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## ENGL 1301 - English Composition I - Language and Communication

Glenn Shaheen

*Prairie View A&M University, glshaheen@pvamu.edu*

Ymitri Mathison

*Prairie View A&M University, yjmathison@pvamu.edu*

DeLinda Marzette -Stuckey

*Prairie View A&M University, demarzette@pvamu.edu*

Richard Schmitt

*Prairie View A&M University, raschmitt@pvamu.edu*

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# English Composition I

Edited By:

Glenn Shaheen, Ymitri Mathison, DeLinda Marzette-Stuckey, Baomei Lin, and Richard Schmitt

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## **Resources:**

[Writing For Success](#)

[Let's Get Writing!](#)

[English Composition: Connect, Collaborate, Communicate](#)

[Writing Guide With Handbook](#)

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# Chapter 1

## Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

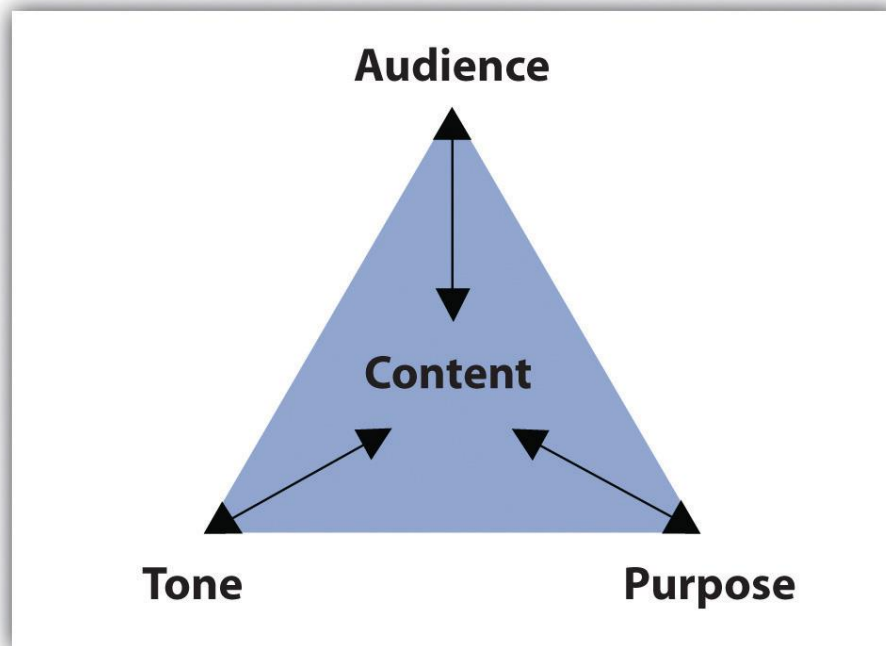
Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you are reading a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author has to say very quickly. During the writing process, it is helpful to position yourself as a reader. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. One technique that effective writers use is to begin a fresh paragraph for each new idea they introduce.

Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks. One paragraph focuses on only one main idea and presents coherent sentences to support that one point. Because all the sentences in one paragraph support the same point, a paragraph may stand on its own. To create longer assignments and to discuss more than one point, writers group together paragraphs.

Three elements shape the content of each paragraph:

1. Purpose. The reason the writer composes the paragraph.
2. Tone. The attitude the writer conveys about the paragraph's subject.
3. Audience. The individual or group whom the writer intends to address.

Figure 6.1 Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content Triangle



The assignment's purpose, audience, and tone dictate what the paragraph covers and how it will support one main point. This section covers how purpose, audience, and tone affect reading and writing paragraphs.

## Identifying Common Academic Purposes

The purpose for a piece of writing identifies the reason you write a particular document. Basically, the purpose of a piece of writing answers the question "Why?" For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theater. Why write instructions to the babysitter? To inform him or her of your schedule and rules. Why write a letter to your congressman? To persuade him to address your community's needs.

In academic settings, the reasons for writing fulfill four main purposes: to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate. You will encounter these four purposes not only as you read for your classes but also as you read for work or pleasure. Because reading and writing work together, your writing skills will improve as you read.

Eventually, your instructors will ask you to complete assignments specifically designed to meet one of the four purposes. As you will see, the purpose for writing will guide you through each part of the paper, helping you make decisions about content and style. For now, identifying these purposes by reading paragraphs will prepare you to write individual paragraphs and to build longer assignments.

## Summary Paragraphs

A summary shrinks a large amount of information into only the essentials. You probably summarize events, books, and movies daily. Think about the last blockbuster movie you saw or the last novel you read. Chances are, at some point in a casual conversation with a friend, coworker, or classmate, you compressed all the action in a two-hour film or in a two-hundred-page book into a brief description of the major plot movements. While in conversation, you probably described the major highlights, or the main points in just a few sentences, using your own vocabulary and manner of speaking.

Similarly, a summary paragraph condenses a long piece of writing into a smaller paragraph by extracting only the vital information. A summary uses only the writer's own words. Like the summary's purpose in daily conversation, the purpose of an academic summary paragraph is to maintain all the essential information from a longer document. Although shorter than the original piece of writing, a summary should still communicate all the key points and key support. In other words, summary paragraphs should be succinct and to the point.

### Sample Longer Piece of Writing

According to the Monitoring the Future Study, almost two-thirds of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students reported having tried alcohol at least once in their lifetime, and two-fifths

reported having been drunk at least once (Johnston et al. 2006x). Among 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students, these rates had risen to over three-quarters who reported having tried alcohol at least once. In terms of current alcohol use, 33.2 percent of the Nation's 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 47.0 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported having used alcohol at least once in the past 30 days; 17.6 percent and 30.2 percent, respectively, reported having been drunk in the past 30 days; 21.0 percent and 28.1 percent, respectively, reported having had five or more drinks in a row in the past 2 weeks (sometimes called binge drinking); and 1.3 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively, reported daily alcohol use (Johnston et al, 2006a).

Alcohol consumption continues to escalate after high school. In fact, eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds have the highest levels of alcohol consumption and alcohol dependence of any age group. In the first 2 years after high school, lifetime prevalence of alcohol use (based on 2005 follow-up surveys from the Monitoring the Future Study) was 81.8 percent, 30-day use prevalence was 59 percent, and binge-drinking prevalence was 36.3 percent (Johnston et al. 2006b). Of note, college students on average drink more than their noncollege peers, even though they drank less during high school than those who did not go on to college (Johnston et al. 2006a,b; Schulenberg and Maggs 2002). For example, in 2005, the rate of binge drinking for college students (1 to 4 years beyond high school) was 40.1 percent, whereas the rate for their noncollege age mates was 35.1 percent.

Alcohol use and problem drinking in late adolescence vary by sociodemographic characteristics. For example, the prevalence of alcohol use is higher for boys than for girls, higher for White and Hispanic adolescents than for African American adolescents, and higher for those living in the north and north central United States than for those living in the South and West. Some of these relationships change with early adulthood, however. For example, although alcohol use in high school tends to be higher in areas with lower population density (i.e., rural areas) than in more densely populated areas, this relationship reverses during early adulthood (Jonston et al., 2006 a,b). Lower economic status (i.e., lower educational level of parents) is associated with more alcohol use during the early high school years; by the end of high school, and during the transition to adulthood, this relationship changes, and youth from higher socioeconomic backgrounds consume greater amounts of alcohol.

A summary of the report should present all the main points and supporting details in brief. Read the following summary of the report written by a student:

Brown et al. inform us that by tenth grade, nearly two-thirds of students have tried alcohol at least once, and by twelfth grade this figure increases to over three-quarters of students. After high school, alcohol consumption increases further, and college-aged students have the highest levels of alcohol consumption and dependence of any age group. Alcohol use varies according to factors such as gender, race, geographic location, and socioeconomic status.



Some of these trends may reverse in early adulthood. For example, adolescents of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to consume alcohol during high school years, whereas youth from higher socioeconomic status are more likely to consume alcohol in the years after high school

Notice how the summary retains the key points made by the writers of the original report but omits most of the statistical data. Summaries need not contain all the specific facts and figures in the original document; they provide only an overview of the essential information.

## Analysis Paragraphs

An analysis separates complex materials in their different parts and studies how the parts relate to one another. The analysis of simple table salt, for example, would require a deconstruction of its parts—the elements sodium (Na) and chloride (Cl). Then, scientists would study how the two elements interact to create the compound NaCl, or sodium chloride, which is also called simple table salt.

Analysis is not limited to the sciences, of course. An analysis paragraph in academic writing fulfills the same purpose. Instead of deconstructing compounds, academic analysis paragraphs typically deconstruct documents. An analysis takes apart a primary source (an essay, a book, an article, etc.) point by point. It communicates the main points of the document by examining individual points and identifying how the points relate to one another.

Take a look at a student's analysis of the journal report.

At the beginning of their report, Brown et al. use specific data regarding the use of alcohol by high school students and college-aged students, which is supported by several studies. Later in the report, they consider how various socioeconomic factors influence problem drinking in adolescence. The latter part of the report is far less specific and does not provide statistics or examples.

The lack of specific information in the second part of the report raises several important questions. Why are teenagers in rural high schools more likely to drink than teenagers in urban areas? Where do they obtain alcohol? How do parental attitudes influence this trend? A follow-up study could compare several high schools in rural and urban areas to consider these issues and potentially find ways to reduce teenage alcohol consumption.

Notice how the analysis does not simply repeat information from the original report but considers how the points within the report relate to one another. By doing this, the student uncovers a discrepancy between the points that are backed up by statistics and those that require additional information. Analyzing a document involves a close examination of each of the individual parts and how they work together.

## Synthesis Paragraphs

A synthesis combines two or more items to create an entirely new item. Consider the electronic musical instrument aptly named the synthesizer. It looks like a simple keyboard but displays a dashboard of switches, buttons, and levers. With the flip of a few switches, a musician may combine the distinct sounds of a piano, a flute, or a guitar—or any other combination of instruments—to create a new sound. The purpose of the synthesizer is to blend together the notes from individual instruments to form new, unique notes.

The purpose of an academic synthesis is to blend individual documents into a new document. An academic synthesis paragraph considers the main points from one or more pieces of writing and links the main points together to create a new point, one not replicated in either document.

Take a look at a student's synthesis of several sources about underage drinking.

In their 2009 report, Brown et al. consider the rates of alcohol consumption among high school and college-aged students and various sociodemographic factors that affect these rates. However, this report is limited to assessing the rates of underage drinking, rather than considering methods of decreasing these rates. Several other studies, as well as original research among college students, provide insight into how these rates may be reduced.

One study, by Spoth, Greenberg, and Turrise (2009) considers the impact of various types of interventions as a method for reducing alcohol consumption among minors. They conclude that although family-focused interventions for adolescents aged ten to fifteen have shown promise, there is a serious lack of interventions available for college-aged students who do not attend college. These students are among the highest risk level for alcohol abuse, a fact supported by Brown et al.

I did my own research and interviewed eight college students, four men and four women. I asked them when they first tried alcohol and what factors encouraged them to drink. All four men had tried alcohol by the age of thirteen. Three of the women had also tried alcohol by thirteen and the fourth had tried alcohol by fifteen. All eight students said that peer pressure, boredom, and the thrill of trying something illegal were motivating factors. These results support the research of Brown et al. However, they also raise an interesting point. If boredom is a motivating factor for underage drinking, maybe additional after school programs or other community measures could be introduced to dissuade teenagers from underage drinking. Based on my sources, further research is needed to show true preventative measures for teenage alcohol consumption

Notice how the synthesis paragraphs consider each source and use information from each to create a new thesis. A good synthesis does not repeat information; the writer uses a variety of sources to create a new idea.

## Evaluation Paragraphs

An evaluation judges the value of something and determines its worth. Evaluations in everyday experiences are often not only dictated by set standards but also influenced by opinion and prior knowledge. For example, at work, a supervisor may complete an employee evaluation by judging his subordinate's performance based on the company's goals. If the company focuses on improving communication, the supervisor will rate the employee's customer service according to a standard scale. However, the evaluation still depends on the supervisor's opinion and prior experience with the employee. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine how well the employee performs at his or her job.

An academic evaluation communicates your opinion, and its justifications, about a document or a topic of discussion. Evaluations are influenced by your reading of the document, your prior knowledge, and your prior experience with the topic or issue. Because an evaluation incorporates your point of view and reasons for your point of view, it typically requires more critical thinking and a combination of summary, analysis, and synthesis skills. Thus, evaluation paragraphs often follow summary, analysis, and synthesis paragraphs. Read a student's evaluation paragraph.

Throughout their report, Brown et al. provide valuable statistics that highlight the frequency of alcohol use among high school and college students. They use several reputable sources to support their points. However, the report focuses solely on the frequency of alcohol use and how it varies according to sociodemographic factors. Other sources, such as Spoth, Greenberg, and Turrisi's study (2009) and the survey I conducted among college students, examine the reasons for alcohol use among young people and offer suggestions as to how to reduce the rates. Nonetheless, I think that Brown et al. offer a useful set of statistics from which to base further research into alcohol use among high school and college students.

Notice how the paragraph incorporates the student's personal judgment within the evaluation. Evaluating a document requires prior knowledge that is often based on additional research.

### Tip

When reviewing directions for assignments, look for the verbs *summarize*, *analyze*, *synthesize*, or *evaluate*. Instructors often use these words to clearly indicate the assignment's purpose. These words will cue you on how to complete the assignment because you will know its exact purpose.

### Exercise 1

Read the following paragraphs about four films and then identify the purpose of each paragraph.

1. This film could easily have been cut down to less than two hours. By the final scene, I noticed that most of my fellow moviegoers were snoozing in their seats and were barely paying attention to what was happening on screen. Although the director sticks diligently to the book, he tries too hard to cram in all the action, which is just too ambitious for such a detail-oriented story. If you want my advice, read the book and give the movie a miss.
2. During the opening scene, we learn that the character Laura is adopted and that she has spent the past three years desperately trying to track down her real parents. Having exhausted all the usual options—adoption agencies, online searches, family trees, and so on—she is on the verge of giving up when she meets a stranger on a bus. The chance encounter leads to a complicated chain of events that ultimately result in Laura getting her lifelong wish. But is it really what she wants? Throughout the rest of the film, Laura discovers that sometimes the past is best left where it belongs.
3. To create the feeling of being gripped in a vice, the director, May Lee, uses a variety of elements to gradually increase the tension. The creepy, haunting melody that subtly enhances the earlier scenes becomes ever more insistent, rising to a disturbing crescendo toward the end of the movie. The desperation of the actors, combined with the claustrophobic atmosphere and tight camera angles create a realistic firestorm, from which there is little hope of escape. Walking out of the theater at the end feels like staggering out of a Roman dungeon.
4. The scene in which Campbell and his fellow prisoners assist the guards in shutting down the riot immediately strikes the viewer as unrealistic. Based on the recent reports on prison riots in both Detroit and California, it seems highly unlikely that a posse of hardened criminals will intentionally help their captors at the risk of inciting future revenge from other inmates. Instead, both news reports and psychological studies indicate that prisoners who do not actively participate in a riot will go back to their cells and avoid conflict altogether. Examples of this lack of attention to detail occur throughout the film, making it almost unbearable to watch.

Collaboration

Share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Writing at Work

Thinking about the purpose of writing a report in the workplace can help focus and structure the document. A summary should provide colleagues with a factual overview of your findings without going into too much specific detail. In contrast, an evaluation should include your personal opinion, along with supporting evidence, research, or examples to back it up. Listen for words such as *summarize*, *analyze*, *synthesize*, or *evaluate* when your boss asks you to complete a report to help determine a purpose for writing.

## Exercise 2

Consider the essay most recently assigned to you. Identify the most effective academic purpose for the assignment.

My assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

My purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

## Identifying the Audience

Imagine you must give a presentation to a group of executives in an office. Weeks before the big day, you spend time creating and rehearsing the presentation. You must make important, careful decisions not only about the content but also about your delivery. Will the presentation require technology to project figures and charts? Should the presentation define important words, or will the executives already know the terms? Should you wear your suit and dress shirt? The answers to these questions will help you develop an appropriate relationship with your audience, making them more receptive to your message.

Now imagine you must explain the same business concepts from your presentation to a group of high school students. Those important questions you previously answered may now require different answers. The figures and charts may be too sophisticated, and the terms will certainly require definitions. You may even reconsider your outfit and sport a more casual look. Because the audience has shifted, your presentation and delivery will shift as well to create a new relationship with the new audience.

In these two situations, the audience—the individuals who will watch and listen to the presentation—plays a role in the development of presentation. As you prepare the presentation, you visualize the audience to anticipate their expectations and reactions. What you imagine affects the information you choose to present and how you will present it. Then, during the presentation, you meet the audience in person and discover immediately how well you perform.

Although the audience for writing assignments—your readers—may not appear in person, they play an equally vital role. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about audience has become so common that you may not even detect the audience-driven decisions.

For example, you update your status on a social networking site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humor in mind. Even at work, you send e-mails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message.

In other words, being aware of “invisible” readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day. Consider the following paragraphs. Which one would the author send to her parents? Which one would she send to her best friend?

Example A

Last Saturday, I volunteered at a local hospital. The visit was fun and rewarding. I even learned how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. Unfortunately, I think caught a cold from one of the patients. This week, I will rest in bed and drink plenty of clear fluids. I hope I am well by next Saturday to volunteer again.

#### Example B

OMG! You won't believe this! My advisor forced me to do my community service hours at this hospital all weekend! We learned CPR but we did it on dummies, not even real peeps. And some kid sneezed on me and got me sick! I was so bored and sniffing all weekend; I hope I don't have to go back next week. I def do NOT want to miss the basketball tournament!

Most likely, you matched each paragraph to its intended audience with little hesitation. Because each paragraph reveals the author's relationship with her intended readers, you can identify the audience fairly quickly. When writing your own paragraphs, you must engage with your audience to build an appropriate relationship given your subject. Imagining your readers during each stage of the writing process will help you make decisions about your writing. Ultimately, the people you visualize will affect what and how you write.

### Tip

While giving a speech, you may articulate an inspiring or critical message, but if you left your hair a mess and laced up mismatched shoes, your audience would not take you seriously. They may be too distracted by your appearance to listen to your words.

Similarly, grammar and sentence structure serve as the appearance of a piece of writing. Polishing your work using correct grammar will impress your readers and allow them to focus on what you have to say.

Because focusing on audience will enhance your writing, your process, and your finished product, you must consider the specific traits of your audience members. Use your imagination to anticipate the readers' demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations.

- **Demographics.** These measure important data about a group of people, such as their age range, their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, or their gender. Certain topics and assignments will require these kinds of considerations about your audience. For other topics and assignments, these measurements may not influence your writing in the end. Regardless, it is important to consider demographics when you begin to think about your purpose for writing.
- **Education.** Education considers the audience's level of schooling. If audience members have earned a doctorate degree, for example, you may need to elevate your style and use more formal language. Or, if audience members are still in college, you could write in a more relaxed style. An audience member's major or emphasis may also dictate your writing.

- **Prior knowledge.** This refers to what the audience already knows about your topic. If your readers have studied certain topics, they may already know some terms and concepts related to the topic. You may decide whether to define terms and explain concepts based on your audience's prior knowledge. Although you cannot peer inside the brains of your readers to discover their knowledge, you can make reasonable assumptions. For instance, a nursing major would presumably know more about health-related topics than a business major would.
- **Expectations.** These indicate what readers will look for while reading your assignment. Readers may expect consistencies in the assignment's appearance, such as correct grammar and traditional formatting like double-spaced lines and legible font. Readers may also have content-based expectations given the assignment's purpose and organization. In an essay titled "The Economics of Enlightenment: The Effects of Rising Tuition," for example, audience members may expect to read about the economic repercussions of college tuition costs.

### Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, generate a list of characteristics under each category for each audience. This list will help you later when you read about tone and content.

#### 1. Your classmates

- Demographics \_\_\_\_\_
- Education \_\_\_\_\_
- Prior knowledge \_\_\_\_\_
- Expectations \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Your instructor

- Demographics \_\_\_\_\_
- Education \_\_\_\_\_
- Prior knowledge \_\_\_\_\_
- Expectations \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. The head of your academic department

- Demographics \_\_\_\_\_
- Education \_\_\_\_\_
- Prior knowledge \_\_\_\_\_
- Expectations \_\_\_\_\_

4. Now think about your next writing assignment. Identify the purpose and then identify the audience. Create a list of characteristics under each category.

My assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

My purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

My audience: \_\_\_\_\_

- Demographics \_\_\_\_\_
- Education \_\_\_\_\_
- Prior knowledge \_\_\_\_\_
- Expectations \_\_\_\_\_

### Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Keep in mind that as your topic shifts in the writing process, your audience may also shift.

Also, remember that decisions about style depend on audience, purpose, and content. Identifying your audience's demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how you write, but purpose and content play an equally important role. The next subsection covers how to select an appropriate tone to match the audience and purpose.

## Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood. Or a coworker who needs to let off some steam after a long meeting may crack a sarcastic joke.

Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit through writing a range of attitudes, from excited and humorous to somber and critical. These emotions create connections among the audience, the author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers intimate their attitudes and feelings with useful devices, such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose.

Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

Many species of plants and animals are disappearing right before our eyes. If we don't act fast, it might be too late to save them. Human activities, including pollution, deforestation, hunting, and overpopulation, are devastating the natural environment. Without our help, many species will not survive long enough for our children to see them in the wild. Take the tiger, for example.



Today, tigers occupy just 7 percent of their historical range, and many local populations are already extinct. Hunted for their beautiful pelt and other body parts, the tiger population has plummeted from one hundred thousand in 1920 to just a few thousand. Contact your local wildlife conservation society today to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction.

### Exercise 4

Think about the assignment and purpose you selected in [Note 6.12 “Exercise 2”](#), and the audience you selected in [Note 6.16 “Exercise 3”](#). Now, identify the tone you would use in the assignment.

My assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

My purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

My audience: \_\_\_\_\_

My tone: \_\_\_\_\_

## Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After selecting an audience and a purpose, you must choose what information will make it to the page. Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations, but no matter the type, the information must be appropriate and interesting for the audience and purpose. An essay written for third graders that summarizes the legislative process, for example, would have to contain succinct and simple content.

Content is also shaped by tone. When the tone matches the content, the audience will be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. Consider that audience of third graders. You would choose simple content that the audience will easily understand, and you would express that content through an enthusiastic tone. The same considerations apply to all audiences and purposes.

### Exercise 5

Match the content in the box to the appropriate audience and purpose. On your own sheet of paper, write the correct letter next to the number.

1. Whereas economist Holmes contends that the financial crisis is far from over, the presidential advisor Jones points out that it is vital to catch the first wave of opportunity to increase market share. We can use elements of both experts' visions. Let me explain how.
2. In 2000, foreign money flowed into the United States, contributing to easy credit conditions. People bought larger houses than they could afford, eventually defaulting on their loans as interest rates rose.

3. The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, known by most of us as the humungous government bailout, caused mixed reactions. Although supported by many political leaders, the statute provoked outrage among grassroots groups. In their opinion, the government was actually rewarding banks for their appalling behavior.

1. Audience: An instructor

Purpose: To analyze the reasons behind the 2007 financial crisis

Content: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Audience: Classmates

Purpose: To summarize the effects of the \$700 billion government bailout

Content: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Audience: An employer

Purpose: To synthesize two articles on preparing businesses for economic recovery

Content: \_\_\_\_\_

## Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Exercise 6

Using the assignment, purpose, audience, and tone from [Note 6.18 "Exercise 4"](#), generate a list of content ideas. Remember that content consists of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations.

My assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

My purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

My audience: \_\_\_\_\_

My tone: \_\_\_\_\_

My content ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

## Key Takeaways

- Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks of information.
- The content of each paragraph and document is shaped by purpose, audience, and tone.
- The four common academic purposes are to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate.

- Identifying the audience's demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how and what you write.
- Devices such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language communicate tone and create a relationship between the writer and his or her audience.
- Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations. All content must be appropriate and interesting for the audience, purpose and tone.

Attribution:

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# Chapter 2.1

## Introduction to Research Skills

### A Students' Story

Jaden and Karen are two very different students, both of whom are taking English 100. When asked to write a research-based essay, Jaden copies text directly from internet sources and pastes it into his document as he stays up late and tries to meet the morning deadline for turning in his essay. Karen, on the other hand, has been researching for the past four weeks, finding ideal resources, jotting down her own ideas and significant facts into a Google Doc or in her notebook, always recording exactly what page and paragraph number from which the information came. She was able to use the sources she found in a way that is ideal for college-level writing—to allow them to provide support for her own, original, unique ideas.

Karen gave herself time to gain more knowledge and, therefore, more expertise regarding her topic so that all her studying and gained knowledge would help her become informed for this particular research-based assignment, as well as giving her practice for similar writing assignments that would come her way throughout her college career. Karen had based her writing on her own ideas and then cited others' appropriately, which she continued to do throughout the semester. Her professor praised Karen for her creativity, thoroughness, and organization, along with her correctly citing her sources.

As Karen continued to grow in confidence, she decided to apply for a position as a writing tutor through her college's peer mentoring program. Once hired, she would not only earn a paycheck, but she would also gain valuable experience helping others understand the intricacies involved in the research and writing processes while sharing her own stories regarding how to succeed in college.

Jaden, however, was asked by his professor to make an appointment to meet with her. When he arrived at her office, she invited him to take a seat. "Where did you find your content for this report?" she asked.

A bit befuddled, he answered, "Through researching it . . . like with sources I found on the internet and in articles I found about my topic. They're all listed in my Works Cited." He reached for the paper and flipped to the back pages. "See. These sources. And I included the in-text citations here." He pointed to another section within the body of his report. "And here."

His professor knew that Jaden's report was not only suffering from his failure to commit to the number of hours necessary for such a research-based project but that he had also never adequately learned how to incorporate the words and ideas of experts or others with his own words and ideas in a way that allowed already-existing information to fortify his original writing . . . not replace it.

Such plagiarism—taking the work of others and using it as his own—could involve department chairs and even college deans, the threat of failing a course, or, in extreme cases, suspension. However, particular consideration needed to be given to the fact that Jaden had been writing his research-based essays like this for years, and he had still made it to college. Was he at fault for beginning his report too late and thinking an all-nighter and what was largely a cut-and-paste job could save him? Certainly. But how many instructors before this had just let it slide because he had “included the intext citations”?

One successful habit Karen used was not only reading but also engaging with the source she discovered during the research process. She interacted with the texts by jotting down observations on printouts of articles regarding what the writers’ ideas made her think about. For online sources, she created two columns on a page in her notebook: (1) notes and citations of what the author was saying, and (2) her thoughts, opinions, analysis, or evaluation of each source along with her own, original ideas that came to mind as she was reading.

What Karen did was participate in the existing dialogue about her topic—the conversation that was taking place among the established experts—and contribute by “publishing” (by submitting her essay by the deadline to her professor) her own original ideas as well as her analysis and evaluation of what others said. This practice also resulted in her own synthesis of her previous knowledge with her newly gained knowledge and her continued analytical thinking, innovation, and creation of written knowledge about that topic. She learned that writing allows the individual doing so to enter the conversation, which is what academia, especially at the college level, is all about.

Jaden’s instructor helped him understand how to properly incorporate the ideas of others within his essay through using a body paragraph from his own essay that was largely composed from content that he had obtained from an outside source. She asked Jaden to use two different colored highlighters to identify the phrases that were in his own voice and that were written from his own knowledge and those that came from an outside source. The professor explained the 70/30 rule, which says that 70% of an essay should be in the original voice of the writer and a maximum of 30% can be in the voice of an established expert on the subject, noting that some prefer more of a 60/40 percentage.

The instructor showed Jaden how to follow quoted, paraphrased, or summarized content with standard intext citations within parentheses. She also showed him how to intersperse such important information with sentences he crafted on his own. “State it again in your own words. Explain in your own words how that information relates to the overall focus of your section. Connect that information to more information that will follow,” she explained. “And when you get to the end of your paragraph with more information from an outside source, finish up with your own wise voice.”

“I can do that,” Jaden said. “How come nobody ever showed me how to do that? I’ve been getting away with this kind of research-based writing for years.”

The focus of Composition is the types of writing students will encounter in college and their careers. Most of the majors students choose require them to conduct extensive research all the way through college. So the students' job is to learn how to do it so as to demonstrate their researching skills and increasing knowledge.

An introduction to college writing is based on understanding that the primary underlying skill of academic writing at the college level lies within analysis and the ability to synthesize information into one's own words, citing sources as needed, with the confidence of one who feels part of a given community. The skills needed for good research-based writing involve reading the work of experts, assimilating that information with one's own brilliant (and evolving) ideas, possibly mirroring some of the writing that suits each individual student, and becoming a clear, creative, and confident writer in his or her own right.

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## **Chapter 2.2 The Research Process**

To succeed in college, students need to develop solid research skills that will benefit them throughout and beyond their academic career. They must focus, in and out of class, on doing the following:

- Identifying an area of focus
- Identifying the audience
- Using campus library resources to find information
- Determining if information is scholarly and credible
- Citing sources accurately, avoiding plagiarism, and creating a final written composition using the appropriate style guide

### **Identifying an Area of Focus**

Any student writer's initial task is to make sure he or she understands what the instructor is asking for. Precious time can be wasted if students begin their research without a clear picture of what their end product should look like and how it should read. Once an essay is assigned, and some initial contemplation and research on the student's part, it is a great time to make an appointment with an instructor.

Conscientious college writers begin thinking about and researching essay topics immediately after being given the assignment. As we all know, brainstorming can be a solid way to record important initial ideas. At the end of a brainstorming session, writers can begin to see patterns of interest, which will become perfect places to begin research. Avenues within writer's researching often need to remain fluid initially so student writers can determine what kind of resources are available regarding the respective the topic. This flexibility allows students to narrow or broaden topics into a thesis that might not be obvious at first.

### **Identifying the Audience**

All writing is created for a specific audience. Writers must identify the specific reader they want to reach. If they are writing for a general audience, what is the best way to capture a wide range of readers' interests? Should they provide background information that general readers would not necessarily know? Are they writing for an audience already well versed in this topic, and, if so, does this mean writers can use more scholarly language and include less background information?

### **Using Campus Library Resources and the Internet to Find Information**

Research-based writing is only as credible as the sources the writer uses. Therefore, students should start with the college library catalogs and databases. There, a writer can find reference materials (e.g., encyclopedias and dictionaries), books, multimedia resources, as well as the most valuable resource of all, the college librarian. Librarians are trained with the most up-to-date strategies to access scholarly and popular resources that are available to students and usable for college projects. These days, many of these resources can be accessed online from home, which makes learning to use the tools of the library even more important and valuable.

The internet is increasingly used to find sources for academic essays. However, much of what is found on the web is not appropriate for college work. Note, too, that a simple internet search may not allow students to access full articles of ideal credible and scholarly sources whereas going through one's college or university library main page will allow full and free access.

Some of the skills that good writers use as part of information competency include the following:

- Accessing the library search engines
- Determining the best search terms
- Narrowing or expanding search results
- Finding the best books, articles, and other sources through the library catalog

## **Determining if Information is Credible**

Evaluating the quality of resources is an essential skill, especially in today's world. People are inundated with media of various kinds, much of which tries to get us to buy something or to think in a certain way, so perhaps one of the most essential skills to learn is information literacy. The biggest challenge student researchers have is based in the fact that there is such a vast quantity of information available that could potentially be used for a research-based paper. However, there exists a significant range between highly credible, relevant information and that which is not. Materials found online are usually less reliable than those curated and made available through library resources purchased through the college.

Because "facts" can be accessed in just a few moments, it can be tempting to assume that they are just that—factual. More recently and more often, free online information is not fact, not verifiable through citations, and not credible. In addition, new kinds of sources are available, such as a live news feeds or any one of the array of social media options, thus necessitating a variety of ways of assessing information. As such, understanding how to research is key, especially in this new era when content can be skewed in a number of ways.

Evaluating sources is detective work. The researcher needs to make decisions about what to search for, how to search, and what type of information is credible and academically appropriate. For example, a student who is writing about the Great Pacific Garbage Vortex will find many sources available through library-based searches, as well as through online resources that could be more current. However, information that comes from the website of a company that produces petrochemicals and plastics will not be as valuable as a source that comes from scholarly research found through the PVAMU Library System.



The following are some questions students need to ask of every source they are considering for an academic paper:

- Is this source relevant to the topic? Does it give background, explain concepts, and offer support for or an alternative viewpoint on the topic?
- Is it considered a credible source? What is the expertise of the person who wrote it? How current is it? Where was it published? What was the source of funding for this publication? Would that funding source add bias to the material? Are there references that indicate where the information has come from? Is it scholarly or written for a general audience? What does the language used in the source suggest about the purpose of the piece or the scholarliness of the writers?

Depending on the answers to these questions, writers can feel secure with sources that are relevant and credible. Papers that use high-quality sources get better results and better grades with the sharing of important information with professors and other readers.

## Activities

1. Write assignments about a topic that is not only interesting to you, but that also encourages you to write about that topic with a strong sense of responsibility to the larger audience or the greater good. (Readings and assignments are most ideal when they can be individualized, relevant to your major area of academic focus. Suggestions of such essay topics can be found at the end of this chapter.)
2. **Researched Persuasive Essay:** In two minutes, brainstorm or list the biggest problems you wish could be solved in the world. In another two minutes, list the biggest problems you have noticed in the nation. In one minute, list the biggest problems in your state. In another minute, list the biggest problems in your community, town, area, ahupua'a. Take three minutes to list your personal values, beliefs, and priorities, and number them in order of importance. Then take five minutes to review your prioritized personal lists and select one of the "big problems," from any of the lists, that match up with your values, beliefs, and priorities. This will help you to select topics you care deeply about and can engage with.
3. Once you have selected a topic for a persuasive argument involving research to back up your key idea, spend five minutes freewriting, brainstorming, listing your main claim (i.e., persuasive argument) about a debatable issue. After listing your main claim, list all possible key ideas that back up the main claim, as well as all the solutions and opposing perspectives (i.e., counterclaims) you can think of. Then spend 10 minutes with a partner or a team of three to four peers, discussing your ideas and gathering feedback and additional ideas, and noting down what your partner or team said. Then spend 10 minutes creating an outline or informal list organizing your thesis statement and the key points that become the topic sentences of your paragraphs.

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## Chapter 2.3 Citing Sources

### Citing Sources Accurately, Avoiding Plagiarism, and Creating a Final Research Project

By using the references page and in-text citations of research articles, Karen was able to scout out even more helpful information on her topic. She learned the value of those in-text citations and lists of works consulted when she was reading something interesting and wanted to learn more. When an article cited the name of the original source's author, title, publication information, and direct online link, she was able to go to the original source and dive deeper into the information she was passionate about learning. She also reviewed her syllabus, the formatting and documentation style it indicated, and the style guides themselves.

Every publisher, profession, and academic discipline has its own style guide, which provides standards, expectations, and guidelines for formatting written work, for documenting research, whether read or conducted, and for citing outside sources that help inform readers and other potential writers. Publishers and professors expect written work (i.e., essays and reports) to meet the standards set in these style guides. Information about the five most important, most common style guides used in academic disciplines can be found in the Further Resources box at the end of this chapter.

A research-based essay that conforms to the conventions of a style guide signals to the reader that the writer has joined the academic conversation and should be taken seriously. It also indicates the writer's respect for the thoughts and ideas of others. In addition, the reader learns where to go to find other information on the topic. When writers do not turn in a research paper with the correct format, it is analogous to showing up in board shorts to a job interview.

### Citation Management

While using a style guide requires attention to detail, the process can be simplified by using a variety of free tools that help students make a Works Cited (in MLA) or References (in APA) page. For example, many students use an add-on for Google Docs called [EasyBib Bibliography Creator](#), or [Zotero](#), a free online tool to help students to organize research materials into academic formats.

Another tool is [BibMe: Free Bibliography & Citation Maker](#), and even [Purdue OWL](#) offers generator options.

While these tools make many of the tasks of conforming to a style guide easier, students should always check the final outcome with the style guides themselves because the order in which the citation is generated often comes out wrong for various reasons, often because of the way in which the information was entered. It is important for writers to double-check for little "errors" in

punctuation and capitalization. Sometimes the generator places titles inaccurately in ALL CAPS. Sometimes hyphens are placed where dashes should be. If the quotation marks and apostrophes are in a serif font in the body of the essay, writers need to be sure the quotation marks and apostrophes look the same in the references section.

## **Using Sources Correctly**

Karen found 15 different sources she could use for her 10-page analytical report for her psychology class. She discovered that only nine were fully credible and appropriate for the topic and for college-level writing. In contrast, Jaden went with the first two sources that popped up in his internet search and copied and pasted paragraphs from the sources directly into his document. In addition, he promptly forgot where he got the information and what the title of each was called. He did not notice if there were author names or publication dates. He did not know what form the list of sources at the end of the paper should be in. All of these oversights lessened the quality of his work. Plagiarism (i.e., using the words and ideas of another writer without proper attribution) could cause Jaden to receive a failing grade for his essay and perhaps be grounds for suspension.

## **Annotations and Citations: Be Accurate and Precise**

Karen consulted various free online guides to ensure that her in-text citations and list of works cited were correct and complete. Jaden had missed this significant information when it had been presented in class. When he had that unfortunate required meeting with his professor regarding his plagiarized essay, the fact that he did not understand the importance of this element in the process of crafting his essay was a glaring concern. Was it one that was fixable within his essay at this point in the semester? Not likely.

## **Annotation: The Basics**

It is important to take notes when researching, and to accurately use credible sources. When deep-diving into the information written by others, be sure to take accurate notes, indicating the following:

- Whether the source material borrowed is verbatim (i.e., copied word for word) or paraphrased and summarized (i.e., rewritten in one's own words)
- The page number and paragraph number, if identifiable, from which the information came
- The publication information required for the citation at the end in the style that the professor requires

For MLA-style papers, information such as the author's first and last name, the title of the article, title of the book, publication, magazine, or webpage, publication volume, number, or series, name of the publisher, publication date, and URL, DOI, or link (if the source is online) are all required.

Note: MLA uses the word "Accessed" to denote the date on which the information on the web was obtained. However, for the newest edition MLA 8, it is not required to add this information at the end of the Works Cited entry, but it is especially encouraged when there is no copyright date listed on a website.

## Helpful Annotation Tools

Besides paper, index cards or sticky notes, there are various other methods and software applications (apps) with which to organize source citations, quotations, paraphrases, and summaries, along with one's own ideas and outlines. These include Microsoft Onenote, Evernote, and EndNote.

## Documentation and Citation

To use sources correctly and appropriately, give appropriate credit following the sentence, paragraph, or general area that uses outside source information.

For MLA style, use in-text citations following direct quotes, paraphrasing, or summarizing, with author(s) last name(s) and page numbers (if available) within parentheses. (The information in the in-text citation will be whatever the first word is in the Works Cited entry. For that reason, it can be easier to add in in-text citations after the Works Cited page has been created.)

For example, see the following:

"The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years" (McKenna 5).

Or, if using a signal phrase, the in-text citation will be like this:

The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years" (5).

For APA style, writers use the author(s) last name(s) followed by a comma and the year of publication.

"The opioid epidemic has expanded exponentially in the past five years" (McKenna, 2018).

Essentially, all individuals deserve credit for their hard work. But even more important is the fact the student's own ideas, as expressed through writing, are what professors look for. The student's words should be informed by the research, not usurped by it. Since the grade one earns is based on the value of the content and how it is communicated through the written word,

it's the student's voice that matters to the professor. So writers should supplement and support the original content by incorporating outside sources through quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or paraphrasing, following each instance with in-text citations.

**Quote.** To repeat or copy a group of words from a document or speech, typically with an indication that one is not the original author or speaker. Quotes work well when the material is difficult to paraphrase in a unique way.

**Paraphrase.** To express the meaning of something written or spoken using different words, especially to achieve greater clarity.

**Summarize.** To give a brief statement of the main points of something longer.

An important thing to remember about quoting is that sometimes the material a writer would like to borrow directly is longer than four lines of typed text. If this is the case, writers will need to use something called an "extract," sometimes referred to as a "block quote." In an extract or block quote, the quotation marks are removed from the quoted material, and the entire section being quoted is indented one tab from the left-hand margin. Note that in this case the period goes before the in-text citation.

## **A Word About "Drive-By" Citations**

Another strategy some writers use is what some educators call "drive-by" citations. These are references to a work that make a very quick appearance. Then the student writer moves on without discussing the connection between the student's work and the ideas in the citation. This kind of incorporation of the words or ideas of others is to be avoided as it adds little value.

## **The List at the End of the Paper**

To use sources correctly, it's also critically important to give appropriate credit in a list at the end of any college research paper. There are a variety of names and titles for these lists, depending on the style and style guides.

**Works Cited (MLA).** A Works Cited list is an alphabetical list of works cited, or sources specifically referenced in the body of the paper. All works that have been quoted or paraphrased should be included. Works read but not referenced in the body of the paper should be left off this list.

**References (APA).** A References list is similar to a Works Cited list; this is the term used when citing sources using APA (American Psychological Association) style. The page should be titled "References" and arranged alphabetically by author last name.

**Bibliography (APA).** A Bibliography lists all the material consulted in preparing an essay, whether the essay has actually referred to and cited the work or not.

**Annotated Bibliography.** An annotated bibliography is a list of citations of books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph—the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

## **Notes**

Using notes and bibliography is preferred by those writing within the humanities, including literature, history, and the arts. With this approach, sources are cited in numbered footnotes or endnotes. Each note corresponds to a superscript (raised) numeral within the document. Sources are also usually listed in a separate bibliography.

The author-date approach is more common in the sciences and social sciences. With this approach, sources are briefly cited in the document, usually in parentheses, by author last name and year of publication. Each in-text citation matches up with an entry in a Reference list, where full bibliographic information is provided.

## **Plagiarism, Ethics, and Academic Integrity**

When Jaden was being reprimanded by his professor, he did not understand what he had done wrong. He had copied and pasted text before, and his high school teachers had not noticed. Now he could lose the ability to complete his other courses, if he was expelled from college. He could even lose the opportunity to return to the campus for any future pursuits. He requested help, and the Professor and Dean sent him to the College Writing Center for additional tutoring on research methods and academic integrity, and to the Learning Center for mentoring and counseling about time management, prioritization, and focus. As a new writing tutor, Karen helped Jaden to read and annotate the syllabus information on academic integrity, plagiarism, and online resources for research.

Academic honesty is fundamental in a college environment. It is essential for academic writers to understand the ethical use of other people's words and ideas. College instructors expect students to fulfill their academic obligations through honest and independent effort. Students need to demonstrate academic integrity: the respectful and truthful attribution of credit to those who have provided words and ideas that are used in research assignments. The reason that plagiarism is treated seriously at the college is that it is seen as an academic crime or simply cheating.

## **Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism**

Research writing should present a writer's thinking, supported and illuminated by the thinking and writing of others. Distinguishing between the two is paramount to academic integrity. Desperate students sometimes purchase an essay from a website and submit it as original course work. More often, writers plagiarize due to sloppiness, haste or ignorance. To avoid unintentional plagiarism, writers need to do the following:

- Understand what types of information must be cited
- Understand what constitutes fair use of a source
- Keep source materials and notes carefully organized
- Distinguish what information is composed of facts or general statements that are common knowledge

What is Common knowledge? Common knowledge is a fact or general statement that is commonly known. For example, a writer would not need to cite the statement that fruit juices contain sugar; this is well known and well-documented. However, if a writer explained the differences between the chemical structures of the glucose molecule and how sugar is related to today's levels of obesity in America, a citation would be necessary. When in doubt, cite.

What is Fair Use? Writers are allowed to quote, paraphrase, or summarize material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. The concept of "fair use" means that writers may legitimately use brief excerpts from source material to support and develop their own ideas. For instance, a journalist might excerpt a few lines from a recently released film when writing a movie review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another's work at excessive length, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair use.

The 70/30 and 15% Rules: The 70/30 Rule says that approximately 70% of the written content should be original words and ideas from the student writer, with up to 30% from outside sources. The 15% Rule is that student writers should never use more than 15% of direct quotes from sources. If the writing goes over this amount, the voice of the student is not strong enough.

## **Value Your Own Voice**

Plagiarism is the result of students who lack confidence in their ability to communicate in writing. It also frequently happens because students have not yet mastered the college success skills of time management, prioritization, and focus. In addition, some students value the ethos and authority of the writing of experts, even at the cost of valuing their own words, phrasing, and ideas. They may be afraid to say things in their own way. But college is partly about students finding their own voices and building confidence in communicating. Students remember that quotes and sources shouldn't drive their papers. Their own original ideas should.

Here are two techniques one could use to avoid plagiarism when researching and writing using sources:



- After reading and annotating a research report, put it aside. Without looking at it, freewrite a summary.
- Only use direct quotes when a source's original words provide a unique and critical perspective that can't be paraphrased or briefly summarized.

## **A Note About Time Management While Researching**

Students make time for research in order to develop important college success skills. When professors introduce writing assignments based on research, they hope that students will be excited about their potential topics. Professors encourage students to start researching as soon as possible, so they see what problems rise to the surface: What sources have already been written about the topic? Who is studying and writing about the same area? What makes that individual, researcher, and expert worth listening to? And what gives their work authority and credibility?

Some college students vastly underestimate the time needed to conduct the kind of research that gives them expertise on a topic. Those with lower grades have often simply not planned, nor have they spent enough time immersing themselves in the research process and content so they can become more knowledgeable or "expert" on the field. This is often when plagiarizing happens. Time management is essential.

## **Activities**

- Put away a plagiarized essay and tell the instructor or peer mentor what you wrote, recalling your ideas in your own words (mentioning a source or two as appropriate). You talk; the instructor or peer mentor types. Then review what was typed and see how powerful and effective your own words were. You should gain increased confidence in your own voice and ability to communicate.
- Take out two highlighters and draw through your own words with one color, and through information from an outside source with another color. Learn to recognize how much of the content is your own, and learn the 70/30 Rule.

## **Further Resources**

For each of these styles, a link to a free online guide from Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) is provided. Should the links to specific pages change, please search the [The Purdue OWL](#). Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

"MLA (Modern Language Association): The arts and humanities." The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“American Psychological Association (APA): Education, psychology, and the social sciences.”  
The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS): The world of publishing.” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“Associated Press (AP): Journalism such as magazines and newspapers.” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

“American Medical Association (AMA): Medicine, health, and biological sciences.” The Purdue OWL. Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2019.

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# Chapter 3: Rhetorical Analysis

ELIZABETH BROWNING

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

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

## 1. WHAT IS RHETORICAL ANALYSIS?

Simply defined, rhetoric is the art or method of communicating effectively to an audience, usually with the intention to persuade; thus, rhetorical analysis means analyzing how effectively a writer or speaker communicates her message or argument to the audience.

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

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

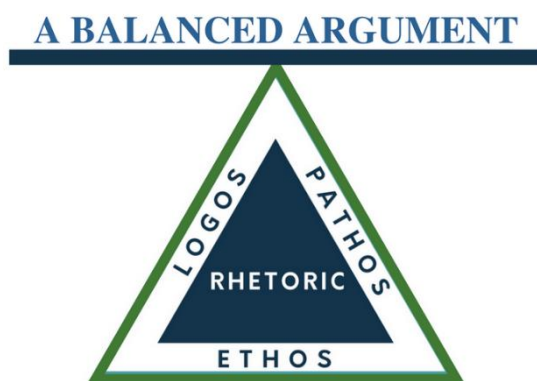
## 2. WHAT IS A RHETORICAL SITUATION?

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

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

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

Figure 2.1 A Balanced Argument



### 3. WHAT ARE THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF RHETORICAL ANALYSIS?

## 3.1 THE APPEAL TO ETHOS

Literally translated, ethos means “character.” In this case, it refers to the character of the writer or speaker, or more specifically, his credibility. The writer needs to establish credibility so that the audience will trust him and, thus, be more willing to engage with the argument. If a writer fails to establish a sufficient ethical appeal, then the audience will not take the writer’s argument seriously.

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

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

Does the writer come across as reliable?

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

Does the writer come across as authoritative and knowledgeable?

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

What kind of credentials or experience does the writer have?

- Look at byline or biographical info
- Identify any personal or professional experience mentioned in the text
- Where has this writer’s text been published?

Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Ethos:

In a perfect world, everyone would tell the truth, and we could depend upon the credibility of speakers and authors. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. You would expect that news reporters would be objective and tell news stories based upon the facts; however, Janet Cooke, Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair, and Brian Williams all lost their jobs for plagiarizing or fabricating part of their news stories. Janet Cooke’s Pulitzer Prize was revoked after it was discovered that

she made up “Jimmy,” an eight-year old heroin addict (Prince, 2010). Brian Williams was fired as anchor of the *NBC Nightly News* for exaggerating his role in the Iraq War.

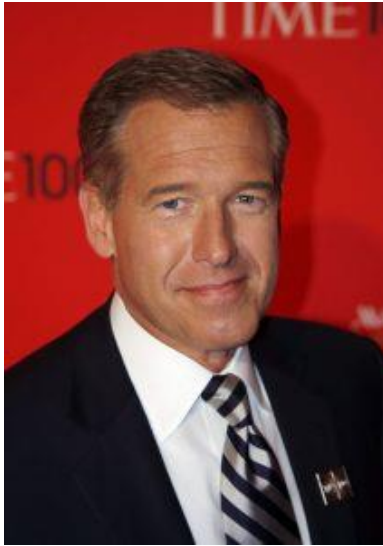


Figure 2.2, Brian Williams at the 2011 Time 100 Gala

Others have become infamous for claiming academic degrees that they didn’t earn as in the case of Marilee Jones. At the time of discovery, she was Dean of Admissions at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). After 28 years of employment, it was determined that she never graduated from college (Lewin, 2007). However, on her website (<http://www.marileejones.com/blog/>) she is still promoting herself as “a sought after speaker, consultant and author” and “one of the nation’s most experienced College Admissions Deans.”

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

## Exercise 1: Analyzing Ethos

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

“Why cancer is not a war, fight, or battle” by Xenia Jordan (<https://tinyurl.com/y7m7bnnm>)

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

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

## 3.2 THE APPEAL TO PATHOS

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

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

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

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

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

### Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Pathos:

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

An appropriate appeal to pathos is different from trying to unfairly play upon the audience's feelings and emotions through fallacious, misleading, or excessively emotional appeals. Such a manipulative use of pathos may alienate the audience or cause them to "tune out." An example would be the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) commercials (<https://youtu.be/6eXfvRcIIv8>, transcript here) featuring the song "In the Arms of an Angel" and footage of abused animals. Even Sarah McLachlan, the singer and spokesperson featured in the commercials, admits that she changes the channel because they are too depressing (Brekke).

Even if an appeal to pathos is not manipulative, such an appeal should complement rather than replace reason and evidence-based argument. In addition to making use of pathos, the author must establish her credibility (ethos) and must supply reasons and evidence (logos) in support of her position. An author who essentially replaces logos and ethos with pathos alone does not present a strong argument.

## Exercise 2: Analyzing Pathos

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

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

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

Step 2: Consider these questions:

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

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

- How does he try to connect with his audience emotionally? Because this is a speech, and he's appealing to the audience in person, consider his overall look as well as what he says.
- How would you describe his manner or attitude?
- Does he use any humor, and if so, to what effect?
- How would you describe his tone?
- Identify some examples of language that show an appeal to pathos: words, phrases, imagery, collective pronouns (we, us, our).
- How do all of these factors help him establish a pathetic appeal?



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

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

### 3.3 THE APPEAL TO LOGOS

Literally translated, logos means "word." In this case, it refers to information, or more specifically, the writer's appeal to logic and reason. A successful logical appeal provides clearly organized information as well as evidence to support the overall argument. If one fails to establish a logical appeal, then the argument will lack both sense and substance.

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

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

Does the writer organize his information clearly?

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

Does the writer provide evidence to back his claims?

- Specific examples
- Relevant source material

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

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

## Recognizing a Manipulative Appeal to Logos:

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

## Exercise 3: Analyzing Logos

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

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

See the article [here](https://tinyurl.com/y6c9v89t) (<https://tinyurl.com/y6c9v89t>).

Step 1: Before reading the article, take a minute to preview the text, a critical reading skill explained in [Chapter 1](#).

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

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

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

## 3.4 THE APPEAL TO KAIROS

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

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

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

Additionally, if a writer covers a topic or puts forth an argument about a subject that is currently a non-issue or has no relevance for the audience, then the audience will fail to engage because whatever the writer’s message happens to be, it won’t matter to anyone. For example, if a writer were to put forth the argument that women in the United States should have the right to vote, no one would care; that is a non-issue because women in the United States already have that right.

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

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

### Exercise 4: Analyzing Kairos

In this exercise, you will analyze a visual representation of the appeal to Kairos. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2015, a photo of a dress was posted to Twitter along with a question as to whether

people thought it was one combination of colors versus another. Internet chaos ensued on social media because while some people saw the dress as black and blue, others saw it as white and gold. As the color debate surrounding the dress raged on, an ad agency in South Africa saw an opportunity to raise awareness about a far more serious subject: domestic abuse.

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

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

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

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

## 4. STRIKING A BALANCE:

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

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

## Exercise 5: Rhetorical Analysis

Step 1: Choose one of the articles linked below.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The Washington Post*, Op-Ed, "Michael Vick doesn't belong in the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame" (<https://tinyurl.com/yavxcmjl>)

## Key Takeaways

Understanding the Rhetorical Situation:

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

Identifying the Rhetorical Appeals:

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

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Figure 2.1 “A Balanced Argument,” Kalyca Schultz, Virginia Western Community College, CC-0.

Figure 2.2, “Brian Williams at the 2011 Time 100 Gala,” David Shankbone, Wikimedia, CC-BY 3.0.

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# Chapter 4: Strategies for Gathering Reliable Information

Now that you have planned your research project, you are ready to begin the research. This phase can be both exciting and challenging. As you read this section, you will learn ways to locate sources efficiently, so you have enough time to read the sources, take notes, and think about how to use the information.

Of course, the technological advances of the past few decades—particularly the rise of online media—mean that, as a twenty-first-century student, you have countless sources of information available at your fingertips. But how can you tell whether a source is reliable? This section will discuss strategies for evaluating sources critically so that you can be a media-savvy researcher.

In this section, you will locate and evaluate resources for your paper and begin taking notes. As you read, begin gathering print and electronic resources, identify at least eight to ten sources by the time you finish the chapter, and begin taking notes on your research findings.

## Locating Useful Resources

When you chose a paper topic and determined your research questions, you conducted preliminary research to stimulate your thinking. Your research proposal included some general ideas for how to go about your research—for instance, interviewing an expert in the field or analyzing the content of popular magazines. You may even have identified a few potential sources. Now it is time to conduct a more focused, systematic search for informative primary and secondary sources.

## Using Primary and Secondary Sources

Writers classify research resources in two categories: primary sources and secondary sources. *Primary sources* are direct, firsthand sources of information or data. For example, if you were writing a paper about the First Amendment right to freedom of speech, the text of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights would be a primary source.

Other primary sources include the following:

- Research articles
- Literary texts
- Historical documents such as diaries or letters
- Autobiographies or other personal accounts

*Secondary sources* discuss, interpret, analyze, consolidate, or otherwise rework information from primary sources. In researching a paper about the First Amendment, you might read articles about legal cases that involved First Amendment rights, or editorials expressing commentary on the First Amendment. These sources would be considered secondary sources because they are one step removed from the primary source of information.

The following are examples of secondary sources:

- Magazine articles
- Biographical books
- Literary and scientific reviews
- Television documentaries

Your topic and purpose determine whether you must cite both primary and secondary sources in your paper. Ask yourself which sources are most likely to provide the information that will answer your research questions. If you are writing a research paper about reality television shows, you will need to use some reality shows as a primary source, but secondary sources, such as a reviewer's critique, are also important. If you are writing about the health effects of nicotine, you will probably want to read the published results of scientific studies, but secondary sources, such as magazine articles discussing the outcome of a recent study, may also be helpful.

Once you have thought about what kinds of sources are most likely to help you answer your research questions, you may begin your search for print and electronic resources. The challenge here is to conduct your search efficiently. Writers use strategies to help them find the sources that are most relevant and reliable while steering clear of sources that will not be useful.

## Finding Print Resources

Print resources include a vast array of documents and publications. Regardless of your topic, you will consult some print resources as part of your research. (You will use electronic sources as well, but it is not wise to limit yourself to electronic sources only, because some potentially useful sources may be available only in print form.) [Table 11.1 "Library Print Resources"](#) lists different types of print resources available at public and university libraries.

Table 11.1 Library Print Resources



Resource Type	Description	Example(s)
Reference works	<p>Reference works provide a summary of information about a particular topic. Almanacs, encyclopedias, atlases, medical reference books, and scientific abstracts are examples of reference works. In some cases, reference books may not be checked out of a library.</p> <p>Note that reference works are many steps removed from original primary sources and are often brief, so these should be used only as a starting point when you gather information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2010</i></li> <li>• <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual</i> published by the American Psychiatric Association</li> </ul>
Nonfiction books	<p>Nonfiction books provide in-depth coverage of a topic. Trade books, biographies, and how-to guides are usually written for a general audience. Scholarly books and scientific studies are usually written for an audience that has specialized knowledge of a topic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Low-Carb Solution: A Slimmer You in 30 Days</i></li> <li>• <i>Carbohydrates, Fats and Proteins: Exploring the Relationship Between Macronutrient Ratios and Health Outcomes</i></li> </ul>
Periodicals and news sources	<p>These sources are published at regular intervals—daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Newspapers, magazines, and academic journals are examples. Some periodicals provide articles on subjects of general interest, while others are more specialized.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>New York Times</i></li> <li>• <i>PC Magazine</i></li> <li>• <i>JAMA, The Journal of the American Medical Association</i></li> </ul>
Government publications	<p>Federal, state, and local government agencies publish information on a variety of topics. Government publications include reports, legislation, court documents, public records, statistics, studies, guides, programs, and forms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Census 2000 Profile</i></li> <li>• <i>The Business Relocation Package</i> published by the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>

Resource Type	Description	Example(s)
Business and nonprofit publications	Businesses and nonprofit organizations produce publications designed to market a product, provide background about the organization, provide information on topics connected to the organization, or promote a cause. These publications include reports, newsletters, advertisements, manuals, brochures, and other print documents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A company's instruction manual explaining how to use a specific software program</li> <li>• A news release published by the Sierra Club</li> </ul>

Some of these resources are also widely available in electronic format. In addition to the resources noted in the table, library holdings may include primary texts such as historical documents, letters, and diaries.

## Writing at Work

Businesses, government organizations, and nonprofit organizations produce published materials that range from brief advertisements and brochures to lengthy, detailed reports. In many cases, producing these publications requires research. A corporation's annual report may include research about economic or industry trends. A charitable organization may use information from research in materials sent to potential donors.

Regardless of the industry you work in, you may be asked to assist in developing materials for publication. Often, incorporating research in these documents can make them more effective in informing or persuading readers.

### Tip

As you gather information, strive for a balance of accessible, easy-to-read sources and more specialized, challenging sources. Relying solely on lightweight books and articles written for a general audience will drastically limit the range of useful, substantial information. On the other hand, restricting oneself to dense, scholarly works could make the process of researching extremely time-consuming and frustrating.

## Exercise 1

Make a list of five types of print resources you could use to find information about your research topic. Include at least one primary source. Be as specific as possible—if you have a particular resource or type of resource in mind, describe it.

To find print resources efficiently, first identify the major concepts and terms you will use to conduct your search—that is, your *keywords*. These, along with the research questions you identify, will help you find sources using any of the following methods:

- Using the library's online catalog or card catalog
- Using periodicals indexes and databases
- Consulting a reference librarian

You probably already have some keywords in mind based on your preliminary research and writing. Another way to identify useful keywords is to visit the Library of Congress's website at <http://id.loc.gov/authorities>. This site allows you to search for a topic and see the related subject headings used by the Library of Congress, including broader terms, narrower terms, and related terms. Other libraries use these terms to classify materials. Knowing the most-used terms will help you speed up your keyword search.

Jorge used the Library of Congress site to identify general terms he could use to find resources about low-carb dieting. His search helped him identify potentially useful keywords and related topics, such as carbohydrates in human nutrition, glycemic index, and carbohydrates—metabolism. These terms helped Jorge refine his search.

## Tip

Knowing the right keywords can sometimes make all the difference in conducting a successful search. If you have trouble finding sources on a topic, consult a librarian to see whether you need to modify your search terms.

## Exercise 2

Visit the Library of Congress's website at <http://id.loc.gov/authorities> and conduct searches on a few terms related to your topic.

1. Review your search results and identify six to eight additional terms you might use when you conduct your research.
2. Print out the search results or save the results to your research folder on your computer or portable storage device.

## Using Periodicals, Indexes, and Databases

Library catalogs can help you locate book-length sources, as well as some types of nonprint holdings, such as CDs, DVDs, and audio books. To locate shorter sources, such as magazine and journal articles, you will need to use a periodical index or an online periodical database. These tools index the articles that appear in newspapers, magazines, and journals. Like catalogs, they provide publication information about an article and often allow users to access a summary or even the full text of the article.

Print indexes may be available in the periodicals section of your library. Increasingly, libraries use online databases that users can access through the library website. A single library may provide access to multiple periodical databases. These can range from general news databases to specialized databases. [Table 11.2 “Commonly Used Indexes and Databases”](#) describes some commonly used indexes and databases.

Table 11.2 Commonly Used Indexes and Databases

Resource	Format	Contents
<i>New York Times Index</i>	Print	Guide to articles published in the <i>New York Times</i>
ProQuest	Online	Database that archives content from newspapers, magazines, and dissertations
Psychlit, PsycINFO	Online	Databases that archive content from journals in psychology and psychiatry
Business Source Complete	Online	Database that archives business-related content from magazines and journals
MEDLINE, PubMed	Online	Databases that archive articles in medicine and health

Resource	Format	Contents
EBSCOhost	Online	General database that provides access to articles on a wide variety of topics

## Reading Popular and Scholarly Periodicals

When you search for periodicals, be sure to distinguish among different types. Mass-market publications, such as newspapers and popular magazines, differ from scholarly publications in their accessibility, audience, and purpose.

Newspapers and magazines are written for a broader audience than scholarly journals. Their content is usually quite accessible and easy to read. Trade magazines that target readers within a particular industry may presume the reader has background knowledge, but these publications are still reader-friendly for a broader audience. Their purpose is to inform and, often, to entertain or persuade readers as well.

Scholarly or academic journals are written for a much smaller and more expert audience. The creators of these publications assume that most of their readers are already familiar with the main topic of the journal. The target audience is also highly educated. Informing is the primary purpose of a scholarly journal. While a journal article may advance an agenda or advocate a position, the content will still be presented in an objective style and formal tone. Entertaining readers with breezy comments and splashy graphics is not a priority.

Because of these differences, scholarly journals are more challenging to read. That doesn't mean you should avoid them. On the contrary, they can provide in-depth information unavailable elsewhere. Because knowledgeable professionals carefully review the content before publication, scholarly journals are far more reliable than much of the information available in popular media. Seek out academic journals along with other resources. Just be prepared to spend a little more time processing the information.

## Writing at Work

Periodicals databases are not just for students writing research papers. They also provide a valuable service to workers in various fields. The owner of a small business might use a database such as Business Source Premiere to find articles on management, finance, or trends within a particular industry. Health care professionals might consult databases such as MedLine to research a particular disease or medication. Regardless of what career path you plan to

pursue, periodicals databases can be a useful tool for researching specific topics and identifying periodicals that will help you keep up with the latest news in your industry.

## Consulting a Reference Librarian

Sifting through library stacks and database search results to find the information you need can be like trying to find a needle in a haystack. If you are not sure how you should begin your search, or if it is yielding too many or too few results, you are not alone. Many students find this process challenging, although it does get easier with experience. One way to learn better search strategies is to consult a reference librarian.

Reference librarians are intimately familiar with the systems libraries use to organize and classify information. They can help you locate a particular book in the library stacks, steer you toward useful reference works, and provide tips on how to use databases and other electronic research tools. Take the time to see what resources you can find on your own, but if you encounter difficulties, ask for help. Many university librarians hold virtual office hours and are available for online chatting.

### Exercise 3

Visit your library's website or consult with a reference librarian to determine what periodicals indexes or databases would be useful for your research. Depending on your topic, you may rely on a general news index, a specialized index for a particular subject area, or both. Search the catalog for your topic and related keywords. Print out or bookmark your search results.

1. Identify at least one to two relevant periodicals, indexes, or databases.
2. Conduct a keyword search to find potentially relevant articles on your topic.
3. Save your search results. If the index you are using provides article summaries, read these to determine how useful the articles are likely to be.
4. Identify at least three to five articles to review more closely. If the full article is available online, set aside time to read it. If not, plan to visit our library within the next few days to locate the articles you need.

### Tip

One way to refine your keyword search is to use Boolean operators. These operators allow you to combine keywords, find variations on a word, and otherwise expand or limit your results. Here are some of the ways you can use Boolean operators:

- Combine keywords with and or + to limit results to citations that include both keywords—for example, diet + nutrition.
- Combine keywords with not or – to search for the first word without the second. This can help you eliminate irrelevant results based on words that are similar to your search

term. For example, searching for obesity not childhood locates materials on obesity but excludes materials on childhood obesity.

- Enclose a phrase in quotation marks to search for an exact phrase, such as “morbid obesity.”
- Use parentheses to direct the order of operations in a search string. For example, since Type II diabetes is also known as adult-onset diabetes, you could search (Type II or adult-onset) and diabetes to limit your search results to articles on this form of the disease.
- Use a wildcard symbol such as #, ?, or \$ after a word to search for variations on a term. For instance, you might type diabet# to search for information on diabetes and diabetics. The specific symbol used varies with different databases.

## **Finding and Using Electronic Resources**

With the expansion of technology and media over the past few decades, a wealth of information is available to you in electronic format. Some types of resources, such as a television documentary, may only be available electronically. Other resources—for instance, many newspapers and magazines—may be available in both print and electronic form. The following are some of the electronic sources you might consult:

- Online databases
- CD-ROMs
- Popular web search engines
- Websites maintained by businesses, universities, nonprofit organizations, or government agencies
- Newspapers, magazines, and journals published on the web
- E-books
- Audio books
- Industry blogs
- Radio and television programs and other audio and video recordings
- Online discussion groups

The techniques you use to locate print resources can also help you find electronic resources efficiently. Libraries usually include CD-ROMs, audio books, and audio and video recordings among their holdings. You can locate these materials in the catalog using a keyword search. The same Boolean operators used to refine database searches can help you filter your results in popular search engines.

## **Using Internet Search Engines Efficiently**

When faced with the challenge of writing a research paper, some students rely on popular search engines as their first source of information. Typing a keyword or phrase into a search engine instantly pulls up links to dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of related websites—what could be easier? Unfortunately, despite its apparent convenience, this research strategy has the following drawbacks to consider:

- Results do not always appear in order of reliability. The first few hits that appear in search results may include sites whose content is not always reliable, such as online encyclopedias that can be edited by any user. Because websites are created by third parties, the search engine cannot tell you which sites have accurate information.
- Results may be too numerous for you to use. The amount of information available on the web is far greater than the amount of information housed within a particular library or database. Realistically, if your web search pulls up thousands of hits, you will not be able to visit every site—and the most useful sites may be buried deep within your search results.
- Search engines are not connected to the results of the search. Search engines find websites that people visit often and list the results in order of popularity. The search engine, then, is not connected to any of the results. When you cite a source found through a search engine, you do not need to cite the search engine. Only cite the source.

A general web search can provide a helpful overview of a topic and may pull up genuinely useful resources. To get the most out of a search engine, however, use strategies to make your search more efficient. Use multiple keywords and Boolean operators to limit your results. Click on the Advanced Search link on the homepage to find additional options for streamlining your search. Depending on the specific search engine you use, the following options may be available:

- Limit results to websites that have been updated within a particular time frame.
- Limit results by language or country.
- Limit results to scholarly works available online.
- Limit results by file type.
- Limit results to a particular domain type, such as .edu (school and university sites) or .gov (government sites). This is a quick way to filter out commercial sites, which can often lead to more objective results.

Use the Bookmarks or Favorites feature of your web browser to save and organize sites that look promising.

## **Using Other Information Sources: Interviews**

With so many print and electronic media readily available, it is easy to overlook another valuable information resource: other people. Consider whether you could use a person or group as a



primary source. For instance, you might interview a professor who has expertise in a particular subject, a worker within a particular industry, or a representative from a political organization. Interviews can be a great way to get firsthand information.

To get the most out of an interview, you will need to plan ahead. Contact your subject early in the research process and explain your purpose for requesting an interview. Prepare detailed questions. Open-ended questions, rather than questions with simple yes-or-no answers, are more likely to lead to an in-depth discussion. Schedule a time to meet, and be sure to obtain your subject's permission to record the interview. Take careful notes and be ready to ask follow-up questions based on what you learn.

## Tip

If scheduling an in-person meeting is difficult, consider arranging a telephone interview or asking your subject to respond to your questions via e-mail. Recognize that any of these formats takes time and effort. Be prompt and courteous, avoid going over the allotted interview time, and be flexible if your subject needs to reschedule.

## Evaluating Research Resources

As you gather sources, you will need to examine them with a critical eye. Smart researchers continually ask themselves two questions: "Is this source relevant to my purpose?" and "Is this source reliable?" The first question will help you avoid wasting valuable time reading sources that stray too far from your specific topic and research questions. The second question will help you find accurate, trustworthy sources.

## Determining Whether a Source Is Relevant

At this point in your research process, you may have identified dozens of potential sources. It is easy for writers to get so caught up in checking out books and printing out articles that they forget to ask themselves how they will use these resources in their research. Now is a good time to get a little ruthless. Reading and taking notes takes time and energy, so you will want to focus on the most relevant sources.

To weed through your stack of books and articles, skim their contents. Read quickly with your research questions and subtopics in mind. [Table 11.3 "Tips for Skimming Books and Articles"](#) explains how to skim to get a quick sense of what topics are covered. If a book or article is not especially relevant, put it aside. You can always come back to it later if you need to.

Table 11.3 Tips for Skimming Books and Articles

Tips for Skimming Books	Tips for Skimming Articles
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read the dust jacket and table of contents for a broad overview of the topics covered.</li> <li>2. Use the index to locate more specific topics and see how thoroughly they are covered.</li> <li>3. Flip through the book and look for subtitles or key terms that correspond to your research.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skim the introduction and conclusion for summary material.</li> <li>2. Skim through subheadings and text features such as sidebars.</li> <li>3. Look for keywords related to your topic.</li> <li>4. Journal articles often begin with an abstract or summary of the contents. Read it to determine the article's relevance to your research.</li> </ol>

## Determining Whether a Source Is Reliable

All information sources are not created equal. Sources can vary greatly in terms of how carefully they are researched, written, edited, and reviewed for accuracy. Common sense will help you identify obviously questionable sources, such as tabloids that feature tales of alien abductions, or personal websites with glaring typos. Sometimes, however, a source's reliability—or lack of it—is not so obvious.

To evaluate your research sources, you will use critical thinking skills consciously and deliberately. You will consider criteria such as the type of source, its intended purpose and audience, the author's (or authors') qualifications, the publication's reputation, any indications of bias or hidden agendas, how current the source is, and the overall quality of the writing, thinking, and design.

## Evaluating Types of Sources

The different types of sources you will consult are written for distinct purposes and with different audiences in mind. This accounts for other differences, such as the following:

- How thoroughly the writers cover a given topic
- How carefully the writers research and document facts
- How editors review the work
- What biases or agendas affect the content

A journal article written for an academic audience for the purpose of expanding scholarship in a given field will take an approach quite different from a magazine feature written to inform a

general audience. Textbooks, hard news articles, and websites approach a subject from different angles as well. To some extent, the type of source provides clues about its overall depth and reliability. [Table 11.4 “Source Rankings”](#) ranks different source types.

Table 11.4 Source Rankings

High-Quality Sources	
<p>These sources provide the most in-depth information. They are researched and written by subject matter experts and are carefully reviewed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarly books and articles in scholarly journals</li> <li>• Trade books and magazines geared toward an educated general audience, such as <i>Smithsonian Magazine</i> or <i>Nature</i></li> <li>• Government documents, such as books, reports, and web pages</li> <li>• Documents posted online by reputable organizations, such as universities and research institutes</li> <li>• Textbooks and reference books, which are usually reliable but may not cover a topic in great depth</li> </ul>
Varied-Quality Sources	
<p>These sources are often useful. However, they do not cover subjects in as much depth as high-quality sources, and they are not always rigorously researched and reviewed. Some, such as popular magazine articles or company brochures, may be written to market a product or a cause. Use them with caution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News stories and feature articles (print or online) from reputable newspapers, magazines, or organizations, such as <i>Newsweek</i> or the Public Broadcasting Service</li> <li>• Popular magazine articles, which may or may not be carefully researched and fact checked</li> <li>• Documents published by businesses and nonprofit organizations</li> </ul>
Questionable Sources	
<p>These sources should be avoided. They are often written primarily to attract a large readership or present the author’s opinions and are not subject to careful review.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loosely regulated or unregulated media content, such as Internet discussion boards, blogs, free online encyclopedias, talk radio shows, television news shows</li> </ul>

	with obvious political biases, personal websites, and chat rooms
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## Tip

Free online encyclopedias and wikis may seem like a great source of information. They usually appear among the first few results of a web search. They cover thousands of topics, and many articles use an informal, straightforward writing style. Unfortunately, these sites have no control system for researching, writing, and reviewing articles. Instead, they rely on a community of users to police themselves. At best, these sites can be a starting point for finding other, more trustworthy sources. Never use them as final sources.

## Evaluating Credibility and Reputability

Even when you are using a type of source that is generally reliable, you will still need to evaluate the author's credibility and the publication itself on an individual basis. To examine the author's credibility—that is, how much you can believe of what the author has to say—examine his or her credentials. What career experience or academic study shows that the author has the expertise to write about this topic?

Keep in mind that expertise in one field is no guarantee of expertise in another, unrelated area. For instance, an author may have an advanced degree in physiology, but this credential is not a valid qualification for writing about psychology. Check credentials carefully.

Just as important as the author's credibility is the publication's overall reputability. Reputability refers to a source's standing and reputation as a respectable, reliable source of information. An established and well-known newspaper, such as the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*, is more reputable than a college newspaper put out by comparatively inexperienced students. A website that is maintained by a well-known, respected organization and regularly updated is more reputable than one created by an unknown author or group.

If you are using articles from scholarly journals, you can check databases that keep count of how many times each article has been cited in other articles. This can be a rough indication of the article's quality or, at the very least, of its influence and reputation among other scholars.

## Checking for Biases and Hidden Agendas

Whenever you consult a source, always think carefully about the author's or authors' purpose in presenting the information. Few sources present facts completely objectively. In some cases, the source's content and tone are significantly influenced by biases or hidden agendas.

Bias refers to favoritism or prejudice toward a particular person or group. For instance, an author may be biased against a certain political party and present information in a way that subtly—or not so subtly—makes that organization look bad. Bias can lead an author to present facts selectively, edit quotations to misrepresent someone's words, and distort information.

Hidden agendas are goals that are not immediately obvious but influence how an author presents the facts. For instance, an article about the role of beef in a healthy diet would be questionable if it were written by a representative of the beef industry—or by the president of an animal-rights organization. In both cases, the author would likely have a hidden agenda.

As Jorge conducted his research, he read several research studies in which scientists found significant benefits to following a low-carbohydrate diet. He also noticed that many studies were sponsored by a foundation associated with the author of a popular series of low-carbohydrate diet books. Jorge read these studies with a critical eye, knowing that a hidden agenda might be shaping the researchers' conclusions.

## **Using Current Sources**

Be sure to seek out sources that are current, or up to date. Depending on the topic, sources may become outdated relatively soon after publication, or they may remain useful for years. For instance, online social networking sites have evolved rapidly over the past few years. An article published in 2002 about this topic will not provide current information. On the other hand, a research paper on elementary education practices might refer to studies published decades ago by influential child psychologists.

When using websites for research, check to see when the site was last updated. Many sites publish this information on the homepage, and some, such as news sites, are updated daily or weekly. Many nonfunctioning links are a sign that a website is not regularly updated. Do not be afraid to ask your professor for suggestions if you find that many of your most relevant sources are not especially reliable—or that the most reliable sources are not relevant.

## **Evaluating Overall Quality by Asking Questions**

When you evaluate a source, you will consider the criteria previously discussed as well as your overall impressions of its quality. Read carefully, and notice how well the author presents and supports his or her statements. Stay actively engaged—do not simply accept an author's words as truth. Ask questions to determine each source's value. Checklist 11.1 lists ten questions to ask yourself as a critical reader.

### **Checklist 11.1**

## Source Evaluation

- Is the type of source appropriate for my purpose? Is it a high-quality source or one that needs to be looked at more critically?
- Can I establish that the author is credible and the publication is reputable?
- Does the author support ideas with specific facts and details that are carefully documented? Is the source of the author's information clear? (When you use secondary sources, look for sources that are not too removed from primary research.)
- Does the source include any factual errors or instances of faulty logic?
- Does the author leave out any information that I would expect to see in a discussion of this topic?
- Do the author's conclusions logically follow from the evidence that is presented? Can I see how the author got from one point to another?
- Is the writing clear and organized, and is it free from errors, clichés, and empty buzzwords? Is the tone objective, balanced, and reasonable? (Be on the lookout for extreme, emotionally charged language.)
- Are there any obvious biases or agendas? Based on what I know about the author, are there likely to be any hidden agendas?
- Are graphics informative, useful, and easy to understand? Are websites organized, easy to navigate, and free of clutter like flashing ads and unnecessary sound effects?
- Is the source contradicted by information found in other sources? (If so, it is possible that your sources are presenting similar information but taking different perspectives, which requires you to think carefully about which sources you find more convincing and why. Be suspicious, however, of any source that presents facts that you cannot confirm elsewhere.)

## Writing at Work

The critical thinking skills you use to evaluate research sources as a student are equally valuable when you conduct research on the job. If you follow certain periodicals or websites, you have probably identified publications that consistently provide reliable information. Reading blogs and online discussion groups is a great way to identify new trends and hot topics in a particular field, but these sources should not be used for substantial research.

### Exercise 4

Use a search engine to conduct a web search on your topic. Refer to the tips provided earlier to help you streamline your search. Evaluate your search results critically based on the criteria you have learned. Identify and bookmark one or more websites that are reliable, reputable, and likely to be useful in your research.

## Managing Source Information

As you determine which sources you will rely on most, it is important to establish a system for keeping track of your sources and taking notes. There are several ways to go about it, and no one system is necessarily superior. What matters is that you keep materials in order; record bibliographical information you will need later; and take detailed, organized notes.

## Keeping Track of Your Sources

Think ahead to a moment a few weeks from now, when you've written your research paper and are almost ready to submit it for a grade. There is just one task left—writing your list of sources.

As you begin typing your list, you realize you need to include the publication information for a book you cited frequently. Unfortunately, you already returned it to the library several days ago. You do not remember the URLs for some of the websites you used or the dates you accessed them—information that also must be included in your bibliography. With a sinking feeling, you realize that finding this information and preparing your bibliography will require hours of work.

This stressful scenario can be avoided. Taking time to organize source information now will ensure that you are not scrambling to find it at the last minute. Throughout your research, record bibliographical information for each source as soon as you begin using it. You may use pen-and-paper methods, such as a notebook or note cards, or maintain an electronic list. (If you prefer the latter option, many office software packages include separate programs for recording bibliographic information.)

[Table 11.5 “Details for Commonly Used Source Types”](#) shows the specific details you should record for commonly used source types. Use these details to develop a working bibliography—a preliminary list of sources that you will later use to develop the references section of your paper. You may wish to record information using the formatting system of the American Psychological Association (APA) or the Modern Language Association (MLA), which will save a step later on.

Table 11.5 Details for Commonly Used Source Types

Source Type	Necessary Information
Book	Author(s), title and subtitle, publisher, city of publication, year of publication

Source Type	Necessary Information
Essay or article published in a book	Include all the information you would for any other book. Additionally, record the essay's or article's title, author(s), the pages on which it appears, and the name of the book's editor(s).
Periodical	Author(s), article title, publication title, date of publication, volume and issue number, and page numbers
Online source	Author(s) (if available), article or document title, organization that sponsors the site, database name (if applicable), date of publication, date you accessed the site, and URL
Interview	Name of person interviewed, method of communication, date of interview

Your research may involve less common types of sources not listed in [Table 11.5 “Details for Commonly Used Source Types”](#).

## Exercise 5

Create a working bibliography using the format that is most convenient for you. List at least five sources you plan to use. Continue to add sources to your working bibliography throughout the research process.

## Tip

To make your working bibliography even more complete, you may wish to record additional details, such as a book's call number or contact information for a person you interviewed. That way, if you need to locate a source again, you have all the information you need right at your fingertips. You may also wish to assign each source a code number to use when taking notes (1, 2, 3, or a similar system).



## **Taking Notes Efficiently**

Good researchers stay focused and organized as they gather information from sources. Before you begin taking notes, take a moment to step back and think about your goal as a researcher—to find information that will help you answer your research question. When you write your paper, you will present your conclusions about the topic supported by research. That goal will determine what information you record and how you organize it.

Writers sometimes get caught up in taking extensive notes, so much so that they lose sight of how their notes relate to the questions and ideas they started out with. Remember that you do not need to write down every detail from your reading. Focus on finding and recording details that will help you answer your research questions. The following strategies will help you take notes efficiently.

## **Use Headings to Organize Ideas**

Whether you use old-fashioned index cards or organize your notes using word-processing software, record just one major point from each source at a time, and use a heading to summarize the information covered. Keep all your notes in one file, digital or otherwise. Doing so will help you identify connections among different pieces of information. It will also help you make connections between your notes and the research questions and subtopics you identified earlier.

## **Know When to Summarize, Paraphrase, or Directly Quote a Source**

Your notes will fall under three categories—summary notes, paraphrased information, and direct quotations from your sources. Effective researchers make choices about which type of notes is most appropriate for their purpose.

- Summary notes sum up the main ideas in a source in a few sentences or a short paragraph. A summary is considerably shorter than the original text and captures only the major ideas. Use summary notes when you do not need to record specific details but you intend to refer to broad concepts the author discusses.
- Paraphrased notes restate a fact or idea from a source using your own words and sentence structure.
- Direct quotations use the exact wording used by the original source and enclose the quoted material in quotation marks. It is a good strategy to copy direct quotations when an author expresses an idea in an especially lively or memorable way. However, do not rely exclusively on direct quotations in your note taking.

Most of your notes should be paraphrased from the original source. Paraphrasing as you take notes is usually a better strategy than copying direct quotations, because it forces you to think

through the information in your source and understand it well enough to restate it. In short, it helps you stay engaged with the material instead of simply copying and pasting. Synthesizing will help you later when you begin planning and drafting your paper.

## **Maintain Complete, Accurate Notes**

Regardless of the format used, any notes you take should include enough information to help you organize ideas and locate them instantly in the original text if you need to review them. Make sure your notes include the following elements:

- Heading summing up the main topic covered
- Author's name, a source code, or an abbreviated source title
- Page number
- Full URL of any pages buried deep in a website

Throughout the process of taking notes, be scrupulous about making sure you have correctly attributed each idea to its source. Always include source information so you know exactly which ideas came from which sources. Use quotation marks to set off any words or phrases taken directly from the original text. If you add your own responses and ideas, make sure they are distinct from ideas you quoted or paraphrased.

Finally, make sure your notes accurately reflect the content of the original text. Make sure quoted material is copied verbatim. If you omit words from a quotation, use ellipses to show the omission and make sure the omission does not change the author's meaning. Paraphrase ideas carefully, and check your paraphrased notes against the original text to make sure that you have restated the author's ideas accurately in your own words.

## **Use a System That Works for You**

There are several formats you can use to take notes. No technique is necessarily better than the others—it is more important to choose a format you are comfortable using. Choosing the format that works best for you will ensure your notes are organized, complete, and accurate. Consider implementing one of these formats when you begin taking notes:

- Use index cards. This traditional format involves writing each note on a separate index card. It takes more time than copying and pasting into an electronic document, which encourages you to be selective in choosing which ideas to record. Recording notes on separate cards makes it easy to later organize your notes according to major topics. Some writers color-code their cards to make them still more organized.
- Use note-taking software. Word-processing and office software packages often include different types of note-taking software. Although you may need to set aside some time to learn the software, this method combines the speed of typing with the same degree of organization associated with handwritten note cards.

- Maintain a research notebook. Instead of using index cards or electronic note cards, you may wish to keep a notebook or electronic folder, allotting a few pages (or one file) for each of your sources. This method makes it easy to create a separate column or section of the document where you add your responses to the information you encounter in your research.
- Annotate your sources. This method involves making handwritten notes in the margins of sources that you have printed or photocopied. If using electronic sources, you can make comments within the source document. For example, you might add comment boxes to a PDF version of an article. This method works best for experienced researchers who have already thought a great deal about the topic because it can be difficult to organize your notes later when starting your draft.

Choose one of the methods from the list to use for taking notes. Continue gathering sources and taking notes. In the next section, you will learn strategies for organizing and synthesizing the information you have found.

## Key Takeaways

- A writer's use of primary and secondary sources is determined by the topic and purpose of the research. Sources used may include print sources, such as books and journals; electronic sources, such as websites and articles retrieved from databases; and human sources of information, such as interviews.
- Strategies that help writers locate sources efficiently include conducting effective keyword searches, understanding how to use online catalogs and databases, using strategies to narrow web search results, and consulting reference librarians.
- Writers evaluate sources based on how relevant they are to the research question and how reliable their content is.
- Skimming sources can help writers determine their relevance efficiently.
- Writers evaluate a source's reliability by asking questions about the type of source (including its audience and purpose); the author's credibility, the publication's reputability, the source's currency, and the overall quality of the writing, research, logic, and design in the source.
- In their notes, effective writers record organized, complete, accurate information. This includes bibliographic information about each source as well as summarized, paraphrased, or quoted information from the source.

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# Chapter 5: Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement

Have you ever known a person who was not very good at telling stories? You probably had trouble following his train of thought as he jumped around from point to point, either being too brief in places that needed further explanation or providing too many details on a meaningless element. Maybe he told the end of the story first, then moved to the beginning and later added details to the middle. His ideas were probably scattered, and the story did not flow very well. When the story was over, you probably had many questions.

Just as a personal anecdote can be a disorganized mess, an essay can fall into the same trap of being out of order and confusing. That is why writers need a thesis statement to provide a specific focus for their essay and to organize what they are about to discuss in the body.

Just like a topic sentence summarizes a single paragraph, the thesis statement summarizes an entire essay. It tells the reader the point you want to make in your essay, while the essay itself supports that point. It is like a signpost that signals the essay's destination. You should form your thesis before you begin to organize an essay, but you may find that it needs revision as the essay develops.

## Elements of a Thesis Statement

For every essay you write, you must focus on a central idea. This idea stems from a topic you have chosen or been assigned or from a question your teacher has asked. It is not enough merely to discuss a general topic or simply answer a question with a yes or no. You have to form a specific opinion, and then articulate that into a controlling idea—the main idea upon which you build your thesis.

Remember that a thesis is not the topic itself, but rather your interpretation of the question or subject. For whatever topic your professor gives you, you must ask yourself, “What do I want to say about it?” Asking and then answering this question is vital to forming a thesis that is precise, forceful and confident.

A thesis is one sentence long and appears toward the end of your introduction. It is specific and focuses on one to three points of a single idea—points that are able to be demonstrated in the body. It forecasts the content of the essay and suggests how you will organize your information. Remember that a thesis statement does not summarize an issue but rather dissects it.

## A Strong Thesis Statement

A strong thesis statement contains the following qualities.

**Specificity.** A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall, the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then narrow down its parts until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care coverage.

**Precision.** A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic is options for individuals without health care coverage, then your precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers. You must further pinpoint what you are going to discuss regarding these limited effects, such as whom they affect and what the cause is.

**Ability to be argued.** A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement often is not considered arguable. Be sure your thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.

**Ability to be demonstrated.** For any claim you make in your thesis, you must be able to provide reasons and examples for your opinion. You can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or you can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.

**Forcefulness.** A thesis statement that is forceful shows readers that you are, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.

**Confidence.** In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also use confidence in your claim. Phrases such as *I feel* or *I believe* actually weaken the readers' sense of your confidence because these phrases imply that you are the only person who feels the way you do. In other words, your stance has insufficient backing. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades your readers to have faith in your argument and open their minds to what you have to say.

## Tip

Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first person, your thesis should not contain phrases such as *in my opinion* or *I believe*. These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you use a firm attitude.

## Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, write a thesis statement for each of the following topics. Remember to make each statement specific, precise, demonstrable, forceful and confident.

Topics

- Texting while driving
- The legal drinking age in the United States
- Steroid use among professional athletes
- Abortion
- Racism

## Examples of Appropriate Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the following requirements:

- Specificity
  - Precision
  - Ability to be argued
  - Ability to be demonstrated
  - Forcefulness
  - Confidence
1. The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the play *Fences* symbolize the challenge of black males who lived through segregation and integration in the United States.
  2. Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.
  3. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet* spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.
  4. J. D. Salinger's character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions.
  5. Compared to an absolute divorce, no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.
  6. Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.
  7. In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.

## Tip

You can find thesis statements in many places, such as in the news; in the opinions of friends, coworkers or teachers; and even in songs you hear on the radio. Become aware of thesis statements in everyday life by paying attention to people's opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Pay attention to your own everyday thesis statements as well, as these can become material for future essays.

Now that you have read about the contents of a good thesis statement and have seen examples, take a look at the pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis:

- A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of your subject or a description of what you will discuss in your essay.

Weak thesis statement: My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.

- A thesis is weak when it makes an unreasonable or outrageous claim or insults the opposing side.

Weak thesis statement: Religious radicals across America are trying to legislate their Puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.

- A thesis is weak when it contains an obvious fact or something that no one can disagree with or provides a dead end.

Weak thesis statement: Advertising companies use sex to sell their products.

- A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad.

Weak thesis statement: The life of Abraham Lincoln was long and challenging.

## Exercise 2

Read the following thesis statements. On a separate piece of paper, identify each as weak or strong. For those that are weak, list the reasons why. Then revise the weak statements so that they conform to the requirements of a strong thesis.

1. The subject of this paper is my experience with ferrets as pets.
2. The government must expand its funding for research on renewable energy resources in order to prepare for the impending end of oil.
3. Edgar Allan Poe was a poet who lived in Baltimore during the nineteenth century.
4. In this essay, I will give you lots of reasons why slot machines should not be legalized in Baltimore.
5. Despite his promises during his campaign, President Kennedy took few executive measures to support civil rights legislation.
6. Because many children's toys have potential safety hazards that could lead to injury, it is clear that not all children's toys are safe.
7. My experience with young children has taught me that I want to be a disciplinary parent because I believe that a child without discipline can be a parent's worst nightmare.

## Writing at Work

Often in your career, you will need to ask your boss for something through an e-mail. Just as a thesis statement organizes an essay, it can also organize your e-mail request. While your e-mail will be shorter than an essay, using a thesis statement in your first paragraph quickly lets your

boss know what you are asking for, why it is necessary, and what the benefits are. In short body paragraphs, you can provide the essential information needed to expand upon your request.

## Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis will probably change as you write, so you will need to modify it to reflect exactly what you have discussed in your essay. Remember from [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#) that your thesis statement begins as a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process for the purpose of planning and guiding your writing.

Working thesis statements often become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

### Tip

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you grow closer to a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

## Ways to Revise Your Thesis

You can cut down on irrelevant aspects and revise your thesis by taking the following steps:

1. Pinpoint and replace all nonspecific words, such as *people*, *everything*, *society*, or *life*, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.

Working thesis: Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.

Revised thesis: Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.

The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like *people* and *work hard*, the writer can better focus his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing.

2. Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.



Revised thesis: The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.

A *joke* means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for *joke*. By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines his or her stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.

3. Replace any linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs are forms of the verb *to be*, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

Working thesis: Kansas City schoolteachers are not paid enough.

Revised thesis: The Kansas City legislature cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.

The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word *are*. Linking verbs often make thesis statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, “Why are they not paid enough?” But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. The writer should ask himself or herself questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement, one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered “enough”?
- What is the problem?
- What are the results

4. Omit any general claims that are hard to support.

Working thesis: Today’s teenage girls are too sexualized.

Revised thesis: Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman’s worth depends on her sensuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.

It is true that some young women in today’s society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. Many girls have strict parents, dress appropriately, and do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school and high school. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:

- Which teenage girls?
- What constitutes “too” sexualized?
- Why are they behaving that way?
- Where does this behavior show up?
- What are the repercussions?

## Writing at Work

In your career you may have to write a project proposal that focuses on a particular problem in your company, such as reinforcing the tardiness policy. The proposal would aim to fix the problem; using a thesis statement would clearly state the boundaries of the problem and tell the goals of the project. After writing the proposal, you may find that the thesis needs revision to reflect exactly what is expressed in the body. Using the techniques from this chapter would apply to revising that thesis.

## Key Takeaways

- Proper essays require a thesis statement to provide a specific focus and suggest how the essay will be organized.
- A thesis statement is your interpretation of the subject, not the topic itself.
- A strong thesis is specific, precise, forceful, confident, and is able to be demonstrated.
- A strong thesis challenges readers with a point of view that can be debated and can be supported with evidence.
- A weak thesis is simply a declaration of your topic or contains an obvious fact that cannot be argued.
- Depending on your topic, it may or may not be appropriate to use first person point of view.
- Revise your thesis by ensuring all words are specific, all ideas are exact, and all verbs express action.

Attribution:

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## Chapter 6: A Repository Of Logical Fallacies

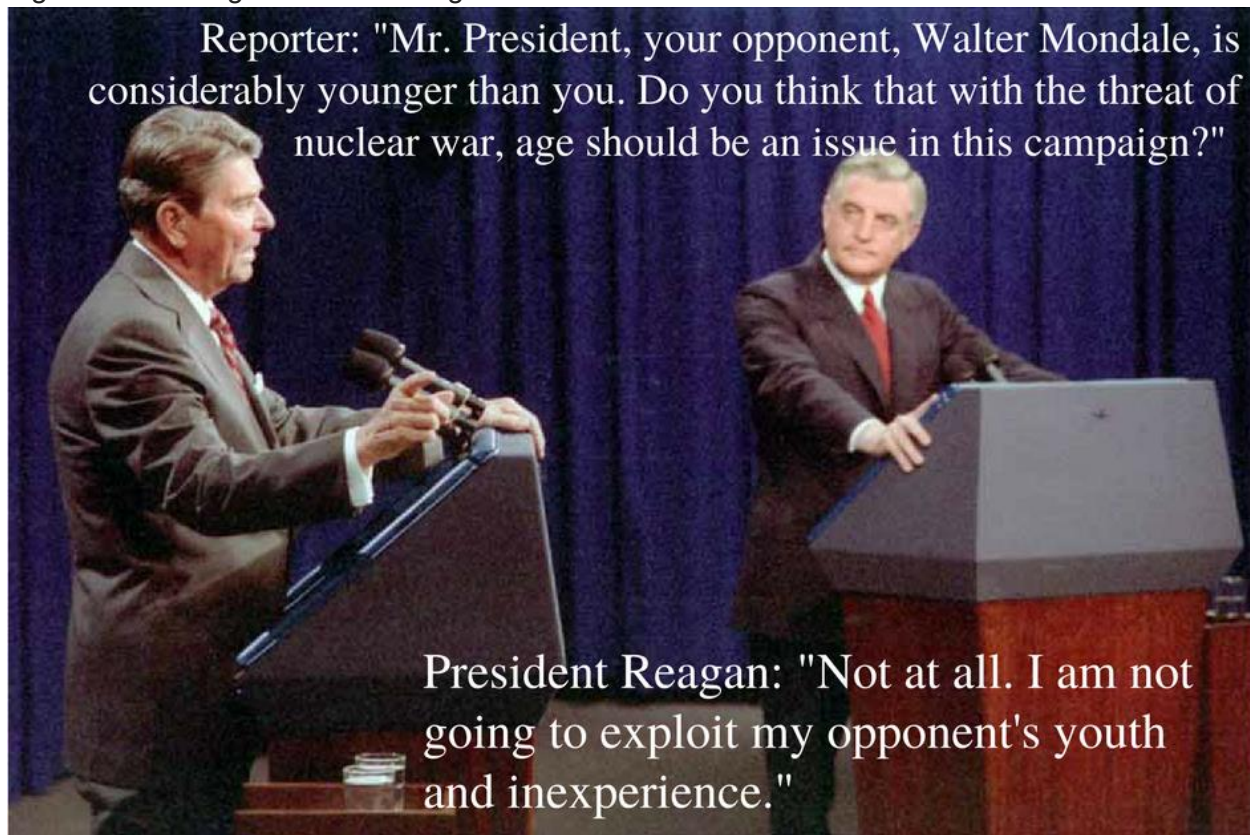
Below is a list of informal fallacies, divided into four main categories: fallacies of irrelevance, presumption, ambiguity, and inconsistency. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it will include some of the most common fallacies used by writers and speakers, both in the world and in the classroom.

### Fallacies of Irrelevance

One of the most common ways to go off track in an argument is to bring up irrelevant information or ideas. They are grouped here into two main categories: the red herring fallacies and the irrelevant appeals.

- **Red Herring Fallacies**—These aim to distract the reader by introducing irrelevant ideas or information. They divert attention away from the validity, soundness, and support of an argument. Think of red herrings as squirrels to a dog—almost impossible to resist chasing once spotted.

Figure 3.12 “Reagan’s Red Herring”



- Weak/False Analogy—An analogy is a brief comparison, usually to make writing more interesting and to connect with the reader. While writers often use analogies effectively to illustrate ideas, a bad analogy can be misleading and even inflammatory.

Example: “Taxes are like theft.” This statement makes a false analogy because taxes are legal and thus cannot logically be defined as, or even compared to, something illegal.

- Ad Hominem Attacks—The *argumentum ad hominem* is one of the most recognizable and irresistible of the red herring fallacies. Ad hominem attacks distract from an argument by focusing on the one making the argument, trying to damage his or her credibility. There are two main types of ad hominem attack: abuse and circumstance:

Ad hominem attacks of abuse are personal (often ruthlessly so), meant to insult and demean. Attacks of abuse distract the audience as well as the speaker or writer because he will believe it necessary to defend himself from the abuse rather than strengthen his argument.

Examples: These can include attacks on the body, intelligence, voice, dress, family, and personal choices and tastes.

Figure 3.13 “Student vs. Freud Ad Hominem”



In ad hominem attacks of circumstance, the debater implies that his opponent only makes an argument because of a personal connection to it instead of the quality and support of the argument itself, which should be considered independent of any personal connection.

Example: “You only support the Latino for this job because you’re a Latino.”

This statement fails the logic test because it only takes a personal characteristic into account—race—when making this claim. This claim does not consider two important issues: (1) People do not base every decision they make on their race, and (2) there may have been other perfectly logical reasons to support the Latino job applicant that had nothing to do with race.

- **Guilt by Association**—This red herring fallacy works by associating the author of an argument with a group or belief so abhorrent and inflammatory in the minds of the audience that everyone, author and audience alike, is chasing squirrels up trees—that is, they are occupied by the tainted association to the reviled group—instead of dealing with the merits of the original argument.

Example: the *argumentum ad Nazium*, or playing the Hitler card. To counter an argument, either the arguer or a part of the argument itself is associated with Hitler or the Nazis. (“Vegetarianism is a healthy option for dieters.” “Never! You know, Hitler was a vegetarian!”) Because almost no one wants to be associated with fascists (or other similarly hated groups, like cannibals or terrorists), the author now faces the task of defending himself against the negative association instead of pursuing the argument. If, however, there are actual Nazis—or the equivalent of Nazis, such as white supremacists or other neofascists—making an argument based on fascist ideology, it is perfectly reasonable to criticize, oppose, and object to their extreme and hateful views.

Figure 3.15 “Guilt by Association”





Irrelevant Appeals—Unlike the rhetorical appeals, the irrelevant appeals are attempts to persuade the reader with ideas and information that are irrelevant to the issues or arguments at hand, or the appeals rest on faulty assumptions in the first place. The irrelevant appeals can look and feel like logical support, but they are either a mirage or a manipulation.

- Appeal to Popularity—Also known as the bandwagon fallacy, the appeal to popularity implies that because many people believe or support something, it constitutes evidence for its validity. However, once we stop to think this idea through, we can easily remember popular ideas that were not at all good or justifiable: The majority does not always make the best choice.

Example: A good example here would be fashion trends. What is popular from one day to the next does not necessarily have anything to do with whether something logically is a good idea or has practical use.

Figure 3.16 “Appeal to Popularity”



- Appeal to Incredulity—suggests that a lack of understanding is a valid excuse for rejecting an idea. Just because someone does not personally understand how something works does not mean that thing is false. A person does not need to understand how a car’s engine works to know that it *does* work, for instance. Often, in addition to rejecting the difficult idea, the arguer goes on to suggest that anyone who believes in the idea is foolish to do so.

Example: “It’s just common sense that the earth is flat because when I look at it, I can’t see any curve, not even when I’m in an airplane. I don’t need any scientist to tell me what I can clearly figure out with my own eyes.” This person has casually dismissed any scientific evidence against a flat earth as if it did not matter. Often those making an illogical appeal to incredulity will substitute what they think of as “common sense” for actual scientific evidence with the implication that they do not need any other basis for understanding. The problem is that many of the truths of our universe cannot be understood by common sense alone. Science provides

the answers, often through complex mathematical and theoretical frameworks, but ignorance of the science is not a justifiable reason for dismissing it.

- **Appeal to Nature**—the assumption that what is natural is (1) inherently good and therefore (2) constitutes sufficient reason for its use or support. This is flawed because (1) how we determine what is natural can and does change, and (2) not everything that is natural is beneficial.

Example: “Vaccines are unnatural; thus, being vaccinated is more harmful than not being vaccinated.” A person making this statement has made an illogical appeal to nature. The fact that vaccines are a product of human engineering does not automatically mean they are harmful. If this person applied that logic to other cases, she would then have to reject, for instance, *all* medicines created in the lab rather than plucked from the earth.

- **Appeal to Tradition/Antiquity**—assumes that what is old or what “has always been done” is automatically good and beneficial. The objection, “But, we’ve always done it this way!” is fairly common, used when someone tries to justify or legitimize whatever “it” is by calling on tradition. The problems are these: (1) Most rudimentary history investigations usually prove that, in fact, “it” has *not* always been done that way; (2) tradition is not by itself a justification for the goodness or benefit of anything. Foot binding was a tradition at one point, but a logical argument for its benefit would strain credulity.

Example: “We should bar women from our club because that is how it has always been done.” The person making this argument needs to provide logical reasons women should not be included, not just rely on tradition.

## Fallacies of Presumption

To call someone presumptuous is to accuse that person of overreaching—making bold assertions without adequate reason or failing to follow the rules of behavior (but presuming it is okay to do so). The logical fallacy version of this involves making a case with inadequate or tainted evidence, or even no evidence whatsoever, or by having unjustified reasons for making the case in the first place.

**Working with Flawed Evidence**—These fallacies occur when an author uses evidence that has been compromised.

- **Hasty Generalization**—A hasty generalization derives its conclusion from too little information, evidence, or reason.

One type of hasty generalization is jumping to a conclusion from a small amount of evidence.

Example: Having one bad meal at a restaurant and then immediately concluding that all meals from that restaurant will be just as bad.



Figure 3.18 “Hasty Generalization”



Another type of hasty generalization involves relying on anecdotal evidence for support. As human beings, we overestimate the power of personal experience and connections, so they can drown out scientific data that contradict an individual—or anecdotal—experience. Additionally, anecdotal evidence is persuasive because of the human desire for perfection. Perfection is a lofty—and mostly unreachable—goal, and when a product or a person or a program fails to live up to perfection, it becomes easier to dismiss—particularly when a personal story or two of imperfection is involved. Accurate information, however, comes from a much larger amount of data—analysis of hundreds or thousands or even millions of examples. Unfortunately, data can feel impersonal and, therefore, less convincing.

Example: “I love my new Banana™ laptop. The product ratings for it are very high.” “Oh, no one should ever buy one of their computers! My brother had one, and it was full of glitches.” Basing a judgement or an argument on a personal story or two, as in this case, is not logical but can be incredibly persuasive. However, if 98% of Banana™ computers run perfectly well, and only 2% have glitches, it is illogical to use that 2% to write this product off as universally terrible.

In scholarship, hasty generalizations can happen when conclusions derive from an unrepresentative sample. Data coming from a group that fail to represent the group's full complexity is unrepresentative, and any results drawn from that data will be flawed.

Example: If advances in cancer research were only, or mostly, tested on men, that would be unrepresentative of humanity because half of the human population—women—would not be represented. What if the cancer treatments affect women differently?

Another type of hasty generalization derived from poor research is the biased sample. This comes from a group that has a predisposed bias to the concepts being studied.

Example: If a psychologist were to study how high school students handled challenges to their religious views, it would be flawed to only study students at schools with a religious affiliation since most of those students may be predisposed toward a single type of religious view.

- **Sweeping Generalization**—the inverse of the hasty generalization. Instead of making a conclusion from little evidence, the sweeping generalization applies a general rule to a specific situation without providing proper evidence, without demonstrating that the rule even applies, or without providing for exceptions. Stereotyping is one prominent type of sweeping generalization; a stereotype derives from general ideas about a group of people without accounting for exceptions or accuracy or that there is any sound reasoning behind the stereotype.
- **Confirmation Bias**—a pernicious fallacy that can trip even careful scholars. It occurs when the writer or researcher is so convinced by her point of view that she only seeks to confirm it and, thus, ignores any evidence that would challenge it. Choosing only data that support a preformed conclusion is called cherry picking and is a one-way ticket to skewed results. Related to this fallacy is another—disconfirmation bias—when the writer or researcher puts so much stock in her side of the argument that she does not apply equal critical evaluation to the arguments and evidence that support the other side. In other words, while too easily and uncritically accepting what supports her side, she is unreasonably critical of opposing arguments and evidence.

Example: In the later nineteenth century, when archaeology was a new and thrilling field of study, Heinrich Schliemann excavated the ancient city of Troy, made famous in Homer's epic poem, *The Iliad*. In fact, Schliemann used *The Iliad* as a guide, so when he excavated, he looked to find structures (like walls) and situations (proof of battles) in the archaeological remains. While Schliemann's work is still considered groundbreaking in many ways, his method was flawed. It allowed him to cherry pick his results and fit them to his expectations—i.e., that his results would fit the myth. When Schliemann sought to confirm story elements from *The Iliad* in the archaeological record, he risked misinterpreting his data. What if the data was telling a different story than that in *The Iliad*? How could he know for sure until he put the book down and analyzed the archaeological evidence on its own merits? For more on Schliemann and his famous early excavations, see his Encyclopedia Britannica [entry](https://tinyurl.com/y9tk4vou) (<https://tinyurl.com/y9tk4vou>), or look up "Heinrich Schliemann" in the *Gale Virtual Reference Library* database.

- **No True Scotsman**—a false claim to purity for something that is too complex for purity, like a group, an identity, or an organization. Those making claims to purity usually

attempt to declare that anyone who does not fit their “pure” definition does not belong. For example, national identity is complicated and can mean something different to each person who claims that identity; therefore, it is too complex for a one-size-fits-all definition and for any one litmus test to prove that identity.

Examples: “No real Scot would put ice in his scotch!” “No real man would drink lite beer!” “No real feminist would vote Republican!” Each of these statements assumes that everyone has the same definition for the identities or groups discussed: Scots, men, and feminists. However, the members of each group are themselves diverse, so it is illogical to make such blanket declarations about them. It is actually quite reasonable for a Scottish person to like ice in her scotch and still claim a Scottish identity or for a man to drink lite beer without relinquishing his manhood or for a feminist to vote Republican while still working toward women’s rights.

Figure 3.19 “No True Southerner, No True Scotsman”



Working with No Evidence—These fallacies occur when the evidence asserted turns out to be no evidence whatsoever.

- **Burden of Proof**—This logical fallacy, quite similar to the appeal to ignorance, occurs when the author forgets that she is the one responsible for supporting her arguments and, instead, shifts the burden of proof to the audience.

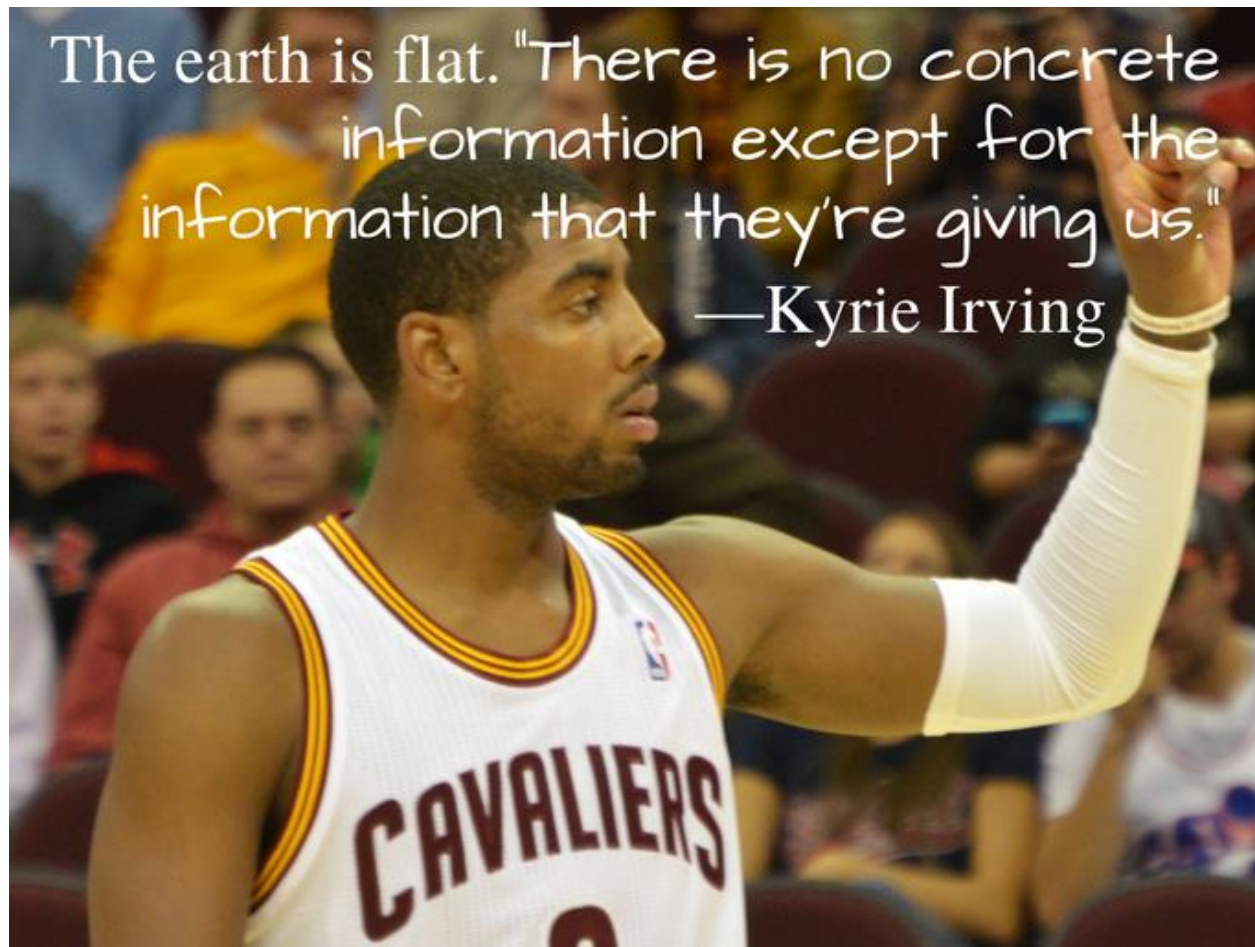
Example: “Larry stole my painting,” Edith cried. “Prove to me he didn’t!” No: The one making the claim must give reasons and evidence for that claim *before* anyone else is obligated to refute it. If Edith cannot give sound proof of Larry’s guilt, the argument should be rejected.

- **Arguing from Silence or Ignorance**—Like the burden of proof fallacy, this one occurs when the author, either implicitly or explicitly, uses a lack of evidence as a type of proof. This is the basis for most conspiracy theory nonsense, as if the lack of evidence is so hard to believe, the only reason to explain why it is missing is a cover up. Remember, it is the writer’s job to present positive proof (evidence that actually exists and can be literally seen) to support any argument made. If a writer cannot find evidence, he must admit that he may be wrong and then, find a new argument!

Example: “There is no proof that Joe the Politician conspired with the Canadians to rig the elections.” “A-ha! That there is nothing to find is proof that he did! He must have paid off everyone involved to bury the evidence.” Lack of proof cannot be—in and of itself—a type of proof because it has no substance; it is a nothing. Is it possible that proof may arise in the future? Yes, but until it does, the argument that Joe and the Canadians rigged an election is illegitimate. Is it possible that Joe both rigged the election and paid people off to hide it? Again, yes, but there are two problems with this reasoning: (1) Possibility, like absence of evidence, is not in itself a type of evidence, and (2) possibility does not equal probability. Just because something is possible does not mean it is probable, let alone likely or a sure thing. Those supporting conspiracy theories try to convince others that lack of proof is a type of proof and that a remote possibility is actually a surety. Both fail the logic test.

Figure 3.20 “Arguing from Ignorance”





- Circular Reasoning—also known as begging the question, occurs when, instead of providing reasons for a claim, the arguer just restates the claim but in a different way. An author cannot sidestep reasons and proof for an argument by just repeating the claim over and over again.

Example: "The death penalty is sinful because it is wrong and immoral." The conclusion (the death penalty is sinful) looks like it is supported by two premises (that it is wrong, that it is immoral). The problem is that the words "wrong" and "immoral" are too close in meaning to "sinful," so they are not actual reasons; rather, they are just other ways to state the claim.

Working with False Ideas about Evidence or Reasoning—These fallacies either (1) presume something is a reason for or evidence of something else when that connection has not been adequately or fairly established or (2) unfairly limit one's choices of possible reasons.

- False Dilemma/Dichotomy—occurs when one presents only two options in an argument when there are, in fact, many more options. Arguments have multiple sides, not just two, so when only two are presented, readers are forced to choose between them

when they should be able to draw from a more complex range of options. Another way to talk about the false dichotomy is to call it reductionist because the arguer has *reduced* the options from many to only two.

Example: “So, are you a dog person or a cat person? Are you a Beatles person or a Rolling Stones person? You can be only one!” Both of these examples provide a false choice between two options when there are clearly others to choose from. One might also reasonably choose both or neither. When an arguer only provides two options, she tries to rig the response and to get the responder to only work within the severely limited framework provided. Life is more complicated than that, so it is unreasonable to limit choices to only two.

Figure 3.22 “False Dilemma”



- Loaded Question—embeds a hidden premise in the question, so anyone who responds is forced to accept that premise. This puts the responder at an unfair disadvantage because he has to either answer the question and, by doing so, accept the premise, or challenge the question, which can look like he is ducking the issue.

Example: “So, when did you start practicing witchcraft?” The hidden premise here is that the responder is a witch, and any reply is an admittance to that as a fact. An open question, one that does not trick the responder into admitting the presumption of witchcraft, would be this: “Are you a witch?”

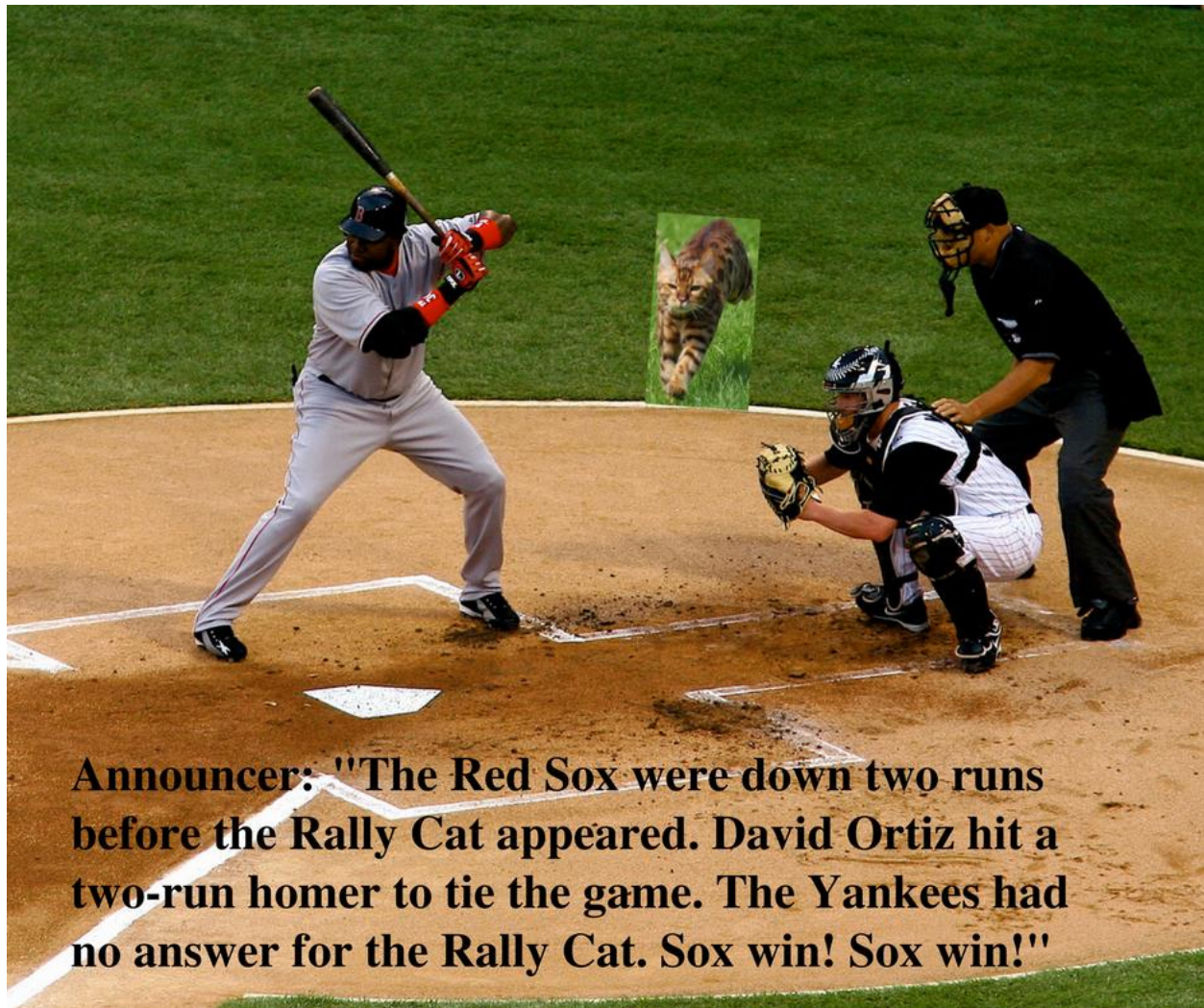
False Cause—asserts causes that are more assumptions than actual causes. There are three types of false cause fallacies:

- Post hoc ergo propter hoc—In Latin, this phrase means “after this, therefore, because of this,” which asserts that when one thing happens before another thing, the first must have caused the second. This is a false assumption because, even if the two things are related to each other, they do not necessarily have a causal relationship.

Example: Superstitions draw power from this logical fallacy. If a black cat crosses Joe the Politician’s path, and the next day Joe loses the election, is he justified, logically, in blaming the cat? No. Just because the cat’s stroll happened before the election results does not mean the one caused the other.

Figure 3.23 “Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc”





**Announcer: "The Red Sox were down two runs before the Rally Cat appeared. David Ortiz hit a two-run homer to tie the game. The Yankees had no answer for the Rally Cat. Sox win! Sox win!"**

- Slippery Slope—the cause/effect version of jumping to a conclusion. A slippery slope argument claims that the first link in a causal chain will inevitably end in the most disastrous result possible, thus working to scare the audience away from the initial idea altogether. Keep in mind, legitimate and logical causal chains can be argued: where one cause leads to a logical effect, which then leads to the next logical effect, which then leads to the next logical effect, and so on. Those using the slippery slope fallacy, however, do not bother to carefully establish a logical chain but rather skip right ahead to the worst possible conclusion.

Example: “Oh no, if I fail this test, my whole life is ruined!” This is a common fear among panicked students but is a prime example of the slippery slope. The student likely imagines this sort of logical chain: a failed test → failed class → getting behind in college → flunking out of college → all future job prospects falling through → total unemployment → abject poverty → becoming a pariah to family and friends → a thoroughly ruined life. The worry is that failing a test, should it even happen at all, will automatically result in the worst possible case: a totally



failed life. However, when thought through more calmly and logically, hopefully, the student will realize that many mitigating factors lie between one failed test and total ruination and that the total ruination result is actually quite unlikely.

## Fallacies of Ambiguity

To be ambiguous is to be unclear; thus, fallacies of ambiguity are those that, intentionally or not, confuse the reader through lack of clarity. They create a fog that makes it difficult to see what the conclusion or the reasonable parts of an argument are, or the fog prevents a reasonable conclusion in the first place.

- **Quoting out of Context**—occurs when quoting someone without providing all the necessary information to understand the author's meaning. Lack of context means that the original quote's meaning can be obscured or manipulated to mean something the original author never intended. Usually that context comes from the original text the quote came from that the borrower has failed to include or deliberately excluded.

Example: Original statement: "You may hand write your assignments but only when instructed to in the assignment schedule."

Quote used: "You may hand write your assignments."

Clearly, the quoted part leaves out some crucial information, qualifying information that puts limits on the initial instruction. The scenario may be this: The original statement came from a professor's syllabus, and the student quoted just the first part to an advisor, for instance, while trying to register a complaint over a bad grade for an assignment he hand wrote but wasn't supposed to. When the student exclaims, "But my professor told me I could hand write my assignments!" he is guilty of muddying the truth by quoting out of context. He left out the part that told him to verify the assignment instructions to see if handwriting were allowable or not.

- **Straw Man**—Creating a straw man argument involves taking a potentially reasonable argument and misrepresenting it, usually through scare tactics or oversimplification, i.e., by creating an argument that sounds similar to the original but in reality is not. The straw man argument is designed to be outrageous and upsetting, and thus easier to defeat or get others to reject. Why try to dismantle and rebut a reasonable argument when one can just knock the head off the straw man substitute instead?

Example: "I think we need to get rid of standardized testing in junior high and high school, at least in its current form." "That's terrible! I can't believe you don't want any standards for students. You just want education to get even worse!" In this scenario, the second person has committed the straw man fallacy. She has distorted the first person's argument—that standardized *testing* in its current form should be eliminated—and replaced it with a much more objectionable one—that *all* educational standards should be eliminated. Because there are more ways than just testing to monitor educational standards, the second person's argument is a blatant misrepresentation and an over simplification.

Figure 3.24 “Straw Man”



## Fallacies of Inconsistency

This category of fallacies involves a lack of logical consistency within the parts of the argument itself or on the part of the speaker.

- **Inconsistency Fallacy**—is one of the more blatant fallacies because the speaker is usually quite up-front about his inconsistency. This fallacy involves making contradictory claims but attempting to offset the contradiction by framing one part as a disclaimer and, thus, implying that the disclaimer inoculates the one making it from any challenge.

Example 1: "I'm not a racist but..." If what follows is a racist statement, the one saying this is guilty of the inconsistency fallacy and of making a racist statement. Making a bold claim against racism is not a shield.

Example 2: “I can’t be sexist because I’m a woman.” The speaker, when making this kind of statement and others like it, assumes that she cannot logically be called out for making a sexist statement because she happens to be a member of a group (women) who are frequent victims of sexism. If the statements she makes can objectively be called sexist, then she is guilty of both sexism and the inconsistency fallacy.

Figure 3.25 “Inconsistency Fallacy”



- False Equivalence—asserts that two ideas or groups or items or experiences are of equal type, standing, and quality when they are not.

Example: The belief in intelligent design and the theory of evolution are often falsely equated. The logical problem lies not with desire to support one or the other idea but with the idea that these two concepts are the same *type* of concept. They are not. Intelligent design comes out of belief, mainly religious belief, while evolution is a scientific theory underpinned by factual data. Thus, these two concepts should not be blithely equated. Furthermore, because these two concepts are not the same type, they do not need to be in opposition. In fact, there are those who may well believe in intelligent design while also subscribing to the theory of

evolution. In other words, their religious beliefs do not restrict an adherence to evolutionary theory. A religious belief is faith based and, thus, is not evaluated using the same principles as a scientific theory would be.

- False Balance—applies mainly to journalists who, because they wish to present an appearance of fairness, falsely claim that two opposing arguments are roughly equal to each other when one actually has much more weight to it—of both reasoning and evidence.

Example: The majority of scientists accept climate change as established by empirical evidence, while a scant few do not; putting one representative of each on a news program, however, implies that they represent an equal number of people, which is clearly false.

## Key Takeaways: Logical Fallacies

- Both formal and informal fallacies are errors of reasoning, and if writers rely on such fallacies, even unintentionally, they undercut their arguments, particularly their crucial appeals to *logos*. For example, if someone defines a key term in an argument in an ambiguous way or if someone fails to provide credible evidence, or if someone tries to distract with irrelevant or inflammatory ideas, her arguments will appear logically weak to a critical audience.
- More than just *logos* is at stake, however. When listeners or readers spot questionable reasoning or unfair attempts at audience manipulation, they may conclude that an author's ethics have become compromised. The credibility of the author (*ethos*) and perhaps the readers' ability to connect with that writer on the level of shared values (*pathos*) may well be damaged.

Attribution:

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# Chapter 7: Creating a Rough Draft for a Research Paper

At last, you are ready to begin writing the rough draft of your research paper. Putting your thinking and research into words is exciting. It can also be challenging. In this section, you will learn strategies for handling the more challenging aspects of writing a research paper, such as integrating material from your sources, citing information correctly, and avoiding any misuse of your sources.

## The Structure of a Research Paper

Research papers generally follow the same basic structure: an introduction that presents the writer's thesis, a body section that develops the thesis with supporting points and evidence, and a conclusion that revisits the thesis and provides additional insights or suggestions for further research.

Your writing voice will come across most strongly in your introduction and conclusion, as you work to attract your readers' interest and establish your thesis. These sections usually do not cite sources at length. They focus on the big picture, not specific details. In contrast, the body of your paper will cite sources extensively. As you present your ideas, you will support your points with details from your research.

## Writing Your Introduction

There are several approaches to writing an introduction, each of which fulfills the same goals. The introduction should get readers' attention, provide background information, and present the writer's thesis. Many writers like to begin with one of the following catchy openers:

- A surprising fact
- A thought-provoking question
- An attention-getting quote
- A brief anecdote that illustrates a larger concept
- A connection between your topic and your readers' experiences

The next few sentences place the opening in context by presenting background information. From there, the writer builds toward a thesis, which is traditionally placed at the end of the introduction. Think of your thesis as a signpost that lets readers know in what direction the paper is headed.

Jorge decided to begin his research paper by connecting his topic to readers' daily experiences. Read the first draft of his introduction. The thesis is underlined. Note how Jorge progresses from the opening sentences to background information to his thesis.

## Beyond the Hype: Evaluating Low-Carb Diets

### I. Introduction

Over the past decade, increasing numbers of Americans have jumped on the low-carb bandwagon. Some studies estimate that approximately 40 million Americans, or about 20 percent of the population, are attempting to restrict their intake of food high in carbohydrates (Sanders and Katz, 2004; Hirsch, 2004). Proponents of low-carb diets say they are not only the most effective way to lose weight, but they also yield health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. Meanwhile, some doctors claim that low-carb diets are overrated and caution that their long-term effects are unknown. Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

### Exercise 1

Write the introductory paragraph of your research paper. Try using one of the techniques listed in this section to write an engaging introduction. Be sure to include background information about the topic that leads to your thesis.

### Tip

Writers often work out of sequence when writing a research paper. If you find yourself struggling to write an engaging introduction, you may wish to write the body of your paper first. Writing the body sections first will help you clarify your main points. Writing the introduction should then be easier. You may have a better sense of how to introduce the paper after you have drafted some or all of the body.

## Writing Your Conclusion

In your introduction, you tell readers where they are headed. In your conclusion, you recap where they have been. For this reason, some writers prefer to write their conclusions soon after they have written their introduction. However, this method may not work for all writers. Other writers prefer to write their conclusion at the end of the paper, after writing the body paragraphs. No process is absolutely right or absolutely wrong; find the one that best suits you.

No matter when you compose the conclusion, it should sum up your main ideas and revisit your thesis. The conclusion should not simply echo the introduction or rely on bland summary statements, such as "In this paper, I have demonstrated that..." In fact, avoid repeating your thesis verbatim from the introduction. Restate it in different words that reflect the new

perspective gained through your research. That helps keep your ideas fresh for your readers. An effective writer might conclude a paper by asking a new question the research inspired, revisiting an anecdote presented earlier, or reminding readers of how the topic relates to their lives.

## **Writing at Work**

If your job involves writing or reading scientific papers, it helps to understand how professional researchers use the structure described in this section. A scientific paper begins with an abstract that briefly summarizes the entire paper. The introduction explains the purpose of the research, briefly summarizes previous research, and presents the researchers' hypothesis. The body provides details about the study, such as who participated in it, what the researchers measured, and what results they recorded. The conclusion presents the researchers' interpretation of the data, or what they learned.

## **Using Source Material in Your Paper**

One of the challenges of writing a research paper is successfully integrating your ideas with material from your sources. Your paper must explain what you think, or it will read like a disconnected string of facts and quotations. However, you also need to support your ideas with research, or they will seem insubstantial. How do you strike the right balance?

You have already taken a step in the right direction by writing your introduction. The introduction and conclusion function like the frame around a picture. They define and limit your topic and place your research in context.

In the body paragraphs of your paper, you will need to integrate ideas carefully at the paragraph level and at the sentence level. You will use topic sentences in your paragraphs to make sure readers understand the significance of any facts, details, or quotations you cite. You will also include sentences that transition between ideas from your research, either within a paragraph or between paragraphs. At the sentence level, you will need to think carefully about how you introduce paraphrased and quoted material.

Earlier you learned about summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting when taking notes. In the next few sections, you will learn how to use these techniques in the body of your paper to weave in source material to support your ideas.

## **Summarizing Sources**

When you summarize material from a source, you zero in on the main points and restate them concisely in your own words. This technique is appropriate when only the major ideas are relevant to your paper or when you need to simplify complex information into a few key points for your readers.



Be sure to review the source material as you summarize it. Identify the main idea and restate it as concisely as you can—preferably in one sentence. Depending on your purpose, you may also add another sentence or two condensing any important details or examples. Check your summary to make sure it is accurate and complete.

In his draft, Jorge summarized research materials that presented scientists' findings about low-carbohydrate diets. Read the following passage from a trade magazine article and Jorge's summary of the article.

## Assessing the Efficacy of Low-Carbohydrate Diets

Adrienne Howell, Ph.D.

Over the past few years, a number of clinical studies have explored whether high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets are more effective for weight loss than other frequently recommended diet plans, such as diets that drastically curtail fat intake (Pritikin) or that emphasize consuming lean meats, grains, vegetables, and a moderate amount of unsaturated fats (the Mediterranean diet). A 2009 study found that obese teenagers who followed a low-carbohydrate diet lost an average of 15.6 kilograms over a six-month period, whereas teenagers following a low-fat diet or a Mediterranean diet lost an average of 11.1 kilograms and 9.3 kilograms respectively. Two 2010 studies that measured weight loss for obese adults following these same three diet plans found similar results. Over three months, subjects on the low-carbohydrate diet plan lost anywhere from four to six kilograms more than subjects who followed other diet plans.

### Summary

In three recent studies, researchers compared outcomes for obese subjects who followed either a low-carbohydrate diet, a low-fat diet, or a Mediterranean diet and found that subjects following a low-carbohydrate diet lost more weight in the same time (Howell, 2010).

### Tip

A summary restates ideas in your own words—but for specialized or clinical terms, you may need to use terms that appear in the original source. For instance, Jorge used the term *obese* in his summary because related words such as *heavy* or *overweight* have a different clinical meaning.

### Exercise 2

On a separate sheet of paper, practice summarizing by writing a one-sentence summary of the same passage that Jorge already summarized.

## Paraphrasing Sources



When you paraphrase material from a source, 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.

Again, 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.

In his draft, Jorge frequently paraphrased details from sources. At times, he needed to rewrite a sentence more than once to ensure he was paraphrasing ideas correctly. Read the passage from a website. Then read Jorge's initial attempt at paraphrasing it, followed by the final version of his paraphrase.

## **Source**

Dieters nearly always get great results soon after they begin following a low-carbohydrate diet, but these results tend to taper off after the first few months, particularly because many dieters find it difficult to follow a low-carbohydrate diet plan consistently.

## **Summary**

People usually see encouraging outcomes shortly after they go on a low-carbohydrate diet, but their progress slows down after a short while, especially because most discover that it is a challenge to adhere to the diet strictly (Heinz, 2009).

After reviewing the paraphrased sentence, Jorge realized he was following the original source too closely. He did not want to quote the full passage verbatim, so he again attempted to restate the idea in his own style.

## **Summary**

Because it is hard for dieters to stick to a low-carbohydrate eating plan, the initial success of these diets is short-lived (Heinz, 2009).

## **Exercise 3**

On a separate sheet of paper, follow these steps to practice paraphrasing.

1. Choose an important idea or detail from your notes.
2. Without looking at the original source, restate the idea in your own words.

3. Check your paraphrase against the original text in the source. Make sure both your language and your sentence structure are original.
4. Revise your paraphrase if necessary.

## Quoting Sources Directly

Most of the time, you will summarize or paraphrase source material instead of quoting directly. Doing so shows that you understand your research well enough to write about it confidently in your own words. However, direct quotes can be powerful when used sparingly and with purpose.

Quoting directly can sometimes help you make a point in a colorful way. If an author's words are especially vivid, memorable, or well phrased, quoting them may help hold your reader's interest. Direct quotations from an interviewee or an eyewitness may help you personalize an issue for readers. And when you analyze primary sources, such as a historical speech or a work of literature, quoting extensively is often necessary to illustrate your points. These are valid reasons to use quotations.

Less experienced writers, however, sometimes overuse direct quotations in a research paper because it seems easier than paraphrasing. At best, this reduces the effectiveness of the quotations. At worst, it results in a paper that seems haphazardly pasted together from outside sources. Use quotations sparingly for greater impact.

When you do choose to quote directly from a source, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure you have transcribed the original statement accurately.
- Represent the author's ideas honestly. Quote enough of the original text to reflect the author's point accurately.
- Never use a stand-alone quotation. Always integrate the quoted material into your own sentence.
- Use ellipses (...) if you need to omit a word or phrase. Use brackets [ ] if you need to replace a word or phrase.
- Make sure any omissions or changed words do not alter the meaning of the original text. Omit or replace words only when absolutely necessary to shorten the text or to make it grammatically correct within your sentence.
- Remember to include correctly formatted citations that follow the assigned style guide.

Jorge interviewed a dietician as part of his research, and he decided to quote her words in his paper. Read an excerpt from the interview and Jorge's use of it, which follows.

## Source

Personally, I don't really buy into all of the hype about low-carbohydrate miracle diets like Atkins and so on. Sure, for some people, they are great, but for most, any sensible eating and exercise plan would work just as well.

## Summary

Registered dietician Dana Kwon (2010) admits, "Personally, I don't really buy into all of the hype....Sure, for some people, [low-carbohydrate diets] are great, but for most, any sensible eating and exercise plan would work just as well."

Notice how Jorge smoothly integrated the quoted material by starting the sentence with an introductory phrase. His use of ellipses and brackets did not change the source's meaning.

## Documenting Source Material

Throughout the writing process, be scrupulous about documenting information taken from sources. The purpose of doing so is twofold:

1. To give credit to other writers or researchers for their ideas
2. To allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic if desired

You will cite sources within the body of your paper and at the end of the paper in your bibliography.

## Citing Sources in the Body of Your Paper

In-text citations document your sources within the body of your paper. These include two vital pieces of information: the author's name and the year the source material was published. When quoting a print source, also include in the citation the page number where the quoted material originally appears. The page number will follow the year in the in-text citation. Page numbers are necessary only when content has been directly quoted, not when it has been summarized or paraphrased.

Within a paragraph, this information may appear as part of your introduction to the material or as a parenthetical citation at the end of a sentence. Read the examples that follow.

## Summary

Leibowitz (2008) found that low-carbohydrate diets often helped subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar levels.

The introduction to the source material includes the author's name followed by the year of publication in parentheses.

## Summary

Low-carbohydrate diets often help subjects with Type II diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood-sugar levels (Leibowitz, 2008).

The parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence includes the author's name, a comma, and the year the source was published. The period at the end of the sentence comes after the parentheses.

## Creating a List of References

Each of the sources you cite in the body text will appear in a references list at the end of your paper. While in-text citations provide the most basic information about the source, your references section will include additional publication details. In general, you will include the following information:

- The author's last name followed by his or her first (and sometimes middle) initial
- The year the source was published
- The source title
- For articles in periodicals, the full name of the periodical, along with the volume and issue number and the pages where the article appeared

Additional information may be included for different types of sources, such as online sources. A sample reference list is provided with the final draft of Jorge's paper later in this chapter.

## Using Primary and Secondary Research

As you write your draft, be mindful of how you are using primary and secondary source material to support your points. Recall that primary sources present firsthand information. Secondary sources are one step removed from primary sources. They present a writer's analysis or interpretation of primary source materials. How you balance primary and secondary source material in your paper will depend on the topic and assignment.

## Using Primary Sources Effectively

Some types of research papers must use primary sources extensively to achieve their purpose. Any paper that analyzes a primary text or presents the writer's own experimental research falls in this category. Here are a few examples:

- A paper for a literature course analyzing several poems by Emily Dickinson
- A paper for a political science course comparing televised speeches delivered by two presidential candidates
- A paper for a communications course discussing gender biases in television commercials
- A paper for a business administration course that discusses the results of a survey the writer conducted with local businesses to gather information about their work-from-home and flextime policies
- A paper for an elementary education course that discusses the results of an experiment the writer conducted to compare the effectiveness of two different methods of mathematics instruction

For these types of papers, primary research is the main focus. If you are writing about a work (including nonprint works, such as a movie or a painting), it is crucial to gather information and ideas from the original work, rather than relying solely on others' interpretations. And, of course, if you take the time to design and conduct your own field research, such as a survey, a series of interviews, or an experiment, you will want to discuss it in detail. For example, the interviews may provide interesting responses that you want to share with your reader.

## Using Secondary Sources Effectively

For some assignments, it makes sense to rely more on secondary sources than primary sources. If you are not analyzing a text or conducting your own field research, you will need to use secondary sources extensively.

As much as possible, use secondary sources that are closely linked to primary research, such as a journal article presenting the results of the authors' scientific study or a book that cites interviews and case studies. These sources are more reliable and add more value to your paper than sources that are further removed from primary research. For instance, a popular magazine article on junk-food addiction might be several steps removed from the original scientific study on which it is loosely based. As a result, the article may distort, sensationalize, or misinterpret the scientists' findings.

Even if your paper is largely based on primary sources, you may use secondary sources to develop your ideas. For instance, an analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's films would focus on the films themselves as a primary source, but might also cite commentary from critics. A paper that presents an original experiment would include some discussion of similar prior research in the field.

Jorge knew he did not have the time, resources, or experience needed to conduct original experimental research for his paper. Because he was relying on secondary sources to support his ideas, he made a point of citing sources that were not far removed from primary research.

## Tip

Some sources could be considered primary or secondary sources, depending on the writer's purpose for using them. For instance, if a writer's purpose is to inform readers about how the No Child Left Behind legislation has affected elementary education, a *Time* magazine article on the subject would be a secondary source. However, suppose the writer's purpose is to analyze how the news media has portrayed the effects of the No Child Left Behind legislation. In that case, articles about the legislation in news magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News & World Report* would be primary sources. They provide firsthand examples of the media coverage the writer is analyzing.

## Avoiding Plagiarism

Your research paper presents your thinking about a topic, supported and developed by other people's ideas and information. It is crucial to always distinguish between the two—as you conduct research, as you plan your paper, and as you write. Failure to do so can lead to plagiarism.

## Intentional and Accidental Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of misrepresenting someone else's work as your own. Sometimes a writer plagiarizes work on purpose—for instance, by purchasing an essay from a website and submitting it as original course work. In other cases, a writer may commit accidental plagiarism due to carelessness, haste, or misunderstanding. To avoid unintentional plagiarism, follow these guidelines:

- Understand what types of information must be cited.
- Understand what constitutes fair use of a source.
- Keep source materials and notes carefully organized.
- Follow guidelines for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources.

## When to Cite

Any idea or fact taken from an outside source must be cited, in both the body of your paper and the references list. The only exceptions are facts or general statements that are common knowledge. Common-knowledge facts or general statements are commonly supported by and found in multiple sources. For example, a writer would not need to cite the statement that most breads, pastas, and cereals are high in carbohydrates; this is well known and well documented. However, if a writer explained in detail the differences among the chemical structures of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, a citation would be necessary. When in doubt, cite.

# Fair Use

In recent years, issues related to the fair use of sources have been prevalent in popular culture. Recording artists, for example, may disagree about the extent to which one has the right to sample another's music. For academic purposes, however, the guidelines for fair use are reasonably straightforward.

Writers may quote from or paraphrase material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. Fair use means that the writer legitimately uses brief excerpts from source material to support and develop his or her own ideas. For instance, a columnist may excerpt a few sentences from a novel when writing a book review. However, quoting or paraphrasing another's work at excessive length, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair use.

As he worked on his draft, Jorge was careful to cite his sources correctly and not to rely excessively on any one source. Occasionally, however, he caught himself quoting a source at great length. In those instances, he highlighted the paragraph in question so that he could go back to it later and revise. Read the example, along with Jorge's revision.

## Summary

Heinz (2009) found that "subjects in the low-carbohydrate group (30% carbohydrates; 40% protein, 30% fat) had a mean weight loss of 10 kg (22 lbs) over a 4-month period." These results were "noticeably better than results for subjects on a low-fat diet (45% carbohydrates, 35% protein, 20% fat)" whose average weight loss was only "7 kg (15.4 lbs) in the same period." From this, it can be concluded that "low-carbohydrate diets obtain more rapid results." Other researchers agree that "at least in the short term, patients following low-carbohydrate diets enjoy greater success" than those who follow alternative plans (Johnson & Crowe, 2010).

After reviewing the paragraph, Jorge realized that he had drifted into unoriginal writing. Most of the paragraph was taken verbatim from a single article. Although Jorge had enclosed the material in quotation marks, he knew it was not an appropriate way to use the research in his paper.

## Summary

Low-carbohydrate diets may indeed be superior to other diet plans for short-term weight loss. In a study comparing low-carbohydrate diets and low-fat diets, Heinz (2009) found that subjects who followed a low-carbohydrate plan (30% of total calories) for 4 months lost, on average, about 3 kilograms more than subjects who followed a low-fat diet for the same time. Heinz concluded that these plans yield quick results, an idea supported by a similar study conducted by Johnson and Crowe (2010). What remains to be seen, however, is whether this initial success can be sustained for longer periods.

As Jorge revised the paragraph, he realized he did not need to quote these sources directly. Instead, he paraphrased their most important findings. He also made sure to include a topic sentence stating the main idea of the paragraph and a concluding sentence that transitioned to the next major topic in his essay.

## **Working with Sources Carefully**

Disorganization and carelessness sometimes lead to plagiarism. For instance, a writer may be unable to provide a complete, accurate citation if he didn't record bibliographical information. A writer may cut and paste a passage from a website into her paper and later forget where the material came from. A writer who procrastinates may rush through a draft, which easily leads to sloppy paraphrasing and inaccurate quotations. Any of these actions can create the appearance of plagiarism and lead to negative consequences.

Carefully organizing your time and notes is the best guard against these forms of plagiarism. Maintain a detailed working bibliography and thorough notes throughout the research process. Check original sources again to clear up any uncertainties. Allow plenty of time for writing your draft so there is no temptation to cut corners.

## **Writing at Work**

Citing other people's work appropriately is just as important in the workplace as it is in school. If you need to consult outside sources to research a document you are creating, follow the general guidelines already discussed, as well as any industry-specific citation guidelines. For more extensive use of others' work—for instance, requesting permission to link to another company's website on your own corporate website—always follow your employer's established procedures.

## **Academic Integrity**

The concepts and strategies discussed in this section connect to a larger issue—academic integrity. You maintain your integrity as a member of an academic community by representing your work and others' work honestly and by using other people's work only in legitimately accepted ways. It is a point of honor taken seriously in every academic discipline and career field.

Academic integrity violations have serious educational and professional consequences. Even when cheating and plagiarism go undetected, they still result in a student's failure to learn necessary research and writing skills. Students who are found guilty of academic integrity violations face consequences ranging from a failing grade to expulsion from the university. Employees may be fired for plagiarism and do irreparable damage to their professional reputation. In short, it is never worth the risk.



## Key Takeaways

- An effective research paper focuses on the writer's ideas. The introduction and conclusion present and revisit the writer's thesis. The body of the paper develops the thesis and related points with information from research.
- Ideas and information taken from outside sources must be cited in the body of the paper and in the references section.
- Material taken from sources should be used to develop the writer's ideas. Summarizing and paraphrasing are usually most effective for this purpose.
- A summary concisely restates the main ideas of a source in the writer's own words.
- A paraphrase restates ideas from a source using the writer's own words and sentence structures.
- Direct quotations should be used sparingly. Ellipses and brackets must be used to indicate words that were omitted or changed for conciseness or grammatical correctness.
- Always represent material from outside sources accurately.
- Plagiarism has serious academic and professional consequences. To avoid accidental plagiarism, keep research materials organized, understand guidelines for fair use and appropriate citation of sources, and review the paper to make sure these guidelines are followed.

This Chapter was derived from:

"Chapter 12.1: Creating a Rough Draft for a Research Paper." *Writing for Success*.

University of Montana, 2015.

## Chapter 8: Writing Body Paragraphs

If your thesis gives the reader a roadmap to your essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict what follows your introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement.

The body paragraphs present the evidence you have gathered to confirm your thesis. Before you begin to support your thesis in the body, you must find information from a variety of sources that support and give credit to what you are trying to prove.

### Select Primary Support for Your Thesis

Without primary support, your argument is not likely to be convincing. Primary support can be described as the major points you choose to expand on your thesis. It is the most important information you select to argue for your point of view. Each point you choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph you write. Your primary supporting points are further supported by supporting details within the paragraphs.

#### Tip

Remember that a worthy argument is backed by examples. In order to construct a valid argument, good writers conduct lots of background research and take careful notes. They also talk to people knowledgeable about a topic in order to understand its implications before writing about it.

### Identify the Characteristics of Good Primary Support

In order to fulfill the requirements of good primary support, the information you choose must meet the following standards:

- Be specific. The main points you make about your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be specific. Use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build upon your general ideas. These types of examples give your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your claim. General examples, while they convey the necessary information, are not nearly as compelling or useful in writing because they are too obvious and typical.
- Be relevant to the thesis. Primary support is considered strong when it relates directly to the thesis. Primary support should show, explain, or prove your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you may think you need to include it all in your body paragraphs. But effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.

- Be detailed. Remember that your thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. The body paragraphs are where you develop the discussion that a thorough essay requires. Using detailed support shows readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

## **Prewrite to Identify Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement**

Recall that when you prewrite you essentially make a list of examples or reasons why you support your stance. Stemming from each point, you further provide details to support those reasons. After prewriting, you are then able to look back at the information and choose the most compelling pieces you will use in your body paragraphs.

### **Exercise 1**

Choose one of the following working thesis statements. On a separate sheet of paper, write for at least five minutes everything that comes into your mind on the topic.

1. Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.
2. Students cheat for many different reasons.
3. Drug use among teens and young adults is a problem.
4. The most important change that should occur at my college or university is

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## **Select the Most Effective Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement**

After you have prewritten about your working thesis statement, you may have generated a lot of information, which may be edited out later. Remember that your primary support must be relevant to your thesis. Remind yourself of your main argument, and delete any ideas that do not directly relate to it. Omitting unrelated ideas ensures that you will use only the most convincing information in your body paragraphs. Choose at least three of only the most compelling points. These will serve as the topic sentences for your body paragraphs.

### **Exercise 2**

Refer to the previous exercise and select three of your most compelling reasons to support the thesis statement. Remember that the points you choose must be specific and relevant to the thesis. The statements you choose will be your primary support points, and you will later incorporate them into the topic sentences for the body paragraphs.

## Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

When you support your thesis, you are revealing evidence. Evidence includes anything that can help support your stance. The following are the kinds of evidence you will encounter as you conduct your research:

1. **Facts.** Facts are the best kind of evidence to use because they often cannot be disputed. They can support your stance by providing background information on or a solid foundation for your point of view. However, some facts may still need explanation. For example, the sentence “The most populated state in the United States is California” is a pure fact, but it may require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument.
2. **Judgments.** Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts. Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are founded upon careful reasoning and examination of a topic.
3. **Testimony.** Testimony consists of direct quotations from either an eyewitness or an expert witness. An eyewitness is someone who has direct experience with a subject; he adds authenticity to an argument based on facts. An expert witness is a person who has extensive experience with a topic. This person studies the facts and provides commentary based on either facts or judgments, or both. An expert witness adds authority and credibility to an argument.
4. **Personal observation.** Personal observation is similar to testimony, but personal observation consists of your testimony. It reflects what you know to be true because you have experiences and have formed either opinions or judgments about them. For instance, if you are one of five children and your thesis states that being part of a large family is beneficial to a child’s social development, you could use your own experience to support your thesis.

## Writing at Work

In any job where you devise a plan, you will need to support the steps that you lay out. This is an area in which you would incorporate primary support into your writing. Choosing only the most specific and relevant information to expand upon the steps will ensure that your plan appears well-thought-out and precise.

### Tip

You can consult a vast pool of resources to gather support for your stance. Citing relevant information from reliable sources ensures that your reader will take you seriously and consider your assertions. Use any of the following sources for your essay: newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals, which are periodicals that address topics in a specialized field.

# Choose Supporting Topic Sentences

Each body paragraph contains a topic sentence that states one aspect of your thesis and then expands upon it. Like the thesis statement, each topic sentence should be specific and supported by concrete details, facts, or explanations.

Each body paragraph should comprise the following elements.

topic sentence + supporting details (examples, reasons, or arguments)

Topic sentences indicate the location and main points of the basic arguments of your essay. These sentences are vital to writing your body paragraphs because they always refer back to and support your thesis statement. Topic sentences are linked to the ideas you have introduced in your thesis, thus reminding readers what your essay is about. A paragraph without a clearly identified topic sentence may be unclear and scattered, just like an essay without a thesis statement.

## Tip

Unless your teacher instructs otherwise, you should include at least three body paragraphs in your essay. A five-paragraph essay, including the introduction and conclusion, is commonly the standard for exams and essay assignments.

Consider the following the thesis statement:

Author J.D. Salinger relied primarily on his personal life and belief system as the foundation for the themes in the majority of his works.

The following topic sentence is a primary support point for the thesis. The topic sentence states exactly what the controlling idea of the paragraph is. Later, you will see the writer immediately provide support for the sentence.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced themes in many of his works.

## Exercise 3

In Exercise 2 you chose three of your most convincing points to support the thesis statement you selected from the list. Take each point and incorporate it into a topic sentence for each body paragraph.

Supporting point 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting point 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting point 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## **Draft Supporting Detail Sentences for Each Primary Support Sentence**

After deciding which primary support points you will use as your topic sentences, you must add details to clarify and demonstrate each of those points. These supporting details provide examples, facts, or evidence that support the topic sentence.

The writer drafts possible supporting detail sentences for each primary support sentence based on the thesis statement:

Thesis statement: Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.

Supporting point 1: Dogs can scare cyclists and pedestrians.

Supporting details:

1. Cyclists are forced to zigzag on the road.
2. School children panic and turn wildly on their bikes.
3. People who are walking at night freeze in fear.

Supporting point 2:

Loose dogs are traffic hazards.

Supporting details:

1. Dogs in the street make people swerve their cars.
2. To avoid dogs, drivers run into other cars or pedestrians.
3. Children coaxing dogs across busy streets create danger.

Supporting point 3: Unleashed dogs damage gardens.

Supporting details:

1. They step on flowers and vegetables.

2. They destroy hedges by urinating on them.
3. They mess up lawns by digging holes.

The following paragraph contains supporting detail sentences for the primary support sentence (the topic sentence), which is underlined.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works. He did not hide his mental anguish over the horrors of war and once told his daughter, “You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose, no matter how long you live.” His short story “A Perfect Day for a Bananafish” details a day in the life of a WWII veteran who was recently released from an army hospital for psychiatric problems. The man acts questionably with a little girl he meets on the beach before he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide. Another short story, “For Esmé – with Love and Squalor,” is narrated by a traumatized soldier who sparks an unusual relationship with a young girl he meets before he departs to partake in D-Day. Finally, in Salinger’s only novel, The Catcher in the Rye, he continues with the theme of posttraumatic stress, though not directly related to war. From a rest home for the mentally ill, sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of his nervous breakdown following the death of his younger brother.

## Exercise 4

Using the three topic sentences you composed for the thesis statement in [Note 9.18 “Exercise 1”](#), draft at least three supporting details for each point.

Thesis statement: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary supporting point 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting details: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary supporting point 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting details: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary supporting point 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting details: \_\_\_\_\_

## Tip

You have the option of writing your topic sentences in one of three ways. You can state it at the beginning of the body paragraph, or at the end of the paragraph, or you do not have to write it at all. This is called an implied topic sentence. An implied topic sentence lets readers form the main idea for themselves. For beginning writers, it is best to not use implied topic sentences because it makes it harder to focus your writing. Your instructor may also want to clearly identify

the sentences that support your thesis. For more information on the placement of thesis statements and implied topic statements, see [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#).

## Tip

Print out the first draft of your essay and use a highlighter to mark your topic sentences in the body paragraphs. Make sure they are clearly stated and accurately present your paragraphs, as well as accurately reflect your thesis. If your topic sentence contains information that does not exist in the rest of the paragraph, rewrite it to more accurately match the rest of the paragraph.

## Key Takeaways

- Your body paragraphs should closely follow the path set forth by your thesis statement.
- Strong body paragraphs contain evidence that supports your thesis.
- Primary support comprises the most important points you use to support your thesis.
- Strong primary support is specific, detailed, and relevant to the thesis.
- Prewriting helps you determine your most compelling primary support.
- Evidence includes facts, judgments, testimony, and personal observation.
- Reliable sources may include newspapers, magazines, academic journals, books, encyclopedias, and firsthand testimony.
- A topic sentence presents one point of your thesis statement while the information in the rest of the paragraph supports that point.
- A body paragraph comprises a topic sentence plus supporting details.

This Chapter was derived from:

“Chapter 9.2: Writing Body Paragraphs.” *Writing for Success*. University of Montana, 2015.



# Chapter 9: Organizing Your Writing

The method of organization you choose for your essay is just as important as its content. Without a clear organizational pattern, your reader could become confused and lose interest. The way you structure your essay helps your readers draw connections between the body and the thesis, and the structure also keeps you focused as you plan and write the essay. Choosing your organizational pattern before you outline ensures that each body paragraph works to support and develop your thesis.

This section covers three ways to organize body paragraphs:

1. Chronological order
2. Order of importance
3. Spatial order

When you begin to draft your essay, your ideas may seem to flow from your mind in a seemingly random manner. Your readers, who bring to the table different backgrounds, viewpoints, and ideas, need you to clearly organize these ideas in order to help process and accept them.

A solid organizational pattern gives your ideas a path that you can follow as you develop your draft. Knowing how you will organize your paragraphs allows you to better express and analyze your thoughts. Planning the structure of your essay before you choose supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and targeted research.

## Chronological Order

Chronological arrangement has the following purposes:

- To explain the history of an event or a topic
- To tell a story or relate an experience
- To explain how to do or to make something
- To explain the steps in a process

Chronological order is mostly used in expository writing, which is a form of writing that narrates, describes, informs, or explains a process. When using chronological order, arrange the events in the order that they actually happened, or will happen if you are giving instructions. This method requires you to use words such as *first*, *second*, *then*, *after that*, *later*, and *finally*. These transition words guide you and your reader through the paper as you expand your thesis.

For example, if you are writing an essay about the history of the airline industry, you would begin with its conception and detail the essential timeline events up until present day. You would follow the chain of events using words such as *first*, *then*, *next*, and so on.

## Writing at Work

At some point in your career you may have to file a complaint with your human resources department. Using chronological order is a useful tool in describing the events that led up to your filing the grievance. You would logically lay out the events in the order that they occurred using the key transition words. The more logical your complaint, the more likely you will be well received and helped.

### Exercise 1

Choose an accomplishment you have achieved in your life. The important moment could be in sports, schooling, or extracurricular activities. On your own sheet of paper, list the steps you took to reach your goal. Try to be as specific as possible with the steps you took. Pay attention to using transition words to focus your writing.

Keep in mind that chronological order is most appropriate for the following purposes:

- Writing essays containing heavy research
- Writing essays with the aim of listing, explaining, or narrating
- Writing essays that analyze literary works such as poems, plays, or books

## Tip

When using chronological order, your introduction should indicate the information you will cover and in what order, and the introduction should also establish the relevance of the information. Your body paragraphs should then provide clear divisions or steps in chronology. You can divide your paragraphs by time (such as decades, wars, or other historical events) or by the same structure of the work you are examining (such as a line-by-line explication of a poem).

### Exercise 2

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that describes a process you are familiar with and can do well. Assume that your reader is unfamiliar with the procedure. Remember to use the chronological key words, such as *first*, *second*, *then*, and *finally*.

## Order of Importance

Order of importance is best used for the following purposes:

- Persuading and convincing
- Ranking items by their importance, benefit, or significance
- Illustrating a situation, problem, or solution

Most essays move from the least to the most important point, and the paragraphs are arranged in an effort to build the essay's strength. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to begin with your most important supporting point, such as in an essay that contains a thesis that is highly debatable. When writing a persuasive essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it immediately captivates your readers and compels them to continue reading.

For example, if you were supporting your thesis that homework is detrimental to the education of high school students, you would want to present your most convincing argument first, and then move on to the less important points for your case.

Some key transitional words you should use with this method of organization are *most importantly*, *almost as importantly*, *just as importantly*, and *finally*.

## Writing at Work

During your career, you may be required to work on a team that devises a strategy for a specific goal of your company, such as increasing profits. When planning your strategy you should organize your steps in order of importance. This demonstrates the ability to prioritize and plan. Using the order of importance technique also shows that you can create a resolution with logical steps for accomplishing a common goal.

### Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that discusses a passion of yours. Your passion could be music, a particular sport, filmmaking, and so on. Your paragraph should be built upon the reasons why you feel so strongly. Briefly discuss your reasons in the order of least to greatest importance.

## Spatial Order

Spatial order is best used for the following purposes:

- Helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it
- Evoking a scene using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
- Writing a descriptive essay

Spatial order means that you explain or describe objects as they are arranged around you in your space, for example in a bedroom. As the writer, you create a picture for your reader, and their perspective is the viewpoint from which you describe what is around you.

The view must move in an orderly, logical progression, giving the reader clear directional signals to follow from place to place. The key to using this method is to choose a specific starting point and then guide the reader to follow your eye as it moves in an orderly trajectory from your starting point.

Pay attention to the following student's description of her bedroom and how she guides the reader through the viewing process, foot by foot.

Attached to my bedroom wall is a small wooden rack dangling with red and turquoise necklaces that shimmer as you enter. Just to the right of the rack is my window, framed by billowy white curtains. The peace of such an image is a stark contrast to my desk, which sits to the right of the window, layered in textbooks, crumpled papers, coffee cups, and an overflowing ashtray. Turning my head to the right, I see a set of two bare windows that frame the trees outside the glass like a 3D painting. Below the windows is an oak chest from which blankets and scarves are protruding. Against the wall opposite the billowy curtains is an antique dresser, on top of which sits a jewelry box and a few picture frames. A tall mirror attached to the dresser takes up most of the wall, which is the color of lavender.

The paragraph incorporates two objectives you have learned in this chapter: using an implied topic sentence and applying spatial order. Often in a descriptive essay, the two work together.

The following are possible transition words to include when using spatial order:

- Just to the left or just to the right
- Behind
- Between
- On the left or on the right
- Across from
- A little further down
- To the south, to the east, and so on
- A few yards away
- Turning left or turning right

## **Exercise 4**

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph using spatial order that describes your commute to work, school, or another location you visit often.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

## Key Takeaways

- The way you organize your body paragraphs ensures you and your readers stay focused on and draw connections to, your thesis statement.
- A strong organizational pattern allows you to articulate, analyze, and clarify your thoughts.
- Planning the organizational structure for your essay before you begin to search for supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and directed research.
- Chronological order is most commonly used in expository writing. It is useful for explaining the history of your subject, for telling a story, or for explaining a process.
- Order of importance is most appropriate in a persuasion paper as well as for essays in which you rank things, people, or events by their significance.
- Spatial order describes things as they are arranged in space and is best for helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it; it creates a dominant impression.

This Chapter was derived from:

“Chapter 9.3: Organizing Your Writing.” *Writing for Success*. University of Montana, 2015.

# Chapter 10: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs

Picture your introduction as a storefront window: You have a certain amount of space to attract your customers (readers) to your goods (subject) and bring them inside your store (discussion). Once you have enticed them with something intriguing, you then point them in a specific direction and try to make the sale (convince them to accept your thesis).

Your introduction is an invitation to your readers to consider what you have to say and then to follow your train of thought as you expand upon your thesis statement.

An introduction serves the following purposes:

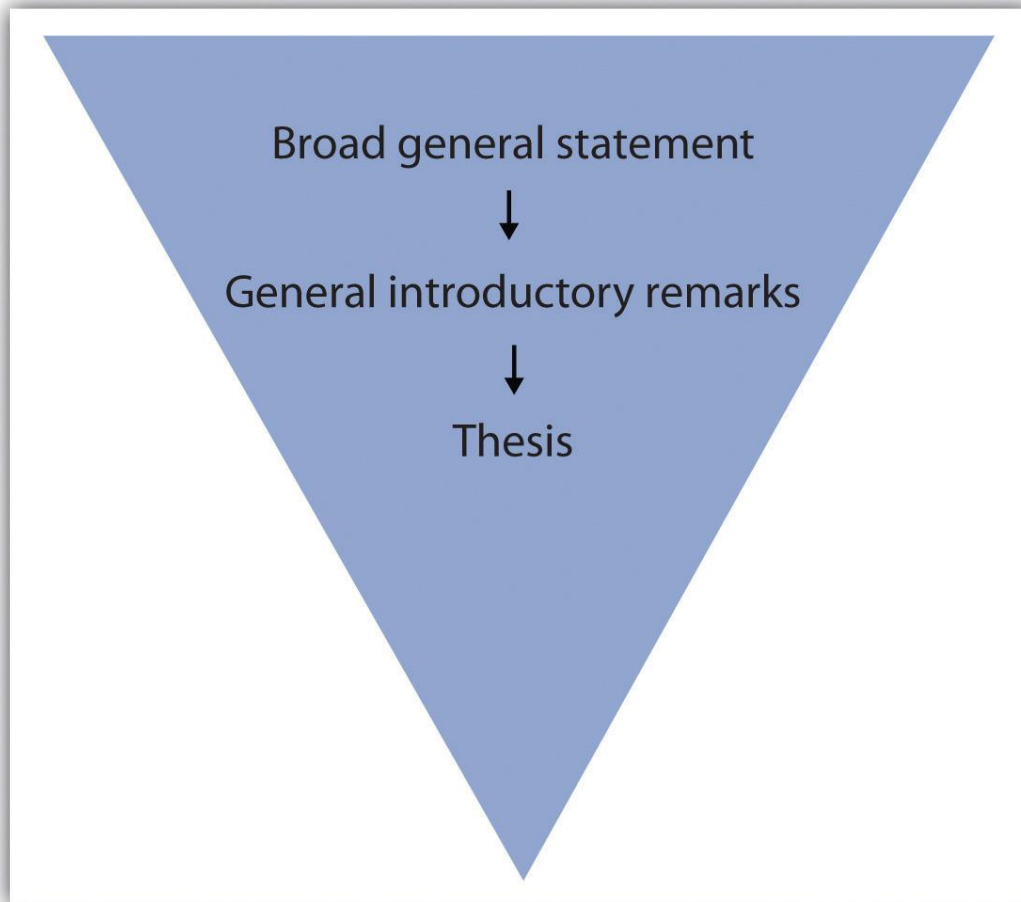
1. Establishes your voice and tone, or your attitude, toward the subject
2. Introduces the general topic of the essay
3. States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs

First impressions are crucial and can leave lasting effects in your reader's mind, which is why the introduction is so important to your essay. If your introductory paragraph is dull or disjointed, your reader probably will not have much interest in continuing with the essay.

## Attracting Interest in Your Introductory Paragraph

Your introduction should begin with an engaging statement devised to provoke your readers' interest. In the next few sentences, introduce them to your topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. As you move deeper into your introduction, you gradually narrow the focus, moving closer to your thesis. Moving smoothly and logically from your introductory remarks to your thesis statement can be achieved using a funnel technique, as illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 9.1 Funnel Technique



## Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, jot down a few general remarks that you can make about the topic for which you formed a thesis in [Chapter 5, “Developing a Strong, Clear Thesis Statement”](#).

Immediately capturing your readers' interest increases the chances of having them read what you are about to discuss. You can garner curiosity for your essay in a number of ways. Try to get your readers personally involved by doing any of the following:

- Appealing to their emotions
- Using logic
- Beginning with a provocative question or opinion
- Opening with a startling statistic or surprising fact
- Raising a question or series of questions

- Presenting an explanation or rationalization for your essay
- Opening with a relevant quotation or incident
- Opening with a striking image
- Including a personal anecdote

## Tip

Remember that your diction, or word choice, while always important, is most crucial in your introductory paragraph. Boring diction could extinguish any desire a person might have to read through your discussion. Choose words that create images or express action.

In this sample a student, Mariah, writes her introduction. Her thesis statement is underlined.

Play Atari on a General Electric brand television set? Maybe watch Dynasty? Or read old newspaper articles on microfiche at the library? Twenty-five years ago, the average college student did not have many options when it came to entertainment in the form of technology. Fast-forward to the twenty-first century, and the digital age has digital technology, consumers are bombarded with endless options for how they do most everything-from buying and reading books to taking and developing photographs. In a society that is obsessed with digital means of entertainment, it is easy for the average person to become baffled. Everyone wants the newest and best digital technology, but the choices are many and the specifications are often confusing.

## Tip

If you have trouble coming up with a provocative statement for your opening, it is a good idea to use a relevant, attention-grabbing quote about your topic. Use a search engine to find statements made by historical or significant figures about your subject.

## Writing at Work

In your job field, you may be required to write a speech for an event, such as an awards banquet or a dedication ceremony. The introduction of a speech is similar to an essay because you have a limited amount of space to attract your audience's attention. Using the same techniques, such as a provocative quote or an interesting statistic, is an effective way to engage your listeners. Using the funnel approach also introduces your audience to your topic and then presents your main idea in a logical manner.

## Exercise 2

Reread each sentence in Mariah's introductory paragraph. Indicate which techniques she used and comment on how each sentence is designed to attract her readers' interest.



# Writing a Conclusion

It is not unusual to want to rush when you approach your conclusion, and even experienced writers may fade. But what good writers remember is that it is vital to put just as much attention into the conclusion as in the rest of the essay. After all, a hasty ending can undermine an otherwise strong essay.

A conclusion that does not correspond to the rest of your essay, has loose ends, or is unorganized can unsettle your readers and raise doubts about the entire essay. However, if you have worked hard to write the introduction and body, your conclusion can often be the most logical part to compose.

## The Anatomy of a Strong Conclusion

Keep in mind that the ideas in your conclusion must conform to the rest of your essay. In order to tie these components together, restate your thesis at the beginning of your conclusion. This helps you assemble, in an orderly fashion, all the information you have explained in the body. Repeating your thesis reminds your readers of the major arguments you have been trying to prove and also indicates that your essay is drawing to a close. A strong conclusion also reviews your main points and emphasizes the importance of the topic.

The construction of the conclusion is similar to the introduction, in which you make general introductory statements and then present your thesis. The difference is that in the conclusion you first paraphrase, or state in different words, your thesis and then follow up with general concluding remarks. These sentences should progressively broaden the focus of your thesis and maneuver your readers out of the essay.

Many writers like to end their essays with a final emphatic statement. This strong closing statement will cause your readers to continue thinking about the implications of your essay; it will make your conclusion, and thus your essay, more memorable. Another powerful technique is to challenge your readers to make a change in either their thoughts or their actions. Challenging your readers to see the subject through new eyes is a powerful way to ease yourself and your readers out of the essay.

### Tip

When closing your essay, do not expressly state that you are drawing to a close. Relying on statements such as *in conclusion*, *it is clear that*, *as you can see*, or *in summation* is unnecessary and can be considered trite.

### Tip

It is wise to avoid doing any of the following in your conclusion:

- Introducing new material
- Contradicting your thesis
- Changing your thesis
- Using apologies or disclaimers

Introducing new material in your conclusion has an unsettling effect on your reader. When you raise new points, you make your reader want more information, which you could not possibly provide in the limited space of your final paragraph.

Contradicting or changing your thesis statement causes your readers to think that you do not actually have a conviction about your topic. After all, you have spent several paragraphs adhering to a singular point of view. When you change sides or open up your point of view in the conclusion, your reader becomes less inclined to believe your original argument.

By apologizing for your opinion or stating that you know it is tough to digest, you are in fact admitting that even you know what you have discussed is irrelevant or unconvincing. You do not want your readers to feel this way. Effective writers stand by their thesis statement and do not stray from it.

### **Exercise 3**

On a separate sheet of a paper, restate your thesis from Exercise 2 of this section and then make some general concluding remarks. Next, compose a final emphatic statement. Finally, incorporate what you have written into a strong conclusion paragraph for your essay.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers

Mariah incorporates some of these pointers into her conclusion. She has paraphrased her thesis statement in the first sentence.

In a society fixated on the latest and smartest digital technology, a consumer can easily become confused by the countless options and specifications. The ever-changing state of digital technology challenges consumers with its updates and add-ons and expanding markets and incompatible formats and restrictions—a fact that is complicated by salesmen who want to sell them anything. In a world that is increasingly driven by instant gratification, it's easy for people to buy the first thing they see. The solution for many people should be to avoid buying on impulse. Consumers should think about what they really need, not what is advertised.

### **Tip**

Make sure your essay is balanced by not having an excessively long or short introduction or conclusion. Check that they match each other in length as closely as possible, and try to mirror the formula you used in each. Parallelism strengthens the message of your essay.

## Writing at Work

On the job you will sometimes give oral presentations based on research you have conducted. A concluding statement to an oral report contains the same elements as a written conclusion. You should wrap up your presentation by restating the purpose of the presentation, reviewing its main points, and emphasizing the importance of the material you presented. A strong conclusion will leave a lasting impression on your audience.

## Key Takeaways

- A strong opening captures your readers' interest and introduces them to your topic before you present your thesis statement.
- An introduction should restate your thesis, review your main points, and emphasize the importance of the topic.
- The funnel technique to writing the introduction begins with generalities and gradually narrows your focus until you present your thesis.
- A good introduction engages people's emotions or logic, questions or explains the subject, or provides a striking image or quotation.
- Carefully chosen diction in both the introduction and conclusion prevents any confusing or boring ideas.
- A conclusion that does not connect to the rest of the essay can diminish the effect of your paper.
- The conclusion should remain true to your thesis statement. It is best to avoid changing your tone or your main idea and avoid introducing any new material.
- Closing with a final emphatic statement provides closure for your readers and makes your essay more memorable.

This Chapter was derived from:

"Chapter 9.4: Writing Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs." *Writing for Success*.

University of Montana, 2015.

# Chapter 11: Developing a Final Draft of a Research Paper

Given all the time and effort you have put into your research project, you will want to make sure that your final draft represents your best work. This requires taking the time to revise and edit your paper carefully.

You may feel like you need a break from your paper before you revise and edit it. That is understandable—but leave yourself with enough time to complete this important stage of the writing process. In this section, you will learn the following specific strategies that are useful for revising and editing a research paper:

- How to evaluate and improve the overall organization and cohesion
- How to maintain an appropriate style and tone
- How to use checklists to identify and correct any errors in language, citations, and formatting

## Revising Your Paper: Organization and Cohesion

When writing a research paper, it is easy to become overly focused on editorial details, such as the proper format for bibliographical entries. These details do matter. However, before you begin to address them, it is important to spend time reviewing and revising the content of the paper.

A good research paper is both organized and cohesive. Organization means that your argument flows logically from one point to the next. Cohesion means that the elements of your paper work together smoothly and naturally. In a cohesive research paper, information from research is seamlessly integrated with the writer's ideas.

## Revise to Improve Organization

When you revise to improve organization, you look at the flow of ideas throughout the essay as a whole and within individual paragraphs. You check to see that your essay moves logically from the introduction to the body paragraphs to the conclusion, and that each section reinforces your thesis. Use Checklist 11.1 to help you.

### Checklist 11.1

Revision: Organization

At the essay level

- Does my introduction proceed clearly from the opening to the thesis?
- Does each body paragraph have a clear main idea that relates to the thesis?
- Do the main ideas in the body paragraphs flow in a logical order? Is each paragraph connected to the one before it?
- Do I need to add or revise topic sentences or transitions to make the overall flow of ideas clearer?
- Does my conclusion summarize my main ideas and revisit my thesis?

At the paragraph level

- Does the topic sentence clearly state the main idea?
- Do the details in the paragraph relate to the main idea?
- Do I need to recast any sentences or add transitions to improve the flow of sentences?

## Exercise 1

Follow these steps to begin revising your paper's overall organization.

1. Print out a hard copy of your paper.
2. Read your paper paragraph by paragraph. Highlight your thesis and the topic sentence of each paragraph.
3. Using the thesis and topic sentences as starting points, outline the ideas you presented—just as you would do if you were outlining a chapter in a textbook. Do not look at the outline you created during prewriting. You may write in the margins of your draft or create a formal outline on a separate sheet of paper.
4. Next, reread your paper more slowly, looking for how ideas flow from sentence to sentence. Identify places where adding a transition or recasting a sentence would make the ideas flow more logically.
5. Review the topics on your outline. Is there a logical flow of ideas? Identify any places where you may need to reorganize ideas.
6. Begin to revise your paper to improve organization. Start with any major issues, such as needing to move an entire paragraph. Then proceed to minor revisions, such as adding a transitional phrase or tweaking a topic sentence so it connects ideas more clearly.

Collaboration

Please share your paper with a classmate. Repeat the six steps and take notes on a separate piece of paper. Share and compare notes.

**Tip**

Writers choose transitions carefully to show the relationships between ideas—for instance, to make a comparison or elaborate on a point with examples. Make sure your transitions suit your purpose and avoid overusing the same ones.

## Revise to Improve Cohesion

When you revise to improve cohesion, you analyze how the parts of your paper work together. You look for anything that seems awkward or out of place. Revision may involve deleting unnecessary material or rewriting parts of the paper so that the out-of-place material fits in smoothly.

In a research paper, problems with cohesion usually occur when a writer has trouble integrating source material. If facts or quotations have been awkwardly dropped into a paragraph, they distract or confuse the reader instead of working to support the writer's point. Overusing paraphrased and quoted material has the same effect. Use Checklist 11.2 to review your essay for cohesion.

### Checklist 11.2

Revision: Cohesion

- Does the opening of the paper clearly connect to the broader topic and thesis? Make sure entertaining quotes or anecdotes serve a purpose.
- Have I included support from research for each main point in the body of my paper?
- Have I included introductory material before any quotations? Quotations should never stand alone in a paragraph.
- Does paraphrased and quoted material clearly serve to develop my own points?
- Do I need to add to or revise parts of the paper to help the reader understand how certain information from a source is relevant?
- Are there any places where I have overused material from sources?
- Does my conclusion make sense based on the rest of the paper? Make sure any new questions or suggestions in the conclusion are clearly linked to earlier material.

### Exercise 2

Follow these steps to begin revising your paper to improve cohesion.

1. Print out a hard copy of your paper.
2. Read the body paragraphs of your paper first. Each time you come to a place that cites information from sources, ask yourself what purpose this information serves. Check that it helps support a point and that it is clearly related to the other sentences in the paragraph.

3. Identify unnecessary information from sources that you can delete.
4. Identify places where you need to revise your writing so that readers understand the significance of the details cited from sources.
5. Skim the body paragraphs once more, looking for any paragraphs that seem packed with citations. Review these paragraphs carefully for cohesion.
6. Review your introduction and conclusion. Make sure the information presented works with ideas in the body of the paper.
7. Revise the places you identified in your paper to improve cohesion.

### Collaboration

Please exchange papers with a classmate. Complete step four. On a separate piece of paper, note any areas that would benefit from clarification. Return and compare notes.

## Writing at Work

Understanding cohesion can also benefit you in the workplace, especially when you have to write and deliver a presentation. Speakers sometimes rely on cute graphics or funny quotations to hold their audience's attention. If you choose to use these elements, make sure they work well with the substantive content of your presentation. For example, if you are asked to give a financial presentation, and the financial report shows that the company lost money, funny illustrations would not be relevant or appropriate for the presentation.

## Using a Consistent Style and Tone

Once you are certain that the content of your paper fulfills your purpose, you can begin revising to improve style and tone. Together, your style and tone create the voice of your paper, or how you come across to readers. Style refers to the way you use language as a writer—the sentence structures you use and the word choices you make. Tone is the attitude toward your subject and audience that you convey through your word choice.

## Determining an Appropriate Style and Tone

Although accepted writing styles will vary within different disciplines, the underlying goal is the same—to come across to your readers as a knowledgeable, authoritative guide. Writing about research is like being a tour guide who walks readers through a topic. A stuffy, overly formal tour guide can make readers feel put off or intimidated. Too much informality or humor can make readers wonder whether the tour guide really knows what he or she is talking about. Extreme or emotionally charged language comes across as unbalanced.

To help prevent being overly formal or informal, determine an appropriate style and tone at the beginning of the research process. Consider your topic and audience because these can help

dictate style and tone. For example, a paper on new breakthroughs in cancer research should be more formal than a paper on ways to get a good night's sleep.

A strong research paper comes across as straightforward, appropriately academic, and serious. It is generally best to avoid writing in the first person, as this can make your paper seem overly subjective and opinion based. Use Checklist 11.3 on style to review your paper for other issues that affect style and tone. You can check for consistency at the end of the writing process. Checking for consistency is discussed later in this section.

## Checklist 11.3

### Style

- My paper avoids excessive wordiness.
- My sentences are varied in length and structure.
- I have avoided using first-person pronouns such as *I* and *we*.
- I have used the active voice whenever possible.
- I have defined specialized terms that might be unfamiliar to readers.
- I have used clear, straightforward language whenever possible and avoided unnecessary jargon.
- My paper states my point of view using a balanced tone—neither too indecisive nor too forceful.

## Word Choice

Note that word choice is an especially important aspect of style. In addition to checking the points noted on Checklist 11.3, review your paper to make sure your language is precise, conveys no unintended connotations, and is free of biases. Here are some of the points to check for:

- Vague or imprecise terms
- Slang
- Repetition of the same phrases (“Smith states..., Jones states...”) to introduce quoted and paraphrased material
- Exclusive use of masculine pronouns or awkward use of *he* or *she*
- Use of language with negative connotations, such as *haughty* or *ridiculous*
- Use of outdated or offensive terms to refer to specific ethnic, racial, or religious groups

## Tip



Using plural nouns and pronouns or recasting a sentence can help you keep your language gender neutral while avoiding awkwardness. Consider the following examples.

- Gender-biased: When a writer cites a source in the body of his paper, he must list it on his references page.
- Awkward: When a writer cites a source in the body of his or her paper, he or she must list it on his or her references page.
- Improved: Writers must list any sources cited in the body of a paper on the references page.

## Keeping Your Style Consistent

As you revise your paper, make sure your style is consistent throughout. Look for instances where a word, phrase, or sentence just does not seem to fit with the rest of the writing. It is best to reread for style after you have completed the other revisions so that you are not distracted by any larger content issues. Revising strategies you can use include the following:

- Read your paper aloud. Sometimes your ears catch inconsistencies that your eyes miss.
- Share your paper with another reader whom you trust to give you honest feedback. It is often difficult to evaluate one's own style objectively—especially in the final phase of a challenging writing project. Another reader may be more likely to notice instances of wordiness, confusing language, or other issues that affect style and tone.
- Line-edit your paper slowly, sentence by sentence. You may even wish to use a sheet of paper to cover everything on the page except the paragraph you are editing—that forces you to read slowly and carefully. Mark any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.

### Exercise 3

Using Checklist 11.3, line-edit your paper. You may use either of these techniques:

1. Print out a hard copy of your paper. Read it line by line. Check for the issues noted on Checklist 11.3, as well as any other aspects of your writing style you have previously identified as areas for improvement. Mark any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.
2. If you prefer to work with an electronic document, use the menu options in your word-processing program to enlarge the text to 150 or 200 percent of the original size. Make sure the type is large enough that you can focus on only one paragraph at a time. Read the paper line by line as described in step 1. Highlight any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.

Collaboration

Please exchange papers with a classmate. On a separate piece of paper, note places where the essay does not seem to flow or you have questions about what was written. Return the essay and compare notes.

## Editing Your Paper

After revising your paper to address problems in content or style, you will complete one final editorial review. Perhaps you already have caught and corrected minor mistakes during previous revisions. Nevertheless, give your draft a final edit to make sure it is error-free. Your final edit should focus on two broad areas:

1. Errors in grammar, mechanics, usage, and spelling
2. Errors in citing and formatting sources

## Correcting Errors

Given how much work you have put into your research paper, you will want to check for any errors that could distract or confuse your readers. Using the spell-checking feature in your word-processing program can be helpful—but this should not replace a full, careful review of your document. Be sure to check for any errors that may have come up frequently for you in the past. Use Checklist 11.4 to help you as you edit:

### Checklist 11.4

Grammar, Mechanics, Punctuation, Usage, and Spelling

- My paper is free of grammatical errors, such as errors in subject-verb agreement and sentence fragments.
- My paper is free of errors in punctuation and mechanics, such as misplaced commas or incorrectly formatted source titles.
- My paper is free of common usage errors, such as *alot* and *alright*.
- My paper is free of spelling errors. I have proofread my paper for spelling in addition to using the spell-checking feature in my word-processing program.
- I have checked my paper for any editing errors that I know I tend to make frequently.

## Checking Citations and Formatting

When editing a research paper, it is also important to check that you have cited sources properly and formatted your document according to the specified guidelines. There are two reasons for this. First and foremost, citing sources correctly ensures that you have given proper credit to other people for ideas and information that helped you in your work. Second, using

correct formatting establishes your paper as one student's contribution to the work developed by and for a larger academic community. Increasingly, American Psychological Association (APA) style guidelines are the standard for many academic fields. Modern Language Association (MLA) is also a standard style in many fields. Use Checklist 11.5 to help you check citations and formatting.

## Checklist 11.5

### Citations and Formatting

- Within the body of my paper, each fact or idea taken from a source is credited to the correct source.
- Each in-text citation includes the source author's name (or, where applicable, the organization name or source title) and year of publication. I have used the correct format of in-text and parenthetical citations.
- Each source cited in the body of my paper has a corresponding entry in the references section of my paper.
- My references section includes a heading and double-spaced, alphabetized entries.
- Each entry in my references section is indented on the second line and all subsequent lines.
- Each entry in my references section includes all the necessary information for that source type, in the correct sequence and format.
- My paper includes a title page.
- My paper includes a running head.
- The margins of my paper are set at one inch. Text is double spaced and set in a standard 12-point font.

## Writing at Work

Following APA or MLA citation and formatting guidelines may require time and effort. However, it is good practice for learning how to follow accepted conventions in any professional field. Many large corporations create a style manual with guidelines for editing and formatting documents produced by that corporation. Employees follow the style manual when creating internal documents and documents for publication.

## Key Takeaways

- Organization in a research paper means that the argument proceeds logically from the introduction to the body to the conclusion. It flows logically from one point to the next. When revising a research paper, evaluate the organization of the paper as a whole and the organization of individual paragraphs.

- In a cohesive research paper, the elements of the paper work together smoothly and naturally. When revising a research paper, evaluate its cohesion. In particular, check that information from research is smoothly integrated with your ideas.
- An effective research paper uses a style and tone that are appropriately academic and serious. When revising a research paper, check that the style and tone are consistent throughout.
- Editing a research paper involves checking for errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, usage, spelling, citations, and formatting.

This Chapter was derived from:

“Chapter 12.2: Developing a Final Draft of a Research Paper.” *Writing for Success*.

University of Montana, 2015.

# Chapter 12: Memoir and Personal Narrative: Learning Lessons from the Personal

## Exploring the Past to Understand the Present

Personal writing is unique in that it tells *your* story. Because it is a form of storytelling, there may be a tendency to discount personal writing as less academic or less valuable a skill than more formal writing. Although it may allow for greater freedom in style and content, personal writing is valuable in its own right because it enables you to make sense of the world as you—not others—experience it.

Two genres of this type of writing are personal narratives and memoirs. A genre is a category of writing that features compositions with distinct characteristics, styles, content, and formats. These two genres belong to the larger family of creative nonfiction, a term that applies to the kind of nonfiction writing that shares many traits with fiction writing. The main difference is that the plots, settings, and characters come from real life rather than an author's imagination. Works of creative nonfiction include American writers Sebastian Junger's (b. 1962) *The Perfect Storm* (1997), Jon Krakauer's (b. 1954) *Into Thin Air* (1997), and Terry Tempest Williams's (b. 1955) *Refuge* (1991). Shorter pieces appear regularly in popular literary magazines, especially in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *The Atlantic*, as well as in periodicals such as *Sports Illustrated*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Writers of narrative nonfiction commonly borrow stylistic and formal techniques from the fast-paced visual narratives of film and television as well as from the innovative language of poetry, fiction, and drama. These influences encourage a multifaceted, multidimensional prose style to keep pace with the multifaceted and multidimensional real world. In addition to memoirs and personal narratives, biographies, autobiographies, and literary journalism are considered creative nonfiction.

## Differences between Memoir and Personal Narrative

Both a memoir and a personal narrative are accounts of personal experiences written in a narrative style, but there are some differences. A memoir is an account of certain incidents in a person's life, often from a specific period of time. The narrator is a character in the story and reflects on past events to draw a conclusion based on those events. Memoirs focus on how the author remembers a part of their own life. On the other hand, personal narratives typically center on one major event through which the narrator reveals thoughts, feelings, and possibly related experiences. Like other works in the narrative genre, personal narratives and memoirs develop setting, plot, characterization, and dialogue.

The word *memoir* comes from the French *mémoire*, meaning “memory.” Personal writing relies on memory but is not necessarily an account of every detail of the event the author is writing about. If this were the case, it could make for dry and tedious reading, contrary to what most authors seek—audience engagement. The more important aim is to create a composition that is emotionally authentic and conveys the core sentiment of an event, time period, or lesson and its impact on you, the writer. In the next section, you will meet an author who does just that. He reflects on deeply personal events from his own life as they relate to broader cultural and social issues. The subject of your personal narrative or memoir should not be just *you*, though you will tell a story from your life. The overall message of the story should be about something bigger—a universal understanding, a lesson learned, a common human experience. The more readers can relate to your story through the details you include, the more it will mean to them.

## The Cultural Aspect

Personal writing provides a unique opportunity to explore cultural contexts. Culture—shared values, customs, arts, and traits of a social group—is at the heart of personal narratives and memoirs and should be part of their central focus. Including historical information, anecdotes, and vivid details in your writing, as well as using a specific and relevant English variety, helps you depict the cultures that are part of your life and enhances readers’ understanding. Thus, readers are likely to experience deeper empathy and emotional responses in connection to the larger issues presented. You also provide opportunities for culture to be shared as a common human experience.

## Memoir Trailblazer: Ta-Nehisi Coates



Figure 12.1 Author Ta-Nehisi Coates often frames current events from the perspective of his own lived experiences. (credit: “Ta Nehisi Coates 2 BBF 2010 Shankbone” by David Shankbone/ Wikimedia, CC BY 3.0)

“I just felt this . . . deep need to express myself. . . . I felt the deep need to understand.”

## The Storyteller's Tools: Context and Voice

Ta-Nehisi Coates (b. 1975) is a best-selling author, journalist, and educator. His writing explores complex issues such as race relations, urban policing, and racial identity, often focusing on his personal experiences as a person of color. Coates was born in Baltimore, Maryland. His mother was a teacher, his father a librarian and founder of the Black Classic Press, which publishes and republishes significant works by and about lesser-known people of African descent. Reading the works of these authors instilled in Coates a lifelong love of reading and learning and a desire to experience the world outside his neighborhood.

Coates began his writing vocation at age 17, first exploring the genre of poetry. He studied journalism at Howard University for five years but did not graduate. However, he did write and begin earning bylines as a young writer, publishing articles in popular periodicals such as *Washington Monthly*, *Mother Jones*, and *Time*. In 2008, he became a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, often writing articles and covering stories about national current events. Among other topics, he has written about Barack Obama (b. 1961) as the first Black president and the shooting of Florida teen Trayvon Martin (1995–2012).

True to the genre of personal narrative, Coates focuses his writing not only on his lived experiences but also on their meaning in the context of larger cultural and social issues, specifically examining race relations and racial equity. In 2008, Coates published his first book, the critically acclaimed memoir *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood*. In it, he writes about his childhood, especially his memories of his father. A former member of the Black Panther Party (founded in 1966), Coates's father raised him and his six siblings as a family unit in West Baltimore. Coates's father and the children's four mothers raised the siblings together. Though they didn't all live together, they were a continuing and active presence in one another's lives.

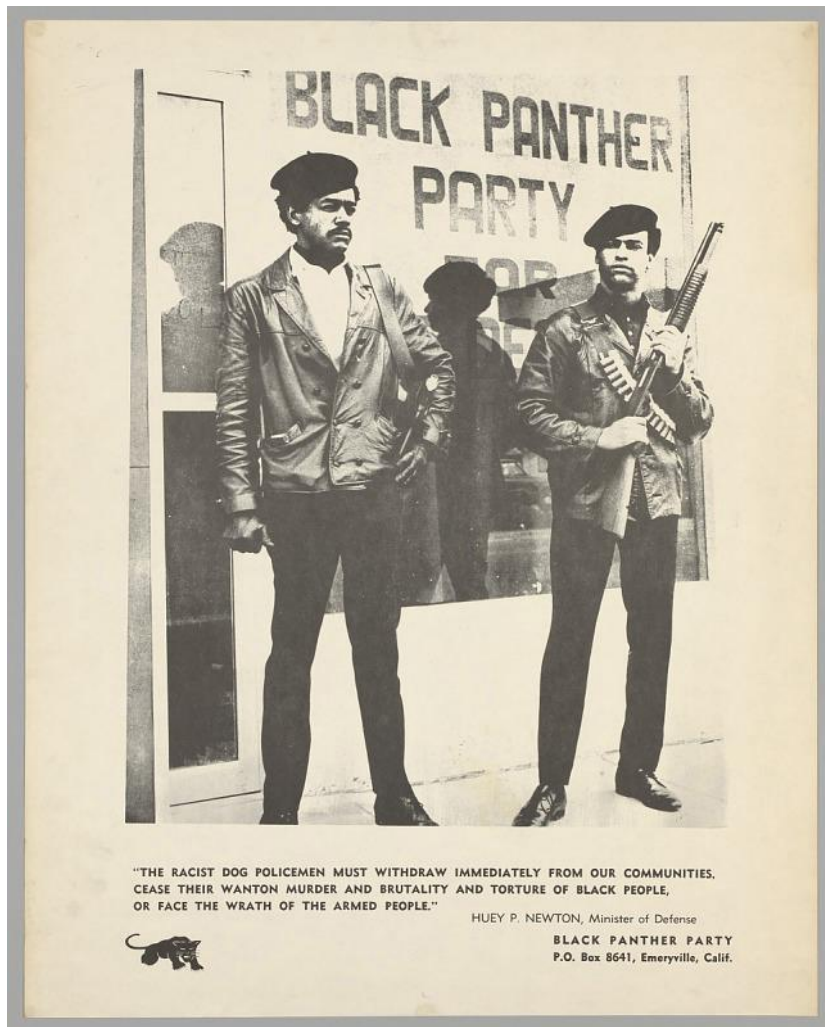


Figure 12.2 Bobby Seale (left; b. 1936) and Huey P. Newton (right; 1942–1989) founded the Black Panther Party in 1966 in response to police violence and racism. (credit: “Black and white poster of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale” by Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Public Domain)

Coates credits his unusual upbringing with providing him both stability and early access to influential “Afro-centric” literature, which would influence his life and career. His memoir reflects the steps his father took to encourage his son’s development into adulthood, from reading all types of books to exploring the neighborhood to helping him grapple with what it means to be a Black man in America. This lived experience is central to the personal narrative he creates in *The Beautiful Struggle*.

Coates’s best-known essay, “The Case for Reparations,” which proposes reparations for slavery, was published in *The Atlantic* in June 2014. Framing his argument around the history of slavery, Coates paints a picture detailing the connections among slavery, race, and economics,



specifically focusing on the modern Chicago housing crisis and policy. “The essence of American racism is disrespect,” he proposes.

The next year, Coates published the best seller *Between the World and Me*, a personal narrative written as a letter to his teenage son. In this book, recounting his own upbringing in Baltimore’s violent inner city during the crack cocaine epidemic, Coates explores the idea that the structure of American society fosters white supremacy. He reveals his wish for his son, now “growing into consciousness”: “that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable.” In 2019, Coates published his first novel, *The Water Dancer*, a work of historical fiction about a slave who helps in the Underground Railroad.

In addition to writing, Coates is an educator. From 2012 to 2014, he was a visiting professor at MIT, and in 2014, he joined the faculty of the City University of New York as a journalist-in-residence. Coates compares writing to a refining process: by applying pressure to yourself, you develop new muscles. He calls writing “an act of physical courage” that relies on the revision process to translate thought to page: “I . . . consider the entire process about failure, and I think that’s . . . why more people don’t write.”

Coates uses doubling in his writing. Because he is both protagonist and narrator, he sees himself as both subject and object, both character and storyteller, and at once a participant and an observer in his narration. Such doubling is often symbolic in memoirs, represented by paired events or mirroring.

You can watch [Advice on Writing](#) to learn more of Coates’s advice to writers such as yourself. You can also read some of his [articles](#) to study his writing style. Listen as American correspondent Martha Teichner (b. 1948), interviews Coates on [CBS Sunday Morning](#), November 5, 2017.

## Discussion Questions

1. How might Coates’s use of personal stories influence the emotions of his readers?
2. How might Coates use personal anecdotes and current events to create commentary on broad historical ideas? What personal events can you link to more wide-ranging ideas or issues?
3. What is the impact of the cultural and lived experiences that Coates weaves into his personal writing? How would the impact differ if he wrote in a more academic style?
4. Coates says his writing process is about pressure and failure. In what way is failure part of the development of narrative writing?

5. On what turning points or important events might Coates focus in his memoir when discussing his father?

## **Glance at Genre: Conflict, Detail, and Revelation**

In personal writing genres, you share experiences of your life, centering them on a specific theme or memory. Unlike an autobiography, which typically extends across an entire lifetime or at least a number of years, memoirs and personal narratives are shaped by a narrower focus, with more specific storytelling surrounding a time period or an event. When writing in these personal genres, authors seek to make an emotional connection with their audience to relate an experience, emotion, or lesson learned.

## **Characteristics of Memoirs and Personal Narratives**

One way to approach a memoir or personal narrative is to think of it as a written series of photographs—snapshots of a period of time, moment, or sequence of events connected by a theme. In fact, writing prose snapshots is analogous to constructing and arranging a photo album composed of separate images. Photo albums, when carefully assembled from informational snapshots, tell stories with clear beginnings, middles, and endings. However, they show a lot of white space between one picture and the next, with few transitions explaining how the photographer got from one scene to another. In other words, while photo albums tell stories, they do so piecemeal, requiring viewers to fill in or imagine what happens between shots. You also might think of snapshots as individual slides in a slideshow or pictures in an exhibition—each the work of the same maker, each a different view, all connected by some logic, the whole presenting a story.

Written snapshots function in the same way as visual snapshots, each connected to the next by white space. Sometimes written snapshots can function as a series of complete and independent paragraphs, each an entire thought, without obvious connections or transitions to the preceding or following paragraph. White space between one snapshot and another gives readers breathing space, allowing them time to digest one thought before continuing to the next. It also exercises readers' imaginations; as they participate in constructing logic that offers textual meaning, the readers themselves make connections and construct meaning. At other times, snapshots flow more directly, one after another, through chronological, circular, parallel, or other structures to move from event to event.

The secret to using snapshots successfully in your writing is to place them carefully in an order that conveys a theme and creates an unbreakable thread. And as with visual snapshots, writers must carefully choose which moments to include—and which to omit. Because they tell stories, memoirs and personal narratives share aspects of the fictional narrative genre. In writing them, you will use crafting tools to tell a vivid and purposeful story that takes into consideration your personal experience and the needs of your reader.

## **The Storyteller's Dilemma: Clarity of Action**

How you construct your story is as important as the story you choose to tell. Deciding on the most effective way the way to tell the story—that is, deciding what framework to use—helps you develop clarity of action to lead readers to the theme or message you seek to develop. Various components work together to bring clarity, but most often in a memoir or personal narrative, clarity comes from plot and character development. Narratives often follow a general structure called an *arc* to develop characters and plot and build the emotional impact of a story. Look at [Figure 12.3](#) for an idea of what a story arc looks like.

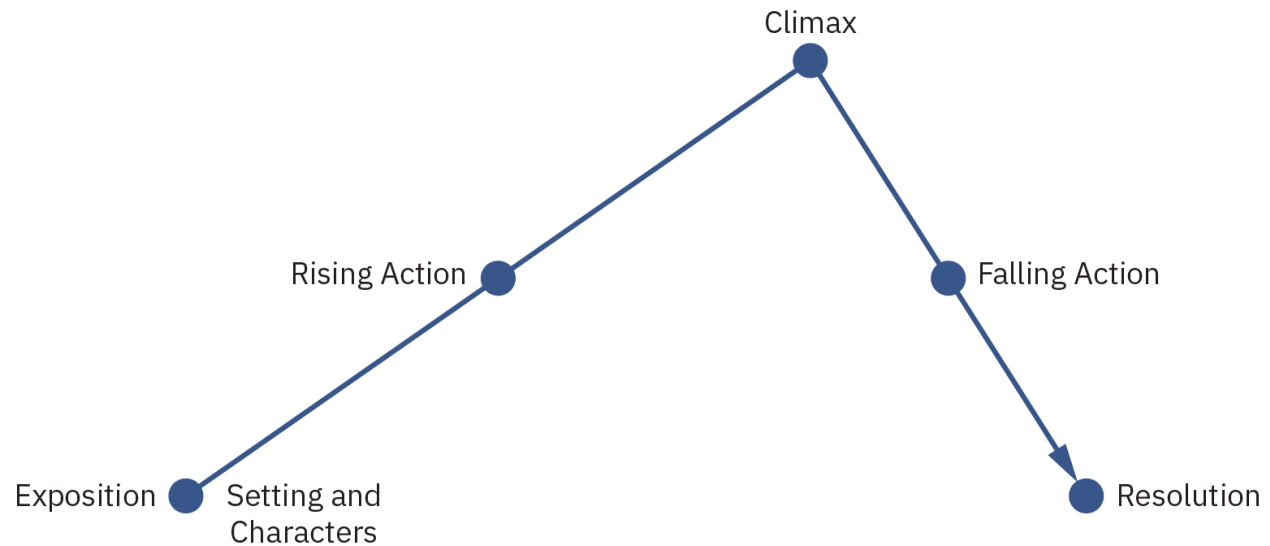


Figure 12.3 Narrative arc (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

This arc, also called a *narrative arc* or a *plot triangle*, is composed of the following elements:

- The exposition sets up the narrative. It introduces characters and setting and establishes the primary conflict of the story, allowing readers to learn the who, what, when, where, and why of the events that will unfold.
- Next, the rising action fully develops the conflict. This developed series of events, the longest part of the narrative, produces increasing tension that engages readers.
- The climax is the turning point of the narrative, in which the story reaches its highest point of tension and conflict. It is the moment when some kind of action must be taken.
- In the falling action, the conflict begins to be resolved, and the tension lessens.
- Finally, during the resolution, the conflict is resolved, and the narrative ends. In memoirs and personal narratives, the resolution often includes or precedes a reflection that examines the broader implications of the theme or lessons learned. Of course, as in real life, conflicts are not always resolved, but the narrator can still reflect on the outcome of the situation.

Although many narratives and memoirs follow this plot-driven arc, narratives can also focus on character arcs. Character-driven narratives explore an individual, most often the narrator, and their development. The stories focus on creating an emotional connection between the character and the reader. Both plot and character arcs may be, and often are, present in memoirs and personal narratives.

Regardless of whether the focus is on plot or characters, conflict is synonymous with the reason for telling your story—it is the driving force. Conflict is often the main challenge faced by a character, and it urges the story along by engaging readers through tension and encouraging them to keep reading. Without conflict, your memoir or personal narrative will lack an overall theme. The major conflict is the undercurrent that drives each scene and is often developed by an inciting incident. Introduced in the exposition and developed in the rising action, this incident sets the mood of the story and engages readers. After the story's climax, where the conflict reaches its peak, the tension gradually resolves during the falling action and moves toward resolution, during which you can explicitly or implicitly explore the theme that ties the story elements together. Sometimes the resolution is accompanied by a revelation, in which the narrator or reader understands something about the bigger picture, such as a lesson learned from the events recounted or knowledge about the general human condition. Of course, each scene or section should have its own conflict, connected in some way to the overarching message of your writing. As you write, ask yourself, *What's the conflict?* By identifying the conflict explicitly, you will ensure that it remains central to your narrative.

Other important aspects of personal writing overlap with the narrative genre. Both reader engagement and plot rely largely on vivid details and sensory descriptions to move readers through the story.

## Key Terms for Memoir or Personal Narrative Writing

- **anecdotes:** a short, interesting story or event told to demonstrate a point or amuse the audience.
- **Bias:** the inclusion or exclusion of certain events and facts, the decisions about word choice, and the consistency of tone. All work together to convey a particular feeling or attitude. Bias comes from a specific stance or worldview and can limit a text, particularly if that bias is left unexamined.
- **Characters:** fictional people (or other beings) created in a work of literature. The narrator of a memoir or personal narrative is the nonfiction equivalent of the main character.
- **Climax:** the point of highest level of interest and emotional response in a narrative.
- **Conclusion:** in narrative writing, the resolution. It is the point at which the narrator has reached a decision.
- **Conflict:** the major challenge that the main character faces.
- **Doubling:** a mirroring of events, objects, characters, or concepts in a memoir.
- **Exposition:** the beginning section of a narrative that introduces the characters, setting, and plot.
- **Falling action:** the section of the plot after the climax in which tension from the main conflict is decreased and the narrative moves toward the conclusion, or resolution.
- **Flashback:** a scene that interrupts the chronological order of the main narrative to return to a scene from an earlier time.

- Foreshadowing: hints of what is to come in the text.
- Mood: the atmosphere of the text, often achieved through details, description, and setting.
- Plot: the events that make up a narrative or story.
- Point of view: the perspective from which a narrative is told. Memoirs and personal narratives usually use the first-person point of view, or tell the story through the eyes of the narrator.
- Resolution: the point at which a story's conflict is settled; the conclusion of a narrative.
- Revelation: a discovery about a person, event, or idea that shapes the plot.
- Rising action: a series of events in the plot in which tension surrounding the major conflict increases and the plot moves toward its climax.
- Setting: when and where a narrative occurs. Setting is revealed through narration and details.
- Theme: the underlying idea that reveals the author's message about a narrative.
- Vivid details: sensory language and detailed descriptions that help readers gain a deeper and fuller understanding of ideas and events in the narrative.
- Voice: the combination of vocabulary, tone, sentence structure, dialogue, and other details that make a text authentic and engaging. Voice is the "identity" or "personality" of the writer and includes the specific English variety used by the narrator and characters.

## Writing Process: Making the Personal Public

Now it's your turn to put pen to paper and experience the genre through action. Once you choose a moment to write about and begin the narrative process, you may want to rearrange, rewrite, or even omit some parts entirely. The goal is to create a story that not only gets your message across but also creates an emotional connection with your readers.

## Summary of Assignment: A Turning Point

Choose an event from your life that has stuck in your memory as a turning point of some sort. Certainly, you can write about major milestones—graduations, achievements, and the like—but consider small moments and events, too: something that someone said to you or that you overheard, a time you got or didn't get what you wanted, a time you were disappointed, or a time you thought you knew better than a more experienced person. To get the most accurate perspective of the event, go back in time as far as you can so that you think about the event as objectively as possible and know it as a real and meaningful turning point. Write a story about the event, and use narrative techniques to show why the event has become meaningful. Here are some other ideas about possible turning points:

- A changed attitude toward a friend, sibling, or other family member
- A change of major, if that change is a big step away from what you planned to do

- Making or not making the cut for a team or some other group
- Your feelings when you learned something about yourself or someone close to you
- A move from another country to the United States or from another U.S. location to where you are now
- Becoming fluent in another language
- Realizing that a certain behavior either gets you what you want or doesn't
- Realizing that someone you admire is not so admirable, or vice versa
- Becoming friends with someone you didn't expect to be friends with
- Facing an illness or crisis and how it changed or didn't change you

*Another Lens.* An alternative to writing a first-person narrative about a turning point is to consider writing about the event from the perspective of someone—or something—else. If the story involves another person in addition to yourself, consider making that person the narrator and having them tell the story as they might view it. Also consider telling your story from an outside observer's perspective, or even from the perspective of an inanimate object—for example, the pen used to sign a contract. This perspective may be beneficial for exploring your own emotions and may also offer a helpful alternative if including details about your personal life in your story makes you uncomfortable.

#### Quick Launch: Plot Diagram

Once you have chosen a topic, freewrite for 5 to 10 minutes, considering the following questions:

- Why is this event memorable?
- What conflict did you face?
- What images come to mind when you think of this event?

Then, begin to isolate details to create a plot diagram. Remember, following a plot diagram involves focusing on the building of tension surrounding the conflict in a story and then resolving it in a meaningful way.

#### Drafting: Conflict, Point of View, Organization, and Reflection

With the skeleton of a plot diagram in mind, freewrite again for 5 to 10 minutes, considering the following questions:

- Why is this event memorable?
- What conflict did you face?
- What images come to mind when you think of this event?
- What do you want to express to your readers about the event?
- What lessons did you learn from the event?

## Purpose

Along with your freewrite, consider what message you want to leave with readers. The reason this moment is important to you should be made clear to readers through the development of the story, most often through the conflict and its resolution. Remember that the conflict is the primary problem or obstacle that the main character—most likely you in this personal narrative—faces and must overcome in order to reach a resolution. Conflict in a personal narrative, as in fiction, usually consists of one or more of five main conflict types:

- Character vs. character
- Character vs. self
- Character vs. environment or nature
- Character vs. society
- Character vs. fate or the supernatural

The purpose and theme are shaped by the conflict. Consider the conflict in the Mark Twain excerpt. Twain needs to run a crossing that, at the beginning of the passage, he feels confident to handle. But as the story progresses and Mr. Bixby sends more people to make him nervous, Twain begins to second-guess himself.

“But that did the business for me. My imagination began to construct dangers out of nothing, and they multiplied faster than I could keep the run of them. All at once I imagined I saw shoal water ahead! The wave of coward agony that surged through me then came near dislocating every joint in me. All my confidence in that crossing vanished. I seized the bell-rope; dropped it, ashamed; seized it again; dropped it once more; clutched it tremblingly once again, and pulled it so feebly that I could hardly hear the stroke myself.”

This conflict not only builds the reader’s interest in the main character’s problem but also helps Twain develop the theme, his message to the reader: you must rely on your knowledge and training rather than second-guess yourself. In this anecdote, the theme is explicitly stated, but more often than not, authors are more subtle, requiring readers to infer themes on the basis of details in the text. The ways in which you craft your conflict and theme will affect its significance to your readers.

To help you organize your work, complete a graphic organizer like [Table 12.4](#) as you are able at this point. You may want to revise it later as you write your draft.

Basic Story Elements
Purpose
Conflict
Main Characters
Theme

Table 12.4 Basic story elements

## Plot Elements

Now that you have considered your overall message and have a general idea of what you will write about, think of how you will structure your story. You already have diagrammed some of the Mark Twain excerpt and know how plots move along. One idea for organizing the plot of your narrative is to write down individual moments or events on notecards and physically place them on a table to mimic a hands-on plot diagram. You should have a series of events leading to the climax and fewer events that make up the falling action. This method of plot diagramming also helps you identify where holes may turn up in your plan. For example: *Is your exposition missing key background information that is necessary for readers to understand the story? Have you created sufficient tension in the lead-up to the climax of your story?* Examine your plot diagram to identify where you need more (or perhaps less) detail in your outline. You might notice that the plot diagram is a bit lopsided, skewing left. If it does, then much of your story leads up to the climax, as it should, with fewer words between the climax and resolution.

Most, but not all, personal narratives are written in chronological order; that is, the storyteller follows the sequence of events according to the order in which they occur. However, there are other structures, such as anecdotes told according to theme, through flashbacks, or in reverse chronological order. The order in which you recount events is important in building tension in the story, thus stimulating readers' curiosity. Seriously consider how each choice that you make will create readers' engagement and emotional connection to your story as you plan toward the climax.

### Exposition

Next, follow your plot diagram to begin writing your narrative. Start with a strong introduction. Try to think of this introductory section as the "hook," engaging readers so that they want to continue reading. Create the introduction with vivid details or a relatable anecdote. Remember that this section will introduce the main characters, the setting, and the conflict. Here are some suggestions for an opening strategy, all of which should be brief, generally not more than two paragraphs:

- Anecdote related to your story
- Description of one of the characters involved
- Scenario in which you ask readers what they might do in that situation
- Description of a setting in which you found yourself
- Significant dialogue or action that you will explain later
- One or more open-ended questions that relate closely to the theme; avoid yes/no questions

### Transitions

As you do in other writing, build your overall structure through transitions—words and phrases you use to move readers through events, ideas, and time. Transitions smooth connections between ideas, clarifying them and making reading easier. In narratives, transitions often



indicate the passage of time. They may also introduce new characters or ideas, tie ideas together, or make connections to the larger theme or message.

Transitions may be concrete, as is the one Mark Twain uses: “Well, one matchless summer’s day. . .” This statement clearly establishes the passage of time. But transitions can also be abstract or subtle, helping the author organize ideas and information. More subtle transitions include changes in elements such as tone, voice, point of view, or even setting. Use the plot diagram as an outline, and move from event to event as you draft your narrative. You will have freedom with paragraph length and structure because you will use dialogue and description. Also, some events or characters may require more detail than others. As you write your narrative, use transitions to move readers along until you ultimately resolve the central conflict and tie its resolution to the theme.

### Point of View

Authors have options for narrating a literary work—that is, they can choose from whose point of view they tell the story. In your narrative, you most likely will use the first-person point of view. When a story is told from this point of view, the narrator is a character in the story and tells it as it happens—that is, as the narrator experiences the event. Mark Twain tells his story from the first-person point of view in the excerpt from *Life on the Mississippi*. The first sentence of that excerpt reads, “Mr. Bixby served me in this fashion once, and for years afterward I used to blush even in my sleep when I thought of it.” Not only do readers understand that the narrator is telling the story, using pronouns such as *me* and *I*, but the narrator also describes his feelings (“blush[ing] even in my sleep”) and thoughts.

## Characters

Characters in a personal narrative are generally real people, at least in part. As the author, you can focus on certain character traits and ignore, minimize, or exaggerate others. In making the people in your narrative come to life, you will likely assign them different ways of behaving and speaking. For example, one character may use long words and speak condescendingly to another. Another character may find conversation difficult and say little, relying on gestures more than words. Still another character might be generous, sympathetic, arrogant, or sneaky. When creating characters, make sure the characters’ language and behavior reflect their characterizations.

You can use a web diagram, similar to the one shown in [Figure 12.5](#), to keep track of characters’ traits.

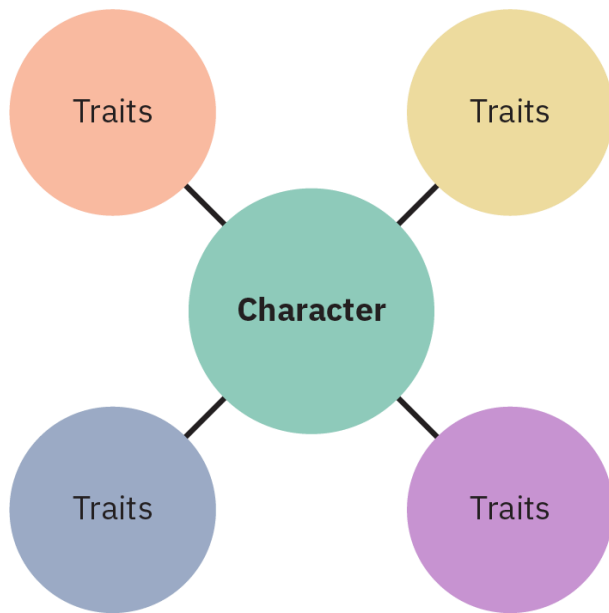


Figure 12.5 Character web (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

## Setting

Where and when your narrative takes place is an important part of a narrative, as it is in the excerpt from Twain's story. You may want to describe a setting in detail if it is important in the course of the story, or you may find it a less essential part of the narrative. In either case, the setting must be described to some extent to give the narrative a sense of time and place.

## Verb Tense

Choose the tense in which you want to tell your story, and ensure that you stay consistent throughout the narrative. Typically, you will choose between past tense and present tense. Past tense provides a familiar sense of storytelling, as Twain develops in his anecdote: "I looked around, and there stood Mr. Bixby, smiling a bland, sweet smile." Another option is to tell your story in the present tense, which provides a sense of urgency to the events and allows readers to feel closer to the action. If you are considering using the present tense, try substituting it in the excerpt from *Life on the Mississippi*. Consider how it sounds and the difficulties you might encounter in using it. Whichever tense you choose, however, the most important thing is to stick to it, changing it only to indicate a change in chronology. For example, if you are narrating in the present tense and want to indicate something that happened at a time before the events of your story, you would change tenses for clarity.

## Active vs. Passive Voice

Verbs have two voices: active and passive. In an active-voice sentence structure, the subject performs the action of the verb. In a passive-voice sentence structure, the subject receives the action of the verb. Consider the examples in [Table 12.6](#).

Active Voice	Passive Voice
I devoured the silky pudding.	The silky pudding was devoured by me.
The teacher will give you directions.	Directions will be given to you by the teacher.
The barnacles scraped my skin.	My skin was scraped by the barnacles.
The sloth carried her baby on her back.	The baby sloth was carried by its mother on her back.
The two presidents are signing the agreement.	The agreement is being signed by the two presidents.
A tornado destroyed the neighborhood.	The neighborhood was destroyed by a tornado.

Table 12.6 Active vs. passive voice

The meanings in both passive and active voice remain the same, yet their effect is different. In active voice, the message will be clearer and often more convincing. While it is not wrong to write in the passive voice on occasion, you will usually strengthen your writing by focusing on how a subject performs an action rather removing it from the direct action.

## Imagery

In personal narratives and memoirs, imagery not only brings the experience to life but also engages readers through their senses. For example, Twain appeals to the sense of hearing when he describes “the leadsman’s sepulchral cry:—‘D-e-e-p four!’” The use of figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, hyperbole, or personification, often enhances these descriptions. Think of images and figurative language as ways of *showing* versus *telling*. Consider Twain’s recounting of the moment he loses his nerve: “I began to climb the wheel like a squirrel.” Certainly, he could have said instead, “I spun the wheel back and forth.” But the use of figurative language, in this case a simile comparing his action to a squirrel’s, helps readers imagine and share Twain’s terror as if they are experiencing the event in the same way. Within a scene in your story, choose an event, moment, or place, and practice using imagery to describe it. Then use a graphic organizer like [Figure 12.7](#) to imagine how you might use each sense to describe the same event or another event, moment, or place from your story.

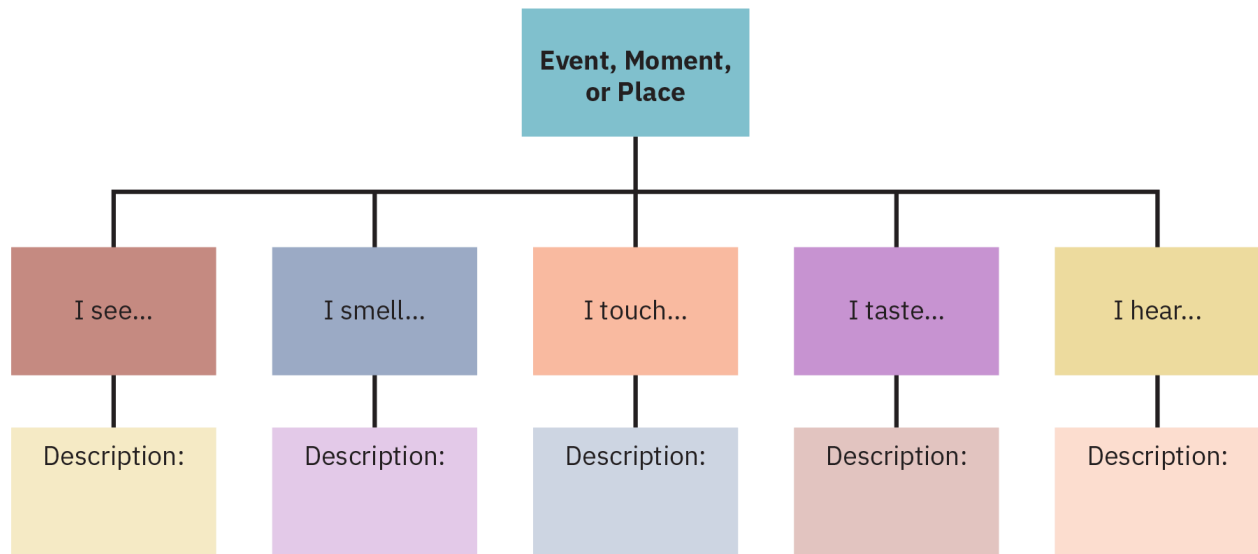


Figure 12.7 Senses chart (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY 4.0 license)

For your narrative, you do not have to use all the descriptions in the graphic organizer, and doing so would likely clutter your story. Choose the best, most powerful details to enhance your writing and help readers viscerally experience the event, moment, or place.

## Sentence Structure

You can structure your text in various ways to achieve your intended mood, tone, and overall message. No matter what your form or style, sentences are your main units of composition, explaining the world in terms of subjects, actions, and objects: some force (a subject) does something (action) that causes something else to happen (an object). Narrative writing, like all prose, is built around complete and predictable sentences.

Sometimes, however, writers use sentences in less predictable and more playful ways. For example, fragmented sentences suggest fragmented stories. Fragmented sentences can be used judiciously in conventional writing, even academic writing, as long as their purpose is clear and your fragment is not mistaken for a grammatical error. Writers sometimes use fragments audaciously and sometimes with abandon to create the special effects they want: *A flash of movement. A bit of a story. A frozen scene.*

Fragments force quick reading, ask for impressionistic understanding, and suggest parts rather than wholes. Like snapshots, fragments invite strong reader participation to stitch information together and move toward clear meaning. Fragmented sentences suggest, too, that things are moving fast. Often used in dialogue as well to mimic real speech, purposeful fragments can be powerful: *Deliberate. Intentional. Careful. Functional. Usually brief.*

Consider British novelist Charles Dickens's (1812–1870) use of fragments in this story told in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836). The impact of the sentence fragments here conveys a sensory experience and creates a mood for the reader.

“Heads, heads—take care of your heads!” cried the loquacious stranger, as they came out under the low archway, which in those days formed the entrance to the coach-yard. “Terrible place—dangerous work—other day—five children—mother—tall lady, eating sandwiches—forgot the arch—crash—knock—children look round—mother’s head off—sandwich in her hand—no mouth to put it in—head of a family off—shocking, shocking!”

On the opposite pole of sentence structure are labyrinthine sentences. A labyrinthine sentence seems never to end. Instead, it goes on and on and on, using all sorts of punctuational and grammatical tricks to create a compound sentence (two or more independent clauses joined by a comma and a conjunction such as *and*, *or*, or *but*) or a complex sentence (one independent clause with one or more dependent clauses). Such sentences are often written to suggest that events or time are running together and hard to separate. However, such writing may more often suggest error than experiment, so be careful.

Another type of sentence variation is achieved through repetition of words, phrases, or sentences for emphasis. Repeated words and ideas suggest continuity of idea and theme, help meld ideas and paragraphs, and sometimes create rhythms that are pleasing to the ear. While refrain is a term more often associated with music, poetry, and sermons, it is a form of repetition that is quite powerful in prose as well. A refrain is a phrase or group of words repeated throughout a text to remind readers (or listeners) of an important theme. For example, the words “I have a dream” are a refrain from American activist Martin Luther King Jr.’s (1929–1968) speech by the same name. Look at how Mark Twain uses repetition to increase the tension.

“I seized the bell-rope; dropped it, ashamed; seized it again; dropped it once more; clutched it tremblingly once again, and pulled it so feebly that I could hardly hear the stroke myself.”

Variation in sentence structure, established through such techniques as fragments, labyrinthine sentences, and repetition, creates certain effects within the text because each technique conveys its information in an unmistakable way. These techniques are stylistic devices that add an emotional dimension to the typically factual material of narrative prose without announcing, labeling, or dictating what those emotions should be. The wordplay of alternate-style composing allows narrative prose to convey themes more often conveyed through more obviously poetic forms. These sentence variations are a large component of what constitutes voice.

## Voice

As you write, focus on developing your voice, which in writing is the identity or personality of the narrator or writer. A writer’s voice is sometimes equated with an individual’s personal style—the elements that contribute to the way that person looks and acts. *Do you favor*

*certain kinds of clothing? Do you walk in a certain way? Do you have certain characteristic gestures or speech patterns?* In writing, your voice is the sum total of the words you choose, the way you use them, the attitude you project by your word choice, the mood you create, the way your words describe characters, the way characters speak and behave, and the way you relate events. In personal writing, voice comes through via narration, dialogue, and characterization and the way you project your personality through them.

Further, writers often speak with more than one voice, or maybe with a single voice that has a wide range, varied registers, multiple tones, and different pitches. In any given composition, a writer may try to say two things at the same time. Sometimes writers question their own assertions, sometimes they say one thing aloud and think another silently to themselves, sometimes they say one thing that means two things, and sometimes they express contradictions, paradoxes, or conundrums.

Double voices in a text may be indicated by parentheses—the equivalent of an actor speaking an aside on the stage or in a film. In a film, the internal monologue of a character may be revealed as a voice-over or through printed subtitles while another reaction is happening on-screen. With text, you can change the type size or font or switch to *italic*, boldface, or CAPITAL LETTERS to signal a switch in your voice as a writer. The double voice can also occur without distinguishing markers at all or with simple paragraph breaks or spaces.

Effective voice can be achieved through sentence structure and word choices. Try to balance descriptive language and dialogue. You likely have heard the expression “Show, don’t tell.” Use narration to describe events, actions, and even the narrator’s thoughts, but don’t fall into the trap of feeling as though you need to describe *everything*. Allow events to flow naturally through the narration, weaving in action and dialogue. Precisely placed dialogue can reinforce the narration.

Because voice infuses personality into the composition, the lack of voice or a weak voice may make your story read like a timeline rather than selected events leading to a meaningful turning point. You want your voice to be consistent, reliable, and relatable to your readers. Often this voice will sound like you, infusing your personality or identity into the text. If you recreate authentic (or a good imitation of authentic) dialogue, narration, and description, your voice will likely be strongest, as it suggests a real connection with you.

## **Mood**

When expressing the narrator’s emotions and point of view about the events of the text, voice is a major factor in creating mood (atmosphere). For example, a mood may be gloomy, happy, or tense. The same event told by a narrator with a casual, lighthearted voice can be read completely differently if narrated with a formal, argumentative voice. Consider these two sentences and the effect created by the word choice:

- The rain danced on the pavement, sparkling droplets falling from cotton balls above.
- The rain pounded the pavement, pouring buckets from thundering gray clouds above.

The mood in the first sentence reflects a positive disposition toward the rain. The second sentence, though it says nearly the same thing, shows a negative attitude, expressing the violence of the rain. The two distinct moods, developed through imagery, details, and language, influence the reader's perception of the rain.

## Conclusion and Reflection

At the end of your story, you will have the opportunity to reflect on the turning-point event, its impact on you, and perhaps its application to a universal theme. In the Twain example, the reflection is relatively straightforward.

“Very well, then. You shouldn't have allowed me or anybody else to shake your confidence in that knowledge. Try to remember that. And another thing: when you get into a dangerous place, don't turn coward. That isn't going to help matters any.”

“It was a good enough lesson, but pretty hardly learned. Yet about the hardest part of it was that for months I so often had to hear a phrase which I had conceived a particular distaste for. It was, “Oh, Ben, if you love me, back her!”

Twain uses Mr. Bixby's words to teach both himself and readers the lesson. Twain's reflection also points to a universal lesson, creating a relatable thread from which readers can learn. As you compose your reflection, ask yourself these questions:

- What have you learned from your turning point?
- What can readers learn from your turning point?
- How will you express this lesson?

You may reflect by using literary elements such as imagery or figurative language that help develop the theme or message. You will want to leave room for your readers' own interpretations so that they can apply the lesson to their own lives, as Twain does. Certainly, most people have doubted their knowledge and abilities at some point, and Mr. Bixby's directive “Don't turn coward” has universal meaning.

## Peer Review: Focus on Big-Picture Elements

After your first draft is complete, begin the process of peer review. In this initial review, peer reviewers should focus on big-picture elements, such as plot, point of view, organization, and reflection. Peer reviewers can use the following sentence starters to assess these elements.

- My first impression of the story is \_\_\_\_\_. From it, I learned \_\_\_\_\_.
- The story begins with/by \_\_\_\_\_. It could be made more engaging by \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author uses dialogue to \_\_\_\_\_.
- The narrative is organized by \_\_\_\_\_. Doing \_\_\_\_\_ could strengthen the organization.
- The author's main point is \_\_\_\_\_ and is developed by \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author wants to tell me \_\_\_\_\_.

- I think these details could be made stronger to better develop the main idea or theme of \_\_\_\_\_.

In addition, peer reviewers may choose to mark the manuscript in the following ways:

- Circle unnecessary details. Underline places where more vivid details would bring events or ideas to life.
- Mark places where transitions are needed.
- Place quotation marks in the margin to indicate places where dialogue might better develop the story.

## Revising: Let the Small Stuff Go for Now

After reading through your peer review, you now have the opportunity to revise your story. When you are revising, reimagine your manuscript until it reaches your audience in the way you want it to. Begin this process by identifying the physical changes you want to make. These might include moving, adding, or deleting content and rewriting ideas. There are also nonphysical ways to revise. Focus on the big picture; think about whether the way you have told your story has delivered your intended message effectively. Avoid getting caught up in minute details before you have shaped the narrative to relate your intended ideas.

Use the following checklist to work through the revision process.

- Introduction: Does the introduction hook the reader and establish the background knowledge needed, including plot and setting?
- Sequence of events: Is the story told in a logical and consistent order?
- Vivid details: Do you provide vivid details that engage your readers' senses?
- Tone and mood: Are the tone and mood effective for your purpose?
- Characterization, narration, and voice: Have you developed consistent and specific characterization through your narration and voice?
- Dialogue: Does the dialogue help move the plot and reflect the characters?
- Transitions: Have you used clear transitions and time signals to establish chronology and connect important ideas?
- Structure: Have you developed a cohesive structure, including varying sentence lengths and structures? Can you improve sentences by restructuring, combining, or separating them?
- Conclusion: Does your conclusion clearly explain the significance of the turning-point event, including its relationship to the theme you want to develop?

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