ACADEMIC WRITING I (FORD)

Lumen Learning
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Book: Academic Writing I (Ford)

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: An Overview of the Writing Process

1.10: Creating Paragraphs

A paragraph is a self-contained portion of your argument. Paragraphs will begin by making a claim that connects back to your thesis. The body of the paragraph will present the evidence, reasoning and conclusions that prove that claim. Usually, paragraphs will end by connecting their claim to the larger argument or by setting up the claim that the next paragraph will contain.

How Many Paragraphs Do You Need?

There is no set number for how many paragraphs a paper should have. You will need one for an introduction and one for a conclusion, but after that the number can vary. However, you will need one paragraph for every claim that makes up your argument.

Paragraphs should be used to develop one idea at a time rather than contain many different ideas and claims. If you have a lot of ideas and claims to address, you may be tempted to combine related claims into the same paragraph. Combining different points in the same paragraph cuts down on how much space you have to argue each point. This will divide your reader's attention and make your argument less thorough.

By dedicating each paragraph to only one part of your argument, you will give the reader time to fully evaluate and understand each claim before going on to the next one. Think of paragraphs as a way of guiding your reader's attention – by giving them a single topic, you force them to focus on it. When you direct their focus, they will have a much easier time following your argument.

Some writing manuals will direct you to have one paragraph for every point made in your thesis. The general idea behind this rule is a good one – you need to address every point, and you will need at least a paragraph for each. However, do not feel like you can only devote one paragraph to each point. If your argument is complex, you may need to have subsections for each of your main points. Each one of those supporting points should be its own paragraph.

Using Topic Sentences

Every paragraph of argument should begin with a topic sentence that tells the reader what the paragraph will prove. By providing the reader with expectations at the start of the paragraph, you help them understand where you are going and how the paragraph fits in with the overall structure of your argument. Topic sentences should always connect back to your thesis statement – if you cannot find a way to describe a paragraph in relation to your thesis, you probably do not need it for your argument.

Creating Good Paragraphs

If the thesis contains multiple points or assertions, each body paragraph should support or justify them, preferably in the order the assertions were originally stated in the thesis. Thus, the topic sentence for the first body paragraph will refer to the first point in the thesis sentence and the topic sentence for the second body paragraph will refer to the second point in the thesis sentence. Each body paragraph is something like a miniature essay in that they each need an introductory sentence that makes an important and interesting argument, and that they each need a good closing sentence in order to produce a smooth transition between one point and the next. Transitions from one argument to the next, as well as within paragraphs, are important to add coherence to your paper.

1.11: Paragraphs

What this handout is about

This handout will help you understand how paragraphs are formed, how to develop stronger paragraphs, and how to completely and clearly express your ideas.

What is a paragraph?

Paragraphs are the building blocks of papers. Many students define paragraphs in terms of length: a paragraph is a group of at least five sentences, a paragraph is half a page long, etc. In reality, though, the unity and coherence of ideas among sentences is what constitutes a paragraph. A paragraph is defined as "a group of sentences or a single sentence that forms a unit" (Lunsford and Connors 116). Length and appearance do not determine whether a section in a paper is a paragraph. For instance, in some styles of writing, particularly journalistic styles, a paragraph can be just one sentence long. Ultimately, a paragraph is a sentence or group of sentences that support one main idea. In this handout, we will refer to this as the "controlling idea," because it controls what happens in the rest of the paragraph.

How do I decide what to put in a paragraph?

Before you can begin to determine what the composition of a particular paragraph will be, you must first decide on a working thesis for your paper. What is the most important idea that you are trying to convey to your reader? The information in each paragraph must be related to that idea. In other words, your paragraphs should remind your reader that there is a recurrent relationship between your thesis and the information in each paragraph. A working thesis functions like a seed from which your paper, and your ideas, will grow. The whole process is an organic one—a natural progression from a seed to a full-blown paper where there are direct, familial relationships between all of the ideas in the paper.

The decision about what to put into your paragraphs begins with the germination of a seed of ideas; this "germination process" is better known as brainstorming . There are many techniques for brainstorming; whichever one you choose, this stage of paragraph development cannot be skipped. Building paragraphs can be like building a skyscraper: there must be a well-planned foundation that supports what you are building. Any cracks, inconsistencies, or other corruptions of the foundation can cause your whole paper to crumble.

So, let's suppose that you have done some brainstorming to develop your thesis. What else should you keep in mind as you begin to create paragraphs? Every paragraph in a paper should be

- **Unified**—All of the sentences in a single paragraph should be related to a single controlling idea (often expressed in the topic sentence of the paragraph).
- **Clearly related to the thesis**—The sentences should all refer to the central idea, or thesis, of the paper (Rosen and Behrens 119).
- **Coherent**—The sentences should be arranged in a logical manner and should follow a definite plan for development (Rosen and Behrens 119).
- **Well-developed** —Every idea discussed in the paragraph should be adequately explained and supported through evidence and details that work together to explain the paragraph's controlling idea (Rosen and Behrens 119).

How do I organize a paragraph?

There are many different ways to organize a paragraph. The organization you choose will depend on the controlling idea of the paragraph. Below are a few possibilities for organization, with brief examples.

- **Narration:** Tell a story. Go chronologically, from start to finish. (See an example.)
- **Description:** Provide specific details about what something looks, smells, tastes, sounds, or feels like. Organize spatially, in order of appearance, or by topic. (See an example.)
- **Process:** Explain how something works, step by step. Perhaps follow a sequence—first, second, third. (See an example.)
- **Classification:** Separate into groups or explain the various parts of a topic. (See an example.)
- **Illustration:** Give examples and explain how those examples prove your point. (See the detailed example in the next section of this handout.)

5-step process to paragraph development

Let's walk through a 5-step process to building a paragraph. Each step of the process will include an explanation of the step and a bit of "model" text to illustrate how the step works. Our finished model paragraph will be about slave spirituals, the original songs that African Americans created during slavery. The model paragraph uses illustration (giving examples) to prove its point.

Step 1. Decide on a controlling idea and create a topic sentence

Paragraph development begins with the formulation of the controlling idea. This idea directs the paragraph's development. Often, the controlling idea of a paragraph will appear in the form of a topic sentence. In some cases, you may need more than one sentence to express a paragraph's controlling idea. Here is the controlling idea for our "model paragraph," expressed in a topic sentence:

Model controlling idea and topic sentence— *Slave spirituals often had hidden double meanings.*

Step 2. Explain the controlling idea

Paragraph development continues with an expression of the rationale or the explanation that the writer gives for how the reader should interpret the information presented in the idea statement or topic sentence of the paragraph. The writer explains his/her thinking about the main topic, idea, or focus of the paragraph. Here's the sentence that would follow the controlling idea about slave spirituals:

Model explanation—*On one level, spirituals referenced heaven, Jesus, and the soul; but on another level, the songs spoke about slave resistance.*

Step 3. Give an example (or multiple examples)

Paragraph development progresses with the expression of some type of support or evidence for the idea and the explanation that came before it. The example serves as a sign or representation of the relationship established in the idea and explanation portions of the paragraph. Here are two examples that we could use to illustrate the double meanings in slave spirituals:

Model example A— *For example, according to Frederick Douglass, the song "O Canaan, Sweet Canaan" spoke of slaves' longing for heaven, but it also expressed their desire to escape to the North. Careful listeners heard this second meaning in the following lyrics: "I don't expect to stay / Much longer here. / Run to Jesus, shun the danger. / I don't expect to stay."*

Model example B— *Slaves even used songs like "Steal Away to Jesus (at midnight)" to announce to other slaves the time and place of secret, forbidden meetings.*

Step 4. Explain the example(s)

The next movement in paragraph development is an explanation of each example and its relevance to the topic sentence and rationale that were stated at the beginning of the paragraph. This explanation shows readers why you chose to use this/or these particular examples as evidence to support the major claim, or focus, in your paragraph.

Continue the pattern of giving examples and explaining them until all points/examples that the writer deems necessary have been made and explained. NONE of your examples should be left unexplained. You might be able to explain the relationship between the example and the topic sentence in the same sentence which introduced the example. More often, however, you will need to explain that relationship in a separate sentence. Look at these explanations for the two examples in the slave spirituals paragraph:

Model explanation for example A— *When slaves sang this song, they could have been speaking of their departure from this life and their arrival in heaven; however, they also could h ave been describing their plans to leave the South and run, not to Jesus, but to the North.*

Model explanation for example B—*[The relationship between example B and the main idea of the paragraph's controlling idea is clear enough without adding another sentence to explain it.]*

Step 5. Complete the paragraph's idea or transition into the next paragraph

The final movement in paragraph development involves tying up the loose ends of the paragraph and reminding the reader of the relevance of the information in this paragraph to the main or controlling idea of the paper. At this point, you can remind your reader about the relevance of the information that you just discussed in the paragraph. You might feel more comfortable, however, simply transitioning your reader to the next development in the next paragraph. Here's an example of a sentence that completes the slave spirituals paragraph:

Model sentence for completing a paragraph— *What whites heard as merely spiritual songs, slaves discerned as detailed messages. The hidden meanings in spirituals allowed slaves to sing what they could not say.*

Notice that the example and explanation steps of this 5-step process (steps 3 and 4) can be repeated as needed. The idea is that you continue to use this pattern until you have completely developed the main idea of the paragraph.

Here is a look at the completed "model" paragraph:

Slave spirituals often had hidden double meanings. On one level, spirituals referenced heaven, Jesus, and the soul, but on another level, the songs spoke about slave resistance. For example, according to Frederick Douglass, the song "O Canaan, Sweet Canaan" spoke of slaves' longing for heaven, but it also expressed their desire to escape to the North. Careful listeners heard this second meaning in the following lyrics: "I don't expect to stay / Much longer here. / Run to Jesus, shun the danger. / I don't expect to stay." When slaves sang this song, they could have been speaking of their departure from this life and their arrival in heaven; however, they also could have been describing their plans to leave the South and run, not to Jesus, but to the North. Slaves even used songs like "Steal Away to Jesus (at midnight)" to announce to other slaves the time and place of secret, forbidden meetings. What whites heard as merely spiritual songs, slaves discerned as detailed messages. The hidden meanings in spirituals allowed slaves to sing what they could not say.

Troubleshooting paragraphs

1) Problem: the paragraph has no topic sentence. Imagine each paragraph as a sandwich. The real content of the sandwich—the meat or other filling—is in the middle. It includes all the evidence you need to make the point. But it gets kind of messy to eat a sandwich without any bread. Your readers don't know what to do with all the evidence you've given them. So, the top slice of bread (the first sentence of the paragraph) explains the topic (or controlling idea) of the paragraph. And, the bottom slice (the last sentence of the paragraph) tells the reader how the paragraph relates to the broader argument. In the original and revised paragraphs below, notice how a topic sentence expressing the controlling idea tells the reader the point of all the evidence.

Original paragraph

> *Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.*

Revised paragraph

> *Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.*

Once you have mastered the use of topic sentences, you may decide that the topic sentence for a particular paragraph really shouldn't be the first sentence of the paragraph. This is fine—the topic sentence can actually go at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph; what's important is that it is in there somewhere so that readers know what the main idea of the paragraph is and how it relates back to the thesis of your paper. Suppose that we wanted to start the piranha paragraph with a transition sentence—something that reminds the reader of what happened in the previous paragraph—rather than with the topic sentence. Let's suppose that the previous paragraph was about all kinds of animals that people are afraid of, like sharks, snakes, and spiders. Our paragraph might look like this (the topic sentence is underlined):

Like sharks, snakes, and spiders, pirahnas are widely feared. Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.

2) Problem: the paragraph has more than one controlling idea. If a paragraph has more than one main idea, consider eliminating sentences that relate to the second idea, or split the paragraph into two or more paragraphs, each with only one main idea. In the following paragraph, the final two sentences branch off into a different topic; so, the revised paragraph eliminates them and concludes with a sentence that reminds the reader of the paragraph's main idea.

Original paragraph

Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. A number of South American groups eat piranhas. They fry or grill the fish and then serve them with coconut milk or tucupi, a sauce made from fermented manioc juices.

Revised paragraph

Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, for the most part, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won't bite humans.

3) Problem: transitions are needed within the paragraph. You are probably familiar with the idea that transitions may be needed between paragraphs or sections in a paper (see our handout on this subject). Sometimes they are also helpful within the body of a single paragraph. Within a paragraph, transitions are often single words or short phrases that help to establish relationships between ideas and to create a logical progression of those ideas in a paragraph. This is especially likely to be true within paragraphs that discuss multiple examples. Let's take a look at a version of our piranha paragraph that uses transitions to orient the reader:

Although most people consider piranhas to be quite dangerous, they are, except in two main situations, entirely harmless. Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas' instinct is to flee, not attack. But there are two situations in which a piranha bite is likely. The first is when a frightened piranha is lifted out of the water—for example, if it has been caught in a fishing net. The second is when the water level in pools where piranhas are living falls too low. A large number of fish may be trapped in a single pool, and if they are hungry, they may attack anything that enters the water.

In this example, you can see how the phrases "the first" and "the second" help the reader follow the organization of the ideas in the paragraph.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout's topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the UNC Libraries citation tutorial .

Lunsford, Andrea and Robert Collins. *The St. Martin's Handbook, Annotated Instructor's Edition*. 5th Ed. New York: St. Martin's, 2003.

Rosen, Leonard and Laurence Behrens. *The Allyn and Bacon Handbook, Annotated Instructor's Edition*. 4th Ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

1.12: Conclusions

What this handout is about

This handout will explain the functions of conclusions, offer strategies for writing effective ones, help you evaluate your drafted conclusions, and suggest conclusion strategies to avoid.

About conclusions

Introductions and conclusions can be the most difficult parts of papers to write. While the body is often easier to write, it needs a frame around it. An introduction and conclusion frame your thoughts and bridge your ideas for the reader.

Just as your introduction acts as a bridge that transports your readers from their own lives into the "place" of your analysis, your conclusion can provide a bridge to help your readers make the transition back to their daily lives. Such a conclusion will help them see why all your analysis and information should matter to them after they put the paper down.

Your conclusion is your chance to have the last word on the subject. The conclusion allows you to have the final say on the issues you have raised in your paper, to summarize your thoughts, to demonstrate the importance of your ideas, and to propel your reader to a new view of the subject. It is also your opportunity to make a good final impression and to end on a positive note.

Your conclusion can go beyond the confines of the assignment. The conclusion pushes beyond the boundaries of the prompt and allows you to consider broader issues, make new connections, and elaborate on the significance of your findings.

Your conclusion should make your readers glad they read your paper. Your conclusion gives your reader something to take away that will help them see things differently or appreciate your topic in personally relevant ways. It can suggest broader implications that will not only interest your reader, but also enrich your reader's life in some way. It is your gift to the reader.

Strategies for writing an effective conclusion

One or more of the following strategies may help you write an effective conclusion.

- Play the "So What" Game. If you're stuck and feel like your conclusion isn't saying anything new or interesting, ask a friend to read it with you. Whenever you make a statement from your conclusion, ask the friend to say, "So what?" or "Why should anybody care?" Then ponder that question and answer it. Here's how it might go:

  You: *Basically, I'm just saying that education was important to Douglass.*

  Friend: *So what?*

  You: *Well, it was important because it was a key to him feeling like a free and equal citizen.*

  Friend: *Why should anybody care?*

  You: *That's important because plantation owners tried to keep slaves from being educated so that they could maintain control. When Douglass obtained an education, he undermined that control personally.*

  You can also use this strategy on your own, asking yourself "So What?" as you develop your ideas or your draft.

- Return to the theme or themes in the introduction. This strategy brings the reader full circle. For example, if you begin by describing a scenario, you can end with the same scenario as proof that your essay is helpful in creating a new understanding. You may also refer to the introductory paragraph by using key words or parallel concepts and images that you also used in the introduction.
- Synthesize, don't summarize: Include a brief summary of the paper's main points, but don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. Instead, show your reader how the points you made and the support and examples you used fit together. Pull it all together.
- Include a provocative insight or quotation from the research or reading you did for your paper.
- Propose a course of action, a solution to an issue, or questions for further study. This can redirect your reader's thought process and help her to apply your info and ideas to her own life or to see the broader implications.
- Point to broader implications. For example, if your paper examines the Greensboro sit-ins or another event in the Civil Rights Movement, you could point out its impact on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. A paper about the style of writer Virginia Woolf could point to her influence on other writers or on later feminists.

Strategies to avoid

- Beginning with an unnecessary, overused phrase such as “in conclusion,” “in summary,” or “in closing.” Although these phrases can work in speeches, they come across as wooden and trite in writing.
- Stating the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion.
- Introducing a new idea or subtopic in your conclusion.
- Ending with a rephrased thesis statement without any substantive changes.
- Making sentimental, emotional appeals that are out of character with the rest of an analytical paper.
- Including evidence (quotations, statistics, etc.) that should be in the body of the paper.

Four kinds of ineffective conclusions

1. The “That’s My Story and I’m Sticking to It” Conclusion. This conclusion just restates the thesis and is usually painfully short. It does not push the ideas forward. People write this kind of conclusion when they can’t think of anything else to say. Example: In conclusion, Frederick Douglass was, as we have seen, a pioneer in American education, proving that education was a major force for social change with regard to slavery.
2. The “Sherlock Holmes” Conclusion. Sometimes writers will state the thesis for the very first time in the conclusion. You might be tempted to use this strategy if you don’t want to give everything away too early in your paper. You may think it would be more dramatic to keep the reader in the dark until the end and then “wow” him with your main idea, as in a Sherlock Holmes mystery. The reader, however, does not expect a mystery, but an analytical discussion of your topic in an academic style, with the main argument (thesis) stated up front. Example: (After a paper that lists numerous incidents from the book but never says what these incidents reveal about Douglass and his views on education): So, as the evidence above demonstrates, Douglass saw education as a way to undermine the slaveholders’ power and also an important step toward freedom.
3. The “America the Beautiful”/”I Am Woman”/”We Shall Overcome” Conclusion. This kind of conclusion usually draws on emotion to make its appeal, but while this emotion and even sentimentality may be very heartfelt, it is usually out of character with the rest of an analytical paper. A more sophisticated commentary, rather than emotional praise, would be a more fitting tribute to the topic. Example: Because of the efforts of fine Americans like Frederick Douglass, countless others have seen the shining beacon of light that is education. His example was a torch that lit the way for others. Frederick Douglass was truly an American hero.
4. The “Grab Bag” Conclusion. This kind of conclusion includes extra information that the writer found or thought of but couldn’t integrate into the main paper. You may find it hard to leave out details that you discovered after hours of research and thought, but adding random facts and bits of evidence at the end of an otherwise-well-organized essay can just create confusion. Example: In addition to being an educational pioneer, Frederick Douglass provides an interesting case study for masculinity in the American South. He also offers historians an interesting glimpse into slave resistance when he confronts Covey, the overseer. His relationships with female relatives reveal the importance of family in the slave community.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout’s topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the UNC Libraries citation tutorial .

All quotations are from:

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, edited and with introduction by Houston A. Baker, Jr., New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

Strategies for Writing a Conclusion. Literacy Education Online, St. Cloud State University. 18 May 2005 < http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/conclude.html >.

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1.13: The Perfect Paragraph

As Michael Harvey writes, paragraphs are "in essence—a form of punctuation, and like other forms of punctuation they are meant to make written material easy to read."[1] Effective paragraphs are the fundamental units of academic writing; consequently, the thoughtful, multifaceted arguments that your professors expect depend on them. Without good paragraphs, you simply cannot clearly convey sequential points and their relationships to one another.

Many novice writers tend to make a sharp distinction between content and style, thinking that a paper can be strong in one and weak in the other, but focusing on organization shows how content and style converge in deliberative academic writing. Your professors will view even the most elegant prose as rambling and tedious if there isn't a careful, coherent argument to give the text meaning. Paragraphs are the "stuff " of academic writing and, thus, worth our attention here.

Key Sentences (a.k.a. Topic Sentences)

In academic writing, readers expect each paragraph to have a sentence or two that captures its main point. They're often called "topic sentences," though many writing instructors prefer to call them "key sentences." There are at least two downsides of the phrase "topic sentence." First, it makes it seem like the paramount job of that sentence is simply to announce the topic of the paragraph. Second, it makes it seem like the topic sentence must always be a single grammatical sentence. Calling it a "key sentence" reminds us that it expresses the central *idea* of the paragraph. And sometimes a question or a two-sentence construction functions as the key.

Key sentences in academic writing do two things. First, they establish the main point that the rest of the paragraph supports. Second, they situate each paragraph within the sequence of the argument, a task that requires transitioning from the prior paragraph. Consider these two examples:[2]

Version A:

Now we turn to the epidemiological evidence.

Version B:

The epidemiological evidence provides compelling support for the hypothesis emerging from etiological studies.

Both versions convey a topic; it's pretty easy to predict that the paragraph will be about epidemiological evidence, but only the second version establishes an argumentative point and puts it in context. The paragraph doesn't just describe the epidemiological evidence; it shows how epidemiology is telling the same story as etiology. Similarly, while Version A doesn't relate to anything in particular, Version B immediately suggests that the prior paragraph addresses the biological pathway (i.e. etiology) of a disease and that the new paragraph will bolster the emerging hypothesis with a different kind of evidence. As a reader, it's easy to keep track of how the paragraph about cells and chemicals and such relates to the paragraph about populations in different places.

A last thing to note about key sentences is that academic readers expect them to be at the beginning of the paragraph. (The first sentence this paragraph is a good example of this in action!) This placement helps readers comprehend your argument. To see how, try this: find an academic piece (such as a textbook or scholarly article) that strikes you as well written and go through part of it reading just the first sentence of each paragraph. You should be able to easily follow the sequence of logic. When you're writing for professors, it is especially effective to put your key sentences first because they usually convey your own original thinking. It's a very good sign when your paragraphs are typically composed of a telling key sentence followed by evidence and explanation.

Knowing this convention of academic writing can help you both read and write more effectively. When you're reading a complicated academic piece for the first time, you might want to go through reading only the first sentence or two of each paragraph to get the overall outline of the argument. Then you can go back and read all of it with a clearer picture of how each of the details fit in. And when you're writing, you may also find it useful to write the first sentence of each paragraph (instead of a topic-based outline) to map out a thorough argument before getting immersed in sentence-level wordsmithing.

Cohesion and Coherence

With a key sentence established, the next task is to shape the body of your paragraph to be both cohesive and coherent. As Williams and Bizup[3] explain, cohesion is about the "sense of flow" (how each sentence fits with the next), while coherence is about the "sense of the whole."[4]

For the most part, a text reads smoothly when it conveys a thoughtful and well organized argument or analysis. Focus first and most on your ideas, on crafting an ambitious analysis. The most useful guides advise you to first focus on getting your ideas on paper and then revising for organization and word choice later, refining the analysis as you go. Thus, consider the advice here as if you already have some rough text written and are in the process of smoothing out your prose to clarify your argument for both your reader and yourself.

Cohesion

Cohesion refers to the flow from sentence to sentence. For example, compare these passages:

Version A:

Granovetter begins by looking at balance theory. If an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be tied to each other, according to balance theory (1973:1363).[5] Bridge ties between cliques are always weak ties, Granovetter argues (1973:1364). Weak ties may not necessarily be bridges, but Granovetter argues that bridges will be weak. If two actors share a strong tie, they will draw in their other strong relations and will eventually form a clique. Only weak ties that do not have the strength to draw together all the "friends of friends" can connect people in different cliques.

Version B:

Granovetter begins by looking at balance theory. In brief, balance theory tells us that if an actor, A, is strongly tied to both B and C, it is extremely likely that B and C are, sooner or later, going to be tied to each other (1973:1363). Granovetter argues that because of this, bridge ties between cliques are always weak ties (1973:1364). Weak ties may not necessarily be bridges, but Granovetter argues that bridges will be weak. This is because if two actors share a strong tie, they will draw in their other strong relations and will eventually form a clique. The only way, therefore, that people in different cliques can be connected is through weak ties that do not have the strength to draw together all the "friends of friends."[6]

Version A has the exact same information as version B, but it is harder to read because it is less cohesive. Each sentence in version B begins with old information and bridges to new information.

The first sentence establishes the key idea of balance theory. The next sentence begins with balance theory and ends with social ties, which is the focus of the third sentence. The concept of weak ties connects the third and fourth sentences and concept of cliques the fifth and sixth sentences. In Version A, in contrast, the first sentence focuses on balance theory, but then the second sentence makes a new point about social ties *before* telling the reader that the point comes from balance theory. The reader has to take in a lot of unfamiliar information before learning how it fits in with familiar concepts. Version A is coherent, but the lack of cohesion makes it tedious to read.

The lesson is this: if you or others perceive a passage you've written to be awkward or choppy, even though the topic is consistent, try rewriting it to ensure that each sentence begins with a familiar term or concept. If your points don't naturally daisy-chain together like the examples given here, consider numbering them. For example, you may choose to write, "Proponents of the legislation point to four major benefits." Then you could discuss four loosely related ideas without leaving your reader wondering how they relate.

Coherence

While cohesion is about the sense of flow, coherence is about the sense of the whole . For example, here's a passage that is cohesive (from sentence to sentence) but lacks coherence:

Your social networks and your location within them shape the kinds and amount of information that you have access to. Information is distinct from data, in that makes some kind of generalization about a person, thing, or population. Defensible generalizations about society can be either probabilities (i.e., statistics) or patterns (often from qualitative analysis). Such probabilities and patterns can be temporal, spatial, or simultaneous.

Each sentence in the above passage starts with a familiar idea and progresses to a new one, but it lacks coherence—a sense of being about one thing. Good writers often write passages like that when they're free-writing or using the drafting stage to cast a wide net for ideas. A writer weighing the power and limits of social network analysis may free-write something like that example and, from there, develop a more specific plan for summarizing key insights about social networks and then discussing them with reference to the core tenets of social science. As a draft, an incoherent paragraph often points to a productive line of reasoning; one just has to continue thinking it through in order to identify a clear argumentative purpose for each paragraph. With its purpose defined, each paragraph, then, becomes a lot easier to write. Coherent paragraphs aren't just about style; they are a sign of a thoughtful, well developed analysis.

The Wind-Up

Some guides advise you to end each paragraph with a specific concluding sentence , in a sense, to treat each paragraph as a kind of mini-essay. But that's not a widely held convention. Most well written academic pieces don't adhere to that structure. The last sentence of the paragraph should certainly be in your own words (as in, not a quote), but as long as the paragraph succeeds in carrying out the task that it has been assigned by its key sentence, you don't need to worry about whether that last sentence has an air of conclusiveness. For example, consider these paragraphs about the cold fusion controversy of the 1980s that appeared in a best-selling textbook :[7]

The experiment seemed straightforward and there were plenty of scientists willing to try it. Many did. It was wonderful to have a simple laboratory experiment on fusion to try after the decades of embarrassing attempts to control hot fusion. This effort required multi-billion dollar machines whose every success seemed to be capped with an unanticipated failure. 'Cold fusion' seemed to provide, as Martin Fleischmann said during the course of that famous Utah press conference, 'another route'—the route of little science.

In that example, the first and last sentences in the paragraph are somewhat symmetrical: the authors introduce the idea of accessible science, contrast it with big science, and bring it back to the phrase "little science." Here's an example from the same chapter of the same book that does not have any particular symmetry :[8]

The struggle between proponents and critics in a scientific controversy is always a struggle for credibility. When scientists make claims which are literally 'incredible', as in the cold fusion case, they face an uphill struggle. The problem Pons and Fleischmann had to overcome was that they had credibility as electrochemists but not as nuclear physicists. And it was nuclear physics where their work was likely to have its main impact.

The last sentence of the paragraph doesn't mirror the first, but the paragraph still works just fine. In general, every sentence of academic writing should add some unique content. Don't trouble yourself with having the last sentence in every paragraph serve as a mini-conclusion. Instead, worry about developing each point sufficiently and making your logical sequence clear.

Conclusion: Paragraphs as Punctuation

To reiterate the initial point, it is useful to think of paragraphs as punctuation that organize your ideas in a readable way. Each paragraph should be an irreplaceable node within a coherent sequence of logic. Thinking of paragraphs as "building blocks" evokes the "five-paragraph theme" structure explained earlier : if you have identical stone blocks, it hardly matters what order they're in. In the successful organically structured college paper, the structure and tone of each paragraph reflects its indispensable role within the overall piece. Make every bit count and have each part situated within the whole.

1. Michael Harvey, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*, Second Edition (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2013), 70. ↵
2. Etiology is the cause of a disease—what's actually happening in cells and tissues—while epidemiology is the incidence of a disease in a population. ↵
3. Joseph M. Williams.and Joseph Bizup. Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace 11th edition (New York: Longman, 2014), 68. Joseph M. Williams and Joseph Bizup. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* 11th edition (New York: Longman, 2014), 68. ↵
4. Ibid., 71. ↵
5. The quote uses a version of an ASA-style in-text citation for Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1973): 1360-80. ↵
6. Guiffre. *Communities and Networks*, 98. ↵
7. Harry Collins and Trevor Pinch, *The Golem: What You Should Know About Science* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Canto, 1998), 58. ↵
8. Ibid., 74. ↵

1.14: Introductions and Conclusions

A key piece of advice many writers either do not ever get or don't believe is that **it's not necessary to write introductions first or to write conclusions last.** Just because the introduction appears first and the conclusion appears last doesn't mean they have to be written that way. Here's a really tired metaphor to help explain: just because you walk into a building through the door doesn't mean the door was built first. The foundation went in first, even though you rarely if ever see that part. And lots of imperfections in the foundation and the walls were covered up before you even moved in, so you can't see those either unless you look closely.

Introductions

Even though a nearly infinite number of topics and arrangements is possible in English prose, introductions generally follow one of several patterns. If you're writing a children's story, you'd probably start with "once upon a time" or something similar. If you're writing a research article in biomechanical engineering, you'd probably start with a statement about how previous research has examined the problem of loading soldiers with daypacks on various surfaces, including sand, concrete, and railroad ballast. These examples are poles apart, but their introductions share very similar purposes: they orient their imagined readers to the topic, time, and place.

In working toward the overall goal of orienting readers, introductions may

- Provide background about a topic.
- Locate readers in a specific time and/or place.
- Start with a compelling quotation or statistic—something concrete.
- Include an ethical appeal, with which you (explicitly or implicitly) show that you've done your homework and are credible.
- Articulate a main claim/thesis.
- Lay out the stakes for the piece of writing—that is, why the reader should bother reading on.

The following video addresses how to do several of these things, starting with the very first sentence of your introduction.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: http://pb.libretexts.org/temp/?p=1411

Conclusions

Conclusions usually

- Summarize the argument (especially in longer pieces of writing)
- "Bookend" a story that started in the introduction
- Include an emotional appeal, with which you (explicitly or implicitly) connect the "logic" of the argument to a more passionate reason intended to sway the reader
- Issue a call to action

Ideally, a conclusion will work in tandem with an introduction, having some kind of "call back" element to remind your reader of the powerful opening you provided. Additional advice for conclusions is found in the following video.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: http://pb.libretexts.org/temp/?p=1411

1.15: Comparative Chart of Writing Strategies

Structuring Specialized Paragraphs

Many of the same common patterns of organizing your writing and thinking are available at the paragraph level to help you make your case to support your thesis. Using these common patterns helps readers understand your points more easily.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Analogy	Analogies are used to draw comparisons between seemingly unlike people, items, places, or situations. Writers use analogies to help clarify a point.	Walking down an aisle at a farmers' market is like walking down the rows in a garden. Fresh mustard greens might be on one side and fresh radishes on another. The smell of green beans meshes with the smell of strawberries and the vibrant colors of nature are everywhere. You might find that you even have a little garden dirt on your shoes.
Cause and effect	Cause-and-effect paragraphs point out how one thing is caused by another and are used to clarify relationships.	You will find that your meals benefit greatly from shopping at the farmers' market. You will eat fewer unnatural foods, so you will feel better and have more energy. The freshness of the foods will make your dishes taste and look better. The excitement of finding something new at the market will translate to eagerness to try it out within a meal. It won't be long until you anticipate going to the farmers' market as a way to enhance the quality of your meals.
Comparison and contrast	Comparison and contrast is simply telling how two things are alike or different. You can choose to compare and contrast by selecting a trait, explaining how each thing relates, and then moving on to another trait (alternating organization, as here). Or for more complex comparisons and contrasts, you can describe all the features of one thing in one or more paragraphs and then all the features of the other thing in one or more paragraphs (block organization).	Tomatoes purchased at the farmers' market are almost totally different from tomatoes purchased in a grocery store. To begin with, although tomatoes from both sources will mostly be red, the tomatoes at the farmers' market are a brighter red than those at a grocery store. That doesn't mean they are shinier—in fact, grocery store tomatoes are often shinier since they have been waxed. You are likely to see great size variation in tomatoes at the farmers' market, with tomatoes ranging from only a couple of inches across to eight inches across. By contrast, the tomatoes in a grocery store will be fairly uniform in size. All the visual differences are interesting, but the most important difference is the taste. The farmers' market tomatoes will be bursting with flavor from ripening on the vine in their own time. The grocery store tomatoes are often close to flavorless. Unless you have no choice, you really should check out a farmers' market the next time you're shopping for fresh produce.
Definition	Definition paragraphs are used to clarify key word or concepts.	If you see a "pluot" at the farmers' market, give it a try. It might seem odd to see a fruit you have never heard of before, but pluots are relatively new in the fruit world. A pluot is a hybrid fruit created from joining an apricot and a plum. Pluots range in size from that of a small apricot to that of a large plum. The outer skin varies in color from sort of cloudy golden to cloudy purplish. Overall, a pluot looks and tastes more like a plum than an apricot, although the skins are less tart than those of typical plums.
Description	You can use description to bring something to life so that the readers can get a clear impression of it.	The farmers who sell their wares at the farmers' market near my house are as natural as their foods. They are all dressed casually so that they look more like they are hanging out with friends than trying to entice people to purchase something from them. The women aren't wearing makeup and the men have not necessarily shaved in a few days. They are eager to share information and samples without applying any sales pressure. They are people with whom you would likely enjoy sitting around a campfire and trading stories.
Examples	Examples are commonly used to clarify a point for readers.	You will find some foods at the farmers' market that you might not typically eat. For example, some farmers bring pickled pigs' feet or mustard greens that taste like wasabi. Some vendors sell gooseberry pies and cactus jelly. It is not uncommon to see kumquat jam and garlic spears. The farmers' market is truly an adventuresome way to shop for food.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Narration	Narration is writing that sounds like a story. You might use narration within a nonfiction paper as a means of personalizing a topic or simply making a point stand out.	Sauntering through the farmers' market on a cool fall day, I happened upon a small lizard. Actually, my foot nearly happened upon him, but I stopped just in time to pull back and spare him. As I stooped to look at him, he scampered up over the top of a watermelon and out of sight. Glancing behind the melon, I saw that the lizard had a friend. I watched them bopping their heads at each other and couldn't help but wonder if they were communicating. Perhaps the one was telling the other about the big brown thing that nearly crashed down upon him. For him, I expect it was a harrowing moment. For me, it was just another charming trip to the farmers' market.
Problem–solution	A problem–solution paragraph begins with a topic sentence that presents a problem and then follows with details that present a solution for the problem.	Our farmers' market is in danger of closing because a building is going to be constructed in the empty lot where it has been held for the past ten years. Since the market is such an asset to our community, a committee formed to look for a new location. The first idea was to close a street off for a few hours each Saturday morning. Unfortunately, the city manager nixed that idea since he believed that too many people would complain. Barry Moore suggested that the market could be held in the state park that is just a few miles out of town. Again, a government worker struck down the idea. This time, the problem was that for-profit events are not allowed in state parks. Finally, I came up with the perfect idea, and our government blessed the idea. Since the high school is closed on Saturday, we will be having the market in the school parking lot.

Using a Clear Organizational Pattern

Depending on your writing topic, you might find it beneficial to use one of these common organizational patterns.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Process analysis	A process analysis paragraph is used to describe how something is made or to explain the steps for how something is done.	The first key to growing good tomatoes is to give the seedlings plenty of room. Make sure to transplant them to small pots once they get their first leaves. Even when they are just starting out in pots, they need plenty of light, air, and heat. Make sure to warm up the ground in advance by covering it in plastic sheeting for a couple of weeks. When you are ready to plant them in soil, plant them deeply enough so they can put down some strong roots. Mulch next, and once the stems of the tomato plants have reached a few inches in height, cut off the lower leaves to avoid fungi. Carefully prune the suckers that develop in the joints of the developing stems.
Chronological	Chronological arrangement presents information in time order.	As soon as I arrived at the farmers' market, I bought a large bag of lettuce. I walked around the corner and saw the biggest, most gorgeous sunflower I had ever seen. So I bought it and added it to my lettuce bag. The flower was so big that I had to hold the bag right in front of me to keep it from being bumped. At the Wilson Pork Farm booth, I tasted a little pulled pork. You guessed it—I had to buy a quart of it. I went on with a plastic quart container in my left hand and my lettuce and flower in my right hand. I was handling it all just fine until I saw a huge hanging spider plant I had to have. Ever so gently, I placed my pulled pork container inside the spider fern plant pot. Now I was holding everything right in front of me as I tried to safely make my way through the crowd. That's when I met up with little Willie. Willie was about seven years old and he was playing tag with his brother. I'm not sure where their mother was, but Willie came running around the corner and smacked right into me. You are probably thinking that poor Willie had pulled pork all over his clothes and an upside-down plant on his head. But no, not at all. That was me. Willie didn't even notice. He was too busy chasing his brother.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
General-to-specific	A common paragraph format is to present a general idea and then give examples.	The displays at the farmers' market do not lack for variety. You will see every almost every kind of fresh, locally grown food you can imagine. The featured fruits on a given day might be as varied as pomegranates, persimmons, guava, jackfruit, and citron. Vegetables might include shiitake mushrooms, artichokes, avocados, and garlic. Some vendors also sell crafts, preserves, seeds, and other supplies suitable for starting your own garden.
Specific-to-general	The reverse of the above format is to give some examples and then summarize them with a general idea.	Your sense of smell is awakened by eighteen varieties of fresh roma tomatoes. Your mouth waters at the prospect of sampling the fresh breads. Your eye catches a glimpse of the colors of handmade, embroidered bags. You linger to touch a perfectly ripe peach. Your ears catch the strain of an impromptu jug band. A walk up and down the aisles of your local farmers' market will engage all of your senses.
Spatial	A paragraph using spatial organizationpresents details as you would naturally encounter them, such as from top to bottom or from the inside to the outside. In other words, details are presented based on their physical location.	From top to bottom, the spice booth at our farmers' market is amazing. Up high they display artwork painstakingly made with spices. At eye level, you see at least ten different fresh spices in small baggies. On the tabletop is located an assortment of tasting bowls with choices ranging from desserts to drinks to salads. Below the table, but out of the way of customers, are large bags of the different spices. Besides being a great use of space, the spice booth looks both professional and charming.

Maintaining Internal Integrity of Paragraphs

A paragraph is more than just a group of sentences thrown together. You need to make linkages between your ideas, use parallelism, and maintain consistency.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Linkages	Paragraphs with linkages flow well so that readers can follow along easily. You need to present an idea and then link the rest of the ideas in the paragraph together. Do not leave any pulling together for your readers to do mentally. Do it all for them.	Not all the booths at a farmers' market feature food. One couple has a booth that sells only fresh flowers. They display some flowers in antique containers and sell the flowers, the containers, or both. A clothesline above our heads displays a variety of dried flowers. A table holds about fifty vases of varying sizes, and they are all full of flowers. Some vases hold only one kind of long-stem flowers. Others hold mixtures of uncut flowers. Still others showcase gorgeous arrangements. Both the man and the woman wear a wreath of flowers on their heads. The whole display is so attractive and smells so fabulous that it really draws people in.

Pattern	Explanation	Example
Parallelism	Parallelism means that you maintain the same general wording and format for similar situations throughout the paragraph so that once readers figure out what is going on, they can easily understand the whole paragraph.	The history of this farmers' market followed a fairly typical pattern. It started out in the 1970s as a co-op of local farmers, featuring a small city block of modest tables and temporary displays every Saturday morning from April to October from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In the early 1990s, with the help of a grant from the city, the market expanded its footprint to a larger, more centrally located city block with ample parking. It benefited greatly from the installation of permanent booths, electrical outlets, and a ready water supply. These amenities drew far more customers and merchants. Its popularity reached unprecedented levels by 2000, when the city offered to help with the staffing needed to keep it open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Recently, discussions began about how to open the market on weeknights in the summer from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Consistency	A paragraph with consistency uses the same point of view and the same verb tense throughout. In other words, if you are using third person in the beginning of the paragraph, you use it throughout the paragraph. If you are using present tense to start the paragraph, you stick with it.	There comes a time each year when you must begin the all-important step of actually harvesting your vegetable garden. You will want to pick some of your vegetables before they are fully ripe. Eggplants, cucumbers, and squash fall into this category because they can further ripen once you have picked them. On the other hand, you will find that tomatoes, pumpkins, and most melons really need to ripen fully before you harvest them. You should also keep in mind that you will need plenty of storage space for your bounty. And if you have a good harvest, you might want to have a few friends in mind, especially as recipients for your squash and cucumbers.

Using Transitions

Transitions within paragraphs are words that connect one sentence to another so that readers can easily follow the intended meanings of sentences and relationships between sentences. The following table shows some commonly used transition words:

Commonly Used Transition Words	
To compare/contrast	after that, again, also, although, and then, but, despite, even though, finally, first/second/third/etc., however, in contrast, in the same way, likewise, nevertheless, next, on the other hand, similarly, then
To signal cause and effect	as a result, because, consequently, due to, hence, since, therefore, thus
To show sequence or time	after, as soon as, at that time, before, during, earlier, finally, immediately, in the meantime, later, meanwhile, now, presently, simultaneously, so far, soon, until, then, thereafter, when, while
To indicate place or direction	above, adjacent to, below, beside, beyond, close, nearby, next to, north/south/east/west, opposite, to the left/right
To present examples	for example, for instance, in fact, to illustrate, specifically
To suggest relationships	and, also, besides, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, too

1.16: Revising

Reviewing, Editing, Proofreading, and Making an Overview

Every time you revise your work substantially, you will be conducting three distinct functions in the following order: reviewing for purpose, editing and proofreading, making a final overview.

Reviewing for Purpose

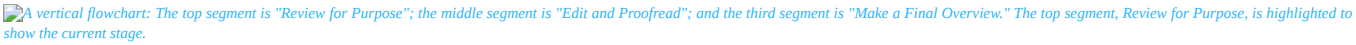
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Understand why and when to review for purpose.
- Be prepared to use self-questioning in the purpose review process.

Although you will naturally be **reviewing for purpose** throughout the entire writing process, you should read through your first complete draft once you have finished it and carefully reconsider all aspects of your essay. As you review for purpose, keep in mind that your paper has to be clear to others, not just to you. Try to read through your paper from the point of view of a member of your targeted audience who is reading your paper for the first time. Make sure you have neither failed to clarify the points your audience will need to have clarified nor overclarified the points your audience will already completely understand.

Figure *8.1*


A vertical flowchart: The top segment is "Review for Purpose"; the middle segment is "Edit and Proofread"; and the third segment is "Make a Final Overview." The top segment, Review for Purpose, is highlighted to show the current stage.

Revisiting Your Statement of Purpose

Self-questioning is a useful tool when you are in the reviewing process. In anticipation of attaching a writer's memo to your draft as you send it out for peer or instructor review, reexamine the six elements of the triangle that made up your original statement of purpose (voice, audience, message, tone, attitude, and reception):

Voice: Does it sound like a real human being wrote this draft? Does my introduction project a clear sense of who I am? Honestly, would someone other than my paid instructor or assigned peer(s) read beyond the first paragraph of this essay?

Audience: Does my writing draw in a specific set of readers with a catchy hook? Do I address the same audience throughout the essay? If I don't, am I being intentional about shifting from one audience to another?

Message: Are my main points strong and clear? Do I have ample support for each of them? Do my supporting details clearly support my main points?

Tone: Am I using the proper tone given my audience? Is my language too casual or not professional enough? Or is it needlessly formal and stiff sounding? Does my tone stay consistent throughout the draft?

Attitude: Will my organization make sense to another reader? Does my stance toward the topic stay consistent throughout the draft? If it doesn't, do I explain the cause of the transformation in my attitude?

Reception: Is my goal or intent for writing clear? How is this essay likely to be received? What kind of motivation, ideas, or emotions will this draft draw out of my readers? What will my readers do, think, or feel immediately after finishing this essay?

Handling Peer and Instructor Reviews

In many situations, you will be required to have at least one of your peers review your essay (and you will, in turn, review at least one peer's essay). Even if you're not required to exchange drafts with a peer, it's simply essential at this point to have another pair of eyes, so find a classmate or friend and ask them to look over your draft. In other cases, your instructor may be intervening at this point with ungraded but evaluative commentary on your draft. Whatever the system, before you post or trade your draft for review, use your answers to the questions in "Reviewing for Purpose" to tweak your original statement of purpose, giving a clear statement of your desired voice, audience, message, tone, attitude, and reception. Also, consider preparing a **descriptive outline** showing how the essay actually turned out and comparing that with your original plan, or consider writing a brief narrative describing how the essay developed from idea to execution. Finally, include any other questions or concerns you have about your draft, so that your peer reader(s) or instructor can give you useful, tailored feedback. These reflective statements and documents

could be attached with your draft as part of a writer's memo. Remember, the more guidance you give your readers, regardless of whether they are your peers or your instructor, the more they will be able to help you.

When you receive suggestions for content changes from your instructors, try to put aside any tendencies to react defensively, so that you can consider their ideas for revisions with an open mind. If you are accustomed only to getting feedback from instructors that is accompanied by a grade, you may need to get used to the difference between **evaluation** and **judgment** . In college settings, instructors often prefer to intervene most extensively after you have completed a first draft, with evaluative commentary that tends to be suggestive, forward-looking, and free of a final quantitative judgment (like a grade). If you read your instructors' feedback in those circumstances as final, you can miss the point of the exercise. You're supposed to do something with this sort of commentary, not just read it as the justification for a (nonexistent) grade.

Sometimes peers think they're supposed to "sound like an English teacher" so they fall into the trap of "correcting" your draft, but in most cases, the prompts used in college- level peer reviewing discourage that sort of thing. In many situations, your peers will give you ideas that will add value to your paper, and you will want to include them. In other situations, your peers' ideas will not really work into the plan you have for your paper. It is not unusual for peers to offer ideas that you may not want to implement. Remember, your peers' ideas are only suggestions, and it is your essay, and you are the person who will make the final decisions. If your peers happen to be a part of the audience to which you are writing, they can sometimes give you invaluable ideas. And if they're not, take the initiative to find outside readers who might actually be a part of your audience.

When you are reviewing a peer's essay, keep in mind that the author likely knows more about the topic than you do, so don't question content unless you are certain of your facts. Also, do not suggest changes just because you would do it differently or because you want to give the impression that you are offering ideas. Only suggest changes that you seriously think would make the essay stronger.

Key Takeaways

- You should review for purpose while you are writing, after you finish your first draft, and after you feel your essay is nearly complete.
- Use self-questioning to evaluate your essay as you are revising the purpose. Keep your voice, audience, message, tone, attitude, and reception in mind as you write and revise.
- When you are reviewing a peers' essay, make only suggestions that you think will make the essay stronger. When you receive reviews from instructors or peers, try to be open minded and consider the value of the ideas to your essay.

Exercises

1. Find multiple drafts of an essay you have recently completed. Write a descriptive outline of at least two distinct drafts you wrote during the process.
2. For a recently completed essay, discuss how at least one element of your statement of purpose (voice, audience, message, tone, attitude, or reception) changed over the course of the writing process.
3. With your writing group, develop five questions you think everyone in your class should have to answer about their essay drafts before submitting them for evaluation from a peer or your instructor.

Editing and Proofreading

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Understand why editing and proofreading is important even for careful writers.
- Recognize the benefits of peer editing and proofreading and the similarities between editing and proofreading your work and the work of others.
- Know how to edit and proofread for issues of both mechanics and style.

When you have made some revisions to your draft based on feedback and your recalibration of your purpose for writing, you may now feel your essay is nearly complete. However, you should plan to read through the entire final draft at least one additional time. During this stage of editing and proofreading your entire essay, you should be looking for general consistency and clarity. Also, pay particular attention to parts of the paper you have moved around or changed in other ways to make sure that your new versions still work smoothly.

Although you might think editing and proofreading isn't necessary since you were fairly careful when you were writing, the truth is that even the very brightest people and best writers make mistakes when they write. One of the main reasons that you are likely to make mistakes is that your mind and fingers are not always moving along at the same speed nor are they necessarily in sync. So what ends up on the page isn't always exactly what you intended. A second reason is that, as you make changes and adjustments, you might not totally match up the original parts and revised parts. Finally, a third key reason for proofreading is because you likely have errors you typically make and proofreading gives you a chance to correct those errors.

Figure 8.2

Editing and proofreading can work well with a partner. You can offer to be another pair of eyes for peers in exchange for their doing the same for you. Whether you are editing and proofreading your work or the work of a peer, the process is basically the same. Although the rest of this section assumes you are editing and proofreading your work, you can simply shift the personal issues, such as "Am I…" to a viewpoint that will work with a peer, such as "Is she…"

As you edit and proofread, you should look for common problem areas that stick out. There are certain writing rules that you must follow, but other more stylistic writing elements are more subjective and will require judgment calls on your part.

Be proactive in evaluating these subjective, stylistic issues since failure to do so can weaken the potential impact of your essay. Keeping the following questions in mind as you edit and proofread will help you notice and consider some of those subjective issues:

- **At the word level:** Am I using descriptive words? Am I varying my word choices rather than using the same words over and over? Am I using active verbs? Am I writing concisely? Does every word in each sentence perform a function?
- **At the sentence level:** Am I using a variety of sentence beginnings? Am I using a variety of sentence formats? Am I using ample and varied transitions? Does every sentence advance the value of the essay?
- **At the paragraph and essay level:** How does this essay look? Am I using paragraphing and paragraph breaks to my advantage? Are there opportunities to make this essay work better visually? Are the visuals I'm already using necessary? Am I using the required formatting (or, if there's room for creativity, am I using the optimal formatting)? Is my essay the proper length?

Key Takeaways

- Edit and proofread your work since it is easy to make mistakes between your mind and your typing fingers, as well as when you are moving around parts of your essay.
- Trading a nearly final version of a draft with peers is a valuable exercise since others can often more easily see your mistakes than you can. When you edit and proofread for a peer, you use the same process as when you edit and proofread for yourself.
- As you are editing and proofreading, you will encounter some issues that are either right or wrong and you simply have to correct them when they are wrong. Other more stylistic issues, such as using adequate transitions, ample descriptive words, and enough variety in sentence formats, are subjective. Besides dealing with matters of correctness, you will have to make choices about subjective and stylistic issues while you proofread.

Exercises

1. Write a one-page piece about how you decided which college to attend. Give a copy of your file (or a hard copy) to three different peers to edit and proofread. Then edit and proofread your page yourself. Finally, compare your editing and proofreading results to those of your three peers. Categorize the suggested revisions and corrections as objective standards of correctness or subjective matters of style.
2. Create a "personal editing and proofreading guide" that includes an overview of both objective and subjective issues covered in this book that are common problems for you in your writing. In your guide, include tips from this book and self-questions that can help you with your problem writing areas.

Making a Final Overview

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Understand the types of problems that might recur throughout your work.
- Know when you should conduct isolated checks during a final overview.
- Understand how to conduct isolated checks.

While you are managing the content of your essay and moving things around in it, you are likely to notice isolated issues that could recur throughout your work. To verify that these issues are satisfactorily dealt with from the beginning to the end of your essay, make a checklist of the issues as you go along. Conduct isolated checks of the whole paper after you are finished editing and proofreading. You might conduct some checks by flipping through the hard-copy pages, some by clicking through the pages on your computer, and some by conducting "computer finds" (good for cases when you want to make sure you've used the same proper noun correctly and consistently). Remember to take advantage of all the editing features of the word processing program you're using, such as spell check and grammar check. In most versions of Word, for instance, you'll see red squiggly lines underneath misspelled words and green squiggly lines underneath misuses of grammar. Right click on those underlined words to examine your options for revision.

Figure 8.3

The following checklist shows examples of the types of things that you might look for as you make a final pass (or final passes) through your paper. It often works best to make a separate pass for each issue because you are less likely to miss an issue and you will probably be able to make multiple, single-issue passes more quickly than you can make one multiple-issue pass.

- All subheadings are placed correctly (such as in the center or at the beginning of a page).
- All the text is the same size and font throughout.
- The page numbers are all formatted and appearing as intended.
- All image and picture captions are appearing correctly.
- All spellings of proper nouns have been corrected.
- The words “there” and “their” and “they’re” are spelled correctly. (Or you can insert your top recurring error here.)
- References are all included in the citation list.
- Within the citation list, references are all in a single, required format (no moving back and forth between Modern Language Association [MLA] and American Psychological Association [APA], for instance).

- All the formatting conventions for the final manuscript follow the style sheet assigned by the instructor (e.g., MLA, APA, Chicago Manual of Style [CMS], or other).

This isn't intended to be an all-inclusive checklist. Rather, it simply gives you an idea of the types of things for which you might look as you conduct your final check. You should develop your unique list that might or might not include these same items.

Key Takeaways

- Often a good way to make sure you do not miss any details you want to change is to make a separate pass through your essay for each area of concern. You can conduct passes by flipping through hard copies, clicking through pages on a computer, or using the "find" feature on a computer.
- You should conduct a final overview with isolated checks after you are finished editing and proofreading the final draft.
- As you are writing, make a checklist of recurring isolated issues that you notice in your work. Use this list to conduct isolated checks on the final draft of your paper.

Exercise

Complete each sentence to create a logical item for a list to use for a final isolated check. Do not use any of the examples given in the text.

1. All the subheadings are…
2. The spacing between paragraphs…
3. Each page includes…
4. I have correctly spelled…
5. The photos are all placed…
6. The words in the flow charts and diagrams…

1.17: Matters of Grammar, Mechanics, and Style

For many students, the discussion of grammar, mechanics, and style is intimidating. There are rules, and lots of them. And when rules are broken, some kind of inquisition or punishment is bound to follow. Any student who has experienced an instructor's editorial comments (also known as the red pen "blood" in the margins of a paper) knows what it feels like to be a hapless violator of the rules.

Rules Matter

Photo of uncapped red pen laying on a typed page, which has proofreading marks on it

Despite your gut reactions to learning certain rules for grammar, mechanics, and style, you have to acknowledge that the rules matter. People communicate daily in written forms, such as emails, letters, reports, and essays. And many of them need to communicate in such a way that they are taken seriously.

In academic writing, it is your job to make sure that the people who read what you write (your instructor and classmates) understand what you are trying to say. If your thoughts are not arranged appropriately, your readers may get confused. If you do not acknowledge and employ the rules of grammar, mechanics, and style, you are at a distinct disadvantage as a communicator.

The Grammar Report

Being able to identify grammatical, mechanical, or stylistic problems that exist in your writing is one way to improve your writing. These problems may have been with you for some time, failing to be identified, researched, and remedied.

The Grammar Report assignments will assist you in not only identifying your problem, but also you help you seek out examples of the problem, research the rules related to the problem, and finally "reporting" on your experience to your classmates. Indeed, the process is not just about you addressing a writing problem; it is about sharing your experience and remedies, so that you can teach others to avoid writing errors.

Improving Grammar, Mechanics, and Style

There are a wide variety of resources to support your research. A good place to start is the free online textbook, *Successful Writing*. You can use the find/search feature of your browser to look up particular topics and use the practice exercises to work through the process of identifying and correcting errors.

Here are some online resources that you may find useful, as well:

- Capital Community College's Guide to Grammar and Writing
- Grammar Book
- Excelsior Online Writing Lab (OWL)
- Grammar Girl

At some point, you may find that you share the same grammatical, mechanical, or stylistic problems with others in this course. Take a moment to look at the most commonly occurring grammar errors listed in the "Attending to Grammar" materials developed by the Dartmouth Writing Program. Of the top 20 grammar errors listed, consider which ones are common to you. Then make sure you make every effort to eradicate them from your writing.

1.18: Peer Review Checklist

Each essay is made up of multiple parts. In order to have a strong essay each part must be logical and effective. In many cases essays will be written with a strong thesis, but the rest of the paper will be lacking; making the paper ineffective. An essay is only as strong as its weakest point.


Clip art of a checklist. No writing is visible, just lines where item text would appear.

One of the most important steps for creating a strong essay is to have others review it. By completing a peer review you will be able to create a better thesis statement and supporting arguments.

Using a checklist to complete your review will allow you to rate each of the parts in the paper according to their strength. There are many different peer review checklists, but the one below should be helpful for your assignment.

1. Is the thesis clear?
2. Does the author use his or her own ideas in the thesis and argument?
3. Is the significance of the problem in the paper explained? Is the significance compelling?
4. Are the ideas developed logically and thoroughly?
5. Does the author use ethos effectively?
6. Does the author use pathos effectively?
7. Are different viewpoints acknowledged?
8. Are objections effectively handled?
9. Does the author give adequate explanations about sources used?
10. Are the sources well-integrated into the paper, or do they seem to be added in just for the sake of adding sources?
11. Is the word choice specific, concrete and interesting?
12. Are the sentences clear?
13. Is the overall organization of the argument effective?
14. Are the transitions between paragraphs smooth?
15. Are there any grammatical errors?

Sources

Based on the rubric found at: Grading Rubric Template (Word)

1.1: Introduction to Writing

Reading and Writing in College

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Understand the expectations for reading and writing assignments in college courses.
- Understand and apply general strategies to complete college-level reading assignments efficiently and effectively.
- Recognize specific types of writing assignments frequently included in college courses.
- Understand and apply general strategies for managing college-level writing assignments.
- Determine specific reading and writing strategies that work best for you individually.

As you begin this section, you may be wondering why you need an introduction. After all, you have been writing and reading since elementary school. You completed numerous assessments of your reading and writing skills in high school and as part of your application process for college. You may write on the job, too. Why is a college writing course even necessary?

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

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

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

Table 1.1 “High School versus College Assignments” summarizes some of the other major differences between high school and college assignments.

Table 1.1 High School versus College Assignments

High School	College
Reading assignments are moderately long. Teachers may set aside some class time for reading and reviewing the material in depth.	Some reading assignments may be very long. You will be expected to come to class with a basic understanding of the material.
Teachers often provide study guides and other aids to help you prepare for exams.	Reviewing for exams is primarily your responsibility.
Your grade is determined by your performance on a wide variety of assessments, including minor and major assignments. Not all assessments are writing based.	Your grade may depend on just a few major assessments. Most assessments are writing based.
Writing assignments include personal writing and creative writing in addition to expository writing.	Outside of creative writing courses, most writing assignments are expository.
The structure and format of writing assignments is generally stable over a four-year period.	Depending on the course, you may be asked to master new forms of writing and follow standards within a particular professional field.

High School	College
Teachers often go out of their way to identify and try to help students who are performing poorly on exams, missing classes, not turning in assignments, or just struggling with the course. Often teachers will give students many “second chances.”	Although teachers want their students to succeed, they may not always realize when students are struggling. They also expect you to be proactive and take steps to help yourself. “Second chances” are less common.

This chapter covers the types of reading and writing assignments you will encounter as a college student. You will also learn a variety of strategies for mastering these new challenges—and becoming a more confident student and writer.

Throughout this chapter, you will follow a first-year student named Crystal. After several years of working as a saleswoman in a department store, Crystal has decided to pursue a degree in elementary education and become a teacher. She is continuing to work part-time, and occasionally she finds it challenging to balance the demands of work, school, and caring for her four-year-old son. As you read about Crystal, think about how you can use her experience to get the most out of your own college experience.

Exercise 1

Review Table 1.1 “High School versus College Assignments” and think about how you have found your college experience to be different from high school so far. Respond to the following questions:

1. In what ways do you think college will be more rewarding for you as a learner?
2. What aspects of college do you expect to find most challenging?
3. What changes do you think you might have to make in your life to ensure your success in college?

Reading Strategies

Your college courses will sharpen both your reading and your writing skills. Most of your writing assignments—from brief response papers to in-depth research projects—will depend on your understanding of course reading assignments or related readings you do on your own. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to write effectively about a text that you have not understood. Even when you do understand the reading, it can be hard to write about it if you do not feel personally engaged with the ideas discussed.

This section discusses strategies you can use to get the most out of your college reading assignments. These strategies fall into three broad categories:

1. **Planning strategies.** To help you manage your reading assignments.
2. **Comprehension strategies.** To help you understand the material.
3. **Active reading strategies.** To take your understanding to a higher and deeper level.

Planning Your Reading

Have you ever stayed up all night cramming just before an exam? Or found yourself skimming a detailed memo from your boss five minutes before a crucial meeting? The first step in handling college reading successfully is planning. This involves both managing your time and setting a clear purpose for your reading.

Managing Your Reading Time

For now, focus on setting aside enough time for reading and breaking your assignments into manageable chunks. If you are assigned a seventy-page chapter to read for next week’s class, try not to wait until the night before to get started. Give yourself at least a few days and tackle one section at a time.

Your method for breaking up the assignment will depend on the type of reading. If the text is very dense and packed with unfamiliar terms and concepts, you may need to read no more than five or ten pages in one sitting so that you can truly understand and process the information. With more user-friendly texts, you will be able to handle longer sections—twenty to forty pages, for instance. And if you have a highly engaging reading assignment, such as a novel you cannot put down, you may be able to read lengthy passages in one sitting.

As the semester progresses, you will develop a better sense of how much time you need to allow for the reading assignments in different subjects. It also makes sense to preview each assignment well in advance to assess its difficulty level and to determine how much reading time to set aside.

Tip

College instructors often set aside reserve readings for a particular course. These consist of articles, book chapters, or other texts that are not part of the primary course textbook. Copies of reserve readings are available through the university library; in print; or, more often, online. When you are assigned a reserve reading, download it ahead of time (and let your instructor know if you have trouble accessing it). Skim through it to get a rough idea of how much time you will need to read the assignment in full.

Setting a Purpose

The other key component of planning is setting a purpose. Knowing what you want to get out of a reading assignment helps you determine how to approach it and how much time to spend on it. It also helps you stay focused during those occasional moments when it is late, you are tired, and relaxing in front of the television sounds far more appealing than curling up with a stack of journal articles.

Sometimes your purpose is simple. You might just need to understand the reading material well enough to discuss it intelligently in class the next day. However, your purpose will often go beyond that. For instance, you might also read to compare two texts, to formulate a personal response to a text, or to gather ideas for future research. Here are some questions to ask to help determine your purpose:

- **How did my instructor frame the assignment?** Often your instructors will tell you what they expect you to get out of the reading:
  - Read Chapter 2 and come to class prepared to discuss current teaching practices in elementary math.
  - Read these two articles and compare Smith's and Jones's perspectives on the 2010 health care reform bill.
  - Read Chapter 5 and think about how you could apply these guidelines to running your own business.
- **How deeply do I need to understand the reading?** If you are majoring in computer science and you are assigned to read Chapter 1, "Introduction to Computer Science," it is safe to assume the chapter presents fundamental concepts that you will be expected to master. However, for some reading assignments, you may be expected to form a general understanding but not necessarily master the content. Again, pay attention to how your instructor presents the assignment.
- **How does this assignment relate to other course readings or to concepts discussed in class?** Your instructor may make some of these connections explicitly, but if not, try to draw connections on your own. (Needless to say, it helps to take detailed notes both when in class and when you read.)
- **How might I use this text again in the future?** If you are assigned to read about a topic that has always interested you, your reading assignment might help you develop ideas for a future research paper. Some reading assignments provide valuable tips or summaries worth bookmarking for future reference. Think about what you can take from the reading that will stay with you.

Improving Your Comprehension

You have blocked out time for your reading assignments and set a purpose for reading. Now comes the challenge: making sure you actually understand all the information you are expected to process. Some of your reading assignments will be fairly straightforward. Others, however, will be longer or more complex, so you will need a plan for how to handle them.

For any expository writing—that is, nonfiction, informational writing—your first comprehension goal is to identify the main points and relate any details to those main points. Because college-level texts can be challenging, you will also need to monitor your reading comprehension. That is, you will need to stop periodically and assess how well you understand what you are reading. Finally, you can improve comprehension by taking time to determine which strategies work best for you and putting those strategies into practice.

Identifying the Main Points

In college, you will read a wide variety of materials, including the following:

- **Textbooks.** These usually include summaries, glossaries, comprehension questions, and other study aids.
- **Nonfiction trade books.** These are less likely to include the study features found in textbooks.
- **Popular magazine, newspaper, or web articles.** These are usually written for a general audience.

- **Scholarly books and journal articles.** These are written for an audience of specialists in a given field.

Regardless of what type of expository text you are assigned to read, your primary comprehension goal is to identify the main point: the most important idea that the writer wants to communicate and often states early on. Finding the main point gives you a framework to organize the details presented in the reading and relate the reading to concepts you learned in class or through other reading assignments. After identifying the main point, you will find the supporting points, the details, facts, and explanations that develop and clarify the main point.

Some texts make that task relatively easy. Textbooks, for instance, include the aforementioned features as well as headings and subheadings intended to make it easier for students to identify core concepts. Graphic features, such as sidebars, diagrams, and charts, help students understand complex information and distinguish between essential and inessential points. When you are assigned to read from a textbook, be sure to use available comprehension aids to help you identify the main points.

Trade books and popular articles may not be written specifically for an educational purpose; nevertheless, they also include features that can help you identify the main ideas. These features include the following:

- **Trade books.** Many trade books include an introduction that presents the writer's main ideas and purpose for writing. Reading chapter titles (and any subtitles within the chapter) will help you get a broad sense of what is covered. It also helps to read the beginning and ending paragraphs of a chapter closely. These paragraphs often sum up the main ideas presented.
- **Popular articles.** Reading the headings and introductory paragraphs carefully is crucial. In magazine articles, these features (along with the closing paragraphs) present the main concepts. Hard news articles in newspapers present the gist of the news story in the lead paragraph, while subsequent paragraphs present increasingly general details.

At the far end of the reading difficulty scale are scholarly books and journal articles. Because these texts are written for a specialized, highly educated audience, the authors presume their readers are already familiar with the topic. The language and writing style is sophisticated and sometimes dense.

When you read scholarly books and journal articles, try to apply the same strategies discussed earlier. The introduction usually presents the writer's thesis, the idea or hypothesis the writer is trying to prove. Headings and subheadings can help you understand how the writer has organized support for his or her thesis. Additionally, academic journal articles often include a summary at the beginning, called an abstract, and electronic databases include summaries of articles, too.

Monitoring Your Comprehension

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

Textbooks often include comprehension questions in the margins or at the end of a section or chapter. As you read, stop occasionally to answer these questions on paper or in your head. Use them to identify sections you may need to reread, read more carefully, or ask your instructor about later.

Even when a text does not have built-in comprehension features, you can actively monitor your own comprehension. Try these strategies, adapting them as needed to suit different kinds of texts:

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

These discussions can also serve as a reality check. If everyone in the class struggled with the reading, it may be exceptionally challenging. If it was a breeze for everyone but you, you may need to see your instructor for help.

As a working mother, Crystal found that the best time to get her reading done was in the evening, after she had put her four-year-old to bed. However, she occasionally had trouble concentrating at the end of a long day. She found that by actively working to

summarize the reading and asking and answering questions, she focused better and retained more of what she read. She also found that evenings were a good time to check the class discussion forums that a few of her instructors had created.

Exercise 2

Choose any text that that you have been assigned to read for one of your college courses. In your notes, complete the following tasks:

1. Summarize the main points of the text in two to three sentences.
2. Write down two to three questions about the text that you can bring up during class discussion.

Tip

Students are often reluctant to seek help. They feel like doing so marks them as slow, weak, or demanding. The truth is, every learner occasionally struggles. If you are sincerely trying to keep up with the course reading but feel like you are in over your head, seek out help. Speak up in class, schedule a meeting with your instructor, or visit your university learning center for assistance.

Deal with the problem as early in the semester as you can. Instructors respect students who are proactive about their own learning. Most instructors will work hard to help students who make the effort to help themselves.

Taking It to the Next Level: Active Reading

Now that you have acquainted (or reacquainted) yourself with useful planning and comprehension strategies, college reading assignments may feel more manageable. You know what you need to do to get your reading done and make sure you grasp the main points. However, the most successful students in college are not only competent readers but active, engaged readers.

Using the SQ3R Strategy

One strategy you can use to become a more active, engaged reader is the SQ3R strategy, a step-by-step process to follow before, during, and after reading. You may already use some variation of it. In essence, the process works like this:

1. **Survey** the text in advance.
2. Form **questions** before you start reading.
3. **Read** the text.
4. **Recite** and/or **record** important points during and after reading.
5. **Review** and **reflect** on the text after you read.

Before you read, you survey, or preview, the text. As noted earlier, reading introductory paragraphs and headings can help you begin to figure out the author's main point and identify what important topics will be covered. However, surveying does not stop there. Look over sidebars, photographs, and any other text or graphic features that catch your eye. Skim a few paragraphs. Preview any boldfaced or italicized vocabulary terms. This will help you form a first impression of the material.

Next, start brainstorming questions about the text. What do you expect to learn from the reading? You may find that some questions come to mind immediately based on your initial survey or based on previous readings and class discussions. If not, try using headings and subheadings in the text to formulate questions. For instance, if one heading in your textbook reads "Medicare and Medicaid," you might ask yourself these questions:

- When was Medicare and Medicaid legislation enacted? Why?
- What are the major differences between these two programs?

Although some of your questions may be simple factual questions, try to come up with a few that are more open-ended. Asking in-depth questions will help you stay more engaged as you read.

The next step is simple: read. As you read, notice whether your first impressions of the text were correct. Are the author's main points and overall approach about the same as what you predicted—or does the text contain a few surprises? Also, look for answers to your earlier questions and begin forming new questions. Continue to revise your impressions and questions as you read.

While you are reading, pause occasionally to recite or record important points. It is best to do this at the end of each section or when there is an obvious shift in the writer's train of thought. Put the book aside for a moment and recite aloud the main points of the section or any important answers you found there. You might also record ideas by jotting down a few brief notes in addition to, or instead of, reciting aloud. Either way, the physical act of articulating information makes you more likely to remember it.

After you have completed the reading, take some time to review the material more thoroughly. If the textbook includes review questions or your instructor has provided a study guide, use these tools to guide your review. You will want to record information in a more detailed format than you used during reading, such as in an outline or a list.

As you review the material, reflect on what you learned. Did anything surprise you, upset you, or make you think? Did you find yourself strongly agreeing or disagreeing with any points in the text? What topics would you like to explore further? Jot down your reflections in your notes. (Instructors sometimes require students to write brief response papers or maintain a reading journal. Use these assignments to help you reflect on what you read.)

Exercise 3

Choose another text that that you have been assigned to read for a class. Use the SQ3R process to complete the reading. (Keep in mind that you may need to spread the reading over more than one session, especially if the text is long.)

Be sure to complete all the steps involved. Then, reflect on how helpful you found this process. On a scale of one to ten, how useful did you find it? How does it compare with other study techniques you have used?

Using Other Active Reading Strategies

The SQ3R process encompasses a number of valuable active reading strategies: previewing a text, making predictions, asking and answering questions, and summarizing. You can use the following additional strategies to further deepen your understanding of what you read.

- **Connect what you read to what you already know.** Look for ways the reading supports, extends, or challenges concepts you have learned elsewhere.
- **Relate the reading to your own life.** What statements, people, or situations relate to your personal experiences?
- **Visualize.** For both fiction and nonfiction texts, try to picture what is described. Visualizing is especially helpful when you are reading a narrative text, such as a novel or a historical account, or when you read expository text that describes a process, such as how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
- **Pay attention to graphics as well as text.** Photographs, diagrams, flow charts, tables, and other graphics can help make abstract ideas more concrete and understandable.
- **Understand the text in context.** Understanding context means thinking about who wrote the text, when and where it was written, the author's purpose for writing it, and what assumptions or agendas influenced the author's ideas. For instance, two writers might both address the subject of health care reform, but if one article is an opinion piece and one is a news story, the context is different.
- **Plan to talk or write about what you read.** Jot down a few questions or comments in your notebook so you can bring them up in class. (This also gives you a source of topic ideas for papers and presentations later in the semester.) Discuss the reading on a class discussion board or blog about it.

As Crystal began her first semester of elementary education courses, she occasionally felt lost in a sea of new terms and theories about teaching and child development. She found that it helped to relate the reading to her personal observations of her son and other kids she knew.

Writing at Work

Many college courses require students to participate in interactive online components, such as a discussion forum, a page on a social networking site, or a class blog. These tools are a great way to reinforce learning. Do not be afraid to be the student who starts the discussion.

Remember that when you interact with other students and teachers online, you need to project a mature, professional image. You may be able to use an informal, conversational tone, but complaining about the work load, using off-color language, or "flaming"

other participants is inappropriate.

Active reading can benefit you in ways that go beyond just earning good grades. By practicing these strategies, you will find yourself more interested in your courses and better able to relate your academic work to the rest of your life. Being an interested, engaged student also helps you form lasting connections with your instructors and with other students that can be personally and professionally valuable. In short, it helps you get the most out of your education.

Common Writing Assignments

College writing assignments serve a different purpose than the typical writing assignments you completed in high school. In high school, teachers generally focus on teaching you to write in a variety of modes and formats, including personal writing, expository writing, research papers, creative writing, and writing short answers and essays for exams. Over time, these assignments help you build a foundation of writing skills.

In college, many instructors will expect you to already have that foundation.

Your college composition courses will focus on writing for its own sake, helping you make the transition to college-level writing assignments. However, in most other college courses, writing assignments serve a different purpose. In those courses, you may use writing as one tool among many for learning how to think about a particular academic discipline.

Additionally, certain assignments teach you how to meet the expectations for professional writing in a given field. Depending on the class, you might be asked to write a lab report, a case study, a literary analysis, a business plan, or an account of a personal interview. You will need to learn and follow the standard conventions for those types of written products.

Finally, personal and creative writing assignments are less common in college than in high school. College courses emphasize expository writing, writing that explains or informs. Often expository writing assignments will incorporate outside research, too. Some classes will also require persuasive writing assignments in which you state and support your position on an issue. College instructors will hold you to a higher standard when it comes to supporting your ideas with reasons and evidence.

Table 1.2 “Common Types of College Writing Assignments” lists some of the most common types of college writing assignments. It includes minor, less formal assignments as well as major ones. Which specific assignments you encounter will depend on the courses you take and the learning objectives developed by your instructors.

Table 1.2 Common Types of College Writing Assignments

Assignment Type	Description	Example
Personal Response Paper	Expresses and explains your response to a reading assignment, a provocative quote, or a specific issue; may be very brief (sometimes a page or less) or more in-depth	For an environmental science course, students watch and write about President Obama’s June 15, 2010, speech about the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.
Summary	Restates the main points of a longer passage objectively and in your own words	For a psychology course, students write a one-page summary of an article about a man suffering from short-term memory loss.
Position Paper	States and defends your position on an issue (often a controversial issue)	For a medical ethics course, students state and support their position on using stem cell research in medicine.
Problem-Solution Paper	Presents a problem, explains its causes, and proposes and explains a solution	For a business administration course, a student presents a plan for implementing an office recycling program without increasing operating costs.
Literary Analysis	States a thesis about a particular literary work (or works) and develops the thesis with evidence from the work and, sometimes, from additional sources	For a literature course, a student compares two novels by the twentieth-century African American writer Richard Wright.

Assignment Type	Description	Example
Research Review or Survey	Sums up available research findings on a particular topic	For a course in media studies, a student reviews the past twenty years of research on whether violence in television and movies is correlated with violent behavior.
Case Study or Case Analysis	Investigates a particular person, group, or event in depth for the purpose of drawing a larger conclusion from the analysis	For an education course, a student writes a case study of a developmentally disabled child whose academic performance improved because of a behavioral-modification program.
Laboratory Report	Presents a laboratory experiment, including the hypothesis, methods of data collection, results, and conclusions	For a psychology course, a group of students presents the results of an experiment in which they explored whether sleep deprivation produced memory deficits in lab rats.
Research Journal	Records a student's ideas and findings during the course of a long-term research project	For an education course, a student maintains a journal throughout a semester-long research project at a local elementary school.
Research Paper	Presents a thesis and supports it with original research and/or other researchers' findings on the topic; can take several different formats depending on the subject area	For examples of typical research projects, see Chapter 12 "Writing a Research Paper".

WRITING AT WORK

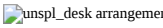
Part of managing your education is communicating well with others at your university. For instance, you might need to e-mail your instructor to request an office appointment or explain why you will need to miss a class. You might need to contact administrators with questions about your tuition or financial aid. Later, you might ask instructors to write recommendations on your behalf.

Treat these documents as professional communications. Address the recipient politely; state your question, problem, or request clearly; and use a formal, respectful tone. Doing so helps you make a positive impression and get a quicker response.

Key Takeaways

- College-level reading and writing assignments differ from high school assignments not only in quantity but also in quality.
- Managing college reading assignments successfully requires you to plan and manage your time, set a purpose for reading, practice effective comprehension strategies, and use active reading strategies to deepen your understanding of the text.
- College writing assignments place greater emphasis on learning to think critically about a particular discipline and less emphasis on personal and creative writing.

1.2: Defining the Writing Process

 On the surface, nothing could be simpler than writing: You sit down, you pick up a pen or open a document on your computer, and you write words. But anyone who has procrastinated or struggled with writer's block knows that the writing process is more arduous, if not somewhat mysterious and unpredictable.

People often think of writing in terms of its end product—the email, the report, the memo, essay, or research paper, all of which result from the time and effort spent in the act of writing. In this course, however, you will be introduced to writing as the recursive process of planning, drafting, and revising.

Writing is Recursive

You will focus as much on the process of writing as you will on its end product (the writing you normally submit for feedback or a grade). *Recursive* means circling back; and, more often than not, the writing process will have you running in circles. You might be in the middle of your draft when you realize you need to do more brainstorming, so you return to the planning stage. Even when you have finished a draft, you may find changes you want to make to an introduction. In truth, every writer must develop his or her own process for getting the writing done, but there are some basic strategies and techniques you can adapt to make your work a little easier, more fulfilling and effective.

Developing Your Writing Process

The final product of a piece of writing is undeniably important, but the emphasis of this course is on developing a writing process that works for you. Some of you may already know what strategies and techniques assist you in your writing. You may already be familiar with prewriting techniques, such as freewriting, clustering, and listing. You may already have a regular writing practice. But the rest of you may need to discover what works through trial and error. Developing individual strategies and techniques that promote painless and compelling writing can take some time. So, be patient.

A Writer's Process: Ali Hale

Read and examine *The Writing Process* by Ali Hale. Think of this document as a framework for defining the process in distinct stages: Prewriting, Writing, Revising, Editing, and Publishing. You may already be familiar with these terms. You may recall from past experiences that some resources refer to prewriting as planning and some texts refer to writing as drafting.

What is important to grasp early on is that the act of writing is more than sitting down and writing something. Please avoid the "one and done" attitude, something instructors see all too often in undergraduate writing courses. Use Hale's essay as your starting point for defining your own process.

A Writer's Process: Anne Lamott

In the video below, Anne Lamott, a writer of both non-fiction and fiction works, as well as the instructional novel on writing Bird by Bird: Instructions on Writing, discusses her own journey as a writer, including the obstacles she has to overcome every time she sits down to begin her creative process. She will refer to terms such as "the down draft," "the up draft," and "the dental draft."

As you watch, think about how her terms, "down draft," "up draft," "dental draft," work with those presented by Hale's *The Writing Process*. What does Lamott mean by these terms? Can you identify with her process or with the one Hale describes? How are they related?

Also, when viewing the interview, pay careful attention to the following timeframe: 11:23 to 27:27 minutes and make a list of tips and strategies you find particularly helpful. Think about how your own writing process fits with what Hale and Lamott have to say. Is yours similar? Different? Is there any new information you have learned that you did not know before exposure to these works?

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1.3: Videos: Prewriting Techniques

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a technique of listing as many ideas as possible about your writing topic. The greatest rule of brainstorming is to keep the process as broad and open as possible. This video suggests several things that you DON'T want to do.

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Mindmapping

Mindmapping is similar to brainstorming, but it is much more visual. It allows you to create connections between ideas. It can be a useful step after brainstorming, or it may match your style better if brainstorming seems too random. This video provides a good overview:

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Freewriting

Freewriting is a process of simply writing. It helps you get started and can expand your thinking. Watch this video to learn more about this technique:

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1.4: What is an Essay?

If you were asked to describe an essay in one word, what would that one word be?

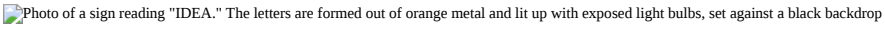


Photo of a sign reading "IDEA." The letters are formed out of orange metal and lit up with exposed light bulbs, set against a black backdrop

Okay, well, in one word, an essay is an **idea.**

No idea; no essay.

But more than that, the best essays have *original and insightful* ideas.

Okay, so the first thing we need to begin an essay is an *insightful idea* that we wish to share with the reader.

But original and insightful ideas do not just pop up every day. Where does one find original and insightful ideas?

Let's start here: an idea is an *insight* gained from either a) our personal experiences, or b) in scholarship, from synthesizing the ideas of others to create a new idea.

In this class (except for the last essay) we write **personal essays**; therefore, we will focus mostly on a) *personal experience* as a source for our ideas.

Life teaches us lessons. We learn from our life experiences. This is how we grow as human beings. So before you start on your essays, reflect on your life experiences by employing one or more of the brainstorming strategies described in this course. Your brainstorming and prewriting assignments are important assignments because remember: *no idea; no essay*. Brainstorming can help you discover an *idea* for your essay. So, ask yourself: What lessons have I learned? What insights have I gained that I can write about and share with my reader? Your reader can learn from you.

Why do we write?

We write to improve our world; it's that simple. We write personal essays to address the most problematic and fundamental question of all: What does it mean to be a human being? By sharing the insights and lessons we have learned from our life experiences we can add to our community's collective wisdom.

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

For example:

For your *Narrative* essay: do more than simply relate a series of events. Let the events make a point about the central *idea* you are trying to teach us.

For your *Example* essay: do more than tell us about your experience. *Show* us your experience. *Describe* your examples in descriptive details so that your reader actually experiences for themselves the central *idea* you wish to teach them.

For the *Comparison Contrast* essay: do more than simply tell us about the differences and similarities of two things. *Evaluate* those differences and similarities and draw an *idea* about them, so that you can offer your reader some basic insight into the comparison.

Okay, one last comment. Often students say to me: "I am so young; I do not have any 
Photo of an open moleskin journal, showing two blank lined pages
meaningful insights in to life." Okay, well, you may not be able to solve the pressing issues of the day, but think of it this way. What if a younger brother or sister came to you and in an anxious voice said; "I've got to do X. I've never had to do X. You've had some experience with X. Can you give me some advice?" You may have some wisdom and insights from your own life experience with X to share with that person. Don't worry about solving the BIG issues in this class. You can serve the world as well by simply addressing, and bringing to life in words, the problems and life situations that you know best, no matter how mundane. Please notice that with rare exception the essays you will read in this class do *not* cite outside sources. They are all written from the author's actual life experiences. So think of your audience as someone who can learn from your life experiences and write to them and for them.

1.5: Audience

What this handout is about

This handout will help you understand and write for the appropriate audience when you write an academic essay.

Audience matters

When you're in the process of writing a paper, it's easy to forget that you are actually writing to someone. Whether you've thought about it consciously or not, you always write to an audience: sometimes your audience is a very generalized group of readers, sometimes you know the individuals who compose the audience, and sometimes you write for yourself. Keeping your audience in mind while you write can help you make good decisions about what material to include, how to organize your ideas, and how best to support your argument.

To illustrate the impact of audience, imagine you're writing a letter to your grandmother to tell her about your first month of college. What details and stories might you include? What might you leave out? Now imagine that you're writing on the same topic but your audience is your best friend. Unless you have an extremely cool grandma to whom you're very close, it's likely that your two letters would look quite different in terms of content, structure, and even tone.

Isn't my instructor my audience?

Yes, your instructor or TA is probably the actual audience for your paper. Your instructors read and grade your essays, and you want to keep their needs and perspectives in mind when you write. However, when you write an essay with only your instructor in mind, you might not say as much as you should or say it as clearly as you should, because you assume that the person grading it knows more than you do and will fill in the gaps. This leaves it up to the instructor to decide what you are really saying, and she might decide differently than you expect. For example, she might decide that those gaps show that you don't know and understand the material. Remember that time when you said to yourself, "I don't have to explain communism; my instructor knows more about that than I do" and got back a paper that said something like "Shows no understanding of communism"? That's an example of what can go awry when you think of your instructor as your only audience.

Thinking about your audience differently can improve your writing, especially in terms of how clearly you express your argument. The clearer your points are, the more likely you are to have a strong essay. Your instructor will say, "He really understands communism—he's able to explain it simply and clearly!" By treating your instructor as an intelligent but uninformed audience, you end up addressing her more effectively.

How do I identify my audience and what they want from me?

Before you even begin the process of writing, take some time to consider who your audience is and what they want from you. Use the following questions to help you identify your audience and what you can do to address their wants and needs.

- Who is your audience?
- Might you have more than one audience? If so, how many audiences do you have? List them.
- Does your assignment itself give any clues about your audience?
- What does your audience need? What do they want? What do they value?
- What is most important to them?
- What are they least likely to care about?
- What kind of organization would best help your audience understand and appreciate your? What do you have to say (or what are you doing in your research) that might surprise your audience?
- What do you want your audience to think, learn, or assume about you? What impression do you want your writing or your research to convey?

How much should I explain?

This is the hard part. As we said earlier, you want to show your instructor that you know the material. But different assignments call for varying degrees of information. Different fields also have different expectations. For more about what each field tends to expect from an essay, see the Writing Center handouts on writing in specific fields of study. The best place to start figuring out how much you should say about each part of your paper is in a careful reading of the assignment. We give you some tips for reading assignments and figuring them out in our handout on how to read an assignment . The assignment may specify an audience for your

paper; sometimes the instructor will ask you to imagine that you are writing to your congressperson, for a professional journal, to a group of specialists in a particular field, or for a group of your peers. If the assignment doesn't specify an audience, you may find it most useful to imagine your classmates reading the paper, rather than your instructor.

Now, knowing your imaginary audience, what other clues can you get from the assignment? If the assignment asks you to summarize something that you have read, then your reader wants you to include more examples from the text than if the assignment asks you to interpret the passage. Most assignments in college focus on argument rather than the repetition of learned information, so your reader probably doesn't want a lengthy, detailed, point-by-point summary of your reading (book reports in some classes and argument reconstructions in philosophy classes are big exceptions to this rule). If your assignment asks you to interpret or analyze the text (or an event or idea), then you want to make sure that your explanation of the material is focused and not so detailed that you end up spending more time on examples than on your analysis. If you are not sure about the difference between explaining something and analyzing it, see our handouts on reading the assignment and argument .

Once you have a draft, try your level of explanation out on a friend, a classmate, or a Writing Center tutor. Get the person to read your rough draft, and then ask her to talk to you about what she did and didn't understand. (Now is not the time to talk about proofreading stuff, so make sure she ignores those issues for the time being). You will likely get one of the following responses or a combination of them:

- If your listener/reader has **tons of questions** about what you are saying, then you probably need to explain more. Let's say you are writing a paper on piranhas, and your reader says, "What's a piranha? Why do I need to know about them? How would I identify one?" Those are vital questions that you clearly need to answer in your paper. You need more detail and elaboration.
- If your reader seems **confused**, you probably need to explain more clearly. So if he says, "Are there piranhas in the lakes around here?" you may not need to give more examples, but rather focus on making sure your examples and points are clear.
- If your reader **looks bored and can repeat back to you more details than she needs to know** to get your point, you probably explained too much. Excessive detail can also be confusing, because it can bog the reader down and keep her from focusing on your main points. You want your reader to say, "So it seems like your paper is saying that piranhas are misunderstood creatures that are essential to South American ecosystems," not, "Uh… piranhas are important?" or, "Well, I know you said piranhas don't usually attack people, and they're usually around 10 inches long, and some people keep them in aquariums as pets, and dolphins are one of their predators, and…a bunch of other stuff, I guess?"

Sometimes it's not the amount of explanation that matters, but the word choice and tone you adopt. Your word choice and tone need to match your audience's expectations. For example, imagine you are researching piranhas; you find an article in *National Geographic* and another one in an academic journal for scientists. How would you expect the two articles to sound? *National Geographic* is written for a popular audience; you might expect it to have sentences like "The piranha generally lives in shallow rivers and streams in South America." The scientific journal, on the other hand, might use much more technical language, because it's written for an audience of specialists. A sentence like "*Serrasalmus piraya* lives in fresh and brackish intercoastal and proto-arboreal sub-tropical regions between the 45th and 38th parallels" might not be out of place in the journal.

Generally, you want your reader to know enough material to understand the points you are making. It's like the old forest/trees metaphor. If you give the reader nothing but trees, she won't see the forest (your thesis, the reason for your paper). If you give her a big forest and no trees, she won't know how you got to the forest (she might say, "Your point is fine, but you haven't proven it to me"). You want the reader to say, "Nice forest, and those trees really help me to see it." Our handout on paragraph development can help you find a good balance of examples and explanation.

Reading your own drafts

Writers tend to read over their own papers pretty quickly, with the knowledge of what they are trying to argue already in their minds. Reading in this way can cause you to skip over gaps in your written argument because the gap-filler is in your head. A problem occurs when your reader falls into these gaps. Your reader wants you to make the necessary connections from one thought or sentence to the next. When you don't, the reader can become confused or frustrated. Think about when you read something and you struggle to find the most important points or what the writer is trying to say. Isn't that annoying? Doesn't it make you want to quit reading and surf the web or call a friend?

Putting yourself in the reader's position

Instead of reading your draft as if you wrote it and know what you meant, try reading it as if you have no previous knowledge of the material. Have you explained enough? Are the connections clear? This can be hard to do at first. Consider using one of the

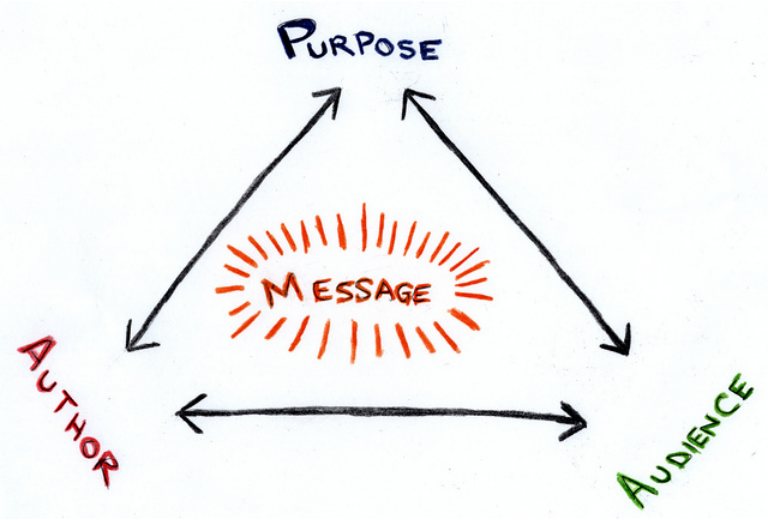
following strategies:

- Take a break from your work—go work out, take a nap, take a day off. This is why the Writing Center and your instructors encourage you to start writing more than a day before the paper is due. If you write the paper the night before it's due, you make it almost impossible to read the paper with a fresh eye.
- Try outlining after writing—after you have a draft, look at each paragraph separately. Write down the main point for each paragraph on a separate sheet of paper, in the order you have put them. Then look at your "outline"—does it reflect what you meant to say, in a logical order? Are some paragraphs hard to reduce to one point? Why? This technique will help you find places where you may have confused your reader by straying from your original plan for the paper.
- Read the paper aloud—we do this all the time at the Writing Center, and once you get used to it, you'll see that it helps you slow down and really consider how your reader experiences your text. It will also help you catch a lot of sentence-level errors, such as misspellings and missing words, which can make it difficult for your reader to focus on your argument.

These techniques can help you read your paper in the same way your reader will and make revisions that help your reader understand your argument. Then, when your instructor finally reads your finished draft, he or she won't have to fill in any gaps. The more work you do, the less work your audience will have to do—and the more likely it is that your instructor will follow and understand your argument.

1.6: Rhetorical Context

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



The three key factors–purpose, author, and audience–all work together to influence what the text itself says, and how it says it. Let's examine each of the three in more detail.

Purpose

Any time you are preparing to write, you should first ask yourself, "Why am I writing?" All writing, no matter the type, has a purpose. Purpose will sometimes be given to you (by a teacher, for example), while other times, you will decide for yourself. As the author, it's up to you to make sure that purpose is clear not only for yourself, but also–especially–for your audience. If your purpose is not clear, your audience is not likely to receive your intended message.

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

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

Why Purpose Matters

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

Useful Questions

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

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

Audience

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

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

What to Think About

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

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

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

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

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

Applying Your Analysis to Your Writing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Author

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

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

Questions for Consideration

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

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

1.7: Thesis Statements

What this handout is about

This handout describes what a thesis statement is, how thesis statements work in your writing, and how you can discover or refine one for your draft.

Introduction

Writing in college often takes the form of persuasion—convincing others that you have an interesting, logical point of view on the subject you are studying. Persuasion is a skill you practice regularly in your daily life. You persuade your roommate to clean up, your parents to let you borrow the car, your friend to vote for your favorite candidate or policy. In college, course assignments often ask you to make a persuasive case in writing. You are asked to convince your reader of your point of view. This form of persuasion, often called academic argument, follows a predictable pattern in writing. After a brief introduction of your topic, you state your point of view on the topic directly and often in one sentence. This sentence is the thesis statement, and it serves as a summary of the argument you'll make in the rest of your paper .

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement:

- tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
- is a road map for the paper; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
- directly answers the question asked of you. A thesis is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II or Moby Dick; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or the novel.
- makes a claim that others might dispute.
- is usually a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.

If your assignment asks you to take a position or develop a claim about a subject, you may need to convey that position or claim in a thesis statement near the beginning of your draft. The assignment may not explicitly state that you need a thesis statement because your instructor may assume you will include one. When in doubt, ask your instructor if the assignment requires a thesis statement. When an assignment asks you to analyze, to interpret, to compare and contrast, to demonstrate cause and effect, or to take a stand on an issue, it is likely that you are being asked to develop a thesis and to support it persuasively. (Check out our handout on understanding assignments for more information.)

How do I get a thesis?

A thesis is the result of a lengthy thinking process. Formulating a thesis is not the first thing you do after reading an essay assignment. Before you develop an argument on any topic, you have to collect and organize evidence, look for possible relationships between known facts (such as surprising contrasts or similarities), and think about the significance of these relationships. Once you do this thinking, you will probably have a "working thesis," a basic or main idea, an argument that you think you can support with evidence but that may need adjustment along the way.

Writers use all kinds of techniques to stimulate their thinking and to help them clarify relationships or comprehend the broader significance of a topic and arrive at a thesis statement. For more ideas on how to get started, see our handout on brainstorming .

How do I know if my thesis is strong?

If there's time, run it by your instructor or make an appointment at the Writing Center to get some feedback. Even if you do not have time to get advice elsewhere, you can do some thesis evaluation of your own. When reviewing your first draft and its working thesis, ask yourself the following:

- *Do I answer the question?* Re-reading the question prompt after constructing a working thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.
- *Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?*If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it's possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.

- Is my thesis statement specific enough?

Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: *why* is something “good”; *what specifically* makes something “successful”?

- *Does my thesis pass the “So what?” test?* If a reader’s first response is, “So what?” then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
- *Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?* If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It’s o.k. to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.
- *Does my thesis pass the “how and why?” test?* If a reader’s first response is “how?” or “why?” your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.

Examples

Suppose you are taking a course on 19th-century America, and the instructor hands out the following essay assignment: Compare and contrast the reasons why the North and South fought the Civil War. You turn on the computer and type out the following:

The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.

This weak thesis restates the question without providing any additional information. You will expand on this new information in the body of the essay, but it is important that the reader know where you are heading. A reader of this weak thesis might think, “What reasons? How are they the same? How are they different?” Ask yourself these same questions and begin to compare Northern and Southern attitudes (perhaps you first think, “The South believed slavery was right, and the North thought slavery was wrong”). Now, push your comparison toward an interpretation—why did one side think slavery was right and the other side think it was wrong? You look again at the evidence, and you decide that you are going to argue that the North believed slavery was immoral while the South believed it upheld the Southern way of life. You write:

While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.

Now you have a working thesis! Included in this working thesis is a reason for the war and some idea of how the two sides disagreed over this reason. As you write the essay, you will probably begin to characterize these differences more precisely, and your working thesis may start to seem too vague. Maybe you decide that both sides fought for moral reasons, and that they just focused on different moral issues. You end up revising the working thesis into a final thesis that really captures the argument in your paper:

While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government.

Compare this to the original weak thesis. This final thesis presents a way of *interpreting* evidence that illuminates the significance of the question. *Keep in mind that this is one of many possible interpretations of the Civil War—it is not the one and only right answer to the question.* There isn’t one right answer; there are only strong and weak thesis statements and strong and weak uses of evidence.

Let’s look at another example. Suppose your literature professor hands out the following assignment in a class on the American novel: Write an analysis of some aspect of Mark Twain’s novel Huckleberry Finn. “This will be easy,” you think. “I loved Huckleberry Finn!” You grab a pad of paper and write:

Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn is a great American novel.

Why is this thesis weak? Think about what the reader would expect from the essay that follows: you will most likely provide a general, appreciative summary of Twain’s novel. The question did not ask you to summarize; it asked you to analyze. Your professor is probably not interested in your opinion of the novel; instead, she wants you to think about *why* it’s such a great novel—what do Huck’s adventures tell us about life, about America, about coming of age, about race relations, etc.? First, the question asks you to pick an aspect of the novel that you think is important to its structure or meaning—for example, the role of storytelling, the contrasting scenes between the shore and the river, or the relationships between adults and children. Now you write:

In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.

Here's a working thesis with potential: you have highlighted an important aspect of the novel for investigation; however, it's still not clear what your analysis will reveal. Your reader is intrigued, but is still thinking, "So what? What's the point of this contrast? What does it signify?" Perhaps you are not sure yet, either. That's fine—begin to work on comparing scenes from the book and see what you discover. Free write, make lists, jot down Huck's actions and reactions. Eventually you will be able to clarify for yourself, and then for the reader, why this contrast matters. After examining the evidence and considering your own insights, you write:

Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain's Huckleberry Finn suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave "civilized" society and go back to nature.

This final thesis statement presents an interpretation of a literary work based on an analysis of its content. Of course, for the essay itself to be successful, you must now present evidence from the novel that will convince the reader of your interpretation.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout's topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the UNC Libraries citation tutorial .

Anson, Chris M. and Robert A. Schwegler. The Longman Handbook for Writers. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 2000.

Hairston, Maxine and John J. Ruszkiewicz. The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers. 4th ed. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

Lunsford, Andrea and Robert Connors. The St. Martin's Handbook. 3rd ed. New York: St. Martin's, 1995.

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1.8: How to Write a Thesis Statement

Whether you are writing a short essay or a doctoral dissertation, your thesis statement will arguably be the most difficult sentence to formulate. An effective thesis statement states the purpose of the paper and, therefore, functions to control, assert and structure your entire argument. Without a sound thesis, your argument may sound weak, lacking in direction, and uninteresting to the reader.

Start with a question — then make the answer your thesis

Regardless of how complicated the subject is, almost any thesis can be constructed by answering a question.

-  **Question:** "What are the benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade classroom?"
  - **Thesis: "Computers allow fourth graders an early advantage in technological and scientific education."**
- **Question: "Why is the Mississippi River so important in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*?" Thesis: "The river comes to symbolize both division and progress, as it separates our characters and country while still providing the best chance for Huck and Jim to get to know one another."**

Question: "Why do people seem to get angry at vegans, feminists, and other 'morally righteous' subgroups?" Thesis: "Through careful sociological study, we've found that people naturally assume that "morally righteous" people look down on them as "inferior," causing anger and conflict where there generally is none."

Tailor your thesis to the type of paper you're writing

N ot all essays persuade, and not all essays teach. The goals of your paper will help you find the best thesis.

- **Analytical: Breaks down something to better examine and understand it. Ex. "This dynamic between different generations sparks much of the play's tension, as age becomes a motive for the violence and unrest that rocks King Lear."**

Expository: Teaches or illuminates a point. Ex. "The explosion of 1800's philosophies like Positivism, Marxism, and Darwinism undermined and refuted Christianity to instead focus on the real, tangible world." Argumentative: Makes a claim, or backs up an opinion, to change other peoples' minds. Ex. "Without the steady hand and specific decisions of Barack Obama, America would never have recovered from the hole it entered in the early 2000's."

Ensure your thesis is provable

 Do not come up with your thesis and then look it up later. The thesis is the end point of your research, not the beginning. You need to use a thesis you can actually back up with evidence.

Good Theses Examples:

- “By owning up to the impossible contradictions, embracing them and questioning them, Blake forges his own faith, and is stronger for it. Ultimately, the only way for his poems to have faith is to temporarily lose it.”
- “According to its well-documented beliefs and philosophies, an existential society with no notion of either past or future cannot help but become stagnant.”
- “By reading “Ode to a Nightingale” through a modern deconstructionist lens, we can see how Keats viewed poetry as shifting and subjective, not some rigid form.”

Bad Theses Examples:

- “The wrong people won the American Revolution.” While striking and unique, who is “right” and who is “wrong” is exceptionally hard to prove, and very subjective.
- “The theory of genetic inheritance is the binding theory of every human interaction.” Too complicated and overzealous. The scope of “every human interaction” is just too big
- “Paul Harding’s novel *Tinkers* is ultimately a cry for help from a clearly depressed author.” Unless you interviewed Harding extensively, or had a lot of real-life sources, you have no way of proving what is fact and what is fiction.”

Get the sound right

You want your thesis statement to be identifiable as a thesis statement. You do this by taking a very particular tone and using specific kinds of phrasing and words. Use words like “because” and language which is firm and definitive.

Example thesis statements with good statement language include:

- “Because of William the Conqueror’s campaign into England, that nation developed the strength and culture it would need to eventually build the British Empire.”
- “Hemingway significantly changed literature by normalizing simplistic writing and frank tone.”

Know where to place a thesis statement

Because of the role thesis statements play, they appear at the beginning of the paper, usually at the end of the first paragraph or somewhere in the introduction. Although most people look for the thesis at the end of the first paragraph, its location can depend on a number of factors such as how lengthy of an introduction you need before you can introduce your thesis or the length of your paper.

Limit a thesis statement to one or two sentences in length

Thesis statements are clear and to the point, which helps the reader identify the topic and direction of the paper, as well as your position towards the subject.

1.9: Organizing an Essay

There are many elements that must come together to create a good essay. The topic should be clear and interesting. The author's voice should come through, but not be a distraction. There should be no errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or capitalization. Organization is one of the most important elements of an essay that is often overlooked. An organized essay is clear, focused, logical and effective.

Organization makes it easier to understand the thesis. To illustrate, imagine putting together a bike. Having all of the necessary tools, parts, and directions will make the job easier to complete than if the parts are spread across the room and the tools are located all over the house. The same logic applies to writing an essay. When all the parts of an essay are in some sort of order, it is both easier for the writer to put the essay together and for the reader to understand the main ideas presented in the essay.

 Photo of a white kitchen lit with windows. Rows of glass jars line shelves over the countertop, and a hanging rack of pans and pots appears beneath that.Although organization makes tasks easier to complete, there is not just one way of organizing. For example, there are hundreds of ways to organize a kitchen. The glasses can go in the cupboard to the right of the sink or to the left of it. The silverware can be placed in any number of drawers. Pots and pans can be hung on hooks over the island in the center of the kitchen or hidden in cupboard space beneath the counter. It does not matter as much where these items are placed, but that they are organized in a logical manner. Essays, like kitchens, can also be organized in different ways. There are three common strategies; however, it is important to note that these are broad categories. Variations of these strategies can be used, and they may be combined with one another.[1]

Strategy 1. Reverse Outlining

If your paper is about Huckleberry Finn, a working thesis might be: "In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore." However, you might feel uncertain if your paper really follows through on the thesis as promised.

This paper may benefit from reverse outlining. Your aim is to create an outline of what you've already written, as opposed to the kind of outline that you make before you begin to write. The reverse outline will help you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both your organization and your argument.

Read the draft and take notes

Read your draft over, and as you do so, make very brief notes in the margin about what each paragraph is trying to accomplish.

Outline the Draft

After you've read through the entire draft, transfer the brief notes to a fresh sheet of paper, listing them in the order in which they appear. The outline might look like this:

- Paragraph 1: Intro
- Paragraph 2: Background on Huck Finn
- Paragraph 3: River for Huck and Jim
- Paragraph 4: Shore and laws for Huck and Jim
- Paragraph 5: Shore and family, school
- Paragraph 6: River and freedom, democracy
- Paragraph 7: River and shore similarities
- Paragraph 8: Conclusion

Examine the Outline

Look for repetition and other organizational problems. In the reverse outline above, there's a problem somewhere in Paragraphs 3-7, where the potential for repetition is high because you keep moving back and forth between river and shore.

Re-examine the Thesis, the Outline, and the Draft Together

Look closely at the outline and see how well it supports the argument in your thesis statement. You should be able to see which paragraphs need rewriting, reordering or rejecting. You may find some paragraphs are tangential or irrelevant or that some paragraphs have more than one idea and need to be separated.

Strategy 2. Talk It Out


Drawing of two men sitting at a cafe table talking. They are wearing period dress (bowlers, suits, bow ties).

If your paper is about President Roosevelt's New Deal, and your working thesis is: "The New Deal was actually a conservative defense of American capitalism." This strategy forces to explain your thinking to someone else.

Find a Friend, your T.A., your Professor, a relative, a Writing Center tutor, or any sympathetic and intelligent listener.
People are more accustomed to talking than writing, so it might be beneficial to explain your thinking out loud to someone before organizing the essay. Talking to someone about your ideas may also relieve pressure and anxiety about your topic.

Explain What Your Paper Is About
Pay attention to how you explain your argument verbally. It is likely that the order in which you present your ideas and evidence to your listener is a logical way to arrange them in your paper. Let's say that you begin (as you did above) with the working thesis. As you continue to explain, you realize that even though your draft doesn't mention "private enterprise" until the last two paragraphs, you begin to talk about it right away. This fact should tell you that you probably need to discuss private enterprise near the beginning.

Take Notes
You and your listener should keep track of the way you explain your paper. If you don't, you probably won't remember what you've talked about. Compare the structure of the argument in the notes to the structure of the draft you've written.

Get Your Listener to Ask Questions
As the writer, it is in your interest to receive constructive criticism so that your draft will become stronger. You want your listener to say things like, "Would you mind explaining that point about being both conservative and liberal again? I wasn't sure I followed" or "What kind of economic principle is government relief? Do you consider it a good or bad thing?" Questions you can't answer may signal an unnecessary tangent or an area needing further development in the draft. Questions you need to think about will probably make you realize that you need to explain more your paper. In short, you want to know if your listener fully understands you; if not, chances are your readers won't, either.[2]

Strategy 3. Paragraphs

Readers need paragraph breaks in order to organize their reading. Writers need paragraph breaks to organize their writing. A paragraph break indicates a change in focus, topic, specificity, point of view, or rhetorical strategy. The paragraph should have one main idea; the topic sentence expresses this idea. The paragraph should be organized either spatially, chronologically, or logically. The movement may be from general to specific, specific to general, or general to specific to general. All paragraphs must contain developed ideas: comparisons, examples, explanations, definitions, causes, effects, processes, or descriptions. There are several concluding strategies which may be combined or used singly, depending on the assignment's length and purpose:

- a summary of the main points
- a hook and return to the introductory "attention-getter" to frame the essay
- a web conclusion which relates the topic to a larger context of a greater significance
- a proposal calling for action or further examination of the topic
- a question which provokes the reader
- a quote
- a vivid image or compelling narrative[3]

Put Paragraphs into Sections
You should be able to group your paragraphs so that they make a particular point or argument that supports your thesis. If any paragraph, besides the introduction or conclusion, cannot fit into any section, you may have to ask yourself whether it belongs in the essay.

Re-examine each Section
Assuming you have more than one paragraph under each section, try to distinguish between them. Perhaps you have two arguments in favor of that can be distinguished from each other by author, logic, ethical principles invoked, etc. Write down the distinctions — they will help you formulate clear topic sentences.

Re-examine the Entire Argument
Which section do you want to appear first? Why? Which Second? Why? In what order should the paragraphs appear in each

section? Look for an order that makes the strongest possible argument.[4]

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1. Organizing an Essay ↵
2. Reorganizing Your Draft ↵
3. Parts of an Essay ↵
4. Reorganizing Your Draft ↵

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Narrative Essay

2.10: Student Sample: Narrative Essay

My College Education

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

I entered college intending to earn a degree in engineering. I always liked the way mathematics had right and wrong answers. I understood the logic and was very good at it. So when I received my first philosophy assignment that asked me to write my interpretation of the Camus essay, I was instantly confused. What is the right way to do this assignment, I wondered? I was nervous about writing an incorrect interpretation and did not want to get my first assignment wrong. Even more troubling was that the professor refused to give us any guidelines on what he was looking for; he gave us total freedom. He simply said, “I want to see what you come up with.”

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

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

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

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

2.11: Your Instructions for Essay 1

Narrative Essay Prompt

Choose one of the following topics to write your own narrative essay. The topic you decide on should be something you care about, and the narration should be a means of communicating an **idea** that ties to the essay's theme. Remember in this essay, the narration is not an end in itself. Your essay should be at least 500 words long and should include an introduction, two or three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

FRIENDS

1. Gaining independence
2. A friend's sacrifice
3. A significant trip with your family
4. A wedding or a funeral
5. A incident from family legend

THE WORLD AROUND YOU

1. A storm, a flood, an earthquake, or another natural event
2. A school event
3. The most important minutes of a sporting event

LESSONS OF DAILY LIFE

1. A time you confronted authority
2. A time you had to deliver bad news
3. Your biggest social blunder

FIRSTS

1. Your first day of school
2. The first performance you gave
3. A first date

Writing Your Narrative Essay

To get started writing your essay:

1. Take time to review possible subjects
2. Use prewriting to help you narrow your topic to one experience.

Remember that "story starters" are everywhere. Think about it—status updates on social media websites can be a good place to start. You may have already started a "note"on Facebook, and now is your chance to develop that idea into a full narrative. If you keep a journal or diary, a simple event may unfold into a narrative. Simply said, your stories may be closer than you think!

When drafting your essay:

1. Develop an enticing title – although don't let yourself get stuck on the title. A great title might suggest itself after you've begun the prewriting and drafting processes.
2. Use the introduction to establish the situation the essay will address.
3. Avoid addressing the assignment directly. (For example, don't write "I am going to write about my most significant experience," because this takes the fun out of reading the work!)
4. Think of things said at the moment this experience started for you—perhaps use a quote, or an interesting part of the experience that will grab the reader.
5. Let the story reflect your own voice. (Is your voice serious? Humorous? Matter-of-fact?)
6. Organize the essay in a way that
   - Establishes the situation *[introduction]*;
   - Introduces the complication(s) *[body]*; and
   - States the lesson you learned *[conclusion]*
7. To avoid just telling what happens, make sure your essay takes time to reflect on why this experience is significant.

Be sure to:

- Decide on something you care about so that the narration is a means of communicating an **idea.**
- Include *characters, conflict, sensory details.*
- Create a *sequence* of *events* in a *plot.*
- Develop an enticing title.
- Use the introduction to pull the reader into your singular experience.
- Avoid addressing the assignment directly. (don't write "I am going to write about…" – this takes the fun out of reading the work!)
- Let the essay reflect your own voice (Is your voice serious? Humorous? Matter-of-fact?)
- Avoid telling just what happens by making sure your essay reflects on why this experience is significant.

02.12: Grammar

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2.12: Grammar/Mechanics Mini-Lecture

The "Guide to Writing" handbook in our Course Resource folder has lots of material about grammar and mechanics. It's available all semester for you to consult as you write your papers. In addition, I've also posted review videos about grammar and mechanics in our first eight modules as supplemental material that you may find helpful and interesting! Here's your first group of videos. Enjoy!

To refresh your understanding of subjects, verbs, irregular verbs and subject-verb agreement, please review the videos below. (If the links aren't "clickable" for you, copy and paste the link into a new browser window.)

Subject and Verbs

http://youtu.be/qNc0N0k9B4Y

Irregular Verbs in the Past Tense

http://youtu.be/jJ5xnJyXvTk

Subject-Verb Agreement

http://youtu.be/M_P6d_Pt76k

2.1: Essay Basics

Audience

It's important to keep your audience in mind when writing. Imagine you are writing about your first full day as a college student. How might your writing vary for the audiences below?

* a text you are sending to your best friend

* an email you are sending to a parent or guardian

* a retelling of your experiences for a paper you are writing for your sociology course

In each example above, the method of communication will shape the length and depth of what you write as well as the style (including word choices) and the level of formality. Think about what *content* you may need to include based on what each specific audience already knows or needs to know about your topic.

Purpose

Most writing has one of these two purposes:

1. to inform

2. to persuade

Structure

Generally speaking, an essay is made up of three parts: an introduction (with a thesis), a body consisting of a group of paragraphs, and a conclusion.

2.2: Introduction to Narrative Essay

Narrative Essay

Reflect for a moment on the last memorable story you heard, told, or read. What made the story remain with you? Was it a compelling character or participant in the action? An interesting set of circumstances? Was it told in an amusing or serious manner, and did it make you react emotionally?

Everyone loves a good story, and each day we seek out good stories in a variety of media: novels, short stories, newspapers, works of fine art, blogs, even notes and posts on social media pages.

Narration is the art of storytelling, and in this module, you will investigate the ways in which writers employ common narration strategies to engage readers from the beginning to the end of a significant event. You will also look critically at some examples of effective narration as you draft your narrative essay.

Module Outcomes

After successfully completing this module, you should be able to:

1. Describe the purpose, basic components, characteristics, and structure of narrative writing
2. Demonstrate writing techniques of a narrative essay

2.3: Student Sample: Narrative Essay

Instructions: Read the student essay, "Melon Harvest," by J. Workman. First read the NON-ANNOTATED student essay, and then compare it to the ANNOTATED version of the same essay. The purpose of annotation is to help you think deeply about a text as you read it. Notice how the annotated comments analyze and respond to the essay.

This is a model for how to engage with and annotate the writing you will encounter in this course.

Melon Harvest (Non-Annotated Version)

By J. Workman

At two in the afternoon I drove the five miles from our apartment complex into downtown Texarkana to drop off voter registration forms and mail paperwork about my recent change in residency to my employer. My husband's job had brought me to this small city straddling the border of Texas and Arkansas, where everything still felt quaint and unfamiliar.

Driving home down Jefferson Avenue on the Arkansas side of town I passed a grocery store parking lot where a farmer had parked his beat-up truck and shoddy trailer under a faded awning. The trailer was loaded up with the last of his watermelon harvest—late season, probably sweet as they come. The truck bed held early season sweet potatoes. End of the summer fare and beginning of the winter stores, all in one load. The farmer's back was facing me as he helped a woman buying watermelons. His arms were huge and his shoulders wider than a yardstick. He was tall, big, sunburned on his neck and upper arms.

Without warning, tears filled my eyes. Although this farmer was a stranger to me, I recognized his profile. I knew his stories, including the toil, drudgery and poverty that too often mark a hard-working farmer's life. That life was just two generations back for me: my Grandma Wanda grew up a farmer's daughter. Great Grandpa George was a farmer and cowhand and blacksmith and sheep shearer and whatever else he could do to put food on the table.

Although rural communities surrounded Texarkana, somehow I was surprised to see this hardscrabble farmer here, now today. He was the real thing. This man wasn't like the hippie organic growers at the Santa Monica farmer's market I visited every Saturday before I moved from L.A. He wasn't a part-timer coming to town only seasonally with a load of grapes or melons. This man was no immigrant laborer from Mexico or El Salvador or Guatemala who came in the 1990s to work the farms on behalf of the white owners. He was not the descendent of Latin American or Asian laborers who came three generations ago and now own farms themselves.

This was a homegrown, Caucasian, American farmer, but the not-quite-Norman Rockwell kind. He was a "dirt farmer," as my new neighbor Billy described the type, himself the son of a sharecropper. He grew whatever he could coax out of the land, working those acres generation after generation to hold onto the family homestead. This farmer was young, early thirties perhaps, close to my own age (although you can't really tell after awhile because farmers take on the age of the earth). Seeing him hit close to home for me, too much a reminder of the hardship and poverty of my own family's roots, uncomfortably manifest today in another family's ongoing hardship.

Wiping my eyes, I realized I was projecting all this onto some random roadside farmer, and I didn't even stop to buy a melon. I thought about it, but I didn't really want to have to eat a whole watermelon on my own. More than that, I didn't know how I would explain to him the tears I knew would stream from my eyes as I hefted the melon and counted out the bills.

Turning the corner into our apartment complex I passed the Greyhound station just in time to be a voyeur viewing a private moment between a mother and son. She was sending him off, probably to a city somewhere. He was a big, overweight, sloppy but good-natured looking boy. For the second time tears sprang to my eyes, and I couldn't say quite say why. After all, my parents put me on a Greyhound bus to go back to college after the holidays one winter. My father said it was a mandatory life experience, taking the bus to school. When I complained, he told me it was good motivation to finish college and get a good job. I can't say he was wrong about that.

But here in Texarkana my tears flowed again for that mother and son and the harshness of the big city world out beyond this place. I cried for the harshness of my citified eyes judging these homespun people in their quaint small place with its oddities and familiarities, its first names and slow-moving afternoons and churches bigger than stadiums.

I cried for how God must love the humility of a place like this, a town that unobtrusively preserves a Bible in the courthouse and trusts this nation could never do wrong. Perhaps in some ways this is a better place—better than me and the world I'm from. But in

some ways it's also a dying place, dying like a field of vines after the melons are harvested, wilting in the sunlight of America's finest hour.

Annotated Version

Click on the link to view the annotated version of the essay: "Melon Harvest," by J. Workman

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2.4: “Shooting an Elephant” by George Orwell

In “Shooting an Elephant,” author George Orwell finds himself in a position of authority as an Indian community encounters a rampaging elephant.

Click on the link to view the essay: “Shooting an Elephant” by George Orwell

As you are reading, identify the following:

- The “situation”
- The “complications”
- The “lesson” the author learned from the experience

2.5: “Sixty-nine Cents” by Gary Shteyngart

In “Sixty-nine Cents,” author Gary Shteyngart describes a coming-of-age experience as a first-generation Russian-Jewish immigrant in modern America.

Click on the link to view the essay: “Sixty-nine Cents” by Gary Shteyngart

As you are reading, identify the following:

- The “situation”
- The “complications”
- The “lesson” the author learned from the experience.

2.6: Video: The Danger of a Single Story

Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice — and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

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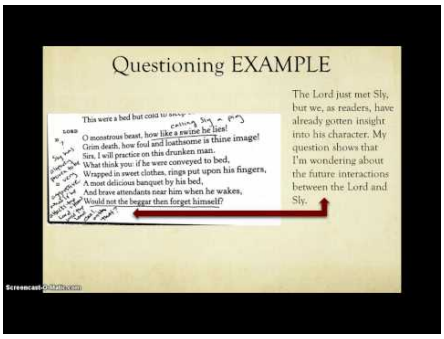
2.7: How to Write an Annotation

One of the greatest challenges students face is adjusting to college reading expectations. Unlike high school, students in college are expected to read more "academic" type of materials in less time and usually recall the information as soon as the next class.

The problem is many students spend hours reading and have no idea what they just read. Their eyes are moving across the page, but their mind is somewhere else. The end result is wasted time, energy, and frustration…and having to read the text again.

Although students are taught *how to read* at an early age, many are not taught *how to actively engage* with written text or other media. Annotation is a tool to help you learn how to actively engage with a text or other media.

View the following video about how to annotate a text.



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Annotating a text or other media (e.g. a video, image, etc.) is as much about you as it is the text you are annotating. What are YOUR responses to the author's writing, claims and ideas? What are YOU thinking as you consider the work? Ask questions, challenge, think!

When we annotate an author's work, our minds should *encounter* the mind of the author, openly and freely. If you met the author at a party, what would you like to tell to them; what would you like to ask them? What do you think they would say in response to your comments? You can be critical of the text, but you do not have to be. If you are annotating properly, you often begin to get ideas that have little or even nothing to do with the topic you are annotating. That's fine: it's all about generating insights and ideas of your own. Any good insight is worth keeping because it may make for a good essay or research paper later on.

The Secret is in the Pen

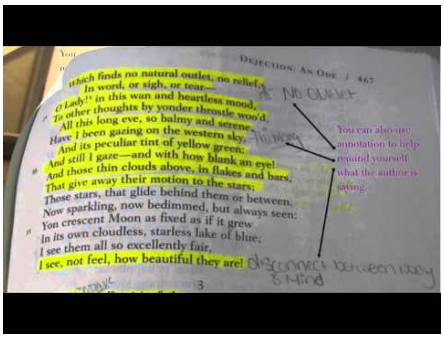
One of the ways proficient readers read is with a pen in hand. They know their purpose is to keep their attention on the material by:

- *Predicting* what the material will be about
- *Questioning* the material to further understanding
- *Determining* what's important
- *Identifying* key vocabulary
- *Summarizing* the material in their own words, and
- *Monitoring* their comprehension (understanding) during and after engaging with the material

The same applies for mindfully viewing a film, video, image or other media.

Annotating a Text

Review the video, "How to Annotate a Text." Pay attention to both how to make annotations and what types of thoughts and ideas may be part of your annotations as you actively read a written text.



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Example Assignment Format: Annotating a Written Text

For the annotation of reading assignments in this class, you will cite and comment on a minimum of FIVE (5) phrases, sentences or passages from notes you take on the selected readings.

Here is an example format for an assignment to annotate a written text:

Passage #	Quotation and Location	My Comments / Ideas
1	*Direct quote (paragraph #)*	Add your comments here
2	*Direct quote (paragraph #)*	Add your comments here
3	*Direct quote (paragraph #)*	Add your comments here
4	*Direct quote (paragraph #)*	Add your comments here
5	*Direct quote (paragraph #)*	Add your comments here

Example Assignment Format: Annotating Media

In addition to annotating written text, at times you will have assignments to annotate media (e.g., videos, images or other media). For the annotation of media assignments in this class, you will cite and comment on a minimum of THREE (3) statements, facts, examples, research or any combination of those from the notes you take about selected media.

Here is an example format for an assignment to annotate media:

Passage #	Describe Passage	My Comments / Ideas
1	Passage Description	Add your comments here
2	Passage Description	Add your comments here
3	Passage Description	Add your comments here

2.8: How to Write a Summary

Proficient students understand that *summarizing*, identifying what is most important and restating the text (or other media) in your own words, is an important tool for college success.

After all, if you really know a subject, you will be able to summarize it. If you cannot summarize a subject, even if you have memorized all the facts about it, you can be absolutely sure that you have not learned it. And, if you truly learn the subject, you will still be able to summarize it months or years from now.

Proficient students may monitor their understanding of a text by summarizing as they read. They understand that if they can write a one- or two-sentence summary of each paragraph after reading it, then that is a good sign that they have correctly understood it. If they can not summarize the main idea of the paragraph, they know that comprehension has broken down and they need to use fix-up strategies to repair understanding.

Summary Writing Format

- When writing a summary, remember that it should be in the form of a paragraph.
- A summary begins with an introductory sentence that states the text's title, author and main point of the text as you see it.
- A summary is written in your own words.
- A summary contains only the ideas of the original text. Do not insert any of your own opinions, interpretations, deductions or comments into a summary.
- Identify in order the significant sub-claims the author uses to defend the main point.
- Copy word-for-word three separate passages from the essay that you think support and/or defend the main point of the essay as you see it.
- Cite each passage by first signaling the work and the author, put "quotation marks" around the passage you chose, and put the number of the paragraph where the passages can be found immediately after the passage.
- Using source material from the essay is important. Why? Because defending claims with source material is what you will be asked to do when writing papers for your college professors.
- Write a last sentence that "wraps" up your summary; often a simple rephrasing of the main point.

Example Summary Writing Format

In the essay *Santa Ana*, author Joan Didion's main point is (*state main point*). According to Didion "…*passage 1*…" (para.3). Didion also writes "…*passage 2*…" (para.8). Finally, she states "…*passage 3*…" (para. 12) Write a last sentence that "wraps" up your summary; often a simple rephrasing of the main point.

2.9: Writing for Success: Narration

This section will help you determine the purpose and structure of narration in writing.

The Purpose of Narrative Writing

Narration means the art of storytelling, and the purpose of narrative writing is to tell stories. Any time you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident in your day, you engage in a form of narration. In addition, a narrative can be factual or fictional. A factual story is one that is based on, and tries to be faithful to, actual events as they unfolded in real life. A fictional story is a made-up, or imagined, story; the writer of a fictional story can create characters and events as he or she sees fit.

The big distinction between factual and fictional narratives is based on a writer's purpose. The writers of factual stories try to recount events as they actually happened, but writers of fictional stories can depart from real people and events because the writers' intents are not to retell a real-life event. Biographies and memoirs are examples of factual stories, whereas novels and short stories are examples of fictional stories.

Know Your Purpose

Because the line between fact and fiction can often blur, it is helpful to understand what your purpose is from the beginning. Is it important that you recount history, either your own or someone else's? Or does your interest lie in reshaping the world in your own image—either how you would like to see it or how you imagine it could be? Your answers will go a long way in shaping the stories you tell.

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

The Structure of a Narrative Essay

Major narrative events are most often conveyed in chronological order, the order in which events unfold from first to last. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and these events are typically organized by time. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed here:

Chronological Transitional Words

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

Other basic components of a narrative are:

- Plot – The events as they unfold in sequence.
- Characters – The people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, also known as the protagonist.
- Conflict – The primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot that the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.
- Theme – The ultimate message the narrative is trying to express; it can be either explicit or implicit.

Writing a Narrative Essay

When writing a narrative essay, start by asking yourself if you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then freewrite, brainstorm, or mindmap about topics that are of general interest to you. For more information about pre-writing, review the materials in "My Writing Process – Prewriting and Draft."

Once you have a general idea of what you will be writing about, you should sketch out the major events of the story that will compose your plot. Typically, these events will be revealed chronologically and climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story. The use of strong details is crucial as you describe the events and characters in your narrative. You want the reader to emotionally engage with the world that you create in writing.

Keep the Senses in Mind

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

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook your reader into wanting to read more. Try opening the essay with an event that is interesting to introduce the story and get it going. Finally, your conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story and impress upon your reader the ultimate theme of the piece.

Narratives Tell A Story

Every day, you relate stories to other people through simple exchanges. You may have had a horrible experience at a restaurant the night before, or you may have had some good news you are ready to share. In each one of these experiences there's a story, and when you begin to share a personal experience, you often communicate in a narrative mode.

Although narratives can vary widely, most share several common features. Generally, storytellers establish:

- *Characters*, the person/people (sometimes they are animals) the story is about, which may include the storyteller
- *Conflict*, or struggle in the story, that builds their audience's interest
- *Details*, or descriptions, that appeal to the *senses* of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste
- *A sequence* of *events* in a *plot*, or order of what happens in the story, that keeps the audience engaged as the story unfolds
- Reflection of events around a *theme*, or unifying idea, for telling the story

Narratives of Love and War

Consider two narratives that couldn't be more different—a tale of love and a story of war: John Hodgman's sweet, geeky tale of falling in love and Emmanuel Jal's story of being a child soldier and learning to forgive his enemies. Review these videos below then engage in a discussion following the directions as listed.

John Hodgman: *A Brief Digression on Matters of Lost Time*

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Emmanuel Jal: *The Music of a War Child*

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Narrative Essay Example

Read the following example of a narrative essay. Note how it reflects the basic components and common features of narratives, as discussed above.

My College Education

By Scott McLean, in *Writing for Success*

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

I entered college intending to earn a degree in engineering. I always liked the way mathematics had right and wrong answers. I understood the logic and was very good at it. So when I received my first philosophy assignment that asked me to write my interpretation of the Camus essay, I was instantly confused. What is the right way to do this assignment, I wondered? I was nervous about writing an incorrect interpretation and did not want to get my first assignment wrong. Even more troubling was that the professor refused to give us any guidelines on what he was looking for; he gave us total freedom. He simply said, "I want to see what you come up with."

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

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

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

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

Key Takeaways

- Narration is the art of storytelling.
- Narratives can be either factual or fictional. In either case, narratives should emotionally engage the reader.
- Most narratives are composed of major events sequenced in chronological order.
- Time transition words and phrases are used to orient the reader in the sequence of a narrative.
- The four basic components to all narratives are plot, character, conflict, and theme.
- The use of sensory details is crucial to emotionally engaging the reader.
- A strong introduction is important to hook the reader. A strong conclusion should add resolution to the conflict and evoke the narrative's theme.

03: Illustration

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Illustration/Example Essay

03.1: Introduction to Illustration

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3.1: Introduction to Illustration/Example Essay

Illustration/Example

To illustrate means to show or demonstrate something clearly. An effective illustration essay clearly demonstrates and supports a point through the use of examples and/or evidence. Ultimately, you want the evidence to help the reader “see” your point, as one would see a good illustration in a magazine or on a website. The stronger your evidence is, the more clearly the reader will consider your point.

In this module, you will develop your skills in illustration/example writing.

Module Outcomes

After successfully completing this module, you should be able to:

1. Determine the purpose and structure of the illustration essay.
2. Understand how to write an illustration essay.

03.2: Writing for Success: Illustration

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3.2: Writing for Success: Illustration/Example

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This section will help you determine the purpose and structure of illustration/ example in writing.

The Purpose of Illustration in Writing

To illustrate means to show or demonstrate something clearly. An effective illustration essay, also known as an example essay, clearly demonstrates and supports a point through the use of evidence.

The controlling idea of an essay is called a thesis. A writer can use different types of evidence to support his or her thesis. Using scientific studies, experts in a particular field, statistics, historical events, current events, analogies, and personal anecdotes are all ways in which a writer can illustrate a thesis. Ultimately, you want the evidence to help the reader "see" your point, as one would see a good illustration in a magazine or on a website. The stronger your evidence is, the more clearly the reader will consider your point.

Using evidence effectively can be challenging, though. The evidence you choose will usually depend on your subject and who your reader is (your audience). When writing an illustration essay, keep in mind the following:

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

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

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

The Structure of an Illustration Essay

The controlling idea, or thesis, belongs at the beginning of the essay. Evidence is then presented in the essay's body paragraphs to support the thesis. You can start supporting your main point with your strongest evidence first, or you can start with evidence of lesser importance and have the essay build to increasingly stronger evidence. This type of organization is called "order of importance."

Transition words are also helpful in ordering the presentation of evidence. Words like first, second, third, currently, next, and finally all help orient the reader and sequence evidence clearly. Because an illustration essay uses so many examples, it is also helpful to have a list of words and phrases to present each piece of evidence. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed here:

Phrases of Illustration

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

Vary the phrases of illustration you use. Do not rely on just one. Variety in choice of words and phrasing is critical when trying to keep readers engaged in your writing and your ideas.

Writing an Illustration Essay

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

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

Illustration/Example Essay Example

Letter to the City

By Scott McLean in *Writing for Success*

To: Lakeview Department of Transportation

From: A Concerned Citizen

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

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

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

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

Each day that goes by without attention to this issue is a lost opportunity to save lives and make the community a safer, more enjoyable place to live. Because the safety of citizens is the priority of every government, I can only expect that the Department of Transportation and the City of Lakeview will act on this matter immediately. For the safety and well-being of Lakeview citizens, please do not let bureaucracy or money impede this urgent project.

Sincerely,

A Concerned Citizen

Key Takeaways

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

3.3: “She’s Your Basic L.O.L. in N.A.D” by Perri Klass

In “She’s Your Basic L.O.L. in N.A.D,” pediatrician and writer Perri Klass discusses the medical-speak she encountered in her training as a doctor and its underlying meaning.

Click on the link to view the essay: “She’s Your Basic L.O.L. in N.A.D” by Perri Klass

As you read, look for the following:

- The author’s primary thesis or theme
- The examples provided by each author to assert the theme
- See if you can determine which essay uses “multiple” examples (a series of brief examples to illustrate or assert the thesis) and which essay uses “extended” examples (longer examples explained through multiple sentences or paragraphs)

3.4: “April & Paris” by David Sedaris

In “April & Paris,” writer David Sedaris explores the unique impact of animals on the human psyche.

Click on the link to view the essay: “April & Paris” by David Sedaris

As you read, look for the following:

- The author’s primary thesis or theme
- The examples provided by the author to assert the theme
- See if you can determine which essay uses “multiple” examples (a series of brief examples to illustrate or assert the thesis) and which essay uses “extended” examples (longer examples explained through multiple sentences or paragraphs)

03.5: Student Sample: Illustration

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3.5: Student Sample: Illustration/Example Essay

Illustration/Example Essay Example

Letter to the City

To: Lakeview Department of Transportation

From: A Concerned Citizen

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

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

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

Each day that goes by without attention to this issue is a lost opportunity to save lives and make the community a safer, more enjoyable place to live. Because the safety of citizens is the priority of every government, I can only expect that the Department of Transportation and the City of Lakeview will act on this matter immediately. For the safety and well-being of Lakeview citizens, please do not let bureaucracy or money impede this urgent project.

Sincerely,

A Concerned Citizen

03.6: Grammar

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3.6: Grammar/Mechanics Mini-Lecture

To refresh your understanding of sentence fragments, review the videos below:

Sentence Fragments

http://youtu.be/VPyTT_81eUs

Sentence Fragments, How to Identify and Correct Them in Writing

http://youtu.be/Lb3WIj8DOfM

Sentences and Sentence Fragments

http://youtu.be/qewplmEd6F4

04: Compare

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Compare/Contrast Essay

04.1: Introduction to Compare

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4.1: Introduction to Compare/Contrast Essay

Comparison in writing discusses elements that are similar, while **contrast** in writing discusses elements that are different.

The key to a good compare-and-contrast essay is to choose two or more subjects that connect in a meaningful way. The purpose of conducting the comparison or contrast is not simply to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities. Through this process, the essay reveals insights that are interesting to the reader.

In this module, you will develop your skills in compare and contrast writing.

Module Outcomes

After successfully completing this module, you should be able to:

1. Determine the purpose and structure of the compare and contrast essay.
2. Understand how to write a compare and contrast essay.

4.2: “Disability” by Nancy Mairs

In *“Disability,”* writer Nancy Mairs discusses the experience of being a disabled person in a world focused on the able-bodied.

Click on the link to view the essay: “Disability,” by Nancy Mairs

As you read, look for the following:

- What “points for comparison” does the author use?
- How does the author go beyond the obvious similarities and differences to surface interesting ideas and insights?

4.3: “Friending, Ancient or Otherwise” by Alex Wright

In “Friending, Ancient or Otherwise,” writer Alex Wright explores the evolution and purpose of friendship in the age of social media.

Click on the link to view the essay: “Friending, Ancient or Otherwise” by Alex Wright

As you read, look for the following:

- What “points for comparison” does the author use?
- How does the author go beyond the obvious similarities and differences to surface interesting ideas and insights?

4.4: “A South African Storm” by Allison Howard

As you read, look for the following:

- What “points for comparison” does the author use?
- How does the author go beyond the obvious similarities and differences to surface interesting ideas and insights?

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

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

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

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

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

The people who are walking along this swath of tar road are black. Black people don’t live in this neighborhood—or in my town at all, for the most part. They work and board here as domestic workers, nannies, gardeners. Their families live in black townships and rural villages—some just outside of my town; others far away, in places like Venda.

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

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

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

But on the long walk home, positively soaked and smiling like a fool, I notice a car pulling over and a man yelling in Afrikaans to get in, get in. I look in the direction I’ve come from and several meters behind me is a woman with a baby tied to her back and an elderly man carrying bags, leading a young boy by the hand. On the road ahead, a woman about my age carries a parcel wrapped in plastic, balanced precariously on her head. There are maybe 20 people walking with me in my reverie of rain and they are black. And the man in the car is white and he’s gesturing frantically for me to get in. Why me? Why not the others? Because I’m white and it’s about race. Everything is about race here.

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

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

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

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

04.5: Writing for Success: Compare

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4.5: Writing for Success: Compare/Contrast

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This section will help you determine the purpose and structure of comparison/contrast in writing.

The Purpose of Compare/Contrast in Writing

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

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

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

The Structure of a Compare/Contrast Essay

The compare-and-contrast essay starts with a thesis that clearly states the two subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both and the reason for doing so. The thesis could lean more toward comparing, contrasting, or both. Remember, the point of comparing and contrasting is to provide useful knowledge to the reader. Take the following thesis as an example that leans more toward contrasting:

Thesis Statement: Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny.

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

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

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

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

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

Phrases of Comparison and Contrast

Comparison	Contrast
one similarity	one difference
another similarity	another difference
both	conversely
like	in contrast

Comparison	Contrast
likewise	unlike
similarly	while
in a similar fashion	whereas

Writing an Compare/Contrast Essay

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

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

After you finish analyzing the subjects, write a conclusion that summarizes the main points of the essay and reinforces your thesis.

Compare/Contrast Essay Example

Comparing and Contrasting London and Washington, DC

By Scott McLean in *Writing for Success*

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

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

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

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

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

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

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A compare-and-contrast essay analyzes two subjects by either comparing them, contrasting them, or both.
- The purpose of writing a comparison or contrast essay is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities between two subjects.
- The thesis should clearly state the subjects that are to be compared, contrasted, or both, and it should state what is to be learned from doing so.
- There are two main organizing strategies for compare-and-contrast essays.

1. Organize by the subjects themselves, one then the other.
2. Organize by individual points, in which you discuss each subject in relation to each point.

- Use phrases of comparison or phrases of contrast to signal to readers how exactly the two subjects are being analyzed.

04.6: Grammar

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4.6: Grammar/Mechanics Mini-Lecture

To refresh your understanding of run-on sentences and comma splice sentences, review the videos below:

Run-on Sentences

http://youtu.be/8_TiyaKtmXI

Comma Splices and How to Fix Them

http://youtu.be/SGqGWMoRJC0

How to Avoid Run-on Sentences

http://youtu.be/R2P9-JPAHN4

Identify and Fix Comma Splices

http://youtu.be/-vck6uK-kow

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Cause and Effect Essay

5.1: Introduction to Cause and Effect Essay

Cause and Effect

It is often considered human nature to ask, “why?” and “how?” We want to know how our child got sick so we can better prevent it from happening in the future. We want to know why a colleague received a pay raise because we want one as well. We want to know how much money we will save over the long term if we buy a hybrid car. These examples identify only a few of the relationships we think about in our lives, but each shows the importance of understanding cause and effect.

In this module, you will develop your skills in cause and effect writing.

Module Outcomes

After successfully completing this module, you should be able to:

1. Determine the purpose and structure of the cause and effect essay.
2. Understand how to write a cause and effect essay.

5.2: “Cultural Baggage” by Barbara Ehrenreich

Click on the link to view the essay: “Cultural Baggage” by Barbara Ehrenreich

As you read, first identify the author’s primary thesis or theme. Then identify the “causes” and/or “effects” that help reinforce the author’s thesis.

5.3: “Women in Science” by K.C. Cole

Click on the link to view the essay: “Women in Science” by K.C. Cole

As you read, first identify the author’s primary thesis or theme. Then identify the “causes” and/or “effects” that help reinforce the author’s thesis.

5.4: Writing for Success: Cause and Effect

This section will help you determine the purpose and structure of cause and effect in writing.

The Purpose of Cause and Effect in Writing

It is often considered human nature to ask, “why?” and “how?” We want to know how our child got sick so we can better prevent it from happening in the future, or why a colleague received a pay raise because we want one as well. We want to know how much money we will save over the long term if we buy a hybrid car, or how long we will live if we exercise daily. These examples identify only a few of the relationships we think about in our lives, but each shows the importance of understanding cause and effect.

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

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

The Structure of a Cause and Effect Essay

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

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

- Start with the cause and then talk about the effects.
- Start with the effect and then talk about the causes.

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

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

Because cause-and-effect essays determine how phenomena are linked, they make frequent use of certain words and phrases that denote such linkage. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed here:

Phrases of Causation

as a result	consequently
because	due to
hence	since
thus	therefore

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

Be careful of resorting to empty speculation. In writing, speculation amounts to unsubstantiated guessing. Writers are particularly prone to such trappings in cause-and-effect arguments due to the complex nature of finding links between phenomena. Be sure to have clear evidence to support the claims that you make.

Writing an Cause and Effect Essay

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

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

Use the phrases of causation when trying to forge connections between various events or conditions. This will help organize your ideas and orient the reader. End your essay with a conclusion that summarizes your main points and reinforces your thesis.

Cause and Effect Essay Example

Effects of Video Game Addiction

By Scott McLean

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

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

One common effect of video game addiction is isolation and withdrawal from social experiences. Video game players often hide in their homes or in Internet cafés for days at a time—only reemerging for the most pressing tasks and necessities. The effect of this isolation can lead to a breakdown of communication skills and often a loss in socialization. While it is true that many games, especially massive multiplayer online games, involve a very real form of e-based communication and coordination with others, and these virtual interactions often result in real communities that can be healthy for the players, these communities and forms of communication rarely translate to the types of valuable social interaction that humans need to maintain typical social functioning. As a result, the social networking in these online games often gives the users the impression that they are interacting socially, while their true social lives and personal relations may suffer.

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

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

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

Key Takeaways

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

5.5: Student Sample: Cause and Effect Essay

Cause and Effect Essay Example

Effects of Video Game Addiction

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05.6: Grammar

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5.6: Grammar/Mechanics Mini-Lecture

To refresh your understanding of how to correctly use commas, review the videos below:

How to Use Commas – Overview

http://youtu.be/keZpj7PjNEo

Using Commas Correctly

http://youtu.be/pOwcovqtkGY

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Using Sources

6.10: Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism

- How to Summarize: An Overview
- How to Quote and Paraphrase: An Overview
- When to Quote, When to Paraphrase
- Four Examples of Quotes and Paraphrases
- How to Avoid Plagiarism in the Research Process
- Plagiarism and the Internet

Learning how to effectively quote and paraphrase research can be difficult and it certainly takes practice. Hopefully, your abilities to make good use of your research will improve as you work through the exercises in part two and three of *The Process of Research Writing*, not to mention as you take on other research writing experiences beyond this class. The goal of this chapter is to introduce some basic strategies for summarizing, quoting and paraphrasing research in your writing and to explain how to avoid plagiarizing your research.

How to Summarize: An Overview

A summary is a brief explanation of a longer text. Some summaries, such as the ones that accompany annotated bibliographies, are very short, just a sentence or two. Others are much longer, though summaries are always much shorter than the text being summarized in the first place.

Summaries of different lengths are useful in research writing because you often need to provide your readers with an explanation of the text you are discussing. This is especially true when you are going to quote or paraphrase from a source.

Of course, the first step in writing a good summary is to do a thorough reading of the text you are going to summarize in the first place. Beyond that important start, there are a few basic guidelines you should follow when you write summary material:

- Stay "neutral" in your summarizing. Summaries provide "just the facts" and are not the place where you offer your opinions about the text you are summarizing. Save your opinions and evaluation of the evidence you are summarizing for other parts of your writing.
- Don't quote from what you are summarizing. Summaries will be more useful to you and your colleagues if you write them in your own words.
- Don't "cut and paste" from database abstracts. Many of the periodical indexes that are available as part of your library's computer system include abstracts of articles. Do no "cut" this abstract material and then "paste" it into your own annotated bibliography. For one thing, this is plagiarism. Second, "cutting and pasting" from the abstract defeats one of the purposes of writing summaries and creating an annotated bibliography in the first place, which is to help you understand and explain your research.

How to Quote and Paraphrase: An Overview

Writers quote and paraphrase from research in order to support their points and to persuade their readers. A quote or a paraphrase from a piece of evidence in support of a point answers the reader's question, "says who?"

This is especially true in academic writing since scholarly readers are most persuaded by effective research and evidence. For example, readers of an article about a new cancer medication published in a medical journal will be most interested in the scholar's research and statistics that demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatment. Conversely, they will not be as persuaded by emotional stories from individual patients about how a new cancer medication improved the quality of their lives. While this appeal to emotion can be effective and is common in popular sources, these individual anecdotes do not carry the same sort of "scholarly" or scientific value as well-reasoned research and evidence.

Of course, your instructor is not expecting you to be an expert on the topic of your research paper. While you might conduct some primary research, it's a good bet that you'll be relying on secondary sources such as books, articles, and Web sites to inform and persuade your readers. You'll present this research to your readers in the form of quotes and paraphrases.

A “quote” is a direct restatement of the exact words from the original source. The general rule of thumb is any time you use three or more words as they appeared in the original source, you should treat it as a quote. A “paraphrase” is a restatement of the information or point of the original source in your own words.

While quotes and paraphrases are different and should be used in different ways in your research writing (as the examples in this section suggest), they do have a number of things in common. Both quotes and paraphrases should:

- be “introduced” to the reader, particularly the first time you mention a source;
- include an explanation of the evidence which explains to the reader why you think the evidence is important, especially if it is not apparent from the context of the quote or paraphrase; and
- include a proper citation of the source.

The method you should follow to properly quote or paraphrase depends on the style guide you are following in your academic writing. The two most common style guides used in academic writing are the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the American Psychological Association (APA). I discuss both of these different style guides in some detail in the Appendix of this book. Your instructor will probably assign one of these styles before you begin working on your project, however, if he/she doesn’t mention this, be sure to ask.

When to Quote, When to Paraphrase

The real “art” to research writing is using quotes and paraphrases from evidence effectively in order to support your point. There are certain “rules,” dictated by the rules of style you are following, such as the ones presented by the MLA or the ones presented by the APA. There are certain “guidelines” and suggestions, like the ones I offer in the previous section and the ones you will learn from your teacher and colleagues.

But when all is said and done, the question of when to quote and when to paraphrase depends a great deal on the specific context of the writing and the effect you are trying to achieve. Learning the best times to quote and paraphrase takes practice and experience.

In general, **it is best to use a quote when**:

- **The exact words of your source are important for the point you are trying to make.** This is especially true if you are quoting technical language, terms, or very specific word choices.
- **You want to highlight your *agreement* with the author’s words**. If you agree with the point the author of the evidence makes and you like their exact words, use them as a quote.
- **You want to highlight your *disagreement* with the author’s words**. In other words, you may sometimes want to use a direct quote to indicate exactly what it is you disagree about. This might be particularly true when you are considering the antithetical positions in your research writing projects.

In general, **it is best to paraphrase when**:

- **There is no good reason to use a quote to refer to your evidence.** If the author’s exact words are not especially important to the point you are trying to make, you are usually better off paraphrasing the evidence.
- **You are trying to explain a particular a piece of evidence in order to explain or interpret it in more detail**. This might be particularly true in writing projects like critiques.
- **You need to balance a direct quote in your writing.** You need to be careful about directly quoting your research too much because it can sometimes make for awkward and difficult to read prose. So, one of the reasons to use a paraphrase instead of a quote is to create balance within your writing.

Tips for Quoting and Paraphrasing

- **Introduce** your quotes and paraphrases to your reader, especially on first reference.

- **Explain** the significance of the quote or paraphrase to your reader.
- **Cite** your quote or paraphrase properly according to the rules of style you are following in your essay.
- **Quote when** the exact words are important, when you want to highlight your agreement or your disagreement.
- **Paraphrase when** the exact words aren't important, when you want to explain the point of your evidence, or when you need to balance the direct quotes in your writing.

Four Examples of Quotes and Paraphrases

Here are four examples of what I mean about properly quoting and paraphrasing evidence in your research essays. In each case, I begin with a **BAD** example, or the way **NOT** to quote or paraphrase.

Quoting in MLA Style

Here's the first **BAD** example, where the writer is trying to follow the rules of MLA style:

> There are many positive effects for advertising prescription drugs on television. "African-American physicians regard direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines as one way to educate minority patients about needed treatment and healthcare options" (Wechsler, Internet).

This is a potentially good piece of information to support a research writer's claim, but the researcher hasn't done any of the necessary work to explain where this quote comes from or to explain why it is important for supporting her point. Rather, she has simply "dropped in" the quote, leaving the interpretation of its significance up to the reader.

Now consider this revised **GOOD** (or at least **BETTER**) example of how this quote might be better introduced into the essay:

> In her Pharmaceutical Executive article available through the Wilson Select Internet database, Jill Wechsler writes about one of the positive effects of advertising prescription drugs on television. "African-American physicians regard direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines as one way to educate minority patients about needed treatment and healthcare options."

In this revision, it's much more clear what point the writer is trying to make with this evidence and where this evidence comes from.

In this particular example, the passage is from a traditional print journal called *Pharmaceutical Executive*. However, the writer needs to indicate that she actually found and read this article through Wilson Select, an Internet database which reproduces the "full text" of articles from periodicals without any graphics, charts, or page numbers.

When you use a direct quote in your research, you need to the indicate page number of that direct quote or you need to indicate that the evidence has no specific page numbers. While it can be a bit awkward to indicate within the text how the writer found this information if it's from the Internet, it's important to do so on the first reference of a piece of evidence in your writing. On references to this piece of evidence after the first reference, you can use just the last name of the writer. For example:

> Wechsler also reports on the positive effects of advertising prescription drugs on television. She writes…

Paraphrasing in MLA Style

In this example, the writer is using MLA style to write a research essay for a Literature class. Here is a **BAD** example of a paraphrase:

> While Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, his love for her is indistinguishable from his love of his possessions (Callahan).

There are two problems with this paraphrase. First, if this is the first or only reference to this particular piece of evidence in the research essay, the writer should include more information about the source of this paraphrase in order to properly introduce it. Second, this paraphrase is actually not of the entire article but rather of a specific passage. The writer has neglected to note the page number within the parenthetical citation.

A **GOOD** or at least **BETTER** revision of this paraphrase might look like this:

> John F. Callahan suggests in his article "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream" that while Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, his love for her is indistinguishable from his love of his possessions (381).

By incorporating the name of the author of the evidence the research writer is referring to here, the source of this paraphrase is now clear to the reader. Furthermore, because there is a page number at the end of this sentence, the reader understands that this passage is a paraphrase of a particular part of Callahan's essay and not a summary of the entire essay. Again, if the research writer had introduced this source to his readers earlier, he could have started with a phrase like "Callahan suggests…" and then continued on with his paraphrase.

If the research writer were offering a brief summary of the entire essay following MLA style, he wouldn't include a page number in parentheses. For example:

> John F. Callahan's article "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream" examines Fitzgerald's fascination with the elusiveness of the American Dream in the novels *The Great Gatsby*, *Tender is the Night*, and *The Last Tycoon*.

Quoting in APA Style

Consider this **BAD** example in APA style, of what **NOT** to do when quoting evidence:

> "If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage." (Repetto, 2001, p. 84).

Again, this is a potentially valuable piece of evidence, but it simply isn't clear what point the research writer is trying to make with it. Further, it doesn't follow the preferred method of citation with APA style.

Here is a revision that is a **GOOD** or at least **BETTER** example:

> Repetto (2001) concludes that in the case of the scallop industry, those running the industry should be held responsible for not considering methods that would curtail the problems of over-fishing. "If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage" (p. 84).

This revision is improved because the research writer has introduced and explained the point of the evidence with the addition of a clarifying sentence. It also follows the rules of APA style. Generally, APA style prefers that the research writer refer to the author only by last name followed immediately by the year of publication. Whenever possible, you should begin your citation with the author's last name and the year of publication, and, in the case of a direct quote like this passage, the page number (including the "p.") in parentheses at the end.

Paraphrasing in APA Style

Paraphrasing in APA style is slightly different from MLA style as well. Consider first this **BAD** example of what NOT to do in paraphrasing from a source in APA style:

> Computer criminals have lots of ways to get away with credit card fraud (Cameron, 2002).

The main problem with this paraphrase is there isn't enough here to adequately explain to the reader what the point of the evidence really is. Remember: your readers have no way of automatically knowing why you as a research writer think that a particular piece of evidence is useful in supporting your point. This is why it is key that you introduce and explain your evidence.

Here is a revision that is **GOOD** or at least **BETTER**:

> Cameron (2002) points out that computer criminals intent on committing credit card fraud are able to take advantage of the fact that there aren't enough officials working to enforce computer crimes. Criminals are also able to use the technology to their advantage by communicating via email and chat rooms with other criminals.

Again, this revision is better because the additional information introduces and explains the point of the evidence. In this particular example, the author's name is also incorporated into the explanation of the evidence as well. In APA, it is preferable to weave in

the author's name into your essay, usually at the beginning of a sentence. However, it would also have been acceptable to end an improved paraphrase with just the author's last name and the date of publication in parentheses.

How to Avoid Plagiarism in the Research Process

Plagiarism is the unauthorized or uncredited use of the writings or ideas of another in your writing. While it might not be as tangible as auto theft or burglary, plagiarism is still a form of theft.

In the academic world, plagiarism is a serious matter because ideas in the forms of research, creative work, and original thought are highly valued. Chances are, your school has strict rules about what happens when someone is caught plagiarizing. The penalty for plagiarism is severe, everything from a failing grade for the plagiarized work, a failing grade for the class, or expulsion from the institution.

You might not be aware that plagiarism can take several different forms. The most well known, **purposeful plagiarism**, is handing in an essay written by someone else and representing it as your own, copying your essay word for word from a magazine or journal, or downloading an essay from the Internet.

A much more common and less understood phenomenon is what I call **accidental plagiarism**. Accidental plagiarism is the result of improperly paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting, or citing your evidence in your academic writing. Generally, writers accidentally plagiarize because they simply don't know or they fail to follow the rules for giving credit to the ideas of others in their writing.

Both purposeful and accidental plagiarism are wrong, against the rules, and can result in harsh punishments. Ignoring or not knowing the rules of how to not plagiarize and properly cite evidence might be an *explanation*, but it is not an excuse.

To exemplify what I'm getting at, consider the examples below that use quotations and paraphrases from this brief passage:

> Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties. Rock started out as an Anglo-American phenomenon and has become an industry. Nonetheless, it was able to capture the hopes of young people around the world and provided enjoyment to those of us who listened to or played rock. Sixties pop was the conscience of one or two generations that helped bring the war in Vietnam to a close. Obviously, neither rock nor pop has solved global poverty or hunger. But is this a reason to be "against" them? (ix).

And just to make it clear that *I'm* not plagiarizing this passage, here is the citation in MLA style:

Lévy, Pierre. Cyberculture. Trans. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.

Here's an obvious example of plagiarism:

> Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties.

In this case, the writer has literally taken one of Lévy's sentences and represented it as her own. That's clearly against the rules.

Here's another example of plagiarism, perhaps less obvious:

> The same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people.

While these aren't Lévy's exact words, they are certainly close enough to constitute a form of plagiarism. And again, even though you might think that this is a "lesser" form of plagiarism, it's still plagiarism.

Both of these passages can easily be corrected to make them acceptable quotations or paraphrases.

> **In the introduction of his book Cyberculture, Pierre Lévy observes that** "Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties" **(ix)**.

> **Pierre Lévy suggests** that the same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people **(ix)**.

Note that changing these passages from examples of plagiarism to acceptable examples of a quotation and a paraphrase is extremely easy: properly cite your sources.

This leads to the “golden rule” of avoiding plagiarism:

Always cite your sources. If you are unsure as to whether you should or should not cite a particular claim or reference, you should probably cite your source.

Often, students are unclear as to whether or not they need to cite a piece of evidence because they believe it to be “common knowledge” or because they are not sure about the source of information. When in doubt about whether or not to cite evidence in order to give credit to a source (“common knowledge” or not), you should cite the evidence.

Plagiarism and the Internet

Sometimes, I think the ease of finding and retrieving information on the World Wide Web makes readers think that this information does not need to be cited. After all, it isn’t a traditional source like a book or a journal; it is available for “free.” All a research writer needs to do with a web site is “cut and paste” whatever he needs into his essay, right? Wrong!

You need to cite the evidence you find from the Internet or the World Wide Web the same way you cite evidence from other sources. To not do this is plagiarism, or, more bluntly, cheating. Just because the information is “freely” available on the Internet does not mean you can use this information in your academic writing without properly citing it, much in the same way that the information from library journals and books “freely” available to you needs to be cited in order to give credit where credit is due.

It is also not acceptable to simply download graphics from the World Wide Web. Images found on the Internet are protected by copyright laws. Quite literally, taking images from the Web (particularly from commercial sources) is an offense that could lead to legal action. There are places where you can find graphics and clip art that Web publishers have made publicly available for anyone to use, but be sure that the Web site where you find the graphics makes this explicit before you take graphics as your own.

In short, you can use evidence from the Web as long as you don’t plagiarize and as long as you properly cite it; don’t take graphics from the Web unless you know the images are in the public domain.

6.11: Avoiding Plagiarism

How to Avoid Plagiarizing

Tip #1: Make Sure You Are Very Certain about What Is and is Not Plagiarism

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Tip #2: Give Yourself Plenty of Time to Complete an Assignment

Running out of time on an assignment is a main cause of plagiarism. Rushing to meet a deadline can result in carelessness (leading to unintentional plagiarism – see the next tip) and the desire to find a quick, easy solution such as copying someone else's work. Don't give in to that temptation! Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and the chance of being caught (which is likely) is not worth it.

Avoid this situation entirely by starting your assignment far ahead of time and planning out when you will complete each phase of the writing process. Even if your teacher does not require you to turn in materials for each stage of the writing process (i.e. brainstorming, creating a thesis statement, outlining, drafting, revising, etc.), set your own personal deadlines for each step along the way and make sure to give yourself more than enough time to finish everything.

Tip #3: Document Everything

Plagiarism isn't always a conscious choice. Sometimes it can be unintentional, typically resulting from poor documentation of one's sources during the research phase. For example, sometimes students will write down an idea from a source using words identical to or very close to those in the original, but then when they go to write their paper forget that the material was not already in their own words. Adopting good research habits can prevent this type of plagiarism.

Print, photocopy, or scan the relevant pages of every source you are using (including the title and copyright pages, since they have the information you need for a bibliographic citation). When taking notes by hand (or typed into a file), list the bibliographic information for each source you use. Make sure to put quotation marks around any wordings taken directly from the source (and note the page where you found it), and remember to put everything else into your own words right away, so there is no danger of forgetting something is a quote. Documenting where all of your ideas, information, quotations, and so on come from is an important step in avoiding plagiarism.

Tip #4: Don't Include Too Much Material Taken from Other Sources

Tips for integrating sources into your research.

Writing assignments are about your ideas, your interpretations, and your ability to synthesize information. You should use relevant sources to support your ideas using evidence such as quotes, paraphrases, and summaries, as well as statistics and other data. But don't lose sight of the fact that your argument is central! Including too much material from other sources can result in a paper that feels like it has been pasted together from a variety of authors, rather than a cohesive essay. Such papers also run a much higher risk of setting off plagiarism warnings in SafeAssign or other plagiarism-detecting software. Try to find a balance: use enough evidence from credible sources to prove your points but don't let the ideas of others take the place of your own thoughts.

Tip #5: When in Doubt, Give a Citation

There are certain types of information – typically referred to as common knowledge – that don't require a citation when you include them in your writing. These are facts that are widely known and can be easily found in a number of sources. They are not ideas that originated with one particular source. Examples include scientific facts (for example, that solid, liquid, and gas are three states of matter), general historical information (for example, that George Washington was the first US president), or even information commonly known to certain groups of people but not others (for example, most musicians know that a C major triad includes the notes C, E, and G, even though many non-musicians would have no idea what a C major triad is).

For everything else, you need to include a citation, regardless of whether you are quoting directly from the source, paraphrasing it, or giving a summary. If you are at all unsure whether something qualifies as common knowledge or not, give a citation. You can also consult a more experienced figure in your field, such as your instructor, to find out if something counts as common knowledge or not.

In academic writing, the **"Quote Sandwich" approach** is useful for incorporating other writers' voices into your essays. It gives meaning and context to a quote, and helps you avoid plagiarism. This 3-step approach offers your readers a deeper understanding of what the quote is and how it relates to your essay's goals.

1. **Step 1***:* Provide context for the source. If you haven't used it yet in the essay, tell us the source's title and author (if known), and any other information that's relevant, like the purpose of the organization that published it, for instance.
2. **Step 2:** Provide the quote itself. Be sure to format correctly and use quotation marks around exact language.
3. **Step 3***:* Provide a summary and/or analysis of what the quote says, and how it relates to the subject matter of your essay and your thesis.

6.12: How to Write a Summary by Paraphrasing Source Material

When you paraphrase material from a source, you restate the information from an entire sentence or passage in your own words, using your own original sentence structure. A paraphrased source differs from a summarized source in that you focus on restating the ideas, not condensing them.

It is important to check your paraphrase against the source material to make sure it is both accurate and original. Inexperienced writers sometimes use the thesaurus method of paraphrasing—that is, they simply rewrite the source material, replacing most of the words with synonyms. This constitutes a misuse of sources. A true paraphrase restates ideas using the writer's own language and style.

Review the videos below about developing paraphrasing skills with writing:

Instruction on how to paraphrase:

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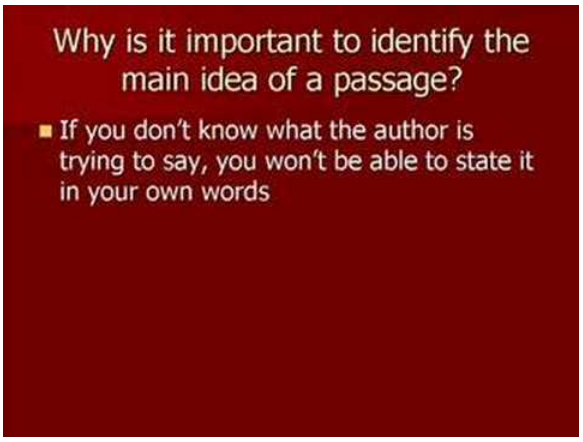
How to avoid plagiarism when paraphrasing a text:



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Paraphrase Writing Format

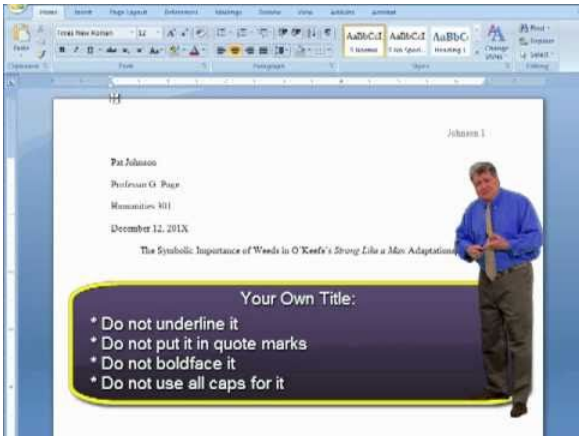
- **REMEMBER: IN THIS ASSIGNMENT, YOU SHOULD *PARAPHRASE* THE "WORD FOR WORD" PASSAGES THAT YOU CHOOSE. Follow the instructions below:**

- Write a Summary the way you always have, i.e., selecting “word-for-word” passages from the essay included in this module. Cite the page numbers in parentheses as you have up to now.
- Make a copy of your summary and place it below the original. Go into the copy of your summary and *try to paraphrase each “word-for-word” passage that you cited.*
- When writing a summary, remember that it should be in the form of a paragraph.
- A summary begins with an introductory sentence that states the text’s title, author and main point of the text as you see it.
- A summary is written in your own words.
- A summary contains only the ideas of the original text. Do not insert any of your own opinions, interpretations, deductions or comments into a summary.
- Identify in order the significant sub-claims the author uses to defend the main point.
- Using source material from the essay is important. Why? Because defending claims with source material is what you will be asked to do when writing papers for your college professors.
- Write a last sentence that “wraps” up your summary; often a simple rephrasing of the main point.

Example Paraphrase Writing Format

In the essay *Santa Ana*, author Joan Didion’s main point is (*state main point*). According to Didion …*PARAPHRASE 1*…”. Didion also CLAIMS… PARAPHRASE *2*…”. Finally, she CLAIMS “…*PARAPHRASE 3*…” Write a last sentence that “wraps” up your summary; often a simple rephrasing of the main point.

6.13: MLA Format



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Formatting the Works Cited Page (MLA)

Whenever you incorporate outside sources into your own writing, you must provide both in-text citations (within the body of the paper) and full citations (in the works cited page). The in-text citations point your reader toward the full citations in the works cited page.

That's why the first bit of information in your in-text citation (generally, the author's name; if no name is provided, the title of the article/book/webpage) should directly match up with the beginning of your works cited entry for that source. For further information about in-text citations, please read "Formatting In-Text Citations."

For example, let's say I have a quote from Benedict Anderson's
Imagined Communities in my research paper. Within the body of the paper, following the quote, I include the following in-text citation: (Anderson 56). This information points to the book's entry in my works cited page:

Anderson, Benedict.
Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

Read more…

Formatting In-text Citations (MLA)

How might you format your in-text citations so that they're more compliant with MLA guidelines?

You already know why MLA formatting guidelines are an important part of an academic paper, but let's face it—who can remember all those rules about when and where certain citation information is requisite and when and where particular punctuation is appropriate? Thankfully, memorizing all of MLA's formatting guidelines is not necessary! MLA style guides can be found easily online or in texts like
The MLA Handbook, and writers can refer to these resources when they are unclear about a particular MLA style guideline.

Nonetheless, as you create multiple drafts of your composition papers, there are some MLA conventions that you will need to call on time and time again. In particular, as you integrate source material masterfully into your work, you will be required to call on proper in-text citation guidelines repeatedly. It is therefore important that you take the time to memorize the MLA guidelines for in-text citations.

Read more…

MLA Checklist

- Is the heading in the upper left-hand corner of the first page?
- Does the heading include:
  - Your name?
  - Your instructor's name?
  - The course name?
  - The date?
- Does the paper have an original title (other than something like "Final Paper")?
  - Is the title presented without being bolded, italicized, or placed in quotation marks
- Read more…

MLA Template

Read more…

Exercise: In-text Citations (MLA)

Look at the sentences below, each of which contains an incorrectly formatted in-text citation. Specify the error made in each sentence; then, write a new sentence in which the in-text citation is correctly formatted.

1. The parlor metaphor of writing describes writing as entering into a conversation, as in arriving late and a parlor and talking to guests who have been there long before you have (7).

2. In "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love," Jim Corder explains that "Everyone is an argument." (1)

3. David Sedaris's
Me Talk Pretty One Day takes place at a school in Paris (Sedaris 1).

Read more…

6.14: Formatting the Works Cited Page (MLA)

Whenever you incorporate outside sources into your own writing, you must provide both in-text citations (within the body of the paper) and full citations (in the works cited page). The in-text citations point your reader toward the full citations in the works cited page.

That's why the first bit of information in your in-text citation (generally, the author's name; if no name is provided, the title of the article/book/webpage) should directly match up with the beginning of your works cited entry for that source.

For example, let's say I have a quote from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* in my research paper. Within the body of the paper, following the quote, I include the following in-text citation: (Anderson 56). This information points to the book's entry in my works cited page:

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

When your reader sees the in-text citation in your essay, she may decide that the source might be valuable for her own research. When she looks at the works cited page, she can easily locate the source (because the works cited page is alphabetized and because she has the in-text citation as her referent) and then can use the full citation to retrieve a copy of the source for her own research. But aside from providing the reader with resources for her own research, the works cited page serves another function: it establishes the writer's credibility. If a writer fails to include in-text citations and/or a works cited page, that writer has plagiarized because he or she has neglected to provide the publication information of the source. In addition, when a reader locates undocumented information in an essay, she will likely think that the information was made up by the writer or that the information was stolen from a source, or plagiarized. And when a reader peruses a writer's works cited page, she can see the types of sources used by the writer, assessing those sources in terms of their credibility. For instance, if a reader reads my works cited page and sees I cite sources from university presses such as Oxford UP and Cambridge UP, she will know that I've incorporated credible sources into my research paper. Thus, including both in-text citations and a works cited page in a research paper provides the writer with ethos, or credibility.

Now let's take a look at how to properly format a works cited page according to MLA guidelines:

Yirinec 38

Works Cited

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

Boucicault, Dion. "Jessie Brown; or, The Relief of Lucknow." *Plays by Dion Boucicault*. Ed Peter Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. Print.

Bratlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988. Print.

Carens, Timothy. *Outlandish English Subjects in the Victorian Domestic Novel*. Cambridge: Palgrave, 2005. Print.

Collins, Wilkie. *The Moonstone*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002. Print.

Darwin, Charles. *The Voyage of the Beagle*. New York: Modern Library, 2001. Print.

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. *The Sign of the Four*. London: Aziloth Books, 2010. Print.

Haggard, H. Rider. *She*. Breinigsville, PA: Dodo, 2011. Print.

Herbert, Christopher. *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma. Princeton*: Princeton UP, 2008. Print.

Placement

According to MLA guidelines, the works cited page should appear after the body of your paper and any accompanying endnotes. It should begin on a new page, and the pagination should continue from the body of the paper. In the above example, the works cited page begins on page 38, which means that the essay concluded on page 37.

General Format

The works cited page should be double-spaced throughout. The first line of each entry should be flush with the left margin; if the entry extends more than one line, ensuing lines should be indented 1/2 inch from the left margin. The first page of the works cited list should have the title "Works Cited," not "Bibliography." The works cited title should appear in the same manner as the paper's title: capitalized and centered—not bolded, within quotation marks, italicized, underlined, or in a larger font.

Entries

The entries should be alphabetized based on the author's last name. According to MLA guidelines, author names come first in an entry, then titles, then the publication information (city of publication, publisher, and date of publication), and then the type of media—the details for different types of sources vary, but this is the general structure followed. Note that if the city is not "well-known" and there is more than one city with that name, unlike New York and London, then the state or territory should be included after the city, e.g., "Roswell, GA: 2006." If no name is provided for a given source, the title of the work/webpage will take the place of the author's last name and should still be placed in its proper alphabetical location. Also note that "university" and "press" are always abbreviated "U" and "P" in works cited entries.

Here are some guidelines for commonly used sources:

Single-Authored Book

Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Place of Publication: Publisher, Date of Publication. Type of media.

Example:

Bratlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism*, 1830–1914. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988. Print.

Book with Multiple Authors

Last Name, First Name (of first author listed), and First Name Last Name (of second author, etc.).
Title of Book. Place of Publication: Publisher, Date of Publication. Type of media.

Example:

Sabherhagen, Fred, and James V. Hart. *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Francis Ford Coppola Film*. New York: Signet, 1992. Print.

Article or Chapter in an Edited Collection (or Textbook)

Last Name, First Name. "Article Title." *Title of Book*. Ed. First Name Last Name (of Editor). Place of Publication: Publisher, Date of Publication. Page Range of Article. Type of Media.

Example:

Vieregge, Quentin. "Writing as Process." *Negotiating Writing Spaces*. Ed. Jennifer Yirinec and Lauren Cutlip. Plymouth, MI: Hayden-McNeil, 2011. 57–59. Print.

Article in a Print Journal

Last Name, First Name. "Article Title." *Title of Journal*. Volume #.Issue # (Date of publication): Page Range of Article. Print.

Example:

Rogers, Pat. "Crusoe's Home." *Essays in Criticism* 24.4 (Oct. 1974): 375–90. Print.

Journal Article Accessed Using an Electronic Database

Last Name, First Name. "Article Title." *Journal Name* Volume #.Issue # (Date of publication): Page Range of Article. *Database*. Web. Date of Access.

Example:

Lamont, Rose C. "Coma versus Comma: John Donne's Holy Sonnets in Edson's *WIT*." *The Massachusetts Review* 40.4 (Winter 1999–2000): 569–75. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 April 2012.

Article Accessed from an Online Journal

Last Name, First Name. “Article Title.” *Journal Name* Volume #.Issue # (Date of publication): n.pag. Web. Date of Access.

Example:

Haynsworth, Leslie. “All the Detective’s Men: Binary Coding of Masculine Identity in the Sherlock Holmes Stories.” *Victorians Institute Journal 38* (2010): n.pag. Web. 16 May 2012.

Article from a Webpage

Last Name, First Name (if given). “Title of Webpage.” *Website Title*. Publisher of website (often found at the bottom of the page), date of last update. Web. Date of Access. See (URL is only necessary if you think your reader won’t easily be able to locate the webpage).

Example:

“Opening Night: Wit Starring Cynthia Nixon.” *Broadway.com.* Broadway.com, Inc., 2012. Web. 12 Feb. 2012.

Entire Website

Website Title. Publisher of website, date of last update. Date of Access. See (URL is only necessary if you think your reader won’t easily be able to locate the webpage).

Example:

Broadway.com. Broadway.com, Inc., 2012. Web. 12 Feb. 2012.

For information about how to format the works cited entries for different sources, consult The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th edition). Or, consult the
Purdue OWL.

6.15: Citing Paraphrases and Summaries (APA)

How should a paraphrased passage be cited?

When paraphrasing a passage, it is essential to express the ideas of the author in your own original words; however, the author's message and meaning should always be preserved.

Charges of plagiarism can be avoided by including the proper citation of the work you are drawing from in your paraphrase. The APA requires a paraphrase to include the author's last name and the work's year of publication, but also suggests that the page number of the original text be included.

Let's look at an example of a cited paraphrase:

Original text: "A yellow flower is yellow because it reflects yellow light and absorbs other wavelengths. The red glass of a stained glass window is red because it transmits red light and absorbs other wavelengths. The process by which we perceive the colours of natural objects around us can therefore be described as a 'subtractive' process" (Pender, 1998, p. 14). [1]

Paraphrase: Pender explains that through *subtractive process*, humans see the color of objects based on the wavelengths of light that are absorbed by each object (Pender, 1998, p. 14). [1]

> ***Note:*** *The paraphrase maintains the ideas of the original passage while expressing the message in a new voice. The original author is also cited properly.*

How should a summarized passage or work be cited?

When summarizing a passage or work from another writer, briefly outline in your own original words the major ideas presented in the source material. As brevity is the key feature of a summary, it is essential to express the main concepts of the original passage in as concise a manner as possible. Consider using a summary—rather than a short or block quotation—when preserving the original wording of the source material is not necessary for the reader to understand the ideas under discussion.

Let's look at an example of a cited summary:

Original text: "In their everyday life, people generally assume that they see the world around them the way it really is. When camping in Colorado, hikers believe they see the horizon as dotted with snow-covered mountaintops. When laying on the beach in North Carolina, sunbathers believe they see pelicans flying above the breaking waves. And these people would nearly always be right. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine *not*believing that the sights and sounds delivered to conscious awareness by perceptual systems are accurate renderings of the outside world. It would be difficult to know how to act if one could not trust one's senses to accurately report what the world outside is like" (Balcetis, 2010, p. 77). [2]

Summary: In *Social Psychology of Visual Perception*, Balcetis (2010) argues that because humans rely on the sensory information received from their body, they form preconceived beliefs about their surroundings that manifest as imaginary visual occurrences (p. 77). [2]

> ***Note:*** *The summary maintains the ideas of the original passage while concisely expressing its main concepts. The original author is also cited properly.*

How should multiple sources be cited in a single parenthetical reference?

If multiple works need to be cited in the same set of parentheses, simply arrange them in alphabetical order by the author's last names, or the order in which they would be listed in the References page. Use a semicolon to separate each work from the next one.

Let's look at an example of multiple authors being cited:

In the past thirty years, Parkinson's disease has been written about extensively by recognized figures in the field (Dorros, 1989; Duvoisin, 1991; Hauser & Zesiewicz, 1996). [3][4][5]

> ***Note:*** *This example includes the in-text citations of three works arranged in alphabetical order by authors' names, separated by semi-colons, and enclosed in parentheses.*

See also:

- Formatting In-text Citations (APA)

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[1] Pender, K. (1998). *Digital colour in graphic design*. Burlington, VT: Elsevier Science & Technology.

[2] Balcetis, E. (2010). *Social psychology of visual perception*. Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis.

[3] Dorros, S. (1989). *Parkinson's: A patient's view*. Cabin John, MD: Seven Locks Press.

[4] Duvoisin, R. C. (1991). *Parkinson's disease: A guide for patient and family*. New York, NY: Raven Press.

[5] Hauser, R. A., & Zesiewicz, T. A. (1996). *Parkinson's disease: Questions and answers*. Coral Springs, FL: Merit.
