experts (the authors' peers) before being published.

Marvin: So that would make peer-reviewed articles pretty reliable.

Where do I find them?

O-Prof: Google's got a specialized search engine, Google Scholar, that will search for scholarly articles that might be useful (www. googlescholar.com). But often the best place is the college library's www. googlescholar.com bibliographic databases. A database is a collection of related data, usually electronic, set up for easy access to items in the collection. Library bibliographic databases contain ar- ticles from newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, and other publications. They can be very large, but they're a lot smaller than the whole Internet, and they generally contain reliable information. The Internet, on the other hand, con- tains both good and bad information.

M a rvin l oo ks do wn a t h is f ee t.

Marvin: Sounds sort of like looking for shoes. When I was buying my running shoes, I went to a specialty running shop instead of a regular shoe store. The specialty shop had all the brands I was looking for, and I didn't have to weed through sandals and dress shoes. Is that kind of like a library's bibliographic database?

O-Prof: Exactly. But remember, ***a database search engine*** can only find what's actually in the database. If you're looking for information on drinking water, you won't find much in a database full of art history publications. The library has some subject guides that can tell you the best databases to use for your topic.

Marvin: What about books? I did check out the library catalog and found a couple of good books on my topic.

O-Prof: Yes, don't forget about books. You generally have to walk physically to get information that's only in print form, or have someone else bring it to you. Even though Google has now scanned many of the world's books into its database, they won't give you access to the entire book if the book is still under copyright.

Marvin: So I'm back to real walking again.

O-Prof: Yes. Don't forget to ask for help when you're looking around for sources. Reference librarians make very good guides; it's their job to keep up on where various kinds of knowledge are located and help people find that knowledge. Professors also make good guides, but they're most familiar with where to find knowledge in their own fields.

Marvin: I could ask my health and environment professor for help, of course, and maybe my geology and chemistry professors. I'm guessing my music teacher would be less helpful.

O-Prof: One last hint about finding sources. If you find an article or book that's helpful for your paper, look at its reference list. There might be some useful sources listed there.

Marvin: Thanks, Professor. I think I can do some good *walking* now.

What about that *talking* metaphor?

O-Prof: Before we move on, there's an important aspect of *walking* with sources that you need to be aware of. In college writing, if you use a source in a paper, you're expected to let the reader know exactly how to find that source as well. Providing this "source address" information for your sources is known as *documenting your sources*.

Marvin: What do you mean by a "source address"?

O-Prof: It's directions for finding the source. A mailing address tells you how to find a person: the house number, street, city, state, and zip code. To help your readers find your sources, it's customary to give them the name of the author; the title of the book or article or website; and other information such as date, location of publication, publisher, even the data- base in which a source is located. Or, if it's a website, you might give the name of the site and/or the date on which you accessed it. Source documentation can be complicated, because the necessary source address information differs for different types of sources (e.g., books vs. journal articles, electronic vs. print). Additionally, different disciplines (e.g., history, philosophy, psychology, literature, etc.) use different "address" formats. Eventually, you'll become familiar with the documentation conventions for your own academic ma- jor, but source documentation takes a lot of practice. In the meantime, your teachers and various writing handbooks can provide instructions on what information you'll need.

Marvin: Do I really need to include all that information? A lot of times, the sources I use are readings my teachers have assigned, so they already know where to find them.

O-Prof: Your teachers don't always know where all your sources are from, and they also want you to get into the habit of source documentation. And what about your other readers? If they're deeply interested in your topic, they may want to find more information than you've included in your paper. Your source documentation allows them to find the original source. And there are other reasons for documenting sources. It can help readers understand your own position on a topic, because they can see which authors you agree with and which you don't. It also shows readers you've taken time to investigate your topic and aren't just writing off the top of your head. If readers see that your ideas are based on trustworthy sources, they're more likely to trust what you say.

Marvin: Like, if I used a university or government website on bottled water quality, they'd trust me more than if I just used a bot- tled water company website.

O-Prof: Yes. But to dig deeper into the question of trust, let's move on to a second metaphor: *talking*. Although the metaphor of *walking* is useful for understanding how to find and document sources, it can give the impression that sources are separate, inert,

and neutral things, waiting to be snatched up like gold nuggets and plugged into your writing. In reality, sources are parts of overlapping knowledge networks that connect meanings and the people that make and use them. Knowledge networks are always in flux, since people are always making new meaning. Let's go back to your health and environment project. Refresh my memory. What kinds of questions do you need answers to before you can write your paper?

Marvin: Well, I need to know if bottled water is truly healthier, like the beverage companies claim. Or would I be just as well off drinking tap water?

O-Prof: To answer this question, you'll want to find out who's *talking* about these issues. As Kenneth Burke put it, you can think of sources as voices in an ongoing conversation about the world:

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

The authors of texts aren't speaking aloud, of course, but they're making written statements that others can "listen" and "respond" to. Knowing which texts you can trust means understanding which authors you can trust.

Marvin: How do I figure that out?

O-Prof: It helps to know who the authors are. What they're saying. Where, when, and to whom they're saying it. And what their purposes are. Imagine the world as divided into many parlors like the one Kenneth Burke described. You'd want to go to the parlors where people who really know something are *talking* about the topics you're interested in. Let's go back to your initial Google search for a minute. Did any Wikipedia articles come up for bottled water?

Marvin: Yeah, and I took a quick look at one of them. But some of my professors say I shouldn't use Wikipedia.

O-Prof: That's because the quality of information in Wikipedia var- ies. It's monitored by volunteer writers and editors rather than experts, so you should double-check information you find in Wikipedia with other sources. But Wikipedia articles are often good places to get background info and good places to connect with more reliable sources. Did anything in the Wikipedia article seem useful for finding sources on bottled water?

M a rvin clicks ba c k t o t he W i k ip ed i a sit e.

Marvin: It does mention that the National Resources Defense Council and the Drinking Water Research Foundation have done some studies on the health effects of bottled water ("Bottled Water").

O-Prof: So, you could go to the websites for these organizations to find out more about the studies. They might even have links to the full reports of these studies, as well as other resources on your topic. Who else might have something to say about the healthfulness of bottled and tap water?

Marvin: Maybe doctors and other health professionals? But I don't know any I could ask.

O-Prof: You can look in the library's subject guides or ask the librarian about databases for health professionals. The Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) database is a good one. Are you logged in to the library? Can you try that one?

M a rvin logs i n, fin d s t he da t abase, a n d typ e s in " bo ttl ed w a ter AND health."

Marvin: Here's an article called "Health Risks and Benefits of Bottled Water." It's in the journal *Primary Care Clinical Office Practice* (Napier and Kodner).

O-Prof: If that's a peer-reviewed journal, it might be a good source for your paper.

Marvin: Here's another one: "Socio-Demographic Features and Fluoride Technologies Contributing to Higher Fluorosis Scores in Permanent Teeth of Canadian Children" (Maupome et al.). That one sounds pretty technical.

O-Prof: And pretty narrow, too. When you start using sources writ- ten by experts, you move beyond the huge porch of public discourse, where everyone *talks* about all questions on a general level, into some smaller conversational parlors, where groups of specialists *talk* about more narrow questions in greater depth. You generally find more detailed and trust- worthy knowledge in these smaller parlors. But sometimes the conversation may be too narrow for your needs and difficult to understand because it's experts *talking* to experts.

Wa y ahead o f t he pr o f e ss o r, M a rvin ' s a lr ead y st a rt ed r ead ing abo ut t he hea lt h r i sks a n d benefi ts o f bo ttl ed w a ter.

Marvin: Here's something confusing. The summary of this article on risks and benefits of bottled water says tap water is fine if you're in a location where there's good water. Then it says that you should use bottled water if the purity of your water source is in question. So which is better, tap or bottled?

O-Prof: As you read more sources, you begin to realize there's not always a simple answer to questions. As the CINAHL article points out, the answer depends on whether your tap water is pure enough to drink. Not everyone agrees on the answers, either. When you're advising your future clients (or in this case, writing your paper), you'll need to "listen" to what different people who *talk* about the healthfulness of bottled and tap water have to say. Then you'll be equipped to make your own recommendation.

Marvin: Is that when I start writing?

O-Prof: You've really been writing all along. Asking questions and gathering ideas from sources is all part of the process. As we think about the actual drafting, though, it's helpful to move on to that third metaphor: *cooking*. When you *cook* with sources, you process them in new ways. Cooking, like writing, involves a lot of decisions. For instance, you might decide to combine ingredients in a way that keeps the full flavor and character of each ingredient.

Marvin: Kind of like chili cheese fries? I can taste the flavor of the chili, the cheese, and the fries separately.

O-Prof: Yes. But other food preparation processes can change the character of the various ingredients. You probably wouldn't enjoy gobbling down a stick of butter, two raw eggs, a cup of flour, or a cup of sugar (well, maybe the sugar!). But if you mix these ingredients and expose them to a 375-degree tem- perature, chemical reactions transform them into something good to eat, like a cake.

M a rvin r ea c he s int o h is ba c k p a c k a n d pulls o ut a snack.

Marvin: You're making me hungry. But what do chili cheese fries and cakes have to do with writing?

O-Prof: Sometimes, you might use verbatim quotations from your sources, as if you were throwing walnuts whole into a sal- ad. The reader will definitely "taste" your original source. Other times, you might paraphrase ideas and combine them into an intricate argument. The flavor of the original source might be more subtle in the latter case, with only your source documentation indicating where your ideas came from. In some ways, the writing assignments your professors give you are like recipes. As an apprentice writing *cook,* you should analyze your assignments to determine what "ingredients" (sources) to use, what "cooking processes" to follow, and what the final "dish" (paper) should look like. Let's try a few sample assignments. Here's one:

Assignment 1: Critique (given in a human development course)

We've read and studied Freud's theory of how the human psyche develops; now it's time to evaluate the theory. Read at least two articles that critique Freud's theory, chosen from the list I provided in class. Then, write an essay discussing the strengths and

weaknesses of Freud's theory.

Assume you're a student in this course. Given this assignment, how would you describe the required ingredients, processes, and product?

M a rvin t h inks f o r a minute, while chewing and swallowing a mouthful of apple.

Marvin: Let's see if I can break it down:

Ingredients:

• everything we've read about Freud's theory

• our class discussions about the theory

• two articles of my choice taken from the list provided by the instructor

Processes: I have to read those two articles to see their criticisms of Freud's theory. I can also review my notes from class, since we discussed various critiques. I have to think about what aspects of Freud's theory explain human development well, and where the theory falls short—like in class, we discussed how Freud's theory reduces human development to sexuality alone.

Product: The final essay needs to include both strengths and weaknesses of Freud's theory. The professor didn't specifically say this, but it's also clear I need to incorporate some ideas from the two articles I read—otherwise why would she have assigned those articles?

O-Prof: Good. How about this one?

Assignment 2: Business Plan (given in an entrepreneurship course)

As your major project for this course, your group will develop a business plan for a student-run business that meets some need on this campus. Be sure to include all aspects of a business plan. During the last few weeks of class, each group will present the plan to the class, using appropriate visuals.

Marvin: I'll give it a try.

Ingredients: Hmm . . . It's hard to tell the sources I'll need. Obviously, whatever the teacher teaches us about business plans in the course will be important—hope she goes into detail about this and provides examples. What if she doesn't? What sources could my group use? Our textbook has a chap- ter on business plans that will probably help, and maybe we can go to the library and look for books about writing business plans. Some sample business plans would be helpful—I wonder if the Center for Small Business Support on our cam- pus would have some?

Processes: Well, maybe we could have each member of the group look for sources about business plans and then meet together to discuss what we need to do, or talk online. Don't know how we'll break down the writing—maybe we could divide up the various sections of the plan, or discuss each section together, then someone could write it up?

Product: It's clear that we have to include all the information that business owners put in a business plan, and we'll have to follow the organization of a typical plan. But we can't tell exactly what that organization should be until we've done some research.

O-Prof: Here's one last assignment to try out.

Assignment 3: Research Paper (given in a health and environment course)

Write a 6–8-page paper in which you explain a health prob- lem related to water pollution (e.g., arsenic poisoning, gastrointestinal illness, skin disease, etc.). Recommend a potential way or ways this health problem might be addressed. Be sure to cite and document the sources you use for your paper.

Marvin: Oho, trick question! That one sounds familiar.

Ingredients: No specific guidance here, except that sources have to relate to water pollution and health. I've already de- cided I'm interested in how bottled water might help with health where there's water pollution. I'll have to pick a health problem and find sources about how water pollution can cause that problem. Gastrointestinal illness sounds promis- ing. I'll ask the reference librarian where I'd be likely to find good articles about water pollution, bottled water, and gas- trointestinal illness.

Process: There's not very specific information here about what process to use, but our conversation's given me some ideas. I'll use scholarly articles to find the connection be- tween water pollution and gastrointestinal problems, and whether bottled water could prevent those problems.

Product: Obviously, my paper will explain the connection between water and gastrointestinal health. It'll evaluate whether bottled water provides a good option in places where the water's polluted, then give a recommendation about what people should do. The professor did say I should address any objections readers might raise—for instance, bottled water may turn out to be a good option, but it's a lot more expen- sive than tap water. Finally, I'll need to provide in-text cita- tions and document my sources in a reference list.

O-Prof: You're on your way. Think for a minute about these three assignments. Did you notice that the "recipes" varied in their specificity?

Marvin: Yeah. The first assignment gave me very specific information about exactly what source "ingredients" to use. But in the second and third assignments, I had to figure it out on my own. And the processes varied, too. For the business plan, the groups will use sources to figure out how to organize the plan, but the actual content will be drawn from their own ideas for their business and any market research they do. But in the third assignment—my own assignment—I'll have to use content from my sources to support my recommendation.

O-Prof: Different professors provide different levels of specificity in their writing assignments. If you have trouble figuring out the "recipe," ask the professor for more information.

Marvin: Sometimes it can be really frustrating not to have enough information. Last semester, I sat around being frustrated and put off doing an assignment as long as possible, then rushed to finish it. I didn't do very well on the rough draft, but then I met with my professor and talked to him. Also, the class read each other's papers. Getting feedback and looking at what other students had done gave me some new ideas for my final draft.

O-Prof: When it comes to "cooking with sources," no one expects you to be an executive chef the first day you get to college. Over time, you'll become more expert at writing with sourc- es, more able to choose and use sources on your own. You'll probably need less guidance for writing in your senior year than in your freshman year. Which brings me to the last metaphor for using sources.

Marvin: *Eating*, right?

O-Prof: Good memory. In fact, this last metaphor is about memory, which is how sources become a part of who you are. You've probably heard the expression, "you are what you eat." When you *eat* sources—that is, think about things, experiment, read, write, talk to others—you yourself change. What you learn stays with you.

Marvin: Not always. It's hard for me to remember the things I learn in class until the final exam, not to mention after the class is over.

O-Prof: Of course. We all forget a lot of the things we learn, espe- cially those we seldom or never use again; but what you learn and use over a long period of time will affect you deeply and shape the way you see the world. Take a look at this quote from Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*, where the narrator's talking about his apprenticeship as a steamboat pi- lot. When he first began his apprenticeship, the Mississippi River looked the same as any other river. But after he made many long trips up and down it, with the captain and others explaining things along the way, he began to see it in all its complexity.

The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book—a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. (77–78)

Eventually, the narrator could identify each of the river's bends, knew how its currents were running, and could estimate how deep it was just by looking at the surface. It was the same river, but he was a different man. Your bottled water project isn't as involved as learning to pilot a steamship. But once you start reading your sources, your experience of bottled water will shift. It'll still be the same water you used to drink, but it won't be the same you.

Marvin: I can sort of see that already. I've learned a lot about anatomy and physiology in the physician assistant program. Now, when I see a soccer player, I think about how the shin guard is protecting her tibia, not her shin. If I see someone with yellowish eyeballs, I think about bilirubin levels. And I always read the health section of the newspaper first.

O-Prof: Right. And a journalism major, who takes courses on beat reporting and feature writing, thinks about what will make a good story. A geology major does field work, looks at maps, learns about geological history, and sees rocks everywhere. Over time, through much exposure to a field and practice in it, a person's identity gradually becomes intertwined with his or her profession. Not entirely, of course. All of us are many things. A doctor may have an interest in calligraphy. A business manager might study poetry in her spare time. In both work and leisure activities, you'll keep on learning and making meaning from sources like other people, writing, books, websites, videos, articles, and your own experience. College is about learning *how* to make meaning. Learn how to *walk* (find the sources you need); *talk* (converse with source authors); *cook* (integrate sources to make new meaning); and *eat* (allow sources to change your life). You won't ever finish using sources to make meaning—not in your health and environment course, not while you're in college, not even after you've been working and living for a long time.

M a rvin gl a nc e s a t h is w a tc h.

Marvin: Speaking of time, I should probably grab some dinner before the cafeteria closes. Thanks, Professor, for all your help.

- O-Prof: Good luck with your paper, and with the rest of your writing life.



Annoying Ways People Use Sources

by Kyle D. Stedman

I hate slow drivers. When I'm driving in the fast lane, maintaining the speed limit exactly, and I find myself behind someone who thinks the fast lane is for people who drive ten miles per hour *below* the speed limit, I get an annoyed feeling in my chest like hot water filling a heavy bucket. I wave my arms around and yell, "What . . . ? But, hey .

. . oh come *on!*" There are at least two explanations for why some slow drivers fail to move out of the way:

1. They don't know that the generally accepted practice of high- way driving in the U.S. is to move to the right if an upcoming car wants to pass. Or,

2. They know the guidelines but don't care.

But here's the thing: writers can forget that their readers are sometimes just as annoyed at writing that fails to follow conventions as drivers are when stuck behind a car that fails to move over. In other words, there's something similar between these two people: the knowledge- able driver who thinks, "I thought all drivers *knew* that the left lane is for the fastest cars," and the reader who thinks, "I thought all writers *knew* that outside sources should be introduced, punctuated, and cited according to a set of standards."

One day, you may discover that something you've written has just been read by a reader who, unfortunately, was annoyed at some of the ways you integrated sources. She was reading along and then suddenly exclaimed, "What . . . ? But, hey . . . oh come *on!*" If you're lucky, this reader will try to imagine why you typed things the way you did, giving you the benefit of the doubt. But sometimes you'll be slotted into positions that might not really be accurate. When this frustrated reader walks away from your work, trying to figure out, say, why you used so many quotations, or why you kept starting and ending paragraphs with them, she may come to the same conclusions I do about slow drivers:

1. You don't know the generally accepted practices of using sources (especially in academic writing) in the U.S. Or,
2. You know the guidelines but don't care.

And it will be a lot harder for readers to take you seriously if they think you're ignorant or rude.

This judgment, of course, will often be unfair. These readers might completely ignore the merits of your insightful, stylistically beautiful, or revolutionarily important language—just as my anger at another driver makes me fail to admire his custom paint job. But readers and writers don't always see eye to eye on the same text. In fact, some things I write about in this essay will only bother your pickiest readers (some teachers, some editors, some snobby friends), while many other readers might zoom past how you use sources without blinking. But in my experience, I find that teachers do a disservice when we fail to alert students to the kind of things that some readers might be annoyed at—however illogical these things sometimes seem. People are often unreasonably picky, and writers have to deal with that—which they do by trying to anticipate and preemptively fix whatever might annoy a broad range of readers. Plus, the more effectively you anticipate that pickiness, the more likely it is that readers will interpret your quotations and paraphrases in the way you want them to—critically or acceptingly, depending on your writing context.

It helps me to remember that the ***conventions of writing have a fundamentally rhetorical nature***. That is, I follow different conventions depending on the purpose and audience of my writing, because I know that I'll come across differently to different people depending on how well I follow the conventions expected in any particular writing space. In a blog, I cite a source by hyperlinking; in an academic essay, I use a parenthetical citation that refers to a list of references at the end of the essay. One of the fundamental ideas of rhetoric is that speakers/writers/composers shape what they say/write/create based on what they want it to do, where they're publishing it, and what they know about their audience/readers. And those decisions include nitty gritty things like introducing quotations and citing paraphrases clearly: not everyone in the entire world approaches these things the same way, but when I strategically learn the expectations of my U.S. academic audience, what I really want to say comes across smoothly, without little annoying blips in my readers' experience. Notice that I'm not saying that there's a particular *right* or *wrong* way to use conventions in my writing—if the modern U.S. academic system had evolved from a primarily African or Asian or Latin American cultural consciousness instead of a European one, conventions for writing would probably be very different. That's why they're *conventions* and not *rules.*

The Annoyances

Because I'm not here to tell you *rules*, *decrees*, or *laws*, it makes sense to call my classifications *annoyances*. In the examples that follow, I wrote all of the annoying examples myself, but all the examples I use of good writing come from actual student papers in first year composition classes at my university; I have their permission to quote them.

Armadillo Roadkill

Everyone in the car hears it: buh-BUMP. The driver insists to the passengers, "But that armadillo—I didn't see it! It just came out of nowhere!"

Dating Spider-Man: starting or ending a para- graph with a quotation

Sadly, a poorly introduced quotation can lead readers to a similar exclamation: "It just came out of nowhere!" And though readers probably won't experience the same level of grief and regret when surprised by a quotation as opposed to an armadillo, I submit that there's a

kinship between the experiences: both involve a normal, pleasant activity (driving; reading) stopped suddenly short by an unexpected barrier (a sudden armadillo; a sudden quotation).

Here's an example of what I'm talking about:

We should all be prepared with a backup plan if a zombie invasion occurs. "Unlike its human counterparts, an army of zombies is completely independent of support" (Brooks 155). Preparations should be made in the following areas. . . .

Did you notice how the quotation is dropped in without any kind of warning? (Buh-BUMP.)

The Fix: The easiest way to ***effectively massage in quotations*** is by purposefully returning to each one in your draft to see if you set the stage for your readers—often, by signaling that a quote is about to come, stating who the quote came from, and showing how your readers should interpret it. In the above example, that could be done by introducing the quotation with something like this (new text bolded):

We should all be prepared with a backup plan if a zombie invasion occurs. MaxBrooks suggests a number of ways to prepare for zombies' particular traits, though he underestimates the ability of humans to survive in harsh environments. For example, he writes, "Unlike its human counterparts, an army of zombies is completely independent of support" (155). Hisshortsightedness could have a number of consequences. . . .

In this version, I know a quotation is coming ("For example"), I know it's going to be written by Max Brooks, and I know I'm being asked to read the quote rather skeptically ("he underestimates"). The sentence with the quotation itself also now begins with a "tag" that eases us into it ("he writes").

Here's an actual example from Alexsandra. Notice the way she builds up to the quotation and then explains it:

In the first two paragraphs, the author takes a defensive position when explaining the perception that the public has about scientists by saying that "there is anxiety that scientists lack both wisdom and social responsibility and are so motivated by ambition . . ." and "scientists are repeatedly referred to as 'playing God'" (Wolpert 345). With this last sentence especially, his tone seems to demonstrate how he uses the ethos appeal to initially set a tone of someone that is tired of being misunderstood.

Alexsandra prepares us for the quotation, quotes, and then analyzes it. I love it. This isn't a hard and fast rule—I've seen it broken by the best of writers, I admit—but it's a wise standard to hold yourself to unless you have a reason not to.

Dating Spider-Man

Dating Spider-Man: starting or ending a paragraph with a quotation

An annoyance that's closely connected to Armadillo Roadkill is the tendency writers sometimes have of starting or ending paragraphs with quotations. This isn't technically *wrong*, and there are situations when the effect of surprise is what you're going for. But often, a paragraph-beginning or paragraph-closing quotation feels rushed, unexplained, disjointed.

It's like dating Spider-Man. You're walking along with him and he says something remarkably interesting—but then he tilts his head, hearing something far away, and suddenly shoots a web onto the near- est building and *zooms* away through the air. As if you had just read an interesting quotation dangling at the end of a paragraph, you wanted to hear more of his opinion, but it's too late—he's already moved on. Later, he suddenly jumps off a balcony and is by your side again, and he starts talking about something you don't understand. You're con- fused because he just dropped in and expected you to understand the context of what was on his mind at that moment, much like when readers step into a paragraph that begins with a quotation. Here's an example:

[End of a preceding paragraph:] . . . Therefore, the evidence clearly suggests that we should be exceptionally careful about deciding when and where to rest.

"When taking a nap, always rest your elbow on your desk and keep your arm perpendicular to your desktop" (Piven and Borgenicht 98). After all, consider the following scenario. . . .

There's a perfectly good reason why this feels odd—which should feel familiar after reading about the Armadillo Roadkill annoyance above. When you got to the quotation in the second paragraph, you didn't know what you were supposed to think about it; there was no guidance.

The Fix is the same: ***in the majority of situations, readers appreciate*** being guided to and led away from a quotation by the writer doing the quoting. Readers get a sense of pleasure from the safe flow of hearing how to read an upcoming quotation, reading it, and then being told one way to interpret it. Prepare, quote, analyze.

I mentioned above that there can be situations where starting a paragraph with a quotation can have a strong effect. Personally, I usually enjoy this most at the beginning of essays or the beginning of sections—like in this example from the very beginning of Jennifer's essay:

"Nothing is ever simple: Racism and nobility can exist in the same man, hate and love in the same woman, fear and loyalty, compromise and idealism, all the yin-yang dichotomies that make the human species so utterly confounding, yet so utterly fascinating" (Hunter). The hypocrisy and complexity that Stephen Hunter from the *Washington Post* describes is the basis of the movie *Crash* (2004).

Instantly, her quotation hooks me. It doesn't feel thoughtless, like it would feel if I continued to be whisked to quotations without preparation throughout the essay. But please don't overdo it; any quotation that opens an essay or section ought to be integrally related to your topic (as is Jennifer's), not just a cheap gimmick.

Un cle Barry and His Encyclopedia of Use- less Information

You probably know someone like this: a person (for me, my Uncle Barry) who con-

Uncle Barry and his Encyclopedia of Useless Information: using too many quotations in a row

I might casually bring up something in the news ("Wow, these health care debates are getting really heated, aren't they?") and then find myself barraged by all of Uncle Barry's ideas on government- sponsored health care—which *then* drifts into a story about how his cousin Maxine died in an underfunded hospice center, which had a parking lot that he could have designed better, which reminds him of how good he is at fixing things, just like the garage door at my parents' house, which probably only needs a little. . . . You get the idea. I might even think to myself, "Wait, I want to know more about that topic, but you're zooming on before you contextualize your information at all."

This is something like reading an essay that relies too much on quotations. Readers get the feeling that they're moving from one quotation to the next without ever quite getting to hear the *real* point of what the author wants to say, never getting any time to form an opinion about the claims. In fact, this often makes it sound as if the author has almost no authority at all. You may have been annoyed by paragraphs like this before:

Addressing this issue, David M. Potter comments, "Whether Seward meant this literally or not, it was in fact a singularly accurate forecast for territorial Kansas" (199). Of course, Potter's view is contested, even though he claims, "Soon, the Missourians began to perceive the advantages of operating without publicity" (200). Interestingly, "The election was bound to be irregular in any case" (201).

Wait—huh? This author feels like Uncle Barry to me: grabbing right and left for topics (or quotes) in an effort to sound authoritative.

The Fix is to return to each quotation and decide why it's there and then massage it in accordingly. If you just want to use a quote to cite a *fact*, then consider paraphrasing or summarizing the source material (which I find is usually harder than it sounds but is usually worth it for the smoothness my paragraph gains). But if you quoted because you want to draw attention to the source's particular phrasing, or if you want to respond to something you agree with or disagree with in the source, then consider taking the time to surround *each* quotation with guidance to your readers about what you want them to think about that quote.

In the following passage, I think Jessica demonstrates a balance between source and analysis well. Notice that she only uses a single quotation, even though she surely could have chosen more. But in- stead, Jessica relies on her instincts and remains the primary voice of authority in the passage:

Robin Toner's article, "Feminist Pitch by a Democrat named Obama," was written a week after the video became public and is partially a response to it. She writes, "The Obama campaign is, in some ways, subtly marketing its candidate as a post-feminist man, a generation beyond the gender conflicts of the boomers." Subtly is the keyword. Obama is a passive character throughout the video, never directly addressing the camera. Rather, he is shown indirectly through speeches, intimate conversations with supporters and candid interaction with family. This creates a sense of intimacy, which in turn creates a feeling of trust.

Toner's response to the Obama video is like a diving board that Jessica bounces off of before she gets to the really interesting stuff: the pool (her own observations). A bunch of diving boards lined up without a pool (tons of quotes with no analysis) wouldn't please anyone—except maybe Uncle Barry.

Am I in the Right Movie?

When reading drafts of my writing, this is a common experience: I start to read a sentence that seems interesting

Am I in the Right Movie? failing to integrate a quotation into the grammar of the preceding sentence

and normal, with everything going just the way I expect it to. But then the unexpected happens: a quotation blurts itself into the sentence in a way that doesn't fit with the grammar that built up to quotation. It feels like sitting in a movie theater, everything going as expected, when suddenly the opening credits start for a movie I didn't plan to see. Here are two examples of what I'm talking about. Read them out loud, and you'll see how suddenly wrong they feel.

1. Therefore, the author warns that a zombie's vision "are no dif- ferent than those of a normal human" (Brooks 6).

2. Sheila Anne Barry advises that "Have you ever wondered what it's like to walk on a tightrope—many feet up in the air?" (50)

In the first example, the quoter's build-up to the quotation uses a singular subject—*azombie's vision*—which, when paired with the quotation, is annoyingly matched with the plural verb *are.* It would be much less jolting to write, "a zombie's vision *is,*" which makes the subject and verb agree. In the second example, the quoter builds up to the quotation with a third-person, declarative independent clause: *SheilaAnne Barry advises.* But then the quotation switches into second person—*you*—and unexpectedly asks a question—completely different from the expectation that was built up by the first part of the sentence.

The Fix is usually easy: you read your essay out loud to someone else, and if you stumble as you enter a quotation, there's probably something you can adjust in your lead-in sentence to make the two fit together well. Maybe you'll need to choose a different subject to make it fit with the quote's verb (*reader* instead of *read ers; each* instead of *all*), or maybe

you'll have to scrap what you first wrote and start over. On occasion you'll even feel the need to transparently modify the quotation by adding an [s] to one of its verbs, always being certain to use square brackets to show that you adjusted something in the quotation. Maybe you'll even find a way to quote a shorter part of the quotation and squeeze it into the context of a sentence that is mostly your own, a trick that can have a positive effect on readers, who like smooth water slides more than they like bumpy slip-and-slides. Jennifer does this well in the following sentence, for example:

In *Crash*, no character was allowed to "escape his own hypocrisy" (Muller), and the film itself emphasized that the reason there is so much racial tension among strangers is because of the personal issues one cannot deal with alone.

She saw a phrase that she liked in Muller's article, so she found a way to work it in smoothly, without the need for a major break in her thought. Let's put ourselves in Jennifer's shoes for a moment: it's possible that she started drafting this sentence using the plural subject *characters*, writing "In *Crash*, no characters were allowed. . . ." But then, imagine she looked back at the quote from Muller and saw that it said "escape *his* own hypocrisy," which was a clue that she had to change the first part of her sentence to match the singular construction of the quote.

I Can't Find the Stupid Link

You've been in this situation: you're on a website that seems like it might be interesting and you want to learn more about it. But the home page doesn't tell you much, so you look for an "About

I Can't Find the Stupid Link: no connection between the first letter of a parenthetical citation and the first letter of a works cited entry

Us" or "More Information" or "FAQ" link. But no matter where you search—Top of page? Bottom? Left menu?—you can't find the stupid link. This is usually the fault of web designers, who don't always take the time to test their sites as much as they should with actual users.

The communication failure here is simple: you're used to finding certain kinds of basic information in the places people usually put it. If it's not there, you're annoyed.

Similarly, a reader might see a citation and have a quick internal question about it: *What journal was this published in? When was it published? Is this an article I could find online to skim myself? This author has a sexy last name—I wonder what his first name is?* Just like when you look for a link to more information, this reader has a simple, quick question that he or she expects to answer easily. And the most basic way for readers to answer those questions (when they're reading a work written in APA or MLA style) is (1) to look at the information in the citation, and (2) skim the references or works cited section alphabeti- cally, looking for the first letter in the citation. There's an assumption that the first letter of a citation will be the letter to look for in the list of works cited.

In short, the following may annoy readers who want to quickly learn more about the citation:

[Essay Text:] A respected guide on the subject suggests, "If possible, always take the high ground and hold it" (*The Zom-bie Survival Guide* 135).

[Works Cited Page:] Brooks, Max. *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead.* New York: Three Rivers, 2003. Print.

The reader may wonder when *The Zombie Survival Guide* was published and flip back to the works cited page, but the parenthetical citation sends her straight to the *Z*'s in the works cited list (because initial *A*'s and *The*'s are ignored when alphabetizing). However, the complete works cited entry is actually with the *B*'s (where it belongs).

The Fix is to make sure that the first word of the works cited entry is the word you use in your in-text citation, every time. If the works cited entry starts with Brooks, use (Brooks) in the essay text.

Citations not including last names may seem to complicate this advice, but they all follow the same basic concept. For instance, you might have:

A citation that only lists a title. For instance, your citation might read ("Gray Wolf General Information"). In this case, the assumption is that the citation can be found under the *G* section of the works cited page. Leah cites her paraphrase of a source with no author in the following way, indicating that I should head to the *G*'s if I want to learn more about her source:

Alaska is the only refuge that is left for the wolves in the United States, and once that is gone, they will more than likely become extinct in this country ("Gray Wolf General Information").

A citation that only lists a page number. Maybe the citation simply says (25). That implies that somewhere in the surrounding text, the essay writer must have made it stupendously clear what name or title to look up in the works cited list. This happens a lot, since it's common to introduce a quotation by naming the person it came from, in which case it would be repetitive to name that author again in the citation.

A quotation without a citation at all. This happens when you cite a work that is both A) from a web page that doesn't number the pages or paragraphs and B) is named in the text surrounding the quotation. Readers will assume that the author is named nearby. Stephanie wisely leaves off any citation in the example below, where it's already clear that I should head to the *O*'s on the works cited page to find information about this source, a web page written by Opotow:

To further this point, Opotow notes, "Don't imagine you'll be unscathed by the methods you use. The end may justify the means. . . . But there's a price to pay, and the price does tend to be oneself."

I Swear I Did Some Research: dropping in a citation without making it clear what information came from that source

Let's look in depth at this potentially annoying passage from a hypothetical student paper:

It's possible that a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the universe will open new doors of understanding. If theories from sociology, communication, and philosophy joined with physics, the possibilities would be boundless. This would inspire new research, much like in the 1970s when scientists changed their focus from grand-scale theories of the universe to the small concerns of quantum physics (Hawking 51).

In at least two ways, this is stellar material. First, the author is actually voicing a point of view; she sounds knowledgeable, strong. Second, and more to the point of this chapter, the author includes a citation, showing that she knows that ethical citation standards ask authors to cite paraphrases and summaries—not just quotations.

But on the other hand, which of these three sentences, exactly, came from Hawking's book? Did *Hawking* claim that physics experts should join up with folks in other academic disciplines, or is that the student writer? In other words, at which point does the author's point of view meld into material taken specifically from Hawking?

I recognize that there often aren't clean answers to a question like that. What we read and what we know sometimes meld together so unnoticeably that we don't know which ideas and pieces of information are "ours" and which aren't. Discussing "patchwriting," a term used to describe writing that blends words and phrases from sources with words and phrases we came up with ourselves, scholar Rebecca Moore Howard writes, "When I believe I am not patchwriting, I am simply doing it so expertly that the seams are no longer visible—or I am doing it so unwittingly that I cannot cite my sources" (91). In other words, *all* the moves we make when writing came from somewhere else at some point, whether we realize it or not. Yikes. But remember our main purpose here: to not look annoying when using sources. And most of your instructors aren't going to say, "I understand that I couldn't tell the difference between your ideas and your source's because we quite naturally patchwrite all the time. That's fine with me. Party on!" They're

much more likely to imagine that you plopped in a few extra citations as a way of defensively saying, “I swear I did some research! See? Here’s a citation right here! Doesn’t that prove I worked really hard?”

The Fix: Write the sentences preceding the citation with *specific words and phrases that will tell readers what information came from where.* Like this (bolded words are new):

It’s possible that a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the universe will open new doors of understanding. **I believe that** if theories from sociology, communication, and philosophy joined with physics, the possibilities would be boundless. This would inspire new research, much like **thechangesStephenHawking describes happening** in the 1970s when scientists changed their focus from grand-scale theories of the universe to the small concerns of quantum physics (51).

Perhaps these additions could still use some stylistic editing for wordiness and flow, but the source-related job is done: readers know exactly which claims the essay writer is making and which ones Hawking made in his book. The last sentence and only the last sentence summarizes the ideas Hawking describes on page 51 of his book.

One warning: you’ll find that scholars in some disciplines (especially in the sciences and social sciences) use citations in the way I just warned you to avoid. You might see sentences like this one, from page 64 of Glenn Gordon Smith, Ana T. Torres-Ayala, and Allen J. Heindel’s article in the *Journal of Distance Education:*

Some researchers have suggested “curriculum” as a key element in the design of web-based courses (Berge, 1998; Driscoll, 1998; Meyen, Tangen, & Lian, 1999; Wiens & Gunter, 1998).

Whoa—that’s a lot of citations. Remember how the writer of my earlier example cited Stephen Hawking because she summarized his ideas? Well, a number of essays describing the results of experiments, like this one, use citations with a different purpose, citing previous studies whose general conclusions support the study described in this new paper, like building blocks. It’s like saying to your potentially skeptical readers, “Look, you might be wondering if I’m a quack. But I can prove I’m not! See, all these other people published in similar areas! Are you going to pick fights with all of *them* too?” You might have noticed as well that these citations are in APA format, reflecting the standards of the social sciences journal this passage was published in. Well, in this kind of context APA’s requirement to cite the year of a study makes a lot of sense too—after all, the older a study, the less likely it is to still be relevant.

Use Your Turn Signals You may have guessed the biggest weakness in an essay like this: what’s annoying varies from person to person, with some readers happily skimming past awkward introductions to quotations without a blink, while others see a paragraph-opening quotation as something to complain about on Facebook. All I’ve given you here—all I *can* give you unless I actually get to know you and your various writing contexts—are the basics that will apply in a number of academic writing contexts. Think of these as signals to your readers about your intentions, much as wise drivers rely on their turn signals to communicate their intentions to other drivers. In some cases when driving, signaling is an almost artistic decision, relying on the gut reaction of the driver to interpret what is best in times when the law doesn’t mandate use one way or the other. I hope your writing is full of similar signals. Now if I could only convince the guy driving in front of me to use *his* blinker. . . .

The Antithesis Exercise

by Steven D. Krause

You might find yourself quite attached to your topic and your working thesis. Perhaps you are so attached and focused on your topic that you have a hard time imagining why anyone would disagree with you. This attachment is certainly understandable. After you have done so much hunting in the library and on the Internet and thinking about your working thesis, you might have a hard time imaging how anyone could possibly disagree with your position, or why they would want to.

But it is important to remember that not all of your potential readers are going to automatically agree with you. If your topic or take on an issue is particularly controversial, you might have to work hard at convincing almost all of your readers about the validity of your argument.

The process of considering opposing viewpoints is the goal of this exercise, the Antithesis essay. Think about this exercise as a way of exploring the variety of different and opposing views to the main argument you are trying to make with your research project.

Revisiting the working (and inevitably changing) thesis

Here is a quick review of the characteristics of a good thesis:

• A thesis advocates a specific and debatable issue.
• A thesis can either be directly stated (as is often the case in academic writing) or implied.
• A thesis is NOT a statement of fact, a series of questions, or a summary of events.

A thesis answers the two most basic reader questions “What’s your point?” and “Why should I care?”

While it is important that you start your research project with a working thesis that is as clear as you can possibly make it, it is also important to remember that your working thesis is temporary and it will inevitably change as you learn more about your topic and as you conduct more research.

• While some computer hackers are harmless, most of them commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem.

• The international community should enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries and save endangered fish species around the world.

• The Great Gatsby’s depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream is still relevant today.

Chances are, if you started off with a working thesis similar to one of these, your current working thesis has changed a bit. For example, let’s consider the working thesis “While some computer hackers are harmless, most of them commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem.” While the researcher may have begun with this thesis in mind, perhaps she changed it slightly, based on interactions with other students, her instructor, and her research.

Suppose she discovered journal articles and Web sites that suggested that, while many computer hackers are dangerous, many are also helpful in preventing computer crimes. She might be inclined then to shift her emphasis slightly, perhaps to a working thesis like, “While many hackers commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem, they can also help law enforcement officials to solve and prevent crime.” This change is the same topic as the original working thesis (both are still about hackers and computer crime, after all), but it does suggest a different emphasis, from “hackers as threat and problem” to “hackers as potentially helpful.”

Of course, these changes in the working thesis are not the only changes that were possible. The original working thesis could have just as easily stayed the same as it was at the beginning of the process or research. Further, just because the emphasis of the working thesis may be in the process of changing doesn’t mean that other related points won’t find their way into the research project when it is put together. While this research writer might change her emphasis to write about “good” hackers as crime solvers, she still would probably need to discuss the fact that there are “bad” hackers who commit crimes.

The point here is simple: your working thesis is likely to change in small and even large ways based on the research you do, and that's good. Changing the way you think about your research topic and your working thesis is one of the main ways the process of research writing becomes educational, interesting, and even kind of fun.

Why Write an Antithesis Essay?

One of the key tests of a working thesis is the presence of logical points of disagreement. There's not much point in researching and writing about how "computer crime is bad" or "fisheries are important" or similar broad arguments because everyone more or less would agree with these assertions. Generating an antithesis essay will help you:

• test how "debatable" your working thesis actually is. If you are able to arrive at and write about the ways in which readers might disagree with your working thesis, then chances are, your working thesis is one that readers need to be persuaded about and need evidence to prove.

• consider ways of addressing the anticipated objections to your thesis. There's nothing wrong with reasonable readers disagreeing with your point of view on a topic, but if you hope to persuade at least some of them with your research, you will also need to satisfy the objections some of these readers might have.

• revise your working thesis into a stronger position. If you're having a hard time coming up with any opposition to your working thesis, you probably have to do more work on shaping and forming your working thesis into a more arguable position.

Generating Antithetical Points in Five Easy Steps

Generating potential objections to your working thesis—the points you can use to develop your antithesis essay—is a simple process. In fact, if your working thesis is on a controversial topic and you've already done a fair amount of research, you might need very little help generating antithetical points. If you are doing research on gun control, you have undoubtedly found credible research on both sides of the issue, evidence that probably supports or rejects your working thesis.

In addition to those points that seem straight-forward and obvious to you already, consider these ***five basic steps for generating ideas to consider your antithesis***: have a working thesis, think about opposing viewpoints, think about the alternatives, and imagine hostile audiences. Once you have generated some plausible antithetical arguments, you can consider different ways to counter these positions. I offer some ideas on how to do that in the section "Strategies for Answering Antithetical Arguments."

• Step 1: Have a working thesis you have begun researching and thinking about.

If you are coming to this chapter before working through the working thesis essay exercises in chapter five, you might want to take a look at that chapter now.

You also need to have at least some preliminary research and thinking about your working thesis done before you consider the antithesis. This research is likely to turn up evidence that will suggest more clearly what the arguments against your working thesis might actually be.

• Step 2: Consider the direct opposite of your working thesis. Assuming you do have a working thesis that you've begun to research and think about, the next step in generating ideas for a working thesis is to consider the opposite point of view. Sometimes, this can be as simple as changing the verb or modifying term from positive to negative (or vice-versa).

Consider these working theses and their opposites:

Working Thesis	**The Opposite**
Drug companies should be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV.	Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV.
The international community should not enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries.	The international community should enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries.

This sort of simple change of qualifiers can also be useful in exposing weak working theses because, generally speaking, the opposite of positions that everyone simply accepts as true are ones that everyone accepts as false. If you were to change the qualifying terms in the weak working theses "Drunk driving is bad" or "Teen violence is bad" to their opposites, you end up with

theses for positions that are difficult to hold. After all, just as most people in modern America need little convincing that drunk driving or teen violence are “bad” things, few credible people could argue that drunk driving or teen violence are “good” things.

Usually, considering the opposite of a working thesis is more complex than simply changing the verb or modifying term from positive to negative (or vice-versa). For example:

Working Thesis The Opposite(s)

While many hackers commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem, they can also help law enforcement officials to solve and prevent crime. There is little hackers can do to help law enforcement officials solve and prevent computer crime. Computer hackers do not represent represent a serious threat or Internet security problem.

Both opposites are examples that counter the working thesis, but each takes a slightly different emphasis. The first one questions the first premise of the working thesis about the “threat” of computer hackers in the first place. The second takes the opposite view of the second premise.

• Step 3: Ask “why” about possible antithetical arguments. Of course, these examples of creating oppositions with simple changes demand more explanation than the simple opposite. You need to dig further than that by asking and then answering– the question of why. For example:

Why should drug companies not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs? Because…

• The high cost of television advertising needlessly drives up the costs of prescriptions.
• Television commercials too frequently provide confusing or misleading information about the drugs.
• The advertisements too frequently contradict and confuse the advice that doctors give to their patients.

Why should the international community enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries? Because…

• Without international cooperation, many different kinds of fish will become instinct in the coming decades.
• Preventing over-fishing now will preserve fish populations for the future.
• Unchecked commercial fishing causes pollution and other damage to the oceans’ ecosystems.

Step 4: Examine alternatives to your working thesis. For example, consider the working thesis “Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television because the commercials too often contradict and confuse the advice that doctors give their patients.” This working thesis assumes that drug ads are an important cause of problems between doctors and patients. However, someone could logically argue that there are other more important causes of bad communication between doctors and patients. For example, the number of patients doctors see each day and the shortness of each visit certainly causes communication problems. The billing and bureaucracy of insurance companies also often complicates doctor/patient communication.

Now, unlike the direct opposite of your working thesis, the alternatives do not necessarily completely invalidate your working thesis. There’s no reason why a reader couldn’t believe that both drug advertisements on television and the bureaucracy of the insurance companies are the cause of bad doctor/patient communication. But it is important to consider the alternatives within your research project in order to convince your readers that the position that you are advocating in your working thesis is more accurate (see especially the “Weighing Your Position Against the Opposition” strategy on page xx for answering these sorts of antithetical arguments.

• Step 5: Imagine hostile audiences. Whenever you are trying to develop a clearer understanding of the antithesis of your working thesis, you need to think about the kinds of audiences who would disagree with you. By thinking about the opposites and alternatives to your working thesis, you are already starting to do this because the opposites and the alternatives are what a hostile audience might think.

Sometimes, potential readers are hostile to a particular working thesis because of ideals, values, or affiliations they hold that are at odds with the point being advocated by the working thesis. For example, people who identify themselves as being “pro-choice” on the issue of abortion would certainly be hostile to an argument for laws that restrict access to abortion; people who identify themselves as being “pro-life” on the issue of abortion would certainly be hostile to an argument for laws that provide access to abortion.

At other times, audiences are hostile to the arguments of a working thesis because of more crass and transparent reasons. For example, the pharmaceutical industry disagrees with the premise of the working thesis “Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV” because they stand to lose billions of dollars in lost sales. Advertising companies and television broadcasters would also be against this working thesis because they too would lose money. You can probably easily imagine some potential hostile audience members who have similarly selfish reasons to oppose your point of view.

Of course, some audiences will oppose your working thesis based on a different interpretation of the evidence and research. This sort of difference of opinion is probably most common with research projects that are focused on more abstract and less definitive subjects. A reader might disagree with a thesis like “The Great Gatsby’s depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream is still relevant today” based on differences about how the book depicts “the American dream,” or about whether or not the novel is still relevant, and so forth.

But there are also different opinions about evidence for topics that you might think would have potentially more concrete “right” and “wrong” interpretations. Different researchers and scholars can look at the same evidence about a subject like conservation of fisheries and arrive at very different conclusions. Some might believe that the evidence indicates that conservation is not necessary and would not be effective, while other researchers and scholars might believe the completely opposite position.

Regardless of the reasons why your audience might be hostile to the argument you are making with your working thesis, it is helpful to try to imagine your audience as clearly as you can. What sort of people are they? What other interests or biases might they have? Are there other political or social factors that you think are influencing their point of view? If you want to persuade at least some members of this hostile audience that your point of view and your interpretation of the research is correct, you need to know as much about your hostile audience as you possibly can. Of course, you’ll never be able to know everything about your hostile audience, and you certainly won’t be able to persuade all of them about your point. But the more you know, the better chance you have of convincing at least some of them.

Finding Antithetical Points on the Internet

The best (and worst!) thing about the Internet is that almost anyone can say almost anything. This makes the Internet fertile territory for finding out what the opposition thinks about the position you are taking in your working thesis.

A search of the Web on almost any topic will point you to web sites that take a wide variety of stances on that topic. When you do a search for “computer hackers” or “computer crime” on the Web, you are just as likely to find links to law enforcement agencies and articles on Internet security as you are to find links to sites that argue computer hackers are good, or even instructions on how to commit various computer crimes.

Usenet newsgroups are also excellent places to find antithetical positions. To search newsgroups, you can browse through the list of the newsgroups that you have access to at your university and read through the ones that have titles related to your topic. You can also search newsgroups using the commercial service “Google Groups,” which is at <http://groups.google.com>.

Hyperlink: For advice on conducting effective Internet searches and using newsgroups, see Chapter Two, “Understanding and Using the Library and the Internet for Research” and the section called “Finding Research on the Internet: An Overview.”

Keep in mind that information you find on the Internet always has to be carefully considered. This is particularly true with newsgroups, which have much more in common with forums like talk radio or “letters to the editor” in the newspaper than they do with academic research. This doesn’t mean this information is automatically unreliable, but you should be cautious about the extent to which you can or should trust the validity of anything you find on the Internet.

Strategies for Answering Antithetical Arguments

It might not seem logical, but directly acknowledging and addressing positions that are different from the one you are holding in your research project can actually make your position stronger. When you take on the antithesis in your research project, it shows you have thought carefully about the issue at hand and you acknowledge that there is no clear and easy “right” answer.

There are many different ways you might incorporate the antithesis into your research project to make your own thesis stronger and to address the concerns of those readers who might oppose your point of view. For now, focus on three basic strategies: directly refuting your opposition, weighing your position against the opposition, and making concessions.

• Directly Refuting Your Opposition. Perhaps the most obvious approach, one way to address those potential readers who might raise objections to your arguments is to simply refute their objections with better evidence and reasoning. To answer the argument that the international community should not enact measures to preserve fisheries, demonstrate with your evidence that it has indeed been effective. Of course, this is an example of yet another reason why it is so important to have good research that supports your position: when the body of evidence and research is on your side, it is usually a lot easier to make a strong point.

Answering antithetical arguments with the research that supports your point of view is also an example of where you as a researcher might need to provide a more detailed evaluation of your evidence. ***The sort of questions you should answer about your own research***— who wrote it, where was it published, when was it published, etc.— are important to raise in countering antithetical arguments that you think come from suspicious sources. For example, chances are that an article about the problems of more strict drunk driving laws that appears in a trade journal for the restaurant industry is going to betray a self-interested bias.

Hyperlink: To review the process for evaluating the quality of your research, see Chapter One, "Thinking Critically About Research," particularly the section called "Evaluating the quality and credibility of your research."

• Weighing Your Position Against the Opposition. Readers who oppose the argument you are trying to support with your research might do so because they value or "weigh" the implications of your working thesis differently than you do. Those opposed to a working thesis like "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV" might think this because they think the advantages of advertising drugs on television—increased sales for pharmaceutical companies, revenue for advertising agencies and television stations, and so forth—are more significant than the disadvantages of advertising drugs on television. Those who would argue against the working thesis "Tougher gun control laws would be of little help in the fight against teen violence" probably think that the advantage of having fewer guns available to teenagers to use for violence is less important than the disadvantageous effects stronger gun control laws might have on lawful gun owners.

Besides recognizing and acknowledging the different ways of comparing the advantages and disadvantages suggested by your working thesis, ***the best way of answering these antithetical arguments in your own writing*** is to clearly explain how you weigh and compare the evidence. In other words, even if the readers who oppose your point of view are in some ways correct, the advantages you advocate in your working thesis are much more significant than the disadvantages.

For example, a writer might argue that any of the loss of profit to pharmaceutical companies, advertising agencies, and television stations would be a small price to pay for the advantages of banning prescription drug TV ads. A writer with a working thesis like "Tougher gun control laws would be of little help in the fight against teen violence" might have to defend his arguments against a hostile audience by suggesting that in the long-run, the costs of infringing the right to bear arms and our other liberties would far outweigh the few instances of teen violence that might be stopped with stronger gun control laws.

• Making Concessions. In the course of researching and thinking about the antithesis to your working thesis and its potentially hostile audiences, it may become clear to you that these opposing views have a point. When this is the case, you may want to consider revising your working thesis or your approach to your research to make some concessions to these antithetical arguments.

Sometimes, student researchers "make concessions" to the point of changing sides on their working thesis—that is, in the process of researching, writing, and thinking about their topic, a research moves from arguing a working thesis like "Most computer hackers are criminals and represent a great risk to Internet security" to one like "Most computer hackers are merely curious computer enthusiasts and can help solve problems with Internet security."

This sort of shift in thought about an issue might seem surprising, but it makes perfect sense when you remember the purpose of research in the first place. When we study the evidence on a particular issue, we often realize that our initial and uninformed impression or feelings on an issue were simply wrong. That's the role of research: we put more trust in opinions based on research than in things based on "gut instinct" or feelings.

Usually, most concessions to antithetical perspectives on your working thesis are less dramatic and can be accomplished in a variety of ways. You might want to employ some qualifying terms to "hedge" a bit. For example, the working thesis "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV" might be qualified to "Drug companies should be closely regulated about what they are allowed to advertise in TV." The working thesis "The international community should enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries and save endangered fish species around the world" might be changed to "The international community should enact stronger conservation measures to preserve fisheries and help endangered fish species around

the world." Both of these are still strong working theses, but they also acknowledge the sort of objections the opposition might have to the original working thesis.

But be careful in using qualifying terms! An ***over-qualified working thesis*** can be just as bad as a working thesis about something that everyone accepts as true: it can become so watered-down as to not have any real significance anymore. For example, theses like "Drug company television advertising is sometimes bad and sometimes good for patients" and "While there are good reasons for enacting stronger conversation measures for protecting endangered fish species, there are also good reasons to not make new conservation laws" are both over-qualified to the point of taking no real position at all.

But You Still Can't Convince Everyone…

If you are using research to convince an audience about something, then you must understand the opposite side of the argument you are trying to make. That means you need to include antithetical positions in your on-going research, you should think about the opposites and alternatives to the point you are making with your working thesis, you have to imagine your hostile audience as clearly as possible, and you should employ different strategies to answer your hostile audiences' objections.

But even after all this, you still can't convince everyone that you're "right." You probably already know this. We have all been in conversations with friends or family members where, as certain as we were that we were right about something and as hard as we tried to prove we were right, our friends or family were simply unwilling to budge from their positions. When we find ourselves in these sorts of deadlocks, we often try to smooth over the dispute with phrases like "You're entitled to your opinion" or "We will have to agree to disagree" and then we change the subject. In polite conversation, this is a good strategy to avoid a fight. But in academic contexts, these deadlocks can be frustrating and difficult to negotiate.

A couple of thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher and rhetorician Aristotle said that all of us respond to arguments based on three basic characteristics or appeals: logos or logic, pathos or emotional character, and ethos, the writer's or speaker's perceived character. Academic writing tends to rely most heavily on logos and ethos because academics tend to highly value arguments based on logical research and arguments that come from writers with strong "***character-building" qualifications***—things like education, experience, previous publications, and the like. But it's important to remember that pathos is always there, and particularly strong emotions or feelings on a subject can obscure the best research.

Most academic readers have respect for writers when they successfully argue for positions that they might not necessarily agree with. Along these lines, most college writing instructors can certainly respect and give a positive evaluation to a piece of writing they don't completely agree with as long as it uses sound logic and evidence to support its points. However, all readers—students, instructors, and everyone else—come to your research project with various preconceptions about the point you are trying to make. Some of them will already agree with you and won't need much convincing. Some of them will never completely agree with you, but will be open to your argument to a point. And some of your readers, because of the nature of the point you are trying to make and their own feelings and thoughts on the matter, will never agree with you, no matter what research evidence you present or what arguments you make. So, while you need to consider the antithetical arguments to your thesis in your research project to convince as many members of your audience as possible that the point you are trying to make is correct, you should remember that you will likely not convince all of your readers all of the time.

Assignment: Writing the Antithesis Essay

Based on the most current and most recently revised version of your working thesis, write a brief essay where you identify, explain, and answer the antithesis to your position. Keep in mind that the main goal of this essay is to think about an audience of readers who might not agree with you and to answer at least some of the questions and complaints they might have about your research project. Be sure to include evidence about both the antithesis and your working thesis, and be sure to answer the objections hostile readers might have.

Questions to consider as you write your first draft

• Have you revisited your working thesis? Based on the research and writing you have done up to this point, how has your working thesis changed?

• Have you done enough research on the ***antithetical position*** to have a clear understanding of the objections? (You might want to review the work you've done with your annotated bibliography at this point). What does this research suggest about the

opposition's points and your points?

• What sort of brainstorming have you done in considering the antithesis? Have you thought about the "opposite" of your thesis and the reasons why someone might hold that point of view? Have you considered the "alternatives" to your working thesis and why someone might find one or more of these alternative viewpoints more persuasive than your points?

• Have you clearly imagined and considered what your "hostile audience" is like? What sorts of people do you think would object to your working thesis? What kind of motivations would hostile audiences have to disagree with you?

• In considering the objections to your working thesis, do you believe that the evidence is on your side and you can refute hostile audiences' objections directly with the research you have done?

• When you compare the points raised by the antithesis to the points of your working thesis, do you think that the advantages and values of your working thesis outweigh those of the antithesis?

• Are there some concessions that you've made to your working thesis based on the points raised by the antithetical point of view? How have you incorporated these concessions into your revised working thesis?

Revision and Review

During the peer review process, you should encourage your readers to review your rough draft with the same sort of skeptical view that a hostile audience is likely to take toward your points. If your readers already disagree with you, this won't be difficult. But if they more or less agree with the argument you are trying to make with your research, ask them to imagine for a moment what a hostile reader might think as they examine your essay. You might even want to help them with this a bit by describing for your reviewers the hostile audience you are imagining.

Hyperlink: For guidelines and tips for working with your classmates in peer review sessions, see chapter four "How To Collaborate and Write With Others," particularly the section "Peer Review as Collaboration."

• Do your readers clearly understand the antithetical positions you are focusing on in your essay? Do they think that the antithetical positions you are focusing on in your essay are the most important ones? Do they believe you have done enough research on the antithetical positions to adequately discuss them in your essay?

• What other objections to the argument you are trying to make with your working thesis do your readers have? In other words, have they thought of antithetical arguments that you haven't considered in your essay?

• Do your readers think that you have clearly answered the antithetical arguments to your working thesis? Do they accept the logic of your arguments? Do they believe incorporating more evidence into the essay would make your answer to the antithetical arguments better?

• Imagining themselves as members of the "hostile audience," do your readers find themselves at least partially persuaded by the answers you have to the antithetical arguments in your essay? Why or why not?

A Student Example:

"Are Casinos Good For Las Vegas? Defending Legalized Gambling," by Kerry Oaks

For this assignment, the instructor asked students to write a short essay that addressed a few of the main antithetical arguments to each student's working thesis. Kerry Oaks' research up to this point had focused almost exclusively on the positive aspects of gambling in Las Vegas. "Researching the other side of this argument was an important step for me," Oaks said. "I still think that gambling—particularly in a place like Las Vegas—is good for the economy and everything else. But my research for the antithesis assignment also made me think that maybe casinos should spend more money on trying to prevent some of the problems they're causing."

Are Casinos Good For Las Vegas? Defending Legalized Gambling

Antithesis Essay Assignment

Few places in this country are as exciting as Las Vegas, Nevada, a city known for its "party" atmosphere and legalized gambling. My working thesis, which is "Casinos and legalized gambling have had a positive economic effect on Las Vegas," has explored

how and why Las Vegas became such a popular tourist destination. Needless to say, there are a lot critics who disagree with my working thesis. While these antithetical positions are important, I believe that they can be answered.

Some critics say that the economic and employment gains offered by legalized gambling are exaggerated. In an excerpt published on the PBS documentary show Frontline website, John Warren Kindt says the economic benefits of legalized gambling have been exaggerated. While gambling initially leads to more jobs, it ultimately is a bad business investment.

However, the same sort of economic problems that Kindt describes happening in other parts of the country haven't happened in Las Vegas. In fact, Las Vegas remains one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. For example, as Barbara Worcester wrote in her article, "People Flock to Las Vegas for Relocation, Employment," the unemployment rate in Las Vegas in December 1999 was 3.1 percent, which is the lowest unemployment rate since August 1957, when it was 2 percent. (44).

Another argument is that casinos in the Las Vegas area cause crime, suicide, and murder. According to Jay Tolson's article "Face of the Future?" "Clark County has almost 70 percent of the population of a state that leads the nation in its rates of suicide, high school dropouts, death by firearms, teenage pregnancies, and death from smoking." (52).

Clearly, this is a real problem for the area and for the state, but it cannot all be blamed on the casinos. Frank Fahrenkopf, President of the American Gambling Association, said in an interview with the PBS documentary show Frontline that there's nothing about gambling in itself that creates crime and these problems. As Fahrenkopf was quoted on the Frontline website, "Any enterprise that attracts large numbers of people. The crime rate at Orlando went up. It wasn't anything that Mickey and Minnie were doing that caused it, it was just that it was a draw of people to a community."

Even with these negative effects of crime and such, legalized gambling has still greatly improved the lives of people in Las Vegas. As Tolson writes, "there is still a sense that Las Vegas is a place where working people can realize the American Dream" (50) made possible in part by taxes on gambling instead of property or income.

Certainly, Las Vegas has all kinds of problems, but they are the same ones as those associated with any major and rapidly growing city in the United States. But on the whole, I think the benefits of casinos in Las Vegas outweigh the disadvantages of gambling. After all, there wouldn't be much of anything in Las Vegas if it weren't for the casinos that thrive there.

Important Concepts

sources of meaning

peer-reviewed

a database search engine

conventions of writing have a fundamentally rhetorical nature

effectively massage in quotations

in the majority of situations, readers appreciate

five basic steps for generating ideas to consider your antithesis

one of the key tests of a working thesis

generating ideas to consider your antithesis

the best (and worst!) thing about the Internet

The sort of questions you should answer about your own research

the best way of answering these antithetical arguments in your own writing

over-qualified working thesis

character-building qualifications

antithetical position

During the peer review process, you should encourage

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1 Using Sources. **Authored by**: Hartness Library**License**: Standard YouTube License

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19: Citing Your Sources

19.1 In-text Citation
19.2 Works Cited Entries
19.3 Standard Style and Documentation Systems



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“Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism” by Steven D. Krause

“Summarize & Paraphrase Sources” by Joe Moxley

“When to Quote and When to Paraphrase” by Brianna Jerman

“Tell Your Readers When You Are Citing, Paraphrasing, or Summarizing” by Joe Moxley

“Avoid Dropped Quotations provided” by Writing Commons

“Use Solely Your Own Words to Paraphrase” provided by Writing Commons

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“Avoiding Plagiarism” by Jennifer Janechek

“Understand When Citations are Necessary” by Joe Moxley

“Avoiding Plagiarism: A Checklist for Student Writers” by Angela Eward-Mangione

Chapter Preview

Define the reason writers quote and paraphrase from research.

Define plagiarism.

Explain the ways to make a point using evidence.



https://youtu.be/ssTKVakPvwQ

Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism

by Steven D. Krause

Learning how to effectively quote and paraphrase research can be difficult and it certainly takes practice. The goal of this chapter is to introduce some basic strategies for summarizing, quoting and paraphrasing research in your writing and to explain how to avoid plagiarizing your research.

How to Summarize: An Overview

A ***summary*** is a brief explanation of a longer text. Some summaries, such as the ones that accompany annotated bibliographies, are very short, just a sentence or two. Others are much longer, though summaries are always much shorter than the text being summarized in the first place.

Summaries of different lengths are useful in research writing because you often need to provide your readers with an explanation of the text you are discussing. This is especially true when you are going to quote or paraphrase from a source.

Of course, the first step in writing a good summary is to do a thorough reading of the text you are going to summarize in the first place. Beyond that important start, there are a few basic guidelines you should follow when you write summary material:

- **Stay “neutral” in your summarizing.** Summaries provide “just the facts” and are not the place where you offer your opinions about the text you are summarizing. Save your opinions and evaluation of the evidence you are summarizing for other parts of your writing.
- **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.
- **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.

How to Quote and Paraphrase: An Overview

Writers quote and paraphrase from research in order to support their points and to persuade their readers. A quote or a paraphrase from a piece of evidence in support of a point answers the reader’s question, “says who?”

This is especially true in academic writing since scholarly readers are most persuaded by effective research and evidence. For example, readers of an article about a new cancer medication published in a medical journal will be most interested in the scholar’s research and statistics that demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatment. Conversely, they will not be as persuaded by emotional stories from individual patients about how a new cancer medication improved the quality of their lives. While this appeal to emotion can be effective and is common in popular sources, these individual anecdotes do not carry the same sort of “scholarly” or scientific value as well-reasoned research and evidence.

Of course, your instructor is not expecting you to be an expert on the topic of your research paper. While you might conduct some primary research, it’s a good bet that you’ll be relying on secondary sources such as books, articles, and Web sites to inform and persuade your readers. You’ll present this research to your readers in the form of quotes and paraphrases.

A “***quote***” is a direct restatement of the exact words from the original source. The general rule of thumb is any time you use three or more words as they appeared in the original source, you should treat it as a quote. A “paraphrase” is a restatement of the information or point of the original source in your own words.

While quotes and paraphrases are different and should be used in different ways in your research writing (as the examples in this section suggest), they do have a number of things in common. Both quotes and paraphrases should:

- The method you should follow to properly quote or paraphrase depends on the style guide you are following in your academic writing. The two most common style guides used in academic writing are the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the American Psychological Association (APA). I discuss both of these different style guides in some detail in the Appendix of this book. Your instructor will probably assign one of these styles before you begin working on your project, however, if he/she doesn’t mention this, be sure to ask.

  When to Quote, When to Paraphrase

  The real “art” to research writing is using quotes and paraphrases from evidence effectively in order to support your point. There are certain “rules,” dictated by the rules of style you are following, such as the ones presented by the MLA or the ones presented by the APA. There are certain “guidelines” and suggestions, like the ones I offer in the previous section and the ones you will learn from your teacher and colleagues.

  But when all is said and done, the question of when to quote and when to paraphrase depends a great deal on the specific context of the writing and the effect you are trying to achieve. Learning the best times to quote and paraphrase takes practice and experience.

  In general, **it is best to use a quote when:**

  - In general, **it is best to paraphrase when:**
    - **There is no good reason to use a quote to refer to your evidence.** If the author’s exact words are not especially important to the point you are trying to make, you are usually better off paraphrasing the evidence.
    - **You are trying to explain a particular a piece of evidence in order to explain or interpret it in more detail.** This might be particularly true in writing projects like critiques.
    - **You need to balance a direct quote in your writing.** You need to be careful about directly quoting your research *too* much because it can sometimes make for awkward and difficult to read prose. So, one of the reasons to use a paraphrase instead of a quote is to create balance within your writing.

Tips for Quoting and Paraphrasing

- **Introduce** your quotes and paraphrases to your reader, especially on first reference.
- **Explain** the significance of the quote or paraphrase to your reader.
- **Cite** your quote or paraphrase properly according to the rules of style you are following in your essay.
- **Quote when** the exact words are important, when you want to highlight your agreement or your disagreement.
- **Paraphrase when** the exact words aren't important, when you want to explain the point of your evidence, or when you need to balance the direct quotes in your writing.

Four Examples of Quotes and Paraphrases

Here are four examples of what I mean about properly quoting and paraphrasing evidence in your research essays. In each case, I begin with a **BAD** example, or the way **NOT** to quote or paraphrase.

Quoting in MLA Style

Here's the first **BAD** example, where the writer is trying to follow the rules of MLA style:

There are many positive effects for advertising prescription drugs on television. "African-American physicians regard direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines as one way to educate minority patients about needed treatment and healthcare options" (Wechsler, Internet).

This is a potentially good piece of information to support a research writer's claim, but the researcher hasn't done any of the necessary work to explain where this quote comes from or to explain why it is important for supporting her point. Rather, she has simply "dropped in" the quote, leaving the interpretation of its significance up to the reader.

Now consider this revised **GOOD** (or at least **BETTER**) example of how this quote might be better introduced into the essay:

In her Pharmaceutical Executive article available through the Wilson Select Internet database, Jill Wechsler writes about one of the positive effects of advertising prescription drugs on television. "African-American physicians regard direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines as one way to educate minority patients about needed treatment and healthcare options."

In this revision, it's much more clear what point the writer is trying to make with this evidence and where this evidence comes from.

In this particular example, the passage is from a traditional print journal called *Pharmaceutical Executive.* However, the writer needs to indicate that she actually found and read this article through Wilson Select, an Internet database which reproduces the "full text" of articles from periodicals without any graphics, charts, or page numbers.

When you use a direct quote in your research, you need to the indicate page number of that direct quote or you need to indicate that the evidence has no specific page numbers. While it can be a bit awkward to indicate within the text how the writer found this information if it's from the Internet, it's important to do so on the first reference of a piece of evidence in your writing. On references to this piece of evidence after the first reference, you can use just the last name of the writer. For example:

Wechsler also reports on the positive effects of advertising prescription drugs on television. She writes…

Paraphrasing in MLA Style

In this example, the writer is using MLA style to write a research essay for a Literature class. Here is a **BAD** example of a paraphrase:

While Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy in *The Great Gatsby,* his love for her is indistinguishable from his love of his possessions (Callahan).

There are two problems with this paraphrase. First, if this is the first or only reference to this particular piece of evidence in the research essay, the writer should include more information about the source of this paraphrase in order to properly introduce it. Second, this paraphrase is actually not of the *entire* article but rather of a specific passage. The writer has neglected to note the page number within the parenthetical citation.

A **GOOD** or at least **BETTER** revision of this paraphrase might look like this:

John F. Callahan suggests in his article "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream" that while Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy in *The Great Gatsby,* his love for her is indistinguishable from his love of his possessions (381).

By incorporating the name of the author of the evidence the research writer is referring to here, the source of this paraphrase is now clear to the reader. Furthermore, because there is a page number at the end of this sentence, the reader understands that this passage is a paraphrase of a particular part of Callahan's essay and *not* a summary of the entire essay. Again, if the research writer had introduced this source to his readers earlier, he could have started with a phrase like "Callahan suggests…" and then continued on with his paraphrase.

If the research writer were offering a brief summary of the entire essay following MLA style, he wouldn't include a page number in parentheses. For example:

John F. Callahan's article "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream" examines Fitzgerald's fascination with the elusiveness of the American Dream in the novels The Great Gatsby, Tender is the Night, and The Last Tycoon.

Quoting in APA Style

Consider this **BAD** example in APA style, of what **NOT** to do when quoting evidence:

"If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage." (Repetto, 2001, p. 84).

Again, this is a potentially valuable piece of evidence, but it simply isn't clear what point the research writer is trying to make with it. Further, it doesn't follow the preferred method of citation with APA style.

Here is a revision that is a **GOOD** or at least **BETTER** example:

Repetto (2001) concludes that in the case of the scallop industry, those running the industry should be held responsible for not considering methods that would curtail the problems of over-fishing. "If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage" (p. 84).

This revision is improved because the research writer has introduced and explained the point of the evidence with the addition of a clarifying sentence. It also follows the rules of APA style. Generally, APA style prefers that the research writer refer to the author only by last name followed immediately by the year of publication. Whenever possible, you should begin your citation with the author's last name and the year of publication, and, in the case of a direct quote like this passage, the page number (including the "p.") in parentheses at the end.

Paraphrasing in MLA Style

Paraphrasing in APA style is slightly different from MLA style as well. Consider first this **BAD** example of what **NOT** to do in paraphrasing from a source in APA style:

Computer criminals have lots of ways to get away with credit card fraud (Cameron, 2002).

The main problem with this paraphrase is there isn't enough here to adequately explain to the reader what the point of the evidence really is. Remember: your readers have no way of automatically knowing why you as a research writer think that a particular piece of evidence is useful in supporting your point. This is why it is key that you introduce and explain your evidence.

Here is a revision that is **GOOD** or at least **BETTER:**

Cameron (2002) points out that computer criminals intent on committing credit card fraud are able to take advantage of the fact that there aren't enough officials working to enforce computer crimes. Criminals are also able to use the technology to their advantage by communicating via email and chat rooms with other criminals.

Again, this revision is better because the additional information introduces and explains the point of the evidence. In this particular example, the author's name is also incorporated into the explanation of the evidence as well. In APA, it is preferable to weave in the author's name into your essay, usually at the beginning of a sentence. However, it would also

have been acceptable to end an improved paraphrase with just the author's last name and the date of publication in parentheses.

How to Avoid Plagiarism in the Research Process

Plagiarism is the unauthorized or uncredited use of the writings or ideas of another in your writing. While it might not be as tangible as auto theft or burglary, plagiarism is still a form of theft.

In the academic world, plagiarism is a serious matter because ideas in the forms of research, creative work, and original thought are highly valued. Chances are, your school has strict rules about what happens when someone is caught plagiarizing. The penalty for plagiarism is severe, everything from a failing grade for the plagiarized work, a failing grade for the class, or expulsion from the institution.

You might not be aware that plagiarism can take several different forms. The most well known, ***purposeful plagiarism***, is handing in an essay written by someone else and representing it as your own, copying your essay word for word from a magazine or journal, or downloading an essay from the Internet.

A much more common and less understood phenomenon is what I call ***accidental plagiarism*.** Accidental plagiarism is the result of improperly paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting, or citing your evidence in your academic writing. Generally, writers accidentally plagiarize because they simply don't know or they fail to follow the rules for giving credit to the ideas of others in their writing.

Both purposeful and accidental plagiarism are wrong, against the rules, and can result in harsh punishments. Ignoring or not knowing the rules of how to not plagiarize and properly cite evidence might be an *explanation*, but it is not an *excuse*.

To exemplify what I'm getting at, consider the examples below that use quotations and paraphrases from this brief passage:

Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties. Rock started out as an Anglo-American phenomenon and has become an industry. Nonetheless, it was able to capture the hopes of young people around the world and provided enjoyment to those of us who listened to or played rock. Sixties pop was the conscience of one or two generations that helped bring the war in Vietnam to a close. Obviously, neither rock nor pop has solved global poverty or hunger. But is this a reason to be "against" them? (ix).

And just to make it clear that *I'm* not plagiarizing this passage, here is the citation in MLA style:

Lévy, Pierre. Cyberculture. Trans. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.

Here's an obvious example of plagiarism:

Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties.

In this case, the writer has literally taken one of Lévy's sentences and represented it as her own. That's clearly against the rules.

Here's another example of plagiarism, perhaps less obvious:

The same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people.

While these aren't Lévy's exact words, they are certainly close enough to constitute a form of plagiarism. And again, even though you might think that this is a "lesser" form of plagiarism, it's still plagiarism.

Both of these passages can easily be corrected to make them acceptable quotations or paraphrases.

In the introduction of his book Cyberculture, Pierre Lévy observes that "Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties**" (ix).**

Pierre Lévy suggests that the same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people **(ix).**

Note that changing these passages from examples of plagiarism to acceptable examples of a quotation and a paraphrase is extremely easy: properly cite your sources.

This leads to the “golden rule” of avoiding plagiarism:

Always cite your sources. If you are unsure as to whether you should or should not cite a particular claim or reference, you should probably cite your source.

Often, students are unclear as to whether or not they need to cite a piece of evidence because they believe it to be “common knowledge” or because they are not sure about the source of information. When in doubt about whether or not to cite evidence in order to give credit to a source (“common knowledge” or not), you should cite the evidence.

Plagiarism and the Internet

Sometimes, I think the ease of finding and retrieving information on the World Wide Web makes readers think that this information does not need to be cited. After all, it isn’t a traditional source like a book or a journal; it is available for “free.” All a research writer needs to do with a web site is “cut and paste” whatever he needs into his essay, right? Wrong!

You need to cite the evidence you find from the Internet or the World Wide Web the same way you cite evidence from other sources. To not do this is plagiarism, or, more bluntly, cheating. Just because the information is “freely” available on the Internet does not mean you can use this information in your academic writing without properly citing it, much in the same way that the information from library journals and books “freely” available to you needs to be cited in order to give credit where credit is due.

It is also not acceptable to simply download graphics from the World Wide Web. Images found on the Internet are protected by copyright laws. Quite literally, taking images from the Web (particularly from commercial sources) is an offense that could lead to legal action. There are places where you can find graphics and clip art that Web publishers have made publicly available for anyone to use, but be sure that the Web site where you find the graphics makes this explicit before you take graphics as your own.

In short, you can use evidence from the Web as long as you don’t plagiarize and as long as you properly cite it; don’t take graphics from the Web unless you know the images are in the public domain. For more information on citing electronic sources, see Chapter 12, “Citing Your Research with MLA and APA Style.”

Summarize & Paraphrase Sources

by Joe Moxley

Learn how to integrate the words and ideas of others into your documents without losing your voice and focus.
Over the years, conventions have evolved regarding how writers should acknowledge and integrate the ideas and works of others.

This section on annotating, summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources explains how to develop an annotated bibliography, and it explains how this effort can help you to manage your time and help create a focus for your research report. In addition, this section clarifies distinctions between summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources, and exploring conventions for weaving others’ ideas and words into your prose without destroying your focus and voice.

When to Quote and When to Paraphrase

by Brianna Jerman

Academic writing requires authors to connect information from outside sources to their own ideas in order to establish credibility and produce an effective argument.

Sometimes, the rules surrounding source integration and plagiarism may seem confusing, so many new writers err on the side of caution by using the simplest form of integration: direct quotation. However, using direct quotes is not always the best way to use a source. Paraphrasing or summarizing a text is sometimes a more effective means of supporting a writer's argument than directly quoting. Taking into consideration the purpose of their own writing and the purpose of utilizing the outside source, authors should seek to vary the ways in which they work sources into their own writing.

Paraphrasing and quoting are two of the three ways an author can integrate sources. The two methods are closely related, and therefore, can sometimes be confused with one another. ***Quoting borrows*** the exact wording used in a source and is indicated by placing quotes around the borrowed material. Paraphrasing, on the other hand, borrows an idea found in a shorter passage but communicates this idea using different words and word order. While it is acceptable to loosely follow a similar structure, paraphrasing requires more than simply changing a few of the original words to synonyms. Both paraphrasing and directly quoting have their merit, but they should be used at different times for different purposes. An author chooses to use one of these strategies depending on why the source is being used and what information the source provides.

When to Paraphrase

Paraphrasing provides an author the opportunity to tailor the passage for the purpose of his or her own essay, which cannot always be done when using a direct quote. Paraphrasing should be used to

- Further explain or simplify a passage that may be difficult to understand. It could be that the topic, such as the process of extracting stem cells, is particularly difficult to follow, or that the author has used language that further complicates the topic. In such situations, paraphrasing allows an author to clarify or simplify a passage so the audience can better understand the idea.
- Establish the credibility of the author. In connection to the above point, paraphrasing a complicated passage can help the author establish trust with his or her audience. If an author directly quotes a difficult passage without analysis or further explanation, it may appear that he or she does not understand the idea. Paraphrasing not only clarifies the idea in the passage but also illustrates that the writer, since he or she can articulate this difficult message to the reader, is knowledgeable about the topic and should be trusted.
- Maintain the flow of the writing. Each author has a unique voice, and using direct quotes can interrupt this voice. Too many quotes can make an essay sound choppy and difficult to follow. Paraphrasing can help communicate an important idea in a passage or source without interrupting the flow of the essay.
- Eliminate less relevant information. Since paraphrasing is written using the author's own words, he or she can be more selective in what information from a passage should be included or omitted. While an author should not manipulate a passage unnecessarily, paraphrasing allows an author to leave out unrelated details that would have been part of a direct quote.
- Communicate relevant statistics and numerical data. A lot of times, sources offer statistical information about a topic that an author may find necessary to developing his or her own argument. For example, statistics about the percentage of mothers who work more than one job may be useful to explaining how the economy has affected children rearing practices. Directly quoting statistics such as this should be avoided.

When to Quote

Direct quotes should be used sparingly, but when they are used, they can be a powerful rhetorical tool. As a rule, avoid using long quotes when possible, especially those longer than three lines. When quotes are employed, they should be used to

Provide indisputable evidence of an incredible claim. Directly quoting a source can show the audience exactly what the source says so there is not suspicion of misinterpretation on the author's part.

- Communicate an idea that is stated in a particularly striking or unique way. A passage should be quoted if the source explains an idea in the best way possible or in a way that cannot be reworded. Additionally, quoting should be used when the original passage is particularly moving or striking.
- Serve as a passage for analysis. If an author is going to analyze the quote or passage, the exact words should be included in the essay either before or following the author's analysis.

- Provide direct evidence for or proof of an author's own claim. An author can use a direct quote as evidence for a claim he or she makes. The direct quote should follow the author's claim and a colon, which indicates that the following passage is evidence of the statement that precedes it.
- Support or clarify information you've already reported from a source. Similar to the above principle, an author can use a direct quote as further evidence or to emphasize a claim found in the source. This strategy should be used when an idea from a source is particularly important to an author's own work.
- Provide a definition of a new or unfamiliar term or phrase. When using a term that is used or coined by the source's author or that is unfamiliar to most people, use direct quotes to show the exact meaning of the phrase or word according to the original source.



Tell Your Readers When You Are Citing, Paraphrasing, or Summarizing

by Joe Moxley

While documentation styles differ in their formats and procedures, they all agree on one point: You must ensure that your readers know when you are borrowing from secondary sources. Remember, in particular, that readers read from left to right.

They should not–and truly cannot–be expected to read backwards to determine just how much of a paragraph or section is borrowed from a secondary source. For example, note the confusion a reader would have in evaluating Theresa Lovins's interesting essay, "Objectionable Rock Lyrics":

Many Americans fear government intervention when it comes to human rights. They fear that government censorship of rock lyrics might lead to other restrictions. Then too, what would the guidelines be, who would make these decisions, and how might it affect our cherished constitutional rights? Questions like these should always be approached with serious consideration. We have obligations as parents to protect our children and as Americans to uphold and protect our rights. Therefore, it's important to ask what effects proposals like Tipper Gore's, president of PMRC, might have on our freedoms in the future. She recommends that the record companies utilize a rating system: X would stand for profane or sexually explicit lyrics, V for violence, O for occultism, and D/A for drugs/alcohol. The PMRC also suggest that the lyrics be displayed on the outside cover along with a general warning sticker which perhaps might read "Parental Guidance: Explicit Lyrics." To date, record companies have not agreed to all these demands but some have decided to put warning labels on certain questionable albums (Morthland).

Although Lovins provides complete documentation for Morthland–the source that she is citing in this paragraph–she does not clarify for the reader exactly what she is borrowing from Morthland. As a result, the reader cannot know if the author is indebted to Morthland for all of the thoughts in this paragraph or merely the section on PMRC's proposal. This problem could be easily rectified by including a transitional sentence that distinguished her thoughts from those of other authors whom she is citing. For example, Lovins could write, "According to John Morthland's recent essay in High Fidelity, Tipper Gore has recommended that record companies do such and such." If Lovins did not want to call so much attention to Morthland, she could merely put Morthland's name in parentheses after the word "future" in the sixth sentence of this paragraph.

The second example, below, serves as another example of how an ambiguous citation/paraphrase results in confusion for the audience:

While the PMRC's request needs to be studied, perhaps they have merit. Rating systems could actually serve to alert the public, similar to how movie ratings have helped motion picture audiences choose the types of movies they wish to view. A committee could be appointed by a reputable party such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The group would perform its duties in a manner similar to that used by the Academy of Motion Pictures. This type of system has not hurt the movie industry, but has actually aided in promoting some movies. For instance, "The Black Hole" by Walt Disney Productions was given a PG rating. Disney was trying to reach a broader audience and by receiving this kind of rating they did just that. It told the adult audience that it wasn't along the same lines as a Mary Poppins film, and perhaps it contained

material which they could enjoy but was too sophisticated for a 4-6 year old to grasp. Movie rating is a good example, proving that rating systems can and do, in fact, work (Wilson).

Lovins runs into the same problem in this paragraph as she did in the previous one. Because she doesn't inform the reader about exactly when she is referring to Connie Wilson's Time essay, "A Life in the Movies," readers cannot be sure whether it is Lovins's idea or Wilson's that "a committee could be appointed" to evaluate the lyrics of rock music. If this idea was originally propounded by Wilson, then Lovins could be considered guilty of plagiarism, yet most people would merely describe this particular example as sloppy scholarship.



Avoid Dropped Quotations

provided by Writing Commons

Why is it important to avoid dropped quotations?

A dropped quotation—a quote that appears in a paper without introduction—can disrupt the flow of thought, create an abrupt change in voice, and/or leave the reader wondering why the quote is included.

Instead of creating an unwelcome disruption in their paper's cohesiveness with a dropped quotation, thoughtful writers should employ strategies for smoothly integrating source material into their own work.

What are the benefits of fluently integrating a direct quotation?

When quotations are smoothly integrated, writers can strategically introduce their readers to the new speaker, connect their point to the quotation's theme, and provide their audience with a clear sense of how the quote supports the paper's argument. Using these tactics to segue from the writer's voice to the source's voice can add agency and authority to the writer's ideas.

What can be done to fluently integrate a direct quotation into a paper?

Use a signal phrase at the beginning or end of the quotation:

- Sample signal phrases:
  - Noted journalist John Doe proposed that " . . . " (14).
  - Experts from The Centers for Disease Control advise citizens to " . . . " (CDC).
  - ". . . ," suggested researcher Jane Doe (1).

Use an informative sentence to introduce the quotation:

- Sample introductory sentences:
  - The results of dietician Sally Smith's research counter the popular misconception that a vegan diet is nutritionally incomplete:
  - An experiment conducted by Dave Brown indicates that texting while driving is more dangerous than previously believed:

Use appropriate signal verbs:

adds	confirms	lists	reports
argues	describes	illustrates	states
asserts	discusses	notes	suggests
claims	emphasizes	observes	writes

Use Solely Your Own Words to Paraphrase

provided by Writing Commons

What does it mean to paraphrase?

When paraphrasing, a writer uses his or her own words to restate someone else's ideas. Paraphrasing does not mean simply changing a few of the original words, rearranging the structure of the sentence, or replacing some words with synonyms. A paraphrase should explain a borrowed idea in the writer's own voice but must also remain true to the message of the original text. Why is it important to paraphrase using only your own words?

- **To avoid plagiarism:** If you are presenting an idea other than your own and you haven't cited the source, this act could be considered plagiarism. Remember, however, that even when you paraphrase using your own words, you must still cite the original source since the idea has been borrowed.
- **To simplify or clarify complex ideas found in the original passage:** Sometimes an author has explained an idea or concept in a way that is difficult to follow, or an idea may be particularly perplexing. By using your own words, you not only illustrate to readers that you understand this concept, but also help readers understand the idea more clearly. This clarification is especially important if the idea you're paraphrasing is vital to developing and supporting your own argument.
- **To report the essential information of the idea:** A lengthy direct quote may provide details that are not clearly relevant to your purpose or argument. By using your own words to paraphrase the idea, you can eliminate information that might distract your reader from the main message.

Let's look at an example of a paraphrase: **Direct quote:** "[The new laws] would also help ensure that companies like BP that are responsible for oil spills are the ones that pay for the harm caused by these oil spills, not the taxpayers. This is in addition to the low-interest loans that we've made available to small businesses that are suffering financial losses from the spill" (Obama). [1] **Paraphrase:** According to the President, the proposed legislation would hold oil companies accountable for damages caused by oil spills and provide affordable loans to businesses whose profits have been affected by such incidents (Obama). [1] Obama, Barack. "Remarks on the Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico." The White House. Washington, D.C. 14 May 2010. Address. Web. 30 Apr. 2012.

Paraphrase Accurately to Preserve the Source's Ideas

provided by Writing Commons

What does it mean to paraphrase?

When paraphrasing, a writer uses his or her own words to restate someone else's ideas. The borrowed idea should be presented in the writer's own voice but must remain true to the message of the original text. A paraphrase should clearly and accurately communicate the most important points of a text without integrating outside ideas.

How can the source's ideas be preserved when paraphrasing?

- Read the text closely and carefully to ensure clear understanding.
- Without looking back at the original text, paraphrase the idea(s) of the passage in your own words.
- Compare your paraphrase with the original passage.
  - Have you accurately communicated the message of the original text?
  - Have you used your own words instead of copying those in the original text?
  - Have you included information or opinions that are not part of the original text?

Let's look at an example:

Original text: "Women with dependent children are most likely to take up measures such as part-time working and other reduced working-hour arrangements, and school term-time working (where it is available, mostly in the public sector) is almost exclusively female. A number of barriers appear to limit men's take-up of such measures: the organization of the workplace (including perceptions of their entitlement, that is, perceptions that men's claims to family responsibilities are valid), the business environment and the domestic organization of labour in employees' homes (including the centrality of career for the father and mother and their degree of commitment to gendered parenting, both closely class-related)" (Gregory and Milner 4-5). [1]

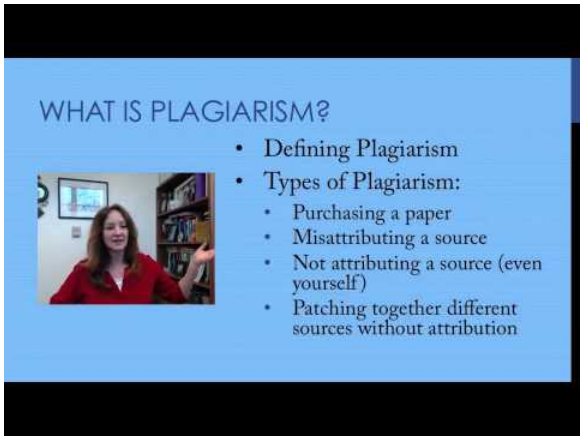
Paraphrase: Gregory and Milner explain that men are less likely than women to pursue part-time and alternative work schedules that compliment home life responsibilities. The authors propose that this pattern is due to conceptions about gender at the workplace, where men are viewed as responsible for their families' needs, and at home, where views of traditional parenting roles and socio-economic conditions affect expectations for division of household labor between parents (4-5).

Note: The paraphrase captures Gregory and Milner's ideas about men's and women's likelihood to participate in part-time work situations, and the reason behind these choices, without copying the authors' original language and voice.

Avoiding Plagiarism

by Jennifer Janechek

When incorporating outside sources, it's important to be conscious of what constitutes plagiarism and to avoid plagiarizing material. ***Plagiarism*** occurs when an author uses someone else's ideas, words, or style in his or her own writing without properly attributing the information to that source. While many people think that plagiarism only occurs when a writer directly copies someone else's words, there are many other types of plagiarism: using the ideas of someone else without referencing that source; failing to capture a source's point in your own words when paraphrasing; mimicking an author's style; and neglecting to include an in-text citation for a quote, paraphrase, or summary.



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But don't be afraid to use outside sources! They're incredibly important to academic writing. For example, if you wrote an essay on the Indian Mutiny without incorporating any source material, you would lose credibility, and your reader would likely think that you've made up everything in your paper. But first, here is a breakdown of a few key points regarding source material and plagiarism:

- Plagiarism occurs when you use someone else's ideas.

A writer can plagiarize a source by referencing the ideas espoused by another writer without giving credit to (citing) the original source. Let's say, for example, that you read an article by Jennifer Yirinec called "Dramatic Representations of the Indian Mutiny." In reading that article, you learn that Yirinec views dramatic representations of the Indian Mutiny as showing some negativity toward the colony of India. In referencing this idea in your own paper, you would have to provide an in-text citation. Below is an example of how the writer should reference this idea:

Original quote (from source):

"I argue that dramatic representations of the Indian Mutiny shed a negative light upon the colony of India." (from Jennifer Yirinec, "Dramatic Representations of the Indian Mutiny," pg. 54).

Writer's incorporation of this idea into her paper:

The Indian Mutiny inspired many English dramas that depicted India in a negative light (Yirinec 54).

Even if you're not quoting or paraphrasing, you're referencing an idea that came from someone else; as such, it's important to provide an in-text citation that attributes the idea to the source.

- Plagiarism occurs when you switch words around.

Paraphrasing can be tricky, and sometimes students who mean to paraphrase can unintentionally plagiarize by failing to communicate a source's ideas in their own words; however, this doesn't lessen the offense, so it's important to learn to paraphrase correctly. Paraphrasing does not mean merely switching words around. You'll learn more about paraphrasing in another piece in this section, but for now, let's take a look at an example of plagiarism:

Original quote (from source):

"I argue that dramatic representations of the Indian Mutiny shed a negative light upon the colony of India." (from Jennifer Yirinec, "Dramatic Representations of the Indian Mutiny," pg. 54)

Line from student paper:

Dramatic representations figuring the Indian Mutiny depict India, a colony of Britain, in a negative light (Yirinec 54).

You see, these excerpts are very similar; though they are worded slightly differently, paraphrasing requires the writer to represent the source's ideas in his or her own words—not to jumble the original source's words to create a new sentence.

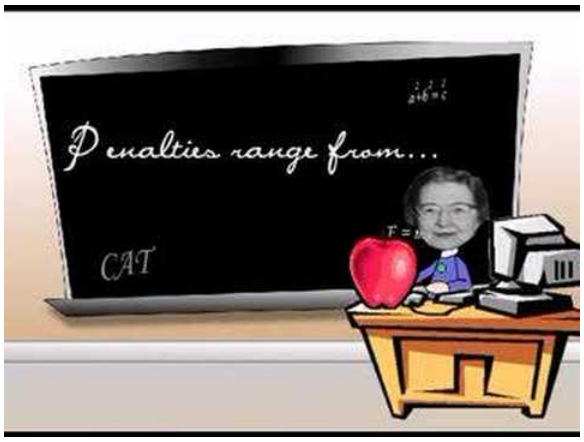
The general rule of thumb is that a writer who uses three or more words from a source should place quotation marks around those words and cite accordingly.

- Plagiarism occurs when you mimic an author's style.

While it's certainly productive to read published articles to learn how prominent writers structure and communicate their ideas, writers should not copy other writers' styles. Yes, even mimicking an author's style counts as plagiarism. When reading academic articles, note how writers organize their paragraphs, articulate their theses, vary their diction and sentence structure, and incorporate source material, but be careful not to steal another author's style. You don't want to write exactly like someone else, anyway! Learn from many different published authors, determine what strategies work best for you, and negotiate different strategies based upon your rhetorical situation and purpose. But always be yourself in writing.

- Plagiarism occurs when you forget to include an in-text citation.

Even if you forget to drop in an in-text citation for a source that you quote, paraphrase, or summarize but do reference the source in your works cited page, you are still plagiarizing another author's words and/or ideas. That's why it's always important to consider what ideas are your own and what ideas you've gleaned from outside sources during the research and writing processes. It's generally a bad idea to write a draft in which you include quotes and paraphrases without ensuing citations, intending to return later to the draft and insert the necessary in-text citations—if you do this, you might overlook source material when you return to the paper.



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Plagiarism has many different levels—some offenses are greater than others. A common student fear is that he or she will plagiarize material unknowingly—that he or she will accidentally reference an idea or phrase that came from a source he or she hasn't read. This is actually pretty rare, and if it happens, it is something that you can discuss with your instructor. Do not be afraid to incorporate evidence into your paper just because you're worried that you'll unintentionally plagiarize. Referencing others' ideas is essential in a research assignment. Hopefully the pieces on introducing and integrating evidence will help you successfully incorporate evidence into your assignments without plagiarizing. But also be sure to check out your individual university's plagiarism policy.

Understand When Citations are Necessary

by Joe Moxley

Avoid plagiarism and academic dishonesty by understanding when you need to provide citations in your research.

While you may be an unusually bright, innovative thinker, your instructors still expect your research reports to link your insights with those of other scholars. Research involves "listening in" on a scholarly discussion in professional periodicals, books, and reference volumes, and then synthesizing, extending, and connecting what you discover through others' publications with your own insights.

One of the ***cornerstones of academic research*** is the need to acknowledge sources. Researchers and users of research expect you to qualify on whose shoulders you stand. Whose ideas influenced yours?

Give Credit Where Credit Is Due

You must acknowledge your indebtedness to other authors throughout your project by following an established method for documenting sources. Each discipline has its own procedures for citing material, which you will need to familiarize yourself with if you hope to be taken seriously as a knowledgeable and competent contributor to your chosen field. Although style guides differ in regard to where the author's name or publishing source is listed, they are all designed to ensure that proper credit is given to authors. As you know from your experience as a writer, developing insights and conducting original research is difficult and time-consuming, so you can understand why people want to receive proper credit for their original ideas.

Use the following questions to ascertain whether you need to cite sources of information in your work:

1. Is the information taken directly from another source? Is this information not generally well known? In other words, is this information part of the common domain–i.e., the knowledge, assumptions, and so on that experts in a field already know or assume? Or is this new knowledge, something the author has discovered or developed within his/her writing?

2. Am I paraphrasing or summarizing someone else's original thoughts? If you cite three or more words from the original or even one word that was coined by the author, you should acknowledge your indebtedness by placing quotation marks around the borrowed terms.
3. Will summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting the source add a layer of authority to your interpretation or argument? Perhaps the source is influential, which may sway readers' opinions regarding the strength of your argument or conclusions.

Whenever you answer yes to any of these questions, then you must document the source. But be careful: Avoid stringing together a list of sources and calling it a research paper. College instructors tend to be very critical of essays that read like laundry lists of loosely tied-together ideas. Connectedness is key; learning how to balance another writer's words with your own requires patience, practice, and diligence in thinking-through multiple drafts of a document.



Avoiding Plagiarism: A Checklist for Student Writers

by Angela Eward-Mangione

After you understand what plagiarism is, as well as how to avoid it, consider using a plagiarism checklist as you draft and edit your work. The following checklist is ideal for use during the drafting and revising stages of the writing process.

Checklist for Avoiding Plagiarism

1. **Apply** a note-taking system in your pre-writing process.

- *I have carefully used a note-taking system, such as synthesis notes, while conducting research.*
- *I have recorded citation information for each source so that I do not have to locate it later*

2. **Verify** the accuracy of information about your source during the pre-writing process.

- *I have reviewed all the information about the source—such as its authors, title, container, publisher, and year of publication—to ensure it is accurate.*

3. **Outline** your first draft, but only include your original ideas.

- *I have created an outline only consisting of my original thesis statement and main ideas to ensure that I have not substituted others' ideas or words for my own.*

4. **Identify** ideas and details from your source notes that support or spar with your main ideas.

- *I have purposefully selected details from credible, relevant sources to support my thesis statement and main ideas.*

5. **Decide** which details to quote or paraphrase.

- *I have chosen to directly quote definitions, passages for analysis, or information that has been uniquely stated.*
- *I have decided to paraphrase information to further explain a topic or maintain the flow of writing. When paraphrasing information, I have used my own words and sentence structures.*

6. **Place** quotation marks around any short quotes.

- *I have placed quotation marks around content that I have directly quoted, except for long quotes, which formatting guidelines (e.g., MLA, APA, or Chicago Style) require me to place in a free-standing block without quotation marks.*

7. **Lead** quoted and/or paraphrased content with signal phrases or informative sentences.

- *I have inserted signal phrases or informative sentences prior to any information that I have quoted or paraphrased.*

8. **Insert** in-text citations after quoted and/or paraphrased information.

- *I have included in-text citations directly after quoted and/or paraphrased information rather than citing my sources at the end of each paragraph.*

- *I have followed the correct formatting guidelines (e.g., MLA, APA, or Chicago Style) for all in-text citations.*

9. **Include** a Works Cited or References Page.

- *I have included a complete list of sources that have been quoted and/or paraphrased in my paper.*
- *I have followed the correct formatting guidelines (e.g., MLA, APA, or Chicago Style) for my Works Cited or References Page.*

10. **Ask** your instructor any questions you have before, not after, you submit your paper.

- *I have sought advice regarding any questions that relate to the content and/or documentation in my paper.*
- *I understand that submitting my paper means that I am also stating it consists only of my own work, except in cases for which I have included appropriate documentation. I have not purchased any of the content in my paper.*

Important Concepts

summary

why writers quote and paraphrase from research

quote

the real "art" to research writing

plagiarism

quoting is borrowing

what paraphrasing provides an author

cornerstones of academic research

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The Process of Research Writing | Steven D. Krause | Spring 2007

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1: https://youtu.be/ssTKVakPvwQ

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Video 3: https://youtu.be/4P05vgxDoPU

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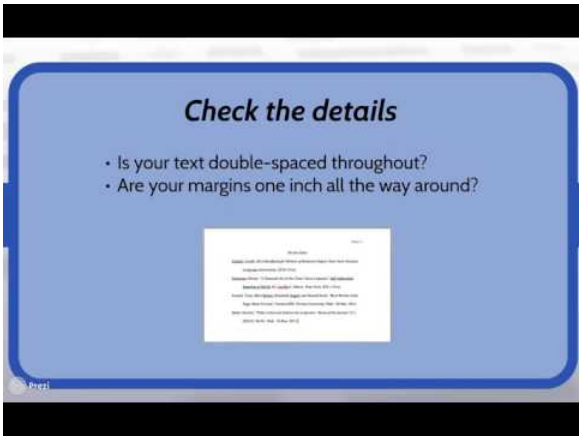
19.2: Works Cited Entries

Article links:

“Works Cited Page Checklist” by JM Paquette

Chapter Preview

List the rules for a works cited page.



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Works Cited Page Checklist

by JM Paquette

Did I do this right? A checklist for your Works Cited Page!

We get it: formatting can be tough, especially when you’ve been working on a paper for a while and your eyes are starting to cross and the letters are bleeding into one another. If you find yourself nearing the end, use this handy checklist to make sure your Works Cited Page follows all of the rules!

Works Cited Page Checklist, WritingCommons.org

1. Is your Works Cited on a new page of the paper? For instance, ***if your essay is four pages long, your Works Cited Page should be on page five***. While you’re checking out page numbers, do a quick scan of your page layout. You should have your header in the upper right hand corner (last name page number) and the words “Works Cited” centered above your list. That’s it!
2. Is your list double-spaced? Nicely done. How about those margins? Still one inch all the way around? Great!
3. Are your entries in alphabetical order by the last name of the author or, if there is no available author, by the title? Scan your list now and remember your alphabet.

   Works Cited Page Checklist, WritingCommons.org

   Also, keep in mind that when alphabetizing, you should ignore the words “The,” “a,” and “an.” For instance, a source called “This article is awesome” should go under “A” for “Awesome,” not “T” for “The.” (It took ITunes many years to figure this out—don’t make the same mistake!)
4. Scan the left side of your page. The first line of each new entry should be aligned with the margin. The rest of each citation (each line of text below the first one) should be indented. This makes it easier for readers to find the source they are seeking without wading through extra information.
5. Did you add any unnecessary extras? Scan your page now and delete any bullet points or numbers. Your list is alphabetized—that’s enough organization for MLA. Also, you do not need to repeat your first page heading on this page (Name, teacher name,

class, date). Just the upper right hand corner name and page number is enough.

You made it! Now your readers can use the Works Cited Page as MLA intended. Thanks for being a courteous MLA format user.

Important Concepts

if your essay is four pages long, your Works Cited Page should be on page five

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

Video 1: MLA Works Cited Page Checklist, Editor JMPaquette. License: Standard YouTube License.

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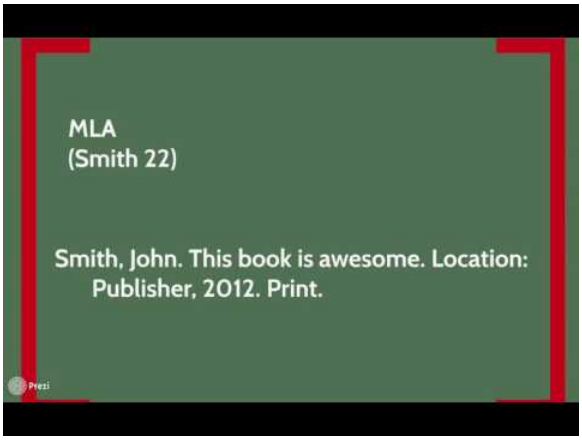
19.3: Standard Style and Documentation Systems

Article links:

"Citing Your Research Using MLA or APA Style" by Steven D. Krause

Chapter Preview

- Describe how citation distinguishes academic research writing from other kinds of writing.
- Compare the two manuals that academics use for citing research.
- Explain parenthetical citation.
- Identify elements of a works cited page.



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Citing Your Research Using MLA or APA Style

by Steven D. Krause

What is Citation For, Anyway?

As I've discussed throughout The Process of Research Writing Writing, ***citation*** is one of the key elements that distinguishes academic research writing from other kinds of writing. Academic readers are keenly interested in knowing where the writer found her evidence, in many cases so the reader can retrieve that evidence and read it themselves if they want.

Second, academic writers are also very interested in giving credit to other writers' ideas. As I discussed in chapter three, "Quoting and Paraphrasing Your Research," to not give proper credit to another writer's words or ideas is plagiarism. To not use citation in academic writing is simply against the rules.

So, in the most general sense, the ***goal of citation in academic writing*** is pretty straight-forward: properly citing your research in your writing explains to your readers where you found the evidence to support your points.

Finding Out More About MLA and APA Citation

There are several different sets of ***"rules" that academics use for citing research***. The two most commonly used in writing classes and used by academics working in the humanities (things like English, history, philosophy, Women's studies, and education) and the "soft sciences" (psychology, sociology, political science, and so forth) are the guidelines of the Modern Language Association and those of the American Psychological Association.

While academic journals that focus on scholarship having to do with literature and language tend to follow the MLA guidelines, there are other English studies journals that use the style rules of the APA.

This chapter includes an abbreviated version of the basic rules of both MLA and APA style you will need to cite most types of materials you include in your research project. But for materials and details about citation that you don't find included here, you may want to consult the official style guides, their Web sites, or other documentation sources.

The definitive guide for the rules of MLA is:

Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Sixth Edition. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

For APA style, the definitive guide is:

American Psychological Association. Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Fifth Edition. Washington: APA, 2001.

Both the MLA and APA style guides are very complete. However, as you work on citing your research and review the guidelines I offer here, keep in mind two things:

• No style guide accounts for everything. While there are rules of citation for almost all of the different types of evidence you might use in your research projects, you might come across some type of evidence that doesn't seem to be covered. Talk with your teacher when this happens, but you may need to approximate what you think is the proper citation style.

• Style guides are evolving, changing, and open to interpretation. While it may seem that the rules for citation in MLA, APA, and other style guides have always and forever been the same and are completely beyond any interpretation, this is not the case. The most obvious recent example as to how style guides change is the internet. Up until a few years ago, there were no good rules with any of the common style guides as to how to cite information from a web site because there were no web sites.

An Abbreviated Guide to MLA Style

Parenthetical Citation

MLA style uses "***parenthetical citation***" instead of footnotes or endnotes to indicate within the text the source of a quote or a paraphrase. There should be enough information within the parenthetical citation to help your reader locate the complete bibliographic information on your "works cited" page.

In MLA style, it's best to weave parenthetical citations into the flow of the sentence—avoid merely "dropping" citations into the text that disrupt it. Also, be sure that the parenthetical citation information clearly refers to the material you are citing. See Chapter Three, "Quoting and Paraphrasing Your Research," for suggestions on how to do this effectively.

Author in a phrase

Whenever possible, incorporate the name of the author into the sentence and note the page number in the parentheses. Use the author's full name on the first reference, and the author's last name on each subsequent reference.

Sara Baase writes in A Gift of Fire "The desire for the advantages of small community life … is prompting many professionals and knowledge workers to move to small towns" (296).

Author in the citation

When you don't name the author in the sentence, you need to include it in the parenthetical citation.

Still, many people "prefer city life for its vibrancy and career and social opportunities" (Baase 296).

Two or three authors

Name all of the authors, preferably in the sentence, but if not, in the parenthetical citation. Use the authors' full names on the first reference, and the authors' last names on each subsequent reference.

As David D. McKenny, Werner M. Newhausser, and David Julius explain, while we know a lot about how people detect heat, "little is known about how we detect cold" (52).

Group or corporate author

If the text is the product of a group, a committee, a corporation, etc., use the group or corporate author as you would an author name.

According to the National Research Council's report Inland Navigation System Planning, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finds itself between those advocating for commerce and those wanting to protect the environment (ix).

Unknown author

Use the title of the work or a shortened version of it instead of the author's name. Generally speaking, you should avoid using phrases like "anonymous" or "unknown author."

As reported in the article "TV Dropped from Medicare Bill," …

Author of two or more pieces of evidence in your project

It's not uncommon to cite different works from the same author in an essay. When this happens, you need to make it clear in your citation which work you are quoting.

The Financial Services Information Sharing and Analysis Center was designed to combat cybercrime (Markoff, "New Center," C-2).

Work in an anthology

When you quote a work that is reprinted in an anthology, use the name of the author of the work (not the name of the editor) and the page numbers from the anthology. In your Works Cited page, you will note the name of the editor and the anthology.

Lehan connects the character Gatsby with other myths of man-god figures, both as seen through his eyes and the eyes of other characters (80-1).

Indirect source

An ***indirect quote*** is when you quote from a piece of evidence where that writer is quoting someone else. To properly cite indirect quotes, use the abbreviation "qtd." in the parenthetical citation to explain the source of the indirect quote.

Steve Miller said "I have no financial incentive to kid you about anything" (qtd. in Naughton 24).

A work without a page number (including Web sites)

This would include quotations and paraphrases from a Web site or other Internet source, from a television show, a radio program, and so forth. On the first reference to this sort of evidence, try to work an explanation of the source within the sentence itself to make it clear why you aren't noting a page number.

"The Term Hacker," according to Susan Brenner's web site Cybercrimes.net, "also tends to connote membership in the global community defined by the net."

The CNN web site reported about a recent international conference about Internet crime in the article "World cybercrime experts see need for laws, ties."

You should also use this approach when you are citing newspaper, journal, or other types of articles that originally appeared in a "traditional" print source but that you discovered through a Web site or a database that did not note page numbers. This can make for some awkward phrasing, but it is important to indicate that the version of the text you are using is not paper-based but is Web-based.

According to Robert Pear in his 1999 article "Drug Companies Getting F.D.A. Reprimands for False or Misleading Advertising," available through the New York Times Web Site, "The Federal Government has repeatedly reprimanded drug companies" for making false claims in their ads.

On references after the first one to the evidence, refer to it by the last name of the author.

Formatting of Works Cited Pages, Annotated Bibliographies, and Works Consulted Documents

Whenever you include quotes and paraphrases in your research essays, you must note the bibliographic information about where you found this evidence. In MLA style, this is called a "Works Cited" page. The "Works Cited" page is a list of citations which is alphabetized based on author's last names (or, if a piece of evidence doesn't have an author, on the title of the evidence, not counting the words "A," "An," or "The") that explains where you found your research.

Works cited pages include only the evidence that you quoted in your essay. Unlike an annotated bibliography (like the project I describe in Chapter Six), a works cited pages include only a citation and not an annotation. Finally, you might be required to put together a "Works Consulted" list. This is a list of citations for all the work that you considered but didn't necessarily quote in your research project.

MLA style calls for Works Cited pages to be double-spaced with a hanging indent of a half inch, as you can see in the examples here. The specific format for each of your entries on your Works Cited page will vary according to the type of evidence. But in general, each of your entries should include enough information about the research you are quoting or paraphrasing so that the reader could find this research themselves if they wanted to find it.

Books

Works Cited entries for a book always include:

• The Author or authors. Last name first of the first author; for each author after that, it is first name first.

• Title of the book. You should underline the title or put it in italics.

• Publication information. This includes the name of the publisher and the city of publication.

• Year of publication.

Book, single author

Brackett, Virginia. F. Scott Fitzgerald: Writer of the Jazz Age. Greensboro, NC : Morgan Reynolds Publishers, 2002.

Book, two or more authors

With multiple authors, list the first author last name first, separated from the author's first name with a comma. List all of the authors first name followed by the last name.

Jennings, Simon, Michel J. Kaiser, and John D. Reynolds. Marine Fisheries Ecology. Oxford: Blackwell Science, 2001.

Book, corporate or group author

National Research Council. Inland Navigation System Planning: The Upper Mississippi River—Illinois Waterway. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001.

Selection from an anthology or a chapter from a book that is edited

Lehan, Richard. "The Great Gatsby–The Text as Construct: Narrative Knots and Narrative Unfolding." F. Scott Fitzgerald : New Perspectives. Eds. Jackson R. Bryer, Alan Margolies, and Ruth Prigozy. Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 2000. 78-89.

Don't use "p." or "pp." for noting page numbers.

If you include two or more items from the same anthology or edited book, you should list the edited book as an entry by itself in the works cited page.

Bryer, Jackson R., Alan Margolies, and Ruth Prigozy, Eds. F. Scott Fitzgerald : New Perspectives. Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 2000.

In addition, list each of the selections from the anthology according to the author of the selection, the title, and then a reference to the anthology.

Lehan, Richard. "The Great Gatsby–The text as construct: narrative knots and narrative unfolding." Bryer, Margolies, and Prigozy, 78-89.

Book, translation

Derrida, Jacques. Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.

Book, edition other than the first

Baase, Sara. Gift of Fire : Social, Legal, and Ethical Issues for Computers and the Internet. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.

Entry from a reference work

If there is a specific author for the entry, list it. Otherwise, begin with the title of the entry.

Gale, Robert L. "Nick Carraway." An F. Scott Fitzgerald Encyclopedia. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.

"Crime." The Random House Dictionary of the English Language. 2nd ed. New York: Random House, 1987.

Periodicals

Works Cited entries for magazines, journals, newspapers, and other periodicals include:

• The Author or authors. Last name first of the first author; for each author after that, it is first name first.

• Article Title. Enclose the title and sub-title in quotes, with the period at the end of the title inside the quotes.

• ***Publication information***. This includes the periodical title, underlined or italicized; the volume and issue number, when they are available; and the date of publication. For journals, the year goes in parentheses followed by a colon and the page numbers. For magazines and newspapers, list the month or the day and the month before the year, and don't use parentheses. Don't use "p." or "pp." to indicate page numbers.

• Date of publication. This listing will vary according the frequency of the periodical, whether or not it is published by volume, and so forth.

Article in a weekly magazine
Wood, Chris. "Fighting Net Crime." Macleans 12 June 2000: 38-40.

Article in a monthly magazine
Canby, Peter. "The Forest Primeval: A Month in Congo's Wildest Jungle." Harper's Magazine July 2002: 41-56.
Article in a newspaper

Markoff, John. "New Center Will Combat Computer Security Threats." The New York Times 1 October 1999: C2.

Editorial or Letter to the Editor
After the title, indicate if the selection is an editorial or a letter as indicated in the examples below.

McLoughlin, Mary Lou. Letter. Newsweek 5 August 2002: 12.
"Hauptman, Timmer, Carlberg for Council." Editorial. The Ann Arbor News 22 October 2002: A8.

Article in a journal paginated by volume
Some academic journals number the pages according to the volume instead of the issue.

Vann, Irvin B., and G. David Garson. "Crime Mapping and Its Extension to Social Science Analysis." Social Science Computer Review 19 (2001): 471-479.

Article in a journal paginated by issue
Some academic journals number the pages of each issue. When this is the case, put a period after the volume number and before the issue number.

Mansfield, Peter. "The Cancer Industry." The Ecologist 32.3 (2002): 23.

Unsigned article in a periodical
When no author's name is available in any type of periodic publication, begin with the name of the article. When alphabetizing it on your Works Cited page, exclude "A," "An," and "The." For example, an unsigned article in a magazine would look like this:

"An Overdose on Drug Advertising. Is it Driving Up Costs?" Business Week 22 May 2000: 52.
Electronic and Internet-based Sources

Properly citing things from electronic and Internet-based sources like the World Wide Web, email, newsgroups, and CD-ROMs can be confusing. Because these resources are still relatively "new" to the academic community (at least relative to things like books and paper journals), there is still some debate about the precise method of citing some of these sources. The sixth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers makes a lot of progress in addressing these kinds of sources, but questions remain and new types of electronic sources are coming available all the time.

Even though electronic and internet-based sources may look different from traditional journals and books, the basic elements and goals of citation remain the same. Entries should include:

• Author or Authors, which again, should be last name first of the first author and first name first for each author after the first. Unlike traditional books and periodicals, the names of authors of electronic resources (especially Web sites) are often located at the end of the article or another location.

• Title of the article or selection. For an online journal or periodical, a selection from a database, a scholarly project, or similar resource, indicate the title of the article or selection with quotes.

• Publishing information. This might be the title of the online journal or periodical, or the name of the database, scholarly project, or similar resource. This information should appear underlined or in italics.

• Date of publication. As is the case with periodicals, this listing will vary according the frequency of publication of the periodical, whether or not it is published by volume, and so forth. As is the case with the names of the author or authors, finding the date of publication for many electronic resources is challenging. Be sure to look for it carefully, including at the end of the selection.

There are two other elements that are generally common to electronic and internet-based sources:

• Information about the type of electronic resource. As the examples suggest, you need to indicate that your piece of evidence is from an electronic database, a Web site, an email message, and so forth.

• The date of access. Quite literally, this means the date that you found the research. This is important because, as most "Web surfers" have experienced, electronic resources can change and be unavailable without warning.

A "text only" periodical article available via an electronic database

Most community college, college, and university libraries nowadays offer their patrons access to electronic versions of some traditional print resources. These databases, such as Wilson Select and Articles First, include "full text" of articles that appeared originally as an article in the print publication as part of the entries.

These sorts of electronically available resources are just as credible as print resources because they are essentially one in the same. The electronic version of an article from Time magazine is just as credible as the same article from the "paper version" of Time magazine. The concern comes in how you properly cite this material.

If the periodical article is available to you as "text only" and it does not include page numbers, layout, or graphics, you need to indicate clearly that you are accessing that article via an electronic database. ***To properly cite an article that is only text***, you need to first note all of the relevant information you would in a print version of the article and then indicate information about the electronic database, including:

• The name of the database. In this example, Wilson Select.
• The library or library system where you accessed that database. In this case, it would be Eastern Michigan University Halle Library. If you don't know this information, write "Electronic."
• The date of access. That is, when you found the article.
• The address of the database or where you accessed the database.

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>.

A "PDF" periodical article available via an electronic database

Increasingly, databases like Wilson Select are making articles available in Portable Document Format (PDF). PDFs, which have to be downloaded to a computer and viewed or printed out with software like Adobe Acrobat, look exactly like the print version of a periodical article. They include page numbers, graphics, charts, and anything else associated with the original layout. Essentially, they are the same as the print version (or at least a photocopy of the print version).

Because of this, I recommend that you cite PDF versions of periodical articles that you find via an electronic database the same way that you cite an article you find with print.

Article in a Periodical Published on the World Wide Web

To cite an article from a periodical that is published on the World Wide Web, adapt as closely as possible the rules for citing articles that appear in print. The major difference is you need to indicate the Web address or "URL" of the publication.

Sauer, Geoffrey. "Hackers, Order, and Control." Bad Subjects February 1996. 15 August 2002. <eserver.org/bs/24/sauer.html>.

Goozner, Merrill, and Andrew Sullivan. "The Pharmaceutical Industry." Slate 9 April 2001. 13 January 2002. <slate.msn.com>

Article in a Web Version of a Print Periodical or Other Media Outlet

Many newspapers and popular magazines release a "web version" of the publication. Cite these sorts of documents as you would articles from a periodical published on the Web.

Pear, Robert. "Drug Companies Getting F.D.A. Reprimands for False or Misleading Advertising." New York Times 28 March 1999. 15 August 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com>.

"World Cybercrime Experts See Need for Laws, Ties." CNN.com 16 October 2002. 24 October 2002. <http://www.cnn.com>.

Book Being Accessed Electronically Through a Database or The Web

As is the case with periodicals, include the same information you would with a traditional print book, along with the date of access and the information about the database of the Web site.

Icove, David J., Karl A. Seger, and William R. VonStorch. Computer Crime: A Crimefighter's Handbook. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly and Associates, 1995. Net Library E-Book. Eastern Michigan University Halle Library. 27 October 2002. <http://www.emich.edu/halle>.

Scholarly or Reference Web-based Database

F. Scott Fitzgerald Centenary Homepage. University of South Carolina. 16 July 2002.
< http://www.sc.edu/fitzgerald/>.

General Web Page or Web Site

If available, include the author or authors of the Web page or site, the title, and the date of publication. If there is no title available, include a descriptive phrase such as "home page," not underlined, italicized, or within quotation marks.

Stanger, Keith. "Library Guy" Keith Stanger's Home Port. 7 September 2002. 24 October 2002. <http://keithstanger.com>

Krause, Steven. Home page. 28 March 2005. <http://www.stevendkrause.com>.

When you are missing information about the web site, cite based on the information that you have available.

Posting toa emailinglist, online group, or newsgroup

Begin with the author's name (even if the name is obviously a pseudonym), followed by the subject line of the post, the phrase Online posting, the name of the emailing list, group, or newsgroup, and the URL of the group, if available. If it's possible, cite from the group's archives.

Denkinger, Troy. "Re: [SLE] very newbie network quest." Online Posting. 1 February 2000. English SuSE Linux Discussions. 24 October 2002. <lists.suse.com/archive/suse-linux-e/
2000-Feb/>.

Email message

Poe, Marshall. "Re: Reflections/Questions about your JEP article." Email to the author. 5 June 2002.

Synchronous communication message

This would include a posting in a MOO, a MUD, an IRC, or other chat format. Whenever possible, be sure to cite from the group's archives.

Spehar, Donna L. "Researching Who Done It: Building Online Research Skills for Composition II Students." C&W Online 2001/Connections MOO. 16 April 2001. 24 October 2002. <web.nwe.ufl.edu/cwonline2001/archives/
sphear-0416.html>.

CD-ROM, diskette, or similar medium

Cite this kind of source like you were citing the print version of the resource, but indicate the nature of the medium in the citation.

Johns Hopkins University and the Annenberg/CPB Project. A Doll House: Based on the Play by Henrik Ibsen. South Burlington, VT: The Annenberg/CPB Multimedia Collection, 1997.

Other Kinds of Sources

Interview

List the person interviewed as if they were the author. If the interview came from another source (radio or television, for example), indicate that with the citation information. If it is an interview that you conducted, be sure to list that and how you conducted the interview (personal interview, telephone interview, email interview, etc.)

Simmons, Gene. Interview with Terry Gross. Fresh Air. National Public Radio. 4 February 2002.

Wannamaker, Annette. Personal Interview. 13 August 2000.

Lecture or Speech

List the name of the speaker, the title in quotation marks, the name of the institution or group sponsoring the speech, the place, and the date. If there is no title for the speech, use an appropriate label such as "Lecture" or "Keynote speech."

Mauk, Jonathan. “Anti-Reading: Evaluating Student Essays in Current-Traditional Pedagogy.” Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention. Milwaukee, WI. 29 March 1996.

Government Document

If identified, begin with the last name of the author; if not, begin with the name of the government followed by the appropriate agency or subdivision. Only abbreviate things if they can be easily understood. For congressional documents, be sure to note the number, session, and house of Congress (“S” for Senate and “H” or “HR” for House of Representatives), and the type (Report, Resolution, Document, etc.) in abbreviated form, and number the material. If you are citing from the Congressional Record, provide only the date and page number. Otherwise, end with the publication information, often the Government Printing Office (GPO).

United States Congress, House Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Oceans, and Wildlife. Ecosystem-based Fishery Management and the Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. U.S. House 107th Congress. Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 2002.

Pamphlet or Brochure

Treat pamphlets and brochures as books. If the name of the author is unavailable, begin with the name of the pamphlet or brochure.

Sun Safety for Kids: The SunWise School Program. Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2000.

Film, DVD, or Videocassette

Generally, begin with the title, underlined or italicized. Then list the director, the company distributing the work, the version of the work you are citing if it is either a DVD or video, and the year of release. If you are focusing on a particular performer, director, producer, or writer, you can begin with that person’s name. For example:

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. Dir. Peter Jackson. New Line Cinema, 2001.

Luhrmann, Baz, dir. Moulin Rouge. 2000. DVD. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2001.

Television or Radio Program

Cite the way that you would a film, DVD or video, but be sure to note the network.

The Daily Show. John Stewart. Comedy Central Network. 24 October 2002.
All Things Considered. National Public Radio. 24 March 2001.

An Abbreviated Guide to APA Style

Parenthetical Citation

APA style uses “parenthetical citation” to indicate quotations, summaries, paraphrases, and other references to evidence that supports your point. There should be enough information within the parenthetical citation to help your reader locate the complete bibliographic information on your “References” page.

In APA style, the general rule is to indicate the author of the evidence you are citing immediately followed by the date (in parentheses) when that evidence was published. Also, it’s best to try to “weave” the citation into the text of your essay instead of merely “dropping” quotes into place. See Chapter Three, “Quoting and Paraphrasing Your Research,” for suggestions on how to do this effectively.

Author in a phrase

To indicate a paraphrase, use the author’s last name followed immediately by the date of publication in parentheses.

Baase (1997) suggests that the appeals of living in smaller communities has been attractive to many information professionals.

When you are quoting directly from the author, you should still note the author’s last name followed by the date of publication in parentheses. In addition, at the end of the quotation, list the page number, preceded by “p.,” in parentheses.

Still, Baase (1997) indicates that many professionals “prefer city life for its vibrancy and career and social opportunities” (p. 296).

Author in the citation

When you don’t name the author in the sentence, you need to include it in the parenthetical citation.

The threat some believe the Internet represents a serious threat to community that needs to be regulated with laws (Baase, 1997).

Two authors

Use both author's last names in all references. When naming the authors within the text of your essay, join their names with the word "and;" when noting them within the citation, use an ampersand (&).

Skinner and Fream (1997) found differences in attitudes about computer crime among men and women.

There are differences in attitudes about computer crime among men and women (Skinner & Fream, 1997).

Three to Five authors

Use all of the authors' last names for the first reference. For each subsequent reference, use the first author's last name and the phrase "et al."

Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran, and Selfe (1996) point out that before 1980, the computer was for most English teachers "new and difficult territory" (p.48).

Hawisher et al. (1996) also state…

For six or more authors, use only the first author's last name followed by the phrase "et al." on all references, including the first.

Group or corporate author

If the text is the product of a group, a committee, a corporation, etc., use the group or corporate author as you would an author name. If the name of the group is long, use the complete name on the first reference, followed by an abbreviation in brackets. Use the abbreviation on subsequent references.

According to the National Research Council (2001), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers often finds itself between those advocating for commerce and those wanting to protect the environment.

Unknown author

Use the title of the work or a shortened version of it instead of the author's name.

Famous personalities have become an important tool in direct to consumer (DTC) drug marketing ("DTC Marketing: Special Report," 2002).

Two or more sources in the same parenthetical citation

Writings in APA style commonly use multiple sources in one parenthetical citation when the writer is summarizing evidence. In instances like this, list the works alphabetically by the author's last name and separate each entry by a semi-colon.

However, hackers might also be considered "good" and helpful in preventing computer crime as well (Neighly, 2000; Palmer, 2001).

For multiple works by the same author, note the author's last name and the years of the works, separated by a comma.

Author of two or more pieces of evidence in your project

It's not uncommon to cite different works from the same author in an essay. APA style makes clear which piece of evidence you are referring to by the year of publication—for example, (Markoff, 2000), (Markoff, 2001).

If the year is the same, attach the suffix "a," "b," "c," and so forth after the year. The suffixes are then assigned to specific articles in the reference list—for example, (Markoff, 2000 a), (Markoff, 2000b).

Work in an anthology or chapter in a book

When you quote a work that is reprinted in an anthology, use the name of the author of the work (not the name of the editor) and the page numbers from the anthology. In your References page, you will note the name of the editor and the anthology or book.

Lehan (2000) connects the character Gatsby with other myths of man-god figures, both as seen through his eyes and the eyes of other characters.

Indirect source

An indirect quote is when you quote from a piece of evidence where that writer is quoting someone else. Note the source of the quote as you would with any other parenthetical citation, but make it clear in the sentence that your source is quoting someone else.

According to Naughton (2000), Steve Miller said "I have no financial incentive to kid you about anything" (p. 24).

A work without a date (including Web sites)

For a web site or any other document that doesn't have a date of publication, note "n.d." for "no date" in the parentheses.

"The Term Hacker," according to Susan Brenner's web site Cybercrimes.net (n.d.), "also tends to connote membership in the global community defined by the net."

Personal Communications

In APA style, you should include parenthetical references to any personal communications within your essay. This would include things like letters, email correspondence, personal interviews, and the like. APA style also discourages including this sort of evidence on a "Reference" page. See the discussion about including Email messages, interviews, and lecturers or speeches in the next section.

Formatting of Reference Pages, Bibliographies, and Annotated Bibliographies

Whenever you include quotes and paraphrases in your research essays, you must note the bibliographic information about where you found this evidence. In APA style, this is called a "Reference" page. A Reference page is a list of citations which is alphabetized based on author's last names (or, if a piece of evidence doesn't have an author, on the title of the evidence, not counting the words "A," "An," or "The") that explains where you found your research.

Reference pages include only the evidence that you quoted in your essay. A "bibliography" is a list of all of the works that you consulted but that you didn't necessarily quote. Unlike an annotated bibliography (like the project I describe in Chapter Six), a reference pages include only a citation and not an annotation.

APA style calls for reference pages to be double-spaced with a hanging indent of a half inch, as you can see in the examples here. The specific format for each of your entries on your reference page will vary according to the type of evidence. But in general, each of your entries should include enough information about the research you are quoting or paraphrasing so that the reader could find this research themselves if they wanted to find it.

Books

Reference page entries for a book always include:

• The Author or authors. List all of the authors last name first and only the initials of the first and middle names. Separate multiple authors with a comma and separate the last author from the list with an ampersand.

• Publication date. Enclose the date in parentheses.

• Title of the book. You should underline the title or put it in italics. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word of the title and the first letter of the first word after a colon, unless the word is a proper noun.

• Publication information. This includes the name of the publisher and the city of publication.

Book, single author

Brackett, V. (2002). F. Scott Fitzgerald : writer of the jazz age. Greensboro, N.C. : Morgan Reynolds Publishers.

Book, two or more authors

With multiple authors, list all of the authors last name first followed by the writer's first initial. List the authors as they appear on the book, and end the list with an ampersand.

Jennings, S., Kaiser, M. & Reynolds, J. (2001). Marine fisheries ecology. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

Book, corporate or group author

National Research Council. (2001). Inland navigation system planning: The upper Mississippi river—Illinois waterway. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Selection from an anthology or a chapter from a book that is edited

Lehan, R. (2000). The Great Gatsby–The text as construct: narrative knots and narrative unfolding. in Bryer, J., Margolies, A., & Prigozy, R. (Eds). F. Scott Fitzgerald : New perspectives. Athens, GA: U Georgia P, pp. 78-89.

In APA style, repeat this style of citation if you cite multiple chapters from the same book or anthology. Note also that in APA style, titles of chapters or entries are not in quotes and the page numbers of a chapter are indicated with the abbreviation "pp."

Book, translation

Derrida, J. (1978). Writing and difference. (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: U of Chicago P.

Book, edition other than the first

Baase, S. (2003). Gift of fire : Social, legal, and ethical issues for computers and the Internet. (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ : Prentice Hall.

Entry from a reference work

If there is a specific author for the entry, list it. Otherwise, begin with the title of the entry.

Gale, R. (1998). Nick Carraway. An F. Scott Fitzgerald Encyclopedia. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Crime. (1987). The random house dictionary of the English language. (2nd ed.). New York: Random House.

Periodicals

Reference page entries for magazines, journals, newspapers, and other periodicals include:

• The Author or authors. Last name first and the first initial of each author.

• Date of publication. Following the author in parentheses, as was the case with books.

• Article Title. Followed by a period, though not in quotes.

• Publication information. This includes the periodical title, underlined or italicized, the volume and issue number in parentheses (when they are available), and page numbers. In newspapers, precede page numbers with “p.” if it is a single page or “pp” if it is more than one.

Article in a weekly magazine

Wood, C. (2000, June 12). Fighting net crime. Macleans, pp. 38-40.

Article in a monthly magazine

Canby, P. (2002, July). The forest primeval: A month in Congo’s wildest jungle. Harper’s Magazine, pp. 41-56.

Article in a newspaper

Markoff, J. (1999, October 1). New center will combat computer security hreats. The New York Times, p. C2.

Editorial or Letter to the Editor

After the title, indicate if the selection is an editorial or a letter as indicated in the examples below.

McLoughlin, M. (2002, August 5). Rethinking hormone therapy. [Letter to Editor]. Newsweek, p. 12.

Hauptman, Timmer, Carlberg for council. (2002, October 22) [Editorial]. The Ann Arbor News, p. A8.

Article in a journal paginated by volume

Some academic journals number the pages according to the volume instead of the issue. Note the volume number in italics or underlined after the title.

Vann, I., & Garson, G. (2001). Crime mapping and its extension to social science analysis. Social Science Computer Review, 19, pp. 471-479.

Article in a journal paginated by issue

Some academic journals number the pages of each issue. When this is the case, note the volume number (underlined or in italics) and the issue number in parentheses though not underlined or in italics.

Mansfield, P. (2002). The cancer industry. The Ecologist,32 (3), p. 23.

Unsigned article in a periodical

When no author’s name is available in any type of periodic publication, begin with the name of the article. When alphabetizing it on your references page, exclude “A,” “An,” and “The.” For example, an unsigned article in a magazine would look like this:

An overdose on drug advertising. Is it driving up costs? (2000, May 22). Business Week, p. 52.

Electronic and Internet-based Sources

Properly citing things from electronic and Internet-based sources like the World Wide Web, email, newsgroups, CD-ROMs, and so forth can be confusing. Because these resources are still relatively “new” to the academic community (at least relative to things like

books and paper journals), there is still some debate about the precise method of citing some of these sources. What I offer here are my interpretations of the APA rules for citing electronic and internet-based sources; when in doubt about these guidelines, I would encourage you to ask your teacher and to consult the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association or the APA web site.

Even though electronic and internet-based sources may look different from traditional journals and books, the basic elements and goals of citation remain the same. Entries should include:

• Author or Authors, which again, should be last name first followed by first initial for each author. Unlike traditional books and periodicals, the names of authors of electronic resources (especially Web sites) are often located at the end of the article or another location.

• Date of publication. Following the author in parentheses, as was the case with books and periodicals.

• Title of the article or selection. For an online journal or periodical, a selection from a database, a scholarly project, or similar resource, indicate the title of the article or selection. Capitalize only the first word in the title and subtitle and any proper nouns.

• Publishing information. This might be the title of the online journal or periodical, or the name of the database, scholarly project, or similar resource. This information should appear underlined or in italics.

There are two other elements that are generally common to electronic and internet-based sources:

• The date of access. Quite literally, this means the date that you found the research. This is important because, as most "Web surfers" have experienced, electronic resources can change and be unavailable without warning.

• The "address" of whatever it is you are citing. Indicate the URL of a web site, a message from a newsgroup, a reference to an email, and so forth.

A periodical available via an electronic database

As I discussed in chapter two, most community college, college, and university libraries nowadays offer their patrons access to electronic versions of some traditional print resources. These databases, such as Wilson Select and Articles First, include "full text" of articles that appeared originally as an article in the print publication as part of the entries.

Now, on the one hand, these sorts of electronically available resources are just as credible as print resources because they are essentially one in the same. The electronic version of an article from Time magazine is just as credible as the same article from the "paper version" of Time magazine. On the other hand, you need to indicate to your readers that you are citing the electronic version because this version isn't exactly the same as the print version. Since the "full text" available electronically is just text, periodicals available electronically don't include page numbers and they don't include any illustrations or graphics.

To properly cite an article from a periodical available via an electronic database, first note all of the relevant information you would in a print version of the article. Following this, write "Retrieved" followed by the date you found the article, and then "from" followed by the name of the database.

Wechsler, J. (2002). Minority docs see DTC ads as way to address 'race gap.' Pharmaceutical Executive, 27 (5), pp. 32, 34. Retrieved October 20, 2002 from WilsonSelect Database.

Article in a Periodical Published on the World Wide Web

To cite an article from a periodical that is published on the World Wide Web, adapt as closely as possible the rules for citing articles that appear in print. Following this, write "Retrieved" followed by the date you found the article, and then "from" followed by the address of the Web site.

Sauer, G. (1996, February). Hackers, order, and control. Bad Subjects. Retrieved August 15, 2002, from eserver.org/bs/24/sauer.html

Goozner, M., & Sullivan, A. (2001, January 13). The pharmaceutical industry. Slate. Retrieved January 13, 2002, from slate.msn.com

Article in a Web Version of a Print Periodical or Other Media Outlet

Many newspapers and popular magazines release a "web version" of the publication. Cite these sorts of documents as you would articles from a periodical published on the Web.

Pear, R. (1999, March 28). Drug companies getting F.D.A. reprimands for false or misleading advertising. New York Times. Retrieved August 15, 2002, from http://www.nytimes.com

World cybercrime experts see need for laws, ties. (2002, October 16) CNN.com. Retrieved October 24, 2002, from http://www.cnn.com

Book Being Accessed Electronically Through a Database or The Web

As is the case with periodicals, include the same information you would with a traditional print book, along with the date of access and the information about the database of the Web site.

Icove, D., Seger, K. & VonStorch, W. (1995). Computer crime: A crimefighter's handbook. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly and Associates, 1995. Retrieved October 27, 2002 from Net Library E-Book.

Scholarly or Reference Web-based Database

F. Scott Fitzgerald centenary homepage. (2002, January 7). University of South Carolina. Retrieved July, 16 2002, from http://www.sc.edu/fitzgerald/

General Web Page or Web Site

Include the author or authors of the Web page or site, the title, and the date of publication.

Stanger, K. (2002, September 7). "Library guy" Keith Stanger's home port. Retrieved October 24, 2002, from http://keithstanger.com

When you are missing information about the web site, cite based on the information that you have available.

Posting to a emailing **list, online group, or newsgroup**

Begin with the author's name (even if the name is obviously a pseudonym), followed by the date, and the title or subject of the post. Include the phrase "Message posted to" and then the name of the mailing list, online group, or newsgroup, followed by the phrase "archived at" and the location of the group's archives, if available.

Denkinger, T. (2000, February 1). Re: [SLE] very newbie network quest. English SuSE Linux Discussion, archived at lists.suse.com/archive/suse-linux-e/
2000-Feb/

Email message

The APA Publications Manual discourages the inclusion of any "personal communication" like email messages, letters, memos, or personal interviews in a Reference page because personal communications "do not provide recoverable data."

The APA Publications Manual goes on to say that you should "Use your judgment" about including personal communications like email in a Reference page. Here is an example of how you might do this:

Poe, M. (2002, June 5). Re: reflections/questions about your JEP article. Personal Communication, electronic mail.
Synchronous communication message
For MOOs, MUDs, Chat room, IRCs, etc. Be sure to include information about a message archive, if available.

Spehar, D. (2001, April 16). Researching who done it: building online research skills for composition II students. C&W Online 2001/Connections MOO, archived at web.nwe.ufl.edu/
cwonline2001/archives/sphear-0416.html
CD-ROM, diskette, or similar medium
Cite this kind of source like you were citing the print version of the resource, but indicate in brackets the nature of the source.

Johns Hopkins University and the Annenberg/CPB Project. (1997). [CD-ROM]. A doll house: Based on the play by Henrik Ibesn. South Burlington, VT: The Annenberg/CPB Multimedia Collection.

Other Kinds of Sources

Interview

List the person interviewed as if they were the author. If the interview came from another source (radio or television, for example), indicate that with the citation information.

Jeffrey, P. (2002 March). “A conversation with Paul L. Jeffrey: Runaway prescription drug costs.” [Interview with journal]. Policy and Practice of Public Human Services 60(1), 10-13.

In APA, the rules for interviews that you conduct (personal interview, telephone interview, email interview, etc.) are different. The APA Publications Manual discourages the inclusion of any “personal communication” including personal interviews in a Reference page because personal communications “do not provide recoverable data.”

The APA Publications Manual goes on to say that you should “Use your judgment” about including personal communications in your References page. Here is an example of how you might do this:

Wannamaker, A. (2000, August 13). Personal communication.

Lecture or Speech

Mauk, J. (1996, March 29). Anti-reading: Evaluating student essays in current-traditional pedagogy. Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention. Milwaukee, WI.

Government Document

If identified, begin with the last name of the author; if not, begin with the name of the government followed by the appropriate agency or subdivision. Only abbreviate things if they can be easily understood. For congressional documents, be sure to note the number, session, and house of Congress (“S” for Senate and “H” or “HR” for House of Representatives), and the type (Report, Resolution, Document, etc.) in abbreviated form, and number the material. If you are citing from the Congressional Record, provide only the date and page number. Otherwise, end with the publication information, often the Government Printing Office (GPO).

United States Congress. (2002). House committee on resources, subcommittee on fisheries conservation, oceans, and wildlife. Ecosystem-based fishery management and the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens fishery conservation and management act. U.S. House 107th Congress. Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO.

Pamphlet or Brochure

Treat pamphlets and brochures as books, though note in brackets that it is a pamphlet or brochure. If the name of the author is unavailable, begin with the name of the pamphlet.

Sun safety for kids: The SunWise school program. (2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Film**, DVD, or Videocassette**

Give the last name followed by the first initial of the producer, director, writer, etc., of the work. Follow each name with the function of the contributor in parentheses. After giving the year and title of the film, indicate it is a “motion picture” in brackets, followed by the country of origin and the name of the production company.

Jackson, P. (Director) (2001). The lord of the rings: The fellowship of the ring. [Motion Picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.
Luhrmann, B. (Director) (2001) Moulin Rouge. [DVD]. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Television or Radio Program

Stewart, J. (Host)(2002, October 24). The Daily Show. [Television Program]. United States: Comedy Central.

All things considered. (2001, March 24). [Radio Program]. United States: National Public Radio.

Important Concepts

citation

goal of citation in academic writing

rules that academics use for citing research

parenthetical citation

indirect quote

Works cited pages

To properly cite an article that is only text

Publication information

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MULTIMEDIA CONTENT INCLUDED

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20: Revising Your Research Project

20.1 Revising Your Research Paper	

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20.1: Revising Your Research Paper

Article links:

“Introduction to Polishing Your Research Paper” provided by Lumen Learning

“Revising and Editing” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter Preview

- Identify major areas of concern in the draft essay during revising and editing.
- Use peer reviews and editing checklists to assist revising and editing.
- Revise and edit the first draft of your essay and produce a final draft.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=182

Introduction to Polishing Your Research Paper

provided by Lumen Learning

Now that you have completed the draft of your research paper, you will revise and polish it. Keep in mind that writing is a process from the pre-writing phase to drafting to revising your essay. In this final unit, we will review techniques for revising and improving your writing. ***In revising your paper, you will consider*** the use of diction, sentence-level issues (e.g., transitional phrases, grammar, tone, etc.), paragraph-level problems (e.g., cohesion, relating the paragraph back to your thesis), and incorporating proper format for MLA style.

Revising and Editing

provided by Lumen Learning

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

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.

TIP

How do you get the best out of your revisions and editing? Here are some strategies that writers have developed to look at their first drafts from a fresh perspective. Try them throughout this course; 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.
- Pretend you are one of your readers. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why?
- 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.

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.

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.

TIP

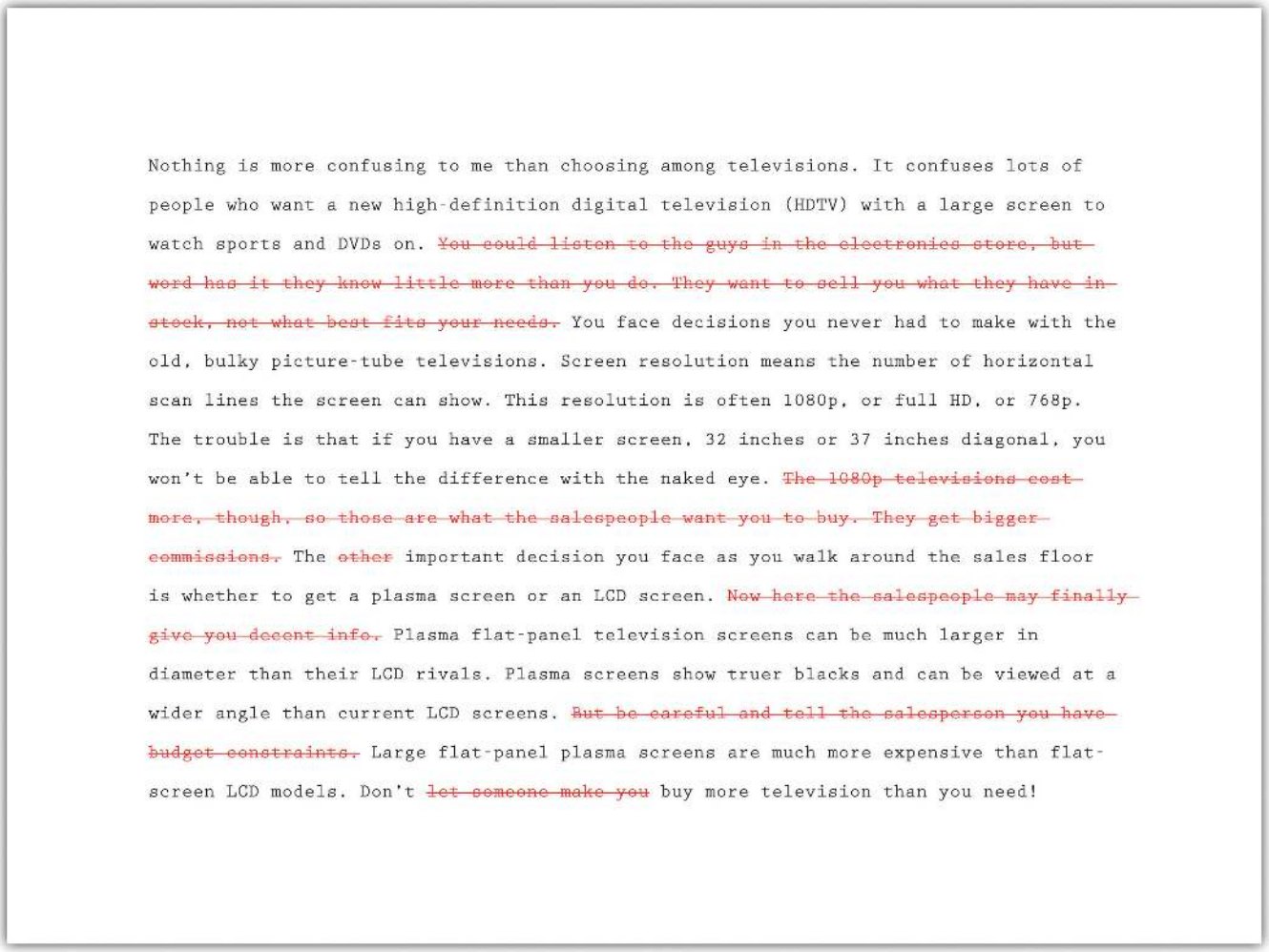
Reading your writing aloud will often help you find problems with unity and coherence. Listen for the clarity and flow of your ideas. Identify places where you find yourself confused, and write a note to yourself about possible fixes.

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 off-topic 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 diagonal, 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 truer blacks 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!

TIP

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.

Writing at Work

Many companies hire ***copyeditors and proofreaders*** to help them produce the cleanest possible final drafts of large writing projects. Copyeditors 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.

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. Table 7.3 "Common Transitional Words and Phrases" groups many common transitions according to their purpose.

Table 7.3 Common Transitional Words and Phrases

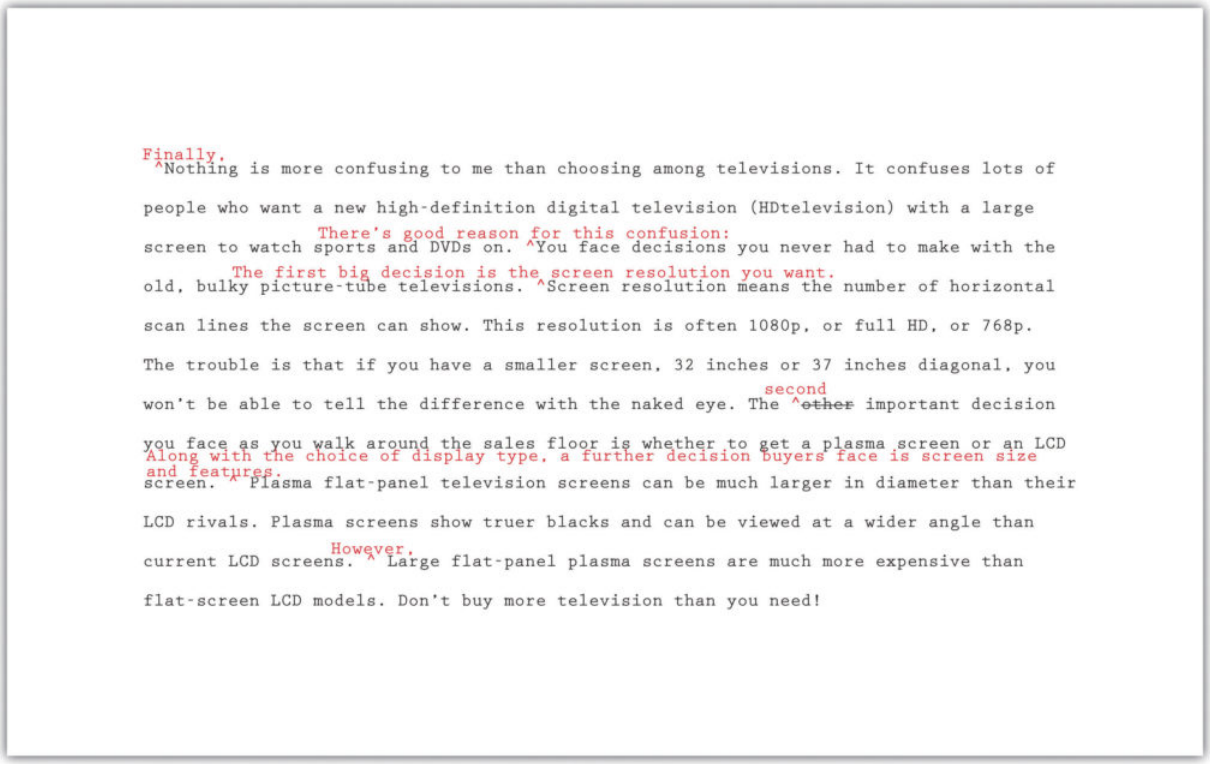
Transitions That Show Sequence or Time		
after	before	later
afterward	before long	meanwhile
as soon as	finally	next
at first	first, second, third	soon
at last	in the first place	then
Transitions That Show Position		
above	across	at the bottom
at the top	behind	below
beside	beyond	inside
near	next to	opposite
to the left, to the right, to the side	under	where
Transitions That Show a Conclusion		
indeed	hence	in conclusion
in the final analysis	therefore	thus
Transitions That Continue a Line of Thought		
consequently	furthermore	additionally
because	besides the fact	following this idea further
in addition	in the same way	moreover
looking further	considering…, it is clear that	
Transitions That Change a Line of Thought		
but	yet	however
nevertheless	on the contrary	on the other hand
Transitions That Show Importance		
above all	best	especially
in fact	more important	most important
most	worst	
Transitions That Introduce the Final Thoughts in a Paragraph or Essay		
finally	last	in conclusion
most of all	least of all	last of all
All-Purpose Transitions to Open Paragraphs or to Connect Ideas Inside Paragraphs		
admittedly	at this point	certainly
granted	it is true	generally speaking

in general	in this situation	no doubt
no one denies	obviously	of course
to be sure	undoubtedly	unquestionably
Transitions that Introduce Examples		
for instance	for example	
Transitions That Clarify the Order of Events or Steps		
first, second, third	generally, furthermore, finally	in the first place, also, last
in the first place, furthermore, finally	in the first place, likewise, lastly	

After Maria 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.

TIP

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.



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.

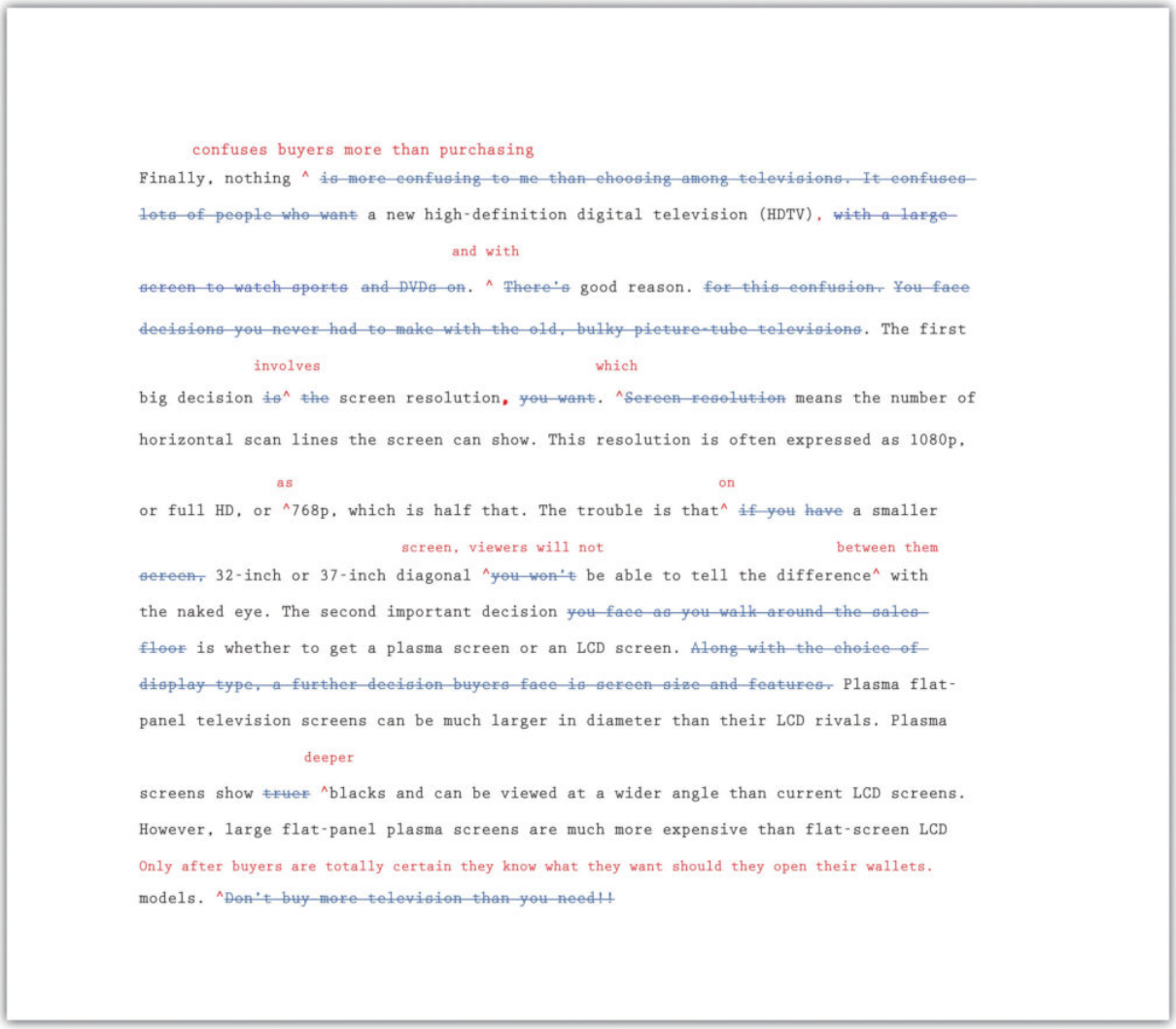
- **Sentences that begin with**
  There is
  or
  There are
  Wordy: There are two major experiments that the Biology Department sponsors.**Revised:** The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.
- **Sentences with unnecessary modifiers.Wordy:** Two extremely famous and well-known consumer 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 e-book reader, which is a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone.My over-sixty uncle bought an e-book reader, and his wife bought an e-book reader, too.**Revised:**The e-book reader, a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone.My over-sixty uncle and his wife both bought e-book readers.

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.



confuses buyers more than purchasing
Finally, 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~~
and with
~~screen to watch sports and DVDs on~~. ^ ~~There's~~ good reason. ~~for this confusion. You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions~~. The first
involves which
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 expressed as 1080p,
as on
or full HD, or ^768p, which is half that. The trouble is that^ ~~if you have~~ a smaller
screen, viewers will not between them
~~screen,~~ 32-inch or 37-inch diagonal ^~~you won't~~ be able to tell the difference^ with the naked eye. The second 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
deeper
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
Only after buyers are totally certain they know what they want should they open their wallets.
models. ^~~Don't buy more television than you need!!~~

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:
    1. Point: _____Why: _____
    2. Point: _____Why: _____
    3. Point: _____Why: _____
5. These places in your essay are not clear to me:
    1. Where: _____Needs improvement because_____
    2. Where: _____Needs improvement because _____
    3. Where: _____Needs improvement because _____
6. The one additional change you could make that would improve this essay significantly is _____.

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.

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:

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

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

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.

TIP

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.

The last section of this book 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 checklist to help you edit your writing.

Checklist

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, where allowed, correctly?
- Can I find any errors in the use of commonly confused words, such as *to*/*too*/*two*?

TIP

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.

TIP

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.

- 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.

Important Concepts

in revising your paper, you will consider

Revising and editing

revise

edit

following your outline closely

unity

copyeditors and proofreaders

transitions

eliminating wordiness

most college essays

although you may be uncomfortable sharing your writing at first

purpose of peer feedback

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21: Planning Your Presentation

21.1 Turning Your Paper into an Oral Presentation	

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21.1: Turning Your Paper into an Oral Presentation

Article links:

“Remediation” provided by Writing Commons

“Text-to-Visual Remediation” provided by Writing Commons

“Text-to-Text Remediation” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter Preview

- Describe the process of remediation.
- Compare text-to-text and text-to-visual remediation.



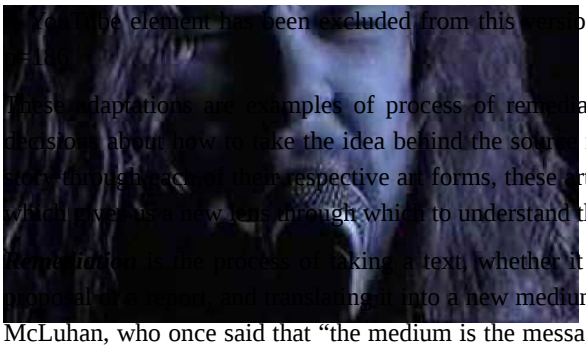
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Remediation

provided by Writing Commons

In the late 1930s, the novelist and screenwriter Dalton Trumbo read an article about the Prince of Wales paying a visit to a hospital in Canada for veterans of the first World War and meeting a soldier who had lost all of his limbs and senses from an explosion. From that inspiration Trumbo wrote his most famous novel, *Johnny Got His Gun* , about a soldier who wakes up in a hospital to find his arms and legs amputated and that he is blind, deaf and mute. It was published in 1939 to great success and in 1971 was adapted into a film that has since become a classic. But the adaptations didn’t stop there: it was also turned into a play in 1981, and the version you are probably most familiar with was the inspiration for Metallica’s 1989 song “One,” with scenes from the 1971 movie appearing in the music video.





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These adaptations are examples of process of remediation at work. Each of the artists behind these adaptations had to make decisions about how to take the idea behind the source material to create his or her own vision for the work. By telling the same story through each of their respective art forms, these artists were able to present a new interpretation of the original story, each of which gives us a new lens through which to understand the soldier's experience.

Remediation is the process of taking a text, whether it is a newspaper article, a story, a film or even something like a business proposal or a report, and translating it into a new medium. Remediation is based on the idea of the famous media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who once said that "the medium is the message." McLuhan meant that how we perceive information changes based the way in which that information is presented.

Let's think about this in terms that you might be more familiar with: many of you have probably had to write a paper for which you had to give an oral report that included a PowerPoint presentation and possibly a handout. Each of those elements, the report, the PowerPoint and the presentation, is a remediation of your original paper. You would not present information in the same way in a PowerPoint as you would on a handout or when you delivered the content verbally. Because of the changes you make from one medium to the next, your audience perceives the information differently based on how it is delivered.

Audience is one of the most important elements of the remediation process, because the creator of the medium must take into consideration how her work will be understood and interpreted. Let's go back to the example of *Johnny Got His Gun*. When it was published in 1939, Trumbo knew that Americans were hoping to avoid having to enter World War II and that people would respond well to a book portraying the horrors of war at its worst (incidentally, that sentiment backfired on him after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, after which his book went through a period of great unpopularity). The film adaptation was not made until 1971, when anti-war sentiments towards Vietnam were at their height and younger filmgoers were once again open to the message Trumbo (who also directed the film) had originally tried to convey. By the time the late 1980's rolled around and Metallica recorded its version, much of the controversy around the book and the film had died down and so the group was able to write a song that spoke to the horror of being imprisoned inside your own body without the baggage of pro or anti-war sentiments.

Regardless of what kind of remediation you are taking on, whether it's artistic, academic or business-related, it is vital to understand how the remediation process works. By knowing how to interpret the most important ideas from the original text and by transferring them in such a way as to give new meaning to the interpretation without misrepresenting the original, you will be far more successful in conveying important ideas to your audience and in understanding how important the way you present your information is.

Text-to-Visual Remediation

provided by Writing Commons

Another type of remediation occurs when you translate text into either a single image or a series of images (a video or slideshow). These two types of remediations fundamentally involve the same process—translating text into visuals.

There are no strict guidelines by which this translation must be done. However, there are some large-scale suggestions or methods by which you can attempt to symbolically capture in visuals the messages and main ideas promoted in your original text. Moreover, the creation of a visual remediation—much in the same manner as the creation of a text remediation—involves an understanding of rhetorical stance and rhetorical strategies.

Obviously, in any type of remediation, you, as a composer, must pay attention to purpose and audience. ***Pictures and videos are mediums*** which are less exclusive in their target audiences than text-based mediums (after all, you need not be able to read in order to comprehend a visual image). At the same time, you must be cognizant, as in text-to-text remediations, of the purpose of the original text and consider how best to capture that purpose in your remediation.

Symbolically Capturing a Message

The ***purpose of a text-to-visual remediation*** is to convey the main ideas of the text with the use of visual images.



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The Road Not Taken from Andrew Callaghan on Vimeo.

For example, if one wants to remediate Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech into a set of images, one first needs to break down that speech into a few main themes or concepts. These might include the following ideas:

- all people are equal,
- skin color is no way to judge a person,
- and assessing character is the proper way to judge a person.

But how might a student portray those main ideas through visuals? Any number of possibilities present themselves to answer that question. A common thread which links the options lies in attempting to translate concepts like equality and character into distinct symbols. You might attempt to express equality in image by presenting a diverse group of people standing on the same ground as to highlight the similarity and parity of those people.

Though remediation is a subjective distillation and representation of a particular set of ideas expressed in the original text, in order to effectively use symbols, a knowledge of some basic symbols and what those symbols often represent may be useful. Water, the color red, and the sun all have distinct and common meanings: rebirth, anger, and life, respectively. You should also consider what connotations certain colors have on your audience—colors connote different things to different cultures, for example. You should avoid creating symbols which need extensive or excessive explanation—an excellent visual remediation should clearly and interestingly capture the essential themes or ideas of the original text.

Rhetorical stance is not only tied to the creation of text. The creation of visuals (whether a single image or a video, or a combination of text and image) is governed by many of the same rhetorical considerations as the construction of text—a knowledge of target audience, the purpose behind these visuals, the tone or feel of the images—and you should constantly keep this in mind when constructing a text-to-visual remediation.

Remember, your remediation should be an expression of your feelings about a particular text, but it should be rooted in an understanding of the original text, including the historical context out of which it came, and an application of rhetorical strategies—knowledge that you should be able to eloquently defend in a reflection piece on the remediation.

Text-to-Text Remediation

Provided by Writing Commons

Instead of remediating a print text into a visual or audio text, you may choose to use a different genre within the print medium. For example, if your original text is a poem, you might want to remediate that poem into song lyrics, a children's book, a letter, or another print genre. Before you construct your text-to-text remediation, consider the following:

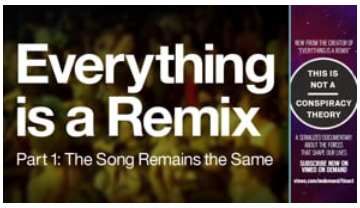
Capturing Content

Before you can create any type of effective or meaningful remediation, you should develop a good understanding of your original text. Your remediation, after all, is based on your decoding of the messages and meanings—the textual content—of your original text. You would be hard-pressed to effectively argue, for example, that Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech is a

strongly worded argument against racial equality because even a basic understanding of King's speech illustrates that he was making the opposite point. In other words, you want to be sure that you have accurately captured the central idea(s) in the original text. Moreover, in the creation of your text-based remediation, you should suggest ideas that are similar to the ideas in the original text—if, to continue the MLK Jr., example, you choose to remediate the text of that particular speech into song lyrics, then you should capture the meaning of that speech (equality and a brighter future for the next generation, perhaps) in the lyrics of your song.

Purpose

Ask yourself the following question: What is the main purpose of the text'? If the original text is a poem that seems to advocate an anti-war message, you can surmise that the poem's purpose is to capture a reader's attention through attractive writing and to persuade the reader that war is to be avoided. There is a distinct connection between a text's purpose and the medium in which it is presented: an opinion column in a newspaper is traditionally a type of text where serious issues are addressed with a central purpose of convincing others to agree with a particular point of view. In this way, medium and purpose are inextricably linked. As you analyze the text that you want to remediate, try to express the purpose of this text: Does it aim to entertain, to enrage, to convince, or cause reflection? And, more to the point, in what ways is that purpose reinforced or modified by the medium that the text uses?



A Vimeo element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/composing2/?p=186

Everything is a Remix Part 1 from Kirby Ferguson on Vimeo.

Likewise, when you are creating your text-based remediation, think about how you want to manipulate the purpose of the text. A ***blog post*** in an online forum that urges people to stop the Iraq war could be remediated in a number of ways, but be mindful that the main purpose of that text is to persuade or convince—a purpose that demands a different rhetorical approach than a text which wishes only to entertain. What this example illustrates, hopefully, is that purpose is inseparable from medium, audience, and rhetorical stance, and an awareness of purpose should be something which governs a writer's remediation process.

Audience

An equally important consideration in the construction of a text-to-text remediation is identifying the possible audiences of both the original text and the remediation. Subtle changes in the delivery method of text—poem, newspaper article, Twitter post—will appeal to very different audiences. This point is very important and plays a major role in the creation of your remediation. An understanding of the characteristics of your audience will help you to identify the tone, word choice, and voice you'll adopt as you remediate the text.

An example might make this point clearer: let's say you remediate a newspaper article about gun control into a series of tweets. You, as a sharp and engaged student, realize these two text-based media have decidedly different target audiences: a newspaper article has an older, perhaps less technologically savvy audience, while the Twitter page is aimed at a younger, more technologically comfortable audience. This difference in target audience must play a large role in your rhetorical stance—word choice, phrasing and voice— so you choose to adopt in your remediation.

Newspaper article phrase:

- "The decline of the quality of some high schools has people concerned"

Twitter post:

- "High School = brain death + pep rallies?"

You might notice how different the rhetorical approaches are in these two text phrases (different word choice, different tone, etc.); however, the fundamental idea or message has remained largely unchanged. Moreover, the likely audience for a Twitter post is altogether different than that of a newspaper article. The rhetorical stance used in the Twitter post, of course, reflects this difference.

We instinctively know how to speak or write in vastly different ways when addressing various audiences; you would, for example, hardly address your first-year composition instructor in the same way you would your roommate. Something similar is at work when you compose your remediation: you need to identify the expected audience for your text-based remediation and allow your audience's expectations to dictate the way you go about creating the new version of the text.

A text-to-text remediation requires a more subtle and analytical approach than a visual remediation or a multimodal remediation because the former involves only small changes in medium. It's important to carefully consider the original text and your subsequent remediation through a thorough analysis of meaning, target audience, purpose, and the way in which rhetorical stance is affected by all three of these concerns. To be an effective writer, you should know that huge changes in medium need not be the only way in which a text's meaning can be significantly altered; instead, a text-based remediation draws its creative significance from tinkering with textual content, targeting new audiences, and recalibrating the original text's purpose.

Important Concepts

remediation

audience

text-to-visual remediation

pictures and videos are mediums

purpose of a text-to-visual remediation

rhetorical stance

text-to-text remediation

before you can create any type of effective or meaningful remediation

blog post

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Glossary

Sample Word 1 | Sample Definition 1

Attributions: Part II Research Writing



The second course in a first-year series is a writing course that focuses on developing academic research writing skills that students will utilize in their academic and professional contexts. The course introduces students to the methods, strategies, and skills required to conduct an informed inquiry: critical reading, critical analysis, synthesis, constructing a research-based argument, and reflection. The course is themed, and students formulate their research questions around that theme. Students also learn how to evaluate academic and non-academic sources and proper citation and documentation of sources. The course also focuses on improving oral communication skills to prepare students to share their research with various audiences.

Chapter 12: Research Proposal

- “Topic Exploration and Research Proposal” provided by the authors
- “Effective Technical Writing in the Information Age” provided by Penn State
- “Reflective Writing Prompt: Topic Proposal” by the authors

Chapter 13: Annotated Bibliography

- “Annotated Bibliography” provided by the authors
- “Reflective Writing Prompt: Annotated Bibliography” by the authors

Chapter 14: Research Paper and Presentation

- “Creating a Rough Draft for a Research Paper” by University of Minnesota
- “Critical Thinking and Research Applications” by University of Minnesota
- “Reflective Writing Prompt: Research Paper & Presentation” by the authors
- “Alternative Ways to Present Your Research” by Steven D. Krause

Chapter 15: Entering the Discourse Community

- “Identifying a Conversation” by Jason Carabelli
- “What Is Research Writing?” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Why Write Research Projects” by Steven D. Krause
- “Managing Your Research Project” provided by Lumen Learning
- “The Seven Steps of the Research Process” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Audience Awareness” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Research Writing in the Academic Disciplines” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Steps in Developing a Research Proposal” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Constructing the Thesis and Argument—From the Ground Up” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Research and the Writing Process” provided by Lumen Learning
- “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?” provided by Lumen Learning

Writing for Success “Steps in Developing a Research Proposal” by University of Minnesota

Chapter 16: Researching: How, What, When, Where, and Why

“Reviewing and Analyzing Your Sources” provided by Lumen Learning

“Thinking Critically About Research” by Steven D. Krause

“Survey Academic Research Communities” by Joe Moxley

“Demystify Research Methods” by Joe Moxley

“Understand Opposing Research Ideologies” by Joe Moxley

“Textual Research” by Joe Moxley”

“Wikipedia Is Good for You!?” by James P. Purdy

“Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills” by Randall McClure

“Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews” by Dana Lynn Driscoll

Chapter 17: Reviewing and Analyzing Your Sources

“The Critique Exercise” by Steven D. Krause

“Reading Games: Strategies for Reading Scholarly Source” by Karen Rosenberg

“Double-Entry Response Format” provided by Writing Commons

CRAAP Test: “CRAAP Test” provided by UTA Libraries

“Secondary Sources in Their Natural Habitats” provided by Lumen Learning

“Listening to Sources, Talking to Sources” provided by Lumen Learning

“Understanding Bias” provided by Lumen Learning

“Questions to Evaluate the Authority of the Researcher’s Methods” by Joe Moxley

“Annotated Bibliographies” provided by Lumen Learning

“How to Write a Summary” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter 18: Writing the Research Paper

“Five Ways of Looking at a Thesis” provided by Lumen Learning

“The Working Thesis Exercise” by Steven D. Krause

“On the Other Hand: The Role of Antithetical Writing in First Year Composition Courses” by Steven D. Krause

“Finding the Good Argument OR Why Bother With Logic?” by Rebecca Jones

“Incorporating Evidence into a Research Paper” by Jennifer Janechek

“Connecting Source Material to Claims” by Eir-Anne Edgar

“Synthesizing Your Research Findings” by Christine Photinos

“Synthesis Notes: Working With Sources To Create a First Draft” by Erika Szymanski

“Introduce Evidence” by Jennifer Janechek

“Analyzing Evidence” by Jennifer Janechek

“Provide Additional Support for This Point” provided by Writing Commons

“Avoid the Use of Unsupported Opinions as Evidence” provided by Writing Commons

“The Research Essay” by Steven D. Krause

“Intros and Outros” provided by Lumen Learning

“Walk, Talk, Cook, Eat: A Guide to Using Sources” by Cynthia R. Haller

“Annoying Ways People Use Sources” by Kyle D. Stedman

“The Antithesis Exercise” by Steven D. Krause

Chapter 19: Citing Your Sources

“Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism” by Steven D. Krause

“Summarize & Paraphrase Sources” by Joe Moxley

“When to Quote and When to Paraphrase” by Brianna Jerman

“Tell Your Readers When You Are Citing, Paraphrasing, or Summarizing” by Joe Moxley

“Avoid Dropped Quotations provided” by Writing Commons

“Use Solely Your Own Words to Paraphrase” provided by Writing Commons

“Paraphrase Accurately to Preserve the Source’s Ideas” provided by Writing Commons

“Avoiding Plagiarism” by Jennifer Janechek

“Understand When Citations are Necessary” by Joe Moxley

“Avoiding Plagiarism: A Checklist for Student Writers” by Angela Eward-Mangione

“Works Cited Page Checklist” by JM Paquette

“Citing Your Research Using MLA or APA Style” by Steven D. Krause

Chapter 20: Revising Your Research Project

“Introduction to Polishing Your Research Paper” provided by Lumen Learning

“Revising and Editing” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter 21: Planning Your Presentation

“Remediation” provided by Writing Commons

“Text-to-Visual Remediation” provided by Writing Commons

“Text-to-Text Remediation” provided by Writing Commons

Attributions: Part I The Composition Process



The Composition Process at the college level is about expanding your writing abilities. The first course in a series of first-year writing courses focuses on introducing students to the concepts and practices of rhetoric and composition. The course prepares students to compose texts in a variety of genres for various purposes, audiences, and contexts, including digital environments. The course emphasizes analytical and critical skills: rhetorical analysis, critical thinking, argument, and reflection. Students use writing processes to draft, peer review, revise, edit, and reflect on their work. The course assignments and projects prepare students for varied writing contexts at the university and in their future professional career. This text contains readings and assignments that prepare students for success.

Chapter 1: The Composing Process

- “Writing in College” by Joseph M. Williams and Lawrence McEnerney
- “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
- “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 2: Critical Concepts

- “Rhetorical Context” provided by Lumen Learning

Chapter 3: Defining the Composing Process

- “Rhetoric and Composition/Analyzing Assignments” provided by Wikibooks
- “Idea Mapping” provided by University of Minnesota
- “Journalistic Questions” provided by Writing Commons
- “Clustering: Spider Maps” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter 4: Rhetorical Invention & Planning

- “Why Study Rhetoric? or, What Freestyle Rap Teaches Us about Writing” provided by Writing Commons
- “Reading Academic Texts” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Active Reading” provided by Writing Commons
- “What are New Literacies?” provided by Writing Commons
- “Tone, Language, and Appeal” provided by Lumen Learning
- “What to Think about When Writing for a Particular Audience” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Consider Your Purpose” provided by Lumen Learning
- “Consider Your Context” provided by Writing Commons
- “Consider Your Media” provided by Writing Commons
- “Document Planner” provided by Writing Commons

Chapter 5: Composing Strategies

- “Think Rhetorically” provided by Lumen Learning

"Navigating Genres" by Kerry Dirk

"Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement" provided by University of Minnesota

"Effective Means for Writing a Paragraph" provided by Candela Open Courses

"Writing Effective Paragraphs" provided by the University of Richmond Writing Center

"Transitional Words and Phrases" provided by the University of Richmond Writing Center

"What Logical Plan Informs Your Paper's Organization?" provided by the Writing Center

"Using Modern Language Association (MLA) Style" provided by University of Minnesota Libraries

"How to Write an Engaging Introduction" provided by Writing Commons

"How to Write a Compelling Conclusion" provided by Writing Commons

Chapter 6: Revising & Recomposing

"Higher Order Concerns" provided by Lumen Learning

"Reflective Writing and the Revision Process: What Were You Thinking?" by Sandra L. Giles

"Style" provided by Writing Commons

"In-class Peer Review" by Joe Moxley and provided by Writing Commons

"Reflect on What You've Learned" provided by Writing Commons

"Navigate Reader Suggestions Wisely" provided by Writing Commons

"Reflect on Your Writing by Joe Moxley" and provided by Writing Commons

Chapter 7: Publishing / Circulation: Media Matters

"Writing Spaces Web Writing Style Guide" provided by Writing Spaces

Chapter 8 ePortfolio

"Electronic Portfolio" provided by Wikipedia

"Building a Blackboard Portfolio" website provided by Elizabeth Burrows

Chapter 9: Narrative

"Literacy Narrative" by the authors

"Reflective Writing Prompts: Narrative Assignment" by the authors

Chapter 10: Analysis and Evaluation

"Analysis/Evaluation" provided by the authors

"Reflective Writing Prompt: Analysis and Evaluation Assignment" by the authors

Chapter 11: Argument

"Argument" provided by the authors

"Handout: How to Make an Effective Argument" provided by Lumen Learning

"Reflective Writing Prompt: Argument Assignment" by the authors

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