

METHODS OF DISCOVERY - ONLINE WRITING GUIDE (ZEMLIANSKY)



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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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1: All Writing is Argumentative

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1.1: Introduction

This chapter is about rhetoric—the art of persuasion. Every time we write, we engage in argument. Through writing, we try to persuade and influence our readers, either directly or indirectly. We work to get them to change their minds, to do something, or to begin thinking in new ways. Therefore, every writer needs to know and be able to use principles of rhetoric. The first step towards such knowledge is learning to see the argumentative nature of all writing.

I have two goals in this chapter: to explain the term rhetoric and to give you some historical perspective on its origins and development; and to demonstrate the importance of seeing research writing as a rhetorical, persuasive activity.

As consumers of written texts, we are often tempted to divide writing into two categories: argumentative and non-argumentative. According to this view, in order to be argumentative, writing must have the following qualities. It has to defend a position in a debate between two or more opposing sides; it must be on a controversial topic; and the goal of such writing must be to prove the correctness of one point of view over another.

On the other hand, this view goes, non-argumentative texts include narratives, descriptions, technical reports, news stories, and so on. When deciding to which category a given piece of writing belongs, we sometimes look for familiar traits of argument, such as the presence of a thesis statement, of “factual” evidence, and so on.

Research writing is often categorized as “non-argumentative.” This happens because of the way in which we learn about research writing. Most of us do that through the traditional research report, the kind which focuses too much on information-gathering and note cards and not enough on constructing engaging and interesting points of view for real audiences. It is the gathering and compiling of information, and not doing something productive and interesting with this information, that become the primary goals of this writing exercise. Generic research papers are also often evaluated on the quantity and accuracy of external information that they gather, rather on the persuasive impact they make and the interest they generate among readers.

Having written countless research reports, we begin to suspect that all research-based writing is non-argumentative. Even when explicitly asked to construct a thesis statement and support it through researched evidence, beginning writers are likely to pay more attention to such mechanics of research as finding the assigned number and kind of sources and documenting them correctly, than to constructing an argument capable of making an impact on the reader.

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1.2: Arguments Aren't Verbal Fights

We often have narrow concept of the word “argument.” In everyday life, argument often implies a confrontation, a clash of opinions and personalities, or just a plain verbal fight. It implies a winner and a loser, a right side and a wrong one. Because of this understanding of the word “argument,” the only kind of writing seen as argumentative is the debate-like “position” paper, in which the author defends his or her point of view against other, usually opposing points of view.

Such an understanding of argument is narrow because arguments come in all shapes and sizes. I invite you to look at the term “argument” in a new way. What if we think of “argument” as an opportunity for conversation, for sharing with others our point of view on something, for showing others our perspective of the world? What if we see it as the opportunity to tell our stories, including our life stories? What if we think of “argument” as an opportunity to connect with the points of view of others rather than defeating those points of view?

Some years ago, I heard a conference speaker define argument as the opposite of “beating your audience into rhetorical submission.” I still like that definition because it implies gradual and even gentle explanation and persuasion instead of coercion. It implies effective use of details, and stories, including emotional ones. It implies the understanding of argument as an explanation of one’s world view.

Arguments then, can be explicit and implicit, or implied. Explicit arguments contain noticeable and definable thesis statements and lots of specific proofs. Implicit arguments, on the other hand, work by weaving together facts and narratives, logic and emotion, personal experiences and statistics. Unlike explicit arguments, implicit ones do not have a one-sentence thesis statement. Instead, authors of implicit arguments use evidence of many different kinds in effective and creative ways to build and convey their point of view to their audience. Research is essential for creative effective arguments of both kinds.

To consider the many types and facets of written argumentation, complete "[Writing Activity 1A: Analyzing Writing Situations](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

You can explore more about what an argument is or isn't [here](#).



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1.3: Definitions of Rhetoric and the Rhetorical Situation

The art of creating effective arguments is explained and systematized by a discipline called rhetoric. Writing is about making choices, and knowing the principles of rhetoric allows a writer to make informed choices about various aspects of the writing process. Every act of writing takes place in a specific rhetorical situation. The three most basic and important components of a rhetorical situation are:

- Purpose of writing
- Intended audience,
- Occasion, or context in which the text will be written and read

These factors help writers select their topics, arrange their material, and make other important decisions about their work.

Before looking closely at different definitions and components of rhetoric, let us try to understand what rhetoric is not. In recent years, the word "rhetoric" has developed a bad reputation in American popular culture. In the popular mind, the term "rhetoric" has come to mean something negative and deceptive. Open a newspaper or turn on the television, and you are likely to hear politicians accusing each other of "too much rhetoric and not enough substance." According to this distorted view, rhetoric is verbal fluff, used to disguise empty or even deceitful arguments.

Examples of this misuse abound. Here are some examples.

Example 1.3.1:

A 2013 Washington Post article "[GOP tries pushing back against "war on women" rhetoric](#)," by Nia-Malika Henderson describes a comment made by former Republican presidential candidate and Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee during the Republican National Committee annual winter meeting. Huckabee suggested that some women "believe that they are helpless without Uncle Sugar coming in and providing for them a prescription each month for birth control because they cannot control their libido or their reproductive system without the help of the government." Some Democrats pointed to Huckabee's statement as proof that the Republican party was waging a "war on women". However, in the article, Chelsi Henry, a Republican woman stated, "What war on women? That just political rhetoric". The word "rhetoric" in this context implies a strategy to deceive or distract.

Another example is the title of the now-defunct political website "[Spinsanity: Countering Rhetoric with Reason](#)." The website's authors state that "engaged citizenry, active press and strong network of fact-checking websites and blogs can help turn the tide of deception that we now see." (<http://www.spinsanity.org>). What this statement implies, of course, is that rhetoric is "spin" and that it is the opposite of truth.

Here, perhaps, is the most interesting example. The author of the video below, posted on Youtube, is clearly dissatisfied with the abundance of "rhetoric" in Barack Obama's 2008 campaign for the White House.



What is interesting about this clip is that its author does not seem to realize that she is engaging in rhetoric as she is criticizing the term. She has a purpose, which is to question Obama's credentials; she is addressing an audience which consists of people who are perhaps considering voting for Obama; finally, she is creating her video in a very real context of the heated battle between Senators Obama and Clinton for the Presidential nomination of the Democratic Party.

Rhetoric is not a dirty trick used by politicians to conceal and obscure, but an art, which, for many centuries, has had many definitions. Perhaps the most popular and overreaching definition comes to us from the Ancient Greek thinker Aristotle. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Ch.2). Aristotle saw primarily as a practical tool, indispensable for civic discourse.

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1.4: Elements of the Rhetorical Situation

When composing, every writer must take into account the conditions under which the writing is produced and will be read. It is customary to represent the three key elements of the rhetorical situation as a triangle of writer, reader, and text, or, as they are represented on this image, as "communicator," "audience," and "message."

The Rhetorical Triangle



Figure 1.1 - Source: [St. Edward's University](https://www.stedwards.edu/communications/communications-101/rhetoric/rhetorical-triangle/)

The three elements of the rhetorical situation are in a constant and dynamic interrelation. All three are also necessary for communication through writing to take place. For example, if the writer is taken out of this equation, the text will not be created. Similarly, eliminating the text itself will leave us with the reader and writer, but without any means of conveying ideas between them, and so on.

Moreover, changing on or more characteristics of any of the elements depicted in the figure above will change the other elements as well. For example, with the change in the beliefs and values of the audience, the message will also likely change to accommodate those new beliefs, and so on.

In his discussion of rhetoric, Aristotle states that writing's primary purpose is persuasion. Other ancient rhetoricians' theories expand the scope of rhetoric by adding new definitions, purposes, and methods. For example, another Greek philosopher and rhetorician Plato saw rhetoric as a means of discovering the truth, including personal truth, through dialog and discussion. According to Plato, rhetoric can be directed outward (at readers or listeners), or inward (at the writer him or herself). In the latter case, the purpose of rhetoric is to help the author discover something important about his or her own experience and life.

The third major rhetorical school of Ancient Greece whose views have profoundly influenced our understanding of rhetoric were the Sophists. The Sophists were teachers of rhetoric for hire. The primary goal of their activities was to teach skills and strategies for effective speaking and writing. Many Sophists claimed that they could make anyone into an effective rhetorician. In their most extreme variety, Sophistic rhetoric claims that virtually anything could be proven if the rhetorician has the right skills. The legacy of Sophistic rhetoric is controversial. Some scholars, including Plato himself, have accused the Sophists of bending ethical standards in order to achieve their goals, while others have praised them for promoting democracy and civic participation through argumentative discourse.

What do these various definitions of rhetoric have to do with research writing? Everything!

If you have ever had trouble with a writing assignment, chances are it was because you could not figure out the assignment's purpose. Or, perhaps you did not understand very well whom your writing was supposed to appeal to. It is hard to commit to purposeless writing done for no one in particular.

Research is not a very useful activity if it is done for its own sake. If you think of a situation in your own life where you had to do any kind of research, you probably had a purpose that the research helped you to accomplish. You could, for example, have been considering buying a car and wanted to know which make and model would suite you best. Or, you could have been looking for an apartment to rent and wanted to get the best deal for your money. Or, perhaps your family was planning a vacation and researched

the best deals on hotels, airfares, and rental cars. Even in these simple examples of research that are far simpler than research most writers conduct, you as a researcher were guided by some overriding purpose. You researched because you had a purpose to accomplish.

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1.5: How to Approach Writing Tasks Rhetorically

The three main elements of rhetorical theory are purpose, audience, and occasion. We will look at these elements primarily through the lens of Classical Rhetoric, the rhetoric of Ancient Greece and Rome. Principles of classical rhetoric (albeit some of them modified) are widely accepted across the modern Western civilization. Classical rhetoric provides a solid framework for analysis and production of effective texts in a variety of situations.

Purpose

Good writing always serves a purpose. Texts are created to persuade, entertain, inform, instruct, and so on. In a real writing situation, these discrete purposes are often combined

To explore how purpose influences rhetorical choices complete "[Writing Activity 1B: Analyzing Purpose](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

Audience

The second key element of the rhetorical approach to writing is audience-awareness. As you saw from the rhetorical triangle earlier in this chapter, readers are an indispensable part of the rhetorical equation, and it is essential for every writer to understand their audience and tailor his or her message to the audience's needs.

The key principles that every writer needs to follow in order to reach and affect his or her audience are as follows:

- Have a clear idea about who your readers will be.
- Understand your readers' previous experiences, knowledge, biases, and expectations and how these factors can influence their reception of your argument.
- When writing, keep in mind not only those readers who are physically present or whom you know (your classmates and instructor), but all readers who would benefit from or be influenced by your argument.
- Choose a style, tone, and medium of presentation appropriate for your intended audience.

Complete "[Writing Activity 1C: Analyzing Audience](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

Occasion

Occasion is an important part of the rhetorical situation. It is a part of the writing context that was mentioned earlier in the chapter. Writers do not work in a vacuum. Instead, the content, form and reception of their work by readers are heavily influenced by the conditions in society as well as by personal situations of their readers. These conditions in which texts are created and read affect every aspect of writing and every stage of the writing process, from topic selection, to decisions about what kinds of arguments used and their arrangement, to the writing style, voice, and persona which the writer wishes to project in his or her writing. All elements of the rhetorical situation work together in a dynamic relationship. Therefore, awareness of rhetorical occasion and other elements of the context of your writing will also help you refine your purpose and understand your audience better. Similarly having a clear purpose in mind when writing and knowing your audience will help you understand the context in which you are writing and in which your work will be read better.

One aspect of writing where you can immediately benefit from understanding occasion and using it to your rhetorical advantage is the selection of topics for your compositions. Any topic can be good or bad, and a key factor in deciding on whether it fits the occasion. In order to understand whether a particular topic is suitable for a composition, it is useful to analyze whether the composition would address an issue, or a rhetorical exigency when created. The writing activity below can help you select topics and issues for written arguments.

Complete "[Writing Activity 1D: Analyzing Rhetorical Exigency](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

To understand how writers can study and use occasion in order to make effective arguments, let us examine another ancient rhetorical concept. Kairos is one of the most fascinating terms from Classical rhetoric. It signifies the right, or opportune moment for an argument to be made. It is such a moment or time when the subject of the argument is particularly urgent or important and

when audiences are more likely to be persuaded by it. Ancient rhetoricians believed that if the moment for the argument is right, for instance if there are conditions in society which would make the audience more receptive to the argument, the rhetorician would have more success persuading such an audience.



Figure 1.2 - Kairos. Source: *Ancient Greek Cities* (www.sikyon.com)

For example, as I write this text, a heated debate about the war on terrorism and about the goals and methods of this war is going on in the US. It is also the year of the Presidential Election, and political candidates try to use the war on terrorism to their advantage when they debate each other. These are topics of high public interest, with print media, television, radio, and the Internet constantly discussing them. Because there is an enormous public interest in the topic of terrorism, well-written articles and reports on the subject will not fall on deaf ears. Simply put, the moment, or occasion, for the debate is right, and it will continue until public interest in the subject weakens or disappears.

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1.6: Rhetorical Appeals

In order to persuade their readers, writers must use three types of proofs or rhetorical appeals. They are **logos**, or logical appeal; **pathos**, or emotional appeal; and **ethos**, or ethical appeal, or appeal based on the character and credibility of the author. It is easy to notice that modern words “logical,” “pathetic,” and “ethical” are derived from those Greek words. In his work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes that the three appeals must be used together in every piece of persuasive discourse. An argument based on the appeal to logic, or emotions alone will not be an effective one.

Understanding how logos, pathos, and ethos should work together is very important for writers who use research. Often, research writing assignments are written in a way that seems to emphasize logical proofs over emotional or ethical ones. Such logical proofs in research papers typically consist of factual information, statistics, examples, and other similar evidence. According to this view, writers of academic papers need to be unbiased and objective, and using logical proofs will help them to be that way.

Because of this emphasis on logical proofs, you may be less familiar with the kinds of pathetic and ethical proofs available to you. Pathetic appeals, or appeals to emotions of the audience were considered by ancient rhetoricians as important as logical proofs. Yet, writers are sometimes not easily convinced to use pathetic appeals in their writing. As modern rhetoricians and authors of the influential book *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1998), Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert Connors said, “People are rather sheepish about acknowledging that their opinions can be affected by their emotions” (86). According to Corbett, many of us think that there may be something wrong about using emotions in argument. But, I agree with Corbett and Connors, pathetic proofs are not only admissible in argument, but necessary (86-89). The most basic way of evoking appropriate emotional responses in your audience, according to Corbett, is the use of vivid descriptions (94).

Using ethical appeals, or appeals based on the character of the writer, involves establishing and maintaining your credibility in the eyes of your readers. In other words, when writing, think about how you are presenting yourself to your audience. Do you give your readers enough reasons to trust you and your argument, or do you give them reasons to doubt your authority and your credibility? Consider all the times when your decision about the merits of a given argument was affected by the person or people making the argument. For example, when watching television news, are you predisposed against certain cable networks and more inclined towards others because you trust them more?

So, how can a writer establish a credible persona for his or her audience? One way to do that is through external research. Conducting research and using it well in your writing help with you with the factual proofs (logos), but it also shows your readers that you, as the author, have done your homework and know what you are talking about. This knowledge, the sense of your authority that this creates among your readers, will help you be a more effective writer.

The logical, pathetic, and ethical appeals work in a dynamic combination with one another. It is sometimes hard to separate one kind of proof from another and the methods by which the writer achieved the desired rhetorical effect. If your research contains data which is likely to cause your readers to be emotional, it data can enhance the pathetic aspect of your argument. The key to using the three appeals, is to use them in combination with each other, and in moderation. It is impossible to construct a successful argument by relying too much on one or two appeals while neglecting the others.

Consider two recent examples of fairly ineffective use of the three appeals. In the beginning of April 2008, two candidates for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama began airing campaign television ads in Pennsylvania ahead of their party's primary presidential election in that state. You can see both ads below.



Clinton's ad is called "Scranton" and it is very heavy of pathos, or emotional appeal. It invokes very warm childhood memories which, the ad's creators hoped, would show Senator Clinton's "softer side" thus persuading more people to vote for her. The purpose of the ad is to stir emotion, and it does it rather well. The problem with this approach is, however, that it does not tell voters much about the concrete steps and activities Senator Clinton would undertake if elected. The ad is rather thin on the logical appeal, and this, in turn, affects Clinton's ethos or credibility.

Barack Obama's ad is called "One Voice," and is calling on his supporters to "change the world."



While this is certainly a worthy cause, it is not clear from this ad how exactly Obama - still a senator at the time - intended to change the world once elected. The reason for this lack of clarity is the heavy emphasis on the pathetic appeal at the expense of logos. If you followed the presidential campaign of 2008, you would know that the call for change which is so clear in this ad was Obama's main slogan, a statement that became a large part of his ethos, or persona as a politician and as a rhetorician. This ad succeeds in highlighting that part of Obama's political persona once again while, probably intentionally, under-emphasizing logos.

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1.7: Research Writing as Conversation

Writing is a social process. Texts are created to be read by others, and in creating those texts, writers should be aware of not only their personal assumptions, biases, and tastes, but also those of their readers. Writing, therefore, is an interactive process. It is a conversation, a meeting of minds, during which ideas are exchanged, debates and discussions take place and, sometimes, but not always, consensus is reached. You may be familiar with the famous quote by the 20th century rhetorician Kenneth Burke who compared writing to a conversation at a social event. In his 1974 book *The Philosophy of Literary Form* Burke writes,

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 of 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 (110-111).

This passage by Burke is extremely popular among writers because it captures the interactive nature of writing so precisely. Reading Burke's words carefully, we will notice that the interaction between readers and writers is continuous. A writer always enters a conversation in progress. In order to participate in the discussion, just like in real life, you need to know what your interlocutors have been talking about. So you listen (read). Once you feel you have got the drift of the conversation, you say (write) something. Your text is read by others who respond to your ideas, stories, and arguments with their own. This interaction never ends!

To write well, it is important to listen carefully and understand the conversations that are going on around you. Writers who are able to listen to these conversations and pick up important topics, themes, and arguments are generally more effective at reaching and impressing their audiences. It is also important to treat research, writing, and every occasion for these activities as opportunities to participate in the on-going conversation of people interested in the same topics and questions which interest you.

Our knowledge about our world is shaped by the best and most up-to-date theories available to them. Sometimes these theories can be experimentally tested and proven, and sometimes, when obtaining such proof is impossible, they are based on consensus reached as a result of conversation and debate. Even the theories and knowledge that can be experimentally tested (for example in sciences) do not become accepted knowledge until most members of the scientific community accept them. Other members of this community will help them test their theories and hypotheses, give them feedback on their writing, and keep them searching for the best answers to their questions. As Burke says in his famous passage, the interaction between the members of intellectual communities never ends. No piece of writing, no argument, no theory or discover is ever final. Instead, they all are subject to discussion, questioning, and improvement.

A simple but useful example of this process is the evolution of humankind's understanding of their planet Earth and its place in the Universe. As you know, in Medieval Europe, the prevailing theory was that the Earth was the center of the Universe and that all other planets and the Sun rotated around it. This theory was the result of the church's teachings, and thinkers who disagreed with it were pronounced heretics and often burned. In 1543, astronomer Nikolaus Kopernikus argued that the Sun was at the center of the solar system and that all planets of the system rotate around the Sun. Later, Galileo experimentally proved Kopernikus' theory with the help of a telescope. Of course, the Earth did not begin to rotate around the Sun with this discovery. Yet, Kopernikus' and Galileo's theories of the Universe went against the Catholic Church's teachings which dominated the social discourse of Medieval Europe. The Inquisition did not engage in debate with the two scientists. Instead, Kopernikus was executed for his views and Galileo was sentenced to house arrest for his views.

Although in the modern world, dissenting thinkers are unlikely to suffer such harsh punishment, the examples of Kopernikus and Galileo teach us two valuable lessons about the social nature of knowledge. Firstly, Both Kopernikus and Galileo tried to improve on an existing theory of the Universe that placed our planet at the center. They did not work from nothing but used beliefs that already existed in their society and tried to modify and disprove those beliefs. Time and later scientific research proved that they

were right. Secondly, even after Galileo was able to prove the structure of the Solar system experimentally, his theory did not become widely accepted until the majority of people in society assimilated it. Therefore, new findings do not become accepted knowledge until they penetrate the fabric of social discourse and until enough people accept them as true.

Complete "[Writing Activity 1E: Finding the Origins of Knowledge](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

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1.8: Conclusions

In this chapter, we have learned the definition of rhetoric and the basic differences between several important rhetorical schools. We have also discussed how to key elements of the rhetorical situation: purpose, audience, and context. As you work on the research writing projects presented throughout this book, be sure to revisit this chapter often. Everything that you have read about here and every activity you have completed as you worked through this chapter is applicable to all research writing projects in this book and beyond. Most school writing assignments give you direct instructions about your purpose, intended audience, and rhetorical occasion. Truly proficient and independent writers, however, learn to define their purpose, audiences, and contexts of their writing, on their own. The material in this chapter is designed to enable to become better at those tasks.

When you receive a writing assignment, it is very tempting to see it as just another hoop to jump through and not as a genuine rhetorical situation, an opportunity to influence others with your writing. It is certainly tempting to see yourself writing only for the teacher, without a real purpose and oblivious of the context of your writing.

The material of this chapter as well as the writing projects presented throughout this book are designed to help you think of writing as a persuasive, rhetorical activity. Conducting research and incorporating its results into your paper is a part of this rhetorical process.

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1.9: Writing Activities

Writing Activity 1A: Analyzing Writing Situations

- Working individually or in small groups, consider the following writing situations. Are these situations opportunities for argumentative writing? If so, what elements of argument do you see? Use your experience as a reader and imagine the kinds of published texts that might result from these writing situations. Apply the ideas about argument mentioned so far in this chapter, including the “explicit” and “implicit” arguments.
- A group of scientists develops a hypothesis and conducts a series of experiments to test it. After obtaining the results from those experiments, they decide to publish their findings in a scientific journal. However, the data can be interpreted in two ways. The authors can use a long-standing theory with which most of his colleagues agree. But they can also use a newer and more ambitious theory on which there is no consensus in the field, but which our authors believe to be more comprehensive and up-to-date. Using different theories will produce different interpretations of the data and different pieces of writing. Are both resulting texts arguments? Why or why not?
- An author wants to write a memoir. She is particularly interested in her relationship with her parents as a teenager. In order to focus on that period of her life, she decides to omit other events and time periods from the memoir. The finished text is a combination of stories, reflections, and facts. This text does not have a clear thesis statement or proofs. Could this “selective” memory” writing be called an argument? What are the reasons for your decision?
- A travel writer who is worried about global warming goes to Antarctica and observes the melting of the ice there. Using her observations, interviews with scientists, and secondary research, she then prepares an article about her trip for The National Geographic magazine or a similar publication. Her piece does not contain a one-sentence thesis statement or a direct call to fight global warming. At the same time, her evidence suggests that ice in the Arctic melts faster than it used to. Does this writer engage in argument? Why or why not? What factors influenced your decision?
- A novelist writes a book based on the events of the American Civil War. He recreates historical characters from archival research, but adds details, descriptions, and other characters to his book that are not necessarily historic. The resulting novel is in the genre known as “historical fiction.” Like all works of fiction, the book does not have a thesis statement or explicit proofs. It does, however, promote a certain view of history, some of which is based on the author’s research and some—on his imagination and creative license. Is this a representation of history, an argument, or a combination of both? Why or why not?

You can probably think of many more examples when argument in writing is expressed through means other than the traditional thesis statement and proofs. As you work through this book, continue to think about the nature of argument in writing and discuss it with your classmates and your instructor.

Writing Activity 1B: Analyzing Purpose

Recall any text you wrote, in or outside of school. Think not only of school papers, but also of letters to relatives and friends, e-mails, shopping lists, online postings, and so on. Consider the following questions.

- Was the purpose of the writing well defined for you in the assignment, or did you have to define it yourself?
- What did you have to do in order to understand or create your purpose?
- Did you have trouble articulating and fulfilling your writing purpose?

Be sure to record your answers and share them with your classmates and/or instructor.

Writing Activity 1C: Analyzing Audience

Every writer needs to consider his or her audience carefully when writing. Otherwise, your writing will be directed at no one in particular. As a result, your purpose will become unclear and your work will lose its effectiveness.

Consider any recent writing task that you faced. As with all the exploration activities included in this chapter, do not limit yourself to school writing assignments. Include letters, e-mails, notes, and any other kinds of writing you may do.

- Did you have a clearly defined audience?
- If not, what measures did you take to define and understand your audience?

- How did you know who your readers were?
- Did your writing purpose fit what your intended audience needed or wanted to hear?
- What were the best ways to appeal to your audience (both logical and emotional)?
- How did your decision to use or not to use external research influence the reception of your argument by your audience?

Writing Activity 1D: Analyzing Rhetorical Exigency

- If you are considering a topic for a paper, think whether the paper would address a specific problem or issue. In other words, will it address a real exigency, something that needs to be solved or discussed?
- Who are the people with interests and stakes in the problem?
- What are your limitations? Can you hope to solve the problem once and for all, or should your goals be more modest? Why or why not?

Share your results with your classmates and instructor.

Writing Activity 1E: Finding the Origins of Knowledge

- Seeing writing as an exchange of ideas means seeing all new theories, ideas, and beliefs as grounded in pre-existing knowledge. Therefore, when beginning a new writing project, writers never work “from scratch.” Instead, they tap into the resources of their community for ideas, inspiration, and research leads. Keeping these statements in mind, answer the following questions. Apply your answers to one of the research projects described in this book. Be sure to record your answers.
- Consider a possible research project topic. What do you know about your topic before you begin to write?
- Where did this knowledge come from? Be sure to include both secondary sources (books, websites, etc.) and primary ones (people, events, personal memories). Is this knowledge socially created? What communities or groups or people created it, how, and why?
- What parts of your current knowledge about your subject could be called “fact” and what parts could be called “opinion?”
- How can your current knowledge about the topic help you in planning and conducting the research for the project?

Share your thoughts with your classmates and instructor.

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2: Research Writing as a Process

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2.1: Introduction

"I work best under pressure." We all have probably heard this statement from someone trying to meet a late deadline. For writers this approach means sitting down to write a paper just hours before it is due, writing only one draft, and submitting it. Such writing is a race against the clock, and there is no time for revision. Writers who believe in this method often say that working fast somehow releases their creative juices and helps them to beat writer's block. Some even say they deliberately put a writing task off to the last minute choosing to race against the clock rather than to work on the assignment gradually and in steps.

Surely, most writers are busy people, and sometimes we feel that there is no time to develop a piece of writing over days or even weeks before it is due. Sometimes we procrastinate, believing that we can produce good quality work just before the deadline. But such a "fast and furious" approach to writing is much more than just a problem of time management or procrastination. While most of us can write something up quickly, will this be our best work and will the resulting paper do justice to our topic and to our audience? Racing against the clock, are we giving ourselves enough time to let the meaning of our writing to mature, or do we commit to paper the first thoughts that come to mind simply because we don't have time to develop them? When we work under stress of an imminent deadline, we naturally focus on getting the product out, that text which we will submit for a grade or publication. We simply have to have something written down. As we concentrate on getting that something on paper, we forget to give ourselves the opportunity to develop our thoughts and ideas, to let our piece evolve in our minds. In other words, we neglect the writing process.

In this chapter, I explain how to approach writing as a process. The process model of writing justifies and endorses an approach to composing as a sequence of thoughtful steps, or quite the opposite to the "work under pressure" model mentioned earlier. Writers who take the process approach treat their work as a sequence of necessary stages. They compose multiple drafts; they seek feedback on those drafts from other readers; they revise the meaning of their writing heavily based on that feedback and on their own evolving thinking about the piece they are working on.

In this chapter, we will explore the main features of the process approach to composing and what makes it radically different from the product one. We will discuss what the process model can help you accomplish as a researcher and a writer. If you are used to the product approach because it has, on some level, worked for you in the past, you may be skeptical towards the process theory. In order to convince you otherwise, I have decided included in this chapter stories and interviews by students, many of whom were also making the transition from the product to the process approach for the first time as they worked on the research writing projects described in this chapter. These narratives by students are not always all-out-success conversion from product to process stories, nor do they need to be. Some of these writers struggle with trying to be process-oriented as they try to understand and apply this new way of composing.

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2.2: Product and Process Theories of Writing

In order to become critical writers and researchers capable of adapting to various writing situations, we must know not only the “how’s”, but also the “why’s” of the theories and methods we try to use. Therefore, let us begin with an overview of the differences between process and product based writing. This will help us make informed decisions about our writing process and choose the best method for writing given our specific rhetorical situation.

Before we begin, though, I'd like to offer a disclaimer. While having a lot of time for writing, revising, and discussing your work with others is, of course, a good thing, there will be situations in every writer's career when producing one version of a text for an upcoming deadline is all we can do. Such product-based writing can be of high-quality, and experienced writers know how to produce such high-quality writing. Typically, they do that by carefully analyzing their rhetorical situation before and during the writing act. Such writers typically spend more time and effort planning and developing a piece in their mind than on paper. At the same time, process-oriented writing which allows for multiple revisions, for "stepping back" and considering the text from multiple points of view, and for discussing your work with others, is likely to result in a better-developed message. As you gain experience with writing a variety of texts for a variety of rhetorical situations, you will discover which method, or combination of methods, work for you.

Product-Based Writing

Here, I'd like to tell a story from my own writing career. Some years ago, before I became a writing teacher, I worked in a job which required me to write and publish a monthly newsletter which described and promoted the services we offered and and try to establish a connection with our customer base.

Writing the newsletter seemed like an easy enough job. After all, I knew well what our organization did and, I thought that I could easily write several pages per week describing that to my readers. So, one afternoon I sat in front of the computer and tried to compose the first issue of our new publication. I had it all in my head: the contents, the style, even the layout of the final draft. I thought I had a vision for this thing, and I really wanted to do a good job with it.

And then, writer's block hit me. I just couldn't write that first sentence. I wrote the beginning of it and wasn't happy with it. So I deleted it and started over again. The next version was no better, so I deleted it, too. After about an hour, I realized that I was in trouble: I had written three sentences out of five or six pages that I had to produce. Even worse, the whole thing was due on my boss's desk the next afternoon.

So, where and how did I get into trouble with my assignment? I thought I knew perfectly well what I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it. My problem was trying to get every word and every sentence “just right” the first time I wrote them. I had a picture of the finished newsletter in my head, but I just didn't know how to get to that picture. Somewhere along the way, I became unable to translate my writing plans into words, sentences and pages. I focused too much on the product of my writing that I had envisioned but that did not yet exist. I was not thinking enough on the process of getting from a blank computer screen to the finished text.

Now I know that I followed the product model of composing that day. As its name suggests, the product approach forces the writer to concentrate on the finished text, or the product of writing, at the expense of the steps and stages necessary to arrive at that product. Finishing the piece quickly, efficiently and in one sitting is what counts. This desire to write everything perfectly the first time can demoralize and incapacitate the writer, especially an inexperienced one.

Here are some of the main features of product-based writing:

- It assumes that writers produce texts in "one sitting," without revising or taking pauses in their work
- It forces the writer to “think before writing.” Product-oriented writers must have a clear plan for writing in our heads before composing.
- Producing only one draft forces them to settle for what came first, which may or may not be their best work.

- In product-oriented writing, there is little or no opportunity for feedback from others

When someone tells us to “think before we write,” we are being asked to believe that meaning can be fully formed in our head before we commit it to paper. It is as if we were forced not only to construct the paper fully in our mind, but also to memorize it. According to the product approach, only then can we begin to write. If this is correct, then writing means only transcribing existing information, ideas, and opinions on to paper.

A writer who follows the product model gets only one opportunity to formulate and express his or her thoughts. Whatever meaning that writer has created in his or her head by thinking about the subject of his or her writing gets transferred on to paper or computer screen as the final version. The quality of such writing (as well as the quality of the ideas which gave birth to it) may be passable, but it is hardly the best this writer can do given the chance to develop and refine these ideas through multiple drafts.

Within the product model, a writer gets only one chance to “get it right.” As my story about writing the newsletter illustrates, this can lead to writer’s block, fear of the blank page or blank computer screen, or whatever else we can call that feeling of helplessness and despair which we face when a deadline is looming and we have not written anything. This feeling makes us rush, and rushing, in turn, produced bad writing.

Because there are no drafts and revisions in product-based writing, writers get little or no opportunity to ask others for feedback and suggestions to improve the writing. The first and only draft is what gets submitted, usually for a grade, and by that time, it is too late to work on improvements. The very first reader who sees the writing, be it a boss at work or a teacher at school, is its judge and jury. This very first reader of a piece grades it or evaluates it in some other way, returning the verdict to the writer. As you learned from the chapter of this book dedicated to rhetoric, composing is a highly social process and no writer works in a vacuum. Asking anyone to write without feedback and the chance to discuss their ideas and drafts clearly contradicts that.

Process-Based Writing

In order to learn to see writing as a process, it is first important to understand that the meaning of any text is created during the act of writing itself, not before.

Here are some basic principles of process-based writing:

- Writing is a process and practice. The meaning of any text is created and evolves during composing and revision.
- In order to develop meaning fully, multiple drafts are necessary. Writing is much more than a transcription tool. It is a means of making knowledge, learning, and critical thinking.
- The writing process can be divided into stages that include but are not limited to invention, revision, and editing.
- Writing is a non-linear process, and its stages often overlap.
- Writers actively seek feedback from readers and judiciously use that feedback in their revisions.
- The process model empowers writers by encouraging them to understand and refine their writing strategies and techniques.

Most writers do not begin a new piece with a set meaning in their minds. We may have an initial idea for a piece of writing, but in order to implement that idea, we have to shape and re-shape it constantly as we write and re-write. The meaning if any text is an ever-evolving entity. Thinking does not precede writing, but happens simultaneously with writing. This shaping and re-shaping of the text’s meaning takes place through drafting and revision. For example, I took every chapter in this book through several drafts before it was published. Some parts of this text were rewritten five or six times, as my own thinking about them changed and as I received feedback from reviewers.

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2.3: Writing is a Non-Linear and Recursive Process

In Lewis Carroll's tale *Alice in Wonderland*, the following dialog takes place between the King and the White Rabbit. Alice is on trial, and the Rabbit believes that he has a letter that might prove her innocence. He asks the King to allow him to read the letter. After the King agrees, the Rabbit asks: "Where shall I begin, please, your Majesty?" And the King answers: "Begin at the beginning.... And go on till you come to the end: then stop."

Writing, of course, is not the same as reading, but writers who are used to the product-based approach to composing often work on their compositions in a manner similar to the one in which the Rabbit read his letter. As you recall, the product-based approach requires writers to "think before they write." According to this theory, we have to plan and lay out our whole compositions in our heads before we can begin writing them down. Consequently, a writer who has the whole piece stored in his or her mind, can quite easily write it from the beginning through the middle and to the end. After all, according to this approach nothing should change in the content of the piece during the act of writing itself. According to the product theory, writing is a sequential and orderly process of transcription.

Having studied the process model, however, we know that the content of every piece of writing gets developed during composing and not before. Thus, when we are working on a paper, we are not merely committing to paper or computer screen some pre-determined and pre-planned ideas that existed in our heads before we began composing. Instead, we are formulating and refining those ideas as compose. Such an approach allows us to take care of the content of the piece before we begin to worry about its structure.

Writers who approach composing in a linear way, tend to think about their pieces in terms of structure rather than content first. That is, before they even come up with enough to say, they, at least subconsciously, begin to worry about introduction, body, conclusion, and other structural elements of a text that does not yet exist. It is difficult for them to do otherwise because, if writing is linear (and in their minds it is), then you have to create the pieces of the future paper sequentially. According to this method, it is impossible to write the body of a text before the introduction. Similarly, within this framework, you cannot write a conclusion before the introduction is finished, and so on.

Writing is a non-linear and recursive process. This means that most writers do not "begin at the beginning" of a piece and "end at the end." Instead, composing takes places in chunks, with authors going back and forth between clusters of ideas and writing possibilities, constantly reviewing and revising them, and moving them between the various parts of the prospective text.

So, how might this non-linear approach to writing work in practical terms? To understand, consider one student's composing process.

Melissa Hull was a student in one of my first-year writing classes. One of the assignments in that class required her to find and study a text produced by some oppressed or under-represented ethnic or cultural group and to show how that group had, over time, adjusted its writing and its self-representation in order to survive in a society dominated by other cultures. Melissa decided to study texts produced by Arvanites, an ethnic and linguistic minority in Greece. Melissa's approach to the project is an excellent example of the recursive and non-linearity nature of writing. I interviewed Melissa to gain an insight into her research and writing processes.

The following are summaries of parts of our conversation.

PZ: Could you describe the early stages of the project? How did you begin to make sense of the assignment?

MH: I started to take notes and jot down ideas before even finding any texts written by Arvanites. However, I did not want to get too far along into the project without showing it to someone first. I was worried that maybe I was doing something wrong.

PZ: How did you start your research and why did you choose to write about Arvanites?

MH: I did some searches of online databases on the library websites on marginalized cultures. At first, the assignment was a little confusing, though.

PZ: Could you describe the writing of the first draft?

MH: I did some searches and found a lot of materials about Arvanites but none by them. It appears that their language is almost dead, so there aren't many written texts by them. I found some texts on the web that said they were by Arvanites, but they were in

Greek, so I could not go with them. I decided to start writing the draft just to make a better sense of the assignment and to go by what I had. I thought things would become clearer as I went. I ended up writing five drafts.

PZ: I seem to remember that you struggled after you write the very first rough draft? What was difficult and how did you resolve the problems?

MH: I knew absolutely nothing about them, but they seemed interesting and wanted to find out.

PZ: Could you describe the differences between your first and following drafts?

MH: After I wrote the first draft and received some feedback from my workshop group, I began to understand that I need a change of direction in my approach because I was not going to be able to find enough texts by the Arvanites. So, I looked a bit broader and wondered if I could use other elements of their culture, such as architecture and crafts, as texts. I was also beginning to realize that the point of my paper could be that there weren't enough texts by the Arvanites and that facts showed something about their culture. So, my point of view on the subject changed as I kept writing drafts and researching.

As you can see from these excerpts, Melissa's plans and the direction in which her paper was going change as she conducted additional research, revised, and received responses from her classmates and instructor. She was creating meaning in and through the process of research and writing.

How does the non-linear and the non-sequential nature of the writing process affect you as a writer? It urges you to move away from thinking about your compositions in structural terms of an introduction, body, and conclusion. Very often, when students discuss their writing plans with me, they say something like "and then, in this paragraph, I will have idea X. And then in the next paragraph, I will include story Y." Certainly, there comes a time in the writing process when a writer needs to revise for structure and coherence deciding how to organize paragraphs and sentences. But, in my experience, many student writers begin to worry about structure way too early, way before they have fully formed and developed their ideas for writing.

So, as you begin to write your next piece, I invite you to begin by thinking not about the structure of your yet unwritten text but about its content. You will create the structure later, once you know what kind of material you have for your writing. Your content will determine the structure of your paper, and you will generate that content not by going through some predetermined routine, but by working in a creative, non-linear, and non-sequential way.

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2.4: Applying the Process Approach to Research Writing

The generic research paper assignment that most of us have been given in school often requires us to come up with a thesis, or position on the subject of our research before we begin researching. The crudest by widely-spread example of this approach goes something like this: a student writer is asked to "defend" a position he or she strongly believes in and to "support" that position with researched evidence. The assumption here is that the writer knows exactly what he she wants to say before the composing process begins. It is easy to see that, in this case, the purpose of research is to find the kinds of sources, proofs, and theories that confirm the writer's existing opinion. Thus, the definition of the term "research" itself is changed and searching for answers is replaced with a quick fix of facts, statistics, and quotes.

Suppose, for example, that you have been assigned to write a researched argument about the death penalty. Suppose also that you are against the death penalty and that, in your paper, you will try to "prove" that killing someone as a means of administering justice is morally wrong. By the way, I think that arguing for or against the death penalty, abortion rights, and other similar controversial subject in a research project is very difficult because most people, including you, the writer, have set views on each of these subjects that cannot be changed. But, we will use the example of the death penalty argument anyway because it keeps popping up in traditional research papers.

Armed with the belief that death penalty is wrong, you go to the library or browse the Internet looking for "research" to support your thesis. Of course, because you already have your thesis, it is very tempting to look for and use only those sources that agree with you and to discard or overlook the others. If you are lucky, you find enough such sources and construct a paper that argues for the abolition of the death penalty. Ask yourself the following question, though: what have you found out or investigated during your research? Have you discovered new theories, opinions, or aspects of your subject? Did anything surprise you, intrigue you, or make you look further? If you answered no to these questions, you did not fulfill the purpose of true research, which is to explore, to discover, and to investigate.

The purpose of research is not to look for proofs that would fit the author's pre-existing theories, but to learn about the subject of the investigation as much as possible and then form those theories, opinions, and arguments on the basis of this newly found knowledge and understanding. And what if there is no data that prove your theory? What if, after hours and days of searching, you realize that there is nothing out there that would allow you to make the claim that you wanted to make? Most likely, this will lead to frustration, a change of the paper's topic, and having to start all over again. Not only will this inconvenience you by making you to race against the clock to meet the deadline and to do lots more busywork than necessary, but it will also be a waste of time because you will not learn anything new. Even if you manage to create a neat and efficient paper, it will be false research, simply jumping through hoops in order to fulfill another meaningless school assignment.

So, should you begin every research project as a disinterested individual without opinions, ideas, and beliefs? Of course, not! There is nothing wrong about having opinions, ideas, and beliefs about your subject before beginning the research process. Good researchers and writers are passionate about their work and want to share their passion with the world. Moreover, pre-existing knowledge can be a powerful research-starter. But what separates a true researcher from someone who simply looks for "proofs" for a pre-fabricated thesis is that a true researcher is willing to question those pre-existing beliefs and to take his or her understanding of the research topic well beyond what he or she knew at the outset. Speaking in terms of the process theory of writing, a good researcher and writer is willing to create new meaning, a new understanding of his or her subject through research and writing and based on the ideas and beliefs that he or she had entering the research project.

Explore "[Writing Activity 2A: Examining Past Writing Experiences](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

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2.5: The Main Stages of the Writing Process

The word “process” itself implies doing things in stages and over time. Applied to writing, this means that as you proceed from the beginning of a writing project through its middle and towards the end, you go through certain definable stages, each of which needs to be completed in order for the whole project to succeed.

Composing is very complex intellectual work consisting of many complex mental activities and processes. As we will see in the next section of this chapter, it is often difficult to say when and where one stage of the writing process ends and the next one begins. However, it is generally agreed that the writing process has at least three discreet stages: invention, revision, and editing. In addition to inventing, revising, and editing, writers who follow the process approach also seek and receive feedback to their drafts from others. It is also important to understand that the writing process is recursive and non-linear. What this means is that a writer may finish initial invention, produce a draft, and then go back to generating more ideas, before revising the text he or she created.



Figure 2.1 - The Writing Process. Source: www.mywritingportfolio.net

Invention

Invention is what writers do before they produce a first complete draft of their piece. As its name suggests, invention helps writers to come up with material for writing. The process theory states that no writer should be expected to simply sit down and write a complete piece without some kind of preparatory work. The purpose of invention is to explore various directions in which the piece may go and to try different ways to develop material for writing. Note the words “explore” and “try” in the previous sentence. They suggest that not all the material generated during invention final, or even the first draft. To a writer used to product-based composing, this may seem like a waste of time and energy. Why generate more ideas during invention than you can into the paper, they reason?

Remember that your goal during invention is to explore various possibilities for your project. At this point, just about the most dangerous and counter-productive thing you can do as a writer is to “lock in” on one idea, thesis, type of evidence, or detail, and ignore all other possibilities. Such a limited approach is particularly dangerous when applied to research writing. A discussion of that follows in the section of this chapter which is dedicated to the application the process model to research writing. Below, I offer several invention, revision, and editing strategies and activities.

Invention Techniques

These invention strategies invite spontaneity and creativity. Feel free to adjust and modify them as you see fit. They will probably work best for you if you apply them to a specific writing project rather than try them out “for practice’s sake.” As you try them, don’t worry about the shape or even content of your final draft. At this stage, you simply don’t know what that draft is going to look like. You are creating its content as you invent. This is not a complete list of all possible invention strategies. Your teacher and classmates may be able to share other invention ideas with you.

Free-writing

As its name suggests, free writing encourages the writer to write freely and without worrying about the content or shape of the writing. When you free-write, your goal is to generate as much material on the page as possible, no matter what you say or how you say it.

Try to write for five, ten, or even fifteen minutes without checking, censoring, or editing yourself in any way. You should not put your pen or pencil down, or stop typing on the computer, no matter what. If you run out of things to say, repeat “I have nothing to say” or something similar until the next idea pops into your head. Let your mind go, go with the flow, and don’t worry about the end product. Your objective is to create as much text as possible. Don’t even worry about finishing your sentences or separating your paragraphs. You are not writing a draft of your paper. Instead, you are producing raw material for that draft. Later on, you just might find a gem of an idea in that raw material which you can develop into a complete draft. Also don’t worry if anyone will be able to read what you have written—most likely you will be the only reader of your text. If your teacher asks you to share your free writing with other students, you can explain what you have written to your group mates as you go along.

Brainstorming

When brainstorming, you list as quickly as possible all thoughts and ideas which are connected, however loosely, to the topic of your writing. As with free writing, you should not worry about the shape or structure of your writing. Your only concern should be to write as long a list of possibilities as you can. As you brainstorm, try not to focus your writing radar too narrowly, on a single aspect of your topic or a single question. The broader you cast your brainstorming net, the better because a large list of possibilities will give you a wealth of choices when time comes to compose your first draft. Your teacher may suggest how many items to have on your brainstorming list. I usually ask my students to come up with at least ten to twelve items in a five to ten minute long brainstorming session, more if possible.

Mind-Mapping

Mind-mapping, which is also known as webbing or clustering, invites you to create a visual representation of your writing topic or of the problem you are trying to solve through your writing and research. The usefulness of mind-mapping as an invention techniques has been recognized by professionals in many disciplines, with at least one software company designing a special computer program exclusively for creating elaborate mind maps.

Here is how mind-mapping works. Write your topic or questions in the middle of a blank page, or type it in the middle of a computer screen, and think about any other topics or subtopics related to this main topic or question. Then branch out of the center connecting the central idea of your mind map to the other ones. The result should like a spider’s web. The figure is a mind-map I made for the first draft of the chapter of this book dedicated to rhetoric.

Drawing

This invention strategy also asks the writer to create a visual representation of his or topic and is particularly useful for personal writing projects and memoirs. In such projects, memories and recollections, however vague and uncertain, are often starting points for writing. Instead of writing about your memories, this invention strategy invites you to draw them. The advantage of this strategy is that it allows the writer not only to restore these memories in preparation for writing, but also to reflect upon them. As you know by now, one of the fundamental principles of the process approach to writing is that meaning is created as the writer develops the piece from draft to draft. Drawing elements of your future project may help you create such meaning. I am not particularly good at visual arts, so I will not subject you to looking at my drawings. Instead, I invite you to create your own.

Outlining

Outlining can be a powerful invention tool because it allows writers to generate ideas and to organize them in a systematic manner. In a way, outlining is similar to mind mapping as it allows you to break down main ideas and points into smaller ones. The difference between mind maps and outlines is, of course, the fact that the former provides a visual representation of your topic while the latter gives you a more linear, textual one. If you like to organize your thoughts systematically as you compose, a good outline can be a useful resource when you begin drafting.

However, it is extremely important to observe two conditions when using outlining as your main invention strategy. The first is to treat your outline as a flexible plan for writing and nothing more. The key word is “flexible.” Your outline is not a rigid set of points which you absolutely must cover in your paper, and the structure of your outline, with all its points and sub-points, does not predetermine the structure of your paper. The second condition follows from the first. If, in the process of writing the paper, you realize that your current outline does not suit you anymore, change it or discard it. Do not follow it devotedly, trying to fit your writing into what your outline wants it to be.

So, again, the outline is your flexible plan for writing, not a canon that you have to follow at all cost. It is hard for writers to create a “perfect” or complete outline before writing because the meaning of a piece takes shape during composing, not before. It is difficult, if not impossible, to know what you are going to say in your writing unless and until you begin to say it. Outlining may help you in planning your first draft, but it should not determine it.

Keeping a journal or a writer's notebook

Keeping a journal or a writer's notebook is another powerful invention strategy. Keeping a writer's journal can work regardless of the genre you are working in. Journals and writer's notebooks are popular among writers of fiction and creative non-fiction. But they also have a huge potential for researching writers because keeping a journal allows you not only to record events and details, but also to reflect on them through writing. In the chapter of this book dedicated to researching in academic disciplines, I discuss one particular type of writing journal called the double-entry journal. If you decide to keep a journal or a writer's notebook as an invention strategy, keep in mind the following principles:

- Write in your journal or notebook regularly.
- Keep everything you write—you never know when you may need or want to use it in your writing.
- Write about interesting events, observations, and thoughts.
- Reflect on what you have written. Reflection allows you to make that leap from simple observation to making sense of what you have observed.
- Frequently re-read your entries.

Reading

It is hard to overestimate the importance of reading as an invention strategy. As you can learn from the chapters on rhetoric and on reading, writing is a social process that never occurs in a vacuum. To get ideas for writing of your own, you need to be familiar with ideas of others. Reading is one of the best, if not the best way, to get such material. Reading is especially important for research writing. For a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between reading and writing and for specific activities designed to help you to use reading for writing, see Chapter 3 of this book dedicated to reading.

Examining your Current Knowledge

The best place to start looking for a research project topic is to examine your own interests, passions, and hobbies. What topics, events, people, or natural phenomena, or stories interest, concern you, or make you passionate? What have you always wanted to find out more about or explore in more depth?

Looking into the storehouse of your knowledge and life experiences will allow you to choose a topic for your research project in which you are genuinely interested and in which you will, therefore, be willing to invest plenty of time, effort, and enthusiasm. Simultaneously with being interesting and important to you, your research topic should, of course, interest your readers. As you have learned from the chapter on rhetoric, writers always write with a purpose and for a specific audience.

Therefore, whatever topic you choose and whatever argument you will build about it through research should provoke response in your readers. And while almost any topic can be treated in an original and interesting way, simply choosing the topic that interests you, the writer, is not, in itself, a guarantee of success of your research project.

Here is some advice on how to select a promising topic for your next research project. As you think about possible topics for your paper, remember that writing is a conversation between you and your readers. Whatever subject you choose to explore and write about has to be something that is interesting and important to them as well as to you. Remember *kairos*, or the ability to “be in the right place at the right time,” which we discussed in Chapter 1.

When selecting topics for research, consider the following factors:

- Your existing knowledge about the topic
- What else you need or want to find out about the topic
- What questions about or aspects of the topic are important not only for you but for others around you.
- Resources (libraries, internet access, primary research sources, and so on) available to you in order to conduct a high quality investigation of your topic.

Read about and “around” various topics that interest you. As I argue later on in this chapter, reading is a powerful invention tool capable of teasing out subjects, questions, and ideas which would not have come to mind otherwise. Reading also allows you to find out what questions, problems, and ideas are circulating among your potential readers, thus enabling you to better and quicker enter the conversation with those readers through research and writing.

Explore "[Writing Activity 2B: Generating Topics](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

If you have an idea of the topic or issue you want to study, try asking the following questions

- Why do I care about this topic?
- What do I already know or believe about this topic?
- How did I receive my knowledge or beliefs (personal experiences, stories of others, reading, and so on)?
- What do I want to find out about this topic?
- Who else cares about or is affected by this topic? In what ways and why?
- What do I know about the kinds of things that my potential readers might want to learn about it?
- Where do my interests about the topic intersect with my readers’ potential interests, and where they do not?

Which topic or topics has the most potential to interest not only you, the writer, but also your readers?

Designing Research Questions

Assuming that you were able to select the topic for your next research project, it is not time to design some research questions. Forming specific and relevant research questions will allow you to achieve three important goals:

- Direct your research from the very beginning of the project
- Keep your research focused and on track
- Help you find relevant and interesting sources

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2.6: Revision Methods

Revision is Essential for Quality Writing and Research

At the heart of the process approach to writing is revision. When writers revise, they assess the strengths and weaknesses of what they have written so far and change the content of the text in an effort to make it more rhetorically effective and interesting for the readers as well as more satisfying for the writer. Again, I repeat, the changes have to be in the content of the writing. Merely making mechanical changes, such as eliminating grammatical errors is not revision. When writers revise, they re-see their message and their approach to the very subject of the piece. A writer committed to revision has no shortcuts around it. Through revision, the text is changed developed, expanded or made more concise, and so on.

Revising a text requires a certain a mindset. Authors who are committed to the idea of revision need to get rid of the popular perception that good writers create their works when struck by genius and in one sitting. They need to understand and get accustomed to the idea that writing is not a “one-shot” activity. It is not a timed contest where you only get one try. Win now or bust. Write one perfect draft or lose the competition. Do your best now, under pressure, or receive a bad grade. But any kind of writing is a creative process, and, like all processes, it implies stages. It allows the writer the opportunity to improve over time, to make changes, to read and re-read what has already been written, think about it, discuss it with others, and improve it.

When writing within the process model, you usually produce only one draft. Once you found your sources, wrote down their summaries on note cards, and gave some thought to ways of arranging your material, you get one chance to write a paper. Writers who approach research as a process constantly evaluate and re-evaluate what they have written and, based on those evaluations, decide how to proceed with their research and writing.

To illustrate how revision might work in a process-based research project, let us return to the example about the death penalty paper. Again, I realize that this example is not perfect, but it is worth using it because of its familiarity to most college students and for convenience’s sake. A process-oriented writer is guided by the idea that once the first round of searches and the first draft are completed, the investigation is far from over. Such a writer has only begun to make his or her meaning and there is still much to be done.

As you experiment with the revision strategies below, remember that making changes to the content of your text is the essence of revision. As a writer, you should not get too attached to your current draft. Instead, you should be able to distance yourself from it, evaluate it as critically as possible, and re-imagine it in a new light. These revision techniques are designed to help you do just that.

Ask Focusing Questions

Focus in writing is the issue, or sub-topic that is at the center of a given text. For example, within a general subject, such as “surfing,” many different foci are possible. One writer may choose to write about the history of surfing, while another might decide to create an instructional manual teaching the basic techniques of the sport. Yet another may want to write a personal narrative about memorable surfing experiences, and so on. A first draft of a text is not always focused because, in a first draft, most writers explore the possibilities their subject has to offer and test the various directions in which they can take their writing. Therefore, one of the tasks you may face after you write the first rough draft of your work is to revise it for focus.

Searching and (Re)Searching

This method is about not settling for the first set of research sources you found and look for other and better ones between the first and second draft. Because writing is a recursive process, when you begin a research writing project, you never really know what you will find. So, once you have created a first exploratory draft of the project, you will ideally have new questions about your topic. To answer those questions, try to search for new sources, even if that will mean replacing the sources you found previously. To test this technique, try the following writing activity.

Explore "[Writing Activity 2C: Gaining New Knowledge Through Revision](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

After completing the first draft of your research project that is probably based on your pre-existing knowledge about the subject and the first round of your searches, consider the following questions. Apply these questions to any research project you are currently working on. You can complete this activity on your own and with your own draft, or use these questions in a workshop group as a guide for discussion and responding.

- During your first round of searches, what new information, ideas, and opinions about your subject have you discovered?
- How does your current understanding of your subject differ from the one you had before you began your research?
- Look back at your original research questions. In the light of your new knowledge, can they be revised, clarified, or modified in any way?
- What additional research do you need in order to answer these revised questions?
- Do not commit to a fixed thesis or a fixed point of view at this point. You are still looking, still exploring.

This activity is an example of what Bruce Ballenger (2001) called “writing in the middle” (176). You are likely between the first and the second draft of a research project. You have completed an initial search, and now it is time to evaluate what you know and what else you need to find out. In terms of the process theory, you are well on your way of creating interesting and rhetorically meaning for yourself and for your readers. By researching, writing about your data, and constantly evaluating both your research data and your writing, you are creating that new and original system of beliefs about your subject which Doug Brent talks about and which I mentioned earlier.

Explore "[Writing Activity 2D: Asking Focusing Questions](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

Explore "[Writing Activity 2E: "Fat" Draft and Writing Between the Lines](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

Explore "[Writing Activity 2F: Searching in the Middle](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

Explore "[Writing Activity 2G: Cut and Paste](#)" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

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2.7: Seeking Feedback From Others and Using It for Revision

Because writing is a social process, it is impossible to compose without getting feedback on your work in progress. The comments and questions you receive from your readers in the process of writing a paper will help you revise and improve your writing. They will also help you to fine tune your writing to your readers' needs and expectations. This is why writers must to actively seek others' feedback on their writing and to use that feedback critically in their revisions.

Basic Principles of Peer Response

A large part of a successful peer response process is the mindset of the participants. Your goal as a writer seeking feedback should be to engage others, your readers, in a conversation about your ideas and your text. Tell your readers about the kinds of problems you are experiencing with the writing and about the questions you have.

As a reader of the writing by others, your goal should be not to criticize, dismantle, and destroy their draft. Your goal is not to fix their grammar mistakes or proofread their paper for them. Instead, your strategic goal as a reader and responder is to help them to take their texts where they, not you, want it to go by giving constructive, thoughtful, and detailed feedback. One of the most accessible guides to peer response for writers has been written by Richard Straub in the essay "Responding--Really Responding—to Other Students' Writing." Straub states:

First, don't set out to seek and destroy all errors and problems in the writing. You are not an editor. You are not a teacher. You are not a cruise missile. And don't rewrite any parts of the paper. You are not the writer; you are a reader. One of many. The paper is not yours; it's the writer's (137).

He recommends the following principles of peer response:

- Play back what you read in the paper to the writer. Ask the writer if the meaning you are getting is the meaning he or she intended.
- Do not take on too much. Select one or two global (or content) problems in the piece and work in them.
- Do not worry about grammar and spelling unless it is an editing workshop.
- Comment in writing. Take notes on the margins and write summative notes at the end of the paper.
- Be polite, but not too polite. If you see a problem in the writing, let the writer know.
- Balance praise and criticism.

Good peer responding strategies and techniques are learned through practice. Neither your teacher nor I will expect you to become an excellent and experienced responder to writing over night. Use the principles above to begin your learning.

Editing and Proofreading

Any written text can be changed and improved almost indefinitely. However, there comes a time in every writing project when the writer has to polish up the final product by editing and proof-reading it. What editing strategies you will choose to employ will depend on the kind of style you want your writing to have. If you want terse and compact language, you will edit for conciseness. If you want an elaborate style, you will want to make sure that every sentence and every phrase is clear and says what you want it to say. In either case, editing is a rhetorical task, and the choice of writing style depends on your rhetorical purpose, the audience for which you are writing, and the context in which you are writing. Becoming a good editor of your own and others' texts takes a lot of practice.

Reading the paper backwards

Start reading the paper from the last sentence on the last page. Doing this forces you to pay attention to the mechanics of every sentence and word. By the time when you proofread your paper, you have probably finished revising it, and your main concern now is to make it as error-free as possible.

Reading to the wall

Sit or stand facing a wall in the classroom or at home. Shut out the outside world. Now, read the paper out loud to yourself, slowly and deliberately. Pay attention to separate words, phrases, and sentences.

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2.8: Conclusion

I hope that this chapter has given you a foundational understanding of process approach to writing and shown you how to apply the process theory to your writing and research. This chapter will be of any use to you only if you apply the knowledge and writing techniques explained here to your own research projects, whether from this book or from elsewhere. It is not meant to be read as an abstract, work meant to indoctrinate you in some inapplicable theory. Instead, I invite you to use and test everything you have read about in this chapter for your own writing.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the process approach to composing that sets it apart from its product counterpart is the way in which the process model empowers writers. Instead of directing writers towards some set of rigid and inflexible rules about writing, the process theory encourages us become aware of the approaches, strategies, and techniques work best for us. As with any theory, following the process model of writing means adhering to certain guidelines and principles. However, within those principles the process theory allows writers considerable flexibility and independence.

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2.9: Writing Activities

Writing Activity 2A: Examining Past Writing Experiences

Remember a situation in which you chose or were forced to follow the product model, whether consciously or sub-consciously. Consider both school writing tasks and out-of-school ones. Working on your own or with a partner, jot down some answers to the following questions. After you finish, be sure to share your ideas with your classmates.

What was the assignment's purpose, audience, and how much time did you have to complete it?

- Briefly describe your composing process. Talk about the amount of time you spent planning the piece in your head and the amount of time you spent writing it. Try to remember whether you had the opportunity to receive feedback from others before the assignment was due. If not, why?
- If at any point in the assignment, you hit writer's block, what did you do about it? Did you have adequate time, resources, and writing techniques to overcome it?
- Who read and evaluated your writing after it was completed? What criteria was the evaluation based on? Did you feel that you did a good job with the piece?

Writing Activity 2B: Generating Topics

If you have an idea of the topic or issue you want to study, try asking the following questions

- Why do I care about this topic?
- What do I already know or believe about this topic?
- How did I receive my knowledge or beliefs (personal experiences, stories of others, reading, and so on)?
- What do I want to find out about this topic?
- Who else cares about or is affected by this topic? In what ways and why?
- What do I know about the kinds of things that my potential readers might want to learn about it?
- Where do my interests about the topic intersect with my readers' potential interests, and where they do not?

Which topic or topics has the most potential to interest not only you, the writer, but also your readers?

Writing Activity 2C: Gaining New Knowledge Through Revision

After completing the first draft of your research project that is probably based on your pre-existing knowledge about the subject and the first round of your searches, consider the following questions. Apply these questions to any research project you are currently working on. You can complete this activity on your own and with your own draft, or use these questions in a workshop group as a guide for discussion and responding.

- During your first round of searches, what new information, ideas and opinions about your subject have you discovered?
- Which of your research results were expected and which ones puzzled you, surprised you, and intrigued you and why?
- How does your current understanding of your subject differ from the one you had before you began your research?
- Look back at your original research questions. In the light of your new knowledge, can they be revised, clarified, or modified in any way?
- What additional research do you need in order to answer these revised questions?
- Do not commit to a fixed thesis or a fixed point of view at this point. You are still looking, still exploring.

This activity is an example of what Bruce Ballenger (2001) called "writing in the middle" (176). You are likely between the first and the second draft of a research project. You have completed an initial search, and now it is time to evaluate what you know and what else you need to find out. In terms of the process theory, you are well on your way of creating interesting and rhetorically meaning for yourself and for your readers. By researching, writing about your data, and constantly evaluating both your research data and your writing, you are creating that new and original system of beliefs about your subject which Doug Brent talks about and which I mentioned earlier.

Writing Activity 2D: Asking Focusing Questions

In the following activity, work with a rough draft you have recently completed. You can complete this activity on your own and working with your own draft. You can also complete this task in a small workshop group and apply the questions below to your classmates' rough drafts. As you work through the tasks below, remember that your goal is to find focus of your writing, to narrow your subject down to a manageable research question or set of questions that you can then investigate in your piece. Work through the following tasks thoroughly. Take adequate notes and record your answers and ideas. If you are reading someone else's writing, be sure to discuss your findings with the author.

- Read the draft carefully, several times if necessary.
- As you read, underline or highlight words, sentences, ideas, or paragraphs that, for whatever reason, seem important or interesting.
- What ideas, stories or arguments is the draft trying to convey or advance? Does it have a “center of gravity,” a central or important point or idea? Perhaps it has several such centers, in which case you will want to take note of them all, as each can later become the paper's focus.
- Which of the ideas, stories, or arguments in the draft are worth developing further and which ones can be discarded? Remember that these ideas and arguments must be interesting and important not only to the writer but also the potential readers of the paper.
- Try to plan for the next draft keeping in mind the focus (or foci) that you found going through the preceding questions.
- As a result of this activity, your piece may take a completely different direction from the one you originally envisioned. Therefore, radical changes in your draft will likely be necessary. You will probably need to rewrite and rearrange whole sections and paragraphs of the paper, add new details, examples, and arguments while discarding some of the old ones.

Writing Activity 2E: “Fat” Draft and Writing Between the Lines

I learned these two revision techniques from my mentor and friend Wendy Bishop. Since then, I have used them many times both in my own writing and in my teaching.

In the “fat” draft activity, you are asked to double the length of your current draft. It does not matter where in the draft you add the material as long as the next version of your text is twice as long as the previous one. It does not even matter all that much whether the sentences and paragraphs you are adding are good enough to stay in final version of your paper. Remember that you are making meaning as you revise, and it is important to generate as many options and ideas as possible in the process of revision.

In “Writing Between the Lines,” you are also required to double the length of your current draft, except here you add a new line underneath every existing one. Computers make this kind of text manipulation easy. The content of every new line you add will, in some way, be related to the line that precedes it. The lines do not need to dovetail into one another smoothly, and the transitions between them do not have to be seamless. Although the organizational decisions you will make about your paper later on may be influenced by what you write now, your primary concern should not be the structure of your paper or transitions between paragraphs and sentences. Instead, you should focus on generating as much material as possible by adding explanations, details, new research, descriptions, and so on.

Writing Activity 2F: Searching in the Middle

This activity will work best if completed between the first and the second drafts of a research project. As in previous exploratory tasks of this chapter, you can apply the questions below to any research project you are currently working on. And, as with previous activities, you can either apply these questions to your own draft or to the drafts of others in a small workshop group. As you work on the questions below, use the notes that you took about your first draft during the previous exploration activity.

- Review your first draft. Get an idea of what it is saying, but try not to look at it as a sum of introduction, body, and conclusion. Instead, evaluate the ideas and concepts presented in it and try to decide how well they answer your research questions.
- Try to make some plans for revision. Use the revision strategies and techniques discussed earlier in this chapter as well as feedback from other readers.
- Now review the research results which you obtained during the first round of searching. What do they do and not do to answer your questions? Revisit your research questions and try to revise them. Next, go back to the library and the Internet and conduct another round of searching, guided by your current, post-first draft vision of your topic and of your project.

Writing Activity 2G: Cut and Paste

Here is another activity invented by Peter Elbow. When I assign this activity to my students, some of them consider it a little unusual at first, but eventually most of them see its usefulness. The purpose of the cut and paste activity is to radically re-see and re-imagine your draft by rearranging and rewriting its paragraphs. This activity works on the assumption that in order to radically re-imagine and revise their work, writers need to detach themselves as much as possible from the draft in its current form. In order to see your paper in a new light, you need to try to forget what it looks like now.

Elbow's cut and paste technique is likely to help you revise on two levels. It will probably help you focus your writing better by showing which parts of your draft belong there and which ones need to be discarded or rewritten. But it may also help you to revise for development and detail by highlighting those parts of your paper which need additional explanations, descriptions, scenes, stories, and so on.

- With a pair of scissors, cut your draft into paragraphs. In my experience and that of my students, printing and cutting the paper works better than manipulating the paragraphs on the computer screen because it seems to allow the writer to remove him or herself better from the current form of the text.
- Lay the paragraphs out on a table in front of you. Make two piles: in one pile, put the paragraphs which seem to fit in with the focus of your paper the way you currently see that focus. Put all the other paragraphs in the other pile.
- Begin working with the second pile by reading through the paragraphs. Try to decide which of them can be rewritten and improved and which ones can be discarded. Don't be afraid to get rid of the material that does not fit into your design for the paper.
- Now, consider the first pile and decide whether any of the paragraphs in it should be re-written.
- Combine both piles. Try to create a new version (or several versions) of your text by arranging and re-arranging the paragraphs in several different ways. Remember that you will be revising most, if not all of them.
- Notice what is missing in this new version. Do you need to add new arguments, details, descriptions, scenes, and so on?

Completing this activity will not produce a finished next draft for you, but it will help you to make some firm and realistic plans for it. Of course, because you have substantially re-seen and re-imagined your first draft, you will have to do write some new material to add to the existing paragraphs and complete the next draft.

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3: Research and Critical Reading

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3.1: 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 is 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. But you also read other texts. 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 towards becoming a critical and active reader is examining your reading process and your reading preferences. Therefore, you are invited to complete the following exploration activity.

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3.2: 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 to 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 do not contain inarguable truths and learning to question 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.

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3.3: 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 known 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 that 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 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 pre-conceptions 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 of 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.

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3.4: 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.

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3.5: 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.

To better understand the key differences between reacting and responding and between binary and nuanced reading, consider the table below.

Reacting to Texts	Responding to Texts
• Works on an emotional rather than an intellectual level. • Prevents readers from studying purposes, intended audiences, and contexts of texts they are working with. • Fails to establish dialog between the reader and the text by locking the reader in his or her pre-existing opinion about the argument.	• Works on an intellectual and emotional level by asking the readers to use all three rhetorical appeals in reading and writing about the text • Allows for a careful study of the text's rhetorical aspects • Establishes dialog among the reader, text, and other readers by allowing all sides to reconsider of existing positions and opinions.
Binary Reading	Nuanced Reading
• Provides only "agree or disagree" answers • Does not allow for an understanding of complex arguments • Prevents the reader from a true rhetorical engagement with the text	• Allows for a deep and detailed understanding of complex texts. • Takes into account "gray areas" of complex arguments. • Establishes rhetorical engagement between the reader and the text.

Figure 3.5.1

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 it 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.

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3.6: 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.

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3.7: 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, one 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 that 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 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 your brain comfortable with the work, then read it again and actually try to understand what's going on in it. 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.

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3.8: 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 your 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.”

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3.9: Writing Activities

Writing Activity 3A: Analyzing your Reading Habits

List all the reading you have done in the last week. Include both “school” and “out-of school” reading. Try to list as many texts as you can think of, no matter how short and unimportant they might seem. Now, answer the following questions.

- What was your purpose in reading each of those texts? Did you read for information, to pass a test, for enjoyment, to decide on a product you wanted to buy, and so on? Or, did you read to figure out some complex problem that keeps you awake at night?
- You have probably come up with a list of different purposes. How did each of those purposes influence your reading strategies? Did you take notes or try to memorize what you read? How long did it take you to read different texts? Did you begin at the beginning and read till you reached the end, or did you browse some texts? Consider the time of day you were reading. Consider even whether some texts tired you out or whether you thought they were “boring.” Why?
- What did you do with the results of your reading? Did you use them for some practical purpose, such as buying a new product or finding directions, or did you use them for a less practical purpose, such as understanding some topic better or learning something about yourself and others?

When you finish, share your results with the rest of the class and with your instructor.

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.

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4: Finding and Evaluating Research Sources

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4.1: Introduction

In order to create rhetorically effective and engaging pieces, research writers must be able to find appropriate and diverse sources and to evaluate those sources for usefulness and credibility. This chapter discusses how to locate such sources and how to evaluate them. On the one hand, this is a chapter about the nuts and bolts of research. If you have written research papers before, searching for sources and citing them in your paper may, at times, have appeared to you as purely mechanical processes, chores necessary to produce a paper. On the other hand, when writers work with research sources, first finding and then evaluating them, they do rhetorical work. Finding good sources and using them effectively helps you to create a message and a persona which your readers are more likely to accept, believe, and be interested in than if unsuitable and unreliable sources are used. This chapter covers the various kinds of research sources available to writers. It discusses how to find, evaluate, and use primary and secondary sources, printed and online ones.

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4.2: Types of Research Sources

It is a well-known cliché: we live in an information age. Information has become a tangible commodity capable of creating and destroying wealth, influencing public opinion and government policies and effecting social change. As writers and citizens, we have unprecedented access to different kinds of information from different sources. Writers who hope to influence their audiences need to know what research sources are available, where to find them, and how to use them.

Primary and Secondary Sources

Definition of Primary Sources

Let us begin with the definition of primary and secondary sources. A primary research source is one that allows you to learn about your subject “first-hand.” Primary sources provide direct evidence about the topic under investigation. They offer us “direct access” to the events or phenomena we are studying. For example, if you are researching the history of World War II and decide to study soldiers’ letters home or maps of battlefields, you are working with primary sources. Similarly, if you are studying the history of your home town in a local archive that contains documents pertaining to that history, you are engaging in primary research. Among other primary sources and methods are interviews, surveys, polls, observations, and other similar “first-hand” investigative techniques.

The fact that primary sources allow us “direct access” to the topic does not mean that they offer an objective and unbiased view of it. It is therefore important to consider primary sources critically and, if possible, gather multiple perspectives on the same event, time period, or questions, from multiple primary sources.

Definition of Secondary Sources

Secondary sources describe, discuss, and analyze research obtained from primary sources or from other secondary sources. Using the previous example about World War II, if you read other historians’ accounts of it, government documents, maps and other written documents, you are engaging in secondary research. Some types of secondary sources with which you are likely to work include books, academic journals, popular magazines and newspapers, websites and other electronic sources.

The same source can be both primary and secondary, depending on the nature and purpose of the project. For example, if you study a culture or group of people by examining texts they produce, you are engaging in primary research. On the other hand, if that same group published a text analyzing some external event, person, or issue and if your focus is not on the text’s authors but on their analysis, you would be doing secondary research.

Secondary sources often contain descriptions and analyses of primary sources. Therefore, accounts, descriptions, and interpretations of research subjects found in secondary sources are at least one step further removed from what can be found in primary sources about the same subject. And while primary sources do not give us a completely objective view of reality, secondary sources, inevitably add an extra layer of opinion and interpretation to the views and ideas found in primary sources. As we have mentioned many times throughout this book, all texts are rhetorical creations, and writers make choices about what to include and what to omit. As researchers, we need to understand that and not to rely on either primary or secondary sources blindly.

Print and Electronic Sources

Researchers have at their disposal both printed and electronic sources. Before the advent of the Internet, most research papers were written based with the use of printed sources only. Until fairly recently, one of the main stated goals of research writing instruction was to give students practice in the use of the library. Libraries are venerable institutions, and therefore printed sources have traditionally been seen (with good reason, usually) as more solid and reliable than those found on the Internet.

With the popularity of the Internet and other electronic means of storing and communicating information, traditional libraries faced serious competition for clients. It has become impractical if not impossible for researchers to ignore the massive amount of information available to them on the Internet or from other online sources. As a result, it is not uncommon for many writers beginning a research project to begin searching online rather than at a library or a local archive. For example, several times in the process of writing this book, when I found myself in need of information, fast, I opened my web browser and researched online. Due to increased access to the internet, it has become common practice for many student writers to limit themselves to online

research and to ignore the library. While there are some cases when a modified version of such an approach to searching may be justifiable (more about that later), it is clear that by using only online research sources, a writer severely limits his or her options.

This section of the chapter covers three areas. First, we will discuss the various types of printed and online sources as well the main similarities and differences between them. Next, I'd like to offer some suggestions on using your library effectively and creatively. Finally, we will the topic of conducting online searches, including methods of evaluating information found on the Internet.

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4.3: Know your Library



Take a Virtual Tour of the TRCC Donald Welter Library

It is likely that your college or university library consists of two parts. One is the brick and mortar building, often at a central location on campus, where you can go to look for books, magazines, newspapers, and other publications. The other part is online. Most good libraries keep a collection of online research databases which are supported, at least in part, by your tuition and fees, and to which only people who are affiliated with the college or the university that subscribes to these databases have access.

Let us begin with the brick and mortar library. If you have not yet been to your campus library, visit it soon. Larger colleges and universities usually have several libraries that may specialize in different academic disciplines. As you enter the library, you are likely to find a circulation desk (place where you can check out materials) and a reference desk. Behind a reference desk, work reference librarians. Instead of wandering around the library alone, hoping to hit the research sources that you need for your project, it is a good idea to talk to a reference librarian at the beginning of every research project, especially if you are at a loss for a topic or research materials.

Your brick and mortar campus library is likely to house the following types of materials:

- Books (these include encyclopedias, dictionaries, indexes, and so on)
- Academic Journals
- Popular magazines
- Newspapers
- Government documents
- A music and film collection (on CDs, VHS tapes, and DVDs)
- A CD-Rom collection
- A microfilm and microfiche collection
- Special collections, such as ancient manuscripts or documents related to local history and culture.

According to librarian Linda M. Miller, researchers need to “gather relevant information about a topic or research question thoroughly and efficiently. To be thorough, it helps to be familiar with the kinds of resources that the library holds, and the services it provides to enable access to the holdings of other libraries.” (2001, 61). Miller’s idea is a simple one, yet it is amazing how many inexperienced writers prefer to use the first book or journal they come across in the library in their writing and do not take the time to learn what the library has to offer.

Here are some practical steps that will help you to learn about your library:

1. Take a tour of the library with your class or other groups if such tours are available. While such group tours are generally less effective than conducting your own searches on a topic that interests you, they will give you a good introduction to the library and, perhaps, give you a chance to talk to a librarian.
2. Check your library’s website to see if online “virtual” tours are available. At James Madison University where I work, the librarians have developed a series of interactive online activities and quizzes which anyone wishing to learn about the JMU

libraries can take in their spare time.

3. Talk to reference librarians! They are, truly, your best source of information. They will not get mad at you if you ask them too many questions. Not only are they paid to answer your questions, but most librarians love what they do and are eager to share their expertise with others.
4. Go from floor to floor and browse the shelves. Learn where different kinds of materials are located and what they look like.
5. Pay attention to the particulars of your campus library's architecture. I am an experienced library user, but it took me some time, after I arrived at my university for the first time, to figure out that our library building has an annex and that to get to that annex I had to take a different elevator from that which would lead me to the main floors.
6. Use the library not only as a source of knowledge, but also as a source of entertainment and diversion. I like going to the library to browse through new fiction acquisitions. Many campus libraries also have excellent film and music collections.

The items on the list above will help you to acquire a general understanding of your campus library. However, the only way to gain an in-depth and meaningful knowledge of your library is to use it for specific research and writing projects. No matter how attentive you are during a library tour or, on your own, going from floor to floor and learning about all the different resources your library has to offer, it is during searches that you conduct for your research projects, that you will become most interested and involved in what you are doing. Here, therefore, is an activity which combines a practical purpose of finding research sources for a research project with a somewhat more far-reaching purpose of learning as much as you can about your campus library.

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4.4: Cyber-library: Online Resources

Besides the brick and mortar buildings, virtually all college and university libraries have a web space which is a gateway to more documents, resources, and information than any library building can house. [Click here to link to TRCC's library page.](#)

From that website, you can not only to conduct a search of the library collection, but also access millions of articles, electronic books, and other resources available on the Internet. I hasten to add that, usually, when trying to access most of those materials, it is a good idea to conduct a search from your campus library page rather than from your favorite search engine. There are three reasons for that. Firstly, most of the materials which you will find through your library site are accessible to paying subscribers only, and cannot be found via any search engine. Secondly, online library searches return organized and categorized results, complete with the date of publication and source—something that cannot be said about popular search engines. Finally, by searching online databases, we can be reasonably sure that the information we retrieve is reliable.

So, what might you expect to find on your library's website? The site of the library at James Madison University where I work offers several links. In addition to the link to the library catalog, there is a "Quick Reference" link, a link called "Research Databases," a "Periodical Locator," "Research Guides," and "Internet Search." There are also links to special collections and to the featured or new electronic databases to which the library has recently subscribed. While your school library probably uses other names for these links, the kinds of resources they offer are rather similar to what JMU's library has to offer.

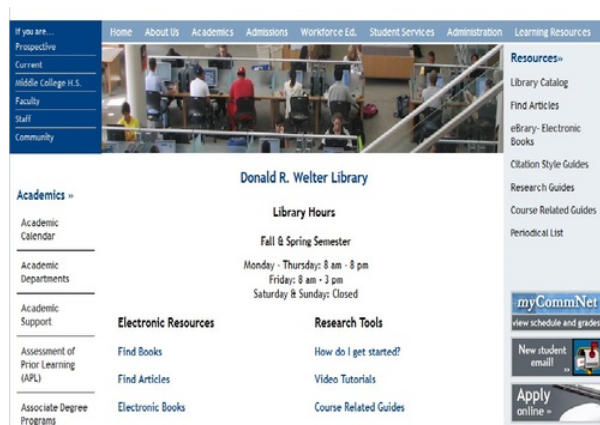


Figure 1 - A Screenshot of Three Rivers Community College library page

The titles of most of these links are self-explanatory. Obviously, the link to the library catalog allows you to search your brick and mortar library's collection. A periodical locator search will tell you what academic journals, popular magazines, and newspapers are available at your library. The Internet search option will allow you to search the World Wide Web, except that your library's Internet searching function will probably allow you to conduct metasearches, that is searches of many search engines simultaneously. However, where a link like "Research Databases" or "Research Guides" will take you, is a little less obvious. Therefore, I will cover these two types of library resources in some detail.

Let us start with the research databases. An average-size college or university subscribes to hundreds, if not thousands of online databases on just about every subject. These databases contain, at a minimum, information about titles, authors, and sources of relevant newspaper and journal articles, government documents, online archive materials, and other research sources. Most databases provide readers with abstracts (short summaries) of those materials, and a growing number of online databases offer full texts of articles. From the research database homepage, it is possible to search for a specific database or according to subject.

Research guide websites are similar to the database homepages, except that, in addition to database links, they often offer direct connections to academic journals and other relevant online resources on the research subject.

Searching online is a skill that can only be learned through frequent practice and critical reflection. Therefore, in order to become a proficient user of your library's electronic resources, you will need to visit the library's website often and conduct many searches. Although the web sites of most libraries are organized according to similar principles and offer similar types of resources, it will be

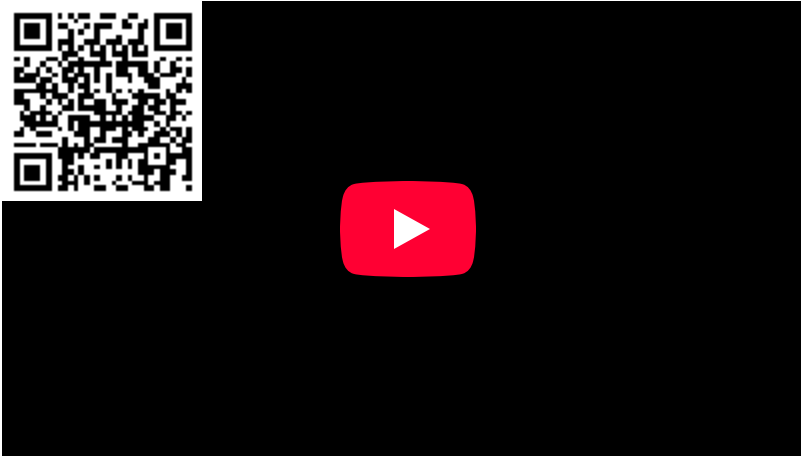
up to you as a researcher and learner to find out what your school library has to offer and to learn to use those resources. I hope that the following activities will help you in that process.

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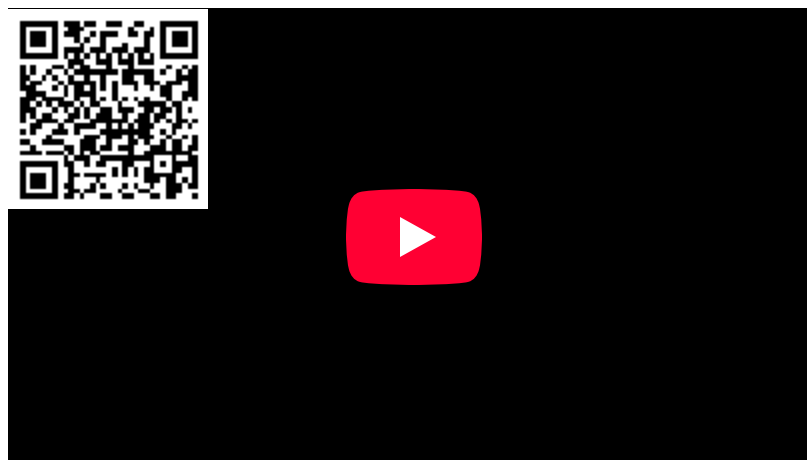
4.5: Online Database Searching

TRCC Video Tutorials

To illustrate the key principles of working with online databases, below are several videos about accessing databases at TRCC. There are other videos available on the TRCC Tutorial Page located [here](#).



Video: Finding Full Text Articles in Library Databases



Video: Searching Academic Search Premier for full text articles

Print Sources or Electronic?

In the early years of the Internet, there was a wide-spread mistrust of the World Wide Web and the information it had to offer. While some of this mistrust is still present, including among writing teachers and students, the undeniable fact is that the authority of the Internet as a legitimate and reliable source of information has increased considerably in recent years. For example, academic journals in almost every discipline compliment their printed volumes with web versions, and some have gone completely online. These online journals employ the same rigorous submission review processes as their printed counterparts. Complete texts of academic and other books are sometimes available on the Internet. Respected specialized databases and government document collections are published entirely and exclusively online.

Print and electronic sources are not created equal, and, although online and other electronic texts are gaining ground rather quickly as legitimate research resources, there is still a wide-spread, and often justified, opinion among academics and other writers that printed materials make better research sources. Some materials that are available in some libraries simply cannot be found online and vice versa. For example, if you are a Shakespeare scholar wishing to examine manuscripts from the Elizabethan times, you will not find them online. To get to them, you will have to visit the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, or a similar repository of scholarship on Shakespeare. On the other hand, if you are researching the Creative Commons movement which is a

community dedicated to reforming copyright laws in this country, then your best bet is to begin your search on the Internet at <http://www.creativecommons.org/>. Surely, after reading the website, you will need to augment your research by reading other related materials, both online and in print, but in this case, starting online rather than in the library is a reasonable idea.

As a researching writer, you should realize that, inherently, printed and electronic sources are not bad or good. Both kinds can be reliable and unreliable, although with printed materials, publishers and libraries take care of not letting utterly unreliable works through to readers. Both kinds can be appropriate and inappropriate for a specific research project. It is up to researchers and writers to learn how to select both print and electronic sources judiciously and how to evaluate them for their reliability and appropriateness for these writers' research and writing purposes.

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4.6: Determining the Suitability and Reliability of Research Sources

Much of the discussion about the relative value of printed and electronic, especially Internet, sources revolves around the issue of reliability. When it comes to libraries, the issue is more or less clear. Libraries keep books, journals, and other publications that usually undergo a rigorous pre and post-publication review process. It is a fairly safe bet that your campus library contains very few or no materials which are blatantly unreliable or false, unless those materials are kept there precisely to demonstrate their unreliability and falsehood. As a faculty member, I am sometimes asked by my university librarians to recommend titles in my academic field which, I feel, our university library should have. Of course, my opinion, as well as the opinions of my colleagues, do not provide a one-hundred-percent guarantee against errors and inaccurate facts, we use our experience and knowledge in the field to recommend certain titles and omit certain others. These faculty recommendations are the last stage in the long process before a publication gets to a campus library. Before that, every book, journal article, or other material undergoes a stringent review from the publisher's editors and other readers.

And while researchers still need to use sound judgment in deciding which library sources to use in their project, the issue is usually one of relevance and suitability for a specific research project and specific research questions rather than one of whether the information presented in the source is truthful or not.

The same is true of some electronic sources. Databases and other research sources, as well as various online research websites which accompany many of contemporary writing textbooks, for example, are subject to the same strict review process as their printed counterparts. Information contained in specialized academic and professional databases is also screened for reliability and correctness.

If, as we have established, most of the materials which you are likely to come across in your campus library are generally trustworthy, then your task as a researcher is to determine the appropriateness of the information which these books, journals, and other materials contain, for your particular research project. It is a simple question, really: will my research sources help me answer the research questions that I am posing in my project? Will they help me learn as much as I can about my topic and create a rhetorically effective and interesting text for my readers?

Consider the following example. Recently, the topic of the connection between certain anti-depressant drugs and suicidal tendencies among teenagers that take those drugs has received a lot of coverage in the media. Suppose that you are interested in researching this topic further. Suppose also that you want not only to give statistical information about the problem in your paper, but also to study first-hand accounts of the people, who have been negatively affected by the anti-depressants. When you come to your campus library, you have no trouble locating the latest reports and studies that give you a general overview of your topic, including rates of suicidal behavior in teenagers who took the drugs, tabulated data on the exact relationships between the dosage of the drugs and the changes in the patients' moods, and so on. All this may be useful information, and there is a good chance that, as a writer, you will still find a way to use it in your paper. You could, for example, provide the summary of the statistics in order to introduce the topic to your readers.

However, this information does not fulfill your research purpose completely. You set out to find out, first-hand, what it is like to be a teenager whose body and mind are affected by the anti-depressants, yet the printed materials that you have found so far offer no such insight. They fulfill your goal only partially. To find such first-hand accounts, then, you will either have to keep looking in the library or to conduct interviews with the people who have affected by these drugs, if you can locate such people.

Suitability of Sources

Determine how suitable a particular source is for your current research project. To do this, consider the following factors:

- **Scope:** What topics and subtopics does the source cover? Is it a general overview of your subject or it is a specialized resource?
- **Audience:** Who is the intended audience for the text? If the text itself is too basic or too specialized, it may not match the expectations and needs of your own target audience.
- **Timeliness:** When was the source published? Does it represent the latest information, theories, and views on the subject? Bear in mind, though, that if you are conducting a historical investigation, you will probably need to consult older materials, too.

Authority

What the credentials of the author or authors of the sources? This may be particularly important when you use Internet sources since a lot of materials by various authors are posted online. As a part of your evaluation of the source's authority, you should also pay attention to the kinds of external sources that were used during its creation. Look through the bibliography or list of works cited attached to the text. Not only will it help you determine how reliable and suitable the source is, but it may also provide you with further leads for your own research. Try asking the above questions of any source you are using for a research project you are currently conducting.

Reliability of Internet Sources

Charles Lowe, the author of the essay "The Internet Can be a Wonderful Place, But...", offers the following opinion of the importance of the Internet as a research source for contemporary researchers:

"To a generation raised in the electronic media culture, the Internet is an environment where you feel more comfortable, more at home than the antiquated libraries and research arenas of the pre-electronic, print culture. To you, instructors just don't get it when they advise against using the Internet for research or require the bulk of the sources for a research paper to come from the library" (129-130).

Indeed, the Internet has become the main source of information not only for college students, but also for a lot of people outside of the academe. And while I do not advise you to stay away from the Internet when researching and I generally do not require my own students to use primarily printed sources, I do know that working with Internet sources places additional demands on the researcher and the writer.

Because much of the Internet is a democratic, open space, and because anyone with a computer can post materials online, evaluating online sources is not always easy. A surprisingly large number of people believe much of the information on the Internet, even if this information is blatantly misleading or if its authors have a self-serving agenda. In the chapter of this book dedicated to research and writing in academic disciplines, we discussed how authority of a text can influence its reception by the readers. I think many students uncritically accept information they find on the internet because some of the sites on which this information appears look and sound very authoritative. Used to believing the published word, inexperienced writers often fall for such information as legitimate research data.

So, what are some of strategies you can use to determine that reliability? The key to successful evaluation of Internet research sources, as any other research sources, is application of your critical reading and thinking skills. In order to determine the reliability of every source, including online sources, it is generally useful to conduct a basic rhetorical analysis of that source. When deciding whether to use a particular website as a research source, every writer should ask and answer the following questions:

- Who is the author (or, authors) of the website and the materials presented on it?
- What is known about the site's author or authors and its publishers and their agendas and goals?
- What is the purpose of the website?
- Who is the target audience of the website
- How do the writing style and the design of the website contribute to (or detract from) its meaning?

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4.7: Website Authors and Publishers

Just like with a printed source, first, we need to consider the author and the publisher of a website. Lowe whom I mentioned earlier suggest that first we need to look at the tag in the website's URL. Whether it is a ".com," a ".org," a ".net," or a ".edu" site can offer useful clues about the types of materials located on the site and about their credibility.

In addition to the three most common URL tags which are listed above, websites of military organizations use the extension ".mil" while websites hosted in other countries have other tags which are usually abbreviations of those countries' names. Sites of government agencies end in ".gov." For example, most sites hosted in Great Britain have the tag "uk" which stands for "United Kingdom." Websites out of Italy usually have the tag "it," and so on.

Typically, a ".com" site is set up to sell or promote a product or service. Therefore, if you are researching Nike shoes, you will probably not want to rely on <http://www.nike.com/> if you want to get a more or less unbiased review of the product. While Nike's website may provide some useful information about the products it sells, the site's main purpose is to sell Nike's goods, playing up the advantages of their products their competitors'.

Keep in mind that not all ".com" websites try to sell something. Sometimes, academics and other professionals obtain ".com" addresses because they are easy to obtain. For example, the (www.joeselvaggio.com). Political candidates running for office also often choose ".com" addresses for their campaign websites. In every case, you need to apply your critical reading skills and your judgment when evaluating a website.

The ".org" sites usually belong to organizations, including political groups. These sites can present some specific challenges to researchers trying to evaluate their credibility and usefulness for their research. To understand these challenges, let us consider the ".org" sites of two political research organizations, also known as "think tanks." One is the conservative Heritage Foundation (<http://www.heritage.org>), and the is the traditionally liberal Center for National Policy (<http://www.cnponline.org>).

Both sites have "About" pages intended to explain to their readers the goals and purposes of the organizations they represent. The Heritage Foundation's site, contains the following information:

...The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute - a think tank - whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. (<http://www.heritage.org/about>)

This statement can tell a researcher a lot about the research articles and other materials contained in the site. It tells us that the authors of the site are not neutral, nor do they pretend to be. Instead, they are advancing a particular political agenda, and so, when used as research sources, the writings on the site should not be seen as unbiased "truths", but as arguments.

The same is true of the Center for National Policy's website, although its authors choose a different rhetorical strategy explaining their political leanings to the readers. They write:

The Center for National Policy (CNP) is a non-profit, non-partisan public policy organization located in Washington, DC. Founded in 1981, the Center's mission is to engage national leaders with new policy options and innovative programs designed to advance progressive ideas in the interest of all Americans (http://www.cnponline.org/people_and_programs.html).

It takes further study of the Center's website, as well as a certain knowledge of the American political scene to realize that the organization is leaning towards the left of the political spectrum. The websites of both organizations contain an impressive amount of research, commentaries, and other materials designed to advance the groups' causes.

When evaluating ".org" sites, it is important to realize that they belong to organizations, and each organization has a purpose or a cause. Therefore, each organizational website will try to advance that cause and fulfill that purpose by publishing appropriate materials. Even if the research and arguments presented on those sites are solid (and they often are), there is no such thing as an

unbiased and disinterested source. This is especially true of political and social organizations whose sole purpose is to promote agendas.

The Internet addresses ending in “.edu” are rather self-explanatory—they belong to universities and other educational institutions. On these sites, we can expect academic articles and other writings, as well as, often, papers and other works created by students. These websites are also useful resources if you are looking for information on a specific college or university. Be aware, though, that typically any college faculty member or student can obtain web space from their institution and publish materials of their own choosing on that space. Thus, some of the texts that appear on “.edu” sites may be personal rather than academic.

In recent years, some political research organizations have begun to use web addresses with the “edu” tag. One of these organizations is The Brookings Institution, whose address is <http://www.brookings.edu>.

Government websites which end in “.gov” can be useful sources of information on the latest legislation and other regulatory documents. The website with a “.net” extension can belong to commercial organizations or online forums.

Website Content

Now that we have established principles for evaluating the authors and publishers of web materials, let us look at the content of the writing. As I have stated above, like all writing, web writing is argumentative, therefore it is important to recognize that authors of web texts work to promote their agendas or highlight the events, organizations, and opinions that they consider right, important, and worthy of public attention. Different writers work from different assumptions and try to reach different audiences. Websites of political organizations are prime examples of that.

Website Design and Style

The style and layout of any text is a part of that text’s message, and online research sources are no exception. Well-designed and written websites add to the ethos (credibility) of their authors while badly designed and poorly written ones detract from it. Sometimes, however, a website with a good-looking design can turn out to be an unreliable or unsuitable research source.

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4.8: Conclusion

Do not Accept A Source Just because it Sounds or Looks Authoritative

Good writers try to create authoritative texts. Having authority in their writing helps them advance their arguments and influence their audiences. To establish such authority, writers use a variety of methods. As has been discussed throughout this chapter, it is important for any researcher to recognize authoritative and credible research sources. On the other hand, it is also important not to accept authoritative sources without questioning them. After all, the purpose of every researcher piece of writing is to create new views and new theories on the subject, not to repeat the old ones, however good and well-presented those old theories may be. Therefore, when working with reliable and suitable research sources, consider them solid foundations which will help you to achieve a new understanding of your subject, which will be your own. Applying the critical source evaluation techniques laid out in this chapter will help you to accomplish this goal.

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4.9: Writing Activities

Writing Activity 4A: Examining the Same Topic through Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary and secondary sources can offer writers different views of the same topic. This activity invites you to explore the different perspectives that you may get after investigating the same subject through primary and secondary sources. It should help us see how our views of different topics depend on the kinds of sources we use.

Find several primary sources on a topic that interests you. Include archival documents, first-hand accounts, lab experiment results, interviews, surveys, and so on. Depending on how much time you have for this project, you may or may not be able to consult all of the above source types. In either case, try to consult sources of three or four different kinds.

Next, write a summary of what you learned about your subject as a result of your primary source investigation. Mention facts, dates, important people, opinions, theories, and anything that seems important or interesting.

Now, conduct a brief secondary source search on the same subject. Use books, journals, popular magazines and newspapers, Internet sites, and so on. Write a summary of your findings.

Finally, compare the two summaries. What differences do you see? What new ideas, perspectives, ideas, or opinions did your secondary source search yield? As a result of these two searches, have you obtained different accounts of the same research subject? Pay special attention to the differences in descriptions, accounts, or interpretations of the same subject. Notice what secondary sources add to the treatment of the subject and what they take away, compared to the primary sources.

Writing Activity 4B: Conducting a Library Search for a Writing Project.

If you have a research and writing topic in mind for your next project, head for your brick-and-mortar campus library. As soon as you enter the building, go straight to the reference desk and talk to a reference librarian. Be aware that some of the people behind the reference desk may be student assistants working there. As a former librarian assistant myself and as a current library user, I know that most student assistants know their job rather well, but sometimes they need help from the professionals. So, don't be surprised if the first person behind reference desk that you speak to will ask someone else to help him or her help you.

Describe your research interests to the librarian. Be pro-active. The worst disservice you can do yourself at this point is to be, sound, and look disinterested. Remember that the librarian can help you if you, yourself, are passionate about the subject of your research and if, and this is very important, the paper you are writing is not due the next day. So, before you go to the library, try to formulate some concrete research questions. For example, instead of saying that you are interested in, say, dolphins, you may be able to ask a questions about the attempts by people to train dolphins as rescue animals or some other similar topic.

If the librarian senses that you have a rather vague idea about what to research and writing about, he or she may point you to general reference sources such as indexes, encyclopedias, and research guides. While those may prove to be excellent thought-triggering publications, use them sparingly and do not succumb to the temptation to choose the first research topic just because your library has a lot of resources on it. After all, your research and writing will be successfully only when you are deeply interested in and passionate about the subject of your investigation.

If you have a more concrete idea about what you would like to research and write about, the reference librarian will be likely to point you to the library's online catalog. I have often seen, in campus libraries across the country, librarians doing searches together with the students, helping them to come up with or refine a writing topic.

Find several different types of materials pertaining to your topic. Include books and academic articles. Don't forget popular magazines and newspapers. Popular press covers just about any subject, event, or phenomenon, but does it differently from academic publications. Also, don't neglect to look in the government documents section to see if there has been any legislation or government regulation relevant to your research subject. Remember that at this stage of the research process, your goal is to learn as much as you can about your topic by casting your research next as far and wide as you can. So, do not limit yourself to the first few sources you will find. Keep looking.

Remember that your goal is to find the best information available. Therefore, you have to look in a variety of sources. If time is a concern, however, you may not be able to study the books dedicated to your topic in detail. In this case, you may decide to focus your research entirely on shorter texts, such as journal and magazine articles, websites, government documents, and so on. It is,

however, a good idea to at least browse through the books on your topic to see whether they contain any information or leads worth investigating further.

Writing Activity 4C: Learning your Cyber-library

- Go to your school library's website and explore the kinds of resources it has to offer.
- Conduct searches on a subject you are currently investigating, or interested in investigating in the future, using the a periodical locator resource (if you library maintains a separate periodical locator resource). Then, conduct similar searches of electronic databases and research guides.
- Summarize, whether in an oral presentation or in writing, the kind of sources you have found and your search process. Pay attention to both successes and failures that occurred as you searched.

Writing Activity 4D: Evaluating the Content of Websites

Go to one of the following websites:

- The Heritage Foundation (<http://www.heritage.org>)
- The Center for National Policy (<http://www.cnponline.org>)
- The Brookings Institution (<http://www.brookings.edu>)
- The American Enterprise Institute (www.aei.org)

Or choose another website suggested by your instructor.

Browse through the content of the site have to offer and consider the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of the site?
2. What is its intended audience? How do we know?
3. What are the main subjects discussed on the sites?
4. What assumptions and biases do the authors of the publications on the site seem to have? How do we know?
5. What research methods and sources do the authors of these materials use?
6. How does research help the writers of the site state their case?

Apply the same analysis to any online sources you are using for one of your research projects.

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5: Acknowledging Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism

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5.1: Acknowledgment of Sources is a Rhetorical Act

To an inexperienced writer, citing and documenting sources may seem like busywork. Yet, when you cite your external sources in the text of your paper and when you document them at the end of your piece in a list of works cited or a bibliography, you are performing a rhetorical act. Complete and accurate citing and documenting of all external sources help writers achieve three very important goals:

1. It enhances your credibility as a writer. By carefully and accurately citing your external sources in the text and by documenting them at the end of your paper you show your readers that you are serious about your subject, your research, and the argument which you are making in your paper. You demonstrate that you have studied your subject in sufficient depth, and by reading credible and authoritative sources.
2. It helps you to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is trying to pass someone else's ideas or writing as your own. It is a serious offense that can damage the reputation of a writer forever and lead to very serious consequences if committed in an academic or professional setting. Later on in the chapter, we will discuss plagiarism and ways to avoid it in detail.
3. The presence of complete citations of sources in your paper will help you demonstrate to your readers that you are an active participant in the community of readers, writers, researchers, and learners. It shows that you are aware of the conversations that are going on among writers and researchers in your field and that you are willing to enter those conversations by researching and writing about the subjects that interest you. By providing enough information about the sources which you used in you own research and writing, you give other interested readers the opportunity to find out more about your subject and, thus, to enter in a conversation with you.

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5.2: The Logic and Structure of a Source Citation

Every time writers cite and document their sources, they do it in two places in the paper—in the text itself and at the end of the paper, in a list of works cited or bibliography. A citation is incomplete and, by and large, useless to the readers, if either of the parts is missing. Consider the following example, in which I cite an academic journal article using the Modern Language Association citation system. Please note that I give this example at this point in the chapter only to demonstrate the two parts of a citation. Later on, we will discuss how to cite and document different kinds of sources using different documentation systems, in full detail.

In-text citations

In-text citations are also known as parenthetical citations or parenthetical references because, at the end of the citation, parentheses are used.

Example 5.2.1:

In her essay “If Winston Weather Would Just Write to Me on E-mail,” published in the journal *College Composition and Communication*, writer and teacher Wendy Bishop shares her thoughts on the nature of writing: “[I see...writing as a mixture of mess and self-discipline, of self-history [and] cultural history.” (101).

The Citation in the List of Works Cited

Example 5.2.2:

Bishop, Wendy. “If Winston Weather Would Just Write to Me on E-mail.” *College Composition and Communication*. 46.1 (1995): 97-103.

The reasons why each citation, regardless of the type of source and the documentation system being used has two parts are simple. Writers acknowledge and document external sources for several reasons. One of these reasons is to give their readers enough information and enable them, if necessary, to find the same source which the paper mentions. Therefore, if we look at the kinds of information provided in the citation (page numbers, titles, authors, publishers, and publication dates), it becomes clear that this information is sufficient to locate the source in the library, bookstore, or online.

When to Cite and Document Sources

The brief answer to this question is “always.” Every time you use someone else’s ideas, arguments, opinions, or data, you need to carefully acknowledge their author and source. Keep in mind that you are not just borrowing others’ words when you use sources in your writing. You are borrowing ideas. Therefore, even if you are not directly citing the source, but paraphrase or summarize it, you still need to cite it both in the text and at the end of the paper in a list of works cited or in a list of references.

The only exception is when you are dealing with what is known as “common knowledge.” Common knowledge consists of facts that are so widely known that they do not require a source reference. For instance, if you say in your writing that the Earth rotates around the Sun or that Ronald Reagan was a US President, you do not need to cite the sources of this common knowledge formally.

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5.3: Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a problem that exists not only on college, university, and high school campuses. In recent years, several high profile cases, some involving famous writers and journalists have surfaced, in which these writers were accused of either presenting someone else's work as their own or fabricating works based on fictitious or unreliable research.

With the advent of the Internet, it has become relatively easy to download complete papers. Various people and organizations, sometimes masquerading as "writing consultants" promise students that they would write a paper on any subject and of any level of complexity for a hefty fee. Clearly, the use of such services by student writers is dishonest and dishonorable. If your college or university is like mine, it probably has adopted strict policies for dealing with plagiarizing writers. Punishments for intentional plagiarism are severe and may include not only a failing grade for the class but even an expulsion from the university.

In addition to intentional plagiarism, there is also the unintentional kind. Experience shows that beginning writers' work sometimes include passages which could be called plagiarized because such writers often do not know how to cite and document external sources properly or do not understand that importance of following proper citation practices.

Observing the following practices will help you avoid plagiarism:

As you research, keep careful notes of your sources. As you take notes for your research project, keep track of what materials in those notes come from external sources and what material is yours. Keep track of all your sources, including interviews and surveys, photographs and drawings, personal e-mails and conversations. Be sure to record the following information:

- Author
- Title
- Date of publication
- Publisher

Remember that when you use external sources, you are borrowing not the words of another writer, but his or her ideas, theories, and opinions. Therefore, even if you summarize or paraphrase a source, be sure to give it full credit. Writers used to have to record this information on separate note cards. However, with the proliferation of online and other electronic tools which allow us to keep track of our research, the task of recording and reflecting on source-related information has become easier.

Anti-Plagiarism Activity

Read the following four paragraphs. They are from a research source, an article in *The New Yorker* magazine. The other three are from student papers which attempt to use the article as an external source. As you read consider the following questions:

- Would you call the student's passage or its parts plagiarized from the original? Why or why not?
- If any parts of the student's passages are plagiarized what needs to be changed in order to avoid plagiarism? Keep in mind that you may need to rewrite the whole Paragraph and not just make changes in separate sentences.
- Which of the student passages will require more significant rewriting than others and why?

Example 5.3.1

Source Paragraph (from the article "Personality Plus," by Malcolm Gladwell. *New Yorker*, Sept 20, 2004).

"One of the most popular personality tests in the world is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a psychological-assessment system based on Carl Jung's notion that people make sense of the world through a series of psychological frames. Some people are extraverts, some are introverts. Some process information through logical thought. Some are directed by their feelings. Some make sense of the world through intuitive leaps. Others collect data through their senses".

Student Paragraph 1

The Myers-Briggs Test is a very popular way to assess someone's personality type. Philosopher Carl Jung believed that people make sense of the world in different ways. Some are extraverts and some are introverts. According to this idea, people process information either by logical reasoning or through intuition or feelings.

Student Paragraph 2

According to writer Malcolm Cladwell, One of the most popular personality tests in the world is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a psychological-assessment system based on Carl Jung's notion that people make sense of the world through a series of psychological frames. Cladwell states that the test is based on the idea by Carl Jung that people make sense of the world through a series of psychological frames. According to Jung, some people are extroverts and some are introverts. Some process information through logical input, and some through feelings. Some make sense of the world through intuitive leaps. Others collect data through their senses.

Student Paragraph 3

One of the most popular personality tests in the world is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a psychological-assessment system based on Carl Jung's notion that people make sense of the world through a series of psychological frames (Cladwell 43). The test is based on Jung's theory that people understand the world differently. This is why we have extroverts and introverts and people who act either based on reasoning or feelings (Cladwell).

Major Citation Systems

In this part of the chapter, I will explain the major citation and documentation systems which you are likely to encounter in your writing for college classes and beyond. The information in this section is not meant to be memorized. Instead, I encourage you to use this material as a reference source, when you are writing a paper and need to cite and document sources correctly, using one of the systems described below, refer to this chapter.

Please note that the following sections include only the basic information about each of the citation styles. There are plenty of excellent sources explaining and illustrating the differences between citation systems. I recommend the cite of the [Online Writing Center at Purdue University](#).

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5.4: Conclusion

Avoiding plagiarism and acknowledging your external sources completely and accurately are vital parts of the writing process. Your credibility as a writer and the reception that you work will receive from readers may depend on how well you acknowledge your sources. By following the guidelines presented in this chapter and by seeking out more knowledge about the rules of citing and documenting from the publications listed in this chapter, you will become a more competent, more professional, and more credible writer. This chapter covers only the basics of source citing and documenting. For more resources this topic and the various styles of documentation, see the Appendix to this book.

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6: Research Writing in The Academic Disciplines

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6.1: 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.

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6.2: Intellectual and Discourse Communities

My contention throughout this book has been that, in order 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.

To examine your place in discourse communities, complete "**Writing Activity 6A: Analyzing Intellectual and Discourse Communities**" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

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.

Rhetorical analysis is a key skill in critically examining sources. Complete "**Writing Activity 6B: Rhetorical Analysis of Academic Texts**" in the "Writing Activities" section of this chapter.

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6.3: 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.

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6.4: 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.

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6.5: Investigating Histories of Academic Discussions

The subjects of academic research, debates, and disagreements develop over time. To you as a student, it may seem that when you read textbooks and other professional literature in your major or other classes you are taking, you are taking in permanent and stable truths. Yet, as we have seen from the previous two sections of this chapter, members of academic communities decide what topics and questions are important and worth researching and discussing before these discussions make it to the textbook or the pages of an academic journal.

As a student, you will be invited to examine the history and development of an issue, problem, or question in your major or other academic disciplines that interests you. In other words, you will be a historian of an academic discipline whose job will be to trace the development of a topic, question, or issue important to one academic community.

How far you will take this project will depend on the time you have, the structure of your class, and the advice of your instructor. For example, you may be limited to conducting a simple series of searches and preparing an oral presentation for your classmates. Or, you may decide to make a full-length writing project out of this assignment, at the end creating a researched essay, an I-search paper, or some other written document presenting and discussing the results of your research.

In either case, try to follow the following steps during this project. Depending on the instructions from your teacher, you may work by yourself or with others.

In order to select an important issue or question that is actively discussed in your academic or professional community, first look through the textbooks in your major or any other academic discipline you are interested in.

Next, conduct a library search for journals in the field and briefly look over what topics, issues, or questions they are concerned with. Conduct a web search for reliable sites where these professional discussions are taking place. If you are taking a class or classes in the discipline you are studying, discuss this assignment and the emerging topic of your investigation with your professor. Try to find out how this topic is explained to the general public in popular magazines and newspapers.

Remember that your goal at this stage of the process is not to learn and report on the current state of this discussion (although such reporting may be a part of your project), but to investigate its historical development as an issue or a problem in the academic discipline of your interest.

Develop a general understanding of the current state of the issue or topic you are interested in. Be sure to include the following elements:

- What is the topic of discussion?
- What evidence of the topic's importance for your academic discipline have you found?
- What is being said about the issue and by whom?
- Are there opposing sides in the discussion and on what ground do they oppose each other?
- What arguments do all the sides in the discussion use?

Conduct research into the origin and the history of your topic. The time range of your investigation will depend on the topic you choose. Some academic discussions go back centuries while others may have started only several years ago. Your research sources may include older textbooks, academic journals and conference proceedings from years past, even articles about your subject written for popular magazines and newspapers and designed to reach a non-specialized audience. As a historian, you will need to cover the following areas:

- The first time the topic or issue gets significant attention from the professional community. Keep in mind that your job is not necessarily to pinpoint the exact date when the first publication on the topic appeared or the first discussion about it took place, although finding that out certainly will not hurt. Rather, try to find out the general time period when the discussion originated or the topic was attracting attention from academic professionals.
- What events in the academic world and society as a whole may have triggered the discussion of this topic? Since the academic world is a part of society as a whole, academic interests and discussions are usually somehow connected with what society as a whole is interested in and concerned about.
- Name a few key figures and events that contributed to the prominence of the topic or issue you are investigating.

- Identify times of paradigm shift for your subject. What event, both in the academic discipline and in society at large, may have caused significant shifts in people's thinking about the issue?
- Try to predict the future development of the discussion. Will it remain an important issue in your discipline or will the discussion end? Why or why not? What factors, events, and people, both in the academic worlds and in society as a whole may contribute to this. How do you suppose the discussion of the topic will evolve in the future? For example, will the questions and issues at stake be revised and redefined?
- 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.

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6.6: 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 key words "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 bad 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 in 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 excitement, surprise, skepticism, and a little concern about the future implications of our ability to clone living creatures. Writing for *The Sunday Times*, in 1998, Steve Connor says that Dolly would undergo tests 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 undisputable 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.

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6.7: Research Activity: Interviewing Academic Professionals

In order to learn more about the conventions of academic discourse, interview a professor at your college. You may wish to talk to one of the teachers whose classes you are currently taking. Or, you may choose to interview a teacher whom you do not yet know personally, but who teaches a course that interests you or who works in an academic major that you are considering. In either case, the purpose of your interview will be to learn about the conventions of research and writing in your interlocutor's academic discipline. You can design your own interview questions. To learn about designing interviews, read the appropriate section in Chapter 7 of this book. To get you started, here are three suggestions:

- Ask to describe, in general, the kinds of research and writing that professionals in that academic field conduct. Focus on research goals, methods, and ways in which research results are discussed in the field's literature.
- Discuss how a specific text from the academic discipline, such as a book or a journal article reflects the principles and approaches covered in the first question.
- Ask for insights on learning the discourse of the discipline.

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 of 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. For advice on locating such sources, see Chapter 11 of this book.

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6.8: 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 trouble-shooting 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 you 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

Example 6.8.1:

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.

Example 6.8.2:

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.

Putting The Writer Back into Writing

If you suspect that you might have passages like the one above in your own academic writing, try to locate them. Then, make them your own by using sources for your rhetorical purpose rather than letting your sources control you. Follow the following suggestions:

- Do something with every source and every external reference. Sources, no matter how authoritative, do not speak for themselves. It is up to you as a writer to explain their significance for your paper and to comment on them. Therefore, every time you need to use an external source in your writing, explain to your readers what that source does for your argument and why you are using it.
- Establish and assert your authority over the subject of your writing and over your sources. It is your paper, and therefore it your voice, your opinions, and your theories that really count in it. External sources are useful learning and argument tools, but it is still you who does the learning and the arguing.
- If you summarize and paraphrase your sources, make sure your readers know where a reference to one source ends and a reference to the next one begins.
- Make sure your readers know whether it is your source speaking or you. If you summarize or paraphrase your sources, rather than quoting them directly, do so in such a way that your audience knows where the summary or paraphrase ends and your own commentary on it begins.
- Carefully analyze what information about your sources your readers need. For example, if most of your readers have not studied your sources in detail, provide them with enough information about the sources.
- Apply the conventions of working with sources that exist in your academic discipline.

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6.9: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

Purpose

Creating an annotated bibliography of your research sources can help you take control of them and put your own voice and personality back into your research writing. Unlike conventional bibliographies that simply provide information about the work's author, title, publisher, and so on, each entry of an annotated bibliography briefly summarizes an entry and then evaluates its possible application to research and writing.

According to Owen Williams, a librarian at the library of the University of Minnesota, annotated bibliographies are created with the following purposes:

- To review literature on a particular subject.
- To illustrate the quality of research that you have done
- To provide examples of the types of sources available
- To describe other items on the topic that might be of interest to the reader.

Williams then provides an example of an entry from an annotated bibliography:

“Sewell, W. (1989). *Weaving a program: Literate programming in WEB*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Sewell explains the code language within these pages including certain lines of code as examples. One useful idea that Sewell uses is to explain characters and how they work in the programming of a Web Page. He also goes through and describes how to make lists and a title section. This will be very useful because all Web Pages have a title section. This author also introduces Pascal which I am not sure if I will include in my manual but after I read more about it I can decide whether this will be helpful to future users. This book will not be the basis of my manual but will add some key points, which are described above.”

Note that the author of this entry not only summarizes the content of a source, but also evaluates the usefulness of this source a specific research project. Annotated bibliographies are not just exercises in the rules of citation. Instead, they help writers to begin the transition from reading sources into writing about them. By combining evaluation with description, annotated bibliographies help writers approach their research actively by beginning to make sense of their sources early on in the research process.

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.

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6.10: 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.

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6.11: Writing Activities

Writing Activity 6A: Analyzing Intellectual and Discourse Communities

List all intellectual and discourse communities to which you belong. Examples of such communities are your academic major, any clubs or other academic or non-academic groups you belong to, your sorority or fraternity, and so on. Do not limit yourself to the groups with which you interact while in school. If you are a member of any virtual communities on the Internet, such as discussion groups, etc., include them in this list as well.

One you have listed all the intellectual and discourse communities to which you belong, consider the following questions:

- What topics of discussion, issues, problems, or concerns keep these communities together? And what constitutes new knowledge for your group? Is it created experimentally, through discussion, or through a combination of these two and other methods?
- How would you characterize the kinds of language which each of these communities use? Is it formal, informal, complex, simple, and so on? How are the community's reasons for existence you listed in the first question reflected in their language?
- When you entered into the community, did you have to change your discourse, both oral and written, in any way, to be accepted and to participate in the discussions of the community? This might be a good time to consider all the linguistic adjustments you had to make becoming a college student or entering your academic major.
- Think of several classes you are currently taking. How do the discourses used in them differ from one another? Think about topics discussed, ways of making knowledge accepted in them, the degree of formality of the language used, and so on.
- Does your community or group produce any written documents? These may include books, professional journals, newsletters, and other documents. Don't forget the papers that you write as a student in your classes. Those papers are also examples of your intellectual community's discourse.
- What is the purpose of those documents, their intended audience, and the language that they use? How different are these documents from one community to the next? Compare, for example, a paper you wrote for your psychology class and one for a literature class.
- How often does a community you belong to come into contact with other intellectual and discourse groups? What kinds of conversations take place? How are conflicts and disagreements negotiated and resolved? How does each group adjust its discourse to hear the other side and be heard by it?

After completing this activity, you will begin to see knowledge making as a social process. I also hope that you will begin to notice the differences that exist in ways that different groups of people use language, reading, and writing. As persuasive and rhetorical mechanisms, reading and writing are supposed to reach between people and groups.

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.

Writing Activity 6B: Rhetorical Analysis of Academic Texts

In consultation with your instructor, select two or three leading journals or other professional publications in your academic major or any other academic discipline in which you are interested. Next, conduct a rhetorical analysis of the writing which appears in them. Consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the articles and other materials that appear in the journals? Talk about this purpose as a whole; then select one or two articles and discuss their purpose in detail. Be sure to give concrete examples and details.
- Who are the intended audience of these publications? What specific elements in the writing which appears there can help us decide?
- Consider the structure and format of the writings in the journals. How do they connect with the purpose of the writing and the intended audience? For instance, what kinds of evidence or citation systems do their authors' use?
- Discuss your results with your classmates and your instructor, or prepare a formal paper reporting and analyzing the results of your research.

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7: Writing Resource Units

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7.1: Basic Page Formatting in MLA



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7.2: In-text Citations in MLA

The Basic Rules of In-text Citations

A common question many students have is "How do I include a quote in my essay?"

You have begun drafting your paper and you are including information from other texts. This information might include quotes, paraphrases, facts, statistics or evidence. Using this material in your essay requires that you acknowledge the source of the information. This acknowledgement is known as "**in-text**" or "**parenthetical**" citations.

You are not expected to memorize everything here. However, after reviewing this material, you should be able to do the following:

1. answer the questions "What is a signal phrase?" and "What is a parenthetical reference?"
2. explain why it is important to cite information properly in your essay
3. demonstrate how to cite a source used within your essay.

Read the material in the following links and watch the short videos below.

1. [MLA In-text Citations](#) at Bedford/St. Martin's *Research and Documentation Online*
2. Answer the questions on this [quiz](#) from the University of Illinois - Springfield. Conduct an internet search to find the correct answers if necessary.

Click [here for a helpful quick guide](#) for in-text citations from Kirkwood Community College Library Services (Cedar Rapids, IA).





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7.3: Formatting a Works Cited Page

Formatting a Works Cited Page in MLA

So, you have included quotes, paraphrases, or other information from sources in your paper. Often, your instructor will ask you to include a Works Cited page at the end of the essay. A Works Cited page is a list of sources that you have used in your paper. There are several popular citation styles that you might encounter in college including MLA, Chicago and APA. In English 101 and in many of the humanities, we use MLA (Modern Language Association) format.

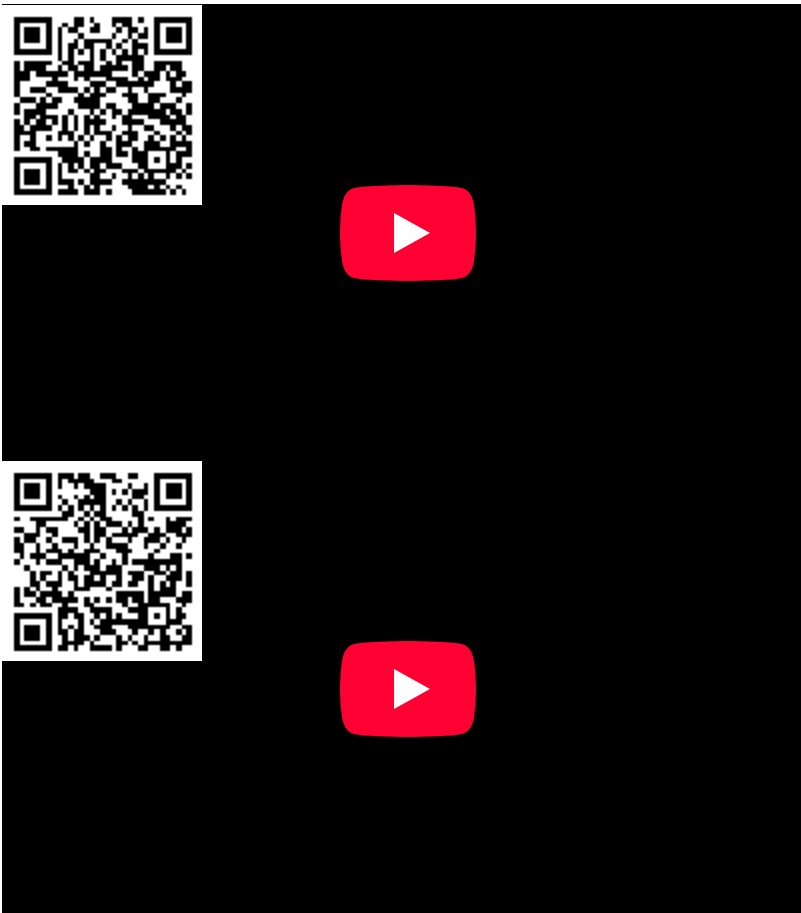
Citing sources makes it easier for readers to find key information about the sources that you used, places you within a larger conversation about a subject and by acknowledging your sources, you can avoid plagiarism.

After completing this unit, you should be able to 1) explain the purpose of a Works Cited page and 2) create and properly format a Works Cited page.

Click [here for a Works Cited page formatting guide for MS Word](#).

Here is a helpful [Quick Reference to MLA Citation Style](#)

View the following video lessons about creating a Works Cited page.



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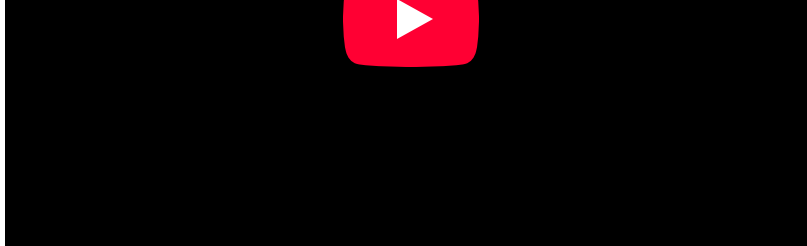
7.4: Citing Websites

This video provides guidelines for citing web sources.



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7.5: Thesis Statements



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