

16.1.1: Introduction

The title of this book is *The Process of Research Writing*, and in the nutshell, that is what the book is about. A lot of times, instructors and students tend to separate “thinking,” “researching,” and “writing” into different categories that aren’t necessarily very well connected. First you think, then you research, and then you write.

The reality is though that the possibilities and process of research writing are more complicated and much richer than that. We *think* about what it is we want to research and write about, but at the same time, we learn *what* to think based on our research and our writing. The goal of this book is to guide you through this process of research writing by emphasizing a series of exercises that touch on different and related parts of the research process.

But before going any further, you need to be aware of two important points about this book:

- **This book is an *introduction* to academic writing and research, and chances are you will keep learning about academic writing and research after this class is over.** You may have to take other writing classes where you will learn different approaches to the writing process, perhaps one where you will learn more about research writing in your discipline. However, even if this is your one and only “writing class” in your college career, you will have to learn more about academic writing for every class and every new academic writing project. Learning how to write well is not something that ends when the class ends. Learning how to write is an on-going, life-long process.
- **Academic writing is not the only kind of writing worth learning about, and it is not the only potential use for this book or this class.** The focus of *The Process of Research Writing* is the important, common, and challenging sort of writing students in a variety of disciplines tend to do, projects that use research to inform an audience and make some sort of point; specifically, academic research writing projects. But clearly, this is not the *only* kind of writing writers do.

Sometimes, students think introductory college writing courses are merely an extension of the writing courses they took in high school. This is true for some, but for the majority of new college students, the sort of writing required in college is different from the sort of writing required in high school. College writing tends to be based more on research than high school writing. Further, college-level instructors generally expect a more sophisticated and thoughtful interpretation of research from student writers. It is not enough to merely use more research in your writing; you also have to be able to think and write about the research you’ve done.

Besides helping you write different kinds of projects where you use research to support a point, the concepts about research you will learn from this course and *The Process of Research Writing* will help you become better **consumers** of information and research. And make no mistake about it: information that is (supposedly) backed up by research is everywhere in our day-to-day lives. News stories we see on television or read in magazines or newspapers are based on research. Legislators use research to argue for or against the passage of the laws that govern our society. Scientists use research to make progress in their work.

Even the most trivial information we all encounter is likely to be based on something that at least looks like research. Consider advertising: we are all familiar with “research-based” claims in advertising like “four out of five dentists agree” that a particular brand of toothpaste is the best, or that “studies show” that a specific type of deodorant keeps its wearers “fresh” longer. Advertisers use research like this in their advertisements for the same reason that scientists, news broadcasters, magazine writers, and just about anyone else trying to make a point uses research: it’s persuasive and convinces consumers to buy a particular brand of toothpaste.

This is not to say that every time we buy toothpaste we carefully mull over the research we’ve heard mentioned in advertisements. However, using research to persuade an audience must work on some level because it is one of the most commonly employed devices in advertising.

One of the best ways to better understand how we are effected by the research we encounter in our lives is to learn more about the process of research by becoming better and more careful critical readers, writers, and researchers. Part of that process will include the research-based writing you do in this course. In other words, this book will be useful in helping you deal with the practical and immediate concern of how to write essays and other writing projects for college classes, particularly ones that use research to support a point. But perhaps more significantly, these same skills can help you write and read research-based texts well beyond college.

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