Critical Reading, Critical Writing

Authors:

Kathy Boylan, English Department (Virginia Western Community College)

Elizabeth Browning, English Department (Virginia Western Community College)

Katelyn Burton, Brown Library (Virginia Western Community College)

Kirsten DeVries, English Department (Virginia Western Community College)

Jenifer Kurtz, English Department (Virginia Western Community College)

Ann Moser, English Department (Virginia Western Community College)

Dale Dulaney, Brown Library

Kalyca Schultz, Brown Library

Ann Filmore

Johnny Cook

Elizabeth Caruso, Howard Community College

Cate Bombick, Howard Community College

Emily Russell, Howard Community College

Jeff Moore, Howard Community College

Sarah Johnson, Howard Community College

Karen Kyger, Howard Community College

Nic Learned, Howard Community College

Jeremy O'Roark, Howard Community College

Peer Reviewers:

Sarah Chitwood, English Department

Nancy Francisco, Academic Link, Writing Center
Janet Little, English Department
Annie Woodford, English Department
Christine Woods, English Department

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SP/FA23 Edition

Check with your instructor to make sure you are using the most current edition.

Introduction

SARAH JOHNSON; BETH CARUSO; AND NIC LEARNED

Welcome to College Composition: An introductory letter to students

Nobody majors in College Composition. Why is that?

The homework is one possible answer: there tends to be a lot of it, and it tends to require a different kind of engagement than the homework you might do in your other classes. For instance, when asked to simply read from a history textbook, you need only remember key information. And in disciplines like math, there's typically a clear right or wrong answer. But with writing, there is no clear path–no prescription telling you exactly what to say or how to say it. Instead, you have to wrestle with the material, and you have to push yourself to think thoughts that nobody has ever thought before.

But the main reason that nobody majors in College Composition is likely that with the exception of ~~torturing students~~ teaching, there's no career in it. Honestly, when is the last time you heard a parent or friend say to someone, "Hey, I have some College Composition work I need done. Do you know anybody who does a good job and won't overcharge me?"

So why are you here? Why are you spending time on something that requires about as much effort as anything else you will do in college? There are two reasons:

First, nearly every other major in college will require writing. That idea is an easy sell for text-heavy disciplines like history, psychology, religion, etc.. But for those of you math types—who see numbers as truth and the words that surround them as fluffy

stuff—it can be a bit tougher to see how the ability to write well is necessary for you to succeed in your courses. We must admit that at first, it might not be. But as you progress through your major, you will find that writing becomes an increasingly integral part of your work—the part where you explain to us numbers-impaired folks what all those crazy equations mean and why we should care about them. Similarly, you aspiring engineers will have to explain how your work can be lucrative to investors, just as you cyber-security folks will need to convince your clients that you know what you're doing.

The second (and more important) reason that you are here has to do with what makes writing such an energy-consuming task in the first place: writing the way you will be expected to write in this course requires creating knowledge and perspective that is new, which means going beyond memorizing facts, repeating the perspectives of experts, or regurgitating what your teacher said the day before. It means transitioning from passively consuming information to actively constructing it—from being on the receiving end of the knowledge that others have created to being a creator of knowledge yourself. All majors in college share this central aim for you to transition from simply learning about their discipline to actually contributing to it, though it may not be apparent in your first and second-year courses. And that is why you are here: to learn to become a critical contributor to a knowledge-making community, a quality that you will need, not only to succeed in your chosen major, but also to succeed in your chosen profession, and more broadly, to contribute to society actively and constructively. In a sense, it is less accurate to say that nobody majors in College Composition and more accurate to say that everyone does.

And so, the emphasis in this course won't be learning how to construct grammatically-correct sentences (though grammar is part of it), nor will it be learning how to write the perfect five-paragraph essay (honestly, you can forget everything you've learned about those); instead, the emphasis will be learning how to contribute to a knowledge-making community—communities like the ones you will encounter in your other courses, regardless of

discipline, but which you will also encounter in the professional and civic contexts you hope to be a part of after you leave college. **In a nutshell, you are here to learn how to use the writing process to create knowledge and perspective that is useful to you and others.**

FROM THE PROF

"Your **presence** *matters*. Your **participation** *matters*. **Show up** consistently and bring a positive attitude. Be **active** and contribute to the conversation. Know your **value** and share it with your classmates."

- BETH CARUSO

English faculty at Howard Community College

Asking Questions

What do you learn about in a course that aims to help you transition from passively receiving knowledge to playing an active role in its creation? What concepts, skills, etc. comprise the central content of

such a course? And most importantly, what will you have to learn to pass it?

The shortest possible answer to those questions: **critical inquiry**.

What is critical inquiry? If you ask 20 different instructors of College Composition to define it, you will likely get 20 different answers (we did and we did), but that transition from passively receiving knowledge to actively creating it begins now, so at some point, you will have to work out your own understanding, and yet you might take comfort in the fact that there are many acceptable definitions.

For now, it is enough to note the word, "inquiry," which connotes asking questions and seeking something that is not already known. And the word, "critical," which is not really negative in this sense but instead refers to critical thinking, which itself entails reflection, evaluation, and looking at an issue from multiple perspectives. As a process, **Critical Inquiry thus begins with questions, it examines, engages, and evaluates others' responses to those questions, and it results in the writer putting forward a provisional but informed response to his/her/their original research questions.** This response should be useful to the writer, personally, but should also be useful to other researchers and stakeholders addressed or affected by the research topic.

In this course, you will thus learn to form questions and to use those questions to drive your research, your writing, and ultimately, what you contribute to the conversations taking place among people currently doing research around the areas you're interested in.

In practice, and as you apply these lessons, we'll ask you to let go of the myth (or dream) of a perfect first draft – a final product that sounds great and that you write, sentence by painstaking sentence, the first time you sit down to work on it. In fact, most of your teachers (and most creative writers and professional writers) know that when they sit down to tackle a serious writing project, they are going to produce a bit of a mess – a collection of ideas, perhaps, some interesting paragraphs, maybe, but certainly not a completed

product. Instead, experienced writers seem to recognize that when we write, we're writing to ourselves first, we're figuring out our ideas and only starting to properly arrange them. We know that the thesis might still be a bit unclear, we know that we're still learning and thinking about things – this is critical inquiry in action.

FROM THE PROF

"EXPECT TO MAKE A MESS SOMETIMES, AND TO FEEL CHALLENGED. SUCCESS IN THIS CLASS ISN'T ABOUT WRITING A PERFECT ESSAY. IT'S ABOUT GROWING AS A WRITER AND AS A THINKER, AND IT REQUIRES THE COURAGE TO MAKE MISTAKES."

-EMILY RUSSELL

English faculty at Howard Community College

Knowing that the first draft will never be the final draft, well, it takes the pressure off. We can sit down, get started, trust that we'll return later, and not worry so much about picking every "right" word or "sounding good." Revisiting the draft, taking breaks, revising after getting feedback, these are all steps that will make the writing experience less stressful and, most likely, more successful. That's

what happens when we treat writing (and learning and critical inquiry and research in general) as a process.

In service of that process, you will learn about a few other things along the way:

- **The reading process** will help you read sophisticated texts in sophisticated ways.
- **The writing process** will help you produce sophisticated texts of your own through brainstorming, pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing.
- **Information literacy** will help you to locate sources who have done research on the topics that matter to you, and it will help you to know which kinds to use and in what ways.
- **Rhetoric**—the study of persuasive writing, speech, and/or other media—will help you better understand the audiences, purposes, and contexts of those sources, and it will help you make strategic composing decisions in light of your own audiences, purposes, and contexts.
- **Argument** will help you analyze the arguments of your sources and will help you compose effective arguments of your own–arguments that will constitute your contribution to the conversations taking place among your sources.
- **Genre** will help you compose with mindfulness that the texts you read and the texts you write are always read through readers' expectations.
- **Academic writing conventions** will help you write with fluency in the forms that you will use in your other courses and will give you experience contributing actively to a knowledge-making community.
- **Multimodality** will help you compose traditional and non-traditional texts with awareness of the ways in which non-alphabetic factors shape readers' understanding of texts.
- **Structure, grammar, and mechanics** will help you to produce clear, cohesive, and sophisticated writing (as appropriate to your rhetorical situation).

That is an imposing and potentially intimidating list, but this text and your instructor will guide you through these skills that, we argue, are in fact quite natural to humans, who are inherently social, chatty beings, and for whom consuming and composing text is almost second-nature.

How This Course Will Benefit You

Here, at Howard Community College, we have seven learning objectives for this course.

Learning Objectives for College Composition

1. Construct texts by working through varying stages of the writing process.
2. Demonstrate awareness of audience, purpose, and context through making informed decisions about forms of appeal, style, genre, and modality.
3. Exhibit knowledge of writing conventions related to expectations such as clarity, cohesion, organization, paragraph structure, grammar, and mechanics.
4. Maintain a controlling purpose for research and writing that emerges from a clearly-defined research question.
5. Locate, evaluate, and integrate appropriate sources accurately and fairly through paraphrase and direct

quotation.

6. Critically engage sources through interpretation, analysis, and/or critique in service of developing and supporting logical, well-defined claims.
7. Document sources with in-text and works cited citations following current MLA, APA, or Chicago Manual of Style guidelines or other methods as appropriate to the rhetorical situation.

These course objectives, we like to point out to students, are written to a specific audience—namely, teachers of college composition and the different institutions our students might transfer to (so this course might satisfy another school's required first-year composition course).

With that in mind, we think that it's important that you, as the student of this course, start to think about what these objectives actually mean to you so you know what to expect and so you're prepared to be actively involved in the different activities in the course.

Furthermore, as we pointed out earlier – all students, at some point in their college careers, will benefit from a healthy toolbox of strategies and tools for sophisticated reading and writing tasks, so in order to be a **metacognitive (self-aware) and active learner**, a great place to start is to break down these objectives and reconsider them in your own language.

COURSE TIP:

Unpack the Objectives!

Complete the following activity on your own or with a classmate.

First, read the course objectives and identify any concepts that you don't fully understand. Highlight those to revisit later.

Second, rewrite the objectives that you feel you do understand, but do it in your own words (paraphrase) and include examples if you can think of some.

Lastly, go back and reread the objectives that were less clear to you. Make a list of questions to present to classmates or your professor.

There's been a subset of research in the field of rhetoric and composition that looks at writing across disciplines (fields of study) or writing across curricula / contexts. Among other things, scholars study the role of writing in different types of classes and how the concepts and tools that students learn (or don't learn) in a writing class will transfer (or not) into their other classes. So how will this course benefit you? We think it will help you in all of your classes and in many other facets of your life: personal and professional, as well as academic.

When we talk about critical inquiry, we're talking about the process of making meaning out of complicated and sometimes confusing or contradictory information (Objectives #6 and #4) in order to learn and understand issues you're curious about. Many students have told us that learning to be more intentional and savvy researchers has changed the way they retrieve and process information in their classes and when they're doing their own, personal, research.

Another of the major lessons we want students to take away from this course is that "good" writing may look very different from one setting or assignment to the next (this is a key part of Objective #3). And we remind students that many of them will develop a great

deal of skills (and confidence) as they work their way through higher level courses if and when they can build on the concepts and ideas about writing we study in our course (Objective #2).

FROM THE PROF

"Don't check your identity, experiences, and values at the door. Bring them into the class and into your writing."

-EMILY RUSSELL

English faculty at Howard Community College

So, what good is a 100-level course? Well, in this course, you can learn certain habits to cultivate, certain steps or processes to work through, and certain questions to ask when faced with new

or difficult writing tasks. In fact, there's a researcher in our field, David Russell, who has a great metaphor about writing skills and the limiting notion that there are strict writing "rules" or "tools" that will help a student throughout all their future writing tasks. We'll simplify this a bit, but Russell basically points out that if you're good at one kind of sport (say football), you have certain "ball-handling" skills that likely make you so good at that sport. But if you were to try to apply those same skills to a game of ping-pong or golf, you're not likely to be as successful, right?

Similarly, you'll learn as we study texts in this class, there can be just as big a difference among a successful paragraph on a resume, one in a short news article, or one in a well-researched, "academic" argument essay. It may be a bummer that we can't teach you the "rules" of "good" writing. But what we can explore in our College Composition course are the right kinds of questions and considerations to pose and evaluate that will help you better understand how start to write when you're given new tasks in the future (Objectives #1-#4).

FROM THE PROF

"Student success depends on the person's commitment to reading, writing, and asking questions of the professor, the texts, and themselves. It depends on the person's desire to learn through the struggle of obtaining new knowledge."

–KOFI ADISA

English faculty at Howard Community College

What to Expect

Students, we've learned, hate "busy work" and often just want to know "how long it has to be." Students also prefer clear guidelines for homework assignments, and they seem to really love a detailed rubric.

Well: we have some good news and some "bad" news:

First, the good news: basically, if you treat all of the assignments in this course seriously–that is, if you **tackle them thoughtfully** and produce meaningful texts for all of the activities you're assigned–you'll be building your major assignments **step-by-step** so

that you'll never have to cram, rush, and pull an "all-nighter" starting from scratch. Phew, right?

More good news: we use Canvas assignments and modules in Canvas to present and collect all of the resources you'll need to be successful in this course. We'll present detailed assignments with what we believe to be **clear and detailed instructions** – it's just up to you to 1) keep on top of your assignments, their due dates, and their expectations 2) learn how to navigate Canvas and check your HCC email for announcements, and 3) ask for clarification and help when you need it (including reaching out to HCC campus resources like tutoring at the Composition and Literature Center or the Learning Assistance Center!).

And the "bad" news? Well, sometimes you might come across assignments that aren't so clear-cut, or that have less detailed instructions than you're used to seeing. Or, you may be assigned an essay that contains a holistic, comprehensive rubric rather than a point-by-point rubric. While this might feel a bit unsettling at first, think of it this way: you're actually being **empowered**. When an assignment has fewer criteria, it can feel a lot less limiting, and you've been given an opportunity to own it. So, take the reins, think critically, be creative, and explore new possibilities with your coursework. That said, keep in mind that **it's perfectly normal to feel stuck or confused from time to time**. If you'd like clarification on an assignment, don't be afraid to send your professor a message in Canvas; your active engagement with the course material will surely impress them!

FROM THE PROF

"You will receive from this course exactly what you put into it; the rewards and confidence you gain will be equal to the attention you give to every assignment and the quality of work that you produce."

-LENETT PARTLOW-MYRICK

English faculty at Howard Community College

A note on your homework for this course:

Thinking is invisible. Unlike training as an athlete, running laps or lifting weights, where you can measure your pace, your times, and your actual improvements, thinking—and growing as a thinker–isn't quite as visible. So in college, when you're told you should likely spend 3 or more hours working outside of class for every hour that a class actually meets, this is when the invisible thinking happens. Now, rereading an article over and over and never feeling like you're making progress is a terrible feeling. Much like the pressure or stress of sitting in front of a blank word document and trying to come up with a great opening line. If you aren't making progress, or don't feel like you're making progress, it can be easy to want to give up or just turn in what seems to meet the bare minimum. However, spending time working through difficult texts will actually help you process and understand those texts when you have the right set of tools—questions that help you analyze and take that text apart, for example, will help you make the time you spend on your homework more meaningful and useful!

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

I had a **misconception** that crippled my writing ability: I assumed that **reading and writing** were separate entities. I had no idea that to analyze a text, you have to first understand the author and their intentions. **I was frustrated** because while my peers could understand and discuss what we were reading, I felt totally lost. Then, my teacher took a challenging article and **broke it down piece by piece**, **as if it were a puzzle**. This helped me see that reading critically doesn't just mean reading carefully. It involves **applying strategies** to further one's understanding of the text.

What does this thinking look like in action? Your teacher is probably going to ask you to reflect, to explain, to analyze multiple different assignments. First, make sure you understand what is being asked of you by these different instructions (reflect – reexamine and reevaluate; explain – take the ideas and concepts and put them in your own words, clarify the ideas, take time to fully process them; analyze – identify different parts of a text, perhaps, and try to understand it more fully by evaluating or processing those different parts). Secondly, set out to meet those instructions fully by working through assignments in steps, using plenty of details and examples to support your ideas and your claims, and writing clearly so your ideas are fully understood by your reader – your teacher or other students.

The Role of Sources

In this course, you'll be working with a variety of **sources**. Sources come in many forms. Many sources are text based– articles,

interviews, and the like–while others rely on visual communication (photos, graphics, etc.). Often, you'll find that online sources, such as websites, contain a combination of text and images. Expect to encounter sources on a regular basis in your assignments. For example, you might have a homework assignment that asks you to read and respond to an article, or you may be tasked with writing an essay that involves conducting online research.

Things to Remember When You're Working with Sources

- **Consider your intentions.** Sometimes, your purpose will be to find sources that support your specific claims and ideas. In these situations, sources should be chosen wisely and with a specific purpose in mind. Knowing why you're using a source often influences how effectively you can integrate that source into your writing.
- **At the same time, be open to a variety of perspectives.** When possible, try not to limit yourself to a fixed list of sources, and resist the urge to go hunting only for information that confirms your predetermined ideas. Instead, allow for possibilities that you hadn't considered, and aim to investigate and articulate your own perspective as you interact with the perspectives of sources.
- **Have conversations with your sources.** Your relationship with a given source should resemble a

dialogue. Don't just take a source at face value. Rather than positioning your sources as unquestioned authorities, or as backup that "proves" your argument, approach them with a critical eye, ask questions, and comment on what they say, using "I" statements to distinguish your perspective from theirs (yes, you can use "I"!).

- **Be a responsible researcher.** The sources that you choose should be credible, reliable, and unbiased. You'll learn more about this as you practice evaluating sources throughout this course.

How to Succeed: Metacognition and Meaningful Engagement

Meta, basically, means an awareness of something.

Cognition has to do with thinking and understanding.

So **metacognition is an awareness of your own learning, thinking, and comprehension** – being metacognitive means you're being a self-aware student. Teachers assign metacognitive assignments to help students pause and take stock of both their processes and their products, what they're producing in their classes. These are often reflection assignments, as in: reflect on major concepts from our first unit – what concepts did you learn and which ones were you best able to apply to your own work?

We've already talked about how you'll be engaged in the act of making meaning and contributing to conversations through Critical Inquiry in this course, but you'll also want to pay attention to yourself—how you're developing strengths and recognizing weaknesses in your work habits, your writing processes, and in your

final products. You'll reflect metacognitively on your reading and your writing.

FROM THE PROF

"The keys to succeeding in this course are **commitment** to yourself, to the most important thing that you want to be and do at this time, and the **resolve** to make that happen."

-LENETT PARTLOW-MYRICK

English faculty at Howard Community College

Reflecting on your reading will help you determine which strategies are most effective for increasing your reading comprehension. **As a successful college reader, you will need to adjust your use of reading strategies depending on the difficulty of the text and your purpose for reading it.** Having a toolbox of reading strategies that work well for you will help you successfully monitor your comprehension and troubleshoot problems as they arise. You will want to continue to identify and strengthen the

strategies that are working best for you and eliminate the ones that are least effective.

As a writer, reflecting will help you pay attention to your progress, your struggles, your strengths, and your weaknesses. Additionally, by considering different assignments and tasks (in this course and across courses) you will be more likely to *transfer your learning* and find similarities across assignments that help you to be more prepared and more confident.

Once you start recognizing patterns, hiccups, problems, solutions, and good questions to ask yourself, you'll be more involved in your learning–and you'll be better prepared to tackle more challenging assignments. Remember: learning takes time. Everyone has to struggle through difficult tasks. What matters in the end is that we can look back and see how we were able to conquer those challenges–what tools we used and what strategies we employed.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY

BEFORE COLLEGE, I WAS A **LAZY RESEARCHER**. I TOOK THE FIRST PIECE OF INFORMATION I COULD FIND AND WENT WITH IT. SINCE THEN, **I'VE LEARNED** THAT A CURSORY GLANCE AT A SOURCE JUST **ISN'T ENOUGH**. IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND AND BENEFIT FROM USING SOURCES, ONE MUST **DIG DEEPER** AND **ENGAGE** WITH WHAT THE SOURCE SAYS AND IMPLIES.

Finally, much of what separates those who succeed in College Composition from those who don't is just plain doing the work. Some of you are already strong writers, others not so much, but regardless of performance in your previous courses, the content of this course is likely almost entirely new, which means that those of you who were successful in the past will still have much to learn, while those who may have struggled will suddenly find yourselves on a more level playing field. The assignment prompts, for example, will ask you to do things in writing that you've likely never been asked to do before, and even the prompts themselves might be difficult to understand at first. In such moments, **it helps to focus on the operations–on action words like "reflect," "analyze," and**

"compose." But it also helps to plan in advance for the fact that the writing task is never as simple as it first appears, so leaving yourself ample time to complete the assignments is the first step. In general, whether you are a strong reader and writer or an aspiring one, success in this course requires consistent engagement and presence, keeping up with the assignments, and taking advantage of the resources available to you, such as conferencing with your instructor and visiting the Composition and Literature Center.

Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)

ALP courses are designed to allow students who qualify, to skip the developmental writing or reading course and move directly into college composition, saving those students both time and money by allowing them to complete their academic credits faster. ALP differs from the traditional college composition course in that students meet for four hours a week instead of three. The extra hour of instruction will help students master academic writing skills. Students in ALP cover the same topics and adhere to the same requirements as students in traditional college composition

courses, including formal arguments, documentation, and research. If you are not currently enrolled in an ALP section but think you might benefit from doing so, speak to your instructor within the first week of class.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

ESL sections of English 121 are designed for students who are multilingual and speak English as a second or other language. ESL sections of ENGL 121 have the same course content as other sections of ENGL 121 (and there is no distinction on the transcript), but the ESL sections are designed and taught by instructors specialized in second-language instruction. ESL sections (with sufficient enrollment) also utilize a lab instructor, who offers additional support and feedback. If you are not currently enrolled in an ESL section but think you might benefit from doing so, speak to your instructor within the first week of class.

About This Text

This textbook is an Open Educational Resource (OER). OERs are typically authored by several contributors, who have compiled and remixed content from various sources. What does that mean for you? Well, it means that you're being provided with some of the most relevant and helpful content, which has been hand-picked to give you the best possible learning experience. As you make your way through this textbook, you'll notice that the chapters and sections often vary by author, style, length, and format. Just like your favorite customized beverage at the local coffee shop, this textbook has been tailored to meet your interests and needs so that you can be successful in College Composition.

Speaking of success…to get the most of this textbook, you are encouraged to be an **active reader** and thinker. What does it mean to be an active reader? Simply put, an active reader engages, reacts to, and interacts with a text in meaningful ways. While reading, an active reader thinks critically, asks questions, and reacts to what the text says both implicitly and explicitly.

One of the most effective strategies for active reading is to **annotate**, or mark up the text as you read. Annotating helps you to make important connections that enhance your understanding of the material and help you retain what you have learned. You may already have some familiarity and perhaps even some prior experience with annotation. Highlighting, underlining, and circling key words and phrases, writing notes on the page — if you've ever done these things, you've annotated a text!

Following are our recommendations for how to annotate this textbook.

If You'd Like to Annotate On Your Screen:

1. Using your device, navigate to https://pressbooks.howardcc.edu/criticalreadingcriticalwriting/.
   Select **"Download this book"** and a drop-down menu will appear. The drop-down menu contains a list of format options for downloading the textbook.
2. From the drop-down menu, select the format option that is best suited for your device. Here are some tips for choosing a suitable format from the drop-down menu:

   - If you have a computer that contains Adobe Acrobat DC or a similar PDF editing application, select **Digital PDF**.
   - The **EPUB** and **MOBI** formats are supported by many devices, including mobile phones, tablets (such as iPad),

and eReaders (such as Kindle and Nook). Some devices allow for read-only by default, so you may need to obtain an additional application that will allow you to edit the textbook file.

After you download and open the textbook on your device, use your application's built-in tools to highlight key content and add your own notes to refer back to later. Tip: In addition to annotating directly on the page, it's a great idea to jot down notes in a separate notebook or document.

Note: Check with your instructor to see whether they have a preferred annotation method that they recommend. For instance, **if your instructor has provided access to a web-based annotation application**, such as hypothes.is or NowComment, you can use that application to annotate the textbook directly in your web browser.

If You'd Prefer to Annotate on Paper:

1. Using your device, navigate to https://pressbooks.howardcc.edu/criticalreadingcriticalwriting/.
   Select "Download this book" and a drop-down menu will appear. The drop-down menu contains a list of format options for downloading the textbook.
2. From the drop-down menu, select the **Print_PDF** format option to download the printable textbook. Tip: Before printing, check to be sure that you have enough ink and paper in your printer!

If you don't have access to a printer, **you can order a printed copy** of this textbook for a reasonable fee. To do this, navigate to https://pressbooks.howardcc.edu/criticalreadingcriticalwriting/,

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1. Critical Reading

ELIZABETH BROWNING; KAREN KYGER; AND CATE BOMBICK

Reading as a Conversation

What would happen if you walked by the tables in front of Duncan Hall on your first day at HCC, approached a group of strangers quietly chatting, and proceeded to announce to the group exactly what you were thinking at the moment? Most likely, the group would stop talking, look at you, laugh, and slowly move away. Let's try another approach.

This time, you walk up and quietly join the group. You listen for a few minutes to figure out the topic being discussed and to understand the group members' different perspectives before adding your own voice to the conversation. You have probably used this method many times throughout your life and have found it to work well, especially when joining a group of people you do not know very well. This method is the very same way to approach reading in your college courses.

To be a successful reader in college, you will need to move beyond simply understanding what the author is trying to say and think about the conversation in which the author is participating.

By thinking about reading and writing as a conversation, you will want to consider:

- Who else has written about this topic?
- Who are they?
- What is their perspective or argument on this topic?
- What type of evidence do they use to support their point of view?

In this chapter, we will introduce expectations for college reading, identify key strategies of skilled readers, and review the active reading process. Throughout the chapter, you will find links to samples, examples, and materials you may use.

We will also be introducing the concept of critical reading. Critical reading is moving beyond just understanding the author's meaning of a text to consider the choices the author makes to communicate their message.

By learning to read critically, you will not only improve your comprehension of college-level texts, but also improve your writing by learning about the choices other writers have make to communicate their ideas. Honing your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills will give you a more solid foundation for success, both academically and professionally.

Understanding and using the strategies outlined in this chapter is an important part of your success in your ENGL-121 College Composition course. You will need strong reading skills in order to understand assignments, write papers and participate in class discussion. Here are the ENGL-121 objectives that are relevant to the reading process:

4) Maintain a controlling purpose for research and writing that emerges from a clearly-defined research question.
5) Locate, evaluate, and integrate appropriate sources accurately and fairly through paraphrase and direct quotation.
6) Critically engage sources through interpretation, analysis, and/or critique in service of developing and supporting logical, well-defined claims.

Taken together, these objectives prescribe an approach to reading that is driven by questions, that is sensitive to authors' meaning, credibility, and relevance, and that does not take sources' perspectives for granted but that evaluates the reliability of their claims.

In This Chapter

1. Expectations for Reading in College
2. What is critical reading?
3. Why do we read critically?
4. How do we read critically?
    - 4.1 Start with Questions
    - 4.2 Identify the Main Idea and Supporting Details
    - 4.3 Decode Vocabulary
    - 4.4 Utilize Metacognitive Strategies
    - 4.5 Read Recursively
5. The Active Reading Process
    - 5.1 Before you read
    - 5.2 While you read
    - 5.3 After you read
6. Now what?

1. Expectations for Reading in College

How does reading in college differ from reading in high school?

In college, academic expectations change from what you may have experienced in high school. As the quantity of work expected of

you increases, the quality of the work also changes. You must do more than just understand course material and summarize it on an exam. You will be expected to engage seriously with new ideas by reflecting on them, analyzing them, critiquing them, making connections, drawing conclusions, or finding new ways of thinking about them. Educationally, you are moving into deeper waters. Learning how to read and write strategically and critically will help you swim.

***Figure* 1.1 "High School versus College Assignments" summarizes other major differenc high school and college assignments.**

High School Reading	**College Reading**
Primary Types: Textbook, literature	**Primary Types**: Textbook, literatur persuasive analysis, research, multi sources, self-selected material
Student Expectations: Read to find the main idea, share opinions, and make personal connections	**Student Expectations**: Read to for conclusions about the author or te examples that support/refute a tex compare/contrast texts. Use texts questions for further inquiry.
Student Goals: Understand text and share reactions to the text, be able to answer questions posed by the teacher, and ask questions to clarify understanding.	**Student Goals**: Analyze the text an synthesize to enter academic conve on a topic, be able to ask questions insights with peers and professors further the conversation.
Teacher Expectations: Complete reading/ assignment, answer who, what, when, where, and how questions, and share connections to the text.	**Professor Expectations:** Develop t reactions to assignments, enter int conversation on the topics, *why* qu the focus, share questions and answ a topic.
Teacher Goals: Check student understanding of the material through assignments (test, quizzes, papers, etc).	**Professor Goals**: To guide and resp student's analysis and synthesis of information. Comprehension is ass

If Problems Arise: Teachers may go out of their way to help students who are performing poorly on exams, missing classes, not turning in assignments, or struggling with the course. Students are often given "second chances" to complete and submit assignments.	**If Problems Arise**: Professors may r students performing poorly, but oft students to be proactive and take s help themselves (i.e. attending offic emailing professors, etc.). "Second are less common.

2. What is critical reading?

Reading critically does not simply mean being moved, affected, informed, influenced, and persuaded by a piece of writing. It refers to analyzing and understanding the overall composition of the writing as well as how the writing has achieved its effect on the audience.

This level of understanding begins with thinking critically about the texts you are reading. In this case, "critically" does not mean that you are looking for what is wrong with a work (although during your critical process, you may well do that). Instead, thinking critically means approaching a work as if you were a critic or commentator whose job it is to analyze a text beyond its surface.

***Tip*:**
A text is simply a piece of writing, or as *Merriam-Webster* defines it, "the main body of printed or written matter on a page." In English classes, the term "text" is often used interchangeably with the words "reading" or "work."

This step is essential in analyzing a text, and it requires you to consider many different aspects of a writer's work. Do not just consider what the text says; think about what effect the author intends to produce in a reader or what effect the text has had on *you* as the reader. For example, does the author want to persuade, inspire, provoke humor, or simply inform the audience? Look at the process through which the writer achieves (or does not

achieve) the desired effect and which rhetorical strategies are used.

These rhetorical strategies are covered in the **next chapter**. If you disagree with a text, what is the point of contention? If you agree with it, how do you think you can expand or build upon the argument put forth?

Consider the example below. Which of the following tweets below are critical and which are uncritical?

Figure 1.2 "Lean In Tweets"

3. Why do we read critically?

Critical reading has many uses. If applied to a work of literature, for example, it can become the foundation for a detailed textual analysis. With scholarly articles, critical reading can help you evaluate their potential reliability as future sources.

Finding an error in someone else's argument can be the point of destabilization you need to make a worthy argument of your own, illustrated in the final tweet from the previous image, for example. Critical reading can help you hone your own argumentation skills because it requires you to think carefully about which strategies are effective for making arguments, and in this age of social media and instant publication, thinking carefully about what we say is a necessity.

4. How to read critically

Reading does not come naturally. It is not an instinct that you were born with — rather, it is a cultural development that began 6,000 years ago when humans began to use symbols to represent ideas. The process of reading is learned through instruction and recruits brain mechanisms that evolved for other purposes.

In other words, you weren't born to read. Reading is a learned skill that relies on interaction nature, nurture, and culture. It is a cognitive tool that is developed through learning and practice. So what reading strategies are already in your toolbox? What strategies can you add to your toolbox to become a more efficient and effective college reader?

4.1 Start with Questions

Questions to Ask a Text

Inquiry-based learning methods, or question-based investigations, are often the basis for writing and research at the college level. Specific questions generated about the text can guide your critical reading process and help you when writing a formal analysis.

When reading critically, you should begin with broad questions and then work towards more specific questions; after all, the ultimate purpose of engaging in critical reading is to turn you into an analyzer who asks questions that work to develop the purpose of the text

In order to develop good questions before reading a text, you will want to think about your purpose for reading. As a college student, you'll want to think about why your professor assigned this particular text? How does this text connect to topics you have been discussing in class or to other assigned readings?

For example, if you have been assigned to read UMBC President, Freeman Hrabowski's essay entitled, "Colleges Prepare People for Life," ask yourself why your professor assigned that particular text. Perhaps your professor wants you to read a variety of perspectives on the purpose of college. In that case, you'll want to ask a question such as, What is Hrabowski's view on the purpose of college? Perhaps, your professor is preparing you to write an argument essay and would like students to see how other authors have crafted their arguments. In that case, a good question might be, How does Hrabowski introduce other people's views on this topic and how can that help me in my own writing?

Another effective questioning strategy is to turn the title or a sub-heading into a question by adding *what*, *how*, or *why* to the title or heading. You can turn the title into a question by adding *how*. The question becomes "How do colleges prepare people for life?" Once

you have finished reading the essay, return to that question to see how well you can answer it using the information you learned from the text.

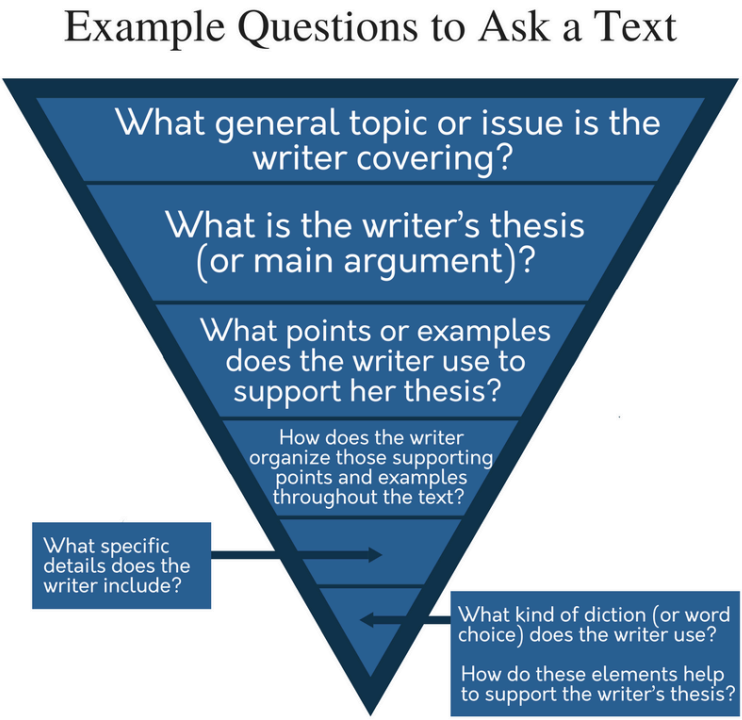


Figure 1.3 "Example Questions to Ask a Text"

Questions For Further Inquiry

In addition to asking questions of the text and author, you will want to use a text to develop additional questions about the topic. This is a crucial step in the process of entering into an academic conversation. To develop questions for further inquiry, you should

focus on open-ended questions that cannot be easily answered by a quick Internet search.

For example, if you are reading a text about changing the name of Washington's NFL team, a question for future inquiry could be "What are the effects of media stereotypes?" A closed-ended question such as "What other NFL teams use Native Americans as a mascot?" would close the door to inquiry. The answer to the second question can be easily found using a quick search that ends your line of inquiry. Conversely, the first question can lead to a much deeper level of critical thinking about the topic.

As you read and learn more about the topic, you may want to develop additional questions even if this line of inquiry goes in a completely different direction from where you started. To develop questions for inquiry consider asking these types of questions:

- Where are there holes or gaps in the logic or evidence in this text?
- What else would you like to know about this topic beyond this text?
- How are other authors writing about this topic?
- Where are the disagreements between texts?

More on Starting with a Question

1. Asking Questions as a Reading Comprehension Strategy
2. Critical Reading Questionnaire
3. K-W-L Guide

4.2 Identify the Main Idea and Supporting Details

Your college professors will expect you to be able to read independently to understand all the information you are expected to process in your college texts. Some of your reading assignments will be fairly straightforward. Others will be longer and more complex, so you will need a plan for how to handle them.

For any expository writing—that is, nonfiction, informational writing—your first comprehension goal is to identify the main points and relate any details to those main points. Regardless of what type of expository text you are assigned to read, the primary comprehension goal is to identify the main point: the most important idea that the writer wants to communicate. This idea is often stated early on in the introduction and re-emphasized in the conclusion.

Finding the main point gives you a framework to organize the details presented in the reading and to relate the reading to concepts you learned in class or through other reading assignments. After identifying the main point, find the supporting points: the details, facts, and explanations that develop and clarify the main point.

***Tip*:**
Your instructor may use the term "main point" interchangeably with other terms, such as thesis, main argument, the main focus, or core concept.

More on Identifying the Main Idea and Supporting Details

1. Finding the Main Idea
2. Implied Main Idea
3. Supporting Details and Patterns in Reading
4. Notes Outline
5. Notes Organizer
6. Argument Organizer

4.3 Decode Vocabulary

Understanding the vocabulary used in your college texts is a critical component of reading comprehension. Having strategies to use when you come across unfamiliar words will help you build and improve your vocabulary. You can sometimes determine the meaning of a word by looking within the word (at its root, prefix, or suffix) or around the word (at the clues given in the sentence or paragraph in which the word appears). If you are unable to determine the meaning of word in context, you may look up the definition.

Each academic discipline has its own terminology, and part of your success in all of your college courses will require you to move beyond simple memorization of word meanings to using these terms appropriately within the context of the situation. This means being aware that words have different meanings and connotations associated with them, and these meanings and connotations can change depending upon the situation in which they are being used.

Context Determines Meaning

Match the correct meaning of the word synthesis to the context in which it is being used:

Definition #1: the combination of ideas to form a theory or system.

Definition #2: the production of chemical compounds by reaction from simpler materials.

Context: Your English professor would like to see you use more synthesis within the body of your essay.

Answer: You may get a failing grade on your essay if you combine chemicals to form an explosion, so you better go with definition #1!

More on Decoding Vocabulary

1. Using Context Clues
2. Context Clues and Practice
3. Denote or Connote?
4. Developing Strategies for Building Vocabulary

4.4 Utilize Metacognitive Strategies

Because college-level texts can be challenging, you will also need to monitor your reading comprehension. That is, you will need to

stop periodically and assess how well you understand what you are reading. You can improve comprehension by taking time to determine which strategies work best for you and putting those strategies into practice.

Finding the main idea and paying attention to text features as you read helps you figure out what you should know. Just as important, however, is being able to figure out what you do not know and developing a strategy to deal with it.

Textbooks often include comprehension questions in the margins or at the end of a section or chapter. As you read, stop occasionally to answer these questions on paper or in your head. Use them to identify sections you may need to reread, read more carefully, or ask your instructor about later. Even when a text does not have built-in comprehension features, you can actively monitor your own comprehension.

Try these strategies, adapting them as needed to suit different kinds of texts:

- **Summarize.** At the end of each section, pause to summarize the main points in a few sentences. If you have trouble doing so, revisit that section.
- **Ask and answer questions.** When you begin reading a section, try to identify two to three questions you should be able to answer after you finish it. Write down your questions and use them to test yourself on the reading. If you cannot answer a question, try to determine why.
- **Don't read in a vacuum.** Look for opportunities to discuss the reading with your classmates. Many instructors set up online discussion forums or blogs specifically for that purpose. Participating in these discussions can help you determine whether your understanding of the main points is the same as that of your peers.

More on Metacognitive Strategies

1. What is Metacognition?
2. Setting a Purpose for Reading
3. Cornell Notes

4.5 Read Recursively

Reading is a recursive, rather than linear, activity. It is rare that you will read a text in college once, straight through from beginning to end. You may need to read a sentence or paragraph several times to understand it. Your reading will slow down or speed up as you encounter novel or familiar information. You may get "lost" in an example and need to double back or skip ahead to understand the point the author is trying to make.

You should plan on reading a text more than once: first for general understanding, and then to analyze and synthesize the material. Reading actively and recursively is the secret to becoming an effective reader.

- **First Reading** – Focus on the literal meaning of the text. What is the author "saying"? Annotate the text or take notes to keep track of the thesis and key points. Use strategies for unfamiliar vocabulary.
- **Second Reading** – Focus on "how" the author is communicating. What literary or rhetorical techniques does the author use? Pretend you are having a conversation with the author. What questions do you have? Are there any gaps in

the narrative, evidence, or conclusions?

- **Further Readings** – Are you ready to join in the academic conversation? What additional questions do you have to further guide you inquiry into this topic? How does the text relate to other readings, class discussions, or "real world" situations? Here are a few questions to consider:
    - What ideas/passages did you find most/least interesting?
    - What did you learn from the reading that you did not know before?
    - Did the author succeed in changing your view on the topic? Why or why not?
    - What elements of the text did you connect with the most?
    - What problems do you have with the text?

More on Reading Recursively

1. Active Reading
2. Active Reading In Action
3. Active Reading with a Digital Source

5. The Active Reading Process

What strategies do I use when I read? What strategies do I need to add?

How many times have you read a page in a book, or even just a paragraph, and by the end of it thought to yourself, "I have no idea

what I just read; I can't remember any of it?" Almost everyone has done it, and it's particularly easy to do when you don't care about the material, are not interested in the material, or if the material is full of difficult or new concepts. If you don't feel engaged with a text, then you will passively read it, failing to pay attention to substance and structure. Passive reading results in zero gains; you will get nothing from what you have just read.

On the other hand, critical reading is based on active reading because you actively engage with the text, which means thinking about the text before you begin to read it, asking yourself questions as you read it as well as after you have read it, taking notes or annotating the text, summarizing what you have read, and, finally, evaluating the text.

Completing these steps will help you to engage with a text, even if you don't find it particularly interesting, which may be the case when it comes to assigned readings for some of your classes. In fact, active reading may even help you to develop an interest in the text even when you thought that you initially had none.

By taking an actively critical approach to reading, you will be able to do the following:

- Stay focused while you read the text
- Understand the main idea of the text
- Understand the overall structure or organization of the text
- Retain what you have read
- Pose informed and thoughtful questions about the text
- Evaluate the effectiveness of ideas in the text

5.1 Before you read

Establish Your Purpose

Establishing *why* you read something helps you decide *how* to read it, which saves time and improves comprehension. Before you start to read, remind yourself what questions you want to keep in mind. (Review Start with a Question section in this chapter). Then establish your purpose for reading.

In college and in your profession, you will read a variety of texts to gain and use information (e.g., scholarly articles, textbooks, reviews). Some purposes for reading might include the following:

- to scan for specific information
- to skim to get an overview of the text
- to relate new content to existing knowledge
- to write something (often depends on a prompt)
- to discuss in class
- to critique an argument
- to learn something
- for general comprehension

Strategies differ from reader to reader. The same reader may use different strategies for different contexts because her purpose for reading changes. Ask yourself "why am I reading?" and "what am I reading?" when deciding which strategies work best.

Preview the Text

Once you have established your purpose for reading, the next step is to preview the text. Previewing a text involves skimming over it and

noticing what stands out so that you not only get an overall sense of the text, but you also learn the author's main ideas before reading for details. Thus, because previewing a text helps you better understand it, you will have better success analyzing it.

Questions to ask when previewing may include the following:

- What is the title of the text? Does it give a clear indication of the text's subject?
- Who is the author? Is the author familiar to you? Is any biographical information about the author included?
- If previewing a book, is there a summary on the back or inside the front of the book?
- What main idea emerges from the introductory paragraph? From the concluding paragraph?
- Are there any organizational elements that stand out, such as section headings, numbering, bullet points, or other types of lists?
- Are there any editorial elements that stand out, such as words in italics, bold print, or in a large font size?
- Are there any visual elements that give a sense of the subject, such as photos or illustrations?

Once you have formed a general idea about the text by previewing it, the next preparatory step for critical reading is to speculate about the author's purpose for writing.

- What do you think the author's aim might be in writing this text?
- What sort of questions do you think the author might raise?

***Tip*:**
To skim a text means to look over a text briefly in order to get the gist or overall idea of it. When skimming, pay attention to these key parts:

- Title
- Introduction (which give context, background, and introduces the writer's main idea)
- Topic sentences of body paragraphs
- Conclusion (which often completes or clarifies the writer's thesis or solution)
- Bold or italicized terms

Activate Your Background Knowledge on the Topic

All of us have a library of life experiences and previous reading knowledge stored in our brains, but this stored knowledge will sit unused unless we consciously take steps to connect to it or "activate" this knowledge.

After previewing a text, ask yourself, "What do I already know about this topic?" If you realize that you know very little about the topic or have some gaps, you may want to pause and do some quick Internet searches to fill in those gaps.

Although Wikipedia is usually not considered a credible source for an academic essay, it can be a helpful tool to discover what other people are saying about the topic, author, or publisher of a text. Internet searches, online encyclopedias, news websites may all be used to help you quickly learn some of the key issues related to the topic.

As you read, you should consider what new information you have learned and how it connects to what you already know. Making connections between prior knowledge and new information is a critical step in reading, thinking, and learning.

More on Pre-Reading Strategies

1. Setting a Purpose for Reading
2. Reading with Purpose

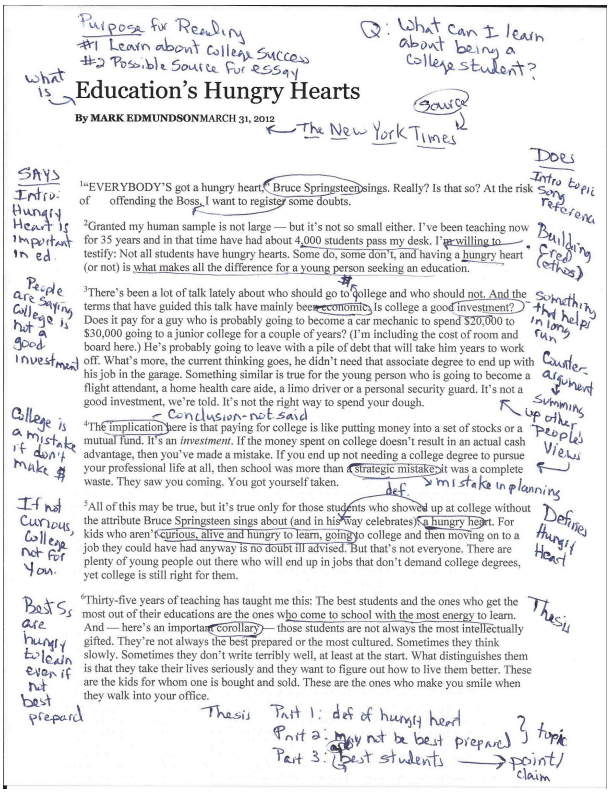
5.2 While you read

Improve Comprehension through Annotation

Annotating a text means that you actively engage with it by taking notes as you read, usually by marking the text in some way (underlining, highlighting, using symbols such as asterisks) as well as by writing down brief summaries, thoughts, or questions in the margins of the page. If you are working with a textbook and prefer not to write in it, annotations can be made on sticky notes or on a separate sheet of paper.

Regardless of what method you choose, annotating not only directs your focus, but it also helps you retain that information. Furthermore, annotating helps you to recall where important points are in the text if you must return to it for a writing assignment or class discussion.

***Tip*:**
Annotations should not consist of JUST symbols, highlighting, or underlining. Successful and thorough annotations should combine those visual elements with notes in the margin and written summaries; otherwise, you may not remember why you highlighted that word or sentence in the first place.



Purpose for Reading
#1 Learn about College Success
#2 Possible Source for essay

Q: What can I learn about being a College student?

what is

Education's Hungry Hearts

By MARK EDMUNDSON MARCH 31, 2012

Source

The New York Times

SAYS

Intro: Hungry Heart is Important in ed.

Does

Intro topic Song Reference

1 "EVERYBODY'S got a hungry heart," Bruce Springsteen sings. Really? Is that so? At the risk of offending the Boss, I want to register some doubts.

Building Credibility (ethos)

2 Granted my human sample is not large — but it's not so small either. I've been teaching now for 35 years and in that time have had about 4,000 students pass my desk. I'm willing to testify: Not all students have hungry hearts. Some do, some don't, and having a hungry heart (or not) is what makes all the difference for a young person seeking an education.

People are saying College is not a good investment

3 There's been a lot of talk lately about who should go to college and who should not. And the terms that have guided this talk have mainly been economic. Is college a good investment? Does it pay for a guy who is probably going to become a car mechanic to spend $20,000 to $30,000 going to a junior college for a couple of years? (I'm including the cost of room and board here.) He's probably going to leave with a pile of debt that will take him years to work off. What's more, the current thinking goes, he didn't need that associate degree to end up with his job in the garage. Something similar is true for the young person who is going to become a flight attendant, a home health care aide, a limo driver or a personal security guard. It's not a good investment, we're told. It's not the right way to spend your dough.

Something that helps in long run

Counter-argument

Summing up other People's Views

Conclusion-not said

College is a mistake if don't make $

4 The implication here is that paying for college is like putting money into a set of stocks or a mutual fund. It's an *investment*. If the money spent on college doesn't result in an actual cash advantage, then you've made a mistake. If you end up not needing a college degree to pursue your professional life at all, then school was more than a strategic mistake: it was a complete waste. They saw you coming. You got yourself taken.

def.

mistake in planning

If not curious, College not for you.

5 All of this may be true, but it's true only for those students who showed up at college without the attribute Bruce Springsteen sings about (and in his way celebrates): a hungry heart. For kids who aren't curious, alive and hungry to learn, going to college and then moving on to a job they could have had anyway is no doubt ill advised. But that's not everyone. There are plenty of young people out there who will end up in jobs that don't demand college degrees, yet college is still right for them.

Defines Hungry Heart

Best Ss are hungry to learn even if not best prepard

6 Thirty-five years of teaching has taught me this: The best students and the ones who get the most out of their educations are the ones who come to school with the most energy to learn. And — here's an important corollary — those students are not always the most intellectually gifted. They're not always the best prepared or the most cultured. Sometimes they think slowly. Sometimes they don't write terribly well, at least at the start. What distinguishes them is that they take their lives seriously and they want to figure out how to live them better. These are the kids for whom one is bought and sold. These are the ones who make you smile when they walk into your office.

Thesis

Thesis Part 1: def of hungry heart
Part 2: may not be best prepared } topic
Part 3: best students → point/claim

Figure 1.4 "Sample of Says/Does Annotations"

More on Active Reading Strategies

1. Be an Active Reader
2. 10 Active Reading Strategies

3. How to Take Notes
4. Says/Does In Action
5. UNC Annotated Journal Article
6. UNC Annotated Book Chapter Excerpt
7. Annotation Checklist

Consider the Unique Qualities of the Text

The way you approach a text should vary based on the type of text you encounter. Reading a poem is very different from reading a chapter in a textbook. There are unique structures, elements, and purposes to the various texts you will encounter in college.

Below are some examples of active reading strategies employed with a variety of "texts" you might encounter in college including textbooks, scientific research, online media, artwork, and more. Notice how the readers approach the text differently based on the length, format, subject matter, and the reader's own purpose for reading.

Textbook	Scholarly Research	Online Media
• Reading a Textbook • Active Reading	• Reading Strategies • Database • Research Review • Skimming and Scanning	• Online Sources • Judging Online Materials • Evaluating Online
Persuasive Text	**Literature**	**Visual Media**
• Analyzing the Argument • Analyzing the Evidence	• Annotating • More on Annotating	• Visual Rhetoric • Art/Visual Media

5.3 After you read

Once you've finished reading, take time to review your initial reactions from your first preview of the text. Were any of your earlier questions answered within the text? Was the author's purpose similar to what you had speculated it would be?

The following steps will help you process what you have read so that you can move onto the next step of analyzing the text.

- Summarize the text in your own words (note your impressions, reactions, and what you learned)
- Talk to someone about the author's ideas to check your comprehension
- Identify and reread difficult parts of the text
- Review your annotations
- Try to answer some of your own questions from your annotations
- Connect the text to others you have read or researched on the topic

Once you understand the text, the next steps will be to analyze and synthesize the information with other sources and with your own knowledge. You will be ready to add your perspective, especially if you can provide evidence to support your viewpoint.

Just like with any new skill, developing your ability to read critically will require focus and dedication. With practice, you will gain confidence and fluency in your ability to read critically. You will be ready to join the academic conversations that surround you at HCC and beyond.

More on After-Reading Strategies

1. Summary/Response Organizer
2. Cause Effect Organizer
3. Problem Solution Organizer

6. Now What?

After you have taken the time to read a text critically, the next step, which is covered in the **next chapter**, is to analyze the text rhetorically to establish a clear idea of what the author wrote and how the author wrote it, as well as how *effectively* the author communicated the overall message of the text.

***Tip*:**
Students are often reluctant to seek help. The truth is, every learner occasionally struggles. If you are sincerely trying to keep up with the course reading but feel like you are in over your head, seek out help. Speak up in class, schedule a meeting with your instructor, or visit your university learning center for assistance. Deal with the problem as early in the semester as you can. Instructors respect students who are proactive about their own learning. Most instructors will work hard to help students who make the effort to help themselves.

Key Takeaways

- College-level reading and writing assignments differ from high school assignments in quantity, quality, and purpose.

- Managing college reading assignments successfully requires you to plan and manage your time, set a purpose for reading, implement effective comprehension skills, and use active reading strategies to deepen your understanding of the text.
- Finding the main idea and paying attention to textual features as you read helps you figure out what you should know. Just as important, however, is being able to figure out what you do not know and developing a strategy to deal with it.
- Ask and answer questions. When you begin reading a section, try to identify two to three questions you should be able to answer after you finish it. If you cannot answer a question, try to determine why. Active engagement in the inquiry process is critical to success in college.
- College writing assignments place greater emphasis on learning to think critically about a particular discipline and less emphasis on personal and creative writing. Your focus becomes analyzing and synthesizing information to enter into academic conversations.
- Do not read in a vacuum. Simply put, don't rely solely on your own interpretation. Look for opportunities to discuss the reading in and out of class to help clarify and deepen your understanding.

Additional Instructional Overviews

- The Reading Process
- Close Reading in College
- Student Success and Metacognition

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Figure 1.2 "Lean In Tweets," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 1.3 "Example Questions to Ask a Text," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0 .

Figure 1.4 "Sample Says/Does Annotation," Karen Kyger, Howard Community College, CC-0.

Originally Composed by Elizabeth Browning; revised by Karen Kyger and Cate Bombick, Howard Community College Faculty

2. Rhetorical Analysis

ELIZABETH BROWNING

For many people, particularly those in the media, the term **"rhetoric"** has a largely negative connotation. A political commentator, for example, may say that a politician is using "empty rhetoric" or that what that politician says is "just a bunch of rhetoric." What the commentator means is that the politician's words are lacking substance, that the purpose of those words is more about manipulation rather than meaningfulness. However, this flawed definition, though quite common these days, does not offer the entire picture or full understanding of a concept that is more about clearly expressing substance and meaning rather than avoiding them.

This chapter will clarify what rhetorical analysis means and will help you identify the basic elements of rhetorical analysis through explanation and example.

1. **What is rhetorical analysis?**
2. **What is rhetorical situation?**
3. **What are the basic elements of rhetorical analysis?**
   - **3.1 The appeal to ethos.**
   - **3.2 The appeal the pathos.**
   - **3.3 The appeal to logos.**
   - **3.4 The appeal to kairos.**
4. **Striking a balance?**

1. What is rhetorical analysis?

Simply defined, **rhetoric** is the art or method of communicating

effectively to an audience, usually with the intention to persuade; thus, **rhetorical analysis** means analyzing how effectively a writer or speaker communicates her message or argument to the audience.

The ancient Greeks, namely Aristotle, developed rhetoric into an art form, which explains why much of the terminology that we use for rhetoric comes from Greek. The three major parts of effective communication, also called the **Rhetorical Triangle**, are **ethos**, **patho**s, and **logos**, and they provide the foundation for a solid argument. As a reader and a listener, you must be able to recognize how writers and speakers depend upon these three rhetorical elements in their efforts to communicate. As a communicator yourself, you will benefit from the ability to see how others rely upon ethos, pathos, and logos so that you can apply what you learn from your observations to your own speaking and writing.

Rhetorical analysis can evaluate and analyze any type of communicator, whether that be a speaker, an artist, an advertiser, or a writer, but to simplify the language in this chapter, the term "writer" will represent the role of the communicator.

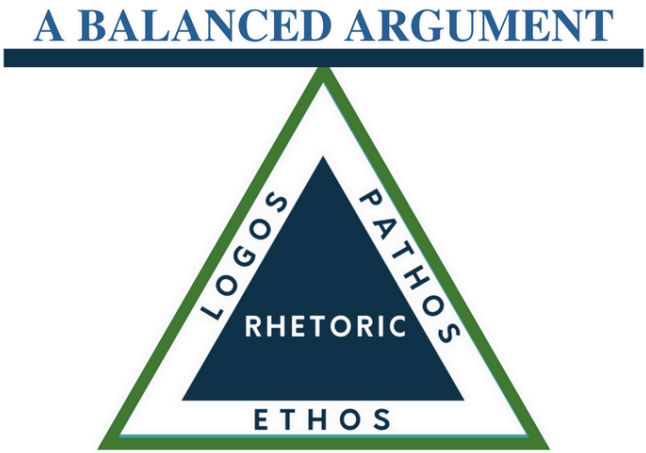
2. What is a rhetorical situation?

Essentially, understanding a **rhetorical situation** means understanding the context of that situation. A rhetorical situation comprises a handful of key elements, which should be identified before attempting to analyze and evaluate the use of rhetorical appeals. These elements consist of **the communicator** in the situation (such as the writer), **the issue at hand** (the topic or problem being addressed), **the purpose** for addressing the issue, **the medium** of delivery (e.g.–speech, written text, a commercial), and **the audience** being addressed.

Answering the following questions will help you identify a rhetorical situation:

- **Who is the communicator or writer?**
- **What is the issue that the writer is addressing?**
    - What is the main argument that the writer is making?
- **What is the writer's purpose for addressing this issue?**
    - To provoke, to attack, or to defend?
    - To push toward or dissuade from certain action?
    - To praise or to blame?
    - To teach, to delight, or to persuade?
- **What is the form in which the writer conveys it?**
    - What is the structure of the communication; how is it arranged?
    - What oral or literary genre is it?
    - What figures of speech (schemes and tropes) are used?
    - What kind of style and tone is used and for what purpose?
    - Does the form complement the content?
    - What effect could the form have, and does this aid or hinder the author's intention?
- **Who is the audience?**
    - Who is the intended audience?
    - What values does the audience hold that the author or speaker appeals to?
    - Who have been or might be secondary audiences?
    - If this is a work of fiction, what is the nature of the audience within the fiction?

Figure 2.1 A Balanced Argument



3. What are the basic elements of rhetorical analysis?

3.1 The appeal to ethos

Literally translated, ethos means "character." In this case, it refers to the character of the writer or speaker, or more specifically, his credibility. The writer needs to establish credibility so that the audience will trust him and, thus, be more willing to engage with the

argument. If a writer fails to establish a sufficient **ethical appeal**, then the audience will not take the writer's argument seriously.

For example, if someone writes an article that is published in an academic journal, in a reputable newspaper or magazine, or on a credible website, those places of publication already imply a certain level of credibility. If the article is about a scientific issue and the writer is a scientist or has certain academic or professional credentials that relate to the article's subject, that also will lend credibility to the writer. Finally, if that writer shows that he is knowledgeable about the subject by providing clear explanations of points and by presenting information in an honest and straightforward way that also helps to establish a writer's credibility.

When evaluating a writer's **ethical appeal**, ask the following questions:

Does the writer come across as reliable?

- Viewpoint is logically consistent throughout the text
- Does not use hyperbolic (exaggerated) language
- Has an even, objective tone (not malicious but also not sycophantic)
- Does not come across as subversive or manipulative

Does the writer come across as authoritative and knowledgeable?

- Explains concepts and ideas thoroughly
- Addresses any counter-arguments and successfully rebuts them
- Uses a sufficient number of relevant sources
- Shows an understanding of sources used

What kind of credentials or experience does the writer have?

- Look at byline or biographical info
- Identify any personal or professional experience mentioned in the text

- Where has this writer's text been published?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Ethos:

In a perfect world, everyone would tell the truth, and we could depend upon the credibility of speakers and authors. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. You would expect that news reporters would be objective and tell news stories based upon the facts; however, Janet Cooke, Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, and Brian Williams all lost their jobs for plagiarizing or fabricating part of their news stories. Janet Cooke's Pulitzer Prize was revoked after it was discovered that she made up "Jimmy," an eight-year old heroin addict (Prince, 2010). Brian Williams was fired as anchor of the *NBC Nightly News* for exaggerating his role in the Iraq War.

Figure 2.2, Brian Williams at the 2011 Time 100 Gala

Others have become infamous for claiming academic degrees that they didn't earn as in the case of Marilee Jones. At the time of discovery, she was Dean of Admissions at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). After 28 years of employment, it was determined that she never graduated from college (Lewin, 2007). However, on her

website (http://www.marileejones.com/blog/) she is still promoting herself as "a sought after speaker, consultant and author" and "one of the nation's most experienced College Admissions Deans."

Beyond lying about their own credentials, authors may employ a number of tricks or fallacies to lure you to their point of view. Some of the more common techniques are described in the **next chapter**. When you recognize these fallacies, you should question the credibility of the speaker and the legitimacy of the argument. If you use these when making your own arguments, be aware that they may undermine or even destroy your credibility.

Exercise 1: Analyzing Ethos

Choose an article from the links provided below. Preview your chosen text, and then read through it, paying special attention to how the writer tries to establish an ethical appeal. Once you have finished reading, use the bullet points above to guide you in analyzing how effective the writer's appeal to ethos is.

"Why cancer is not a war, fight, or battle" by Xeni Jordan (https://tinyurl.com/y7m7bnnm)

"Relax and Let Your Kids Indulge in TV" by Lisa Pryor (https://tinyurl.com/y88epytu)

"Why are we OK with disability drag in Hollywood?" by Danny Woodburn and Jay Ruderman (https://tinyurl.com/y964525k)

3.2 The appeal to pathos

Literally translated, **pathos** means "suffering." In this case, it refers to emotion, or more specifically, the writer's appeal to the audience's emotions. When a writer establishes an effective **pathetic appeal**, she makes the audience care about what she is saying. If the audience does not care about the message, then they will not engage with the argument being made.

For example, consider this: A writer is crafting a speech for a politician who is running for office, and in it, the writer raises a point about Social Security benefits. In order to make this point more appealing to the audience so that they will feel more emotionally connected to what the politician says, the writer inserts a story about Mary, an 80-year-old widow who relies on her Social Security benefits to supplement her income. While visiting Mary the other day, sitting at her kitchen table and eating a piece of her delicious homemade apple pie, the writer recounts how the politician held Mary's delicate hand and promised that her benefits would be safe if he were elected. Ideally, the writer wants the audience to feel sympathy or compassion for Mary because then they will feel more open to considering the politician's views on Social Security (and maybe even other issues).

When evaluating a writer's **pathetic appeal**, ask the following questions:

Does the writer try to engage or connect with the audience by making the subject matter relatable in some way?

- Does the writer have an interesting writing style?
- Does the writer use humor at any point?
- Does the writer use **narration**, such as storytelling or anecdotes, to add interest or to help humanize a certain issue within the text?
- Does the writer use **descriptive** or attention-grabbing details?
- Are there hypothetical examples that help the audience to imagine themselves in certain scenarios?
- Does the writer use any other examples in the text that might emotionally appeal to the audience?
- Are there any visual appeals to pathos, such as photographs or illustrations?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Pathos:

Up to a certain point, an **appeal to pathos** can be a legitimate part of an argument. For example, a writer or speaker may begin with an anecdote showing the effect of a law on an individual. This anecdote is a way to gain an audience's attention for an argument in which evidence and reason are used to present a case as to why the law should or should not be repealed or amended. In such a context, engaging the emotions, values, or beliefs of the audience is a legitimate and effective tool that makes the argument stronger.

An appropriate appeal to **pathos** is different from trying to unfairly play upon the audience's feelings and emotions through fallacious, misleading, or excessively emotional appeals. Such a **manipulative** use of pathos may alienate the audience or cause them to "tune out." An example would be the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) **commercials** (https://youtu.be/6eXfvRcllV8, transcript **here**) featuring the song "In the Arms of an Angel" and footage of abused animals. Even Sarah McLachlan, the singer and spokesperson featured in the commercials, admits that she changes the channel because they are too depressing (Brekke).

Even if an appeal to pathos is not manipulative, such an appeal should complement rather than replace reason and evidence-based

argument. In addition to making use of pathos, the author must establish her credibility (**ethos**) and must supply reasons and evidence (**logos**) in support of her position. An author who essentially replaces logos and ethos with pathos alone does not present a strong argument.

Exercise 2: Analyzing Pathos

In the movie *Braveheart*, the Scottish military leader, William Wallace, played by Mel Gibson, gives a speech to his troops just before they get ready to go into battle against the English army of King Edward I.

See clip **here** (https://youtu.be/h2vW-rr9ibE, transcript**here**). See clip with closed captioning **here**.

Step 1: When you watch the movie clip, try to gauge the general emotional atmosphere. Do the men seem calm or nervous? Confident or skeptical? Are they eager to go into battle, or are they ready to retreat? Assessing the situation from the start will make it easier to answer more specific, probing rhetorical questions after watching it.

Step 2: Consider these questions:

- What issues does Wallace address?
- Who is his audience?
- How does the audience view the issues at hand?

Step 3: Next, analyze Wallace's use of pathos in his speech.

- How does he try to connect with his audience emotionally? Because this is a speech, and he's appealing to the audience in person, consider his

overall look as well as what he says.

- How would you describe his manner or attitude?
- Does he use any humor, and if so, to what effect?
- How would you describe his tone?
- Identify some examples of language that show an appeal to pathos: words, phrases, imagery, collective pronouns (we, us, our).
- How do all of these factors help him establish a pathetic appeal?

Step 4: Once you've identified the various ways that Wallace tries to establish his appeal to pathos, the final step is to evaluate the effectiveness of that appeal.

- Do you think he has successfully established a pathetic appeal? Why or why not?
- What does he do well in establishing pathos?
- What could he improve, or what could he do differently to make his pathetic appeal even stronger?

3.3 The appeal to logos

Literally translated, **logos** means "word." In this case, it refers to information, or more specifically, the writer's appeal to logic and reason. A successful **logical appeal** provides clearly organized information as well as evidence to support the overall argument. If

one fails to establish a logical appeal, then the argument will lack both sense and substance.

For example, refer to the previous example of the politician's speech writer to understand the importance of having a solid logical appeal. What if the writer had *only* included the story about 80-year-old Mary without providing any statistics, data, or concrete plans for how the politician proposed to protect Social Security benefits? Without any factual evidence for the proposed plan, the audience would not have been as likely to accept his proposal, and rightly so.

When evaluating a writer's **logical appeal**, ask the following questions:

Does the writer organize his information clearly?

- Ideas are connected by transition words and phrases
    - Choose the link for **examples of common transitions** (https://tinyurl.com/oftaj5g).
- Ideas have a clear and purposeful order

Does the writer provide evidence to back his claims?

- Specific examples
- Relevant source material

Does the writer use sources and data to back his claims rather than base the argument purely on emotion or opinion?

- Does the writer use concrete facts and figures, statistics, dates/times, specific names/titles, graphs/charts/tables?
- Are the sources that the writer uses credible?
- Where do the sources come from? (Who wrote/published them?)
- When were the sources published?
- Are the sources well-known, respected, and/or peer-reviewed (if applicable) publications?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Logos:

Pay particular attention to numbers, statistics, findings, and quotes used to support an argument. Be critical of the source and do your own investigation of the facts. Remember: What initially looks like a fact may not actually be one. Maybe you've heard or read that half of all marriages in America will end in divorce. It is so often discussed that we assume it must be true. Careful research will show that the original marriage study was flawed, and divorce rates in America have steadily declined since 1985 (Peck, 1993). If there is no scientific evidence, why do we continue to believe it? Part of the reason might be that it supports the common worry of the dissolution of the American family.

Fallacies that misuse appeals to logos or attempt to manipulate the logic of an argument are discussed in the next **chapter**.

Exercise 3: Analyzing Logos

The debate about whether college athletes, namely male football and basketball players, should be paid salaries instead of awarded scholarships is one that regularly comes up when these players are in the throes of their respective athletic seasons, whether that's football bowl games or March Madness. While proponents on each side of this issue have solid reasons, you are going to look at an article that is *against* the idea of college athletes being paid.

Take note: Your aim in this rhetorical exercise is *not* to figure out where you stand on this issue; rather, your aim is to evaluate how effectively the writer establishes a logical appeal to support his position, whether you agree with him or not.

See the article **here** (https://time.com/5558498/ncaa-march-madness-pay-athletes/).

Step 1: Before reading the article, take a minute to preview the text, a critical reading skill explained in **Chapter 1**.

Step 2: Once you have a general idea of the article, read through it and pay attention to how the author organizes information and uses evidence, annotating or marking these instances when you see them.

Step 3: After reviewing your annotations, evaluate the organization of the article as well as the amount and types of evidence that you have identified by answering the following questions:

- Does the information progress logically throughout the article?
    - Does the writer use transitions to link ideas?
    - Do ideas in the article have a clear sense of order, or do they appear scattered and unfocused?
- Was the amount of evidence in the article proportionate to the size of the article?
    - Was there too little of it, was there just enough, or was there an overload of evidence?
- Were the examples of evidence relevant to the writer's argument?
- Were the examples clearly explained?
- Were sources cited or clearly referenced?
- Were the sources credible? How could you tell?

3.4 The Appeal to Kairos

Literally translated, **Kairos** means the "supreme moment." In this case, it refers to appropriate timing, meaning *when* the writer presents certain parts of her argument as well as the overall timing of the subject matter itself. While not technically part of the Rhetorical Triangle, it is still an important principle for constructing an effective argument. If the writer fails to establish a strong **Kairotic appeal**, then the audience may become polarized, hostile, or may simply just lose interest.

If appropriate timing is not taken into consideration and a writer introduces a sensitive or important point too early or too late in a text, the impact of that point could be lost on the audience. For example, if the writer's audience is strongly opposed to her view, and she begins the argument with a forceful thesis of why she is right and the opposition is wrong, how do you think that audience might respond?

In this instance, the writer may have just lost the ability to make any further appeals to her audience in two ways: first, by polarizing them, and second, by possibly elevating what was at first merely strong opposition to what would now be hostile opposition. A polarized or hostile audience will not be inclined to listen to the writer's argument with an open mind or even to listen at all. On the other hand, the writer could have established a stronger appeal to Kairos by building up to that forceful thesis, maybe by providing some neutral points such as background information or by addressing some of the opposition's views, rather than leading with why she is right and the audience is wrong.

Additionally, if a writer covers a topic or puts forth an argument about a subject that is currently a non-issue or has no relevance for the audience, then the audience will fail to engage because

whatever the writer's message happens to be, it won't matter to anyone. For example, if a writer were to put forth the argument that women in the United States should have the right to vote, no one would care; that is a non-issue because women in the United States already have that right.

When evaluating a writer's **Kairotic appeal**, ask the following questions:

- Where does the writer establish her thesis of the argument in the text? Is it near the beginning, the middle, or the end? Is this placement of the thesis effective? Why or why not?
- Where in the text does the writer provide her strongest points of evidence? Does that location provide the most impact for those points?
- Is the issue that the writer raises relevant at this time, or is it something no one really cares about anymore or needs to know about anymore?

Exercise 4: Analyzing Kairos

In this exercise, you will analyze a visual representation of the appeal to Kairos. On the 26th of February 2015, a photo of a dress was posted to Twitter along with a question as to whether people thought it was one combination of colors versus another. Internet chaos ensued on social media because while some people saw the dress as black and blue, others saw it as white and gold. As the color debate surrounding the dress raged on, an ad agency in South Africa saw an opportunity to raise awareness about a far more serious subject: domestic abuse.

Step 1: Read this **article** (https://tinyurl.com/yctl8o5g) from CNN about how and why the photo of the dress went viral so that you will be better informed for the next step in this exercise:

Step 2: Watch the **video** (https://youtu.be/SLv0ZRPssTI, transcript **here**)from CNN that explains how, in partnership with The Salvation Army, the South African marketing agency created an ad that went viral.

Step 3: After watching the video, answer the following questions:

- Once the photo of the dress went viral, approximately how long after did the Salvation Army's ad appear? Look at the dates on both the article and the video to get an idea of a time frame.
- How does the ad take advantage of the publicity surrounding the dress?
- Would the ad's overall effectiveness change if it had come out later than it did?
- How late would have been too late to make an impact? Why?

4. Striking a Balance:

Figure 2.3 An Unbalanced Argument

The foundations of rhetoric are interconnected in such a way that a writer needs to establish *all* of the rhetorical appeals to put forth an effective argument. If a writer lacks a pathetic appeal and only tries to establish a logical appeal, the audience will be unable to connect emotionally with the writer and, therefore, will care less about the overall argument. Likewise, if a writer lacks a logical appeal and tries to rely solely on subjective or emotionally driven examples, then the audience will not take the writer seriously because an argument based purely on opinion and emotion cannot hold up without facts and evidence to support it. If a writer lacks either the pathetic or logical appeal, not to mention the kairotic appeal, then the writer's ethical appeal will suffer. All of the appeals

must be sufficiently established for a writer to communicate effectively with his audience.

For a visual example, **watch** (https://tinyurl.com/yct5zryn, transcript **here**) violinist Joshua Bell show how the rhetorical situation determines the effectiveness of all types of communication, even music.

Exercise 5: Rhetorical Analysis

Step 1: Choose one of the articles linked below.

Step 2: Preview your chosen text, and then read and annotate it.

Step 3: Next, using the information and steps outlined in this chapter, identify the rhetorical situation in the text based off of the following components: the communicator, the issue at hand, the purpose, the medium of delivery, and the intended audience.

Step 4: Then, identify and analyze how the writer tries to establish the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, logos, and Kairos throughout that text.

Step 5: Finally, evaluate how effectively you think the writer establishes the rhetorical appeals, and defend your evaluation by noting specific examples that you've annotated.

BBC News, "**Taylor Swift Sexual Assault Case: Why is it significant?**" (https://tinyurl.com/ybopmmdu)

NPR, "**Does Cash Aid Help the Poor–Or Encourage Laziness?**" (https://tinyurl.com/y8ho2fhw)

Key Takeaways

Understanding the Rhetorical Situation:

- Identify who the communicator is.
- Identify the issue at hand.
- Identify the communicator's purpose.
- Identify the medium or method of communication.
- Identify who the audience is.

Identifying the Rhetorical Appeals:

- Ethos = the writer's credibility
- Pathos = the writer's emotional appeal to the audience
- Logos = the writer's logical appeal to the audience
- Kairos = appropriate and relevant timing of subject matter
- In sum, effective communication is based on an understanding of the rhetorical situation and on a balance of the rhetorical appeals.

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Figure 2.3 "An Unbalanced Argument," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

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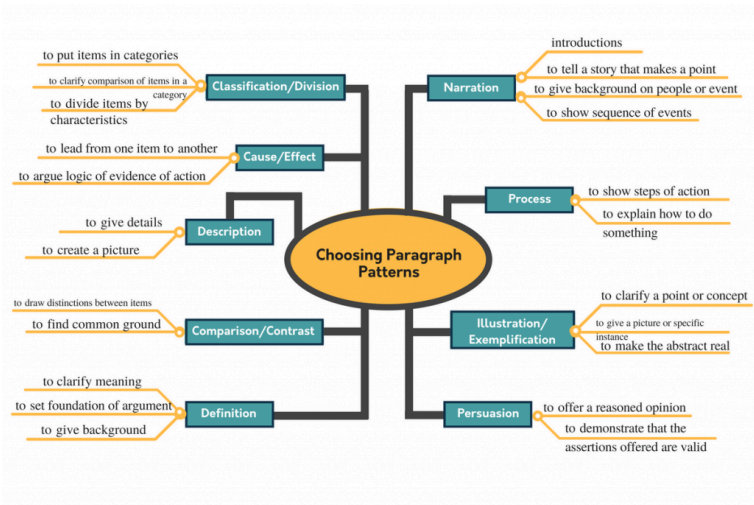
3. Rhetorical Modes

JENIFER KURTZ

The term rhetorical modes refers to the different styles and techniques we use when we write. This chapter will discuss different modes, explaining the specific aspects and techniques involved in these methods of communication. As you read about these, remember that the rhetorical mode a writer chooses depends on his/her purpose for writing. Some assignments ask students to use a specific rhetorical mode, such as writing a descriptive passage or contrasting two concepts, but most essays incorporate several different rhetorical modes to express an idea. Overall, the rhetorical modes are a set of tools that allow you different methods to effectively communicate information to your audience.

Figure 5.1 Choosing Paragraph Patterns



1. Narrative
2. Description
3. Process analysis
4. Illustration and exemplification
5. Cause and effect
6. Comparison and contrast
7. Definition
8. Classification

1. Narrative

The purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. This is a form we are familiar with, as any time we tell a story about an event or incident in our day, we are engaging in a form of narration. In terms of writing, narration is the act of describing a sequence of events. Sometimes this is the primary mode of an essay—writing a narrative essay about a particular event or experience, and sometimes this is a component used within an essay, much like other evidence is offered, to support a thesis. This chapter will discuss the basic components of narration, which can be applied either as a stand-alone essay or as a component within an essay.

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

The Structure of a Narrative Essay

Chronological order, the order in which events unfold from first to last, is the most common organizational structure for narratives. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed below.

Figure 5.2 Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time

after/afterward	as soon as	at last	before
currently	during	eventually	meanwhile
next	now	since	soon
finally	later	still	then
until	when/whenever	while	first, second, third

The following are the other basic components of a narrative:

• **Plot**. The events as they unfold in sequence.

• **Characters**. The people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, each narrative has there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, or the protagonist.

• **Conflict**. The primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot, which the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.

• **Theme**. The ultimate message the narrative is trying to express; it can be either explicit or implicit.

Writing at Work

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

Narrative Anecdotes

An **anecdote** is a short, personal **narrative** about something specific. It is often used as a component in an essay, acting as evidence to support your thesis, as an example to demonstrate your point, and/or as a way to establish your credibility. It always has a point in telling it.

Elements of an Anecdote

1. Who, Where, When

Have you ever wondered why children's stories begin something like this?

> *Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away, the teachers were revolting ...*

It is the start of a simple narrative. It also contains all the elements of a beginning to any narrative: when, where, and who. An anecdote, because it is short, will begin similarly:

> *One day, while I was sitting at a stop sign waiting for the light to change...*

This little particle of an anecdote tells when, who, and where before the first sentence even ends.

Note: An anecdote sets up a particular incident; it does not tell about a long period of time.

2. What Happened (Sequence of Events)

Any narrative also includes a sequence of events. You should be able to read an anecdote and tell what happens first, what happens next, and so on. In the following anecdote, the bolded words suggest each event in the sequence.

Example Anecdote:

My first day of college I parked in the "South Forty," which is what everyone called the huge parking lot on the edge of the campus. It was seven forty-five in the morning, hazy and cool. I walked across the parking lot, crossed a busy street, walked over a creek, through a "faculty" parking lot, crossed another street, and came to the first row of campus buildings. I walked between buildings, past the library and the student mall. I passed many quiet, nervous-looking students along the way. Many of them smiled at me. One trio of young girls was even chuckling softly among themselves when they all smiled and said "Hi" to me at once. By the time I got to my classroom, far on the other side of campus from the parking lot, I was smiling and boldly saying "Hi" to everyone, too, particularly the girls. Every single one of them smiled or responded with a "Hi" or made a friendly comment or even chuckled happily. It was my first day of college.

When I found the building I was looking for, a friend from high school appeared. She was in my first class! I

smiled at her and said, “Hi!” She looked at me. She smiled. Then she laughed. She said, “Why are you wearing a sock on your shirt?” I looked down. A sock had come out of the dryer clinging to my shirt.

3. Implied Point

Most of us want to make sure that we “get the point across” to whatever story we are telling, assuming it has a point. To do this, we tend to explain what we are telling. It is sometimes very difficult to stop. However, stopping in a timely way allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

Show, don’t tell

In the anecdote above, I am very tempted to tell the reader what I felt at the moment I realized that everyone was laughing AT me rather than just being friendly. For the ending, where the point is in this case, it is best to let the reader infer (draw conclusions, fill in the blanks) what happens implicitly rather than to state explicitly what the point is, or what the narrator felt, or anything else.

Tip

The more indirect you are about your object or place the better. In the anecdote above, it might be obvious that my object is a sock or my place is a parking lot. The point is, it is not an anecdote “about” a sock; it is referred to indirectly.

How do we show rather than tell? First, describe what you see (I don't really see anything with "I was SO embarrassed…") or what you smell, hear, or taste, but NOT what you feel. An easy way to check whether you are showing or telling is to go through your anecdote and underline the verbs. If the verbs are "be"-verbs (is, was, were, etc.) or verbs that describe actions we cannot see ("I thought…" "I believed…" "I imagined…" "it made me upset…" and so on) then you are probably telling. In the sentence above I used "walked," "lecturing," "ripped," and "said."

Most Common Question:

"What makes stories or anecdotes interesting and something I can relate to?"

Actually, it is a simple principle, even though it may not be obvious. We "relate" or "connect" most easily to situations we recognize and so fill in the blanks. If you "tell" me, for example, "I was SO embarrassed …" then you have not let me fill in MY embarrassment. On the other hand, if you "show" me a scene, it allows me to fit my own experience into it:

> "I walked past the corner of the aluminum whiteboard tray while lecturing to a class. It ripped my pants. After a moment I said, 'Class dismissed.'"

The writer of those statements, hopes the reader will fill in some similarly embarrassing moment without the writer clearly stating that this is what is supposed to be done. The connection, the act of "filling in," is what people tend to refer to as "relating to."

Interestingly, it does not even matter whether or not readers fill in what the writer intend for them to fill in; it is the act of filling in our own experiences that makes us "relate" to an incident. From a writer's perspective, that means we should show rather than tell.

Second, resist the temptation to "explain." Let the reader fill in the blanks! It is so much more personal when the reader participates by filling in.

Assignment 1

Write an anecdote that contains who, where, when, and what happens (a sequence of events). Think about an anecdote that **involves**, **alludes to, or otherwise includes your object or place**; it does not have to be "about" your place. It also does not have to be "true" in the strict sense of the word; we will not be able to verify any believable details if they add to the effect of the anecdote. Type it out. Keep it simple and to the point.

Clichés

What are 'clichés' and why can't we use them?

Clichés are figurative phrases and expressions that you have probably heard a million times. For our purposes, there are two kinds of clichés: the ones that jump out at you and the ones that we use without thinking.

If you are paying attention, you will notice that the two sentences above contain at least 3 clichés. You might also notice that clichés are best suited to spoken language, because they are readily available and sometimes when we speak, we don't have time to replace a common expression with a unique one. However, we DO have time to replace clichés while we are writing.

The problem with clichés in writing is that they are too general when we should be much more specific. They also tend to tell rather than show. In the first sentence above, we have most likely heard the phrase, "have probably heard a million times." In speech, that expression works. In writing, it should be **literal** rather than **figurative.** The first sentence is better this way:

Clichés are figurative phrases and expressions that we have

heard so many times that we all share some understanding of what they mean.

Not exactly what you thought when you read it at the beginning of this answer, is it? That is why being *literal and specific* in writing is better than *figurative and vague* as a rule.

Here is a re-write of the second sentence at the start of this answer:

> For our purposes, there are two kinds of clichés: the ones that are obvious expressions (like "You can lead a horse to water ...") and the ones that are not part of expressions but seem to "go" easily into a group of words (like "we use without thinking").

The second type is more difficult to identify and eradicate. Usually it is a group of words we have heard before that doesn't add anything to a statement. For example, instead of "We watched the donuts roll down the street every night," you might be tempted to add to it this way: "We watched the donuts roll down the street each and every night." Avoid clichés in your writing.

To see more see more commonly used clichés and for guidance on how to rewrite them, see this **handout** (https://writingcenter.unc.edu/cliches/) from The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Writing Center.

Some Other Rhetorical Tips

- To create strong details, keep the human senses in mind. You want your reader to be immersed in the world that you create, so focus on details related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch as you describe people, places, and events in your

narrative.

- Create tension by making the reader nervous about what is going to happen through sentence structure, tone, and voice.

- Add dialogue to show the immediacy and drama of the personal interactions (re-creating conversations as necessary to make your narrative work).

- Name specific objects to re-create the scene by selecting details that leave the readers with a dominant impression of how things were.

- Show people in action by describing precise movements and dialogue to convey the action of the scene.

External Links:

"**Sixty-nine Cents**" (https://tinyurl.com/ybjasq9c) by Gary Shteyngart: In "Sixty-nine Cents," author Gary Shteyngart describes a coming-of-age experience as a first-generation Russian-Jewish immigrant in modern America.

Sherman Alexie grew up on the Spokane Reservation in

Washington State. He chronicles his challenges in school, starting in first grade, in ***Indian Education*** (https://tinyurl.com/hlshngr).

Sandra Cisneros offers an example of a narrative essay in "**Only Daughter**" (https://tinyurl.com/yc4srod7) that captures her sense of her Chicana-Mexican heritage as the only daughter in a family of seven children. The essay is also available **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y7hzxhz6).

Annie Dilliard offers an example of a narrative essay in an excerpt, often entitled "**The Chase**" (https://tinyurl.com/ycsen7r4) from her autobiography *An American Childhood*, outlining a specific memorable event from her childhood. This essay is also available **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y7udsl88).

Student Sample Essay

My College Education

The first class I went to in college was philosophy, and it changed my life forever. Our first assignment was to write a short response paper to the Albert Camus essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." I was extremely nervous about the assignment as well as college. However, through all the confusion in philosophy class, many of my questions about life were answered.

I entered college intending to earn a degree in engineering. I always liked the way mathematics had right and wrong answers. I understood the logic and was very good at it. So when I received my first philosophy assignment that asked me to write my interpretation of the Camus essay, I was instantly confused. What is the right way to do this assignment, I

wondered? I was nervous about writing an incorrect interpretation and did not want to get my first assignment wrong. Even more troubling was that the professor refused to give us any guidelines on what he was looking for; he gave us total freedom. He simply said, "I want to see what you come up with."

Full of anxiety, I first set out to read Camus's essay several times to make sure I really knew what was it was about. I did my best to take careful notes. Yet even after I took all these notes and knew the essay inside and out, I still did not know the right answer. What was my interpretation? I could think of a million different ways to interpret the essay, but which one was my professor looking for? In math class, I was used to examples and explanations of solutions. This assignment gave me nothing; I was completely on my own to come up with my individual interpretation.

Next, when I sat down to write, the words just did not come to me. My notes and ideas were all present, but the words were lost. I decided to try every prewriting strategy I could find. I brainstormed, made idea maps, and even wrote an outline. Eventually, after a lot of stress, my ideas became more organized and the words fell on the page. I had my interpretation of "The Myth of Sisyphus," and I had my main reasons for interpreting the essay. I remember being unsure of myself, wondering if what I was saying made sense, or if I was even on the right track. Through all the uncertainty, I continued writing the best I could. I finished the conclusion paragraph, had my spouse proofread it for

errors, and turned it in the next day simply hoping for the best.

Then, a week or two later, came judgment day. The professor gave our papers back to us with grades and comments. I remember feeling simultaneously afraid and eager to get the paper back in my hands. It turned out, however, that I had nothing to worry about. The professor gave me an A on the paper, and his notes suggested that I wrote an effective essay overall. He wrote that my reading of the essay was very original and that my thoughts were well organized. My relief and newfound confidence upon reading his comments could not be overstated.

What I learned through this process extended well beyond how to write a college paper. I learned to be open to new challenges. I never expected to enjoy a philosophy class and always expected to be a math and science person. This class and assignment, however, gave me the self-confidence, critical-thinking skills, and courage to try a new career path. I left engineering and went on to study law and eventually became a lawyer. More important, that class and paper helped me understand education differently. Instead of seeing college as a direct stepping stone to a career, I learned to see college as a place to first learn and then seek a career or enhance an existing career. By giving me the space to express my own interpretation and to argue for my own values, my philosophy class taught me the importance of education for education's sake. That realization continues to pay dividends every day.

2. Description

Description is the tool writers use to make things come alive for their readers, to make sure that their audience is fully immersed in the words on the page. Every time you tell a story to someone, or tell someone about something, you use description even if you don't know it. Description can be as basic as, "I have a blue car" or "That is such a cute baby" or as detailed as "*The flowers soak up the golden sun's rays and begin to show their vibrant colors.*" Descriptive words are used to provide more information and provide added insight. In fact, description is the one tool that most allows writers (and speakers) to show instead of just tell, which enables us to exemplify our points to our readers.

There are two basic types of description, **objective** and **subjective**. Objective description is demonstrated in the first two examples above; it gives a factual account of the subject. Subjective description offers a more personal view of the details by choosing specific words and phrases such as *vibrant* to describe colors in the above example. Vibrant doesn't just offer detail about the colors, it also offers an opinion or a value judgment within the description. Most descriptions offer a mix of the two to convey the details while also offering the audience an idea of the emotional context of the subject being described.

Sensory Details

Figure 5.3 The Five Senses

All expressive description, however, uses **sensory details** as its basis. These are details that appeal to the ***five senses***—*sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch.* Of course, different subjects lead themselves to an emphasis on different sensory details and not all subjects require a use of all five senses. We all recognize the importance of sight as a descriptive tool, but we don't always realize how important other sensory details can also be. Consider, though, how often you will smell a certain smell and instantly think of something or someone specific. You might smell freshly baked bread and think of your grandma's kitchen, or popcorn and think of a movie theater. Hearing a certain phrase might make you think of an old friend or acquaintance. You might associate a certain type of material with a blanket you had as a child. When you take a bite of pepperoni pizza you might be reminded of the slumber parties of your youth. Sensory details really can play an important part in making a description come alive.

Assignment 2

Choose an everyday object. Write a description of that object that appeals to all five senses in a way that does not state the object.

Exercise 1

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

1. Night
2. Beach
3. City
4. Dinner
5. Stranger

Using Concrete Description

Try to use specific, concrete descriptions. For example, a writer may write *beautiful* to describe a tree. However, *beautiful* is too vague. Instead, a concrete adjective or modifier would be stronger and gives greater impact. The reader needs details for a picture to form in their heads, abstract concepts like *beautiful* lack a real-world analog.

Here's a reworked description of the tree: "the sun's rays glistened off the rain-slick leaves, even as the afternoon sky dipped towards evening." The *beautiful* qualities of the tree are "shown" through concrete details instead of merely told through abstraction. This gives the reader the illusion of immediate experience, as opposed to the dictionary variety.

Similes and Metaphors

Another way to add descriptive language is to use **similes** and **metaphors**, creating a picture in readers' heads by comparing two objects to each other. Similes and metaphors help to make

connections between two ideas, concepts, or objects that clarify or give new meaning.

A **simile** is a comparison using the words like or as. It usually compares two dissimilar objects. For example, the bread was as dry as a bone. The comparison links a piece of bread that has become hard and white to a bone that is also hard and white. Bones often dry out, and so does bread. These similar characteristics are what make the simile effective.

A **metaphor** states that one thing is something else. It is a comparison, but it does NOT use like or as to make the comparison. For example, my grandmother is an open book. The comparison implies that the my grandmother is full of information that she willingly shares with others.

To make a simile or metaphor, identify an object like a sunset, tree, or river, or a concept like love, peace, or anger. Then think of another object that has some similar traits. Decide whether the words "like" or "as" will help make the connection more understandable. A good simile or metaphor will make the reader look at both objects in a new perspective.

By adding similes and metaphors to a description paper, the writer can appeal to the readers' imagination and make the writing more interesting to read. Similes and metaphors add spark to descriptions. However, many cliches come in the form of similes and metaphors, so strive to create comparisons that are specific to your particular subject.

The Structure of a Description Essay

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

The organization of the essay may best follow **spatial order**, an arrangement of ideas according to physical characteristics or

appearance. Depending on what the writer describes, the organization could move from top to bottom, left to right, near to far, warm to cold, frightening to inviting, and so on.

For example, if the subject were a client's kitchen in the midst of renovation, you might start at one side of the room and move slowly across to the other end, describing appliances, cabinetry, and so on. Or, you might choose to start with older remnants of the kitchen and progress to the new installations. Maybe start with the floor and move up toward the ceiling.

Exercise 2

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

1. Bus stop
2. Your office
3. Your car
4. A coffee shop
5. Lobby of a movie theater
6. Mystery Option. Choose an object to describe but do not indicate it. Describe it so that you preserve the mystery.

Writing a Description

In order to write descriptively, you must take a topic and decide how to make that topic vivid for your audience. If the topic of the piece is merely to describe a particular place, you must decide what elements of that place, when described in text, will become most vivid for your audience. The first step in any descriptive writing is to

choose a topic and begin to work out a **thesis statement**. You may choose to describe a particular place.

Thesis

Sample Thesis Statement

Although Minnesota may seem drab and cold to outsiders, natives of the state find it a wonderful place to live.

We can see in this thesis statement that the writer will attempt to show the aspects of Minnesota that make it a great place to live. After detailing a thesis statement, you should come up with a list of sensory words that provide vivid detail and support the thesis. You may start by thinking about the five senses. How does your particular place look, smell, feel, taste, and sound like? How can you best describe these senses so the reader feels what you feel? By organizing the elements of descriptive language into easier to handle sections, like the five senses, you are able to more specifically engage in what elements of the description are most useful.

Order of Presentation

The writer in this case could choose to present the positive aspects of Minnesota in terms of the seasons and weather changes. The details could be presented linearly, starting with spring and going through the winter, highlighting the aspects of each season that most closely support the thesis, that Minnesota is a great place to live.

Prior to starting the essay, give some thought to the audience of your piece. Who is going to read the essay, and what effect would you like it to have upon the readers? An awareness of audience

is important in choosing the level of formality you take with your writing. Knowing your audience will also help you distinguish which details to include throughout your essay. Assume that your audience knows very little or nothing about your subject matter, and include details that may seem obvious to you.

Audience

Example Audience: In this particular essay, the writer wants to show an outsider to the state why Minnesota natives are so happy to live there. The essay should help break down stereotypes for those outsiders about Minnesota's cold weather and apparent drabness. Because the essay is designed for those who do not live in Minnesota, and maybe have never been there, it is important to include details about the state that may seem obvious to a native.

With the preparatory work complete, it is time now to begin writing your essay. Use your thesis statement to begin to construct an introductory paragraph. The introduction should set up the basis for your essay, and the thesis statement should state its purpose.

Introduction

Example Introduction

Many who have not traveled to the state of Minnesota only hear of its cold weather and boring reputation. They are sure missing out on the great opportunities that Minnesota affords. Each season offers different senses that native Minnesotans and tourists know and love. Although Minnesota may seem drab and cold to outsiders, natives of the state find it a wonderful place to live.

With the introduction complete, it is time to start constructing

the body paragraphs of your essay. Each body paragraph should have a central theme in itself, and that theme should be represented in a topic sentence. Consequently, each sentence of the paragraph should relate to and support the topic sentence. The body paragraphs are where the majority of the details should be given. When writing the first draft of your descriptive essay, include as many details as is reasonably possible. You can always eliminate the ones that do not serve the essay as well when you are revising your draft. In the case of the Minnesota nature essay, we have decided to set up the body paragraphs in terms of season, starting with spring.

Body

Example Body Paragraph

Spring in Minnesota brings new life to the state after the long winter season. The rain washes the landscape clean, leaving its fresh aroma for all to enjoy. The flowers soak up the golden sun's rays and begin to show their vibrant colors. The first birds can be seen and heard throughout the woods and fields, telling their stories in beautiful songs. The lakes begin to show their glossy finish as the ice melts away slowly under the heat of the season.

With the body paragraphs complete, it is time to bring the essay to a close with the conclusion. The conclusion should draw a conclusion based on what has been presented throughout the body of the essay. It needs to return to the thesis, but not in an overt way. The conclusion should give the reader a final sense of what the essay was meant to portray. Remember that there should not be any

new material introduced in the conclusion, and the way it is worded should give the reader a sense of finality.

Conclusion

Example Conclusion

The variety of activities and distinct seasons found in Minnesota reveal diverse beauty of this state. As one considers the benefits of each season, it becomes clearer why so many native Minnesotans are content with their home state. Minnesota is truly a wonderful place to live.

With the essay complete, it is time to reread and revise your essay (also see revision sections of this textbook). Read your first draft and pinpoint all of the descriptor words you used. If possible, go back and add more after the ones you already used in the essay. If you can, read your essay aloud to a friend and have him/her tell you what images are vivid and what images need more development. Rework any images that are cloudy with more descriptions. Also, check to see if your descriptions have made use of all of the five senses: sound, smell, texture, sight, and taste. Repeat these steps as many times as necessary until you are happy with your product.

Key Takeaways

- Description essays should describe something vividly to the reader using strong sensory details.
- Sensory details appeal to the five human senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.
- A description essay should start with the writer's main impression of a person, a place, or an object.

External Links

Checklist of **Things to Consider** (https://tinyurl.com/y7zegezs) when writing a description.

Susan Berne visits New York and describes her impressions in ***Where Nothing Says Everything*** (https://tinyurl.com/yboc9m9s), also called *Ground Zero*. Another link to the story is **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y99fchlw).

Heather Rogers provides a detailed description (book excerpt) of a landfill that challenges the reader to consider his or her own consumption and waste in ***The Hidden Life of Garbage*** *(https://tinyurl.com/y7sb348m).*

Sample Descriptive Essay

America's Pastime

As the sun hits my face and I breathe in the fresh air, I temporarily forget that I am at a sporting event. But, when I open my eyes and look around, I am reminded of all things American. From the national anthem to the international players on the field, all the sights and sounds of a baseball game come together like a slice of Americana pie.

First, the entrance turnstiles click and clank, and then a hallway of noise bombards me. All the fans' voices coalesce in a chorus of sound, rising to a humming clamor. The occasional, "Programs, get your programs, here!" jumps out through the hum to get my attention. I navigate my way through the crowded walkways of the stadium, moving to the right of some people, and to the left of others, I eventually find the section number where my seat is located. As I approach my seat I hear the announcer's voice echo around the ball park, "Attention fans. In honor of our country, please remove your caps for the singing of the national anthem." His deep voice echoes around each angle of the park, and every word is heard again and again. The crowd sings and hums "The Star-Spangled Banner," and I feel a surprising amount of national pride through the voices. I take my seat as the umpire shouts, "Play ball!" and the game begins.

In the fifth inning of the game, I decide to find a concessions stand. Few tastes are as American as hot dogs and soda pop, and they cannot be missed at a ball game. The smell of hot dogs carries through the park, down every aisle, and inside every concourse. They are always as unhealthy as possible, dripping in grease,

while the buns are soft and always too small for the dog. The best way to wash down the Ball Park Frank is with a large soda pop, so I order both. Doing my best to balance the cold pop in one hand and the wrapped-up dog in the other, I find the nearest condiments stand to load up my hot dog. A dollop of bright green relish and chopped onions, along with two squirts of the ketchup and mustard complete the dog. As I continue the balancing act between the loaded hot dog and pop back to my seat, a cheering fan bumps into my pop hand. The pop splashes out of the cup and all over my shirt, leaving me drenched. I make direct eye contact with the man who bumped into me. He looks me in the eye, looks at my shirt, and tells me how sorry he is. I just shake my head and keep walking. "It's all just part of the experience," I tell myself.

Before I am able to get back to my seat, I hear the crack of a bat, followed by an uproar from the crowd. Everyone is standing, clapping, and cheering. I missed a home run. I find my aisle and ask everyone to excuse me as I slip past them to my seat. "Excuse me. Excuse me. Thank you. Thank you. Sorry," is all I can say as I inch past each fan. Halfway to my seat I can hear discarded peanut shells crunch beneath my feet, and each step is marked with a pronounced crunch.

When I finally get to my seat I realize it is the start of the seventh inning stretch. I quickly eat my hot dog and wash it down with what is left of my soda pop. The organ starts playing and everyone begins to sing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." While singing the song, putting my arms around friends and family with me, I

watch all the players taking the field. It is wonderful to see the overwhelming number of players on one team from around the world: Japan, the Dominican Republic, the United States, Canada, and Venezuela. I cannot help but feel a bit of national pride at this realization. Seeing the international representation on the field reminds me of the ways that Americans, though from many different backgrounds and places, still come together under common ideals. For these reasons and for the whole experience in general, going to a Major League Baseball game is the perfect way to glimpse a slice of Americana.

3. Process Analysis

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

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

What is the difference between process instruction and process explanation?

Process instruction is direct instruction (such as how to change a tire), so direct address (2nd person) can be used. It is okay to

communicate to the audience because you imagine their purpose in reading the instruction is to learn and follow said instruction. **Process explanations** are more like what we get in textbooks (the Krebs Cycle explained in a biology textbook, e.g.). They are more formal and involve third person with the process itself at the heart. No more direct address or command language allowed, and paragraph structure is the norm.

Writing at Work

The next time you have to explain a process to someone at work, be mindful of how clearly you articulate each step. Strong communication skills are critical for workplace satisfaction and advancement. Effective process analysis plays a critical role in developing that skill set.

Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, make a bulleted list of all the steps that you feel would be required to clearly illustrate three of the following four processes. Also, identify whether each of these are process instruction or process explanation:

1.Tying a shoelace

2.Parallel parking

3.Planning a successful first date

4.Being an effective communicator

The Structure of a Process Analysis Essay

The process analysis essay opens with a discussion of the process and a thesis statement that states the goal of the process.

The organization of a process analysis essay typically follows **chronological order**. The steps of the process are conveyed in the order in which they usually occur. Body paragraphs will be constructed based on these steps. If a particular step is complicated and needs a lot of explaining, then it will likely take up a paragraph on its own. But if a series of simple steps is easier to understand, then the steps can be grouped into a single paragraph.

The **time transition phrases** covered in the **Illustration and Exemplification** section are also helpful in organizing process analysis essays. Words such as first, second, third, next, and finally can be helpful cues to orient the reader and organize the content of essay.

Tip

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

spots and ensure no steps have been omitted. Can your reader follow the steps to recreate the process?

Exercise 4

Choose two of the lists you created in Exercise 3 and start writing out the processes in paragraph form. Try to construct paragraphs based on the complexity of each step. For complicated steps, dedicate an entire paragraph. If fewer complicated steps fall in succession, group them into a single paragraph.

Writing a Process Analysis Essay

Choose a topic that is interesting, is relatively complex, and can be explained in a series of steps. As with other rhetorical writing modes, choose a process that you know well so that you can more easily describe the finer details about each step in the process. Your thesis statement should come at the end of your introduction, and it should state the final outcome of the process you are describing. Remember to also include, either in the introduction or the first body paragraph, a list of necessary equipment/tools and any relevant recommendations for where the process should take place.

Body paragraphs are composed of the steps in the process. Each step should be expressed using strong details and clear examples. Use time transition phrases to help organize steps in the process

and to orient readers. The conclusion should thoroughly describe the result of the process described in the body paragraphs.

Exercise 5

Choose one of the expanded lists from Exercise 4. Construct a full process analysis essay from the work you have already done. That means adding an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, time transition phrases, body paragraphs, and a solid conclusion.

Assignment 3

Choose something that you know how to do well or that your understand thoroughly. Make sure it is complex enough to warrant instructions (i.e. skip instructions for basic tasks – brushing teeth, driving a car, etc.). If you are writing **process instructions**, be sure to include a section at the beginning explaining what materials or tools are required, what clothing is recommended and what environment is necessary. If you are writing **process explanation**, be sure to introduce what you plan to explain, and any information about it the reader needs to understand your explanations. Conclude with some idea of what the reader should expect after the steps are done.

Key Takeaways

- A process analysis essay explains how to do something, how something works, or both.
- The process analysis essay opens with a discussion of the process and a thesis statement that states the outcome of the process.
- The organization of a process analysis essay typically follows a chronological sequence.
- Time transition phrases are particularly helpful in process analysis essays to organize steps and orient reader.

External Links

Stanley Fish, a professor of humanities and law at Florida International University, tells us why ***Getting Coffee Is Hard to Do*** (*https://tinyurl.com/y89lmsfc*). Another link to this story is here (https://tinyurl.com/yareanjc).

Arthur Miller takes a humorous look at a gruesome process in ***Get It Right: Privatize Executions*** (*https://tinyurl.com/ycdknq8d*). Another link to the story is **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y6wdcwtn).

Sample Process Essay

How to Grow Tomatoes from a Seedling

Growing tomatoes is a simple and rewarding task, and more people should be growing them. This paper walks readers through the main steps for growing and maintaining patio tomatoes from a seedling.

The first step in growing tomatoes is determining if you have the appropriate available space and sunlight to grow them. All tomato varieties require full sunlight, which means at least six hours of direct sun every day. If you have south-facing windows or a patio or backyard that receives direct sunlight, you should be able to grow tomatoes. Choose the location that receives the most sun.

Next, you need to find the right seedling. Growing tomatoes and other vegetables from seeds can be more complicated (though it is not difficult), so I am only discussing how to grow tomatoes from a seedling. A seedling, for those who do not know, is typically understood as a young plant that has only recently started growing from the seed. It can be anything from a newly germinated plant to a fully flowering plant. You can usually find tomato seedlings at your local nursery for an affordable price. Less than five dollars per plant is a common price. When choosing the best seedling, look for a plant that is short with healthy, full leaves and no flowers. This last point tends to be counterintuitive, but it is extremely important. You do not want a vegetable plant that has already started flowering in the nursery because it will have a more difficult time adapting to its

new environment when you replant it. Additionally, choose a plant with one strong main stem. This is important because the fewer stems that a tomato plant has, the more easily it can transport nutrients to the fruit. Multiple stems tend to divide nutrients in less efficient ways, often resulting in either lower yields or smaller fruit.

Once you have found the right seedlings to plant back home, you need to find the best way of planting them. I recommend that you plant your tomatoes in containers. If you have the space and sunlight, then you can certainly plant them in the ground, but a container has several advantages and is usually most manageable for the majority of gardeners. The containers can be used in the house, on a patio, or anywhere in the backyard, and they are portable. Containers also tend to better regulate moisture and drain excess water. Choose a container that is at least 10 inches in diameter and at least 1 foot deep. This will provide sufficient room for root development.

In addition to the container, you also need the appropriate soil mixture and draining mechanisms. For the best drainage, fill the bottom of your container with 2 or 3 inches of gravel. On top of the gravel, fill ¾ of the container with soil. Choose a well-balanced organic soil. The three main ingredients you will find described on soil bags are N-P-K—that is, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Without going into too much detail about the role of each element in plant growth, I will tell you that an average vegetable will grow fine in a 10-5-5

mixture. This ratio, too, will be easy to find at your local nursery.

Once you have the gravel in the bottom of the container and the soil on top, you are ready to transplant the tomato. Pick up the tomato in the plastic container it comes in from the nursery. Turn it upside down, and holding the stem between your fingers, pat the bottom lightly several times, and the plant should fall into your hand. Next, you should gently break up with your hands the root ball that formed in the nursery container. Be gentle, but be sure to rip them up a bit; this helps generate new root growth in the new container. Be careful not to damage the roots too much, as this could stunt the growth or even destroy the plant altogether.

Next, carve out a hole in the soil to make space for the plant. Make it deep enough to go about an inch higher than it was previously buried and wide enough so all the roots can comfortably fit within and beneath it. Place the seedling in the hole and push the removed soil back on top to cover the base of the plant. After that, the final step in planting your tomato is mulch. Mulch is not necessary for growing plants, but it can be very helpful in maintaining moisture, keeping out weeds, and regulating soil temperature. Place two-three inches of mulch above the soil and spread it out evenly.

Once the mulch is laid, you are mostly done. The rest is all watering, waiting, and maintenance. After you lay the mulch, pour the plant a heavy amount of water. Water the plant at its base until you see water coming through the bottom of the container. Wait ten minutes,

and repeat. This initial watering is very important for establishing new roots. You should continue to keep the soil moist, but never soaking wet. One healthy watering each morning should be sufficient for days without rain. You can often forego watering on days with moderate rainfall. Watering in the morning is preferable to the evening because it lessens mold and bacteria growth.

Choosing to grow the patio variety of tomatoes is easiest because patio tomatoes do not require staking or training around cages. They grow in smaller spaces and have a determinate harvest time. As you continue to water and monitor your plant, prune unhealthy looking leaves on the main stem, and cut your tomatoes down at the stem when they ripen to your liking. As you can see, growing tomatoes can be very easy and manageable for even novice gardeners. The satisfaction of picking and eating fresh food, and doing it yourself, outweighs all the effort you put in over the growing season.

4. Illustration and Exemplification

To **illustrate** means to show or demonstrate something clearly through the use of evidence. To **exemplify** means to demonstrate through the use of examples. This is a technique that can stand alone but is most often used within an essay to demonstrate the various points that an essay is offering as it supports it thesis. Effective **illustration** clearly demonstrates and supports a point through the use of evidence.

A writer can use different types of evidence to support his or her thesis. Using scientific studies, experts in a particular field, statistics, historical events, current events, analogies, and personal anecdotes are all ways in which a writer can illustrate a thesis. A variety of evidence is needed to demonstrate the validity of any thesis. Ultimately, you want the evidence to help the reader "see" your point, as one would see a good illustration in a magazine or on a website. ***This I Believe*** (https://thisibelieve.org/) is a website that collects essays that illustrate core values and beliefs. Visit the program's website for some examples.

The stronger your evidence is, the more clearly the reader will consider your point. Using evidence effectively can be challenging, though. The evidence you choose will usually depend on your subject, your essay's purpose, and your audience. When writing an illustration essay, keep in mind the following:

- Use evidence that is appropriate for your topic as well as appropriate for your audience.
- Assess how much evidence you need to adequately explain your point , which depends on the complexity of the subject and the knowledge of your audience regarding that subject.

For example, if you were writing about a new communication software and your audience was a group of English-major undergrads, you might want to use an analogy or a personal story to illustrate how the software worked. You might also choose to add a few more pieces of evidence to make sure the audience understands your point. However, if you were writing about the same subject and your audience members were information technology (IT) specialists, you would likely use more technical evidence because they would be familiar with the subject.

Keeping in mind your subject in relation to your audience will increase your chances of effectively illustrating your point.

Tip

You never want to insult your readers' intelligence by over-explaining concepts the audience members may already be familiar with, but it may be necessary to clearly articulate your point. When in doubt, add an extra example to illustrate your idea.

Exercise 6

On a separate piece of paper, form a thesis based on each of the following three topics. Then list the types of evidence that would best explain your point for each audience.

1. Topic: Combat and mental health
2. Audience: family members of veterans, doctors
3. Topic: Video games and teen violence
4. Audience: parents, children
5. Topic: Architecture and earthquakes
6. Audience: engineers, local townspeople

The Structure of an Illustration Essay

The controlling idea, or thesis, often belongs at the beginning of the essay. Evidence is then presented in the essay's body paragraphs, to support the thesis. As you decide how to present

your evidence, consider order of importance, then decide whether you want to with your strongest evidence first, or start with evidence of lesser importance and have the essay build to increasingly stronger evidence. The table below shows the connection between order and purpose.

Figure 5.4 Order Versus Purpose

ORDER	PURPOSE
Chronological Order	To explain the history of an event or a topic
	To tell a story or relate an experience
	To explain how to do or make something
	To explain the steps in a process
Spatial Order	To help readers visualize something as you want them to see it
	To create a main impression using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
Order of Importance	To persuade or convince
	To rank items by their importance, benefit, or significance

The time transition words listed in the table above are also helpful in ordering the presentation of evidence. Words like *first*, *second*, *third*, *currently*, *next*, and *finally* all help orient the reader and sequence evidence clearly. Because an illustration essay uses so

many examples, it is also helpful to have a list of words and phrases to present each piece of evidence. The table below provides a list of phrases for illustration.

Figure 5.5 Phrases of Illustration

PHRASES OF ILLUSTRATION	
case in point	for example
for instance	in particular
in this case	one example/ another example
specifically	to illustrate

Tip

Vary the phrases of illustration you use. Do not rely on

just one. Variety in choice of words and phrasing is critical when trying to keep readers engaged in your writing and your ideas.

Writing at Work

In the workplace, it is often helpful to keep the phrases of illustration in mind as a way to incorporate them whenever you can. Whether you are writing out directives that colleagues will have to follow or requesting a new product or service from another company, making a conscious effort to incorporate a phrase of illustration will force you to provide examples of what you mean.

Exercise 7

On a separate sheet of paper, form a thesis based on one of the following topics. Then support that thesis with three pieces of evidence. Make sure to use a different phrase of illustration to introduce each piece of evidence you choose.

1. Cooking
2. Baseball
3. Work hours
4. Exercise
5. Traffic

Collaboration: Please share with a classmate and compare your answers. Discuss which topic you like the best or would like to learn more about. Indicate which thesis statement you perceive as the most effective.

Writing an Illustration Essay

First, decide on a topic that you feel interested in writing about. Then create an interesting introduction to engage the reader. The main point, or thesis, should be stated at the end of the introduction.

Gather evidence that is appropriate to both your subject and your audience. You can order the evidence in terms of importance, either from least important to most important or from most important to least important. Be sure to fully explain all of your examples using strong, clear supporting details.

Exercise 8

Choose a motto or other inspirational statement that appeals to you. Using the aspects outlined above, write a paragraph that illustrates this statement. Remember to

include specific examples and description to illustrate your interpretation of this statement.

Assignment 4

Choosing either a topic from Exercise 7 or Exercise 8 write a minimum five paragraph illustration essay.

Key Takeaways

- An illustration essay clearly explains a main point using evidence.
- When choosing evidence, always gauge whether the evidence is appropriate for the subject as well as the audience.
- Organize the evidence in terms of importance, either from least important to most important or from most important to least important.
- Use time transitions to order evidence.
- Use phrases of illustration to highlight examples.

Student Sample: Illustration/Example Essay

Letter to the City

To: Lakeview Department of Transportation

From: A Concerned Citizen

The intersection of Central Avenue and Lake Street is dangerous and demands immediate consideration for the installation of a controlling mechanism. I have lived in Lakeview my entire life, and during that time I have witnessed too many accidents and close calls at that intersection. I would like the Department of Transportation to answer this question: how many lives have to be lost on the corner of Central Avenue and Lake Street before a street light or stop sign is placed there?

Over the past twenty years, the population of Lakeview has increased dramatically. This population growth has put tremendous pressure on the city's roadways, especially Central Avenue and its intersecting streets. At the intersection of Central Avenue and Lake Street it is easy to see how serious this problem is. For example, when I try to cross Central Avenue as a pedestrian, I frequently wait over ten minutes for the cars to clear, and even then I must rush to the median. I will then have to continue to wait until I can finally run to the other side of the street. On one hand, even as a physically fit adult, I can run only with significant effort and care. Expecting a senior citizen or a child to cross this street, on the other hand, is extremely dangerous

and irresponsible. Does the city have any plans to do anything about this?

Recent data show that the intersection of Central Avenue and Lake Street has been especially dangerous. According to the city's own statistics, three fatalities occurred at that intersection in the past year alone. Over the past five years, the intersection witnessed fourteen car accidents, five of which were fatal. These numbers officially qualify the intersection as the most fatal and dangerous in the entire state. It should go without saying that fatalities and accidents are not the clearest way of measuring the severity of this situation because for each accident that happens, countless other close calls never contribute to city data. I hope you will agree that these numbers alone are sufficient evidence that the intersection at Central Avenue and Lake Street is hazardous and demands immediate attention.

Nearly all accidents mentioned are caused by vehicles trying to cross Central Avenue while driving on Lake Street. I think the City of Lakeview should consider placing a traffic light there to control the traffic going both ways. While I do not have access to any resources or data that can show precisely how much a traffic light can improve the intersection, I think you will agree that a controlled busy intersection is much safer than an uncontrolled one. Therefore, at a minimum, the city must consider making the intersection a four-way stop.

Each day that goes by without attention to this issue is a lost opportunity to save lives and make the community a safer, more enjoyable place to live. Because the safety of citizens is the priority of every

government, I can only expect that the Department of Transportation and the City of Lakeview will act on this matter immediately. For the safety and well-being of Lakeview citizens, please do not let bureaucracy or money impede this urgent project.

Sincerely,

A Concerned Citizen

External Links

"**April & Paris**" (https://tinyurl.com/y9rgud9b) by David Sedaris: In "April & Paris," writer David Sedaris explores the unique impact of animals on the human psyche.

"**She's Your Basic L.O.L. in N.A.D**" (https://tinyurl.com/y7ocnnl5) by Perri Klass: In "She's Your Basic L.O.L. in N.A.D," pediatrician and writer Perri Klass discusses the medical-speak she encountered in her training as a doctor and its underlying meaning.

Jessica Bennett, a senior writer for *Newsweek*, offers an example of an illustration essay when she presents ***The Flip Side of Internet Fame*** (https://tinyurl.com/y9yjmqt9). You can also see the essay **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y7vd53db).

5. Cause and Effect

It is often considered human nature to ask, "why?" and "how?" We want to know how our child got sick so we can better prevent it from happening in the future, or why our colleague received a pay raise because we want one as well. We want to know how much

money we will save over the long term if we buy a hybrid car. These examples identify only a few of the relationships we think about in our lives, but each shows the importance of understanding cause and effect.

A cause is something that produces an event or condition; an effect is what results from an event or condition. The purpose of the **cause-and-effect essay** is to determine how various phenomena relate in terms of origins and results. Sometimes the connection between cause and effect is clear, but often determining the exact relationship between the two is very difficult. For example, the following effects of a cold may be easily identifiable: a sore throat, a runny nose, and a cough. But, determining the cause of the sickness can be far more difficult. A number of causes are possible, and to complicate matters, these possible causes could have combined to cause the sickness. That is, more than one cause may be responsible for any given effect. Therefore, cause-and-effect discussions are often complicated and frequently lead to debates and arguments.

Tip

Use the complex nature of cause and effect to your advantage. Often it is not necessary, or even possible, to find the exact cause of an event or to name the exact effect. So, when formulating a thesis, you can claim one of a number of causes or effects to be the primary, or main, cause or effect. As soon as you claim that one cause or one effect is more crucial than the others, you have developed a thesis.

Exercise 9

Consider the causes and effects in the following thesis statements. Identify whether each statement is identifying a cause or an effect. Then, list a cause and effect for each one on your own sheet of paper.

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

Exercise 10

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

1. Health and nutrition
2. Sports
3. Media

4. Politics
5. History

The Structure of a Cause-and-Effect Essay

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

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

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

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

Regardless of which structure you choose, be sure to explain each element of the essay fully and completely. Explaining complex relationships requires the full use of evidence, such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and anecdotes.

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

Figure 5.6 Phrases of Causation

PHRASES OF CAUSATION	
as a result	consequently
because	due to
hence	since
thus	therefore

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

Tip

Be careful of resorting to empty speculation. In writing, speculation amounts to unsubstantiated

guessing. Writers are particularly prone to such trappings in cause-and-effect arguments because of the complex nature of finding links between phenomena. Be sure to have clear evidence to support the claims that you make.

Exercise 11

Look at some of the cause-and-effect relationships from Exercise 9. Outline the links you listed. Outline one using a cause-then-effect structure. Outline the other using the effect-then-cause structure.

Writing a Cause-and-Effect Essay

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

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

to most important (or vice versa), or order the effects from least important to most important (or vice versa).

Use the phrases of causation when trying to forge connections between various events or conditions. This will help organize your ideas and orient the reader. End your essay by drawing a conclusion based on the information presented. You may find it helpful to think of the conclusion as an answer to the question: "so what" or as a continuation of the statement "and so. . . ". In some cases, may be appropriate to issue a call to action in your essay's conclusion. XERCISE 4

Exercise 12

Choose a local issue or topic that concerns you. Examine both the causes and effects of this issue or topic, and write a paragraph that outlines these using the components of a cause and effect essay.

Assignment 5

Choose one of the ideas you outlined in Exercise 11 and write a full cause-and-effect essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, strong evidence and examples, and a thoughtful conclusion.

Key Takeaways

The purpose of the cause-and-effect essay is to determine how various phenomena are related.

- The thesis states what the writer sees as the main cause, main effect, or various causes and effects of a condition or event.
- The cause-and-effect essay can be organized in one of these two primary ways:
  - Start with the cause and then write about the effect.
  - Start with the effect and then write about the cause.
- Strong evidence is particularly important in the cause-and-effect essay because of the complexity of determining connections between phenomena.
- Phrases of causation are helpful in signaling links between various elements in the essay.

Cause and Effect Essay Example

Effects of Video Game Addiction

By Scott McLean

Video game addition is a serious problem in many parts of the world today and deserves more attention. It is no secret that children and adults in many countries throughout the world, including Japan, China, and the United States, play video games every day. Most players are able to limit their usage in ways that do not interfere with their daily lives, but many others have developed an addiction to playing video games and suffer detrimental effects.

An addiction can be described in several ways, but generally speaking, addictions involve unhealthy attractions to substances or activities that ultimately disrupt the ability of a person to keep up with regular daily responsibilities. Video game addiction typically involves playing games uncontrollably for many hours at a time—some people will play only four hours at a time while others cannot stop for over twenty-four hours. Regardless of the severity of the addiction, many of the same effects will be experienced by all.

One common effect of video game addiction is isolation and withdrawal from social experiences. Video game players often hide in their homes or in Internet cafés for days at a time—only reemerging for the most pressing tasks and necessities. The effect of this isolation can lead to a breakdown of communication skills and often a loss in socialization. While it is true that many games, especially massive multiplayer online games, involve a very real form of e-based communication and coordination with others, and these virtual interactions often result in real communities that

can be healthy for the players, these communities and forms of communication rarely translate to the types of valuable social interaction that humans need to maintain typical social functioning. As a result, the social networking in these online games often gives the users the impression that they are interacting socially, while their true social lives and personal relations may suffer.

Another unfortunate product of the isolation that often accompanies video game addiction is the disruption of the user's career. While many players manage to enjoy video games and still hold their jobs without problems, others experience challenges at their workplace. Some may only experience warnings or demerits as a result of poorer performance, or others may end up losing their jobs altogether. Playing video games for extended periods of time often involves sleep deprivation, and this tends to carry over to the workplace, reducing production and causing habitual tardiness.

Video game addiction may result in a decline in overall health and hygiene. Players who interact with video games for such significant amounts of time can go an entire day without eating and even longer without basic hygiene tasks, such as using the restroom or bathing. The effects of this behavior pose significant danger to their overall health.

The causes of video game addiction are complex and can vary greatly, but the effects have the potential to be severe. Playing video games can and should be a fun activity for all to enjoy. But just like everything else, the amount of time one spends playing video games needs

to be balanced with personal and social responsibilities.

External Links

"**Women in Science**" (https://tinyurl.com/y8pggr7g) by K.C. Cole. The link to the essay is correct. It seems to be titled "Hers" but it is the correct essay.

"**Cultural Baggage**" (https://tinyurl.com/yc7qeuyp) by Barbara Ehrenreich.

Robin Tolmach Lakoff discusses the power of language to dehumanize in "***From Ancient Greece to Iraq: The Power of Words in Wartime"*** (https://tinyurl.com/y76bt3ah).

Alan Weisman examines the human impact on the planet and its effects in "***Earth without People***" (https://tinyurl.com/mswazr).

6. Comparison and Contrast

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

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

distinctions between elements in a similar category will increase the audience's understanding of that category, which is the purpose of the compare-and-contrast essay.

Figure 5.7 Apples, Green and Red

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

Writing at Work

Comparing and contrasting is also an evaluative tool. In order to make accurate evaluations about a given topic, you must first know the critical points of similarity and difference. Comparing and contrasting is a primary tool for many workplace assessments. You have likely compared and contrasted yourself to other colleagues. Employee advancements, pay raises, hiring, and firing are typically conducted using comparison and contrast. Comparison and contrast could be used to evaluate companies, departments, or individuals.

Exercise 13

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

1. Romantic comedies
2. Internet search engines
3. Cell phones

Exercise 14

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

1. Department stores and discount retail stores
2. Fast food chains and fine dining restaurants
3. Dogs and cats

The Structure of a Comparison and Contrast Essay

The compare-and-contrast essay starts with a thesis that clearly states the two subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both and the reason for doing so. Remember, the point of comparing and

contrasting is to provide useful knowledge to the reader. Take the following thesis as an example that focuses on contrast.

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

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

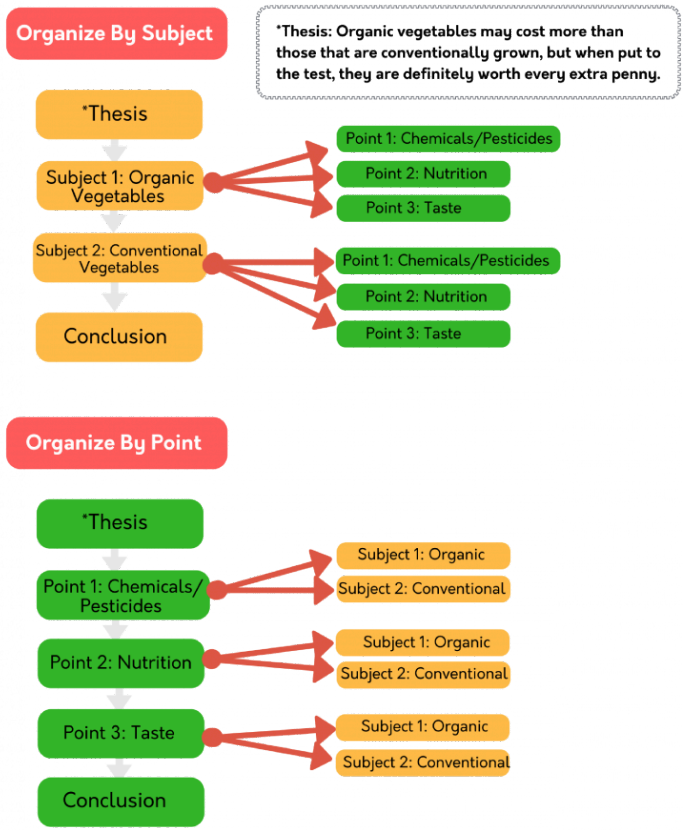
You may organize compare-and-contrast essays in one of the following two ways:

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

The organizational structure you choose depends on the nature of the topic, your purpose, and your audience.

See the chart below, which diagrams the ways to organize the organic versus conventional vegetables thesis.

Figure 5.8 Organization Diagram



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

Figure 5.9 Phrases of Comparison and Contrast

COMPARISON	CONTRAST
one similarity	one difference
another similarity	another difference
both	conversely
like	in contrast
likewise	unlike
similarly	while
in a similar fashion	whereas

Exercise 15

Create an outline for each of the items you chose in Exercises 13 and 14. Use the point-by-point organizing strategy for one of them, and use the subject organizing strategy for the other.

Writing a Comparison and Contrast Essay

First, choose whether you want to compare seemingly disparate subjects, contrast seemingly similar subjects, or compare and contrast subjects. Once you have decided on a topic, introduce it with an engaging opening paragraph. Your thesis should come at the end of the introduction, and it should establish the subjects you will compare, contrast, or both as well as state what can be learned from doing so.

The body of the essay can be organized in one of two ways: by subject or by individual points. The organizing strategy that you choose will depend on, as always, your audience and your purpose. You may also consider your particular approach to the subjects as well as the nature of the subjects themselves; some subjects might better lend themselves to one structure or the other. Make sure to use comparison and contrast phrases to cue the reader to the ways in which you are analyzing the relationship between the subjects.

After you finish analyzing the subjects, write a conclusion that reinforces your thesis while drawing a conclusion based on what you have presented. This conclusion is the "and so" statement for your essay, giving you the place to offer a judgement based on the examination you have just offered.

Writing at Work

Many business presentations are conducted using comparison and contrast. The organizing strategies—by subject or individual points—could also be used for organizing a presentation. Keep this in mind as a way of organizing your content the next time you or a colleague have to present something at work.

Exercise 16

Choose two people who are significant in your life and have a similar relationship with you (two friends, two siblings, etc). Make a list of similarities and differences between these people. Consult your list, then draw a conclusion based on the presence of these similarities and differences. Outline the similarities and differences, then write a statement that offers an overall conclusion.

Assignment 5

Choose one of the outlines you created in Exercise 15 or 16, and write a full compare-and-contrast essay. Be sure to include an engaging introduction, a clear thesis, well-defined and detailed paragraphs, and a fitting conclusion that ties everything together.

Key Takeaways

- A compare-and-contrast essay analyzes two subjects by either comparing them, contrasting them, or both.
- The purpose of writing a comparison or contrast essay is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities between two subjects.
- The thesis should clearly state the subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both, and it should state what is to be learned from doing so.
- There are two main organizing strategies for compare-and-contrast essays.
    - Organize by the subjects themselves, one then the other.
    - Organize by individual points, in which you discuss each subject in relation to each point.
- Use phrases of comparison or phrases of contrast to signal to readers how exactly the two subjects are being analyzed.

External Links

"**Disability**" (https://tinyurl.com/y99te6e2) by Nancy Mairs: In "Disability," writer Nancy Mairs discusses the experience of being a disabled person in a world focused on the able-bodied. It seems to be titled "Hers" but it is the correct essay.

"**Friending, Ancient or Otherwise**" (https://tinyurl.com/y85u8ae8) by Alex Wright: In "Friending, Ancient or Otherwise,"

writer Alex Wright explores the evolution and purpose of friendship in the age of social media.

"***Sex, Lies and Conversation: Why Is It So Hard for Men and Women to Talk to Each Other*?**" (https://tinyurl.com/y95dpehx) by Deborah Tannen. In this essay, Tannen compares and contrasts conversation styles. You can view the essay **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y9vnjqv8) also.

Example Comparison and Contrast Essay

"A South African Storm"

By Allison Howard – Peace Corps Volunteer: South Africa (2003-2005)

It's a Saturday afternoon in January in South Africa. When I begin the 45–minute walk to the shops for groceries, I can hear thunder cracking in the distance up the mountain in Mageobaskloof. But at 4 p.m. the sky is still light and bright and I am sure—famous last words—I will be fine without an umbrella.

Just the basics: eggs, bread, Diet Coke in a bag slung into the crook of my elbow. Halfway from town, two black South African women—domestic workers in the homes of white Afrikaner families—stop me with wide smiles. They know me; I'm the only white person in town who walks everywhere, as they do. They chatter quickly in northern Sotho: "Missus, you must go fast. Pula e tla na! The rain, it comes!" They like me, and it feels very important to me that they do."Yebo, yebo, mma," I say—Yes, it's true—and I hurry along in flip-

flops, quickening my pace, feeling good about our brief but neighborly conversation. These are Venda women.

My black South African friends tell me it's easy to tell a Venda from a Shangaan from a Xhosa from a Pedi. "These ones from Venda , they have wide across the nose and high in the cheekbones," they say. But I don't see it; I'm years away from being able to distinguish the nuances of ethnicity. Today, I know these women are Vendas simply because of their clothing: bright stripes of green and yellow and black fabric tied at one shoulder and hanging quite like a sack around their bodies. They've already extended a kindness to me by speaking in northern Sotho. It's not their language but they know I don't speak a word of Afrikaans (though they don't understand why; Afrikaans is the language of white people). They know I struggle with Sotho and they're trying to help me learn. So they speak Sotho to me and they're delighted and amused by my fumbling responses. And I am, quite simply, delighted by their delight.

The Venda ladies are right: the rain, it comes. Lightly at first, and by habit I begin trotting to hurry my way home. Just a little rain at first and there are plenty of us out in it. I can see others up ahead on the street and others still just leaving the shops to get back before the real rain begins.

The people who are walking along this swath of tar road are black. Black people don't live in this neighborhood—or in my town at all, for the most part. They work and board here as domestic workers, nannies, gardeners. Their families live in black

townships and rural villages—some just outside of my town; others far away, in places like Venda.

Today, we're walking together in the rain, and I'm quickening my pace because—after all , it's raining . That's what you do in the rain. And even though it's coming down noticeably harder, it's 80 degrees and I'm not cold, I'm just wet. My hair is stuck to my forehead and my T-shirt is soaked … and I'm the only one running for cover. And I think: So what? It's just water and in the middle of the January summer, it's warm, refreshing water. Why run? Why do we run from the rain?

In my life back in the United States, I might run because I was carrying a leather handbag, or because I wore an outfit that shouldn't get wet. I would run because rain dishevels and messes things up. Mostly though, we run because we just do; it's a habit. I've done it a hundred times: running to my car or the subway station with a newspaper sheltering my head. I have never not quickened my pace in the rain until today.

It took all of my 27 years and a move to Africa , where I don't have a leather handbag to shelter or a pretty outfit to protect. I'm wearing an old cotton skirt and a T-shirt, and I'm drenched, and I love it. I learn things here in the most ordinary circumstances. And I feel like a smarter, better woman today because I got groceries in the rain.

But on the long walk home, positively soaked and smiling like a fool, I notice a car pulling over and a man yelling in Afrikaans to get in, get in. I look in the direction I've come from and several meters behind me is a woman with a baby tied to her back and an elderly

man carrying bags, leading a young boy by the hand. On the road ahead, a woman about my age carries a parcel wrapped in plastic, balanced precariously on her head. There are maybe 20 people walking with me in my reverie of rain and they are black. And the man in the car is white and he's gesturing frantically for me to get in. Why me? Why not the others? Because I'm white and it's about race. Everything is about race here.

This man in the car is trying to do something kind and neighborly. He wants to help me and his gesture is right, but his instincts are so wrong. How do you resent someone who is, for no benefit of his own, trying to help? But I do. I resent him and I resent the world he lives in that taught him such selective kindness. This whole event unravels in a few seconds' time. He's leaned over and opened the car door, urging me in … and I get in. And we speed past my fellow walkers and he drops me at my doorstep before I have time to think of anything besides giving him directions.

It feels like a mistake because I'm ashamed to think what the Venda women would have felt if he'd ignored them and they had watched me climb into that car. In some ways, the whole episode seems absurd. I'm not going to atone for 400 years of South African history by walking with black people in the rain. If I'd refused his ride, he wouldn't have thought anything besides the fact that I was certifiably crazy. That's the thing about being here: I'm not going to changeanything. But I believe it matters in some infinitesimal way that people like the Venda women, and the dozens of people who may walk alongside me on any given day, know that I'm there. In

black South African culture it is polite to greet every person you pass. That's what they do, so I do it, too. On the occasional morning, someone might greet me as "sesi," sister. I have to believe that matters; I know it matters to me.

I was disappointed in myself for getting into the car because I acted according to the same habit that makes us think rain an inconvenience. Just as we run from the rain, I hopped into that car because I'm supposed to. Conventionally, it makes sense. But convention compels us to do so many things that don't make any sense at all. Convention misinforms our instincts. And in a larger sense, it is convention that propels Afrikaner culture anachronistically into the future. Ten years after the supposed end of apartheid, I'm living in a world of institutionalized racism. Convention becomes institution—and it's oppressive and it's unjust. I know that if I'm going to make it here for two more years, I need to walk in the rain. It's a small, wasted gesture, but it's an uncorrupted instinct that makes me feel human.

So much about living here feels like that fraction of a second when the Afrikaner man was appealing to my conventional sensibilities and the people on the street were appealing to my human instincts. It may feel unnatural to reject those sensibilities just as, at first, it feels unnatural to walk in the rain. But if I lose a hold on my instincts here, I'll fail myself and I'll fail to achieve those tiny things that matter so much. It's simple and it's small; and it's everything. Gandhi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Indeed. Let it rain.

Example Comparison and Contrast Essay#2

Comparing and Contrasting London and Washington, DC

Both Washington, DC, and London are capital cities of English-speaking countries, and yet they offer vastly different experiences to their residents and visitors. Comparing and contrasting the two cities based on their history, their culture, and their residents show how different and similar the two are.

Both cities are rich in world and national history, though they developed on very different time lines. London, for example, has a history that dates back over two thousand years. It was part of the Roman Empire and known by the similar name, Londinium. It was not only one of the northernmost points of the Roman Empire but also the epicenter of the British Empire where it held significant global influence from the early sixteenth century on through the early twentieth century. Washington, DC, on the other hand, has only formally existed since the late eighteenth century. Though Native Americans inhabited the land several thousand years earlier, and settlers inhabited the land as early as the sixteenth century, the city did not become the capital of the United States until the 1790s. From that point onward to today, however, Washington, DC, has increasingly maintained significant global influence. Even though both cities have different histories, they

have both held, and continue to hold, significant social influence in the economic and cultural global spheres.

Both Washington, DC, and London offer a wide array of museums that harbor many of the world's most prized treasures. While Washington, DC, has the National Gallery of Art and several other Smithsonian galleries, London's art scene and galleries have a definite edge in this category. From the Tate Modern to the British National Gallery, London's art ranks among the world's best. This difference and advantage has much to do with London and Britain's historical depth compared to that of the United States. London has a much richer past than Washington, DC, and consequently has a lot more material to pull from when arranging its collections. Both cities have thriving theater districts, but again, London wins this comparison, too, both in quantity and quality of theater choices. With regard to other cultural places like restaurants, pubs, and bars, both cities are very comparable. Both have a wide selection of expensive, elegant restaurants as well as a similar amount of global and national chains. While London may be better known for its pubs and taste in beer, DC offers a different bar-going experience. With clubs and pubs that tend to stay open later than their British counterparts, the DC night life tend to be less reserved overall.

Both cities also share and differ in cultural diversity and cost of living. Both cities share a very expensive cost of living—both in terms of housing and shopping. A downtown one-bedroom apartment in DC can easily cost $1,800 per month, and a similar "flat" in London

may double that amount. These high costs create socioeconomic disparity among the residents. Although both cities' residents are predominantly wealthy, both have a significantly large population of poor and homeless. Perhaps the most significant difference between the resident demographics is the racial makeup. Washington, DC, is a "minority majority" city, which means the majority of its citizens are races other than white. In 2009, according to the US Census, 55 percent of DC residents were classified as "Black or African American" and 35 percent of its residents were classified as "white." London, by contrast, has very few minorities—in 2006, 70 percent of its population was "white," while only 10 percent was "black." The racial demographic differences between the cities is drastic.

Even though Washington, DC, and London are major capital cities of English-speaking countries in the Western world, they have many differences along with their similarities. They have vastly different histories, art cultures, and racial demographics, but they remain similar in their cost of living and socioeconomic disparity.

7. Definition

The purpose of a definition essay may seem self-explanatory, to simply define something. But defining terms in writing is often more complicated than just consulting a dictionary. In fact, the way we

define terms can have far-reaching consequences for individuals as well as collective groups. Ultimately, a definition essay will share your special understanding about your chosen topic.

Take, for example, a word like *alcoholism*. The way in which one defines alcoholism depends on its legal, moral, and medical contexts. Lawyers may define alcoholism in terms of its legality; parents may define alcoholism in terms of its morality; and doctors will define alcoholism in terms of symptoms and diagnostic criteria. Think also of terms that people tend to debate in our broader culture. How we define words, such as *marriage* and *climate change*, has enormous impact on policy decisions and even on daily decisions. Think about conversations couples may have in which words like *commitment*, *respect*, or *love* need clarification.

Defining terms within a relationship, or any other context, can at first be difficult, but once a definition is established between two people or a group of people, it is easier to have productive dialogues. Definitions, then, establish the way in which people communicate ideas. They set parameters for a given discourse, which is why they are so important. When defining is the major impetus of an essay, the writer cast him/herself as the expert, aiming at an audience who knows less, maybe much less, about the topic.

Tip

When writing definition essays, avoid terms that are too simple, that lack complexity. Think in terms of concepts, such as *hero*, *happiness*, or *loyalty*, rather than physical objects. Definitions of concepts and abstractions, rather than concrete objects, are often fluid and contentious, making for a more effective definition essay.

Writing at Work

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

Exercise 17

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

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your responses.

The Structure of a Definition Essay

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

The rest of the essay should explain the rationale for your definition. Remember that a dictionary's definition is limiting, and you should not rely strictly on the dictionary entry. Instead, consider the context in which you are using the word. **Context** identifies the circumstances, conditions, or setting in which something exists or occurs. Often words take on different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. For example, the ideal leader in a battlefield setting could likely be very different from a leader in an elementary school setting. If a context is missing from the essay, the essay may be too short or the main points could be confusing or misunderstood.

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

You define according to principles of definition, but you are the author of the definition. As you consider how to develop your essay, it might be helpful to consider the parts of a formal definition:

Parts of a definition:

- Formal re-definition
- History
- Context
- Sounds
- Similar things
- Function
- Meaning

Example: Here is an example of a formal definition for "candle:"

> The candle is a kind of reminder that not only lets me think of my friend when I see it, but also lights my room when I think of her. Every time I clean my room, or get dressed, or pass by, or go to bed, or wake up in the morning, I see the candle and think of my friend. At times, I just light it for a few minutes, and I am reminded of her presence. I am bombarded with meeting reminders, "to do" lists, alarms, sticky notes, deadlines, requests, and on and on. My candle is the only reminder I have that slows me down and lets me think of her. The silent burning of the candle reminds me of her quiet demeanor, the long silences that followed our fights, and the suddenness with which her life was snuffed out. Like an old photograph, or stories told by friends, or places we met, or the smell of barberry and cinnamon, my candle reminds me of the time we were together. The candle only burns when I light it once a year – on the day I lost her. To me, the candle signifies a life lived quietly, resolutely, but with a burning passion for living in the moment.

You may define any object or place this way. When you have a

definition constructed, you may add it to the other elements in your personal writing. When you finish ALL the elements, you may then arrange elements for greatest effect.

Writing at Work

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

Exercise 18

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

- Bravery
- Adulthood
- Consumer culture
- Violence
- Art

Writing a Definition Essay

Choose a topic that will be complex enough to be discussed at length. Be sure that the term is abstract, and that it is or refers to something that can mean different things to different people. Also, be sure that you choose a word that you have some familiarity with. Since you need to elaborate on the word you choose to define, you will need to have your own base of knowledge or experience with the concept you choose. If you try to define something that is beyond the scope of your paper or your own experience, the task will become overwhelming and get mired down in details or abstractions.

After you have chosen your word or phrase, start your essay with an introduction that establishes the relevancy of the term in the chosen specific context. Your thesis can come at the end of the introduction, can be implied throughout the development of the essay, or can be clearly asserted in the conclusion. However, you must have a clear idea of your thesis–your overall definition for the term or concept– that is reinforced throughout the development of the essay.

The body paragraphs should each be dedicated to explaining a different facet of your definition. Make sure to use clear examples and strong details to illustrate your points. A definition can be developed in a number of ways. A definition of a business management concept such as Total Quality Management (TQM), for instance, could begin with a **history** (a kind of process paper) of its inception in Japanese management systems, its migration across the Pacific, its implementation and transformation in American systems, and its predicted demise. It could also (or instead) include examples of the kind of labor conflict that TQM is supposed to eliminate or alleviate. Or it could describe TQM as a **process**, the steps involved in its implementation, or involve an **analysis** of its principles and its place in management theory. **Contrasts** to other management theories might be appropriate, demonstrating what TQM is not as well as what it is. We could even think of it as a **cause**

and effect situation in which we describe how TQM responds to certain needs in the workplace. Negation also works well, as you can define your topic by what it is not or does not have. A definition essay is not limited to any one method of development and it may, in fact, employ more than one method at once. Implicit in all of these techniques, and therefore essential in your essay, is an analysis of this topic you have chosen. By developing and explaining your own opinion of what the topic you have chosen means, you are in a way analyzing the topic.

Your concluding paragraph should pull together all the different elements of your definition to ultimately reinforce your thesis. It draws a conclusion based on the overall breakdown of the information offered throughout the body of the essay.

Tip

Don't rely on that old cliché of the dictionary or encyclopedia definition. Even if your intent is to show how inadequate or wrong-headed the dictionary might be, this device has been used far too often to be effective. The point of your essay is to provide your reader with a new way of looking at things — *your* way, not Noah Webster's.

Exercise 19

Choose a label that you would give yourself (such as good friend, daughter, brother, student, etc). For this label, consider both the denotation of the word and your connotation of it. Then, write paragraph that defines this word using at least one other rhetorical techniques such as illustration, description, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and narration.

Assignment 6

Create a full definition essay from one of the items you already defined in Exercise 18 or 19. Be sure to include an interesting introduction, a clear thesis, a well-explained context, distinct body paragraphs, and a conclusion that pulls everything together.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

- Definitions establish the way in which people communicate ideas. They set parameters for a given discourse.
- Context affects the meaning and usage of words.
- The thesis of a definition essay should clearly state the writer's definition of the term in the specific context.
- Body paragraphs should explain the various facets of the definition stated in the thesis.
- The conclusion should pull all the elements of the definition together at the end and reinforce the thesis.

Some Additional Tips About Definition

Avoid using the phrases "is where" and "is when" in your definition: "Total Quality Management is when management and labor agree to. . . ." "A computer virus is where . . . ."

Avoid circular definitions (repeating the defined term within the predicate, the definition itself): "A computer virus is a virus that destroys or disrupts software . . . ."

Avoid using a too narrow definition, one that would unduly limit the scope of your paper: "Reggae music is sung on the Caribbean island of Jamaica. . . ."

Avoid defining the word by quoting the dictionary or encyclopedia because that detracts from your own thoughts and opinions.

External Links

"**I Learned to Understand Shame**" (https://tinyurl.com/ybsp3ytz) by Joe Quinn. In this essay, Quinn defines and analyzes shame by combining personal experience in post 9/11 America with research.

"**Pride**" (https://tinyurl.com/ydamxkqo) by Ian Frazier. In this essay, published by *Outside Online*, *New Yorker* writer Ian Frazier uses a mix of rhetorical devices to define the concept of pride.

Student Sample Essay

Defining Good Students Means More Than Just Grades

Many people define good students as those who receive the best grades. While it is true that good students often earn high grades, I contend that grades are just one aspect of how we define a good student. In fact, even poor students can earn high grades

sometimes, so grades are not the best indicator of a student's quality. Rather, a good student pursues scholarship, actively participates in class, and maintains a positive, professional relationship with instructors and peers.

Good students have a passion for learning that drives them to fully understand class material rather than just worry about what grades they receive in the course. Good students are actively engaged in scholarship, which means they enjoy reading and learning about their subject matter not just because readings and assignments are required. Of course, good students will complete their homework and all assignments, and they may even continue to perform research and learn more on the subject after the course ends. In some cases, good students will pursue a subject that interests them but might not be one of their strongest academic areas, so they will not earn the highest grades. Pushing oneself to learn and try new things can be difficult, but good students will challenge themselves rather than remain at their educational comfort level for the sake of a high grade. The pursuit of scholarship and education rather than concern over grades is the hallmark of a good student.

Class participation and behavior are another aspect of the definition of a good student. Simply attending class is not enough; good students arrive punctually because they understand that tardiness disrupts the class and disrespects the professors. They might occasionally arrive a few minutes early to ask the professor questions about class materials or mentally prepare for the day's

work. Good students consistently pay attention during class discussions and take notes in lectures rather than engage in off-task behaviors, such as checking their cell phones or daydreaming. Excellent class participation requires a balance between speaking and listening, so good students will share their views when appropriate but also respect their classmates' views when they differ from their own. It is easy to mistake quantity of class discussion comments with quality, but good students know the difference and do not try to dominate the conversation. Sometimes class participation is counted toward a student's grade, but even without such clear rewards, good students understand how to perform and excel among their peers in the classroom.

Finally, good students maintain a positive and professional relationship with their professors. They respect their instructor's authority in the classroom as well as the instructor's privacy outside of the classroom. Prying into a professor's personal life is inappropriate, but attending office hours to discuss course material is an appropriate, effective way for students to demonstrate their dedication and interest in learning. Good students go to their professor's office during posted office hours or make an appointment if necessary. While instructors can be very busy, they are usually happy to offer guidance to students during office hours; after all, availability outside the classroom is a part of their job. Attending office hours can also help good students become memorable and stand out from the rest, particularly in lectures with hundreds enrolled. Maintaining positive, professional relationships with

professors is especially important for those students who hope to attend graduate school and will need letters of recommendation in the future.

Although good grades often accompany good students, grades are not the only way to indicate what it means to be a good student. The definition of a good student means demonstrating such traits as engaging with course material, participating in class, and creating a professional relationship with professors. While professors have different criteria for earning an A in their courses, most will agree on these characteristics for defining good students.

8. Classification

The Purpose of Classification in Writing

The purpose of **classification** is to break down broad subjects into smaller, more manageable, more specific parts. We classify things in our daily lives all the time, often without even thinking about it. It is important, however, to be sure to use a single basis for the division of categories; otherwise, you may end up with items that fall into multiple categories. Cell phones, for example, have now become part of a broad category. They can be classified as feature phones, media phones, and smartphones.

Smaller categories, and the way in which these categories are created, help us make sense of the world. Keep both of these elements in mind when writing a classification essay.

Tip

Choose topics that you know well when writing classification essays. The more you know about a topic, the more you can break it into smaller, more interesting parts. Adding interest and insight will enhance your classification essays.

Exercise 20

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

1. The United States
2. Colleges and universities
3. Beverages
4. Fashion

The Structure of a Classification Essay

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

When people think of New York, they often think of only New York City. But New York is actually a diverse state with a full range

of activities to do, sights to see, and cultures to explore. In order to better understand the diversity of New York state, it is helpful to break it into five separate regions: Long Island, New York City, Western New York, Central New York, and Northern New York.

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

Each body paragraph of a classification essay is dedicated to fully illustrating each of the subcategories. In the previous example, then, each region of New York would have its own paragraph.

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

Tip

To avoid settling for an overly simplistic classification, make sure you break down any given topic at least three different ways. This will help you think outside the box and perhaps even learn something entirely new about a subject.

Exercise 21

Using your classifications from Exercise 20, write a brief paragraph explaining why you chose to organize each main category in the way that you did.

Writing a Classification Essay

Start with an engaging opening that will adequately introduce the general topic that you will be dividing into smaller subcategories. Your thesis should come at the end of your introduction. It should include the topic, your subtopics, and the reason you are choosing to break down the topic in the way that you are. Use the following classification thesis equation:

topic + subtopics + rationale for the subtopics = thesis.

The organizing strategy of a classification essay is dictated by the initial topic and the subsequent subtopics. Each body paragraph is dedicated to fully illustrating each of the subtopics. In a way, coming up with a strong topic pays double rewards in a classification essay. Not only do you have a good topic, but you also have a solid organizational structure within which to write.

Be sure you use strong details and explanations for each subcategory paragraph that help explain and support your thesis. Also, be sure to give examples to illustrate your points. Finally, write a conclusion that links all the subgroups together again. The conclusion should successfully wrap up your essay by connecting it to your topic initially discussed in the introduction. Continue in this section to read a sample classification essay.

Exercise 22

Consider things that are a part of your daily life. Create a list that classifies these items both as an overall categories and then within sub-topics.

Assignment 7

Building on Exercises 21 and 22, write a five-paragraph classification essay about one of the four original topics. In your thesis, make sure to include the topic, subtopics, and rationale for your breakdown. And make sure that your essay is organized into paragraphs that each describes a subtopic.

Key Takeaways

- The purpose of classification is to break a subject into smaller, more manageable, more specific parts.
- Smaller subcategories help us make sense of the

world, and the way in which these subcategories are created also helps us make sense of the world.

- A classification essay is organized by its subcategories.

Example Essay

Types of Higher Education Programs

Today's students have many choices when it comes to pursuing a degree: four-year programs, two-year programs, large or small classroom settings, and even daytime or evening classes. With all the different options to consider, potential students should learn about the different types of colleges, so they can find a school that best fits their personality, budget, and educational goals.

One type of higher education program for students to consider is a liberal arts college. These schools tend to be small in size and offer a range of undergraduate degrees in subjects like English, history, psychology, and education. Students may choose a liberal arts college if they want a more intimate classroom setting rather than large lecture-style classes. Students may also consider a liberal arts college if they want to gain knowledge from a

variety of disciplines, rather than focus on a single area of study. Many liberal arts schools are privately owned, and some have religious affiliations. Liberal arts schools can come with a hefty price tag, and their high cost presents an obstacle for students on a tight budget; moreover, while some students might appreciate a liberal arts school's intimate atmosphere, others might encounter a lack of diversity in the student body. Still, students seeking a well-rounded education in the humanities will find liberal arts colleges to be one option.

Universities, another type of higher education program, offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Usually universities are larger than colleges and can accommodate tens of thousands of students in many different majors and areas of study. A large student body means that class sizes are often larger, and some classes may be taught by graduate students rather than professors. Students will feel at home at a university if they want a focused academic program and state-of-the-art research facilities. While some universities are private, many are public, which means they receive funding from the government, so tuition is more affordable, and some even offer discounted in-state tuition for state residents. Also, universities attract many international students, so those looking for a variety of campus cultural groups and clubs will appreciate a greater sense of diversity among the student body. Universities can be overwhelming for some, but they are the right fit for students who seek

research opportunities and academic studies, especially in the fields of mathematics and science.

Community college is a type of higher education program popular with students on a limited budget who want to take college courses but may not know what they want to major in. Most schools offer degrees after two years of study, usually an associate's degree that prepares students to enter the workforce; many students choose to study at a community college for two years and then transfer to a four-year college to complete their undergraduate degree. Like liberal arts schools, classes are small and allow instructors to pay more attention to their students. Community college allows students to live at home rather than in a dormitory, which also keeps costs down. While some young people might not like the idea of living at home for school, many adults choose to attend community college so they can advance their education while working and living with their families.

Online universities are another type of higher education program that are gaining popularity as technology improves. These schools offer many of the same degree programs as traditional liberal arts colleges and universities. Unlike traditional programs, which require students to attend classes and lectures, online universities offer greater academic flexibility and are a great option for students wishing to pursue a degree while still working full time. At online universities, students access course materials, such as video lectures and assessments, remotely using a personal computer and are able to speed up or slow down their progress to

complete their degree at their own pace. Students may attend classes in the comfort of their own homes or local libraries, but students hoping for the social community of higher education might not enjoy this aspect of higher education.

With so many colleges and universities to choose from, it may be difficult for a student to narrow down his or her selection, but once a student knows what he or she is looking for, the process may become much easier. It is very important for students to learn about the different types of higher education programs available before making their selections.

External Links

Amy Tan describes relationship with her heritage, her mother, and her languages in ***Mother Tongue*** *(https://tinyurl.com/hya7ob5)*. The essay is also available **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y7gbr9hs).

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Figure 5.8 "Organization Diagram," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 5.9 "Phrases of Comparison and Contrast," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

4. Argument

KIRSTEN DEVRIES

At school, at work, and in everyday life, argument is one of main ways we exchange ideas with one another. Academics, business people, scientists, and other professionals all make arguments to determine what to do or think, or to solve a problem by enlisting others to do or believe something they otherwise would not. Not surprisingly, then, argument dominates writing, and training in argument writing is essential for all college students.

This chapter will explore how to define argument and how to talk about arguments.

1. **What Is Argument?**
2. **What Are the Components and Vocabulary of Argument?**

1. What Is Argument?

All people, including you, make arguments on a regular basis. When you make a claim and then support the claim with reasons, you are making an argument. Consider the following:

- If, as a teenager, you ever made a case for borrowing your parents' car using reasonable support—a track record of responsibility in other areas of your life, a good rating from your driving instructor, and promises to follow rules of driving conduct laid out by your parents—you have made an argument.

- If, as an employee, you ever persuaded your boss to give you a

raise using concrete evidence—records of sales increases in your sector, a work calendar with no missed days, and personal testimonials from satisfied customers—you have made an argument.

- If, as a gardener, you ever shared your crops at a farmer's market, declaring that your produce is better than others using relevant support—because you used the most appropriate soil, water level, and growing time for each crop—you've made an argument.

- If, as a literature student, you ever wrote an essay on your interpretation of a poem—defending your ideas with examples from the text and logical explanations for how those examples demonstrate your interpretation—you have made an argument.

The two main models of argument desired in college courses as part of the training for academic or professional life are **rhetorical argument** and **academic argument**. If rhetoric is the study of the craft of writing and speaking, particularly writing or speaking designed to convince and persuade, the student studying **rhetorical argument** focuses on how to create an argument that convinces and persuades effectively. To that end, the student must understand how to think broadly about argument, the particular vocabulary of argument, and the logic of argument. The close sibling of rhetorical argument is academic argument, argument used to discuss and evaluate ideas, usually within a professional field of study, and to convince others of those ideas. In **academic argument**, interpretation and research play the central roles.

However, it would be incorrect to say that academic argument and rhetorical argument do not overlap. Indeed, they do, and often.

A psychologist not only wishes to prove an important idea with research, but she will also wish to do so in the most effective way possible. A politician will want to make the most persuasive case for his side, but he should also be mindful of data that may support his points. *Thus, throughout this chapter, when you see the term* ***argument****, it refers to a broad category including both* ***rhetorical*** *and* ***academic argument****.*

Before moving to the specific parts and vocabulary of argument, it will be helpful to consider some further ideas about what argument is and what it is not.

Argument vs. Controversy or Fight

Consumers of written texts are often tempted to divide writing into two categories: argumentative and non-argumentative. According to this view, 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.

A related definition of argument 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," many students think the only type of argument writing is the debate-like position paper, in which the author defends his or her point of view against other, usually opposing, points of view.

These two characteristics of argument—as controversial and as a fight—limit the definition because arguments come in different disguises, from hidden to subtle to commanding. It is useful 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 an issue, for showing others our perspective of the world? 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?

One community that values argument as a type of communication

and exchange is the community of scholars. They advance their arguments to share research and new ways of thinking about topics. Biologists, for example, do not gather data and write up analyses of the results because they wish to fight with other biologists, even if they disagree with the ideas of other biologists. They wish to share their discoveries and get feedback on their ideas. When historians put forth an argument, they do so often while building on the arguments of other historians who came before them. Literature scholars publish their interpretations of different works of literature to enhance understanding and share new views, not necessarily to have one interpretation replace all others. There may be debates within any field of study, but those debates can be healthy and constructive if they mean even more scholars come together to explore the ideas involved in those debates. Thus, be prepared for your college professors to have a much broader view of argument than a mere fight over a controversial topic or two.

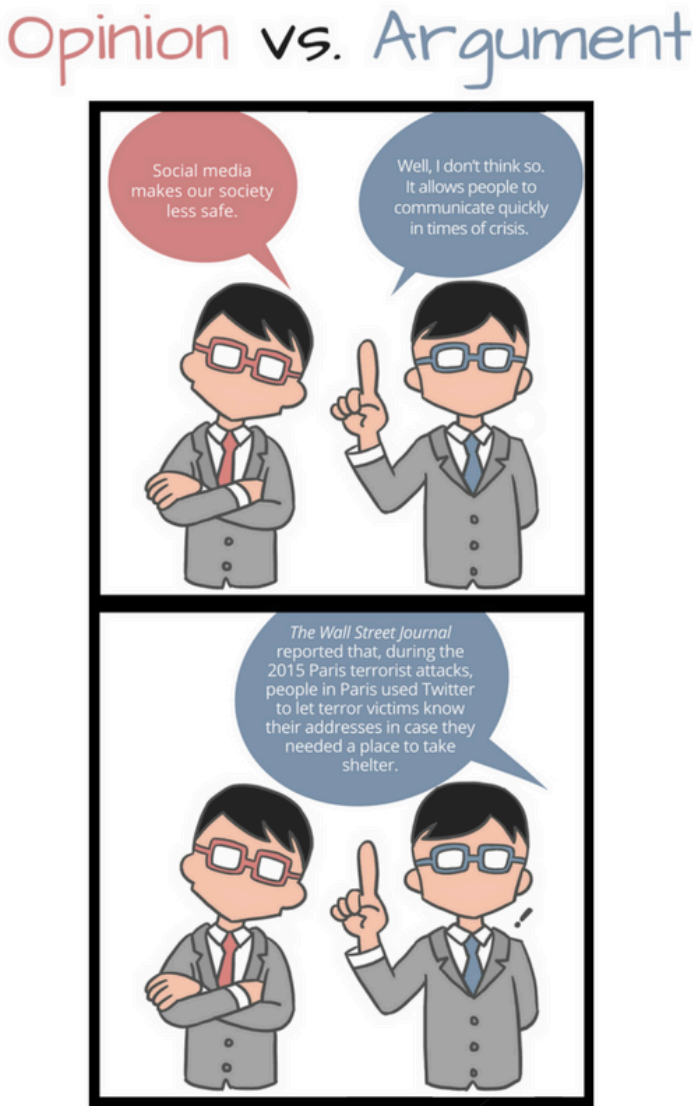
Argument vs. Opinion

Argument is often confused with opinion. Indeed, arguments and opinions sound alike. Someone with an opinion asserts a claim that he thinks is true. Someone with an argument asserts a claim that she thinks is true. Although arguments and opinions do sound the same, there are two important differences:

1. **Arguments have rules; opinions do not**. In other words, to form an argument, you must consider whether the argument is reasonable. Is it worth making? Is it valid? Is it sound? Do all of its parts fit together logically? Opinions, on the other hand, have no rules, and anyone asserting an opinion need not think it through for it to count as one; however, it will not count as an argument.
2. **Arguments have support; opinions do not**. If you make a claim and then stop, as if the claim itself were enough to demonstrate its truthfulness, you have asserted an opinion only. An argument must be supported, and the support of an argument has its own rules. The support must also be

reasonable, relevant, and sufficient.

Figure 3.1 “Opinion vs Argument”



Argument vs. Thesis

Another point of confusion is the difference between an argument and an essay's **thesis**. For college essays, there is no essential difference between an argument and a thesis; most professors use these terms interchangeably. An argument is a claim that you must then support. The main claim of an essay is the point of the essay and provides the purpose for the essay. Thus, the main claim of an essay is also the thesis. For more on the thesis, see **Chapter 4, "The Writing Process."**

Consider this as well: Most formal essays center upon one main claim (the thesis) but then support that main claim with supporting evidence and arguments. The **topic sentence** of a body paragraph can be another type of argument, though a supporting one, and, hence, a narrower one. Try not to be confused when professors call both the thesis and topic sentences arguments. They are not wrong because arguments come in different forms; some claims are broad enough to be broken down into a number of supporting arguments. Many longer essays are structured by the smaller arguments that are a part of and support the main argument. Sometimes professors, when they say supporting points or supporting arguments, mean the reasons (**premises**) for the main claim (**conclusion**) you make in an essay. If a claim has a number of reasons, those reasons will form the support structure for the essay, and each reason will be the basis for the topic sentence of its body paragraph.

Argument vs. Fact

Arguments are also commonly mistaken for statements of fact. This comes about because often people privilege facts over opinions, even as they defend the right to have opinions. In other words, facts are "good," and opinions are "bad," or if not exactly bad, then fuzzy and thus easy to reject. However, remember the important distinction between an argument and an opinion stated above: While argument may sound like an opinion, the two are not

the same. An opinion is an assertion, but it is left to stand alone with little to no reasoning or support. An argument is much stronger because it includes and demonstrates reasons and support for its claim.

As for mistaking a fact for an argument, keep this important distinction in mind: An argument must be **arguable**. In everyday life, arguable is often a synonym for doubtful. For an argument, though, arguable means that it is worth arguing, that it has a range of possible answers, angles, or perspectives: It is an answer, angle, or perspective with which a reasonable person might disagree. Facts, by virtue of being facts, are not arguable. **Facts** are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as definitively true or definitively false. For example, 2 + 2 = 4. This expression identifies a verifiably true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data. When a fact is established, there is no other side, and there should be no disagreement.

The misunderstanding about facts (being inherently good) and argument (being inherently problematic because it is not a fact) leads to the mistaken belief that facts have no place in an argument. This could not be farther from the truth. First of all, most arguments are formed by analyzing facts. Second, facts provide one type of support for an argument. Thus, do not think of facts and arguments as enemies; rather, they work closely together.

Explicit vs. Implicit Arguments

Arguments can be both explicit and implicit. **Explicit arguments** contain prominent and definable thesis statements and multiple specific proofs to support them. This is common in academic writing from scholars of all fields. **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. Implicit arguments involve evidence of many different

kinds to build and convey their point of view to their audience. Both types use rhetoric, logic, and support to create effective arguments.

Argument and Rhetoric

An argument in written form involves 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 most basic and important components of a rhetorical situation are

- **Author** of the text.
- **Purpose** of the text.
- **Intended audience** (i.e., those the author imagines will be reading the text).
- **Form or type** of text.

These components give readers a way to analyze a text on first encounter. These factors also help writers select their topics, arrange their material, and make other important decisions about the argument they will make and the support they will need. For more on rhetoric, see **Chapter 2, "Rhetorical Analysis."**

Key Takeaways: What is an Argument?

With this brief introduction, you can see what rhetorical or academic argument *is not*:

- An argument need not be controversial or about a controversy.
- An argument is not a mere fight.
- An argument does not have a single winner or loser.
- An argument is not a mere opinion.

- An argument is not a statement of fact.

Furthermore, you can see what rhetorical argument *is*:

- An argument is a claim asserted as true.
- An argument is arguable.
- An argument must be reasonable.
- An argument must be supported.
- An argument in a formal essay is called a thesis. Supporting arguments can be called topic sentences.
- An argument can be explicit or implicit.
- An argument must be adapted to its rhetorical situation.

2. What Are the Components and Vocabulary of Argument?

Questions are at the core of arguments. What matters is not just that you believe that what you have to say is true, but that you give others viable reasons to believe it as well—and also show them that you have considered the issue from multiple angles. To do that, build your argument out of the answers to the five questions a rational reader will expect answers to. In academic and professional writing, we tend to build arguments from the answers to these main questions:

1. What do you want me to do or think?
2. Why should I do or think that?
3. How do I know that what you say is true?

4. Why should I accept the reasons that support your claim?
5. What about this other idea, fact, or consideration?
6. How should you present your argument?

When you ask people to do or think something they otherwise would not, they quite naturally want to know why they should do so. In fact, people tend to ask the same questions. As you make a reasonable argument, you anticipate and respond to readers' questions with a particular part of argument:

1. The answer to *What do you want me to do or think?* is your **conclusion**: "I conclude that you should do or think X."

2. The answer to *Why should I do or think that?* states your **premise**: "You should do or think X because . . ."

3. The answer to *How do I know that what you say is true?* presents your **support**: "You can believe my reasons because they are supported by these facts . . ."

4. The answer to *Why should I accept that your reasons support your claim?* states your general principle of reasoning, called a **warrant**: "My specific reason supports my specific claim because whenever this general condition is true, we can generally draw a conclusion like mine."

5. The answer to *What about this other idea, fact, or conclusion?***acknowledges** that your readers might see things differently and then **responds** to their **counterarguments**.

6. The answer to *How should you present your argument?* leads to the **point of view**, **organization**, and **tone** that you should use when making your arguments.

As you have noticed, the answers to these questions involve knowing the particular vocabulary about argument because these terms refer to specific parts of an argument. The remainder of this section will cover the terms referred to in the questions listed above as well as others that will help you better understand the building blocks of argument.

What Is a Conclusion, and What Is a Premise?

The root notion of an argument is that it convinces us that

something is true. What we are being convinced of is the **conclusion**. An example would be this claim:

Littering is harmful.

A reason for this conclusion is called the **premise**. Typically, a conclusion will be supported by two or more **premises**. Both premises and conclusions are **statements**. Some premises for our littering conclusion might be these:

Littering is dangerous to animals.

Littering is dangerous to humans.

Thus, to be clear, understand that an argument asserts that the writer's claim is true in *two* main parts: the **premises** of the argument exist to show that the **conclusion** is true.

Tip

Be aware of the other words to indicate a conclusion–*claim*, *assertion*, *point*–and other ways to talk about the premise–*reason*, *factor*, the *why*. Also, do not confuse this use of the word conclusion with a conclusion paragraph for an essay.

What Is a Statement?

A **statement** is a type of sentence that can be true or false and corresponds to the grammatical category of a **declarative sentence**. For example, the sentence,

The Nile is a river in northeastern Africa,

is a statement because it makes sense to inquire whether it is true or false. (In this case, it happens to be true.) However, a sentence is still a statement, even if it is false. For example, the sentence,

The Yangtze is a river in Japan,

is still a statement; it is just a false statement (the Yangtze River

is in China). In contrast, none of the following sentences are statements:

Please help yourself to more casserole.
Don't tell your mother about the surprise.
Do you like Vietnamese pho?

None of these sentences are statements because it does not make sense to ask whether those sentences are true or false; rather, they are a request, a command, and a question, respectively. Make sure to remember the difference between sentences that are declarative statements and sentences that are not *because arguments depend on declarative statements*.

Tip

A question cannot be an argument, yet students will often pose a question at the end of an introduction to an essay, thinking they have declared their thesis. They have not. If, however, they answer that question (**conclusion**) and give some reasons for that answer (**premises**), they then have the components necessary for both an argument and a declarative statement of that argument (**thesis**).

To reiterate: All arguments are composed of premises and conclusions, both of which are types of statements. The premises of the argument provide reasons for thinking that the conclusion is true. Arguments typically involve more than one premise.

What Is Standard Argument Form?

A standard way of capturing the structure of an argument, or diagramming it, is by numbering the premises and conclusion. For

example, the following represents another way to arrange the littering argument:

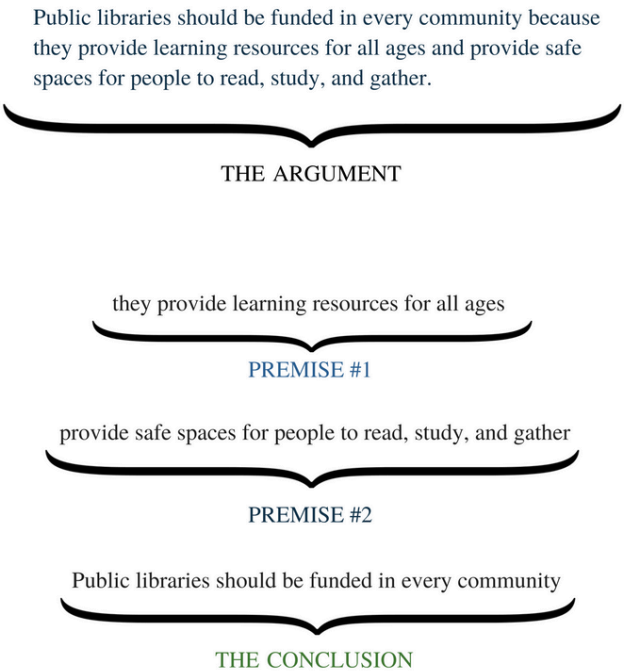
1. Littering is harmful
2. Litter is dangerous to animals
3. Litter is dangerous to humans

This numbered list represents an argument that has been put into **standard argument form**. A more precise definition of an argument now emerges, employing the vocabulary that is specific to academic and rhetorical arguments. An argument is a set of **statements**, some of which (the **premises**: statements 2 and 3 above) attempt to provide a reason for thinking that some other statement (the **conclusion**: statement 1) is true.

Tip

Diagramming an argument can be helpful when trying to figure out your essay's thesis. Because a thesis is an argument, putting the parts of an argument into standard form can help sort ideas. You can transform the numbered ideas into a cohesive sentence or two for your thesis once you are more certain what your argument parts are.

Figure 3.2 "Argument Diagram"



Recognizing arguments is essential to analysis and critical thinking; if you cannot distinguish between the details (the support) of a piece of writing and what those details are there to support (the argument), you will likely misunderstand what you are reading. Additionally, studying how others make arguments can help you learn how to effectively create your own.

What Are Argument Indicators?

While mapping an argument in standard argument form can be a good way to figure out and formulate a thesis, identifying arguments by other writers is also important. The best way to identify an argument is to ask whether a claim exists (in statement form) that a writer justifies by reasons (also in statement form). Other identifying

markers of arguments are key words or phrases that are premise indicators or conclusion indicators. For example, recall the littering argument, reworded here into a single sentence (much like a thesis statement):

> Littering is harmful *because* it is dangerous to both animals and humans.

The word "because" here is a **premise indicator**. That is, "because" indicates that what follows is a reason for thinking that littering is bad. Here is another example:

> The student plagiarized *since* I found the exact same sentences on a website, and the website was published more than a year before the student wrote the paper.

In this example, the word "since" is a premise indicator because what follows is a statement that is clearly intended to be a reason for thinking that the student plagiarized (i.e., a premise). Notice that in these two cases, the premise indicators "because" and "since" are interchangeable: "because" could be used in place of "since" or "since" in the place of "because," and the meaning of the sentences would have been the same.

Figure 3.3 "Common Premise Indicators"

COMMON PREMISE INDICATORS	
since	because
for	as
given that	seeing that
for the reason that	is shown by the fact that

In addition to premise indicators, there are also **conclusion indicators**. Conclusion indicators mark that what follows is the conclusion of an argument. For example,

> Bob-the-arsonist has been dead for a year, *so* Bob-the-arsonist didn't set the fire at the East Lansing Starbucks last week.

In this example, the word "so" is a conclusion indicator because what follows it is a statement that someone is trying to establish as true (i.e., a conclusion). Here is another example of a conclusion indicator:

> A poll administered by Gallup (a respected polling company) showed candidate X to be substantially behind

candidate Y with only a week left before the vote; *therefore*, candidate Y will probably not win the election.

In this example, the word "therefore" is a conclusion indicator because what follows it is a statement that someone is trying to establish as true (i.e., a conclusion). As before, in both of these cases, the conclusion indicators "so" and "therefore" are interchangeable: "So" could be used in place of "therefore" or "therefore" in the place of "so," and the meaning of the sentences would have been the same.

Figure 3.4 "Common Conclusion Indicators"

COMMON CONCLUSION INDICATORS	
therefore	so
hence	thus
implies that	consequently
it follows that	we may conclude that

Exercise 2

Which of the following are arguments? If it is an argument, identify the conclusion (claim) of the argument. If it is not an argument, explain why not. Remember to look for the qualifying features of an argument: (1) It is a statement or series of statements, (2) it states a claim (a conclusion), and (3) it has at least one premise (reason for the claim).

1. The woman with the hat is not a witch since witches have long noses, and she doesn't have a long nose.
2. I have been wrangling cattle since before you were old enough to tie your own shoes.
3. Albert is angry with me, so he probably won't be willing to help me wash the dishes.
4. First, I washed the dishes, and then I dried them.
5. If the road weren't icy, the car wouldn't have slid off the turn.
6. Marvin isn't a fireman and isn't a fisherman, either.
7. Are you seeing the rhinoceros over there? It's huge!
8. Obesity has become a problem in the US because obesity rates have risen over the past four decades.
9. Bob showed me a graph with rising obesity rates, and I was very surprised to see how much they had risen.
10. Marvin isn't a fireman because Marvin is a Greyhound, which is a type of dog, and dogs can't be firemen.
11. What Susie told you is not the actual reason she

missed her flight to Denver.

12. Carol likely forgot to lock her door this morning because she was distracted by a clown riding a unicycle while singing Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Simple Man."
13. No one who has ever gotten frostbite while climbing K2 has survived to tell about it; therefore, no one ever will.

What Constitutes Support?

To ensure that your argument is sound—that the premises for your conclusion are true—you must establish **support**. The burden of proof, to borrow language from law, is on the one making an argument, not on the recipient of an argument. If you wish to assert a claim, you must then also support it, and this support must be relevant, logical, and sufficient.

It is important to use the right kind of evidence, to use it effectively, and to have an appropriate amount of it.

- If, for example, your philosophy professor did not like that you used a survey of public opinion as your primary evidence in an ethics paper, you most likely used material that was not **relevant** to your topic. Rather, you should find out what philosophers count as good evidence. Different fields of study involve types of evidence based on relevance to those fields.

- If your professor has put question marks by your thesis or has written, "It does not follow," you likely have problems with **logic**. Make sure it is clear how the parts of your argument logically fit together.

- If your instructor has told you that you need more analysis, suggested that you are "just listing" points or giving a "laundry list," you likely have not included enough explanation for how a point connects to and supports your argument, which is another problem with **logic**, this time related to the **warrants** of your argument. You need to fully incorporate evidence into your argument. (See more on warrants immediately below.)

- If you see comments like "for example?," "proof?," "go deeper," or "expand," you may need more evidence. In other words, the evidence you have is not yet **sufficient**. One or two pieces of evidence will not be enough to prove your argument. Similarly, multiple pieces of evidence that aren't developed thoroughly would also be flawed, also insufficient. Would a lawyer go to trial with only one piece of evidence? No, the lawyer would want to have as much evidence as possible from a variety of sources to make a viable case. Similarly, a lawyer would fully develop evidence for a claim using explanation, facts, statistics, stories, experiences, research, details, and the like.

You will find more information about the different types of evidence, how to find them, and what makes them credible in **Chapter 6, "Research."** Logic will be covered later on in this chapter.

What Is the Warrant?

Above all, connect the evidence to the argument. This connection is the **warrant**. Evidence is not self-evident. In other words, after introducing evidence into your writing, you must demonstrate why and how this evidence supports your argument. You must explain the significance of the evidence and its function in your paper. What turns a fact or piece of information into evidence is the connection

it has with a larger claim or argument: Evidence is always evidence *for* or *against* something, and you have to make that link clear.

Tip

Student writers sometimes assume that readers already know the information being written about; students may be wary of elaborating too much because they think their points are obvious. But remember, readers are not mind readers: Although they may be familiar with many of the ideas discussed, they don't know what writers want to do with those ideas unless they indicate that through explanations, organization, and transitions. Thus, when you write, be sure to explain the connections you made in your mind when you chose your evidence, decided where to place it in your paper, and drew conclusions based on it.

What Is a Counterargument?

Remember that arguments are multi-sided. As you brainstorm and prepare to present your idea and your support for it, consider other sides of the issue. These other sides are **counterarguments**. Make a list of counterarguments as you work through the writing process, and use them to build your case – to widen your idea to include a valid counterargument, to explain how a counterargument might be defeated, to illustrate how a counterargument may not withstand the scrutiny your research has uncovered, and/or to show that you are aware of and have taken into account other possibilities.

For example, you might choose the issue of declawing cats and set up your search with the question should I have my indoor cat

declawed? Your research, interviews, surveys, personal experiences might yield several angles on this question: Yes, it will save your furniture and your arms and ankles. No, it causes psychological issues for the cat. No, if the cat should get outside, he will be without defense. As a writer, be prepared to address alternate arguments and to include them to the extent that it will illustrate your reasoning.

Almost anything claimed in a paper can be refuted or challenged. Opposing points of view and arguments exist in every debate. It is smart to anticipate possible objections to your arguments – and to do so will make your arguments stronger. Another term for a counterargument is **antithesis** (i.e., the opposition to a thesis). To find possible counterarguments (and keep in mind there can be many counterpoints to one claim), ask the following questions:

- Could someone draw a different conclusion from the facts or examples you present?
- Could a reader question any of your assumptions or claims?
- Could a reader offer a different explanation of an issue?
- Is there any evidence out there that could weaken your position?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, the next set of questions can help you respond to these potential objections:

Is it possible to concede the point of the opposition, but then challenge that point's importance/usefulness?

- Can you offer an explanation of why a reader should question a piece of evidence or consider a different point of view?
- Can you explain how your position responds to any contradicting evidence?
- Can you put forward a different interpretation of evidence?

It may not seem likely at first, but clearly recognizing and addressing different sides of the argument, the ones that are not

your own, can make your argument and paper stronger. By addressing the antithesis of your argument essay, you are showing your readers that you have carefully considered the issue and accept that there are often other ways to view the same thing.

You can use signal phrases in your paper to alert readers that you are about to present an objection. Consider using one of these phrases–or ones like them–at the beginning of a paragraph:

- Researchers have challenged these claims with…
- Critics argue that this view…
- Some readers may point to…

What Are More Complex Argument Structures?

So far you have seen that an argument consists of a conclusion and a premise (typically more than one). However, often arguments and explanations have a more complex structure than just a few premises that directly support the conclusion. For example, consider the following argument:

> No one living in Pompeii could have survived the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. The reason is simple: The lava was flowing too fast, and there was nowhere to go to escape it in time. Therefore, this account of the eruption, which claims to have been written by an eyewitness living in Pompeii, was not actually written by an eyewitness.

The **main conclusion** of this argument—the statement that depends on other statements as evidence but doesn't itself provide any evidence for other statements—is

> A. This account of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius was not actually written by an eyewitness.

However, the argument's structure is more complex than simply having a couple of premises that provide evidence directly for the conclusion. Rather, some statements provide evidence directly for the main conclusion, but some premise statements support other premise statements which then support the conclusion.

To determine the structure of an argument, you must determine which statements support which, using premise and conclusion indicators to help. For example, the passage above contains the phrase, "the reason is…" which is a premise indicator, and it also contains the conclusion indicator, "therefore." That conclusion indicator helps identify the main conclusion, but the more important element to see is that statement A does not itself provide evidence or support for any of the other statements in the argument, which is the clearest reason statement A is the main conclusion of the argument. The next questions to answer are these: Which statement most directly supports A? What most directly supports A is

> B. No one living in Pompeii could have survived the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius.

However, there is also a reason offered in support of B. That reason is the following:

> C. The lava from Mt. Vesuvius was flowing too fast, and there was nowhere for someone living in Pompeii to go to escape it in time.

So the main conclusion (A) is directly supported by B, and B is supported by C. Since B acts as a premise for the main conclusion but is also itself the conclusion of further premises, B is classified as an **intermediate conclusion**. What you should recognize here is that *one and the same statement can act as both a premise and a conclusion*. Statement B is a premise that supports the main conclusion (A), but it is also itself a conclusion that follows from C. Here is how to put this complex argument into standard form (using numbers this time, as is typical for diagramming arguments):

1. The lava from Mt. Vesuvius was flowing too fast, and there was nowhere for someone living in Pompeii to go to escape it in time.
2. Therefore, no one living in Pompeii could have survived the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. (from 1)
3. Therefore, this account of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius was not

actually written by an eyewitness. (from 2)

Notice that at the end of statement 2 is a written indicator in parentheses (from 1), and, likewise, at the end of statement 3 is another indicator (from 2). From 1 is a shorthand way of saying, "this statement follows logically from statement 1." Use this convention as a way to keep track of an argument's structure. It may also help to think about the structure of an argument spatially, as the figure below shows:

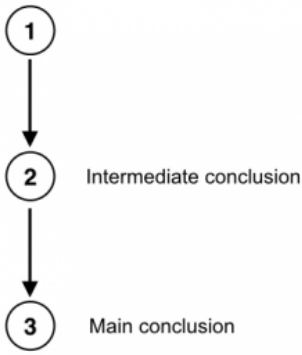


Figure 3.5 from Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking by Matthew Van Cleave

The main argument here (from 2 to 3) contains a **subargument**, in this case, the argument from 1 (a premise) to 2 (the intermediate conclusion). A subargument, as the term suggests, is a part of an argument that provides indirect support for the main argument. The main argument is simply the argument whose conclusion is the main conclusion.

Another type of structure that arguments can have is when two or more premises provide direct but independent support for the conclusion. Here is an example of an argument with that structure:

> Wanda rode her bike to work today because when she arrived at work she had her right pant leg rolled up, which cyclists do to keep their pants legs from getting caught in the chain. Moreover, our co-worker, Bob, who works in accounting, saw her riding towards work at 7:45 a.m.

The conclusion of this argument is "Wanda rode her bike to work today"; two premises provide independent support for it: the fact

that Wanda had her pant leg cuffed and the fact that Bob saw her riding her bike. Here is the argument in standard form:

1. Wanda arrived at work with her right pant leg rolled up.
2. Cyclists often roll up their right pant leg.
3. Bob saw Wanda riding her bike towards work at 7:45.
4. Therefore, Wanda rode her bike to work today. (from 1-2, 3 independently)

Again, notice that next to statement 4 of the argument is an indicator of how each part of the argument relates to the main conclusion. In this case, to avoid any ambiguity, you can see that the support for the conclusion comes independently from statements 1 and 2, on the one hand, and from statement 3, on the other hand. It is important to point out that an argument *or subargument* can be supported by one or more premises, the case in this argument because the main conclusion (4) is supported jointly by 1 and 2, and singly by 3. As before, we can represent the structure of this argument spatially, as the figure below shows:

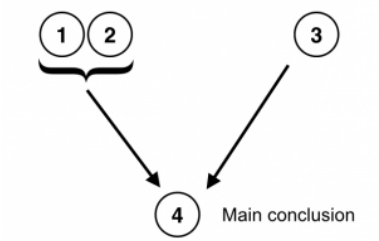


Figure 3.6 from Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking by Matthew Van Cleave

There are endless argument structures that can be generated from a few simple patterns. At this point, it is important to understand that arguments can have different structures and that some arguments will be more complex than others. Determining the structure of complex arguments is a skill that takes some time to master, rather like simplifying equations in math. Even so, it may help to remember that any argument structure ultimately traces back to some combination of premises, intermediate arguments, and a main conclusion.

Exercise 3

Write the following arguments in standard form. If any arguments are complex, show how each complex argument is structured using a diagram like those shown just above.

1. There is nothing wrong with prostitution because there is nothing wrong with consensual sexual and economic interactions between adults. Moreover, there is no difference between a man who goes on a blind date with a woman, buys her dinner and then has sex with her and a man who simply pays a woman for sex, which is another reason there is nothing wrong with prostitution.

2. Prostitution is wrong because it involves women who have typically been sexually abused as children. Proof that these women have been abused comes from multiple surveys done with female prostitutes that show a high percentage of self-reported sexual abuse as children.

3. Someone was in this cabin recently because warm water was in the tea kettle and wood was still smoldering in the fireplace. However, the person couldn't have been Tim because Tim has been with me the whole time. Therefore, someone else must be in these woods.

4. Someone can be blind and yet run in the Olympic

Games since Marla Runyan did it at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

5. The train was late because it had to take a longer, alternate route seeing as the bridge was out.

6. Israel is not safe if Iran gets nuclear missiles because Iran has threatened multiple times to destroy Israel, and if Iran had nuclear missiles, it would be able to carry out this threat. Furthermore, since Iran has been developing enriched uranium, it has the key component needed for nuclear weapons; every other part of the process of building a nuclear weapon is simple compared to that. Therefore, Israel is not safe.

7. Since all professional hockey players are missing front teeth, and Martin is a professional hockey player, it follows that Martin is missing front teeth. Because almost all professional athletes who are missing their front teeth have false teeth, it follows that Martin probably has false teeth.

8. Anyone who eats the crab rangoon at China Food restaurant will probably have stomach troubles afterward. It has happened to me every time; thus, it will probably happen to other people as well. Since Bob ate the crab rangoon at China Food restaurant, he will probably have stomach troubles afterward.

9. Lucky and Caroline like to go for runs in the afternoon

in Hyde Park. Because Lucky never runs alone, any time Albert is running, Caroline must also be running. Albert looks like he has just run (since he is panting hard), so it follows that Caroline must have run, too.

10. Just because Linda's prints were on the gun that killed Terry and the gun was registered to Linda, it doesn't mean that Linda killed Terry since Linda's prints would certainly be on her own gun, and someone else could have stolen her gun and used it to kill Terry.

Key Takeaways: Components of Vocabulary and Argument

- **Conclusion**—a claim that is asserted as true. One part of an argument.
- **Premise**—a reason behind a conclusion. The other part of an argument. Most conclusions have more than one premise.
- **Statement**—a declarative sentence that can be evaluated as true or false. The parts of an argument, premises and the conclusion, should be statements.
- **Standard Argument Form**—a numbered breakdown of the parts of an argument (conclusion and all premises).
- **Premise Indicators**—terms that signal that a

premise, or reason, is coming.

- **Conclusion Indicator**—terms that signal that a conclusion, or claim, is coming.
- **Support**—anything used as proof or reasoning for an argument. This includes evidence, experience, and logic.
- **Warrant**—the connection made between the support and the reasons of an argument.
- **Counterargument**—an opposing argument to the one you make. An argument can have multiple counterarguments.
- **Complex Arguments**–these are formed by more than individual premises that point to a conclusion. Complex arguments may have layers to them, including an intermediate argument that may act as both a conclusion (with its own premises) and a premise (for the main conclusion).

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Figure 3.4 "Common Conclusion Indicators," by Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

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5. Academic inquiry and developing a research question

NIC LEARNED

Academic inquiry and developing a research question

College is about learning to create knowledge for the benefit of oneself and others.

So how is that knowledge created? In one word, discourse. Discourse means "conversation," though knowledge-creating conversations are slightly different than conversations that people might have about, say, which fast food restaurant has the best chicken sandwich. **Academic discourse**, in particular, is a conversation that takes place through research over time: a researcher learns what previous researchers have said argued about a particular topic and then responds through research of their own.

The goal of that research is to move beyond what is already known. Explorers seek uncharted lands. Astronomers point their telescopes to unstudied galaxies. Food critics taste chicken sandwiches that others have yet to review.

These are examples of inquiry—of researchers developing useful questions and looking for the gaps in our collective knowledge. What questions remain unanswered? What controversies have yet to be settled?

As a college student, you will be expected to research this way.

Your audiences will know a lot about the existing scholarship on your topic, and they will want to know what YOU have to contribute.

Producing this insight will require that you first develop questions to guide your research. This is easier said than done, since not all research questions are effective. Some help you to contribute meaningfully to the conversations taking place around your topic, while others make it hard to do so.

Further, since research questions work best when connected to existing research, you will likely need to revise and refine your research question in response to the sources you find. In this way, academic inquiry, like the writing process, is **recursive**, or "characterized by recurrence or repetition" (Bing Dictionary). You might begin with one research question in mind, but after consulting your sources, you might think of other questions, other avenues of inquiry. The end result of your research might even be to produce a new research question or a recommendation for how the conversation taking place among researchers of your topic ought to proceed.

In this chapter, you will learn how to craft questions that will guide your research and that will, ultimately, position you to generate insight into your topic.

In this Chapter

1. The benefits of learning inquiry
2. How to develop a research question
3. Checklist for evaluating/revising research questions
4. You've finished your project; now what?

5. Takeaways

1. The benefits of learning inquiry

Learning academic inquiry takes effort; is it worth it?

Here are some of the benefits:

- Employers covet the kinds of skills associated with inquiry: critical thinking, research ability, information literacy, the ability to analyze complex issues, the ability to adapt to new contexts, and intellectual curiosity (Justice et al.)

- Inquiry-based research teaches you to behave as a practitioner—as a person in the field who doesn't simply learn about things, but actually does them (Lazonder and Harmsen. Padeste et al.). Further, research shows that inquiry-based learning transfers to other courses and other non-academic situations (Lazonder and Harmsen, Hmelo-Silver).

- Inquiry-based research allows you to connect what you're learning to your own interests and to have a say in what you're learning and writing about (Justice et al., Blessinger et al., Hmelo-Silver).

2. How to develop a research question

A research question determines the quality and nature of the work that flows from it, so spending an extra few minutes at this stage can make a big difference later. That said, a research question should continue to evolve and grow throughout the research writing process, so it should be regarded as fluid rather than fixed.

Also, you are striving to develop new knowledge and insight—not to simply learn repeat what your instructor says—so your instructors will play a different role than what you might be used to. They will serve as "research animators" (Justice et al.), assisting your journey through the research process by providing skills and necessary support along the way, so don't hesitate to seek them out if and when you get stuck.

Finally, remember that inquiry is recursive, which means that it is cyclical, though the steps don't always proceed in a particular order, and you may find it necessary to repeat some steps multiple times:

A. Read the assignment carefully. This is key for succeeding at any college-level writing assignment, but it is especially important at early stages because your inquiry sets the trajectory of the project. Pay extra close attention to the following:

- **How many sources the assignment requires:** The best research questions are clear and focused, but your question will need to be broad enough to allow you to find the number of sources you need given the time and resources available. At times, you may need to experiment with your question in order to find enough sources, though resist the temptation to switch topics if you don't find sources right away—research usually takes time, and rest assured that there is research on just about everything!

- **What kinds of sources your project needs** (academic sources, news articles, other non-scholarly sources, etc.): Think about what kind of research you'd have to do to answer a particular question, and make sure the question points you toward the kind of sources required in the assignment. For example, the question "What are people saying about Harry Potter?" calls for research into popular sources such as book reviews, while the question, "What literary devices are used in Harry Potter?" calls for research into academic sources.
- **What kinds of actions you are asked to perform in the final assignment:** Note words like "analyze," "interpret," "argue," etc., and make sure that your research question positions you to perform those actions. For example, "What are the benefits of stem cell research?" calls for a report-style essay, while "Should stem cell research be legal?" calls for an argument, and "How is the issue of stem cell research being discussed?" calls for analysis. If you're ever unsure about your question, it's never a bad idea to bounce your question off of your instructor or a tutor at the Composition and Literature Center.

B) Consider your personal connection to the topic. Ultimately, your research project should be useful to others, but it should also be interesting to you!

If your course has a central theme or essential question, then reflect on your personal connections to the course topic by journaling or taking notes on relevant experiences—the more detailed the better. Often, these observations can also prove useful when it comes to critically-engaging your sources.

And if your research direction is up to you, avoid cliche topics in favor of those that are relevant to your academic or career goals or personal experiences. For example, "steroid use in sports" might sound like a safe research topic, but if you enjoy gaming with your friends, you'll likely be much more successful researching the role of gaming in social relationships. Know also that there is academic research that explores almost every dimension of human experience, so it's likely that you can find sources and contribute to knowledge about just about any topic, though you may need to consult your instructor or research librarian for guidance.

Finally, it helps to know whether it makes sense, according to the purpose of the assignment, to incorporate personal experience in the final draft of your research essay: some scholars do not write about their experiences in their academic work, though others do so in really engaging and effective ways!

From your peers

"Ask questions that can help you with attaining important information that you may not have understood previously."

- JAZMIERA SMOTHERS

Successfull ENGL 121 student at Howard Community College

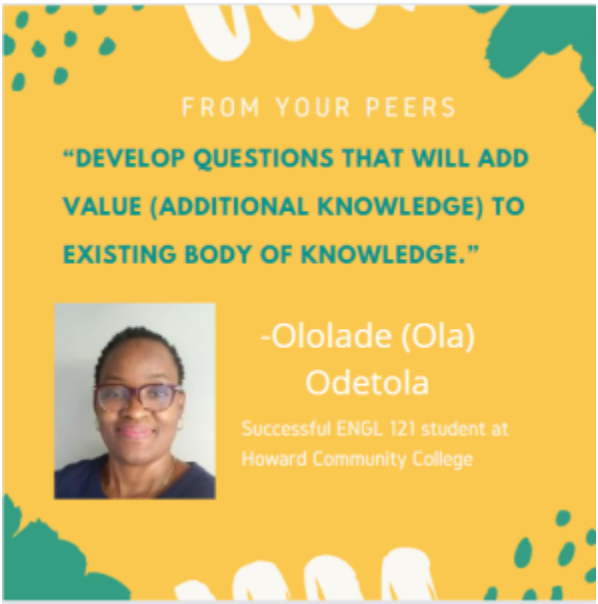
C) Brainstorm sub-issues pertaining to your topic that might be suitable for research: A great way to explore the possibilities that your project presents is to make a mind map: on a piece of paper or notebook, write your topic in the center. Then, around your topic, make note of the various sub-topics that are relevant to your topic. You might also try this same strategy with your research question, posing questions pertaining to the original question. This strategy can help you develop the kinds of specific, focused, and sophisticated questions that will best help you succeed in your essay.

D) Identify enigmatic aspects of your topic. The qualities of a good research question are very similar to those of good discussion questions; questions that require complex answers or that can be argued from multiple perspectives are the best conversation-starters and drive the most sophisticated and successful research writing. For example, the question, "Is a hot dog a sandwich?" might not be a perfect question for academic research, but it is thought-provoking and debatable.

E) Identify sites of controversy among your sources. What debates about your topic can you find within sources, and how might they shape your research question? You may even find that different sources present differing perspectives or arguments about your question. This step requires first consulting at least some of your sources but remember that your research question or inquiry should evolve and grow throughout the research process.

Remember also that in academic discourse, we're looking for what is not yet known , so while it might feel safe to steer your project towards areas where your sources agree, it actually makes more sense to target the areas of

contention. You can also look for **lacunae**—or gaps in research—to suggest and direct subsequent research.



F) Develop a question that is informed. Again, your research question will need to evolve as you work your way through the research process, but your inquiry should reflect at least a little understanding of your topic and, possibly, the prevailing arguments or research taking place around that topic. Whereas you might start out with a fairly simple question like, "What are the effects of humor," you might revise it after doing some research to something more sophisticated like, "What are the effects of divisive humor in workplace situations?"

Note: occasionally, we researchers don't find sources that respond to our initial research questions. Don't give up too easily!

If you find yourself in this predicament, seek help from your instructor or research librarian—often, they can provide a few tweaks to your search strategy to help you locate the relevant scholarship.

3. Checklist for evaluating/revising research questions

Here are criteria for evaluating your research question: Your research question/inquiry should…

- Target controversy or some point of contention among sources
- Be relevant or interesting to you, personally
- Require critical thinking
    - Not simply position you to argue something that you already think (as in, "What makes chicken wings the best food?")
- Allow for complex, debatable answers
    - Not be a yes/no, either/or question
    - Not necessarily have a clear right or wrong answer—or at least, not a simple one that is easily-reached
- Be focused and specific
- Be answerable through scholarly research
    - Not be purely fact-based (as in, "What is the population of Australia?") or easily answered through a Google search (though of course facts DO have a role to play in research!)
- Not pose a question to the reader (as in, "What do **you** think is the best way to address homelessness?")

4. You've finished your research project; now

what?

Often, learning about a topic leads to even more questions, so you might think about continuing the work you did in the following ways:

- **Build on your inquiry in other classes/contexts.** This might feel like cheating—and it is, if you don't add significantly to the work you've already done, and if you don't get your instructor's permission beforehand. But it is actually common practice for students and scholars to continue pursuing a research interest in other classes, and it makes a lot of sense to do so. There may be additional aspects of your question that you did not get to write about or directions that you did not get to research that it will make sense to explore. Just be sure to clear it with your instructor first.

- **Think about acting on your findings.** If you feel that your project has produced insight that might be helpful or applicable in some way, act on it! For example, if your project has convinced you that gaming improves social cohesion, you might start a gaming club on campus.

- **Reflect on your learning process.** One of the benefits of inquiry identified in Section 1 is that it develops your self-awareness, a quality that can improve your learning in general and also make you a more effective professional and citizen in your post-college life. Once your project is complete, reflect on HOW you learned what you learned—which strategies proved useful, which areas you struggled with, and how you navigated the various processes of producing knowledge,

insight, or perspective about your topic—and remember those lessons in future contexts.

5. Key Takeaways

1) The process of inquiry is recursive, and its aim is to generate new knowledge—for yourself and others.

2) Inquiry-based research positions you as an active participant in the learning process, giving you say in what you learn and helping you develop skills that will serve you in academic and professional contexts.

3) In research writing, developing a research question can be tricky at first, but because the question plays a large role in the trajectory and quality of the work that follows, it's worth a spending a little extra time to make sure you get it right.

4) Make sure your question is suitable for what is required in the assignment. If you're ever unsure, ask your instructor!

5) Some general qualities of good research questions:

- Clear and focused
- Debatable
- Target sites of controversy among sources
- Can be responded to through academic research
- Relevant to you—personally, professionally, etc.

6) In most academic contexts, it's important to clearly-state your inquiry at some point in your essay.

7) Academic essays don't typically "solve" their research questions; instead, research usually continues, perhaps in response to new questions that emerge. Similarly, finishing your project doesn't have to mean the end of your inquiry; it's okay and can even be productive to build upon your research in other classes and/or contexts (just be sure to clear it with your instructor so it doesn't look like you're turning in the same project for a different class!).

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6. Finding and Using Outside Sources

KATELYN BURTON

Many college courses require students to locate and use secondary sources in a research paper. Educators assign research papers because they require you to find your own sources, confront conflicting evidence, and blend diverse information and ideas—all skills required in any professional leadership role. Some research papers also allow students to pursue their own topic of interest. In this section, we will answer the following questions:

1. **What are the different types of sources?**
2. **What makes a source scholarly or academic?**
3. **How can I create a research strategy?**
4. **Where can I find credible sources for my paper?**

1. What are the different types of sources?

Why is it that even the most informative *Wikipedia* articles are still often considered illegitimate? What are good sources to use instead? Above all, follow your professor's guidelines for choosing sources. He or she may have requirements for a certain number of articles, books, or websites you should include in your paper. Be sure to familiarize yourself with your professor's requirements.

The table below summarizes types of secondary sources in four tiers. All sources have their legitimate uses, but the top-tier ones are considered the most credible for academic work.

Figure 6.1 Source Type Table

Tier	Type	Content	Uses	How to find them
1	Peer-reviewed academic publications	Rigorous research and analysis	Provide strong evidence for claims and references to other high-quality sources	Academic article databases from the library's website
2	Reports, articles, and books from credible non-academic sources	Well researched and even-handed descriptions of an event or state of the world	Initial research on events or trends not yet analyzed in the academic literature; may reference important Tier 1 sources	Websites of relevant government/ nonprofit agencies or academic article databases from the library's website
3	Short pieces from newspapers or credible websites	Simple reporting of events, research findings, or policy changes	Often point to useful Tier 2 or Tier 1 sources, may provide a factoid or two not found anywhere else	Strategic *Google* searches or article databases including newspapers and magazines
4	Agenda-driven or uncertain pieces	Mostly opinion, varying in thoughtfulness and credibility	May represent a particular position within a debate; more often provide keywords and clues about higher quality sources	Non-specific *Google* searches

Tier 1: Peer-reviewed academic publications

Sources from the mainstream academic literature include books and scholarly articles. Academic books generally fall into three categories: (1) textbooks written with students in mind, (2) academic books which give an extended report on a large research project, and (3) edited volumes in which each chapter is authored by different people.

Scholarly articles appear in academic journals, which are published multiple times a year to share the latest research findings with scholars in the field. They're usually sponsored by an academic society. To be published, these articles and books had to earn favorable anonymous evaluations by qualified scholars. Who are the experts writing, reviewing, and editing these scholarly publications? Your professors. We describe this process below. Learning how to read and use these sources is a fundamental part of being a college student.

Tier 2: Reports, articles, and books from credible non-academic sources

Some events and trends are too recent to appear in Tier 1 sources. Also, Tier 1 sources tend to be highly specific, and sometimes you need a more general perspective on a topic. Thus, Tier 2 sources can provide quality information that is more accessible to non-academics. There are three main categories.

First, official reports from government agencies or major international institutions like the World Bank or the United Nations; these institutions generally have research departments staffed with qualified experts who seek to provide rigorous, even-handed information to decision-makers.

Second, feature articles from major newspapers and magazines like *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *London Times*, or *The Economist* are based on original reporting by experienced journalists (not press releases) and are typically 1500+ words in length.

Third, there are some great books from non-academic presses that cite their sources; they're often written by journalists. All three of these sources are generally well researched descriptions of an

event or state of the world, undertaken by credentialed experts who generally seek to be even-handed. It is still up to you to judge their credibility. Your instructors, librarians, or writing center consultants can advise you on which sources in this category have the most credibility.

Tier 3. Short pieces from periodicals or credible websites

A step below the well-developed reports and feature articles that make up Tier 2 are the short tidbits that one finds in newspapers and magazines or credible websites. How short is a short news article? Usually, they're just a couple paragraphs or less, and they're often reporting on just one thing: an event, an interesting research finding, or a policy change. They don't take extensive research and analysis to write, and many just summarize a press release written and distributed by an organization or business. They may describe corporate mergers, newly discovered diet-health links, or important school-funding legislation.

You may want to cite Tier 3 sources in your paper if they provide an important factoid or two that isn't provided by a higher-tier piece, but if the Tier 3 article describes a particular study or academic expert, your best bet is to find the journal article or book it is reporting on and use that Tier 1 source instead. Sometimes you can find the original journal article by putting the author's name into a library database.

What counts as a credible website in this tier? You may need some guidance from instructors or librarians, but you can learn a lot by examining the person or organization providing the information (look for an "About" link on the website). For example, if the organization is clearly agenda-driven or not up-front about its aims and/or funding sources, then it definitely isn't a source you want to cite as a neutral authority. Also look for signs of expertise. A tidbit about a medical research finding written by someone with a science background carries more weight than the same topic written by a policy analyst. These sources are sometimes uncertain, which is all the more reason to follow the trail to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 source

whenever possible. The better the source, the more supported your paper will be.

Tip

It doesn't matter how well supported or well written your paper is if you don't cite your sources! A citing mistake or a failure to cite could lead to a failing grade on the paper or in the class. For more information about citations, see **Chapter 7, "How and Why to Cite."**

Tier 4. Agenda-driven or pieces from unknown sources

This tier is essentially everything else. These types of sources—especially *Wikipedia*—can be helpful in identifying interesting topics, positions within a debate, keywords to search, and, sometimes, higher-tier sources on the topic. They often play a critically important role in the early part of the research process, but they generally aren't (and shouldn't be) cited in the final paper.

Exercise 1

Based on what you already know or what you can find from Tier 4 sources like *Wikipedia*, start a list of the people, organizations, sources, and keywords that seem most relevant to your topic. You may need this background information when you start searching for more scholarly sources later on.

Tip

Try to locate a mixture of different source types for your assignments. Some of your sources can be more popular, like Tier 3 websites or encyclopedia articles, but you should also try to find at least a few Tier 1 or Tier 2 articles from journals or reputable magazines/ newspapers.

Key Takeaways

- There are several different categories of academic and popular sources. Scholarly sources are usually required in academic papers.
- It's important to understand your professor's requirements and look for sources that fill those requirements. Also, try to find a variety of different source types to help you fully understand your topic.

2. What makes a source scholarly or academic?

Most of the Tier 1 sources available are academic articles, also called scholarly articles, scholarly papers, journal articles, academic papers, or peer-reviewed articles. They all mean the same thing: a paper published in an academic journal after being scrutinized anonymously and judged to be sound by other experts in the subfield. Academic articles are essentially reports that scholars write to their peers—present and future—about what they've done in their research, what they've found, and why they think it's important. Scholarly journals and books from academic presses use a **peer-review** process to decide which articles merit publication. The whole process, outlined below, can easily take a year or more!

Figure 6.2 Understanding the Academic Peer Review Process

Understanding
THE ACADEMIC PEER REVIEW PROCESS
1. AUTHOR SENDS MANUSCRIPT TO JOURNAL EDITOR
2. EDITOR READS MANUSCRIPT
3. EDITOR THEN...
ACCEPTS MANUSCRIPT
OR
REJECTS MANUSCRIPT
4. EDITOR RECRUITS OTHER EXPERTS (PEERS)
5. PEERS REVIEW MANUSCRIPT
DOES IT NEED REVISION?
7. AUTHOR MAKES REVISIONS BASED ON COMMENTS
6. EDITOR SENDS PEERS' COMMENTS TO AUTHOR
8. EDITOR THEN...

When you are trying to determine if a source is scholarly, look for the following characteristics:

- **Structure**: The full text article often begins with an abstract or summary containing the main points of the article. It may also be broken down into sections like "Methods," "Results," and "Discussion."
- **Authors**: Authors' names are listed with credentials/degrees and places of employment, which are often universities or research institutions.The authors are experts in the field.
- **Audienc**e: The article uses advanced vocabulary or specialized language intended for other scholars in the field, not for the average reader.
- **Length**: Scholarly articles are often, but not always, longer than the popular articles found in general interest magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, etc. Articles are longer because it takes more content to explore topics in depth.
- **Bibliography or Reference List**: Scholarly articles include footnotes, endnotes or parenthetical in-text notes referring to items in a bibliography or reference list. Bibliographies are important to find the original source of an idea or quotation.

Figure 6.3 Example Scholarly Source

Transnational Debts: The Cultural Memory of Navajo Code Talkers in World War II

asjournal.org /59-2015/cultural-memory-of-navajo-code-talkers-in-world-war-ii/

Author & Credentials

by Birgit Däwes, Professor and Chair of American Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, and Director of the University of Vienna's Center of Canadian Studies.

Abstract

Even 70 years after it ended, World War II continues to endure in the global imagination. In the United States, images of the "Good War" prevail, and memories of the soldiers have been widely translated into displays of national heroism and glorification. At the same time, the celebratory narrative of national unity and democratic triumph is undercut by the counter-histories and experiences of the 44,000 Native American soldiers who served in this war. Their experiences and memories—in oral histories, interviews, as well as in fiction and film—challenge the narrative of a glorious nation in unison, especially in light of the historical conflicts between American nationalism and Native American political sovereignty. This paper investigates the specific memorial debt owed to the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II. Focusing on John Woo's film *Windtalkers* (2002), Joseph Bruchac's novel *Code Talker* (2005), and Chester Nez's memoir *Code Talker* (2011), I will inquire into the field of tension between tribal, national, and transnational identities and explore the ways in which these tensions are negotiated at different sites of commemoration, especially in contrast to the distorted, consumer-oriented memory produced by the Hollywood industry. Through codes of orality, communal identity, and historicity, I argue, counter-strategies of narrating and remembering World War II not only decisively shape a revisionist writing of recent history and enrich the multicultural narrative of 'America' by Indigenous voices, but they also substantially contribute to current debates about transnational American identities.

Specialized Vocabulary

When Navajo (Diné) Code Talker Chester Nez passed away in June 2014 at age 93, his death marked "the end of an era," according to CNN reporters AnneClaire Stapleton and Chelsea Carter: he was the last remaining of the original group of 29 Navajo soldiers who had been recruited to sign up with the U.S. Marine Corps in 1942 in order to develop a communications code based on the Navajo language (cf. Aaseng 27–37, Paul 23–33).[1] Long ignored by the public, over 400 Navajo code talkers, along with hundreds of other Indigenous American communications specialists from nations as diverse as the Comanche, the Seminole, the Hopi, the Assiniboine, or the Cherokee (cf. "Native Words"), substantially complicate and diversify the discourse of the so-called "Good War" and its debts. And while the Navajo code talkers were at least publicly recognized after 1968 (when the code and its developers were declassified), it took until 2013 for Congress to acknowledge the contributions of 33 other Native American nations to the war effort (Vogel).

Endnotes

Notes

1 The other 28 original code talkers were Frank Pete, Willsie Bitsie, Eugene Crawford, John Brown, Cosey Brown, John Benally, William Yazzie, Benjamin Cleveland, Nelson Thompson, Lloyd Oliver, Charlie Begay, William McCabe, Oscar Ithma, David Curley, Lowell Damon, Blamer Slowtalker, Alfred Leonard, Dale June, James Dixon, Roy Begay, James Manuelito, Harry Tsosie, George Dennison, Carl Gorman, Samuel Begay, John Chee, Jack Nez, and John Willie (Paul 12).

2 This was the case when they returned to reservations, where low-cost mortgages and free college education were not available. Ed Gilbert, however, also mentions that "the educational benefits of the GI Bill opened a new world" (60)—at least for those veterans willing to leave the reservation.

3 Another novel entitled Code Talker: A Novel of the Navajo was published in 2012 by non-Native author Ivon Blum.

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Suggested Citation
Däwes, Birgit. "Transnational Debts: The Cultural Memory of Navajo Code Talkers in World War II." American Studies Journal 59 (2015). Web. 18 July 2017. DOI 10.18422/59-04.

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9/9

Writing at Work

Finding high-quality, credible research doesn't stop after college. Citing excellent sources in professional presentations and publications will impress your boss, strengthen your arguments, and improve your credibility.

Key Takeaways

- Academic sources follow a rigorous process called peer-review. Significant time and effort goes into ensuring that scholarly journal articles are high-quality and credible.
- Skim a source and look for elements like a defined structure, author credentials, advanced language, and a bibliography. If these elements are included, the source is likely academic or scholarly.

3. How can I create a research strategy?

Now that you know what to look for, how should you go about

finding academic sources? Having a plan in place before you start searching will lead you to the best sources.

Research Questions

Many students want to start searching using a broad topic or even their specific thesis statement. If you start with too broad of a topic, your search results list will overwhelm you. Imagine having to sort through thousands of sources to try to find ones to use in your paper. That's what happens when your topic is too broad; your information will also be too broad. Starting with your thesis statement usually means you have already formed an opinion about the topic. What happens if the research doesn't agree with your thesis? Instead of closing yourself off to one side of the story, it's better to develop a **research question** that you would like the research to help you answer about your topic.

Steps for Developing a Research Question

The steps for developing a research question, listed below, help you organize your thoughts.

Step 1: Pick a topic (or consider the one assigned to you).

Step 2: Write a narrower/smaller topic that is related to the first.

Step 3: List some potential questions that could logically be asked in relation to the narrow topic.

Step 4: Pick the question in which you are most interested.

Step 5: Modify that question as needed so that it is more focused.

Here's an example:

Figure 6.4 Developing a Research Question

Keywords & Search Terms

Starting with a research question helps you figure out precisely what you're looking for. Next, you'll need the most effective set of **search terms** – starting from main concepts and then identifying related terms. These **keywords** will become your search terms, and you'll use them in library databases to find sources.

Identify the keywords in your research question by selecting nouns important to the meaning of your question and leaving out words that don't help the search, such as adjectives, adverbs,

prepositions and, usually, verbs. Nouns that you would use to tag your research question so you could find it later are likely to be its main concepts.

Example: *How are birds affected by wind turbines?*

The keywords are birds and wind turbines. Avoid terms like *affect* and *effect* as search terms, even when you're looking for studies that report effects or effectiveness. These terms are common and contain many synonyms, so including them as search terms can limit your results.

Example: *What lesson plans are available for teaching fractions?*

The keywords are lesson plans and fractions. Stick to what's necessary. For instance, don't include: children—nothing in the research question suggests the lesson plans are for children; teaching—teaching isn't necessary because lesson plans imply teaching; available—available is not necessary.

Keywords can improve your searching in all different kinds of databases and search engines. Try using keywords instead of entire sentences when you search *Google* and see how your search results improve.

For each keyword, list alternative terms, including synonyms, singular and plural forms of the words, and words that have other associations with the main concept. Sometimes synonyms, plurals, and singulars aren't enough. Also consider associations with other words and concepts. For instance, it might help, when looking for information on the common cold, to include the term virus—because a type of virus causes the common cold.

Here's an example of keywords & synonyms for our previous research question arranged in a graphic organizer called a Word Cloud:

Figure 6.5 What's Your Research Question?

Once you have keywords and alternate terms, you are prepared to start searching for sources in library search engines called **databases**.

Key Takeaways

- It's a good idea to begin the research process with a

question you'd like to answer, instead of a broad topic or a thesis statement.

- Creating a research strategy and finding keywords and alternate terms for your topic can help you locate sources more effectively.
- Creating a Word Cloud to organize your thoughts makes searching for sources faster and easier.

4. Where can I find credible sources for my paper?

The college library subscribes to **databases** (search engines) for credible, academic sources. Some are general purpose databases that include the most prominent journals in many disciplines, and some are specific to a particular discipline. HCC's library website (https://howardcc.libguides.com/homepage) includes a database list containing over one hundred search engines, organized by subject area.

Sometimes the online database list is overwhelming for students. Please remember, you can always seek advice from librarians on the best databases for your topic. Librarians have also created Research Help Guides (http://infoguides.virginiawestern.edu/), which contain tutorials for various parts of the research process, and don't hesitate to use the Chat Function (https://howardcc.libguides.com/chat) if you get stuck!

Tip

If you can't find the sources you need, visit the Reference Desk or set up an appointment for one-on-one help from a librarian. You can find the library's hours and contact information on the HCC library homepage (https://howardcc.libguides.com/homepage).

Key Takeaways

- Academic libraries subscribe to special search engines for scholarly sources called databases.
- Librarians can help you find and use the best databases for your subject or topic.

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Figure 6.1 "Source Type Table," Writing in College: From

Competence to Excellence, by Amy Guptill, Open SUNY, CC-BY-SA-NC.

Figure 6.2 "Understanding the Academic Peer Review Process," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 6.3 "Example Scholarly Source", Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-BY-SA, derivative image from "Transnational Debts: The Cultural Memory of Navajo Code Talkers in World War II" in American Studies Journal, by Birgit Dawes, American Studies Journal, CC-BY-SA.

Figure 6.4 "Developing a Research Question," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 6.5 "What's Your Research Question?," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

7. The Writing Process

KATHY BOYLAN

Communication skills, including writing, are some of the most important soft skills (employable skills that have more to do with emotional IQ such as common sense, communication, problem-solving, and collaboration) that students learn when they are in college because most professions require high competency in written communication, which can be a chance for one to shine or to falter. With emails, memos, letters, texts, and even Tweets, most people spend a fair amount of time at work communicating via the written word. Whether you are messaging a colleague, writing to your manager, creating the company newsletter, or writing a press release to the media, your writing skills can boost or hinder your career easily, even if you do not have a "writing" profession. Basically, writing skills make a difference in how you are perceived in college and in the workplace. That is the reason it is important to be sure you are following expected guidelines, always using the steps of the writing process, and making sure that all of your writing is coherent, concise, credible, and correct.

1. **What is the writing process?**
2. **What is prewriting?**
3. **What is a thesis statement?**
4. **How to organize and arrange.**
5. **How to write a rough draft.**
6. **What is revising?**
7. **What is done during editing & proofreading & formatting?**
8. **What are other types of academic writing?**

1. What is the writing process?

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

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

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

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

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

Publishing – Sharing the final draft with others.

Figure 4.1 The Writing Process

Please note that the writing process is not linear. Steps may be repeated, just like the arrows in the diagram above circle back through earlier steps.

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

2. What is prewriting?

Prewriting describes all of the thinking and planning that precedes the actual writing of a paper.

Much careful thought needs to be given to the assignment in general at the beginning of prewriting before focusing on your topic.

Thinking

- First, understand the writing assignment and its limits. Consider the assignment's length. Always know the expected length of a writing assignment. A two-page paper has a much narrower topic than a ten-page paper would have. If there is no page limit, consider the nature of the assignment to suggest its **length**. A summary of a chapter will be much shorter than the original chapter. An analysis of a poem may likely be longer than the poem itself.
- Second, establish the assignment's **purpose**. It is important to know the reasons you are writing or the purposes you are trying to accomplish with the writing.

  1. **Expressive writing** conveys personal feelings or impressions to the audience.
  2. **Informative writing** enlightens the audience about something.
  3. **Persuasive writing** attempts to convince the audience to think or act in a certain way.

  Other more specific purposes can include entertaining, analyzing, hypothesizing, assessing, summarizing, questioning, reporting, recommending, suggesting, evaluating, describing, recounting, requesting, and instructing.

- Next, determine the assignment's **audience**. You must determine to whom you are writing. An audience can be an

individual or a group. An audience can be general or specialized. Once you define your audience, you must determine how much the audience already knows about the subject to know how much or little background information should be included. You should also determine how best to approach your audience in terms of language, rhetorical strategies, purposes for reading, and background knowledge.

- Then devise the assignment's **occasion**. The occasion for which you are writing will determine the formality and scope of a writing project. An in-class writing assignment will differ from an out-of-class formal assignment. A memo for fellow office workers will differ from a report written for the company's president. A letter to an aunt will differ from a letter written to a bank to request a personal loan.
- Finally, assess your **own previous knowledge of the subject**. Before writing, you need to determine what you already know about a subject, what you need to find out about the subject, and what you think about the subject. Personal essays draw upon your own experiences and observations; research essays require you to gain new knowledge through research.

Topic Choice

The next step in prewriting, and often the hardest, is **choosing a topic** for an essay if one has not been assigned. Choosing a viable general topic for an assignment is an essential step. Sometimes your instructor will give you an idea to begin an assignment, and other times your instructor will ask you to come up with a topic on your own. A captivating topic covers what an assignment will be about and fits the assignment's purpose and its audience. There are various methods you may use to discover an appropriate topic for your writing.

Using Experience and Observations

When selecting a topic, you may also want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting

topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts. These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

Tip

Have you seen an attention-grabbing story on your local news channel? Many current issues appear on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. These can all provide inspiration for your writing. Our library's **database** (http://infoguides.virginiawestern.edu/az.php) *Issues and Controversies* is a first-rate source.

Reading

Reading plays a vital role in all the stages of the writing process, but it first figures in the development of ideas and topics. Different kinds of documents can help you choose a topic and develop that topic. For example, a magazine advertising the latest research on the threat of global warming may catch your eye in the supermarket. This cover may interest you, and you may consider global warming as a topic, or maybe a novel's courtroom drama sparks your curiosity of a particular lawsuit or legal controversy. After you choose a topic, critical reading is essential to the development of a topic. While reading almost any document, you evaluate the author's point of view by thinking about his main idea and his support. When you judge the author's argument, you discover more about the author's opinion as well as your own. If these steps already seem daunting, remember that even the best writers need to use prewriting strategies to generate ideas.

Tip

The steps in the writing process may seem time consuming at first, but following these steps will save you time in the future. The more you plan in the beginning by reading and using prewriting strategies, the less time you may spend writing and editing later because your ideas will develop more swiftly.

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

Freewriting

Freewriting (also called brainstorming) is an exercise in which you write freely (jot, list, write paragraphs, dialog, take off on tangents: whatever "free" means to you) about a topic for a set amount of time (usually three to five minutes or until you run out of ideas or energy). Jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Try not to worry about what you are saying, how it sounds, whether it is good or true, grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. If you are stuck, just copy the same word or phrase repeatedly until you come up with a new thought or write about why you cannot continue. Just keep writing; that is the power of this technique!

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

thoughts in interesting directions. Quickly recording your thoughts on paper will help you discover what you have to say about a topic. When writing quickly, try not to doubt or question your ideas, but if you do, write those, too. Allow yourself to write freely and unselfconsciously. Once you start writing with few limitations, you may find you have more to say than you first realized. Your flow of thoughts can lead you to discover more ideas about the topic as well as different perspectives on it. Freewriting may even lead you to discover another topic that excites you even more than your original idea. Freewriting can also be used to narrow a topic and/or to develop supporting ideas once a broad topic has been chosen.

Journaling is another useful strategy for generating topic and content ideas. Journaling can be useful in exploring different topic ideas and serve as possible topic ideas for future papers.

Tip

Some prewriting strategies can be used together. For example, you could use experience and observations to come up with a topic related to your course studies. Then you could use freewriting to describe your topic in more detail and figure out what you have to say about it.

Focusing Topic

Once a general topic has been assigned to or chosen by you, then you must decide on the **scope** of the topic. Broad topics always need to be narrowed down to topics that are more specific. Then you need to determine what you are going to say about a subject. Two ways to help narrow a general subject down to a narrower topic are **probing** and **focused freewriting**.

- **Probing** is asking a series of questions about the topic. **Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?** As you choose your topic, answering these questions can help you revisit the ideas you already have and generate new ways to think about your topic. You may also discover aspects of the topic that are unfamiliar to you and that you would like to learn more about. All these idea-gathering techniques will help you plan for future work on your assignment.

For example, if you were writing about tattoos, then you might ask yourself the following questions: **Who** do you know that has tattoos or who are some celebrities with memorable tattoos? **What** kinds of tattoos do people usually get–what symbols and what words? **Where** do people place tattoos on their bodies or where do people go to get tattoos–tattoo parlors? **When** do people get tattoos–is it after some memorable event or life stage? **Why** do people get tattoos? Finally, **how** do people get tattoos–what is the actual process?

- **Focused Freewriting** is freewriting again and again with each freewriting cycle becoming more focused (also called **looping**), and it can yield a great deal of useful material. Try this by taking the most compelling idea from one freewriting and starting the next with it.

Developing a Topic

The following checklist can help you decide if your narrowed topic is a possible topic for your assignment:

- Why am I interested in this topic?
- Would my audience be interested and why?
- Do I have prior knowledge or experience with this topic? If so, would I be comfortable exploring this topic and sharing my experiences?
- Why do I want to learn more about this topic?
- Is this topic specific? What specifics or details about this topic stand out to me?
- Does it fit the purpose of the assignment, and will it meet the required length of the assignment?

3. What is a thesis statement?

Once the topic has been narrowed to a workable subject, then determine what you are going to say about it; you need to come up with your controlling or main idea. A **thesis** is the main idea of an essay. It communicates the essay's purpose with clear and concise wording and indicates the direction and scope of the essay. It should not just be a statement of fact nor should it be an announcement of your intentions. It should be an idea, an opinion of yours that needs to be explored, expanded, and developed into an **argument**.

A thesis statement:

- tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
- is a road map for the paper; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
- is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject

itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II or *Moby Dick*; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or the novel.

- makes a claim that others might dispute.
- is usually a single sentence somewhere in the introductory paragraph that presents the writer's argument to the reader. However, as essays get longer, a sentence alone is usually not enough to contain a complex thesis. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the readers of the logic of their interpretation.

If an assignment asks you to take a position or develop a claim about a subject, you may need to convey that position or claim in a thesis statement near the beginning of your draft. The assignment may not explicitly state that the writer needs a thesis statement because the instructor may assume the writer will include one. When an assignment asks you to analyze, to interpret, to compare and contrast, to demonstrate cause and effect, or to take a stand on an issue, it is likely that you are being asked to develop a thesis and to support it persuasively.

How do I get a thesis?

A thesis is the result of a lengthy thinking process. Formulating a thesis is not the first thing you do after reading an essay assignment. Before you develop an argument on any topic, you have to collect and organize evidence, look for possible relationships between known facts (such as surprising contrasts or similarities), and think about the significance of these relationships. **(See chapter on argument for more detailed information on building an argument.)** Once you have done this thinking, you will probably have a "working thesis," a basic or main idea, an argument that you can support with evidence. It is deemed a "working thesis" because it is a work in progress, and it is subject to change as you move through the writing process. Writers use all kinds of techniques to stimulate their thinking and to help them clarify relationships or

comprehend the broader significance of a topic to arrive at a thesis statement.

For example, there is the question strategy. One way to start identifying and narrowing a thesis idea is to form a question that you want to answer. For example, if the starting question was "Do cats have a positive effect on people with depression? If so, what are three effects?

The question sends you off to explore for answers. You then begin developing support. The first answer you might find is that petting cats lowers blood pressure, and, further question how that works. From your findings (research, interviews, background reading, etc.), you might detail how that happens physically or you might describe historical evidence. You could explain medical research that illustrates the concept. Then you have your first supporting point — as well as the first prong of your thesis: Cats have a positive effect on people with depression because they can lower blood pressure . . . .

When you start with a specific question and find the answers, the argument falls into place. The answer to the question becomes the thesis, and how the answer was conceived becomes the supporting points (and, usually, the topic sentences for each point).

How do I know if my thesis is strong?

If there is time, run it by the instructor or make an appointment at the Composition and Literature Center to get some feedback (https://www.howardcc.edu/programs-courses/academics/academic-divisions/english-world-languages/resources/). Even if you do not have time to get advice elsewhere, you can do some thesis evaluation of your own.

When reviewing the first draft and its working thesis, ask the following:

- *Is my thesis statement an opinion, and is it a complete thought?* Beware of posing a question as your thesis statement. Your

thesis should answer a question that the audience may have about your topic. Also, be sure that your thesis statement is a complete sentence rather than just a phrase stating your topic.

- *Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose*? If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it is possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.

- *Is my thesis statement provable*? Can I establish the validity of it through the evidence and explanation that I offer in my essay?

- *Is my thesis statement specific*? Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like "good" or "successful," see if you could be more specific: *Why* is something "good"; *what specifically* makes something "successful"?

- *Does my thesis pass the* "*So what*?" *test*? If a reader's first response is, "So what?" then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.

- *Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering*? If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It is okay to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured

out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.

- *Does my thesis pass the "how and why?" test?* If a reader's first response is "how?" or "why?" your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.

To create a thesis statement simply follow this formula:

TOPIC + CLAIM = THESIS STATEMENT

Examples:

1. Animals + Dogs make better pets than cats. =When it comes to animals, dogs make better pets than cats because they are more trainable, more social, and more empathetic.
2. Movies & Emotions + *Titanic* evoked many emotions. = The movie *Titanic* evoked many emotions from an audience.
3. Arthur Miller & *Death of a Salesman* + Miller's family inspired the Loman family. = Arthur Miller's family and their experiences during the Great Depression inspired the creation of the Loman family in his play *Death of a Salesman*.

For more information on bad, good and better thesis statements from the writing center at the University of Evansville, go **here** (https://tinyurl.com/y8sfjale).

Exercise: Creating Effective Thesis Statements

Using the formula, create effective thesis statements for the following topics:

1. Fake News
2. Drone Technology
3. Fast Food
4. Homework
5. Helicopter Parents

Then have a partner check your thesis statements to see if they pass the tests to be strong thesis statements.

Once a working thesis statement has been created, then it is time to begin building the body of the essay. Get all of the key supporting ideas written down, and then you can begin to flesh out the body paragraphs by reading, asking, observing, researching, connecting personal experiences, etc. Use the information from below to maintain the internal integrity of the paragraphs and smooth the flow of your ideas.

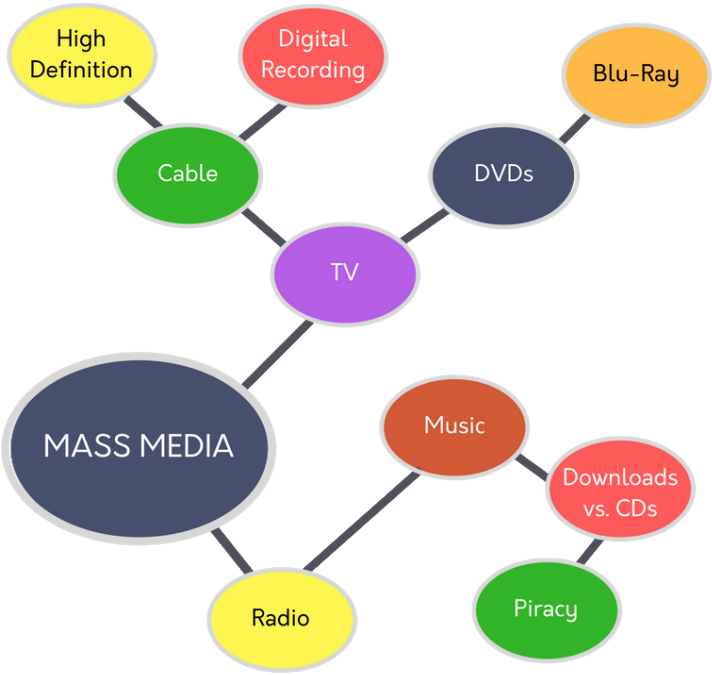
4. How to organize and arrange?

Once you have generated supporting ideas for the main idea of your paper, you need to arrange those ideas in some type of order. **Clustering** and **outlining** can help organize the ideas.

Clustering (also called idea mapping) is a way of visually arranging

ideas. Begin clustering by writing the topic in the center of a sheet of paper. Circle the topic, and then surround it with words and phrases that identify the major points to be discussed in the paper. Continue the process until all supporting details and secondary details have been listed. Many writers like this method because the shapes show how the ideas relate or connect, and writers can find a focused topic from the connections mapped. Using clustering, you might discover connections between topics that you had not thought of before.

Figure 4.2 Clustering



Outlining lists the major supporting details in a tentative order and includes secondary supporting details.

Figure 4.3 Traditional Formal Outline

Traditional Formal Outline

1. Introduction
   Thesis statement
2. Main Point #1 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 1*
   1. Supporting detail → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 1*
      1. Subpoint
      2. Subpoint
   2. Supporting detail
      1. Subpoint
      2. Subpoint
   3. Supporting detail
      1. Subpoint
      2. Subpoint
3. Main Point #2 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 2*
   1. Supporting detail
   2. Supporting detail
   3. Supporting detail
4. Main Point #3 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 3*
   1. Supporting detail
   2. Supporting detail
   3. Supporting detail
5. Conclusion

Before you write, you need to decide how to organize your ideas. You need to determine the **rhetorical mode(s)** that will be used and the order of the supporting ideas. Simplistically speaking, there are nine basic **rhetorical modes**. They are as follows: **narration, description, exemplification, process, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, classification and division, definition, and argument.** However, most complex writing begins with an argument of some sort and then uses a combination of modes to relay one's message.

Structure of a Paragraph and Essay

All formal paragraphs and essays have a **title**, a beginning or an **introduction**, a **middle-a body of supporting paragraphs**, and an end or **conclusion**.

A **title** is at the top of your paragraph or essay, but it is often the last thing that you create because until the paper is complete, you do not really know what your final product will be. A good title makes people want to read your paper; it does not merely repeat the topic sentence or thesis statement; it hints at your main idea. It is not a complete sentence, but it is a phrase or phrases that indicate your topic.

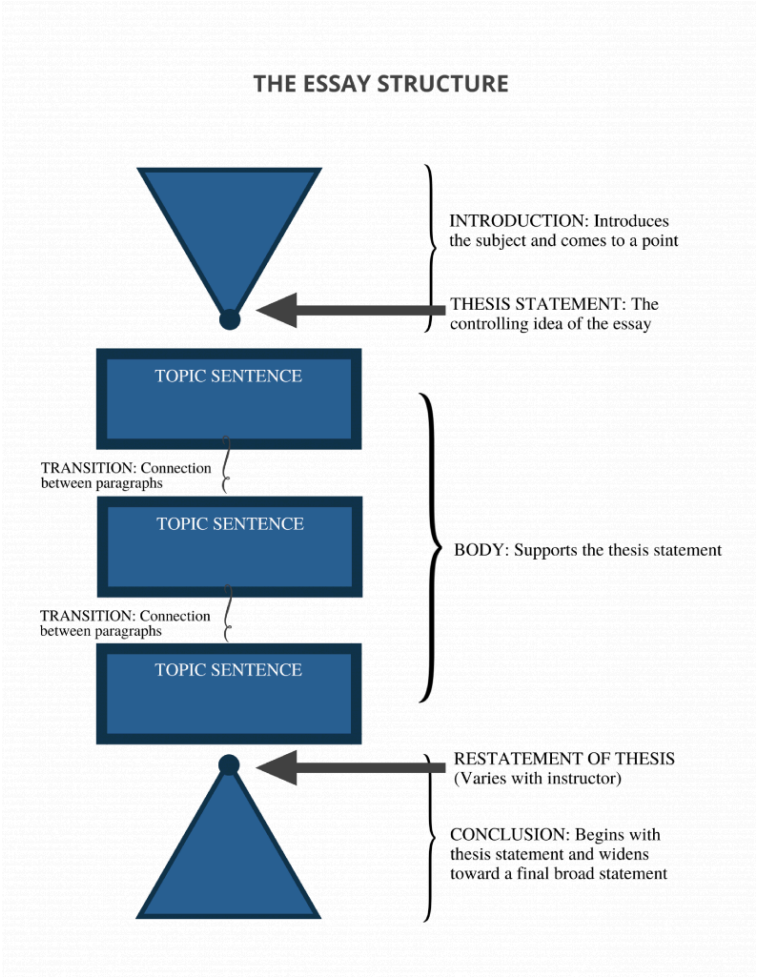
An effective **introduction** captures your readers' attention and arouses their curiosity. In a paragraph, it is often your topic sentence, and in an essay, it usually includes your thesis statement, which narrows your subject, claims something specific and significant, and conveys your purpose and often your form of organization. You can include a question, tell a story, use a quotation, give interesting facts or statistics, give background information, or outline a problem and/or a solution. **Do not tell the reader what your topic is–show them. Do not be vague and mysterious. Do not refer back to your title. Do not apologize for what you are about to say, and be original.** The important thing is that you hook your readers' attention and motivate them to continue reading.

Your **body of supporting evidence** should be organized, unified

and coherent. The support can be organized using chronological order, spatial order, or emphatic order. Each supporting detail should have its own topic sentence and be developed with valuable supporting details. In an essay, the supporting ideas should support your thesis statement. **You should use transitional words or phrases** to establish connections between paragraphs and different ideas. **You should use parallel structure** throughout your paper and use repetition sparingly and only when it is effective and necessary. Be consistent in tense, number, and person throughout your paper as well. The entire body of supporting evidence should be focused on supporting your main idea without straying off topic or including unrelated ideas.

Your **conclusion** should let the readers know that you are finished and not leave them with any unanswered questions. It may recommend a call to action, or it may just summarize a long and complex paper. The conclusion may repeat some of the ideas from the introduction, but it should not be a replica of that paragraph. It may restate your main idea. The conclusion can be either hopeful or hopeless depending on the mood of your paper. You may leave your reader with some final important facts, or a compelling example, or a final visual image. **It is important that you do not go off in a new direction in your conclusion. Do not make sweeping generalizations, and again do not apologize for any of your ideas.** Once these arrangements and ideas have been decided, then an outline should be constructed.

Figure 4.4 The Essay Structure



Using a Clear Organizational Pattern

Depending on your topic, you might find it beneficial to use one of these common organizational patterns, either within individual paragraphs or within the entire essay:

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Process analysis	A process analysis paragraph is used to describe how something is made or to explain the steps for how something is done.	The first key to growing good tomatoes is to give the seedlings plenty of room. Make sure to transplant them to small pots once they get their first leaves. Even when they are just starting out in pots, they need plenty of light, air, and heat. Make sure to warm the ground in advance by covering it in plastic sheeting for a couple of weeks. When you are ready to plant them in soil, plant them deeply enough, so they can put down some strong roots. Mulch next, and once the stems of the tomato plants have reached a few inches in height, cut off the lower leaves to avoid fungi. Carefully prune the suckers that develop in the joints of the developing stems.
Chronological	Chronological arrangement presents information in time order.	As soon as I arrived at the farmers' market, I bought a large bag of lettuce. I walked around the corner and saw the biggest, most gorgeous sunflower I had ever seen. I bought it and added it to my lettuce bag. The flower was so big that I had to hold the bag right in front of me to keep it from being bumped. At the Wilson Pork Farm booth, I tasted a little pulled pork. You guessed it—I had to buy a quart of it. I went on with a plastic quart container in my left hand and my lettuce and flower in my right hand. I was handling it all just fine until I saw a huge hanging spider plant I had to have. Ever so gently, I placed my pulled pork container inside the spider fern plant pot. Now I was holding everything right in front of me as I tried to safely make my way through the crowd. That is when I met up with little Willie. Willie was about seven years old, and he was playing tag with his brother. I am not sure where their mother was, but Willie came running around the corner and smacked right into me. You are probably thinking that poor Willie had pulled pork all over his clothes and an upside-down plant on his head, but no, not at all. I was the one. Willie didn't even notice. He was too busy chasing his brother.

General-to-specific	A common paragraph format is to present a general idea and then give examples.	The displays at the farmers' market do not lack for variety. You will see every almost every kind of fresh, locally grown food you can imagine. The featured fruits on a given day might be as varied as pomegranates, persimmons, guava, jackfruit, and citron. Vegetables might include shiitake mushrooms, artichokes, avocados, and garlic. Some vendors also sell crafts, preserves, seeds, and other supplies suitable for starting your own garden.
Specific-to-general	The reverse of the above format is to give some examples and then summarize them with a general idea.	Your sense of smell is awakened by eighteen varieties of fresh roma tomatoes. Your mouth waters at the prospect of sampling the fresh breads. Your eye catches a glimpse of the colors of handmade, embroidered bags. You linger to touch a perfectly ripe peach. Your ears catch the strain of an impromptu jug band. A walk up and down the aisles of your local farmers' market will engage all of your senses.
Spatial	A paragraph using spatial organization presents details as you would naturally encounter them, such as from top to bottom or from the inside to the outside. In other words, details are presented based on their physical location.	From top to bottom, the spice booth at our farmers' market is amazing. Up high vendors display artwork painstakingly made with spices. At eye level, you see at least ten different fresh spices in small baggies. On the tabletop is located an assortment of tasting bowls with choices ranging from desserts to drinks to salads. Below the table, but out of the way of customers, are large bags of the different spices. Besides being a great use of space, the spice booth looks both professional and charming.

5. How to Write a Rough Draft.

Make the Writing Process Work for You! What makes the writing process beneficial to writers is that it encourages alternatives to standard practices and motivates you to develop your best ideas. For instance, the following approaches, done alone or in combination with others, may improve your writing and help you move forward in the writing process:

- Begin writing with the part you know the most about. The purpose of a first draft is to get ideas down on paper that can then be revised. Consider beginning with the body paragraphs and drafting the introduction and conclusion later. You can start with the third point in your outline if ideas come easily to mind, or you can start with the first or second point Although paragraphs may vary in length, keep in mind that short paragraphs may contain insufficient support. Readers may also think the writing is abrupt. Long paragraphs may be wordy and may lose your reader's interest. As a guideline, try to write paragraphs longer than one sentence but shorter than the length of an entire double-spaced page.

- Write one supporting point at a time and then stop. As long as you complete the assignment on time, you may choose how many paragraphs you complete in one sitting. Pace yourself. On the other hand, try not to procrastinate. Writers should always meet their deadlines.

- Take short breaks to refresh your mind. This tip might be most useful if you are writing a multipage report or essay. Still, if you are antsy or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind

rest, but do not let breaks extend too long. If you spend too much time away from your essay, you may have trouble starting again. You may forget key points or lose momentum. Try setting an alarm to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write.

- Be reasonable with your goals. If you decide to take ten-minute breaks, try to stick to that goal. If you told yourself that you need more facts, then commit to finding them. Holding yourself to your own goals will create successful writing assignments.

- Keep your audience and purpose in mind as you write. These aspects of writing are just as important when you are writing a single paragraph for your essay as when you are considering the direction of the entire essay.

- Of all of these considerations, keeping your purpose and your audience at the front of your mind is key to writing success. If your purpose is to persuade, for example, you will present your facts and details in the most logical and convincing way you can for the particular audience you have in mind. If your audience dwells on logic, for example, points that use reason, facts, documented information, and the like, will provide the persuasion to which those readers best respond. Some writers find it useful to keep the purpose and audience at the top of every page, highlighted in some way, as a reminder of the targets of each point.

- Your purpose will guide your mind as you compose your sentences. Your audience will guide word choice. Are you writing for experts, for a general audience, for other college students, or for people who know very little about your topic? Keep asking yourself what your readers, with their background and experience, need to know to understand your ideas. How can you best express your ideas, so they are meaningful and memorable and your communication is effective?

- Write knowing that the revision and editing processes lie ahead, so leave plenty of time for those stages.

Tip

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

Writing at Work

Many of the documents you produce at work target a particular audience for a particular purpose. You may find that it is highly advantageous to know as much as you can about your target audience and to prepare your message to reach that audience, even if the audience is a coworker or your boss. Menu language is a common example. Descriptions like "organic romaine" and "free-range chicken" are intended to appeal to a certain type of customer though perhaps not to the same customer who craves a thick steak. Similarly, mail-order companies research the demographics of the people who buy their merchandise. Successful vendors customize product descriptions in catalogs to appeal to their buyers' tastes. For example, the product descriptions in a skateboarder catalog will differ from the descriptions in a clothing catalog for mature adults.

Tips to Avoid Writer's Block

Set up scheduled times to write and set deadlines to accomplish different parts of your essay, and avoid perfectionism–that comes later in the writing process.

Maintaining Internal Integrity of Paragraphs

A paragraph needs to provide links between the ideas, and here are techniques that you can put into practice.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Linkages	Paragraphs with unity flow well so that readers can follow along easily. You need to present an idea and then link the rest of the ideas in the paragraph together. Do not leave any unifying for your readers to do mentally. Do it all for them.	Not all the booths at a farmers' market feature food. One couple has a booth that sells only fresh flowers. They display some flowers in antique containers and sell the flowers, the containers, or both. A clothesline above our heads displays a variety of dried flowers. A table holds about fifty vases of varying sizes, and they are all full of flowers. Some vases hold only one kind of long-stem flowers. Others hold mixtures of uncut flowers. Still, others display gorgeous arrangements. Both the man and the woman wear a wreath of flowers on their heads. The whole display is so attractive and smells so fabulous that it really draws people.
Parallelism	Parallelism means that you maintain the same general wording and format for similar situations throughout the paragraph so that once readers figure out what is going on, they can easily understand the whole paragraph.	The history of this farmers' market followed a typical pattern. It started out in the 1970s as a co-op of local farmers, featuring a small city block of modest tables and temporary displays every Saturday morning from April to October from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In the early 1990s, with the help of a grant from the city, the market expanded its footprint to a larger, more centrally located city block with ample parking. It benefited greatly from the installation of permanent booths, electrical outlets, and a ready water supply. These amenities drew far more customers and merchants. Its popularity reached unprecedented levels by 2000, when the city offered to help with the staffing needed to keep it open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Recently, discussions began about how to open the market on weeknights in the summer from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Consistency	A paragraph with consistency uses the same point of view and the same verb tense throughout. In other words, if you are using third person in the beginning of the paragraph, you use it throughout the paragraph. If you are using present tense to start the paragraph, you stick with it.	There comes a time each year when you must begin the all-important step of actually harvesting your vegetable garden. You will want to pick some of your vegetables before they are fully ripe. Eggplants, cucumbers, and squash fall into this category because they can further ripen once you have picked them. On the other hand, you will find that tomatoes, pumpkins, and most melons really need to ripen fully before you harvest them. You should also keep in mind that you would need plenty of storage space for your bounty. If you have a good harvest, you might want to have a few friends in mind, especially as recipients for your squash and cucumbers.

Using Transitions

Transitions within paragraphs are words that connect one sentence to another so that readers can follow the intended meanings of sentences and relationships between sentences. Transitions may also smooth the flow between body paragraphs. The following table shows some commonly used transition words:

Commonly Used Transition Words	
To compare/ contrast	after that, again, also, although, and then, but, despite, even though, finally, first/second/third/etc., however, in contrast, in the same way, likewise, nevertheless, next, on the other hand, similarly, then
To signal cause and effect	as a result, because, consequently, due to, hence, since, therefore, thus
To show sequence or time	after, as soon as, at that time, before, during, earlier, finally, immediately, in the meantime, later, meanwhile, now, presently, simultaneously, so far, soon, until, then, thereafter, when, while
To indicate place or direction	above, adjacent to, below, beside, beyond, close, nearby, next to, north/south/east/west, opposite, to the left/ right
To present examples	for example, for instance, in fact, to illustrate, specifically
To suggest relationships	and, also, besides, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, too

6. What Is revising?

Once a rough draft is created, take some time to step away from the essay to get a newer and better perspective. Then begin revising. Revising means reexamining and rethinking the first draft, adding and deleting ideas extensively; rearranging any of the ideas, sentences, or paragraphs in the first draft; rewriting sentences and paragraphs for more variety, better flow, and more precise word

choices. Often times, you may have three or four drafts before you are finally satisfied with a final draft. For easier revision, follow the following tips:

- Take time between the first draft and the later revisions to approach it more objectively.

- Revise on hard copy rather than on the computer screen. Do not delete any drafts! Do label each successive one. Allow yourself and others to annotate (comment on and give suggestions to improve) your draft.

- Read the draft aloud. Better yet, have someone else read it aloud.

- Take advantage of opportunities to get feedback; however, do not become overwhelmed by feedback.

- Do not allow ego to get in the way of a successful paper.

- Revise in stages–

    1. Revise for overall meaning and structure. Does the essay develop a central point clearly and logically and are the purpose, tone, and point-of-view suited for the audience of the essay?

2. Revise for paragraph development. Check that your paragraphs are logically ordered, unified, and specific.
3. Revise sentence structure. Make your sentences consistent with your overall tone, varied in type and length, emphatic, and economical.

- Finally, revise for word choices. Aim for an appropriate level of diction, word choices that do not overstate or understate, specific rather than general terms, strong verbs, only necessary modifiers, and original and nonsexist language.

- When you get your essays back, read the essay and heed your instructor's comments. They can help improve your future essays. If you do not understand your grade or the instructor's comments, schedule a conference to discuss them with her. As you revise your future essays, revisit the mistakes made before and be sure you avoid repeating them.

7. What is done during editing & proofreading & formatting?

- To **edit**, search for grammatical errors, check punctuation, check spelling, and look over sentence style and word choices one last time. See chapters **8**, **9**, and **10** for additional help.

- To **proofread**, look for surface errors, such as typos, incorrect

spacing, or formatting problems.

- To **format**, be sure that you are following the formatting style your instructor requires whether it is Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), etc. For more information, see the Brown Library **Citation Styles Guide** (http://infoguides.virginiawestern.edu/citations).

- Overall, look carefully for any error, large or small, that may weaken the essay's message or undermine its credibility.

8. What are other types of academic writing?

There are many different types of writing that you will be asked to create during your academic and professional careers. Always be clear what your boss or professor expects in an assignment before you begin writing. Below is just a sample of the various assignments you may be given:

Personal/reflective writing assignment–personal expression about an experience, event, situation, or information.

Expository writing assignment–writing that explains, describes, or informs.

Case study–a written report about a situation, group, or person that one has studied.

Review–summarizing as well as analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing, a show, or an event.

Technical report–clear, detailed report of the procedures

undertaken and the results obtained during a scientific or technical procedure.

Lab report–writing that details the steps taken and the results of a scientific experiment.

Book report–writing that summarizes the contents of a book as well as some commentary concerning the writer's opinion of the book.

Critical analysis/critique–writing an informed review and an analysis of the significance of a piece of writing or an event.

Bibliography–writing a full list of all resources consulted during a research project.

Annotated bibliography–writing not only a list of all resources consulted for a research project, but also including a summary and analysis of each resource.

Literature review–writing that focuses on a specific research topic and the critical aspects of the literature consulted during the research process.

Research paper–the final product following an extended period of research, critical thinking, and composition that encompasses the writer's own ideas supported by a combination of primary and secondary sources.

E-mail–writing in electronic mail

Web writing–writing web content, which needs to be direct, concise, and credible.

Oral presentation of written report–developing an effective summary of a project to be delivered in front of an audience; may include visual aids.

Midterm/final exam essay–exams often include short essay questions that need to be written in a short amount of time.

Resume & other 'business' writing–writing that must communicate pertinent information in a concise, easy-to-read format.

Key Takeaways

- All writers rely on steps and strategies to begin the writing process.
- The steps in the writing process are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing.
- Prewriting is the transfer of ideas from abstract thoughts into words, phrases, and sentences on paper.
- A good topic interests the writer, appeals to the audience, and fits the purpose of the assignment. Writers often choose a general topic first and then narrow the focus to a more specific topic.
- A strong thesis statement is key to having a focused and unified essay.
- Rough drafts are opportunities to get ideas down onto paper to get a first look at how your ideas will work together.
- Revising improves your writing as far as supporting ideas, organization, sentence flow, and word choices.
- Editing spots and corrects any errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, and formatting.
- Regardless of the type of assignment you may be given in college or in work, it benefits you to follow a writing process, to put in the work necessary to understand your subject and audience, and to communicate your ideas confidently and coherently.

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Figure 4.2 "Clustering," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 4.3 "Traditional Formal Outline," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 4.4 "The Essay Structure," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 4.5 "Point of View," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

8. Integrating Sources

Using Sources to Serve Academic Argument

SARAH JOHNSON AND JEREMY O'ROARK

At some point in your academic career, you will be asked to move beyond merely reporting on the findings of sources, as you would in a bibliography, and instead to use what you have learned from sources to participate meaningfully and responsibly in an academic conversation. This may be a literal conversation or one that takes place in writing as writers read and respond to one another.

All academic writers must show how what they know or what they claim connects with prior information or knowledge. This is true even when these scholars are presenting a new study or their own new findings. Sometimes, academic writers contribute to what we know or understand about a subject by presenting their own position, or argument, in an ongoing debate. At these times, they must use perspectives and information from others to support or provide evidence for that position. This is a skill that you will practice as a composition student.

Finding credible, relevant sources (chapter 6) is only one part of the research process; effectively integrating those sources in the arrangement of an academic or argumentative essay is a different task requiring further close reading and critical thinking. This chapter highlights three skills of academic writers when they work with sources:

1. Considering the different roles that sources can play in your argument
2. Synthesizing, or connecting information from multiple sources in unique ways
3. Providing context for your reader about each source and how it fits into your argument

In this Chapter

1. Roles that Sources Can Play
1.1 Good Research is a Process that Starts with Inquiry
1.2 Reading Sources with their Roles in Mind
1.3 How Body Paragraphs Serve a Thesis
2. Synthesis of Multiple Sources
3. Putting Sources in Context
3.1 Context of the Source Itself
3.2 Context of Your Argument

1. Roles that Sources Can Play

1.1 Good Research is a Process that Starts with Inquiry

Good research starts with a question; you have an idea about something, and you want to learn more. Academic research is a specific type that involves finding and reading sources to prepare to participate in an academic conversation. This requires you to keep three elements in your mind and to stay aware of how they are changing, and how they are changing each other, as you learn more (figure 8.1):

1. your central research topic or question
2. your knowledge or understanding about the topic
3. your working main claim or position about the topic (working thesis)

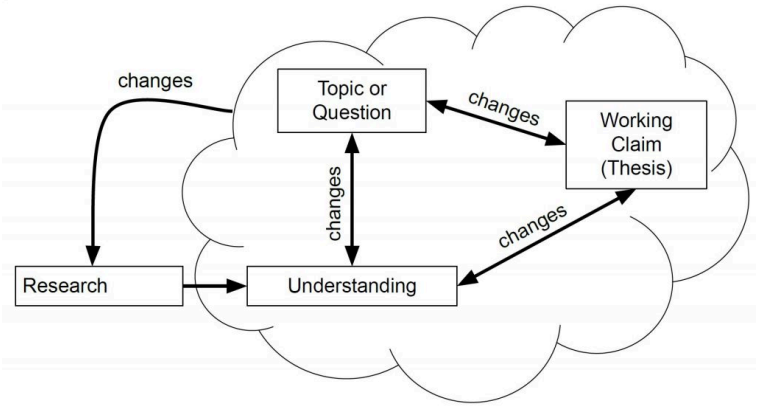


Figure 8.1 Research Process Flowchart

To evaluate whether a source is relevant for your purpose, you should not just try to decide whether it "fits" or relates to what you already know or believe. In fact, that source's perspective may change what you believe. Or, it may change your entire question or topic itself, as you learn about specific issues, conversations, and debates related to the question that you started with.

Example of Research as a Recursive Process

Imagine that you start with a broad research question: "are the graduation rates really so low for college students in the United States?" After some preliminary research, you learn that, yes, there

are some statistics that highlight a problem of students starting but not finishing college.

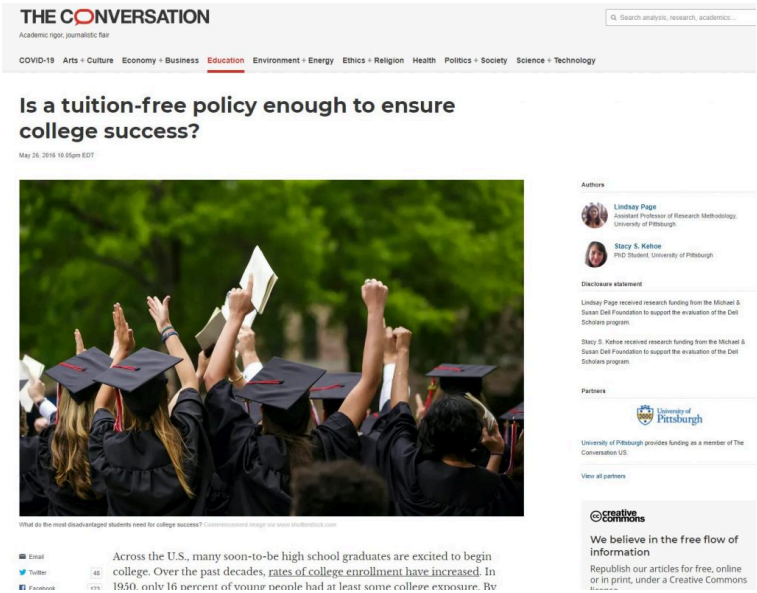
So, you narrow your research question to learn more: "what factors contribute to students' struggles with completing college?" And you start to see that there is an ongoing conversation about students from under-served populations: low-income students and first-generation students in particular.

So, given all your findings, you write a working thesis that might sound like this:

Example Working Thesis: First Draft

The promise of college as a gateway to increased financial earnings or lifelong success for its attendees isn't panning out; more needs to be done to address completion rates for college graduates—especially among under-served populations, including students from low-income households.

Remember: your initial topic was graduation rates, and that shifted to a topic about why students struggle to finish college. While you are researching, keep in mind that the many ongoing conversations about higher education might not immediately "match" or sound just like your own search terms or topic. So, skimming articles and texts about your overarching topic—college—can still be valuable. Look at the article in figure 8.2 and note the title: it seems to be asking about the possible effects of free college tuition. It doesn't look like it will "answer" your research question, but it can still prove useful.



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Is a tuition-free policy enough to ensure college success?

May 26, 2016 10.05pm EDT

What do the most disadvantaged students need for college success? Commencement image via www.shutterstock.com

Email

Twitter 48

Facebook 175

Across the U.S., many soon-to-be high school graduates are excited to begin college. Over the past decades, rates of college enrollment have increased. In 1950, only 16 percent of young people had at least some college exposure. By

Authors

Lindsay Page
Assistant Professor of Research Methodology, University of Pittsburgh

Stacy S. Kehoe
PhD Student, University of Pittsburgh

Disclosure statement

Lindsay Page received research funding from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation to support the evaluation of the Dell Scholars program.

Stacy S. Kehoe received research funding from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation to support the evaluation of the Dell Scholars program.

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Figure 8.2 Example Source #1 that Widens the Conversation

As you skim this source, you find that, as the title implies, these authors argue that making college free is not "enough to ensure college success" because low-income students face more complex struggles than just the difficulty of affording college. So, even though your working thesis does not directly relate to the main claim or thesis of this article, it contains relevant perspectives and evidence about your topic.

Similarly, if your working question or topic is why low-income students struggle in college, then the article in figure 8.3 may not seem to answer your question directly. Instead, it appears to be about why a New York college's "accelerated" associate degree programs should be used as a good model for making a policy for the whole nation. But, if these authors are arguing that their college has made a successful "pathway out of poverty," then maybe part of their

article first describes the problem that you are researching (low-income student struggles) before arguing for their specific solution.

Postsecondary Pathways Out of Poverty: City University of New York Accelerated Study in Associate Programs and the Case for National Policy

DIANA STRUMBOS, DONNA LINDERMAN, AND CARSON C. HICKS

A postsecondary education holds the promise of higher lifetime earnings and social mobility, but too many low-income students never complete their degrees. We propose a set of policy recommendations based on the highly effective Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at the City University of New York (CUNY). CUNY ASAP is a comprehensive and integrated program that addresses multiple barriers to student success by providing students with enhanced advising as well as academic and career services, financial support, and a highly structured degree pathway. ASAP has been shown to have large positive effects on associate degree graduation rates and to cost less per graduate than regular college services. A national policy based on the ASAP model could serve as a highly effective anti-poverty strategy.

Keywords: community college, postsecondary education, associate degree

Figure 8.3 Example Source #2 that Broadens the Conversation

After reading these and other sources, you should revisit and revise your working claim or thesis statement to reflect all that you have learned and the likely position that you will take in your argument. Note the changes between this one and the previous example:

Example Working Thesis: Second Draft

Because low-income students do not complete college at

the same rate as their peers due to several "hidden" barriers, American community colleges should redesign the ways in which they educate and support students from low-income households in order to meet the goal of putting those students on the path to increased financial earnings and lifelong stability.

Key Takeaways

As you research, your working thesis should remain flexible. You may start with a suspicion or be leaning in one direction, but you should enter into the process with an open mind, ready to learn more about the issue so that you fully understand it, so that you can see multiple perspectives, and so that you can join the conversation with your own writing.

1.2 Rereading Sources with their Roles in Mind

Once you have reached the step of preparing to "join the conversation" with your own writing, review how all of the perspectives and information that you have gathered relate or "speak to" your working thesis statement. How will you organize and present all that you have learned to your reader to persuade them effectively?

You are already familiar with the idea of a text appealing to readers by providing logical reasons, conveying credibility, and evoking an emotional response. So you can think of the perspectives and information from your sources as tools that strengthen these rhetorical appeals of your argument. But sources can serve in more specific ways, too.

Sources often provide evidence to support the claims within your argument. There are different kinds of evidence that are persuasive in different ways:

- **Numerical data** and statistics such as the results of scientific studies or surveys
- **Expert testimony**: the views and ideas of experts who support your claims
- **Stories and anecdotes**: specific examples that illustrate the real human experience of your topic and elicit emotion
- **Counterarguments**: opposing viewpoints or ideas that otherwise challenge your claims, which you will refute or answer

Also, some sources may include background information that you must provide as a writer so that your reader is adequately informed about your topic. This may include:

- The **scope** or scale of your topic (where your topic is relevant and how widespread it is)
- **Definitions** of terms or explanations of unfamiliar concepts that are important to your argument
- The **history** of events that your reader must understand for a full understanding of why the topic exists in its present form
- Information that shows the **timeliness** or relevance of the issue (kairos) and why it is important right now

With all of your research available, it may help to check for gaps in your supporting evidence using a chart like the one in table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Roles of a Source (Example 1)

Source #1: Page and Kehoe	
Background/ Kairos	Section 1: rates of enrollment increasing, but graduation rates low Section 3: discussion about need for support that goes beyond financial assistance and discussion about what kind of support helps
Numerical data and statistics	Section 1: statistics about college attendance + also "only three in five completed their bachelor's degree within six years" + contrast between students from high-income families who completed (3/4) and students from low-income families (under half) Section 3: statistics about success in one program "61-75%" Section 4: increase in AA degree from 18-33%
Expert testimonies	Section 3: quote attributed to Dell Scholars program, students need "ongoing support and assistance to address all of the emotional, lifestyle, and financial challenges that may prevent scholars from completing college." Section 4: Levin and Garcia explain cost/value of program
Stories and anecdotes	Section 2: Story about "Veronica" and her needs for childcare and additional financial guidance Story about "Marcus" as a full-time student and also supporting a family
Counterarguments	Last 2 paragraphs address problem of "free tuition" as a solution to completion rates; possible counterargument to explore?

This kind of graphic organizer lets you "see" how your research will (or will not) help you start to build and support your argument.

A successful academic argument will draw from multiple sources in a variety of ways. So to help you create your graphic

organizer–and start outlining your argumentative body paragraphs–it's important that you review your sources strategically to start seeing how they will serve you as a writer. Let's take a look at an article we've used in some of our model paragraphs (in the next section of this chapter).

This is an article called, "Feet on Campus, Heart at Home: First-Generation College Students Struggle with Divided Identities," and it's written by Linda Banks-Santilli, a college professor. In our research, we were focusing on the struggles faced by students from low-income families, but Banks-Santilli notes that around 50 percent of first-generation students are low-income students, so this article seems relevant to our argument as well. When we reread Banks-Santilli, keeping the different roles sources can play in mind, we can add to our graphic organizer (Table 8.2):

Table 8.2 Roles of a Source (Example 2)

Source #2: Banks-Santilli	
Background/ Kairos	Defines first-gen students, could use this in a separate paragraph about this population or explain that "About 50% of all FG students in the US are low-income."
Numerical data and statistics	
Expert testimonies	
Stories and anecdotes	Section 3 – last paragraph: one student's experience moving away to college and still helping parents with household finances
Counterarguments	

It's clear that this source, Banks-Santilli, doesn't "serve" many parts of our thesis. This is because the focus of the article isn't aligned with the focus of our argument. That doesn't mean it isn't a useful source in the creation and composition of our argument.

In fact, if you fill out a graphic organizer with all of your sources, you will be able to "see" quite a bit about what you have and what you need to make and support your argument. You will notice if

there is an obvious lack of evidence, for instance, or a lack of counterarguments. You will probably not use everything you note in your graphic organizer in your actual essay, but the act of rereading sources critically to note how they can serve your argument will help you.

1.3 How Body Paragraphs Serve a Thesis

Students are sometimes intimidated by the prospect of a 6, 7, or even 10 page assignment. They can't imagine they'll have enough to say to fill that length. One way that may help tackle such a task is to consider a shift in your thinking: you're no longer the researcher, you're now the messenger, writing your own argument that explains and develops your thesis.

If we break down the thesis statement above we can see that there are several points to explain, claims to prove, and ideas to develop (Table 8.3), and these different parts will likely become different sections of your essay.

Table 8.3 Sample Implications of a Thesis Statement

Excerpt from thesis statement	Implications for body paragraphs
Because low-income students do not complete college at the same rate as their peers	First, this needs to be proven or demonstrated thoroughly to engage readers and prepare them for the rest of the argument.
due to several "hidden" barriers	The second half of this clause argues for the main cause of the problem—though it is not specified in detail—and this also needs to be explained and proven: what are the "hidden" barriers? What do readers need to know or understand regarding these obstacles to completion? What is the proof that these are the primary cause of the problem?
American community colleges should redesign the ways in which they educate and support students from low-income households in order to meet the goal of putting those students on the path to increased financial earnings and lifelong stability	This thesis ends with a "proposal" section: a call for change. It may be more complicated to support this: 1. If we are calling for a redesign, we may first need to prove problems with the "old design." So, the parts of college that are inhibiting completion must be presented and analyzed in some way. 2. The writer has to choose whether they will present specific solutions or changes and prove why they are the best ones, or just focus on proving the need for change in some meaningful way. Note: this thesis specifies community colleges, so the essay will likely focus on two-year institutions at some point in the argument.

Exercise #1

In your own paper, you may want to identify different points or parts of your working thesis. If you take the time to do this, you will be able to start imagining the different parts or sections of your own paper:

- Do you mention a specific problem? Will you prove that problem? Give background information about it? Define terms? Explore and discuss the current status of the problem?
- Should you address multiple causes of that problem? Or do you intend to demonstrate the severity of that problem by discussing effects?
- Have you identified multiple populations affected by the issue that you are presenting?

Once you've clarified (for yourself) what, exactly, you will need to accomplish in your essay to support your argument, you may find it easier to start drafting paragraphs that address those separate points. In fact, it can be most effective to write a draft of your body paragraphs before revising your thesis statement and finally drafting your introduction and conclusion sections.

2. Synthesis of Multiple Sources

One way in which academic writers create knowledge or make progress in the discussion or exploration of a topic is by juxtaposing or combining the ideas and perspectives from multiple sources, or **synthesizing**, in new ways.

When you write a summary, rhetorical analysis, or annotated bibliography, you are reporting on a single source at a time.

Synthesis asks you to do more. Through research, you have reached a deeper understanding of the different perspectives or parts of your topic by reading multiple sources and finding connections between them. The goal of synthesis is to now try to help your reader to reach that same understanding. So synthesis is both the invisible act of learning about different perspectives and messages and the very visible act of using multiple sources in the composition of your own, unique message.

Why Synthesize?

Synthesis in academic writing helps your reader to see the same connections between information in sources that you see, which in turn helps to persuade your reader to reach the same conclusion that you have from your research.

Furthermore, your argument will be more well-rounded and more well-developed when you use more than one source of support for each of your main claims. Also, because it is often dangerous to rely on a single source for information, incorporating multiple sources in support of a claim or idea helps to ensure that your information is accurate to you and your reader.

Usually it is not considered productive for an academic writer to repeat, summarize, or paraphrase a large passage or many ideas from a single source. Not only does this fail to further the discussion of a topic beyond what has already been said by others, but it may also pose problems of academic integrity, since academic ethics require a writer to produce original work and provide attribution for ideas that are not her or his own.

Examples of Synthesis in a Sample Essay

A paragraph like the one below would appear earlier in the essay to provide background information as well as context, before the writer starts to "prove" the thesis. This is a meaningful way to engage readers and prepare them for the rest of the argument.

In this paragraph, the writer uses three sources to present the scope of the problem (essentially, the background information about the issue and some context about current data or ongoing discussions before highlighting the specific population of individuals that the thesis statement will address (students from low-income households). First, read the paragraph, then review Table 8.4 for annotations on how these sources are working together.

Example Synthesis Paragraph: Background Information

Students are not completing the college degrees they set out to achieve. The number of students attending college has increased over time; "In 1950, only 16 percent of young people had at least some college exposure. By 2012, this figure rose to 63 percent" (Page and Kehoe). However, the rate of students graduating is just too low. According to NPR Education reporter Elissa Nadworny, "just 58 percent of students who started college in the fall of 2012 had earned any degree six years later." Nadworny is citing the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center for this information in her article written in 2019. Among community college students, this number is even lower: below forty percent (Nadworny). The promise of college as

a way ahead is especially troubling for students who don't come from a place of privilege. Statistics show that low-income students do not complete at the rate that) high-income students do (Page and Kehoe, Favero). In fact, researchers from the City University of New York published an article about an accelerated associate degree program aimed at helping increase graduation rates (Strumbos et al.). They discuss the fact that college as a stepping stone or a way to advance students' economic mobility becomes increasingly problematic when we recognize that students from low-income households are "six times less likely to have earned a bachelor's degree by the age of twenty-five than those from high-income families" (102). Page and Kehoe note that this is especially troubling since the "gaps in degree attainment" have been increasing. Clearly this issue isn't getting better on its own.

Table 8.4 Synthesis of Sources

excerpt from the paragraph	function of the the source(s)
The number of students attending college has increased over time; "In 1950, only 16 percent of young people had at least some college exposure. By 2012, this figure rose to 63 percent" (Page and Kehoe). However, the rate of students graduating is just too low. . According to NPR Education reporter Elissa Nadworny, "just 58 percent of students who started college in the fall of 2012 had earned any degree six years later."	One source shows the wider context of the total number of students attending college, and then other sources show the percentages of those students who actually graduate.
According to NPR Education reporter Elissa Nadworny, "just 58 percent of students who started college in the fall of 2012 had earned any degree six years later." Nadworny is citing the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center for this information in her article written in 2019. Among community college students, this number is even lower: below forty percent (Nadworny)	The writer puts their topic in context by moving from general to specific. One source states the completion rates for American college students and then community college students.
They discuss the fact that college as a stepping stone or a way to advance students' economic mobility becomes increasingly problematic when we recognize that students from low-income households are "six times less likely to have earned a bachelor's degree by the age of twenty-five than those from high-income families" (102).	Then, another source focuses more specifically on completion rates for low-income students.
Page and Kehoe note that this is especially troubling since the "gaps in degree attainment" have been increasing.	This source claims that there is a trend, or consistent change over time. Proving that there is a growing problem shows the current relevance or timeliness (kairos) of the topic.

A paragraph like the one below would serve as a body paragraph presenting one claim that supports our working thesis. This paragraph tries to engage readers logically, supporting its claim

with evidence from sources. The first sentence acts as a **topic sentence** (a helpful indicator about the paragraph's main claim). The writer then uses information from two sources to prove this claim. First, read the paragraph, then review Table 8.5 for annotations on how these sources are working together.

Example Synthesis Paragraph: Supporting a Claim Logically

A major reason why low-income students do not earn degrees at the same rates as their peers is that they are more likely to face obstacles in their personal lives that may slow or delay their college progress. In their 2018 study, Strumbos et al. report that if a student does not complete twenty credits per year, they are not likely to complete their degree. Unfortunately, this "degree momentum" is often difficult for low-income students to achieve due to what Nathan Favero, a professor of public policy at American University, calls "personal barriers to success." For example, Favero notes that low-income students may be single parents who lack support from other family members, and so they "can feel a strong pull to pause their studies and start working" when unexpected bills arise. Diana Strumbos and her colleagues agree that "Work and family obligations sometimes force students to attend part time, which can again lead to a loss of momentum and decrease their likelihood of graduating." Therefore, typical degree programs and schedules often do not serve low-income students.

Table 8.5 Synthesis of Sources Example #2

excerpt from the paragraph	function of the the source(s)
if a student does not complete twenty credits per year, they are not likely to complete their degree	The first source presents data to provide evidence (in this case, of the claim that pace of credits correlates with completion)
Unfortunately, this "degree momentum" is often difficult for low-income students to achieve due to what Nathan Favero, a professor of public policy at American University, calls "personal barriers to success."	A different source is used here in order to show that multiple sources corroborate the claim. (Multiple experts have reached the same conclusion about a major cause of the problem.)
Favero notes that low-income students may be single parents who lack support from other family members, and so they "can feel a strong pull to pause their studies and start working" when unexpected bills arise.	The purpose of this evidence is to present an expert's testimony or viewpoint. This expert view draws a conclusion or inference from the previously presented data, and it confirms the writer's claim.
Diana Strumbos and her colleagues agree that "Work and family obligations sometimes force students to attend part time, which can again lead to a loss of momentum and decrease their likelihood of graduating."	This source presents an expert view that affirms the main claim: the link between the cause (personal barriers) and the effect (loss of degree momentum).
Therefore, typical degree programs and schedules often do not serve low-income students.	The closing sentence reaches a new conclusion about the claim based on the evidence that has been presented. (In this example, because some students' "personal barriers" are a cause of the problem, changes to "typical degree programs" may be part of the solution.)

A paragraph like the one below would serve as a later body paragraph. This paragraph tries to engage the reader emotionally. After the writer has proven their claims about major causes of the issue by citing data that was reported by credible sources, the writer presents individual examples in narrative form–anecdotal evidence–to illustrate the quality or nature of the issue. First, read the paragraph, then review Table 8.6 for annotations on how these sources are working together.

Example Synthesis Paragraph: Using Anecdotal Evidence

It may be easy to overlook the role that a family plays in either supporting a student or creating additional burdens for them while at college. While time, money, and knowledge may flow from an affluent family to a student, for a low-income student it may be the other way around. For example, Linda Banks-Santilli, an Associate Professor of Education, explains how some first-generation students may feel as though they're leaving their families behind or abandoning them. One student moved to live on campus, but she was concerned about her parents, who didn't own or use computers, so she "divided her time," Banks-Santilli notes, between her own coursework and paying her family's bills. Page and Kehoe describe a similar situation when they introduce Marcus, a student who had "transitioned successfully to college but retained responsibility for supporting his family financially. [...] Marcus stumbled academically, was placed on probation, and lost his financial aid." What Page and Kehoe demonstrate here is that playing the dual roles of student and family provider often proves too challenging to sustain.

Table 8.6 Synthesis of Sources Example #3

excerpt from the paragraph	function of the the source(s)
One student moved to live on campus, but she was concerned about her parents, who didn't own or use computers, so she "divided her time," Banks-Santilli notes, between her own coursework and paying her family's bills. Page and Kehoe describe a similar situation when they introduce Marcus, a student who had "transitioned successfully to college but retained responsibility for supporting his family financially	Use of different sources suggests that these example situations are widespread, present in multiple contexts, or observed by multiple experts.
"[...] Marcus stumbled academically, was placed on probation, and lost his financial aid."	Multiple examples prompt the reader to find similarities between them and infer a pattern or trend.
that playing the dual roles of student and family provider often proves too challenging to sustain.	A phrase following the evidence states the common pattern or trend presented by multiple examples ("dual roles") and states the claim that these examples support. The phrase reinforces the writer's original claim (the burden of family obligations on low-income college students).

Reviewing these annotations, you should see two things. First, that successful synthesis means that you have engaged in critical inquiry by drawing upon multiple texts and perspectives in order to form your own. Second, that the use of multiple sources can strengthen your argument by:

- showing how expert testimonies confirm data
- presenting common patterns or trends
- showing that an issue is present in multiple contexts

Exercise #2

Take an early draft of your paper and evaluate one paragraph at a time:

- How many sources have you cited in this paragraph?
- Do these sources "talk to each other"?
- What function(s) do these sources serve?
- Can you explain (to yourself) how each source has contributed to your overall message or perspective?

3. Putting Sources in Context

In general, you should refer to sources with your audience in mind. You should not expect your reader to infer the connection between your quotes, paraphrases, or summaries, and your claims. Nor should you simply drop quotes into your paragraphs without analyzing or discussing them in some way.

When revising a draft, you may find that you have dropped a quote into a paragraph with no introduction and then moved on without discussing the ideas of the quote at all. This is usually not helpful to academic readers. Or, you may find in your draft that you have repeated the phrase, "This quote says that…" or "This quote shows…" quite often. While this shows an effort to refer to quoted sources, it is not likely to help your reader to understand your sources or the specific ways in which they connect to your argument.

When you refer to a source in academic writing, you are taking it out of one context–where it was initially published–and transplanting it into another–your own writing, where it serves

a specific purpose. Therefore, academic writers often include the most important information for their readers about:

1. the original context of the source itself, and
2. how the source information fits into their own argument

They often choose transitions that will best present this information in order to integrate source information into their writing.

3.1 Context of the Source Itself

When considering what your reader needs to know about the original context of source information, think about the five "w" questions (who, what, where, when, and why). Would explaining any of this information about the original source help your reader to understand the information and the role that it plays in your argument?

For example, in the body paragraph above, the writer writes,

> Unfortunately, this "degree momentum" is often difficult for low-income students to achieve due to what Nathan Favero, **a professor of public policy at American University**, calls "personal barriers to success."

This source serves the role of presenting an expert view agreeing with the writer's claim, so the most relevant information about the source is who wrote it. Therefore, the paragraph introduces this evidence using a phrase that elaborates on the credentials of the author to show his expertise: "a professor of public policy at American University." See table 8.7 for different ways to consider a source's context.

Table 8.7 Context of a Source

Information about the source's original context	Consider explaining this in your writing when you want to show...
Who wrote it?	the author's experience or credentials in order to present expert testimony, or show the unique perspective or bias of the source.
What is the author's main idea or thesis?	how the source's focus is different from or similar to your own.
Where was the source originally published?	the credibility of a source related to a specific topic or audience, or the bias of a source.
Where geographically was the information in the source gathered?	information about a different location or cultural context than the one you are writing about.
When was the source published?	past information, trends over time, contrasting information from different times, or relevance of current information (kairos).
Why was the source written, or why was the study conducted?	how a source's purpose is different from or similar to your own..
How did the author gather their information?	the significance or scope of numerical data or statistics, or how stories and anecdotes were gathered.

You have probably heard of instances of dishonesty that occur when writers present information "out of context." Sometimes, presenting source information without explaining its original purpose, audience, or context presents a false impression to your reader. In these cases, your writing may imply that a source agrees with, disagrees with, or relates to your claim when this is not the case.

3.2 Context of Your Argument

So how do you effectively integrate the words (quotes) and ideas (paraphrases) of your sources into your own argument?

First, keep in mind why you are quoting/paraphrasing a certain part of a certain source. Then, decide how you may need to refer to that source material in neighboring sentences in your own writing to help your reader to understand your intent and the role that this reference serves in your argument. Does the quote or paraphrase prove a claim that you have just made? Does it define or explain something that you are trying to make clear to readers? Does it provide an example or illustration of one of your claims? Does it elaborate on or introduce a different perspective about a previous point that you have made?

Second, keeping your purpose for the quote or paraphrase in mind, choose the best transition words and phrases to show how the quote or paraphrase relates to the neighboring sentences and ideas.

- Transitions like *Similarly* or *Furthermore* will show that you are about to present more on a line of reasoning.
- Transitions like *However* or *On the other hand* will show that you are about to present a conflicting idea.
- Transitions like *Consequently*, *Therefore*, or *Because* will show cause and effect.

Third, choose the best **signal verb** to show how the source material relates to your neighboring sentences or ideas. These verbs, paired with the author of your source text, work much like transitional words and phrases:

If a reference is near the beginning of a paragraph or is the first reference to a source, you may choose a neutral verb:

- Favero *writes* that…
- Favero *explores* several factors that…
- Favero *states*/Favero *argues*

Later, you can connect source material to the ideas in your

paragraph by using verbs that indicate how the source relates to neighboring ideas:

- show agreement (Favero *concurs*)
- disagreement (Favero *disputes*...)

You can also give readers an indication of what kind of information you will be presenting. Consider how these different verbs would fit with different types of quotations or paraphrases:

- Favero *lists*...
- Favero *claims*...
- Favero *emphasizes*...

Below, the sample body paragraph is shown, this time with key words highlighted to show how the writer integrates the source materials into the context of their own argument using transitions and signal verbs. Which highlighted words are most helpful to you as the reader, and what do they tell you about the writer's purpose for each quote or paraphrase?

Sample Paragraph: Using Transitional Phrases and Signal Phrases

A major reason why low-income students do not earn degrees at the same rates as their peers is that they are more likely to face obstacles in their personal lives that may slow or delay their college progress. In their 2018 study, Strumbos et al. **report** that if a student does not complete twenty credits per year, they are not likely to complete their degree. Unfortunately, this "degree momentum" is often difficult for low-income students to achieve due to

what Nathan Favero, a professor of public policy at American University, calls "personal barriers to success." **For example,** Favero **notes** that low-income students may be single parents who lack support from other family members, and so they "can feel a strong pull to pause their studies and start working" when unexpected bills arise. Diana Strumbos and her colleagues **agree** that "Work and family obligations sometimes force students to attend part time, which can again lead to a loss of momentum and decrease their likelihood of graduating." **Therefore**, typical degree programs and schedules often do not serve low-income students.

Exercise #3

Take a fully developed body paragraph and edit it for the use of transition phrases and signal phrases to show context:

1. Highlight all source material within the paragraph (quotes, paraphrases, and summaries)
2. Review these highlighted passages to see:
    1. Have you addressed any of the five "w" questions for your sources? If not, is there anything more that your reader needs to understand about this source's original

context?

2. Have you included signal verbs for your quotes and/or paraphrases? Do you have a variety of appropriate words (for example *argues* vs. *believes* vs. *points out*)?
3. Have you used transitions to help show how sources' ideas and your own ideas are related to each other?

Final Takeaway

Don't just randomly select source material because you are required to use quotes in your writing. Source information should be well-selected and have a clear purpose. And that purpose should be clear to your reader.

Additional Resource

Roles of Sources Graphic Organizer (PDF)

9. How and Why to Cite

KATELYN BURTON

Figure 7.1 Citation Needed

One of the most important skills you can develop as a student is the ability to use outside sources correctly and smoothly. Academic knowledge builds on the knowledge of others. When we cite others through our quotations and paraphrases, we start with ideas established by others and build upon them to develop our own ideas.

Specifically, this section will offer answers to these questions:

1. **What is a quotation?**
2. **When should I quote?**
3. **How long should a quotation be?**
4. **What is a paraphrase?**
5. **When should I paraphrase?**
6. **What is effective paraphrasing?**

7. When does paraphrasing become plagiarism?
8. How do I use signal phrases to introduce quotations and paraphrases?
9. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence?
10. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence if I am not quoting a complete sentence?
11. What punctuation should I use with quotations?
12. What is plagiarism?
13. Why should I cite?
14. How can I avoid plagiarism?
15. What is common knowledge?
16. What is MLA?
17. How do I format references?
18. What do I do if my source differs from the basic pattern for a reference?
19. How do I format in-text citations?

1. What is a quotation?

A quotation is one way you may make use of a source to support and illustrate points in your essay. A quotation is made up of exact words from the source, and you must be careful to let your reader know that these words were not originally yours. To indicate your reliance on exact words from a source, either place the borrowed words between quotation marks or if the quotation is four lines or more, use indentation to create a block quotation.

Once you have determined that you want to use a quotation, the following strategies will help you smoothly fit quotations into your writing. We will discuss these strategies in more detail later in this chapter.

- Signal phrases help you integrate quoted material into your essay.
- Quotations must be made to work within the grammar of your sentences, whether you are quoting phrases or complete sentences.
- Quotations must be properly punctuated.
- Quotations must contain a citation.

2. When should I quote?

Quote when the exact wording is necessary to make your point. For example, if you were analyzing the style choices in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, you would quote because it would be important to illustrate the unforgettable language or to use exact wording in a discussion of word choice and sentence structure. You would also quote if the exact wording captures information, tone, or emotion that would be lost if the source were reworded. Use quotations to assist with conciseness if it would take you longer to relate the information if you were to put it into your own words. Finally, if you cannot reword the information yourself and retain its meaning, you should quote it.

Source: It has begun. It is awful—continuous and earthquaking.

Quoting to preserve emotion: One nurse described an exchange between the two sides as "awful—continuous and earthquaking" (Burton 120).

3. How long should a quotation be?

Quote only as many words as necessary to capture the information, tone, or expression from the original work for the new context that you are providing. Lengthy quotations actually can backfire on a

writer because key words from the source may be hidden among less important words. In addition, your own words will be crowded out. Never quote a paragraph when a sentence will do; never quote a sentence when a phrase will do; never quote a phrase when a word will do.

Source: It has begun. It is awful—continuous and earthquaking.

Quoting everything: One nurse described an artillery exchange between the two sides. She wrote, "It has begun. It is awful—continuous and earthquaking" (Burton 120).

Quoting key words: One nurse described an artillery exchange between the two sides as "awful—continuous and earthquaking" (Burton 120).

4. What is a paraphrase?

A **paraphrase** preserves information from a source but does not preserve its exact wording. A paraphrase uses vocabulary and sentence structure that is largely different from the language in the original. A paraphrase may preserve specialized vocabulary shared by everyone in a field or discipline; otherwise, the writer paraphrasing a source starts fresh, creating new sentences that repurpose the information in the source so that the information plays a supportive role its new location.

5. When should I paraphrase?

Paraphrase when information from a source can help you explain or illustrate a point you are making in your own essay, but when the exact wording of the source is not crucial.

Source: The war against piracy cannot be won without mapping and dividing the tasks at hand. I divide this map into two parts:

that which anyone can do now, and that which requires the help of lawmakers.

Paraphrase: Researchers argue that legislators will need to address the problem but that other people can get involved as well (Lessig 563).

If you were analyzing Lessig's style, you might want to quote his map metaphor; however, if you were focusing on his opinions about the need to reform copyright law, a paraphrase would be appropriate.

6. What is effective paraphrasing?

Effective paraphrasing repurposes the information from a source so that the information plays a supportive role in its new location. This repurposing requires a writer to rely on her own sentence structure and vocabulary. She creates her own sentences and chooses her own words so the source's information will fit into the context of her own ideas and contribute to the development of her thesis.

Source: Citizens of this generation witnessed the first concerted attempt to disseminate knowledge about disease prevention and health promotion, downplaying or omitting altogether information about disease treatment.

Effective Paraphrase: Murphy pointed out that in the first half of the nineteenth century, people worked hard to spread information about how to prevent disease but did not emphasize how to treat diseases (415).

7. When does paraphrasing become plagiarism?

A paraphrase should use vocabulary and sentence structure

different from the source's vocabulary and sentence structure. Potential plagiarism occurs when a writer goes through a sentence from a source and inserts synonyms without rewriting the sentence as a whole.

Source: Citizens of this generation witnessed the first concerted attempt to disseminate knowledge about disease prevention and health promotion, downplaying or omitting altogether information about disease treatment.

Potential plagiarism: People of this period observed the first organized effort to share information about preventing disease and promoting health, deemphasizing or skipping completely information about treating diseases (Murphy 141).

The sentence structure of the bad paraphrase is identical to the sentence structure of the source, matching it almost word for word. The writer has provided an in-text citation pointing to Murphy as the source of the information, but she is, in fact, plagiarizing because she hasn't written her own sentence.

8. How do I use signal phrases to introduce quotations and paraphrases?

Use signal phrases that mention your source to help your reader distinguish between the source and your own ideas. Do not drop quotes into your paper with no setup or explanation. This is your paper and your arguments must be supported; this includes showing how the quote or paraphrase connects to and proves your ideas. A signal verb introduces the quote that is coming and indicates your stance towards the material.

Figure 7.2 Some Sample Signal Verbs

acknowledge	emphasize
admit	illustrate
agree	note
argue	observe
assert	point out
claim	report
comment	state
compare	suggest
complain	summarize
describe	write

Use different verbs of expression to avoid being monotonous but also because some verbs are better for setting up the point you are making. For example, to stress weakness in a source's argument, you might choose to write that your source *admits* or *concedes* a point.

Paraphrase with signal phrase:

As the author points out, quotations are great, but sometimes paraphrases are better (DeVries 3).

Quotation with signal phrase:

> In her diary, the nurse lamented that "one of the most stabbing things in this war is seeing the lines of empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks who at this moment are sound and fit" (Burton 413).

Some signal phrases do not make use of verbs but rely on signal phrases like *according to* or *in the opinion of* or *in the words of*.

9. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence?

Each quotation should be an element inside one of your own sentences and should not stand alone.

Example of an incorrect placement of quotation:

> The author wrote about conditions for nurses during World War I. "One of the most stabbing things in this war is seeing the lines of empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks who at this moment are sound and fit" (Burton 441).

Notice that the quotation stands alone. It is not an element within one of your own sentences. Some beginning writers might try to correct the problem by changing the period after "World War II" to a comma. However, that simply tacks one sentence to the end of another and creates a punctuation error. Instead, each quotation must work within the grammar of one of your sentences.

One way to make a quotation work with sentence grammar is to place it after a verb of expression.

> The author states, "One of the most stabbing things in this war is seeing the lines of empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks who at this moment are sound and fit" (Burton 498).

10. How do I make a quotation work with the grammar of my own sentence if I am not quoting a complete sentence?

A quoted phrase can play any number of roles in the grammar of a sentence: verb, subject or object, adjective or adverb. Look at the example below and pretend that there are no quotation marks. Would the sentence still be grammatical? Yes. That shows that the quoted material works with the grammar of the sentence.

> The nurse makes the ambulances sound like tow trucks going to retrieve demolished vehicles when she writes that it was horrible to watch "empty motor ambulances going up to bring down the wrecks" of men (Burton 72).

To integrate a quotation into a sentence, omitting words from the source is acceptable if you follow two rules: use ellipses (...) to signal the omission and avoid distorting the source's meaning. It is also acceptable to adjust capitalization and grammar provided that you follow two rules: use brackets [ ] to signal the change and, again, avoid distorting the source's meaning.

> Lessig argues against the position that "[f]ile sharing threatens... the ability of creators to earn a fair return from their creativity" (Lessig 203).
>
> When he wrote his book, nearly everyone in the music industry felt that "[f]ile sharing threaten[ed]...the ability of creators to earn a fair return from their creativity" (Lessig 203).

11. What punctuation should I use with quotations?

Place quotation marks at the start and the end of direct quotations unless the quotation is long enough to justify the use of the block quotation format (four lines or more).

The in-text, or parenthetical, citation shows your reader where your quotation or paraphrase ends. In-text citations are inserted after the final quotation marks. An in-text citation is not found in the words that you are quoting; it is something you create to identify the source for your readers.

If the quotation immediately follows a verb capturing the act of expression, place a comma after the verb:

> As the author wrote, "A free culture has been our past, but it will only be our future if we change the path we are on right now" (Lessig 287).

Under limited circumstances, a colon (:) can be used to introduce a quotation. The quotation must re-identify or restate a phrase or idea that immediately precedes the colon.

> Lessig reached a radical conclusion about copyrighted material: "It should become free if it is not worth $1 to you" (251).

12. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is using someone else's work without giving him or her credit. "Work" includes text, ideas, images, videos, and audio. In the academic world, you must follow these rules:

- When you use the exact words, you must use quotation marks and provide a citation.
- When you put the information into your own words, you must provide a citation.
- When you use an image, audio, or video created by someone else, you must provide a citation.

Plagiarism could happen with a sentence, a paragraph, or even just a word! For example, Stephen Colbert, of the television show *The Colbert Report*, made up the word "truthiness," meaning something that sounds like it should be true. If you say in a paper something has a ring of "truthiness," you should cite Colbert. If someone else's words catch your interest, you should cite them.

Figure 7.3 Colbert in May 2009

Key Takeaway

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Penalties can range from failing the assignment to failing the course to being expelled. See the VWCC **Student Policies** (https://tinyurl.com/ycoznkku) webpage for more information about academic misconduct and penalties.

Writing at Work

Image 7.4 Jonah Lehrer

Plagiarism isn't just a problem in the academic world. There are many examples of people who plagiarized at work and faced severe consequences. **Jonah Lehrer** (https://tinyurl.com/yb2ah7me), an author and staff writer for *The New Yorker*, fabricated quotes and copied previous work for his book *Imagine*. Once his plagiarism was revealed, his book was removed from bookstores and he was forced to resign from his job.

13. Why should I cite?

Whenever you use sources, it is important that you document them completely and accurately. You make your work more useful to your reader through complete and careful documentation, so you should think of documentation as essential rather than as an "add on" tacked on at the last minute.

When asked why you should cite your sources, many students reply, "So you don't get accused of plagiarizing." It is true that you must provide citations crediting others' work so as to avoid plagiarism, but scholars use citations for many other (and more important!) reasons:

- To make your arguments more credible. You want to use the very best evidence to support your claims. For example, if you are citing a statistic about a disease, you should be sure to use a credible, reputable source like the World Health Organization or Centers for Disease Control (CDC). When you tell your reader the statistic comes from such a source, she will know to trust it– and thereby trust your argument more.

- To show you've done your homework. You want to make it clear to your audience that you've researched your subject, tried hard to inform yourself, and know what you are talking about. As you dive deeper into your research, you will probably find certain authors are experts on the topic and are mentioned in most of the articles and books. You should read these experts' works and incorporate them into your paper.

- To build a foundation for your paper. Great breakthroughs in scholarship are accomplished by building on the earlier,

groundbreaking work of others. For example, Isaac Newton's law of universal gravitation would not have been possible without Johannes Kepler's law of planetary motion. What articles, books, and texts, inspired you to create your argument? You are not the first person to ever consider this issue. You want to provide references to the works which led to your thesis.

- To allow your readers to find the sources for themselves. Someone interested in your topic may be inspired to read some of the sources you used to write your paper. The citation within the paper tells readers what part of your argument is addressed by a particular source, and the full citation in the bibliography provides the information needed to track down that original research.

Key Takeaway

Citing sources doesn't just save you from plagiarizing, it also adds credibility to your arguments, helps you build a strong foundation for your work, and helps your readers locate more information about your topic.

14. How can I avoid plagiarism?

Don't procrastinate. Students who rush make careless mistakes, such as forgetting to include a particular citation or not having all the information needed for documentation. Students under pressure may also make poor choices, such as not documenting sources and hoping the professor won't notice. Your professor will notice.

Take careful notes. You need to be very clear in your notes whether you are writing down word-for-word what you found somewhere else, or if you are jotting down your own idea. You should take down all the information you will need to create your citations.

Cite your sources. Whenever you quote, paraphrase, summarize, or share an unusual fact, tell your reader where the information came from.

Document at the same time you draft. As you begin drafting, prepare a correctly formatted Works Cited page that captures the information also needed for in-text citations. Insert citations into your paper as you are writing it. If you cite-as-you-go, you won't consume time looking up information all over again at the end, and you make it less likely that you will misidentify or omit necessary documentation.

Get comfortable with the required citation style. The most commonly used citation styles are APA, MLA, and Chicago/Turabian. While they share many similarities, they also have differing requirements about what and when to cite. In English, we use MLA style. See section number 16 for more information about MLA citations.

Figure 7.5 Citations

Ask your professor. If you're not sure about citing something, check with your instructor. Learning when to cite, how to lead-in to sources, and how to integrate them into your sentence structures and ideas takes place over time and with feedback.

Key Takeaway

Don't put off creating your citations until the last minute. Cite as you go and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it along the way.

15. What is common knowledge?

Common knowledge is information that is accepted and known so widely you do not need to cite it:

- **Common sayings or cliches**. Examples: Curiosity killed the cat. Ignorance is bliss.
- **Facts that can be easily verified**. As you are conducting your research on a topic, you will see the same facts repeated over and over. Example: You are writing a paper on presidential elections, and you want to mention that Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980. Although you might not have known this fact before your research, you have seen it multiple times and no one ever argues about it.
- **Facts that you can safely assume your readers know**. Examples: Richmond is the capital of Virginia. The North won the U.S. Civil War. Fish breathe using gills.

Not all facts are common knowledge. You will still need to cite:

- **Facts that surprise you or your reader**. Example: Michelangelo was shorter than average (Hughes and Elam 4).
- **Facts that include statistics or other numbers**. Example: As of June 2009, forty-two states had laws that explicitly ban gay marriage, and six states have legalized it (U.S. Department of Labor).
- **If you use the exact words of another writer, even if the content could be considered common knowledge**. Example: Lincoln's first campaign dates to "1832, when he ran as a Whig for the Illinois state legislature from the town of New Salem and lost" (Lincoln 451).

Tip

Common knowledge can be course-specific. For example, the number of bones in the leg could be considered common knowledge in an athletic training course. However, if you are using that fact in an English paper, you cannot assume your professor would have that knowledge, and you would need to cite it.

Key Takeaway

Deciding if something is common knowledge is tricky and can vary depending on your course and your topic. When in doubt, ask your professor for advice.

16. What is MLA?

Different fields prefer different methods of documenting the use of sources. In English, the citation style is called MLA, from the initials of the Modern Language Association. When it comes to documentation, learn to notice and apply the particular style that

you are asked to use. Brown Library has online citation guides (http://infoguides.virginiawestern.edu/citations) for several styles.

Writing at Work

Citations aren't just for research papers and schoolwork. Any time you use outside sources, including in a speech or PowerPoint presentation, you should cite your sources. When you give credit to others, your work is strengthened!

17. How do I format references?

References record bibliographic information about sources that have been cited in the text. The necessary information is author, title, and details about publication (when the source was published and who published it). The order of the information and the punctuation, abbreviation, and spacing conventions may differ depending on the documentation style, but the purpose of the references will be the same: to allow a reader to easily track down your sources.

Basic MLA style reference for a book:

Author(s). *Title of the Book*. Publisher, Date.

Example:

Burton, Katelyn. *The Best Librarian in the World*. Oxford Press, 2016.

Basic MLA style reference for a journal article:

Author(s). "Title of the Article." *Title of the Journal*, Volume number, Issue number. Date, including month or season if you have it, Page numbers. *Database Title*, URL/Link to the article.

Example:

Burton, Katelyn. "Librarians Are Amazing." *Library Journal*, vol. 22, no. 3. Spring 2016, pp. 7-28. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/61245.

Basic MLA style reference for a webpage:

Author(s). "Title of the Webpage."*Title of the Website*,

Date, including day and month if you have it, URL/ Link to the webpage.

Example:

Burton, Katelyn. "Tips for Citing Sources."*Brown Library Website*, 14 June 2016, http://http://www.virginiawestern.edu/library/index.php.

18. What should I do if my source differs from the basic pattern for a reference?

The basic pattern is easy to recognize, but it is impossible to memorize all the variations for different sources. Some sources are available online; some sources are audiovisual instead of print; some sources have translators and editors. These and other details find their way into references. Learn to consult resources that illustrate some of the variations, and then ask yourself which examples seem closest to the source you are trying to document. Creating helpful references for your readers requires attention to both the basic pattern and to details, as well as problem-solving skills and creativity.

Tip

Brown Library has some MLA examples on our **MLA InfoGuide** (https://tinyurl.com/y9fxlz7d). Virginia Commonwealth University maintains a**VCU Writes! website** (https://rampages.us/vcuwrites/) with many more examples of correct MLA citations for different materials. Librarians and Writing Center Consultants at Brown Library can also help you create MLA citations for sources that don't follow the basic pattern.

19. How do I format in-text citations?

In-text citations point readers toward a source that a writer is using in her own article or essay. They are placed inside your paragraphs, a position that explains why they are called "in-text." In-text citations are also called parenthetical citations because information identifying the source will be placed inside parentheses ( ). A writer using MLA style will provide the following in-text information for her readers:

- Author's last name or the name of the organization that created the source, unless it is previously mentioned in the text.
- Page number if available

Example: In the first half of the nineteenth, century people worked

hard to spread information about how to prevent disease but did not emphasize how to treat diseases (Murphy 141).

Key Takeaways

- Different fields require different citation styles. In English, we use rules developed by the MLA.
- Don't panic when it comes to learning MLA. Just find an example that closely matches your source and use the pattern to help you decide what to do.
- Librarians and **Writing Center** (http://infoguides.virginiawestern.edu/writingcenter) Consultants can help you figure out how to cite a source that doesn't match the common examples.

Additional Links

Annotated MLA Sample Paper, (https://tinyurl.com/qzv2afu) Purdue Online Writing Lab

Citation InfoGuide, (http://infoguides.virginiawestern.edu/citations) Brown Library

MLA Examples, (https://tinyurl.com/ycanqqzx) VCU Writes!, Virginia Commonwealth University

Exploring Academic Integrity (https://tinyurl.com/ya3ckaxs), Indiana University Libraries

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10. Navigating Genres

KERRY DIRK

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

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

A: You get your wife back, your job back, your dog back . . .

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

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

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

Given these characteristics, I would feel prepared to write some new country lyrics. But what would happen if I wanted to write a

country song that didn't do any of the above things? Would it still be a country song?

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

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

experience with reading and writing similar texts in similar situations—to orient me to the expectations of this genre" (157).

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

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

> Due to either the nature of things or convention, or both, some situations recur. The courtroom is the locus for several kinds of situations generating the speech of accusation, the speech of defense, the charge to the jury. From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting

> comparable responses; hence rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established. (13)

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

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

Think about genres as tools to help people to get things done. Devitt writes that:

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

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

By this point you might realize that you have been participating in many different genres—whether you are telling a joke, writing an email, or uploading a witty status on Facebook. Because you know how these genres function as social actions, you can quite accurately predict how they function rhetorically; your joke should generate a laugh, your email should elicit a response, and your updated Facebook status should generate comments from your online friends. But you have done more than simply filled in the blanks. Possibly without even thinking about it, you were recognizing the rhetorical situation of your action and choosing to act in a manner that would result in the outcome you desired. I imagine that you would probably not share a risqué joke with your mom, send a "Hey Buddy" email to your professor, or update your Facebook status as "X has a huge wart on his foot." We can see that more than form matters here, as knowing what is appropriate in these situations obviously requires more rhetorical knowledge than does filling out a credit card form. Devitt argues that "people do not label a particular story as a joke solely because of formal features but rather because of their perception of the rhetorical action that is occurring" (Writing 11). True, genres often have formulaic

features, but these features can change even as the nature of the genre remains (Devitt, Writing, 48). What is important to consider here is that if mastering a form were simply a matter of plugging in content, we would all be capable of successfully writing anything when we are given a formula. By now you likely know that writing is not that easy.

Fortunately, even if you have been taught to write in a formulaic way, you probably don't treat texts in such a manner. When approaching a genre for a the first time, you likely view it as more than a simple form: "Picking up a text, readers not only classify it and expect a certain form, but also make assumptions about the text's purposes, its subject matter, its writer, and its expected reader" (Devitt, Writing 12). We treat texts that we encounter as rhetorical objects; we choose between horror movies and chick flicks not only because we are familiar with their forms but because we know what response they will elicit from us (nail-biting fear and dreamy sighs, respectively). Why am I picking popular genres to discuss? I think I agree with Miller when she argues the following:

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

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

I like examples, so here is one more. Many of you may be familiar with *The Onion*, a fictitious newspaper that uses real world examples to create humorous situations. Perhaps the most notable genre of *The Onion* is its headlines. The purpose of these headlines is simple: to make the reader respond by laughing. While many

of the articles are also entertaining, the majority of the humor is produced through the headlines. In fact, the headlines are so important to the success of the newspaper that they are tested on volunteers to see the readers' immediate responses. There are no formal features of these headlines besides the fact that they are all quite brief; they share no specific style. But they are a rhetorical action meant to bring about a specific response, which is why I see them as being their own genre. A few examples for those of you unfamiliar with this newspaper would help to explain what I'm saying. Here are a few of my personal favorites (politically charged or other possibly offensive headlines purposefully avoided):

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

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

And now for some bad news: figuring out a genre is tricky already,

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

Let's consider a genre with which you are surely familiar: the thesis statement. Stop for a moment and consider what this term means to you. Ask your classmates. It's likely that you each have your own definition of what a thesis statement should and should not look like. You may have heard never to start a thesis statement with a phrase like "In this essay." Or you might have been taught that a thesis statement should have three parts, each of which will be discussed in one paragraph of the essay. I learned that many good thesis statements follow the formula "X because Y," where "X" refers to a specific stance, and "Y" refers to a specific reason for taking that stance. For example, I could argue "School uniforms should be required because they will help students to focus more on

academics and less on fashion." Now, whether or not this is a good thesis statement is irrelevant, but you can see how following the "X because Y" formula would produce a nicely structured statement. Take this a step further and research "thesis statements" on the Internet, and you'll find that there are endless suggestions. And despite their vast differences, they all fit under the genre of thesis statement. How is this possible? Because it comes back to the particular situation in which that thesis statement is being used. Again, location is everything.

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

A SCENARIO

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

> ***Ransom Letter 1:***
>
> If you ever want to see your daughter alive again, leave 1 million dollars by the blue garbage can at 123 Ransom Rd. at Midnight. Come alone and do not call the police.
>
> ***Ransom Letter 2:***
>
> Hav daughter. Million $. Blu grbg can 123 Ransom Rd. 12AM. No poliz.

Ransom Letter 3:

Dear Bob,

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

Yours truly,

Jim

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

Immediately, you can probably determine that ransom letter one is the best choice. But have you considered why? What does the first letter have that the other two are lacking? Let's first eliminate the most obvious dud—letter number three. Not only does it mimic the friendly, familiar manner of two friends rather than the threatening note of a deranged kidnapper, but it also suggests both that there is no rush in the matter and that the price is negotiable. Letters one and two are closer; they both contain the same information, but letter two fails to be as rhetorically strong as number one. The spelling errors and choppy feel might suggest that the writer of the note is not intelligent enough to get away with the kidnapping. The first letter is the most rhetorically strong because it is well written and direct. All of these letters would qualify as fitting the genre of ransom letter, but the first one most obviously fits the rhetorical situation.

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

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

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

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

results eventually in lack of meaning: mutual unintelligibility" (Devitt, "Genre" 53).

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

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

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

Learning about genres and how they function is more important than mastering one particular genre; it is this knowledge that helps us to recognize and to determine appropriate responses to different situations—that is, knowing what particular genre is called for in a particular situation. And learning every genre would be impossible anyway, as Devitt notes that "no writing class could possibly teach students all the genres they will need to succeed even in school, much less in the workplace or in their civic lives. Hence the value of teaching genre awareness rather than acquisition of particular genres" (Writing 205). This approach helps to make you a more

effective writer as well, as knowing about genres will make you more prepared to use genres that you won't learn in college. For example, I recently needed to write a letter about removing a late fee on a credit card. I had never written this particular type of letter before, but I knew what action I was trying to accomplish. As a result, I did some research on writing letters and determined that I should make it as formal and polite as possible. The body of the letter ended up as follows:

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

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

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

- First, determine what action you are trying to accomplish. Are you trying to receive an A on a paper? Convince a credit card company to remove a late fee? Get into graduate school? If you don't know what your goal is for a particular writing situation,

you'll have a difficult time figuring out what genre to use.
- Second, learn as much as you can about the situation for which you are writing. What is the purpose? Who is the audience? How much freedom do you have? How does the location affect the genre?
- Third, research how others have responded to similar situations. Talk to people who have written what you are trying to write. If you are asked to write a biology research paper, ask your instructor for examples. If you need to write a cover letter for a summer internship, take the time to find out about the location of that internship.
- And finally, ask questions.

Discussion

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

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11. Multimodal Communication

ANN FILMORE AND JOHNNY COOK

INTRODUCTION

Ann Fillmore

- The Five Modes Explained
- Multi-Modal Considerations

As writers, we make choices. In every situation, we must decide how to best communicate meaning to our intended audiences. It is a process of deliberation that involves calculated choices, strategies, and moves. And, nowadays, writing isn't just putting words onto paper anymore.

"Multi-modal" assignments have become common in higher education, and it is likely that you will be asked to create multi-modal texts during your academic career. In the field of writing/composition, "modality" is a rhetorical decision that you need to consider as you explore how to best achieve your intended purpose(s).

A multi-modal text employs more than one "mode" to communicate meaning *beyond the written word* alone. According to the New London Group, these are the five modes:

LINGUISTIC/ALPHABETIC — written and spoken words

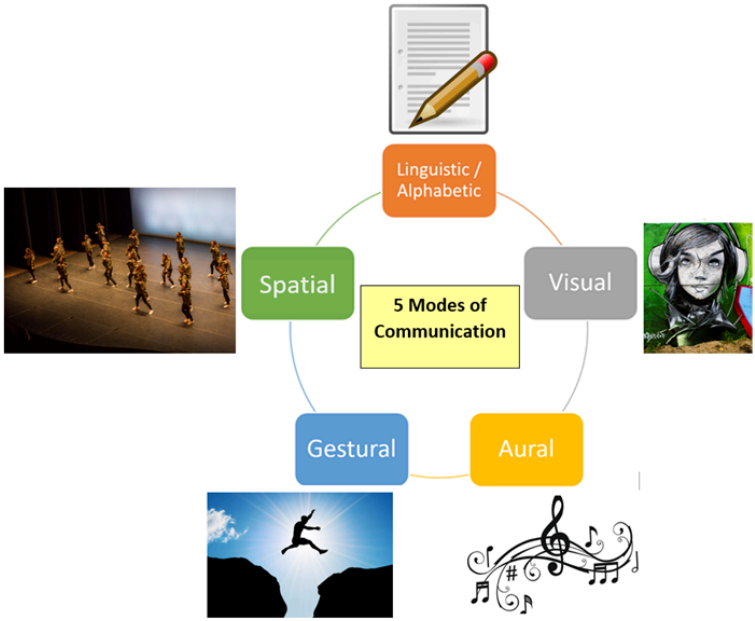
VISUAL — images (moving or still)

AURAL — sound, music

GESTURAL — movement, expression, body language

SPATIAL — position, physical arrangement, proximity

Why would writers want to communicate in a modality other than alphabetic text? We've all heard the saying that "a picture is worth 1000 words." In certain situations, a visual has the potential to convey an idea more effectively and more quickly than written text. Images can help readers to better engage with the topic and experience a moment in a way that could be more difficult to accomplish with words alone.



THE FIVE MODES EXPLAINED

Ann Fillmore

Modality is an important rhetorical decision that writers need to consider. Here's a more detailed look into each mode of communication. Modes can be used individually and in combination with others to create multi-modal texts.

1. Linguistic/Alphabetic Mode: includes written

and spoken words, word choice, vocabulary, grammar, structure, and organization of sentences and paragraphs

Writers use **words** to communicate. This mode is the most widely used, is a form that most people are familiar with, and can be delivered through print and audio.

Shopping lists, emails, text messages, academic essays, and the automated voice you hear as you're on hold with customer service use the linguistic/alphabetic mode since they rely on **words** to create meaning.

2. Visual Mode: includes images, video, color, visual layout, design, font, size, formatting, symbols, visual data (charts, graphs), animation (like gifs)

The visual mode helps writers communicate meaning in a way that can be **seen** by the audience. Sometimes people must see to believe, and visuals can be helpful and even persuasive. For example, if you want to showcase how climate change has devastated the arctic ecosystem, you might include a video that shows real-world footage, like this one by National Geographic. This video is considered a multi-modal text since words, visuals, and audio are used together for a stronger effect.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=_JhaVNJb3ag%3Ffeature%3Doembed%26rel%3D0

The visual mode also includes elements of design and allows writers a more creative way to present text on a page/screen. For example, the textbook in the photo below makes use of labels, headings, color, and other visual features to help the reader more easily understand the information. This textbook is considered multi-modal since it combines multiple modes of communication.

Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

3. Aural Mode: includes spoken words, sound, music, volume, rhythm, speed of delivery, pitch, tone, voice

Sound catches people's attention, and writers use the aural mode to bring their words to life. For example, have you ever listened to a game on the radio? Listen to the way the sportscasters help the audience to experience the game through sound. This sportscast is considered a multi-modal text since the authors combine words (linguistic/alphabetic mode) with sound (aural mode).

https://youtube.com/watch?v=GEKHVp4LTTw%3Ffeature%3Doembed%26rel%3D0

Another example of the aural mode is an audio book. Listen to the following excerpt from *The Carriage*, by Jena Baxter. Spoken words can add depth and emotion to a story. As you listen, pay attention to the volume, rhythm, pitch, speed, and tone of the narrator's voice. Multi-modality can enhance the experience of "reading" a text.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=CxJwT8myN4o%3Ffeature%3Doembed%26rel%3D0

4. Gestural Mode: includes movement, speed, expression, body language, facial expression, physical proximity, interactions between people

The gestural mode of communication allows writers to communicate meaning through **movement**. Traditionally, this mode was used primarily in face-to-face interaction; however, modern technology allows writers to show movement virtually in their work, through video. The gestural mode is often used in combination with other modes, such as linguistic/alphabetic (written/spoken), spatial

(physical arrangement), and aural (sound) to provide an enhanced sensory experience for the audience.

For example, sign languages use the gestural mode since position of the sign and movement are significant factors in generating and distinguishing meaning. In this video, look at how the speakers use movements of the hands, head, face, and body, along with position and speed, to communicate meaning to the audience. Sign languages are considered multi-modal communication since they combine linguistic/alphabetic text with movement.

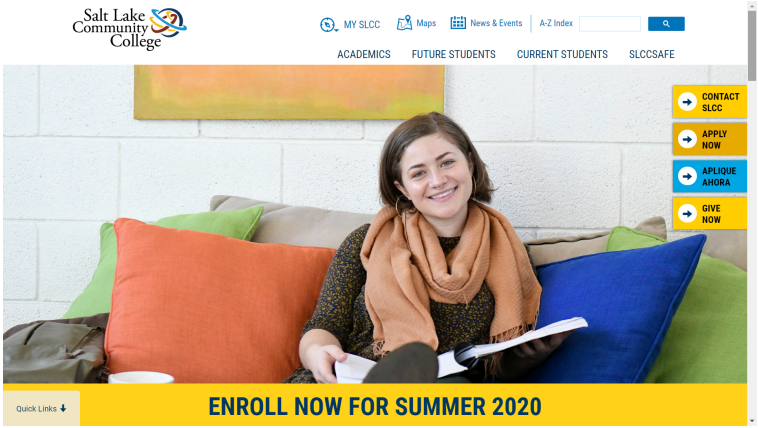
https://youtube.com/watch?v=dmsqXwnqIw4%3Ffeature%3Doembed%26rel%3D0

5. Spatial Mode: includes physical arrangement—spacing, position, organization, proximity, direction, and distance of elements in a text

Writers use the spatial mode of communication in the **physical layout** and **organization** of a text. For example, this tri-fold pamphlet, printed and folded on paper, presents information spatially on six panels. Physical arrangement impacts the way the audience can interact with your work.

Websites also rely heavily on the spatial mode to communicate meaning. Writers make strategic rhetorical decisions about how to arrange digital information in a user-friendly way within a mobile "space." Features like menus, headers, physical layout, and navigation tools (such as links) help the audience to interact with

the site spatially. Websites are considered multi-modal texts since multiple modes are used in combination to communicate with the audience.



Take a few minutes to browse the SLCC website. As you explore, pay attention to how the authors arrange the information within the digital space. What does this communicate to the reader? How does the spatial arrangement enhance or hinder the user experience? These are important rhetorical decisions to consider as you work.

MULTI-MODAL CONSIDERATIONS

Now that you have a further understanding of the five modes of communication and how they work individually and in combination, how can you apply them into your writing?

Start by researching the rhetorical situation. It is essential that you have a firm understanding of the purpose, audience, and context surrounding the writing task. Understanding the rhetorical

situation will help you to make decisions as to which mode or combination of modes might best help you to connect with your intended audience.

As the writer, you'll need to determine which modes could add value to your work. Be careful not to add modes just because you think you should. Each mode you use should add meaning to the text. Consider the opportunities, challenges, and constraints of any writing task and assess and revise your work to meet the needs of the audience.

Some questions you may want to consider:

- Does the rhetorical situation call for a certain mode? Or, do you have some creative freedom in how you present your ideas or make your argument?
- How does a certain mode affect the way your audience will receive or experience the message? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a certain mode for this particular writing task?
- Could you use a combination of modes? Would a multi-modal approach enhance your message or help you to better get your point(s) across?
- Do you possess the technological skills necessary to effectively use a specific mode? Will you need to learn additional skills in order to create your work? If so, how can you best learn these skills in the given time frame?

In conclusion, modality affects how the audience will interact with and generate meaning from your work. Writing in the five modes

can help you to think "outside the box" as you make rhetorical decisions about the kinds of communication that you could use as you venture beyond the printed word.

*Note: Original section authors are indicated under section headings

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READING TRADITIONAL AND NEW MEDIA

Johnny Cook

Throughout college, you will be asked to read and respond to a variety of books, essays, articles, and other texts. However, some classes may ask you to read and respond to different types of traditional media such as visual art, graphic novels, music, television, films, and radio or even new media such as websites, infographics, social media platforms, podcasts, and Youtube videos. Though we may not always be conscious of it, many of us are already engaged in an understanding of culture through various forms of media; we interact daily with all kinds of media and then spend social time discussing our thoughts and reactions to them. 'Reading' media makes use of our existing cultural knowledge while engaging our critical thinking and analysis skills. Applying critical reading skills to traditional and/or new media can differ from reading a traditional refer to the written word:

"Proofread your *text* before submitting the paper."
A text refers to any form of communication, primarily written or oral, that forms a coherent unit, often as an object of study. A book can be a text, and a speech can be a text, but television commercials, magazine ads, website, and emails can also be texts: "Dieting advertisements formed one of the *texts*we studied in my Sociology class."" data-url="https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-rhetoric/glossary/text/">text such as an academic essay, however. Here is a three step process that you can use to analyze media:

1. **Describe the literal content of the media object.**

Content is the literal information being communicated by a media object. This might mean describing the types of sounds or lyrics in a song, the setting and characters in a film or television show, or images from a piece of a visual art. Think of describing the content as *summarizing* the information in an object as opposed to *interpreting* the information. Use straightforward statements to avoid interpretation. For example, you might describe an exhibit in a modern art museum as such: *This picture focuses on a bridge and a river. There are two people standing on the bridge.* Using simpler statements will help keep the content and form of the object separate.

2. **Explain the form of the media object.**

Formal qualities of a media object are the delivery system for an object's content. To discuss the form of an object, you will need to consider the way the object has been organized and how to

describe that organization. Think of this as describing the 'shape' of the new media object. To do this, use descriptive statements that explain how an object appears. Let's return to the picture from before. *The painting is very large and takes up the entire wall. It is made of many bright, unnatural colors, and appears to be made with a computer instead of a paintbrush.* Your description should aim to explain how the object is being presented to the audience.

3. **Synthesize content and form.**

Once you have generated some ideas about the information in the media object (Content) and how that information is presented (Form), you can synthesize the two by combining your observations into a A claim is a type of argumentative thesis - we usually call it a claim when it is being used in a persuasive essay. Claims need to be defended by you with logical, persuasive reasoning. Claims can also be challenged.

The most common types of claims are

- claims of policy (we must do something!),
- claims of value (this is good! or this is bad!),
- claims of definition (this is what it is)
- claims of cause/effect (X has caused Y or X will cause Y)

" data-url="https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-rhetoric/glossary/claim/">claim about the object. A good starting point is to consider what the goals of the creator may have been: Why did the author present *this* content in *this* form? Answering your own questions will help guide you towards a more complete understanding of the object. From here, you can begin to draft a A thesis is the writer's central point (clear, concise, and limited) that provides the

foundation for the rest of the essay. Most often located at the end of the introduction, the thesis establishes the core idea that the rest of the essay will develop. It should never be expressed as a question. A thesis can be explanatory or argumentative; if a thesis is argument-based, it is sometimes referred to as a claim. " data-url="https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/csu-fyw-rhetoric/glossary/thesis/">thesis statement about the purpose and meaning of the media object you are analyzing.

Reading media will help you to think critically about what the object is trying to communicate and how it influences you as a reader. Analyzing media can also help you explore and understand your identity as an individual or a student and how that relates to the culture surrounding you. However, while writing about various forms of media, remember to reference evidence from the object, as there will otherwise be no basis for your claims. Your evidence will, if you are analyzing a film, you may need to cite dialogue or reference the cinematic techniques of a scene as evidence for your conclusions about the meaning of the film. For a piece of music, lyrics, instrumentation, or the structure of the song may be the evidence you include. Once you have completed this process, you should review the object to ensure your claims about the meaning of the piece are supported by your observations on the content and form.

12. Punctuation

JENIFER KURTZ

1. Commas
2. Semicolons
3. Colons
4. Quotes
5. Apostrophes
6. Parentheses
7. Dashes
8. Hyphens

1. Commas

One of the punctuation clues to reading you may encounter is the comma. The comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause in a sentence or a separation of items in a list. Commas can be used in a variety of ways. Look at some of the following sentences to see how you might use a comma when writing a sentence.

- **Introductory word**: Personally, I think the practice is helpful.
- **Lists**: The barn, the tool shed, and the back porch were destroyed by the wind.
- **Coordinating adjectives**: He was a tired, hungry boy.
- **Conjunctions in compound sentences**: The bedroom door was closed, so the children knew their mother was asleep.
- **Interrupting words**: I knew where it was hidden, of course, but I wanted them to find it themselves.
- **Dates, addresses, greetings, and letters**: The letter was postmarked December 8, 1945.

- **Clarification**: Let's eat, Grandma.

Commas after an Introductory Word or Phrase

You may notice a comma that appears near the beginning of the sentence, usually after a word or phrase. This comma lets the reader know where the introductory word or phrase ends and the main sentence begins.

Without spoiling the surprise, we need to tell her to save the date.

In this sentence, *without spoiling the surprise* is an introductory phrase, while *we need to tell her to save the date* is the main sentence. Notice how they are separated by a comma. When only an introductory word appears in the sentence, a comma also follows the introductory word.

Ironically, she already had plans for that day.

Exercise 1

Look for the introductory word or phrase. On your own sheet of paper, copy the sentence and add a comma to correct the sentence.

1. Suddenly the dog ran into the house.
2. In the blink of an eye the kids were ready to go to the movies.
3. Confused he tried opening the box from the other end.
4. Every year we go camping in the woods.
5. Without a doubt green is my favorite color.

6. Hesitating she looked back at the directions before proceeding.

7. Fortunately the sleeping baby did not stir when the doorbell rang.

8. Believe it or not the criminal was able to rob the same bank three times.

Commas in a List of Items

When listing several nouns in a sentence, separate each word with a comma. This allows the reader to pause after each item and identify which words are included in the grouping. When you list items in a sentence, put a comma after each noun, then add the word *and* before the last item. The Oxford comma is when one adds a comma before the *and* that precedes the last item in the list. This is a style choice and is often optional.

We'll need to get flour, tomatoes, and cheese at the store.

The pizza will be topped with olives, peppers and pineapple chunks.

Commas and Coordinating Adjectives

You can use commas to list both adjectives and nouns. A string of adjectives that describe a noun are called coordinating adjectives. These adjectives come before the noun they modify and are most often separated by commas. One important thing to note, however, is that unlike listing nouns, the word *and* does not always need to be before the last adjective.

It was a bright, windy, clear day. (a list of coordinating adjectives–no *and* needed)

Our kite glowed red, yellow, and blue in the morning sunlight. (a list of nouns–*and* needed)

Not all uses of two adjectives require a comma, though.

The class was made up of dedicated medical students. (both dedicated and medical describe students, but medical is essential to confirm what type of students so no comma is needed.)

Exercise 2

On your own sheet of paper, use what you have learned so far about comma use to add commas to the following sentences.

1. Monday Tuesday and Wednesday are all booked with meetings.

2. It was a quiet uneventful unproductive day.

3. We'll need to prepare statements for the Franks Todds and Smiths before their portfolio

reviews next week.

4. Michael Nita and Desmond finished their report last Tuesday.

5. With cold wet aching fingers he was able to secure the sails before the storm.

6. He wrote his name on the board in clear precise delicate letters.

Commas before Conjunctions in Compound Sentences

Commas are sometimes used to separate two independent clauses that are included in the same sentence. The comma comes after the first independent clause and is followed by a conjunction,

such as *for*, *and*, or *but*. For a full list of conjunctions, see **"Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?".**

He missed class today, and he thinks he will be out tomorrow, too.

He says his fever is gone, but he is still very tired.

Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, create a compound sentence by combining the two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

1. The presentation was scheduled for Monday. The weather delayed the presentation for four days.

2. He wanted a snack before bedtime. He ate some fruit.

3. The patient is in the next room. I can hardly hear anything.

4. We could go camping for vacation. We could go to the beach for vacation.

5. I want to get a better job. I am taking courses at night.

6. I cannot move forward on this project. I cannot afford to stop on this project.

7. Patrice wants to stop for lunch. We will take the next exit to look for a restaurant.

8. I've got to get this paper done. I have class in ten minutes.The weather was clear yesterday. We decided to go on a picnic.

9. I have never dealt with this client before. I know

Leonardo has worked with them. Let's ask Leonardo for his help.

Commas before and after Interrupting Words

In conversations, you might interrupt your train of thought by giving more details about what you are talking about. In a sentence, you might interrupt your train of thought with a word or phrase called interrupting words. Interrupting words can come at the beginning or middle of a sentence. When the interrupting words appear at the beginning of the sentence, a comma appears after the word or phrase.

If you can believe it, people once thought the sun and planets orbited around Earth.

Luckily, some people questioned that theory.

When interrupting words come in the middle of a sentence, they are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. You can determine where the commas should go by looking for the part of the sentence that is not essential for the sentence to make sense. In other words, you can take out the interrupting words, and the sentence will still be complete and sensible.

My sister, a psychologist, lives in New York.

Her car, which has side air bags, has a higher insurance rate than her truck.

Exercise 4

On your own sheet of paper, copy the sentence and

insert commas to separate the interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.

1. I asked my neighbors the retired couple from Florida to bring in my mail.

2. Without a doubt his work has improved over the last few weeks.

3. Our professor Mr. Alamut drilled the lessons into our heads.

4. The meeting is at noon unfortunately which means I will be late for lunch.

5. We came in time for the last part of dinner but most importantly we came in time for dessert.

6. All of a sudden our network crashed and we lost our files.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Commas in Dates, Addresses, and the Greetings and Closings of Letters

You also use commas when you write a date, such as in cover letters and e-mails. Commas are used when you write the date, when you include an address, and when you greet someone.

If you are writing out the full date, add a comma after the day and before the year. You do not need to add a comma when you write the month and day or when you write the month and the year. If you need to continue the sentence after you add a date that includes the day and year, add a comma after the end of the date.

The letter is postmarked May 4, 2001.

Her birthday is May 5.

He visited the country in July 2009.

I registered for the conference on March 7, 2010, so we should get our tickets soon.

Also use commas when you include addresses and locations. When you include an address in a sentence, be sure to place a comma after the street and after the city. Do not place a comma between the state and the zip code. Like a date, if you need to continue the sentence after adding the address, simply add a comma after the address.

We moved to 4542 Boxcutter Lane, Hope, Missouri 70832.

After moving to Boston, Massachusetts, Eric used public transportation to get to work.

Greetings are also separated by commas. When you write an e-mail or a letter, you add a comma after the greeting word or the person's name. You also need to include a comma after the closing, which is the word or phrase you put before your signature.

Hello,

I would like more information about your job posting.

Thank you,

Anita Al-Sayf

Dear Mrs. Al-Sayf,

Thank you for your letter. Please read the attached document for details.

Sincerely,

Jack Fromont

Exercise 5

On your own sheet of paper, use what you have learned about using commas to edit the following letter.

March 27 2010

Alexa Marché

14 Taylor Drive Apt. 6

New Castle Maine 90342

Dear Mr. Timmons

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am available on Monday the fifth. I can stop by your office at any time. Is your address still 7309 Marcourt Circle #501? Please get back to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you

Alexa

Commas for Clarification

Sometimes no specific rule calls for a comma, yet one is needed to clarify or eliminate confusion.

Unclear: To Emily Frank was an annoying person.

Clear: To Emily, Henry was an annoying person.

Unclear: The room was full of crying babies and mothers.

Clear: The room was fully of crying babies, and mothers.

Exercise 6

On your own sheet of paper, use what you have learned about comma usage to edit the following paragraphs.

1. My brother Nathaniel is a collector of many rare unusual things. He has collected lunch boxes limited edition books and hatpins at various points of his life. His current collection of unusual bottles has over fifty pieces. Usually he sells one collection before starting another.

2. Our meeting is scheduled for Thursday March 20. In that time we need to gather all our documents together. Alice is in charge of the timetables and schedules. Tom is in charge of updating the guidelines. I am in charge of the presentation. To prepare for this meeting please print out any e-mails faxes or documents you have referred to when writing your sample.

3. It was a cool crisp autumn day when the group set out. They needed to cover several miles before they made camp so they walked at a brisk pace. The leader of the group Garth kept checking his watch and their GPS location. Isabelle Raoul and Maggie took turns carrying the equipment while Carrie took notes about the wildlife they saw. As a result no one noticed the darkening sky until the first drops of rain splattered on their faces.

4. Please have your report complete and filed by April 15 2010. In your submission letter please include your contact information the position you are applying for and two people we can contact as references. We will not be

available for consultation after April 10 but you may contact the office if you have any questions. Thank you HR Department.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

- Punctuation marks provide visual cues to readers to tell them how to read a sentence and convey meaning.
- A comma should be used after an introductory word to separate this word from the main sentence.
- A comma comes after every coordinating adjective except for the last adjective.
- Commas can be used to separate the two independent clauses in compound sentences as long as a conjunction follows the comma.
- Commas are used to separate interrupting words

from the rest of the sentence.

- When you write the date, you add a comma between the day and the year. You also add a comma after the year if the sentence continues after the date.
- When they are used in a sentence, addresses have commas after the street address, and the city. If a sentence continues after the address, a comma comes after the zip code.
- When you write a letter, you use commas in your greeting at the beginning and in your closing at the end of your letter.

2. Semicolons

Another punctuation mark that you will encounter is the semicolon (;). Like most punctuation marks, the semicolon can be used in a variety of ways. The semicolon indicates a break in the flow of a sentence but functions differently than a period or a comma. When you encounter a semicolon while reading aloud, this represents a good place to pause and take a breath.

Semicolons to Join Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to combine two closely related independent clauses. Relying on a period to separate the related clauses into two shorter sentences could lead to choppy writing. Using a comma would create an awkward run-on sentence.

Correct: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview; appearances are important.

Choppy: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview. Appearances are important.

Incorrect: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview, appearances are important.

In this case, writing the independent clauses as two sentences separated by a period is correct. However, using a semicolon to combine the clauses can make your writing more interesting by creating a variety of sentence lengths and structures while preserving the flow of ideas.

Semicolons to Join Items in a List

You can also use a semicolon to join items in a list when the items in the list already require commas. Semicolons help the reader distinguish between items in the list.

Correct: The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey; green, brown, and black; or red, green, and brown.

Incorrect: The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey, green, brown, and black, or red, green, and brown.

By using semicolons in this sentence, the reader can easily distinguish between the three sets of colors.

Tip

Use semicolons to join two main clauses. Do not use semicolons with coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, and *but*.

Exercise 7

On your own sheet of paper, correct the following sentences by adding semicolons. If the sentence is correct as it is, write OK.

1. I did not notice that you were in the office I was behind the front desk all day.

2. Do you want turkey, spinach, and cheese roast beef, lettuce, and cheese or ham, tomato, and cheese?

3. Please close the blinds there is a glare on the screen.

4. Unbelievably, no one was hurt in the accident.

5. I cannot decide if I want my room to be green, brown, and purple green, black, and brown or green, brown, and dark red.

6. Let's go for a walk the air is so refreshing.

Key Takeaways

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list when those items already require a comma.

3. Colons

The colon (:) is another punctuation mark used to indicate a full stop. Use a colon to introduce lists, quotes, examples, and explanations. You can also use a colon after the greeting in business letters and memos.

Dear Hiring Manager:
To: Human Resources
From: Deanna Dean

Colons to Introduce a List

Use a colon to introduce a list of items. Introduce the list with an independent clause.

The team will tour three states: New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

I have to take four classes this semester: Composition, Statistics, Ethics, and Italian.

Colons to Introduce a Quote

You can use a colon to introduce a quote.

Mark Twain said it best: "When in doubt, tell the truth."

If a quote is longer than forty words, skip a line after the colon and indent the left margin of the quote five spaces. Because quotations longer than forty words use line spacing and indentation to indicate a quote, quotation marks are not necessary.

My father always loved Mark Twain's words:

> There are basically two types of people. People who accomplish things, and people who claim
>
> to have accomplished things. The first group is less crowded.

Tip

Long quotations, which are more than four typed lines, are called block quotations. Block quotations frequently appear in longer essays and research papers. For more information about block quotations, see **this resource** (https://tinyurl.com/nwzhlbk).

Colons to Introduce Examples or Explanations

Use a colon to introduce an example or to further explain an idea presented in the first part of a sentence. The first part of the sentence must always be an independent clause; that is, it must stand alone as a complete thought with a subject and verb. Do not use a colon after phrases like *such as* or *for example*.

Correct: Our company offers many publishing services: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Incorrect: Our company offers many publishing services, such as: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Also, do not use a colon after introductory verbs.

Correct: My favorite things to eat are dark chocolate, taffy, and french fries.

Incorrect: My favorite things to eat are: dark chocolate, taffy, and french fries.

Tip

Capitalize the first letter following a colon for a

proper noun, the beginning of a quote, or the first letter of another independent clause. Do NOT capitalize if the information following the colon is not a complete sentence.

Proper noun: We visited three countries: Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Beginning of a quote: My mother loved this line from *Hamlet*: "To thine own self be true."

Two independent clauses: There are drawbacks to modern technology: My brother's cell phone died and he lost a lot of phone numbers.

Incorrect: The recipe is simple: Tomato, basil, and avocado.

Exercise 8

On your own sheet of paper, correct the following sentences by adding semicolons or colons where needed. If the sentence does not need a semicolon or colon, write OK.

1. Don't give up you never know what tomorrow brings.

2. Our records show that the patient was admitted on March 9, 2010 January 13, 2010 and November 16, 2009.

3. Allow me to introduce myself I am the greatest ice-carver in the world.

4. Where I come from there are three ways to get to the grocery store by car, by bus, and by foot.

5. Listen closely you will want to remember this speech.

6. I have lived in Sedona, Arizona Baltimore, Maryland and Knoxville, Tennessee.

7. The boss's message was clear Lateness would not be tolerated.

8. Next semester, we will read some more contemporary authors, such as Vonnegut, Miller, and Orwell.

9. My little sister said what we were all thinking "We should have stayed home."

10. Trust me I have done this before.

Key Takeaways

- Use a colon to introduce a list, quote, or example.
- Use a colon after a greeting in business letters and memos.

4. Quotes

Quotation marks (“ ”) set off a group of words from the rest of the text. Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotations of another person’s words or to indicate a title. Quotation marks always appear in pairs.

Direct Quotations

A direct quotation is an exact account of what someone said or wrote. To include a direct quotation in your writing, enclose the words in quotation marks. An indirect quotation is a restatement of what someone said or wrote. An indirect quotation does not use the person’s exact words. You do not need to use quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Direct quotation: Carly said, “I’m not ever going back there again.”

Indirect quotation: Carly said that she would never go back there.

Writing at Work

Most word processing software is designed to catch errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. While this can be a useful tool, it is better to be well acquainted with the rules of punctuation than to leave the thinking to a computer. Properly punctuated writing will convey your meaning clearly. Consider the subtle shifts in meaning in the following sentences:

- The client said he thought our manuscript was garbage.

- The client said, “He thought our manuscript was garbage.”

The first sentence reads as an indirect quote in which the client does not like the manuscript. But did he actually use the word “garbage”? (This would be alarming!) Or has the speaker paraphrased (and exaggerated) the client’s words?

The second sentence reads as a direct quote from the client. But who is “he” in this sentence? Is it a third party?

Word processing software would not catch this because the sentences are not grammatically incorrect. However, the meanings of the sentences are not the same. Understanding puntcuation will help you write what you mean, and in this case, could save a lot of confusion around the office!

Punctuating Direct Quotations

Quotation marks show readers another person’s exact words. Often, you should identify who is speaking. You can do this at the beginning, middle, or end of the quote. Notice the use of commas and capitalized words.

Beginning: Madison said, “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Middle: “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market,” Madison said, “to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

End: “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner,” Madison said.

Speaker not identified: “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Always capitalize the first letter of a quote even if it is not the beginning of the sentence. When using identifying words in the

middle of the quote, the beginning of the second part of the quote does not need to be capitalized.

Use commas between identifying words and quotes. Quotation marks must be placed *after* commas and periods. Place quotation marks after question marks and exclamation points only if the question or exclamation is part of the quoted text.

Question is part of quoted text: The new employee asked, "When is lunch?"

Question is not part of quoted text: Did you hear her say you were "the next Picasso"?

Exclamation is part of quoted text: My supervisor beamed, "Thanks for all of your hard work!"

Exclamation is not part of quoted text: He said I "single-handedly saved the company thousands of dollars"!

Quotations within Quotations

Use single quotation marks (' ') to show a quotation within in a quotation.

Theresa said, "I wanted to take my dog to the festival, but the man at the gate said, 'No dogs allowed.'"

"When you say, 'I can't help it,' what exactly does that mean?"

"The instructions say, 'Tighten the screws one at a time.'"

Titles

Use quotation marks around titles of short works of writing, such as essays, songs, poems, short stories, articles in periodicals, and chapters in books. Usually, titles of longer works, such as books, magazines, albums, newspapers, and novels, are italicized.

"Annabelle Lee" is one of my favorite romantic poems.

The *New York Times* has been in publication since 1851.

Writing at Work

In many businesses, the difference between exact wording and a paraphrase is extremely important. For legal purposes, or for the purposes of doing a job correctly, it can be important to know exactly what the client, customer, or supervisor said. Sometimes, important details can be lost when instructions are paraphrased. Use quotes to indicate exact words where needed, and let your coworkers know the source of the quotation (client, customer, peer, etc.).

Exercise 9

Copy the following sentences onto your own sheet of paper, and correct them by adding quotation marks where necessary. If the sentence does not need any quotation marks, write OK.

1. Yasmin said, I don't feel like cooking. Let's go out to eat.
2. Where should we go? said Russell.
3. Yasmin said it didn't matter to her.
4. I know, said Russell, let's go to the Two Roads Juice Bar.
5. Perfect! said Yasmin.
6. Did you know that the name of the Juice Bar is a reference to a poem? asked Russell.

7. I didn't! exclaimed Yasmin. Which poem?

8. The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost Russell explained.

9. Oh! said Yasmin, Is that the one that starts with the line, Two roads diverged in a yellow wood?

10. That's the one said Russell.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

- Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotes and titles of short works.
- Use single quotation marks to enclose a quote within a quote.
- Do not use any quotation marks for indirect quotations.

5. Apostrophes

An apostrophe (') is a punctuation mark that is used with a noun to

show possession or to indicate where a letter has been left out to form a contraction.

Possession

An apostrophe and the letter s indicate who or what owns something. To show possession with a singular noun, add 's.

Jen**'s** dance routine mesmerized everyone in the room.

The dog**'s** leash is hanging on the hook beside the door.

Jess**'s** sister is also coming to the party.

Notice that singular nouns that end in s still take the apostrophe s ('s) ending to show possession.

To show possession with a plural noun that ends in s, just add an apostrophe ('). If the plural noun does not end in s, add an apostrophe and an s ('s).

Plural noun that ends in s: The drummers' sticks all moved in the same rhythm, like a machine.

Plural noun that does not end in s: The people's votes clearly showed that no one supported the management decision.

Tip

Do not use apostrophes for plurals. It is a common mistake and easy to find in signs and even newspapers.

Correct: The 1980s were when neon colors came into their own in the world of fashion.

Incorrect: The 1980's were when neon color's came into their own in the world of fashion.

Contractions

A contraction is a word that is formed by combining two words. In a contraction, an apostrophe shows where one or more letters have been left out. Contractions are commonly used in informal writing but not in formal writing.

I do not like ice cream.

I **don't** like ice cream.

Notice how the words *do* and *not* have been combined to form the contraction *don't*. The apostrophe shows where the *o* in *not* has been left out.

We will see you later.

We'll see you later.

Look at the chart for some examples of commonly used contractions.

Figure 0.1 "Commonly Used Contractions"

COMMONLY USED CONTRACTIONS	
aren't	are not
can't	cannot
doesn't	does not
don't	do not
isn't	is not
he'll	he will
I'll	I will
she'll	she will
they'll	they will
you'll	you will
it's	it is, it has
let's	let us
she's	she is, she has
there's	there is, there has
who's	who is, who has

Tip

Be careful not to confuse *it's* with *its*. *It's* is a contraction of the words *it* and *is*. *Its* is a possessive pronoun.

It's cold and rainy outside. (It is cold and rainy outside.)

The cat was chasing its tail. (Shows that the tail belongs to the cat.)

When in doubt, substitute the words *it is* in a sentence. If sentence still makes sense, use the contraction *it's*.

Exercise 10

On your own sheet of paper, correct the following sentences by adding apostrophes. If the sentence is correct as it is, write OK.

1. "What a beautiful child! She has her mothers eyes."
2. My brothers wife is one of my best friends.
3. I couldnt believe it when I found out that I got the job!

4. My supervisors informed me that I wouldnt be able to take the days off.

5. Each of the students responses were unique.

6. Wont you please join me for dinner tonight?

Key Takeaways

- Use apostrophes to show possession. Add 's to singular nouns and plural nouns that do not end in s. Add ' to plural nouns that end in s.
- Use apostrophes in contractions to show where a letter or letters have been left out.

6. Parentheses

Parentheses ( ) are punctuation marks that are always used in pairs and contain material that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence. Parentheses must never contain the subject or verb of a sentence. A sentence should make sense if you delete any text within parentheses and the parentheses.

Attack of the Killer Potatoes has to be the worst movie I have seen (so far).

Your spinach and garlic salad is one of the most delicious (and nutritious) foods I have ever tasted!

Exercise 11

On your own sheet of paper, clarify the following sentences by adding parentheses. If the sentence is clear as it is, write OK.

1. Are you going to the seminar this weekend I am?

2. I recommend that you try the sushi bar unless you don't like sushi.

3. I was able to solve the puzzle after taking a few moments to think about it.

4. Please complete the questionnaire at the end of this letter.

5. Has anyone besides me read the assignment?

6. Please be sure to circle not underline the correct answers.

Key Takeaways

- Parentheses enclose information that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence.

- Parentheses are always used in pairs.

7. Dashes

A dash (—) is a punctuation mark used to set off information in a sentence for emphasis. You can enclose text between two dashes, or use just one dash. To create a dash in Microsoft Word, type two hyphens together. Do not put a space between dashes and text.

Arrive to the interview early—but not too early.

Any of the suits—except for the purple one—should be fine to wear.

Exercise 12

On your own sheet of paper, clarify the following sentences by adding dashes. If the sentence is clear as it is, write OK.

1. Which hairstyle do you prefer short or long?
2. I don't know I hadn't even thought about that.
3. Guess what I got the job!

4. I will be happy to work over the weekend if I can have Monday off.

5. You have all the qualities that we are looking for in a candidate intelligence, dedication, and a strong work ethic.

Key Takeaways

- Dashes indicate a pause in text.
- Dashes set off information in a sentence to show emphasis.

8. Hyphens

A hyphen (-) looks similar to a dash but is shorter and used in different ways.

Hyphens between Two Adjectives That Work as One

Use a hyphen to combine words that work together to form a single description.

The fifty-five-year-old athlete was just as qualified for the marathon as his younger opponents.

My doctor recommended against taking the medication, since it can be habit-forming.

My study group focused on preparing for the midyear review.

Hyphens When a Word Breaks at the End of a Line

Use a hyphen to divide a word across two lines of text. You may notice that most word-processing programs will do this for you. If you have to manually insert a hyphen, place the hyphen between two syllables. If you are unsure of where to place the hyphen, consult a dictionary or move the entire word to the next line.

My supervisor was concerned that the team meet–
ing would conflict with the client meeting.

Key Takeaways

- Hyphens join words that work as one adjective.
- Hyphens break words across two lines of text.

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Figure 9.1 "Commonly Used Contractions," Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

13. Working With Words: Which Word is Right?

JENIFER KURTZ

Just as a mason uses bricks to build sturdy homes, writers use words to build successful documents. Consider the construction of a building. Builders need to use tough, reliable materials to build a solid and structurally sound skyscraper. From the foundation to the roof and every floor in between, every part is necessary. Writers need to use strong, meaningful words from the first sentence to the last and in every sentence in between.

You already know many words that you use every day as part of your writing and speaking vocabulary. You probably also know that certain words fit better in certain situations. Letters, e-mails, and even quickly jotted grocery lists require the proper selection of vocabulary. Imagine you are writing a grocery list to purchase the ingredients for a recipe but accidentally write down cilantro when the recipe calls for parsley. Even though cilantro and parsley look remarkably alike, each produces a very different effect in food. This seemingly small error could radically alter the flavor of your dish!

Having a solid everyday vocabulary will help you while writing, but learning new words and avoiding common word errors will make a real impression on your readers. Experienced writers know that deliberate, careful word selection and usage can lead to more polished, more meaningful work. This chapter covers word choice and vocabulary-building strategies that will improve your writing.

1. Commonly confused words
2. Spelling
3. Word choice
4. Prefixes and suffixes
5. Synonyms and antonyms

6. Using context clues

1. Commonly confused words

Some words in English cause trouble for speakers and writers because these words share a similar pronunciation, meaning, or spelling with another word. These words are called commonly confused words.

For example, read aloud the following sentences containing the commonly confused words *new* and *knew*:

I liked her *new* sweater.

I *knew* she would wear that sweater today.

These words may sound alike when spoken, but they carry entirely different usages and meanings. *New* is an adjective that describes the sweater, and *knew* is the past tense of the verb *to know*. To read more about adjectives, verbs, and other parts of speech see **Chapter 8, "Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?".**

Recognizing Commonly Confused Words

New and *knew* are just two of the words that can be confusing because of their similarities. Familiarize yourself with the following list of commonly confused words. Recognizing these words in your own writing and in other pieces of writing can help you choose the correct word.

Commonly Confused Words

A, An, And

- A (article). Used before a word that begins with a consonant.
- **a** key, **a** mouse, **a** screen
- *An* (article). Used before a word that begins with a vowel.

- **an** airplane, **an** ocean, **an** igloo
- *And* (conjunction). Connects two or more words together.
- peanut butter **and** jelly, pen **and** pencil, jump **and** shout

Accept, Except

- *Accept* (verb). Means to take or agree to something offered.
- They **accepted** our proposal for the conference.
- *Except* (conjunction). Means only or but.
- We could fly there **except** the tickets cost too much.

Affect, Effect

- *Affect* (verb). Means to create a change.
- Hurricane winds **affect** the amount of rainfall.
- *Effect* (noun). Means an outcome or result.
- The heavy rains will have an **effect** on the crop growth.

Are, Our

- *Are* (verb). A conjugated form of the verb *be*.
- My cousins **are** all tall and blonde.
- *Our* (pronoun). Indicates possession, usually follows the pronoun *we*.
- We will bring **our** cameras to take pictures.

By, Buy

- *By* (preposition). Means next to.
- My glasses are **by** the bed.
- *Buy* (verb). Means to purchase.
- I will **buy** new glasses after the doctor's appointment.

Its, It's

- *Its* (pronoun). A form of *it* that shows possession.

- The butterfly flapped **its** wings.
- *It's* (contraction). Joins the words *it* and *is*.
- **It's** the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

Know, No

- *Know* (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.
- I **know** the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.
- *No*. Used to make a negative.
- I have **no** time to visit the zoo this weekend.

Loose, Lose

- *Loose* (adjective). Describes something that is not tight or is detached.
- Without a belt, her pants are **loose** on her waist.
- *Lose* (verb). Means to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something.
- She will **lose** even more weight after finishing the marathon training.

Of, Have

- *Of* (preposition). Means *from* or *about*.
- I studied maps **of** the city to know where to rent a new apartment.
- *Have* (verb). Means to possess something.
- I **have** many friends to help me move.
- *Have* (linking verb). Used to connect verbs.
- I should **have** helped her with that heavy box.

Quite, Quiet, Quit

- *Quite* (adverb). Means *really* or *truly*.
- My work will require **quite** a lot of concentration.
- *Quiet* (adjective). Means not loud.

- I need a **quiet** room to complete the assignments.
- *Quit* (verb). Means to stop or to end.
- I will **quit** when I am hungry for dinner.

Right, Write

- *Right* (adjective). Means proper or correct.
- When bowling, she practices the **right** form.
- *Right* (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.
- Begin the dance with your **right** foot.
- *Write* (verb). Means to communicate on paper.
- After the team members bowl, I will **write** down their scores.

Set, Sit

- *Set* (verb). Means to put an item down.
- She **set** the mug on the saucer.
- *Set* (noun). Means a group of similar objects.
- All the mugs and saucers belonged in a **set**.
- *Sit* (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place
- I'll **sit** on the sofa while she brews the tea.

Suppose, Supposed

- *Suppose* (verb). Means to think or to consider
- I **suppose** I will bake the bread because no one else has the recipe.
- *Suppose* (verb). Means to suggest.
- **Suppose** we all split the cost of the dinner.
- *Supposed* (verb). The past tense form of the verb suppose, meaning required or allowed.
- She was **supposed** to create the menu.

Than, Then

- *Than* (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing
- Registered nurses require less schooling **than** doctors.
- *Then* (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.
- Doctors first complete medical school and **then** obtain a residency.

Their, They're, There

- *Their* (pronoun). A form of *they* that shows possession.
- The dog walkers feeds **their** dogs every day at two o'clock.
- *They're* (contraction). Joins the words *they* and *are*.
- **They're** the sweetest dogs in the neighborhood.
- *There* (adverb). Indicates a particular place.
- The dogs' bowls are over **there**, next to the pantry.
- *There* (explitive used to delay the subject). Indicates the presence of something
- **There** are more treats if the dogs behave.

To, Two, Too

- *To* (preposition). Indicates movement.
- Let's go **to** the circus.
- *To*. A word that completes an infinitive verb.
- **to** play, **to** ride, **to** watch.
- *Two*. The number after one. It describes how many.
- **Two** clowns squirted the elephants with water.
- *Too* (adverb). Means *also* or *very*.
- The tents were **too** loud, and we left.

Use, Used

- *Use* (verb). Means to apply for some purpose.
- We **use** a weed whacker to trim the hedges.
- *Used*. The past tense form of the verb *to use*
- He **used** the lawnmower last night before it rained.

- *Used to*. Indicates something done in the past but not in the present
- He **used** to hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.

Who's, Whose

- *Who's* (contraction). Joins the words *who* and either *is* or *has*.
- Who's the new student? Who's met him?
- *Whose* (pronoun). A form of *who* that shows possession.
- Whose schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?

Your, You're

- *Your* (pronoun). A form of *you* that shows possession.
- **Your** book bag is unzipped.
- *You're* (contraction). Joins the words *you* and *are*.
- **You're** the girl with the unzipped book bag.

Figure 10.1 "Camera Sign"

The English language contains so many words; no one can say for certain how many words exist. In fact, many words in English are borrowed from other languages. Many words have multiple meanings and forms, further expanding the immeasurable number of English words. Although the list of commonly confused words serves as a helpful guide, even these words may have more meanings than shown here. When in doubt, consult an expert: the dictionary!

Exercise 1

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct word.

1. My little cousin turns _____(to, too, two) years old tomorrow.

2. The next-door neighbor's dog is _____(quite, quiet, quit) loud. He barks constantly throughout the night.

3. _____(Your, You're) mother called this morning to talk about the party.

4. I would rather eat a slice of chocolate cake _____(than, then) eat a chocolate muffin.

5. Before the meeting, he drank a cup of coffee and _____(than, then) brushed his teeth.

6. Do you have any _____(loose, lose) change to pay the parking meter?

7. Father must _____(have, of) left his briefcase at the office.

8. Before playing ice hockey, I was _____(suppose, supposed) to read the contract, but I only skimmed it and signed my name quickly, which may _____(affect, effect) my understanding of the rules.

9. Tonight she will _____(set, sit) down and _____(right, write) a cover letter to accompany her résumé and job application.

10. It must be fall, because the leaves _____(are, our) changing, and _____(it's, its) getting darker earlier.

Strategies to Avoid Commonly Confused Words

When writing, you need to choose the correct word according to its spelling and meaning in the context. Not only does selecting the correct word improve your vocabulary and your writing, but it also makes a good impression on your readers. It also helps reduce confusion and improve clarity. The following strategies can help you avoid misusing confusing words.

1. **Use a dictionary**. Keep a dictionary at your desk while you write. Look up words when you are uncertain of their meanings or spellings. Many dictionaries are also available online, and the Internet's easy access will not slow you down. Check out your cell phone or smartphone to see if a dictionary app is available.

2. **Keep a list of words you commonly confuse**. Be aware of the words that often confuse you. When you notice a pattern of confusing words, keep a list nearby, and consult the list as you write. Check the list again before you submit an assignment to your instructor.

3. **Study the list of commonly confused words**. You may not yet know which words confuse you, but before you sit down to write, study the words on the list. Prepare your mind for working with words by reviewing the commonly confused words identified in this chapter.

Figure 10.2 " A Commonly Misused Word on a Public Sign"

Tip

Commonly confused words appear in many locations, not just at work or at school. Be on the lookout for misused words wherever you find yourself throughout the day. Make a mental note of the error and remember its correction for your own pieces of writing.

Writing at Work

All employers value effective communication. From an

application to an interview to the first month on the job, employers pay attention to your vocabulary. You do not need a large vocabulary to succeed, but you do need to be able to express yourself clearly and avoid commonly misused words.

When giving an important presentation on the effect of inflation on profit margins, you must know the difference between *effect* and *affect* and choose the correct word. When writing an e-mail to confirm deliveries, you must know if the shipment will arrive in *to* days, *too* days, or *two* days. Confusion may arise if you choose the wrong word. And, whether fair or not, we do get judged on these things.

Consistently using the proper words will improve your communication and make a positive impression on your boss and colleagues.

Exercise 2

The following paragraph contains eleven errors. Find each misused word and correct it by adding the proper word.

The original United States Declaration of Independence sets in a case at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom as part of the National Archives in Washington, DC. Since 1952, over one million visitors each year of passed through the Rotunda too snap a photograph to capture they're experience. Although signs state, "No Flash Photography,"

forgetful tourists leave the flash on, an a bright light flickers for just a millisecond. This millisecond of light may not seem like enough to effect the precious document, but supposed how much light could be generated when all those milliseconds are added up. According to the National Archives administrators, its enough to significantly damage the historic document. So, now, the signs display quit a different message: "No Photography." Visitors continue to travel to see the Declaration that began are country, but know longer can personal pictures serve as mementos. The administrators' compromise, they say, is a visit to the gift shop for a preprinted photograph.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

- In order to write accurately, it is important for writers to be aware of commonly confused words.

- Although commonly confused words may look alike or sound alike, their meanings are very different.
- Consulting the dictionary is one way to make sure you are using the correct word in your writing. You may also keep a list of commonly confused words nearby when you write or study the chart in this book.
- Choosing the proper words leaves a positive impression on your readers.

Writing Application

Review the latest assignment you completed for school or for work. Does it contain any commonly confused words? Circle each example and use the circled words to begin your own checklist of commonly confused words. Continue to add to your checklist each time you complete an assignment and find a misused word.

2. Spelling

One essential aspect of good writing is accurate spelling. With

computer spell checkers, spelling may seem simple, but these programs fail to catch every error. Spell checkers identify some errors, but writers still have to consider the flagged words and suggested replacements. Writers are still responsible for the errors that remain.

For example, if the spell checker highlights a word that is misspelled and gives you a list of alternative words, you may choose a word that you never intended even though it is spelled correctly. This can change the meaning of your sentence. It can also confuse readers, making them lose interest. Computer spell checkers are useful editing tools, but they can never replace human knowledge of spelling rules, homonyms, and commonly misspelled words. Also, autocorrect can sometimes make the wrong correction, changing the meaning of your statement.

Common Spelling Rules

The best way to master new words is to understand the key spelling rules. Keep in mind, however, that some spelling rules carry exceptions. A spell checker may catch these exceptions, but knowing them yourself will prepare you to spell accurately on the first try. You may want to try memorizing each rule and its exception like you would memorize a rhyme or lyrics to a song.

Write *i* before *e* except after *c*, or when pronounced *ay* like "neighbor" or "weigh."

- achieve, niece, alien
- receive, deceive

When words end in a consonant plus *y*, drop the *y* and add an *i* before adding another ending.

- happy + er = happier
- cry + ed = cried

When words end in a vowel plus *y*, keep the *y* and add the ending.

- delay + ed = delayed

Memorize the following exceptions to this rule: *day*, *lay*, *say*, *pay* = *daily*, *laid*, *said*, *paid*

When adding an ending that begins with a vowel, such as –*able*, –*ence*, –*ing*, or –*ity*, drop the last *e* in a word.

- write + ing = writing
- pure + ity = purity

When adding an ending that begins with a consonant, such as –*less*, –*ment*, or –*ly*, keep the last *e* in a word.

- hope + less = hopeless
- advertise + ment = advertisement

For many words ending in a consonant and an *o*, add –*s* when using the plural form.

- photo + s = photos
- soprano + s = sopranos

Add –*es* to words that end in *s*, *ch*, *sh*, and *x*.

- church + es = churches
- fax + es = faxes

Exercise 3

Identify and correct the nine misspelled words in the following paragraph.

Sherman J. Alexie Jr. was born in October 1966. He is a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian and an American writer, poet, and filmmaker. Alexie was born with hydrocephalus, or water on the brain. This condition led doctors to predict that he would likly suffer long-term brain damage and possibly mental retardation. Although Alexie survived with no mental disabilitys, he did suffer other serious side effects from his condition that plagud him throughout his childhood. Amazingly, Alexie learned to read by the age of three, and by age five he had read novels such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Reared on an Indian reservation, Alexie often felt aleinated from his peers because of his avid love for reading and also from the long-term effects of his illness, which often kept him from socializeing with his peers on the reservation. The reading skills he displaid at such a young age foreshadowed what he would later become. Today Alexie is a prolific and successful writer with several story anthologeis to his credit, noteably *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *The Toughest Indian in the World*. Most of his fiction is about contemporary Native Americans who are influenced by pop culture and pow wows and everything in between. His work is sometimes funny but always thoughtful and full of richness and depth. Alexie also writes poetry, novels, and screenplays. His latest collection of storys is called *War Dances*, which came out in 2009.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Tip

Eight Tips to Improve Spelling Skills

1. **Read the words in your assignment carefully, and avoid skimming over the page**. Focusing on your written assignment word by word will help you pay close attention to each word's spelling. Skimming quickly, you may overlook misspelled words.

2. **Use mnemonic devices to remember the correct spelling of words**. Mnemonic devices, or memory techniques and learning aids, include inventive sayings or practices that help you remember. For example, the saying "It is important to be a beautiful person inside and out" may help you remember that *beautiful* begins with "be a." The practice of pronouncing the word *Wednesday* Wed-nes-day may help you remember how to spell the word correctly.

3. **Use a dictionary**. Many professional writers rely on the dictionary—either in print or online. If you find it difficult to use a regular dictionary, ask your instructor to help you find a "poor speller's dictionary."

4. **Use your computer's spell checker**. The spell checker will not solve all your spelling problems, but it is a useful tool. See the introduction to this section for cautions about spell checkers.

5. **Keep a list of frequently misspelled words**. You will often misspell the same words again and again, but do not let this discourage you. All writers struggle with the spellings of certain words; they become aware of their spelling weaknesses and work to improve. Be aware of which words you commonly misspell, and you can add them to a list to learn to spell them correctly.

6. **Look over corrected papers for misspelled words**. Add these words to your list and practice writing each word four to five times each. Writing teachers will especially notice which words you frequently misspell, and it will help you excel in your classes if they see your spelling improve.

7. **Test yourself with flashcards**. Sometimes the old-fashioned methods are best, and for spelling, this tried-and-true technique has worked for many students. You can work with a peer or alone.

8. **Review the common spelling rules explained in this chapter**. Take the necessary time to master

the material; you may return to the rules in this chapter again and again, as needed.

Tip

Remember to focus on spelling during the editing and revising step of the writing process. Start with the big ideas such as organizing your piece of writing and developing effective paragraphs, and then work your way down toward the smaller—but equally important—details like spelling and punctuation. To read more about the writing process and editing and revising, see **Chapter 4, "The Writing Process."**

Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different meanings.

Commonly Misused Homonyms

Principle, Principal

- **Principle (noun).** A fundamental concept that is accepted as true.
- The **principle** of human equality is an important foundation for all nations.
- **Principal (noun).** The original amount of debt on which

interest is calculated.
- The payment plan allows me to pay back only the **principal** amount, not any compounded interest.
- **Principal (noun).** A person who is the main authority of a school.
- The **principal** held a conference for both parents and teachers.

Where, Wear, Ware

- **Where (adverb).** The place in which something happens.
- **Where** is the restaurant?
- **Wear** (verb). To carry or have on the body.
- I will **wear** my hiking shoes I when go on a climb tomorrow morning.
- **Ware (noun).** Articles of merchandise or manufacture (usually, *wares*).
- When I return from shopping, I will show you my **wares.**

Lead, Led

- **Lead (noun).** A type of metal used in pipes and batteries.
- The **lead** pipes in my homes are old and need to be replaced.
- **Led (verb).** The past tense of the verb *lead*.
- After the garden, she **led** the patrons through the museum.

Which, Witch

- **Which (pronoun).** Replaces one out of a group.
- **Which** apartment is yours?
- **Witch (noun).** A person who practices sorcery or who has supernatural powers.
- She thinks she is a **witch**, but she does not seem to have any powers.

Peace, Piece

- **Peace (noun).** A state of tranquility or quiet.
- For once, there was **peace** between the argumentative brothers.
- **Piece (noun).** A part of a whole.
- I would like a large **piece** of cake, thank you.

Passed, Past

- **Passed (verb).** To go away or move.
- He **passed** the slower cars on the road using the left lane.
- **Past (noun).** Having existed or taken place in a period before the present.
- The argument happened in the **past**, so there is no use in dwelling on it.

Lessen, Lesson

- **Lessen (verb).** To reduce in number, size, or degree.
- My dentist gave me medicine to **lessen** the pain of my aching tooth.
- **Lesson (noun).** A reading or exercise to be studied by a student.
- Today's **lesson** was about mortgage interest rates.

Patience, Patients

- **Patience (noun)**. The capacity of being patient (waiting for a period of time or enduring pains and trials calmly).
- The novice teacher's **patience** with the unruly class was astounding.
- **Patients (plural noun).** Individuals under medical care.
- The **patients** were tired of eating the hospital food, and they could not wait for a home-cooked meal.

Sees, Seas, Seize

- **Sees (verb).** To perceive with the eye.
- He **sees** a whale through his binoculars.
- **Seas (plural noun).** The plural of sea, a great body of salt water.
- The tidal fluctuation of the oceans and **seas** are influenced by the moon.
- **Seize (verb).** To possess or take by force.
- The king plans to **seize** all the peasants' land.

Threw, Through

- **Threw (verb).** The past tense of *throw*.
- She **threw** the football with perfect form.
- **Through (preposition).** A word that indicates movement.
- She walked **through** the door and out of his life.

Exercise 4

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct homonym.

1. Do you agree with the underlying _____(principle, principal) that ensures copyrights are protected in the digital age?

2. I like to _____(where, wear, ware) unique clothing from thrift stores that do not have company logos on them.

3. Marjorie felt like she was being _____(led, lead) on a wild goose chase, and she did not like it one bit.

4. Serina described _____(witch, which) house was hers, but now that I am here, they all look the same.

5. Seeing his friend without a lunch, Miguel gave her a _____(peace, piece) of his apple.

6. Do you think that it is healthy for mother to talk about the _____(passed, past) all the time?

7. Eating healthier foods will _____(lessen, lesson) the risk of heart disease.

8. I know it sounds cliché, but my father had the _____(patients, patience) of a saint.

9. Daniela _____(sees, seas, seize) possibilities in the bleakest situations, and that it is why she is successful.

10. Everyone goes _____(through, threw) hardships in life regardless of who they are.

Commonly Misspelled Words

Below is a list of commonly misspelled words. You probably use these words every day in either speaking or writing. Each word has a segment in bold type, which indicates the problem area of the word that is often spelled incorrectly. If you can, use this list as a guide before, during, and after you write.

Tip

Use the following two tricks to help you master these troublesome words:

1. Copy each word as few times and underline the problem area.
2. Copy the words onto flash cards and have the friend test you.

Figure 10.3 “Commonly Misspelled Words “

a**c**ross	disa**pp**oint	in**teg**ration	partic**u**lar	sep**ara**te
a**dd**ress	disa**pp**rove	in**tell**igent	**per**form	sim**ilar**
ans**w**er	do**es**n't	int**ere**st	**per**haps	**sin**ce
arg**u**ment	eig**hth**	int**er**fere	perso**nn**el	sp**ee**ch
a**th**lete	emba**rr**ass	je**wel**ry	po**ss**e**ss**	stren**gth**
begi**nn**ing	envir**on**ment	jud**gm**ent	po**ss**ible	su**cc**ess
beha**vi**or	exa**gg**erate	knowle**d**ge	**pre**fer	**su**rprise
cal**e**nd**ar**	fam**ili**ar	maint**ain**	pre**jud**ice	**tau**ght
ca**r**ee**r**	fina**lly**	math**e**matics	privi**lege**	temper**a**ture
con**scie**nce	gover**rn**ment	me**a**nt	pro**bab**ly	th**orou**gh
crow**ded**	gramm**ar**	ne**ce**ssary	**psy**cholo**gy**	though**t**
def**ini**te	hei**gh**t	nerv**ous**	p**ur**sue	tire**d**
d**es**cribe	**ill**egal	o**cc**asion	ref**er**ence	unt**il**
desp**er**ate	immed**iate**ly	opin**ion**	**rhy**th**m**	wei**ght**
di**ffe**rent	import**ant**	opt**i**mist	ridic**ul**ous	wri**tt**en

Exercise 5

Identify and correct the ten commonly misspelled words in the following paragraph.

Brooklyn is one of the five boroughs that make up New York City. It is located on the eastern shore of Long Island directly accross the East River from the island of Manhattan. Its beginings stretch back to the sixteenth century when it was founded by the Dutch who originally called it "Breuckelen." Immedietely after the Dutch settled Brooklyn, it came under British rule. However, neither the Dutch nor the British were Brooklyn's first inhabitants. When European settlers first arrived, Brooklyn was largely inhabited by the Lenapi, a collective name for several organized bands of Native American people who settled a large area of land that extended from upstate New York through the entire state of New Jersey. They are sometimes referred to as the Delaware Indians. Over time, the Lenapi succumbed to European diseases or conflicts between European settlers or other Native American enemies. Finalley they were pushed out of Brooklyn completely by the British. In 1776, Brooklyn was the site of the first importent battle of the American Revolution known as the Battle of Brooklyn. The colonists lost this battle, which was led by George Washington, but over the next two years they would win the war, kicking the British out of the colonies once and for all. By the end of the nineteenth century, Brooklyn grew to be a city in its own right. The completion of the Brooklyn Bridge was an ocasion for celebration; transportation and commerce between Brooklyn and Manhattan now became much easier.

Eventually, in 1898, Brooklyn lost its seperate identity as an independent city and became one of five boroughs of New York City. However, in some people's opinien, the intagration into New York City should have never happened; they though Brooklyn should have remained an independent city.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

In today's job market, writing e-mails has become a means by which many people find employment. E-mails to prospective employers require thoughtful word choice, accurate spelling, and perfect punctuation. Employers' inboxes are inundated with countless e-mails daily. If even the subject line of an e-mail contains a spelling error, it will likely be overlooked and someone else's e-mail will take priority.

The best action to take after you proofread an e-mail to an employer and run the spell checker is to have an additional set of eyes go over it with you; one of your teachers may be able to read the e-mail and give you suggestions for improvement. Most colleges and universities have writing centers, which may also be able to assist you.

Key Takeaways

- Accurate, error-free spelling enhances your credibility with the reader.
- Mastering the rules of spelling may help you become a better speller.
- Knowing the commonly misused homonyms may prevent spelling errors.
- Studying the list of commonly misspelled words in this chapter, or studying a list of your own, is one way to improve your spelling skills.

Writing Application

What is your definition of a successful person? Is it based on a person's profession or is it based on his or her character? Perhaps success means a combination of both. In one paragraph, describe in detail what you think makes a person successful. When you are finished, proofread your work for spelling errors. Exchange papers with a partner and read each other's work. See if you catch any spelling errors that your partner missed.

3. Word choice

Effective writing involves making conscious choices with words. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some freewriting exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, written an outline, and even selected your sources. When it is time to write your first draft, start to consider which words to use to best convey your ideas to the reader.

Some writers are picky about word choice as they start drafting. They may practice some specific strategies, such as using a dictionary and thesaurus, using words and phrases with proper connotations, and avoiding slang, clichés, and overly general words.

Once you understand these tricks of the trade, you can move ahead confidently in writing your assignment. Remember, the skill and accuracy of your word choice is a major factor in developing

your writing style. Precise selection of your words will help you be more clearly understood—in both writing and speaking.

Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus

Even professional writers need help with the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, and uses of particular words. In fact, they rely on dictionaries to help them write better. No one knows every word in the English language and its multiple uses and meanings, so all writers, from novices to professionals, can benefit from the use of dictionaries.

Most dictionaries provide the following information:

- **Spelling**. How the word and its different forms are spelled.
- **Pronunciation**. How to say the word.
- **Part of speech**. The function of the word.
- **Definition**. The meaning of the word.
- **Synonyms**. Words that have similar meanings.
- **Etymology**. The history of the word.

Look at the following sample dictionary entry to see which of the preceding information you can identify:

myth, mith, *n.* [Gr. *mythos*, a word, a fable, a legend.] A fable or legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their gods or other divine beings, their own beginnings and early history and the heroes connected with it, or the origin of the world; any invented story; something or someone having no existence in fact.—**myth • ic, myth • i • cal**

Like a dictionary, a thesaurus is another indispensable writing tool. A thesaurus gives you a list of synonyms, words that have the same (or very close to the same) meaning as another word. It also lists antonyms, words with the opposite meaning of the word. A thesaurus will help you when you are looking for the perfect word with just the right meaning to convey your ideas. It will also help you learn more words and use the ones you already know more correctly. However, be careful to avoid choosing words from the

thesaurus that don't fit the tone of your writing or whose meaning might not be a perfect fit for what you are trying to say.

precocious *adj*, *She's such a precocious little girl!*: uncommonly smart, mature, advanced, smart, bright, brilliant, gifted, quick, clever, apt.

Ant. slow, backward, stupid.

Using Proper Connotations

A denotation is the dictionary definition of a word. A connotation, on the other hand, is the emotional or cultural meaning attached to a word. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral. Keep in mind the connotative meaning when choosing a word.

Scrawny

- **Denotation**: Exceptionally thin and slight or meager in body or size.
- **Word used in a sentence**: Although he was a premature baby and a **scrawny** child, Martin has developed into a strong man.
- **Connotation**: (Negative) In this sentence the word *scrawny* may have a negative connotation in the readers' minds. They might find it to mean a weakness or a personal flaw; however, the word fits into the sentence appropriately.

Skinny

- **Denotation**: Lacking sufficient flesh, very thin.
- **Word used in a sentence**: **Skinny** jeans have become very fashionable in the past couple of years.
- **Connotation**: (Positive) Based on cultural and personal impressions of what it means to be skinny, the reader may have positive connotations of the word *skinny*.

Lean

- **Denotation**: Lacking or deficient in flesh; containing little or no fat.
- **Word used in a sentence**: My brother has a **lean** figure, whereas I have a more muscular build.
- **Connotation**: (Neutral) In this sentence, *lean* has a neutral connotation. It does not call to mind an overly skinny person like the word *scrawny*, nor does imply the positive cultural impressions of the word *skinny*. It is merely a neutral descriptive word.

Notice that all the words have a very similar denotation; however, the connotations of each word differ.

Exercises 6

In each of the following items, you will find words with similar denotations. Identify the words' connotations as positive, negative, or neutral by writing the word in the appropriate box. Copy the chart onto your own piece of paper.

curious, nosy, interested

lazy, relaxed, slow

courageous, foolhardy, assured

new, newfangled, modern

mansion, shack, residence

spinster, unmarried woman, career woman

giggle, laugh, cackle

boring, routine, prosaic

noted, notorious, famous

assertive, confident, pushy

Positive	Negative	Neutral

Avoiding Slang

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads and may be used by or be familiar to only a specific group of people. Most people use slang when they speak and in personal correspondences, such as e-mails, text messages, and instant messages. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing.

Writing at Work

Frequent exposure to media and popular culture has desensitized many of us to slang. In certain situations, using slang at work may not be problematic, but keep in mind that words can have a powerful effect. Slang in professional e-mails or during meetings may convey the wrong message or even mistakenly offend someone.

Exercise 7

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee

on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying "like" and "um," and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I've been practicing this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was ten minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don't enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I'm surprised that people didn't boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous his or her first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Avoiding Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused. Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

- **Clichéd**: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my **blood boil**.
- **Plain**: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he

always says something that makes me really angry.

- **Original**: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

Tip

Think about all the cliché phrases that you hear in popular music or in everyday conversation. What would happen if these clichés were transformed into something unique?

Exercise 8

On your own sheet of paper, revise the following sentences by replacing the clichés with fresh, original descriptions.

1. She is writing a memoir in which she will air her family's dirty laundry.

2. Fran had an ax to grind with Benny, and she planned to confront him that night at the party.

3. Mr. Muller was at his wit's end with the rowdy class of seventh graders.

4. The bottom line is that Greg was fired because he missed too many days of work.

5. Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet with just one paycheck.

6. My brain is fried from pulling an all-nighter.

7. Maria left the dishes in the sink all week to give Jeff a taste of his own medicine.

8. While they were at the carnival Janice exclaimed, "Time sure does fly when you are having fun!"

9. Jeremy became tongue-tied after the interviewer asked him where he saw himself in five years.

10. Jordan was dressed to the nines that night.

Avoiding Overly General Words

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring yours words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

- **General:** My new puppy is cute.
- **Specific:** My new puppy is a ball of white fuzz with the biggest black eyes I have ever seen.
- **General:** My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad.
- **Specific:** My teacher, Ms. Atwater, created a presentation detailing exactly how plagiarism is illegal and unethical.

Exercise 9

Revise the following sentences by replacing the overly general words with more precise and attractive language. Write the new sentences on your own sheet of paper.

1. Reilly got into her car and drove off.
2. I would like to travel to outer space because it would be amazing.
3. Jane came home after a bad day at the office.
4. I thought Milo's essay was fascinating.
5. The dog walked up the street.
6. The coal miners were tired after a long day.
7. The tropical fish are pretty.
8. I sweat a lot after running.
9. The goalie blocked the shot.
10. I enjoyed my Mexican meal.

Key Takeaways

- Using a dictionary and thesaurus as you write will improve your writing by improving your word choice.
- Connotations of words may be positive, neutral, or

negative.

- Slang, clichés, and overly general words should be avoided in academic writing.

Writing Application

Review a piece of writing that you have completed for school. Circle any sentences with slang, clichés, or overly general words and rewrite them using stronger language.

4. Prefixes and suffixes

The English language contains an enormous and ever-growing number of words. Enhancing your vocabulary by learning new words can seem overwhelming, but if you know the common prefixes and suffixes of English, you will understand many more words.

Mastering common prefixes and suffixes is like learning a code. Once you crack the code, you cannot only spell words more correctly but also recognize and perhaps even define unfamiliar words.

Prefixes

A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word to create a new meaning. Study the common prefixes in the table below.

> **Tip**
>
> The main rule to remember when adding a prefix to a word is not to add letters or leave out any letters. See the table below for examples of this rule.

Figure 0.4 ” Common Prefixes”

Prefix	Meaning	Example
dis	not, opposite of	dis + satisfied = dissatisfied
mis	wrongly	mis + spell = misspell
un	not	un + acceptable = unacceptable
re	again	re + election = reelection
inter	between	inter + related = interrelated
pre	before	pre + pay = prepay
non	not	non + sense = nonsense
super	above	super + script = superscript
sub	under	sub + merge = submerge
anti	against, opposing	anti + bacterial = antibacterial

Exercise 10

Identify the five words with prefixes in the following paragraph, and write their meanings on a separate sheet of paper.

At first, I thought one of my fuzzy, orange socks

disappeared in the dryer, but I could not find it in there. Because it was my favorite pair, nothing was going to prevent me from finding that sock. I looked all around my bedroom, under the bed, on top of the bed, and in my closet, but I still could not find it. I did not know that I would discover the answer just as I gave up my search. As I sat down on the couch in the family room, my Dad was reclining on his chair. I laughed when I saw that one of his feet was orange and the other blue! I forgot that he was color-blind. Next time he does laundry I will have to supervise him while he folds the socks so that he does not accidentally take one of mine!

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 11

Add the correct prefix to the word to complete each sentence. Write the word on your own sheet of paper.

1. I wanted to ease my stomach _____comfort, so I drank some ginger root tea.

2. Lenny looked funny in his _____matched shirt and pants.

3. Penelope felt _____glamorous at the party because she was the only one not wearing a dress.

4. My mother said those _____aging creams do not work, so I should not waste my money on them.

5. The child's _____standard performance on the test alarmed his parents.

6. When my sister first saw the meteor, she thought it was a _____natural phenomenon.

7. Even though she got an excellent job offer, Cherie did not want to _____locate to a different country.

8. With a small class size, the students get to _____act with the teacher more frequently.

9. I slipped on the ice because I did not heed the _____cautions about watching my step.

10. A _____combatant is another word for civilian.

Suffixes

A suffix is a word part added to the end of a word to create a new meaning. Study the suffix rules in the following boxes.

Rule 1

When adding the suffixes *–ness* and *–ly* to a word, the spelling of the word does not change.

Examples:

- dark + ness = darkness
- scholar + ly = scholarly

Exceptions to Rule 1

When the word ends in y, change the y to i before adding *–ness* and *–ly*.

Examples:

- ready + ly = readily
- happy + ness = happiness

Rule 2

When the suffix begins with a vowel, drop the silent *e* in the root word.

Examples:

- care + ing = caring
- use + able = usable

Exceptions to Rule 2

When the word ends in *ce* or *ge*, keep the silent e if the suffix begins with *a* or *o*.

Examples:

- replace + able = replaceable
- courage + ous = courageous

Rule 3

When the suffix begins with a consonant, keep the silent *e* in the original word.

Examples:

- care + ful = careful
- care + less = careless

Exceptions to Rule 3

Examples:

- true + ly = truly
- argue + ment = argument

Rule 4

When the word ends in a consonant plus *y*, change the *y* to *i* before any suffix not beginning with *i*.

Examples:

- sunny + er = sunnier
- hurry + ing = hurrying

Rule 5

When the suffix begins with a vowel, double the final consonant only if (1) the word has only one syllable or is accented on the last syllable and (2) the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.

Examples:

- tan + ing = tanning (one syllable word)
- regret + ing = regretting (The accent is on the last syllable; the word ends in a single vowel followed by a single consonant.)
- cancel + ed = canceled (The accent is not on the last syllable.)
- prefer + ed = preferred

Exercise 12

On your own sheet of paper, write correctly the forms of the words with their suffixes.

1. refer + ed
2. refer + ence
3. mope + ing
4. approve + al
5. green + ness
6. benefit + ed
7. resubmit + ing
8. use + age
9. greedy + ly
10. excite + ment

Key Takeaways

- A prefix is a word part added to the beginning of a word that changes the word's meaning.
- A suffix is a word part added to the end of a word that changes the word's meaning.
- Learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes will

help expand your vocabulary, which will help improve your writing.

Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing one of your life goals. Include five words with prefixes and five words with suffixes. Exchange papers with a classmate and circle the prefixes and suffixes in your classmate's paper. Correct each prefix or suffix that is spelled incorrectly.

5. Synonyms and antonyms

As you work with your draft, you will want to pay particular attention to the words you have chosen. Do they express exactly what you are trying to convey? Can you choose better, more effective words? Familiarity with synonyms and antonyms can be helpful in answering these questions.

Synonyms

Synonyms are words that have the same, or almost the same, meaning as another word. You can say an "easy task" or a "simple task" because *easy* and *simple* are synonyms. You can say Hong Kong

is a “large city” or a “metropolis” because *city* and *metropolis* are synonyms.

However, it is important to remember that not all pairs of words in the English language are so easily interchangeable. The slight but important differences in meaning between synonyms can make a big difference in your writing. For example, the words *boring* and *insipid* may have similar meanings, but the subtle differences between the two will affect the message your writing conveys. The word *insipid* evokes a scholarly and perhaps more pretentious message than *boring*.

The English language is full of pairs of words that have subtle distinctions between them. All writers, professionals and beginners alike, face the challenge of choosing the most appropriate synonym to best convey their ideas. When you pay particular attention to synonyms in your writing, it comes across to your reader. The sentences become much more clear and rich in meaning.

Writing at Work

Any writing you do at work involves a careful choice of words. For example, if you are writing an e-mail to your employer regarding your earnings, you can use the word *pay*, *salary*, or hourly *wage*. There are also other synonyms to choose from. Just keep in mind that the word you choose will have an effect on the reader, so you want to choose wisely to get the desired effect.

Exercise 13

Replace the underlined words in the paragraph with appropriate synonyms. Write the new paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

When most people think of the Renaissance, they might think of artists like Michelangelo, Raphael, or Leonardo da Vinci, but they often overlook one of the very important figures of the Renaissance: Filippo Brunelleschi. Brunelleschi was born in Florence, Italy in 1377. He is considered the very best architect and engineer of the Renaissance. His impressive accomplishments are a testament to following one's dreams, persevering in the face of obstacles, and realizing one's vision.

The most difficult undertaking of Brunelleschi's career was the dome of Florence Cathedral, which took sixteen years to construct. A major blow to the progress of the construction happened in 1428. Brunelleschi had designed a special ship to carry the one hundred tons of marble needed for the dome. He felt this would be the most inexpensive way to transport the marble, but the unthinkable happened. The ship went down to the bottom of the water, taking all the marble with it to the bottom of the river. Brunelleschi was really sad. Nevertheless, he did not give up. He held true to his vision of the completed dome. Filippo Brunelleschi completed construction of the dome of Florence Cathedral in 1446. His influence on artists and architects alike was felt strongly during his lifetime and can still be felt in this day and age.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Exercise 14

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence with each of the following words that illustrates the specific meaning of each synonym.

1. leave, abandon
2. mad, insane
3. outside, exterior
4. poor, destitute
5. quiet, peaceful
6. riot, revolt
7. rude, impolite
8. talk, conversation
9. hug, embrace
10. home, residence

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Antonyms

Antonyms are words that have the opposite meaning of a given word. The study of antonyms will not only help you choose the most appropriate word as you write; it will also sharpen your overall sense of language. The table below lists common words and their antonyms.

Figure 0.5 ” Common Antonyms “

Word	Antonym	Word	Antonym
absence	presence	frequent	seldom
accept	refuse	harmful	harmless
accurate	inaccurate	horizontal	vertical
advantage	disadvantage	imitation	genuine
ancient	modern	inhabited	uninhabited
abundant	scarce	inferior	superior
artificial	natural	intentional	accidental
attractive	repulsive	justice	injustice
borrow	lend	knowledge	ignorance
bravery	cowardice	landlord	tenant
create	destroy, demolish	likely	unlikely
bold	timid, meek	minority	majority
capable	incapable	miser	spendthrift
combine	separate	obedient	disobedient
conceal	reveal	optimist	pessimist
common	rare	permanent	temporary

decrease	increase	plentiful	scarce
definite	indefinite	private	public
despair	hope	prudent	imprudent
discourage	encourage	qualified	unqualified
employer	employee	satisfactory	unsatisfactory
expand	contract	tame	wild
forget	remember	vacant	occupied

Tip

Learning antonyms is an effective way to increase your vocabulary. Memorizing words in combination with or in relation to other words often helps us retain them.

Exercise 15

Correct the following sentences by replacing the

underlined words with an antonym. Write the antonym on your own sheet of paper.

1. The pilot who landed the plane was a coward because no one was injured.

2. Even though the botany lecture was two hours long, Gerard found it incredibly dull.

3. My mother says it is impolite to say thank you like you really mean it.

4. Although I have learned a lot of information through textbooks, it is life experience that has given me ignorance.

5. When our instructor said the final paper was compulsory, it was music to my ears!

6. My only virtues are coffee, video games, and really loud music.

7. Elvin was so bold when he walked in the classroom that he sat in the back row and did not participate.

8. Maria thinks elephants who live in freedom have a sad look in their eyes.

9. The teacher filled her students' minds with gloomy thoughts about their futures.

10. The guest attended to every one of our needs.

Key Takeaways

- Synonyms are words that have the same, or almost the same, meaning as another word.
- Antonyms are words that have the opposite meaning of another word.
- Choosing the right synonym refines your writing.
- Learning common antonyms sharpens your sense of language and expands your vocabulary.

Writing Application

Write a paragraph that describes your favorite dish or food. Use as many synonyms as you can in the description, even if it seems too many. Be creative. Consult a thesaurus, and take this opportunity to use words you have never used before. Be prepared to share your paragraph.

6. Using context clues

Context clues are bits of information within a text that will assist

you in deciphering the meaning of unknown words. Since most of your knowledge of vocabulary comes from reading, it is important that you recognize context clues. By becoming more aware of particular words and phrases surrounding a difficult word, you can make logical guesses about its meaning. The following are the different types of context clues:

- Brief definition or restatement
- Synonyms and antonyms
- Examples
- General sense of the passage

Brief Definition or Restatement

Sometimes a text directly states the definition or a restatement of the unknown word. The brief definition or restatement is signaled by a word or a punctuation mark.

Consider the following example:

> If you visit Alaska, you will likely see many glaciers, or slow-moving masses of ice.

In this sentence, the word *glaciers* is defined by the phrase that follows the signal word *or*, which is *slow moving masses of ice*.

In other instances, the text may restate the meaning of the word in a different way, by using punctuation as a signal.

Look at the following example:

> Marina was indignant—fuming mad—when she discovered her brother had left for the party without her.

Although *fuming mad* is not a formal definition of the word *indignant*, it does serve to define it. These two examples use signals—the word *or* and the punctuation dashes—to indicate the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Other signals to look for are the words *is*, *as*, *means*, *known as*, and *refers to*.

Synonyms and Antonyms

Sometimes a text gives a synonym of the unknown word to signal the meaning of the unfamiliar word:

> When you interpret an image, you actively question and examine what the image connotes and suggests.

In this sentence the word *suggests* is a synonym of the word *connotes*. The word *and* sometimes signals synonyms.

Likewise, the word *but* may signal a contrast, which can help you define a word by its antonym.

> I abhor clothes shopping, but I adore grocery shopping.

The word *abhor* is contrasted with its opposite: *adore*. From this context, the reader can guess that *abhor* means to dislike greatly.

Examples

Sometimes a text will give you an example of the word that sheds light on its meaning:

> I knew Mark's ailurophobia was in full force because he began trembling and stuttering when he saw my cat, Ludwig, slink out from under the bed.

Although *ailurophobia* is an unknown word, the sentence gives an example of its effects. Based on this example, a reader could confidently surmise that the word means a fear of cats.

Tip

Look for signal words like *such as*, *for instance*, and *for example*. These words signal that a word's meaning may be revealed through an example.

General Sense of the Passage

Sometimes you will happen upon a new term in a passage that

has no examples, synonyms or antonyms to help you decipher the word's meaning. However, by looking at the words and sentences surrounding the word and using your common sense, oftentimes you may make a fairly accurate guess at the meaning of the term. For example if you read the sentence, "The newlyweds were trying to be *frugal* in their shopping because they wanted to save enough money to buy a home," your common sense would tell you that the word *frugal* means saving money and being thrifty because they are trying to save to buy a house.

Exercise 16

Identify the context clue that helps define the underlined words in each of the following sentences. Write the context clue on your own sheet of paper.

1. Lucinda is very adroit on the balance beam, but Constance is rather clumsy.

2. I saw the entomologist, a scientist who studies insects, cradle the giant dung beetle in her palm.

3. Lance's comments about politics were irrelevant and meaningless to the botanist's lecture on plant reproduction.

4. Before I left for my trip to the Czech Republic, I listened to my mother's sage advice and made a copy of my passport.

5. His rancor, or hatred, for socializing resulted in a life of loneliness and boredom.

6. Martin was mortified, way beyond embarrassment, when his friends teamed up to shove him into the pool.

7. The petulant four-year-old had a baby sister who was, on the contrary, not grouchy at all.

8. The philosophy teacher presented the students with several conundrums, or riddles, to solve.

9. Most Americans are omnivores, people that eat both plants and animals.

10. Elena is effervescent, as excited as a cheerleader, for example, when she meets someone for the first time.

Exercise 17

On your own sheet of paper, write the name of the context clue that helps to define the underlined words.

Maggie was a precocious child to say the least. She produced brilliant watercolor paintings by the age of three. At first, her parents were flabbergasted—utterly blown away—by their daughter's ability, but soon they got used to their little painter. Her preschool teacher said that Maggie's dexterity, or ease with which she used her hands, was something she had never before seen in such a young child. Little Maggie never gloated or took pride in her paintings;

she just smiled contentedly when she finished one and requested her parents give it to someone as a gift. Whenever people met Maggie for the first time, they often watched her paint with their mouths agape, but her parents always kept their mouths closed and simply smiled over their "little Monet."

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Tip

In addition to context clues to help you figure out the meaning of a word, examine the following word parts: prefixes, roots, and suffixes.

Writing at Work

Jargon is a type of shorthand communication often used in the workplace. It is the technical language of a special field. Imagine that it is your first time working as a server in a restaurant, and your manager tells you that he is going to "eighty-six" the roasted chicken. If you do not realize that "eighty-six" means to remove an item from the menu, you could be confused. When you first start a job, no matter where it may be, you will encounter jargon that will likely be foreign to you. Perhaps after working the job for a short time, you too will feel comfortable enough to use it. When you are first hired, however, jargon can be baffling and make you feel like an outsider. If you cannot decipher the jargon based on the context, it is always a good policy to ask.

Key Takeaways

- Context clues are words or phrases within a text that help clarify vocabulary that is unknown to you.
- There are several types of context clues including brief definition and restatement, synonyms and antonyms, and example.

Writing Application

Write a paragraph describing your first job. In the paragraph, use five words previously unknown to you. These words could be jargon words or you may consult a dictionary or thesaurus to find a new word. Make sure to provide a specific context clue for understanding each word. Exchange papers with a classmate and try to decipher the meaning of the words in each other's paragraphs based on the context clues.

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14. Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?

JENIFER KURTZ

1. Sentence writing
2. Subject-verb agreement
3. Verb tense
4. Capitalization
5. Pronouns
6. Adjectives and adverbs
7. Misplaced and dangling modifiers

1. Sentence writing

Imagine you are reading a book for school. You need to find important details that you can use for an assignment. However, when you begin to read, you notice that the book has very little punctuation. Sentences fail to form complete paragraphs and instead form one block of text without clear organization. Most likely, this book would frustrate and confuse you. Without clear and concise sentences, it is difficult to find the information you need.

For both students and professionals, clear communication is important. Whether you are typing an e-mail or writing a report, it is your responsibility to present your thoughts and ideas clearly and precisely. Writing in complete sentences is one way to ensure that you communicate well. This section covers how to recognize and write basic sentence structures and how to avoid some common writing errors.

Components of a Sentence

Clearly written, complete sentences require key information: a **subject**, a **verb**, and a complete idea. A sentence needs to make sense on its own. Sometimes, complete sentences are also called **independent clauses**. A clause is a group of words that may make up a sentence. An independent clause is a group of words that may stand alone as a complete, grammatically correct thought. The following sentences show independent clauses.

Figure 8.1 "Sentence Components"

All complete sentences have at least one independent clause. You can identify an independent clause by reading it on its own and looking for the subject and the verb.

Subjects

When you read a sentence, you may first look for the subject, or what the sentence is about. The subject usually appears at the beginning of a sentence as a **noun** or a **pronoun**. A noun is a word that identifies a person, place, thing, or idea. A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun. Common pronouns are *I*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *you*, *they*, and *we*. In the following sentences, the subject is underlined once.

> Malik is the project manager for this project. He will give us our assignments.

In these sentences, the subject is a person: *Malik*. The pronoun *He* replaces and refers back to *Malik*.

> The computer lab is where we will work. It will be open twenty-four hours a day.

In the first sentence, the subject is a place: *computer lab*. In the second sentence, the pronoun *It* substitutes for *computer lab* as the subject.

> The project will run for three weeks. It will have a quick turnaround.

In the first sentence, the subject is a thing: *project*. In the second sentence, the pronoun *It* stands in for the *project*.

> **Tip**
>
> In this chapter, please refer to the following grammar key:
>
> Subjects are underlined once.
>
> *Verbs* are italicized.
>
> LV means linking verb, HV means helping verb, and V means action verb.

Compound Subjects

A sentence may have more than one person, place, or thing as the subject. These subjects are called compound subjects. Compound subjects are useful when you want to discuss several subjects at once.

> Desmond and Maria have been working on that design for almost a year. Books, magazines, and online articles are all good resources.

Prepositional Phrases

You will often read a sentence that has more than one noun or pronoun in it. You may encounter a group of words that includes a preposition with a noun or a pronoun. Prepositions connect a

noun, pronoun, or verb to another word that describes or modifies that noun, pronoun, or verb. Common prepositions include *in*, *on*, *under*, *near*, *by*, *with*, and *about*. A group of words that begin with a **preposition** is called a **prepositional phrase**. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and modifies or describes a word. It cannot act as the subject of a sentence. The following circled phrases are examples of prepositional phrases.

Figure 8.2 "Prepositional Phrases"

Exercise 1

Read the following sentences. Underline the subjects, and circle the prepositional phrases.

1. The gym is open until nine o'clock tonight.
2. We went to the store to get some ice.
3. The student with the most extra credit will win a homework pass.
4. Maya and Tia found an abandoned cat by the side of the road.
5. The driver of that pickup truck skidded on the ice.
6. Anita won the race with time to spare.

7. The people who work for that company were surprised about the merger.

8. Working in haste means that you are more likely to make mistakes.

9. The soundtrack has over sixty songs in languages from around the world.

10. His latest invention does not work, but it has inspired the rest of us.

Verbs

Once you locate the subject of a sentence, you can move on to the next part of a complete sentence: the verb. A verb is often an action word that shows what the subject is doing. A verb can also link the subject to a describing word. There are three types of verbs that you can use in a sentence: **action verbs**, **linking verbs**, or **helping verbs**.

Action Verbs

A verb that connects the subject to an action is called an action verb. An action verb answers the question *what is the subject doing*? In the following sentences, the action verbs are in italics.

The dog *barked* at the jogger.

He *gave* a short speech before we ate.

Linking Verbs

A verb can often connect the subject of the sentence to a describing word. This type of verb is called a linking verb because it links the subject to a describing word. In the following sentences, the linking verbs are in italics.

The coat *was* old and dirty.

The clock *seemed* broken.

If you have trouble telling the difference between action verbs

and linking verbs, remember that an action verb shows that the subject is doing something, whereas a linking verb simply connects the subject to another word that describes or modifies the subject.

A few verbs can be used as either action verbs or linking verbs.

Action Verb: The boy *looked* for his glove.

Linking Verb: The boy *looked* tired.

Although both sentences use the same verb, the two sentences have completely different meanings. In the first sentence, the verb describes the boy's action. In the second sentence, the verb describes the boy's appearance.

Helping Verbs

A third type of verb you may use as you write is a helping verb. Helping verbs are verbs that are used with the main verb to describe a mood or tense. Helping verbs are usually a form of *be*, *do*, or *have*. The word *can* is also used as a helping verb.

The restaurant*is known* for its variety of dishes.

She*does speak up* when prompted in class.

We*have seen* that movie three times.

She*can tell* when someone walks on her lawn.

(is, does, have, and can are helping verbs and known, speak up, seen, and tell are verbs)

Tip

Whenever you write or edit sentences, keep the subject and verb in mind. As you write, ask yourself these questions to keep yourself on track:

Subject: Who or what is the sentence about?

Verb: Which word shows an action or links the subject to a description?

Exercise 2

Copy each sentence onto your own sheet of paper and underline the verb(s) twice. Name the type of verb(s) used in the sentence in the space provided (LV, HV, or V).

1. The cat sounds ready to come back inside. _____

2. We have not eaten dinner yet. _____

3. It took four people to move the broken-down car. _____

4. The book was filled with notes from class. _____

5. We walked from room to room, inspecting for damages. _____

6. Harold was expecting a package in the mail. _____

7. The clothes still felt damp even though they had been through the dryer twice. _____

8. The teacher who runs the studio is often praised for his restoration work on old masterpieces. _____

Sentence Structure, Including Fragments and Run-ons

Now that you know what makes a complete sentence—a subject and a verb—you can use other parts of speech to build on this basic structure. Good writers use a variety of sentence structures to make their work more interesting. This section covers different

sentence structures that you can use to make longer, more complex sentences.

Sentence Patterns

Six basic subject-verb patterns can enhance your writing. A sample sentence is provided for each pattern. As you read each sentence, take note of where each part of the sentence falls. Notice that some sentence patterns use action verbs and others use linking verbs.

Subject–Verb

Computers (subject) *hum* (verb)

Subject–Linking Verb–Noun

Computers (subject) *are* (linking verb) tool (noun)

Subject–Linking Verb–Adjective

Computers (subject) *are* (linking verb) expensive (adjective)

Subject–Verb–Adverb

Computers (subject) *calculate* (verb) quickly (adverb)

Subject–Verb–Direct Object

When you write a sentence with a direct object (DO), make sure that the DO receives the action of the verb.

Sally (subject) rides (verb) a motorcycle (direct object)

Subject–Verb–Indirect Object–Direct Object

In this sentence structure, an indirect object explains *to whom* or *to what* the action is being done. The indirect object is a noun or pronoun, and it comes before the direct object in a sentence.

My coworker (subject) *gave* (verb) me (indirect object) the reports (direct object)

Exercise 3

Use what you have learned so far to bring variety in your writing. Use the following lines or your own sheet of paper to write six sentences that practice each basic sentence pattern. When you have finished, label each part of the sentence (S, V, LV, N, Adj, Adv, DO, IO).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Collaboration

Find an article in a newspaper, a magazine, or online

that interests you. Bring it to class or post it online. Then, looking at a classmate's article, identify one example of each part of a sentence (S, V, LV, N, Adj, Adv, DO, IO). Please share or post your results.

Fragments

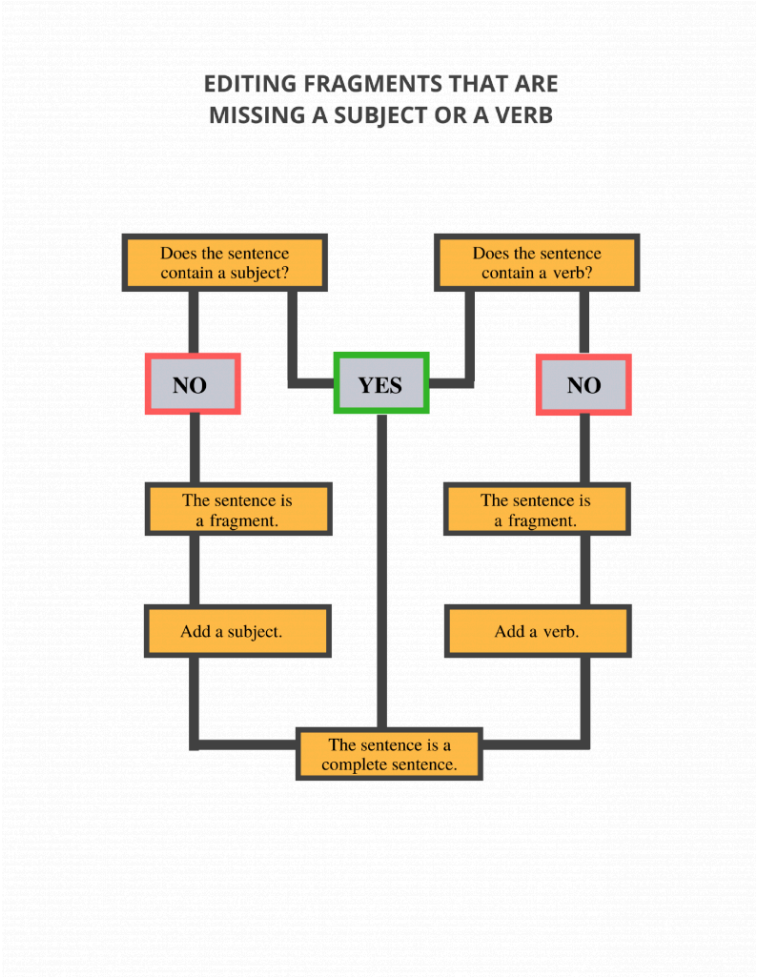
The sentences you have encountered so far have been independent clauses. As you look more closely at your past writing assignments, you may notice that some of your sentences are not complete. A sentence that is missing a subject or a verb is called a fragment. A fragment may include a description or may express part of an idea, but it does not express a complete thought.

Fragment: Children helping in the kitchen.

Complete sentence: Children helping in the kitchen **often make a mess**.

You can easily fix a fragment by adding the missing subject or verb. In the example, the sentence was missing a verb. Adding *often make a mess* creates an S-V-N sentence structure.

Figure 8.3 "Editing Fragments That Are Missing a Subject or a Verb



See whether you can identify what is missing in the following fragments.

Fragment: Told her about the broken vase.

Complete sentence: I told her about the broken vase.

Fragment: The store down on Main Street.

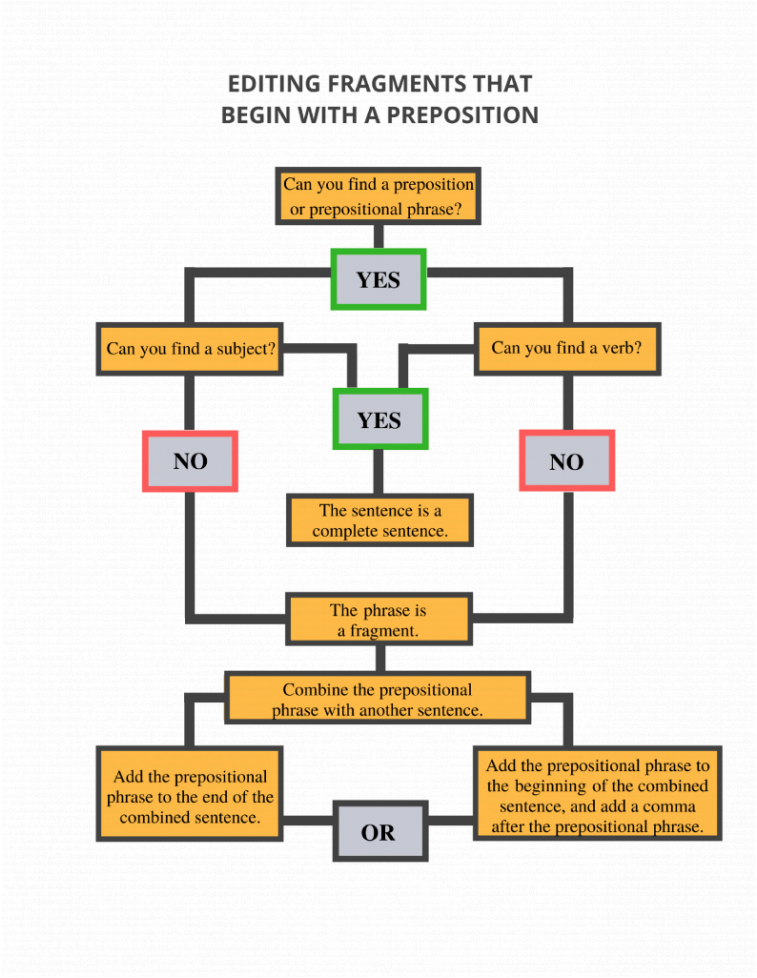
Complete sentence: The store down on Main Street **sells music**.

Common Sentence Errors

Fragments often occur because of some common error, such as starting a sentence with a preposition, a dependent word, an infinitive, or a gerund. If you use the six basic sentence patterns when you write, you should be able to avoid these errors and thus avoid writing fragments.

When you see a preposition, check to see that it is part of a sentence containing a subject and a verb. If it is not connected to a complete sentence, it is a fragment, and you will need to fix this type of fragment by combining it with another sentence. You can add the prepositional phrase to the end of the sentence. If you add it to the beginning of the other sentence, insert a comma after the prepositional phrase.

Figure 8.4 "Editing Fragments That Begin with a Preposition"



Example A

Incorrect: After walking over two miles. John remembered his wallet.

Correct: After walking over two miles, John remembered his wallet.

Correct: John remembered his wallet after walking over two miles.

Example B

Incorrect: The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner. When it was switched on.

Correct: When the vacuum cleaner was switched on, the dog growled.

Correct: The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner when it was switched on.

Clauses that start with a dependent word—such as *since*, *because*, *without*, or *unless*—are similar to prepositional phrases. Like prepositional phrases, these clauses can be fragments if they are not connected to an independent clause containing a subject and a verb. To fix the problem, you can add such a fragment to the beginning or end of a sentence. If the fragment is added at the beginning of a sentence, add a comma.

Incorrect: Because we lost power. The entire family overslept.

Correct: Because we lost power, the entire family overslept.

Correct: The entire family overslept because we lost power.

Incorrect: He has been seeing a physical therapist. Since his accident.

Correct: Since his accident, he has been seeing a physical therapist.

Correct: He has been seeing a physical therapist since the accident.

When you encounter a word ending in *–ing* in a sentence, identify whether or not this word is used as a verb in the sentence. You may also look for a helping verb. If the word is not used as a verb or if no helping verb is used with the *–ing* verb form, the verb is being used as a noun. An *–ing* verb form used as a noun is called a gerund.

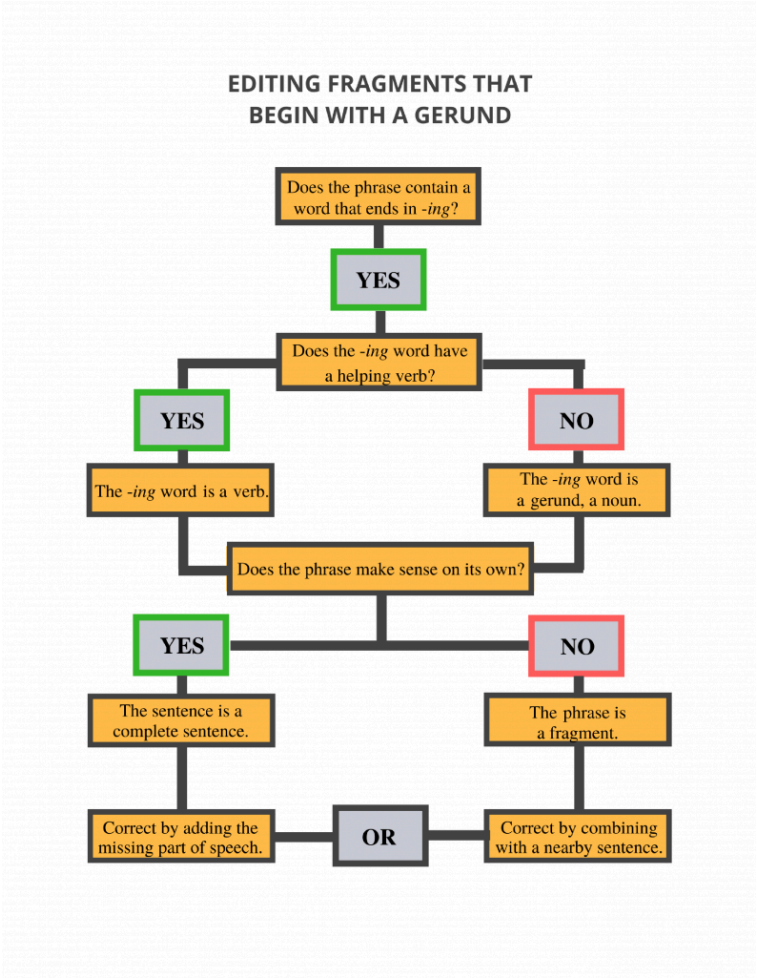
Verb: I *was* (helping verb) *working* (verb) on homework until midnight.

Noun: <u>Working</u> until midnight makes me tired the next morning.

Once you know whether the *–ing* word is acting as a noun or a verb, look at the rest of the sentence. Does the entire sentence

make sense on its own? If not, what you are looking at is a fragment. You will need to either add the parts of speech that are missing or combine the fragment with a nearby sentence.

Figure 8.5 "Editing Fragments That Begin with a Gerund"



Incorrect: Taking deep breaths. Saul prepared for his presentation.

Correct: Taking deep breaths, Saul prepared for his presentation.

Correct: Saul prepared for his presentation. He was taking deep breaths.

Incorrect: Congratulating the entire team. Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Correct: She was congratulating the entire team. Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Correct: Congratulating the entire team, Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Another error in sentence construction is a fragment that begins with an infinitive. An infinitive is a verb paired with the word *to*; for example, *to run*, *to write*, or *to reach*. Although infinitives are verbs, they can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. You can correct a fragment that begins with an infinitive by either combining it with another sentence or adding the parts of speech that are missing.

Incorrect: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes. To reach the one thousand mark.

Correct: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes to reach the one thousand mark.

Correct: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes. We wanted to reach the one thousand mark.

Exercise 4

Copy the following sentences onto your own sheet of paper and circle the fragments. Then combine the fragment with the independent clause to create a complete sentence.

1. Working without taking a break. We try to get as much work done as we can in an hour.

2. I needed to bring work home. In order to meet the deadline.

3. Unless the ground thaws before spring break. We won't be planting any tulips this year.

4. Turning the lights off after he was done in the kitchen. Robert tries to conserve energy whenever possible.

5. You'll find what you need if you look. On the shelf next to the potted plant.

6. To find the perfect apartment. Deidre scoured the classifieds each day.

External Links:

For more information about fragments, follow this **link** (https://tinyurl.com/yaggttd2).

Run-on Sentences

Just as short, incomplete sentences can be problematic, lengthy sentences can be problematic too. Sentences with two or more independent clauses that have been incorrectly combined are known as run-on sentences. A run-on sentence may be either a fused sentence or a comma splice.

Fused sentence: A family of foxes lived under our shed young foxes played all over the yard.

Comma splice: We looked outside, the kids were hopping on the trampoline.

When two complete sentences are combined into one without any punctuation, the result is a fused sentence. When two complete sentences are joined by a comma, the result is a comma splice. Both errors can easily be fixed.

Punctuation

One way to correct run-on sentences is to correct the punctuation. For example, adding a period will correct the run-on by creating two separate sentences.

Run-on: There were no seats left, we had to stand in the back.

Correct: There were no seats left. We had to stand in the back.

Using a semicolon between the two complete sentences will also correct the error. A semicolon allows you to keep the two closely related ideas together in one sentence. When you punctuate with a semicolon, make sure that both parts of the sentence are independent clauses.

External Links:

For more information on semicolons, see **Capitalize Proper Nouns**.

Run-on: The accident closed both lanes of traffic we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

Complete sentence: The accident closed both lanes of traffic; we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

When you use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses, you may wish to add a transition word to show the connection between the two thoughts. After the semicolon, add the transition word and follow it with a comma.

Run-on: The project was put on hold we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Complete sentence: The project was put on hold; however, we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Coordinating Conjunctions

You can also fix run-on sentences by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction. A coordinating conjunction acts as a link between two independent clauses.

Tip

These are the seven coordinating conjunctions that you can use: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. Use these words appropriately when you want to link the two independent clauses. The acronym FANBOYS will help you remember this group of coordinating conjunctions.

Run-on: The new printer was installed, no one knew how to use it.

Complete sentence: The new printer was installed, but no one knew how to use it.

Dependent Words

Adding dependent words is another way to link independent clauses. Like the coordinating conjunctions, dependent words show a relationship between two independent clauses.

Run-on: We took the elevator, the others still got there before us.

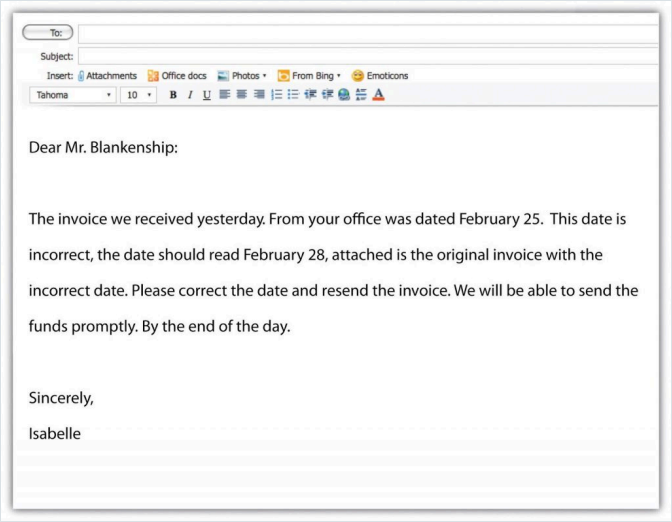
Complete sentence: Although we took the elevator, the others got there before us.

Run-on: Cobwebs covered the furniture, the room hadn't been used in years.

Complete sentence: Cobwebs covered the furniture **because** the room hadn't been used in years.

Writing at Work

Figure 8.6 "Sample e-mail"



Isabelle's e-mail opens with two fragments and two run-on sentences containing comma splices. The e-mail ends with another fragment. What effect would this e-mail have on Mr. Blankenship or other readers? Mr. Blankenship or other readers may not think highly of Isaebelle's communication skills or—worse—may not understand the message at all!

Communications written in precise, complete sentences are not only more professional but also easier to understand. Before you hit the "send" button, read your e-mail carefully to make sure that the sentences are

complete, are not run together, and are correctly punctuated.

Exercise 5

A reader can get lost or lose interest in material that is too dense and rambling. Use what you have learned about run-on sentences to correct the following passages:

1. The report is due on Wednesday but we're flying back from Miami that morning. I told the project manager that we would be able to get the report to her later that day she suggested that we come back a day early to get the report done and I told her we had meetings until our flight took off. We e-mailed our contact who said that they would check with his boss, she said that the project could afford a delay as long as they wouldn't have to make any edits or changes to the file our new deadline is next Friday.

2. Anna tried getting a reservation at the restaurant, but when she called they said that there was a waiting list so she put our names down on the list when the day of our reservation arrived we only had to wait thirty minutes because a table opened up unexpectedly which was good because we were able to catch a movie after dinner in the time we'd expected to wait to be seated.

3. Without a doubt, my favorite artist is Leonardo da Vinci, not because of his paintings but because of his fascinating designs, models, and sketches, including plans for scuba gear, a flying machine, and a life-size mechanical lion that actually walked and moved its head. His paintings are beautiful too, especially when you see the computer enhanced versions researchers use a variety of methods to discover and enhance the paintings' original colors, the result of which are stunningly vibrant and yet delicate displays of the man's genius.

Key Takeaways

- A sentence is complete when it contains both a subject and verb. A complete sentence makes sense on its own.
- Every sentence must have a subject, which usually appears at the beginning of the sentence. A subject may be a noun (a person, place, or thing) or a pronoun.
- A prepositional phrase describes, or modifies, another word in the sentence but cannot be the subject of a sentence.
- Variety in sentence structure and length improves writing by making it more interesting and more

complex.

- Fragments and run-on sentences are two common errors in sentence construction.
- Fragments can be corrected by adding a missing subject or verb. Fragments that begin with a preposition or a dependent word can be corrected by combining the fragment with another sentence.
- Run-on sentences can be corrected by adding appropriate punctuation or adding a coordinating conjunction.

Writing Application

Using the six basic sentence structures, write one of the following:

1. A work e-mail to a coworker about a presentation.
2. A business letter to a potential employer.
3. A status report about your current project.
4. A job description for your résumé.

External Links:

Choose this **link** for more information on how to correct run-on sentences.

2. Subject-verb agreement

In the workplace, you want to present a professional image. Your outfit or suit says something about you when meeting face-to-face, and your writing represents you in your absence. Grammatical mistakes in your writing or even in speaking make a negative impression on coworkers, clients, and potential employers. Subject-verb agreement is one of the most common errors that people make. Having a solid understanding of this concept is critical when making a good impression, and it will help ensure that your ideas are communicated clearly.

Agreement

Agreement in speech and in writing refers to the proper grammatical match between words and phrases. Parts of sentences must agree, or correspond with other parts, in number, person, case, and gender.

- **Number**. All parts must match in singular or plural forms.
- **Person**. All parts must match in first person (*I*), second person (*you*), or third person (*he*, *she*, *it*, *they*) forms.
- **Case**. All parts must match in subjective (*I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *they*, *we*), objective (*me*, *her*, *him*, *them*, *us*), or possessive (*my*, *mine*, *your*, *yours*, *his*, *her*, *hers*, *their*, *theirs*, *our*, *ours*) forms. For more information on pronoun case agreement, see **Pronoun Agreement**.
- **Gende**r. All parts must match in male or female forms.

Subject-verb agreement describes the proper match between subjects and verbs.

Because subjects and verbs are either singular or plural, the subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must agree with each other in number. That is, a singular subject belongs with a singular verb form, and a plural subject belongs with a plural verb

form. For more information on subjects and verbs, see **Sentence Writing**.

Singular: The cat *jumps* over the fence.

Plural: The cats *jump* over the fence.

Regular Verbs

Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern. For example, in the third person singular, regular verbs always end in -s. Other forms of regular verbs do not end in -s. Study the following regular verb forms in the present tense.

Figure 8.7 "Regular Verb Forms in the Present Tense"

	Singular Form	**Plural Form**
First Person	I live	We live
Second Person	You live	You live
Third Person	He/She/It lives	They live

Tip

Add an –*es* to the third person singular form of regular verbs that end in –*sh*, -*x*, –*ch*, and -*s*. (I wish/He wishes, I fix/She fixes, I watch/It watches, I kiss/He kisses.)

Singular: I *read* every day.

Plural: We *read* every day.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the first person singular and the first person plural.

Singular: You *stretch* before you go to bed.

Plural: You *stretch* before every game.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the second person singular and the second person plural. In the singular form, the pronoun *you* refers to one person. In the plural form, the pronoun *you* refers to a group of people, such as a team.

Singular: My mother *walks* to work every morning.

In this sentence, the subject is *mother*. Because the sentence only refers to one mother, the subject is singular. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person singular form.

Plural: My friends *like* the same music as I do.

In this sentence, the subject is *friends*. Because this subject refers to more than one person, the subject is plural. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person plural form.

Tip

Many singular subjects can be made plural by adding an -s. Most regular verbs in the present tense end with an –s in the third person singular. This does not make the verbs plural.

Singular subject, singular verb: The cat*races* across the yard.

Plural subject, plural verb: The cats*race* across the yard.

Exercise 6

On your own sheet of paper, write the correct verb form for each of the following sentences.

1. I (brush/brushes) my teeth twice a day.
2. You (wear/wears) the same shoes every time we go out.
3. He (kick/kicks) the soccer ball into the goal.
4. She (watch/watches) foreign films.
5. Catherine (hide/hides) behind the door.
6. We (want/wants) to have dinner with you.
7. You (work/works) together to finish the project.
8. They (need/needs) to score another point to win the game.
9. It (eat/eats) four times a day.
10. David (fix/fixes) his own motorcycle.

Irregular Verbs

Not all verbs follow a predictable pattern. These verbs are called irregular verbs. Some of the most common irregular verbs are *be*, *have*, and *do*. Learn the forms of these verbs in the present tense to avoid errors in subject-verb agreement.

Be

Study the different forms of the verb *to be* in the present tense.

Figure 8.8 "Forms of To Be Present Tense"

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I am	We are
Second Person	You are	You are
Third Person	He/She/It is	They are

Have

Study the different forms of the verb *to have* in the present tense.

Figure 8.9 "Forms of To Have Present Tense"

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I have	We have
Second Person	You have	You have
Third Person	He/She/It has	They have

Do

Study the different forms of the verb *to do* in the present tense.

Figure 8.10 "Forms of To Do Present Tense"

	Singular Form	**Plural Form**
First Person	I do	We do
Second Person	You do	You do
Third person	He/She/It does	They do

Exercise 7

Complete the following sentences by writing the correct present tense form of *be*, *have*, or *do*. Use your own sheet of paper to complete this exercise.

1. I _____ sure that you will succeed.
2. They _____ front-row tickets to the show.
3. He _____ a great Elvis impersonation.
4. We _____ so excited to meet you in person!
5. She _____ a fever and a sore throat.
6. You _____ not know what you are talking about.
7. You _____ all going to pass this class.
8. She _____ not going to like that.
9. It _____ appear to be the right size.
10. They _____ ready to take this job seriously.

Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

Errors in subject-verb agreement may occur when

- a sentence contains a compound subject;
- the subject of the sentence is separate from the verb;
- the subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun, such as *anyone* or *everyone*;
- the subject of the sentence is a collective noun, such as *team* or *organization*;
- the subject appears after the verb.

Recognizing the sources of common errors in subject-verb agreement will help you avoid these errors in your writing. This section covers the subject-verb agreement errors in more detail.

Compound Subjects

A compound subject is formed by two or more nouns and the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *or*, or *nor*. A compound subject can be made of singular subjects, plural subjects, or a combination of singular and plural subjects.

Compound subjects combined with *and* take a plural verb form.

Two singular subjects: Alicia and Miguel*ride* their bikes to the beach.

Two plural subjects: The girls and the boys*ride* their bikes to the beach.

Singular and plural subjects: Alicia and the boys*ride* their bikes to the beach.

Compound subjects combined with *or* and *nor* are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb.

Two singular subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor Rianna*wants* to eat at that restaurant.

Two plural subjects: Neither the kids nor the adults*want* to eat at that restaurant.

Singular and plural subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor the kids*want* to eat at that restaurant.

Plural and singular subjects: Neither the kids nor Elizabeth*wants* to eat at that restaurant.

Two singular subjects: Either you or Jason*takes* the furniture out of the garage.

Two plural subjects: Either you or the twins*take* the furniture out of the garage.

Singular and plural subjects: Either Jason or the twins*take* the furniture out of the garage.

Plural and singular subjects: Either the twins or Jason*takes* the furniture out of the garage.

Tip

If you can substitute the word *they* for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third person plural verb form.

Separation of Subjects and Verbs

As you read or write, you may come across a sentence that contains a phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Often, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses add more information to the sentence and appear between the subject and the verb. However, the subject and the verb must still agree.

If you have trouble finding the subject and verb, cross out or ignore the phrases and clauses that begin with prepositions or dependent words. The subject of a sentence will never be in a prepositional phrase or dependent clause.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a prepositional phrase:

The students with the best grades *win* the academic awards.

The puppy under the table *is* my favorite.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a dependent clause:

The car that I bought *has* power steering and a sunroof.

The representatives who are courteous *sell* the most tickets.

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to an unspecified person, thing, or number. When an indefinite pronoun serves as the subject of a sentence, you will often use a singular verb form.However, keep in mind that exceptions arise. Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form. To determine whether to use a singular or plural verb with an indefinite pronoun, consider the noun that the pronoun would refer to. If the noun is plural, then use a plural verb with the indefinite pronoun. View the chart to see a list of common indefinite pronouns and the verb forms they agree with.

Figure 8.11 “Common Indefinite Pronouns”

Indefinite Pronouns That Always Take a Singular Verb	Indefinite Pronouns That Can Take a Singular or Plural Verb
anybody, anyone, anything	All
each	Any
everybody, everyone, everything	None
much	Some
many	
nobody, no one, nothing	
somebody, someone, something	

Singular: Everybody in the kitchen *sings* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *everybody* takes a singular verb form because *everybody* refers to a group performing the same action as a single unit.

Plural: All the people in the kitchen *sing* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *all* takes a plural verb form because *all* refers to the plural noun *people*. Because *people* is plural, *all* is plural.

Singular: All the cake *is* on the floor.

In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun *all* takes a singular verb form because *all* refers to the singular noun *cake*. Because *cake* is singular, *all* is singular.

Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person,

place, or thing and considers those people, places, or things one singular unit. Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb. Some commonly used collective nouns are *group*, *team*, *army*, *flock*, *family*, and *class*.

Singular: The class*is* going on a field trip.

In this sentence, *class* is a collective noun. Although the class consists of many students, the class is treated as a singular unit and requires a singular verb form.

The Subject Follows the Verb

You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. In other words, the subject of the sentence may not appear where you expect it to appear. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb.

Here or There

In sentences that begin with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb.

Here *is* my wallet!

There *are* thirty dolphins in the water.

If you have trouble identifying the subject and the verb in sentences that start with *here* or *there*; it may help to reverse the order of the sentence so the subject comes first.

My wallet*is* here!

Thirty dolphins*are* in the water.

Questions

When you ask questions, a question word (*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, or *how*) appears first. The verb and then the subject follow.

Who *are* the people you are related to?

When *am* I going to go to the grocery store?

Tip

If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in questions, try answering the question being asked.

When *am* I going to the grocery store? I *am* going to the grocery store tonight!

Exercise 8

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following sentences. If there are no errors in subject-verb agreement, write OK. Copy the corrected sentence or the word OK on your own sheet of notebook paper.

1. My dog and cats chases each other all the time.
2. The books that are in my library is the best I have ever read.
3. Everyone are going to the concert except me.
4. My family are moving to California.
5. Here is the lake I told you about.
6. There is the newspapers I was supposed to deliver.
7. Which room is bigger?
8. When are the movie going to start?
9. My sister and brother cleans up after themselves.

10. Some of the clothes is packed away in the attic.

Exercise 9

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following paragraph. Copy the paragraph on a piece of notebook paper and make corrections.

Dear Hiring Manager,

I feels that I am the ideal candidate for the receptionist position at your company. I has three years of experience as a receptionist in a company that is similar to yours. My phone skills and written communication is excellent. These skills, and others that I have learned on the job, helps me understand that every person in a company helps make the business a success. At my current job, the team always say that I am very helpful. Everyone appreciate when I go the extra mile to get the job done right. My current employer and coworkers feels that I am an asset to the team. I is efficient and organized. Is there any other details about me that you would like to know? If so, please contact me. Here are my résumé. You can reach me by e-mail or phone. I looks forward to speaking with you in person.

Thanks,

Felicia Fellini

Writing at Work

Figure 8.12 "Advertisement"

Terra Services are dedicated to serving our clients' needs. We settles for nothing less than high quality work, delivered on time. The next time you needs assistance getting your project off the ground, contact Terra Services, where everybody know how important it is that you get the job done right.

Imagine that you are a prospective client and that you saw this ad online. Would you call Terra Services to handle your next project? Probably not! Mistakes in subject-verb agreement can cost a company business. Paying careful attention to grammatical details ensures professionalism that clients will recognize and respect.

Key Takeaways

- Parts of sentences must agree in number, person, case, and gender.
- A verb must always agree with its subject in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb; a plural subject requires a plural verb.
- Irregular verbs do not follow a predictable pattern in their singular and plural forms. Common irregular verbs are *be*, *have*, and *do*.
- A compound subject is formed when two or more nouns are joined by the words *and*, *or*, or *nor*.
- In some sentences, the subject and verb may be separated by a phrase or clause, but the verb must still agree with the subject.
- Indefinite pronouns, such as *anyone*, *each*, *everyone*, *many*, *no one*, and *something*, refer to unspecified people or objects. Most indefinite pronouns are singular.
- A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and treats those people, places, or things one singular unit. Collective nouns require singular verbs.
- In sentences that begin with *here* and *there*, the subject follows the verb.
- In questions, the subject follows the verb.

Writing Application

Use your knowledge of subject-verb agreement to write one of the following:

1. An advertisement for a potential company
2. A memo to all employees of a particular company
3. A cover letter describing your qualifications to a potential employer
4. Be sure to include at least the following:
5. One collective noun
6. One irregular verb
7. One question

3. Verb tense

Suppose you must give an oral presentation about what you did last summer. How do you make it clear that you are talking about the past and not about the present or the future? Using the correct verb tense can help you do this.

It is important to use the proper verb tense. Otherwise, your listener might judge you harshly. Mistakes in tense often leave a listener or reader with a negative impression.

Regular Verbs

Verbs indicate actions or states of being in the past, present,

or future using tenses. Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from the present to past tense. For example, to form a past-tense or past-participle verb form, add *–ed* or *-d* to the end of a verb. You can avoid mistakes by understanding this basic pattern.

Verb tense identifies the time of action described in a sentence. Verbs take different forms to indicate different tenses. Verb tenses indicate

- an action or state of being in the present,
- an action or state of being in the past,
- an action or state of being in the future.

Helping verbs, such as *be* and *have*, also work to create verb tenses, such as the future tense.

Present Tense: Time*walks* to the store. (Singular subject)

Present Tense: Sue and Kimmy*walk* to the store. (Plural subject)

Past Tense: Yesterday, they*walked* to the store to buy some bread. (Singular subject)

Exercise 10

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tenses. Write the corrected sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. The Dust Bowl (is, was, will be) a name given to a period of very destructive dust storms that occurred in the United States during the 1930s.

2. Historians today (consider, considered, will consider)

The Dust Bowl to be one of the worst weather of events in American history.

3. The Dust Bowl mostly (affects, affected, will affect) the states of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.

4. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to occur in these dry regions, but not to the devastating degree of the 1930s.

5. The dust storms during The Dust Bowl (cause, caused, will cause) irreparable damage to farms and the environment for a period of several years.

6. When early settlers (move, moved, will move) into this area, they (remove, removed, will remove) the natural prairie grasses in order to plant crops and graze their cattle.

7. They did not (realize, realized, will realize) that the grasses kept the soil in place.

8. There (is, was, will be) also a severe drought that (affects, affected, will affect) the region.

9. The worst dust storm (happens, happened, will happen) on April 14, 1935, a day called Black Sunday.

10. The Dust Bowl era finally came to end in 1939 when the rains (arrive, arrived, will arrive).

11. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to affect the region, but hopefully they will not be as destructive as the storms of the 1930s.

Irregular Verbs

The past tense of irregular verbs is not formed using the patterns that regular verbs follow.

Here we consider using irregular verbs.

Present Tense: Lauren *keeps* all her letters.

Past Tense: Lauren *kept* all her letters.

Future Tense: Lauren *will keep* all her letters.

Exercise 11

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the irregular verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tense. Copy the corrected sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Marina finally (forgived, forgave, will forgive) her sister for snooping around her room.

2. The house (shook, shaked, shakes) as the airplane rumbled overhead.

3. I (buyed, bought, buy) several items of clothing at the thrift store on Wednesday.

4. She (put, putted, puts) the lotion in her shopping basket and proceeded to the checkout

line.

5. The prized goose (layed, laid, lay) several golden eggs last night.

6. Mr. Batista (teached, taught, taughted) the class how to use correct punctuation.

7. I (drink, drank, will drink) several glasses of sparkling cider instead of champagne on

New Year's Eve next year.

8. Although Hector (growed, grew, grows) three inches in one year, we still called him "Little Hector."

9. Yesterday our tour guide (lead, led, will lead) us through the maze of people in Times Square.

10. The rock band (burst, bursted, bursts) onto the music scene with its catchy songs.

Exercise 12

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence using the correct form of the verb tense shown below.

1. Throw (past)
2. Paint (simple present)
3. Smile (future)
4. Tell (past)
5. Share (simple present)

Maintaining Consistent Verb Tense

Consistent verb tense means the same verb tense is used throughout a sentence or a paragraph. As you write and revise, it is important to use the same verb tense consistently and to avoid shifting from one tense to another unless there is a good reason for the tense shift. In the following box, see whether you notice the

difference between a sentence with consistent tense and one with inconsistent tense.

Inconsistent tense:

The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.

Consistent tense:

The crowd *started* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line.

Consistent tense:

The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approaches* the finish line.

Tip

In some cases, clear communication will call for different tenses. Look at the following example:

When I was a teenager, I *wanted* to be a firefighter, but not I *am studying* computer science.

If the time frame for each action or state is different, a tense shift is appropriate.

Exercise 13

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the inconsistent

verb tense. Copy the corrected paragraph onto your own sheet of paper.

In the Middle Ages, most people lived in villages and work as agricultural laborers, or peasants. Every village has a "lord," and the peasants worked on his land. Much of what they produce go to the lord and his family. What little food was leftover goes to support the peasants' families. In return for their labor, the lord offers them protection. A peasant's day usually began before sunrise and involves long hours of backbreaking work, which includes plowing the land, planting seeds, and cutting crops for harvesting. The working life of a peasant in the Middle Ages is usually demanding and exhausting.

Writing at Work

Read the following excerpt from a work e-mail:

Figure 8.12 "Work e-mail,"

I would like to highlight an important concern that comes up after our meeting last week. During the meeting, we agree to conduct a series of interviews over the next several months in which we hired new customer service representatives. Before we do that, however, I would like to review your experiences with the Customer Relationship Management Program. Please suggest a convenient time next week for us to meet so that we can discuss this important matter.

The inconsistent tense in the e-mail will very likely distract the reader from its overall point. Most likely, your coworkers will not correct your verb tenses or call attention to grammatical errors, but it is important to keep in mind that errors such as these do have a subtle negative impact in the workplace.

Key Takeaways

Verb tense helps you express when an event takes place.

Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from present to past tense.

Irregular verbs do not follow regular, predictable patterns when shifting from present to past tense.

Using consistent verb tense is a key element to effective writing.

Writing Application

Tell a family story. You likely have several family stories to choose from, but pick the one that you find most interesting to write about. Use as many details as you can in the telling. As you write and proofread, make sure your all your verbs are correct and the tenses are consistent.

External Links:

Follow this **link** (https://tinyurl.com/y7t629xu) for more information concerning verbs.

4. Capitalization

Text messages, casual e-mails, and instant messages often ignore the rules of capitalization. In fact, it can seem unnecessary to capitalize in these contexts. In other, more formal forms of communication, however, knowing the basic rules of capitalization and using capitalization correctly gives the reader the impression that you choose your words carefully and care about the ideas you are conveying.

Capitalize the First Word of a Sentence

Incorrect: the museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

Correct: The museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

Incorrect: cooking can be therapeutic.

Correct: Cooking can be therapeutic.

Capitalize Proper Nouns

Proper nouns—the names of specific people, places, objects, streets, buildings, events, or titles of individuals—are always capitalized.

Incorrect: He grew up in harlem, new york.

Correct: He grew up in Harlem, New York.

Incorrect: The sears tower in chicago has a new name.

Correct: The Sears Tower in Chicago has a new name.

Tip

Always capitalize nationalities, races, languages, and religions. For example, American, African American, Hispanic, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on.

Do not capitalize nouns for people, places, things, streets, buildings, events, and titles when the noun is used in general or common way. See the following chart for the difference between proper nouns and common nouns.

Figure 8.13 "Common and Proper Nouns,"

Common Noun	Proper Noun
museum	The Art Institute of Chicago
theater	Apollo Theater
country	Malaysia
uncle	Uncle Javier
doctor	Dr. Jackson
book	*Pride and Prejudice*
college	Smith College
war	the Spanish-American War
historical event	The Renaissance

Exercise 14

On your own sheet of paper, write five proper nouns for each common noun that is listed. The first one has been done for you.

Common noun: river

1. Nile River

2.

3.

Common noun: musician

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Common noun: magazine

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Capitalize Days of the Week, Months of the Year, and Holidays

Incorrect: On wednesday, I will be traveling to Austin for a music festival.

Correct: On Wednesday, I will be traveling to Austin for a music festival.

Incorrect: The fourth of july is my favorite holiday.

Correct: The Fourth of July is my favorite holiday.

Capitalize Titles

Incorrect: The play, *fences*, by August Wilson is one of my favorites.

Correct: The play, *Fences*, by August Wilson is one of my favorites.

Incorrect: The president of the united states will be speaking at my university.

Correct: The President of the United States will be speaking at my university.

Tip

Computer-related words such as "Internet" and "World Wide Web" are usually capitalized; however, "e-mail" and "online" are never capitalized.

Exercise 15

Edit the following sentences by correcting the capitalization of the titles or names.

1. The prince of england enjoys playing polo.

2. “Ode to a nightingale” is a sad poem.

3. My sister loves to read magazines such as the new yorker.

4. *The house on Mango street* is an excellent novel written by Sandra Cisneros.

5. My physician, dr. alvarez, always makes me feel comfortable in her office.

Exercise 16

Edit the following paragraphs by correcting the capitalization.

david grann's *the lost City of Z* mimics the snake-like winding of the amazon River. The three distinct Stories that are introduced are like twists in the River. First, the Author describes his own journey to the amazon in the present day, which is contrasted by an account of percy fawcett's voyage in 1925 and a depiction of James Lynch's expedition in 1996. Where does the river lead these explorers? the answer is one that both the Author and the reader are hungry to discover.

The first lines of the preface pull the reader in immediately because we know the author, david grann, is lost in the amazon. It is a compelling beginning not only because its thrilling but also because this is a true account of grann's experience. grann has dropped the reader smack in the middle of his conflict by admitting the recklessness of his decision to come to this place. the suspense is further perpetuated by his unnerving observation that he always considered himself a Neutral Witness, never getting personally involved in his stories, a notion that is swiftly contradicted in the opening pages, as the reader can clearly perceive that he is in a dire predicament—and frighteningly involved.

Writing at Work

Did you know that, if you use all capital letters to convey a message, the capital letters come across like shouting? In addition, all capital letters are actually more difficult to read and may annoy the reader. To avoid "shouting" at or annoying your reader, follow the rules of capitalization and find other ways to emphasize your point.

Key Takeaways

Learning and applying the basic rules of capitalization is a fundamental aspect of good writing.

Identifying and correcting errors in capitalization is an important writing skill.

Writing Application

Write a one-page biography. Make sure to identify people, places, and dates and use capitalization correctly.

External Links:

Follow this **link** (https://tinyurl.com/y8bnxecf) for more information regarding capitalization.

5. Pronouns

If there were no pronouns, all types of writing would be quite tedious to read. We would soon be frustrated by reading sentences like *Bob said that Bob was tired* or *Christina told the class that Christina received an* A. Pronouns help a writer avoid constant repetition. Knowing just how pronouns work is an important aspect of clear and concise writing.

Pronoun Agreement

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of (or refers back to) a noun or another pronoun. The word or words a pronoun refers to is called the antecedent of the pronoun.

1. *Lani* complained that *she* was exhausted.

She refers to *Lani*.

Lani is the antecedent of *she*.

2. *Jeremy* left the party early, so I did not see *him* until Monday at work.

Him refers to Jeremy.

Jeremy is the antecedent of *him*.

3. *Crina and Rosalie* have been best friends ever since *they* were freshman in high school.

They refers to *Crina and Rosalie*.

Crina and Rosalie is the antecedent of *they*.

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun and the antecedent do not match or agree with each other. There are several types of pronoun agreement.

Agreement in Number

If the pronoun takes the place of or refers to a singular noun, the pronoun must also be singular.

Incorrect: If a *student* (sing.) wants to return a book to the bookstore, *they* (plur.) must have a receipt.

Correct: If a *student* (sing.) wants to return a book to the bookstore, *he or she* (sing.) must have a receipt.

*If it seems too wordy to use *he or she*, change the antecedent to a plural noun.

Correct: If *students* (plur.) want to return a book to the bookstore, *they* (plur.) must have a receipt.

Agreement in Person

Figure 8.14 "Singular and Plural Pronouns"

	Singular Pronouns			**Plural Pronouns**		
First Person	I	me	my (mine)	we	us	our (ours)
Second Person	you	you	your (yours)	you	you	your (your)
Third Person	he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her, its	they	them	their (theirs)

If you use a consistent person, your reader is less likely to be confused.

Incorrect: When a *person* (3rd) goes to a restaurant, *you* (2nd) should leave a tip.

Correct: When a *person* (3rd) goes to a restaurant, *he or she* (3rd) should leave a tip.

Correct: When *we* (1st) go to a restaurant, *I should* (1st) should leave a tip.

Exercise 17

Edit the following paragraph by correcting pronoun agreement errors in number and person.

Over spring break I visited my older cousin, Diana, and they took me to a butterfly exhibit at a museum. Diana and I have been close ever since she was young. Our mothers are twin sisters, and she is inseparable! Diana knows how much I love butterflies, so it was their special present to me. I have a soft spot for caterpillars too. I love them because something about the way it transforms is so interesting to me. One summer my grandmother gave me a butterfly growing kit, and you got to see the entire life cycle of five Painted Lady butterflies. I even got to set it free. So when my cousin said they wanted to take me to the butterfly exhibit, I was really excited!

Indefinite Pronouns and Agreement

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person or thing and are usually singular. Note that a pronoun that refers to an indefinite singular pronoun should also be singular. The following are some common indefinite pronouns.

Figure 8.15 "Common Indefinite Pronouns"

Common Indefinite Pronouns				
all	each one	few	nothing	several
any	each other	many	one	some
anybody	either	neither	one another	somebody
anything	everybody	nobody	oneself	someone
both	everyone	none	other	something
each	everything	no one	others	anyone

Indefinite pronoun agreement

Incorrect: *Everyone* (sing.) should do what *they* (plur.) can to help.

Correct: *Everyone* (sing.) should do what *he or she* (sing.) can to help.

Incorrect: *Someone* (sing.) left *their* (plur.) backpack in the library.

Correct: *Someone* (sing.) left *his or her* (sing.) backpack in the library.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns suggest more than one person but are usually considered singular. Look over the following examples of collective nouns.

Figure 8.16 "Common Collective Nouns"

Common Collective Nouns		
audience	faculty	public
band	family	school
class	government	society
committee	group	team
company	jury	tribe

Collective noun agreement

Incorrect: Lara's *company* (sing.) will have *their* (plur.) annual picnic next week.

Correct: Lara's *company* (sing.) will have *its* (sing.) annual picnic next week.

Exercise 18

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct pronoun. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper. Then circle the noun the pronoun replaces.

1. In the current economy, nobody wants to waste _____ money on frivolous things.

2. If anybody chooses to go to medical school, _____ must be prepared to work long hours.

3. The plumbing crew did _____ best to repair the broken pipes before the next ice storm.

4. If someone is rude to you, try giving _____ a smile in return.

5. My family has _____ faults, but I still love them no matter what.

6. The school of education plans to train _____ students to be literacy tutors.

7. The commencement speaker said that each student has a responsibility toward _____.

8. My mother's singing group has _____ rehearsals on Thursday evenings.

9. No one should suffer _____ pains alone.

10. I thought the flock of birds lost _____ way in the storm.

Subject and Object Pronouns

Subject pronouns function as subjects in a sentence. Object pronouns function as the object of a verb or of a preposition.

Figure 8.17 "Singular and Plural Pronouns"

Singular Pronouns		**Plural Pronouns**	
Subject	**Object**	**Subject**	**Object**
I	me	we	us
you	you	you	you
he, she, it	him, her, it	they	them

The following sentences show pronouns as subjects:

She loves the Blue Ridge Mountains in the fall.

Every summer, *they* picked up litter from national parks.

The following sentences show pronouns as objects:

Marie leaned over and kissed *him*.

Jane moved *it* to the corner.

Tip

Note that a pronoun can also be the object of a preposition.

Near *them*, the children played.

My mother stood between *us*.

The pronouns *us* and *them* are objects of the prepositions *near* and *between*. They answer the questions *near* whom? And *between* whom?

Compound subject pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the subject of the sentence.

The following sentences show pronouns with compound subjects:

Incorrect: *Me and Harriet* visited the Grand Canyon last summer.

Correct: *Harriet and I* visited the Grand Canyon last summer.

Correct: Jenna accompanied *Harriet and me* on our trip.

Tip

Note that object pronouns are never used in the subject position. One way to remember this rule is to remove the other subject in a compound subject, leave only the pronoun, and see whether the sentence makes sense.

For example, *Me visited the Grand Canyon last summer* sounds immediately incorrect.

Compound object pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the object of the sentence.

Incorrect: I have a good feeling about *Janice and I*.

Correct: I have a good feeling about *Janice and me*.

Tip

It is correct to write *Janice and me*, as opposed to *me and Janice*. Just remember it is more polite to refer to yourself last.

Writing at Work

In casual conversation, people sometimes mix up subject and object pronouns. For instance, you might say, "Me and Donnie went to a movie last night." However, when you are writing or speaking at work or in any other formal situation, you need to remember the distinctions between subject and object pronouns and be able to correct yourself. These subtle grammar corrections will enhance your professional image and reputation.

Exercise 19

Revise the following sentences in which the subject and object pronouns are used incorrectly. Copy the revised sentence onto your own sheet of paper. Write a C for each sentence that is correct.

1. Meera and me enjoy doing yoga together on Sundays.

2. She and him have decided to sell their house.

3. Between you and I, I do not think Jeffrey will win the election.

4. Us and our friends have game night the first Thursday of every month.

5. They and I met while on vacation in Mexico.

6. Napping on the beach never gets boring for Alice and I.

7. New Year's Eve is not a good time for she and I to have a serious talk.

8. You exercise much more often than me.

9. I am going to the comedy club with Yolanda and she.

10. The cooking instructor taught her and me a lot.

Who versus Whom

Who or *whoever* is always the subject of a verb. Use *who* or *whoever* when the pronoun performs the action indicated by the verb.

Who won the marathon last Tuesday?

I wonder *who* came up with that terrible idea!

On the other hand, *whom* and *whomever* serve as objects. They are used when the pronoun does *not* perform an action. Use *whom* or *whomever* when the pronoun is the direct object of a verb or the object of a preposition.

Whom did Frank marry the third time? (direct object of verb)

From *whom* did you buy that old record player? (object of preposition)

Tip

If you are having trouble deciding when to use *who* and *whom*, try this trick. Take the following sentence:

Who/Whom do I consider my best friend?

Reorder the sentence in your head, using either *he* or *him* in place of *who* or *whom*.

I consider *him* my best friend.

I consider *he* my best friend.

Which sentence sounds better? The first one, of course. So the trick is, if you can use *him*, you should use *whom*.

Exercise 20

Complete the following sentences by adding *who* or *whom*. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. _____ hit the home run?
2. I remember _____ won the Academy Award for Best Actor last year.
3. To _____ is the letter addressed?

4. I have no idea _____ left the iron on, but I am going to find out.

5. _____ are you going to recommend for the internship?

6. With _____ are you going to Hawaii?

7. No one knew _____ the famous actor was.

8. _____ in the office knows how to fix the copy machine?

9. From _____ did you get the concert tickets?

10. No one knew_____ ate the cake mom was saving.

Key Takeaways

Pronouns and their antecedents need to agree in number and person.

Most indefinite pronouns are singular.

Collective nouns are usually singular.

Pronouns can function as subjects or objects.

Subject pronouns are never used as objects, and object pronouns are never used as subjects.

Who serves as a subject of a verb.

Whom serves as an object of a sentence or the object of a preposition.

Writing Application

Write about what makes an ideal marriage or long-term relationship. Provide specific details to back your assertions. After you have written a few paragraphs, go back and proofread your paper for correct pronoun usage.

6. Adjectives and adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are descriptive words that bring your writing to life.

Adjectives and Adverbs

An adjective is a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. It often answers questions such as *which one*, *what kind*, or *how many*?

1. The *green* sweater belongs to Iris.
2. She looks *beautiful*.

In sentence 1, the adjective *green* describes the noun *sweater*.

In sentence 2, the adjective *beautiful* describes the pronoun *she*.

An adverb is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs frequently end in *–ly*. They answer questions such as *how*, *to what extent*, *why*, *when*, and *where*.

3. Bertrand sings *horribly*.
4. My sociology instructor is *extremely* wise.
5. He threw the ball *very* accurately.

In sentence 3, *horribly* describes the verb *sings*. How does Bertrand sing? He sings *horribly*.

In sentence 4, *extremely* describes the adjective *wise*. How *wise* is the instructor? *Extremely* wise.

In sentence 5, *very* describes the adverb *accurately*. How *accurately* did he throw the ball? *Very* accurately.

Exercise 21

Complete the following sentences by adding the correct adjective or adverb from the list in the previous section. Identify the word as an adjective or an adverb (Adj, Adv).

1. Frederick _____ choked on the piece of chicken when he saw Margaret walk through the door.

2. His _____ eyes looked at everyone and everything as if they were specimens in a biology lab.

3. Despite her pessimistic views on life, Lauren believes that most people have _____ hearts.

4. Although Stefan took the criticism _____, he remained calm.

5. The child developed a _____ imagination because he read a lot of books.

6. Madeleine spoke _____ while she was visiting her grandmother in the hospital.

7. Hector's most _____ possession was his father's bass guitar from the 1970s.

8. My definition of a _____ afternoon is walking to the park on a beautiful day, spreading out my blanket, and losing myself in a good book.

9. She _____ eyed her new coworker and wondered if he was single.

10. At the party, Denise _____ devoured two pieces of pepperoni pizza and a several slices of ripe watermelon.

Comparative versus Superlative

Comparative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare two people or things.

1. Jorge is *thin*.
2. Steven is *thinner* than Jorge.

Sentence 1 describes Jorge with the adjective *thin*.

Sentence 2 compares Jorge to Steven, stating that Steven is *thinner*. So *thinner* is the comparative form of *thin*.

Form comparatives in one of the following two ways:

If the adjective or adverb is a one syllable word, add *–er* to it to form the comparative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *bigger*, *faster*, and *shorter* in the comparative form.

If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *more* in front of it to form the comparative. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *more happily*, *more comfortable*, and *more jealous* in the comparative.

Superlative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare more than two people or two things.

1. Jackie is the *loudest* cheerleader on the squad.
2. Kenyatta was voted the *most confident* student by her graduating class.

Sentence 1 shows that Jackie is not just *louder* than one other person, but she is the *loudest* of all the cheerleaders on the squad.

Sentence 2 shows that Kenyatta was voted the *most confident* student of all the students in her class.

Form superlatives in one of the following two ways:

If the adjective or adverb is a one-syllable word, add *–est* to form the superlative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *biggest*, *fastest*, and *shortest* in the superlative form.

If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *most* in front of it. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *most happily*, *most comfortable*, and *most jealous* in the superlative form.

Tip

Remember the following exception: If the word has two syllables and ends in *-y*, change the *-y* to an *-i* and add *-est*. For example, *happy* would change to *happiest* in the superlative form; *healthy* would change to *healthiest*.

Exercise 22

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the errors in comparative and superlative adjectives.

Our argument started on the most sunny afternoon that I have ever experienced. Max and I were sitting on my front stoop when I started it. I told him that my dog, Jacko, was

more smart than his dog, Merlin. I could not help myself. Merlin never came when he was called, and he chased his tail and barked at rocks. I told Max that Merlin was the most dumbest dog on the block. I guess I was angrier about a bad grade that I received, so I decided to pick on poor little Merlin. Even though Max insulted Jacko too, I felt I had been more mean. The next day I apologized to Max and brought Merlin some of Jacko's treats. When Merlin placed his paw on my knee and licked my hand, I was the most sorry person on the block.

Collaboration

Share and compare your answers with a classmate.

Irregular Words: *Good*, *Well*, *Bad*, and *Badly*

Good, *well*, *bad*, and *badly* are often used incorrectly. Study the following chart to learn the correct usage of these words and their comparative and superlative forms.

Figure 8.18 "Irregular Words"

		Comparative	Superlative
Adjective	good	better	best
Adverb	well	better	best
Adjective	bad	worse	worst
Adverb	badly	worse	worst

Good* versus *Well

Good is always an adjective—that is, a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. The second sentence is correct because *well* is an adverb that tells how something is done.

Incorrect: Cecilia felt that she had never done so *good* on a test.

Correct: Cecilia felt that she had never done so *well* on a test.

Well is always an adverb that describes a verb, adverb, or adjective. The second sentence is correct because *good* is an adjective that describes the noun *score*.

Incorrect: Cecilia's team received a *well* score.

Correct: Cecilia's team received a *good* score.

Bad* versus *Badly

Bad is always an adjective. The second sentence is correct because *badly* is an adverb that tells how the speaker did on the test.

Incorrect: I did *bad* on my accounting test because I didn't study.

Correct: I did *badly* on my accounting test because I didn't study.

Badly is always an adverb. The second sentence is correct because *bad* is an adjective that describes the noun *thunderstorm*.

Incorrect: The coming thunderstorm looked *badly*.

Correct: The coming thunderstorm looked *bad*.

Better* and *Worse

The following are examples of the use of *better* and *worse*:

Tyra likes sprinting *better* than long distance running.
The traffic is *worse* in Chicago than in Atlanta.

Best and Worst

The following are examples of the use of *best* and *worst*:

Tyra sprints *best* of all the other competitors.
Peter finished *worst* of all the runners in the race.

Tip

Remember *better* and *worse* compare two persons or things. *Best* and *worst* compare three or more persons or things.

Exercise 23

Write *good*, *well*, *bad*, or *badly* to complete each sentence. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Donna always felt _____ if she did not see the sun in the morning.
2. The school board president gave a _____ speech for once.

3. Although my dog, Comet, is mischievous, he always behaves _____ at the dog park.

4. I thought my back injury was _____ at first, but it turned out to be minor.

5. Steve was shaking _____ from the extreme cold.

6. Apple crisp is a very _____ dessert that can be made using whole grains instead of white flour.

7. The meeting with my son's math teacher went very _____.

8. Juan has a _____ appetite, especially when it comes to dessert.

9. Magritte thought the guests had a _____ time at the party because most people left early.

10. She _____ wanted to win the writing contest prize, which included a trip to New York.

Exercise 24

Write the correct comparative or superlative form of the word in parentheses. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. This research paper is _____ (good) than my last one.

2. Tanaya likes country music _____ (well) of all.

3. My motorcycle rides _____ (bad) than it did last summer.

4. That is the _____ (bad) joke my father ever told.

5. The hockey team played _____ (badly) than it did last season.

6. Tracey plays guitar _____ (well) than she plays the piano.

7. It will go down as one of the _____ (bad) movies I have ever seen.

8. The deforestation in the Amazon is _____ (bad) than it was last year.

9. Movie ticket sales are _____ (good) this year than last.

10. My husband says mystery novels are the _____ (good) types of books.

Writing at Work

The irregular words *good*, *well*, *bad*, and *badly* are often misused along with their comparative and superlative forms *better*, *best*, *worse*, and *worst*. You may not hear the difference between *worse* and *worst*, and therefore type it incorrectly. In a formal or business-like tone, use each of

these words to write eight separate sentences. Assume these sentences will be seen and judged by your current or future employer.

Key Takeaways

Adjectives describe a noun or a pronoun.

Adverbs describe a verb, adjective, or another adverb.

Most adverbs are formed by adding –*ly* to an adjective.

Comparative adjectives and adverbs compare two persons or things.

Superlative adjectives or adverbs compare more than two persons or things.

The adjectives *good* and *bad* and the adverbs *well* and *badly* are unique in their comparative and superlative forms and require special attention.

Writing Application

Using the exercises as a guide, write your own ten-

sentence quiz for your classmate(s) using the concepts covered in this section. Try to include two questions from each subsection in your quiz. Exchange papers and see whether you can get a perfect score.

7. Misplaced and dangling modifiers

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that clarifies or describes another word, phrase, or clause. Sometimes writers use modifiers incorrectly, leading to strange and unintentionally humorous sentences. The two common types of modifier errors are called misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. If either of these errors occurs, readers can no longer read smoothly. Instead, they become stumped trying to figure out *what* the writer meant to say. A writer's goal must always be to communicate clearly and to avoid distracting the reader with strange sentences or awkward sentence constructions. The good news is that these errors can be easily overcome.

Misplaced Modifiers

A misplaced modifier is a modifier that is placed too far from the word or words it modifies. Misplaced modifiers make the sentence awkward and sometimes unintentionally humorous.

Incorrect: She wore a bicycle helmet on her head *that was too large*.

Correct: She wore a bicycle helmet *that was too large* on her head.

Notice in the incorrect sentence it sounds as if her head were too large! Of course, the writer is referring to the helmet, not to the

person's head. The corrected version of the sentence clarifies the writer's meaning.

Look at the following two examples:

Incorrect: They bought a kitten for my brother *they call Shadow*.

Correct: They bought a kitten *they call Shadow* for my brother.

In the incorrect sentence, it seems that the brother's name is *Shadow*. That's because the modifier is too far from the word it modifies, which is *kitten*.

Incorrect: The patient was referred to the physician *with stomach pains*.

Correct: The patient *with stomach pains* was referred to the physician.

The incorrect sentence reads as if it were the physician who has stomach pains! What the writer means is that the patient has stomach pains.

Tip

Simple modifiers like *only*, *almost*, *just*, *nearly*, and *barely* often get used incorrectly because writers often stick them in the wrong place.

Confusing: Tyler *almost* found fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

Revised: Tyler found *almost* fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

How do you *almost* find something? Either you find it or you do not. The revisedsentence is much clearer.

Exercise 25

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences to correct the misplaced modifiers.

1. The young lady was walking the dog on the telephone.
2. I heard that there was a robbery on the evening news.
3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller for the baby that he called "Speed Racer."
4. Rolling down the mountain, the explorer stopped the boulder with his powerful foot.
5. We are looking for a babysitter for our precious six-year-old who doesn't drink or smoke and owns a car.
6. The teacher served cookies to the children wrapped in aluminum foil.
7. The mysterious woman walked toward the car holding an umbrella.
8. We returned the wine to the waiter that was sour.
9. Charlie spotted a stray puppy driving home from work.
10. I ate nothing but a cold bowl of noodles for dinner.

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that describes something that has been left out of the sentence. When there is nothing that the word, phrase, or clause can modify, the modifier is said to dangle.

Incorrect: *Riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

Correct: As Jane was *riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

In the incorrect sentence, *riding in the sports car* is dangling. The reader is left wondering who is riding in the sports car. The writer must tell the reader!

Incorrect: *Walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: As Jonas was *walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: The trees looked like spooky aliens as Jonas was *walking home at night*.

In the incorrect sentence *walking home at night* is dangling. Who is walking home at night? Jonas. Note that there are two different ways the dangling modifier can be corrected.

Incorrect: To win the spelling bee, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

Correct: If we want to win the spelling bee this year, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

In the incorrect sentence, *to win the spelling bee* is dangling. Who wants to win the spelling bee? We do!

Tip

The following three steps will help you quickly spot a dangling modifier:

Look for an *–ing* modifier at the beginning of your sentence or another modifying phrase:

Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie. (*Painting* is the *–ing* modifier.)

Underline the first noun that follows it:

Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.

Make sure the modifier and noun go together logically. If they do not, it is very likely you have a dangling modifier.

After identifying the dangling modifier, rewrite the sentence.

Painting for three hours at night, *Maggie* finally finished the kitchen.

Exercise 26

Rewrite the following the sentences onto your own sheet of paper to correct the dangling modifiers.

1. Bent over backward, the posture was very challenging.

2. Making discoveries about new creatures, this is an interesting time to be a biologist.

3. Walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.

4. Playing a guitar in the bedroom, the cat was seen under the bed.

5. Packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.

6. While looking in the mirror, the towel swayed in the breeze.

7. While driving to the veterinarian's office, the dog nervously whined.

8. The priceless painting drew large crowds when walking into the museum.

9. Piled up next to the bookshelf, I chose a romance novel.

10. Chewing furiously, the gum fell out of my mouth.

Exercise 27

Rewrite the following paragraph correcting all the misplaced and dangling modifiers.

I bought a fresh loaf of bread for my sandwich shopping in the grocery store. Wanting to make a delicious sandwich, the mayonnaise was thickly spread. Placing the cold cuts on the bread, the lettuce was placed on top. I cut the sandwich in half with a knife turning on the radio. Biting into the sandwich, my favorite song blared loudly in my ears. Humming and chewing, my sandwich went down smoothly. Smiling, my sandwich will be made again, but next time I will add cheese.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

Misplaced and dangling modifiers make sentences difficult to understand.

Misplaced and dangling modifiers distract the reader.

There are several effective ways to identify and correct misplaced and dangling modifiers.

Writing Application

See how creative and humorous you can get by writing ten sentences with misplaced and dangling modifiers. This is a deceptively simple task, but rise to the challenge. Your writing will be stronger for it. Exchange papers with a

classmate, and rewrite your classmate's sentences to correct any misplaced modifiers.

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This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.

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ELIZABETH BROWNING; KIRSTEN DEVRIES; KATHY BOYLAN; JENIFER KURTZ; AND KATELYN BURTON