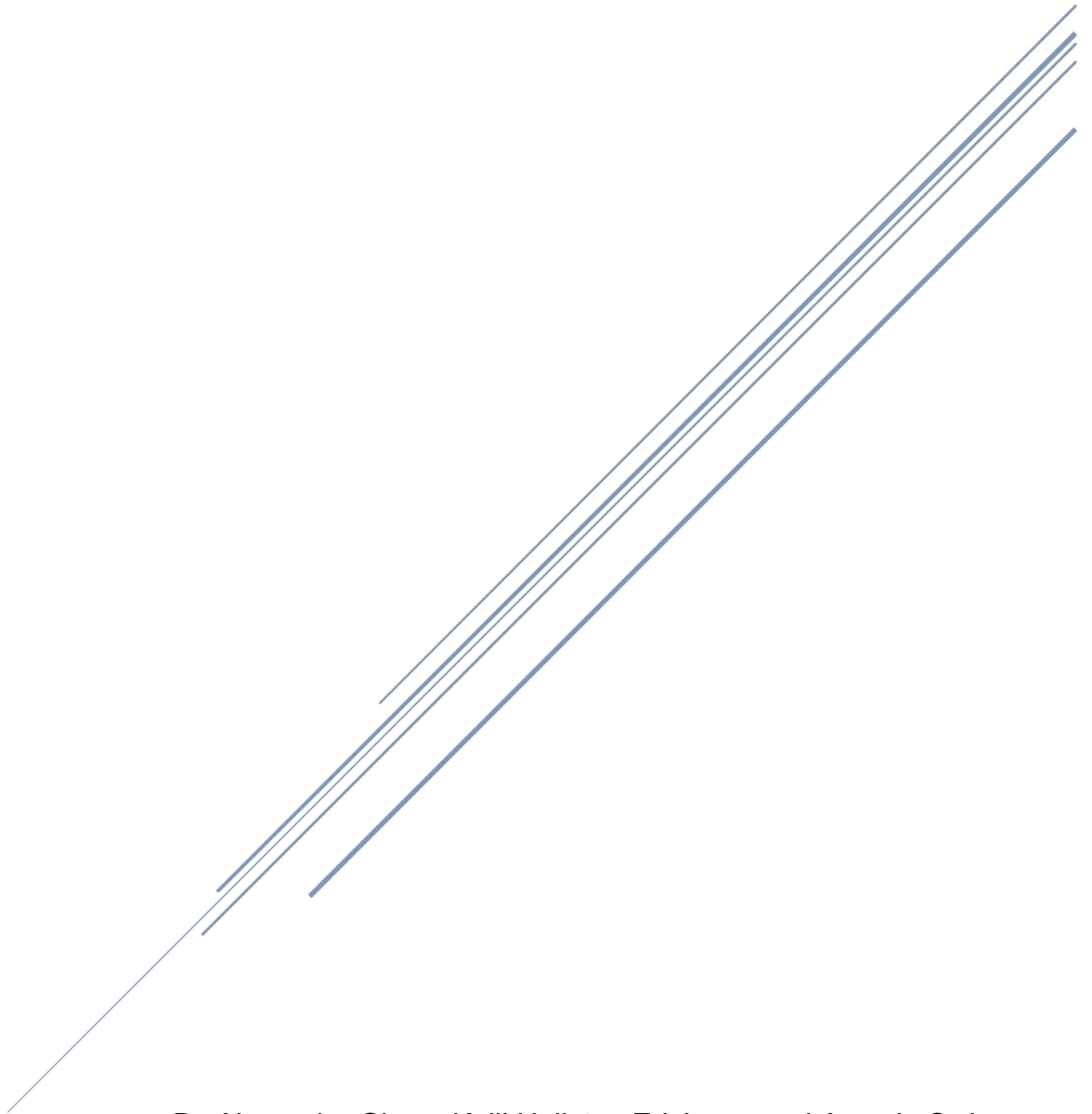# YOU, WRITING!

A Guide to College Composition

By Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten Erickson, and Amy Jo Swing

Contents

Introduction to Students and Instructors

This text is meant to be used in any first year College Composition class or as a general guide to college writing. The book focuses on writing as a process, not a product. The goal is to help students discover their own writing process, trying out different methods and strategies to find what works best for them.

Instructors can use the text as a whole or pick and choose the parts that are relevant and useful to their course outcomes and teaching style. They can also change, add, or rewrite the book to suit their courses.

[Note: this is an updated version of the text *You, Writing!* that was released Spring 2018. This is to replace that text. It is not much different from the original Spring 2018 version of *You, Writing!* Most of the changes from the first edition of *You, Writing!* are editing and style issues. This edition is *You, Writing!* 2019.]

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Chapter One: Why Write?

Almost every college student in the country takes a class in writing. It's a given. Why? Why is writing important? Do you just need to be able to write college papers and a résumé to get a job? Yes, but writing is much, much bigger than that. Writing is the major way humans communicate in the 21st century, more than in any other time in history. We write everywhere, all the time, across the globe.

[Words: facebook, charts, bibliographies, tweets, forms, notes, reviews, minutes, letters, notes, news, estimates, lyrics, resumes, emails, papers, poems, presentations, blogs, Instagram, thankyous, snapchat, ads, lab, application, prospectus, lists, outlines, memos, texts]

Look at the word cloud above. These are just a few of the kinds of writing we do. Take a minute to think about how often you write in one day. Count everything: texts, notes, lists, taking notes in class, sending emails to professors, responding to assignments online, writing a note for your roommate to complain about the cat box, writing dialogue blurbs for your comic book panel in the margins of your lecture notes. If you want something to last, you put it in writing.

In any career today, writing is an important component. In fact, your writing is often the first impression you give. Much of the work in the world takes place in writing, such as in email communication, online collaboration, and in harnessing social media. Writing well and communicating clearly are foundational parts of being a professional and are some of the most crucial skills employers look for in any field. Even tech-giant companies realize that soft skills like communication and teamwork are greater indicators of success than technical expertise.

According to a recent article in *The Washington Post*, "The seven top characteristics of success at Google are all soft skills: being a good coach; communicating and listening well; possessing insights into others (including others' different values and points of view); having empathy toward and being supportive of one's colleagues; being a good critical thinker and problem solver; and being able to make connections across complex ideas" (Strauss).

Google, like many companies, finds that workers who can think, communicate, and work with each other are more productive than employees who are more STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)-focused. This goes for pretty much every job out there from nurse to contractor to college president. Writing well will help you be better at any job you have.

Learning to write well not only helps you communicate, but it also helps you organize and think. To be able to answer an essay question in a geology class, you must be able to not only write well but understand the question, remember and select facts and examples appropriate to the question, and organize your ideas in a manner that best communicates your answer.

Even in your personal life, writing is a powerful tool. Think about times you have received written comments that moved you, for good or bad: made you laugh, smile, cry, put butterflies in your stomach. Writing has the power to change people in surprising ways.

As you move through this text, think about the ways you will use writing skills in your academic life, your personal life, and your professional life. Writing well is a skill that will get you far in this modern world.

Chapter Two: A Writing Process for Every Writer

I am terrible at astrophysics! I've just never been good at it.

Have you ever heard someone say this? Probably not. However, you've probably heard statements like these (maybe you've even said them yourself):

"I've never been good at grammar."

"Writing isn't really my thing. I think I'm more left-brained."

"I'm just not creative, so I can't write well."

These statements have echoed across classrooms all over the country and the response from most teachers of writing is the same: writing takes practice. No one ever woke up being good at astrophysics or mountain biking or piano playing. Even those who might pick up those activities easily had a foundation of skills and practice to build on and each came to mastery of their activity differently. This is true for writers, too. This is true for you!

Writing is a process, and although many writers follow a similar process, each writer is unique. Think of your writing process as your fingerprint. It has the same characteristics as most fingerprints, swirls and lines and patterns, but yours is unique to you. The key in writing well is to know your process and make it work for you.

So, what is a writing process?

The basic writing process chart

Audience and Purpose
- Define audience
- Define the purpose
- Understand the assignment

Exploration
- Explore and choose ideas
- Explore and choose topic

Thesis
- Articulate a thesis or claim
- Find and create content ideas to support thesis

Organization
- Select best organizational strategies
- Outline or plan

Drafting
- Write body of paper
- Research or explore for content
- Work on intro, conclusionn, and title

Revising
- Refocus on audience and purpose
- Make major changes
- Use peer review and other feedback
- Re-draft

Editing
- Edit for consistency
- Edit for style
- Check sources/research

Proofread
- Fix grammar, spelling, and capitalization errors
- Look for small, missed errors and inconsistencies

These steps are the basics of a writing process, and the process looks pretty clear. However, each writer will spend different amounts of time on the process. Also, writing isn't this linear. Sometimes it looks more like:

Audience and Purpose
- Define audience
- Define purpose
- Understand the assignment

Exploration
- Explore and choose ideas
- Explore and choose topic

Thesis
- Articulate a thesis or claim
- Find and create content ideas to support thesis

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Proofread
- Fix grammar, spelling, and capitalization errors
- Look for small, missed errors and inconsistencies

[handwritten annotations: "Re-envision!", "Does paper still fit thesis? Brainstorm again", "Think about audience"]

As you can see, the process goes back and forth. Writers might have a thesis and organization and begin drafting. Then they might realize the thesis isn't working, so they go back and revise the thesis. Then the organization will need to change, too. Once the draft is done, the introduction and conclusion might need to be rewritten because they no longer address the audience and purpose.

When revising, writers should be going back to all of the previous parts of the process: thinking about whether the writing meets audience and purpose, whether the thesis still holds true, if the organization is still working, if the style is still clear and consistent.

Revising sometimes means scrapping everything and starting over.

All writers have a process.

Let's look at an example, something we do all the time, like writing a grocery list. Even writing a grocery list is a process:

- Who is the audience? Is this for me or someone else? That informs other decisions.

- What is my purpose? Do I want a huge shopping trip, multiple stops or a short in and out?

Once audience and purpose have been thought through, the following steps might be taken:

Exploration: What do I need? Make a list.

Thesis: Create a heading that leads the audience to the goal. Are you shopping for a major event like a party? Are there specific needs of your guests (vegetarian, gluten free)?

Organization: Redo the list based on organization (for a grocery store, it might be how the store is laid out: grocery, meat, canned goods, condiments, dairy, bread). Your goal is efficiency. Get in, get the stuff, get out.

Draft: Write the list in the organizational format chosen.

Revise: Look it over. Is it legible? If the audience is someone else, will they understand what it all means? Did you miss anything? Do you need checkboxes? Do you need to add specific brands, types, or descriptions? Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, not generic?

Edit: Are the spelling and words consistent and clear?

Proofread: Check to make sure everything is there.

Throughout the rest of this book, this process, shown simply in the example above, will be explored and explained in detail.

In writing, the trick is to find your process, to see what you do and how you do it.

Think about the kind of writer you are.

What kind of writer are you?

- *Are you a sprinter?*

Do you have lots of ideas and want to get to them quickly?

If so, you probably skip to drafting and spend a lot of time on revising.

Try spending more time on the start of the writing process. Spend more time on defining audience and purpose and on exploring and planning. Then revising might not be a Herculean task.

- *Are you a jogger?*

Do you try to go through the writing process one step at a time?

Maybe some parts are harder than others, like organization or writing a thesis?

Try new strategies for those parts of the writing process that are most difficult. If revision is hard, get lots of feedback and learn to critique others. If audience

and purpose make no sense, spend some time looking at how other writers bend their writing to their audiences and purpose.

- *Are you a tightrope walker?*

Do you want everything to be perfect before you set it down on paper?

Are you a perfectionist? If so, you probably spend a lot of time at the start of the writing process but have more trouble with revising.

Try being willing to make changes in revision based on looking at organization, audience and purpose. Is everything in the paper *really* working together? Don't be afraid to get rid of parts and start over.

Chapter Three: Defining Audience and Purpose

If a college instructor told you just to write a paper, what would you do? No other directions—just "Write a paper." How would you proceed? Would you just sit down and begin writing whatever came to mind, such as the latest prospects for the local football team or how much you dislike the classic band *Steely Dan*? Even if you did start writing, how would you know you were going to get a good grade on the paper?

You wouldn't.

Why?

Because you have no idea what the expectations of the assignment are or who the writing is for—you do not know the audience or purpose of the writing assignment.
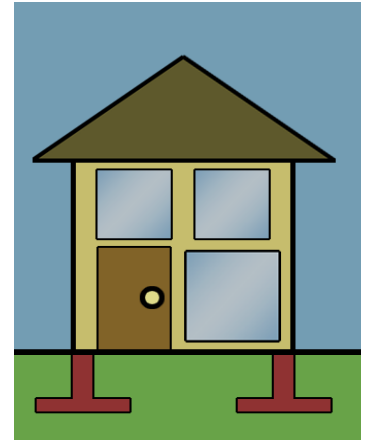
What is an audience?

All audiences, whether viewing a movie, reading a book, watching an advertisement, or listening in a classroom, expect the same things:

To learn something

To be entertained

To feel that whoever is delivering the message knows what he/she/they is/are talking about

To feel their time is not being wasted

To clearly receive the information they thought they were going to receive

In writing, this means that we all agree that we want something that's "clean" (in terms of formatting, like the font size doesn't suddenly *change* **sizes**), easy to read (in terms of grammar, punctuation, and spelling), organized well, and making a clear and an interesting/funny/useful point.

Different audiences will warm to different styles. Some audiences will expect to see evidence of detailed and careful research, such as a supervisor.

However, not all audiences like the same things. Those aspects of us that make us different are demographics, things like:

Age

Race

Gender

Personality

Socio-economic status

Morals

Education level

Where we're from (part of the country and urban/rural)

Politics

Religion

This is why there are so many different magazines in the world. Sure, anyone can pick up any magazine and read it, but publishers of magazines always have a target audience in mind. You can think of a variety of magazines and imagine what their target audiences might be. The audience for *Field and Stream* is different than the audience for *Cosmopolitan* and much different than *Dollhouse Miniatures Magazine*. This isn't an accident.

What does this mean for your writing?

You should always have a target audience in mind when you're writing. This audience is a *specific demographic group* (such as "West High School seniors" or "Incoming freshmen at Central College"), and you should think about what they know about your topic and what might also be most interesting to them. Also, think about what style of writing and tone would most appeal to them.

The more you know about your audience, the better decisions you make in your writing. For example, let's say you want to use a television show about aliens to explain

how humans view the unknown. If your audience grew up in the 1950s through the 1970s, you might use *The Twilight Zone* as an example. If your audience came of age in the 1980s or 1990s, *The X Files* is probably more appropriate, and for a contemporary audience, *Stranger Things* might be fitting. Examples, word choice, tone, style: these all should tailor to your audience.

One thing you **don't** want to do is think about your audience as a group of people you are addressing as in a letter. Don't write an essay that starts with something like, "Single mothers, this essay is for you!!" Nope. In fact, don't mention the audience at all in the essay itself. Simply consider what they know already and what they need to know, and don't spend a bunch of time on stuff they already know; spend more time on what they need to know.

Audience wants and needs

One thing to keep in mind when you are writing is what might motivate or move your audience. The American psychologist Abraham Maslow describe this as the hierarchy of needs. He categorized what most humans want or need in five broad categories (see figure below). The most important section are physiological needs, needs of survival, then safety needs, then emotional needs, then psychological needs, then personal needs.
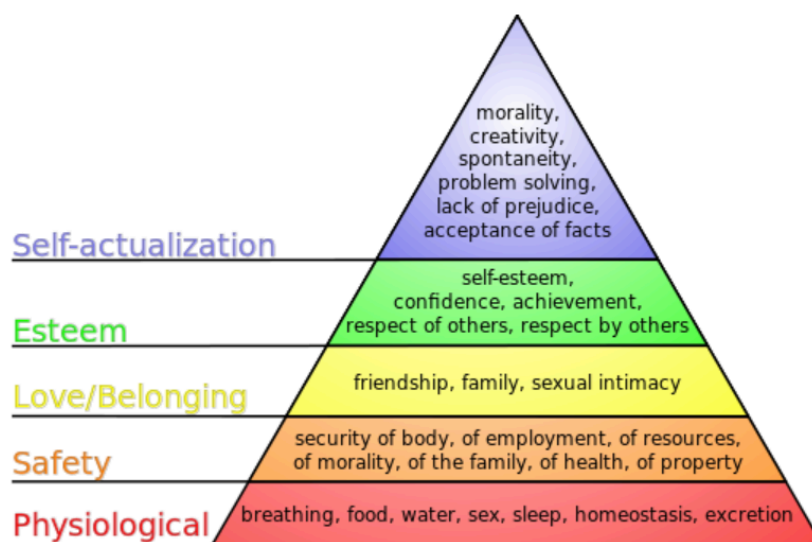
GRAPHIC: NEEDS. By J. Finkelstein (created using Inkscape.) [GFDL (http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html) or CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)], via Wikimedia Commons

By appealing to the needs and wants of your audience, you can be a more effective writer. This applies to any kind of writing, from entertaining essays, which might include jokes that appeal to an audience's ideas about love and belonging, to persuasive essays that might pull on basic needs like water or the safety of children.

Leading the audience

The goal of writing is either to manipulate an audience or to work with the audience. Aristotle said writers should pull their audience along, using personal presence, logic, and emotion (ethos, pathos, and logos). A good writer can play readers, draw them along, and lead them to a pre-planned conclusion. But this all depends on knowing the audience well and knowing English well.

What are ethos, pathos, and logos? These are simply words we use to describe the methods of appealing to an audience. Ethos means you are appealing to an audience by your credentials, your status, your virtue, your knowledge. Pathos means you are appealing to an audience by emotion, by invoking rage, or fear, or love, or pity, and the like. And logos means you are appealing to an audience by reason, that is, by giving facts, by giving statistics, by giving logical argumentation and common sense.

Let's look at how ethos, pathos, and logos work in terms of audience, with an example:

> **Example**: You are trying to persuade your mother to let you go on a study abroad trip for a semester. You need to come up with arguments and evidence that are made specifically with your mom in mind because you know her: you know what kinds of argument work on her and which don't ("all my friends are going" would not cut it). You know which commercials make her tear up (the ones with sick babies and kids graduating from college). You know she doesn't trust online news sources. By considering these factors, you can give the best argument and persuade her to let you go to Paris!

Here's how we could apply ethos, pathos, and logos to this example:

> *Ethos* is a way of convincing your audience through credibility and character. You display to your mother that you have done well in college, you have been on the honor roll, have been responsible. You also have a letter from your history professor who recommended you for the program.

> *Pathos* is a way of convincing your audience by appealing to emotions. You remind your mother of how she is always telling you about that trip to Germany she took when she was in high school, how it opened up her eyes to the wonders

of the world—and that was only two weeks. Imagine what six months in France would do!

Logos is a way of convincing your audience by providing factual support and data. You display to your mother that researchers independent of international study abroad programs found that college students who study abroad have higher graduation and employment rates than students who do not study abroad.

There are also other ways to discuss how we persuade. Organizing the various methods of persuasion into ethos, pathos, and logos is very common, but another way is to use the following categories:

appeal to authority (everybody high-ranking thinks it's a good idea)

appeal to facts (basically this is logos)

appeal to emotion (basically this is pathos)

appeal to trust (basically this is part of ethos)

bandwagon (everyone else agrees, public opinion, common sense)

Purpose

Why are you writing? What do you seek to accomplish? You need to know your purpose, why you are writing, as well as to whom!

If your car broke down on your way to class and you missed a quiz, you might need to write an email to your college instructor. You have an audience. Now, what is your purpose? It is to try to get a retake on the quiz? Is it to take responsibility for missing the quiz and apologize? Is it to complain about how awful your week has been?

Knowing your purpose will help your prepare your writing and draft the best possible email to achieve your desired result. It might even involve research (looking at the syllabus for the class to review the instructor's policies on late or missed work).

Let's look at this example of missing a quiz more closely. When composing the email to your professor, think about the tone you want to take, the kind of language you want to use...

Graphic: Example of careful email to a professor

Dear Professor Q,

This is Student X from your PSYC 1120 Tuesday/Thursday 2 p.m. class.

I wanted to communicate with you about missing the quiz in class today. I realize that you only allow two missing assignments throughout the course, and this is my first one.

I wanted to let you know that I take this class seriously and will make every effort not to miss any more assignments. In your syllabus, you mention the possibility of make up work toward the end of the class, and I would be interested in those options when the time comes.

I will review the class notes and information on our class website and be prepared for the next class. I appreciate any other information or tips that you have to be successful in this course and would meet in person if you have the time.

Sincerely,

Student X

If you did not take the time to think about audience and purpose, to go through the writing process, you might write something like this:

Graphic: Example of a not careful email to a professor

Hey Professor Q,

My car broke down on the way to class, and I missed the quiz. Can I make it up? Also, what did I miss in class today?

Student X

Which email is more likely to achieve your purpose (to succeed in the class)? Which is more likely to give your professor a favorable opinion of you even though you missed class?

Tips for considering audience

Make sure you understand the writing assignment, whether it is for a class or out in the working world. Each writing project will have specific expectations, either in writing (a rubric or directions) or in verbal instructions. Make sure you take note of these instructions and consider them as you're writing: they are part of your audience and purpose.

For example, a paper in an ethics class might give an audience of first year nursing students and your purpose is to highlight an ethical issue in clinical nursing settings. You might be required to use credible sources. Now, you have an audience (first year nursing students), a purpose (educate on ethical issue in clinical sites) and some guidelines (use credible sources). All of these factors will guide your writing process, from finding a topic to considering your writing style to working on organization.

In the professional world, an example might be writing a proposal to a client in an engineering firm. You would need to know the parameters of proposal writing. You would need to use a template or professional format, know as much about your client as possible, and use appropriate professional language in the writing of the piece.

Resources for audience

"Audience Awareness." *Excelsior OWL* https://owl.excelsior.edu/writing-process/audience-awareness/ (Flip through these slides—there are other parts and examples)

"Ethos." *Excelsior OWL* https://owl.excelsior.edu/argument-and-critical-thinking/modes-of-persuasion/modes-of-persuasion-ethos/

"Pathos." *Excelsior OWL* https://owl.excelsior.edu/argument-and-critical-thinking/modes-of-persuasion/modes-of-persuasion-pathos/

"Logos." *Excelsior OWL* https://owl.excelsior.edu/argument-and-critical-thinking/modes-of-persuasion/modes-of-persuasion-logos/

"See it in Practice." *Excelsior OWL* https://owl.excelsior.edu/argument-and-critical-thinking/modes-of-persuasion/modes-of-persuasion-see-it-in-practice/

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Chapter Four: Exploring: Finding a Topic

Some people are lucky. When confronted with a writing task, they jump right in, tapping away at their keyboards or scribbling notes on their notebook pages, generating text without, it seems, a second thought. They're the "chatty ones" of the writing world (in the best possible way, of course), chatting, while you sit by, staring at your blank page, wracking your brain and pulling out your hair, watching their sentences turn into paragraphs that turn into pages and pages, jealous.

We've all been there. Sometimes it's obvious what to write about, but many times it's not. Even if a topic seems clear, we might be missing out on an even better one because we get stuck on our initial idea. Sometimes we think our ideas are dumb; no one would want to read what we have to say. Sometimes we get a writing assignment and get paralyzed by the length. *I have to write seven pages?* You might think: *There's* nothing *I could write on for seven pages. This is going to be a disaster!*

Okay, **stop**.

You cannot let your internal editor take control this early in the process. In fact, your inner critic needs to step off until you get to *editing*. At this point, you should relax your brain and get it into a place of open curiosity: instead of being paralyzed by the endless possibilities, be excited by those possibilities, and know that you'll be able to find topics and points to make within those topics that will lead to solid writing.

You can do it!

To start: Brainstorm

Brainstorming is a classic method of getting as many ideas out as possible while avoiding all judgment of those ideas. It's the first suggestion for exploration because it's entirely natural: as soon as you get a writing assignment, your brain is flipping through ideas, even if you aren't consciously aware of it. When brainstorming, you're doing the same thing as running through ideas in your mind, only you're writing them down as you think of them.

How you brainstorm will depend on the type of writing assignment you're given. Let's say you've been assigned an informative essay, and it can be about whatever you want. That's probably the most open writing assignment you can be given, and this kind of assignment can be paralyzing: there are too many choices! This may even happen in
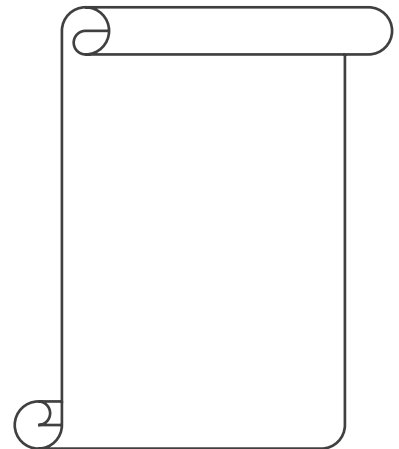
a work situation. Don't worry. Instead, brainstorm. Give yourself five minutes to write down whatever comes into your mind. It might look something like this:

Things I know a lot about

- Raising kids
- Raising dogs and iguanas
- Budgeting
- Netflix and Hulu
- Being a certified nursing assistant
- Bus routes
- Living in an apartment building with noisy neighbors
- Buying a house
- Snapchat
- Photography
- Making Thanksgiving dinner
- Killing houseplants
- Maintaining a good relationship with family members who can drive me crazy
- Doing laundry
- Motivating myself to work out

These topics are random, yes, and many of them are also personal, but note how you could take a topic like, "maintaining good relationships with family members who can drive me crazy" and make it broadly applicable to an outside audience. Who doesn't have a family member who is irritating but unavoidable? This topic probably also has some great stories that go with it, too.

What about the topic "killing houseplants"? Something like "killing houseplants" is surely funny, but it also might be broadened to be a tongue-in-cheek essay about how to NOT do simple things well. Thus, the practical and visible picture of killing houseplants can be written about to make a statement about life more broadly: how to not do simple things well in all aspects of life.

Brainstorming also works when you are given a focused topic. Let's say you're tasked with writing about conventional versus organic farming. You're not particularly interested in the topic, but there it is: you must **write** about it. A brainstorm for that writing assignment might look something like this:

Conventional versus organic farming

- Who is most interested in organic farming?

- Who is most interested in conventional farming?
- What does conventional farming even mean? How about organic?
- GMOs have something to do with this
- The local co-op might have some ideas about organics
- I've seen organic stuff in the regular grocery stores. I wonder how the co-ops feel about that.
- Organics are more expensive
- Organics are healthier, maybe?
- Is this just about produce, or is it about meat and grains?
- If I buy food at the farmer's market, is it organic or conventional?
- Interview the farmer family down the road?

What's happening here is a lot of questioning, which is great. It's showing what the writer is curious about the topic, and it also shows some gaps in knowledge where the writer might need to do some research.

Beware of the tendency to want to take on every item in a brainstormed list of ideas. In the farming example above, yes, all the brainstormed items are related to the topic, but an essay explaining every one of those would look more like a book. Just one of those topics, like organics in traditional grocery stores, might be enough to write an essay. In fact, when you've landed on a specific aspect of the topic, you could brainstorm again for even more specific ideas on the topic.

Once you've carefully considered your audience, you will be able to narrow your topic or do some more specific and detailed brainstorming. For example, what if you need to write about organic versus conventional farming and the audience is your boss and his work-group? Brainstorm that.

It also might be time to turn to freewriting.

Freewriting

Freewriting is just that: free writing. All it costs you is some time. Freewriting allows you to generate text quickly, without judgment, on a specific topic. You'll tend to write in complete sentences in freewriting, but there should be no proofreading involved. So, if there are misspelled or misused words, that's fine. If you have fragment sentences, that's okay too. You must turn off your internal editor to let your ideas flow.

When you have your topic, set your timer (five to ten minutes is plenty to start) and let your pen or fingers fly.

Let's focus in on the relationships with annoying family members topic. A five-minute freewrite on that topic might look something like this:

How to get along with annoying family members

I find thanksgiving and Christmas to be the worst when it comes to getting along with my uncle Marcus. He is always bothering me about how I look because he doesn't like my nose piercing or he hates my hair color, like last Christmas when it was purple he wouldn't stop calling me a purple people eater and it was so annoying. He also talks about politics all the time and makes fun of us when we say grace before the meal, which I think is really disrespectful. I've talked to my mom and dad about it but they say he's family so he will always be welcome and that I need to learn how to get along with him or just ignore him. He's hard to ignore so I've figured out some ways to deal with him.

When he talks about how I look I just say that it's my choice and I'm happy with how I look. I've said that same thing over and over to him. My message doesn't change. Which has seemed to make a difference because I'm not playing into his drama. I'm calm. That calmness also works with the political stuff. I used to get so mad when he'd say stuff I didn't agree with and keep pushing his ideas. But then I decided to try to figure out why he feels that way. It doesn't make a difference in how I feel about the issue but if I'm just like, "oh yeah, so why do you feel like that?" it gets him talking in a more reasonable and less annoying way. And when we say grace and he makes fun of it I either ignore him or I have said before, "this is something we do because it is good to be grateful even if you don't believe in god" and he was kind of surprised by that and didn't say anything anymore.

First, that's a lot of text! Second, there are a lot of great ideas in there that could be expanded into advice, like the part about becoming curious about the uncle's extreme political views rather than being immediately insulted by them. That could easily be expanded into a full paragraph.

Is the freewrite kind of messy and are there errors? Yes, and yes, but the freewrite has also gotten solid ideas down on the page that wouldn't be there otherwise.

In five minutes, this writer has a great start.

Now, the writer can consider audience and purpose to help focus the ideas even more.

Mind mapping

Another method for exploration goes by many names: mind mapping, mapping, clustering, etc. This is a visual way of seeing the connections between your ideas and organizing them. To start, you put the topic in the center of the page and draw a circle around it.

Then you can add other details, drawing circles around those and lines of connection:

Graphic: An example of a cluster map

The mind map can then act as a sort of outline for your essay. Seeing those connections in this visual way shows where you might need more detail or examples, and you can then take those ideas to organize into body paragraphs.

The writer's notebook

Many authors who get paid for their work keep notebooks they fill with their ideas. Similar to a traditional journal, as ideas occur to them, they see or hear interesting things throughout their days, or they find snippets of material as they're reading other work, they record it in a notebook. Sometimes it's a traditional bound paper book, but technology has allowed writers to do this digitally, too. Some utilize a

smartphone's camera, and others use apps like Evernote to archive material as they find it.

The point, though, is to be open to topic possibilities all around you and capture them in real time to refer to later.

Advice for finding a topic

The best advice for exploring: If you're not sure what to write about, and the writing assignment is open-ended, consider two things: your passion and your personal experience.

Ask yourself:

- *What makes me angry/frustrated/irritated?*

- *What makes me happy/satisfied/excited?*

- *What am I really good at?*

- *How do I spend my days?*

- *What are interesting things that have happened in my life?*

Brainstorm as many answers as possible for these questions and you'll have many possible topic choices, or freewrite on them, each for a short time, and compare what you come up with—find the best. In the end, however, you will decide where to go based on your audience and purpose.

Chapter Five: Writing a Thesis

Once you have explored or been given your topic, gotten one that works, and come up with some content, you need to decide what point you are trying to make. That's the basis of a thesis statement or claim. It's the "So what?" of your topic. This "so what" is present in any kind of writing: formal papers, essay question responses, emails, presentations, Twitter posts, proposals to clients. Every piece of writing needs a focus.

In a paper, a thesis tends to be more formal—usually one or two sentences that state the main "so what" of the paper.

For example, let's say your topic is about Native American children being fostered in non-Native homes.

So what?

What are you going to say about this topic? This might lead you to think about audience and purpose again. Are you writing to Native American families to discuss a solution to this issue or to explain why it might be happening? Are you writing to the director of a social service organization that places foster children to persuade her to take a new approach to fostering Native American children? Are you trying to show the inequity in foster programs for Native and non-native families to a more general audience?

Once you figure out your audience and purpose, then you can start thinking of your thesis.

So, let's say your audience is class of graduate students in a social work program at a local university. Your purpose is to inform them about the possible problems with fostering Native American children with non-Native families.

Next, you can go back to your exploring and look for information, examples, evidence, and research that you collected. You might need to go back and look for more now that you really know your focus.

Working thesis

The next step is to write a working thesis. This, in an academic argument research paper, is the *so what*, the *thing you are trying to change*, the *thing being addressed as what ought to be one way rather than another way*:

Sample thesis: *Placing Native American children with non-Native families happens more often than with other cultures and can cause problems not only with the children's social and psychological development, but it also impacts tribal communities and their futures.*

That's a good start although it will probably not end up being your final thesis. As you continue throughout the writing process, your thesis might change to fit the information and ideas that continue to develop.

Elements of a thesis

So what makes a good working thesis? Ask yourself these questions:

1. Is it interesting?

2. Is it limited?

3. Is it specific?

Interesting thesis

Being interesting doesn't have to mean the writing is about mutant zombies who become cheerleaders for a professional football team (although that would be interesting!). The question to ask is "To whom is this interesting?" This means making sure your thesis is relevant to your audience. Is it meaningful? Can the audience connect to it or can you make them connect to it? For example, maybe your topic is worm composting. You decide your audience will be a local gardening club because the topic is interesting and relevant to that population. Your thesis, then, would draw more on how to make the topic interesting to that audience.

Maybe you are given an audience and purpose. You have a write a report and present it to your class and your purpose it to teach them something about the class topic (American Literature). You would want to find a topic that interests you and your audience and then create a thesis that will engage the audience as much as possible.

Sample thesis: *By using Americana music and Jazz rhythms, the poets of the Harlem Renaissance changed American poetry and made it more relevant and accessible to many people, especially people of color.*

Sometimes, your audience is your nursing instructor or a client at work. Then you need to think about what their expectations are. You also need to think about what you know

or what you can learn (through research). Find the intersection between those two things, and you will have a good thesis.
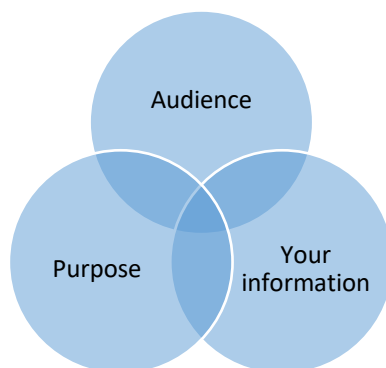
Limited thesis

Having a limited thesis means making sure your topic fits your writing assignment. It is too broad or too narrow? Does the thesis fit the assignment or writing project? A thesis for an email to a potential employer needs to be very focused and limited. Emails should be short and to the point:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to interview with St. Joseph's Hospital, and I am including the additional information we discussed yesterday.

Short, to the point. The email, then, would discuss this additional information. But the "so what" is here to start.

Keep in mind that in the forming of a thesis when writing papers, it's very easy to go too big.

This essay will discuss the Black Lives Matter movement.

Whoa! That's way too big. What about Black Lives Matters? What kind of essay will this be (informative? persuasive? cause and effect?)? Who is the audience? All of this will help you to limit your thesis and topic.

But you also need to be careful not to go too specific either. What about this thesis statement?

The Black Lives Matters movement began with the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida.

This is really just a fact. It is not a claim about what might be changed. It is not part of some ongoing debate we are having about how things ought to be. It just states a historical truth. It would be hard to write a whole paper that focuses only on this thesis statement.

Sample thesis: *Black Lives Matters was started as a political movement to bring attention to racial bias in the justice system and stems from civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s.*

This would be a thesis claiming to make a certain comment about history and historical facts. It is saying, here is *how we should read* these historical facts. Notice that one can debate that. Historians certainly do. For example, you can right away see the counterarguments here. Someone could counter:

Black Lives Matters has little to no relationship to the main Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s; in fact, it is more an offshoot of one of the more radical branches of those movements.

Or*,*

Black Lives Matters was not started as a political movement, but rather, it was a grass-roots community response to a tragedy that morphed into a political movement to bring attention to racial bias in the justice system.

Notice that both of these are plausible counterarguments, and they are also different ways to read a historical fact. So all three would be good thesis statements. The sample thesis above would be a good, supportable, arguable thesis.

Specific thesis

To be specific means giving a *why* in your thesis. In a working thesis, writers often give the *what* but not the *why*. Look at this example:

College students should take online classes.

That's good that you think college students should take online classes, but why?

Sample thesis: *College students should take at least one online class because it will make their schedule more flexible, teach them important technologies, hone their time management skills, and make them better online writers.*

Notice that it is also the organization of the paper. You can see the sections right there. There is the first paragraph with the introduction to the topic of online classes. Then there will probably be a section (a paragraph or two) on the flexibility of schedule. Then a section on technology. Then time management. Then a bang-up conclusion. It's all right there in the thesis statement. This is typical of thesis statements of academic argument research papers.

Sometimes a thesis might be almost the whole piece of writing, like a note to your roommate.

Does this meet the criteria of a good thesis?

- Yes, it's interesting because Tai, the audience, wants his girlfriend to continue to date him.

- Yes, it's limited. It says what it needs to say and no more.

- Yes, it's specific. It gives a what and a why.

Hey Tai! You need to clean the bathroom man because your girlfriend is coming up to visit tomorrow.
You don't want her to know what a slob you really are.
:(

Where is the thesis?

Generally, the thesis should be in your introduction, often toward the end of it. This allows you to introduce the topic, give context to the subject and then narrow to your specific thesis, your what and why. In longer papers, the thesis or claim might be a short transitional paragraph towards the beginning of the paper.

Keep in mind that once your thesis statement is given, everything in the body of the paper should be focused on supporting and developing it—nothing should go beyond it. That's why you may sometimes need to rewrite your thesis several times as you are drafting and revising.

The main idea of the thesis also appears in the conclusion, in some way—it is the take-away, the "here is what you need to remember from this."

Tips for writing a thesis statement

Here are some tips for writing a thesis statement, especially an academic, researched, argument thesis statement (also called a "claim").

- Are there plausible counterarguments to your thesis (your argument, your central claim)? A good thesis has plausible counterarguments. For example, what if your thesis is: "The sky is blue"? You know that it is a bad thesis. How? Because who would plausibly argue the contrary?

- Speak your thesis to someone. Pretend you are at a dinner party and someone asks: "Hey, Dwayne, what are you arguing in your economic justice paper?" Can you briefly state what your central claim is? If you can, that's good. It shows you are probably staying on focus. You know what specific things you are trying to change. You also can say it in a few brief sentences to a friend, so you are probably sticking to one topic.

- After you have finished the writing process, compare the beginning of your paper to the end of your paper. Is the thesis (central claim / argument) the same? Or have you veered off into another argument or discussion? This expanding of one thesis into many theses is very common in people who have a lot of good ideas! Pick just one good one. Stick to it.

- In general, all writing needs a focus, a theme, a subject. However, we should note that a thesis is not always the same as a focus. We think sometimes of "thesis" meaning "focus" or "general idea." But often in writing studies, in formal academic argument papers*, when we use this word "thesis" we mean formal argument or claim being made*. That is, what exactly is the main thing the paper is claiming, or wanting switched? What is the "it should be read, or thought of, or treated this way" that then gives reasons for why things should go one way and not another on a debated topic? Keep this in mind for academic, researched, argument papers.

- Another way to think of your thesis in an academic, researched, argument paper, is by answering this question: Where is the "things should be **this** way, the way I say they should be and **not that way,** the way those others say" in your paper?

Resources

"The Thesis Statement." *Capital Community College Guide to Grammar and Writing*. (http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/thesis.htm).

Chapter Six: Organizing

What's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning? Chances are that the first thing is always the first you do, and the second and third things might be the same day after day as well. For example, you might turn off the alarm first, and then head to the bathroom to relieve yourself. You might then head to the kitchen and start the coffee, and while that's brewing, jump into the shower...and so on.

The importance of organization

Humans like routine, and some even expect it so much that deviation from the routine can throw off an entire day.

One area where we all expect routine is in an essay. But in all writing modes, not just in an essay, there is some kind of organization pattern, just as there is in every architectural structure.

The routine, or organization, of a piece creates a framework that guides the reader through your excellent ideas. Of course, you can find examples of writers who twist their writing in unexpected ways, but those are exceptions that are difficult to pull off effectively. And you often find them in the creative modes, rather than the research-like modes. In general, you'll find using an accepted organizational format not only useful for the reader, but satisfying for you as the structure will lend strength to your ideas.

Why is organization important?

- Readers expect it.
- It helps make your ideas clearer.
- It shows you're credible; you know how to organize, so you know what you're doing.
- It helps the flow of your writing, removing reading "stumbling blocks."

Getting started with organization

So, how do you get started? First, consider the overall structure of any piece of writing:

- Introduction
- Body paragraphs

- Conclusion

So that is the basic idea. But let's look at organization more carefully, using the example of an essay as our mode.

Keep in mind as you go through this section that if we were writing a novel, or a movie review, or a manual for work, or an epic poem, there would be different expectations, in many ways. But for the most part, the organizational ideas below go for all modes and genres of writing.

The most basic essay format is the five-paragraph essay. It looks like this:

Introduction

Body paragraph 1

Body paragraph 2

Body paragraph 3
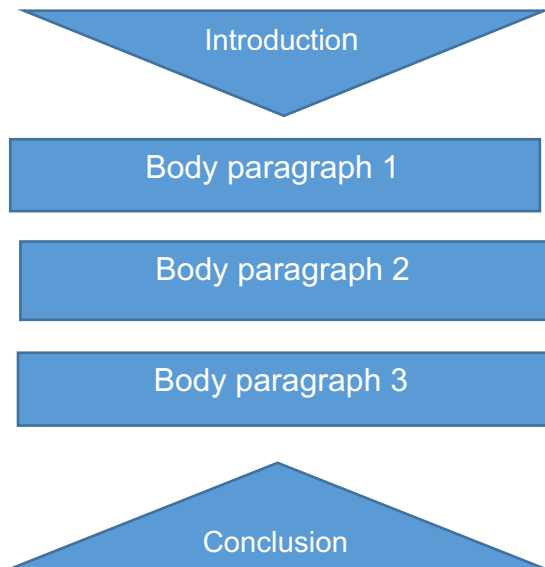
Conclusion

Note that the introduction is an inverted triangle because traditionally, introductions begin broadly and move to more specific information, ending with the very specific thesis statement. The conclusion, then, goes from the specific essay idea to broader generalizations about the topic.

You may have learned about the five paragraph essay in school before, and you might be comfortable with it, too. That's great! Now, it's time to expand on this to create essays of more than five paragraphs. Some essays, like essay questions in a history exam, might only require two paragraphs, while a research paper might require twenty paragraphs.

In general, though, all essays will follow the introduction, body, conclusion structure, but introductions and conclusions may be more than one paragraph, and you may have more than three body paragraphs.

Ways to organize

You have several options for organizing your ideas: chronological order, spatial order, or order of importance.

Chronological order

Chronological, or time, order is used when relating events in which time plays a crucial role. It's the easiest of the organizational structures because it's one we've used as humans since we started telling each other stories: "Once upon a time…" It's used all the time in the working world, too. For example, in healthcare, charting will often use chronological order to explain when things happened. This is a great structure to use when time is of the essence. The same is true for a police report, to take another example.

If it matters **when** things happened or you're directing a reader how to do something, putting things in chronological order makes sense. For example, you might write an essay about Google. If you're talking about how it became the most popular search engine, you would utilize chronological order to describe its ascent to domination.

Another example would be a biography. If you're writing about Frederick Douglass, for example, a chronological outline might look something like this:

1. Early life
   a. Parents
   b. Separation from mother
2. Teenage years
   a. Learning to read
   b. Tutoring other slaves
   c. Punishment
3. Escape from slavery
   a. Unsuccessful attempt
   b. Successful escape
4. Free years
   a. Marriage
   b. Work as an abolitionist and preacher

Spatial order

Spatial order, or space order, is often used when you're describing. This one is also easy because when you deploy it, you act like a video camera: describing from right to left or vice versa, or from the top to the bottom or vice-versa. In the working world, civil

engineers, for example, would find spatial order to be extremely important when looking at road design plans. Sometimes description is the major role of an essay, but more frequently, you'll use description within a single paragraph and will then consider spatial order for that segment only. An example might be describing a treehouse you had as a child, or it could be describing the scene of an accident. An outline for an essay on this topic using spatial order might look like this:

I. Before I get to the scene
    a. Walking down the street
        i. Passing people
        ii. A dog barks viciously
        iii. Hear the sirens
    b. Turning the corner
        i. Smell the fire
        ii. Hear shouting
II. Seeing the scene from afar
    a. Three cars
        i. One is halfway up a light pole
        ii. Another is jammed up behind the first
        iii. A third has t-boned the second
    b. Emergency vehicles
    c. Crowd of people
III. Getting close up to the scene
    a. People on stretchers
    b. Firefighters putting out the blaze
    c. A woman screaming
    d. An elderly woman's dismissive comments

Order of importance

Now, order of importance is the most common organizational structure, but it can be tricky. You can look at it in several ways:

- General to specific (commonly called deduction): Moving from general ideas to more specific ideas

- Specific to general (commonly called induction): Moving from specific ideas to more general ideas

- Most to least critical: Making your strongest point first and then bringing up less critical ideas

- Least to most critical: Bringing up less critical points early on to build up into the most important point of all

Ways to organize: An example of ways to organize a persuasive writing

How about an example? Let's say you want to discuss the benefits of long-distance running. You might have the following points:

- Increases strength and cardiovascular health
- Encourages weight loss
- Excellent for stress relief
- Creates a state of "flow"
- Promotes self-esteem though setting and achieving goals

How would you organize these points using order of importance? It is, of course, a matter of judgment. Which of these points is most important to you as the writer and, even more importantly, to your audience?

Let's say your audience is first-year college student women who have never run before and want to avoid the "Freshman Fifteen." You might want to hit them with the most important points first, to catch their attention, and then move to the other benefits, like this:

- Encourages weight loss
- Increases strength and cardiovascular health
- Excellent for stress relief
- Promotes self-esteem though setting and achieving goals
- Creates a state of "flow"

If your audience is middle-aged people who need to unwind from their days in a healthy way, it might make more sense to start with the less "important," or more obvious to that audience, points and then build to the more compelling points that will convince them to give it a try:

- Encourages weight loss
- Increases strength and cardiovascular health
- Promotes self-esteem though setting and achieving goals
- Creates a state of "flow"
- Excellent for stress relief

Audience is critical when deciding on an organizational structure. To look at this topic of running from a slightly different perspective, what if you wanted to write about the reasons why running is difficult? What if your audience included mostly personal trainers? You might organize from the specific ideas to the more general ideas:

Specific ideas:
- The distance aspect is threatening to new runners
- Running as an exercise can be punishing on the body
- Newer runners don't know about training regimens

General idea:
- Create a specific training program that is accessible and easy on the body to help gain strength and endurance

If you happen to be a personal trainer or you know a lot about running and your audience is middle age runners who have started and quit running programs over and over, you might go from the more general ideas to the more specific ideas:

General ideas:
- Safety is key when you begin exercise
- Use a running training program that starts slowly help gain strength and endurance

Specific ideas:
- Newer runners have to build up their distance over time
- Starting slow is important to avoid punishing the body
- There are various training regimens that can work

Organization considerations

Organization is related to the mode of writing you choose.

Sometimes, like using spatial order for descriptive writing, the type of writing you're doing (mode) will determine organizational structure.

One mode that requires quite strict adherence to organization is compare and contrast. Let's look at this mode now as an example.

Let's say you're comparing four wheel drive and all-wheel drive vehicles. The audience is parents with young kids who have just moved to Minnesota from a southern state. You need to come up with *points of comparison* that are useful for that audience, such as:

- Cost of the vehicle
- Reliability over time
- Gas mileage
- Traction on the road

Based on this audience and their foremost desire for safety on the treacherous winter roads, you might want to use a general order of importance to get your points of comparison in order, going from the most important point to the lesser points:

- Traction on the road
- Reliability over time
- Cost of the vehicle
- Gas mileage

Once you've decided on the order of your points of comparison, you have two choices when it comes time to organize the whole essay: whole to whole or point by point.

With whole to whole, you talk about **Topic One** and then **Topic Two**. An outline might look like this:

Four Wheel Drive Vehicle
- Traction on the road
- Reliability over time
- Cost of the vehicle
- Gas mileage

All-Wheel Drive Vehicle
- Traction on the road
- Reliability over time
- Cost of the vehicle
- Gas mileage

Note: The order of the points of comparison is the same for each type of vehicle.

With point by point, those points of comparison drive the bus:

Traction on the road
- Four wheel drive
- All-wheel drive

Reliability over time

- Four wheel drive
- All-wheel Drive

Cost of the vehicle
- Four wheel drive
- All-wheel drive

Gas mileage
- Four wheel drive
- All-wheel drive

Note: For each point of comparison, you would talk about four wheel drive vehicles first, and then move to the all-wheel drive vehicles.

Cause and effect will lend itself better to induction and deduction. Classification will be a "most important to least important" (or vice-versa) situation.

Again, what organizational structure do you choose? It depends on your topic and its mode, but ultimately, knowing what the audience expectations are for your piece of writing will help you make your decision.

Organization between and within paragraphs

Now that you've decided how you're going to organize your essay as a whole, you're going to start working on getting your points on the page. How are you going to make sure your ideas flow, both within your paragraphs and when moving from paragraph to paragraph? First, note that just as an essay starts with an introduction, moves into the body, and then has a conclusion, paragraphs reflect that same structure:

- Topic sentence
- Body
- Concluding sentence

The topic sentence, like the thesis statement in an essay, gives an overview of the paragraph. The body sentences support the topic sentence with transitions, working within them to help the ideas flow. Then the concluding sentence helps wrap up ideas and/or transition into the paragraph that follows.

Consider the following paragraph from *The Atlantic* article "Why Do Humans Talk to Animals if They Can't Understand?" by Arianna Rebolini. The words in green act as *transitions* within the paragraph:

It's no stretch to suppose that a person with few or no friends would treat a pet more like a human friend. (topic sentence) Perhaps, too, people speak to their pets because they like to believe the animals understand, and perhaps people like to believe they understand because the alternative is kind of scary. To share a home with a living being whose mind you can't understand and whose actions you can't anticipate is to live in a state of unpredictability and disconnectedness. So people imagine a mind that understands, and talk to it. **(concluding sentence)**
Work cited note: Rebolini, Arianna "Why do humans talk to animals if they can't understand?" *The Atlantic* 18 August 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/08/talking-to-pets/537225/

Just like in an essay, you can consider using any of the major organizational methods (order of importance, chronological order, etc.) to guide the ideas of each paragraph. Another good habit to have is to notice the way things are organized in texts you read. You can get good ideas for how to organize your own texts from other well-organized texts. You can also consider the bevy of transitional words and phrases to use within your paragraphs (from https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=english-textbooks):

Chart: Common transitional words and phrases

Transitions that show sequence or time:

After	Before	Later	Afterward	Before long
Meanwhile	As soon as	Finally	Next	At first
First, second, third…	Soon	At last	In the first place	Then

Transitions that show position:

Above	Across	At the bottom	At the top	Behind
Below	Beside	Beyond	Inside	Near
Next to	Opposite	To the left, to the right, to the side	Under	Where

Transitions that show a conclusion:

Indeed	Hence	In conclusion
In the final analysis	Therefore	Thus

Transitions that continue a line of thought:

Consequently	Furthermore	Additionally	Because
Besides the fact	Following this idea	Further	In addition
In the same way	Moreover	Considering…it is clear that	Looking beyond

Transitions that change a line of thought:

But	Yet	However
Nevertheless	On the contrary	On the other hand

Transitions that show importance:

Above all	Best	Especially	In fact
More important	Most important	Most	Worst

Transitions that introduce the final thoughts in a paragraph or essay:

Finally	Last	In conclusion
Most of all	Least of all	Last of all

All-purpose transitions to open paragraphs or to connect ideas inside paragraphs:

Admittedly	At this point	Certainly	Granted	It is true
Generally speaking	In general	In this situation	No doubt	No one denies
Obviously	Of course	To be sure	Undoubtedly	Unquestionably

Transitions that introduce examples:

For instance	For example

Transitions that clarify the order of events or steps:

First, second, third	Generally, furthermore, finally	In the first place, also, last
In the first place, furthermore, finally	In the first place, likewise, lastly	

Resources

Table of Common Transitional Words and Phrases: page 40 from *Successful College Composition*
(https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=english-textbooks)

Writing introductions, conclusions, and titles: A key to organizing

Orienting the reader: Writing an introduction

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…

Does this ring a bell? These are the opening words to every episode in the massive, culture-bending *Star Wars* franchise.

They shoot the white girl first, but the rest they can take their time.

Sit with that one for a minute. Shocking? Yes. Compelling? Yes. Does it make you want to know what's going on? Absolutely. You might not recognize this as the first line from Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise*, but it is a good first line. It not only sets a scene showing violence and a group of people (probably men) on a murder spree, killing another group of people (at least one white woman; the rest are not white, and we can guess that they're probably women, too), but it also pulls out any number of emotional reactions. That is an incredible first line.

Now, these examples are pretty extreme. The first is from one of the most popular, if not THE most popular, series of films in American history, and the second is from the seventh novel by one of the greatest American authors alive today. Your introductions don't need to be as earth-shattering, but they do need to do three things:

- Grab the reader's attention
- Give a sense of the direction of ideas in the essay
- Set up what the writing will be like in the essay (super formal, more informal, etc.)

No big deal, right? Actually, it can feel like a HUGE deal, and writing the introduction can be so scary for some writers that it stops any forward progress. So, here are the first two rules for writing introductions:

Two rules for writing introductions

Rule Number One: *If you don't have ideas for the introduction, skip it!*

No, don't skip it altogether—you need to have one!—but if it's freaking you out and stopping you from getting going on your essay, start working with your body paragraphs first. Sometimes you need to play with the essay ideas for a while before an idea for the introduction alights on your shoulder and demands your attention.

Of course, sometimes ideas aren't that cooperative and you need to work at pulling them out. Have you written the rest of the essay and now you are considering the virtues of skipping writing an introduction altogether rather than going through the torture of having to figure it out? First, relax. Don't take it so seriously.

Rule Number Two: *Consider audience!*

This brings us to the second rule about introductions. Ask yourself: *What will get my audience's attention?* Always consider the audience's needs, interests and desires. If your audience is similar to you in any way, fabulous. Ask yourself: What would get *my* attention? Write an introduction that amuses or fascinates you. After all, if you're genuinely delighted, that could rub off on the reader.

Types of introductions: Thesis statement, anecdote, asking questions, a contradiction, and starting in the middle

It might help if you had some ideas about the types of introductions out there:

- Thesis statement
- Anecdote
- Asking questions
- A contradiction
- Starting in the middle

Thesis statement introductions are for the traditionalists. They also often work well in professional writing. They are typical in formal essays where it's important to start broad to help create context for a topic before narrowing it in to land at the specific point of the essay, in the thesis statement, at the end of the introductory paragraph. Sometimes formal academic argument papers even start with the thesis statement, as in this example:

> <u>*Parents are heroes because they work hard to show their children the difference between right and wrong, they teach their children compassion, and they help them to grow into stable, loving adults*</u>*. Parents act as guides for their kids while allowing them to make mistakes, listening to them when their kids need to talk, pushing them along when they're too shy to move on their own, and cheering the loudest when their kids achieve their dreams. It's no easy task to be the steady, moral compass that kids need, as parents are people too, and people make mistakes. As a species, though, we manage more often than not to raise well-adjusted kids who turn into hardworking adults, giving us hope for the future.*

As you can see, it's a pretty general and generic introduction, but it firmly orients the reader into the topic.

Let's say you want to stretch your creativity a bit, though. You might try an **anecdotal introduction**, where you tell a brief but complete story (real or fictional). This is using *narration* to catch the reader's attention. Here's an example of that using the same topic and thesis statement as above:

> *When my brother was little, he used to get into all sorts of trouble. Because he was just so curious about everything, his desire to check things out often overrode his good sense. This finally got the best of him when he was nine and got stuck in a tree. He climbed up there to look into a bird's nest, and we found him after he started yelling for us. He was twenty feet up there, and before my mom and I knew what was happening, my dad jumped up and started climbing, which was amazing because my father isn't too fond of heights. He got up to Jason and then helped him down, showing him where to put his hands and feet. When they were both safely on the ground, my parents scolded Jason while simultaneously hugging him. He was still terrified, and suddenly, I could see how terrified my dad was, too. I never forgot that moment, and I also came to a realization. Parents aren't just heroes because they will put their lives on the line for their kids. <u>Parents are heroes because they work hard to show their children the difference between right and wrong, they teach their children compassion, and they help them to grow into stable, loving adults.</u>*

This is a great strategy to try because it gives a specific example of your topic, and it's human nature to enjoy hearing stories. The reader won't be able to help being pulled into your essay when you use narration.

Another strategy writers employ when writing introductions is asking a question or questions to catch the reader's attention. You might have heard the adage, "There are no dumb questions, only dumb answers." While that's often true, when it comes to introductions, you need to be smart about the types of questions you ask, always keeping your audience in mind:

- DON'T ask yes or no questions.
- DON'T ask questions that will cause the reader to tune out.
- DO ask questions that get the reader thinking in the direction you're planning on going in within your essay.

Here's an example of a question that will stop your reader in his or her tracks:

> *Have you ever wondered about how Einstein's String Theory applies to old growth forests?*

Why is this a bad question? Simple: what if the reader answers that and says "Uh…no." You've just lost the reader.

Instead, consider your audience: what questions might they actually have about your topic? For example:

When you were a kid, who were your heroes? Was it Luke Skywalker? The President of the United States? An astronaut? A firefighter? Heroes come from all walks of life…

This series of questions begins with an open-ended question that frames the topic (childhood heroes) and gets readers thinking, but not too much—the follow-up questions keep readers from floating off into la-la land with their own ideas.

Another strategy that can work well is considering the **contradictions** in your topic, playing Devil's Advocate, and bringing them up right away in the introduction. When it comes to your topic, what clichés are out there about it? What misunderstandings do people have? Those ideas can make for a great introduction. For example:

When kids think about heroes, they often think about Superman or Spiderman in all of their comic book glory. These superheroes fight the bad guys, restoring order in the chaos that the villains create in the comics. They always win in the end because they are the good ones and because they have amazing abilities. What kid hasn't thought about how cool it would be to have super powers? What kids often miss, however, and don't understand until they're older, is that their parents are the real superheroes in their lives. The super powers that parents have may not be bionic vision or super strength, but they have powers that are much more important. <u>Parents are heroes because they work hard to show their children the difference between right and wrong, they teach their children compassion, and they help them to grow into stable, loving adults</u>.

Note that in this sample, there's a contradiction: the cliché idea of heroes as cartoon superheroes, but there's also a rhetorical question. Often, strategies for writing introductions can be combined to great effect.

Finally, an introductory strategy worth noting is similar to an anecdote, but instead of starting at the beginning of a story, you start in the middle of the action. For example, instead of setting the scene by starting in the cafeteria on a normal school day, you would start like this:

A wad of spaghetti smacked the side of my face, and one of the noodles ricocheted off my cheek and swung into my mouth. I nearly inhaled it, but before I

started choking, I managed to fling a handful of fries in Jose's direction. I saw Amy running over to dump her milkshake on Anthony's head before I ducked under the table. It was full-on pandemonium in the cafeteria, boys versus girls, a spark of rage finally igniting after weeks of classroom tension.

Starting an essay right in the middle of action immediately piques the reader's interest and creates a tension that can, admittedly, be difficult to come down from, but it sure makes for an exciting start.

These strategies can serve to enliven your essay topic, not just for the reader, but for you. When you can build an introduction that you can be proud of, it can give you creative ideas for the rest of your piece. Consider trying several different strategies for your introduction and choose what works best. Perhaps even combine a few to customize. It's also worth noting that, though introductions are traditionally one paragraph with the thesis statement as the last sentence, there's nothing saying an introduction can't be more than one paragraph. It's all about what's going to work for your topic and for your audience.

Making your mark: Writing a conclusion

Let's be honest. When you've spent so much time working out the ideas of your essay, organizing them, and writing an awesome, eye-catching introduction, by the time you get to the conclusion, you might have run out of steam. It can feel impossible to maintain the creative momentum through the most boring of paragraphs: the conclusion. So what do writers do? Easy: they start by writing, "In conclusion…" and sum up what the reader just got done reading.

If that feels off to you, good. It should. Unless you've written a long essay, a summary-style conclusion isn't appropriate and can even be insulting to the reader: why would you think readers need to be reminded of what they just read? Have more faith in them and in your own writing. If you've done your job in the essay, your ideas will be etched in readers' brains.

You still need to have a conclusion, though. So what's a conscientious writer to do?

The goal of a conclusion is to leave the reader with the final impression of your take on the topic. You don't need to try to have the final, be-all, end-all word on the topic, case closed, no more discussion. Readers will reject this. And again, don't worry about summarizing what you've just written.

Think about a boring conclusion being like the end of a class period. Your classmates are putting their books away, packing their bags, glancing at their phones—

their minds are already floating away from the topics in the class. An effective teacher will keep student attention until she is ready to dismiss the class, and an effective conclusion will not just keep the reader's attention until the end but will make them want to go back to the beginning and re-read—to see what they might have missed.

Types of conclusions: Mirroring the introduction, predicting the future, humor

The easiest way to write a conclusion, especially after you've written a stellar introduction, is to **mirror the introduction.** So, if you've started by setting the scene in the cafeteria mid-food fight, go back to the cafeteria in the conclusion, perhaps just as the fight is over and it's dawned on all the kids that this was a bad idea. If you spent your introduction bringing up a contradiction and dispelling it, allude to that contradiction again in your conclusion. If you asked a question in the introduction, you'd better be sure to answer it in the conclusion.

Mirroring is the easiest way of thinking about an appropriate concluding strategy. You might also consider looking into the crystal ball and **predicting the future**. Let's say you're arguing for increased sales taxes to help improve your city's crumbling roads in your essay. In your conclusion, paint a picture of what the future roads would look like (or feel like when driving on them!) if you got your way. This idyllic, concrete scene would remain in readers' minds, increasing the chances that they'll remember your point of view.

Another option that helps to endear you one more time to the reader is ending with something funny or catchy. When readers feel good because you utilized the strategy of a **humorous conclusion**, they'll remember that feeling and your take on the topic. You don't need to be a comedian to be funny, either. You can utilize jokes made in popular culture to make your reader smile: from the classic "Where's the beef?" catchphrase the fast-food chain Wendy's utilized in the 80's to the more current "double rainbow" YouTube video to the most cutting-edge memes, these jokes can be utilized for an impactful conclusion. The key, however (and warning!), is to *consider your audience*. Choose something that will amuse your audience, because although you don't need to be a comedian to write a humorous conclusion, like a comedian, if the joke falls flat, you'll leave readers with crickets chirping and awkward silence that all comedians face one time or another.

Another great option is one encouraged by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in his books on *Rhetoric:* use a maxim, or proverb. These are like folk-wisdom, or quotes by famous people who really know how to turn a phrase.

For example, in writing a paper arguing about nursery rhymes and the gender roles in them, you could end by quoting a portion of the ending nursery rhyme:

Snip, snap, snout,
This tale's told out.

Of course, this strategy could fail, too, by hitting the wrong note or not being quite on-topic. This is where an extra pair of eyes (or two or three) helps: test your conclusion out on others before you call it your final draft.

Name the game: Writing a gripping title

Some people have no problem coming up with titles for their essays. The struggle is NOT real for them, and they don't understand why the rest of us have difficulties with this relatively small part of the essay, at least *small* words-wise. These same people should probably go out and play the lottery because they're lucky. For the rest of us, however, we need to work at it.

Titles are scary because they're short, yet they must do a lot of work: they state the topic, a direction for the topic, and grab attention. You might note that these are basically the same tasks of the introduction, but at least with that, you have a whole paragraph. Not so with a title (unless you're going for something absurd, which your supervisor or writing teacher will likely not appreciate).

Yes, writing a title requires some creativity. In this case, though, there's a strategy you can use to think about title creation.

Step One: Write down your topic

Hank Aaron, baseball legend

Step Two: Think about the points you're going to make in the essay about your topic

This is a major research paper, so it's long. I'm going to write about his baseball life, his early life, and his passions outside of baseball (civil rights)

Step Three: Brainstorm a list of ideas, clichés, and associations dealing with your topic

Baseball, take me out to the ball game, grand slam, double-header, triple play, seventh-inning stretch, peanuts and Cracker Jack, "Juuuust a bit outside," major league, home run, homers, crack of the bat, Negro League, Milwaukee Brewers, The Hammer (his nickname), swing and miss…

Step Four: Put the ideas together in interesting ways to create title options

Hank Aaron Hammers It Home

Triple Play: The Life, Love, and Career of Hank Aaron

From Mobile to the Majors: Hank Aaron's Success Story

…and so on.

Note that the second two title options above utilize a colon. These are titles with subtitles, sometimes called a two-part title. The first part, before the colon, is the eye-catcher. The second part gives a direction for the essay. This is an opportunity you can exercise to get more words for your title. Note that each section of this chapter utilizes a title and subtitle! It's a great strategy to try.

Let's say you're going to write a persuasive essay about the importance of attending class. You can think of different titles based on different strategies:

- **Description of your essay**
  - For Example: How to be a Successful College Student

- **Rhetorical question**
  - To Attend or Not to Attend?

- **Mode of writing title**
  - Go to Class!

- **Two-part title**
  - Attendance: The Key to Acing College

- **Lifting a great phrase from your essay title**
  - Be There: Attending Class to Ace College

Chapter Seven: Drafting

What is drafting? Drafting is quickly writing up what you have on your topic, completely to the end.

Once you have defined your audience and purpose, explored, written a thesis, and organized your information, it's time to draft.

Drafting means writing a complete product. Whether it is an email to a client, a lab report in chemistry, or a research paper, a draft has the basics of what is going to be in the final version of the paper, the one you deliver to your boss or instructor.

A draft does not mean a *rough draft*. Nothing about drafting should be *rough,* since you have already been through over half of the writing process and are prepared to soon have a complete piece of writing. Complete, however, doesn't mean finished. You still have three more steps of the writing process to go (revising, editing, and proofreading).

Tips for drafting

So what are some good things to try to remember when you start drafting a paper?

- Try to be sure that the substance, or main claim or main idea (argument/thesis) with the main reasons and support is there. The rest you can refine later, but the plot, or main focus and evidence, that should all be there.

- Don't forget that if this is an academic paper, you need to be including the cite information as you go. It's easier to do it as you go, than to go back and find what you looked at and used as sources.

- Ask yourself about your draft: If I give this to a peer or a teacher, or my boss, to review, can I be sure they'll have a pretty good idea of the basics of what I'm going about here?

- Don't sweat extras in drafts. That is, when in doubt, write it, and just be sure that when you revise, you cut, cut, cut. Just remember as you draft though, that you can't cut later if there is nothing on the paper. So, while drafting, get a lot of good stuff down, then you can cut the *least best* (worst!) in the revising process.

Drafting means putting all of your work together clearly and in an organized way, and seeing how it looks. Different modes (genres) have different basics that you want to make sure are in your draft.

The next few sections detail the basic structure of a few common modes (or genres) in writing. Some brief examples are also provided.

Modes

A mode, or type, or form, is the kind of writing you are choosing to do. A *mode*, in writing studies, is also sometimes called a *genre*.

What are some modes? To take an example, you can choose to do the kind of writing that informs. This is often called expository writing, but in this book, we refer to it as informative writing. Informative writings include **reports**, manuals, **annotated bibliographies**, **narratives,** news reports, and descriptions.

You may also choose to do persuasive writing, which means the text you produce seeks to argue a point to convince an audience. Under persuasive writing we can include **rhetorical analyses** and **literary analyses**, which are persuasive assignments often assigned in college. You might also be asked to write a thesis-driven essay that makes a strong point and is then defended in the rest of the essay. Persuasive writing can use experience or research to support the thesis.

There are also a variety of important professional types of writing which include emails, **résumés**, postings on social media, **cover letters**, and **proposals**.

Other modes include proclamations, law codes, policies, deeds, manifestos, declarations, treaties, speeches, and anthologies.

Informative writing

Informative writing is not generally said to be written in order to influence an audience's opinion. A person writes informative texts simply to provide data, or statistics, or information. Organization is very important in informative writing because often the person reading an informative text is does not need to read the entire text. They only want to find and read the information they are looking for. Examples of this would be a manual for a new iPhone, a dictionary, or an employee's report to their boss about a new product release.

Another example of informative writing is a news report. For the most part, it lets the reader know what happened, and when, and where, and how. For example, "The

college budget projections were announced Tuesday by the President in the commons room of the university." Sometimes the reason, or cause, of what happened is mentioned, but this is not the only focus, nor is it a point of debate, in a news report. A news report, like all informative writing, is fact-centered.

In general, for informative writing, one has a very clear topic, such as "fluid mechanics" or "how a supernova operates" or "how to play tag" or "what happened at the Constitutional Convention in 1787." Informative writing has clear definitions and is often accompanied by straightforward organization. Informative writing also sometimes includes an outline or big and bold topical headings that go before each section and subsection. This is so that the reader can very easily find the piece of information they are looking for. Detailed informative writing must be well-researched.

Informative writing: Reports

A report is a piece of writing that gives information or tells what happened. A report must be well-researched, or utilize first-hand experience. When writing a report, you can use your experience or the experience of others. A report must have a clear topic and outline. The definitions must be obvious or well-explained. Any quotations contained in a report must be accurate.

A report begins with a clear explanation of what will be contained in it. Then it moves to supporting detail. Then it concludes, often summing up the main things to be learned in the report.

Often a longer report has a "brief" or "summary" before the main report, containing all the major points that are in the main report. You can find short summary documents like this often in law, where one must have the full, detailed report available, but one must also have a summary document to give to anyone who just wants the "talking points" from the main report. This is often also called a "fact sheet", printable as a one-page pdf or brochure that tells the main ideas of the larger document or text.

Examples of reports include data from a survey or poll, a report from a zoologist on the conditions in a certain facility, and a news report. See, the example below and notice that this example shows a writing that could also be called an essay.

Example of a report – informative writing

What I Did on My Summer Vacation

"Boom! Crack-a-lacka!" A thundercloud burst outside my window and woke up me and my teddy bear. It was the first day of summer vacation. My

father's list on the fridge was the only thing between me and freedom. I went downstairs and entered the eggy-smelling kitchen. But there was no list on the fridge!

This is how my summer vacation began, and it got better from there. My cousins and I rode horses on their farm all through the first weeks of the summer, and then we all jumped into the pickup and went to the rodeo. Have you ever seen a five-year-old boy ride a mad hog? We did. And my uncle bought us pink ice cream and pink cotton candy. We looked like hogs ourselves when we were done. But, in case you're wondering, we didn't throw up on the rides.

You know that feeling when August comes closer, how you can't figure out how to pack the most amount of fun into one day? Well that feeling would not go away for me last summer, because I got a free load of books from one of my aunts, left on the porch one morning in mid-July. Well, this killed my outdoor play for three weeks, unless you count reading "Catcher in the Rye" and "The Outsiders" and "Old Yeller" in the treehouse for hours on end in the shady breezes by the brook as "playing outside."

In August, though, my dog got sick, so we spent most of our time at the vet, or making cards to tack on the fence near his doghouse so he could see them and maybe get well faster. My sister planted a "hope garden" next to the doghouse with one sad plot of grass and two bean plants. She said that some Native American tradition she read about promised that the "hope garden" would make the dog get better faster. I didn't believe her, but the grass looked fresh and pretty next to the fading doghouse.

Summer vacation ends, as you know, on Labor Day. I had swam, jumped, kicked, raced, and read all summer. I had two skinned knees and one skinned elbow to prove it, and six fish bone skeletons hanging on the walls in my room to prove I had fished. I won a fourth place ribbon at the local fair for my chili, and there was a green ribbon above the kitchen table to prove that. But I had no ribbon to prove our team had beat the team of the neighboring town in our baseball tournament this summer. You'll have to just believe me on that.

In the writing process, when you are revising informative writing, you will probably focus especially on revising for accuracy of data, clarity of presentation, and organization.

Informative writing: Example of a book report

Jamal Student
English 101
Book report on *Beyond Good and Evil*, by Friedrich Nietzsche

Wicked Moods and Tones

In Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche adds to the philosophical conversations of the late 1800s. He discusses nature, what is natural, and the*

importance of psychology. But his main focus is on what he says is "morality." In his discussion of this topic, he seeks to unchain people from old ideas of right and wrong ways to behave, and to have them be more free.

He goes through history, and mentions many movements of philosophy from Plato to the present. He seems to be arguing against quite a few of the people he mentions, holding them to be somewhat antiquated and stifling. His way of writing is so playful, however, that one can't be entirely sure of what Nietzsche really thinks. For example, he writes, "All this goes to prove that from our fundamental nature and from remote ages we have been—accustomed to lying" (61). When he says this, does he mean "lying" in a moral sense? It is hard to know.

I enjoyed this book. I thought it was difficult to comprehend, what with all the Latin phrases, but I got enough out of it to form the judgment that it is worth reading, has some interesting ways of using language and some fascinating thoughts, and that it makes me understand modernity and the history of thought a little better.

Work cited
Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil* [1886]. Dover 1997

Informative writing: Compare and contrast

A compare and contrast writing is often done as a short paper on its own, or as smaller part of a research or persuasive essay. It describes two things carefully and clearly, and then compares them, often ending by concluding which of the two is better.

A compare and contrast essay is well-organized, factual, and detailed. The style is often direct and vivid. The point is to document similarities and differences, to make people see things in a fresh way, or to gain insight. It focuses the audience's attention in a way that makes them think.

Examples include comparing two products and concluding which is better or outlining two solutions to a contemporary or personal problem and concluding which is better. Often, when preparing to write a compare and contrast piece, the writer makes lists of similarities and differences between the two things that are being compared. The subject-by-subject, or block method of organization can be used—one describes one thing completely, and then the other, and then concludes. Or, one can go point-by-point.

Example of compare and contrast – informative writing

Mow, Wow, the Best Way to Mow

I have to buy a lawnmower. I live in the suburbs, and one must have a lawnmower when one has a lawn. But which lawnmower, that is the question. A riding lawnmower or a push mower? My lawn is only one acre, but the grass grows quickly in the summer, and I want to make the right choice.

A riding lawnmower is easier on the back. You don't have to sweat as much when you ride. A riding lawnmower is big, too, and gets the job done quicker, because the wide blade is cutting so much grass per second. A riding lawnmower can also be used by all members of the household—my elderly father can even cut the grass with a riding lawnmower if he wishes to. But on the other hand, a riding lawnmower is expensive. It is also bigger, so you have to have more space in the garage to store it. It is also an attraction to children, and they could get hurt on it.

A push mower helps you get much more exercise when you use it, because you are using your arm and leg muscles a great deal as you push that mower, especially through the taller grass. A push mower can also get into littler areas, so you don't have to go over the lawn with a weed-whipper when you're done mowing to get all the spaces under the deck and around trees. A push mower is also small and easily stored. A push mower also has less pollution, because the engine is so small. But a push mower is also slower, so will the grass get mowed as often if I get a push mower? And with a push mower, it takes longer to do the entire lawn, because the area the blade is cutting is not very large.

I think I'm going to go with a push mower. I like the idea of getting more exercise whenever I cut the lawn. I like the cheap price. I want to help the environment. And, let's face it, I don't want the neighbors in my uppity suburb to think I'm lazy.

Informative writing: Annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a specific kind of informative writing that is often assigned in beginning college courses. There are three elements of an annotated bibliography: the citation of an article, the summary of the article, and the connection to the topic at hand. Sometimes this last element, the connection to the topic being researched, is not included. In an annotated bibliography there is always a citation of an article. For example, you may write an annotated bibliography about three books and articles that you found about why people become psychopaths. Often, an annotated bibliography is done in preparation for writing a longer paper in which you seek to persuade.

Each entry of an annotated bibliography begins with the citation of the book or article. Then there is a brief summary of the contents of the book or article. Sometimes, the last few sentences of an annotated bibliography include a reason why the book is going to be used in a research project, or why it is important, or an assessment (value-

judgment) about the book or article. Annotated bibliographies can be very brief summaries, such as in the example of an annotated bibliography below. Or they can be longer, and each entry may include a key quote or two from the book or article.

Example of annotated bibliography: Informative writing

Jade Patel
English 101
Fall 2020

Psychopathic Personality Research

My topic is crime, specifically psychopathy. So far I have three articles that I have found, which I annotate below.

1.
McCuish, E. C. and R. Corrado, P. Lussier, and S. D. Hart. "Psychopathic traits and offending trajectories from early adolescence to adulthood" *Journal of Criminal Justice* 42.1 (2014): 66-76

In this article, the authors go through trajectory studies of adolescence who have committed crime. They categorize different types of traits and research which traits are associated with offending behavior. They make conclusions that it is the chronic individuals who appear to be the most psychopathic.

2.
Kiehl, Kent, and Morris Hoffman. "The criminal psychopath: History, neuroscience, treatment, and economics" *Jurimetrics* 51 (2011): 355-397

In this article, the authors go through the history of the psychopathic personality. They describe the problem that psychopaths present to society. They try to increase awareness of the condition, and give information about psychopaths that is informed by history and research.

3.
Millon, Theodore, and Erik Simonsen, Roger Davis, and Morten Birket-Smith (eds). *Psychopathy: Antisocial, Criminal, and Violent Behavior*. The Guilford Press 2002.

In this book, the editors present articles on psychopathy. They try to bring the reader up to date on what the current research situation is like in psychopathy studies. They discuss definitions and the reasons people are psychopaths, as well as how to correct and fight against the bad effects that psychopaths have on society.

Informative writing: Descriptions / Explaining a process

In writing a description, you state the place, thing, time, process, action, or person you are describing. Then you proceed to give details about it. For example, when you write a short story, you often describe the main character towards the beginning of the story; she is an engineer, tall, white-haired, and likes fishing.

A description is often a small part of a larger piece of writing. For example, in a compare and contrast paper, you describe the two things you are comparing, first one, then the other, and then you compare and contrast them. Or in an experience-based persuasion writing, you describe a situation you were in. Careful word choice and position is key to a good description.

In writing a description, keep the five senses in mind. What did it look like? Start at the top and work your way down. What did it smell like? Compare the smell to something else if you can. What did it feel like, the different parts of it? What did it sound like and taste like? And in writing descriptions, as with all writing, look at other good descriptions and model your writing on them.

Graphic: Informative versus persuasive writing

Now we have reviewed informative modes of writing. Here is a graphic to illustrate as we move to a different kind of writing, a different mode: persuasive writing.

INFORMATIVE VERSUS PERSUASIVE WRITING
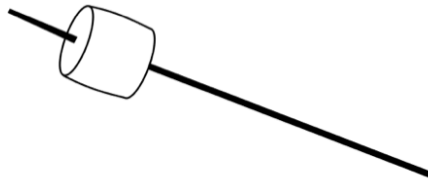
An example of informative writing about marshmallows:

Marshmallows are sweet. They are white. They are often roasted over a fire. They are very soft and melt easily. Most Americans have eaten marshmallows, especially at the lake during the summer.

An example of an argument about marshmallows:

Marshmallows should be sold with warning labels. They stick to your hands when they melt when it is hot. They are also horrible for your teeth. They are high in calories too. For these and many other reasons, bags of marshmallows should come with warning labels.

Persuasive writing

Persuasive writing includes narration, rhetorical and literary analyses, definition, and experience- or research-based argumentation.

All forms of writing contain some kind of persuasion, even informative writing. For an example, a grocery list is informative writing, but the audience, the person for whom it is written, also takes it as a bit persuasive; it has the implied argument: "You should go pick these things up from the store." Even a report you deliver to your boss informs him of what the engineering department is up to, but it also has that implied persuasion: We're doing our job here well; our department is worth the money, and so on.

But let's look at persuasive writing now as writing that has as its very essence and core the desire to persuade, to change minds, to move people in one direction and not another.

Persuasive writing does contain factual information that is not arguable. But, in general, persuasive writing is not about just giving information. It is meant to shift hearts, to move souls, to change opinions, to deepen thought.

Often persuasive writing is called "argumentative writing." However, it is unfortunate that when people hear the word "argument," they think of two people screaming at each other in the kitchen, and one of them is ready to knock the other one over the head. But an argument paper is not about bad feelings and destroying the other person, or at least, it shouldn't be. There is a technical way we use the word "argument" in writing texts, it simply means offering a written text into an ongoing debate with the hope of securing agreement among people of good will who currently disagree with you or hold a different view. This is the nature of deliberative democracy, and it is the only ethical way to do argument.

In all argument writing, or persuasive writing, you give background information, and you make a claim (thesis) and you give evidence to support the thesis. You often appeal to the interests and emotions of your audience. You keep an ethical and respectful tone. You usually entertain counterarguments. You conclude, summing up your main points.

Remember, you don't argue about things that are self-evident (such as that the sun is in the sky), but about things that can reasonably be debated, such as who will win the Super Bowl this year, or what we should do about health care in our state. You should also choose topics that people care about deeply. It depends on the audience.

Often we make a distinction between persuading by working with your reader and persuading by leading your reader. Which method you choose will depend on your audience. If you think your audience will not mind feeling as if you are controlling them, you may choose to persuade them by leading them. If you think your audience would prefer to feel as if they are participating in their movement towards a new position, you may wish to persuade them by working with them—by acknowledging them often, by reminding them what they already know, etc.

As discussed in earlier chapters, we often say that there are three methods of persuasion: ethos (persuading by means of presenting good character, credentials, or reputable sources), pathos (persuading by means of moving the emotions), and logos (persuading by means of facts and reason).

The basic outline of an argument, or persuasive form of writing, is this

- Claim (thesis) (as part of the introduction)
- Supporting reasons
- Consideration of counter-arguments (optional)
- Conclusion and resaying of claim (thesis)

Because persuasion is so dependent on a central claim (thesis), often in the writing process you'll find that if you change your thesis, even a little, you have to go through and rework a good deal of the rest of the writing.

Persuasive writing: Definition writing

Definition writing is often parts, or sections, of other writings. Definitions are important, because accuracy of definition, or naming, is one of the greatest problems in persuasion—often people mean different things by the same word. So, especially in using big, abstract words like "justice" and "democracy" and "fair," you need to be clear on what you mean. For example, if you write a whole paper arguing that scholarships need to be awarded fairly but never define "fair," then your argument is founded on shaky ground. Even if you provide great evidence and reasoning, your audience can say, "But that's not what I think *fair* means."

When defining, keep in mind that there are different kinds of definitions: denotations and connotations. A denotation is the official, accepted definition. It includes both the official dictionary information (including parts of speech, forms, and alternate meanings) and commonly held definitions. For example, take the word "apple." An apple's denotation would include its pronunciation, the fact it is a noun, and the idea that it refers to a fruit growing on a tree in a northern climate that can be red, green, or yellow.

The connotations of a word are meanings that go beyond the denotation, that often have feelings and symbolic meanings. Take the word "apple" again. We associate so many things with apples: health (an apple a day keeps the doctor away), education (an apple for a teacher), patriotism (American as apple pie). sin (Garden of Eden), New York City (The Big Apple). You could probably think of even more.

When you define a word, be aware of its denotation and connotations. And remember, you can use connotations to lead and persuade and move your reader. For example, knowing apples are a symbol of health, you can use that in your writing to symbolize healthy living. Apples are serious, too (unlike the funny banana).

Writing a dictionary definition is not enough. For example, the definition of a "rosebud" in the dictionary is "a bud of a rose." This is not really helpful for really explaining the object to someone not familiar with it. There are many other ways to define:

- *Define by category*. Put the word or term in a larger organizational context. For example: **patriotism** can be put in term of military service or in another category like volunteering and giving back to one's community.

- *Define by example*. For example, a **good student** is like Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter books; she is prepared, does not procrastinate, is not afraid to ask questions, but also is willing to help others without cheating.

- *Define with a synonym*. Use words that are similar. For example, a **hipster** is a bit like the beatniks of the 1950s, smart and stylish but also a source of ridicule by others.

- *Define by operation*. Break it down into parts/how it works. For example, a **responsible parent** has to be a mentor, role model, guidance counselor, therapist, and even a jailer on occasion.

- *Define through historical process*. Look at how word has evolved over time. For example, the word **holocaust** originally meant to be consumed by fire, but after World War II, the meaning changed. It now refers to the mass genocide of Jewish and other peoples by the Nazis.

- *Define by negation*. Define something by what it is not. You cannot do this extensively because eventually, you have to define it. For example, a **Physician's Assistant** (PA) is not an MD (Medical Doctor). PAs can perform many of the same procedures as an MD and even prescribe medications but they can only assist in surgery and not perform it on their own. Also, PAs work under the supervision of an MD.

Persuasive writing: Narrative

Narrative is a special kind of persuasive writing. Examples of narrative include the personal narrative, the reflection paper, and the memoir. Often these are also called "essays." Stories, long and short, are narratives. The idea in a narrative is for the audience to be moved a certain way, to have a sort of revelation, or to see something in a new light. This is why narrative writing is categorized under persuasive writing. You are trying to persuade an audience to behold a matter in a certain way—you are trying to stir their soul. One example of a narrative is a fairy tale that tells a moral.

Example of narrative: Fairy tale with moral – persuasive writing

The poor little sparrow was called Pride. Pride's mother said, "Pride, leave the nest and make your way in the world." So Pride tweeted farewell to her siblings and soared off towards the tallest tree.

At the top of the tallest pine tree in the forest, Pride made a nest. She could see for miles. She could see the weather vane on the roof of the barn in the valley over the hill. And every night she heard the wind in the pines just below her.

One day, as Pride was going about gathering worms on the ground far below, she heard a chipmunk squeaking at another chipmunk. "What are you quarreling over?" tweeted Pride. One chipmunk, whose name was Sam, said, "Joe here is not gathering quickly enough. And we have a party tonight. We have to be ready." Pride nodded and said, "I believe I am invited to the party." Sam looked and Joe, and Joe looked at Sam. "Why not?" they shrugged. "Seven o'clock."

Pride fluttered back down to the plot of dirt happily. Just then she saw two worms wiggling in the dirt. She carefully picked them both up in her beak and began climbing through the air to her nest near the stars. But half-way up, she got so tired. And the worms were so heavy! So, regretfully, she dropped one of them. When she finally got to her nest, she was so tired, she put the worm on the table, sat in the armchair, and fell asleep.

When she woke, it was half past seven. She flew to the mirror, arranged her feathery hair, put on her best yellow bonnet, and began the trip to the chipmunks. She passed the tallest branches, then the middle branches, and then finally, she found the chipmunks by following the sound of the fiddle that filtered through the lowest branches.

"What are you doing here?" Sam asked her when he saw Pride entering the party room amid the broken balloons and empty cake pans. "Why, coming to the party," she said. "It's over," he said. And he stretched out on a branch, fluffed his pillow, and snored off.

"Oh, no!" thought Pride. "Why, oh, why did I build my nest so high, and so far away from everybody else's?"

The use of stories with interesting details are common in good narrative writing. For example, here is a line from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

This was Slim, the jerkline skinner. His hatchet face was ageless. He might have been thirty-five or fifty. His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought (33-34).

You can see how exact and careful and clear this description is. Narrative writing often includes much figurative language. In other words, narrative writing focuses on the senses—how did it feel? How did it taste, and what did it smell like? There is also often a lot of dialogue in narrative writing. There is a clear beginning and a clear end. There is often a takeaway lesson, or memory. Sometimes, there is a plot with complexity and resolution. The topic is usually one of love, or envy, or death, or big choices, or something very interesting to humans.

In narrative writing, the thesis, or central claim, is often ambiguous or arguable—it cannot be pinpointed into one sentence, the way you can find a thesis sentence in an academic argument paper.

For example, what is the central argument of the superhero movies? It is not: "Monsters are pink." It is not "Everybody should go to college." It may be something like "Be strong" or "Believe in yourself" or "Work hard" or "Fight for what is right." And we perhaps can argue which of those is the main argument of each superhero movie. But we are all somewhere near each other in terms of what we think the argument, or claim, could be.

Persuasive writing: Rhetorical analysis

A rhetorical analysis seeks to convince an audience what is going on in a chosen text, in terms of the chosen text's effect on its audience. The form of the thesis, or claim (or central argument) of a rhetorical analysis is the same in every rhetorical analysis. In other words, you don't invent your own thesis statement when you write a rhetorical analysis; you simply fill in the blanks of the given form of the thesis of all rhetorical analyses, which is something like this:

In this rhetorical analysis, I am arguing that [Insert name of important text] is persuasive by means of _____.

Then, you give evidence to support your claim.

In rhetorical analyses, you very often give background about the text you are studying and telling your audience about. You also quote extensively from the text you are analyzing to provide the evidence to support your way of seeing how the text is persuasive. You also paraphrase your text and summarize it. As you can see, a rhetorical analysis is a very good exercise for getting really into the meat of what is going on in whatever text you choose to analyze.

For some examples:

- Maya Angelou's poems are persuasive by means of her strong images and rhythms that feel so passionate.
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt's speech "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" was persuasive because of ethos: the speaker had a great reputation as a leader.
- Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech was persuasive because of his displaying of the logic and common sense of our common humanity.

At the end of a rhetorical analysis, sometimes you, the writer, sum up why you think the text you studied is persuasive specifically to you—you being the audience.

The most common type of rhetorical analysis is the one that uses the Aristotelian categories of ethos, pathos, and logos to organize it. You put this formula into the first paragraph of your rhetorical analysis in some form and then just follow through on giving evidence to support your claim (thesis). Just as a reminder, *ethos* is the character or reputation of the writer of the text. *Pathos* is the emotional appeals or evoking of feelings that the text makes to occur in the audience, and *logos* is the logical elements in the text, the appeals to facts and reason and common sense (or, universal truths, in a sense).

Some tips for writing a good rhetorical analysis are:

- Choose a worthy text; do not choose a text that is irrelevant or that nobody cares about or will ever read.
- Read the text carefully and know it well; notate it and find good quotes in it.
- Summarize it.
- Feel if you have an emotional reaction. Document the emotion.
- Feel if you are moved by the logic and facts and common sense in the writing. Document it.
- Feel if you are respecting the author more and more as you read. Document that.
- Learn something about the writer of the text, if you can.
- Learn something about the historical situation of the text or the conversation that the text is involved with.

- Think about who else is interested in the text or the topic that the text discusses.
- Consider the audience of the text you are studying—how might they be moved or persuaded? What is the purpose?
- Make sure you entertain other points of view, or counter-arguments. This almost always strengthens your own argument because it displays that you know about and have carefully considered other stakeholders.

Example of rhetorical analysis – persuasive writing

I recently read "A Piece of Chalk" by G. K. Chesterton. The writer is persuasive by means of ethos, in that he creates a sense of trust in his reader by means of his facility with English and with his love for the things most humans love: Nature, philosophy, art. The writer is also persuasive by means of pathos, because he evokes an emotional response, even to things such as color, that is "red-hot" and "draws roses" and "black" which is "definite." The writer is also persuasive by means of logos, or logic, but not data. For he gives all kinds of logical arguments, but to go along with them you have to agree with certain assumptions, which are almost always amazing and vast assumptions.

Chesterton persuades by ethos by presenting himself, the writer, as one who cares about humanity. For example, he says that others might draw a cow, but he draws "the soul of the cow," so that it becomes something poetical and greater than it is in itself. He also describes himself in the first paragraph as a friendly person, as he interacts with the woman in the kitchen with humor. By mentioning things like "the pocket-knife" and calling it "the infant of the sword," Chesterton amuses with his fresh and touching uses of language.

Chesterton persuades by pathos because he is always mentioning emotion-laden topics and subjects, like "devils and seraphim" and "blind old gods" and "the live green figure of Robin Hood." He does not call a path through a field a path through a field; he calls it "those colossal contours", thus evoking a feeling of vastness and closeness and love for all of England. Everyone carries things in their pockets. But for Chesterton to call these items "primeval and poetical" is yet another example of his making a smiling feeling of the enormity of humanity's cares out of something so small and inconsequential.

Chesterton persuades by logos not with providing an array of scientific facts, but by laying out statements that have amazing assumptions behind them. For example, he says that elements of the landscape being smooth "declares in the teeth of our timid and cruel theories that the mighty are merciful." To assume that smoothness in nature is the same as smoothness of humankind is simply an amazing

and amusing leap. In the end, he assumes that his audience is going to go along with his assumption that "white" is the color of "virtue." This is easy to assume along with him, because he slips it into the narrative of his essay on virtue, which he says is "a vivid and separate thing."

In my view, Chesterton is persuasive by means of ethos more than anything else. By presenting himself as a philosopher and one who cares deeply about man, the audience is easily persuaded to follow him wherever he leads them in his writing, and to agree with such a jolly, wise, and people-loving person, which is so refreshing in this, what Chesterton calls, this "pessimistic period" we live in.

Work cited
Chesterton, G. K. "A Piece of Chalk" [1905]. *www.gkc.org.uk*, http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/chalk.html. Accessed 14 Feb. 2018.

Persuasive writing: Literary analysis

To write a literary analysis, one picks an important text of literature. Then one makes a claim about it and supports that claim with evidence from the literature text itself, and sometimes also from sources that shed light on the literature text. The key to a good literary analysis is to deeply and closely read the literature text, come up with one clear claim that is reasonable, and support it by evidence, especially by quoting or paraphrasing or summarizing items from the text.

To use the example of D. H. Lawrence's short story "The Prussian Officer," I could claim that the text is to be read as a commentary on the lostness of modern human life. I could support this by directly quoting from the end of the story, where we read:

He stared till his eyes went black, and the mountains, as they stood in their beauty, so clean and cool, seemed to have it, that which was lost in him (18).

I could find other portions of the text which also exhibit this sense of wandering and befuddlement. Notice that my interpretation **can be argued against by others**. Others may think the text is directed towards truths that are something somewhat different. But because my evidence is grounded in the literary text itself, my thesis, or claim, is most certainly at least a reasonable claim.

As with a rhetorical analysis, the thesis, or central claim, of every literary analysis essentially follows the same form. So somewhere you will see in every literary analysis this kind of claim: "The text, [Insert name of literary text], should be read as _____, because _____."

Tips for doing a literary analysis are:

- Grammar is important. Knowing what parts of speech are in the text and where and why, helps you make educated statements about them. For example, to know how to talk about a text as "written in the first person" versus "written in the third person" is necessary to writing a good literary analysis. For example, Moby Dick begins "Call me Ishmael." This is the first person. It does not begin "There was a man named Ishmael," which sends forth a very different feeling. Being able to notice this means knowing grammar.
- Things that are multicultural are nice to analyze, especially if you are trying to appeal to a wider audience.
- The more closely you read the literature text you are writing about, the better your analysis will be.
- Knowing the historical context and conversation of the text you are analyzing is also helpful.
- Showing that you know possible counter-claims to what you are claiming about the text will usually only strengthen your own case.
- Secondary sources--academic sources about the literature text you are examining--can sometimes be helpful.

Remember, when you write a literary analysis, you are writing to an audience of people who probably know and care about the text you are analyzing. So, already, you know that your audience is going to want you to care about and know about the text. For example, your audience could be the other members of your literature or composition course.

When reading the chosen literary text you are analyzing, look at themes, patterns, images, language, metaphors, interpretations, the plot line. As you read, think carefully about why the writer of the literary text chose one word and not another, why they put an image in where they put it, why they were silent in a certain place where you thought there would be something said—things like this.

Literary analyses are sometimes experience-based. In other words, you, the reader, simply write about how you responded to the text, how you reacted. This is experience-based persuasion, which is the next section. But even if you are writing an experience-based (often called a reader-response) literary analysis, you still must support your claims from the literary text and be prepared to defend them.

The following example is a simple version of a literary analysis because it does not involve citing anything other than the text under analysis. More advanced analyses often include references to the work of other scholars in the field who research the literary text.

Example of a literary analysis – persuasive writing

"Ode on a Grecian Urn," and Depression

Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" should be read as a confession of depression. The writer is clearly depressed. The maidens are "loth"—why can't they be something more positive? There is a "mad pursuit" and a "struggle to escape." To me that sounds kind of upsetting. And the entire poem is filled with references to that which the writer wants but cannot get, which makes the writer sound unfulfilled and sunken. For we read of "unheard" melodies and the bold lover in the poem is told he can "never, never" kiss the girl.

The author even admits that he, or someone, is left with "a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd." And we all know that cows often low because they are missing their mothers, or food, and here we have this poor "heifer lowing at the skies" in the poem. And who wouldn't get depressed being reminded of "old age" and how this generation is being wasted by it?

Some might argue that at the end of the poem, the talk about truth being beauty and beauty being truth, is upbeat. But it sounds a little fraught to me, even there, for the unnamed narrator tells the audience "…—that is all / Ye know on earth." If that's it, and everything on earth is full of silent streets and we have just read about a place "desolate" and a person "for ever panting", then, I ask you, where does this leave us? In a funk, that's what I say.

Work Cited
Keats, John. "Ode on a Grecian Urn." *The Poetry Foundation.*
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn.
Accessed 14 Feb. 2018.

Persuasive writing: Experience-based persuasion

In college as well as in a job situation, most persuasive writing you do will have to do with persuading with logos, or facts and data. However, there is also experience-based writing that depends on style, passion (pathos), and experience (ethos). The following is an argument, or claim:

A man should never marry. I am charmed when I hear a man say, 'I am still living alone.' When I hear someone say, 'He has married into so and so's family' or 'He has taken such and such a wife and they are living together,' I feel nothing but

contempt for the man. He will be ridiculed by others too, who will say, 'No doubt he thought that commonplace woman was quite a catch, and that's why he took her off with him.' Or, if the woman happens to be beautiful, they are sure to feel, 'He dotes on her so much that he worships her as his private Buddha. Yes, that's no doubt the case' (Kenko, Yoshida, "from Essays in Idleness" 2341)

The central thesis is the first line: "A man should not marry." The writer then goes on to very feelingly support his view, his claim, his thesis. But he does not cite any data, or scientific research, to support his thesis. He is convincing by experience, by emotion, by character.

As the example above exhibits, any novel, poem, story, or similar writing can be also called an experience-based persuasion writing. Here, in this textbook, we focus on the more academic kind of experience-based persuasion text you are often asked to write in learning environments and job situations. The key in both kinds of persuasion writing, however, is that you must have a clear thesis or claim. You must stick to that same claim throughout your paper, and you must support it with evidence. You often do well to include the admission that there are valid possible counter-arguments to your claim, and you should refute them as best and reasonably as you can.

The difference between experience-based and research-based persuasion is only that experience-based persuasion is more subjective, non-scientific. It is more about how you, one person, feel about something.

Again, the form of an experience-based persuasion writing is:

- Claim (thesis) (as part of the introduction)
- Supporting reasons
- Consideration of counter-arguments (optional)
- Conclusion and resaying of claim (thesis).

You must have a clear, arguable thesis, and you must stick to that single claim throughout the entire text. You must give reasons to support your thesis. You do well to consider why your claim could be wrong—what good reasons there could be to oppose you. And then at the end you say your thesis again, in a fresh and memorable way. Feel free to look at models to get ideas.

Tip: To write experience-based persuasion, simply read news or postings on the internet on topics that you're interested in. You will quickly find something to disagree with or argue against. Use that point of agreement or disagreement to start your paper.

Persuasive writing: Research-based persuasion

Research-based persuasion writing is similar to experience-based persuasion writing. The difference is that you, the writer, do not put so much of yourself into the argument. You come up with a working thesis, or claim, and then do research to find items to support your claim with facts and authorities.

Research-based persuasion writing is especially about trying to persuade an audience through their logic and reason.

It cannot be emphasized enough how careful you must be about phrasing and forming your thesis, or central claim, in research-based persuasion writing. If you say, "I argue that there are a lot of problems with crime in our country," you cause your reader to become immediately lost. This is far too vague. If you claim, "Crime is bad," then your reader shakes their head again—this is not an arguable argument, because who is going to plausibly argue against that claim? But if you say something like, "I argue that _____ has been proven to help improve the crime situation, based on data from _____, supported by researchers _____ and _____," the reader knows that you know your data, you know your topic, you know your research, you know your issue, and you are acquainted with at least some of the other people involved in the issue.

Be very specific in your claim (thesis, argument)!

Secondly, you must be very careful about following through on your thesis. You must adhere to it throughout your writing, and you must finish the paper with essentially the same claim that you began it with.

As far as research for a research-based persuasion paper, the key here is to find important, relevant research. To do this, you must skim many texts and find what you need.

Also key here is to document your sources. Keep track of what you are reading, and document where you got everything. And finally, quote from your sources accurately and fairly. And if something is a quote, keep it in quotes.

Do not just lift someone else's words and pass them off as your own!

Ethos, or having a tone of ethical responsibility, is important in a research-based persuasion writing as well. You do well to follow the general ways and forms of the people who are in the field you are writing in. You do well to present yourself as you actually are, with honesty. You can be as passionate about your topic as you like, but

be fair and reasonable. Look at counter-arguments lucidly and considerately. Keep your tone professional, clear, and genuine, as much as possible.

Professional writing

Professional writing might also be called business writing. In professional writing, you are writing much as you write reports, in expository (informative) writing, as we discussed above. You are conveying information and a tone of professionalism. Examples of professional writing include professional emails, résumés and cover letters, and social media postings.

Professional writing: Emails

In a professional email, you want to greet the recipient or recipients politely. You want to use proper grammar and have a calm and consistent style. Stay with the business matter at hand. You want to break up your writing into clear and separate topics—think organization and structure, so that any decision-makers above you or equal to you can quickly find what information they need, using short and to-the-point sentences.

Remember always that your email is a public document, no matter how private it may seem to you. And don't phrase anything in an email differently than what you would say to the recipient face to face.

Example of professional writing: emails

4 February 2015
Dear Colleagues,
cc: Jim Boss

Our method of reserving the main conference room in Room 412 used to be a sign-up sheet at my desk here in Room 12. We are moving to an online sign-up sheet for the use of the main conference room, beginning tomorrow at 8am.

To reserve the room now, one simply goes to the website, www.conferenceroom412.com, and clicks on the block of time (in ½ hour increments) that one wishes to reserve the room for. The system will automatically fill in your contact information and block out the time for you. You can fill in as much information as you would like about your use of the room.

In the event that there is a scheduling conflict, and two people wish to reserve the room at the same time, the procedure for resolving the conflict is the same as before: email me and I will resolve the conflict within two hours of receipt of your email.

If you have any questions about this new method, please contact me.

Regards,
Jane Secretary
Administrative Assistant,
Business XYZ Jane.secretary@businessxyz.com
763-222-1763
Room 12

Professional writing: Résumés and cover letters

Résumés are important for working people. A résumé tells the reader who you are, what you have done, and why they should hire you. It does not use sentences so much as it uses bullet-points, white space, and brief data phrases. The goal is to accurately and quickly display oneself to a potential employer. In writing a résumé, do not have errors. Carefully proof-read what you have in your résumé before you send it. Simply list your name, your education, your qualifications, and your work history, but avoid all personal pronouns. Utilize active verbs to describe your experience.

The key to good résumé writing is accuracy, conciseness, and consistency.

Example of cover letter:

14 July 2017

Human Resources Director
Weatherford Public Schools
Weatherford, MN

Dear Human Resources Director,

As my résumé indicates, I have extensive experience managing the grounds and facilities of schools. I would appreciate it if you would carefully consider my application to be head janitor at the Weatherford Public Schools. I am honest, good with people, and very responsible. I believe this is why I was promoted from janitor to head janitor at Midland Public Schools, which job I presently hold.

When there is a problem in the school, I fix it immediately, or find out how to get the resources together to get it fixed as soon as possible. I document everything, and the safety of the students and staff is my highest priority. Along with this, I also keep a productive and happy team going every day.

I can provide references to you, of people familiar with me and my work, who will also inform you as to my excellent worth and qualifications for the position of head janitor.

My contact information is below and on my résumé. I very much look forward to hearing back from you soon, to discuss the possibility of me coming to work at Weatherford Public Schools to serve you, your students, your staff, and your community.

Regards,

Joe Schmo
joeschmo@gmail.com
763-763-7676
1234 Tree Street
Midland, MN 55555

Examples of résumés:

Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Cell Phone
Home Phone/Office Phone
E-mail Address

Objective or Statement of Interest

Clear and concise statement of professional goal that may include job or position and may also indicate a field (financial services, human resources).

Employment Experience

- List in reverse chronological order (i.e., put the most recent position first).
- Note the job title, the company, and dates of employment.
- Include clear statements of work performed as part of your job responsibilities, using language similar to the job announcement.
- If the job announcement emphasizes supervisory experience, for example, this should be an area of emphasis in your descriptions of tasks performed.
- Indicate the most important or relevant job responsibilities or skills involved with those tasks first in priority order.
- Include awards, citations, or commendations that relate to your objective or statement of interest.

Education

List earned degrees and incomplete education if applicable:

- Undergraduate Studies, 86 credits, University of State
- Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in Computer Information Systems, Community College of State, 2005
- High School Diploma, City High School, GPA or class rank
- Include technical certificates and completed trainings if they directly relate to your objective or statement of interest.

Community Service

List activities, your role, and, if applicable and space is available, your accomplishments:

- Eagle Scout, Troop #12345, 1998–2001
- Youth Choir Leader, Community Interfaith Church, 1995–2001
- Students in Free Enterprise Team, City High School, 1998–2001

References

List names of references, their positions, and their contact information or include "references upon request."

Chronological résumé from *Business English for Success* from Saylor Books.

Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Cell Phone
Home Phone/Office Phone
E-mail Address

Objective
Clear and concise statement of professional goal (job or position)

Qualification Highlights
Experience that directly relates to job description
- You may choose to highlight a specific skill that relates to the position (e.g., bilingual, computer and technology proficient, certified diesel technician).
- Only highlight specific skills, certifications, or license(s) that indicate you meet (or exceed) the minimum qualifications.
- Only highlight personal traits if they clearly meet the position description (e.g., if a sales position requires an outgoing personality, highlight theater experience and previous sales experience).

Professional Skills
- You may want to list skills with clear "because" statements, demonstrating your mastery of a skill because of your volunteer work, internship, previous employment, or similar accomplishment.

Sales
You may also want to use a key skill as the focal point (e.g., sales) and include a series of brief statements that demonstrate range or depth of experience in that skill:
- Fundraising for your youth group (name of organization, date)
- Customer service call experience
- Voter recruitment initiative participation
- Census bureau work

Skill 2

Employment History
You may not need this category if you covered it in the skill summaries above.

Education
List earned degrees and incomplete education if applicable:
- Undergraduate Studies, 86 credits, University of State

References
List names of references, their positions, and their contact information or include "references upon request."

Functional Résumé from *Business English for Success* from Saylor Books.

Professional writing: Social media postings

Why do we include a little note about social media postings under professional writing? Because your social media postings are part of your public ethos, or reputation, and they will remain with you. What conclusions will your peers draw from your postings on Twitter? What will a future potential employer think in reviewing your Facebook profile?

Appropriate social media posting:

Finished my last final exam today! Ready for the next steps, whatever they be!

Not appropriate:

Done with exams! Hello Jack Daniels. See you in a week!

Keep in mind that you can always create private Facebook or other social media groups for your friends and family—or have two separate accounts, one for professional use and another for more casual communications.

Always be aware that potential employers may still be able to see any public accounts.

That's it. Now you can move on to drafting a paper. You know your mode, you have an idea of its form. Start typing!

Tips for overcoming writer's block

Just as a review of what we saw in chapter two, getting started in finding a topic, here are some tips to overcome writer's block, no matter what mode you end up in:

- Look at examples of modes for ideas

- Look at the requirements of what you're assigned (if there are requirements)

- Look at a peer's paper, or find an example

- Read on the subject to joggle your brain

- Mindmap, freewrite, brainstorm

- Start writing something else that you know you can write on, keeping the assignment in mind, and see if this freewriting can morph into something closer to what you need to be writing.

A final thought on modes. When you choose a mode, remember that it comes with expectations already built in the mind of the audience—they are familiar with the customs of that mode. You can exploit those audience expectations in persuading the audience.

Chapter Eight: Revising

Revising: Re-seeing your writing

Wow—you've gone through the whole writing process, thinking about audience and purpose, exploring, creating a thesis, organizing, choosing a mode, drafting, even researching. Now, you have a completed piece of writing: an essay, email, proposal, research paper, or other form of writing. You're done, right?

Wait a minute. Actually, in many ways, you are just beginning. You need to revise.

Revising, for most writers, is the most important thing to improving your writing, the most crucial part of the writing process. You may think that a completed first draft means little improvement is needed; you just need to fix errors. Even experienced writers, however, need to improve their drafts, and they rely on peers during revising and editing.

The short story writer Raymond Chandler said a writer should, "Throw up into your typewriter in the morning. Clean up every noon" (Revision Quotes).

You may know that athletes miss catches, fumble balls, or overshoot goals. Dancers forget steps, turn too slowly, or miss beats. For both athletes and dancers, the more they practice, the stronger their performance will become. Web designers seek better images, a more clever design, or a more appealing background for their web pages. Writers have the same capacity to profit from improvement and revision.

Revising is the act of starting the writing process over again. When you have a completed draft, you need to go back and check that the draft works. Take a second look at your ideas. You might add, cut, move, or change information to make your ideas clearer, more accurate, more interesting, or more convincing.

"That's the magic of revisions – every cut is necessary, and every cut hurts, but something new always grows."
— Kelly Barnhill (Revision Quotes).

The writing process and revision

Take a look at the writing process again—in the revision stage:

Graphic: Writing process, revision stage

Audience and Purpose
- Does the content and language still fit your audience? Did your audience change?
- Does the content and language still meet the purpose of the writing project? Did the purpose change?
- Does this draft still fit the project or assignment directions?

Exploring
- Do you need to go explore more: find more content and research to support your audience, purpose, and assignment?
- Do you need to go back and start over with a new topic?

Thesis
- Look at thesis/claim: does it still fit the content of the essay?
- If not, revise thesis (if possible) and make sure content supports thesis.
- Revise content to make sure it supports thesis.

Organizing
- Examine the organization of the draft.
- Does the organization still support thesis, audience, and purpose? If not, reorganize and reorder essay.
- Do paragraphs stay focused on one clear idea? If not, revise paragraphs.
- Are there transitions between paragraphs and is it clear how the paragraphs tie back to the thesis/claim?
- Are the title, introduction, and conclusion still working to engage readers and support the purpose? Think about revising both.

Drafting
- Re-draft sections of the draft to make them stronger, better supported, and more focused on audience and purpose.
- Sometimes, this means re-drafting large sections of the writing pieces or even starting over.
- See if more research or support is needed (back to exploration).

Revising
- Do this again (professional writers might revise and re-draft several times).
- Solicit feedback from peers and professionals on each draft.

Editing
- Edit for consistency.
- Edit for style.
- Check sources/research.

Proofreading
- Correct errors in grammar, spelling, and capitalization.
- Look for small, missed errors and inconsistencies (there/their, its, it's, second person you pronouns).

Going back through the writing process and asking questions (as in the above chart) is the first step in revising. You need to look at your own work with a critical eye. However, one set of eyes is usually not enough. That's where peer review comes in.

Peer review

Peer review is getting feedback from others.

Peer review can be very formal, like in a composition class where you have two or three other students read your essay draft and give suggestions on how to improve it, or where you give it to a colleague to review before you give it to your mutual boss.

It could also be more informal. For example, you could have your friend's girlfriend who is an English major look over your essay and give you ideas or point out errors or inconsistencies. You might even use a campus writing center for feedback or an online tutoring center like Smarthinking or Tutor.com.

Are you writing in a work setting? If so, your colleagues or supervisor will provide valuable feedback.

It's important to realize that getting feedback is not the same as plagiarism or cheating. When you ask for a review, you are asking for a response from a reader. You should not ask someone else to "fix" or rewrite the paper for you.

Having someone else look at your writing is essential. You can write, revise, edit, proofread, then write more, revise more, edit more, proofread more, etc., and you will still miss errors in your own writing. Even wildly famous writers (*especially* wildly famous authors!) like Stephen King and J. K. Rowling rely on others to help them revise, polish, and perfect their writing.

So what does peer review entail? It means asking the right questions of your reader and being willing to accept constructive criticism. Many people hear the words *critic*, *critical*, and *criticism* and pick up only negative vibes that provoke feelings that make them blush, grumble, or shout. As a writer and a thinker, though, you need to learn to be critical of yourself in a positive way and have high expectations for your work. Having others see your work will help with this.

Here are some ideas a peer reviewer might use to help you improve your work:

1. Who is the audience and what is the purpose of this essay? Does it fit the content of the paper? The reviewer might point to places where the content could connect better with audience and purpose.

2. Is the thesis statement clear? Is it interesting (to the audience), specific, and well worded? The reviewer might suggest revisions to the thesis to improve it. If it is an argument making a claim with supports to the claim (thesis), often the peer reviewer can give counter-arguments that they think of.

3. Are the paragraphs well organized with a clear focus or topic sentence? Are they in a logical order? Do the ideas in the paragraphs tie back to the thesis? The reviewer might suggest how to improve the paragraphs and organization.

4. Are there specific examples, facts, and/or support in the body of the essay? The reviewer might make suggestions for additional examples and support.

5. Are the sentences interesting, effective, varied and well-crafted? Are any sentences weak? Confusing? Awkward? Uninteresting? The reviewer might make suggestions for making sentences more effective.

6. Are any words weak, vague, or unclear? Do any words need to be defined? Are the words active? Are any words possibly offensive to the intended audience? The peer reviewer might point out ineffective and vague or unneeded words.

7. The peer reviewer might mark any grammar, spelling, or syntax errors on the draft itself.

8. The peer reviewer could suggest two additional improvements that the author could make before turning in the final draft (like title, one, etc.).

9. The peer reviewer might ask: Am I laughing, thinking, being amazed, really looking at something in a new way, as I read this? What is the big take-away that I am seeing?

Once you receive feedback from others (the more the better), then you can sift through it to see what is helpful. You might find contradictions at times: one reader might love your conclusion while another might think it's uninteresting. In the end, you can decide how to change and shape your writing.

The great thing about peer review is that it helps you look more closely at things. For example, you might decide parts of your conclusion are good but that you need to add a story at the end to engage the reader.

Sample quick peer review sheet:

PEER REVIEW SHEET

WRITER:

READER:

1. Read the paper once through silently or aloud before you start reading it through to provide comments.

2. Comment on the introduction and the goal of the paper. What is this paper about, what is the goal, based on your reading of the opening paragraph/s?

3. Look at the conclusion. Is it effective? Does it provide food for thought or a good recap of the argument or main idea? Is it consistent in terms of ideas with the opening paragraph?

4. Look at the body of the paper. Check for organization, supporting details, sentence structure, etc. Offer suggestions.

5. Tell one way that this paper could be improved.

Further research

Sometimes you might need to do further research or exploring in the revising stage. Maybe your thesis/claim has changed slightly and you now need some evidence to support that change. Maybe you realize you did not fully support one of your key arguments and need more evidence and data. Even in a narrative essay, you might decide that a fact or quote could help the essay be more credible or help your audience connect more. In any case, be open to going to look for more resources in the revision stage. As you revise, keep an eye out for gaps in specific detail and support.

Reorganizing

In the revision stage, you might need to reorganize your draft. Maybe you originally planned to organize the paragraphs chronologically, but as you work on revising, you realize you are overlapping ideas too much. You can then go back and re-plan. You might even make a new outline to guide your new organization. Instead of time order, you might revise to order of importance. This means changing topic sentences, moving around main points and examples, and most likely, getting rid of

some things and adding others. It also might mean writing a new introduction or conclusion to fit the new ideas and new order.

Slash and burn

Finally, in revision, you need to be willing to get rid of things that aren't working. It might be language. It might be the introduction or conclusion. It might be a whole body paragraph. Go through your draft and circle anything you question or seems inconsistent. Be willing to jettison those parts if they don't support your thesis, create engagement for your reader, or are unneeded or uninteresting.

Let's look at an example.

Revision: How this all works

Let's look at the sample essay from **Chapter Two: A Writing Process for Every Writer** again.

Sample first draft

I was a 35 year old single mother of two girls when I decided to go back to school. I wasn't fired or downsized or anything like that. I just knew that because of the fact that I was working hard and barely making enough to make ends meat that I needed a change. Working parents can go back to school if they follow some simple tips.

A working parent should follow some tips to make their college experience easier. Here are some things I learned. Set aside time each day to work on classes. For me I had a break between my campus classes and I could study and do homework then. That helped allot. Then I would work after the kids went to bed on online classes since deadlines were at midnight. If I needed more time to study or do other stuff, I would wake up before the kids and do it then –with lots of coffee to help! I would also work on weekends while kids were at playdates or birthday parties or when they had a weekend with there dad. I also used the learning center. I am not great in math and the tutors there really helped me. Sometimes I would go 2-3 times a week right after class to get help. By the end of the semester, I didn't need to as much. I also asked my kids to help out. They are 7 and 4 and can at least vaccum, pick up toys, and stuff like that. Jaylyn even made her own lunch before school.

Working parents face many challenges when they go back to college. From needing to work less to childcare issues. I needed to find a way to cut back on my hours at work to be able to go to school. Luckily, my boss was willing to do that. He let me go from 40 hours to 30 and change my schedule, but then our budget was really tight. I also had to worry about childcare. My oldest daughter was in 2nd grade and could do an afterschool program, but my youngest was in daycare and adding extra hours was expensive. I really had to think hard about whether or not I could go back to college.

I was able to overcome the challenges and go back to school. Like I said earlier, my work was willing to be flexible so I could attend morning classes. My kids and I made a bugdget and talked about how we could cut down on a few things to save money. I was also able to get some grants and loans to pay for college. The best thing was that I was able to take some of my classes online, then I could work at night after the kids went to bed, and I had more time to work and also be with my girls. Their was also the issue of childcare. I really could not afford to pay more than I was. Actually with reduced pay, I couldn't even afford to pay what I was already paying. Then an angle appeared. My Aunt Joyce, who just retired, said she would take Bailey two days a week! That allowed me to cut down on daycare hours and make our budget a little better.

Going to school when you work and have kids is tough. Really tough, but you can do it if I could do it. I've been in school two semesters now and was on the honor role both times! With a little help and believing in yourself, you can go to college too!

Now let's do some work on revising it—asking critical questions and looking closely at the essay. This should include some feedback from others too.

Revising the first draft **Need title (peer reviewer suggested something about Working Parents)**

I was a 35 year old single mother of two girls when I decided to go back to school. I wasn't fired or downsized or anything like that. **Maybe too informal? Rewrite: I was not fired or downsized. Maybe talk about what my job was? Some of the peer reviewers asked that.** I just knew that because of the fact that **wordy—rewrite this—just because** I was working hard and barely making enough to make ends meat **meet—cliché? Maybe think of a new way to say this?** that I needed a change. **Need transition here—kind of abrupt** Working parents can go back to school if they follow some simple tips. **Thesis doesn't mention challenges and overcoming them. Need to add that. Even though working parents face real challeneges, they can overcome them and be successful.?**

Need something here ~~A working parent~~ **Working parents** should follow some tips to make their **pronoun errors—make it parents/their** college experience easier. Here are some things I learned. Set aside time each day to work on classes. For **Awkward** ~~me~~ **example,** I had a break between my campus classes **do I need comma here? Check with writing tutor** and I could study and do homework then. That helped ~~allot~~ **a lot (maybe find a better word)**. Then I would work after the kids went to bed on online classes since deadlines were at midnight. If I needed more time to study or do other stuff, I would wake up before the kids **add time?** and do it then –with lots of coffee to help! I would also work on weekends while kids were at playdates or birthday parties or when they had a weekend with ~~there~~ **their** dad. I also used the learning center. I am not great in math and the tutors there really helped me. Sometimes**,** I would go 2-3 times a week right after class to get help. By the end of the semester, I didn't need to as much. I also asked my kids to help out. They are 7 and 4 and can at least ~~vaccum~~ **use spell check!**, pick up toys, and stuff like that **too informal?**. Jaylyn even made her own lunch before school. **Need ending sentence. By following these tips, I was able to make school, work, and home work smoothly. Is this the best place for these tips? Peer reviewer mentioned that this might be better as the 4ᵗʰ paragraph.**

Need a transition here? Working parents face many challenges when they go back to college. From needing to work less to childcare **is this is sentence?** issues. I needed to find a way to cut back on my hours at work to be able to go to school. Luckily, **Maybe this should go in the next paragraph—about overcoming challenges. Talk more here about my job and what it is and how it was hard. Also maybe add a quote here—do some research on challenges of working parents? My instructor said we could use a couple of short sources if needed.** my boss was willing to do that. He let me go from 40 hours to 30 and change my schedule, but then our budget was really tight. I also had to worry about childcare. My oldest daughter was in 2ⁿᵈ grade and could do an afterschool program, but my youngest was in daycare and adding extra hours was expensive. **Maybe talk about how much she was there? Talk about the challenge of my schedule. Should I talk about their dad here? One of the peer reviewers asked about him but I don't really want to add that.** I really had to think hard about whether or not I could go back to college.

Need traditions here I was able to overcome the challenges and go back to school. Like I said earlier, my work was willing to be flexible so I could attend morning classes.**add the details here--** My kids and I made a ~~bugdget~~ **budget**and talked about how we could cut down on a few things to save money. **Examples? Like we decided to only eat out once a month instead of once a week and the girls agreed to $3 allowance instead of $5.** I was also able to get some grants and loans to pay for college. The best thing was that I was able to take some of my classes online, **is this comma right? Check grammar site** then I could work at night after the kids went to

bed, and I had more time to work and also be with my girls. Their **peer reviewer said it should be There** was also the issue of childcare. I really could not afford to pay more than I was. **Should I say how much?** Actually with reduced pay, I couldn't even afford to pay what I was already paying. Then an angle **whoops—angel!** appeared. My Aunt Joyce, who just retired, said she would take Bailey **need to get the girls' names in earlier in the paper** two days a week! That allowed me to cut down on daycare hours and make our budget a little better. **Do I need a transition sentence here?**

Going to school when you work and have kids is tough**.** Really tough**fragment—but I like this. Figure out punctuation**, but you **get rid of yous because my instructor doesn't like second person** can do it if I could do it. I've been in school two semesters now and was on the honor role both times! With a little help and believing in yourself, you can go to college too! **Kind of short conclusion.**

Additional notes: Now we might also think about adding some sources. Look in library databases and credible online sources. For example, one might add into the margin of one's draft a note to considers source about students who juggle school and work and family:

h[*ttps://www.cpcc.edu/spark/archives/parents-in-college-must-juggle-r*](https://www.cpcc.edu/spark/archives/parents-in-college-must-juggle-r)*esponsibilities#!*

Make sure to paraphrase this one.

Here's another one about challenges and strengths of single parents in college: https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/old/articles/070207lt.htm

Use direct quote from here.

After all the review, we are ready to re-draft. This might not be the final draft, but the essay is much stronger than the first draft.

Rewrite of first draft

Making College Work for the Working Parent

I was a 35 year old single mother of two girls, Jaylyn (7) and Bailey (4), when I decided to go back to school. Unlike some workers in the last decades, I wasn't fired or downsized; I just knew that because I was working hard and barely making enough to take care of my family that I needed a change. I wanted a career that I liked and that made a good wage. I knew it would be difficult, but I also knew I was not alone.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Over 20% of 2-4 year college students are parents and about 3/4th of those work" (WoI). Even though working parents face real challenges, they can overcome them and be successful.

As many students know, working parents face many challenges when they go back to college including income, work schedules, and childcare. For example, I needed to find a way to cut back on my hours at work to be able to go to school. I was working 40 hours a week, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday as a clerk at a small auto parts supply store. This schedule left me no time to take classes except at night or on weekends, which would leave me no time to spend with my children. I also had to worry about childcare. My oldest daughter was in 2nd grade and could do an afterschool program, but my youngest was in daycare and adding extra hours was impossible. She already had to go to daycare five days a week for over 9 hours, and I was spending over $700 a month on childcare. If I had to cut hours at work and pay for college, I could not afford to pay that much for daycare. These challenges were almost overwhelming and again, I was not alone. According to the Office of Community Work-Study, Center for Service and Learning, at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, "Financial difficulties are a great concern of many single parents… In addition to paying for tuition, there is often stress related to future college loan payments. Another financial issue for these students is child care. Finding child care during the hours needed to work and go to classes can be difficult and very expensive" (Tehan). Like other working parents, I really had to think hard about whether or not I could go back to college.

Once I made up my mind to do it, I was able to overcome the challenges and go to college for a degree in nursing. First, I was able to change my work schedule. Luckily, my boss at the auto parts store let me go from 40 hours to 30 and change my schedule to work afternoons, so I could attend morning classes. The best thing was that I was able to take some of my classes online, so I could work at night after the kids went to bed, and I had more time to work and also be with my girls. Second, my kids and I made a budget and decided to save money by eating out once a month instead of once a week. My amazing daughters also agreed to lower their allowance from $5 to $3 each week. I was also able to get some grants and loans to pay for college. Third, I still had to tackle childcare: I could not pay $700 a month when I was cutting my income. Then an angel appeared. My Aunt Joyce, who just retired, said she would watch Bailey two days a week! That allowed me to cut down on daycare hours and make our budget a little better.

Once I was able to overcome challenges to start school, then I had to make college work. Being successful as a working parent student takes some work, like time management, using college tutors, and having kids help out at home. Working parents needs to set aside time each day to work on classes. For example, I had a break between my campus classes and I would study and do homework then. Then I would

work on online classes for 2-3 hours after my children were in bed since deadlines were at midnight. If I needed more time to study or complete homework, I would wake up before the kids and do it then –with lots of coffee to help! I would also work on weekends while kids were at playdates or birthday parties or when they had a weekend with their dad. In addition, I used the college learning center. I am not great in math and the tutors there really helped me. Sometimes I would go 2-3 times a week right after class to get help. By the end of the semester, I didn't need to as much because I was understanding the material. I also asked my kids to help out. They started helping with chores like dusting, vacuuming, and picking up toys. Jaylyn even made her own lunch before school. By following these tips, I was able to make school, work, and family run smoothly.

Going to college while working and raising a family alone is tough, really tough. However, if I can do it, any single parent can. I've been in school two semesters now and was on the honor role both times! Even know it's difficult now, my family and I know the future holds some wonderful things: a better job and a better life. By overcoming challenges, any parent can go to college and succeed.

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Strategies for revising

How do you get the best out of your revising process? Here are some strategies that writers have developed to look at their first drafts from a fresh perspective:

- Take a break. You are proud of what you wrote, but you might be too close to it to make changes. Set aside your writing for a few hours, a day, even a week until you can look at it objectively.

- Ask someone you trust for feedback and constructive criticism.

- Pretend you are one of your readers. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why?

- Use the resources that your college or workplace provides. Find out where your school's writing lab is located and ask about the assistance they provide online and in person or discuss your draft with peers or writing experts in your workplace.

- Read something in the same mode around the same topic that is a good text. Do you see any hints there for modeling your own work on?

Tips for revising

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

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

- Having more to revise is better than having less.

Sometimes, in writing studies, editing and revising are the same thing. And they can be the same thing. But revising can sometimes mean completely rewriting your paper, and that is bigger than just editing. Revision can also be called *global content editing*. Below is a chart for clarification purposes.

Chart: Clarifying "proofreading" and "editing" and "revising"

Copy editing / Proofreading	Editing	Revising (global content editing / global editing / content editing)
Grammar errors	Organizational errors	Major organizational errors
Spelling errors	Topic sentences	Content addition and deleting
Formatting	Style issues such as allusion, word choice, repetition, rhythm,	What is being argued
Typos	Research items: is it the best source?	Main focus, main point, main thesis or claim
White space, font		Focus of paper
Placement of captions, pictures		Intent for audience total effect
Citation accuracy (MLA or APA, etc)		Completely rewriting

Chart: This chart lays out the ways the words "proofreading" and "editing" and "revising" are often used in writing studies.

Parts of this chapter came from: From *Business English For Success.*

Resources

"Revising Drafts" *The Writing Center,* University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
(https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/revising-drafts/)

"Revising the Draft" *Harvard College Writing Center*
(https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/revising-draft)

"Reverse Outlining" Amherst College
(https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/resourcesforwriters/
revision/reverse_outline

Chapter Nine: Editing

After you have revised your essay, probably several times, and the content and organization is working, then you can move on to editing. Editing involves making sure the language and style is consistent and appropriate to the audience.

To tis end, we will now review style, what it is. Then we will move on to editing for style and then, editing for other things.

Style

What is style?

The content of your mind is *what* you are telling. Style is *how* you tell it. In other words, style is the *way* you tell what is in your mind. Style has to do with things like sound and rhythm, word choice, where you place words and phrases in sentences, and sentence length and structure. You want to have a style that is going to get and keep your audience. Style and tone are closely related. Here we especially review style.

Style and clarity

Writing assumes an audience and audiences must understand a person's writing. Thus, before you ever think about style, you need to make sure you are **clear** so your audience understands what your thought is. To have clear writing, you must have clear thinking. People who write a great deal still struggle with getting their thoughts onto the page, and you must wrestle with this too. Take heart. You're not alone, as the philosopher Wittgenstein wrote

Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly (28).

You could replace "thought" here with "written."

Once your basic ideas are on the paper and clear, and your organization and research are pretty good, then you can move on to think about style. It's something that often comes out without thinking about it. So, in considering your style, you have to work your brain hard to think about how you are coming across in your writing and whether or not your style helps or takes away from your main ideas. You do all this by considering your audience.

You can have a wonderful and captivating style, but it does you no good if you are not communicating to your audience. Write plainly, and not in parables, or you will probably confuse your audience. Sometimes you are *trying* to be vague, or abstract, or to "speak enigmas" as Stevenson wrote in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (40), but you should not be writing enigmas unintentionally.

Ensuring clarity

You must have a clear style. One of the most common ways to make sure your writing is clear is to have someone else read it and tell you whether or not they understand it. Another way is for you to write something, and then set it aside. A few days later, you can take a "fresh" look at it and see it as if with new eyes, and ask: "Is it clear?" Another way to check for clarity is to skim through your writing quickly, outlining your main ideas on a separate piece of paper. Then look at what you have in your outline—is this essentially what you wanted to say? Another way is to simply pick up a conversation with someone. Tell them, "I'm writing a paper on forests." Then go on, "My main point is that…" Are you able to simply and easily explain the contents of your paper? A final way to check your paper for clarity is to read it out loud to yourself, sometimes in front of a mirror. As you read, are you following what is said? What do you hear?

> Did I…
> Have someone else read it?
> Wait a bit, then give it another look?
> Skim and outline?
> Talk it through to someone?
> Read it out loud?

Consistency

Besides being clear, you must be consistent. Imagine walking up a flight of stairs. Each step is a different distance from the next one. In such a situation, you will spend most of your time trying to figure out where to put your foot most safely, rather than getting to the top of the landing quickly, where the leprechaun and the pot of gold are. This disorienting effect is what you do to your audience when you are not consistent in your writing.

Your natural style

Style is the **way** in which you say what you say, as we mentioned above. It is not the **what**, but the **how**. You should choose what comes naturally as your default style. Aristotle wrote that "That which is natural persuades, but the artificial does not" (353). You should try not to be artificial when you write—it should "sound like you" instead of sounding like someone who is trying to do or be something they are not. However, you still need to consider audience. For example, you would not want to write like your

average talking self, texting an audience of close friends late at night, if you are writing to the Executive Director of a non-profit.

Slowly, over time, as you learn more about writing, and write more and more, your style will probably change. You will incorporate aspects of different styles of the different authors you have read into your own style as you hone your writing process. You will also be able to write in different styles. But now, as you begin writing longer pieces, you should start by simply doing what first comes to your mind.

For example, say you want to write a description about last night. So you, almost unthinkingly, begin,

Last night I saw a lady in pink.

That is your first sentence. You look at it and try to decide if that is how you want to start. At this point, you might become self-conscious. You think: *that's too simple and childish.* So you change it to

Last night I beheld a damsel in pink.

But notice that this was not what came to your mind first, and also notice that most people don't use the word "damsel" any longer, nor the word "beheld." Therefore, hold off on trying to "elevate" your language until it comes naturally to you.

For another example, say you are writing a description about last night again. Now perhaps you would *like* to allude to Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" where there is a line,

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw

Perhaps you want to allude to this poem because you want to make the point in your writing that this is not just a description about last night, but a commentary on inspiration. Then you could write,

Last night I beheld a damsel in pink. She held a harp.

That would fit your subject matter, it would be intentional, and it would probably please your audience, depending on who they are.

To take another example, what if you were writing an eye-witness report, as if for a school newspaper, about attending a legislative meeting on recycling? Would you start,

The pained faces of the sign-waving students faced the passive bowed heads of their local legislators at the meeting last Friday about recycling funding…

Or would you start,

Mr. Smith and Ms. Haran, state legislators, met with students at the Capitol for a few hours on Friday to discuss the upcoming vote on recycling funding…

At least one way to answer this question is to ask: Which of these styles sounds more natural to me? In deciding this, of course, you must always think of audience.

Audience drives style

As they go through whatever writing process they have, writers adjust their style to their audiences to avoid odd turns of phrases, elaborate sentences, and exotic images unless the audience needs them for a specific purpose. In other words, don't be dull, and don't be odd, and don't be vague or wandering, unless this is your intent and you know your audience requires it.

Imagine you are asked to write an argument research paper. You have done your research and have a rough outline of how you are going to organize the paper. Now you are ready to sit down and write. What style will you use? The style of argument is often clinical; it is very plain, straightforward, and logical. In other words, the language, or style, of an argument paper is sometimes uncomplicated, unadorned and clear, and straightforward. Even anecdotes given to start or illustrate a point are quite easy to understand. We do not doll up argument research papers with amazing feats of poetry or stunning images, for the most part.

Not only argument papers, but expository (informative) writing papers are also often very simple and plain in style. If you are writing an argument paper that is less scientific, however, then you perhaps do want to have a more emotional style. You may want to use anecdotes and make a personal connection to your audience by using language that evokes strong thoughts in them.

But just imagine, now you have written the argument paper. You read it and notice that because you are very passionate about the topic you are arguing about, your paper is actually quite theatrical, full of emphasis and enthusiasm. If you know that this is acceptable to your audience, you will be fine. Make sure, though, that above all things, you do not sacrifice clear meaning on the altar of fine sounding dressed-up phrases. In most persuasive writing, logic and facts still need to be there. But you need to know who is going to be reading your paper and what they will
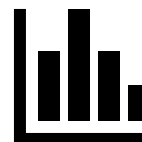
be most persuaded by. A dry, factual style? A style full of passionately stated statistics? Stories?

Learning the rules and knowing the natures of those to whom you address can result in the most effective and difficult productions of texts: the ability to persuade different people of different or even opposite things with the same text.

Some writers can put people entirely into another state of being, as it were, and "transport them out of themselves" and put them into a heightened mind that is completely in the realm of our words; this is the "effect of genius" that Longinus writes of (163).

Describing style

A metaphor is a way of using one thing to explain another thing. Usually, in a metaphor, one is using something visible and concrete to explain something that is abstract and invisible. For example, to illustrate the un-see-able idea "power", we might use this image:
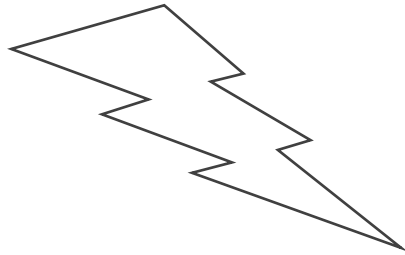
For another example, in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare says that

All the world's a stage.

He takes something big and total, and abstract, "the world," and puts it with something everyone can see and easily imagine a picture of in their mind, a "stage," so that we can better understand what he means by "world," because we all can see a stage.

So in talking about style, which is abstract, we tend to use metaphors. We say, for example, "Wordsworth sometimes writes in a very tender style." The word "tender" is something that we associate with a person's personality more than a certain kind of writing.

But this is how we talk about style, because it is hard to describe.

Graphic: Words to describe style

[Words: Aphoristic, eloquent, plain, elaborate, dull, elusive, folksy, democratic, journalistic, formal, vague, crisp, clumsy, wandering, light, detailed, fun, wordy]

Tone

You can misunderstand the *content* of what someone says, and you can also misunderstand the *tone*, or spirit, of what they say. Sarcasm in conversation is an example of this. You can tell someone "Great job!" and mean it—he made a delicious cake!—or you can tell someone "Great job!" and not mean it—he forgot to add sugar. That is tone.
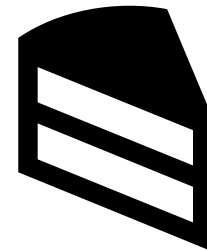
Tone is how content gets communicated to the audience. One thing useful to remember about tone is that even if your content is off, if your tone is agreed to and liked by your audience, you can still make inroads with that audience. In other words, it is at the level of tone that some of the most fruitful communication actually occurs.

This is because tone goes to motivation, or intent.

With communication, as in the law courts, intent dictates everything. In a court of law, you go to jail not based on whether you hit someone or not, but based on what your *intent* was when you did the hitting—was it accidental? Was it on purpose? What was your intent? What was the "spirit" or "tone" in which you did that act? The same is true of writing.

People can read your intent from what you write—they can feel your spirit, they can see your emotional landscape, they can perceive your motivations. They discern your aim. As Vygotsky put it, "To understand another's speech, it is not sufficient to understand his words—we must understand his thought. But even that is not enough— we must also know its motivation" (125).

Thus, tone is also related to the character of the writer or speaker. And, remember what Aristotle says, that "moral character, so to say, constitutes the most effective means of proof" (17). This is what we called *ethos* earlier. In other words, having good moral character, or reputation and credentials, is often the most effective way to persuade an audience.

Graphic: Words to describe tone
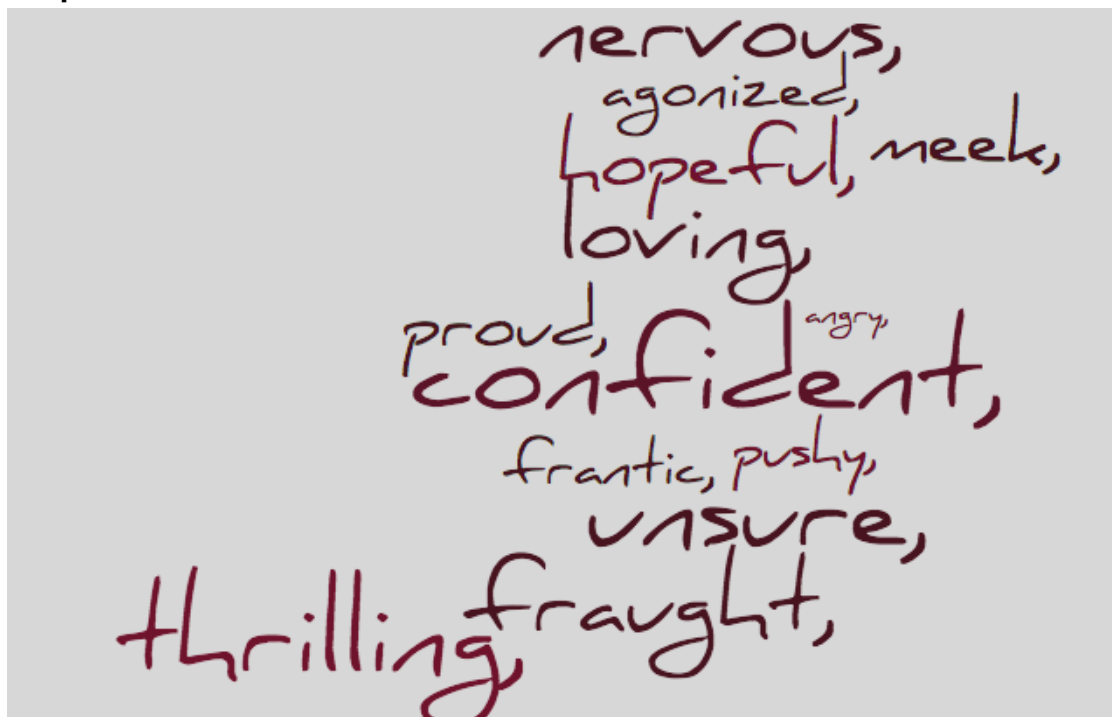
[Words: nervous, agonized, hopeful, meek, loving, angry, proud, confident, frantic, pushy, unsure, fraught, thrilling]

And so, style and tone are closely related. To return now to style.

Types of styles

There are various ways to discuss style. We can divide style into high, medium, and low styles. We can also divide style into the Anglo-Saxon and the Latinate styles. There are also other ways to categorize different styles. But we will look at these two ways.

High, medium, and low styles

For the most part, in writing texts, you want to use common expressions, rather than coming up with something elegant or complicated. We might call this writing in a low style. In some situations, you may want to choose this "low style." It is sometimes also called the "plain" style. This would mean you sometimes even include slang, and your sentences are shorter. Your writing would sound more like spoken language than written language. You would not use much figurative language or many images. You would sound matter of fact. Most newspaper writing is done in the "plain" or "low" style.

You also may want to try to write in a high style. Think of a fashionable woman walking down Fifth Avenue in New York City dressed in the height of fashion. She has on a diamond and ruby-encrusted necklace. She has a Kate Spade purse, a Hermes silk scarf, and her skirt is long, folded and flared, swishing above her Malono Blahnik heels. This is like high style. It is not the jeans and white T-shirt of low style. Writing in a high style means you use words that are more obscure, or even archaic. You are extravagant with your word choices, and perhaps you adorn your content with a wealth of images and metaphors. Your sentences are probably longer and often have many clauses. You might even have alliteration and sound patterning. You choose uncommon or hard-working verbs, and you really put the dictionary to use.

The beginning of the Declaration of Independence, we might say, is probably closer to a high style.

> *When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. (Jefferson)*

If it were a low to medium style, it might look more like this:

As time goes by, sometimes one group of people find it necessary to separate themselves from another country that they are part of. According to the laws of nature, they are most certainly allowed to do this. But when they separate themselves, in order to stay in good favor among the other people who live on earth, they should state why they are separating.

A lower style would be somewhere even more casual, or simple. Something like:

Sometimes folks in one country have to break away from the others. This is probably fine if they do, but if they do this, they should tell why. Just to be fair and keep a good reputation.

We don't have to divide styles into high, medium, and low. Perhaps a more useful way to discuss them is to use the two categories of "spare/simple" and "adorned." Some people also describe these styles as "Anglo-Saxon" and "Latinate." The "Anglo-Saxon" style would roughly correspond to the "spare/simple" style and the "Latinate" style would roughly correspond to the "adorned" style.

The Anglo-Saxon, or "spare" style means that you use words that come from Germanic, or Old Norse, or Old English roots. These words are almost always shorter than Latinate words. These words are the most basic building blocks of the English language. Anglo-Saxon words are mostly simple words. For example, in an unadorned and folksy way, you bid a "hearty welcome" to your guests. If you were to give your guests a "cordial reception," you would be shifting to a more Latinate style. The roots of the words "heart" and "welcome" are Anglo-Saxon. The roots of "cordial" and "reception" are Latinate (or Greek, which tends to be the same thing, for our purposes). Here is a brief list of Anglo-Saxon words and their Latinate "equivalents":

Anglo-Saxon	Latinate
Choke	Asphyxiate
Forsaken	Relinquished
Drunk	Inebriated
Answer	Response
Ask	Inquire
Thing	Item
Aware	Cognizant
Before	Prior
Belly	Abdomen
Murder	Homicide
Angry	Apoplectic

Notice that Anglo-Saxon words tend to be shorter. Notice that the Latinate words tend to be words that are also technical terms. For example, a medical doctor will describe almost everything relating to your body in exclusively Latinate (Greek) terms; she will call your "tummy" (Anglo-Saxon) your "abdomen" (Latinate).

You also notice that when writing has more Latinate words, it usually sounds loftier, more educated and erudite and even hoity-toity. But an Anglo-Saxon style tends to sound more folksy, down-to-earth, and often, more truthful.

Here is an example of a mix of the two styles. This is Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." Many of the key Anglo-Saxon words are in red, and the key Latinate words are marked in blue.

> *Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here… (Lincoln)*

Notice, among other things, that Lincoln tends to use two words for one idea, such as "fitting and proper" and "so conceived and so dedicated" and "little note nor long remember." And when he gets to his idea of what we cannot do, he uses three negative forms of similar verbs, "dedicate" and "consecrate" and "hallow" in the line: "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground."

Considerations of style

Variation in word choice

This brings us to the topic of word choice, which is sometimes called diction. Making a good choice of how to vary the expression when you are repeating the same thing is a matter of long immersion in the language of English. Your word choices are often the most revealing of your style. You can write:

> *He has deceived you, he has lied to you—he is even now prevaricating.*

Or you could write,

> *He is lying, I tell you, he is lying. And he lies in every word!*

These are different ways to speak, and depend on the audience, and the context, and your purpose as well.

As mentioned above, it is good to repeat yourself prudently. But when you do, you can use different words. You are basically resaying what you want to say in a few different ways. This is because your reader needs to be kept on topic. They need to be reminded again and again of your main point.

Figurative language

Above we talked about metaphor, in explaining style and tone. Metaphor is also a part of figurative language. The figurative language (the making-to-be-seen-vividly language) that you use to describe the abstract (that which cannot be seen) is sometimes the most important choice you make in writing situations.

When you want to talk about "happiness," do you tell your audience that happiness is, as Charles Schulz had it, "a warm puppy"? Everybody can see a warm puppy. Or do you state something more on the lines of what Confucius said, that "happiness" (an abstract concept) is "to study" and "to meet friends." Or do you just use the word "happiness" and not worry about being sure that your audience has the same definition of happiness that you have?

We have a saying that "seeing is believing." You want your reader to see what you are writing, so you use words to make image-productions (figurative language) that bring it before the audience's mental eyes vividly. As Horace wrote, "Less vividly is the mind stirred by what finds entrance through the ears than by what is brought before the trusty eyes, and what the spectator can see for himself" (465).

Remember that these figures, or image-productions, are basic to writing. You do well to create word-visualizations when you write creatively, as well as when you write for more informative purposes.

For example, are you writing a history paper trying to inform about George Washington? You could organize the paper around a visual of the puzzle and begin,

There were many pieces that came together to make up the life of George Washington. The first piece of the puzzle was that he was a general. Another piece of the puzzle was that he was a manager.
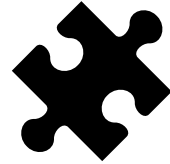
Using the visual of the puzzle might keep your audience following your argument better. They will keep waiting for that next puzzle piece that starts each paragraph.

Or what if you were to write a news story about a protest? What was the protest like? Could you start by writing, "The protest on the lawn of the president's house last Saturday was more like a gathering of lost doves than a feast of dragons." Then you could go on to show how quiet the protest was. For some audiences, the images of doves and dragons might work to quickly get them to the feeling of what it was like to be at the protest.

Even in a scientific paper, you might want to think about word-visualizations (image productions, figurative language). The famous psychologist John B. Watson wrote that, "The behaviorist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute" (158). Ask yourself why he used "dividing line" rather than "difference" or "demarcation" or "separation marking"?

What about the famous computer scientist, Alan Turing's opening lines of his article "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"? He wrote:

I propose to consider the question, "Can machines think?"; This should begin with definitions of the meaning of the terms "machine" and "think"?...The new form of the problem can be described in terms of a game which we call the "imitation game" (Turing 433).

Now ask yourself: how carefully Turing is choosing his words? And why does he choose a more physical, visable, see-able, concept "game" to describe the answer to a question about the "mind" which nobody can see, and "thinking" which nobody can see?

And finally, notice how scientists Tversky and Kahneman, writing about how we make decisions, start one of their most famous papers by giving three concrete examples that we can all see and relate to, and visualize easily: an election result, a guilty defendant, and a dollar. They write,

Most important decisions are based on beliefs concerning the likelihood of uncertain events such as the outcome of an election, the guilt of a defendant, or the future value of the dollar (1).

Metaphor and simile

Metaphor is saying something by means of something else, as we described above. Usually what you are saying is something abstract, something you cannot see, and what you are using to say it is something concrete, something you can see. Metaphor is like simile. The only difference between a simile and a metaphor is that a simile includes the word "as." So, for example, a metaphor is "I am a dove." A simile is "I am like a dove." Another example is the 80's song by Pat Benatar: "Love is a battlefield." A simile for the same would be "Love is like a battlefield."

There are many different technical terms besides image-production, metaphor, and simile (or allegory and analogy) used to describe this same thing: you need to make what you are saying visual (mentally see-able) to people. The star is twinkling in the sky. How can I say that more visually? How about "like a diamond in the sky"? But that is almost a cliché; most audiences would not think it is fresh. I have to come up with something more striking. This is not easy, and some people are just naturally good at it—they think in metaphor.

So how can I describe that twinkling star? Maybe scientifically, "the star, a pulsing astronomical scintillation."

You can also think of these "image-productions" as symbols. What does the American flag symbolize? A flag is something you can see, and, in this case, it stands for abstract ideas like love of country, freedom, and democracy.

Parallelism, rhythm, and repetition

One of the rules of finding a good style that fits you, your subject matter, and your audience, is to think about nature. Thus, it is good to know that the natural rhythm of the English language is to have one syllable that is emphasized, followed by another that is not, followed by another that is; or, to start with a syllable that is not emphasized, and then have one that is, and then one that is not, and so on. So, it is **one**-two, **one**-two pattern, or one-**two**, one-**two**.

For example, the American pledge of allegiance is not a poem. It is prose. And it begins with a non-emphasized syllable. If we write in the counting, and make bold the emphasized syllables, we have:

> 1 2　　1 2 1　　2 1 2　1 2 1 2 1　2　　1 2 1　2 1
> I **pledge** al-**le**-giance **to** the **flag**, **of** the U-**ni**-ted **States** of A-**me**-ri-**ca**.

Notice that the natural rhythm of non-emphasized syllable followed by emphasized syllabue only breaks down twice: right after "flag" and then it corrects immediately, and right after the "of" the precedes the word "America."

When people make choices of wording as they write, they often exploit this natural pattern of English. For example, what if you wrote,

He is **run-**ning **quick-**ly.

Because "**quick**ly" ends with a non-emphasized syllable, it trails a bit more than

He is **run**ning **fast**.

In the sentence "**He** is **run**ning **fast**," the word "fast" is somewhat more emphasized, and thus the sentence ends on a strong beat (to use a metaphor from music). To choose "**He** is **run**ning **quick**ly" over "**He** is **run**ning **fast**" has the subtle effect of slightly making your sentence more soft, or less direct.

Let's look at an example. In the last paragraph of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" Poe writes, "I foamed --I raved --I swore!" How would this sound in terms of impact on the mental hearing, if he had written, "I foamed --I raved --I anathematized!"? Poe did not repeat three verbs exactly; he did not write "I foamed, I foamed, I foamed," although he did repeat the pronoun "I" three times. But he did repeat the sound pattern—the pronoun "I," followed by the one-syllable verb. And later on in that final paragraph he plays with this same exact sound pattern, by varying the middle section a bit: "They heard! --they suspected! --they knew!"

Poe, like most writers who really want to hit people hard and fast with their meaning clearly, choses almost all short, one-syllable words. If you fit this idea in with the knowledge we discussed above, that English is a language that naturally tends to have one emphasized syllable followed by another non-emphasized syllable, followed by an emphasized syllable, and so on, you notice that Poe is very much depending on verbs and nouns.

I **gasped** for **breath**.

I **paced** the **floor**.

This constant use of the short words, with nouns and verbs (the verbs above are "to gasp" and "to pace") filling in the spaces where the emphasized syllable is, tends to have the effect of highlighting some of the longer, less compact words when they do appear at times. For example, when he writes of his "violent gesticulations" in that last paragraph of "The Tell-Tale Heart," the word "gesticulations" is sort of flailing about

waving its many syllables around, just as Poe is waving his hands about in the story. For he doesn't write "violent hand-wavings."

When writing headings and titles, pay attention to the sounds and rhythms. And when writing anything that you want people to really remember well, keep these truths about the English language in mind. For example, are you writing a memoir? How are you going to describe the treehouse that you built, and someone burnt it down and killed a dog in it? "My treehouse burnt down that year, and the neighbor's dog died in the fire." Or "Somebody burned down my treehouse. The neighbor's dog was tied up in the treehouse at the time. And so he perished in the flames."

Person

"Call me Ishmael." This is the first line of the novel *Moby Dick*. How would this book feel, to start, if it began, "He was called Ishmael"? This is a choice of persons. "Call me Ishmael" is in the second person. One person addresses another directly. "He was called Ishmael" is third person. One person talks to another person about a third person.

Do you want to write in the first person, using "I"? Or do you want to write in the third person, talking always about "them," and "he" and "she"? Do you ever want to address your audience (second person)? Would you do it by writing,

What do you think, friend, about the judicial branch?

This is second person. Or would you write,

One wonders what others think about the judicial branch?

This is third person.

Chart: Person: Singular / Plural

	Singular	Plural
First person	I, me, my, mine	We, us, our
Second person	You, your	You, yours
Third person	he / she / it, him/her/it, his/her/its	They, them, their

In nature, when you are standing facing someone and speaking to them, you say "you" to the person. And when you are talking to yourself, you are in your own mind saying "I." And when you are talking about someone else, to another person, you are

saying "he" or "she" or "it," referring to that third person. Notice that if you mentally visualize each of these three situations, these situations are about distance, familiarity, and remoteness. Your choice of persons makes a difference in your style.

Verb and noun choice

This brings us to nouns and verbs. Nursery rhymes are almost completely made up of nouns and verbs. In music, when we sing and are given a choice of where to emphasize the word, we always choose a noun or verb naturally, over an adjective or a helping verb, or an article, and the like. This is because our brains simply know that the adjectives, helping verbs, and articles, are not as important as the verbs and nouns.

A sentence has meaning if there is a subject (noun) and a verb. The rest is extra. For example,

Silly enthusiastic Joe bright

is not a sentence. It needs a verb to be a sentence.

Remember what we discussed above, about making things visible. In nature, we see objects. And the objects are doing or being something. Thus, for the most part, it is better to have your writing heavily dependent on verbs and nouns. They are more visible than adjectives. Good writers use adjectives and adverbs sparingly. This is true in writing about anything, including science. For example, read the following opening lines from Albert Einstein's "On the electrodynamics of moving bodies":

It is well known that Maxwell's electrodynamics—as usually understood at present—when applied to moving bodies, leads to asymmetries that do not seem to attach to the phenomena. Let us recall, for example, the electrodynamic interaction between a magnet and a conductor (140).

What if we added in adjectives and adverbs:

*It is **certainly** well known that Maxwell's **interesting** electrodynamics—as usually understood at present---when applied to moving bodies, leads to **complicated** asymmetries that do not seem to attach to the phenomena. Let us **briefly** recall, for example, the electrodynamic interaction between a **chosen** magnet and a **certain** conductor.*

You begin to see how unnecessary they are.

You can not only break down sentences into parts of speech, but you can even go the level of watching your vowels and consonants to create a certain style flow.

Sentence style

This brings us to sentences. A word alone is not much. But once you put it into a sentence, it is joined into a marvelous number of relationships that we can call "syntax." This makes the rules of a sentence, especially the rules relating to the verb, the sun around which everything in the sentence turns.

Let's take an example. You can write

The cat wore a hat.

You have a subject "the cat" and a verb "wore" and an object "hat." What if you were to write this instead?:

The hat wore a cat.

Now, following the rules, "hat" is the subject and the cat must be somewhere on the hat. So this is different. But to return to the first example:

The cat wore a hat.

How did the cat wear the hat?

The cat wore the hat stubbornly.

But what if we want to really emphasize the cat's stubbornness? We could write, with a slightly different meaning

Stubbornly, the cat wore the hat.

And what if we wrote

The cat wore the hat, stubborn.

Now we have some purposeful ambiguity here. If a modifier is before a word it modifies, it can only modify (or, give more information about) that word. So if it said "The stubborn hat wore the hat" we have no choice about using "stubborn" to modify "cat." But, put where it is in the above example, "stubborn" might also modify "hat." According to the natural meanings of "cat" and "hat" it is more likely that most people would assume "stubborn" here modifies "cat" and not "hat", but the possibility is at least there.

A sentence is, simply, a complete thought. We also say a sentence has to have a subject and a verb. But more than these, a sentence is "an organization of items in the world" and "a structure of logical relationships" (Fish 14). Your sentencing choices are a big part of your style.

Allusion

Let's say you are writing about your bosses mistreating the employees, and you write,

It seems like we are just like flies to wanton boys to the bosses.

In so doing, you are alluding to the line from *King Lear*, by Shakespeare, where he says,

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods:
They kill us for their sport (Act 4, Scene 1).

By using the words from Shakespeare, you are not just enriching your writing by putting the strong and vivid image of boys swatting flies into it. You are also pulling in some of the sense, or feeling, or pathos and tragedy of Shakespeare's play into your own writing. This, of course, assumes that your audience is familiar with Shakespeare's play.

For example, if someone is worried that they are late, they might not just say very blandly,

I'm going to get into trouble if I am late.

They might say, more vividly,

I'm going to turn into a pumpkin if I am late.

And this is alluding to the story of Cinderella. Or a student released from the final class on the last day of school might sing out, "I am free at last! I am free at last!" alluding to Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech.

Thus, some rules of allusion are:

- You probably should not allude to things that at least some of your audience is not familiar with.

- By allusion, you are using another writer's words as a short-cut to achieve the image or feeling you are aiming at.

- Allusion is not plagiarism, and you do not have to put quotation marks around the words in your text that are taken directly from another text in order to allude to it. This is because the citation is already in the minds of the audience. They know you didn't "steal" it. They know you didn't intend to pass off the other writer's words as your own.

- People tend to allude to popular songs of the day by the most popular singers as well as things from popular culture, such as lines from very famous TV shows or movies.

- Be careful with allusions. You have to know your audience well to use them. Sometimes, a style that is rich in allusions is used to "keep the rabble out"—that is, to make those who don't "get" the allusions feel excluded.

- Making the choice to use allusions is all about audience knowledge. In American English culture, we don't use many allusions, or depend on them much for communication. But in some cultures, such as many African tribes, almost every sentence is an allusion to an existing text or memorized maxim that is commonly known in the community. This is also true for many Arabic-language cultures, as well as many cultures in Asia.

Repetition

Does it bother you to see a thousand trees repeated in a forest? Probably not. A tree is repeated a thousand times, but there is enough variation to keep it beautiful. Something similar to this can be seen in writing. One does well to repeat one's argument in a number of forms, so that the audience's various capabilities are engaged.

People learn in different ways. Some like a story. Some like a clear statement of fact backed up by research. Repeating the same argument in different forms is an effective way to convey meaning, just as judiciously repeating a word keeps it lodged in the mind of the audience. Take a look at how Browning uses the word "smile" here in "My last duchess," for an example of repeating something for effect:

Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together.

Style, final thoughts

Respectfulness

Your tone, in general, should be calm, moderate, and generous, unless some circumstances of the writing situation demand otherwise. You should not call your supervisor "dude," or anything casual or slangy. You should err on the side of formality in business situations, unless you know something more casual is acceptable.

How to work on your style

The best way to work on your style is by reading other writers and by doing imitation exercises using their work.

Take the example of a musician. He does not play his own music, usually. He plays a lot of music he likes, and then over time, his style becomes a sort of blend of all the different music he has played and listened to over the years. All good writers read a lot, and this influences their style.

Good writers also find the styles of writers they like, and imitate them, borrowing from them, pretending to be them, until their own unique style gets more developed. By modeling yourself on other writers, you can also expand your capabilities. For example, do you usually write very short sentences, so that you sound almost elementary? Don't be afraid to keep writing like this. Many of the best writers do. But if you want to have the ability to write long sentences as well, try imitating something.

Editing for style

You can edit for style now that you have reviewed the things having to do with style, as above.

Style or tone issues that we ourselves often don't perceive, these can be noticed by another. Am I actually offending someone? Am I sounding strident when I only want to sound passionate? Am I coming across as negative? Who am I really going to convince with this? Knowing audience well is the ticket here. But in academic and college writing, often the audience is really "your instructor," which makes it hard because it is sort of a fake situation. But it is perhaps going to be easier when you get out into the real world, because you'll almost always be quite aware of your audience, and it won't be just one instructor at one school with specific ideas and a certain way of thinking.

What else can you edit for?

Content is first. But there are other things to edit for, too. What do you want to achieve? Again, audience drives this. And again, your instructor, or your peer or supervisor can help you out.

Editing for other things

Editing, or revising, for content is key. This was covered in the chapter on revising. You want to make sure you cut out portions of your draft and revise so that what you're really trying to say comes out cleanly. This does mean that you need to be sure what it is that you're trying to say.

Clarity is the key to editing. Think of the "reasonable person" standard. Will a reasonable person comprehend what I'm trying to say?

Let's quickly review some of the highlights of editing for content, which we called "revising."

- Think about keeping your reader on track—are they going to follow what you're saying easily? Do you need headings? Do you need more topic sentences?

- Look at organization. Are you still organized? Go back and do the more drastic revision if necessary—slash and burn if necessary.

- What about research? Do you need to double-check anything? Is there some important text on the topic you need to skim or at least be aware of?

- Would a peer review be helpful at this point?

- Did you check the introductions and conclusions to make sure they're powerful and useful, and that they match each other in terms of what you're trying to say?

- Think about visuals or videos? Charts? Would these be needed?

- Think about accessibility, even in terms of physical disabilities such as the needs of blind people or folks who don't see well.

- What about balance? Are you relying too much on one source, or one data point, or one way of persuading people? Is one section long and detailed, and another equally important section is breezed by?

- And, of course, even though "proofreading" is the editing of grammar, and here, in this book, we think of editing as something much more than just finding little grammar errors or typos, by all means correct any typos that you see as you do content or global editing, or major revisions.

- Use the spellchecker if you are in a word processing program. Use the dictionary, and use a thesaurus.

Chart: Clarifying "proofreading" and "editing" and "revising"

Copy editing / Proofreading	Editing	Revising (global content editing / global editing / content editing)
Grammar errors	Organizational errors	Major organizational errors
Spelling errors	Topic sentences	Content addition and deleting
Formatting	Style issues such as allusion, word choice, repetition, rhythm,	What is being argued
Typos	Research items: is it the best source?	Main focus, main point, main thesis or claim
White space, font		Focus of paper
Placement of captions, pictures		Intent for audience total effect
Citation accuracy (MLA or APA, etc)		Completely rewriting

Chart: This chart lays out the ways the words "proofreading" and "editing" and "revising" are often used in writing studies.

Chapter Ten: Proofreading

Okay, now you have an almost complete writing project: you have done it all, from determining an audience and purpose to editing for style, organization, sentences, and everything else! It's time to look for errors. Proofreading means looking for common grammatical errors, and for capitalization errors, spelling errors, and the like.

Getting more feedback can help, and so can looking carefully at your words and letters. For a small writing piece, you can even read the paper backwards to look more carefully at words and language and not content. That can help you locate errors that are easy to miss.

There are reasons why people change what they write, and often the reasons can be traced to grammar rules. Consider the following excerpt from James Baldwin's children's version of *Robinson Crusoe*:

MY name is Robinson Crusoe. I was born in the old city of York, where there is a broad river, with ships coming and going.

When I was a little boy, I spent much of my time looking at the river.

How pleasant was the quiet stream, flowing, always flowing, toward the far-away sea!   ... (Baldwin 1)

This is simple. But what if it read in this way:

My name's are Robinson Crusoe. I is borned in the old city of York, where there is a broad river, with ship coming and goings. When I was a little boy, I spends much of my time looking at the river…

What is trying to be said here? There are many questions in the reader's mind: Is "name's" a typo? Is it supposed to be "name"? Or, are there more than one names? What about the words "is borned"? Is the author trying to use the word "borne" as in "carry"? Or is he talking about being given birth to? What about "ship coming and goings?" Is there another subject that governs "goings" since it is in a different form of the verb that clearly goes with the subject "ship"? Or is "coming" acting more like a noun, and if so, why isn't it "ships coming and going"? Confronted with these questions, often a reader does not know what to do, so they stop reading. Even if this text was written in "slang English," as texts often are written to show different dialects, you would still notice that the grammar is logical and easy to follow. For example:

My name be Robinson Crusoe...

Standard English correction machines will put this as an error, but it is only perhaps a style error, and perhaps an audience error. We could even call it a grammar error. But it is not a logical error. There is no logical inconsistency because there are no possibilities for relationships that are not easily defined for the reader. No dialect of English, or any other language, will ever create a logical error. Neither will a small child.

People's brains are by nature very closely connected to grammatical rules, to relationships among words. So, when you make an error in writing by writing something against a rule, you cause a pause, an error reading, in the deepest level of the brain of your audience. You do not want to do this accidentally.

To illustrate, have you ever laughed at the bad grammar as you heard a two-year-old say,

I runned fastest, Mom!

But don't laugh too hard. This is still logically sound, though not grammatically sound. This is because the two-year-old knows the grammar rule, having already internalized it. They know that the rule in English is that in order to put a present tense verb, such as "to run," into past tense, you add "ed" at the end of it. Thus, this is what the child did. The child hasn't yet learned the exceptions to the rule. But they know the rule and you understand what they say.

Your audience expects you to work with the rules.

Often, funny examples like the following are given to illustrate how important these rules are for accurately conveying meaning—in this case, punctuation rules:

Eat Grandma, her cake is best.

Eat! Grandma—her cake is best.

It is good to have a working knowledge of what the following terms are, when you begin learning writing: adjective, adverb, noun, verb, and pronoun. Additionally, you should know the articles, conjunctions, and prepositions.

The simple sentence

You've been writing sentences for years, perhaps even decades. Children learn how to make sentences early on, things like, "I want cookie," and "No!" (Yes, that's a complete sentence!) Do you know what makes a complete sentence, though? There are three things:

Subject: This is very often a noun (a person, place, thing or idea) that's doing the action, which is the…

Verb: the action or state of being (like "is") that the subject is doing or being.

A complete thought (A complete thought with a subject and verb is "I run.")

A complete sentence might also be referred to as an "independent clause." A "clause" (not Claus, as in Santa) is a group of words that may make up a complete sentence. This means that there are "dependent" clauses, too, that have a subject or verb but do not have a complete thought and therefore cannot be complete sentences, but that's a discussion for later.

Check out the following sentence that has **three** independent clauses (in bold), or complete sentences, in it:

We went to the store, we bought M&Ms and a People *magazine, and then we went home.*

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 and making sure it has a complete thought. You could write three sentences: ***We*** *went to the store.* ***We*** *bought M&Ms and a People magazine. And then* ***we*** *went home.* Each of these has a subject (bold), and a verb (underlined).

Let's look at an example of an independent clause, which is a clause that can stand alone by itself without the reader thinking "something else is needed for this to be completed and make sense." Again, an independent clause is also called a complete sentence:

The mustard is too spicy.

That's a complete thought. No reader will think "there is something missing here."

Now, these are examples of clauses that are *not* independent:

> *Spicy mustard.* (There's no verb, and it's an incomplete thought.)

> *Dislikes the spicy mustard.* (There's no subject, and it's an incomplete thought.)

> *Since the mustard is too spicy.* (It's an incomplete thought. There is a verb "is" and there is a noun "mustard." But neither is the governing verb or main subject. The word "since" subjugates all that follows it into a dependent idea, so that we are waiting for the main thought. The "since" ask like a logical lever that flips on in the mind, telling us: this part of the sentence is all about the since, the **why** of the main subject and governing verb. But those, the main subject and the governing verb, we don't have, so we wait for them, as our reason tells us to.)

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, or stands in for, a noun. Common pronouns are *I, he, she, it, you, they*, and *we*. In the following sentences, the subject is in bold.

> **Marco** *enjoys an icy cold Cherry Coke with his French fries.* **He** *doesn't eat particularly well.*

In these sentences, the subject is a person: Marco. The pronoun "he" replaces and refers back to Marco.

> **Chicken Tikka Masala** *is a delicious Indian dish.* **It** *is often served with jasmine rice.*

In these sentences, the subject is a thing: Chicken Tikka Masala, and the pronoun "it" replaces and refers back to the Chicken Tikka Masala.

> **Love** *can hurt.* **It** *also makes the world turn.*

In these sentences, "love" is the idea, and the pronoun "it" replaces and refers back to love.

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 we see in sentences: action verbs, linking verbs, and helping verbs. Action verbs and linking verbs can be the main verbs (governing verbs) of a sentence. Helping verbs are not.

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 subject is bold and the verb is italicized.

The **dog** *barked* at the runner.

The **man** *gave* a speech about greenhouse gases.

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 subject is bold and the verb is italicized.

The **coat** *was* old and dirty.

The **clock** *seems* slow.

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: The **boy** *looked* for his glove.

Linking: 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. The verb, in this case, takes an object, which in this sentences is "glove." Some verbs take objects. Some verbs do not. In the second sentence, the verb describes the boy's appearance. It says, in essence, **boy=___.**

Helping verbs

A third type of verb you may use as you write is a helping verb. Helping verbs are used with the main (or governing) verb to indicate a mood or tense. They are usually a form of *be, do,* or *have*. The word *can* is also used as a helping verb. In the following sentences, the subject is in bold, the helping verb is underlined, and the verb is italicized.

The **restaurant** <u>is</u> *known* for a variety of dishes.

She <u>does</u> *speak up* when prompted in class.

We <u>have</u> *seen* that movie seventeen times.

She <u>can</u> *tell* when someone walks on her lawn.

Prepositional phrases

Sometimes *prepositional phrases* will throw off your hunt for subjects and verbs when you're trying to determine if a sentence is complete. A prepositional phrase begins with prepositions, like *in, on, under, near, by, with*, and *about*, and they often include nouns (remember: a noun is a person, place, thing, or idea). For example:

Under the moon

By the bodega

In love **with** you

In these prepositional phrases, the preposition is in bold.

When you're looking for the subject or verb in a sentence, it will never be in the prepositional phrase. Check out the following sentence:

Charles wandered through the aisles in the hardware store on the corner.

This sentence has *three* prepositional phrases:

through the aisles

in the hardware store

on the corner

Whew! So, if you cross out all those prepositional phrases in the sentence, finding the subject and verb is easy:

Charles *wandered* ~~through the aisles in the hardware store on the corner~~.

All of this explanation of the simple sentence is to help you spot and avoid some of the most common errors in writing: run-on and sentence fragments.

Run-ons, fragments, comma splices

As we discussed, complete sentences, or independent clauses, contain a subject, a verb, and form complete a thought:

The big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away.

The subject is "cow," the verb is "walked." The other words modify or give more information about other words.

What is a sentence fragment?

Fragments occur when the sentence is missing the subject and/or verb and/or it's an incomplete thought:

Walked quickly and quietly away towards the rabbit.

There is no subject in this group of words. What or who walked? Notice that the word "rabbit" is a noun and can, in its own sentence, be the subject. But in this case, it is part of the prepositional phrase that tells where the walking is towards. Thus, it cannot be the subject, even though it is a noun.

Because the big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away.

The addition of the subordinating conjunction "because" creates an incomplete thought.

Other words that create fragments when added to the beginning of sentences include other subordinating conjunctions and coordinating conjunctions (lists of these are at the end of the section). These are words that turn levers in brains to indicate some sort of connection is coming, like a trailer with a hitch. That part of the sentence needs something with an engine (main subject and governing verb) to hook up to before it can go anywhere. It needs a simple sentence (independent clause) to hitch to.

Sentence fragments are fixed by either adding the missing words or hooking the fragment onto a sentence that comes before it or after it in the paragraph.

The big brown <u>cow</u> *walked* quickly and quietly away.

Because the big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away, <u>I</u> didn't *need* to run away in terror from it.

In the above examples, the main (simple) subject is underlined, and the verb is in italics. In the second sentence, "cow" is no longer the subject, because the word "because" has come in and made that whole clause from "because" to "away" into a dependent clause, a trailer, needing a hitch.

What is a run-on sentence?

Run-on sentences happen when two complete sentences (independent clauses) are put together incorrectly:

I walked down to the store the heat was getting to me.

"I walked down to the store" is a perfectly fine sentence. "The heat was getting to me" is another great sentence. Put them together, though, without proper punctuation, and you have a run-on.

If you separate these two complete sentences with a comma, you have a type of run-on called a comma splice:

I walked down to the store, the heat was getting to me.

The comma is probably not strong enough to hold two sentences together. Why is this? There are logical, common sense reasons for it. One, certainly, is that since "store" is a noun, and "heat" is a noun, if there is no comma, the reader is left wondering what exactly the relationship is between "store" and "heat." This is because nouns can modify (give information about) other nouns. Once you put in the comma, you immediately take away the possible question in the readers mind about what the relationship might be between "the store" and "the heat" because the comma indicates, sort of, "new thought starting here." The reader knows that the noun "the heat" is the subject of something, starting a whole new section of the sentence. Again, this all proves yet another time that a sentence is a series of logical-grammatical relationships that people's brains are programmed at birth to know and follow.

How to fix a run-on sentence

So, if I do have a run-on sentence, which is basically a sentence that doesn't easily make sense, how do I fix it? There are options. Use a coordinating conjunction:

I walked down to the store, for the heat was getting to me.

…or use a subordinating conjunction:

I walked down to the store since the heat was getting to me.

…or use a semicolon:

I walked down to the store; the heat was getting to me.

…or use a conjunctive adverb with a semicolon:

I walked down to the store; indeed, the heat was getting to me.

…or go ahead and use a period.

I walked down to the store. The heat was getting to me.

One of the most common run-on sentences is this type:

As I walked down to the store the heat was getting to me.

It's a run-on because it starts with a subordinating conjunction (again, words like because, since, when, and if) and does not have a comma separating out the two sentences. It should look like this:

As I walked down to the store, the heat was getting to me.

Some instructors will also call the clause, "As I walked down to the store" an introductory phrase that needs a comma after it. Whatever the instructor calls it, the comma needs to be there.

List of coordinating conjunctions:
For
And
Nor
But
Or

Yet
So

List of common subordinating conjunctions:
Because
If
Since
When
While
As
Before
Wherever
Once
After
Although
Even (if, though)
Unless
Until
Where

List of common conjunctive adverbs:
Also
However
Indeed
Nonetheless
Otherwise
Consequently
Besides
Indeed
Moreover
Similarly
Still
Likewise
Furthermore
Hence
Nevertheless
Next
Therefore
Thus

Verb tense

Once again, every sentence must have a main subject (noun) and a verb (governing verb).

>   **We** <u>caught</u> *the tread of dancing feet,*
>   **We** <u>loitered</u> *down the moonlit street,*
>   *And* <u>stopped</u> *beneath the harlot's house.* (Wilde "The harlot's house")

The verb is underlined above. A verb in a sentence is that which tells the action, or the state of being. Above, the actions are "caught" and "loiter" and "stop".
The subject (a pronoun) is "we." Notice that you could write the above as three sentences, and they would all be good sentences:

>   *We caught the tread of dancing feet.*

And

>   *We loitered down the moonlit street.*

And finally, with an insertion of the subject again,

>   *And we stopped beneath the harlot's house.*

Verbs can be in different tenses. For example, the above example is written in the past tense. If it were present, it would be

>   "We catch" or "We are catching" and "We loiter" or "We are loitering" and "We stop" or "We are stopping."

If it were future tense, it would be

>   "We will be catching" and "We will be loitering" and "We will be stopping."

These are the three basic tenses in English: past, present, and future. They indicate the time of the action.

Let's look at the sentence again, considering the subject.

>   *We caught the tread of dancing feet.*

The subject of the sentence above is "we." That is the subject, the thing that is doing the action, or is in the state of being. The subject is always a noun. Again, the verb, or the thing that is what "we" are doing, is the word "caught."

One common error in writing, with verbs, is that the writer switches tenses mid-paragraph, or even mid-sentence. This is a relationship error. It makes the sentence non-logical; it doesn't "make sense." For example:

Sometimes a horrible marionette
Came out, and smoked its cigarette
Upon the steps like a live thing. (Wilde "The harlot's house")

That's a nice phrase. But what if it said:

Sometimes a horrible marionette
Came out, and smoking its cigarette
Upon the steps like a live thing.

Now you have created head-scratching questions of relationship for the reader, the audience. The "and" in the second line awaits another verb in the same form or verb tense as the one it is connecting to "came." And that second verb in the same form never comes. So the audience is confused. The audience also awaits another pronoun, or noun, to provide a subject for "smoking its cigarette upon the steps like a live thing." Perhaps it is the horrible marionette that is "smoking its cigarette upon the steps like a live thing"? But perhaps it is something else, like an officer, in which case we would expect something like

"Sometimes a horrible marionette
Came out, and smoking its cigarette
Upon the steps like a live thing, the officer debated.

Or, we could do as the original, and change "smoking" to "smoked," as it should be, so that we know that it is the second verb describing what the marionette did.

Another common error in writing, with verbs, is that the tense does not match the subject.

He sit.

In third person singular, there is an "s" at the end of the verb. The "he" already indicates that this is third person singular, but the "s" is another grammatical marker that indicates the same thing. This is redundancy, but languages do this.

So the correct way to write it is "He sits." For various reasons, you can write "he sit" and you will probably be understood. However, you should know the rule.

When writing a longer sentence, it is easy to put the wrong verb. For example, we might write, quickly, during one of the pre-writing or drafting parts of our writing process:

> *Almira and I, sea-weed draped, rose up out of the ocean. We raced to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We knew there was no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone was roasting corn. Almira and **I go over** to the man selling corn. **We say**, "How much?"*

In the second to the last sentence, the verb tense shifts. So then, in revising, we realize we need to change it to all past tense, or else keep it to the basic present, which is how the above passage ends. We try the past tense:

> *Almira and I, sea-weed draped, rose up out of the ocean. We raced to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We knew there was no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone was roasting corn. Almira and I **went over** to the man selling corn. **We said**, "How much?"*

But what about the present tense?

> *Almira and I, sea-weed draped, **rise up** out of the ocean. We **race** to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We **know** there is no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, **someone is roasting** corn. Almira and I **go over** to the man selling corn. We **say**, "How much?"*

Either choice is fine, as long as one stays consistent.

To keep the flow, and also to keep the reader in the same sense of time (past tense), the verb should stay in past tense throughout a sentence.

Within a paragraph, you should also try to keep the same tense. Sometimes people change tenses between sections of a writing, but they have an obvious reason for doing so. This is so that the reason-element of the audience's brain does not stall.

If you change tenses, you should do it deliberately, not accidentally.

Pronoun/antecedent agreement

A pronoun stands in place of another noun that has already been named. If we are writing about Frank, we do not keep using his name, saying "Frank skipped dinner, and then Frank shook the dice." We write, "Frank skipped dinner, and then he shook the dice." In this case, the antecedent (thing referred to) of the pronoun is Frank. That is, the antecedent (thing referred to) is the word to which the pronoun refers back to.

One of the most common writing errors is not having your pronoun match the number of the antecedent (thing referred to). In other words, if the antecedent is singular, use a singular pronoun. If the antecedent is plural, use a plural pronoun.

On Thursdays, Jim and Kheena do math together, and then they eat.

Since the subject, "Jim and Kheena" is plural, keep the verb plural. Here is another example:

On Thursdays, Kheena does math, and then they eat.

Since the subject, "Kheena," is singular, keep the pronoun singular:

On Thursdays, Kheena does math, and then she eats.

The most common error in pronoun/antecedent agreement is with the pronouns "they" and "their." For example:

When a student forgets to pay their tuition, they will get dropped from classes.

The easiest fix is to make "students" plural; otherwise, you should change the pronouns "their" and "they" to "he or she."

A final example. Look at this, from a poem:

He did not wear his scarlet coat,
For blood and wine are red,
And blood and wine were on his hands
When they found him with the dead (Wilde, "The ballad of")

Imagine that this read

He did not wear his scarlet coat,
For blood and wine are red,
And blood and wine were on their hands

When they found him with the dead (Wilde "The ballad of")

You would think that the blood and wine are on the hands of the people who found "him" rather than on "his" hands.

Passive and active voice

When writing sentences, there are basically two ways to show action: passively and actively.

Passive: The ball was thrown to Brenna at second base.
Active: Reeza threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

Both sentences are complete and convey an action with the verb; however, the first sentence, the passive sentence, almost seems to be missing something. If you try to picture the action, you might see a baseball coming out of nowhere, hurtling toward a girl at second base. In the active sentence, the picture is more complete: you can see who threw the ball. Even with the additional information, both sentences are the same length.

In general, active voice is more effective.

Construct your sentences so that someone or something is doing something— not just something being done. Look for "to be" verbs like *is, are, was, were*. These are often a sign of passive voice.

That doesn't mean passive voice can't be useful. When you want to deemphasize the subject or avoid responsibility, passive voice is the way to go. For example, a car company that had a major mechanical issue with their airbags and had to recall millions of cars is probably not going to admit total fault.

An error was made in the production of the airbag in your Brand X car.

This is a useful application of passive voice. If the sentence were active, the company might actually be legally more liable.

Company X made a mistake in the production of airbags…

NO! Don't say that. We'll get sued!

Modifier errors caused by passive voice

Another problem with using passive voice is that it can cause grammatical errors like dangling or misplaced modifiers. A modifier is a descriptive word or phrase that often comes as a dependent clause at the start of a sentence.

With pinpoint accuracy, Reeza threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

The phrase "with pinpoint accuracy" is a modifier, describing how Reeza threw the ball. Now, try that same phrase with the passive sentence.

With pinpoint accuracy, the ball was thrown to Brenna at second base.

Now what is the phrase describing? From the structure of the sentence, the ball is throwing itself with pinpoint accuracy. In fact, the person who threw with accuracy isn't even in the sentence, so this is a dangling modifier.   Even if Reeza was in the sentence and the sentence was still passive, there would still be a logic problem.

With pinpoint accuracy, the ball was thrown by Reeza to Brenna at second base.

Now, Reeza is there, but the sentence still almost makes it sound like the ball was throwing itself. This is a misplaced modifier.

Correct modifier placement: With pinpoint accuracy, Reeza threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

More resources on passive and active voice and modifier errors:

"Active and passive verbs," *Oxford Dictionaries*.
https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/grammar/active-and-passive-verbs

"Active vs Passive Voice," *Howcast.* https://youtu.be/cOhUmttkt90

"Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers," Tamu Writing Center.
https://youtu.be/RHWyN1xGFdc

Comma rules simplified

Let's talk about commas. One of the hardest things in proofreading is commas. This is because often, unlike with other punctuation, commas are often only placed based on style considerations, or audience considerations. In other words, the rules are sometimes more flexible.

Here is one good rule you should know about commas: Use commas in between items in a series:

> *Bob likes ice cream, ham sandwiches, and pickled herring blended together into a shake.*

Do you need the comma before "and" in the list? Do as your instructor says. Generally, it's not *wrong* to have it, but if the items in the list will be at all confusing for the reader without it, include it.

Another rule is: Use commas to separate out extra information from the rest of the sentence (commas with introductory phrases, transitional expressions, parentheticals, appositives, nonrestrictive clauses). This is information that, if removed, will not change the basic meaning of the sentence:

> I find lutefisk disgusting, **despite what you say about it.**

> *Mighty Ducks,* **that movie that stars Emilio Estevez**, was filmed in Minneapolis.

> **Hey**, did you listen to Manuela's speech?

> Rhonda, **who constantly forgets things**, left her jean jacket on the couch.

> **After the movies,** Don and Janice danced the electric boogaloo to some classic Prince.

> Margarita, **the best Jell-o salad maker in all the land,** forgot to buy mandarin oranges.

> Tim accidentally shaved off an eyebrow, **which turned out to be a good look for him.**

What about other connections in sentences? You can use commas to indicate that the end of the "subordinate" or "modifying" thought is done. That is, use commas in coordination and subordination:

> Even though he wandered around the mall for hours, **Javier** <u>couldn't</u> <u>find</u> the perfect pair of shoes.

> **I** <u>got sick</u> of waiting for him, so I went out to the car.

In the first example, the clause "even though…" is modifying, or giving information about, why and under what circumstances Javier "couldn't find" (the main subject and verb of the sentence). In the second, the comma is used in conjunction with the word "so" to move to the second section of the sentence, which is a section that indicates results of the main subject "I" and the verb "got sick." Again, notice that the hinge of the sentence is the main subject and main (or governing) verb, and the other things in the sentence, including very long clauses or phrases, are just giving more information about (modify) that basic thing indicated by the subject and verb.

Use commas to separate out two coordinating adjectives that describe the same noun:

He is a silly, fun kid.

Note: silly and fun are of the same "weight" or importance and are therefore coordinating. You could easily say "He is a fun, silly kid" and the sentence makes sense—that's how you know they're coordinating and need a comma between them. Here's an example of non-coordinating adjectives:

That ridiculous foam rubber clown nose is in the garbage.

You wouldn't say, "That foam rubber ridiculous clown nose…" This means that "ridiculous" and "foam rubber"—and "clown," for that matter—are of different weight, so the adjectives need to be presented in that order in the sentence, thus making them non-coordinating.

There are also some other smaller, but still important, comma rules that you should know about.

Use commas after a city and the state in a sentence:

The population of Minneapolis, Minnesota, is over 400,000 people.

Use commas to separate items in a date:

He was hired Tuesday, March 30, 1987.

Use commas to separate items in an address:

I live at 123 Maple Street, Rochester, Minnesota.

Semicolons, once and for all

The rule for using a semicolon is easy: use it in place of a period, but the sentences (or independent clauses! Remember those?) connected by a semicolon must be logically or thematically related in some way.

YES: Shadi went to the movie by herself; she had a good time.
NO: Shadi went to the movie by herself; it's a sunny day in the neighborhood.

YES: Alfonso is a great dancer; he swings his arms like nobody's business.
NO: Alfonso is a great dancer; the green bean casserole needs to get thrown out.

Here's another rule for semicolons: use them instead of commas to separate items in a list if the items in the list have commas in them. What? Here's an example:

Dachshunds have several interesting traits, such as short, powerful legs; a territorial bark; a long, low body; and the adorable, sometimes annoying devotion to a single owner.

Colons: Use them right

Colons can be used in a sentence to replace words like, "for example" or "namely." Check it out:

YES: Teachers have a lot on their plates: planning class lessons, executing on those lessons, and grading.

NO: Teachers have a lot on their plates, for example: planning class lessons, executing on those lessons, and grading.

Colons can also be used to separate out titles with their subtitles, as was done for this chapter's section title.

Apostrophes

In brief, an apostrophe shows possession. If the word is singular, add an apostrophe and an "s" even if the word already ends with an "s." For example:

Russ's shoes stink.

If the word is plural and ends with an "s," just put an apostrophe after the "s."

The princesses' gowns were pretty.

If the word is plural, but does not end in an "s," a word such as "children" or "men" or "moose," then use an apostrophe and an "s."

The children's ice cream melted quickly.

An apostrophe is also used

-In a contraction, to show that there are letters missing:

You're (you are)

-To provide clarity when the thing that is plural is just one letter, or is a number.

There are two m's in the word mummy.

In the 90's we drove muscle cars.

Spelling

If you spell a word incorrectly, you can also cause your audience to pause and scratch their heads, stopping everything to try to decide how to solve this rule problem rather than continuing on to learn about the point of what you are trying to say in your writing. You not only get fewer "ethos points," or reliability and credibility points, when you make spelling errors, you also cause problems in meaning.

Thus, you should make every effort to keep your audience in the space of what you are trying to tell them of or persuade them of, rather than throw them into a soup of senselessness where they have to try to figure out the fundamentals of language and logic.

In English, there are many words that sound the same, but are spelled differently and have different meanings. For example, these homophones:

affect / effect

they're / there / their

it's / its

your / you're

two / to / too

sew, so

by, bye, buy

then/than

I, eye

The word "homophone" just means "same sound." So these sound the same. But they have different meanings. What if you wrote:

Eye did not see, I to I.

Your audience would perhaps think you were trying to write a riddle, or a grand philosophical commentary on the nature of being and selfhood. Or, they would think you simply did not know that you should have written it:

I did not see eye to eye.

Wordiness

How can writing be too wordy? It's made of words, right? However, good writing means using the right words and sometimes the fewest words. Too many words, or too many vague or confusing words or phrases can actually cloud your ideas, making them hard to understand or less effective. Sometimes less is more.

Here is an example:

In this day and age of easy technology and hand-held devices and cell phones, it's easy to communicate with pretty much anyone, almost anywhere, literally any time of the day. The question that this brings up is whether or not communicating all the time is good or bad. Because of the fact that we all need cell phones, we now rely on them too much.

This passage uses 65 words to say what? Does it really need all those words? Are all the words actually doing anything or are they just taking up space?

Let's look at the passage more closely, commenting on the words and language.

*In this day and age (**cliché and really long phrase**) of ~~easy~~ **not really specific** technology ~~and~~ hand-held devices and **aren't hand-held devices also cell phones? Too much repetition** cell phones, it's **passive voice-not really effective. Who is communicating? What does easy mean?** easy to communicate with pretty much **vague description** anyone, almost **what are the exceptions?** anywhere, literally **do we need all these descriptors?** any time of the day. The question ~~that this brings up~~ **wordy phrase** is whether or not communicating all the time is **more passive verbs** good or bad. Because ~~of the fact that~~ **don't need this** we all need **do we? Support this?** cell phones, we now rely on them too much **vague—how much is too much?***

Now, we could rewrite this, being much clearer and more concise.

Hand-held devices make communication effective; people can communicate instantaneously with others across the globe, both with audio and video. However, instant communication may come with consequences like dependence on cell phones.
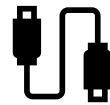
Now, we have 31 words to say what 65 did before—and it's more concise and clear. To develop the paragraphs more, we can add examples, details, and maybe even research.

This following section was adapted from *Business English for Success:*

Identifying wordiness: Choosing specific, appropriate words

Most college essays should be written in formal English suitable for an academic situation. Follow these principles to be sure that your word choice is appropriate.

- **Avoid slang.** Find alternatives to *bummer*, *kewl*, and *rad*.
- **Avoid language that is overly casual.** Write about "men and women" rather than "girls and guys" unless you are trying to create a specific effect. A formal tone calls for formal language.
- **Avoid contractions.** Use *do not* in place of *don't*, *I am* in place of *I'm*, *have not* in place of *haven't*, and so on. Contractions are considered casual speech.
- **Avoid clichés.** Overused expressions such as *green with envy*, *face the music*, *better late than never*, and similar expressions are empty of meaning and may not appeal to your audience.
- **Be careful when you use words that sound alike but have different meanings.** Some examples are *allusion/illusion*, *complement/compliment*, *council/counsel*, *concurrent/consecutive*,

founder/flounder, and *historic/historical*. When in doubt, check a dictionary.

- **Choose words with the connotations you want.** Choosing a word for its connotations is as important in formal essay writing as it is in all kinds of writing. Compare the positive connotations of the word *proud* and the negative connotations of *arrogant* and *conceited*.
- **Use specific words rather than overly general words.** Find synonyms for *thing*, *people*, *nice*, *good*, *bad*, *interesting*, and other vague words. Or use specific details to make your exact meaning clear.

Let's stop this overview of proofreading here—those are a lot of rules! We covered the main things to consider for proofreading, or copy editing. Remember that having a clean, proofread copy of your final draft is important. Your audience expects it.

You gain credibility (ethos points) by following the standard rules of English in most contexts.

Remember also that you can proofread while you write, or while you revise, but you should not let this get in the way of getting good ideas down—don't "edit as you go" if this freezes you up, because all of the perfect proofreading in the world is not going to help a paper with bad ideas and incoherent content.

Portions of this chapter were adapted from the book *Business English for Success:* https://www.oercommons.org/courses/business-english-for-success/view

Chapter Eleven: Research Process

Now you know about the basic writing process. Let's learn more about research, which kicks your writing up to a new level. Research is not used in all academic or school or college writing. And you will find that on a job, the writing assigned to you will not often say: do research in databases. But you must read to get information, for many writing assignments.

All writing requires you to know your stuff, and that is research.

Researching a writing assignment

In this book, we focus on research in academic writings. In this sense, doing research means having outside support for what you are writing. Usually, that is logic, or data, which our world agrees is the best thing to turn to for proof that cannot be argued against. This data is data achieved by the rigorous and time-tested scientific method.

Argumentative writing and writing describing academic subjects tend to require research. Other modes, such as memoirs, poems, or opinion often require little to no research. The amount of research you need will depend on your audience.

You've got a writing assignment. Perhaps its parameters are specific, based on something you might be studying in class:

Write a 5-6 page essay describing the purposes of Benjamin Franklin's various trips to Europe pre-American Revolution and the effects on the Revolution itself.

Sometimes the parameters are specific to you:

Write about a misconception others have about you and why they're wrong.

Or, at work, your supervisor might give you a daunting task:

Write a report explaining what the IT department has been up to in the past year.

Other times, though, the assignment is broader:

Write an argumentative essay that effectively utilizes ethos, pathos, and logos along with two scholarly sources to make three to four salient points in support of your side of the argument along with at least one counterargument that is then refuted in your text.

Whew! For many of us, the first instinct is to fire up our web browser of choice and do a quick internet search to figure out what to write about. At that point, however, you've just given up control over your essay. You're letting the ideas of others take over your planning, and it might (even unconsciously) color your own thoughts on the topic.

Does it make your life easier to do this preliminary searching? Sure. The problem, however, is that if you want to improve your ability to think and then write about those thoughts, then the search you do before you do your own thinking hijacks the essay. Your piece then becomes a collection of others' ideas, when the point is for you to look at your own ideas and then make them more complex by bringing in those outside sources.

Ultimately, when you're given an assignment and you're not sure where to start, follow the advice in Chapter Two of this book for getting some of your own ideas. Don't be afraid of them. The thing about your own ideas is that if you write with those, you will automatically be more clear, because you know what's going on, your thoughts are usually clearer to you than to anyone else.

Once you've landed on a topic, do some freewriting to get as many of your own ideas as possible, even if you're not sure that you'll use all of them in the essay. Look at where you might have some holes in what you know. These holes can now be filled with research: fire up those computers, because it's time to start digging.

> **The Ultimate Rule for Research:**
> Don't let the research drive your ideas.
> YOU drive your ideas.

Sources

It is possible to divide sources up into categories. You can save time in writing by focusing on the best sources. This is true in academic assignments as well as writing you may do for a job.

Types of sources

A useful way to categorize sources is as follows:

- *Excellent sources.* The best sources to use are called *primary* sources. These are the actual text of a work, such as an eyewitness report, the word-for-word law, the text of the most important book/s in the field, or, (sometimes, but rarely)

the text of the important article in the most important journal/s in the field. An excellent source is any text that important experts and stakeholders turn to when they have to make a decision in real life about any given topic.

- *Good sources.* Articles (online and in print) and books written by academics about the topic area you chose. Also, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and textbooks.

- *Other sources*. Magazine and newspaper articles, or articles authored for use on the internet only.

Examples of types of sources

- If I am writing about Shakespeare, an excellent source is Shakespeare himself. A good source is a book written recently by a scholar about Shakespeare.

- If I am writing about the criminal mind, excellent sources are articles and books about the criminal mind, as well as important court cases and texts of law and psychology that govern how we deal with and think about the criminal mind.

- If I am writing about how my summer vacation went, the first most excellent source would be myself. The second would be my mom, or other people who know the most about what I did.

- If I am writing to argue for or against a local bar ordinance in my hometown, excellent sources would be the text of the ordinance itself and a statement given by the chief of police. Good sources would be articles in academic journals about local bar ordinances as well as any articles in local newspapers that cover the topic of the ordinance carefully.

- If I am writing about American policy on the war in Afghanistan, an excellent source would be a government document that governs the policy of the war today. Another excellent source would be a widely-read book or article about the war written by an expert in the field. A good source would be an academic journal article about the war written by an academic.

In general, original texts and those texts that people read and routinely refer to are the best texts.

A tip for finding sources

Read the abstract first, to see if you need to read the entire article. If there is no abstract, read the first few paragraphs to see if you need to read the entire article.

Finding sources

Where do you find information on a topic? Google it, obviously! Yes, in the early college courses you're taking, the internet likely has all the information you'll need to address your writing topics. This might also be true in the working world. There are many other resources, however, worth your consideration. Varying your source type will make your research stronger and show that you're a thoughtful writer.

Also, remember: you need to consider your audience and purpose before you start your research to determine what that group might need in terms of outside sources.

Finding sources: Basic search engines

The information you need is right at your fingertips. This is a cliché for a reason: *it's true!* Going online is the easiest way to research your topic. Most of us use Google, but Ask, Bing, Yahoo, among others are also popular, and we can easily pull these up on desktops or laptops or as apps on our smartphones. Yes, it's easy to find information using a search, especially when the search engine offers search terms for us as we're typing in what we'd like to find.

There are a few things to watch out for, though. First, many search engines will give you search results based on previous searches. This means that when you Google "political correctness," the search results you get might be different than your buddy Malcolm's, which might also be different than Ariana's. Also, you want to be clear about your search terms. Instead of searching for "Lyme disease," which will likely give you a basic definition along with over 60,000 results in less than a second (that's a LOT of information!), search for "Lyme disease Minnesota" or "Lyme disease alternative treatment" for more specific information and data. You can also type in questions, like "Can Lyme disease be cured?"

Remember, though, that just because a source *looks* good, that doesn't mean it *is* good. And by "good," we mean appropriately scholarly or professional for your topic and purpose.

Finding sources: Academic databases

As a student in college, you're lucky because you have access to an amazing wealth of solid research sources via free access to academic databases. What's a database? It's a search engine for sources that are usually only found in print: academic journals, magazines, and newspapers.

You know what magazines and newspapers are, but you might not have a lot of experience with academic journals. Journals, such as the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *The Lancet,* are where experts in a field publish their studies. These essays are peer reviewed, meaning that other experts read the studies and agree that the findings therein are correct. What this means for YOU is that an academic journal is often a great source for your essay. The scientific journals are especially helpful.

The other sources found in databases, magazines and newspapers are also good sources. The best thing about looking for, say, a newspaper article on a database rather than online is that in a database, the access is free and goes back for years and years. When you look online at a newspaper, sometimes you can only search so far in the past or can only look at a few articles before you have to pay for access. No, thank you! Use the databases instead.

When using a database, use search terms like for an internet search engine. Don't ask questions, however. Remove unnecessary words, like "the" or "in". For example, you might Google "What are the main symptoms of Lyme disease?", but in an academic database, you would search "symptoms Lyme disease."

There are a variety of other ways to limit your searches. If you do an "advanced search," you could search "Lyme disease" AND "symptoms" AND "Minnesota." You can often limit the results based on published dates. For example, by looking at just 2016 and 2017. You can limit your results by "Full text," meaning that all the search results will be the full articles. Sometimes you only get an abstract, which is a summary of the article, and if you want the whole thing, you need to do an interlibrary loan, something your librarian can help you with.

Speaking of librarians, use them! They are specially trained to be experts on research strategies and love to help students who are proactive about finding solid sources. Conduct your research in the library where it's quiet, the resources are free, and live human help is right there for you.

The other great thing about an academic database? It will create a full citation for you, so you don't have to worry about starting from scratch to create it yourself. Of course, it's your responsibility to double-check the correctness of the citation generated by the database, but it's likely to be right.

Finding sources: Print books, magazines, and journals

While you're in the library, why not search through the available print materials? You can't get much more scholarly than a good old-fashioned published book. Plus,

some topics that don't change a great deal (such as the geology of Minnesota or anatomy) lend themselves better to book research.

Print books can be wonderful. Though it might seem intimidating to think about looking at an entire book, worry not: use the Table of Contents in the front of the book or the Index in the back as a way to ferret out the sections in the book that will be useful for your research.

What about magazines and journal articles? Though you can find more magazine and journal articles in an academic database than you're likely to find in print in your library, sometimes browsing through those print sources can spark other ideas; you might run across information in a journal you didn't previously think about, or sometimes your eyes get tired of staring at a computer and you need to rest them by looking at a printed page. Whatever the reason, it's worth looking at the printed resources in your library.

Finding sources: Interviews

Probably one of the most often overlooked resources when doing research is to use other people. Why not talk to a person, or interview them via email? Specifically, why not talk to an expert on the topic you're researching? Who better to learn about Lyme disease from than a doctor or someone who has it? These experts can provide solid information that can also put a personal touch on the topic.

There are a few things to be careful of when considering a person to interview, though:

- The person should actually be an expert. Your cousin might know a friend who had a brother whose friend has Lyme disease. The cousin is NOT an expert, and neither is the brother; only the person who has it is the expert. Also, don't confuse usage with expertise: a friend might use Snapchat constantly, but that doesn't mean she's an expert (except, perhaps, being an expert on addiction to social media).

- Ask with plenty of lead time and explain what you're doing. People are busy. How would you like it if a random person contacted you with a bunch of questions they needed answers to tomorrow? You'd ignore that person. Instead, make it easy for the expert to help you out:

  o Say who you are, what you're doing, and how you got the expert's contact information (it's especially good when you've been referred to the person by a common acquaintance—that's networking at its finest).

- o Explain when you need the information (at least a week ahead of time).

- o If you'd like to meet in person, give as much lead time as possible and as many time options as possible.

- o Include your list of questions. You shouldn't overwhelm the expert: give him or her five questions or so.

- o Give the expert several ways of getting ahold of you; a return email is likely, but offer a phone number for the person to call or text if that's more comfortable.

- o Always thank the expert for his or her time. Remember, time is a valuable resource!

- • If it's an email conversation, cite as an email source. If conducting the interview in person, it's cited as a personal interview.

Tips on interviews

There are also several things to consider when you're creating a list of interview questions:

- • What's the purpose of your research? Focus in on a specific aspect of the topic that needs an expert's ideas. DON'T rely on an expert for *everything* you need in your research.

- • Don't overwhelm your expert with a huge list of questions. Three to five questions is a "polite" number: this would get enough information but wouldn't be an overwhelming number for your expert to answer.

- • When writing questions, phrase them so they are open-ended and neutral.

  - o Closed-ended questions get a limited amount of information. For example: *Does this hospital have a policy on hand washing?*

  - o Open-ended questions allow for expansion. For example: *What are the hospital policies on hand washing, and how have employees responded to those policies?*

  - o Leading questions suggest an answer and can demonstrate an incorrect assumption that can make your interview subject feel negatively about you

and the interview. **Don't ask leading questions**. For example: *Some employees here have been angry about the hand washing policies, right?*

- o Neutral questions are best; they're just looking for information. The open-ended example questions above are neutral.

- When asking questions, make sure they're organized in the same order you're planning on using the information in your essay. That makes your life much easier when you're going to use it. For example, if you're talking with someone who has had chronic Lyme disease, it would be worth putting your questions in chronological order:

  - o When did you first notice symptoms that made you go to the doctor?

  - o When did you receive your diagnosis? Was it difficult to get that diagnosis?

  - o What was your treatment plan?

  - o How are you still feeling the effects of your Lyme disease?

- Use this interview information just like other sources: by quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing, and be sure to cite the information, too. In MLA, you cite an interview of John Lennon as:

  Lennon, John. Personal Interview. January 1, 2018

Finding sources: Videos, podcasts, and other audio sources

As you're conducting your research, consider utilizing non-print sources such as videos or radio programs. TED Talks, Youtube lecture series, National Public Radio, and specialized podcasts can be excellent sources of information and can help break up all the reading you're doing. Just as you'd do when searching online, though, make sure the sources you're using are appropriately useful and academic.

Just as anyone can start a blog and spout off their opinions on any subject under the sun, anyone can make a YouTube video and do the same.

Beware of bias.

The Website Litmus Test:
How to tell if the website you're looking at is credible or not

There's a huge amount of information out there on the web, so it can be difficult to tell whether a website is credible or if it's biased or just plain wrong. Here are some things to look for when surfing for credible material on the internet:

1. The website has an author. A website doesn't *have* to have an author to be credible, but it helps.
2. The website author has a biography of his/her credentials.
3. The website comes from a source that's reputable (e.g. a well-known college or university or an unbiased news organization)
4. The website looks boring. Silly fonts, colors, pictures, advertisements, etc., can show a lack of professionalism.
5. The information on the website makes sense. If you find a website with information that shocks you on your topic, beware. It could very well be biased.
6. It's grammatically perfect. A website that has a bunch of misspellings and run-on sentences is not to be trusted (keep in mind that effect on the reader when it comes to your writing, too!!).
7. The website has links to other reputable sources.
8. The information on the website is unbiased. Obviously, neutral information is good information to have. It's not bad to use information from personal blog postings or other biased sources, but you must acknowledge that information as biased and not as fact; otherwise, it will reflect poorly on you as a writer.
9. Watch out for the .com endings. .edu, .gov, and .org endings to websites can provide more credible information.

And, finally, one big DON'T: Don't rely on Wikipedia. This editable-by-anyone encyclopedia is helpful for very basic information, but you've probably chosen a topic about which you should already know the basic information, so it's not helpful that way. The way it IS helpful is to look at the end of the article for a list of sources: those sources can be useful for future research.

Keep in mind that none of the items listed above are deal-breakers (and it's not even an exhaustive list!). Also, the above could just as well say **The website and app litmus test** these days. When you start to see several of these red flags, though, and you're starting to get the feeling in your gut that this source might not be good, move on. There are many, many, *many* more sources in the online sea.

It is not a huge deal to use a biased source, but you must acknowledge it as such in the writing or risk being dismissed by your readers. Again, audience is key.

Finding sources: Pictures

Sometimes a judicious insertion of a picture can help break up a text, or orient the reader, or give a visual cue. Graphic artists are often employed by firms to do the visuals of a text, once the writers have written the text. For most college writing courses, visuals are not required, as creating visual art is usually thought of as a separate skill. But you should be aware of the possibility for needing visuals. For example, in much science writing, graphs and charts are very important parts of the text.

Reading sources

One of the most daunting tasks of research is not finding the sources themselves but actually reading them. Even if you're a person who loves reading, doing so for pleasure is not the same fact-finding mission that the research mindset requires. When you're reading for research, you're a detective, looking for clues in the world that will support your pre-set idea about a topic. When you think about it in those terms, reading requires a different set of skills. Sure, it might be different than reading a novel, but it can be easily practiced and will not require you to read carefully from beginning to end. You can get the information you need without making it too difficult on yourself.

Critical reading of sources

So, let's say you're looking at a printout of a journal article you found on an academic database. It's long—over ten pages!—but you know it's got information you'd like to use in your essay. How do you wade through it, knowing you'll need to go through many other sources just like it?

First, get clear in your brain what your purpose is with this piece. What information are you looking for, exactly? Perhaps your purpose isn't to find information. Maybe you want to figure out how this piece is organized to get inspiration for your own piece's organization. You might also be trying to figure out the merits of this particular writer's arguments. Whatever it is you're doing, make sure you've got that clearly in your mind before you start.

Now, it's time to start reading. Your initial impulse might be to start at the beginning and read all the way through. You could do this, of course. Along the way, you might highlight especially useful information, perhaps underlining unknown words to look up later or summarizing in a few words what each paragraph is about. This engagement with the text is important: it keeps you from getting bored and makes it easier later on when you want to review the source again and aren't especially interested in re-reading again from the beginning (who would be?). When you're done, you might immediately summarize the source on a separate sheet of paper, recalling the most important information you remember from the text.

If it makes you feel a little sick thinking about reading straight through, you have a few options. First, why not just find the thesis statement (or, in a medical study journal article, start by looking at the end where it will have a section titled something like "experiment results"). By reading the central argument of the academic source first, you can decide whether or not you need it. And remember, this is what people will do with your argument research paper, as well!

Second, you might consider the "skim and savor" method. Read the entire introductory paragraph. Then, for most of the rest of the piece, you're skimming. Carefully read the first sentence in the paragraph, and then let your eyes lightly move over the rest of the paragraph, ending with carefully reading the last sentence. If you see something useful, read that part carefully—that's the savoring part. Highlight. Circle. Put hearts and stars around it. Do whatever you need to do to be able to go back and find that part. Then, read the entire concluding paragraph. This tactic will give you a sense of where the most useful information to you is and be able to come back to it quickly.

One last word of advice: keep track of all your sources! You could print them off, keep a list of them in a notebook, make a list in a word processing document on your computer, email the links to yourself, take pictures of the screen, use an archive like Evernote or Pinterest to collect and organize research…do whatever you have to do to make sure all your precious research isn't lost.

So, read, read, read, listen, listen, listen, search, search, search, watch, watch, watch. Take notes. Toss out the stupid stuff and find what is useful. Get good at reading and clicking through your phone to find things.

Example: Annotating a text

First, get clear in your brain what your purpose is with this piece. What information are you looking for, exactly? Perhaps your purpose isn't to find information. Maybe you want to figure out how this piece is organized to get inspiration for your own piece's organization. You might also be trying to figure out the merits of this particular writer's arguments. Whatever it is you're doing, make sure you've got that clearly in your mind before you start.

[margin note: key to research: purpose!]

Now, it's time to start reading. Your initial impulse might be to start at the beginning and read all the way through. You could do this, of course. Along the way, you might highlight especially useful information, perhaps underlining unknown words to look up later or summarizing in a few words what each paragraph is about. This engagement with the text is important: it keeps you from getting bored and makes it easier later on when you want to review the source again and aren't especially interested in re-reading again from the beginning (who would be?). When you're done, you might immediately summarize the source on a separate sheet of paper, recalling the most important information you remember from the text.

[margin note: helps with using sources in my piece later on!]

If it makes you feel a little sick thinking about reading straight through, you might consider the "skim and savor" method. Read the entire introductory paragraph. Then, for most of the rest of the piece, you're skimming. Carefully read the first sentence in the paragraph, and then let your eyes lightly move over the rest of the paragraph, ending with carefully reading the last sentence. If you see something useful, read that part carefully—that's the savoring part. Highlight. Circle. Put hearts and stars around it. Do whatever you need to do to be able to go back and find that part. Then, read the entire concluding paragraph. This tactic will give you a sense of where the most useful information to you is and be able to come back to it quickly.

[margin note: savor] *[margin note: key]*

One last word of advice: keep track of all your sources! You could print them off, keep a list of them in a notebook, make a list in a word processing document on your computer, email the links to yourself, take pictures of the screen...do whatever you have to do to make sure all your precious research isn't lost.

Using sources

Quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing sources

First, a note: it is difficult to talk about quoting, summarizing and paraphrasing without also talking about in-text citation, which is where you say where you got the information that's being quoted, summarized, or paraphrased. Therefore, you'll see in-text citations (and full citations at the end of this section) for the source used as you must always cite outside sources when they're used in a piece of writing.

More information about citation—in the writing itself as well as for a Work Cited (MLA) or References (APA) page—will be linked in the section that follows.

Proper quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing aren't just about grammatical correctness; using them is a fine art. You can choose which of the three you want to use at certain times in your work to support your ideas. They all have different effects, so as you're learning what they are and practicing, consider how a quote's effect might be different than a summary's effect, which are both different than a paraphrase.

Before we say anything else, though, we have to tell you that the number one thing to remember when using research in any paper is this:

IF YOU USE AN OUTSIDE SOURCE IN ANY WAY,
SHAPE, OR FORM, YOU MUST CITE IT IN THE TEXT,
EVEN IF YOU DON'T USE THE SOURCE'S EXACT WORDS.

All right. Now, let's get down to business:

Quoting sources

Quoting is the easiest way of incorporating outside sources. Unfortunately, because it is the easiest way, it is also not necessarily the best way.

People sometimes have the tendency to dump a bunch of quotes in their papers and think that'll make them look smart. Trust me; it doesn't. Too much quoting will make you look like you don't care, you're lazy, and/or you don't have an original thought of your own, and it also puts several different styles of writing in the same piece, which can interrupt the flow of ideas and read awkwardly. Sometimes, however, quoting is the most effective way of getting the information down, so if you must, be sure to use the author's exact words and put quotation marks around it.

Example: Mentioning the author before the quote*:

MLA: An example of the difficulty of writing papers appears in *Sweet Agony* by Gene Olson: "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (13).

APA: An example of the difficulty of writing papers appears in *Sweet Agony* by Olson (1972): "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how

long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (p. 13).

***Note:** The phrase "An example of the difficulty of writing papers appears in *Sweet Agony* by Gene Olson:" is called a *signal phrase* or *tag*. Other examples of signal phrases are "Olson states," "Olson claims that" and "Olson suggests." There are many others, too. These phrases help to introduce source material in quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing. Thoughtful use of tags is important to help cite correctly as well as encourage the flow of your writing.

Example: The same quote without mentioning the author before it. In this example, the citation information follows the quote, in parenthesis:

> **MLA:** "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson 13).

> **APA:** "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson, 1972, p. 13).

Consider the effect of citing in the parentheses versus using a tag in the sentence itself. If it's the first time you're using a source in the text, it's not a bad idea to use a tag; after that, you can do either.

Quoting sources: Long quotes

For essays written using the MLA documentation style, quotes that are more than four typed lines (not sentences, but *lines as they appear on the page*), or for essays written using the APA documentation style, quotes that are more than 40 *words* (or longer), make a block quote. Check this out:

> **MLA:** Writing is difficult. Everybody knows this. It has been said over and over through the centuries. As Gene Olson states:

>> There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain. Herein lies the ultimate frustration of writing; herein also lies its bittersweet charm and challenge. It's like chasing butterflies in a world where there are always more butterflies, each new batch prettier than the last. (13)

APA: Basically the same thing, but use "Olson (1972)" in the tag and (p. 13) in the parentheses.

Note that the indenting takes the place of quotes. Block quotes should be used sparingly, as they break up the flow of the paper and can cause reader impatience.

Finally, when using quotes, make sure you set up the quote in the text with your own ideas and after the quote, interpret it in some way for the reader, such as discussing how it fits in with your other ideas. That will help the reader understand the quote itself and make you more credible to the reader.

Quoting sources: Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is when you take an exact quote and put it into your own words and writing style, capturing the same ideas as the original. It is approximately as long as the original as you go sentence-by-sentence, putting the original **all in your own words**. Quotation marks go around the exact phrasing that is borrowed from the original, and paraphrases are always cited.

Original quote: "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson 13).

Paraphrase using **MLA**: As Gene Olson states in *Sweet Agony*, writing can take a lot out of a person. One can write long and hard, coming up with a ton of text, but one can always do better (13).

APA: Follow the same rules as quoting in APA.

See that? It's the same idea as the original and the same length, but different words. Can you see how this might have a different effect on a reader than a direct quote?

In case you were wondering, here's an example of the original quote paraphrased poorly:

Poor paraphrase: Writing is a demanding task. One works a long time at it and produces many words, but there's always room for improvement.

This is not good because it is too close to the original, using many of the same words and phrases, and it's also missing a citation. This would be considered plagiarism.

Quoting sources: Summarizing

Summaries do just that: they sum up the main idea or spirit of the original text. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original text. Though there are no quotation marks (unless you use some of the exact phrasing from the original), you still cite.

Original quote: "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson 13).

Summary in MLA: Writing is difficult, mostly because it can always be better (Olson 13).

Summary in APA: Writing is difficult, mostly because it can always be better (Olson, 1972, p. 13).

Citing sources

The importance of citation

"Wait," you may say, "Isn't it common knowledge that writing is difficult, and there's always room for improvement? Why would we have to cite this Olson guy if it's common knowledge?" Good question. Here's the answer: If you hadn't thought about including this particular piece of information in your paper until you read Olson's book, cite it. Again: ***when in doubt, cite.***

Work Cited (MLA)

Olson, Gene. *Sweet Agony*. Windyridge Press, 1972.

Reference (APA)

Olson, G. (1972). *Sweet agony.* Grants Pass, OR: Windyridge Press.

Citing sources: Basic citation styles

Sometimes the citation style you use is your choice, but most often, your instructor will give you a style he or she would like you to use. The two most common are MLA and APA.

MLA, or Modern Language Association, is used most often in the humanities: English, history, the languages, etc. It is focused on the names of authors; this authorial expertise is highly valued in the humanities.

APA, or the American Psychological Association, is used most often in the sciences: biology, chemistry, sociology, and, as the name suggests, psychology, among others. It is most focused on dates; this is why you see the copyright date noted after the last name when it's used in a signal phrase in the text.

Citations in both styles have two parts: source information in the actual essay(called an in-text citation) and source information on a separate page that becomes an *alphabetical* list of all your sources.

MLA Citation

Let's say we're looking at a (fictional) website. When creating an in-text citation, you can use a signal phrase or a parenthetical citation (as noted in the previous section). In MLA citation, a signal phrase will mention, at the very least, the author(s) OR, if there's no author, the title of the work. For example:

According to Fred Rogers…

As noted in the article, "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,"…

A parenthetical citation is placed after the source material (remember, you cite even if you put the source information in your own words!), and it looks like this:

(Rogers).

Or, if there is no author, then

("It's a Beautiful Day").

Note that the period goes outside the parentheses and you should use a shortened version of the title.

Creating a works cited

Now, you've got half the job done. It's no good having an in-text citation if it doesn't refer to a source, so on a separate sheet of paper titled "Work Cited," you'll list what's called the *full citation* for each source. It might look something like this:

Rogers, Fred. "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood." *Fred Rogers Superfans*,

2015, www.fredrogerssuperfans.com.

APA Citation

Let's continue with the same fictional website. When creating an in-text citation for APA, a signal phrase will mention the author (but only the first initial of the first name as APA maintains gender neutrality) AND the copyright date:

According to F. Rogers (2015)…

As noted in the article, "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" (2015)…

An APA parenthetical citation would look something like this:

(F. Rogers, 2015).

("It's a Beautiful Day," 2015).

As with MLA citation, you'll also need a separate list of sources for APA citation. It should be titled "References," and just like in MLA citation, your sources should be alphabetized. A citation might look something like this:

Rogers, F. (2015). "It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood." Retrieved from www.fredrogerssuperfans.com

What can be most frustrating about citation is that there are as many ways to cite sources as there are sources. First, know that the basic citation formatting is similar, so when you get the basics down, it makes it easier. Second, there are lots of sources out there to help you make your citations.

Here are some of the best:

Online citation tools

EasyBib Citation Guides: http://www.easybib.com/guides/citation-guides/

Citing Your Sources: MLA (Williams Libraries): https://libguides.williams.edu/citing/mla

Citing Your Sources: APA (Williams Libraries): https://libguides.williams.edu/citing/apa

MLA Citation Style Guide: 8th Edition (LIU Post): http://liu.cwp.libguides.com/ mlastyle

APA Citation Style Guide (LIU Post): http://liu.cwp.libguides.com/APAstyle

USER BEWARE: Go ahead and use a citation-generating tool, but the responsibility is yours to make sure the citation is correct. For that reason alone, it's worth having an understanding of how citations should look.

Example: Parts of a website used in citation

Appendix: Glossary of terms commonly used in writing and English studies

Adjective. A word that modifies a noun. A word (or a phrase, which is called an adjectival phrase) that gives more information about a noun. In the following sentence, "unkindest" is the adjective modifying the noun "cut": "This was the most unkindest cut of all" (*Julius Caesar*). The adjective tells us *what kind of* cut it was, the "unkindest."

Active voice. The type of sentence in which the subject of the verb is distinctly stated and is prominent, rather than de-emphasized; most sentences are written in active voice. The opposite of active voice is **passive voice**, which see.

Adverb. A word that modifies a verb. A word (or a phrase, which is called an adverbial phrase) that gives more information about a verb. In the following sentence, "often" modifies the verb "fear": "In time we hate that which we often fear" (*Antony and Cleopatra*). The adverb tells more information about "fear," telling us *when*.

Allusion. The interspersing of a phrase or group of words from one text into another text. The words and phrases of the text that is interspersed are immediately recognizable to an audience. Allusions are used to strike an audience with some feeling or idea that is contained in the text alluded to. For example, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare wrote, "Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have immortal longings in me." The following sentence could be written to contain an allusion to this Shakespearean phrase: "Give me my bat, put on my hat, I have immortal longings in me for the game." The idea would be to put in the allusion (interspersing some of his words and phrasing-forms) to Shakespeare in order to move the feeling of the Shakespeare's tragedy's commentary on the meaning of life's briefness into one's own text.

Analogy. A comparison of two things that are unlike, or, a likeness between two otherwise unlike things. One can also think of an analogy as a parallel. An example: "The children gathered around the table like bees to honey, with mom as the queen bee." By analogy, once you compare "children" to "bees"--which they are not obviously like until you write them so, this makes mom the queen bee. And, to draw out the parallel further, this makes the kitchen a hive. Often in an analogy, one of the things compared is more familiar to the audience; the idea is to shed light on the unfamiliar by using the familiar, or to shed light on the abstract idea (the un-see-able) by using a something visible (the see-able).

Annotated bibliography. A writing assignment often assigned in university courses in which the student is told to read texts, cite them using a selected academic citation rule, and write a paragraph or so about them. In an annotated bibliography, the student is

usually asked to summarize each of the texts they read or give the main ideas of the texts.

Assumption. That which must be taken as true in order to go along with someone's central **argument**, or **claim**, or **thesis**. In other words, if you state, or claim, that "Children like candy," you assume many things. For example, you assume your audience has the same understanding of what "children" and "candy" are that you do. In *Measure for Measure* we read: "The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart / Goes all decorum." This sentence assumes that the audience knows that a nurse is the one in charge of the baby, not the other way around. Otherwise it makes no sense. Often, as in the example from *Measure for Measure*, the assumption is so obvious that the audience would never see it as something one might reasonably argue about.

Argument. In writing studies, an argument is simply a **claim**, or a statement (often called a **thesis statement**) that one is going to back up with evidence. An academic argument contains no animosity. An example of the use of this word in writing studies: "My argument is that science textbooks are too expensive in the field of anthropology, and the evidence I give is data I got from six local bookstores."

Audience. Those who read or come into contact with a writer's text.

Beat, or *stress*. Where the emphasis falls on a word, or in a phrase. In the word ca-**tas**-tro-phe, the second syllable takes the beat, or gets the most stress. In the word ca-tas-**tro**-phic, the third syllable takes the most stress. In the sentence "I am not in the giving vein today" (Richard III), one could say that the word that takes the most stress, or gets the main beat, is the word "giving." If we read the sentence as iambic (broken up into sets of two beats, the second of which gets more stress than the first), then the syllables that are stressed, or take the beat, are "am" "in "giv-" "vein" and "-day." One could put "in the" as one beat (two short, unimportant words, thought of as one-syllable because they're said together so quickly) and think of this sentence as **I** am **not** in the **giv**-ing **vein** to**day**." Or, thinking of "in" and "the" as their own separate beats: I **am** not **in** the **giv**-ing **vein** to**day**. But either way, as is the way of English, the beat, or stress, is every-other-syllable. Beat, or stress, is related to rhythm.

Cause and effect. A writing assignment often assigned in university courses in which the writer is asked to talk about the effects (consequences, reasons why) of a certain thing that exists among us, or did exist. The idea is to promote critical thinking in writing.

Claim. An **argument**, or **thesis**. Something that one posits (hypothesizes, conjectures, assumes) is true or ought to be done, which they will then prove is true or ought to be done by facts, or other means of proof. A **claim** rests on **assumptions** about how things are, which are usually unstated.

Cliché. An overused word or phrase. In describing someone's age, you say they are "as old as the hills." This is the same as saying "old" alone, because "as the hills," a picture, is so often used in this phrase that it has lost its power to be an image that evokes anything in an audience's mind. Similarly: "every cloud has a silver lining" and "I am scared to death" and "the writing is on the wall" and "that dog don't hunt" and every phrase that is common and does not arrest with its freshness.

Connotation. The idea or emotion that a word gives the audience which is in addition to its literal or main meaning. In the sentence "This structure has two helical chains each coiled round the same axis" (Watson and Crick 737), the literal, or main meaning of the word "chain" is "a connected linking series of rings or items." But some **connotations** of the word "chain" are the ideas of strength, and continuity, and stability.

Coordinating conjunction. The words "and," "but," "for," "nor," "or," "so," and "yet" are the coordinating conjunctions in English. They express a relationship between two simple sentences (or between complete ideas, or clauses, or words) in such a way that both of the two remain almost completely equal in status. For example: "I skip and run." Here the pronoun "I" governs two verbs that are equal in status: "skip" and "run." The coordinating conjunction "and" connects the two verbs, keeping them on the same level, so that the one action does not depend on the other, which is the case with **subordinating conjunctions**, which see.

Cover letter. A letter that comes before a résumé, which introduces the candidate for a job to the prospective employer.

Definition. The meaning of a word; the intent for understanding; a way of using a series of words to elaborate on the exact sense in which one is using one specific word.

Denotation. The specific, main, literal meaning of a word, as opposed to any associated emotions or ideas the word brings with it; see **connotation** for tied-in idea.

Dialogue. Words in quotation marks, said by characters in a story or text.

Diction. Word choice. Diction can also include choice of phrases, as well as making sentence choices and word-image choices (figurative language).

Edit. To review, revise, and correct a text. Content editing is when you edit the ideas in a text. Copy editing is when you edit the small grammar and punctuation of a text.

Essay. A text on a certain topic, commenting on it, enlightening about it, or making a general case for something around that topic. Essays are often assigned in beginning college courses. They often also appear in magazines. They are not long papers, or

texts, in general. Essays are about subjects of interest, and are not fiction. An essay is sometimes called a composition.

Ethos. One's character; the reputation one has, especially ethically; moral worth or virtue; also, more modernly, ethos includes the idea of credentials. One's reputation, or ethos, or moral authority, can be one's means of **proof**.

Example. Illustrating a concept that is broad, by giving a specific. A way of making sure an audience understands, by giving them both a category (group), along with an example of something in the category (or group), to make a large concept more see-able. An example can even be a brief story or anecdote.

Exposition (Expository writing). Writing that gives a main idea and then gives details about it, and then concludes. Expository writing is writing that sets forth reasons for something, or provides information about something, or describes something. It is not fiction writing, it is fact writing.

Fallacy. A term sometimes used in writing studies, this is a word that properly belongs more to the discipline of logic. A fallacy is a logical error, such as a false generalization, giving only two choices when there are certainly more options than two. Another example is assigning a cause to a thing only because the thing came after another thing in time, with no proven scientific data that the one caused the other. There are other types of fallacies, too. Fallacy is also related to scientific truth, or reason. In writing studies, it is discussed because of the emphasis on proving things, or supporting things with reasons, in academic argument papers.

Figurative language. Language that makes the abstract concrete; language that evokes physical image ideas in the minds of the audiences to bring them to an understanding of something non-physical, or invisible, such as a large idea or abstract concept. Instead of stating that "people deceive others," which is a large idea, "deception," Shakespeare used figurative language, with things concrete that people can see, such as a smile or a dagger, saying "There's daggers in men's smiles" (*Macbeth*). **Metaphors**, **similes**, and **analogies** (sometimes) are examples of figurative language.

Fragment. A set of words lacking the completeness of a sentence, such that the reader has no way to reasonably connect the ideas contained in the words to their intended association, thus leaving the reader in an unsolved question of logic and meaning. For example "gods themselves throw" is probably a fragment. We know, for example, that something is missing because the verb "throw" takes an object. Unless the writer meant that the gods throw themselves, and this is logically unlikely. The complete sentence, from *King Lear* is actually "Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, / The gods themselves throw incense."

Freewriting. Writing without thinking about how or what you are writing; writing that involves digging into one's thoughts and writing them as they come, unorganized and unedited, in preparation for more polished work.

Helping verb. A helping verb is a verb usually near the main (governing) verb that gives more information about the aspect of the main (governing) verb. It indicates aspect of time, or completion of an action, or wish. For example, the sentence "I gulp" does not have a helping verb. But if I add in a helping verb "would," so the sentence is "I would gulp," I am giving a different aspect of the main (governing) verb of the sentence, which is "to gulp." In the sentence "I will gulp," the helping verb "will" is indicating future tense, which is an aspect of time.

Introduction. Along with the body and the conclusion, one of the three easily identifiable parts of almost any text of writing. It is what comes first, the first paragraph or first section of a written text, and the introduction is often the only thing most of the audience reads.

Irony. In writing, irony is a sort of mocking of something. The writer means one thing, but writes the text in such a way that it seems less than straightforward, because what is written intends to mean the opposite of what it first seems to be, if one is only looking at it childlikely and literally. One old Greek writing (oratory) handbook defined it as "to say something and pretend that you are not saying it" ("Rhetorica ad Alexandrum" 1434a).

Journaling. Writing about yourself and your life and your opinions for yourself alone in a text nobody will ever read. The audience of one who does journaling is the one doing the journaling; often a writer journals to exercise their brain in order to write better for audiences.

Linking verb. A linking verb is the main (governing) verb of a sentence when it just indicates existence of a connection, or relationship. There are only a few linking verbs in English, and the most common, by far, is the verb "to be." For example, "The fly is snarky." In this sentence "is" links two things "fly" and "snarky" and says that one exists a certain way. It tells state-of-being, or description of the fly. Other linking verbs are: "to seem," "to feel," "to appear," and "to become."

Literary analysis. A text analyzing a literary text. Often assigned in university writing courses, a literary analysis makes a claim (thesis, central argument) about a literary text and supports it, mainly with reasons and evidence, including quotations, from the literary text under analysis.

Literary devices. Things like analogy, metaphor, rhyming, allusion, and alliteration that writers use to affect audiences with their texts.

Logos. Reason, or logic, or data; that which appeals to the human capacity for common sense, rules of logic, and scientifically provable truths or assertions. Usually thought to be the best means of **proof**.

Main verb. The main verb (governing verb), of a sentence is the verb that gives the main action or state-of-being of the sentence. A sentence must have a main (governing) verb, to be a sentence. For example, the sentence "Stop!" is a complete sentence, because it has a main (governing) verb "to stop" and a subject (implied "you"). There can be more than one main verb, such as in "Stop, drop, and roll." There are three here. Often a main (governing) verb in a sentence will appear with a helping verb which is giving information about aspect or wish, or time-conditions of the main (governing) verb. The main (governing) verb of a sentence can be a linking verb.

Maxim. A short saying, usually twenty words or less that is easy to memorize, easy to quote, and contains a sort of folk wisdom (generally known and accepted) in it. Also called a "proverb," as in the Bible "wealth maketh many friends." Also called an "adage" or "aphorism." The phrase "Look both ways before you cross the street" is a maxim, as is "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Maxims often contain elements of poetry. This makes them more memorable. An "epigram" is a sort of maxim in poetic form, as is this one by Benjamin Franklin: "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."

Metaphor. A phrase that is putting two unlike things together, without using "like" or "as"; an example is "Happiness is a warm puppy" (Charles Schulz). Usually one of the things in the comparison is concrete and visible, something we can see, (the "warm puppy"), and the other is abstract and invisible ("happiness"), which we cannot see. The goal of a metaphor is to transport some element of meaning from the one thing to the other, or to imply play with the interchange of the transport.

Modifier. A word or phrase, such as an **adjective** or **adverb** or **prepositional phrase**, that gives information about another word or phrase. In the title *The Cat in the Hat*, the words "in the hat" modify, or give information about, the cat.

Myth. In writing studies, a kind of writing which is a story told to explain why something is what it is. Myths involve high, spiritual topics of universal concern such as creation and love.

Narration (*Narrative writing*). A story or essay or recollection of an event that gives enlightenment to the audience and interests them by setting forth that which interests humans. Narrations can be fiction or non-fiction. Narrations can also be included in argument research essays. For example, when someone starts out an essay arguing about educational policy by narrating a story or anecdote to orient the reader to their

attitude and subject matter, that little story is a bit of narration in a paper that is really a research paper.

Noun. A person, place, or thing (or idea); a word that names an object or thing.

Paraphrase. Saying the words from someone else's text in your own words, making sure you're including the main idea of the text you are paraphrasing. Lady Macbeth said, "Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." To paraphrase: *Lady Macbeth feels guilty because of the blood she smells on her hand*. A paraphrase is not a **quotation**, in which a text is simply repeated exactly, word for word, and quote marks are placed around it. Instead, a paraphrase is relaying the substance of a sentence or phrase in the words you choose yourself.

Paragraph. Sentences set together, usually shown to be a set by spacing or by indenting, which are reasonably all connected to the same idea, which idea is made clear by the first sentence of the paragraph, in general. Paragraphs can be only a couple sentences, or they can be very long. In modern writing, they are usually short.

Passive voice. The state of a sentence in which the real subject of the verb is unstated, usually to de-emphasize it, even though grammatically, there is a plain "other" (misleading) subject. Politicians, for example, say "Mistakes were made." This is passive voice. The subject in this sentence, grammatically, is actually "mistakes" and the verb is "to make." But who made them? Therefore, "mistakes," the grammatical subject, is a misleading subject. By stating something in passive voice, one can move the attention away from the actual actor or responsible party, and put the attention on the object of the action. If John made the mistake, and we rewrote the sentence into active voice, we would write "John made mistakes." A middle way is to put the person doing the action into a prepositional phrase: "Mistakes were made by John." This is still passive voice, but we do know who the actor, or subject of the verb, is, now, who is John (the subject doing the verb).

Pathos. Emotion or feelings such as sadness, pity, fear, or anger. Sensations, empathy, sympathy, and heightened awareness are involved in pathos. Pathos is a mode of persuasion that is not thought of as connected to reason or facts, nor is it related to the reputation of the speaker, but it is the stirring up of feeling in the hearts of the audience. It is carrying the audience away by evoking a higher viscerality or sentiment or sensation in them, rather than by reason or authority. Pathos is a non-logical means of **proof**.

Persuasion. The art or ability, to change or influence the will, or soul.

Plagiarism. In general, plagiarism is the use of someone else's words in your own text, which words are not set off by quotes to indicate that the words are not of your own

invention. Allusion, however, is not plagiarism, and neither is it plagiarism to use someone else's words in your own text without putting them in quotes and attributing them to the author if the author doesn't mind.

Preposition. A word expressing a relationship of one word or set of words to another set of words, such as "for" "on" or "after." There are many others. A preposition is part of a structure in a sentence that gives more information about, or "steers," other words, telling things about them such as "where" or "why" or "how" or "when" they are. In general, a preposition steers a noun ("**in** the boat," "**after** the play"), and appears in a prepositional phrase, which see.

Prepositional phrase. Short set of words in sentences that belong as a group, which begin with a preposition, and modify (give more information about) another word in the sentence, such as location, time, direction, or reason. In *Troilus and Cressida* we read "Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back, / Wherein he puts alms for oblivion." The phrase "at his back" belongs in a logical relationship to the word "wallet." It modifies the word, or gives more information about the word. It tells "where" (location).

Proof. The evidence given to display to and convince an audience why a person's claim (or argument, or thesis) is true, or should be accepted. Usually we say that the best proof is rational, or logical proof—being persuaded by facts that exist in our world. Other ways of proving, or giving proof, which are less rational, are: appeals to passion (emotion, feeling; this is pathos), appeals to authority (ethos), and force.

Quotation. A selection of text set off by marks " " to indicate the words within the marks are from a certain other place, or said by another person, exactly in that form.

Revising. Making changes to improve a text.

Rhetoric. A discipline that concerns itself with persuasion and the study of texts that persuade.

Rhetorical analysis. A type of writing often assigned in universities in which the writer examines a text and writes about why and how the text is persuasive for a given audience.

Rough draft. A basic, only somewhat organized version of a text, which is later revised and polished, to make it finalized and available for audience use.

Run-on sentence. A sentence that has two parts, or two "sentences" that are independent and could stand alone, that are not connected right, such that a reasonable reader is likely to be confused. An example from *King Lear* is: "I cannot heave my heart into my mouth I love your majesty according to my bond no more no less." A run-on

sentence disrupts the reader's mind by offering them unsolved choices of how to connect words and ideas. For example, in the sentence just quoted, does "into my mouth" go with "I love" or with "heave my heart"? It is not clear. To fix this sentence, one could turn this into two independent sentences, each of which could stand alone: "I cannot heave my heart into my mouth. I love your majesty according to my bond; no more, no less."

Sentence. A rule-bound set of words that contain logical relationships among them to convey meaning; the two main word categories that one must have in order to have a sentence are subject (a noun) and verb (action or state of being).

Signal phrase, or *signal tag*. A few introductory words put before a quote to introduce it, that is, to signal that a quote is coming, such as "In the author's words" or "As the author explains it" or "As the text itself phrases it" or "As it says in the article." For example, in quoting a certain author's words "Boo-hoo to that," you introduce this quote by a signal phrase: *In the author's words, "Boo-hoo to that" (2)*. Or, *As the author explains it, "Boo-hoo to that" (2)*. There are many others.

Simple sentence. A short sentence with just one main subject idea and verb idea. In *Troilus and Cressida* we read "Her bed is India." If this were the end of the sentence, it would be a simple sentence with the subject "bed" and the verb "is." But the Shakespeare actually wrote: "Her bed is India: there she lies, a pearl." This is two simple sentences joined by a colon.

Sound patterning (**alliteration**, **assonance**). The catchiness or memory-triggering devices used in writing such as alliteration (consonants grouped near each other that are the same; "Fred fried a fish" catches and binds with the "f" sound) or assonance (grouped vowels near each other that are the same; "Ghosts do a "Boo!"" catches and binds with the oo sound). Repetition and other patterns of sound might also be mentioned.

Story. See also narrative. A story can be long or short, but it usually has a plot (a beginning, tension in the middle, and an end) and dialogue. It also has characters.

Subordinating conjunction. A little word, such as "while," "although," "since," (and there are others), that is put in a sentence to express a status relationship between two words, clauses, or sentences. In a sentence with a subordinating conjunction, one group of words expressing one idea is lower in status than the other, less emphasized words. A subordinating conjunction is similar to a preposition in that it is a word that sets up other words for logical relationships to other words. For example, "While you skip, I run." In this sentence, the main action, or governing verb, is "run." But "while you skip" gives us information about the running—it is done while the skipping is going on by you. And if it said "While you skip, I run around the block" the "while you skip" would be

information adding to our knowledge about the "I run", telling us under what circumstances I run, and so would the "around the block" (a preposition phrase telling where). See also **coordinating conjunctions**.

Style. The way something is written (not the content, or ideas written), which is exhibited in word choice, phrasing choices, and other literary devices.

Summary. A section of text that gives a shorter version of a larger text, in words that are one's own words but still convey the main thought of the larger text.

Thesis. The main **argument** or **claim** being made in a persuasive text.

Thesis statement (central claim). See **claim** or **argument**. The sentence or sentences that tell the main argument a paper is making, in an academic or persuasive text; usually found towards the beginning of the writing. Proofs of the thesis, or support paragraphs, usually follow.

Tone. The author's intent and feeling towards the audience of their text, or the people and actions in a text. The tone of a text comes forth mainly from style choices and the state of the author's inner mind.

Topic sentence. The first sentence in a paragraph, in which the central idea of the paragraph is brought up or made clear.

Transitions. Words used to move from one phrase to another, or from one paragraph to another such as "And" or "Next," or "And thus" or "To conclude."

Verb. The word in a sentence that describes actions or states of being. In a sentence, there will always be a main (governing) verb. There may even be two or more governing verbs. There also may be other non-main verbs, in clauses that are subordinate to the main clause, or in prepositional phrases, and the like. For example in *Henry IV, Part 1* we read: "I speak of peace, while covert enmity / Under the smile of safety wounds the world." Here, the main (governing) verb is "speak." But "wounds" is also a verb. It is not the main governing verb, though, in terms of the logical relationships of this sentence.

Work cited (*bibliography*) – a list at the end of an informative (expository) writing which tells where the scholarly information in the text came from, written in an academic form according to the rules of a discipline such as MLA (Modern Language Association) or APA (American Psychological Association) style guidelines.

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