



READ, THINK, WRITE

WRITING IN UNIVERSITY

Pam Chamberlain and Adien Dubbelboer

**Read, Think,
Write**

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**Pam Chamberlain *and*
Adien Dubbelboer**

Published in 2023 by Remix, an imprint of Athabasca
University Press
1 University Drive, Athabasca, AB Canada



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15215/remix/9781998944026.01>
ISBN: 9781998944019 (paper) | 9781998944026 (pdf) |
9781998944033 (epub)

Cover design by Lisa Mentz

Images that appear in this text, unless otherwise noted,
were adapted from Scott McLean, *Writing for Success*, and
Tara Horkoff, *Writing for Success: 1st Canadian Edition*.

Read, Think, Write is an adaptation with original material
written by Pam Chamberlain and Adien Dubbelboer.
Adapted from *Writing for Success* by Scott McLean and
Writing for Success: 1st Canadian Edition by Tara Horkoff.

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For more information, please visit aupress.ca or email
OERpublishing@athabascau.ca.

Acknowledgements

Although this textbook is based on the excellent work of Scott McLean, in the original open-educational-resource textbook *Writing for Success*, and Tara Horkoff, in the first Canadian version, this book has ultimately been shaped by and for the needs of thousands of Athabasca University's visiting and program students over the years. We are immensely grateful for the significant contributions from AU tutors Stuart Edgar and Sharren Patterson, in [Chapters 17](#) and [18](#), respectively. Thanks are due to Rob Wiznura for his overall vision and contributions to [Chapter 18](#). We are also grateful to many other past and current English 255 tutors for their advice and knowledge and to Sarah-Jean Watt and her colleagues at the Write Site for their insights. Finally, this project would not have happened without the support of AU Press—particularly Megan Hall, Kathy Killoh, and Karyn Wisselink—Athabasca University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Dean Manijeh Mannani.

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Contents

Preface	<i>xiii</i>
To the Student: How to Use This Book	<i>xv</i>
Part I. Welcome to University	1
Chapter 1. How to Succeed in Your University Studies	3
Learning in a Post-secondary Context:	
The Transition from High School to University	4
Set Goals	7
Manage Your Time	8
Understand Yourself as a Learner	12
Take Notes Effectively	16
Make Use of Resources	24
Chapter 2. Introduction to Academic Reading	27
Reading in University	28
Reading Strategies	30
Improve Your Reading Comprehension	34
Read Actively	44
Chapter 3. Introduction to Academic Writing	55
Writing in University	56
What Is Academic Writing?	59
The Writing Process in Brief	61
Managing Writing Assignments	64

Part II. The Writing Process	69
What Is the Writing Process?	69
The Recursive Writing Process	72
Chapter 4. Prewrite: Generate Ideas for Writing	73
The Purpose of Prewriting	73
Using Experience and Observations	75
Reading and Viewing	77
Freewriting	78
Asking Questions	81
Brainstorming	82
Idea Mapping	83
Searching the Internet	85
Chapter 5. Plan and Outline: Organize Your Ideas	91
First Things First: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content	92
Methods of Organization	103
Creating an Outline	108
Chapter 6. Draft: Develop a Piece of Writing	117
The Role of the First Draft	117
Strategies for Drafting	118
The Importance of Tone	124
Chapter 7. Revise: Improve <i>What</i> You've Written	129
The Purpose of Revision	129
Strategies for Revision	130
Revise to Improve Organization	131
Revise to Improve Coherence	133
Revise to Improve Unity	141
Peer Review: Revision	143
Chapter 8. Edit: Improve <i>How</i> You've Written	151
The Purpose of Editing	152
Strategies for Editing	152
Edit for Style and Tone	153
Peer Review: Editing	160

Chapter 9.	Proofread: Polish Your Writing for an Audience	165
	The Purpose of Proofreading	165
	Strategies for Proofreading	166
	Proofread for Errors in Grammar and Mechanics	167
	Proofread for Errors in Format and Documentation	168
	Peer Review: Proofreading	170

Part III. Building Paragraphs and Essays 175

Chapter 10.	Develop an Effective Topic for a Paragraph or an Essay	177
	Choose a Topic	177
	Narrow the Focus	179
Chapter 11.	Paragraph Essentials	187
	What Is a Paragraph?	187
	Effective Topic Sentences	188
	Supporting Sentences	198
	Transitions	200
	Closing Sentences	201
	Paragraph Length	203
Chapter 12.	Essay Essentials: Structure and Thesis Statements	207
	The Parts of an Essay	208
	Thesis Statements	209
Chapter 13.	Essay Essentials: Body Paragraphs	225
	How to Plan the Body of an Essay	226
	Selecting Primary Support	227
	Structuring the Body Paragraphs	230
Chapter 14.	Essay Essentials: Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs	239
	The Introductory Paragraph	239
	The Concluding Paragraph	242
	Write an Effective Essay Title	246

Part IV. Common Writing Assignments	251
Chapter 15. Summary	253
What Is a Summary?	253
How to Write a Summary	256
Avoiding Plagiarism While Summarizing	259
Preparing a Summary for Submission	264
Sample Summary	265
Chapter 16. Expository Essay	271
What Is an Expository Essay?	271
How to Write an Expository Essay	273
Classification Essay	274
Compare-Contrast Essay	279
Cause-Effect Essay	286
Process Essay	292
Chapter 17. Argumentative Essay	301
The Art of Persuasion	302
Rhetorical Devices	304
Logical Fallacies	306
How to Write an Argumentative Essay	310
Chapter 18. Analytical Essay	327
What Is Analysis?	328
The Process of Analyzing	328
Analytical Context	333
Critical Analysis Essay	334
Rhetorical Analysis Essay	353
Chapter 19. Personal Essay	367
What Is (and Isn't) a Personal Essay?	368
How to Write a Personal Essay	370
How to Structure a Personal Essay	379
Part V. Research and Documentation	387
Chapter 20. Research Sources: Finding and Selecting Relevant, Reliable Sources	389
Identifying Keywords for a Research Search	390

Types of Research Sources	391
Evaluating Research Sources	402
Managing Information from Research	411
Thinking Critically About Information from Research	417
Chapter 21. Integrating Research: Paraphrasing and Quoting	423
What Is Paraphrasing?	424
How to Paraphrase Effectively	425
What Are Quotations?	432
When to Quote	433
Guidelines for Quoting	434
Short Quotations	434
Long (Block) Quotations	440
How to Alter Quotations	442
Chapter 22. Documentation: Plagiarism, Citations, and the List of Sources	451
Plagiarism and Academic Integrity	452
When to Cite	455
Citations	457
List of Sources	463
Sample MLA-Style List of Sources and Citations	466
Sample APA-Style List of Sources and Citations	467
Part VI. Writer's Handbook	471
Chapter 23. Writing Style	473
Words and Their Meanings	474
Words to Avoid in Academic Writing	478
Commonly Confused Words	484
Point of View	492
Chapter 24. Grammar Handbook	499
Components of a Sentence	500
Subject-Verb Agreement	513
Verb Tense	522
Pronouns	528
Adjectives and Adverbs	537
Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers	543

Chapter 25. Mechanics: Punctuation, Capitalization, and Spelling	549
Comma	550
Semicolon	559
Colon	562
Quotation Marks	565
Apostrophe	569
Dash	572
Hyphen	574
Parentheses	575
Square Brackets	576
Ellipses	577
Slash	579
Italics	580
Capitalization	581
Spelling	585
Answer Key	595

Preface

Writing is often a challenge. If you've ever found it challenging to express yourself in writing for schoolwork or other tasks, this is the book for you.

Read, Think, Write provides instruction in writing, reading, critical thinking, research, and study skills. The book is suitable for students at a wide range of writing levels and abilities. By presenting information in logical, manageable steps, the book helps students prepare for their next writing assignment or university course.

Read, Think, Write starts by providing tools and techniques students can use to effectively study, read, and write in a post-secondary setting. Through an easy-to-follow step-by-step approach, it leads students to success in writing the essays required in English courses and the research essays required in most university disciplines. The book emphasizes the process of writing and encourages students to develop an individual process that will allow them to tackle writing tasks with confidence. The skills developed through this process are also transferrable to the writing tasks required in many career settings.

Each chapter helps students develop proficiency in one of the principles of effective writing. Concepts are illustrated through relevant examples and thought-provoking scenarios. Skills are reinforced through related exercises, questions, and opportunities for students to demonstrate learning. The text involves students in the learning process through reading, discussing, problem-solving, and practicing.

Read, Think, Write can be used effectively by an individual student, and it also presents opportunities for collaboration among students to reinforce and deepen learning.

Read, Think, Write is an adaptation of a number of Open Access textbooks, primarily based on *Writing for Success* by Scott McLean and *Writing for Success: 1st Canadian Edition* by Tara Horkoff.

Features

There is a clear structure to the chapter and segment levels. This allows for easy adaptation to existing and changing course needs or assessment outcomes.

Clear internal summaries and effective displays of information contribute to ease of access to information and increase the student's ability to locate desired content.

Each concept is introduced and then reinforced with an exercise.

Exercises are designed to facilitate both individual work and interaction with peers. Peer-to-peer engagement fosters the development of interpersonal skills and promotes critical thinking skills. Editing exercises develop students' writing skills.

In the comprehensive grammar and punctuation handbook, rule explanations are simplified with clear, relevant, and theme-based examples to facilitate learning and increase knowledge retention.

To the Student

How to Use This Book

Part 1: Welcome to University!

[Chapters 1, 2, and 3](#) will set you up for success in your university studies, so we encourage you to read these chapters at the beginning of the semester. We hope you will read through [Part 1](#) in its entirety, flagging sections that you might want to return to as you work on your assignments. We encourage you to complete the Discussion and Practice exercises to help you reflect on your academic strengths and identify skills that you can build and improve.

Part 2: The Writing Process

If your post-secondary courses require you to complete written assignments, read [Part 2](#) in its entirety. The writing process that is described in [Part 2](#) is applicable to all academic writing assignments—from writing a paragraph to writing an essay to writing a dissertation. It is also useful for writing tasks outside of school, such as at work and at home. Learn the process successful writers use so that you can become successful too! You'll likely want to refer to [Part 2](#) each time you tackle a new writing task.

Part 3: Building Paragraphs and Essays

[Part 3](#) reviews the fundamentals of writing effective paragraphs and successful essays. These are building blocks for all post-secondary assignments. This section explains how to choose a workable topic for an assignment, how to construct effective paragraphs, and how to put those paragraphs together to write a successful essay. Even if you think you already know about writing paragraphs and essays, we encourage you to read [Part 3](#) in its entirety. There is always more to learn!

Part 4: Common Writing Assignments

[Part 4](#) introduces writing assignments that you will likely encounter in your courses. If you're assigned to write an argumentative essay, for example, you can turn to [Chapter 17](#). Remember, though, that there is overlap among essay types. For example, to write an argumentative essay, you might need to summarize the results of a research study using skills introduced in [Chapter 15](#), and you might choose the compare-contrast structure described in [Chapter 16](#). We encourage you to skim [Part 4](#), noting chapters that will be useful to return to when you are working on assignments.

Part 5: Research and Documentation

Most university courses require students to conduct research and integrate it into written assignments. [Part 5](#) describes how to choose good research sources and avoid unsuitable ones. It explains the principles of documenting sources and how to avoid accidentally plagiarizing. It demonstrates how to integrate research into your assignments. Finally, it illustrates how to cite research sources correctly. When the time comes to conduct research, read this section carefully, and return to it each time you write a research paper.

Part 6: Writer's Handbook

The Writer's Handbook is designed as a resource you can use to look up specific grammar and punctuation topics, particularly when an instructor points out a recurring error in your writing. Having said that, many students find it helpful to gradually read through the entire handbook, a section or two at a time, to help them understand errors they may not be aware of. Perhaps you'd like to commit to reading a few pages a week throughout the semester. In particular, we encourage you to read [Chapter 23: Writing Style](#) in its entirety: the tips for developing an effective writing style can help every writer, from beginner to expert.

Practice Exercises

Throughout the textbook, we will reinforce the fact that writing, like any other skill, requires *practice*. Practice is the best way to improve your writing skills. Each chapter contains exercises that encourage you to practice the new skills you're learning. Practice allows you to internalize what you are learning so that you can use those skills again next time. We recommend devoting a

notebook to the practice exercises. As you work through them, record your answers in the notebook, and remember to number each one because exercises in subsequent sections may ask you to refer back and build on the work you did earlier.

Answer Key

This section contains answers to the practice exercises and quizzes that appear throughout the textbook. After you complete each exercise, refer to the [Answer Key](#) and compare your answers to enhance your learning.

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PART I

Welcome to University

Welcome to university! You are taking an exciting step, and you will learn not only new information but also many new skills.

The transition from high school to post-secondary studies can be challenging. Expectations will be higher, and you will be required to work independently. Required readings will become more complex, and you will be required to write more complex assignments. Part 1 is designed to help you make this transition smoothly and successfully.

[Chapter 1](#) explains the differences between high school and university. It also introduces strategies you can use to be successful in your studies, including setting goals, managing your time, understanding your learning preferences, taking useful notes, and identifying helpful resources.

[Chapter 2](#) describes how to effectively read academic articles and books. You will learn strategies for reading actively and critically, improving your comprehension, and retaining information.

[Chapter 3](#) introduces the types of writing expected in university, explains what academic writing is, briefly introduces the writing process (which will be examined in more detail in [Part 2](#)), and offers strategies for managing complex writing assignments.

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1

How to Succeed in Your University Studies

Learning Objectives

- Identify some differences between high school and post-secondary studies
- Set short-term and long-term educational goals to help you focus and succeed
- Develop time-management strategies that will help you use your time effectively
- Consider the role of your learning preferences in your studies
- Develop effective and efficient strategies for taking notes on lectures or readings
- Identify university resources that can help you succeed in your post-secondary studies

This chapter introduces some of the differences between studying in high school and post-secondary contexts. Understanding these differences will help you succeed in your studies. You will learn a variety of strategies for tackling this transition, including setting goals, managing your time, identifying your learning preferences, taking good notes, and using resources. With these tools in your toolbox, you will become a more confident student.

Learning in a Post-secondary Context: The Transition from High School to University

In a post-secondary environment, you will likely find that academic expectations have changed from high school. For one thing, the quantity of work you are expected to do is higher. When instructors expect you to read pages upon pages of a textbook or study hours upon hours for one course, managing your workload can be challenging.

The quality of the work you will be expected to do also changes. It is no longer enough to simply memorize course material and regurgitate it on an exam. You will now be expected to seriously engage with new ideas by reflecting on them, analyzing them, critiquing them, making connections, drawing conclusions, and finding new ways of thinking about a given subject. [Table 1.1](#) summarizes some of the major differences between high school and university.

The transition from high school to university can seem daunting, but keep in mind that you are not alone. Most other first-year students are feeling the same way, and your institution and instructors can offer many resources to help you succeed. You can do your part by practicing the skills and strategies that will be introduced in this chapter, which are essential for success in a post-secondary setting.

To understand the root of the differences between secondary and post-secondary education, it will help to know more about the history of universities. According to Amy Guptill in *Writing in College*,

In their original ancient and medieval forms, universities were centers for scholarship, existing at the pleasure of the crown, church, or state. While centers of study go at least back to ancient Mesopotamia 2500 years BCE, the Islamic and European universities of the first and second millennium CE are usually considered the first of the modern model. Highly privileged people went to these universities as students, but they didn't really attend classes, write papers, and take exams like college students today. Instead, they acted as independent, though novice, scholars: they read everything they could find in their areas of interest, attended lectures that expert scholars gave, and, if they were lucky (and perhaps charming), got some feedback from those scholars on their own work or assisted scholars in theirs. Students were simply the most junior of scholars at a university, enjoying the extraordinary

privilege of interacting with the revered academic superstars of their day.¹

In recent decades, post-secondary institutions have certainly become more student centered; however, students are still expected to be much more

Table 1.1: High School and Post-secondary Studies

High School	Post-secondary
Reading assignments are short or moderately long. Teachers may set aside class time for reading and reviewing the material in depth.	Some reading assignments are very long. You will be expected to read on your own time and come to class prepared to discuss the reading.
Teachers often provide study guides and other aids to help students prepare for exams.	Preparing for exams is primarily the student's responsibility.
Your grade is determined by your performance on a wide variety of assessments, including minor and major assignments. Not all assessments are writing based.	Your grade may depend on just a few major assessments. Most assessments are writing based, though that depends on your area of study.
Writing assignments include personal writing and creative writing in addition to expository writing.	Outside of creative writing courses, most writing assignments are expository, argumentative, analytical, or critical.
The structure and format of writing assignments are generally stable over the high school years. You may have been taught to use a five-paragraph essay structure for all essay-writing tasks.	Depending on the course, you may be asked to master new forms of writing, choose essay structures based on the topic and task, and follow standards within a particular academic or professional field.
Teachers often go out of their way to identify and help students who are performing poorly on exams, missing classes, not turning in assignments, or struggling with the course. Often, teachers will give students many second chances.	Although teachers want their students to succeed, because they have much less direct contact with individual students, they may not always realize when students are struggling. They expect you to be proactive and take steps to help yourself. Second chances are less common.

1 Guptill, Amy. "The Origins of Higher Education." *Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence*, Open Sony Textbooks, Milne Libraries, 2013, <https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/chapter/really-writing-again/>.

self-sufficient and self-reliant than they were in high school. Unlike your high school instructors, your university professors are unlikely to have much, if any, formal training as teachers. Professors are experts in their area of study, but that does not make them expert teachers. That is certainly not to say that there aren't excellent teachers among them, but teaching is only one of the competing roles that many post-secondary professors have. They also have to remain informed about what is happening in their areas of study, conduct research in their fields, publish the findings of their research, communicate with the public about their research, and participate in the daily administration of the university through committee work. For most, however, the main passion will always be their area of study.

Unlike in the past, in today's universities, the teaching staff does not comprise only professors. You may receive instruction from teaching assistants, research assistants, sessional instructors, lecturers, industry professionals, and/or tutors. Some of these instructors will bring valuable professional or academic experience to their teaching, while others will bring a devotion to teaching itself. This richness in the teaching staff benefits students.

DISCUSSION 1.1

Review [Table 1.1: High School and Post-secondary Studies](#) and consider the following questions either on your own or with a peer. Jot the answers down for future reference.

- Did any of the differences between high school and post-secondary studies surprise you? Why?
- In what ways do you think post-secondary education will be rewarding for you as a learner?
- What aspects of post-secondary education do you expect to find most challenging?
- What changes do you think you might have to make in your study skills or work habits to ensure your success in a post-secondary learning environment?

Although the transition from high school to post-secondary studies may seem overwhelming at first, you can set yourself up for success by setting goals, managing your time, identifying your learning preferences, developing note-taking skills, and accessing your institution's resources.

As you work through the remainder of this chapter, remember that every student is different. The strategies presented here are tried-and-true

techniques that work well for many people. However, you may need to adapt them to develop a system that works well for you personally.

Read with an open mind, and consider which techniques have been effective (or ineffective) for you in the past. Which habits from your high school years or your work life could help you succeed now? Which habits might get in your way? What changes might you need to make?

Set Goals

To succeed in university, it's essential to set goals. By planning carefully and following through on daily and weekly goals, you will be able to achieve your goals for the semester.

To do well in the post-secondary environment, it is important to stay focused on how your day-to-day actions determine your long-term success. You may not have chosen a major or a career yet. Even so, you probably have some overarching goals for your studies. For example, you may want to expand your career options, to qualify for a graduate or professional program, or simply to learn something new. In time, you will define your long-term goals more explicitly. In the meantime, doing solid, steady work, day by day and week by week, will help you meet those goals.

DISCUSSION 1.2

Consider the following questions either on your own or with a peer. Jot the answers down for future reference.

- Where are you now? Why are you taking this course?
- Where do you want to be? Identify one long-term goal related to the completion of your diploma or degree. (For instance, you might want a particular job in your field.)
- Identify one short-term goal. For example, set a one-semester goal that will help you fulfill the long-term goal you just set.
- Make a list of stepping stones that will help you meet your short-term goal, such as “set aside ample time to study for the midterm” or “talk to Professor Singh about doing an internship.” Write down everything that you can think of that will help you meet that semester goal.
- Repeat this process, establishing new short-term goals that will help you achieve your long-term goals, then identifying stepping stones to achieving the short-term goals.
- Identify one “stepping stone” action that you can do today. Then do it.

Manage Your Time

In university or college, you have increased freedom to structure your time as you please. With that freedom comes increased responsibility. High school teachers often take it upon themselves to track down students who miss a class or forget an assignment. Your university instructors, however, expect you to take full responsibility for managing your schedule and getting your work done on time.

Students must find ways to balance their time effectively to get the most out of their studies. Some students are fresh out of high school, many students have part-time or full-time jobs, and many students have family or community commitments. Each student's schedule will be unique depending on personal circumstances, but it is important to plan your time in a way that makes sense in your situation, and it is important to establish routines that will enable you to achieve your goals.

Getting Started: Short-Term and Long-Term Planning

At the beginning of the semester, establish a weekly schedule that allocates sufficient time for your schoolwork. A general guideline is that for every hour spent in class, you should expect to spend another two to three hours on reading, writing, and studying for tests. Therefore, if you are taking a biology course that meets for three hours a week, you can expect to spend six to nine hours per week on biology outside of class.

A typical full-time schedule of fifteen university credits per term translates into thirty to forty-five hours per week spent on schoolwork outside of class. All in all, a full-time student spends about as much time on school each week as an employee spends at work. That may sound like a lot of time, but if you plan your time carefully, it is manageable.

TIP: Balancing school and a job can be challenging, but it is doable. Budget time for each class just like an employer would schedule shifts at work. Then make that study time a priority.

The two- to three-hour rule is only a guideline. Realistically, some courses will be more challenging than others, and the demands will ebb and flow throughout the semester. You will likely experience some stress-free weeks and some stressful weeks.

TIP: When you schedule your courses for each term, balance introductory-level courses with more advanced courses and lab-based courses so that your workload is manageable.

In addition to allocating weekly time slots for schoolwork, you will need to plan ahead to schedule extra time to help you handle more intense demands, such as studying for exams and writing major papers. At the beginning of the semester, go through your course syllabi and mark all major due dates and exam dates on a calendar. Use a format that you check regularly, such as your smartphone or the calendar feature in your email. (In [Chapter 3: Managing Writing Assignments](#), you will learn strategies for planning major writing assignments so you can complete them on time.)

TIP: If you must balance a job, classes, and a family, it is crucial to get organized. For the first month of studies, draw up a week-by-week calendar that lists not only your own class and work schedules but also the days your kids attend school/preschool and the days your partner has off from work. Together, discuss how to share the day-to-day household responsibilities so that you will be able to get your schoolwork done. It is also a good idea to discuss your studies with your employer and to ask about reducing your work hours during busy times, such as midterms and final exams.

PRACTICE 1.1

Now that you have learned some time-management basics, it is time to apply those skills to develop a weekly schedule and a semester calendar.

First, decide where you will keep your schedule: On a wall calendar? In a paper agenda book? On your phone? On your laptop? Which one will you check regularly? Once you've chosen a location, stick to it. Jotting events in multiple places is a sure way to miss a deadline.

Working with your class schedule, map out a week-long schedule of study time, applying the two- to three-hour rule. Be sure to include any other non-negotiable responsibilities, such as work duties or childcare duties.

Use your course syllabi to record exam dates and due dates for major assignments in your calendar. Use a star, highlighting, or other special marking to set off any days or weeks that look especially demanding.

Staying Consistent: Time Management Dos and Don'ts

Setting up a schedule is easy, but sticking with it can be challenging. A schedule that looks great on paper may prove to be unrealistic. Sometimes, despite students' best intentions, they end up procrastinating or pulling all-nighters to finish a paper or study for an exam.

Keep in mind, however, that your weekly schedule and semester calendar are time-management tools. Like any tool, their effectiveness depends on the user: you. If you leave a tool sitting in the box unused (e.g., you set up your schedule and then ignore it), it will not help you complete the task. And if, for some reason, a particular tool or strategy is not getting the job done, figure out why and try something else.

With that in mind, read the list of time management dos and don'ts. Keep this list handy and refer to it throughout the semester to troubleshoot if your schoolwork is getting off track.

DO

- ✓ Set aside time to review your schedule and calendar regularly and update or adjust them as needed.
- ✓ Be realistic when you schedule study time. Do not plan to write your paper on Friday night when your friends will be out socializing because when Friday comes, you might end up abandoning your plans and hanging out with your friends instead.
- ✓ Be honest with yourself about where your time goes. Do not fritter away your study time on distractions like social media. Reduce distractions by turning off phone notifications and other alerts.
- ✓ Accept that occasionally your work may get a little off track. No schedule is perfect.
- ✓ Accept that sometimes you may not have time for all the fun things you would like to do.
- ✓ Recognize times when you feel overextended. Sometimes you may just need to push through an especially demanding week. However, if you feel exhausted and overworked all the time, you may need to scale back on some of your commitments.
- ✓ Make a plan for handling high-stress periods, such as final exam week. If possible, reduce other commitments during those periods—for instance, by scheduling time off from your job or arranging for childcare. Build in some time for relaxing activities too.

DON'T

- ✘ Don't procrastinate on challenging assignments. Instead, break them into smaller, manageable tasks that can be accomplished one at a time.
- ✘ Don't fall into the trap of "all or nothing" thinking (e.g., "There is no way I can fit in a three-hour study session today, so I will just wait until the weekend"). Extended periods of free time are hard to come by, so find ways to use small blocks of time productively. For instance, if you have a free half hour between classes, use it to preview a chapter or brainstorm ideas for an essay.
- ✘ Don't let things slide and then promise yourself, "I will do better next week." When next week comes, the accumulated undone tasks will seem even more intimidating, and you will find it harder to get them done.
- ✘ Don't rely on caffeine and sugar to compensate for lack of sleep. These stimulants may temporarily perk you up, but your brain functions best when you are rested.

DISCUSSION 1.3

Consider the following questions either on your own or with a peer. Jot down the answers for future reference.

- Review the list of dos and don'ts.
- Identify at least two habits from the dos list that you could use to improve your time-management skills.
- Identify the habit from the don'ts list that you are most likely to slip into as the semester gets busier. What could you do to combat this habit?

The key to managing your time effectively is consistency.

Completing the following tasks will help you stay on track throughout the semester.

Establish regular times to check in with yourself to identify and prioritize tasks and plan how to accomplish them. Many people find it helpful to schedule some time at the beginning of each week for planning and then to set aside a few minutes each day to consult and adjust the schedule.

PRACTICE 1.2

For the next two weeks, focus on consistently using the time-management system you set up in [Practice 1.1](#). Check in with yourself daily and weekly, stick to your schedule, and take note of anything that interferes with your work. At the end of the two weeks, review your schedule and determine whether you need to adjust it.

TIP: Transfer your work skills. At work, you have probably established strategies for accomplishing job-related tasks efficiently. How could you adapt these strategies to help you be a successful student? For instance, you might sync your school and work schedules on an electronic calendar. Like you would check in with your boss about upcoming work deadlines, establish a buddy system with a fellow student and check in regularly about school projects. Give school the same priority you give work.

Understand Yourself as a Learner

To succeed in your post-secondary education—or any situation in which you must master new concepts and skills—it helps to know what makes you tick. For decades, educational researchers and organizational psychologists have examined how people take in and assimilate new information, how some people learn differently than others, and what conditions make students and workers most productive.

Here are a few questions to think about:

- What is your learning style? For the purposes of this chapter, **learning style** refers to the way you prefer to take in new information: through seeing, through listening, or through some other channel.
- What times of day are you most productive? If your energy peaks early, you might benefit from blocking out early morning time for studying or writing. If you are a night owl, set aside a few evenings a week for schoolwork.
- How much clutter can you handle in your workspace? Some people work fine at a messy desk and know exactly where to find what they need in their stacks of papers; however, most people benefit from maintaining a neat, organized space.
- How well do you juggle potential distractions in your environment? If you can study at home without being tempted to turn on the television,

check your phone, or fix yourself a snack, you may make home your workspace. However, if you require a less distracting environment to stay focused, you may be able to find one on campus or at a public library.

- Does a little background noise help or hinder your productivity? Some people work better when listening to quiet instrumental music or the low hum of conversation in a coffee shop. Others need total silence.
- When you work with a partner or group, do you stay on task? A study partner or group can sometimes be invaluable. However, working this way takes extra planning and effort, so be sure to use the time productively. If you find that group study sessions turn into social occasions, you may study better on your own.
- How do you manage stress? Accept that at certain points in the semester, you will feel stressed. In your day-to-day routine, make time for activities that help you reduce stress, such as exercising, spending time with friends, or relaxing.

DISCUSSION 1.4

With a peer, discuss the answers to the questions above.

Learning Styles

Many people have one or two preferred “channels” for effectively taking in new information. Knowing your preferences can help you develop personalized strategies for studying, time management, and note-taking.

To begin to identify your preferred learning styles, think about how you would go about the process of assembling a piece of furniture. Which of these options sounds most appealing to you?

1. You carefully look over the diagrams in the assembly manual first so you can picture each step in the process.
2. You silently read the directions through, step by step, and then look at the diagrams afterward.
3. You read the directions aloud under your breath or have someone explain them to you.
4. You start putting the pieces together and figure out the process through trial and error, consulting the directions as you work.

Now read the following explanations of each option in the list above. Again, think about whether each description sounds like you.

- If you chose 1, you may benefit from **visual** approaches to learning. You might understand some ideas best when they are presented in a visual format, such as a flow chart, a diagram, or text with clear headings and many photos or illustrations.
- If you chose 2, you may benefit from **verbal** approaches to learning. Perhaps you understand some ideas best through reading and writing about them and taking detailed notes.
- If you chose 3, you may benefit from **auditory** approaches to learning. You might understand some ideas best through listening. You might learn well from spoken lectures or books on tape.
- If you chose 4, you may benefit from **kinesthetic** approaches to learning. Perhaps you sometimes learn best through doing, and you prefer hands-on activities. In long lectures, fidgeting may help you focus.

Your learning preferences do not completely define you as a student. Auditory learners can comprehend a flow chart, and kinesthetic learners can sit still long enough to read a book. However, if you do have one or two dominant learning preferences, you can work with them to get the most out of your classes and study time. Having said that, a well-rounded approach to learning, with the incorporation of different techniques as different tasks require, will lead to success. [Table 1.2](#) lists some useful techniques based on learning preferences. Think of these techniques as strategies that you can add to your toolbox and pull out when needed.

TIP: Never video record or audio record your instructor without their permission!

DISCUSSION 1.5

Review [Table 1.2](#), considering the following questions either on your own or with a peer. Jot down the answers for future reference.

- As you read about the four styles of learning, do one or two appeal to you more than the others?
- Which of the techniques from the second column do you use most often? Which do you use least?
- Which of the learning styles appeals to you least? Review the second column for that style. Are there any new techniques you'd like to try?

Table 1.2: Learning Strategies Based on Learning Preferences

Learning Preference	Strategies
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When possible, represent concepts visually—in charts, diagrams, or sketches. • Use a visual format for taking notes on reading assignments or lectures. • Use different coloured highlighters or pens to colour code information as you read. • Use visual organizers, such as maps and flowcharts, to help you plan writing assignments. • Use coloured pens, highlighters, or the review feature of your word-processing program to revise and edit writing.
Verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the instructional features in course texts—summaries, chapter review questions, glossaries, and so on—to aid your studying. • Take notes on your reading assignments. • Rewrite or condense reading notes and lecture notes, and then study from your notes. • Summarize important ideas in your own words. • Use informal writing techniques, such as brainstorming, freewriting, blogging, or posting on a class discussion forum, to generate ideas for writing assignments. • Reread and take notes on your writing to help you revise and edit.
Auditory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your instructor’s permission to record lectures to supplement your notes. • Read parts of your textbook or notes aloud when you study. • If possible, obtain an audiobook version of important course texts. Make use of supplemental audio materials, such as CDs, DVDs, or podcasts. • Talk through your ideas with other students when studying or when preparing for a writing assignment. • Read your writing aloud to help you draft, revise, and edit. • When an idea for an essay comes to you, record a voice memo on your phone.
Kinesthetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you read or study, use techniques that will keep your hands in motion, such as highlighting or taking notes. • Use tactile study aids, such as flash cards or study guides you design yourself. • Record your ideas on Post-it notes and physically rearrange them to help you determine how to shape an essay. • Engage in physical activity, such as running or swimming, to help you break through writing blocks. • Take breaks during studying to stand, stretch, or move around.

TIP: This material about learning preferences is only the tip of the iceberg. There are numerous other variations in how people learn. Some people like to act on information right away, while others reflect first. Some people excel at mastering details and understanding concrete ideas, while others enjoy exploring abstract theories and innovative, even impractical, ideas. For more information about how you learn, visit your school's academic resource centre.

Take Notes Effectively

By now, you have an idea of what to expect from your post-secondary courses. You have established some educational goals, explored time-management strategies, and identified some of your learning preferences. One more valuable tool to have in your toolbox is a good note-taking system.

Taking Notes During a Lecture

In most post-secondary courses, you will be required to attend lectures, seminars, and talks in which you will receive a tremendous amount of material. The act of converting a spoken lecture to notes helps you organize and retain knowledge. It's essential to have good note-taking skills so that you can efficiently record the most important information.

On the other hand, it's important you don't become so distracted by your note-taking that you stop listening to the lecture. Therefore, it's important to develop a set of strategies and techniques that work for you and that you can use consistently. As you become more skilled in using your system, you will find you can take efficient notes while still paying close attention to the lecture.

Although taking good notes is an essential study skill, many students have never received guidance on *how* to take good notes. Below are strategies you can use to take notes efficiently and effectively. Like any skill, note-taking becomes easier with practice.

10 Tips for Taking Lecture Notes

1. Before class, quickly review your notes from the previous class and review the assigned reading. Fix key terms and concepts in your mind to help you stay focused and pick out the important points during the lecture. Make a prediction: What do you expect to hear in the upcoming lecture?

2. Be prepared: go to class with paper, pens, highlighters, textbooks, and any relevant handouts.
3. Come to class ready to learn. During class, make a point of concentrating. Ask questions if you need to. Be an active participant.
4. As you listen, identify main ideas. Prioritize the important points. Don't let an important idea pass by without noting it. In particular, pay attention to terms or ideas that the instructor emphasizes, repeats, or writes on a whiteboard.
5. If possible, also record supporting points, details, facts, and lists that help develop the main ideas.
6. Take notes as concisely as you can. Use words or phrases instead of full sentences, and use abbreviations when possible.
7. Visually organize your notes into main topics, subtopics, and supporting points to show the relationships between ideas. Leave space, if necessary, so you can add more details under important topics or subtopics.
8. After class, review your notes. If you left blanks, fill them in before you forget the information. If the instructor used unfamiliar terms, look up the terms and write the definitions in your notes.
9. As you review your notes, find ways to engage with the topic: Can you make connections with other lectures or assigned readings? Can you make connections with your own experience?
10. As you review your notes, reflect on your level of understanding: Is there anything you don't understand? (If so, jot down questions and follow up.) Are there any contradictions or ambiguities that piqued your curiosity? (If so, add them to your notes.) What more would you like to learn about this topic?

In addition to helping you organize information, good notes also help you retain and review important concepts later. Review your lecture notes regularly throughout the semester—perhaps weekly—not just before exams.

Organizing Ideas in Your Notes

To be effective, a good note-taking system must help you differentiate among major points, related subtopics, and supporting details. It must visually represent the connections between ideas. To be efficient, a note-taking system must allow you to record and organize information fairly quickly. Although some students like to create detailed, formal outlines or idea maps when they read, these may not be good strategies for taking notes in class because spoken

lectures may not allow time to create them. Instead, focus on recording content simply and quickly to create organized, legible notes.

Try one of the following organization methods for note-taking, and then evaluate its success. Note-taking is a matter of personal preference in terms of style and organization, so if the first format you try doesn't work for you, try another next time!

Modified Outline Format

A modified outline format uses indented spacing to show the hierarchy of ideas without including Roman numerals and lettering. Simply use a dash or bullet to signify each new point. This format works well if you are attending a lecture for which you have not received an outline beforehand. It also works well for taking notes from a reading.

Read this example of a student's notes from a developmental psychology lecture about an important theorist.

LECTURE NOTES ORGANIZED IN MODIFIED OUTLINE FORMAT

Child Development—20th Century Theorists

- Jean Piaget
- Swiss psychologist, influential in education
- First developed theories in 1920s–30s
- 4 major stages of cognitive dev.
 - sensorimotor (0–2)—infants explore the world through motion and 5 senses
 - self-centred perspective
 - need to learn that environment still exists even when they can't see people/objects (e.g., playing peek-a-boo)
 - preoperational (2–7)—kids use “magical” thinking, often not logical
 - less self-centred
 - poor sense of time
 - can think about people/objects that are not physically present
 - concrete operations (7–12)—kids begin to think logically
 - thinking is very concrete
 - improved understanding of physical world

- formal operations (12–adulthood)—logical thinking develops further
 - can understand & test abstract ideas
 - more concerned about the future, hypothetical possibilities

Notice that the margin for the main topic is at the left of the page. Subtopics are indented once, and supporting details are indented once more. To save time, the student used abbreviations for terms like *development* and *example*, dashes and ampersands to replace the words *to* and *and*, and numerals (5 instead of *five*).

Idea Mapping

If you are a visual learner, you may prefer to use a more graphic format for notes, such as an idea map. The next example shows how the lecture notes could be set up differently than in the modified outline format above. Although the visual format is different, the content and organization are the same. This method also works well for taking notes on a reading.

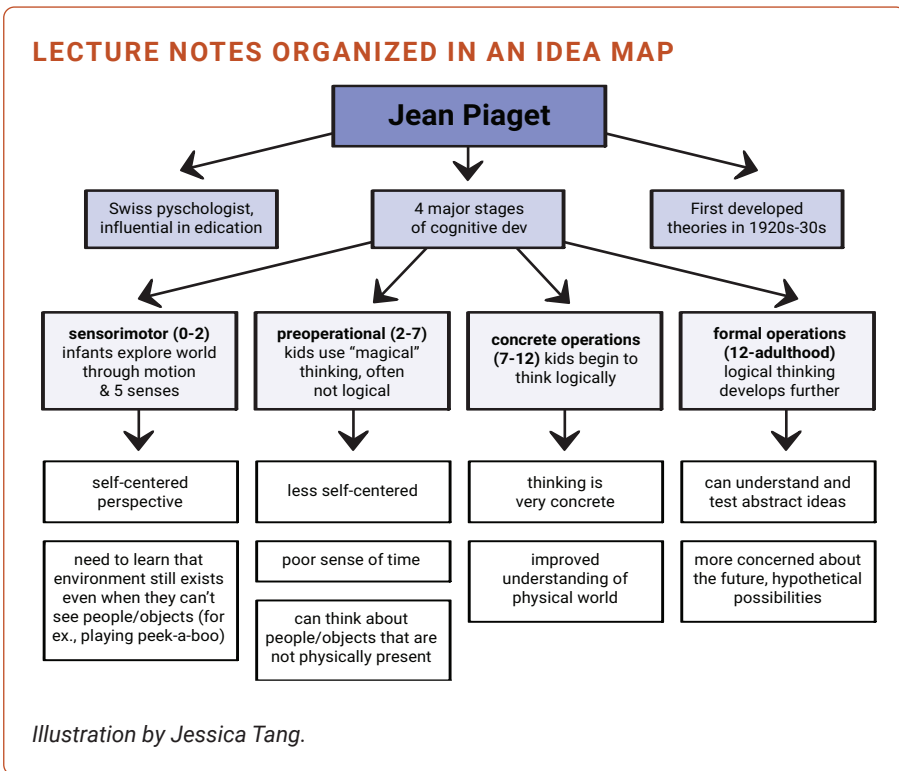


Table Form

If the content of a lecture falls into a predictable, well-organized pattern, you might choose to use a table to record your notes. This system works best when you already know, either before class or at the beginning of class, which categories you should include. It also works well for taking notes on a reading. The next example shows how this system might be used.

LECTURE NOTES ORGANIZED IN TABLE FORM

Theorist	Country of Origin	Years Active	Stages of Child Development
Jean Piaget	Switzerland	1920s through 1970s	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sensorimotor (0–2) 2. Preoperational (2–7) 3. Concrete operational (7–12) 4. Formal operational (12–adulthood)
Erik Erikson	Denmark (studied in Austria, emigrated to US in 1930s)	1930s through 1980s	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trust vs. mistrust (infants); autonomy vs. shame and doubt (toddler) 2. Initiative vs. guilt (preschool–K) 3. Industry vs. inferiority (elementary school) 4. Identity vs. role confusion (teen years) <p>***See also stages of adult development</p>

The Cornell Note-Taking System

In addition to the general techniques already described, you might find it useful to practice a specific strategy known as the Cornell note-taking system. This popular format makes it easy not only to organize information clearly but also to note key terms and summarize content. It can be used for both lectures and readings.

To use the Cornell system, begin by setting up the page with these components:

- The course name and lecture date (or article title) at the top of the page
- A narrow column (about two inches) at the left side of the page
- A wide column (about five to six inches) on the right side of the page
- A space of a few lines marked off at the bottom of the page

During the lecture or reading, record notes in the wide column. You can do so using the traditional modified outline format or a more visual format if you prefer.

Then, as soon as possible after the lecture, review your notes and identify key terms. Jot these in the narrow left-hand column. Later, you can use this

column as a study aid by covering the notes on the right-hand side, reviewing the key terms, and trying to recall as much as you can about them so that you can mentally restate the main points of the lecture. Uncover the notes on the right to check your understanding. Finally, use the space at the bottom of the page to summarize each page of notes in a few sentences.

The next example shows what the notes would look like using the Cornell system.

LECTURE NOTES ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO THE CORNELL SYSTEM

Child Development **September 13, 2011**

Piaget

cognitive

development

sensorimotor

preoperational

concrete operations

formal operations

concrete thinking

abstract thinking

Child Development—20th-Century Theorists

Jean Piaget

- Swiss psychologist, influential in education
- first developed theories in 1920s–30s
- 4 major stages of cognitive dev.
 - sensorimotor (0–2)—infants explore world through motion & 5 senses
 - self-centered perspective
 - need to learn that environment still exists even when they can't see people/objects (e.g., playing peek-a-boo)
 - preoperational (2–7)—kids use “magical” thinking, often not logical
 - less self-centered
 - poor sense of time
 - can think about people/objects that are not physically present
 - concrete operations (7–12)—kids begin to think logically
 - thinking is very concrete
 - improved understanding of physical world
 - formal operations (12–adulthood)—logical thinking develops further
 - can understand & test abstract ideas
 - more concerned about the future, hypothetical possibilities

Piaget believed children go through four stages of cognitive development—sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations. Gradually, they progress from having a very limited understanding of the world (infants and young children) to being more logical (older kids) to being able to think abstractly (preteens and teens).

The Dialectic Note-Taking System

As an alternative—albeit visually similar to the Cornell method—there is also dialectic note-taking, which is useful for taking notes on readings when preparing to write an essay, for example. *The Word on College Reading and Writing* describes dialectic note-taking: “A dialectic is . . . a dialogue, a discussion between two (or more) voices trying to figure something out” (Babin, Monique, et al. “Writing About Texts: Dialectic Note-Taking.” *The Word on College Reading and Writing*, Open Oregon, openoregon.pressbooks.pub/wrd/chapter/dialectic-note-taking/. Accessed 18 July 2023). Reading is like a dialogue with an author. The author wrote this material. Pretend you’re actually talking to the author.

Whenever we read new material, particularly material that is challenging in some way, it is helpful to take dialectic notes to create clear spaces for organizing these different sets of thoughts.

Creating Dialectic Notes

Start by writing down the full bibliographical information of the source you are reading. Then draw a vertical line down the middle of a fresh sheet of paper to make two long columns.

The Left Column

This column will be a straightforward representation of the main ideas in the text you are reading (or viewing). In it, you will note things like

- the author’s main points in the section
- the kind of support the author includes in the section
- other points of significant interest
- the page number, if any (or create an identifier so that you can find it later)

You can directly quote these points, but do write them down as you encounter them, not after the fact. If you quote directly, use quotation marks, and note the page number; if you paraphrase, do not use quotation marks, but do jot down the page number. Be consistent so that you don’t make more work for yourself when you return to your notes.

The Right Column

The right column includes the questions and connections you make as you encounter this author’s ideas. This might include

- questions you want to ask in the next class
- bigger-picture questions you might explore further in writing

- connections to other texts you’ve read or viewed for this class
- connections to your own personal experiences
- connections to the world around you (issues in your community, stories on the news, or texts you’ve read or viewed outside of this class)

Bottom of the Page

It is often a good idea to leave space at the bottom of the page (or on the back) for additional notes about the assigned reading based on what your instructor has to say about it or for comments and questions your peers make about it during class discussion.

LECTURE NOTES ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO THE DIALECTIC SYSTEM

Dialectical Notes for Bradbury’s “The Last Night of the World”

What it says	Questions/Connections
“What would you do if you knew this was the last night of the world?”	It feels so strange to start a story with a character asking a direct question in dialogue . . . can’t decide if it draws me in or not.
“You don’t mean it?” said his wife.	The slow reveal of who these characters are, their relationship to each other, even how many are talking is interesting. I wonder why Bradbury chose to reveal them this way.
Long paragraph about his dream and Stan.	Weird! And a little creepy. . . . I wonder why they shared dreams and how many others are hearing the same one.
This is logical	What? Not a single thing about this is logical! Not even the further explanation makes logical sense.
February 30, 1951	OK, so . . . alternate timeline? The world ending on a day that never has, never will exist?
The discussion about whether the children know.	Why wouldn’t the children have had the same dream?
Notes during class: ...	

TIP: Often, at school or in the workplace, a speaker will provide you with pregenerated notes summarizing electronic presentation slides. You may be tempted not to take notes at all because much of the content is already summarized for you. However, it is a good idea to jot down at least a few notes. Doing so keeps you focused during the presentation, allows you to record details you might otherwise forget, and gives you the opportunity to write down questions or reflections to personalize the content. The same is true for presummarized texts; they never replace taking your own notes in terms of understanding, engaging with, and remembering the content.

PRACTICE 1.3

Set a short-term goal of establishing a note-taking system that works for you.

If you are not already doing so, try using one or more of the note-taking techniques described in this chapter. (Remember that the Cornell system can be combined with other note-taking formats.)

It can take some trial and error to find a note-taking system that works for you. If you find that you are struggling to keep up with lectures, consider whether you need to switch to a different format or be more careful about distinguishing key concepts from unimportant details. If you still find that you are having trouble taking notes effectively, make an appointment with your school's academic resource centre.

Make Use of Resources

One reason students sometimes find post-secondary courses overwhelming is that they do not know about or are reluctant to use the resources available to them. Your student fees pay, in part, for resources such as the health centre, the writing centre, tutoring services, and counselling. If you need help, consider asking for help from the following:

- Your instructor: If you are making an honest effort but still struggling with a particular course, set a time to meet with your instructor and discuss what you can do to improve. They may be able to shed light on a confusing concept or give you strategies to catch up.
- Your academic advisor. Many institutions assign each student an academic advisor who can help them choose courses and ensure they fulfill degree or diploma requirements.

- The academic resource centre: These centres offer a variety of services, which may range from coaching in study skills to coaching for specific courses. Find out what is offered at your school and use the services that you need.
- The writing centre: The writing centre employs coaches to provide feedback on students' writing. They will not write or edit your paper for you, but they can help you through the stages of the writing process. (In some schools, the writing centre is part of the academic resource centre.)
- The library: University libraries not only contain thousands of articles and books, but they are also home to reference librarians. A reference librarian's job is to help students conduct research effectively. Reference librarians may offer in-person or online courses in research skills or documentation strategies. They are also available to help individual students one-on-one with finding research sources for a particular topic or assignment.
- The career resource centre: Visit the career resource centre for guidance on choosing a career path, developing a résumé, or finding and applying for jobs.
- Counselling services: Many schools offer psychological counselling for free or for a low fee. Use these services if you need help coping with your course load, with school-life balance, or with exam anxiety.

Students sometimes neglect to use available resources due to limited time, unwillingness to admit there is a problem, or embarrassment about needing to ask for help. Unfortunately, ignoring a problem usually makes it harder to cope with it later on. Waiting until the end of the semester may also mean fewer resources are available, since many other students are also seeking last-minute help.

DISCUSSION 1.6

First, use the Internet to find out which of the following resources your university has: a writing centre, an academic resource centre, a career centre, a library, academic advisors, and counselling services. Make note of how to contact these resources: By phone? By dropping in? By email? Via an online contact form?

Then consider the following questions either on your own or with a peer. Jot down the answers for future reference.

- Which of your university's resources might be helpful to you now?
- Which of your university's resources do you want to keep in mind if you need them in the future?

At the beginning of a semester or course, your workload is relatively light. This is the perfect time to establish goals, set schedules, brush up on your study skills, learn new note-taking skills, become familiar with resources, and establish good habits. When the demands on your time and energy become more intense, you will have a good system in place for handling them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The transition from high school to post-secondary studies seems daunting, but you can develop skills that will help you make this adjustment successfully.
- It is important to set goals to keep you focused and motivated.
- Plan for both the short term (daily and weekly schedules) and the long term (major semester deadlines).
- To manage your time effectively, be consistent about maintaining your schedule. If your schedule is not working, make adjustments.
- Understanding your individual learning preferences can help you identify the study and time-management strategies that will work best for you.
- Note-taking is one of the most important skills a student can develop. Effective note-taking helps you focus on key ideas, prepares you for exams and essays, and saves time.
- Most post-secondary institutions have many resources available to students. Become aware of your university's resources, and use them to help you succeed in your studies.

2

Introduction to Academic Reading

Learning Objectives

- Identify the expectations for reading in post-secondary courses
- Recognize the types of reading assignments frequently included in post-secondary courses
- Apply strategies to manage and complete post-secondary-level reading assignments efficiently and effectively
- Identify specific reading strategies that work best for you
- Identify the main idea of a text
- Recognize patterns and identify keywords to differentiate between main and supporting ideas
- Apply pattern-identification words to reinforce understanding of main ideas
- Make inferences from implied information

This chapter introduces the types of reading you will be expected to do as a post-secondary student. You will learn a variety of reading and comprehension strategies for mastering these new challenges—and you will practice these strategies so that you can add them to your toolbox to become a more effective and confident reader.

For people who do not usually enjoy reading, the readings required at a university level can be challenging. Even avid readers who love to read will find some texts more difficult than others. Nearly every post-secondary course you take will require reading—often a *lot* of reading—and the texts may be significantly more complex than those you've read before.

However, reading academic texts, like any other skill, can be tackled effectively with preparation, with a plan, and with tools—and like any other skill, reading gets easier with practice. This chapter introduces strategies for handling the reading demands you will encounter at the post-secondary level. The techniques introduced here will help you develop your ability to read effectively and efficiently, whether you are required to read a short article or a long textbook.

Reading in University

In high school, most of the required reading probably consisted of high-school-level textbooks and literature (novels, plays, short stories, and poems). Perhaps you also occasionally read newspaper or magazine articles written for a general audience.

In university, you will read a much wider variety of texts, many written for more sophisticated readers. The content of the texts will likely be more complex: more detailed, more abstract, more research based, and more reliant on background knowledge. [Table 2.1](#) illustrates some of the most common texts you will encounter in your studies.

TIP: In this chapter, **text** refers to any piece of writing that conveys information. Written texts include textbooks, other books, articles, novels, and poems. In your studies, you may also encounter audiovisual texts such as videos, films, lectures, speeches, and paintings.

TIP: Instructors often set aside reserve readings for the course. These reserve readings consist of articles, book chapters, or other texts that are not part of the primary course textbook. Copies of reserve readings are available through the university library, in print, or more often, online. Be sure you know how to access reserve readings. Skim through them in advance to get a rough idea of how much time you will need to read the assignment in full.

Your post-secondary courses will sharpen both your reading and writing skills. Most of your writing assignments—from brief response papers to in-depth research projects—will depend on your understanding of course readings or related readings. It is difficult, if not impossible, to write effectively about a text that you have not understood. Even when you do understand the reading,

it can be hard to write about it if you have not engaged with the ideas in the text. Luckily, there are many reading strategies that will help you understand and engage with the required readings.

Table 2.1: Common Post-secondary Texts

Type	Audience	Purpose	Features
Textbooks	Written for students in an educational setting	To facilitate student learning To summarize large amounts of information in a given field	New vocabulary terms are bolded, and definitions are provided. Key ideas are summarized at the beginning and end of the chapter. Glossary contains definitions of keywords. Index helps the reader find key information. Comprehension questions encourage student engagement with the text. Study questions help student prepare for exams. Other study aids are provided to help student understand and retain information.
Trade books	Written for a general audience, outside an educational setting, who is interested in learning about the topic	To inform	Thesis and purpose are presented in the introduction. Key ideas are in chapter titles, first and last paragraphs of each chapter, headings, and graphics.
Articles in popular magazines or websites	Written for the general public	To inform and/or entertain	Writing style is easy to read. Key ideas are in the introductory paragraph, headings, closing paragraph, and graphics.
Newspapers	Written for the general public	To inform	Writing style is easy to read. Key ideas are in the title and the first paragraph(s) Subsequent paragraphs present increasingly general details.

(continued)

Table 2.1: Common Post-secondary Texts (continued)

Type	Audience	Purpose	Features
Scholarly books and journal articles	Written for highly educated specialists in a given field who are already familiar with the topic	To inform To add new ideas and information to a field of study	Writing style is sophisticated and sometimes dense. Writing uses discipline-specific vocabulary. Work may begin with an abstract (a summary of the main points of the article). Introduction provides the writer's thesis. Headings indicate how the writer has organized support for the thesis. Content is specific and detailed, often including results of research studies.

Reading Strategies

This section introduces strategies that will help you get the most out of your reading assignments. These strategies fall into three broad categories:

- Planning strategies to help you manage your reading assignments
- Comprehension strategies to help you understand the material
- Active reading strategies to take your understanding to a deeper and more comprehensive level

Prereading Strategies

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

Manage Your Reading Time

Some of your post-secondary reading assignments will be fairly straightforward. Others, however, will be longer or more complex, so you will need a plan for handling them.

When you receive a reading assignment, preview it to assess its difficulty level and to determine how much time you will need to set aside for reading. Divide the text into manageable chunks and set aside enough time to read it. For example, if you are asked to read a seventy-page chapter for next week's

class, don't wait until the night before to get started. Give yourself a few days and tackle one section at a time.

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

As the semester progresses, you will develop a better sense of how much time you need to allow for the reading assignments in different subjects.

Set a Purpose

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

Sometimes your purpose is simple: you might just need to understand the reading material well enough to discuss it intelligently in the next class. However, your purpose will often go beyond that. For instance, you might need to summarize a text, to compare two texts, to formulate a personal response to a text, or to gather ideas for future research.

Here are some questions to ask to help determine your purpose:

1. How did my instructor frame the assignment? Often, instructors will tell you what they expect you to get out of the reading. For example, the instructor might ask you to do the following:
 - Read Chapter 2 and come to class prepared to discuss current theories related to conducting risk assessments.
 - Read two articles, by Smith and Jones, and compare the two authors' perspectives on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
 - Read Chapter 5 and think about how you could apply these guidelines to the first stages of on-site patient assessment.
2. How deeply do I need to understand the reading? If you are majoring in emergency management and you are assigned to read Chapter 1, "Introduction to Emergency Management," it is safe to assume the chapter presents fundamental concepts that you will be expected to master. However, for some reading assignments, you may be expected to form a general understanding but not necessarily master

the content. Again, pay attention to how your instructor presents the assignment.

3. How does this assignment relate to other course readings or to concepts discussed in class? Your instructor may make some of these connections explicitly, but if not, try to draw connections yourself.
4. How might I use this text again in the future? If you are assigned to read about a topic that has always interested you, your reading assignment might help you develop ideas for a future research paper. Some reading assignments provide valuable tips or summaries worth bookmarking for future reference. Think about what you can take from the reading that will stay with you.

TIP: Students are often reluctant to seek help. They feel like doing so marks them as slow, weak, or demanding. The truth is that every learner occasionally struggles. If you are trying hard to keep up with the course reading but feel like you are in over your head, seek help. Speak up in class, schedule a meeting with your instructor, or visit your university's learning centre for assistance. Deal with the problem as early in the course as you can. Instructors respect students who are proactive about their own learning and are happy to help students who make the effort to help themselves.

Marking Up a Text

When you are doing assigned readings, it's helpful to **annotate** (mark up) the text as you read. That way, when you need to revisit the text in order to write an essay or study for an exam, you don't need to reread the whole thing. You can return to your annotations—the parts you marked the first time you read the text—which indicate the most important points.

TIP: While it may be fine to mark up a book you own and plan to keep, it is not a good idea to do this in books that are not yours. However, instead of highlighting or underlining, you can use a light pencil to make small check marks in the margins, and you can erase those marks when you are finished with the book.

There is no one “right” set of symbols to use to mark up a text, but do develop a consistent set of symbols that you use regularly, and recognize instantly, to help you visually identify what is happening on the page:

- If a central theme or topic is explicitly stated, circle it.
- If a central theme or topic is not explicitly stated, write it at the top of the page or at the beginning of a section.
- Enclose main points in brackets.
- Underline or highlight keywords and phrases that contain significant details.
- Number the items in a list.
- Use square brackets or highlighting for key terms when the definition follows.
- Draw asterisks, question marks, arrows, or other symbols to mark the importance of ideas, to note terms you want to return to, or to indicate relationships between ideas.
- Jot outlines in the margins.
- In the margins, write questions that you can use to test your memory later.

TIP: If you are reading on a device, the software may include annotation features that you can use to annotate the text.

PRACTICE 2.1

Mark up a page of a textbook you’re using this semester.

Then over the next couple of weeks, aim to develop a personalized standard method of marking up a text:

- Assign specific meanings to symbols (arrows, asterisks, brackets, question marks, exclamation marks).
- Assign specific significance to underlining, double-underlining, circling, and highlighting.
- Assign significance to the position of Post-it notes or paper flags (if you will use them).
- Choose a position on the page where you will write main ideas/themes.
- Choose a position on the page where you will write follow-up questions.

Scholars have established the need to deconstruct the hegemony of ^{*}
Western knowledge in order to emphasize Indigenous ways of being in
the world and ways of knowing. Indigenous knowledge systems have
developed over millennia and are grounded in living relational schemas.
Relationships not only highlight the strong ^① attachment Indigenous ^{"schemas"?}
peoples have to their homelands but also underline the ^② ontological ^{Look up!}
framework that land occupies in those relationships. These relationships
are reciprocal and develop ^a among people as well as ^b between people and
non-human beings. The moral code, norms, and laws governing those
relationships are based on the principles of respect, reciprocity, and ^{} underlying}
obligation. ^{values}

* hegemony = dominance of West. ideas over others
* ontological = related to ways of being

Main Idea: Indig. knowledge is based on
relationships with land, other people,
v non-humans.

Figure 2.1: Sample Marked-Up Text

Text taken from Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez and Nathalie Kermaol, Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place. AU Press, 2016, pp. 7–8.

The more consistent you are with your techniques for marking up a text, the more useful your strategy will be and the more time you will save while both reading and reviewing.

Improve Your Reading Comprehension

You have blocked off time for your reading assignment and set a purpose for reading. Now comes the challenge: making sure you actually understand all the information you are expected to process. Now that you are reading at the post-secondary level, you will likely need to improve your skills in understanding the material you read.

For any expository text—that is, nonfiction informational writing—your first comprehension goal is to identify the main points and relate any details to those main points.

Next, you read for specific supporting details. Recognizing patterns will help you organize your thinking in systematic ways that parallel the presentation in the source. You will also need to make inferences (“read between the lines”).

Because university-level texts can be challenging, you will also need to monitor your reading comprehension. That is, you will need to stop periodically and assess how well you understand what you are reading.

Finally, you can improve comprehension by taking time to determine which strategies work best for you and putting those strategies into practice.

KEY TERMS

- **Main/controlling ideas** (located in thesis statements and topic sentences)
- **Key details** (located within paragraphs)
- **Patterns** (form the structure of the paragraph or section)
- **Inferences** (are not usually written out and must be inferred by the reader)

Many people read to remember everything and do not distinguish among key concepts, key supporting details, positions relative to these concepts, and inferences that can be drawn. Creating a road map with these highlights helps you both understand and remember what you read. This section includes exercises so that you can practice identifying the main and supporting ideas in passages representing the different patterns.

Read for the Main Idea

When you’re reading an expository text, your first comprehension goal is to identify the main point: the most important idea that the writer communicates, which is often stated early on. Finding the main point gives you a framework to organize the details presented in the reading and relate the reading to concepts you have learned in the course and through other reading assignments.

Some main ideas are directly stated; others are implied, and you must infer a statement yourself. When you read, you can identify the main idea of a paragraph, section, chapter, or book by asking yourself the following questions:

- What is the topic or subject matter? What/who is this about?
- What am I supposed to understand about this? (This is the main idea about the topic.)
- Are there any sentences that help clarify what I am supposed to understand about the topic? (Often the first or last sentence will state the main idea.)
- How do I know for sure? All the important information in the paragraph is covered by the main idea sentence. Does it help me understand what is being said about the topic?

Practice 2.2 will give you opportunities to practice identifying the main ideas in paragraphs.

PRACTICE 2.2

Read the three passages below and identify the main idea in each. In the first two examples, the controlling idea is directly stated in the topic sentence. Identify the main idea in both.

In the third passage, the main idea is implied: choose the statement from the list that best represents the main idea of the passage and then explain why the other three statements do not work.

Passage 1: Identify the main idea in this paragraph.

When we think about it, is there really something that we can call “the public”? The population of communities is really made up of a set of publics. The needs and interests of a population are uniform on only the broadest matters, such as health and the security of the person and their property. Beyond those very broad areas of policy, needs and interests differ, sometimes very markedly and sometimes in ways that cause conflict between competing interests. It is highly unlikely that diverse needs or interests of all groups or individuals can all be satisfied at the same time. Thus, industrial firms that produce hazardous wastes may need sites to dispose of such undesirable by-products. Such firms can be thought of as one “public,” and it is apparent that their needs will conflict with the interests of another public—the people who live near the proposed disposal site.

Main idea: _____

Passage 2: Identify the main idea in this paragraph.

Marketing research is a major component or subsystem within a marketing information system. It is used in a very wide variety of marketing situations.

Typically, in a marketing research study, the problem to be solved is first identified. Then a researcher decides whether to use secondary or primary sources of information. To gather primary data, the researcher may use the survey, observation, or experimental method. Normally, primary data are gathered by sampling. Then the data are analyzed, and a written report is prepared.

Main idea: _____

Passage 3: Identify the implied main point in this paragraph.

According to psychiatrist Richard Moscott, the ability to work well is one key to a balanced life. He feels both underworking and overworking are to be avoided. A second key is the ability to love, which requires a certain amount of openness. The ability to be loved is the third key to a balanced life. This is difficult for those who feel unworthy of love. The last key is the ability to play, which involves knowing how to relax.

Main idea: _____

1. The first key to a balanced life, according to Moscott, is the ability to work well.
2. According to Moscott, some people have trouble receiving love.
3. The final key to a balanced life, according to Moscott, is the ability to play.
4. According to Moscott, there are four keys to a balanced life.

State why the other three answers are not the unstated main idea.

Reasons:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Examples taken from Langan, John. *Ten Steps to Building College Reading Skills*. Townsend Press, 1989.

How did you do? Were you able to identify the more general statements from the supporting details? Usually, the controlling idea (or the main idea) is stated in a topic sentence at or near the beginning of the paragraph, but sometimes it is not. Remember that when identifying the topic sentence, all of the

other ideas in that paragraph need to be an example or detail relating to that main point. If one of the ideas does not fit, either you have chosen a statement or idea that is too specific, or the writer did not create a strong topic sentence in the paragraph. When we look at creating paragraphs and topic sentences in [Chapter 10](#), you will learn what creates a strong topic sentence, and this will help you with identifying them in the future.

Read for Key Details

After identifying the main point, look for the supporting points: details, facts, and explanations that develop and clarify the main point. Some texts make that task relatively easy. Textbooks, for instance, include the aforementioned features as well as headings and subheadings intended to make it easier for students to identify core concepts. Graphic features such as sidebars, diagrams, and charts help students understand complex information and distinguish between essential and inessential points.

TIP: Identifying main ideas is like creating a skeleton that holds all the rest of the information together—creating a body. Key facts are like muscles. The point of view and its implications are like the blood that gives life to the body.

Some details are more important than others in explaining, supporting, or developing the main idea.

These exercises will give you opportunities to practice identifying the key details in paragraphs.

PRACTICE 2.3

Identify the key term, its definition, the main idea, and the supporting detail in this paragraph.

Eidetic imagery is the technical term for what most people know as photographic memory. People with eidetic imagery can recall every detail of a memory as clearly as if they were looking at a photograph. People often wish they had this ability, but it can lead to trouble. For example, a law student with eidetic imagery was accused of cheating on an examination because his test paper contained exactly the words in

his textbook. To prove his innocence, he studied an unfamiliar passage for five minutes and then wrote down more than four hundred words from it without making a mistake.

Example taken from Langan, John. *Ten Steps to Building College Reading Skills*. Townsend Press, 1989.

PRACTICE 2.4

Highlight several effects caused by the condition described.

Suffering from debilitating guilt causes many self-defeating behaviours in adulthood. We see adults submitting to the outrageous demands of partners or employers. We see individuals who appear to be constantly angry and then, almost immediately, guilty. We see adults who have felt lifelong depression. The rage felt when shamed in childhood and when suffering from debilitating shame in adulthood is turned against the self because of the dependency on the other for survival. When we are rejected in adulthood by a mate or lover, the feelings we experience are anger at being rejected. Furthermore, if we suffer from debilitating shame, we have not been able to gain autonomy. We continue to feel dependent upon attachment figures. It is from them, from their feelings, attitudes, and opinions of us, that we feel worthwhile. To be angry at someone depended upon for survival causes us enormous guilt. Anger is redirected on the vulnerable self. We become trapped in a circular bind of shame, anger, anxiety, guilt, and depression.

Example taken from Middelton-Moz, Jane. *Shame and Guilt: Masters of Disguise*. Health Communications, 1990, p. 62.

Read for Patterns: Making Connections

Depending on the writer's purpose and the information being shared, there are four general groupings by which information is organized:

1. Definitions, details, and illustrations
2. Time sequences, process descriptions, experiments/instructions, and simple listing
3. Compare and contrast
4. Cause and effect

The list below categorizes keywords that can help you identify main and supporting ideas when you are reading. They help the reader follow the logical organization of the material. You will also need to apply these throughout the rest of the chapters when developing sentences, paragraphs, and essays. In [Chapter 25: Comma](#), you will learn about the punctuation that is used with these transitional words.

Keywords for Identifying Idea Patterns

- Definitions, details, and illustrations. Usually when you see one of these, a definition or concept preceded it.
 - for example
 - for instance
 - as an illustration
 - to illustrate
 - such as
 - to be specific
 - specifically
 - including one
- Time sequence, process description, experiment/instructions, simple listing. Some of these can be used to show sequence in both time and ideas.
 - Time order:
 - first, second, third, etc.
 - then, since, next, before, after, as soon as, now, until, later, while, during, when, finally
 - Additive listing: also, another, and, in addition, moreover, next, first of all, first, second, furthermore, last of all, finally
- Compare and contrast
 - Compare: similarly, similar to, just as with, in comparison, likewise, like, liken, both, compared to, in the same way, in a similar fashion
 - Contrast: on the other hand, conversely, rather, on the contrary, but, however, alternatively, differ, instead of, in contrast to, despite, nevertheless
- Cause and effect
 - thus, because, because of, causes, as a result, results in, result, affects, therefore, since, leads to, brings about, consequently

Read for Implications: Tracing an Idea to Its Conclusion

The methods of recognizing patterns discussed above are concrete and easy to identify. **Inferences**, on the other hand, are more subtle.

To understand the tasks of **implying** and **inferring**, think about a time when you had people visiting your home. When it became late, and you wanted them to leave, did you ask them directly, “Can you leave now”? Probably not. Instead, you may have **implied** that you wanted them to leave. You may have said, “Oh, I can’t believe it’s midnight!” You may have mentioned that you had to wake up early the next morning, or you may have stretched and yawned, hoping that your guests would pick up on your cues and **infer** that it was time to leave. You wanted them to “read” the hints to arrive at the conclusion that you wanted them to leave, even though you did not say it directly.

Implying refers to how a person conveys a subtle message. **Inferring** refers to how another person receives or interprets that message. When a writer **implies** something, they give hints but do *not* state the point directly. The reader is required to **infer** the writer’s meaning by “reading between the lines.”

However, the reader may not actually pick up on the hints at all. Or perhaps the reader will notice the hints but will interpret them differently than the writer hoped. Sometimes readers make inferences that are based more on their own preferences and experiences than on the information the writer provided on the page.

This also means that two readers reading the same text may interpret it differently because of differing individual experiences that led them to arrive at their conclusions.

TIP: As a writer, it is your responsibility to give the readers everything they need so they will arrive at the conclusions you want them to. If you do not express ideas directly, readers may be confused or miss your point.

As a reader, you will often read passages requiring you to make inferences. The next exercises will help you practice reading for inference. Remember, if your answers are different from the ones given, it means you interpreted the information differently and may have missed the author’s point. When interpreting these passages, you can use a process of elimination and ask yourself which statement best completes the passage.

PRACTICE 2.5

Read each passage. Then choose the answer that best completes the final thought of the passage. As you consider the choices, think about why the other answers would not be as appropriate as the one you chose. Then check your answers.

- A. To a manufacturer, the wages paid to employees are a large portion of production expenses. The fact that wages also determine the buying power of the consumer is sometimes overlooked. In times of overproduction, the manufacturer tries to lower operating costs by decreasing the number of employees. This reduces expenditures of money in wages, but it also:
1. maintains the status quo
 2. increases population
 3. raises costs
 4. reduces consumption
- B. Totally new cities that will be built in the future may be better planned than the large cities that already exist. Old cities were not properly planned for the great growth in population and industry that they have had, and many are in the process of tearing down and rebuilding large sections. This process is helping to improve some old cities—both large and small ones—but it does not give them the choice of complete city designing that will be available to:
1. richer cities
 2. larger cities
 3. foreign cities
 4. new cities
- C. The director of this company believes that there is a growing awareness by management that business corporations are, and should be, guided by policies that are designed to satisfy human needs as well as material needs and that there is nothing inconsistent between this and the making of:
1. educational opportunities for workers
 2. good and satisfying profits
 3. political enemies in some quarters
 4. better opportunities for workers
- D. Knowledge and pleasure are inextricably interlocked. It is impossible for us to learn what we do not enjoy, and we cannot enjoy that which does not impart:

1. a lesson
 2. a novelty
 3. a practical use
 4. strong emotion
- E. Oratory is to be best estimated on different principles from those that are applied to other productions. Truth is the object of philosophy and history. The merit of poetry is in its truth even though the truth is understood only through the imagination, which is aroused by poetry. The object of oratory is not truth but persuasion. A speaker who exhausts the whole philosophy of a question, who displays every grace of style, yet produces no effect on an audience, may be a great essayist, a great politician, and a great master of composition but:
1. essentially a persuader
 2. not a poet
 3. essentially an orator
 4. not an orator

Exercises taken from “Reading for Comprehension Exercises.” *SRA Achievement Series*, Science Research Associates, 1978.

Reread any passages for which you didn’t choose the best answer. Consider why you chose the answer you did. Did you miss some clues? Did you focus on something other than the main idea? Did your own ideas or experiences affect your interpretation of the passage?

Monitor Your Comprehension

By finding the main idea and paying attention to text features as you read, you can figure out what you should know. Just as important, however, is being able to figure out what you do not know and developing a strategy to fill the gaps.

Textbooks often include comprehension questions in the margins or at the end of a section or chapter. As you read, stop occasionally to answer these questions. Perhaps write the answers on paper so that you can save them for use later in the course. Use the questions to identify sections you may need to reread, read more carefully, or ask your instructor about later.

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

Summarize. At the end of each section, pause to summarize the main points in a few sentences. If you have trouble doing so, reread the section. (You will learn more about summarizing in [Chapter 15: Summary](#).)

Ask and answer questions. When you begin reading a section, identify two or three questions you should be able to answer after you finish it. Write down the questions and use them to test yourself on the reading. If you cannot answer a question, determine why. Is the answer buried in the section you just read but just not coming across to you? Or do you expect to find the answer in another part of the reading?

Do not read in a vacuum. Look for opportunities to discuss the reading with classmates or others who are familiar with the subject matter. Many instructors set up forums or groups specifically for that purpose. Participating in these discussions can help you determine whether your understanding of the main points is the same as your peers'. Such a discussion can serve as a reality check. If everyone in the class struggled with the reading, it may be exceptionally challenging. If it was easy for everyone but you, you may need to see your instructor for help.

After a while, you will discover the best time to get your reading done: perhaps in the evening, after the kids are in bed; early in the morning, on the couch with a cup of coffee and pen and paper at hand; or in the afternoon, in the library, right after class. Even after you've figured out what time works best for you, you will occasionally have trouble concentrating. When that happens, actively work to summarize the reading and ask and answer questions. These strategies will help you focus better and retain more of what you read.

Read Actively

Now that you have become acquainted with prereading and comprehension strategies, your reading assignments may feel more manageable. You know what you need to do to get your reading done and to ensure you've grasped the main points. However, the most successful students are not only competent readers but active, engaged readers. It's time to take your reading to the next level.

Effective academic reading seeks to gain an understanding not only of the facts, opinions, and beliefs presented in a text but also of the biases, assumptions, and perspectives underlying the discussion. The aim of active reading is to analyze, interpret, and evaluate the text and then draw logical inferences and conclusions.

Active reading emphasizes "reading as thinking." You will need to read actively to comprehend and remember what you are reading, for both your own and your instructor's purposes. In order to do that, you'll need to think about the relevance of ideas to one another and about their usefulness to you personally, academically, and even professionally.

Everyone reads and retains information differently. However, working through the following stages of reading will not only help you understand what you are reading but also increase the likelihood that you will remember what you have read.

While it may seem that this strategy takes a lot of time, working through the stages will actually *save* you time. For example, after surveying a text that you thought you might use for a research paper, you might realize it's not appropriate for your project, and because you quickly surveyed the text, you won't have to waste a lot of time reading it closely. In another example, suppose you closely and critically read a required chapter in your textbook, taking good notes along the way, so when it's time to study for an exam, you will not need to waste time rereading the entire chapter because you already know the material and have good notes to study from.

TIP: Many detailed reading strategies have been developed by experts. You might want to look up the SQ3R approach, for example. For individualized help with reading and comprehension, visit your university's academic resource centre.

The stages of active reading are:

- Survey reading
- Questioning and predicting
- Close reading
- Critical reading
- Reviewing and reflecting

Academic reading differs from our usual daily reading activities, in which interest often determines what we choose to read. What happens when we are really not interested in what we are reading or seeing? Our eyes move down the page and our minds are elsewhere. We may read a paragraph or even several pages and suddenly realize we have no idea what we have just read. To help maintain focus, identify your reading purpose, survey, read closely, be inquisitive, and read critically. By reading for a specific result, you will read faster, you will know what you want from the text, and you will read to get it.

Survey

Before you read, first survey or preview the text. **Surveying** means skimming quickly. Surveying allows you to see the overall themes or the gist of the text.

The goal of surveying is to determine what topics will be covered and to begin to identify the author's main point(s).

There are many benefits of surveying:

- Surveying helps you determine the appropriateness of the material for your purposes. Thus, you don't need to spend time closely reading material that isn't relevant to your assignment, but you do identify material that you want to examine more closely.
- Surveying helps you create a road map: a mental picture of the beginning, middle, and end of the journey through the text.
- Having this road map allows you to organize your travel through the text by highlighting key topics and getting impressions of relevance, which in turn helps with remembering.
- Surveying aids in budgeting study time because you know the length and difficulty of the material.
- Usually, you read study material to find out what is there in order to go back later and learn it. By surveying, you accomplish the same in one-tenth the time.
- Surveying improves concentration because you know what is ahead and how what you are reading will fit into the big picture.

Techniques for Survey Reading

Surveying will help you form a first impression of the material.

To survey an article, read the introductory paragraph and the headings. Look at any boldfaced or italicized vocabulary terms.

To survey a book, look at the table of contents, and scan the preface and the introductory paragraph of each chapter. Flip through the book and look for pictures, charts, graphs, and vocabulary terms. Scan the glossary and the index.

It may take only two minutes to survey a short article or up to ten minutes or more for a longer article or a book.

Sometimes, this survey step alone may be enough because you may need only a general familiarity with the material. However, surveying will also help you determine which parts of the text you want to read closely.

PRACTICE 2.6

Choose any text that you have been assigned this month. Survey the reading, making note of the features listed in [Techniques for Survey Reading](#). Answer these questions:

What are the main themes and topics?

How is the text organized?

Are there illustrations, charts, or graphs? What are the topics?

Are there vocabulary terms or a glossary? What types of words are bolded?

What is your impression of this text?

Question and Predict

After you have surveyed the text but before you read closely, ask questions and make predictions. This step allows you to engage fully with the text you're going to read.

There are many benefits of questioning and predicting:

- Questioning and predicting help you engage more fully with the text, which will improve your attention and concentration.
- Questioning and predicting help you determine how the material relates to your course or your assignment.
- Questioning and predicting help you make connections between the text and information or experiences outside the course—perhaps creating connections to other courses or to daily life.
- Questioning and predicting help you determine the relevance of the text, which, in turn, helps with retention and remembering.
- Questioning and predicting help generate ideas for further research or study.

Techniques for Questioning and Predicting

After surveying, start brainstorming predictions and questions about the text:

What do you expect to learn from the reading?

What do you think the author's main idea is?

You may find that some questions come to mind immediately based on your initial survey or based on previous readings and class discussions. If not, use the headings and subheadings in the text to formulate questions. For instance, if one heading in your criminology textbook is **Conditional Sentence** and another is **Conditional Release**, you might ask yourself these questions:

What are the major differences between these two concepts?

Where does each appear in the sentencing process?

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

PRACTICE 2.7

Referring again to the text you chose for [Practice 2.6](#), write down these predictions:

Predict what topic(s) this text might cover.

Predict what the author's main point will be.

Predict one thing you will learn from this text.

Predict how this text might relate to an upcoming assignment in the course.

Write down these questions:

What is a question that will help you read this text more actively?

What is a question you could take to class to prompt discussion about this text?

What is a question you might still be left with after you read the text?

Can you think of other predictions and questions to add to the list? Once you have asked questions and made predictions, keep them in mind as you move to the next step: close reading, which will help you answer your questions.

Close Reading

Close reading allows you to concentrate and make decisions about what is relevant to your reading purpose and what is not. The goal of close reading is to ensure that you understand what you are reading and to store information in a logical and organized way so when you need to recall the information, it is easier for you to do so.

There are many benefits to close reading:

- You clearly identify main concepts, key details, and their relationships with one another, which is vital for preparing for an exam.
- Your ability to answer essay questions improves because the concepts are organized and understood rather than merely memorized.

- You become more confident because your understanding improves—this, in turn, increases your enjoyment.
- Close reading allows you to summarize effectively what you read.

Techniques for Close Reading

After you have surveyed the text and developed some predictions and questions, read the text slowly and carefully, reading as if you were going to be tested on the material immediately upon completion and you wanted to remember at least 75 to 80 percent of the information. If you keep in mind the question of *why* you are reading the material, it will help you focus because you will be actively engaged with the information you are consuming.

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

As you read, annotate the text by identifying the main themes, key points, and essential details. (You might find it helpful to review the sections on how to mark up a text in [Reading Strategies](#) earlier in this chapter and [Chapter 1: Take Notes Effectively](#).) Consider the relationships between main concepts and key details.

Look closely at photographs, illustrations, diagrams, flow charts, tables, and other graphics, and think about how they relate to the written text. Do these graphics make abstract ideas more concrete and understandable? As you read, pause occasionally to recite or record important points. It is best to do this at the end of each section or when there is an obvious shift in the writer's train of thought. Put the book aside for a moment and recite aloud the main points of the section or any important answers you found there. You might also record ideas by jotting down brief notes in addition to or instead of reciting aloud. Either way, the physical act of articulating information makes you more likely to remember it.

After reading the entire text, summarize the important ideas and their development.

After you have finished reading, set the book aside and briefly answer your initial questions by making notes or highlighting/underlining. Use your own words as much as possible, but if you find an important quotation, write it down, enclosing it in quotation marks and jotting down the source page so that you can find it again easily.

TIP: If you put a verbatim quotation into your notes, make sure to enclose it in quotation marks and identify the source and the page number. This will help you avoid a common but serious mistake: sometimes a student forgets that a sentence in their notes was a quotation, which can lead them to accidentally plagiarize.

If there are any diagrams in the text, make notes from memory that summarize the information they convey. Then look back at the diagrams to make sure the summary is accurate.

Repeat this questioning, reading, and reciting process for the rest of the chapter. As you work your way through, occasionally pause and really think about what you have read; it is easy to work through a section or chapter and realize that you have not actually absorbed any of the material.

TIP: As you read, picture what is described. The technique of visualization is useful for both narrative texts (such as a novel or a historical account) and nonfiction texts (such as instructions for performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR]).

Critical Reading

Critical reading is necessary in order to determine the importance of the concepts presented, their relevance, and the accuracy of arguments. When you read critically, you become even more deeply involved with the material, which will allow you to make better judgments about what is the more important information.

People often read reactively to material—especially to debate, controversy, and politics. When readers react, they bring personal experience and opinion to the concept to which they are reacting. A critical reading, however, should not be based on your personal opinion. Instead, critical reading requires *thinking* critically—as you would expect—about the material. Critical thinking relies on reason, evidence, and open-mindedness and recognizes the biases, assumptions, and motives of both the writer and the reader.

Learning to read critically offers these advantages:

- By substantiating arguments and interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating those supporting the concept, you move from mere reaction into critical reading and deepen your understanding.

- By analyzing relationships between the reading material and other readings or experiences, you make connections.
- By making connections, you will increase your concentration and confidence in being able to discuss and evaluate what you read.

Techniques for Critical Reading

Understand and analyze the material in terms of a writer's purpose and results, relevance to readers, and value to the field at large.

Think about the text in its context. Understanding context means thinking about who wrote the text, when and where it was written, the author's purpose for writing it, and what assumptions or agendas influenced the author's ideas. For instance, two writers might both address the subject of health care reform, but if one article is an opinion piece and one is a news story, the context is different.

Connect what you read to what you already know. Look for ways the reading supports, extends, or challenges concepts you have learned elsewhere.

Relate the reading to your own life. What statements in the text relate to people or situations from your personal experiences? Relate the reading to your personal observations of the ideas, concepts, and theories as they relate to your own life and circumstances.

Review and Reflect

Once you have read the entire text, put each section into the context of the bigger picture. Ask yourself if you have really answered each question you posed in the questioning stage and if the answers are accurate. If the textbook includes review questions or your instructor has provided a study guide, use these tools to guide your review. You may want to record information in a more detailed format than you used during reading, such as in an outline or a list.

There are many ways to review, but here are a few samples:

From memory, jot down the key ideas discussed in the section you just read. Look back through the text and check your memory against what you jotted down. How did you do?

Choose one section from the chapter and write a summary from memory of what you learned from that section. Now review that section. How accurate is your summary? Did you miss anything?

Talk or write about what you read. Jot down questions or comments in your notebook and bring them up. Discuss the reading in a class discussion forum or blog about it.

As you review, reflect on the process of reading, and jot down your reflections.

When you read, did you consciously intend to remember it?
Did anything in the text surprise you, upset you, or make you think?
Did you find yourself strongly agreeing or disagreeing with any points
in the text?
What topics would you like to explore further?

Instructors sometimes require students to write brief response papers or maintain a reading journal. Use these assignments to help you reflect on what you read.

To make sure you remember the information, review your notes again after about one week and then again three or four weeks later.

PRACTICE 2.8

Choose a text other than those you have been assigned to read for a class or course. Work through the five stages: surveying, questioning and predicting, close reading, critical reading, and reviewing and reflecting. As you work through the stages, take notes. Keep in mind that you may need to spread the reading out over more than one session, especially if the text is long.

Then reflect on how helpful you found the process. On a scale of 1 to 10, how useful did you find it? How does it compare with other study techniques you have used?

* * *

Although the process of reading in stages may seem time-consuming, you will find that it actually saves time. Because you have a question in mind while reading, you have a purpose while looking for the important information. The notes you take will also be more organized and concise because you are focused, and this will save you time when it comes to writing essays. Also, since you have reviewed throughout the process, you will not need to spend as much time reviewing for exams because the material is already stored in your memory.

Keep in mind that you will not need to complete all five stages for every text you encounter. For example:

- If you are searching for sources for a research paper, you may survey an article and then decide that it's not suitable for your project. No need to go on to the next stage!

- If you are preparing to attend a lecture on a topic that is covered in a chapter in your textbook, but the chapter is not included in the assigned readings for the course, the first two stages—surveying and questioning and predicting—may be sufficient to prepare you for the lecture.
- If you are reading a very factual text in preparation for a multiple-choice exam that emphasizes the memorization of dates and/or key terms, you may only need to complete the first three stages. Close reading (and reviewing your notes) may be all that you need to prepare for the exam.

With that said, if you are preparing to write a term paper or studying for an essay-based exam, you will certainly want to work through all five stages, including critical reading and reviewing and reflecting, in order to ensure you are actively engaging with the material and will be able to question it, evaluate it, and thoughtfully respond to it.

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

TIP: For in-depth advice on improving your effective reading skills, check out Chapters 1 through 10 of the excellent and very detailed *The Word on College Reading and Writing* by Monique Babin et al., available through BC Campus Open Textbooks: open.bccampus.ca/browse-our-collection/find-open-textbooks/?subject=Academic%20Writing.

This chapter introduced ways to approach reading to help you understand, process, analyze, synthesize, and ultimately remember information better.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Post-secondary-level reading differs from high school assignments not only in quantity but also in quality.

- Managing reading assignments successfully requires you to plan and manage your time, set a purpose for reading, practice effective comprehension strategies, and use active reading abilities to deepen your understanding of the text.
- The five stages of active reading include surveying, questioning and predicting, close reading, critical reading, and reviewing and reflecting.
- Many students find that working their way through the stages of reading allows them to understand readings, to remember the content from readings, to successfully prepare for exams, and to write better research essays.
- Many students find that taking the time to work through the stages of reading saves them time in the long run.

3

Introduction to Academic Writing

Learning Objectives

- Understand the expectations for writing assignments in post-secondary courses
- Recognize specific types of writing assignments frequently included in post-secondary courses
- Understand and apply general strategies for managing and completing post-secondary-level writing assignments efficiently and effectively
- Become familiar with the writing process that successful writers use

This chapter briefly introduces the type of writing you will be expected to do as a post-secondary student, emphasizing how academic writing differs from the types of writing you may have done before. Each of the assignment types introduced in this chapter will be expanded on in [Part 4](#).

In this chapter, you will learn how to manage writing assignments so that you don't end up rushing at the last minute. You will also be introduced to the writing process that successful writers use. This process will be explored in more detail in [Part 2](#).

The goal of this chapter is to briefly introduce some of the skills and strategies you will need to develop to become a more confident writer.

Even people who love writing and do it for a living sometimes struggle to get their thoughts on the page. For people who do not like writing or do not think of themselves as good writers, writing assignments can be stressful and intimidating. However, you cannot get through post-secondary courses without

having to write—sometimes a lot—usually at a more sophisticated level than you have before.

In the first two chapters, you learned what you can expect from your courses and your course readings, and you identified strategies you can use to manage your workload and succeed in your studies. This section specifically addresses how to handle the demands placed on you as a writer at the post-secondary level. The techniques introduced here will help ensure your success in any writing task, whether it is completing an hour-long exam or conducting an in-depth multiweek research project. Writing, like reading or like any other skill, gets easier with practice, and it is easier to tackle writing tasks with a toolbox full of strategies.

DISCUSSION 3.1

What has been your experience with writing for school in the past?
How do you feel about writing now? What concerns do you have about writing in a post-secondary context?

Writing in University

Most writing assignments at the post-secondary level serve a different purpose than the typical writing assignments you completed in high school.

In high school, teachers generally focus on teaching students to write in a variety of modes and formats, which may include personal writing, expository writing, research papers, creative writing, and short answers and essays for exams. In your first-year academic writing course, that list may grow to include writing assignments covering analysis (rhetorical, critical, or conceptual) and in-depth academic research. You will also reinforce and broaden your expository writing skills. Over time, these assignments help you build a foundation of writing skills.

Your first-year academic writing course will focus mainly on developing writing skills rather than building knowledge or insights in a particular academic field. While your composition courses will focus on writing for its own sake—helping you make the transition to higher-level writing assignments—in most of your other courses, writing assignments serve a different purpose. In those courses, you may use writing as one tool among many for learning how to think about a particular academic discipline and how to convey those thoughts. In those courses, your instructors will not explicitly teach essay-writing skills because they will expect you to already have a foundation in essay writing.

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

Finally, personal and creative writing assignments are less common at the post-secondary level than in high school. College and university courses emphasize expository writing—writing that explains or informs. Often, expository writing assignments will require research beyond the course materials. Some classes will require persuasive writing assignments in which you state and support a position on an issue. Your instructors will hold you to a higher standard when it comes to supporting your ideas with reasons and evidence.

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

Remember that when you interact with other students and teachers online, you need to project a mature, professional image. You may be able to use an informal, conversational tone, but complaining about the workload, using off-colour language, or criticizing other participants is inappropriate. [Table 3.1](#) lists some of the most common assignments you will encounter at the post-secondary level. It includes minor, less formal assignments as well as major ones. Which specific assignments you will be given will depend on the courses you take and the learning objectives developed by your instructors. For detailed instructions for the most common types of writing assignments, turn to [Part 4](#).

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

Table 3.1: Common Types of Writing Assignments

Assignment Type	Description	Example
Personal response paper	Expresses and explains your response to an article or other text, a provocative quotation, or a specific issue	For a labour-management course, students watch videos depicting ineffective manager-staff interactions and write a response based on their own experiences and opinions.
Summary	Restates the thesis and main points of a text concisely and objectively and in your own words	For a psychology course, students write a one-page summary of an article about a man suffering from short-term memory loss.
Argumentative essay / position paper	States and defends your position on an issue (often a controversial issue)	For a criminal justice course, students state their positions on minimum and maximum prison sentences, using research to support their arguments.
Problem-solution paper	Presents a problem, explains its causes, and proposes a solution	For an emergency-management course, a student presents a plan for implementing a crisis communications strategy.
Literary analysis	States a thesis about a particular literary work and develops the thesis with evidence from the work and, sometimes, from additional sources	For a literature course, a student analyzes a novel by Timothy Findley, examining its perspective on war, or compares the story to another story, analyzing commonalities and differences in the authors' treatment of war.
Research/ literature review	Summarizes available research findings on a particular topic	For a criminology course, a student reviews research from the past twenty years regarding the presence or absence of a correlation between violence on television and violent behaviour.

Assignment Type	Description	Example
Case study or case analysis	Investigates a particular person, group, business, or event in depth for the purpose of drawing a larger conclusion from the analysis	For a health science course, a student writes a case study demonstrating the successful treatment of a patient experiencing congestive heart failure.
Laboratory report	Presents a laboratory experiment, including the hypothesis, methods of data collection, results, and conclusions	For a psychology course, students present the results of an experiment in which they investigate whether sleep deprivation produces memory deficits in lab rats.
Research journal	Records a student's ideas and findings during the course of a long-term research project	For a capstone project, a student maintains a journal throughout a semester-long research project.
Research paper	Presents a thesis and supports it with original research and/or other researchers' findings on the topic; can take several different formats depending on the subject area	For a criminology course, a student develops a thesis on de-escalation techniques and (a) conducts research on existing evidence and (b) creates their own research tool to measure the effectiveness of such techniques.

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

What Is Academic Writing?

There are many genres of writing, such as personal writing, creative writing, journalistic writing, scientific writing, business writing, academic writing, and so on.

You might already be a proficient writer of memos, reports, poems, stories, or letters. However, in your post-secondary studies, you will primarily be asked to undertake academic writing. Therefore, it is important to know that academic writing is a distinct genre that requires specific skills and conventions.

Generally speaking, **academic writing** is a means to communicate with members of a scholarly community—including researchers who conduct

research studies, professors who teach students, and students learning about a topic and developing their critical thinking skills. Thus, academic writing is *not* the same as other forms of writing, such as writing tailored for the general public. It is unique.

Within the broad genre of academic writing, there are many sub-genres, including textbooks, trade books, lab reports, journal articles, research proposals, dissertations, and undergraduate student essays. [Figure 3.1: Genres and Sub-genres of Writing](#) illustrates some of the many genres of writing and some of their many sub-genres.

In your studies, you may be required to write in a variety of sub-genres of academic writing. While you may be required to write some lab reports, reflective journals, and other kinds of texts, in most of your courses, you will primarily write undergraduate student essays.

The **undergraduate student essay** is a genre of its own with a distinct purpose, form, and conventions unlike any other rhetorical mode. There are two overarching purposes for student essays:

1. They offer students a means to demonstrate their understanding of and engagement with course materials.
2. They offer instructors a means to assess students' understanding of and engagement with course materials.

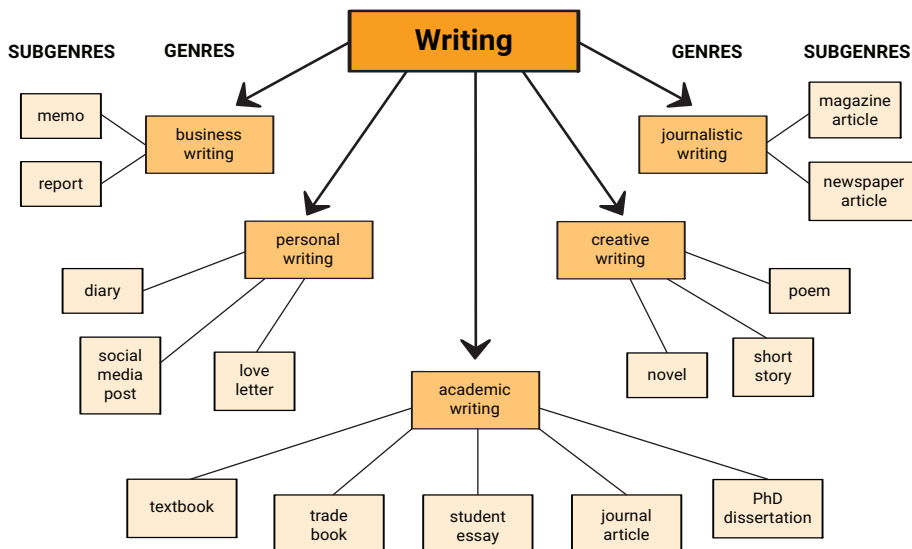


Figure 3.1: Genres and Sub-genres of Writing

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Thus, the writing you'll do in your essays will be very different from what you'll read in other genres, such as non-academic magazines or newspaper articles. The writing you'll do in your essays might seem similar to the writing you'll find in a textbook or a scholarly article, which are other sub-genres of academic writing. However, it's not exactly the same because the overarching purposes of the undergraduate student essay are not the same as the purposes of textbooks or scholarly articles.

What is it that distinguishes academic writing generally, or the undergraduate student essay specifically, from other types of writing that you might already do? The distinctions can be found primarily in the reason you write (purpose), the people you address (audience), the way you address them (tone), and what you write about (content), which you'll learn more about in [Chapter 5](#).

Later, we will get into more detail about specific purposes for particular writing assignments, but for now, the first step to writing successful essays is simply to understand that the undergraduate student essay is a distinct sub-genre unlike any other because of its explicit overarching goals.

TIP: When first learning to write undergraduate essays, students often try to model their writing on a textbook, on a magazine article, or on another type of text. This is rarely successful because the undergraduate student essay is a unique genre.

The Writing Process in Brief

To complete a writing task successfully, good writers use some variation of the writing process. Below is a brief introduction to the steps in the writing process. This process is examined in much more detail in [Part 2: The Writing Process](#).

Prewriting. The writer generates ideas to write about and then begins developing these ideas.

Planning/Outlining. The writer chooses an organizational structure for the writing based on the requirements of the writing task. The writer creates a plan (such as an outline) to arrange and organize the ideas that were generated in the first step.

Drafting. The writer uses the work completed in the first two steps to write a first draft. The first draft includes the ideas the writer brainstormed in the first step, organized into a structure that was chosen in the second step.

Revising. The writer reads the first draft several times to review and reshape its content, perhaps adding, deleting, or moving sentences or paragraphs. At this stage, the writer may go through several drafts before settling on a final draft in which the key points are logically and articulately presented.

Editing. The editing process requires slow and careful rereading of the final draft to ensure that the words on the page convey the writer's ideas as clearly and as effectively as possible.

Proofreading. Proofreading involves identifying and correcting errors in format, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and documentation.

Publishing. Once the text has been edited and proofread, it is ready to publish! In a university course, *publishing* may mean posting a paragraph to an online student forum or submitting an essay to an instructor.

You may have used this process in the past for writing assignments or for other types of creative or work-related projects, such as developing a sketch into a finished painting, composing a song, or completing a report. The steps apply broadly to any project that involves original thinking. You come up with ideas (often vague at first), you work to give them some structure, you make a first attempt, you figure out what needs improving, and then you refine it until you are satisfied.

Most people have used this process in one way or another, but many people have misconceptions about how to use it to write. Here are a few of the most common misconceptions students have about the writing process:

If I understand the assignment, I do not have to waste time on prewriting.

Even if the task is straightforward and you feel ready to start writing, take some time to develop ideas before you plunge into your draft. **Freewriting**—writing about the topic without stopping for a set period of time—is one prewriting technique you might try in that situation. Brainstorming and mapping are other useful techniques. You'll learn more about prewriting in [Chapter 4: Prewrite](#).

I should complete a formal, numbered outline for every writing assignment.

For some assignments, such as lengthy research papers, proceeding without a formal outline can be very difficult. However, for other assignments, a structured set of notes or a detailed graphic organizer may suffice. The important thing is to have a solid plan

for organizing ideas and details. You'll learn more about outlining in [Chapter 5: Plan and Outline](#).

My draft will be better if I write it when I'm feeling inspired.

By all means, take advantage of those moments of inspiration. However, understand that sometimes you will have to write when you are not in the mood. Sit down and start your draft even if you do not feel like it. If necessary, force yourself to write for just one hour. By the end of the hour, you may be far more engaged and motivated to continue. If not, at least you will have accomplished part of the task. You'll learn about drafting in [Chapter 6: Draft](#).

My instructor will tell me everything I need to revise.

If your instructor chooses to review drafts, the feedback can help you improve. However, it is still your job, not your instructor's, to transform the draft into a final, polished piece. That task will be much easier if you give your best effort to the draft before submitting it. During revision, do not just go through and implement your instructor's corrections. Take time to determine what you can change to make the work the best it can be. You'll learn more about revision in [Chapter 7: Revise](#).

I'm a good writer, so I don't need to edit or proofread.

Even talented writers need to edit and proofread their work. At the very least, doing so will help you catch an embarrassing typo or two. Editing and proofreading are the steps that make a good piece of writing into an excellent piece of writing. You'll learn more about editing and proofreading in [Chapter 8: Edit](#).

TIP: The writing process is just as important for timed writing tasks, such as essay exams. Before you begin writing, read the question carefully and think about the main points you want to include in your response. Jot ideas on a piece of paper. Sketch out a very brief outline. Keep an eye on the clock as you write your response so you will have time to review and proofread before turning in your exam.

DISCUSSION 3.2

Thinking back to essays or reports you've written in the past, which steps of the writing process did you use most, and which steps did you typically skip over?

Which of the writing steps would you most like to learn to use effectively in your university writing assignments?

Managing Writing Assignments

There is no magic formula that will make the writing process quick and easy. However, you can learn strategies and use resources to tackle writing assignments with more confidence. This section presents an overview of these strategies and resources.

In [Chapter 1: Manage Your Time](#), you learned general time-management skills. By combining those skills with what you have learned about the writing process, you can make any writing assignment easier to manage.

When your instructor gives you a writing assignment, write the due date on your calendar. Then work backward from the due date, and set aside blocks of time to work on the assignment, allocating time for each step in the writing process. Plan at least two sessions of writing time per step so that you are not trying to move from step 1 to step 5 in one evening. Trying to work that fast is stressful, and it does not yield good results. You will plan better, think better, and write better if you space out the steps and devote sufficient time to the process.

Ideally, you should set aside at least three separate blocks of time to work on a writing assignment: one for prewriting and outlining, one for drafting, and one for revising and editing. Sometimes, those steps may be compressed into just a few days. If you have a couple of weeks to work on a paper, space out the five steps over multiple sessions. Long-term projects, such as research papers, require more time for each step.

[Figure 3.2](#) is a sample of a student's plan for writing a major research paper. Notice that the work begins four weeks before the paper is due—not the night before!

TIP: In some situations, you may not be able to allow time between the steps of the writing process. For instance, you may be asked to write in class or complete a brief response paper overnight. If the time available is very limited, apply a modified version of the writing process (as you

would do for an essay exam). It is still important to give the assignment thought and effort. However, these types of assignments are less formal, and instructors may not expect them to be as polished as formal papers. When in doubt, ask the instructor about expectations, about resources that will be available during the writing exam, and if they have any tips to prepare you to effectively demonstrate your writing skills.

TIP: In some courses, the instructor may distribute copies of a current news article on a topic relevant to the course and assign students to write a response due the following week. Together, these weekly assignments may count for a specific percentage of the course grade. Although each response takes just a few hours to complete, you may learn more from the reading and get better grades on the writing if you spread the work out week by week rather than trying to complete all of the responses just before the due date.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Receive the writing assignment and analyze the instructions: determine the broad topic, purpose, audience, tone, word count, etc.	Use prewriting techniques to generate ideas and narrow the topic.	→	Choose a specific topic and narrow the focus.	Develop research questions and plan a research strategy.	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Conduct research: locate sources, talk with a reference librarian. Read, take notes, and catalogue all sources.				→	Develop a working thesis. Develop an outline or plan.	Write a first draft.
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Write a first draft.		→	Ask a writing centre coach for feedback.	Conduct more research, if necessary.		
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Revise the essay and review the thesis.			→	Ask a peer to review your work.	Make final revisions.	
28	29	30	31			
Prepare a list of research sources.	Proofread the final draft.	→	Publish! (submit the essay).			

Figure 3.2: Sample Plan for Managing a Research Paper

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

For any writing assignment, use these strategies:

- **Make sure you understand the assignment requirements.** If necessary, clarify the requirements with your instructor. Think

carefully about the purpose of the writing, the intended audience, the topics you will need to address, and any specific requirements of the writing form. You will learn more about these steps in [Part 2: The Writing Process](#).

- **Plan ahead.** Divide the work into small, manageable tasks, and set aside time to accomplish each task in turn.
- **Complete each step of the writing process.** [Part 2: The Writing Process](#) will guide you through the steps. With practice, this process will come automatically to you.
- **Use the resources available to you.** Remember that most schools have specific services to help students with their writing, particularly writing centres and university libraries. Review [Chapter 1: Make Use of Resources](#) for information on university resources.

PRACTICE 3.1

Look through your course syllabi for this semester:

How many writing assignments are you expected to complete this semester?

How challenging does each one appear to be in terms of length, required readings, and required research? Assess the apparent difficulty of each, perhaps using a scale of one to five stars.

Referring to the calendar in [Figure 3.2](#) as a guideline, estimate how long you will need to allocate to complete each assignment. (Assignments that require research will certainly require more time.) Work back to a starting date, and mark it on a wall calendar or an electronic calendar.

Allocate time for each step in the writing process, and mark each stage on your calendar. As you allocate time, be mindful that this may not be your only assignment and you will also need time to work on other things.

If you have more than one assignment due the same week, move the start dates of both assignments earlier so that you'll have sufficient time to complete both. If you prefer to not work on both assignments at the same time, schedule time to work on one first and then the other, even if that means starting the first one a few weeks earlier.

* * *

To help you succeed in a variety of writing tasks, the remainder of this textbook offers detailed guidance on specific aspects of writing: the writing process, essential elements of paragraphs and essays, characteristics of common

post-secondary writing assignments, research and documentation, style, grammar, and punctuation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Post-secondary-level writing assignments differ from high school assignments not only in quantity but also in quality.
- Academic writing is a distinct genre of writing, and the student essay is a distinct sub-genre of academic writing.
- Post-secondary writing assignments place greater emphasis on learning to think critically about a particular discipline and less emphasis on personal and creative writing.
- Follow the steps of the writing process to tackle and complete any writing assignment successfully.
- To manage writing assignments, work backward from the due date, allotting appropriate time to complete each step of the writing process. Start early!

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PART II

The Writing Process

Many students feel overwhelmed when facing an assignment, a deadline, and a blank page. Experienced writers, when faced with that blank page, remind themselves that writing—like baking or sketching or gardening—is a *process* consisting of distinct steps that must be performed in the correct order to achieve success. They know that if they follow an established process step by step, they will successfully complete their writing task.

Experienced writers also know that writing is a *skill*, and like every other skill—whether it's baking cakes or scoring goals or speaking French—writing becomes significantly easier with practice.

Successful writers—whether they write films, novels, songs, business proposals, advertisements, or essays—do not write a perfect final copy of a text in one day. They use a process, a series of steps or stages, and this process takes time. The more substantial and important the final piece of writing will be, the more time it will take.

What Is the Writing Process?

Just as you need a recipe, ingredients, and proper tools to cook a delicious meal, you also need a plan, resources, and adequate time to create an effective piece of writing. Effective writing can be simply described as good ideas that are expressed well and arranged in the proper order. To communicate your ideas effectively in writing, follow the steps of the writing process outlined in [Figure P2.1](#).

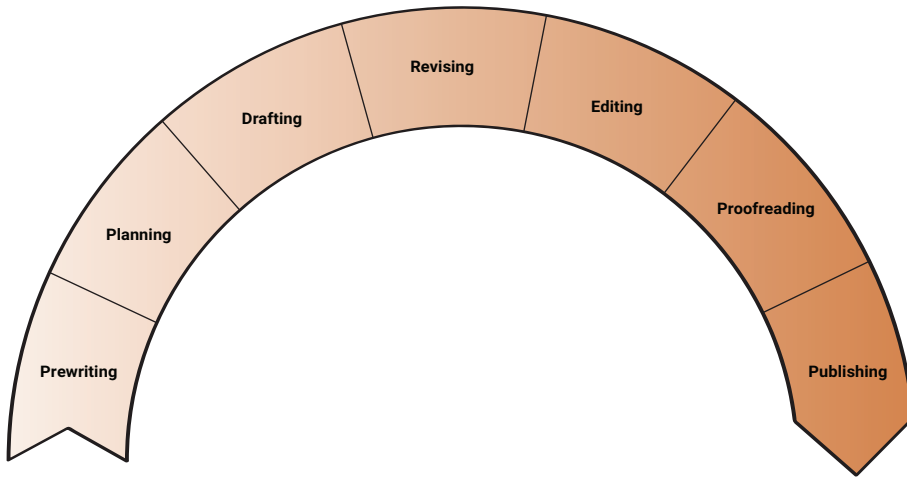


Figure P2.1: The Writing Process

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Prewriting: Generating ideas for writing

In response to an assignment or another writing task, the writer generates ideas to write about and begins developing these ideas using one or more prewriting techniques.

Planning and outlining: Organizing your ideas and planning to write

The writer settles on a central message to convey, chooses an overall organizational structure for the writing based on the requirements of the task, and creates a plan or an outline.

Drafting: Developing your ideas into a piece of writing

The writer uses the work completed in the first two stages to write a first draft. The first draft includes the ideas the writer brainstormed in the first step, organized into a structure that was chosen in the second step. In the case of an essay, the draft will be composed of complete sentences and paragraphs.

*Revising: Improving **what** you've written*

The writer reviews the first draft several times and reshapes its content with the goal of ensuring that the central message is conveyed as clearly as possible. The writer may go through several different drafts before settling on a final draft in which the key points are logically and articulately presented.

*Editing: Improving **how** you've written*

Editing requires slow and careful rereading of the entire piece of writing. In this step, the writer focuses on how the ideas have been conveyed and ensures that the wording is as clear and precise as possible.

Proofreading: Polishing your writing for an audience

In the proofreading stage, the writer corrects errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and format to make the reader's job easier. The reader should be able to easily read the text, focusing on the ideas without being distracted by errors.

Publishing: Sharing your ideas with an audience

Once the text has been edited, it is ready to publish! In a university course, *publishing* may mean submitting an assignment to an instructor or posting a paragraph to an online student forum. In other contexts, publishing may mean submitting a report to a boss, sharing a poem with a friend, sending a letter to the editor of a newspaper, or mailing out your family's annual Christmas letter. In essence, then, publishing means sharing your writing with others so that they can read and appreciate your ideas.

TIP: The essential purpose of writing is to convey your ideas as clearly and coherently as possible to other people. Effectively using the steps in the writing process will ensure that your writing clearly conveys your ideas to your audience.

DISCUSSION P2.1

With a peer, share your answers to these questions:

- When you write an essay, which of the steps do you typically spend the most time on?
- Which steps do you spend the least time on? Would your writing improve if you spent more time on those steps?
- Which steps do you want to learn more about?

The Recursive Writing Process

It's important to remember that the writing process is not linear. In other words, a writer does not move straight through the steps from prewriting to proofreading, one after the other, without ever going back. Instead, writing is a recursive process, which means that a writer will sometimes need to return briefly to a previous step before moving forward.

[Figure P2.2](#) illustrates how a student writer, Mia, moves through the process, occasionally returning to previous stages as she develops her essay.

This section of the textbook will give you the chance to practice these important steps in the writing process. You may find that some of them are familiar to you, while others may be new. You may find that you are confident about some steps but uncertain about others. Take the time to learn how to effectively use each step of the writing process—particularly the ones you are not yet familiar with. Using these strategies can help you overcome the fear of the blank page and confidently begin the writing process.

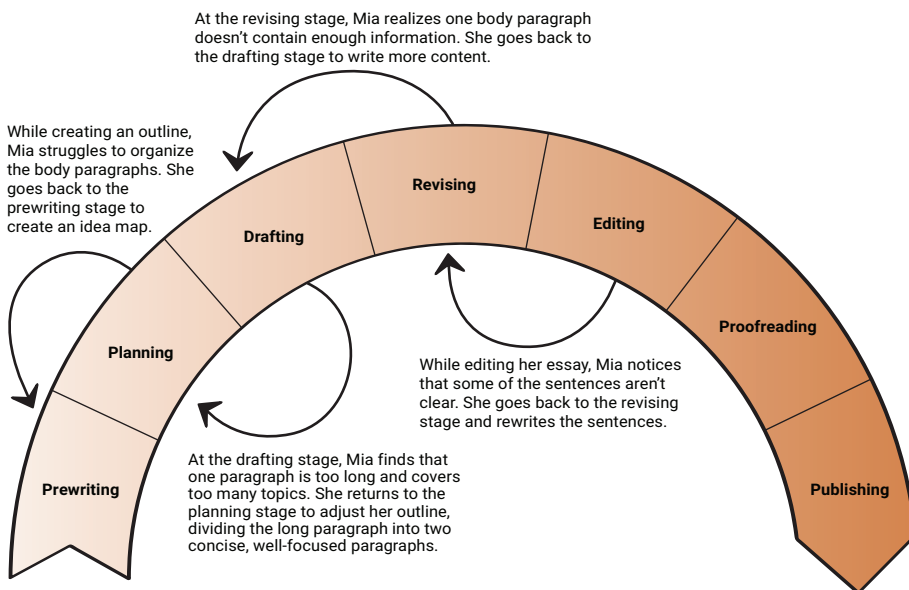


Figure P2.2: The Recursive Writing Process

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

4

Prewrite

Generate Ideas for Writing

Learning Objectives

- Identify the purpose of prewriting
- Identify seven common prewriting strategies
- Select effective prewriting strategies based on the topic and purpose
- Use prewriting strategies to generate ideas to write about

If you think that a blank sheet of paper or a blinking cursor on the computer screen is a scary sight, you are not alone. Many writers, including professional writers, find that beginning to write can be intimidating. Luckily, there are prewriting strategies to help you get started and help you come up with some initial ideas.

Prewriting is the first step of the writing process, the stage in which a writer generates ideas for a writing task and begins to record those ideas on paper or in a computer document.

The Purpose of Prewriting

At the **prewriting** stage, the writer has only one goal: to generate ideas. Ideas are the most important part of any piece of writing, so at this stage, the writer deliberately refuses to be distracted by things like format, grammar, and paragraphing. Instead, the writer focuses only on *what* to write about.

To understand how to approach prewriting, it's helpful to first consider what *not* to do at this stage. At the prewriting stage,

- don't think ahead to the final *form* of the writing, such as an essay structure or the layout of a poem
- don't bother writing in complete sentences or complete paragraphs—words and phrases are fine
- don't pay attention to grammar, spelling, or punctuation, and don't go back to correct errors
- don't think about research, even if it will be required later

When writing an essay, a student who skips over the prewriting stage and focuses prematurely on aspects like organization, punctuation, research, and documentation often doesn't realize that the ideas themselves have not been sufficiently developed. The student may find it hard to write an essay that is long enough to meet the assignment requirements or might write an essay that appears to be long enough but doesn't say much of significance.

Because prewriting focuses on *what you have to say* in your writing, it is probably the most important step in the writing process.

There are many prewriting techniques available to writers, but in this chapter, we will focus on seven:

1. Using experience and observations
2. Reading and viewing
3. Freewriting
4. Asking questions
5. Brainstorming
6. Idea mapping
7. Searching the Internet

DISCUSSION 4.1

Which of these techniques have you used before? Which are new to you?

You will probably not use all seven prewriting techniques for each writing task. Sometimes, you might use only one of them; other times, you might use three or four. Each prewriting technique is useful for a particular purpose, so it's a good idea to practice them all now so that you will have them in your toolbox, ready to use when you encounter your next writing assignment. Then you can choose the most effective prewriting technique(s) for your particular purpose. Personal preference also plays a part in which techniques a writer chooses to use.

TIP: Have you ever thought about an upcoming assignment in the shower or in the car and come up with a terrific idea? Thinking is a form of prewriting! There are many ways to prewrite. Some writers doodle or sketch. Some record voice memos. Others like to talk through their ideas with a friend. You will develop your own preferred prewriting strategies, but the first step is to practice many different strategies so that you have a good selection to choose from.

The same prewriting strategies can be used for any genre of writing. For example, whether you are planning to write a poem about love, a personal essay about love, or a novel about love, at the prewriting stage, you will focus only on generating *ideas* about love. Perhaps you choose to freewrite about love to come up with ideas: the freewriting will look exactly the same regardless of what your plans for the genre are. You will not worry, for now, about whether those ideas will eventually be placed into something that looks like a poem or something that looks like an essay.

This first step in the writing process may seem time-consuming, but it will actually save you time later in the process of writing an essay. The more time you spend prewriting and planning now, the less time you may have to spend writing and editing later because your ideas will develop more swiftly—and you will not waste time following tangents that don't make the final cut in your assignment.

Using Experience and Observations

For some university assignments, you will be encouraged to create your own topic. When selecting a topic, you may want to consider writing about a topic that interests you or one based on your own life and experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. To come up with a potential topic, you might start by making a list. Here are some effective starters:

“Ten Things I Know a Lot About”

“The Five Most Significant Experiences in My Life”

“Four Things I Want to Learn More About”

“Three Issues That Matter Deeply to Me”

“Problems I've Observed in My Community”

Then reflect on the list and choose a topic you'd like to pursue. Jot down ideas, using the freewriting or brainstorming techniques that we'll explore

later in this chapter and focusing on your experiences and your observations about the topic. Under Ten Things I Know a Lot About are some ideas you could consider as areas of direct and personal knowledge. Obviously, your list may be very different.

TEN THINGS I KNOW A LOT ABOUT

1. Parenting
2. Dyslexia
3. Movies
4. Baseball
5. Cooking
6. Cats
7. Nursing
8. Romance novels
9. Halifax
10. Renovating a house

TIP: Most writers discover that the more they know about a topic, the more they can write about it intelligently and interestingly.

For other assignments, you will be required to choose from a list of assigned topics. Sometimes, you may think that you don't have much to say about a topic. However, you may find that you have more of a connection to the topic than you thought. Write the topic on a piece of paper, and jot notes in response to these questions:

- Do I have any experience with this topic?
- What do I already know about this topic?
- Have I made any observations that relate to this topic?
- What would I like to learn about this topic?

After writers think about—and jot down ideas about—their experiences and observations, they often discover what they have to say about their topic. The notes help them begin to develop their thoughts.

PRACTICE 4.1

Choose one of the titles below, and make a list.

- “Ten Things I Know a Lot About”
- “The Five Most Significant Experiences in My Life”
- “Four Things I Want to Learn More About”
- “Three Issues That Matter Deeply to Me”
- “Problems I’ve Observed in My Community”

After you have finished, read the list you created. Which of these topics would be most interesting to write about? Choose one.

In response to that topic, jot brief notes in answer to the following questions:

- What is my experience with this topic?
- What do I already know about this topic?
- What observations have I made?
- What would I still like to learn?

Reading and Viewing

Reading plays a vital role in all the stages of the writing process, but it first figures in the development of ideas and topics. Different kinds of documents can help you choose a topic and also develop that topic. For example, a magazine advertising the latest research on the threat of global warming may catch your eye in the supermarket. The cover may interest you, and you may consider global warming as a topic. Or maybe a novel’s courtroom drama sparks your curiosity about a particular lawsuit or legal controversy.

Likewise, you might watch a documentary film or see a segment on the evening news that piques your interest about a topic. Perhaps you then search YouTube to find a TED Talk so that you can learn more about that topic and the subtopics associated with it.

TIP: Remember, a **text**, in its broadest sense, is anything that conveys information—such as a book, a newspaper article, or a video—that can be examined, interpreted, and analyzed.

After you choose a topic, critical reading and, when applicable, critical viewing are essential to the development of a topic. While reading almost any

text, you evaluate the author's point of view by thinking about the main idea and the support. When you judge the author's argument, you discover more about not only the author's opinion but also your own.

Most important, you must also assess whether the text itself is a reputable source and whether the ideas presented are valid. We live in a time in which misinformation and disinformation are rampant, and it can take dedication and effort to sort reliable information from unreliable information. Ask yourself *who* created the text and *why*—for what purpose? If the creator made the text in order to gain power, popularity, or profit, it is likely not a reliable source. Consider, too, whether the same information is presented in other reputable places. If not, be suspicious.

TIP: Misinformation is false, or wrong, information.

Disinformation is false information deliberately spread for a purpose (often for power or profit).

PRACTICE 4.2

What have you read or viewed lately? Think about textbooks, novels, magazine articles, news segments, and online videos. Jot down five topics that have been raised in your recent reading and viewing:

Share your answers with a classmate. Would any of these topics be suitable to develop in an essay?

Freewriting

Freewriting is an exercise in which you write freely about a topic for a set amount of time (usually five to ten minutes). During the time period, jot down any thoughts that come to mind. Quickly recording your thoughts on paper will help you discover what you have to say about a topic.

When freewriting, don't worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. Try not to doubt or question your ideas. Allow yourself to write freely and unselfconsciously. If you get stuck, copy the same word or phrase over and over until you come up with a new thought.

Once you start writing with few limitations, you may find you have more to say than you first realized. Your flow of thoughts can lead you to discover even more ideas about the topic. Freewriting may even lead you to discover another topic that excites you most.

Writing often comes more easily when you have a personal connection with the topic. To generate ideas in your freewriting, you may also think about experiences you've had that relate to the topic or reading that you have enjoyed or that has challenged your thinking on the topic. This may lead your thoughts in interesting directions.

Look at the following student example. In a communications class, the instructor allowed the students to choose their own topics. One student, Mariah, thought about her experiences with media. She used this freewriting exercise to help generate more concrete ideas from experience:

Last semester my favourite class was about mass media. We got to study radio and television. People say we watch too much television, and even though I tried not to, I end up watching a few reality shows just to relax. Everyone has to relax! It's too hard to relax when something like the news (my husband watches all the time) is on because it's too scary now. Too much bad news, not enough good news. News. Newspapers I don't read as much anymore. I can get the headlines on my home page when I check my email. Email could be considered mass media too these days. I used to go to the video store a few times a week before I started school, but now the only way I know what movies are current is to listen for the Oscar nominations. We have cable but we can't afford the movie channels, so I sometimes look at older movies late at night. UGH. A few of them get played again and again until you're sick of them. My husband thinks I'm crazy, but sometimes there are old black-and-whites from the 1930s and '40s. I could never live my life in black and white. I like the home decorating shows and love how people use colours on their walls. Makes rooms look so bright. When we buy a home, if we ever can, I'll use lots of colour. Some of those shows even show you how to do major renovations by yourself. Knock down walls and everything. Not for me—or my husband. I'm handier than he is. I wonder if they could make a reality show about us.

Notice that the student began with the general topic of mass media. As she wrote, she mentioned several subtopics related to mass media: radio, television, newspapers, websites, email, movies, cable, and reality television.

Notice, too, that the student's writing also went on tangents that were unrelated to mass media, such as home decor. At the prewriting stage, these digressions are fine, and they can even lead your thinking in interesting ways.

The student certainly won't be able to use all of these topics in the essay—there are too many diverse topics to address in a short essay, and some of them aren't even related to mass media. Later, the student will decide which topics to use and which to ignore. At this stage, though, the focus is on generating as many ideas as possible, so the student used freewriting effectively.

We'll follow Mariah's progress on her essay throughout this section of the textbook.

TIP: Some prewriting strategies can be used together. For example, you could use experience and observations to come up with a topic related to your course studies. Then you could freewrite to describe your topic in more detail and figure out what you have to say about it.

Freewriting is a powerful and effective form of prewriting. If you haven't tried it before, we encourage you to practice now.

PRACTICE 4.3

Choose one of the topics you developed in [Practice 4.1](#) or [Practice 4.2](#) or one of the topics below. Freewrite without stopping for five or ten minutes. (Set a timer so you're not distracted by checking the time.) As you write, don't worry about grammar and punctuation, and don't go back to make corrections. Avoid evaluating your thoughts as you write. Don't stop to think. If you get stuck, rewrite the topic word over and over until a new word comes.

- How to be indispensable at work
- The advantages and disadvantages of social media
- The effects of cyberbullying
- Different types of travellers

After you have finished, read what you wrote. Did any of the ideas you wrote surprise you? Do you think this is a topic you would be able to develop further?

Asking Questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? These are questions that reporters and journalists use to gather information for their stories. The questions are called the 6WH questions, after their initial letters.

In everyday situations, you pose these kinds of questions to get information: Who will be my partner for the project? What does this assignment require? When is the next meeting? Why is my car making that odd noise? How do nurses qualify to become nurse practitioners?

You seek the answers to these questions to gain knowledge, to better understand your daily experiences, and to plan for the future. Asking these types of questions will also help you with the writing process. As you explore your topic, asking and answering questions can help you revisit the ideas you already have and generate new ways to think about your topic. You may also discover aspects of the topic that are unfamiliar to you and that you would like to learn more about. All these idea-gathering techniques will help you plan for future work on your assignment.

Reread the sample of Mariah's freewriting paragraph, and note the rambling and disjointed thoughts. Yet the topic that remained of most interest to the student was the one the sample started with: the media. To further explore that topic, the student asks questions about it with the purpose of refining the topic. To see how asking questions can help in choosing a topic, look at the chart that Mariah completed to record questions and answers based on her freewriting.

Questions	Answers
Who?	I use media. Students, teachers, parents, employers, and employees—almost everyone uses media.
What?	The media can be a lot of things. Television, radio, email (I think), newspapers, magazines, books.
Where?	The media is almost everywhere now. It's in homes, at work, in cars, even on cell phones!
When?	Media has been around for a long time but seems a lot more important now.
Why?	Hmm. This is a good question. I don't know why there is mass media. Maybe we have it because we have the technology now. Or people live far away from their families, and they have to stay in touch.
How?	Well, media is possible because of the technology inventions, but I don't know how they all work!

These questions will help the student find direction for the essay and guide them in gathering information when it is time to conduct research.

TIP: Prewriting is very purpose driven; however, it does not follow a set of hard-and-fast rules. The purpose of prewriting is to find and explore ideas so that you will be prepared to write. A prewriting technique like asking questions can help you both find a topic and explore it. The key to effective prewriting is to use the techniques that work best for your thinking process. At first glance, freewriting may not seem to fit your thinking process, but keep an open mind! It may work better than you think. Perhaps brainstorming a list of topics might better fit your personal style. In your own prewriting, use the 5WH questions in any way that benefits your planning.

PRACTICE 4.4

Reread the freewriting you did in [Practice 4.3](#). Using the prompts below, create five questions that arise from your freewriting. It's OK if you do not know the answers yet!

6WH Questions

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

Why?

How?

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is similar to list making. Start with a blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer document) and write your general topic across the top.

Underneath the topic, make a list of more specific ideas. Think of your general topic as a broad category and the list items as things that fit into that category. Often you will find that one item can lead to the next, creating a flow of ideas that can help you narrow your focus to a more specific paper topic.

Below is Mariah's brainstorming list based on the topic of mass media:

Mass Media

Magazines

Internet

Newspapers

Cell phones

Broadcasting

Smartphones

Radio

Text messages

Television

Tiny cameras

DVD

GPS

Gaming / video games

From this list, Mariah can narrow the focus to one particular technology under the broad category of mass media.

PRACTICE 4.5

Choose one of the topics below, and spend five minutes brainstorming related ideas and topics. Don't worry about spelling, and avoid evaluating your thoughts as you make the list.

- How to prepare for an exam
- The advantages and disadvantages of online dating
- The right to privacy
- Types of parents

After you have finished, read the list. Did you come up with some ideas that surprise you? Do you think this is a topic you would be able to develop further?

Idea Mapping

In an **idea map**, you represent your ideas on paper using circles, lines, and arrows. This technique is also known as **clustering** because ideas are broken down and clustered, or grouped, together. Many writers like this method because the shapes show how the ideas relate or connect, and writers can find a focused topic from the connections mapped. Using idea mapping, you might

discover interesting connections between topics that you had not thought of before. This method is also helpful in establishing a structure for an essay and deciding how to organize the body paragraphs.

To create an idea map, start with the general topic in a circle in the centre of a sheet of paper. Then write more specific related ideas around it and use lines or arrows to connect them. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of. Ideas will become increasingly specific as you move out from the centre.

[Figure 4.1](#) shows Mariah's idea map on the topic of mass media.

Notice that the largest circle contains the general topic: mass media. Then the general topic branches into three subtopics written in smaller circles: Internet, television, and radio. The subtopic of television branches into even more specific topics: cable and DVDs. From cable, there are more circles with more specific ideas: high definition and digital recording. The radio topic leads to connections between music, streaming, and piracy. The Internet topic leads to news, YouTube, and social media. Some branches go further than others.

With this idea map, the student can now consider narrowing the focus of the general topic, mass media (which is too big a topic to be managed in a short essay), to a more specific topic (such as music piracy, for example) that is much more suitable for a short essay.

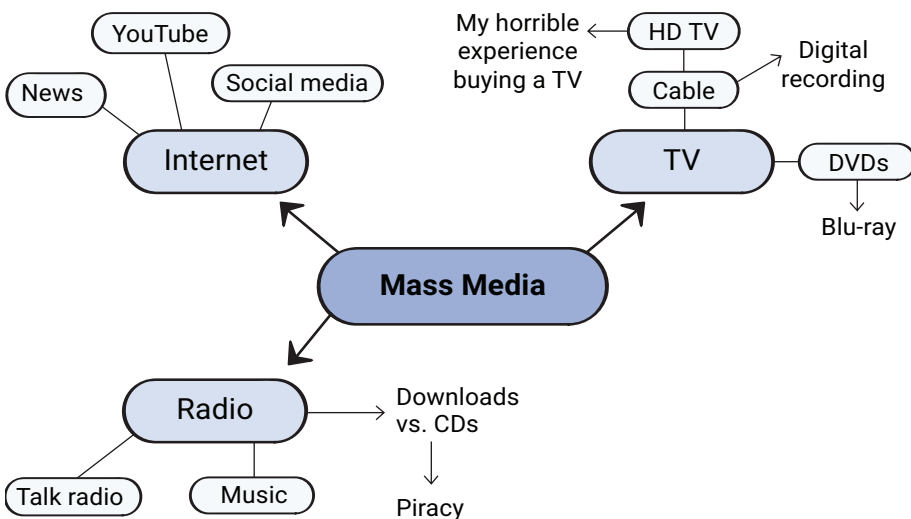


Figure 4.1: Idea Map

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

PRACTICE 4.6

Choose one of the topics below, and on a piece of paper, spend five to ten minutes creating an idea map.

- Extreme sports
- The advantages and disadvantages of online shopping
- Heroism
- Types of students

After you have finished, read what you wrote. Do you think this is a topic you would be able to develop further? Does the map give you any ideas about how you might narrow your topic and organize an essay on it?

Searching the Internet

Using Internet search engines is a good way to see what kind of information is available on your topic. Writers use search engines not only to understand more about the topic's specific issues but also to get better acquainted with their audience.

Look back at the questions you generated in [Practice 4.3](#). Searching the Internet may help you find answers to your questions.

When you search the Internet, type a question or keyword from your broad topic or words from your narrowed focus into your browser's search engine. Then look over the results for relevant and interesting articles.

Results from an Internet search show writers the following information:

Who is talking about the topic

How the topic is being discussed

What specific points are currently being discussed about the topic

It's very important to be choosy about the websites you use. Not all the search results will be useful or reliable. Carefully consider the reliability of online sources before selecting them. Make sure they are reliable, reputable sources for the kind of information you seek. Remember that factual information can be verified in other sources, both online and in print. If you have doubts about any information you find, either do not use it or identify it as potentially unreliable.

TIP: Many students don't realize that Wikipedia is not considered an appropriate source in academic essays. Wikipedia pages can be written by anyone at all, and there is no way for a student to know if that person is an expert or if the information is accurate. While Wikipedia can be a useful starting point to give you an overview of a topic, check that the Wikipedia entry cites reputable sources. Then look up those sources, or find other sources through your school's library, and check that the information is accurate. In your essay, use the information from the reputable sources, and cite them rather than citing Wikipedia. To learn more, read the section on Wikipedia in [Chapter 20: Evaluating Credibility and Reputability](#).

TIP: If the search engine results are not what you are looking for, revise your keywords and search again. Some search engines also offer suggestions for related searches that may give you better results.

Piracy is one of the subtopics that came up in Mariah's idea map. This subtopic piques her interest, so she conducts a Google search for "music piracy." The results are in [Figure 4.2](#).

Mariah reviews the results of the Internet search. First, she skims the Wikipedia article to get an overview of the topic, even though she knows that the Wikipedia article will not be an acceptable source for her final essay. She jots down Wikipedia's definition of *music piracy*: "Music piracy is the copying and distributing of recordings of a piece of music for which the rights owners . . . did not give consent" (Wikipedia). She makes sure to enclose the definition in quotation marks so she doesn't accidentally plagiarize later, and she writes "Wikipedia" after the definition. She knows this is likely not an accurate legal definition of music piracy, but it will help her generate ideas now—and it will guide her when she conducts research later. She also notes the headings in the Wikipedia article, and she adds "history," "arguments," "enforcement," and "economics" to her idea map.

Next, Mariah skims the other sources. She sees that the second result is from the Recording Industry Association of America. That will be a good place to get another definition of music piracy—from the perspective of musicians and record companies. She clicks on the Resource tab to get a sense of the subtopics that might be found on this site, such as copyright infringement. She also notices that there is a section called "For Students" and one called

The image shows a Google search page for the query "music piracy". The search bar at the top contains the text "music piracy" and has a search icon to its right. Below the search bar, there are navigation options: "All", "Images", "News", "Videos", "Maps", and "More". The search results are displayed below these options. The first result is a definition of music piracy: "Music piracy is the copying and distributing of recordings of a piece of music for which the rights owners (composer, recording artist, or copyright-holding record company) did not give consent." Below this definition, there are several scholarly articles listed, each with a title, author, and citation information. The first article is "A behavioral model of digital music piracy" by Gopal, cited by 396. The second is "The antecedents of music piracy attitudes and ..." by Chiou, cited by 443. The third is "Music piracy on the web—how effective are anti-piracy ..." by d'Astous, cited by 326. Below these articles, there are three more results, each with a logo, a title, and a brief description. The first is from RIAA, titled "About Piracy", with a description: "Music theft—or piracy—is constantly evolving as technology changes. Many different actions qualify as piracy, from downloading unauthorized versions of ...". The second is from the University of Chicago, titled "Music Piracy and Its Effects on Demand, Supply, and Welfare" by J Waldfoegel, 2012, cited by 46. The third is from Forbes, titled "Pirate Flags: Music Business Says Piracy Still Threatens Its ..." from Feb 15, 2022, with a description: "These sites accounted for 39.2% of music piracy in 2021, up from 33.9% in 2020," it noted. For the first decade and a half of the 21st century, ...". The fourth result is from GradesFixer, titled "From Napster's Music Piracy to Spotify: [Essay Example] ..." from Jul 7, 2022, with a description: "These platforms allowed people to listen and download music for free, but illegally – so that was a kind of music piracy. However, over time ...".

Figure 4.2: Internet Search Results for “Music Piracy”

“Facts and Research”—she notes this and plans to come back to it later when she begins to conduct research.

Mariah also notices some scholarly articles listed—one from the University of Chicago and others listed above. These might make good research sources later. She looks only at the titles for now. One title indicates that the article discusses the moral arguments regarding antipiracy laws. Another mentions that music piracy is related to supply and demand. She jots these ideas on her idea map, but she doesn’t read the articles yet. She knows they will be heavy reading, and she hasn’t quite chosen a topic yet, so she won’t spend time on them now. For now, in the prewriting stage, she is focusing on generating ideas to write about.

Next, Mariah notices an article from *Forbes* magazine. She’s not very interested in the economics of music piracy, and she’s already added “economics” to her idea map, so she moves on without reading the article.

Mariah takes a moment to review her idea maps, which she has updated based on the Google search (see [Figure 4.3](#)).

On second thought, Mariah decides she’s actually not that excited about writing an essay on music piracy. Based on recent experiences purchasing technology, she’s actually more interested in customers’ experiences.

Luckily, she only spent about fifteen minutes looking at the results of her Google search and recording them on her idea map. Because she knew she was prewriting, she avoided getting distracted by doing in-depth reading of articles that she wouldn’t end up using anyway.

Mariah decides to look into consumer aspects of mass media and then conducts a refocused Internet search of *media technology* and the sometimes-confusing array of expensive products that fill electronics stores. Now she can refocus the topic on the products that have fed the mass media boom in everyday lives.

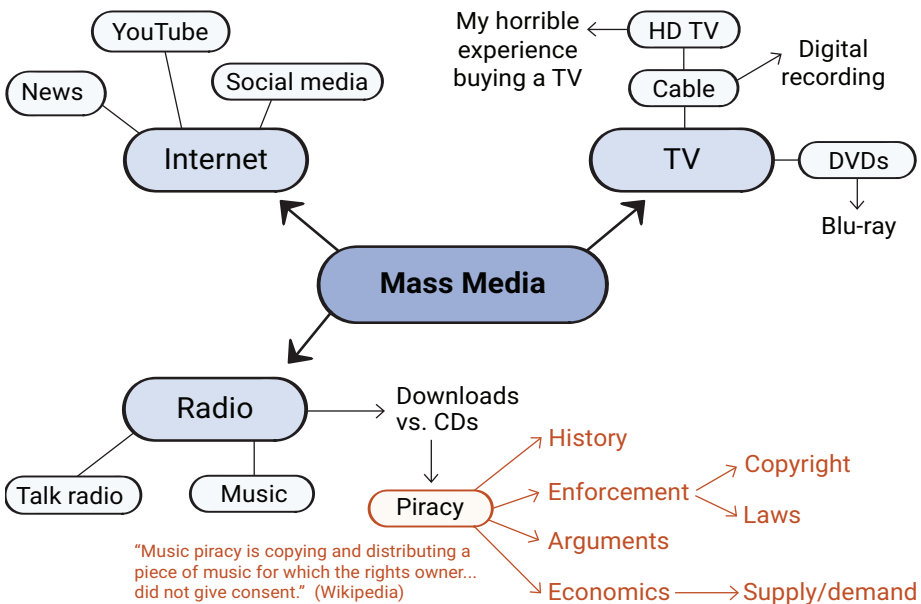


Figure 4.3: Idea Map Updated After an Internet Search

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

PRACTICE 4.7

- A. Conduct an Internet search for one of the questions you wrote in [Practice 4.4](#). How would you choose which websites have the most relevant information? How would you decide which websites are most reliable? Which of the websites seem least reliable?
- B. Conduct an Internet search for one of the topics you chose for [Practice 4.5](#) or [Practice 4.6](#), and answer these questions:
- What results do you get when you type the general topic (the one provided) into the search engine? What results do you get when you type a more specific subtopic (one of the points you generated in your list or map) into the search engine?
 - Which results would be most reliable and useful if you were writing an essay?

* * *

Prewriting strategies are vital first steps in the writing process. First, they help you choose a broad topic, and then they help you narrow the focus of the topic to a more specific idea. Finally, they help you generate content—ideas about the topic—that you can use in your writing.

You may find that you need to adjust your topic as you move through the stages of the writing process. If the topic you have chosen is not working, you can repeat the prewriting activities until you find a better one.

PRACTICE 4.8

Now that you have practiced several prewriting strategies, take a moment to reflect on which ones seemed most useful to you. Which of the techniques would you like to try the next time you need to

- Choose a topic for an essay?
- Generate ideas for an essay?
- Structure/organize an essay?

Compare and discuss your answers with a peer.

With several prewriting strategies in your toolbox, you may feel less anxious about starting an essay. With some ideas down on paper (or saved on a computer), writers are often more confident about tackling a writing task. After generating ideas about your topic, you are ready to continue the process by planning how to organize your essay.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- To begin the writing process, effective writers rely on steps and strategies to generate ideas.
- Prewriting is the transfer of ideas from abstract thoughts into words, phrases, and sentences.
- Prewriting allows a writer to focus on ideas first before becoming distracted by organization, grammar, research, and documentation.
- Effective techniques for finding topics include reflecting on experiences, making observations, reading, freewriting, and brainstorming.
- Effective techniques for generating ideas about a topic include reading, freewriting, brainstorming, asking questions, idea mapping, and searching the Internet.
- Idea mapping is an effective technique for the early stages of organizing an essay.
- Prewriting may be the most important step in the writing process.

5

Plan and Outline

Organize Your Ideas

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the significance of the relationship between audience, purpose, tone, and content and their importance in shaping a piece of writing
- Identify five common academic purposes in writing
- Identify purpose and audience in order to determine appropriate content
- Understand how and why organizational techniques help writers and readers stay focused
- Assess how and when to use chronological order to organize an essay
- Recognize how and when to use order of importance to organize an essay
- Determine how and when to use spatial order to organize an essay
- Construct an informal topic outline and a formal sentence outline

While prewriting is about *ideas*, the planning and drafting stages are about *shape*. Prewriting techniques can be done for any type of writing task. Now, though, you must choose a *form*: a way to organize those ideas. Will your ideas become a poem? A memo? A screenplay? An essay? Each of those texts will require a different shape or structure, so you will need to organize your ideas differently depending on the genre you choose. In this chapter, we will focus on how to plan and organize an undergraduate student essay.

In this step, the writer first determines a purpose and audience for the essay and then creates an outline or similar planning device to arrange and organize the ideas that were generated during prewriting. This step involves

some additional fleshing out of the ideas generated in the first step. It may also include deleting ideas that don't fit the plan or outline.

As you sort through the pieces of information you generated in the prewriting stage, you will begin to see patterns and connections among them. Only when you start to organize your ideas will you be able to translate your insights into a form that will communicate meaning to your audience and achieve the purpose of the writing task.

First Things First: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

When faced with a writing assignment, students are often tempted to jump in and start writing immediately, without planning ahead. Students also tend to focus mostly on what the essay is *about*: the content.

While content is undoubtedly a key component of any writing assignment, you can tackle an assignment more effectively by carefully considering purpose, audience, and tone. Do this during the planning stage to save yourself time overall and to write more effectively.

You may be eager to start writing the first draft, and you may think it's a waste of time to stop to think about purpose and audience. However, if you don't plan ahead, you may find that you end up writing a lot of material that is off track and does not make the cut for the final version of your essay. That wastes a lot of time! If you plan ahead, it is more likely that when you get to the next stages, nearly everything you write will be appropriate and relevant. You'll save time because you won't be tempted to go off track or follow tangents that do not help achieve your purpose in the essay.

Purpose, audience, tone, and content are interrelated elements that shape any piece of writing. Understanding how they interact in undergraduate essays is one of the keys to success for a student writer.

Content is the topic or the subject of the writing: “*What* is the writer writing about?”

Purpose is the reason the writer is writing: “*Why* is the writer writing?”

Audience is the individual or group who will read the writing: “*Who* is the writer writing to?”

Tone is the attitude the writer conveys about the paragraph's subject: “*How* is the writer writing?”

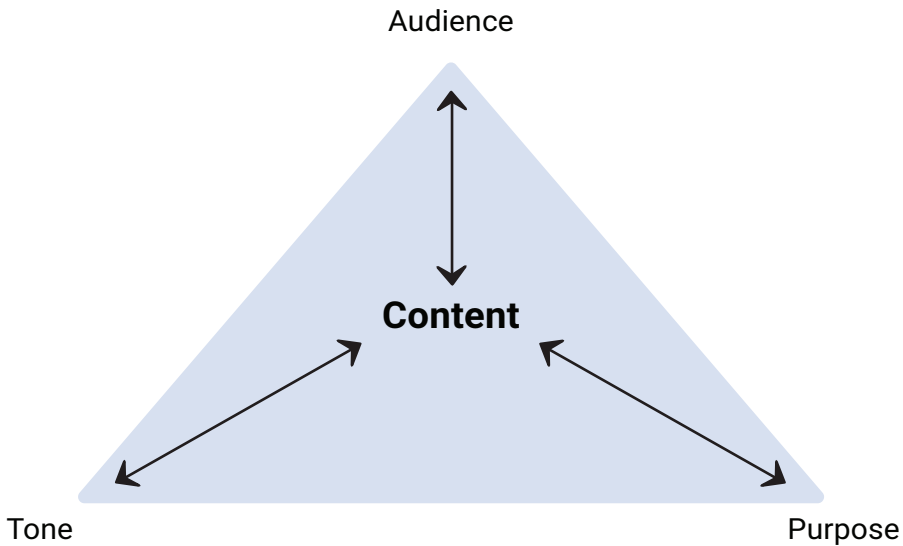


Figure 5.1: The Relationship Between Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

“Why Is the Writer Writing?”: Establishing Purpose

The **purpose** is simply the reason you are writing. The purpose of a piece of writing answers the question “why?” For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theatre. Why write instructions to the babysitter? To inform him of your schedule and rules. Why write a letter to your member of Parliament? To persuade her to address your community’s concerns. Why write in your diary? To explore your feelings and reflect on your experiences.

TIP: If you think the purpose of a piece of writing is to fulfill an assignment or to get a grade, you aren’t thinking deeply enough about purpose. Having a clear sense of purpose is essential to a successful piece of academic writing.

In your university courses, you will be writing for very specific purposes. In [Chapter 3: What Is Academic Writing?](#), we introduced the two overarching purposes of academic essays. Take a moment to review that section before you move on.

While the overarching purposes of an undergraduate essay are to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and thinking and to

give your instructor an opportunity to assess your knowledge and thinking, each particular writing assignment will have a more specific purpose that guides the development of the essay. In academic settings, the six most common purposes for writing are

- to summarize
- to explain
- to analyze
- to synthesize
- to evaluate
- to argue

Your instructors will ask you to complete assignments specifically designed to meet one of those purposes. Understanding the purpose for writing will guide you in writing your assignment and help you make important decisions about content, structure, and style.

TIP: When reading the instructions for an assignment, look for the verbs *summarize*, *explain*, *describe*, *analyze*, *synthesize*, *evaluate*, *argue*, or *assess*. Instructors often use these words to indicate the purpose of the assignment. If you are not certain about the purpose of an assignment, ask your instructor—before you begin writing.

In [Part 4: Common Writing Assignments](#), you will further explore the importance of purpose in particular types of assignments.

PRACTICE 5.1

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

- A. 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.

- B. 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 results 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.
- C. To create the feeling of being gripped in a vise, 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, creates a realistic firestorm from which there is little hope of escape. Walking out of the theatre at the end feels like staggering out of a Roman dungeon.
- D. 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 would 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.

Share with a friend and compare your answers.

“Who Is the Writer Writing To?”: Identifying 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 a suit? 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 clothing and go for 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 people who will watch and listen to the presentation—plays a role in the development of the 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.

Even in informal everyday writing activities, you identify your audience's 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 your own audience-driven decisions.

For example, you update your status on social media with the awareness of who will read 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' sense of humour in mind. Even at work, you probably send emails with an awareness of an unintended recipient who could intercept the message.

Consider the following paragraphs. Which one would the writer 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 I 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!

Because each paragraph reveals the author's relationship with her intended readers, you can identify the audience without hesitation.

Sometimes, unlike when you're speaking to a group of co-workers or writing an email to your mom, the audience for your academic writing assignments may seem unclear or invisible. However, even though your readers (your instructor or your peers) will not appear in person as you write, they play an equally vital role in shaping your writing. Through your writing, you must engage with your audience to build an appropriate relationship given your subject. Imagining your reader(s) 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 your hair is a mess and your shoes are mismatched, your audience is less likely to take you seriously. They may be too distracted by your appearance to listen to your words. Similarly, grammar and mechanics serve as the appearance of a piece of writing. Using correct grammar and punctuation will create a polished piece of writing that will allow your readers to focus on what you have to say without distractions.

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

Demographics: Demographics are data about a group of people, such as their age, ethnicity, religious beliefs, or gender. Certain topics and assignments will require you to consider these factors as they relate to your audience. For other topics and assignments, these measurements may not influence your writing. Regardless, it is important to consider demographics when you think about your purpose for writing.

Education: Education refers to the audience's level of schooling. If all the audience members have PhDs, for example, you may need to elevate your style and use more formal language. If the audience members are first-year college students, you could write in a more

relaxed style. An audience member's major or emphasis of study may also influence your writing.

Prior knowledge: Prior knowledge is what the audience already knows about the topic. You must decide whether or not 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: What will your reader expect while reading your assignment? Readers may expect consistency in the assignment's appearance, such as correct grammar and traditional formatting like double-spaced lines and a 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 will expect to read about the economic repercussions of post-secondary tuition costs.

PRACTICE 5.2

On a sheet of paper, think about a specific course you have this semester. Who will you be writing to? Generate a list of characteristics under each category to help you identify your audience.

Your fellow students

Demographics _____

Education _____

Prior knowledge _____

Expectations _____

Your instructor

Demographics _____

Education _____

Prior knowledge _____

Expectations _____

The head of your academic department

Demographics _____

Education _____

Prior knowledge _____

Expectations _____

Collaboration: Please share with a friend and compare your answers.

“How Is the Writer Writing?”: Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker’s or a writer’s attitude toward a subject and an audience. You may pick up a person’s tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may talk excitedly about a fun ski trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her seriousness. A co-worker 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 words a range of attitudes, from excited and humorous to sombre 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.

Let’s say you must write a paragraph that summarizes the legislative process. How would you write the paragraph if your audience were a class of grade 3 students? You would probably use relatively informal language and simple, everyday words. Your tone might be enthusiastic. You might try to make the paragraph entertaining, perhaps even bringing in humour.

Let’s say you must write another paragraph on the same topic, this time for a class of first-year law students. You would likely choose more formal language and specific legal terminology. Your tone would likely be more serious and professional, and you would be less concerned with entertaining the group and more concerned with being taken seriously. Your language would reflect that, and you would take a more serious and professional tone.

Thus, in both cases, your tone will be influenced by purpose and audience. We will examine tone in more detail in [Chapter 6](#), when you begin to write the sentences and paragraphs of your essay.

PRACTICE 5.3

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 do not 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 pelts and other body parts, the tiger population has plummeted from one hundred thousand in 1920 to just a few thousand (Smith 144). Contact your local wildlife conservation society today to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction.

Words that describe the writer’s tone: _____

“What Are You Writing About?": Choosing Appropriate Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After considering 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, analogies, and observations.

Content is shaped by audience. Are you writing for experts, for a general audience, for other students, or for people who know very little about your topic? Consider that paragraph about the legislative process. In the paragraph for the grade 3 students, what content would you include? What details would you include or omit? What terminology would you choose? Would you include graphic representations? What kind? In the paragraph for the first-year law students, would you include more details? Would you discuss some of the abstract concepts and principles that guide the legislative process? Would the same graphic be appropriate for this audience, or would you need to create a more sophisticated one? Or perhaps these students wouldn’t need a graphic representation, and words would be sufficient.

Regardless of whether you’re writing to grade 3 students or law students, the content must be appropriate, understandable, and interesting for the specific audience. As a result, even though the **topic** of both paragraphs is the same—the legislative process—the **content** of the two paragraphs will be very different because of the audience. Keep asking yourself what your readers, with their

background and experience, need to be told in order to understand your ideas. How can you best express your ideas so they are totally clear and your communication is effective?

Purpose will guide you in your decisions about content—about what information to include in your assignment. If your purpose is simply to summarize an article, your writing will only include information that appeared in that article. However, if your purpose is to analyze the article, you will need to include your own ideas about the article. If the purpose of an essay is to explain what social media is, you will include factual information and examples to define social media, and you might not include information about the advantages and disadvantages of using social media. However, if your purpose is to persuade other students to quit social media, you'll focus on the disadvantages of social media and include facts and details—and maybe expert opinion—that emphasize the negative aspects of social media with the aim of convincing your readers to take action.

Considering the purpose and audience for your writing is just as important when you are writing a single paragraph for your essay as when you are considering the direction of the entire essay.

Finally, content is related to tone too. In the informal paragraph for the grade 3 students, you would use everyday words. For the law students, you would use legal terminology. When the tone matches the content, the audience will be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. We will examine tone in more detail in [Chapter 6](#).

Keep purpose, tone, and audience in the front of your mind as you plan the content of your essay. Establishing purpose, tone, and audience are keys to successful writing.

TIP: Write the purpose and audience on a Post-it note, and attach it to your paper or computer to keep yourself on track. On that note, you might write notes to yourself—perhaps about what that audience might not know or what it needs to know—so that you will be sure to address those issues when you write. It may be a good idea to also state exactly what you want to explain to that audience, to inform them of, or to persuade them of.

PRACTICE 5.4

Thinking about an upcoming essay assignment, describe your specific purpose and audience. Then brainstorm some possibilities for content that would be appropriate for the purpose and audience.

My purpose:

My audience:

Ideas for content:

How would the purpose and audience influence the following?

The amount of background information required in the essay:

The type of information I include in the body of the essay:

The way I organize the essay:

My tone and diction (the words I choose and the level of formality):

Methods of Organization

Now that you've determined the purpose and audience for an essay, and you've generated some ideas for content, it's time to think about shaping that content into essay form. The method of organization you choose for your essay is just as important as its content. You must organize your ideas in a way that makes sense—to show your analytical and critical thinking and to help your reader navigate your essay.

Order refers to decisions about how to organize the content in your essay. What information will you present first, second, third, and so on? The order you choose should closely relate to your purpose for writing the assignment. For example, when writing a story, it may be important to first describe the background for the action and then describe the events in the order they happened. When writing an argumentative essay, you may want to present the ideas based on the order of importance of each reason that supports your argument. Group the supporting ideas effectively to convince readers that your point of view on an issue is well reasoned and worthy of belief.

Your readers, who bring with them different backgrounds, viewpoints, and ideas, need you to clearly organize these ideas in order to help them process and accept them. Without a clear organizational pattern to follow, your readers could become confused and lose interest. The way you structure your essay helps your readers make connections and follow your argument.

Structure also keeps you focused as you plan and write the essay. Choose your organizational pattern before you outline to ensure that each body paragraph will work to support and develop your thesis, and then use that outline to draft your essay so that you stay on track and maintain focus. A solid organizational pattern gives you a path that you can follow as you develop your draft. Knowing how you will organize the paragraphs allows you to better express and analyze your thoughts. Also, planning the structure of your essay before you choose supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and targeted research.

In longer pieces of writing, you may organize different parts in different ways so that your purpose stands out clearly and all parts of the essay work together to consistently develop the main point. Longer papers require more planning than shorter papers do.

Three common methods of organizing writing are

- chronological order
- spatial order
- order of importance

Keep these methods of organization in mind as you plan how to arrange the information. Usually, a writer will primarily use one method in order to create coherence and unity; however, there is overlap between them, and sometimes you will use a combination.

When you write, your goal is not only to complete an assignment but also to write for a specific purpose—perhaps to inform, to explain, to persuade, or a combination of these purposes. Your purpose for writing should always be in the back of your mind because it will help you decide which pieces of information belong together and how you will order them. In other words, choose the order that will most effectively fit your purpose and support your main point. [Table 5.1](#) shows the connection between order and purpose.

Chronological Order

Chronological order is used for the following purposes:

- To narrate or describe the timeline of a series of events (e.g., the events that led to World War II)
- To tell a story or relate an experience (e.g., my trip to India)
- To describe or explain the steps in a process (e.g., the human digestive process)
- To explain how to do or to make something (e.g., how to purchase a condo)

When using chronological order, arrange the events in the order that they actually happened, in the case of narrating an event—or in the order they should happen, in the case of giving instructions. 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 the present day.

In an essay that is structured according to chronological order, the introductory paragraph should introduce the event(s) or process that will be described in the essay. The thesis statement should indicate the significance of the event(s) or process, and it should indicate the events or steps that will be described in the body paragraphs. Each body paragraph should focus on one distinct event—or one distinct step in the process. It's important to place the body paragraphs in the correct order. (Imagine trying to follow a recipe that began by describing how to frost the cake without first explaining how to bake the cake!)

Narrate the chain of events using transitional words or phrases such as *first*, *second*, *then*, *after that*, *later*, and *finally*. These transitional words guide you and your reader through the paper as you expand your thesis.

Table 5.1: Order Versus Purpose

Order	Purpose
Chronological order	To tell a story or relate an experience
	To explain the history of an event or a topic
	To explain the steps in a process of making or doing something
Spatial order	To help readers visualize something as you want them to see it
	To describe various parts of a whole in relation to one another
Order of importance	To persuade or convince
	To rank items by their importance, benefits, or significance

PRACTICE 5.5

Freewrite 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 chronological transitions, such as *first*, *second*, *then*, and *finally*.

Collaboration: Share with a friend and compare your answers.

Spatial Order

Spatial order is used for the following purposes:

- To represent something so that readers can visualize it (e.g., the geography of the Battle of Culloden, including the positions of the British and Jacobite forces)
- To describe parts of a whole in relation to one another (e.g., the five primary geographic regions of Canada)

When using spatial order, arrange subtopics or describe objects/places as they are arranged in space. As the writer, you create a picture in your reader's mind. The reader's perspective is the viewpoint from which you describe what is around you.

In an essay that is structured according to spatial order, the introductory paragraph should introduce the whole thing that will be described in the essay (e.g., the Culloden battlefield or the geography of Canada). The thesis statement should indicate the significance of the whole, and it should indicate the parts

that will be described in the body paragraphs. Each body paragraph should focus on one distinct part (e.g., one of the five geographic regions of Canada). 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. For example, if you were describing the geographical regions of Canada, it would make sense to move from west to east, or from east to west, or from north to south; however, it would not make sense to begin with the prairies and then move to the Pacific Coast and then to the Canadian Shield.

The following transitional words and phrases indicate 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 metres away
- Turning left or turning right
- Next to
- Ten kilometres to the east

Read a student's description of her bedroom, and notice how she guides the reader spatially, metre by metre, in a way that creates a visual image in the reader's mind:

A Sample Paragraph Ordered Spatially

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 colour of lavender.

PRACTICE 5.6

Freewrite a paragraph, using spatial order, that describes your school, your family's home, your home province, or another location you visit often. In the paragraph, focus on the relationships between different parts of the whole space.

Collaboration: Share with a friend and compare your answers.

Order of Importance

Order of importance is used for the following purposes:

- To persuade and convince
- To rank items by their importance, benefits, or significance
- To illustrate a situation, problem, or solution

When using order of importance as an organizational principle, arrange sub-topics or arguments either from most to least important or from least to most important.

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 better to begin with your most important supporting point, such as in an essay that contains a thesis that is highly debatable.

When writing an argumentative essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it immediately catches your readers' attention 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.

Transitional words and phrases you can use with this method of organization include *most important*, *almost as important*, *just as important*, and *finally*.

PRACTICE 5.7

Freewrite a paragraph about a passion of yours, such as music, a particular sport, or cooking, for example. In the paragraph, introduce the reasons you feel so strongly about this passion. Present the reasons in the order of least to greatest importance.

Once you have completed that paragraph, reverse the order, and write about the reasons from greatest to least importance.

If you were to write an essay on this topic, which order would you choose: greatest to least or least to greatest? Which is most effective? Why?

Collaboration: Share with a friend and compare your answers.

PRACTICE 5.8

Referring to the idea map you created in [Practice 4.6](#), consider whether chronological order, spatial order, or order of importance would be the most logical choice for an essay on this topic. Discuss with a peer: Have you chosen the most appropriate order for the topic?

Creating an Outline

Once you've chosen an approach to organizing an essay, create an outline to help you organize your thoughts and stay on track as you begin to write the essay and develop your ideas.

An **outline** is a written plan that serves as a skeleton for the paragraphs you will write. Later, when you draft paragraphs in the next stage of the writing process, you will add support to create “flesh” and “muscle” for your essay.

For an essay question on a test or a brief oral presentation in class, all you may need to prepare is a short, informal outline in which you jot down key ideas in the order you will present them. This kind of outline reminds you to stay focused in a stressful situation and to include all the good ideas that help you explain or prove your point.

For a longer assignment, like an essay or a research paper, many instructors will require you to submit a formal outline before you start writing as a way of making sure you are on the right track and are working in an organized manner. The expectation is that you will build your paper based on the framework created by the outline.

When creating outlines, writers generally go through three stages: a **scratch outline**, an **informal topic outline**, and a **formal sentence outline**.

A **scratch outline** is generated by taking what you have come up with in your freewriting process and organizing the information into a structure that is easy for you to understand and follow (for example, an idea map or hierarchical outline). A scratch outline is very useful when you're required to write an essay in an exam situation.

An **informal topic outline** goes a step further and adds a thesis statement, topic sentences, and some preliminary information you have found through research.

A **formal sentence outline** is a detailed guide that shows how all the supporting ideas relate to one another. It helps you distinguish between ideas that are of equal importance and ones that are of lesser importance.

If your instructor asks you to submit an outline for approval, hand in one that is more formal, structured, and detailed. The more information you provide, the better able your instructor will be to see the direction you will take in the essay. With more information, your instructor can give you better feedback to help you succeed.

TIP: Instructors may also require you to submit an outline with your final draft to check the direction and logic of the assignment. If you are required to submit an outline with the final draft of a paper, remember to revise the outline to reflect any changes you made while writing the paper.

How to Format an Outline

Both informal topic outlines and formal sentence outlines are formatted the same way:

- The introductory paragraph is assigned the Roman numeral I. The complete thesis statement is usually included here.
- Each body paragraph is assigned a Roman numeral (II, III, IV, and so on).
- Within the body paragraphs, capital letters (A, B, C, and so on) represent each main supporting point. These are indented five spaces (press the tab key once).
- If you'd like to subdivide the main supporting points further, use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so on). These are indented ten spaces (press the tab key twice).
- The concluding paragraph is assigned the final Roman numeral.

Below is a skeleton of an outline. The indention helps clarify how the ideas are related by indicating the levels of support and detail. The example outline follows a standard five-paragraph essay arrangement, but longer essays will require more paragraphs and thus more Roman numerals. The information compiled under each Roman numeral will become a paragraph in your final

paper. If you think that a paragraph might become too long, consider whether it actually addresses more than one main idea, and if it does, divide it in two, renumbering the main points appropriately.

TIP: In high school, you may have been taught to write five-paragraph essays. While the five-paragraph essay is a useful starting point, many topics cannot be sufficiently explored in only five paragraphs, and in your university courses, most essays you write will be longer. Also, your university courses might require essays with specific and specialized structures.

I) Introductory Paragraph

Thesis statement:

II) First Body Paragraph

First main idea → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 1*

- A. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 1*
 - 1. Subpoint (supporting detail)
 - 2. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- B. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 1*
 - 1. Subpoint (supporting detail)
 - 2. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- C. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 1*
 - 1. Subpoint (supporting detail)
 - 2. Subpoint (supporting detail)

III) Second Body Paragraph

Second main idea → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 2*

- A. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 2*
 - 2. Subpoint (supporting detail)
 - 2. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- B. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 2*
 - 3. Subpoint (supporting detail)
 - 4. Subpoint (supporting detail)

- C. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 2*
- 3. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- 4. Subpoint (supporting detail)

IV) Third Body Paragraph

- Third main idea → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 3*
- A. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 3*
- 3. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- 2. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- B. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 3*
- 5. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- 6. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- C. Supporting point → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 3*
- 5. Subpoint (supporting detail)
- 6. Subpoint (supporting detail)

V) Concluding Paragraph

Constructing an Informal Topic Outline

In an informal topic outline, indicate main ideas and supporting points with words or phrases. Words and phrases keep the outline short and easy to read. All the headings must be written with parallel structure and labelled as shown above.

In [Chapter 4](#), we followed Mariah's steps to finding and narrowing her topic and developing ideas for inclusion. Based on those steps, here is an informal topic outline Mariah created based on her idea map in [Figure 4.1](#). The purpose of the essay is to inform, and the audience is a general audience of fellow students. Notice how the outline starts with a thesis statement and is followed by main points and supporting details in outline form using short phrases with parallel grammatical structures.

MARIAH'S INFORMAL TOPIC OUTLINE

I. Introduction

- Thesis statement: Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.

- II. E-book readers and the way that people read
 - A. Books easy to access and carry around
 - 1. Electronic downloads
 - 2. Storage in memory for hundreds of books
 - B. An expanding market
 - 1. E-book readers from booksellers
 - 2. E-book readers from electronics and computer companies
 - C. Limitations of current e-book readers
 - 1. Incompatible features from one brand to the next
 - 2. Borrowing and sharing e-books
- III. Film cameras replaced by digital cameras
 - A. Three types of digital cameras
 - 1. Compact digital cameras
 - 2. Single-lens reflex cameras, or SLRs
 - 3. Cameras that combine the best features of both
 - B. The confusing “megapixel wars”
 - C. The zoom lens battle
- IV. The confusing choice among televisions
 - A. 1080p vs. 768p
 - B. Plasma screens vs. LCDs
 - C. Home media centres
- V. Conclusion
 - How to be a wise consumer

TIP: Although an informal topic outline only requires words and phrases for the body paragraphs, do include a thesis statement written as a complete sentence. This is the most important sentence of your essay, and having it clearly stated in the outline will help you stay on track as you develop your thoughts. To learn about writing an effective thesis statement, refer to [Chapter 12: Thesis Statements](#).

PRACTICE 5.9

Referring to the idea map you created in [Practice 4.6](#), develop an informal topic outline for a five-paragraph essay. Be sure to observe correct outline form, including correct indentation and the use of Roman and Arabic numerals and capital letters.

Constructing a Formal Sentence Outline

A sentence outline is the same as a topic outline except you use complete sentences instead of words or phrases. Complete sentences create clarity and can advance you one step closer to a draft in the writing process.

Formal outlines are often quite rigid in their organization. You cannot subdivide a point that has only one part. For example, for every Roman numeral I, there needs to be a II. For every A, there must be a B. For every Arabic numeral 1, there must be a 2. Note this on the sample outline that Mariah made based on her idea map and topic outline:

MARIAH'S FORMAL SENTENCE OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
 - Thesis statement: Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.
- II. E-book readers influence people's reading habits in many ways.
 - A. E-book readers make books easy to access and to carry.
 - 1. Books can be downloaded electronically.
 - 2. Devices can store hundreds of books in memory.
 - B. The market expands as a variety of companies enter it.
 - 1. Booksellers sell their own e-book readers.
 - 2. Electronics and computer companies also sell e-book readers.
 - C. Current e-book readers have significant limitations.
 - 1. The devices are owned by different brands and may not be compatible.
 - 2. Few programs have been made to fit the other way Americans read: by borrowing books from libraries.
- III. Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras.
 - A. The first major choice is the type of digital camera.
 - 1. Compactible digital cameras are light but have fewer megapixels.
 - 2. Single-lens reflex cameras, or SLRs, may be large and heavy but can be used for many functions.
 - 3. Some cameras combine the best features of compacts and SLRs.
 - B. Choosing the camera type involves the confusing "megapixel wars."
 - C. The zoom lens battle also determines the camera you will buy.

- IV. Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions.
 - A. In the resolution wars, what are the benefits of 1080p and 768p?
 - B. In the screen-size war, what do plasma screens and LCD screens offer?
 - C. Does every home really need a media centre?
- V. Conclusion
 - The solution for many people should be to avoid buying on impulse. Consumers should think about what they really need, not what is advertised.

CHECKLIST 5.1: CREATING AN EFFECTIVE OUTLINE

Use this checklist to write an effective outline.

- Do I have a controlling idea that guides the development of the entire piece of writing?
- Do I have two or more main points that I want to make in this piece of writing? Does each main point connect to my controlling idea?
- Is my outline in the best order—chronological order, spatial order, or order of importance—for me to present my main points? Will this order help me get my main point across?
- Do I have supporting details that will help me inform, explain, or prove my main points?
- Do I need to add more support? If so, where?
- Do I need to do additional reading or prewriting?
- Do I need to revise my working thesis statement before I consider it the final version?

TIP: As you are building on your previously created outlines, avoid saving over the previous version; instead, save the revised outline under a new file name. This way, you will still have a copy of the original and any earlier versions in case you want to look back at them.

PRACTICE 5.10

Expand the topic outline you prepared in [Practice 5.9](#) to create a sentence outline. In this outline, be sure to include multiple supporting points for your main topic, even if your topic outline does not contain them. Observe correct

outline form, including indentation and the use of Roman and Arabic numerals and capital letters. Check your outline against [Checklist 5.1](#).

Share your outline with a peer, and ask for feedback on whether the outline seems to be logically organized and whether there are any potential gaps that need to be filled.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The content of writing is shaped by purpose and audience: always be aware of the purpose for writing and the needs of your audience, the two most important aspects of writing.
- Six common purposes for academic writing are to summarize, to explain, to analyze, to synthesize, to argue, and to evaluate.
- Identifying the audience's demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how and what you write.
- To effectively convey their ideas to readers, writers must put their ideas in a logical order.
- A strong organizational pattern allows a writer to articulate, analyze, and clarify ideas.
- Three common organizational approaches are chronological order, spatial order, and order of importance.
- Chronological order is useful for explaining a series of events, telling a story, or explaining a process.
- Spatial order describes things as they are arranged in space and is best for helping readers visualize something as the writer wants them to see it.
- Order of importance is useful to rank subtopics or arguments by their significance.
- Effective writers construct outlines to organize their main ideas and supporting details in the order they will be presented. This step in the writing process helps them remain focused and organized.
- The thesis statement begins the outline, and the outline ends with suggestions for the concluding paragraph.
- A topic outline uses words and phrases to organize the ideas.
- A sentence outline uses complete sentences to organize and express the ideas.
- Planning the organizational structure for your essay before you begin to search for supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and directed research.

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6

Draft

Develop a Piece of Writing

Learning Objectives

- Use drafting strategies to develop the first draft of an essay that includes the ideas generated in the prewriting stage organized according to the outline developed in the planning stage
- Write the first draft in a tone that is appropriate for the purpose, audience, and content
- Identify drafting strategies that help you to convey ideas in a well-organized form

Even professional writers admit that an empty page scares them because they feel they need to come up with something fresh and original every time they open a blank document on their computers. Because you have completed the first two steps in the writing process, you have already recovered from empty-page syndrome. You have already spent a lot of time prewriting and planning. You already know what will go on that blank page: what you wrote in the prewriting and planning stages.

The Role of the First Draft

Drafting is the stage of the writing process in which you develop a complete first version of a piece of writing. The first draft includes the ideas you brainstormed in the first step, organized into the structure or form that was chosen in the second step.

In the case of a college essay, at this stage, you will write the first draft of an essay that is composed of complete sentences arranged into complete paragraphs.

Base the first draft on the outline you created in the previous step of the writing process. First, write the body paragraphs, which contain the essential ideas of your essay. Each main idea—indicated in your outline by Roman numerals II, III, IV, and so on—becomes the topic of a separate body paragraph. Develop it with the supporting details and the subpoints of those details that you included in your outline.

After you have written the body paragraphs, you will write the introductory and concluding paragraphs.

To get more insight into the roles of the introductory paragraph, the body paragraphs, and the concluding paragraph, refer to [Chapter 13](#) and [Chapter 14](#).

A draft is a complete version of a piece of writing, but it is not the final version. The step in the writing process after drafting, as you may remember, is revising. During revision, you will have the opportunity to make changes to your first draft before you put the finishing touches on it during the editing and proofreading stages. A student often goes through three or four drafts (or more!) of an essay before beginning to edit and proofread. A first draft gives you a working version that you can later improve.

TIP: When you begin to draft an essay, follow your outline fairly closely. After all, you spent valuable time developing those ideas. However, as you begin to express your ideas in complete sentences and paragraphs, it might occur to you that a change is needed. For example, you might want to switch the order of the second and third body paragraphs. Try it! Writing a draft, by its nature, is a good time for experimentation.

Strategies for Drafting

TIP: You can write your first draft on a computer or with a pen and paper—whatever works best for you. If you are more comfortable starting on paper, begin your first draft that way and then type it into the computer before you revise. You can also use a voice recording to get yourself started, dictating a paragraph or two to get you thinking.

What makes the writing process so beneficial to writers is that it encourages alternatives to standard practices while motivating you to develop your best

ideas. For instance, the following approaches, done alone or in combination with others, may improve your writing and help you move forward in the writing process:

- Write out the thesis statement on a Post-it note, and keep it in sight as you draft your essay. This will help keep you on track.
- Write a working title for your essay. This, too, will help you focus on your topic and thesis. You will revise the title later (refer to [Chapter 14: Write an Effective Essay Title](#)).
- Begin by writing the section you know the most about. For example, you could start with the third paragraph in your outline if those ideas come easily to mind.

Although paragraphs may vary in length, keep in mind that short paragraphs may contain insufficient support and readers may think the writing is abrupt. Long paragraphs may contain too many ideas and may lose your reader's interest. As a guideline, write paragraphs longer than three sentences but shorter than the length of an entire double-spaced page.

- Write one paragraph at a time and then stop. Pace yourself. As long as you complete the assignment on time, you may choose how many paragraphs you complete in one sitting. On the other hand, don't procrastinate.
- Take short breaks to refresh your mind, especially if you are writing a multipage report or essay. If you are impatient or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind rest, but do not let breaks become too long. If you spend too much time away from your essay, you may have trouble starting again. You may forget key points or lose momentum. Set a timer to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write.
- Be reasonable with your goals. If you decide to limit your breaks to ten minutes, stick to that goal. If you told yourself that you needed more facts for your essay, commit to finding them. Holding yourself accountable for your goals will create successful writing assignments.

In [Chapter 4](#), we followed Mariah's steps in developing her topic and ideas, leading to a formal outline in [Chapter 5](#). Here Mariah begins to write a first draft of an essay about confusing digital technology choices.

Before she begins to draft the essay, Mariah reviews her notes about the purpose and audience for her essay:

Sample Notes About Purpose and Audience

Purpose: My purpose is to inform readers about the wide variety of consumer digital technology available in stores and to explain why the specifications for these products, expressed in numbers that average consumers don't understand, often cause bad, misinformed buying decisions.

Audience: My audience is my instructor and members of this class. Most of them are not heavy into technology except for the usual laptops, cell phones, and MP3 players, which are not topics I'm writing about. I'll have to be as exact and precise as I can be when I explain possible unfamiliar product specifications. At the same time, they're more with it electronically than my grandparents' VCR-flummoxed generation, so I won't have to explain every last detail.

Then Mariah rereads her thesis statement and places it where she can see it as she begins writing:

Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are many, and the specifications are often confusing.

Mariah also gives her essay a working title:

Working title: Confusing Digital Technology

She knows she will revise this title later in the writing process to make it more effective (see [Chapter 14: Write an Effective Essay Title](#)), but for now, the working title will help her remain focused as she drafts her essay.

With her purpose and audience notes fresh in her mind, and her thesis statement and working title in front of her, Mariah returns to her sentence outline. Here is the portion of her outline that provides the plan for the first body paragraph:

FIRST BODY PARAGRAPH IN MARIAH'S FORMAL SENTENCE OUTLINE

- II. E-book readers influence people's reading habits in many ways.
 - A. E-book readers make books easy to access and to carry.
 - 1. Books can be downloaded electronically.
 - 2. Devices can store hundreds of books in memory.

- B. The market expands as a variety of companies enter it.
 - 1. Booksellers sell their own e-book readers.
 - 2. Electronics and computer companies also sell e-book readers.
- C. Current e-book readers have significant limitations.
 - 1. The devices are owned by different brands and may not be compatible.
 - 2. Few programs have been made to fit the other way Americans read: by borrowing books from libraries.

Remember, the Roman numeral II identifies the topic sentence of the paragraph, while the capital letters indicate supporting points, and Arabic numerals label supporting details for each point.

Now Mariah expands the ideas in the outline into a body paragraph. Notice that the outline helps ensure that all the sentences in the body paragraph develop the topic sentence:

E-book readers are changing the way people read, or so e-book developers hope. The main selling point for these handheld devices, which are sort of the size of a paperback book, is that they make books easy to access and carry. Electronic versions of printed books can be downloaded online for a few bucks or directly from your cell phone. These devices can store hundreds of books in memory and, with text-to-speech features, can even read the texts. The market for e-books and e-book readers keeps expanding as a lot of companies enter it. Online and traditional booksellers have been the first to market e-book readers to the public, but computer companies, especially the ones already involved in cell phone, online music, and notepad computer technology, will also enter the market. The problem for consumers, however, is which device to choose.

TIP: If you decide to take a break between finishing your first paragraph and starting the next, jot down some notes to yourself about what you think you should write next. When you return to your work, do not start writing immediately. Put yourself back in context by rereading what you have already written and reviewing those notes.

Next, Mariah refers to the section indicated by Roman numeral III to write the second body paragraph.

SECOND BODY PARAGRAPH IN MARIAH'S FORMAL SENTENCE OUTLINE

- III. Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras.
- A. The first major choice is the type of digital camera.
 - 1. Compactible digital cameras are light but have fewer megapixels.
 - 2. Single-lens reflex cameras, or SLRs, may be large and heavy but can be used for many functions.
 - 3. Some cameras combine the best features of compacts and SLRs.
 - B. Choosing the camera type involves the confusing “megapixel wars.”
 - C. The zoom lens battle also determines the camera you will buy.

You'll notice that further along in the outline, there are far fewer subpoints included, which makes it a bit more of a challenge for Mariah to write the subsequent paragraphs. This could indicate that more prewriting, study, and research need to be done.

Notice that Roman numeral III from the outline becomes the second body paragraph. As you read, ask yourself how well the body paragraph meets Mariah's stated purpose and how well it meets the needs of the audience:

Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras in amateur photographers' gadget bags. My father took hundreds of slides when his children were growing up, but he had more and more trouble getting them developed. So he decided to go modern. But what kind of camera should he buy? The small compact digital cameras could slip right in his pocket, but if he tried to print a photograph larger than an 8 × 10, the quality would be poor. When he investigated buying a single-lens reflex camera, or SLR, he discovered that they were versatile like his old film camera, also an SLR, but they were big and bulky. Then he discovered yet a third type, which combined the smaller size of the compact digital cameras with the zoom lenses available for SLRs. His first thought was to buy one of those, but then he realized he had a lot of decisions to make. How many megapixels should the camera be? Five? Ten? What is the advantage of each? Then came the size of the zoom lens. He knew that 3× was too small, but what about 25×? Could he hold a lens that long without causing camera shake? He read hundreds of photography magazines and buying guides, and he still wasn't sure he was right.

Mariah then begins the third body paragraph, referring to Roman numeral IV from the outline:

THIRD BODY PARAGRAPH IN MARIAH'S FORMAL SENTENCE OUTLINE

- IV. Nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions.
 - A. In the resolution wars, what are the benefits of 1080p and 768p?
 - B. In the screen-size war, what do plasma screens and LCD screens offer?
 - C. Does every home really need a media centre?

Nothing is more confusing than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and movies on. You could listen to the guys in the electronics store, but word has it they know little more than you do. They want to sell you what they have in stock, not what best fits your needs. You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The 1080p televisions cost more, though, so those are what the salespeople want you to buy. They get bigger commissions. The other important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. Now, here the salespeople may finally give you decent info. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma flat-panel television screens show decent blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. But be careful and tell the salesperson you have budget constraints. Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need.

By keeping her audience, purpose, and thesis statement in mind, and by carefully following her outline, Mariah drafts the three body paragraphs of her essay.

TIP: If you write your first draft on the computer, consider creating a new file folder for each course with a set of subfolders inside for each assignment you are given. Label the folders clearly with the course names, and label each assignment folder and document with a title that you will easily recognize. The assignment name is a good choice for the document. Then use that subfolder to store all the drafts you create. When you start each new draft, do not just write over the last one. Instead, save the draft with a new tag after the title—draft 1, draft 2, and so on—so that you will have a complete history of drafts in case your instructor wishes you to submit them.

In your documents, observe any formatting requirements—for margins, headers, placement of page numbers, and other layout matters—that your instructor requires.

The Importance of Tone

In [Chapter 5](#), we introduced the importance of tone in determining the type of content you choose to include in your essay. Now as you write the first draft, be aware of tone as you begin to write sentences and paragraphs. There are many aspects to tone, and each can be represented by a continuum.

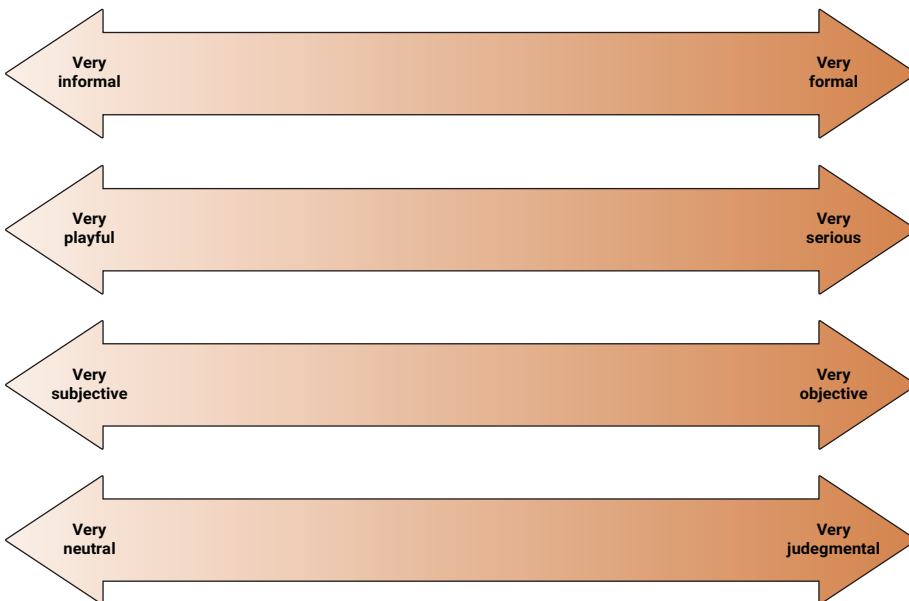


Figure 6.1: Aspects of Tone

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

PRACTICE 6.1

Read the assignment instructions for an upcoming essay in one of your courses. What do the instructions tell you—directly or indirectly—about the expected tone? On each continuum in [Figure 6.1](#), use a pencil to draw a line to indicate the tone you expect to take.

After you've determined the expected tone for a piece of writing, consider how that decision will affect your word choice.

For example, an informal tone would allow you to use contractions and informal words.

Example: Sadly, the kids couldn't put up with the construction racket.

On the other hand, a formal tone would require you to avoid contractions and use formal words.

Example: Unfortunately, the children could not endure the construction noise.

A playful tone would allow you to use humour and irony.

Example: To successfully break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, you will need your iPhone, a bowl of popcorn, and lots of wine.

A serious tone would require you to be sincere and avoid humour and sarcasm.

Example: To successfully break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, you will need to carefully choose the timing and the location, and you should take the time to plan exactly what you will say, in the kindest way possible.

A subjective tone would allow you to use first-person pronouns and to include your experience and opinions.

Example: In my experience, my employers like me because I work hard and I am responsible.

An objective tone would require you to use third-person pronouns and omit your own experience and opinions.

Example: Employers value employees who work hard and take their responsibilities seriously.

A neutral tone would require that you do not evaluate your topic or take a side in an argument.

Example: Mayor Findley recognizes that there are valid arguments on both sides of the debate about safe-injection sites, but further research is required before Council can make a wise policy decision.

A judgmental tone would allow you to make an assessment and choose a side.

Example: Mayor Findley is an inept twerp who must be ejected from office immediately before his stupid policy has this city overrun with drug addicts and crime.

TIP: Do the following to raise the level of formality of your sentences:

- avoid contractions
- avoid first-person pronouns
- avoid idioms and slang
- avoid abbreviations and acronyms
- avoid overusing exclamation marks
- avoid phrasal verbs
- use full words
- write grammatically correct sentences
- use third-person pronouns

We will focus more on tone, word choice, and style later in the writing process: at the editing stage. If you find it distracting or stressful to focus on these matters now, put them aside until later, and instead focus on the ideas and organization, which are the primary focus of the drafting stage. Your main goal now should be to get your ideas on paper in an organized manner.

With that said, you can save yourself time later if you give some thought now to choosing wording that establishes the desired tone. That way, you'll have fewer edits to make later. Remember to keep the tone consistent throughout each paragraph and throughout the whole essay.

Now that you've written a first draft and expressed your ideas in a well-organized manner, it's time to move on to the next step: revising your essay to make it even better.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Use an outline to guide the development of paragraphs and the elaboration of ideas. Each main idea, indicated by a Roman numeral in your outline, becomes the topic of a new paragraph.
- Develop each body paragraph with the supporting details and the subpoints of those details that you included in your outline.
- Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations.
- All content must be appropriate for the audience, purpose, and tone.
- Many students write the introductory and concluding paragraphs last, after fleshing out the body paragraphs.

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7

Revise

Improve What You've Written

Learning Objectives

- Revise an essay and identify the major areas of concern in the draft essay
- Revise an essay to improve organization, coherence, and unity
- Use peer reviews and checklists to assist with revision

You may think that a completed first draft means that little improvement is needed. However, even experienced writers need to improve their drafts and rely on peers during the revising and editing stages. Just like a painter might go back to a painting and add some new brushstrokes or like an architect might go back to the first draft of a blueprint to make improvements, a writer returns to the first draft of an essay to improve it through revision.

Revise and edit in stages: do not expect to catch everything at once. Each time you review your essay, focus on a different aspect of construction so that you will be more likely to catch any mistakes or identify any issues. This chapter contains checklists that identify specific things to look for with each revision.

The Purpose of Revision

In the **revision**, you take a second look at the *ideas* you've expressed in your writing, with the aim of conveying those ideas more clearly and more accurately. You also revise to make your ideas seem more interesting and more convincing.

In this stage, a writer reviews what they have written by reading the first draft several times to consider, reconsider, and reshape its content. This stage

involves both moderate and major changes: adding or deleting a paragraph, phrasing the main point differently, expanding on an important idea, moving a sentence from one paragraph to another, rearranging paragraphs, deleting a sentence, and so forth. At this stage, the writer may go through several drafts before settling on a final draft in which the key points are logically and articulately presented.

An effective essay is organized, coherent, and unified. **Organization** means that your argument flows logically from one point to the next. **Coherence** means that the elements of your essay work together smoothly and naturally and information from research is seamlessly integrated with your ideas. **Unity** means that all the ideas in each paragraph in the entire essay fit together and contribute to the overall message and a cohesive whole.

This chapter will examine each of these aspects in more detail. The practice exercises will help you effectively revise an essay of your own, step by step.

Strategies for Revision

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

To get the most out of your revisions, use strategies that writers have developed to look at their first drafts from a fresh perspective. Try them throughout the writing process; keep using the ones that bring results.

- Set aside your writing for at least a few hours, preferably a day or two, until you can look at it objectively.
- Revise in stages: first focus on organization, then on coherence, then on unity; if possible, take a break of at least a few hours between each stage.
- Ask someone you trust for feedback and constructive criticism.
- Pretend you are the reader. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why?

For many people, the words *critic*, *critical*, and *criticism* provoke only negative feelings. However, as a writer and a thinker, you must learn to be critical of yourself in a positive way and have high expectations for your work. You also need to train your eye and trust your ability to fix what needs fixing. To do this, you need to teach yourself where to look.

Revising allows you to examine important aspects of your writing separately so that you can give each task your undivided attention.

Revise to Improve Organization

When you revise to improve organization, look at the flow of ideas throughout the whole essay and within individual paragraphs. Check to see that the essay moves logically from the introduction to the body paragraphs to the conclusion and that each section reinforces the thesis.

Use [Checklist 7.1: Revise for Organization](#) to help you revise for organization.

CHECKLIST 7.1: REVISE FOR ORGANIZATION

At the essay level

- Does the introductory paragraph proceed clearly from the opening to the thesis?
- Does each body paragraph have a clear main idea that relates to the thesis?
- Do the body paragraphs flow in a logical order? Is each paragraph connected to the one before it?
- Does the concluding paragraph summarize the main ideas and revisit the thesis?

At the paragraph level

- Does the topic sentence of each body paragraph clearly state a main idea that supports the thesis?
- Do the details in the paragraph relate to and support the topic sentence?
- Should I rearrange or revise any sentences or add transitions to improve the flow of sentences?
- Should I add transitions to make the flow of ideas clearer?

Jorge, a student writing an essay on the importance of storytelling for an Indigenous studies course, rereads the first draft of his essay paragraph by paragraph. As he reads, he highlights the main idea of each paragraph so he can see whether his ideas proceed in a logical order.

For the most part, the flow of main ideas is clear throughout the body of the essay. However, Jorge does notice that one body paragraph does not have a clearly expressed main idea:

Some stories simply entertain. Most people like a good, fun story, regardless of their culture. A story about a deer hunt might actually be a means of teaching the geographic location of hunting grounds (Silko 4). A story might serve a dual purpose. Even entertaining narrative stories

serve an educational purpose. Little Bear says stories are an integral part of Native education (81). Storytelling is a way to teach knowledge, customs, and values (81). Stories transmit a culture's creation narrative. King says a culture's creation story shapes its worldview. "We live by stories" (King 153). Creating worldview is perhaps the top job stories have.

During revision, Jorge adds a topic sentence that clearly states the main idea of this paragraph and connects it to the paragraph that precedes it. He also reverses the order of two sentences, in blue below, because he thinks that's a better way to introduce the example of the deer hunt. Finally, he adds transitional words to improve the flow of ideas from sentence to sentence. Read Jorge's revised paragraph:

In Indigenous cultures, stories perform a wide variety of functions.

Some stories simply entertain. Most people like a good, fun story, regardless of their culture. **A story might serve a dual purpose. A story about a deer hunt might actually be a means of teaching the geographic location of hunting grounds (Silko 4).** **Therefore**, even entertaining stories serve an educational purpose. Little Bear says stories are an integral part of Native education **because** storytelling is a way to teach knowledge, customs, and values (81). **Of course**, stories **also** transmit a culture's creation narrative. King says a culture's creation story shapes its worldview. "We live by stories" (King 153). **Thus**, creating worldview is perhaps the top job stories have.

Does the addition of a topic sentence help you identify the main idea of the paragraph? Did Jorge make a good decision when he reversed the order of the two sentences in blue? How does the addition of transitions improve organization and the flow of ideas?

We'll continue to follow the progress of Jorge's essay through the revision and editing stages.

PRACTICE 7.1

Use the following steps to revise an essay you are working on.

Print out a hard copy of your essay. Most people read more slowly and closely on paper than on a computer screen. Printing your essay on paper will allow you to spot errors that you might not notice on the screen.

Read your paper paragraph by paragraph. Highlight your thesis and the topic sentence of each paragraph.

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. You may write in the margins of your draft or create a formal outline on a separate sheet of paper. Do not look at the formal outline you created during the planning stage.

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.

Review the topics in the outline you just made. Is there a logical flow of ideas? Identify any places where you may need to reorganize ideas.

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: Exchange essays with a classmate. Repeat the six steps and take notes about each other's essays. Share and compare notes.

Revise to Improve Coherence

When a piece of writing has **coherence**, the ideas flow smoothly. The wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and from paragraph to paragraph.

When you revise to improve coherence, you analyze how the parts of your essay 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 research papers, problems with coherence 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 7.2: Revise for Coherence](#) to review your essay for coherence.

CHECKLIST 7.2: REVISE FOR COHERENCE

- Does the opening of the essay clearly connect to the broader topic and thesis? Make sure any entertaining quotes or anecdotes serve a clear purpose. (If not, remove them.)
- Have I included support from research for each main point in the body of the paper?
- Have I included introductory material before any quotations? (Quotations should never stand alone in a paragraph.)
- Do 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 the concluding paragraph 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.

Rereading his revised paragraph once more, Jorge looks to see how the different pieces fit together to prove his thesis. He realizes that some of the supporting information needs to be integrated more carefully, and he decides to delete one complete sentence. Read the following paragraph first without Jorge's revisions and then with them. How do the changes improve coherence?

In Indigenous cultures, stories perform a wide variety of functions. Some stories simply entertain, ~~Most people like a good, fun story, regardless of their culture.~~ **but** a story might serve a dual purpose. **For example**, a story about a deer hunt might actually be a means of teaching the geographic location of hunting grounds (Silko 4). Therefore, even entertaining stories serve an educational purpose. **According to Leroy Little Bear, a Blackfoot educator**, stories are an integral part of Native education because storytelling is a way to teach knowledge, customs, and values (81). Of course, stories also transmit a culture's creation narrative. ~~King says a culture's creation story shapes its worldview. "We live by stories" (King 153).~~ **Cherokee writer Thomas King says, "We live by stories" (153), pointing** out that a culture's creation story shapes its worldview. Thus, creating worldview is perhaps the top job stories have.

Jorge decides that his comment about people enjoying fun stories seems subjective and is not necessary to making his point, so he deletes it; then he connects

the sentence before the omission to the one that comes after it. This new sentence now nicely connects to the example of the deer hunt, so Jorge adds the words “for example” to emphasize that connection.

Jorge also realizes he hasn’t integrated his research sources effectively. How would his readers know who Little Bear or King are—or why their opinions should be taken seriously? To integrate the research more smoothly, Jorge briefly introduces each source. He establishes the credibility of the sources by pointing out that one is an educator and one is a writer—and both are Indigenous. By pointing out the credibility of his sources, Jorge improves the credibility of his own essay.

Finally, Jorge notices that the quotation at the end of the paragraph is awkwardly placed and not as effective as it could be, so he integrates the quotation into his sentence. (You will learn more about “dropped” quotations and integrated quotations in [Part 5](#)).

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 the transitions you choose have the meaning that suits your purpose, and avoid overusing the same ones.

Using Transitional Words to Create Coherence

Writers use transitions to clarify how the ideas in their sentences and paragraphs are related. These words and phrases help the writing flow smoothly. Adding transitions is not the only way to improve coherence, but they are often useful and provide a polished finish to your essays. The list below of common transitional words and phrases groups many common transitions according to their purpose.

Transitions That Show Sequence or Time

- after
- before
- later
- afterward
- before long
- meanwhile
- as soon as
- finally

- next
- at first
- first, second, third
- soon
- at last
- in the first place
- then

Transitions That Show Position

- above
- across
- at the bottom
- at the top
- behind
- below
- beside
- beyond
- inside
- near
- next to
- opposite
- to the left, to the right, to the side
- under
- where

Transitions That Show a Conclusion

- indeed
- hence
- in conclusion
- in the final analysis
- therefore
- thus

Transitions That Continue a Line of Thought

- consequently
- furthermore
- additionally
- because
- besides the fact
- following this idea
- further
- in addition
- in the same way

- moreover
- looking further
- considering . . . , it is clear that

Transitions That Change a Line of Thought

- but
- yet
- however
- nevertheless
- on the contrary
- on the other hand
- conversely

Transitions That Show Importance

- above all
- best
- especially
- in fact
- more important
- most important
- most
- worst

Transitions That Introduce the Final Thoughts in a Paragraph or Essay

- finally
- last
- in conclusion
- most of all
- least of all
- last of all

All-Purpose Transitions to Open Paragraphs or to Connect Ideas

Inside Paragraphs

- admittedly
- at this point
- certainly
- granted it is true
- generally speaking
- in general
- in this situation
- no doubt
- no one denies
- obviously
- of course

- to be sure
- undoubtedly
- unquestionably

Transitions That Introduce Examples

- for instance
- for example
- such as

Transitions That Clarify the Order of Events or Steps

- first, second, third
- generally, furthermore, finally
- in the first place, also, last
- in the first place, furthermore, finally
- in the first place, likewise, lastly

With that said, transitions *can* be overused. If every sentence in a paragraph begins with a transitional word, the effect can be distracting for the reader. Imagine if a friend were telling you a story and used a transition at the beginning of every sentence: “First, I did this. . . . Then I did that. . . . Next, I. . . . Then I. . . . After that, I. . . .” Soon you would find yourself paying more attention to the repetitive transitions than the story itself.

To decide whether a transitional word is necessary, look at the relationship between two sentences (or two paragraphs). Ask yourself, “Is the connection between the two perfectly clear?” If so, a transitional word might not be necessary. However, if the connection is not perfectly clear, consider adding a transitional word or phrase.

Students often choose transitions carelessly, as if they were interchangeable, but they aren’t. The choice of a transition can drastically change the meaning of sentences.

Notice the differences in meaning in these pairs of sentences, solely the result of choosing a different transition:

- A. Our profits are down this year. However, we will hire four new staff.
- B. Our profits are down this year. Nevertheless, we will hire four new staff.
- C. Our profits are down this year. Thus, we will hire four new staff.
- D. Our profits are down this year. Therefore, we will hire four new staff.
- E. Our profits are down this year. Moreover, we will hire four new staff.
- F. Our profits are down this year. Additionally, we will hire four new staff.
- G. Our profits are down this year. Meanwhile, we will hire four new staff.

PRACTICE 7.2

1. What do the transitions in A and B imply about the relationship between profits and hiring?
2. What do the transitions in C and D imply about that relationship, and how is the implication different from the one in A and B?
3. What effect do the transitions in E, F, and G have? What do these transitions imply about the relationship between profits and hiring?

Choose transitional words carefully so that the transition clarifies and enhances the relationship between the two sentences. A transitional word should never create confusion. If it does, omit it.

In [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#), we discussed Mariah's steps from a vague idea to a formal outline, which culminated in a first draft in [Chapter 6](#). Now Mariah is ready to revise her essay about media, and she examines her paragraph about televisions to check for coherence. She looks for places where she needs to add a transition or perhaps reword the text to make the flow of ideas clear. In the version that follows, she has already deleted the sentences that are off topic.

Sample Revision Focusing on Coherence

[Finally](#), nothing is more confusing than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and movies on. [There's good reason for this confusion](#): You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. [The first big decision is the screen resolution you want](#). Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The [second other](#) important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. [Along with the choice of display type, a further decision buyers face is screen size and features](#). Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. [However](#), large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't let someone make you buy more television than you need!

TIP: Many writers make their revisions on a printed copy and then transfer them to the version on screen. They conventionally use a small arrow called a caret (^) to show where to insert an addition or correction.

PRACTICE 7.3

Answer the following questions about Mariah's revised paragraph.

Do you agree with the transitions and other changes that Mariah made to her paragraph? Which would you keep, and which were unnecessary? Explain.

Which transition words or phrases did Mariah add to her paragraph? Why did she choose each one?

What effect does adding additional sentences have on the coherence of the paragraph? Explain. When you read both versions aloud, which version has a more logical flow of ideas? Explain.

PRACTICE 7.4

Using the same draft of the essay that you used for [Practice 7.1](#), follow these steps to begin revising your paper to improve coherence.

Print out a hard copy of your paper, or work with your printout from [Practice 7.1](#).

Read the body paragraphs of your essay 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.

Identify unnecessary information from sources that you can delete.

Identify places where you need to revise your writing so that readers understand the significance of the details cited from sources.

Skim the body paragraphs once more, looking for any paragraphs that seem packed with citations.

Review these paragraphs carefully for coherence.

Review the introductory paragraph and concluding paragraph. Make sure the information presented works with the ideas in the body of the paper.

Revise the places you identified in your paper to improve coherence.

Collaboration: Exchange essays with a classmate. Repeat the six steps above and take notes about each other's essays. Share and compare notes.

Writing at Work

Understanding coherence 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.

TIP: Reading your writing aloud will often help you find problems with unity and coherence that you might not notice otherwise. Listen for the clarity and flow of your ideas. Identify places where you find yourself confused, and write a note to yourself about possible fixes.

Revise to Improve Unity

When a piece of writing has **unity**, all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong together, and nothing seems unrelated or out of place.

Sometimes, writers get caught up in the moment and cannot resist a good digression. Even though you might enjoy such detours when you chat with friends, unplanned digressions usually weaken a piece of writing.

Following your outline closely offers you a reasonable guarantee that your writing will stay on purpose and not drift away from the controlling idea. However, when writers are rushed, are tired, or cannot find the right words, their writing may no longer be clear and concise, and they may add information that is not relevant to developing the main idea.

Mariah stayed close to her outline when she drafted the three body paragraphs of the essay tentatively titled "Confusing Digital Technology" But a recent shopping trip for an HDTV upset the student enough that she digressed from the main topic of the third paragraph and included comments about the sales staff at the electronics store she visited.

When Mariah revises the essay, she deletes the off-topic sentences that affect the unity of the paragraph. Read the following paragraph twice, the first time without Mariah's changes and the second time with them.

Sample Revision Focusing on Unity

Nothing is more confusing than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and movies on. ~~You could listen to the guys in the electronics store, but word has it they know little more than you do. They want to sell what they have in stock, not what best fits your needs.~~ You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. ~~The 1080p televisions cost more, though, so those are what the salespeople want you to buy. They get bigger commissions.~~ The **other** important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. ~~Now here the salespeople may finally give you decent info.~~ Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. ~~But be careful and tell the salesperson you have budget constraints.~~ Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't ~~let someone make you~~ buy more television than you need!

PRACTICE 7.5

Answer the following two questions about Mariah's paragraph:

Do you agree with the decision to make the deletions? Did the student cut too much, too little, or just enough? Explain.

Is the explanation of what screen resolution means a digression? Or is it audience friendly and essential to understanding the paragraph? Explain.

Collaboration: Share with a classmate and compare your answers.

PRACTICE 7.6

Use the same draft of the essay that you used for [Practice 7.1](#) and [Practice 7.4](#), and reread it to look for any statements that weaken the unity of the writing. Are there any sentences, ideas, facts, or quotations that don't belong? Ask a peer for a second opinion. Then decide how best to revise.

TIP: When you reread your writing to find revisions to make, look for each type of problem in a separate sweep. Read the essay straight through once to locate any problems with organization. Read it straight through a second time to find problems with coherence. Read it a third time, focusing on unity. While this process may seem time-consuming, it is essential to creating a polished final text. You may follow this same strategy during other stages of the writing process and for any type of writing.

Writing at Work

One of the reasons word-processing programs offer a reviewing feature is that work groups have become common in many businesses. Writing is often collaborative, and the members of a work group and their supervisors often critique group members' work and offer feedback that will lead to a better final product.

Peer Review: Revision

After working closely with a piece of writing, a writer often needs to step back and ask a more objective reader for feedback.

Because writers know what they *intended* to say, they often find it difficult to evaluate whether their writing *actually conveys* what they intended. As we read our own writing, our minds fill in the gaps, adding missing information and making connections between ideas and words.

Therefore, writers can benefit from feedback from a reader who can respond to only the words on the page—in other words, because the reader doesn't have access to what's in the writer's mind or what the writer intended, the reader must make meaning solely from what is written. The reader can then help the writer understand whether the words on the page convey what the writer intended.

Once you've revised the draft of your essay, ask a peer to give you feedback on it. Choose someone you trust, someone who knows about essay writing and/or your topic, and someone who will be honest about the strengths and weaknesses of your essay. The person needs to be able to identify and communicate

specific ways to strengthen your essay. You might choose a classmate, a friend, or a family member, but choose carefully.

The purpose of peer review is to receive constructive criticism of your essay. Your peer is your first real audience, and from your peer, you can learn what confuses a reader—and what delights a reader. Use this feedback to improve the next draft of your essay before sharing it with your instructor or a wider audience.

Although you may be uncomfortable sharing your writing at first, remember that each writer is working toward the same goal: a final draft that effectively conveys a central message to a specific audience to fulfill a purpose. Maintaining a positive attitude when providing feedback will put you and your partner at ease.

Afterward, evaluate your partner's feedback and assess what is most helpful to you. Then use the feedback to revise your draft.

TIP: While your peer is reading your essay, they should not verbally ask you to clarify or provide more information. If your reviewer needs you to verbally fill in the blanks in order to understand your essay, that tells you the essay needs more revisions, because all the ideas should be fully explained in the words on the page. If your reviewer needs to ask, "What did you mean here?" or "Why did you include this?" or "Should you explain that?" those questions tell you that the words you've written have not fully conveyed the ideas you have in your mind. Those questions should be saved for the discussion afterward. This is useful feedback that will help you revise your essay to make it clearer.

TIP: Remember to be courteous, respectful, and polite when giving feedback to a peer. Your feedback should be positive and constructive.

PRACTICE 7.7

Ask a peer to review your essay and provide feedback on *what* you've written so that you can more effectively revise your essay.

Step 1: In preparation for peer review, fill out this information about your essay and share it with your reviewer:

Date: _____

Writer's name: _____

Title of essay: _____

Topic of essay: _____

Audience: _____

Purpose of Essay: _____

Peer reviewer's name: _____

Step 2: Ask your peer reviewer to carefully read your essay in order to provide you with feedback that will help you revise your essay. Your reviewer should follow these steps:

1. Read the checklist below *before* reading the essay so that you know what to look for.
2. Carefully read the essay, focusing on the questions in the checklist. Make notes as you go.
3. Do not ask the writer to clarify or explain anything as you read. If required information is missing from the essay, make a note of the gaps. If you are confused about something, make a note.

Step 3: Go through the checklist with your reviewer and discuss the answers to each question. Ask for clarification if you don't understand some of the feedback.

CHECKLIST 7.3: PEER REVIEW: REVISING FOR ORGANIZATION, COHERENCE, AND UNITY

- Does the title of the essay effectively introduce the topic and suggest the controlling idea?
See [Chapter 14: Write an Effective Essay Title](#)
- Does the title indicate the type of essay (if applicable)?
- Does the introductory paragraph introduce the topic and provide sufficient background information?
See [Chapter 14: The Introductory Paragraph](#)
- Is the thesis (the controlling idea) clearly stated in the first paragraph?
See [Chapter 12: Thesis Statements](#)
- Does the thesis statement indicate the topic *and* present an argument?
- Does the thesis statement catch the reader's attention?
- Are the body paragraphs arranged in a logical order according to a specific organizational pattern? If so, which one?
See [Chapter 5: Methods of Organization](#)
- Would rearranging the paragraphs support the thesis better?
- Does each body paragraph contain a topic sentence that introduces the controlling idea of that paragraph?

See [Chapter 11: Effective Topic Sentences](#)

- Does each paragraph contain several supporting details (descriptions, facts, quotations, reasons, and arguments) to support the topic sentence?

See [Chapter 11: Supporting Sentences](#)

- Is each supporting detail specific, concrete, and relevant to the topic sentence?
- Does each sentence logically follow the preceding one? If not, identify any off-topic sentences.
- Does each body paragraph have only one main point?
- Are there transitional words to help the reader follow the thoughts? If not, should some be added? Are there too many? If so, which are unnecessary?

See [Chapter 11: Transitions](#)

- Does each body paragraph end with a closing statement that sums up the point of the paragraph?

See [Chapter 11: Closing Sentences](#)

- Is the concluding paragraph comprehensive, and does it summarize the main points of the essay in different words?

See [Chapter 14: The Concluding Paragraph](#)

- Does the essay meet the needs of the assignment's purpose and fulfill the audience, genre, and length requirements?

See [Chapter 5: First Things First: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content](#)

Step 4:

Ask your reviewer to fill out the following information about your essay:

This essay is about _____

The main points in this essay are _____

What I most liked about this essay is _____

These three points struck me as the strongest:

Point: _____

Why: _____

Point: _____

Why: _____

Point: _____

Why: _____

Do you believe in what the writer has written? _____

These parts of the essay are not clear to me:

Where: _____

Needs improvement because _____

Where: _____

Needs improvement because _____

Where: _____

Needs improvement because _____

After reading the essay, I have these three questions:

_____?

_____?

_____?

The one additional change that would improve this essay significantly is _____

Step 5: With your reviewer, discuss the feedback from step 4. Ask for clarification as necessary.

Deciding How to Use (or Not Use) Feedback from Peer Review

It may not be necessary to incorporate every recommendation your peer reviewer makes. Some feedback will not apply to your particular situation. Other feedback may be unhelpful or even wrong.

However, if you start to observe a pattern in the responses you receive from peer reviewers, you might want to consider that feedback in future assignments. For example, if you read consistent comments about a need for more research, then you may want to consider including more research in future assignments.

You might get feedback from more than one reader as you share different stages of your revised draft, and you might receive distinct feedback from each individual reader.

Evaluate the responses you receive according to two important criteria:

Determine if the feedback supports the purpose of the assignment.

Determine if the suggested revisions are appropriate to the audience.

Then, using these standards, accept or reject feedback.

PRACTICE 7.8

Consider the feedback you received from the peer review. Which is most helpful? Jot notes below.

The most helpful feedback was _____

I noticed this pattern in the feedback: _____

In my final revision, I will use my partner's feedback to make this change: _____

One piece of feedback I will **not** use is _____
_____ because _____

* * *

You should now be confident you have produced a strong argument that is well constructed and will persuade your audience that your points and point of view are valid. In the [next chapter](#), you'll learn how to take the next step: polishing your writing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In the revision stage, improve *what* is written:

- Review the ideas presented in the first draft and ensure they are conveyed clearly, logically, and thoroughly; add, cut, or move information to improve content.
- Review the organization of the essay and ensure there is a logical argument progressing from the introduction to the body to the conclusion; make changes to improve the order in which ideas are presented and the connections between ideas and sections of the essay.
- Assess coherence: the elements of an essay should work together smoothly and naturally.
- Assess unity: all ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay should clearly belong together.
- In a research paper, determine whether all included information is relevant to the thesis and is smoothly integrated into the paragraphs.

- Devote sufficient time to revision: it will significantly improve your essay.
- Peer review gives writers helpful feedback about the ideas expressed in their writing.
- It is the writer's responsibility to evaluate the results of peer review and incorporate only useful feedback.

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8

Edit

Improve How You've Written

Learning Objectives

- Edit to improve diction
- Determine and maintain an appropriate style and tone
- Edit to ensure the tone is appropriate and consistent

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

If you have been working through each set of revisions, as Mariah and Jorge have, you have produced multiple drafts of your writing. So far, the changes have been focused on content. Perhaps with the help of peer feedback, you have made sure that you sufficiently supported your ideas. You have checked for problems with organization, unity, and coherence.

While the revision stage of the writing process focused on clarifying *what* you write (your ideas), the editing and proofreading stages focus on *how* you write—you express those ideas. Editing requires slow and careful rereading of the entire piece of writing, preferably aloud, to ensure that the writing effectively conveys ideas.

This section presents opportunities for you to focus on different aspects of the editing process. As with revision, you should approach editing in different stages. Also, at the end of the chapter is a comprehensive but more general list of things you should be looking for as well as guidelines for peer review focused on editing.

Taking a break from your essay for at least a day or two improves your ability to edit it effectively, so be sure to leave yourself enough time to complete this important step of the writing process.

The Purpose of Editing

Editing involves re-examining the way you have expressed your ideas and improving word choice (or diction), conciseness, grammar, and tone. You might add, delete, or change words. You'll fix problems in grammar and sentence structure. You might adjust the tone.

In this step, look for vague nouns and verbs that could be replaced with more specific, precise ones. Look for unnecessary words and phrases that add clutter to your writing, and delete them. If you are not certain about the meanings of vocabulary words, look them up in a dictionary to ensure you've used the word correctly, and if not, choose a better word.

By editing, you'll make your essay into a polished piece of writing, the end product of your best efforts.

Strategies for Editing

Editing 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.

Edit your paper slowly, sentence by sentence. You may even wish to use a sheet of paper to cover up everything on the page except the paragraph you are editing. This practice 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.

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.

Edit for Style and Tone

Once you are certain that the content of your paper fulfills your purpose (in other words, it is organized, coherent, and unified), you can begin editing to improve **style** and **tone**. Together, style and tone create the voice of your paper, or how you present yourself and your ideas to your reader.

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.

Although accepted writing styles will vary within different disciplines, the underlying goal is the same—to present yourself 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 humour can make readers wonder whether the tour guide really knows what they are talking about. Extreme or emotionally charged language comes across as biased and subjective.

To avoid being overly formal or informal, determine an appropriate style and tone at the beginning of the writing process. In [Chapter 5: First Things First: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content](#), you considered your topic and audience because these aspects affect the required style and tone. For example, a paper on new breakthroughs in cancer research should be more formal than a paper on how to get a good night's sleep.

A strong essay comes across as straightforward, appropriately academic, and serious. Use [Checklist 8.1: Edit for Style](#) to review your paper for issues related to style and tone and to ensure that the tone remains consistent throughout the essay.

TIP: Different academic disciplines have different conventions regarding levels of formality. For example, if you write an essay for a course in the English Department, you will likely be expected to write formal essays that are objectively written from the third-person perspective. On the other hand, for an essay for a course in the Faculty of Education, you might be encouraged to reflect on your teaching experiences using first-person pronouns and a more conversational, informal style. If you are not sure of the expectations of your discipline, ask your instructor.

TIP: In a formal research paper, it is generally best to avoid writing from the first-person perspective, as this can make your paper seem overly subjective and opinion based.

CHECKLIST 8.1: EDIT FOR STYLE

- My tone is appropriate for the topic, purpose, and audience.
- My essay avoids wordiness.
- My sentences are varied in length and structure.
- I have avoided using first-person pronouns such as *I* and *we* (unless they are required for the purpose of the assignment).
- I have used an 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 (Diction)

Note that word choice (also called diction) is an especially important aspect of style. In addition to checking the points noted in [Checklist 8.1](#), review your paper to make sure your language is precise, conveys no unintended connotations, and is free of bias. At this stage in the writing process, it would be a good idea to read [Chapter 23](#) in its entirety because it provides an in-depth explanation about vague diction, slang, connotations, and biased language. 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 (for a full list of strong verbs to use with in-text citations, see [Chapter 21: Paraphrasing and Quoting](#))
- 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 gender, race, ethnicity, or religion

TIP: Using plural nouns and pronouns or recasting a sentence can help you keep 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 in his bibliography.
- **Awkward:** When a writer cites a source in the body of his or her or their paper, he or she or they must list it in his or her or their bibliography.
- **Improved:** Writers must list any sources cited in the body of a paper in their bibliographies.

Maintaining a Consistent Style

As you edit your essay, make sure the style is consistent throughout. Look for instances where a word, phrase, or sentence does not seem to fit with the rest of the writing.

Upon reviewing his paper for style, Jorge finds that he has generally used an appropriately academic style, maintaining a formal tone and using appropriate diction. However, he notices two glaring exceptions. First, he remembers a comment his Indigenous studies professor made in class: even though Indigenous people have previously been referred to as *Native*, *Indigenous* is now the commonly accepted, most respectful term to use.

Also, Jorge realizes there is a place where his overly informal writing could come across as unserious. He edits his word choice to improve the consistency of the tone. Read his edits:

In Indigenous cultures, stories perform a wide variety of functions. Some stories simply entertain, but a story might serve a dual purpose. For example, an entertaining story about a deer hunt might actually be a means of teaching the geographic location of hunting grounds (Silko 4). Therefore, even entertaining stories serve an educational purpose. According to Leroy Little Bear, a Blackfoot educator, stories are an integral part of **Native Indigenous** education because storytelling is a way to teach knowledge, customs, and values (81). Of course, stories also transmit a culture's creation narrative. Cherokee writer Thomas King says, "We live by stories," pointing out that a culture's creation story shapes its worldview (153). Thus, creating worldview is perhaps the **top job most important function** stories have.

PRACTICE 8.1

Use [Checklist 8.1: Edit for Style](#) to edit your paper line by line. You may use either of these techniques:

Use the same essay draft that you used for [Practice 6.1](#), the one you revised in [Chapter 7](#). Read it line by line. Check for the issues noted in [Checklist 8.1](#) as well as any other aspects of your writing style you have previously identified as areas to improve. Mark any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.

Collaboration: Exchange essays with a classmate. Read each other's essays, preferably aloud, noting places where the tone is inappropriate or inconsistent. Return the essays and compare notes.

TIP: 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 one word and one sentence at a time. Read the paper line by line. Highlight any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.

Writing Clearly and Concisely

Some writers are very methodical and painstaking when they write a first draft. Other writers unleash a lot of words in order to get out all that they feel they need to say. Do either of these methods match your style? Or is your style somewhere in between? No matter which description best fits you, the first draft of almost every piece of writing, no matter its author, can be made clearer and more concise. If you tend to write too much, you will need to look for unnecessary words.

Sometimes writers use too many words when fewer words will appeal more to their audience and better fit their purpose. Here are some common examples of wordiness to look for in your draft. Eliminating wordiness helps all readers because it makes your ideas clear, direct, and straightforward.

Sentences that begin with *There is* or *There are*

Wordy. There are two major experiments that the Biology Department sponsors.

Revised. The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.

Sentences with unnecessary modifiers

Wordy. Two extremely famous and well-known consumer advocates spoke eloquently in favour of the proposed important legislation.

Revised. Two well-known consumer advocates spoke in favour of the proposed legislation.

Sentences with “fluffy” or “deadwood” phrases that add little meaning.

Be judicious when you use phrases such as *in the areas of*, *in terms of*, *with a mind to*, *in order to*, *on the subject of*, *as to whether or not*, *in the period of*, *more or less*, *as far as . . . is concerned*, and similar expressions. You can usually find a more straightforward way to state your point.

Wordy. As a world leader in the field of green technology, the company plans to focus its efforts in the area of geothermal energy. A report as to whether or not to use geysers as an energy source is in the process of preparation.

Revised. As a world leader in green technology, the company plans to focus on geothermal energy. Researchers are preparing a report about using geysers as an energy source.

Sentences in the passive voice or with forms of the verb *to be*: Sentences that contain passive-voice verbs often create confusion because the subject of the sentence does not perform an action. Sentences are clearer when the subject performs the action and is followed by a strong verb. Use strong active-voice verbs in place of forms of *to be*, which can lead to wordiness. Avoid passive voice when you can.

Wordy. It might perhaps be said that using a GPS device is something that is a benefit to drivers who have a poor sense of direction.

Revised. Using a GPS device benefits drivers who have a poor sense of direction.

Sentences with constructions that can be shortened

Wordy. The e-book reader, which is a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone. Not all that long ago, even my over-sixty uncle bought an e-book reader, and his wife bought an e-book reader, too.

Revised. The e-book reader, a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone. Recently, my over-sixty uncle and aunt bought e-readers.

Choosing Specific, Appropriate Words

Most essays at the post-secondary level should be written in formal English suitable for an academic situation. If you tend to use slang and informal language, you will probably need to increase the level of formality in your writing. If you work in a corporate environment where you are expected to use corporate jargon, you will need to delete this jargon from your essay. If you tend to be vague or imprecise in your wording, you will need to find specific words to replace any overly general language.

Follow these principles to be sure that your word choice is appropriate. For more information about word choice, see [Chapter 23: Writing Style](#).

Avoid slang. Find alternatives to *bummer*, *kewl*, and *dope*.

Avoid language that is overly casual. Write about “men and women” rather than “girls and guys,” unless you are trying to create a specific effect. Write about “advantages and disadvantages” rather than “pros and cons.” A formal tone calls for formal language.

Avoid contractions. Use *do not* in place of *don't*, *I am* in place of *I'm*, *have not* in place of *haven't*, and so on. Contractions are considered casual speech.

Avoid clichés. Overused expressions such as *green with envy*, *face the music*, *better late than never*, and similar are empty of meaning and may be a turn-off to your audience.

Be careful when you use words that sound alike but have different meanings. Some examples are *allusion/illusion*, *complement/compliment*, *council/counsel*, *concurrent/consecutive*, *founder/flounder*, and *historic/historical*. When in doubt, check a dictionary.

Choose words with the connotations you want. Choosing a word for its connotations is as important in formal essay writing as it is in all kinds of writing. Compare the positive connotations of the word *proud* and the negative connotations of *arrogant* and *conceited*.

Use specific words rather than overly general words. Replace vague words such as *thing*, *stuff*, *issue*, *people*, *nice*, *good*, *bad*, and *interesting* with words that have more precise meanings. Or use specific details to make your exact meaning clear.

Read the edits Mariah made to make her third paragraph more specific and more concise. Keep in mind, she has already incorporated the changes she made during the revision stage to improve unity and coherence.

Sample Paragraph Edited for Diction

Finally, nothing ~~is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want~~ confuses buyers more than purchasing a new high-definition digital television (HDTV), ~~with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. There's~~ and with good reason. ~~for this confusion: You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions.~~ The first big decision ~~is~~ the involves screen resolution, ~~you want. Screen resolution which~~ means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often expressed as 1080p, or full HD, or as 768p, which is half that. The trouble is that ~~if you have on~~ a smaller ~~screen,~~ 32-inch or 37-inch diagonal screen, viewers will not ~~you won't~~ be able to tell the difference between them with the naked eye. The second other important decision ~~you face as you walk around the sales floor~~ is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. ~~Along with the choice of display type, a further decision buyers face is screen size and features.~~ Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show ~~truer~~ deeper blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. However, large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. ~~Don't let someone make you buy more television than you need! Only~~ after buyers are totally certain they know what they want should they open their wallets.

PRACTICE 8.2

Read Mariah's paragraph aloud twice. The first time you read it, do read the strikethrough words, but don't read the underlined words. The second time, do not read the strikethrough words, and do read the underlined words.

Explain how changes in word choice have affected the student's writing.

Do you agree with the changes that the student made to her paragraph? Which changes would you keep, and which were unnecessary? Explain. What other changes would you have made?

What effect does removing contractions and the pronoun *you* have on the tone of the paragraph? How would you characterize the tone now? Why?

PRACTICE 8.3

Return to the draft essay you were working with in [Practice 8.1](#), the one you revised in [Chapter 7](#). Reread it carefully, aloud, for problems with word choice.

Is the level of formality appropriate?

Have you used specific and appropriate words?

Read it once more to check for conciseness. Remove any unnecessary words and phrases. Make each sentence as concise as it can be.

TIP: Learn to use the reviewing tool in your word processor, and use it during the editing stage of the writing process. Set your reviewing tool to track any changes you make so you will be able to tinker with the text and commit to only those final changes you want to keep.

Now that you've edited your own essay, it's time to ask for help from a peer, who will undoubtedly be able to catch problems that you've missed.

Peer Review: Editing

If this is the first time you've participated in a peer review, please read [Chapter 7: Peer Review: Revision](#) before proceeding.

PRACTICE 8.4

Ask a peer to review your essay and provide feedback on *how* you've written so that you can more effectively edit your essay.

Step 1: In preparation for peer review, fill out this information about your essay and share it with your reviewer:

Date: _____

Writer's name: _____

Title of essay: _____

Topic of essay: _____

Audience: _____

Purpose of Essay: _____

Intended Tone: _____

Peer reviewer's name: _____

Step 2: Ask your peer reviewer to carefully read your essay in order to provide you with feedback that will help you edit your essay. Your reviewer should follow these steps:

1. Read the checklist below *before* reading the essay so that you know what to look for.
2. Carefully read the essay, preferably aloud, focusing on the questions in the checklist. Make notes as you go.
3. Do not ask the writer to clarify or explain any sentences as you read. If the wording is unclear, make a note. If you are confused about something, make a note.

Step 3: Go through the checklist with the reviewer and discuss the answers to each question. Ask for clarification if you don't understand some of the feedback.

CHECKLIST 8.2: PEER REVIEW: EDITING FOR TONE, STYLE, AND CLARITY

Is the essay written in the first person, second person, or third person? Is this a good choice for the audience, the purpose, and the intended tone? Is the point of view consistent throughout?

- Choose three or four words that describe the tone of the essay:

See [Chapter 6: The Importance of Tone](#)

- Is the tone appropriate for the topic, audience, and purpose?
- Is the level of formality appropriate for the audience and purpose?
- Are there any words that are too informal and could be replaced with more formal ones?

See [Chapter 23: Writing Style](#)

- Is there slang or jargon that could be replaced by standard English words?
- Are there any vague or unclear words that could be replaced with specific ones?
- Are any words or phrases repeated too often? Is there wordiness that could be eliminated?
- Does the writing contain clichés that should be eliminated?
- Is the verb tense consistent throughout the essay?

See [Chapter 24: Grammar Handbook](#)

- Has the writer overused passive voice?

TIP: Words that describe tone include the following:

accusatory	biased
confrontational	disrespectful
formal	ironic
optimistic	personal
scornful	sympathetic
aggressive	bitter
cynical	earnest
humorous	judgmental
one-sided	persuasive
sentimental	thoughtful
angry	candid
defiant	earnest
indignant	lighthearted
outraged	playful
serious	urgent
assertive	chatty
direct	enthusiastic
inflammatory	neutral
patronizing	resentful
skeptical	warm
arrogant	concerned
dishonest	evasive
informal	nostalgic
pedantic	resigned
sincere	witty
balanced	condescending
disparaging	fair
informative	objective
pessimistic	sarcastic
subjective	worried

PRACTICE 8.5

Before proceeding, please review “Deciding How to Use (or Not Use) Feedback” in [Chapter 7: Peer Review: Revision](#).

Reflect on the feedback you received from the peer review. Which is most helpful? Jot notes below.

The most helpful feedback was _____

I noticed this pattern in the feedback: _____

In my final edit, I will use my partner’s feedback to make this change:

One piece of feedback I will *not* use is _____

_____ because _____

* * *

You should now be confident you have expressed your ideas clearly and concisely. In the [next chapter](#), you’ll learn how to tackle the last step of the writing process: proofreading your essay.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Editing is the stage of the writing process in which you improve the *way* you’ve written your essay, in preparation for producing a final draft.
- The purpose and audience will affect the tone that you choose.
- At the editing stage, carefully review the writing to improve tone, style, conciseness, and clarity.
- Take a second look at the words and sentences, and fix any problems in grammar and sentence structure.
- Writing should be clear and concise, with no unnecessary words.
- Effective writers use specific, appropriate language and avoid slang, contractions, jargon, clichés, and vague words.
- An effective student essay maintains a consistent style and tone that are appropriately academic.

- Use available resources, including editing checklists, peer review, and your institution's writing centre, to improve your editing skills.
- Peer review can give writers helpful feedback about their writing.
- It is the writer's responsibility to evaluate the results of peer review and incorporate only useful feedback.

Proofread

Polish Your Writing for an Audience

Learning Objectives

- Proofread an essay to improve format, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and other mechanical issues
- Use conventional formatting and mechanics to help a reader interpret the writing without distraction
- Proofread an essay to ensure that the documentation style is applied correctly and consistently

Finally, the last step in the writing process is proofreading. Now it's time to polish your writing in preparation for publishing. Remember, **publishing** simply means sharing your writing with an audience, whether that means posting a paragraph to an online student forum, submitting an essay to a professor for marking, or publishing an article in a student newspaper.

The Purpose of Proofreading

In the proofreading stage, your goal is to make your reader's job as easy as possible by polishing your writing to create an error-free end product that represents all the work you've done thus far.

Readers do not stop to notice correct spelling or proper formatting, but they *do* stop to notice misspellings and typos, which momentarily distract them from focusing on the ideas in your writing. The more errors there are in an essay, the more often a reader will be distracted from your message. If there are an

overwhelming number of errors in an essay, the reader may find it difficult to interpret the meaning at all.

If you proofread effectively, readers will notice the care with which you handled your assignment and your attention to detail in the delivery of an error-free document. That will enhance your credibility as a writer, and it will reinforce the persuasiveness of your argument.

Strategies for Proofreading

Before proofreading, set your paper aside for at least a few hours, preferably a day or more, which will make it easier for you to notice errors. As you review your essay one last time, examine the surface features of your text. Correct the mechanical issues in your essay, such as format, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and documentation. Correcting these errors will make your reader's job easier. You want your reader to be able to easily read your text, focusing on your good ideas, rather than being distracted by typos and confusing errors.

Proofreading takes time, so be sure to budget time to complete this important final step of the writing process.

Before you proofread your essay, look back at the assignment requirements your instructor provided. If your instructor asked for specific fonts, spacing, or margins, be sure you've met those requirements. If your instructor asked for specific formatting and documentation, ensure your text meets those conventions.

To proofread most effectively, print your essay on paper and read it aloud slowly. Using the spell-checking feature in your word-processing program can be helpful, but because a spell-checker only flags certain kinds of errors, the spell-check and grammar check features should not replace a full, careful review of your document. In particular, be sure to check for any errors that may have come up frequently for you in the past.

Writing at Work

Many companies hire copy editors and proofreaders to help them produce the cleanest possible final drafts of large writing projects. Copy editors are responsible for suggesting revisions and style changes; proofreaders check documents for any errors in capitalization, spelling, and punctuation that have crept in. Many times, these tasks are done on a freelance basis, with one freelancer working for a variety of clients.

Proofread for Errors in Grammar and Mechanics

It is difficult to catch all errors in one read-through of your essay, so we recommend proofreading in steps, and each time you review your essay, focus on only one category of potential error.

First, review your essay for grammar and mechanics. Use [Checklist 9.1](#) as a guide.

CHECKLIST 9.1: PROOFREADING FOR GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Grammar

- Are some sentences actually sentence fragments?
- Are some sentences run-ons? How can I correct them?
- Do some sentences need conjunctions between independent clauses?
- Does every verb agree with its subject?
- Is every verb in the correct tense?
- Are tense forms, especially for irregular verbs, written correctly?
- Have I used subject, object, and possessive personal pronouns correctly?
- Have I used *who* and *whom* correctly?
- Is the antecedent of every pronoun clear?
- Do all personal pronouns agree with their antecedents?
- Have I used the correct comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs?
- Is it clear which word a participial phrase modifies, or is it a dangling modifier?

Sentence Structure

- Are all my sentences simple sentences, or do I vary my sentence structure?
- Have I chosen the best coordinating or subordinating conjunctions to join clauses?
- Have I created long, overpacked sentences that should be shortened for clarity?
- Do I see any mistakes in parallel structure?

Punctuation

- Does every sentence end with the correct punctuation?
- Can I justify the use of every exclamation point?
- Have I used apostrophes correctly to write all singular and plural possessive forms?
- Have I used quotation marks correctly?

Mechanics and Usage

- Can I find any spelling errors? How can I correct them?
- Have I used capital letters where they are needed?
- Have I written abbreviations, where allowed, correctly?
- Can I find any errors in the use of commonly confused words, such as *to/too/two*?

TIP: Be careful about relying too much on spell-check and grammar check. A spelling checker cannot recognize that you meant to write *principle* but wrote *principal* instead. A grammar checker often queries constructions that are perfectly correct. The software may not understand your meaning; it makes its checks against a general set of formulas that might not apply in each instance. If you use a grammar checker, accept the suggestions that make sense, but consider why the suggestions came up.

PRACTICE 9.1

Return to the draft essay you were working with in [Practice 8.3](#). Review the essay, using [Checklist 9.1](#) to help you identify problems with grammar and mechanics.

TIP: Proofreading requires patience; it is very easy to read past a mistake—especially because you know what you *meant* to write, even if that’s not what appears on the page. Some professional proofreaders read a text backward so they can concentrate on spelling and punctuation. Another helpful technique is to slowly read a paper aloud, paying attention to every word, letter, and punctuation mark.

Proofread for Errors in Format and Documentation

Your finished assignment should be properly formatted, following the style required of you. Formatting includes the style of the first page, the title, margin size, font type, font size, line spacing, justification, page number placement, location of the writer’s name, and many other factors. Your instructor may require a specific style to be used. The requirements may be very detailed and

rigid for research projects and term papers, especially for research essays. To ensure the format is correct and follows any specific instructions, read through your essay again, proofreading for problems with format.

TIP: Three of the most common documentation styles are MLA (Modern Language Association) style, APA (American Psychological Association) style, and Chicago style. You will learn more about the formatting details of documentation in [Chapter 22: Documentation](#).

When proofreading 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, citing sources correctly ensures that you give 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.

Now review your essay again, this time focusing on format and documentation. Follow [Checklist 9.2: Proofreading for Errors in Format and Documentation](#).

CHECKLIST 9.2: PROOFREADING FOR ERRORS IN FORMAT AND DOCUMENTATION

- In the body of the essay, 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 the page number (if available).
- The citations are correctly formatted.
- Each source cited in the body of the essay has a corresponding entry in the bibliography.
- The bibliography includes a title and double-spaced entries arranged in alphabetical order.
- Each entry in the bibliography is indented on the second line and all subsequent lines.
- Each entry in the bibliography includes all the necessary information for that source type in the correct sequence and format.
- The essay includes a title page, formatted according to the specifications of the documentation style.

- The margins of the document are set at 2.54 cm (one inch) unless otherwise instructed.
- The entire text is double-spaced and set in a standard 12-point font, such as Times New Roman or Arial.

For detailed guidelines on formatting the citations and the bibliography, refer to [Chapter 22: Documentation](#).

PRACTICE 9.2

With the help of [Checklist 9.2](#), proofread your essay, focusing on format and documentation.

Writing at Work

Following 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.

Peer Review: Proofreading

Now that you've proofread your own essay, it's time to ask for help from a peer, who will undoubtedly be able to catch typos and errors that you've missed.

PRACTICE 9.3

If this is the first time you've participated in a peer review, please read [Chapter 7: Peer Review: Revision](#) before proceeding.

Ask a peer to proofread your essay and mark errors in mechanics and documentation.

Step 1: In preparation for peer review, fill out this information about your essay and share it with your reviewer:

Date: _____

Writer's name: _____

Title of essay: _____

Required word count: _____

Required Documentation style:

MLA APA Chicago Other: _____

Instructor's specific instructions regarding the following:

Font type: Times New Roman Arial Other: _____

Font Size: _____ (unless otherwise instructed, use 12-point font)

Margins: _____ (unless otherwise instructor, use 2.54 cm margins on all sides of the page)

Justification _____ (unless otherwise instructed, use left justification for paragraphs and the bibliography; centre titles)

Peer reviewer's name: _____

Step 2: Ask your peer reviewer to carefully proofread your essay and suggest corrections. Your reviewer should follow these steps:

1. Read the checklist below *before* reading the essay so that you know what to look for.
2. Carefully read the essay, focusing on the questions in the checklist. Make notes as you go.

Step 3: Go through the checklist with the reviewer and discuss the answers to each question. Ask for clarification if you don't understand some of the feedback.

TIP: To learn more about the mechanical elements mentioned in [Checklist 9.3](#), refer to [Chapter 25: Mechanics](#).

CHECKLIST 9.3: PEER REVIEW—PROOFREADING

- Does the format of the essay meet the expectations for margins, font type, font size, justification, spacing, and page numbers?
- Circle any spelling errors, capitalization errors, or typographical errors.
- Circle any italicization errors. Remember to italicize the titles of books, newspapers, and magazines. Also italicize a word referred to as a word as well as non-English words.
- Circle any punctuation errors. Are there particular punctuation marks that the writer has trouble with?
- Has the writer provided an in-text citation every time one is necessary?
- Are the in-text citations formatted correctly according to the chosen documentation style?

- Is the bibliography complete? Does it contain all the sources cited in the essay?
- Is the bibliography formatted correctly according to the documentation style?

PRACTICE 9.4

Before proceeding, reread “Deciding How to Use (or Not Use) Feedback from Peer Review” in [Chapter 7: Peer Review: Revision](#).

Then review the feedback you received from the peer review and begin making corrections.

If you are not certain if your reviewer’s corrections are correct, you will need to investigate further. Refer to the following resources:

Format: Reread your assignment instructions and/or the style guide.

Punctuation: Refer to [Chapter 25: Mechanics](#)

Spelling and capitalization: Refer to a dictionary and to [Chapter 25: Mechanics](#)

Documentation: Refer to [Chapter 22: Documentation](#), the Purdue OWL website, and/or the style guide

After making the suggested corrections, read through your essay one last time, looking for any final typos or errors.

PRACTICE 9.5

Reflect on the feedback from your reviewer and consider the following questions:

Did I correctly follow the assignment instructions for font, margins, justification, spacing, and so on?

If not, plan to read assignment instructions more carefully in the future.

Are there any punctuation marks that I struggle to use correctly?
Which ones?

Make a plan to learn how to use these punctuation marks correctly.

Do I consistently misspell certain words? Which ones?

Make a plan to learn the spelling of those words and to watch for them when you proofread future assignments.

Do I struggle to format citations and the bibliography correctly?

If so, make a plan to learn more about the documentation style. Begin with [Part 5: Research and Documentation](#).

* * *

You now have a polished piece of writing that clearly conveys your ideas to your audience. It's time to submit or share your essay. Congratulations!

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Budget time for careful proofreading so that you can submit a polished piece of writing.
- Readers find it easier to read an essay that is correctly formatted and correctly punctuated.
- Mechanical errors distract a reader from focusing on and understanding ideas.
- Proofreading a research paper involves checking for errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, italicization, spelling, citations, and formatting.
- A peer can help with proofreading.
- It is the writer's responsibility to evaluate the results of peer proofreading and incorporate only appropriate corrections.

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PART III

Building Paragraphs and Essays

Now that you've learned a writing process with which you can confidently tackle any writing task—from a brief memo to a major term paper—it's time to turn our attention to the specific building blocks of most academic assignments. In Part 3, we'll examine the fundamentals of writing effective paragraphs and effective essays.

Regardless of what you're writing, the first step is to determine your topic, your purpose, and your audience. Inexperienced writers sometimes hurriedly skip this step, and as a result, they struggle to complete a writing task successfully. If you simply copy a topic from the assignment instructions and start writing straightaway, you have likely not considered the topic deeply enough. In most cases, the topic stated in the assignment instructions is much too broad. To adequately explore it, you'd need to write an entire book! Your instructor expects you to narrow the topic to find a specific, engaging topic suitable for a short essay. In [Chapter 10](#), we'll explore how to develop a suitable narrow topic; with that starting point, you'll find the rest of the essay-writing process much easier.

In [Chapter 11](#), you'll learn the basics of writing effective paragraphs. A paragraph is not simply a bunch of sentences strung together: an effective paragraph has focus, structure, a controlling idea, and logical development. Sometimes, you'll be required to submit a single paragraph, in which case a well-constructed

paragraph is essential. More often, you'll use the tips in [Chapter 11](#) to write the body paragraphs of essays. Whether you're writing one stand-alone paragraph or a long essay, read this chapter closely, and complete the practice exercises to develop your paragraph-writing skills. After all, paragraphs are the building blocks of essays, reports, research papers, dissertations, and books. If the paragraphs themselves aren't effective, the larger text won't be successful either.

In [Chapters 12 to 14](#), you'll work through the main parts of the standard essay structure: the introductory paragraph, the thesis statement, the body paragraphs, and the concluding paragraph. The thesis statement is the single most important sentence in an essay, and once you have developed a good thesis statement, the rest of the essay will follow more easily.

When writing body paragraphs, you'll use the standard paragraph structure introduced in [Chapter 11](#), but body paragraphs require some additional considerations to ensure they will work well with the other paragraphs of an essay. Introductory and concluding paragraphs have their own specific purposes and, as a result, their own special structures. Put all these building blocks together, and you're on your way to writing a successful essay!

The standard essay structure introduced in [Chapters 12 to 14](#) is the foundation of all post-secondary essays, whether you're writing a short four-paragraph essay on a final exam or a two-hundred-page dissertation to earn a PhD. This standard structure is the foundation of personal essays, expository essays, analysis essays, argumentative essays, and research papers. Therefore, we encourage you to read through [Part 3](#) in its entirety, completing the practice exercises along the way. You will likely return to certain sections again and again, each time you tackle a new essay assignment.

Develop an Effective Topic for a Paragraph or an Essay

Learning Objectives

- Use prewriting strategies to choose a topic and narrow the focus
- Identify the characteristics of an effective essay topic

In addition to understanding that writing is a process, effective writers also understand that choosing a good topic for an assignment is an essential step. Sometimes, your instructor will give you an idea to begin an assignment, while other times, your instructor will ask you to come up with a topic on your own.

In this chapter, you will follow the process of a kinesiology student, Alex, as she chooses and narrows a topic in preparation for writing an essay. You will also practice choosing and narrowing a topic of your own.

Choose a Topic

A good general topic not only covers what an assignment will be about but also fits the assignment's purpose and audience. Think about *why* you are writing (to inform, to explain, to persuade, or for some other purpose) and *for whom* you are writing. For a refresher on the importance of audience and purpose, review [Chapter 5: First Things First: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content](#).

Within the constraints of the assignment, try to choose a topic that interests you, which will make writing easier. If you are choosing your own topic, make

sure it is suitable for the course and the assignment. Also, the topic must be manageable in a short essay. We'll discuss this more in the next section.

In [Chapter 4](#), you learned prewriting strategies that are helpful for finding general topics, such as using experiences and observations, brainstorming, and reading. Every time you receive a new writing assignment, return to those prewriting techniques to help generate topic ideas. Even if your instructor assigns you a general topic, prewriting techniques can help generate related ideas and subtopics.

PRACTICE 10.1

Take a moment to review the ideas you generated in [Practice 4.1](#), [Practice 4.2](#), and [Practice 4.3](#).

Choose one topic that you would like to develop throughout this chapter. Regardless of whether this is a practice essay or an essay for a class assignment, choose a topic that

- a. you are interested in
- b. is suitable for a university class
- c. is appropriate for a short essay

Then think about the intended audience and the purpose of the essay.

On a sheet of paper, write the general topic, the purpose, and the audience. Keep the paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter.

My general topic: _____

My purpose: _____

My audience: _____

TIP: Have you seen an attention-grabbing story on your local news channel? Many current issues appear on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. These can all provide inspiration for your writing. Do keep in mind, though, that a popular current topic can wear out its welcome. Also, avoid topics that are likely to be chosen by many other students, unless you have a novel perspective on it.

Narrow the Focus

Once you've chosen a general topic for your assignment, it's essential to narrow the focus. Many students miss this important step, and they try to write about a topic that is much too big for a short essay, which makes for a frustrating experience and a disappointing result.

Consider the example below. Alex's instructor has asked students to write a five-page essay on a topic of interest. Alex wants to write about yoga. However, she knows that the general topic—yoga—is much too broad for a five-page essay. She could write an entire *book* about the topic of yoga (and many people have). Alex knows that in order to make the topic manageable, and in order to write a focused, coherent essay, she needs to narrow the focus to a more specific topic. She uses the prewriting strategy of idea mapping to generate subtopics, starting with the question, "What do I want people to know about yoga?"

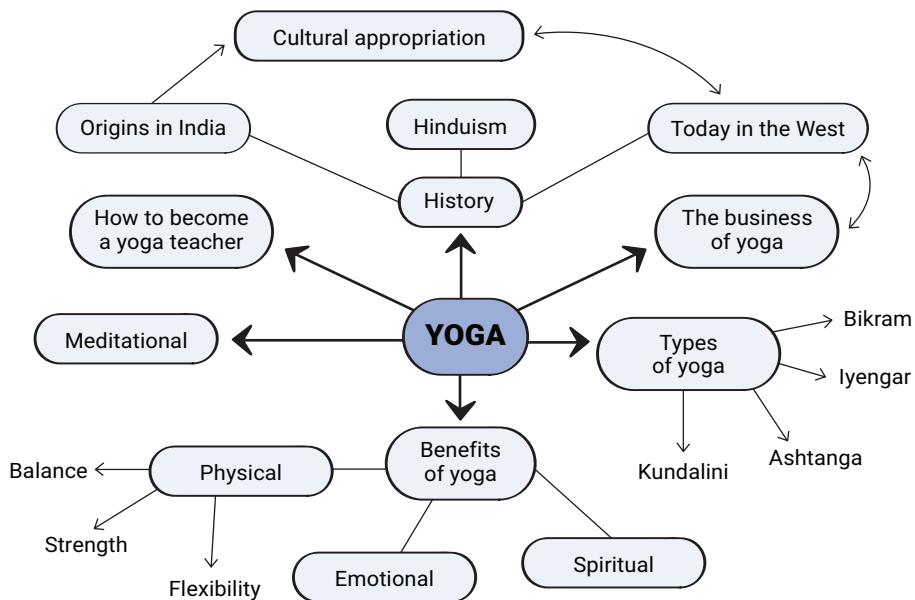


Figure 10.1: Idea Map on the General Topic “Yoga”

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

TIP: In an idea map, the further you move out from centre, the more likely you are to find a topic suitable for a short essay.

After establishing several potential subtopics, Alex has some good choices. She knows that “yoga” is too big a topic for a five-page essay, so she circles some areas of the map that might be suitable. For example, she sees that she could write a classification essay about four types of yoga (see [Figure 10.2](#)).

Or she could write about the benefits of yoga (see [Figure 10.3](#)).

Alternatively, she could write a process essay about how to become a yoga teacher.

Alex decides to write about the benefits of yoga. Referring to her idea map, she identifies three types of benefits: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Alex decides to freewrite about these benefits of yoga for ten minutes. (For a refresher on freewriting, turn to [Chapter 4](#).)

However, after freewriting, Alex realizes that to fully explore all three benefits of yoga, she would probably need to write an essay of twenty or even fifty pages. She knows she cannot do this topic justice in a five-page essay. The topic is still too broad. To narrow the topic further, Alex again refers to her idea map (see [Figure 10.4](#)).

Alex decides that she will focus on the physical benefits of yoga. Even though she is very interested in the emotional and spiritual benefits of yoga, she will not mention them in this essay. Focusing on the physical benefits, her subtopics will be balance, strength, and flexibility. She knows that she can adequately cover this topic in five pages.

Alex has chosen a sufficiently narrowed topic, and she will now be able to write a focused and coherent essay. She jots down her new topic:

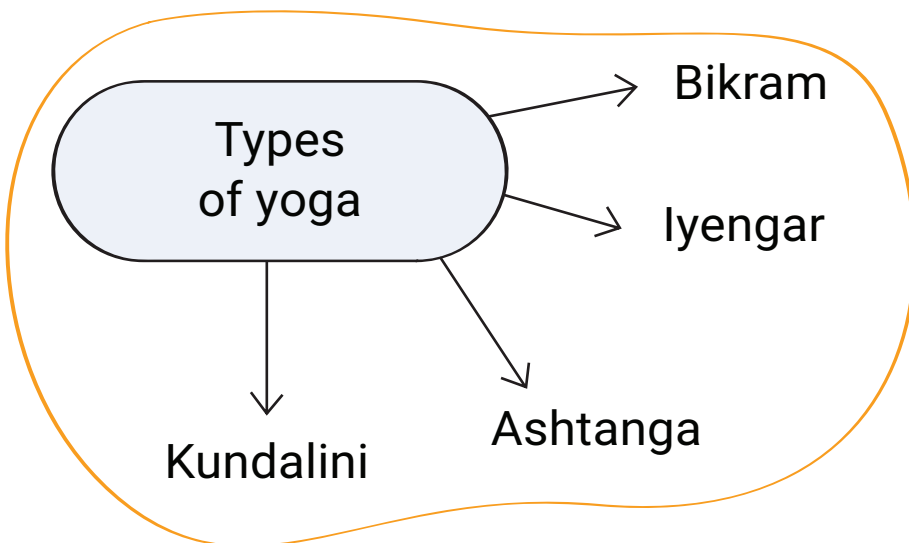


Figure 10.2: A Portion of the Idea Map on the Topic “Yoga”

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

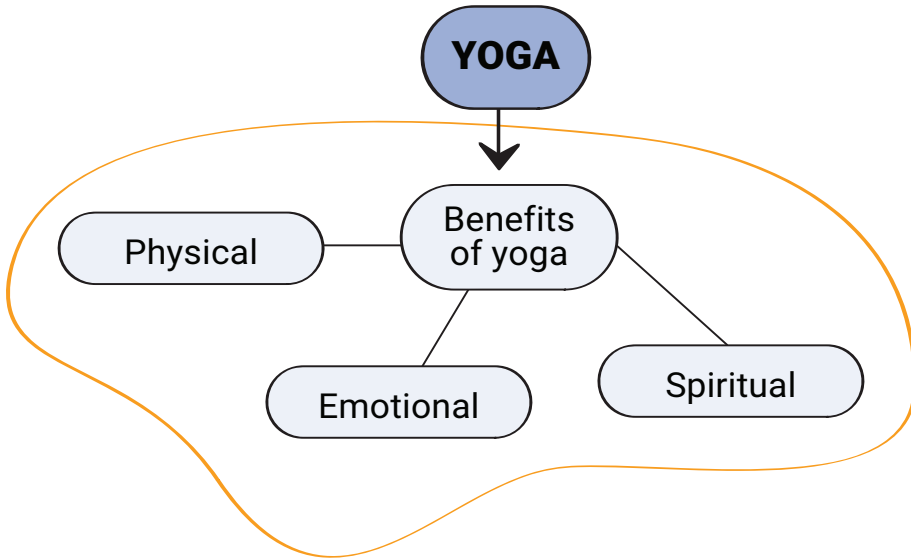


Figure 10.3: A Portion of the Idea Map on the Topic “Yoga”

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

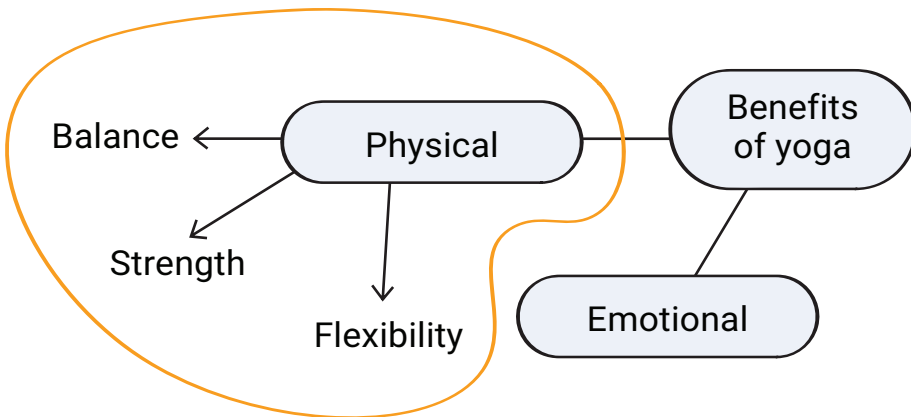


Figure 10.4: A Narrower Portion of the Idea Map on the Topic “Yoga”

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

General Topic: Yoga

Narrower Topic: The benefits of yoga

Final Narrowed Topic: The physical benefits of yoga

Having chosen a narrower topic suitable for a short essay, Alex now spends a few minutes making another idea map to generate and organize more detailed ideas (see [Figure 10.5](#)).

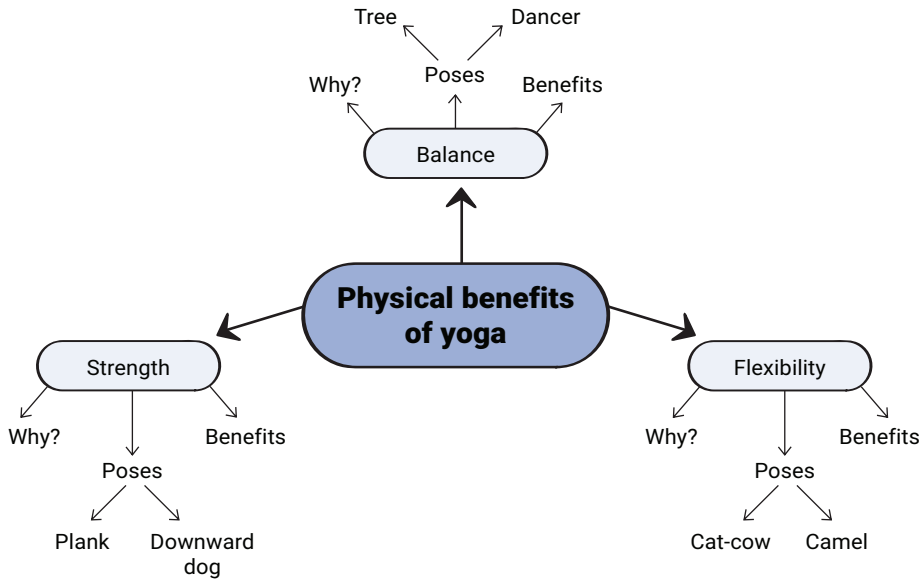


Figure 10.5: A New Idea Map on the “Physical Benefits of Yoga”

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Now, based on the structure she identified in the last idea map, she is ready to create an outline for her essay. Below is Alex’s outline for an essay about the physical benefits of yoga:

TITLE: THE PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF YOGA

I. Introductory paragraph

Thesis statement: Practicing yoga has many physical benefits, including improving balance, increasing strength, and developing flexibility.

II. First body paragraph

Topic sentence: First, practicing yoga improves a person’s balance.

- A. Importance of balance in preventing injuries as we age
- B. Common balance poses
 - i. Tree pose
 - ii. Dancer’s pose.
- C. Effects of practicing balance poses

III. Second body paragraph

Topic sentence: A yoga practice also improves strength.

- A. Why it’s important to build strong muscles
- B. Strengthening yoga poses

- i. Plank pose
 - ii. Downward-facing dog pose
 - C. Effects of these poses
- III. Third body paragraph

Topic sentence: Finally, practicing yoga increases one's flexibility.

 - A. The importance of flexibility for joint health and functional movement
 - B. Poses that increase flexibility
 - i. Cat-cow pose
 - ii. Camel pose
 - C. Effects of these poses on flexibility.
- IV. Concluding paragraph

Restate thesis: People who would like to improve their balance, strength, and flexibility should look to yoga.

As Alex discovered, the prewriting techniques of freewriting and asking questions can help a student think more about a general topic, and the following prewriting strategies can help narrow the focus of a topic:

- Brainstorming
- Idea mapping
- Searching the Internet

Narrowing the focus requires breaking up the topic into subtopics, or more specific points. Generating a lot of subtopics helps in selecting the ones that fit the assignment, appeal to the writer, and meet the needs of the audience.

TIP: As you narrow a topic, keep in mind the required length of the assignment you're writing. A short essay will require a narrower focus than a longer essay would, and a stand-alone paragraph will require a narrower focus than a short essay would.

PRACTICE 10.2

Now choose and complete one of the prewriting strategies to narrow the focus for the general topic you chose in [Practice 10.1](#). Use brainstorming, idea mapping, or searching the Internet. Then record the results below:

My general topic: _____

My narrower topic: _____

My final narrowed topic: _____

Share with a peer and compare your answers. Share what you found and what interests you about the topic.

PRACTICE 10.3

Use [Checklist 10.1: Developing a Good Topic](#) to help you with narrowing a broad topic to a more specific topic that will be suitable for your assignment.

CHECKLIST 10.1: DEVELOPING A GOOD TOPIC

This checklist can help you decide if your narrowed topic is a good topic for your assignment.

With your narrowed focus in mind, answer the bulleted questions in the checklist for developing a good topic. If you can answer “yes” to all the questions, write your topic on the line below. If you answer “no” to any of the questions, think about another topic or adjust the one you have, and try the prewriting strategies again.

- Am I interested in this topic?
- Would my audience be interested?
- Do I have prior knowledge or experience with this topic? If so, would I be comfortable exploring this topic and sharing my experiences?
- Do I want to learn more about this topic?
- Is this topic specific?
- Does it fit the length of the assignment?

An effective topic ensures that you are ready for the next step: writing about that topic in a paragraph or an essay.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Writers often choose a general topic first and then narrow the focus to a more specific topic.
- Prewriting strategies can help a writer generate more specific topics.
- A good topic interests the writer, appeals to the audience, and fits the purpose and requirements of the assignment.

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Paragraph Essentials

Learning Objectives

- Identify the three parts of a well-developed paragraph
- Identify the characteristics of an effective topic sentence
- Identify the characteristics of effective supporting sentences
- Identify the characteristics of an effective closing sentence
- Write an effective paragraph, including a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a closing sentence

This chapter explains how to compose an effective paragraph. Sometimes in your university studies, you will be asked to write a stand-alone paragraph—especially on exams. More often, you will be asked to write an essay or report that is composed of multiple paragraphs. The key to both tasks is the ability to write well-focused, well-developed paragraphs.

Composing an effective paragraph requires a method similar to building a house. You may have the finest content or materials, but if you do not arrange them in the correct order, then the final product will not hold together very well.

What Is a Paragraph?

A paragraph is a series of sentences that are focused on a single topic and work together as a unit to convey a message. The sentences are arranged in a particular order to develop the topic. A writer indicates the beginning of a paragraph by indenting the first line.

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. In a multiparagraph piece of writing, a writer starts a new paragraph for each new idea. A strong paragraph contains three distinct components:

Topic sentence: The topic sentence presents the topic and the controlling idea of the paragraph.

Body: The body is composed of the supporting sentences that develop the controlling idea.

Closing sentence: The closing sentence is the final sentence, which reinforces the controlling idea.

The foundation of a good paragraph—whether it is to be a stand-alone paragraph or part of an essay—is the topic sentence, which expresses the main idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence is often the first sentence of a paragraph, particularly in stand-alone paragraphs and in the body paragraphs of an essay. (In an essay, the topic sentence of each body paragraph relates to the thesis, or main argument, of the essay and guides the reader by signposting what each paragraph is about.) All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to and support the topic sentence. The closing sentence should sum up the paragraph and reinforce the topic sentence.

Effective Topic Sentences

Pick up any newspaper or magazine and read the first sentence of an article. Can you tell what the rest of the article is about? If so, you have likely read the topic sentence. Read the following example:

Creating a national set of standards for math and English education will improve student learning in many provinces.

This topic sentence declares that the writer is in favour of standardizing math and English education. After reading this sentence, a reader might reasonably expect the writer to provide supporting details and facts to argue that standardizing math and English education might improve student learning in many provinces.

TIP: When writing a draft of a paragraph, ask a friend or family member to read the opening line. Ask your reader to predict what your paragraph will be about. If they are unable to accurately predict the topic, consider revising the topic sentence so that it clearly defines your purpose in writing.

The topic sentence orients the reader and provides an indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph. An effective topic sentence

- a. introduces a **topic** (the subject that the writer is writing about)
- b. states a **controlling idea** about that topic (the main idea the writer wants to convey about that subject)
- c. may indicate the writer's **stance** (opinion or argument) about the topic

In [Chapter 10](#), you practiced developing a suitably narrow topic for a paragraph. Now we'll examine the other key component of an effective topic sentence: the controlling idea.

The Controlling Idea

A topic sentence that contains only a topic is not effective. For example:

Ineffective topic sentence: I grew up in Aspen Butte, Alberta.

While this sentence introduces a topic, it merely states a simple *fact* about the topic. It does not contain a controlling idea that will provide direction for the paragraph, so it is not yet an effective topic sentence.

Effective topic sentence: I grew up in Aspen Butte, Alberta, the setting for all my wonderful childhood memories of outdoor activities in beautiful, unspoiled nature.

This sentence introduces a topic *and* a controlling idea that will provide direction for the paragraph. Therefore, it is an effective topic sentence. The reader will expect the entire paragraph to remain focused on pleasant childhood memories of outdoor activities in Aspen Butte.

Because it is the controlling idea that directs the paragraph, different writers may write about the same topic, but differences in the controlling ideas will result in very different paragraphs. Compare these examples:

I grew up in Aspen Butte, Alberta, the setting for all my wonderful childhood memories of outdoor activities in beautiful, unspoiled nature.

I grew up in Aspen Butte, Alberta, a claustrophobic small town that stifled my creativity and individuality to the point that I couldn't wait to leave.

Both sentences are effective topic sentences: each introduces a topic and a controlling idea. However, although both paragraphs are about the same *topic*—growing up in Aspen Butte—the controlling ideas are very different, which will result in two very different paragraphs. Based on the second topic sentence, the reader will expect the entire paragraph to focus on unpleasant childhood memories of living in Aspen Butte.

Notice, too, that the controlling idea is what makes the paragraph interesting. The statement “I grew up in Aspen Butte” does not pique a reader's interest. The two improved topic sentences are much more intriguing and thus more likely to encourage the reader to keep reading. Let's look at some effective topic sentences for academic paragraphs:

Cannabis is a destructive influence on teens and causes long-term brain damage.

The antinausea properties in cannabis are a lifeline for many cancer patients.

Legalizing cannabis would create a higher demand for class A and class B drugs.

Although all three topic sentences introduce the same topic—cannabis—the controlling ideas are very different, so the focus and content of each paragraph will be different, and the writer will have to do different research for each topic to support the topic sentence.

PRACTICE 11.1

Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea in each of the following topic sentences.

- A. Exercising three times a week is the only way to maintain good physical health.

- B. Sexism and racism are still rampant in today's workplace.
- C. Raising the legal driving age to twenty-one would decrease road-traffic accidents.
- D. Owning a business is the only way to achieve financial success.
- E. Dog owners should be prohibited from taking their pets on public beaches.

Five Characteristics of a Good Topic Sentence

1. A good topic sentence introduces a topic *and* a controlling idea.

Weak topic sentence: In this paragraph, I am going to discuss the rising suicide rate among young professionals.

This sentence introduces a topic, but it does not present a controlling idea. Also, it contains unnecessary filler: "In this paragraph, I am going to. . ."

Stronger topic sentence: The rising suicide rate among young professionals is a cause for immediate concern.

This topic sentence presents a controlling idea: a stance on rising suicide rates among young professionals.

2. A good topic sentence provides an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.

Let's say a student is writing a paragraph about a specific incident that involved firefighters and is writing a topic sentence for the paragraph:

Weak topic sentence: People rarely give firefighters the credit they deserve for such a physically and emotionally demanding job.

This topic sentence is too general because the paragraph is not about *all* firefighters or the credit they receive; instead, the paragraph is about a specific incident involving specific firefighters.

Stronger topic sentence: During the October riots, Unit 3B went beyond the call of duty.

This is a strong topic sentence because it indicates that the paragraph will contain information about particular firefighters during a particular incident.

3. A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow.

Weak topic sentence: In general, writing an essay, thesis, or other academic or non-academic document is considerably easier and of much higher quality if you first construct an outline, of which there are many different types.

This topic sentence includes a topic and a controlling idea, but both are buried beneath the confusing sentence structure and

unnecessary vocabulary. These obstacles make it difficult for the reader to follow.

Stronger topic sentence: Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline.

This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow.

4. A good topic sentence focuses on the main controlling idea, not the supporting details.

Weak topic sentence: Salaries should be capped in baseball for many reasons, most importantly so we don't allow the same team to win year after year.

This topic sentence includes one supporting detail—but not the others; therefore, it misleads the reader about the content of the paragraph.

Stronger topic sentence: Introducing a salary cap would improve the game of baseball for three reasons.

This topic sentence omits the additional supporting details so that it can be expanded upon later in the paragraph.

5. A good topic sentence engages the reader by using interesting vocabulary.

Weak topic sentence: The military deserves better equipment.

This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but the language is bland and unexciting.

Stronger topic sentence: The appalling lack of resources provided to the Canadian military requires Canadians' immediate attention.

This topic sentence reiterates the same idea and controlling thesis, but adjectives such as *appalling* and *immediate* better engage the reader. These words also indicate the writer's tone.

TIP: Do be careful with emotive words because not every instructor will appreciate rhetoric that could be regarded as overly emotional or exaggerated, especially in academic discourse.

PRACTICE 11.2

Choose the most effective topic sentence from the following pairs.

- A.
- a. This paragraph will discuss the likelihood of the liberals winning the next election.
 - b. To boost their chances of winning the next election, the liberals need to listen to public opinion.
- B.
- a. The unrealistic demands of union workers are crippling the economy for three main reasons.
 - b. Union workers are crippling the economy because companies are unable to remain competitive as a result of added financial pressure.
- C.
- a. Authors are losing money as a result of technological advances.
 - b. The introduction of new technology will devastate the literary world.
- D.
- a. Rap music is produced by untalented individuals with oversized egos.
 - b. This paragraph will consider whether talent is required in the rap music industry.

TIP: Unless your instructor specifically asks you to, avoid including phrases such as “This paragraph will . . .” or “I will discuss . . .” or “I am going to . . .” in a topic sentence.

PRACTICE 11.3

Using the tips on developing effective topic sentences in this section, create a topic sentence on each of the following subjects. Remember to include a controlling idea.

An endangered species:

The cost of fuel:

The legal drinking age:

A controversial film or novel:

Ask a peer to underline the topic and circle the controlling idea in each of the topic sentences you created.

* * *

Many times, after writing a paragraph, a writer will realize that the paragraph didn't go in exactly the direction that was expected. Therefore, it might be necessary to revise the topic sentence. Let's look again at the topic sentence about education standards:

Creating a national set of standards for math and English education
will improve student learning in many provinces.

When starting out, the student intended to write only about standards for math and English education. However, as he wrote the paragraph, he found himself arguing for standards in science education too.

After finishing the paragraph, the student reviews the topic sentence and realizes that because he added science education to the paragraph, the topic sentence is no longer accurate. It suggests a scope that is narrower than the actual content of the paragraph. Put simply, the topic sentence no longer matches the content of the paragraph.

The writer has two choices: (a) revise the topic sentence so that it more accurately reflects the actual content of the paragraph, or (b) change the content of the paragraph (by removing the reference to science education) so that it more accurately reflects the scope introduced in the topic sentence. The writer should choose one of those options to improve the unity of the paragraph.

After finishing a paragraph, always go back and review the topic sentence to make sure it still matches the rest of the paragraph.

Positioning a Topic Sentence

Identifying topic sentences and thinking about their placement in a paragraph will prepare you to write your own effective topic sentences and well-organized paragraphs.

Think back to what you have been taught previously about where to place a topic sentence in a paragraph. What is the best position for a topic sentence?

PRACTICE 11.4

Read the following paragraph. Underline the topic sentence.

This season, the plague of reality television continues to darken our airwaves. Along with the return of mindless shows like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* and *Big Brother*, we are to be cursed with yet another mindless creation. *Prisoner* follows the daily lives of eight suburban housewives who have chosen to be put in jail for the purposes of a fake psychological experiment. A preview for the first episode shows the usual tears and tantrums associated with reality television. *Survivor* and *The Bachelor* continue with yet another season, but these shows long ago failed to interest intelligent viewers. I dread to think what new shows producers will come up with next season. If any of them are reading this blog, I ask them to stop bombarding us with this garbage. We've had enough reality television to last us a lifetime.

The first sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It tells the reader that the paragraph will be about reality television shows, and it expresses the writer's distaste for these shows through the use of the words *plague* and *darken*.

Each of the following sentences in the paragraph supports the topic sentence by providing further information about specific reality television shows. The final sentence is the closing sentence. It uses different words to reiterate the main point that viewers are bored with reality television shows.

In the example above, the topic sentence opens with a statement about a subject (reality shows) and then presents specific examples (the reality shows *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, *Big Brother*, *Prisoner*, *Survivor*, and *The Bachelor*).

TIP: Body paragraphs in academic essays usually have the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph.

While most paragraphs begin with the topic sentence, topic sentences may be placed in other positions in a paragraph. Let's look at another paragraph.

PRACTICE 11.5

Read the following paragraph. Underline the topic sentence.

Last year, a cat travelled two hundred kilometres to reach its family, who had moved to another city and had left their pet behind. Even though the cat had never been to the new home, it was able to track down its former owners. A dog in my neighbourhood can predict when its master is about to have a seizure. It makes sure that he does not hurt himself during an epileptic fit. Cats and dogs have amazing senses that humans do not have and cannot yet understand.

In this case, the last sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. The paragraph first provides supporting sentences that contain specific examples (a cat that tracked down its owners and a dog that can predict seizures). Then the paragraph ends with the topic sentence, which makes a statement that draws a conclusion from these examples (dogs' and cats' senses are better than humans').

By choosing this placement, the writer presents detailed examples as evidence to back up their point, preparing the reader to accept the topic sentence as the truth.

Sometimes, the topic sentence can appear midparagraph.

PRACTICE 11.6

Read the following paragraph. Underline the topic sentence.

For many years, I suffered from severe anxiety every time I took an exam. Hours before the exam, my heart would begin pounding, my legs would shake, and sometimes I would become physically unable to move. Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a technique for controlling my anxiety: breathing exercises. It seems so simple, but by doing just a few breathing exercises a couple of hours before an exam, I gradually got my anxiety under control. The exercises help slow my heart rate and make me feel less anxious. Better yet, they require no pills, no equipment, and very little time. It is amazing how just breathing correctly has helped me learn to manage my anxiety symptoms.

In this paragraph, the topic sentence is the third sentence, appearing near the middle of the paragraph. It expresses the main idea: breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to his main point (breathing exercises can help control anxiety) by using a personal anecdote (how the writer used to suffer from anxiety). The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The closing sentence restates how breathing can help manage anxiety.

Placing a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph is often used in creative writing.

If you notice that you have used a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph in an academic essay, read through the paragraph carefully to make sure that it contains only one major topic.

The placement of a topic sentence depends on the audience, the purpose, and the arrangement (order) of ideas. When the purpose of the assignment is to persuade, for example, the topic sentence should be the first sentence in a paragraph. In a persuasive essay, the writer's point of view should be clearly expressed at the beginning of each paragraph.

TIP: As you read critically throughout the writing process, keep topic sentences in mind. You may discover topic sentences that are not always located at the beginning of a paragraph. For example, fiction writers customarily use topic ideas, either expressed or implied, to move readers through their text. In nonfiction writing, such as the kind you read in popular magazines, topic sentences are often used when the author thinks it is appropriate (based on the audience and the purpose, of course). A single topic sentence might even control the development of several paragraphs.

Implied Topic Sentences

Some paragraphs do not contain a topic sentence at all. Instead of being directly stated, the main idea is implied in the content of the paragraph. Read the following example:

Heaving herself up the stairs, Luella had to pause for breath several times. She let out a wheeze as she sat down heavily in the wooden rocking chair. Tao approached her cautiously, as if she might crumble

at the slightest touch. He studied her face, like parchment; stretched across the bones so finely he could almost see right through the skin to the decaying muscle underneath. Luella smiled a toothless grin.

Although no single sentence in this paragraph states the main idea, the entire paragraph focuses on one concept: Luella is extremely old. The topic sentence is implied rather than stated. This technique is often used in descriptive narrative writing and creative writing. Implied topic sentences work well if the writer has a firm idea of what they intend to say in the paragraph and sticks to it. However, a paragraph loses its effectiveness if an implied topic sentence is too subtle or the writer loses focus.

TIP: Avoid using implied topic sentences in an informational document or academic essay. Readers may lose patience if they are unable to quickly grasp what the writer is trying to say. The clearest and most efficient way to communicate in an informational document is to position the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph.

Supporting Sentences

You've learned that an effective paragraph has three major structural parts: the topic sentence, the body, and the closing sentence. In a stand-alone paragraph or in the body paragraphs of an essay, the topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph. The topic sentence provides a guide that the rest of the paragraph will follow.

Next, the body of the paragraph must support the topic sentence with more detailed information. Supporting sentences contain points and details that support the controlling idea. Supporting sentences explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence. Most paragraphs contain three to eight supporting sentences, depending on the topic, audience, and purpose for writing. A supporting sentence usually offers one of the following:

Reason

The refusal of the baby boom generation to retire is contributing to the current lack of available jobs.

Fact

Many families now rely on older relatives to support them financially.

Statistic

Nearly 10 percent of adults are currently unemployed in Canada.

Quotation

According to Senator Simons, the Royal Alberta Museum will “revitalize the way we see ourselves as Albertans.”

Example

Last year, Bill was asked to retire at the age of fifty-five.

The type of supporting sentence(s) you choose will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you are attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position, you should rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples rather than personal opinions. To find information for your supporting sentences, consider using the following sources:

Reference book	Dictionary
Academic journal/article	Interview
Newspaper/magazine	Map
Textbook	Website
Encyclopedia	Previous experience
Biography/autobiography	Personal research

PRACTICE 11.7

Read the following paragraph. Underline the topic sentence. After each supporting sentence, indicate whether the supporting sentence contains a reason (R), fact (F), statistic (S), quotation (Q), or example (E).

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. First, hybrid cars get 20 percent to 35 percent more kilometres to the litre than fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicles (___). Second, hybrids produce very few emissions during low-speed city driving (___). Because they do not require as much gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump (___).

Alex Nichols bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance (___). “It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said (___). “The running costs are far lower than previous gas-powered vehicles I’ve owned” (___). Given the low running

costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example.

Transitions

A strong paragraph moves seamlessly from the topic sentence to the supporting sentences and on to the closing sentence. To help organize a paragraph and ensure that ideas logically connect to one another, writers use transitional words and phrases. A **transition** is a connecting word that describes a relationship between ideas. Take another look at the earlier example:

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. First, hybrid cars get 20 percent to 35 percent more kilometres to the litre than fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicles. Second, hybrids produce very few emissions during low-speed city driving. Because they require less gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump.

Alex Nichols bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. "It's the cheapest car I've ever had," she said. "The running costs are far lower than previous gas-powered vehicles I've owned." Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Each of the underlined words is a transition word. Words such as *first* and *second* are transition words that show sequence or clarify order. They help organize the writer's ideas by showing that they have another point to make in support of the topic sentence. Other transition words that show order include *third*, *next*, *also*, *furthermore*, and *finally*.

The transition word *because* is a transition word of consequence that continues a line of thought. It indicates that the writer will provide an explanation of a result. In this sentence, the writer explains why hybrid cars will reduce dependency on fossil fuels (because they require less gas). Other transition words or phrases of consequence include *as a result*, *so that*, *since*, *therefore*, *thus*, or *for this reason*.

To include a summarizing transition in the closing sentence, the writer could rewrite the final sentence as follows:

In conclusion, given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example.

The list below provides some useful transition words and phrases to connect supporting sentences and concluding sentences. (In other chapters of this book, you will learn more transitional words and phrases for other purposes.)

Transitional Words and Phrases to Connect Sentences

For Supporting Sentences

above all	aside from
regardless	correspondingly
for instance	however
in particular	likewise
moreover	on one hand
subsequently	to begin with
also	at the same time
conversely	for example
furthermore	in addition
later on	meanwhile
nevertheless	on the contrary
therefore	in contrast

For Closing Sentences

after all	all in all
to conclude	finally
in brief	in conclusion
in summary	on balance
on the whole	thus
to sum up	in the end

Closing Sentences

The closing sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. An effective closing sentence draws together all the ideas raised in the paragraph. It reminds readers of the controlling idea—the topic sentence—without restating it in exactly the same words. Therefore, the topic sentence and closing sentence will be similar in meaning, and those two sentences frame the supporting sentence in between. Compare the topic sentence and closing sentence from the previous example:

Topic sentence: There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car.

Closing sentence: Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Notice the use of the synonyms *advantages* and *benefits*. The closing sentence reiterates the idea that owning a hybrid is advantageous without using the exact same words. It also summarizes two examples of the advantages covered in the supporting sentences: low running costs and environmental benefits.

Avoid introducing any new ideas in the closing sentence. A closing sentence is intended to provide the reader with a sense of completion. Introducing a subject that is not addressed in the paragraph will confuse the reader and weaken the paragraph.

A closing sentence may do any of the following:

Restate the main idea.

Example: Rising inflation is a concern to many Canadians.

Summarize the key points in the paragraph.

Example: Due to rising inflation and interest rates, many Canadians are struggling to buy groceries and pay their mortgages.

Draw a conclusion based on the information in the paragraph.

Example: These statistics indicate that unless the federal government takes action, rising costs will become a crisis in many Canadian households.

Make a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph.

Example: Based on the recent trends in inflation and interest rates, it is likely that in the next decade, the majority of Canada's young professionals will be unable to afford to purchase a home.

Offer an additional observation about the controlling idea.

Example: The inflation crisis was preventable.

Form the connection between the paragraph it closes and the following one.

Example: To mitigate the devastating effects of inflation, the federal government could take several steps.

PRACTICE 11.8

Choose a topic, and write one example of each type of closing sentence described above.

Paragraph Length

How long should a paragraph be? One answer to this important question may be “long enough”—long enough for you to address your points and explain your main idea.

To grab attention or to present succinct supporting ideas, a paragraph can be fairly short and consist of two to three sentences. Journalistic style often calls for brief two- or three-sentence paragraphs because of the way people read the news, both online and in print. Blogs and other online information sources often adopt this paragraphing style, too, because readers often skim the first paragraphs of a great many articles before settling on the handful of stories they want to read in detail.

However, in most academic essays, avoid very short paragraphs, which tend to make an essay seem choppy and leave the reader with the impression that the supporting points have not been adequately developed.

A paragraph in a complex essay about an abstract point can be two-thirds of a page or more in length. In general, in academic writing, a paragraph is between one-quarter and two-thirds of a page of double-spaced text, or roughly seventy-five to two hundred words in length. As long as the writer maintains focus on the topic and does not switch topics or ramble, a long paragraph is acceptable.

You may find that a particular body paragraph you write may be longer than one that will hold your audience’s interest. In such cases, re-examine the paragraph to determine whether it actually covers more than one main idea. If so, divide the paragraph into two or more shorter paragraphs, adding a topic statement or a transitional word or phrase at the start of the new paragraph. Transition words and phrases show the connection between the two ideas.

PRACTICE 11.9

Identify the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and closing sentence in the following paragraph.

One of the few mammals that can survive in a harsh desert environment, the kangaroo rat has made some fascinating adaptations to a dry climate.

Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a minuscule amount of water. Unlike other desert creatures, the kangaroo rat does not store water in its body but instead is able to convert the dry seeds it eats into moisture. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Please share with a friend and compare your answers.

PRACTICE 11.10

Write a paragraph on a topic of your choice. Be sure to include an effective topic sentence, well-chosen supporting sentences, and an appropriate closing sentence. Focus on the relationship between the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. Use transitions to illustrate the connection between each sentence in the paragraph.

Please share with a friend and compare your work. Examine each paragraph and identify the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. Then consider the following questions:

- Is the topic sentence clearly identifiable, or is it implied?
- Does the topic sentence introduce the topic and contain a controlling idea?
- Where is the topic sentence positioned in the paragraph?
- Do all the supporting sentences relate to the topic sentence?
- Does the writer use effective transitions to link their ideas?
- Does the closing sentence accurately summarize the main point of the paragraph?

Finally, identify the weakest areas of the paragraph and rewrite them.

* * *

Now that you've learned to write effective paragraphs, which are the building blocks of essays, it's time to learn how to make paragraphs work together.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A good paragraph contains three distinct components: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a closing sentence.
- Effective topic sentences contain both a topic and a controlling idea, are clear and easy to follow, use engaging vocabulary, and provide an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.
- Topic sentences may be placed at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph. In most academic essays, the topic sentence of a body paragraph is placed at the beginning of the paragraph.
- Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence by offering facts, reasons, statistics, quotations, or examples.
- Closing sentences summarize the key points in a paragraph and reiterate the main idea without repeating it word for word.
- Transitional words and phrases help organize ideas in a paragraph and show how these ideas relate to one another.

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Essay Essentials

Structure and Thesis Statements

Learning Objectives

- Define an essay
- Recognize the three main parts of a standard essay structure
- Recognize the importance and purpose of a thesis statement in an essay
- Transform a topic into a thesis statement
- Identify the six characteristics of an effective thesis statement
- Identify pitfalls that weaken a thesis statement
- Recognize the relationship between the thesis statement and the structure of an essay
- Revise a thesis statement to make it more effective

As [Chapter 3](#) explained, the college essay is a unique genre of writing with a distinct purpose. An **essay** is a collection of closely related paragraphs, each with a specific purpose, arranged to convey a central idea. Its purpose is to explain a topic to a reader or to persuade the reader that an idea is correct. An essay is longer than a paragraph and shorter than a book. A college essay often—but not always—includes information from research to support the explanation or argument.

In a post-secondary setting, instructors use essays as a means to evaluate students' understanding of the course material. Therefore, it's essential for students to learn to write effective essays in order to successfully convey and demonstrate their knowledge, ideas, and critical thinking.

The Parts of an Essay

In high school, you may have been taught to write five-paragraph essays. While the five-paragraph essay is a useful starting point, many topics cannot be sufficiently explored in only five paragraphs, and in your university courses, most essays you write will be longer.

Regardless of length, a standard essay has three main sections: the introductory paragraph, the body paragraphs, and the concluding paragraph.

Introductory paragraph

Body paragraphs

First body paragraph

Second body paragraph

And so on, depending on the number of body paragraphs

Concluding paragraph

The **introductory paragraph**, or introduction, introduces the topic of the essay, presents the thesis statement, and includes brief signposts indicating the type of information and/or the organization of the body of the essay. This paragraph piques the audience's interest, tells them what the essay is about, and motivates readers to keep reading.

In the **body paragraphs**, the writer provides detailed support for the thesis statement. Each body paragraph focuses on one of the main points introduced in the thesis statement, and it provides evidence to support that point. In each body paragraph, there should be two to three supporting points: reasons, facts, statistics, quotations, examples, or a mix of these. Body paragraphs should be arranged carefully and logically to support the thesis.

The **concluding paragraph**, or conclusion, reinforces the thesis statement, concisely summarizes the main points of the essay, and leaves the audience with a feeling of completion.

[Chapters 12](#), [13](#), and [14](#) are devoted to examining each of these essay parts in more detail.

TIP: Some university courses might require essays with specific and specialized structures. However, unless your instructor has asked for a special structure, for most university courses, you can rely on the standard essay structure introduced in this chapter.

TIP: When writing an essay of more than twenty pages, you might need to think in terms of *sections* instead of paragraphs when structuring your essay. While one introductory paragraph and one concluding paragraph are sufficient for most essays under twenty pages, for a longer essay, the introductory section might be composed of two or more paragraphs, and the concluding section might be composed of two or more paragraphs.

How Long Should an Essay Be?

The number of body paragraphs that your essay contains will be determined, in part, by the required assignment length and, in part, by the topic you've selected. When an author writes a book, she determines the length of the book based on how many words, paragraphs, and chapters are necessary to adequately cover the topic. While it might seem logical to think that the length of an essay should also be determined by the topic, in fact, in a post-secondary setting, the length of an essay is usually determined by the assignment requirements. For example, an instructor might ask for a four-page essay or a ten-page essay (or, perhaps, a 1,000-word essay or a 2,500-word essay). Therefore, the student must narrow the topic sufficiently in order to come up with a specific topic that can be adequately addressed in a short essay. It's important to stay within the assignment guidelines because many instructors will deduct marks for an essay that is too long or too short. While writing an essay, if you find that you have written too much, chances are you haven't narrowed your topic sufficiently. Return to [Chapter 10](#) for help with this.

TIP: When counting the words or pages of your essay to see if your essay meets the assignment requirements, do not count the bibliography.

Thesis Statements

When reading a book, watching a documentary, or listening to a podcast, have you ever asked, "What is the one big idea here?" Every nonfiction writing task—from a three-page essay to a book-length dissertation—requires a big idea that anchors and guides the work. The words *thesis*, *argument*, *stance*, *position*, *claim*, *controlling idea*, and *statement* are often used interchangeably in reference to the big idea, the central message of an essay.

Thesis: The central argument of an essay.

Thesis statement: A sentence in an essay that clearly states the essay's thesis.

TIP: You can find thesis statements in many everyday places, such as the news, the opinions of friends, and even songs 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.

Like a topic sentence condenses the main idea of a single paragraph, a **thesis statement** conveys the big idea, the central message, of an entire essay.

An effective thesis statement is important for two reasons:

1. For you, the writer, the thesis statement is essential in providing direction and focus as you write your essay.
2. For your reader, whether that is your instructor or your peers, the thesis statement conveys the central message of the essay (which is often called the “controlling idea” or the “argument”). It is a signpost that signals the essay's destination.

For a short essay, a thesis statement is usually one sentence long and appears at the end of the introduction. The thesis statement introduces not only the *topic* of the piece of writing but also what you have to say *about* that topic and why it is important. It is specific, and it introduces two or more related supporting points—points that can be developed in the body paragraphs. It forecasts the content of the essay and suggests how the information will be organized in the body of the essay.

TIP: The thesis statement is the single most important sentence in an essay, so devote sufficient time to developing and revising it.

There are three steps to writing an effective thesis statement:

1. Transform your topic into a working thesis statement
2. Use the working thesis statement to create an outline and write a first draft
3. Revise the thesis statement

Transforming a Topic into a Working Thesis Statement

As we discussed in [Chapter 10](#), choosing and narrowing a topic is an important first step in writing an essay, but the second step—creating a thesis statement—is even more important. Ask yourself, “What do I want to say *about* this topic?” Asking and then answering this question is vital to forming a working thesis statement that is precise, forceful, and confident.

Look at [Table 12.1: Topics and Thesis Statements](#) for a comparison of topics and thesis statements. The first column lists a topic. The second column answers the question, “What do I want to say *about* the topic?”

The first thesis statement you write will be a **preliminary thesis statement**, or a **working thesis statement**. You will need it when you create an outline for your essay as a way to organize it. Write the thesis statement at the top of the outline to keep yourself focused as you decide how to organize the body of the essay. You will make several attempts before you devise a working thesis statement that is effective.

As you draft your essay, you may find that the working thesis statement was too broad or too narrow. Don’t be afraid to revise the thesis statement as your essay evolves! It is very likely that your thesis statement will evolve throughout the writing process. You will revise it as you write and revise the body of the

Table 12.1: Topics and Thesis Statements: A Comparison

Topic	Thesis Statement
Music piracy	The recording industry fears that so-called music piracy will diminish profits and destroy markets, but it cannot be more wrong.
The number of consumer choices available in media gear	Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are extensive, and the specifications are often confusing.
E-books and online newspapers increasing their share of the market	E-books and online newspapers will bring an end to print media as we know it.
Online education and the new media	Someday, students and teachers will send avatars to their online classrooms.

essay. Each draft of the thesis statement will bring you closer to the wording that expresses your meaning exactly.

Elements of a Strong Thesis Statement

A strong, effective thesis statement has six qualities:

1. **Specificity:** A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall from [Chapter 10](#), the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then break it down until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a good thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care coverage.
2. **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 the options for individuals without dental care coverage, a precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that limited options exist for those who are uninsured through their employer. The thesis statement should pinpoint what the essay is going to discuss regarding these limited effects, such as whom they affect and what the cause is.
3. **Arguability:** 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. Students often misunderstand the terms *argument* and *argue* as they apply to essays. These terms have a different connotation in daily life (think about arguing with your sibling!) than they do in reference to academic essays. In the thesis statement, an argument is simply the central message of the essay. In reference to the body of an essay, the term *to argue* simply means to support the thesis.
4. **Demonstrability:** You must be able to provide valid reasons and examples for the argument presented in the thesis statement. In post-secondary courses, you will often be required to consult research sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. A worthy argument is backed by examples and details.
5. **Forcefulness/assertiveness:** 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.

6. **Confidence:** In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also demonstrate 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/believes the way you do. In other words, these phrases suggest that your stance has insufficient backing. Take an authoritative stance to persuade your readers to have faith in your argument.

TIP: Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first-person narration, your thesis should not contain phrases such as “in my opinion,” “I believe,” or “in my experience.” These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you make a firm assertion.

Examples of Effective Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the qualities discussed above: specificity, precision, arguability, demonstrability, forcefulness/assertiveness, and confidence.

The societal and personal struggles of Floyd in Kevin Lohrig’s play *Where the Blood Mixes* represent the challenges Indigenous Canadians faced living through segregation and attending residential schools.

The character June/Offred in Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a headstrong rebel who, in her desperate attempts to reunite with her daughter and husband, often has to act in accordance with Gilead’s draconian laws to survive and attain her goals.

Compared to an absolute divorce, a no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.

In today’s job market, a high school diploma is not sufficient to help one land a stable, lucrative job.

TIP: For a longer piece of writing, the thesis should be broader than the main idea for a shorter piece of writing. Be sure to frame a main idea that is appropriate for the length of the assignment. Ask yourself how many pages it will take to explain and explore the main idea in detail. Be reasonable with your estimate. Then expand or trim it to fit the required length.

PRACTICE 12.1

Write a thesis statement for each of the following topics.

- A. Texting while driving
- B. The legal drinking age in different provinces of Canada
- C. Steroid use among professional athletes
- D. Racism
- E. Transphobia

Review each thesis statement and check that it meets the six criteria for an effective thesis statement:

- Specific
- Precise
- Arguable
- Demonstrable
- Forceful/Assertive
- Confident

If any of the six qualities are missing, revise the thesis statement.

Collaboration: Share with a friend and compare your answers.

Five Pitfalls to Avoid When Writing a Thesis Statement

Now that you have learned about how to create effective thesis statements and have seen examples, take a look at five pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis statement.

Common Pitfall #1: Merely Declaring a Topic

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

Example: My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.

Common Pitfall #2: Merely Stating a Fact

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

Example: Advertising companies use sex to sell their products.

Common Pitfall #3: Too General

A thesis statement is weak when the statement is too broad to be managed in a short essay.

Example: The life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau was long and accomplished.

Common Pitfall #4: Making an Unsupportable Claim

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

Example: Religious radicals across the country are trying to legislate their puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.

Common Pitfall #5: Using Inflammatory, Disrespectful, or Otherwise Unprofessional Language

A thesis statement is weak when it contains language that makes the reader doubt the writer's objectivity and credibility.

Example: Mayor Findley is an inept twerp who must be ejected from office immediately before his stupid policy has this city overrun with drug addicts and crime.

PRACTICE 12.2

Read the following thesis statements. Identify each as weak (W) or strong (S).

- A. In this essay, I will discuss my experience with ferrets as pets.
- B. The government must expand its funding for research on renewable energy resources in order to prepare for the impending end of oil.
- C. Margaret Atwood is a Canadian poet who was born in Ottawa in 1939.
- D. In this essay, I will give you a lot of reasons why marijuana should not have been legalized in British Columbia.
- E. 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.

- F. Because a bratty, undisciplined child is a parent's worst nightmare, parents should choose an authoritarian and disciplinary parenting style.

For those that are weak thesis statements, identify which of the five common pitfalls applies.

Then revise the weak statements so that they meet the requirements of a strong thesis.

Collaboration: Share with a friend and compare your answers.

The Thesis Statement and Essay Structure

Very often, a thesis statement will offer an indication of the type of essay and the structure (organization) of the body paragraphs. For example, the thesis statement of a classification essay is likely to introduce the categories that will be examined in the essay.

Example: Psychologists have identified four main parenting styles: neglectful, permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian.

From this thesis statement, we can tell that this essay will classify parenting style into four categories. We can tell that the essay will have four body paragraphs, each focusing on one **category or type** of parent. We expect that

- the first body paragraph will focus on neglectful parents
- the second body paragraph will focus on permissive parents
- the third body paragraph will focus on authoritative parents
- the fourth body paragraph will focus on authoritarian paragraphs

Thus, the thesis statement tells us not only the destination of the essay (the classification of parents into four types) but the road map of the essay (how the body paragraphs will be organized).

Let's look at another thesis statement:

Example: Although both permissive and authoritarian parents have the best interests of their children at heart, the two types of parents differ in their approaches to communication and rules.

What type of essay do you expect from this thesis statement?

The thesis statement mentions a similarity between permissive and authoritarian parents, and it also mentions two differences. Therefore, based on the thesis statement, we expect this to be a compare-contrast essay.

How many body paragraphs do you expect the essay to have based on the thesis statement? What do you expect the focus of each paragraph to be?

It seems likely that this essay will have three body paragraphs, each focusing on a **similarity** or a **difference** between the two types of parents:

- The first body paragraph will focus on a similarity: both types of parents want the best for their child.
- The second body paragraph will focus on a difference: the two types of parents have different approaches to communication.
- The third body paragraph will focus on a second difference: the two types of parents have different approaches to rules.

Let's look at one more thesis statement:

The authoritative approach to parenting is superior because it promotes self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and self-confidence in children.

What type of essay do you expect from this thesis statement?

The thesis statement asserts that one parenting approach is superior to the others, and it lists reasons for this stance. Thus, based on the thesis statement, we expect this to be an argumentative essay.

How many body paragraphs do you expect this essay to have based on the body paragraphs? What do you expect the focus of each paragraph to be?

It is likely that this essay will have three body paragraphs, each focusing on a **reason** that supports the claim that authoritative parents are the best parents:

- The first body paragraph will focus on one reason authoritative parenting is superior: it promotes self-regulation.
- The second body paragraph will focus on a second reason authoritative parenting is superior: it promotes intrinsic motivation.
- The third body paragraph will focus on a third reason authoritative parenting is superior: it promotes self-confidence.

PRACTICE 12.3

Examine each of the thesis statements below. From the thesis statement, can you determine the essay type? If so, which type of essay do you expect? How many body paragraphs do you expect?

Essay Types: Process, Classification, Cause-Effect, Compare-Contrast, Argumentative

- A. The four most significant demographic groups of the past century have been the baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z.
Essay type: _____
Expected number of body paragraphs: _____
- B. Baby boomers and millennials share similarities in their attitudes toward family, but they differ in their attitudes toward work and technology.
Essay type: _____
Expected number of body paragraphs: _____
- C. Baby boomers' attitudes toward family and work were shaped by World War II and the postwar economic boom.
Essay type: _____
Expected number of body paragraphs: _____
- D. Despite popular opinion, millennials are making a larger contribution to the North American economy than baby boomers ever did, particularly in the areas of technology, globalization, and innovation.
Essay type: _____
Expected number of body paragraphs: _____
- E. Throughout the last century, key events contributed to the creation of a new generation of Americans: World War II, the civil rights movement, the introduction of the Internet, and the rise of social media.
Essay type: _____
Expected number of body paragraphs: _____

Revising a Thesis Statement

You already spent some time developing a working thesis statement, but your thesis will probably evolve as you write your essay. Working thesis statements become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. One of the last steps in the process of writing an essay should be to revisit your thesis statement. After you finish revising your essay, revise the thesis statement to reflect or match exactly what you ended up discussing in the body of your essay.

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. To revise your thesis statement, follow these steps:

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

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

After writing the body of the essay, the writer reviews the working thesis and realizes it is too vague. To identify more specific terminology, the writer asks the following:

What age group does “young people” refer to?

Does “young people” refer to *all* young people, regardless of education?

What does “work hard” mean?

What does “success” mean?

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 general terms like *people* and *work hard*, the writer can better focus their research and gain more direction in their writing.

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.

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

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

After writing the body of the essay, the writer reviews the working thesis and realizes it is too broad. The *welfare system* is a broad term referring to dozens of agencies and programs that serve millions of Canadians. Also, *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 identify a more precise and appropriate explanation for *joke*. The writer should ask questions like the 6WH questions introduced in [Chapter 4: Asking Questions](#):

What does *joke* mean in this context?

What specifically is wrong with the welfare system?

Who is affected by the problems in the welfare system?

How can the problems be solved?

By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines their stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.

Revised thesis: Canada's Income Assistance program should provide families in need with enough funds to live and do so without morality clauses that lead to feelings of lower self-worth and shame.

3. **Replace linking verbs with action verbs.** Linking verbs (such as *is/are, do/does, has/have, can, appears, seems, smells, sounds*) provide information about the subject, such as a condition or relationship, but they do not represent any action.

Working thesis: British Columbia's school teachers are not paid enough.

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. Reading the working thesis statement above, readers might wonder *why* teachers are not paid enough, but the statement does not compel them to ask many more questions.

After writing the body of the essay, the writer reviews the working thesis and realizes it is weak due to the lack of an action verb. In order to replace the linking verb with an action verb and thus form a stronger thesis statement—one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue—the writer asks the following:

Who is not paying the teachers enough?

What is considered “enough”?

What is the problem?

What are the results?

Revised thesis: The British Columbia government claims it cannot afford to pay its educators sufficiently, which has resulted in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.

To learn more about linking verbs, refer to [Chapter 24](#) in [Part 6: Writer's Handbook](#).

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

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

First, what does *sexualized* mean? Does it refer to having sex? Does it refer to how girls dress or act? This term is too general to convey useful information. Also, even if the term *sexualized* is clarified, the claim itself is too general to be valid. Even if it is true that some teenage girls are more “sexualized” than in the past, surely it’s not true for *all* girls. Many girls do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school and high school.

After writing the body of the essay, the writer reviews the working thesis and realizes it is much too general. To help in the process of making the thesis statement more specific and clear, the writer asks the following:

- Which* teenage girls? *All* girls?
- What does it mean to be “sexualized”?
- What constitutes “too” sexual?
- Why are they behaving that way?
- Where does this behaviour show up?
- What are the repercussions?

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 behaviour.

A thesis statement that is specific and clear will help your reader understand the purpose and central message of your essay.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Thesis Statement

Let’s put together everything you’ve learned in this chapter into one checklist that you can use to evaluate and revise the thesis statement of an essay.

CHECKLIST 12.1: WRITING AN EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENT

- The thesis statement introduces the specific topic of the essay.
- The thesis statement also includes a statement/argument/claim about that topic.
- The thesis statement is specific.
- The thesis statement is precise.

- The thesis is arguable.
 - The thesis is demonstrable.
 - The thesis statement is forceful and confident.
 - The thesis statement indicates the type of essay and the mode of organization.
 - The thesis statement avoids these common pitfalls:
 - Stating a topic or fact instead of an argument about a topic
 - Being too broad
 - Using vague words
 - Overgeneralizing
 - Making unsupportable claims
 - Using inflammatory, disrespectful, or informal language
 - Including the phrases “I believe,” “I will argue,” or “This essay will”
- After going through the checklist, ask yourself the following:
Do I need to revise my thesis statement before I consider it the final version?

PRACTICE 12.4

Reread the thesis statement in one of your recent essays. Use [Checklist 12.1](#) to evaluate the effectiveness of the thesis statement. If necessary, revise the thesis statement to make it stronger.

PRACTICE 12.5

To strengthen your ability to write effective thesis statements, complete one or all of these practice exercises:

- A. Open a magazine and read a lengthy article. Can you identify the article’s thesis statement? Is it stated or implied?
- B. Start a journal in which you record “spoken” thesis statements. Start listening closely to the opinions expressed by your teachers, classmates, friends, and family members. Ask them to provide at least three reasons for their opinions and record them in the journal. Use this as material for future essays.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A standard essay structure includes an introductory paragraph, at least two body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.
- After gathering and evaluating information for an essay, the next step is to write a working, or preliminary, thesis statement.
- A thesis is not a topic itself but an argument *about* a topic.
- The terms *thesis*, *argument*, *stance*, *controlling idea*, and *statement* are often used interchangeably in reference to the central message of an essay.
- A strong thesis challenges readers with a point of view that can be debated and supported with evidence.
- A thesis statement is a sentence that clearly states the argument of an essay. (In longer essays, a thesis statement may be more than a sentence long.)
- A strong thesis statement is specific, precise, forceful, confident, and demonstrable.
- An effective thesis statement often indicates the type of essay and the mode of organization.
- A working thesis statement expresses the main idea you want to develop in the entire piece of writing. It can be modified as you continue the writing process.
- Revise your thesis by ensuring all words are specific, all ideas are exact, and all verbs express action.

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Essay Essentials

Body Paragraphs

Learning Objectives

- Write an effective topic sentence for a body paragraph
- Select primary support that supports the topic sentence and develops the thesis
- Identify the characteristics of effective support
- Identify types of support
- Organize and present support clearly and coherently
- Write an effective closing sentence for a body paragraph

Once you have written an effective thesis statement and created an outline, it's time to expand on that framework to create the body of the essay. As much as you may wish to just get your ideas down and submit your paper, in order to make sure you are submitting a well-developed and strong essay, provide strong supporting ideas and developed paragraphs that will fit together logically to best convince your reader. Unless your instructor tells you otherwise, include at least two body paragraphs in an essay.

TIP: Although the introductory paragraph will be the first paragraph of your finished essay, most writers write the body of the essay first, and then they write the introductory and concluding paragraphs after.

How to Plan the Body of an Essay

Your thesis statement gives the reader a road map of your essay, and the body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict the content of the body of the essay by reading the thesis statement.

If you created an outline for your essay, you already know what each body paragraph will be about, and you already know the order of the paragraphs. As we discussed in [Chapter 5](#), the paragraphs should be ordered in the most logical way to explain the concept or achieve the purpose of the essay. If you have not yet read [Chapter 5](#), take some time to do so now before proceeding with writing the body paragraphs of your essay. You will learn more about ordering body paragraphs for specific purposes in [Part 4](#). In [Chapter 6: Strategies for Drafting](#), we followed along as Mariah used her detailed outline to write the body paragraphs for her essay. If you have not yet read [Chapter 6](#), take some time to study how Mariah's outline guided the development of the body of the essay.

If you did prewriting on this topic, you will have already written much of the content for the body paragraphs. However, if you find you don't have enough information for one of the points, you can do more prewriting or conduct more research.

Each body paragraph adds another related main idea to support the writer's thesis. Within the body paragraph, the main idea is developed with supporting sentences that contain facts, examples, and other details. By exploring and refining one main idea at a time, writers build a strong case for their thesis.

The first body paragraph should focus on the first main point presented in the thesis statement. It should provide evidence to support that point, such as reasons, facts, statistics, quotations, examples, or a mix.

TIP: You don't need to write the first body paragraph first. Feel free to start with whichever paragraph seems easiest to tackle, and then put it in its proper position when you assemble the essay.

The next body paragraph will develop the second main point from the thesis statement—and so on for each subsequent body paragraph. In the body paragraphs, develop the main points in the same order that they are presented in the thesis statement—this makes the essay seem well organized and coherent.

TIP: At the first-year university level, a body paragraph in an essay should be two-thirds of a page at most, and *never* longer than a page.

After you've completed the first draft of the body of the essay, print it out and use a highlighter to mark the topic sentences in the body paragraphs. Make sure they are clearly stated and accurately represent the content of the paragraphs as well as accurately reflect the thesis. If a topic sentence contains information that does not exist in the rest of the paragraph, rewrite it so that it more closely matches the rest of the paragraph.

Selecting Primary Support

Without primary support, your argument is not likely to be convincing. **Primary support** can be described as the major points you choose to include to develop and expand on your thesis. It is the most important information you select to argue your thesis. Each point you choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph you write.

The primary supporting points are further sustained by **supporting details** within the paragraphs. The type of supporting details your essay requires will depend on the academic discipline and the requirements of the assignment. For example, if you're writing a literary analysis, the supporting details will be quotations from and references to the piece of literature you're analyzing. On the other hand, if you're writing a research paper, the supporting details will consist of facts, statistics, and ideas found in your research. If you're writing a personal essay, the supporting details will come from your own experiences.

Support your thesis by providing evidence. Evidence includes anything that helps to convince your reader that your argument is valid. Many kinds of evidence can be used to support a thesis:

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 province in Canada is Ontario" is a fact, but it may require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument.

Judgments: Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts.

Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are based on careful reasoning and examination of a topic.

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; the witness 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.

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. Keep in mind that for some assignments, personal experience will be relevant, while for others, it won't. If you're not sure, check with your instructor before including personal experience in your essay.

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. Depending on the requirements of the assignment, you might use information from newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, books, and scholarly journals.

Identify the Characteristics of Good Primary Support

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 evidence and to build on 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 a main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with a lot of information that could be used to prove a thesis, you may think you need to include it all in your body paragraphs. However, effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis. Omit anything that doesn't directly relate to the thesis.

Be detailed. Remember that the thesis statement, while making a specific claim, does not contain enough detail to prove that claim. The body paragraphs are where you develop the detailed 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.

PRACTICE 13.1

- A. Choose one of the thesis statements below and prewrite to identify three supporting points for that statement.

The government must expand its funding for research on renewable energy resources in order to prepare for the impending end of oil.

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.

Canada's Income Assistance program should provide families in need with enough funds to live and do so without morality clauses that lead to feelings of lower self-worth and shame.

In today's job market, a high school diploma is not sufficient to help one land a stable, lucrative job.

- B. Which type of support would be best for the topic you chose? Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statistics | <input type="checkbox"/> Facts | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal observations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quotations | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert testimony | <input type="checkbox"/> Judgments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Explanations | <input type="checkbox"/> Examples | <input type="checkbox"/> Reasons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arguments | <input type="checkbox"/> Analogies | <input type="checkbox"/> Anecdotes |

Structuring the Body Paragraphs

Like other stand-alone paragraphs, each body paragraph in an essay should comprise three elements:

topic sentence

supporting details (examples, reasons, or arguments)

closing sentence

The Role of the Topic Sentence in a Body Paragraph

Each body paragraph should contain a **topic sentence** (usually the first sentence of the paragraph) that states a main idea that supports the thesis. The topic sentence should be specific, make a claim, and directly connect to the thesis. (For a refresher on topic sentences, turn to [Chapter 11](#).)

Topic sentences make the structure of a text and the writer's main arguments easy to locate and comprehend. These sentences are vital to the development of the argument because they always refer back to and support the thesis statement. Topic sentences remind the reader what the essay is about, and they indicate how each body paragraph relates to the thesis.

Topic sentences also help you, the writer, stay on track as you write the body paragraphs and support your thesis. A body paragraph without a clearly identified topic sentence may be unclear and scattered, just like an essay without a thesis statement would be.

Consider the following thesis statement, written by Sam, a student in an English literature class:

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 topic sentence for Sam's first body paragraph provides primary support for the thesis. The topic sentence states exactly what the controlling idea of the paragraph is:

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

Later, you will see how Sam provides support for the topic sentence.

PRACTICE 13.2

Refer to the supporting points you developed in [Practice 13.1](#). For each of the supporting points, write a topic sentence.

Supporting point 1: _____

Topic sentence for first body paragraph: _____

Supporting point 2: _____

Topic sentence for second body paragraph: _____

Supporting point 3: _____

Topic sentence for third body paragraph: _____

Collaboration: Share with a friend and compare your answers.

The Role of the Supporting Sentences in a Body Paragraph

In each body paragraph, **supporting sentences** develop or explain the topic sentence. Supporting sentences can contain specific facts, examples, anecdotes, explanations, or other details that elaborate on the topic sentence. These details clarify and demonstrate the supporting point introduced in the topic sentence, which in turn supports the thesis of the essay.

The paragraph from Sam's essay contains supporting sentences to develop the topic sentence, which is underlined:

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from post-traumatic 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 post-traumatic stress disorder, 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.

Now let's look at another student's essay, this one arguing in favour of municipal bylaws for off-leash dogs, in which the supporting details for the entire body of the essay are laid out:

THESIS STATEMENT:

The city should introduce bylaws prohibiting dogs from being allowed to roam because unleashed dogs on city streets endanger cyclists and pedestrians, create traffic hazards, and damage private property.

TOPIC SENTENCE FOR FIRST BODY PARAGRAPH: UNLEASHED DOGS ENDANGER CYCLISTS AND PEDESTRIANS.

Supporting Point: Cyclists are forced to swerve around dogs.

Supporting Point: Schoolchildren may be attacked by dogs.

Supporting Point: Pedestrians may run from dogs into traffic, or they may freeze in fear in crosswalks.

Topic Sentence for Second Body Paragraph: Also, loose dogs are traffic hazards.

Supporting Point: Cars must swerve around dogs, which increases the risk of collisions.

Supporting Point: Cars may stop the flow of traffic to allow a dog to cross the street.

Supporting Point: Dogs may be hit by cars.

Topic Sentence for Third Body Paragraph: Roaming dogs damage lawns and gardens.

Supporting Point: They trample flowers and vegetable gardens.

Supporting Point: They ruin lawns by digging holes.

Supporting Point: They damage shrubs and flowers by urinating on them.

PRACTICE 13.3

Using the three topic sentences you composed in [Practice 13.2](#), jot down at least three supporting details for each point.

Topic sentence for first body paragraph: _____

Supporting details: _____

Topic sentence for second body paragraph: _____

Supporting details: _____

Topic sentence for third body paragraph: _____

Supporting details: _____

The Role of the Closing Sentence in a Body Paragraph

Students often end a body paragraph abruptly so that the paragraph seems, from the reader’s perspective, to have stopped midthought or midargument. If the last sentence of your paragraph contains a fact, a quotation, or a citation, chances are the paragraph is still midargument, and the paragraph requires a closing sentence.

After presenting the detailed evidence in a body paragraph, bring the paragraph to a close and refocus your reader’s attention. The last sentence of a body paragraph should briefly sum up the paragraph and reinforce the idea introduced in the topic sentence.

Here are some possible closing sentences for the essay about unleashed dogs:

Topic Sentence:

First, unleashed dogs can scare cyclists and pedestrians.

Closing sentence:

Thus, off-leash dogs are a danger to cyclists and pedestrians.

Topic Sentence:

Also, loose dogs are a traffic hazard.

Closing Sentence:

Car drivers should not have to worry about the dangers created by wandering dogs.

Topic Sentence:

Finally, roaming dogs damage lawns and gardens.

Closing Sentence:

It is not fair to homeowners to allow unleashed dogs to damage their property.

Each of the closing sentences reinforces the idea introduced in the topic sentence by using keywords. For example, each topic sentence and each closing sentence contains a variation of the key term *unleashed dogs*, which is the topic of the essay and is central to the thesis. The writer also repeats the specific focus of each paragraph—cyclists/pedestrians, traffic, and lawns/gardens—to reinforce the topic sentence and relate it to the overall thesis.

However, notice that the closing sentences do not repeat the topic sentences exactly word for word. For example, the writer uses the terms *unleashed dogs*, *off-leash dogs*, *roaming dogs*, *loose dogs*, and *wandering dogs* to provide some variety. The writer also adds variety by using these terms, which convey the same meaning in different words:

endanger cyclists and pedestrians	danger to cyclists and pedestrians
traffic hazard	car drivers . . . dangers
damage lawns and gardens	homeowners . . . their property

Not only does the writer use synonyms for key terms, but he also uses different sentence structure in the closing sentence so that it's not identical to the topic sentence.

If the topic sentence and the closing sentence are exactly the same, a paragraph will seem unnecessarily repetitive. By varying the wording, the writer reinforces main ideas while retaining the reader's interest.

To write an effective closing sentence:

Do

Reinforce the idea introduced in the topic sentence

Use your own words

Be brief

Don't

Repeat the topic sentence word for word

Include a quotation, statistics, or a citation

Add new ideas

By adding a closing sentence to the end of each body paragraph, you retain control of the argument of your essay. An effective closing sentence sums up the paragraph, emphasizes the point introduced in the topic sentence, and redirects the reader's attention to the thesis.

TIP: If you decide to take a break between finishing your first body paragraph and starting the next one, jot down some notes to yourself about what you think you should write next. When you return to your work, do not start writing immediately. Put yourself back in context by rereading what you have already written and reviewing those notes.

PRACTICE 13.4

Now that you've written the entire body paragraph, take a moment to review it and check for completeness and coherence, using [Checklist 13.1](#).

CHECKLIST 13.1: COHERENCE IN A BODY PARAGRAPH

- Is the topic sentence easily identifiable?
- Does the topic sentence relate to and support the thesis?
- Does the topic sentence clearly state the main idea of the paragraph?
- Do all the supporting ideas support the topic sentence?
- Do the main ideas flow in a logical order from one to the next?
- Have I included all the information from my outline in the body paragraph?
- Do I need to rearrange any sentences to improve the flow of the paragraph?
- Would the addition of transitional words help link sentences within the paragraph?
- Does the paragraph end with an effective closing sentence?

Student Sample: Body Paragraphs

In [Chapter 6: Strategies for Drafting](#), you followed the progress of Mariah, a student writing an essay for a communications class, as she drafted the body of the essay step by step, developing the body paragraphs based on the plan set out in her outline. If you have not yet read [Chapter 6](#), take a few minutes now to study how Mariah's outline guided her as she wrote the body paragraphs. Now

let's look at how all the individual body paragraphs work together to develop an argument in Mariah's first draft:

E-book readers are changing the way people read, or so e-book developers hope. The main selling point for these handheld devices, which are sort of the size of a paperback book, is that they make books easy to access and carry. Electronic versions of printed books can be downloaded online for a few bucks or directly from your cell phone. These devices can store hundreds of books in memory and, with text-to-speech features, can even read the texts. The market for e-books and e-book readers keeps expanding as a lot of companies enter it. Online and traditional booksellers have been the first to market e-book readers to the public, but computer companies, especially the ones already involved in cell phone, online music, and notepad computer technology, will also enter the market. The problem for consumers, however, is which device to choose.

Digital cameras have almost totally replaced film cameras in amateur photographers' gadget bags. My father took hundreds of slides when his children were growing up, but he had more and more trouble getting them developed. So he decided to go modern. But what kind of camera should he buy? The small compact digital cameras could slip right in his pocket, but if he tried to print a photograph larger than an 8×10 , the quality would be poor. When he investigated buying a single-lens reflex camera, or SLR, he discovered that they were versatile as his old film camera, also an SLR, but they were big and bulky. Then he discovered yet a third type, which combined the smaller size of the compact digital cameras with the zoom lenses available for SLRs. His first thought was to buy one of those, but then he realized he had a lot of decisions to make. How many megapixels should the camera be? Five? Ten? What is the advantage of each? Then came the size of the zoom lens. He knew that $3\times$ was too small, but what about $25\times$? Could he hold a lens that long without causing camera shake? He read hundreds of photography magazines and buying guides, and he still wasn't sure he was right.

Nothing is more confusing than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and movies on. You could listen to the guys in the electronics store, but word has it they know little more than you do. They want to sell you what they have in stock, not what best fits your needs. You face decisions you never had

to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The 1080p televisions cost more, though, so those are what the salespeople want you to buy. They get bigger commissions. The other important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. Now here the salespeople may finally give you decent info. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma flat-panel television screens show decent blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. But be careful and tell the salesperson you have budget constraints. Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need.

PRACTICE 13.5

Reread body paragraphs two and three of the first draft of Mariah's in-progress essay, and answer these questions:

- A. In body paragraph two, the example switches to a nonfiction narrative. Do you agree with that decision? Explain. How else could the example develop the paragraph? Why is that better?
- B. Compare the writing styles of paragraphs two and three. Do you see evidence that the writer is losing focus or running out of steam? What evidence do you have? How would you change it? Why?
- C. Choose one of the two body paragraphs. Write a version of your own that you think better fits the example audience and purpose.

* * *

The body paragraphs make up the bulk of an essay, and they contain the most detailed content of the essay: the information that proves the thesis. With the body paragraphs written, it's time to turn to the finishing touches that will pull the essay together: the introductory paragraph, the concluding paragraph, and the titles, which will be examined in [Chapter 14](#).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Body paragraphs develop the argument set forth in the thesis statement.
- A body paragraph comprises a topic sentence plus supporting details plus a closing sentence.
- A topic sentence presents one point of the thesis statement.
- Strong body paragraphs contain evidence that supports a thesis.
- Primary support comprises the most important points used to sustain a thesis.
- Strong primary support is specific, detailed, and relevant to the thesis.
- Evidence includes facts, judgments, testimony, and personal observation.
- The closing sentence sums up the paragraph and reinforces the topic sentence.
- Write body paragraphs of an appropriate length for your writing assignment. Paragraphs at this level of writing can be a little under a page long, as long as they cover the main topics in your outline.

Essay Essentials

Introductory and Concluding Paragraphs

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the importance of strong introductory and concluding paragraphs
- Engage the reader immediately with an introductory paragraph that introduces the topic, the context, and the thesis
- Conclude an essay in an impactful way by reinforcing the thesis, summarizing the main points of the essay, and leaving your reader with something to think about
- Develop an effective title for an essay

Now that you've written the body of the essay, which contains the important ideas and details that support your thesis, it's time to finish the essay with an introductory paragraph and a concluding paragraph, which will book-end the main content of the essay to create a unified whole, along with a suitable title.

The Introductory Paragraph

Picture the introductory paragraph 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).

An introductory paragraph is an invitation to your readers to consider what you have to say and then follow your train of thought as you expand on your thesis statement. An introductory paragraph serves the following purposes:

- Introduces the general topic of the essay
- Establishes your voice and tone, or your attitude, toward the subject
- States the thesis that will be supported in the body paragraphs
- Provides signposts that tell the readers what will be discussed in the essay

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

How to Structure an Introductory Paragraph

Unlike the body paragraphs, the introductory paragraph isn't typically structured the way that a stand-alone paragraph is. An introductory paragraph has its own unique purpose and structure.

An introductory paragraph usually begins with an engaging statement devised to pique a reader's interest in the topic. In the next few sentences, introduce the topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. As you move further into the introduction, gradually narrow the focus, coming closer to your thesis. Stepping smoothly and logically from the more general introductory remarks to the specific thesis statement can be achieved using a **funnel technique**, as illustrated in [Figure 14.1](#).

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:

- Explaining the significance of the topic
- Appealing to emotion
- Using logic
- Presenting a provocative question or opinion
- Stating a startling statistic or surprising fact
- Raising a question or series of questions

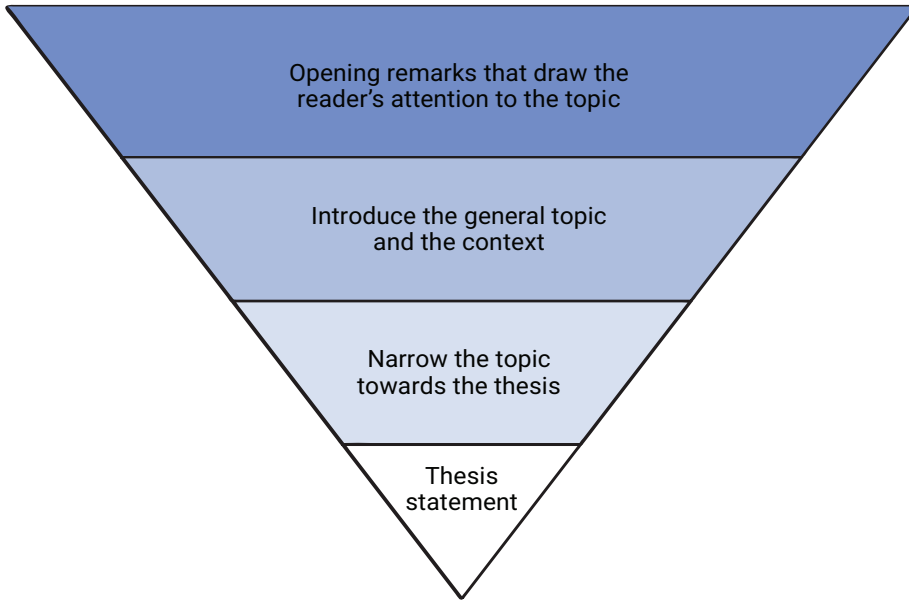


Figure 14.1: The Funnel Structure for the Introductory Paragraph

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

TIP: When using the funnel technique, don't start with *too broad* a topic and don't generalize. If the beginning of your introductory paragraph sounds something like this, it is too general: "Since the beginning of time, all humans have. . . ."

PRACTICE 14.1

Jot down a few general introductory remarks that you can make about the topic you explored in [Practice 13.3](#).

TIP: Remember that your diction, or word choice, while always important, is most crucial in your introductory paragraph. Boring diction could extinguish a reader's desire to read the rest of the essay. Choose words that create images or express action.

At the end of [Chapter 13](#), we saw the first draft of the body paragraphs of Mariah’s essay on media. Now look at Mariah’s first draft of an introductory paragraph for that essay. The 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 revolutionized the way people entertain themselves. In today’s rapidly evolving world of digital technology, consumers are bombarded with endless options of 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.

PRACTICE 14.2

Reread each sentence in the example introductory paragraph. Indicate which technique was used, and comment on how each sentence is designed to attract the reader’s interest. Compare your answers with a peer.

PRACTICE 14.3

Using the funnel structure, write a complete introductory paragraph based on your notes in [Practice 14.1](#). Ask a peer for feedback.

The Concluding Paragraph

It is not unusual to want to rush when you approach the conclusion of your essay, and even experienced writers may fade by the time they get to the end. But what good writers remember is that it is vital to give just as much attention to the concluding paragraph as the rest of the essay.

The concluding paragraph ties all of the components of the essay together and leaves the reader satisfied that the topic has been thoroughly explored and the thesis has been effectively supported. It might also leave the reader with an impression of the significance of the topic and the thesis.

If the introduction and body are well organized and sufficiently developed, the concluding paragraph can be the easiest to compose. However, a hasty ending can undermine an otherwise strong essay.

In the concluding paragraph, reinforce the thesis (using different wording than you did in the thesis statement) to remind the reader of the major arguments and to indicate that the essay is drawing to a close. A strong concluding paragraph also summarizes the main points (from the topic sentences of the body paragraphs) and emphasizes the importance of the topic. To write the conclusion, look back at the main idea of each section/paragraph, and summarize the point using different words than you have already used.

Do not bring up any new points in the concluding paragraph. The ideas expressed in the concluding paragraph must match the ideas presented in the rest of the essay. A concluding paragraph that does not correspond to the rest of your essay, has loose ends, or is disorganized can raise doubts about the entire essay.

TIP: Introductory and concluding paragraphs should not be excessively long or short. In a short essay, these paragraphs will likely each be about half a page long—substantial, but not as long as a body paragraph. A longer essay will, of course, require longer introductory and concluding paragraphs or sections.

How to Structure a Concluding Paragraph

Like the introductory paragraph, the concluding paragraph has its own unique purpose, and it is not structured like a conventional stand-alone paragraph.

The structure of the concluding paragraph is often a mirror image of the introductory paragraph; therefore, the structure is sometimes referred to as a “reverse funnel.”

In the introductory paragraph, you made general introductory statements and then gradually narrowed the focus until you presented your thesis. In the concluding paragraph, reverse this: at the beginning of the concluding paragraph, restate your thesis. Then summarize the main supporting ideas. Follow up with general concluding remarks. The sentences of the concluding paragraph should progressively broaden the focus of your thesis and manoeuvre 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

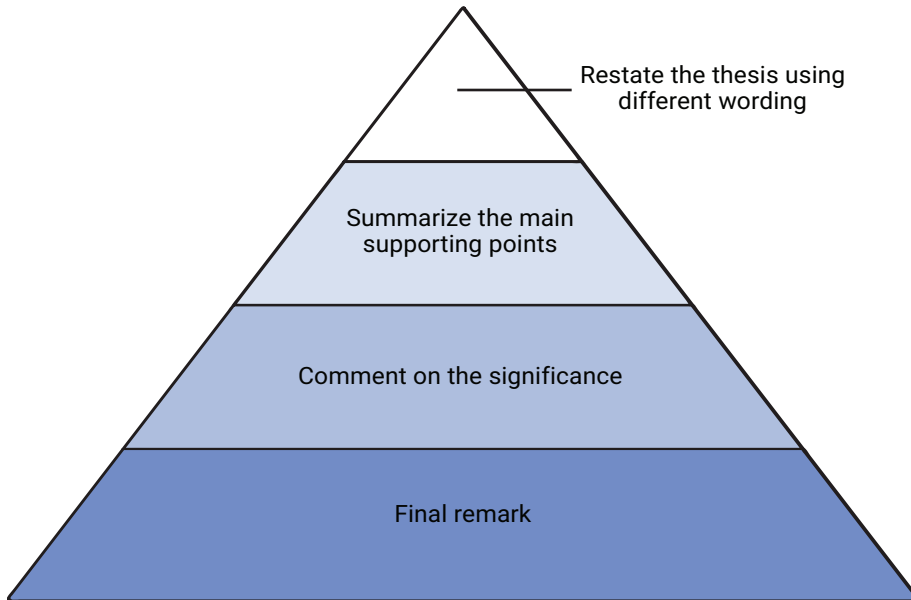


Figure 14.2: The Reverse Funnel Structure for the Concluding Paragraph

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

essay, more memorable. You might want to make a statement that suggests a further and future study opportunity based on the findings described in the essay. 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 concluding your essay, do not expressly state that you are drawing to a close. Statements such as *in conclusion*, *it is clear that*, *you can see that*, or *in summation* are unnecessary and trite.

Common Pitfalls

Because students often rush to write the concluding paragraph, they often add sentences that actually undermine the thesis. Avoid the following in your conclusion:

- Introducing new material
- Contradicting your thesis
- Changing your thesis

Including apologies or disclaimers
Overgeneralizing

Introducing new material in a concluding paragraph has an unsettling effect on your reader. When you raise new points at the end, you make your reader want more information, which you could not possibly provide in the limited space of your final paragraph. The introduction of new ideas at this stage might also make your reader think you've not discussed the topic thoroughly enough in the body of the essay.

Contradicting or changing your thesis statement causes your readers to think that you do not actually have conviction about your topic. After all, you have spent several paragraphs adhering to a singular point of view. If you change sides or your point of view in the conclusion, your reader becomes much 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 that 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.

Earlier in this chapter, we reminded you to avoid being too general in the introductory paragraph. The same applies to the concluding paragraph. If the end of your essay seems to be conveying a message that applies to all people for all time, it's too general.

Mariah's concluding paragraph incorporates some of these pointers. The thesis statement is paraphrased 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.

PRACTICE 14.4

Review the introductory paragraph you wrote for [Practice 14.3](#). Using the reverse funnel structure, write a complete concluding paragraph, being sure to avoid the pitfalls listed above. Ask a peer for feedback:

Does the paragraph

- paraphrase the thesis statement
- briefly summarize the main points
- end with an emphatic statement, a suggestion for further thought or study, a call to action, or a similar powerful closing
- give the reader a sense of completion or closure

Does the paragraph avoid

- introducing new ideas
- contradicting or changing the thesis
- including apologies or disclaimers
- overgeneralizing

TIP: Make sure your essay is balanced. Check that the introductory paragraph and concluding paragraph roughly match each other in length. Mirror the structure in each. Parallelism strengthens the message of your essay.

Write an Effective Essay Title

Now that you've written the introductory paragraph, the body paragraphs, and the concluding paragraph, give your essay an engaging title to draw in readers. Like the headline in a newspaper or the big, bold title in a magazine, an essay's title gives the audience a first peek at the content. If readers like the title, they are likely to keep reading.

An effective title not only introduces the topic of the essay, but it often also implies the main argument of the essay.

We have followed Mariah's progress as she drafted her essay on digital media. Finally, it is time for Mariah to give her essay an engaging title that tells her reader what her topic is and reflects the thesis. You will recall that this was Mariah's working title for her essay:

Working title: Confusing Digital Technology

Now that she’s finished her essay, Mariah revisits the working title. The working title did help her stay focused as she drafted her essay. However, now she would like to make the title more interesting. Upon review, she finds that her working title did contain the topic (digital technology), but she would like to ensure that it reflects her thesis (her position on digital technology). Mariah revises her title:

Revised title: Digital Technology: The Newest and the Best at What Price?

What do you think of Mariah’s revised title? A title may also indicate the *type* of essay. In other words, the title might indicate whether an essay is a personal essay or a research essay. It might indicate the organizational strategy the writer chose, such as directional process, compare-contrast, or cause-effect. It might indicate whether the essay merely *defines* a topic or whether the essay makes a strong *argument* about a topic.

PRACTICE 14.5

Match each of the following essay titles with the type of essay.

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| A. The Four Types of Parents | i. Directional Process Essay |
| B. Car Shopping: How to Avoid Buying a Lemon | ii. Classification Essay |
| C. How Having a Baby Changed My Life for the Better | iii. Compare-Contrast Essay |
| D. Key Events That Led to World War I | iv. Personal Essay |
| E. Michael Jordan and Shaquille O’Neal: Two Basketball Greats | v. Cause-Effect Essay |
| F. The Role of Colonization in Thomas King’s “Borders” | vi. Argumentative Essay |
| G. Carbon Tax: The Way Forward in the Battle Against Climate Change | vii. Literary Analysis |

CHECKLIST 14.1: CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE TITLE

An effective title should pique the reader's interest by providing as much of the following information as possible:

- An introduction of the specific topic of the essay
- An implication of the controlling idea (or “argument”) of the essay
- An assertive statement
- An indication of the type of essay

PRACTICE 14.6

A student has come up with some possible titles for her essay about the role of nurse practitioners in rural health care settings. This was her working title:

Working title: Nurse Practitioners in Rural Places

Now that the essay is written, the student would like to come up with a more interesting and accurate title. She brainstorms six possible titles, which you will read below.

- A. In each of the possible titles, circle the topic, and underline the controlling idea.
 - i. Nurse Practitioners
 - ii. Should Nurse Practitioners Work in Rural Health Care Settings?
 - iii. Providing Better Rural Health Care
 - iv. Nurse Practitioners: Partners in Providing Effective Health Care in Rural Alberta
 - v. Nurse Practitioners: Yes or No?
 - vi. Ways to Provide better Health Care in Rural Alberta
- B. Now take a second look at the titles. Place a check mark beside each one that makes an assertive statement. Put an X beside each title that does not make an assertive statement.
- C. According to the criteria in [Checklist 14.1](#), which title is most effective?
- D. What is missing in each of the other titles?

* * *

While the body paragraphs contain the bulk of the *content* of the essay—the ideas, facts, examples, and other relevant information—a well-written introductory

paragraph and a well-written concluding paragraph, along with an effective essay title, contribute to creating an essay that feels complete, unified, and interesting to the reader. Spend sufficient time on these final three aspects to be sure you're presenting your ideas in the best possible package.

In [Part 3](#), you have learned how to write effective paragraphs, and you have learned how to arrange those paragraphs to write a well-organized essay using standard essay structure. In [Part 4: Common Writing Assignments](#), you will learn about some of the most common types of writing assignments you will encounter in university, and you will learn how to adapt the standard essay structure to meet the specific requirements of each type of assignment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Write the introduction and conclusion last, after you have fleshed out the body paragraphs.
- A strong opening captures your readers' interest and introduces them to your topic before you present your thesis statement.
- The funnel technique for 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 confusion and boredom.
- The concluding paragraph should restate your thesis, review your main points, and emphasize the importance of the topic. It is the final opportunity to convince the reader.
- A concluding paragraph that does not connect to the rest of the essay can diminish the effect of your paper.
- The concluding paragraph should remain true to the thesis statement. Avoid changing your tone or the main idea, and avoid introducing any new material.
- Closing with a final emphatic statement provides closure for your readers and makes your essay memorable.
- An effective title not only introduces your topic, but it may also indicate the type of essay and your stance on the topic.

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PART IV

Common Writing Assignments

In [Chapter 3: What Is Academic Writing?](#), we introduced the overarching purposes of academic writing, emphasizing that these purposes set academic writing apart from other styles of writing you might encounter at work or in daily life. As [Table 3.1](#) illustrated, there are many different forms of writing you might be expected to do in university. Now it's time to turn our attention to the specifics of some of these sub-genres of academic writing.

Part 4 introduces five of the most common types of writing assignments you will encounter in your post-secondary studies. [Table P4.1](#) compares the requirements for these five kinds of assignments. This overview highlights key differences in structure, formality level, point of view, tone, and content. You might want to take a moment to review [Chapter 6: The Importance of Tone](#) before carefully examining [Table P4.1](#).

Understanding the conventions of each kind of assignment is the first step to success—especially if this is the first time you've written this type of assignment. In Part 4, you will learn strategies for mastering each of these five assignment types so that you can become a more confident writer.

If you have not read the chapters on paragraph essentials and essay essentials in [Part 3: Building Paragraphs and Essays](#), take some time to do so now before proceeding. The discussion that follows assumes that you are knowledgeable about standard essay structure.

Table P4.1: A Comparison of the Requirements of Five Common Types of Assignments

	Summary	Expository Essay	Argumentative Essay	Analytical Essay	Personal Essay
Typical structure	One paragraph for a short article (less than five pages) Multiple paragraphs for longer texts	Standard essay structure of at least four paragraphs	Standard essay structure of at least four paragraphs	Standard essay structure of at least four paragraphs	Structure is flexible, but for university assignments, may need to use standard essay structure
Formality level	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Often informal
Point of view	Third person <i>he/she/they</i> <i>him/her/them</i> <i>it</i> <i>one</i>	Third person Exception: How-to essay may use second-person perspective, addressing reader as <i>you</i>	Third person <i>he/she/they</i> <i>him/her/them</i> <i>it</i> <i>one</i>	Third person <i>he/she/they</i> <i>him/her/them</i> <i>it</i> <i>one</i>	First person <i>I/me/my</i> <i>we/us/our</i>
Tone	Objective Neutral Serious	Objective Neutral Usually serious	Persuasive Assertive Serious	Analytical Serious	Subjective Personal Playful or serious
Inclusion of personal experience	No	Usually not, but for some topics, yes Check with instructor	No	No	Yes
Inclusion of personal opinion	No	Usually not, but for some topics, yes Check with instructor	Opinions may be implied, not explicitly stated	Opinions may be implied, not explicitly stated	Yes

Summary

Learning Objectives

- Understand the function and purpose of a summary
- Demonstrate proficiency in the process of writing a summary
- Identify and avoid the challenges of writing summaries
- Write a concise, accurate, effective summary

Every day, you summarize movies, books, and events. Think about the last movie you saw, the last novel you read, or the last hockey game you attended. Afterward, in a conversation with a friend, co-worker, or classmate, did you summarize what you saw or read? If so, you compressed all the action of a two-hour film or a two-hundred-page book or a sixty-minute game into a brief description of the major events. You probably described the main points in just a few sentences, using your own vocabulary and manner of speaking, and you omitted extraneous details that weren't essential to the main events.

You already know how to summarize, and you will use that skill as you learn how to write academic summaries.

What Is a Summary?

Like the summary's purpose in daily conversation, the purpose of an academic summary is to accurately convey the thesis and essential ideas of a longer document. Often, a summary condenses a long piece of writing into only one paragraph by conveying only the most vital information. A summary includes only the thesis, main points, and keywords of the text you're summarizing.

Although summarizing shrinks a large amount of information into only the essentials, it is very important that a summary accurately represents the author's meaning. A summary must not misrepresent the author's ideas.

A summary must be much shorter than the text it's summarizing. The length of a summary is often 15 to 25 percent of the length of the text. Therefore, a summary must be succinct and to the point.

A summary primarily uses the summary writer's words (yes, that is you) along with key terms from the article when necessary.

There are many situations in which you might write a summary:

- You may be required to write and submit a summary as a stand-alone assignment.
- You may be required to write a summary to (a) demonstrate your understanding of the content of an article or (b) demonstrate your ability to summarize—or both!
- You may choose to write summaries of course readings for your own purposes, to support your learning.
- You may choose to write a summary as part of actively reading an article to check your understanding and retention of course materials in preparation for an exam or assignment.
- You may choose to write short summaries of the articles you read during a research project to help you organize your research and to keep track of the main ideas authors have presented about the topic you're researching.

This chapter primarily focuses on writing a summary as a distinct assignment; however, the summarizing skills that you will learn will be applicable to many other academic situations. Summaries are useful not only for remembering and studying information before exams but also for looking at sources and incorporating their information into your essays—your summaries of evidence from research will make your arguments more convincing.

TIP: At work, you will often be required to write a summary: of a meeting, a project, a report, a process, an incident, and so on. The skills you learn in this chapter will help you with those tasks.

Read the following paragraphs from an article in the magazine *Shape* about the benefits of cross-country skiing. Then read a student's summary of the paragraph.

IS CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING GOOD EXERCISE?

by Megan Falk

By strapping on your skis and immersing yourself in nature, you might just get the stress relief and mood boost you need. Research shows that exercising in forests—and even just sitting and looking at trees—can reduce blood pressure and levels of the stress-related hormones cortisol and adrenaline, according to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. [Rosie Brennan says,] “It’s just a release from the hecticness of everyday life, of being stuck inside, working from home, or whatever people are struggling with these days. It’s so underrated and so beneficial. If you only have an hour, the benefit of outdoor exercise for your brain is so much better than going to a gym or trying to do a workout in your garage.”

Cross-country skiing itself provides its own unique mental health benefits, too. “What I love about skiing is that I can just put my skis on, go out in the woods, and have that nice, free feeling of gliding on snow, which kind of gives you a little sense of freedom,” she says. “It’s kind of rhythmic, so you can have the ability to process your thoughts and enjoy fresh air, nature, and all the beauty around you.”

Source: Falk, Megan. “Is Cross-Country Skiing Good Exercise? Top Benefits According to an Olympian.” *Shape*, 13 Mar. 2023, <https://www.shape.com/fitness/trends/benefits-of-cross-country-skiing>.

Student’s Summary

In the article “Is Cross-Country Skiing Good Exercise?” Megan Falk reports that research shows that being in nature, especially forests, enhances a person’s mental and physical well-being by lowering blood pressure and stress levels. Falk’s source, Rosie Brennan, states that exercising outdoors is better than exercising indoors. In particular, cross-country skiing creates good feelings associated with rhythm and easy movement, which also contribute to well-being.

Notice that the summary is much shorter than the excerpt from the article. Also notice that although the student has mostly paraphrased Falk’s ideas in his own words, the summary needed to include some key terms from the source. For instance, the student includes the terms *cross-country skiing*, *nature*, *forests*, *stress*, and *blood pressure*. It would be almost impossible to write an accurate

summary of Falk's article without the terms *cross-country skiing* and *nature*. If the student were to use a thesaurus to replace these keywords with synonyms, the student might misrepresent Falk's meaning. You'll learn more about this in [To Quote or Not to Quote](#) later in this chapter. For now, remember that a summary *must* convey the author's meaning accurately.

How to Write a Summary

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the task of writing a summary as an assignment to be submitted to an instructor. We will focus on writing a summary of a short article, which is the most common summary assignment for first-year students. However, as you progress through your studies, you may be required to write summaries of longer articles, books chapters, and even books! Nevertheless, the concepts presented here will apply to any summarizing task.

First Things First

It goes without saying that in order to summarize a text, you must first understand the content of the text. Close reading is required if you are to write an accurate and effective summary. Before proceeding, take a few minutes to review [Chapter 2: Survey](#) and [Chapter 2: Close Reading](#).

As you read a text in preparation for summarizing, mark up the text as you learned to do in [Chapter 2: Reading Strategies](#) and take notes, focusing on main points and omitting examples, statistics, and other details. Write down the following information: the title of the text you're summarizing, the author, the source, and the date of publication.

Next, carefully read the assignment instructions. Look for the length limit of the summary you are expected to write. It might be one hundred words, two hundred words, or one page, for example. Take this limit seriously. While conciseness is important in all writing, it's especially important in a summary, and you may lose marks if your summary is over the limit.

Finally, read [Table 15.1: The Dos and Don'ts of Writing a Summary](#) to learn about the conventions of writing a summary.

Now that you've carefully read the text you're summarizing, you've examined the assignment instructions, and you've become familiar with some of the conventions of summaries, it's time to write the summary, using a step-by-step process.

Table 15.1: The Dos and Don'ts of Writing a Summary

Do	Don't
Focus on <i>what</i> the author writes	Focus on <i>how</i> the author writes
Objectively convey the content the author has written	Evaluate, assess, or criticize the writer's thesis or supporting points
Include all of the author's main points	Include statistics and specific details unless they are essential to conveying the author's thesis
Make each section of the summary proportional to the section it summarizes	Skip over paragraphs or sections of the article
Include the author's metaphors or analogies only if they are essential to conveying the thesis or a main point	Create your own figures of speech (metaphors, allusions, analogies, etc.) related to the topic
Use your own words and wording to paraphrase the author's ideas	Include your own ideas about the topic
Enclose any copied phrases in quotation marks	Quote entire sentences or include excessive quotations
Acknowledge the author as the source of the ideas by using phrases such as "According to Falk . . ." and "Falk argues that . . ."	Bring in research or other information from outside the article unless your instructor asks you to
Use third-person point of view, formal diction, and an objective, neutral tone	Use first-person pronouns (<i>I/we/our</i>) or second-person pronouns (<i>you/your</i>) and an informal tone
Refer to an author by their last name	Refer to an author by their first name
Be concise	Be wordy

TIP: Students often find it challenging to summarize a text without copying the author's words or grammar. To avoid the temptation to copy, **close the article** before writing each sentence of your summary. This will force you to *paraphrase* (i.e., to use your own words), which will help you avoid accidental plagiarism. This strategy also encourages you to focus on main ideas and ignore details that aren't essential in a summary.

Ten Steps to Writing an Effective Summary

- Step 1. Survey the article to get the gist of the text: How long is it? What is its primary topic?
- Step 2. Read the article closely all the way through, marking up the text and making notes.
- Step 3. Reflect on what you have read. What is the writer's central theme or argument? What are the most important supporting points?
- Step 4. Close the article, and write the first draft of your restatement of the author's thesis. This one-sentence statement should convey the author's thesis (the central argument) in your own words.
- Step 5. Decide how to divide up the article to make it manageable. Think about how long the text is and how long your summary is supposed to be. Let's say you have been asked to write a one-page summary of a four-page article. If the article contains ten substantial paragraphs, it would make sense to summarize each paragraph in one sentence. If the article contains thirty very short paragraphs, it may make more sense to summarize three paragraphs in one sentence.
- Step 6. Now that you've divided up the article, read the first section again closely. At the end of that section, close the article, and in your own words, write one sentence that summarizes the main idea of that section. Be concise!
- Step 7. Move on to the next section, and repeat step 6. The sentence you write now will be the next sentence of your summary. Repeat this process until you have finished the article.
- Step 8. Now reread the sentences that you wrote to summarize each section of the article. Keep them in the same order that you wrote them. Consider these questions:
- Have you captured all the main points? Have you missed anything important? If so, add it now.
 - Have you included any unnecessary details? If so, delete them now.
- Check that all the sentences make sense and connect well to one another. Perhaps some sentences can be combined. If necessary, insert transitional words to make connections between sentences clear.
- Step 9. Next, reread the draft of the restatement of the author's thesis that you wrote in step 2. Do you still think it accurately conveys the author's thesis? If not, revise it so that it does. This sentence will become the first sentence of your summary.

Step 10. Quickly read the article one last time, considering these questions:

- Does your summary accurately convey the author's thesis and main points?
- Have you accidentally copied the author's wording without enclosing the words in quotation marks? If so, add the quotation marks and the page number.

Remember, the first draft of your summary is unlikely to be the final draft that you will submit to your instructor. Set aside the first draft for a few hours, and then return to it with the intention of revising it to make it better. In particular, refer to [Table 15.1: The Dos and Don'ts of Writing a Summary](#) as you revise. For tips on revising effectively, refer to [Chapter 7: Revise: Improve What You've Written](#).

Avoiding Plagiarism While Summarizing

Because a student must work so closely with a text while writing a summary, and because the purpose of a summary is to accurately convey the author's ideas, it can be very easy to slip into plagiarism. In this section, we'll introduce some considerations that must be made to avoid plagiarism, including deciding when to quote and altering sentence structure as you summarize.

To Quote or Not to Quote

For many students, one of the most challenging aspects of writing a summary is deciding whether or not to use the author's keywords and, if you do, whether or not to enclose them in quotation marks. This takes practice!

Remember, a summary should be primarily paraphrased, and it should contain only a few essential quotations, at most. If you are unfamiliar with the concept of paraphrasing, it would be a good idea to read about it in [Chapter 21: Paraphrasing and Quoting](#).

When you're writing a summary, you will certainly need to use some of the keywords and terms from the article in order to accurately convey the author's thesis and main points. The question is how to determine whether those words should be enclosed in quotation marks or not. On one hand, you need to use some key terms, and you don't want to accidentally plagiarize. On the other hand, you know that a summary should not contain too many quotations. What should you do?

To explore this question, let's look at some examples. Earlier in this chapter, you read an excerpt from Megan Falk's article "Is Cross-Country Skiing Good

Exercise? Top Benefits, According to an Olympian.” Then you read a student’s summary of the article.

Student’s Summary

In the article “Is Cross-Country Skiing Good Exercise?” Megan Falk reports that research shows that being in nature, especially forests, enhances a person’s mental and physical well-being by lowering blood pressure and stress levels. Falk’s main source, Rosie Brennan, states that exercising outdoors is better than exercising indoors. In particular, cross-country skiing creates good feelings associated with rhythm and easy movement, which also contributes to well-being.

Notice that the student has included some key terms from the article: *cross-country skiing*, *nature*, *forests*, *stress*, and *blood pressure*. These are factual words that Falk uses literally and neutrally, and there are no other perfectly synonymous terms for them. In order to convey Falk’s thesis, the student must use these terms. Because these words are common words that are used in a usual way, and they do not imply any judgment, they do not need to be enclosed in quotation marks.

However, let’s say that the student wanted to include Rosie Brennan’s description of cross-country skiing to better convey a sense of the mental health benefits. Notice the changes to the last sentence of the summary:

Student’s Summary

In the article “Is Cross-Country Skiing Good Exercise?” Megan Falk reports that research shows that being in nature, especially forests, enhances a person’s mental and physical well-being by lowering blood pressure and stress levels. Falk’s main source, Rosie Brennan, states that exercising outdoors is better than exercising indoors. In particular, cross-country skiing creates good feelings associated with the feeling of “gliding on snow” and achieving a “little sense of freedom,” which contributes to well-being (qtd. in Falk).

In this version of the summary, the student has enclosed two phrases in quotation marks: “gliding on snow” and “little sense of freedom.” These phrases *do* require quotation marks because not only is the student copying a *series of words* instead of a *single word*, but those words imply the speaker’s opinion about cross-country skiing and create a visual image in the reader’s mind. The words are put together in a distinct way for a special effect, so they must be enclosed in quotation marks and attributed to Rosie Brennan.

Often, in their attempts to avoid plagiarizing, students will try to find synonyms for key nouns and verbs. However, this is dangerous because it can distort the author's meaning. Let's look at another example, in which you must summarize this paragraph from Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech "Three Ways of Meeting Oppression":

A second way that oppressed people sometimes deal with oppression is to resort to physical violence and corroding hatred. Violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem; it merely creates new and more complicated ones.

Source: King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Three Ways of Meeting Oppression." *Arguing Through Writing*, 21 July 2023, courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-jefferson-collegecomposition/chapter/martin-luther-king-jr-three-ways-of-meeting-oppression/.

Perhaps you are nervous about using the word *violence* because you are afraid of plagiarizing, so you refer to a thesaurus to look for synonyms. You find the words *warfare*, *sadism*, and *ferocity*. You choose one of the synonyms to write a sentence for your summary:

- Another approach to oppression is warfare, but King argues that it is not a solution.
- The second response some people take is sadism, but King argues that it is not a solution.
- Ferocity is another approach to oppression, but King argues that it is not a solution.

Unfortunately, all of these sentences misrepresent King's points. King is certainly not writing about warfare, and he is also not writing about sadism or ferocity, both of which have different connotations. King is writing about violence, so *violence* is the word you must use. You cannot effectively convey King's idea without using the word *violence*.

Do you need to enclose the word *violence* in quotation marks, though? Often, to avoid plagiarizing, students will enclose all keywords in quotation marks. However, *violence* is a common word with a fairly straightforward meaning, and King is not using it in a special way. Therefore, it doesn't need to be enclosed in quotation marks. You could write this sentence in your summary without fearing plagiarism:

Violence is the second response to oppression, according to King.

Let's say you also want to include the part about hatred. Like violence, *hatred* is a common word with a straightforward meaning, so it wouldn't need to be enclosed in quotation marks. However, perhaps you find the phrase "corroding hatred" very powerful and you want to include it in your summary. Now is the time for quotation marks because King has combined two words in an unusual way, and one of those words (*corroding*) indicates assessment of the other (*hatred*). Therefore, in your summary, you must acknowledge the words as King's:

Violence combined with "corroding hatred" is the second response to oppression, but violence is not the solution to oppression (King).

Mind Your Sentence Structure

Many students are not aware that copying an author's *grammar* is a form of plagiarism! In the "thesaurus method" of paraphrasing, a student simply rewrites the source material, swapping out most of the nouns, verbs, and adjectives with synonyms but retaining the essential grammatical structure of the sentence.

For example, look closely at this sample of a student's paraphrased version of a sentence from King's speech:

Original:

A second way that oppressed people sometimes deal with oppression . . .

Summary:

Another way that subjugated individuals often respond to subjugation . . .

In the rewrite, the student has swapped these keywords with synonyms:

another → a second
oppressed → subjugated
people → individuals
sometimes → often
dealt with → respond to
oppression → subjugation

However, the *structure* of the second sentence is the same as King's! The positions of the nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives are exactly the same in both sentences:

Original: A second way that oppressed people sometimes deal with oppression . . .

Adjective way that adjective noun adverb verb preposition noun

Summary: Another way that subjugated individuals often respond to subjugation . . .

Adjective way that adjective noun adverb verb preposition noun

Both sentences have exactly the same structure:

adjective way that adjective noun adverb verb preposition noun

This is plagiarism because the student has copied King's grammar. The thesaurus method often leads a student into accidental plagiarism. Swapping out a few keywords is not sufficient to avoid charges of plagiarism.

With the article in front of you, it's very easy to unintentionally copy the author's grammar, which is why it's essential to close the article before you write each sentence of your summary. This forces you to use your own words and grammar, which are the two key components of paraphrasing. To learn more about paraphrasing and plagiarizing, refer to [Chapter 21: How to Paraphrase Effectively](#), [Chapter 21: Guidelines for Quoting](#), and [Chapter 22: Plagiarism and Academic Integrity](#).

Abstracts

When reading journal articles, you will notice there is often an **abstract** before the article starts: this is a summary of the article's contents. If you are required to summarize an article, do not depend on the abstract, as it is already a condensed version of the content. The author of the abstract identified the main points from their perspective; these may not match your purpose or your idea of what is important. What may also happen if you try to use the abstract as the basis for your summary is you will likely end up replacing some words with synonyms and not changing the overall ideas into your own words because the ideas are already condensed, and it is difficult to make them more generalized (we will discuss this more in [Chapter 21](#)). You'll need to closely read the entire article to determine for yourself what the key and supporting ideas are.

Preparing a Summary for Submission

To prepare your assignment for submission, structure it like this:

1. The title of a summary should include the word *summary*, the title of the text, and the name of the author of the text:

Example: Summary of Megan Falk’s “Is Cross-Country Skiing Good Exercise?”

Example: Summary of “The Ways of Meeting Oppression” by Martin Luther King Jr.

In the first sentence of the summary, introduce the name of the author, the title of the article, and your restatement of the thesis.

Example: In “The Ways of Meeting Oppression,” Martin Luther King Jr. explains that there are three common ways that oppressed people react to oppression—acquiescence, violence, and nonviolent resistance—but he argues that of the three, nonviolent resistance is the only right and effective response.

2. Then add the sentences from step 8 of [Ten Steps to Writing an Effective Summary](#), ensuring they present the main ideas in the same order they appeared in the original text.

CHECKLIST 15.1: FOR A ONE-PARAGRAPH SUMMARY OF A SHORT ARTICLE

Review this checklist to ensure your summary is ready for submission.

- The first sentence includes the title of the article and the name of the author.
- The first sentence includes my restatement of the author’s thesis, in my own words.
- The rest of the paragraph summarizes the authors’ main supporting ideas in the same order they appeared in the article.
- Each section of the summary is proportional to its corresponding section of the article.
- The summary does not skip over sections of the article.
- The summary is written from the third-person point of view.
- The tone is neutral and objective.
- The summary does not contain any evaluation of the content of the article or the writing itself.
- The summary does not contain analogies, metaphors, or other figures of speech that did not appear in the article.

- The summary does not contain any information that does not appear in the article (such as information from other texts).
- The summary does not contain my thoughts about the topic or the writing.
- Most of the summary is paraphrased (there are few, if any, quotations).
- In the few cases in which a quotation is needed, the quoted material is enclosed in quotation marks and followed by a citation.
- The summary is concise.
- The summary is followed by a list of sources, if required (see [Chapter 22: List of Sources](#)).

TIP: If you are writing a summary of a longer text, such as a longer article or book, you may need more than one sentence to convey the author's thesis and more than one paragraph to convey the author's main points. A summary for a long text may need to be more than one page.

Sample Summary

Read this excerpt from a report on the use of alcohol by adolescents, which is followed by a student's summary of the excerpt.

According to the Monitoring the Future Study, almost two-thirds of 10th-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. 2006a). Among 12th-grade students, these rates had risen to over three-quarters who reported having tried alcohol at least once and nearly three-fifths who reported having been drunk at least once. In terms of current alcohol use, 33.2 percent of the Nation's 10th graders and 47.0 percent of 12th 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, 18-to 24-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 (Johnston et al., 2006a,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.

Excerpt from Brown, Sandra A., et al. "Underage Alcohol Use: Summary of Developmental Processes and Mechanisms: Ages 16–20." *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2009, pp. 41–52, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3860496/.

Now read the student's summary of the above excerpt:

In "Underage Alcohol Use: Summary of Developmental Processes and Mechanisms: Ages 16–20," Sandra A. Brown et al. demonstrate the increasing use of alcohol by American students from the beginning of high school through college. Researchers found that from grades 10 to 12, there are significant increases in the percentage of high school

students who have tried alcohol, who drink frequently, and who binge drink. After high school, consumption increases again, and college-aged students consume more alcohol than people in any other age group. Young people who go to college drink more alcohol than those who don't. The use of alcohol also correlates with demographic factors such as gender, race, geographic location, and socioeconomic status, and research shows that the college students who drink the most are male, white or Hispanic, from the northern states, and from higher socioeconomic classes.

Notice that the summary retains the thesis and the key points made by the writers of the original report but omits most of the specific statistical data. A summary does not need to contain all the specific facts and figures in the original document. Instead, it provides an overview of the essential main ideas.

Now, using the skills you've learned in this chapter, write your own summaries. Before you move on to the practices, review these sections of this chapter:

- [Ten Steps to Writing an Effective Summary](#)
- [Table 15.1: The Dos and Don'ts of Writing a Summary](#)
- [Checklist 15.1: For a One-Paragraph Summary of a Short Article](#)

PRACTICE 15.1

- A. In preparation for writing a one-sentence summary of the main idea, carefully read the following paragraph and (a) mark up the text and/or (b) take notes to identify the main point(s).

Several factors about the environment influence our behaviour. First, temperature can influence us greatly. We seem to feel best when the temperature is in the high teens to low twenties. If it is too hot or cold, we have trouble concentrating. Lighting also influences how we function. A dark lecture hall may interfere with the lecture, or a bright nightclub might spoil romantic conversation. Finally, our behaviour is affected by colour. Some colours make us feel peaceful, while others are exciting. If you wanted a quiet room in which to study, for example, you would not paint it bright orange or red.

Passage taken from Ueland, B. *Becoming a Master Student*.

Houghton Mifflin College Div., 2007, p. 121.

- B. Write a single sentence that summarizes the paragraph's thesis.
C. Collaboration: Share with a peer and compare your answers.

PRACTICE 15.2

- A. In preparation for writing a short summary paragraph, closely read the passage below. Underline the sentences that contain the most important information. (Hint: Underline six sentences). Then reread the underlined sentences and double-underline the thesis statement.

Most people drink orange juice and eat oranges because they are said to be rich in vitamin C. There are also other foods that are rich in vitamin C. It is found in citrus fruits and vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, cabbage, cauliflower, and carrots.

Vitamin C is important to our health. Do you really know how essential this nutrient is to our health and well-being? Our body needs to heal itself. Vitamin C can repair and prevent damage to the cells in our bodies and heal wounds. It also keeps our teeth and gums healthy. That is not all. It protects our body from infections such as colds and flu and also helps us get better faster when we have these infections. That is why a lot of people drink orange juice and take vitamin C tablets every day. This wonderful vitamin is also good for our hearts. It protects the linings of the arteries, which are the blood vessels that carry oxygenated blood. In other words, it offers protection against heart disease.

If we do not get enough vitamin C, which means we are not eating enough food that contains this vitamin, it can lead to serious diseases. Lack of vitamin C can lead to scurvy, which causes swollen gums, cheeks, fingers, hands, toes, and feet. In serious conditions, it can lead to bleeding from wounds, loss of teeth, and opening up of wounds. Therefore, make sure you have enough vitamin C in your diet.

- B. Write a six-sentence summary of the paragraph, referring to [How to Write a Summary](#) and [Checklist 15.1: For a One-Paragraph Summary of a Short Article](#).
- C. Collaboration: Share with a peer and compare your answers.

Exercise taken from “English Language Form 3 Composition— Summary Writing.” Penerbitan Pelangi, reprinted by Scribd.com. www.scribd.com/doc/98238709/Form-Three-Summary-Writing-Exercise. Accessed 8 Aug. 2023.

PRACTICE 15.3

- A. Choose any article that you have been assigned to read for one of your courses. Write a one-paragraph summary of the article, following [Ten Steps to Writing an Effective Summary](#).
- B. Use [Checklist 15.1](#) to check your summary, and revise the summary if necessary.
- C. Collaboration: Share with a peer and compare your answers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Summaries have many purposes in post-secondary courses and research.
- A summary should objectively and concisely convey the thesis and main ideas of a text, omitting details, examples, and statistics that are not essential.
- A summary should be primarily written in your own words, but you may need to use some keywords from the text to effectively convey the author's ideas.
- It's essential to paraphrase effectively so that you don't accidentally plagiarize.
- Paraphrasing effectively includes using your own sentence structure.

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Expository Essay

Learning Objectives

- Describe the purpose and function of expository essays
- Recognize four common types of expository essays
- Determine the purposes and structures of classification, comparison, cause-effect, and process essays
- Write an effective expository essay

You explain things every day. Cooking with a child, you explain how to measure dry ingredients. During a meeting at work, you explain a new process that your co-workers must follow. While out with a friend, you explain the differences between her favourite hockey team and yours. You explain your family's new rules for Internet use, and you explain the consequences of breaking the rules. You already know how to explain, and you will use that skill as you learn to write expository essays.

What Is an Expository Essay?

Put simply, an expository essay is an “explaining” essay, an essay that explains a topic by describing, informing, categorizing, or comparing to allow the reader to clearly understand the concept. An expository essay may contain descriptions, facts, statistics, examples, definitions, and other details that explain a concept, event, or process. Many of your post-secondary writing assignments will be expository essays.

The purpose of an expository essay is to convey information clearly and accurately. An instructor will ask students to write an expository essay to

(a) demonstrate their understanding of a topic and (b) demonstrate the ability to convey information clearly and accurately.

An expository essay can vary in length. At the first-year level, your instructors will likely ask for essays between two and eight pages long. In senior-level courses, an instructor might ask for an essay that is ten or twenty pages long.

Often, but not always, an instructor will require that an expository essay contains research. You will learn more about how to incorporate research into an essay in [Part 5: Research and Documentation](#). In the meantime, in this chapter, we'll focus on some of the special content and structural considerations for different types of expository essays. If you have not yet read the chapters on essay essentials in [Part 3: Building Paragraphs and Essays](#), take some time to do so now before proceeding with [Chapter 16](#). The discussion that follows assumes that you are knowledgeable about standard essay structure.

TIP: In many jobs, expository writing will be the primary type of writing you do. You will write detailed memos, reports, and proposals that explain a process, a project, a strategy, rules, guidelines, and so on. At work, it will be essential that you write clear and effective explanations. The skills you learn in this chapter will help you with those tasks.

As you learned in [Chapter 3: Introduction to Academic Writing](#), an important aspect of writing is identifying your audience and adapting your writing for that audience. When you write an expository essay, you are explaining a concept to your audience. Therefore, you must ask, How much does my audience already know about the topic?

Never assume the reader knows everything about your topic (even if it is part of the reader's field of study). For example, even though you may have several criminology instructors in your program, each has specialized in different areas, which may be different from the one about which you are writing. They all likely have a strong understanding of the concepts but may not recall all the small details of the topic. If your instructor specialized in crime mapping and data analysis, for example, they may not have a strong recollection of specific criminological theories related to other areas of study.

Providing enough background information without being too detailed is a fine balance, but it's important to ensure there are no gaps in the information so your reader will not have to guess your intention.

How to Write an Expository Essay

First, be sure you understand the requirements of the assignment:

- How long, approximately, is the essay required to be?
- Are you required to use a particular form of expository essay, such as definition, classification, compare/contrast, or cause and effect?
- Are you required to conduct research and include it in the essay?

Next, think about structure. You learned about basic essay structure in [Chapter 12: The Parts of an Essay](#). Before proceeding, take a moment to review standard essay structure.

A typical expository essay will have at least four paragraphs:

The **introductory paragraph** introduces the topic of the essay and provides brief signposts indicating the type of information that will appear in the body section of the essay. In the case of an expository essay, this paragraph will often indicate the type of organization/structure (such as classification, compare and contrast, cause and effect, spatial, or chronological) that will be used in the body of the essay. Most importantly, this paragraph will contain a **thesis statement**, often at the end of the paragraph.

Each **body paragraph** should focus on one of the main points raised in the thesis and provide evidence to support that point. The body paragraphs should be ordered in the most logical way to clearly convey ideas. For example, when describing a process, you might choose chronological order to show the sequence in which the steps need to happen. You will learn about the different ways to organize body paragraphs in this chapter.

The **concluding paragraph** reinforces the thesis and provides a concise summary of the information in the body paragraphs.

There are many types of expository essays, including, to name a few, description, definition, illustration, and problem/solution. The remainder of [Chapter 16](#) will focus on four common types of expository essays that are often assigned in university courses:

Classification

Compare and contrast

Cause and effect

Process

Each of these types of expository essays requires special considerations for structure, which will be explained in the remainder of this chapter.

Sometimes, you will be specifically asked to write one of these types of expository essays. However, even if you are writing a literary analysis essay, an argumentative essay, a personal essay, or a research paper, you will likely find these four modes of organization helpful in structuring your ideas. You might not always follow these organizational patterns rigidly, but they might be a useful structural foundation. Also, especially in very long papers, you might use more than one organizational pattern throughout the essay.

TIP: Another term for types of writing is rhetorical modes. **Rhetorical modes** refer simply to the ways to communicate effectively through language. As you read about these modes, keep in mind that the rhetorical mode a writer chooses depends on the purpose for writing. Sometimes writers incorporate a variety of modes in any one essay. In this chapter, we emphasize rhetorical modes as a set of tools that will allow you greater flexibility and effectiveness in communicating with your audience.

Classification Essay

If you see one or more of the following words in an essay assignment, you are probably expected to write a classification essay:

Classify
Categories
Categorize
Types
Kinds
Groups
Sub-genres
Sort
divide

Below are some examples of assignment instructions for classification essays:

Describe the three types of parents, according to Jean Baumrind.
Classify jazz music into three main sub-genres.
Divide house cats into two main kinds based on personality.

When you are specifically asked to write an expository classification essay, you'll want to adhere to the classification structure quite closely. Remember, too, that the classification structure might be useful in analysis essays, personal essays, and research papers.

The Purpose of Classification in Writing

The purpose of classification is to break down a broad subject, concept, or system into smaller, more manageable, more specific parts according to shared qualities or characteristics.

We classify things in our daily lives all the time, often without thinking about it. Motor vehicles, for example, can be classified as trucks, cars, and sports utility vehicles. Music can be classified as jazz, rock, classical, pop, and so on. Smaller categories, and the ways in which these categories are created, help us make sense of the world.

Choosing a Topic for a Classification Essay

Choosing a topic is the first step in writing a classification essay. A classification essay is best suited to something that you want to divide into categories or types.

Once you have chosen the entity you want to classify, do some prewriting to generate ideas and to begin to identify categories or types. **Idea mapping** is especially effective for preparing to write a classification essay because it helps you gradually divide the topic into smaller categories. (Refer to [Chapter 4](#) to learn about idea mapping and other prewriting strategies.)

TIP: To avoid settling for an overly simplistic classification, during the prewriting process, break down any given topic in at least three different ways. This will help you think outside the box and perhaps even learn something entirely new about a subject. After that, choose a classification system for your essay.

PRACTICE 16.1

A. Brainstorm to come up with four different ways vehicles could be classified.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

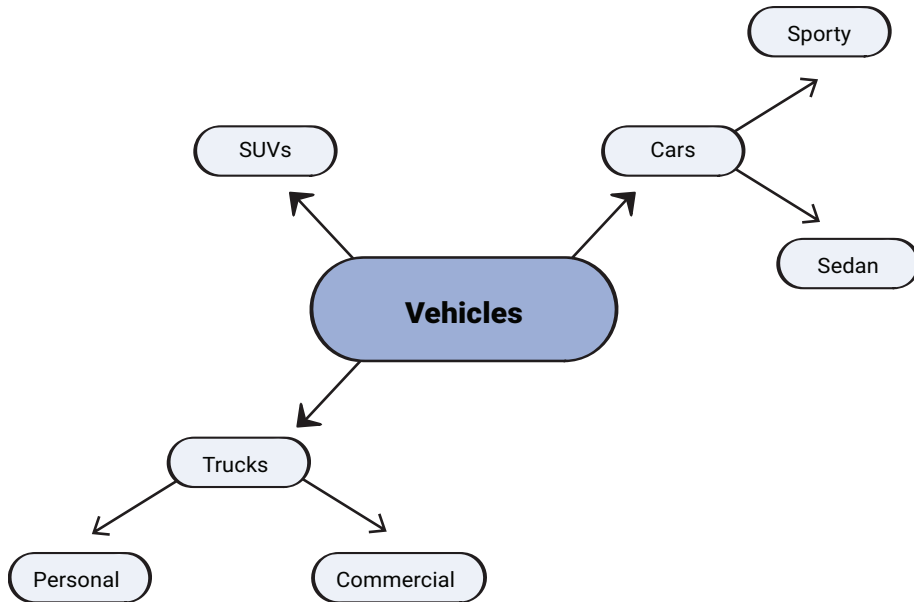


Figure 16.1: Idea Map Classifying Types of Vehicles

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

- B. Create four simple idea maps, one for each of the four approaches to classification that you came up with in step A.
- C. Collaboration: Share and compare your answer with a peer.

Structuring a Classification Essay

Coming up with a strong topic pays double rewards in a classification essay. Not only do you have a good topic, but you also have a solid organizational structure for the essay. The structure of a classification essay is dictated by the initial topic and the subsequent categories or types.

Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph of a classification essay should introduce the broad topic that you will be classifying into categories. This first paragraph should end with a thesis statement that includes the topic, the categories, and the reason for classifying the topic that way. Use the following classification thesis equation:

Thesis statement = topic + categories + rationale for classifying

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH FOR A CLASSIFICATION ESSAY

When people think of British Columbia, they often think of only Vancouver. However, British Columbia is actually a diverse province with a full range of activities to do, sights to see, and cultures to explore. In order to better understand the diversity of the province of British Columbia, it is helpful to break it into seven separate regions: the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, the North and Central Coast, Northern British Columbia, Canyons and the Cariboo, the Thompson-Okanagan, and the Kootenays.

The underlined thesis statement introduces the topic (*British Columbia*) and categories (*names of regions*), and it also provides the rationale for dividing it into those categories (*to understand the diversity of the province*). In this classification essay, the writer hopes to show readers a different way of considering the province.

Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph is dedicated to identifying and illustrating each of the categories. Use strong details and explanations for each subcategory paragraph to reveal the characteristics of that subcategory. Also, include examples to illustrate your points.

Each body paragraph of a classification essay should focus on one category, as shown in this simple outline, in which each of the seven regions is the subject of its own body paragraph:

OUTLINE: REGIONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

I. Introductory Paragraph

Thesis statement: To better understand the diversity of the province of British Columbia, it is helpful to break it into seven separate regions: the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, the North and Central Coast, Northern British Columbia, Canyons and the Cariboo, the Thompson-Okanagan, and the Kootenays.

II. Lower Mainland

III. Vancouver Island

IV. North and Central Coast

- V. Northern BC
- VI. Canyons and the Cariboo
- VII. Thompson-Okanagan
- VIII. Kootenays
- IX. Concluding Paragraph

Notice that developing this essay will require nine paragraphs: one introductory paragraph, seven body paragraphs, and a concluding sentence. Notice, too, the regions are presented in the same order in the thesis statement and in the body of the essay. The topic sentence of each body paragraph should introduce one region:

Another beautiful region with its own distinct culture is Vancouver Island.

Each body paragraph should fully illustrate each category in order to effectively describe it and to clearly convey how that region is distinct from the others.

Concluding Paragraph

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

Words That Emphasize Classification

To emphasize classification, use the following words:

Nouns: category, class, group, division, sub-genre, type, kind

Verbs: categorize, classify, group, divide, subdivide, sort

Adjectives: distinct, special, separate, different

PRACTICE 16.2

- A. Choose one of the topics below. Draw an idea map that identifies categories. Then, to broaden your thinking about the topic, draw another idea map that classifies the same topic in a different way. Choose one approach to work with.
- Types of pop music
 - Types of post-secondary institutions

Types of people on online dating sites

Types of parents

- B. Create a brief outline for a well-organized classification essay. Include a thesis statement. Decide how many categories you will use to classify your topic, and be sure the body of the essay has a corresponding number of body paragraphs (presented in the same order).
- C. Collaboration: Share your outline with a peer.

Compare-Contrast Essay

Another type of expository essay is a **compare-contrast essay**, also called a **comparative essay**, a **comparison essay**, or a **compare/contrast essay**. In a compare-contrast essay, a writer typically compares two subjects (sometimes more) and identifies similarities and differences.

If you see one or more of the following words in an essay assignment, you are probably expected to write a compare-contrast essay:

Compare

Comparison

Similar

Similarities

Same

Different

Differences

Contrast

Below are some examples of assignment instructions for compare-contrast essays:

Compare Canada's and New Zealand's approaches to reconciliation.

What are the similarities and differences between the British colonization of the United States and Australia?

Contrast the attitudes of French and English fur traders toward Indigenous people in North America in the 1700s.

When you are specifically asked to write a compare-contrast essay, adhere to the compare-and-contrast structure quite closely. Comparison-based structures are often useful in analysis essays, personal essays, and research papers, and you might want to be more creative with the structure in those cases. The

comparison structure is useful in English literature courses, social sciences, political studies, business, and many other contexts.

The Purpose of Comparison in Writing

Comparison refers to putting two things side by side (literally or figuratively) and examining them in order to identify similarities and differences. For example, you might compare two people, two novels, two poems, two sociological approaches, two historical events, two concepts, or two scientific methods.

In comparing the two, consider ways in which they are similar and ways in which they are different. Also, determine the *extent* of the similarities and differences: *How* similar or different are they? Comparison helps us understand both entities more fully, and it reveals the *significance* of comparing the two. The purpose of conducting the comparison and/or contrasting is not to state the obvious but rather to illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities.

Choosing a Topic for a Compare-Contrast Essay

A compare-contrast essay is best suited to comparing two subjects. The key to a good topic for a compare-contrast essay is to choose subjects that connect in a meaningful way. If you haphazardly choose two unrelated subjects, your reader will struggle to see the purpose of comparing the two. For example, an essay comparing apples to giraffes is unlikely to produce fruitful results.

First, choose whether you want to compare (a) two seemingly disparate subjects that have surprising similarities or (b) two seemingly similar subjects that have important differences. Sometimes, you will want to emphasize similarities; in other cases, you might want to emphasize differences. Sometimes, you will do both.

Carefully examine the wording of the assignment instructions. If the assignment asks you to *compare* two subjects, you will likely be free to focus on similarities, differences, or both. If an assignment asks you to *compare-and-contrast*, you will likely be expected to identify both similarities and differences. If an assignment asks you to *contrast* two subjects, you will likely be expected to focus on differences. As always, when in doubt, ask your instructor!

To focus on the *differences* between two subjects, you would likely not choose to contrast apples and oranges because the differences between the two are obvious. Rather, you might choose to contrast two *types* of apples to highlight subtle differences: Red Delicious apples are sweet, while Granny Smiths are tart and acidic. Drawing distinctions between elements in a similar category will increase the audience's understanding of both. Identify *characteristics that apply to both subjects* so that you can examine subtle differences. It is helpful to create a table that compares the two according to several characteristics:

Table 16.1: Comparison of Red Delicious and Granny Smith Apples Based on Five Characteristics

Characteristics That Apply to Both	Red Delicious	Granny Smith
Colour		
Flavour		
Juiciness		
Crispness		
Size		

On the other hand, to focus on *similarities*, choose two subjects that seem at first to be somewhat unrelated. In this case, you likely would not choose two different types of apples, as in the example above, because they share so many of the same properties already. Rather, you might try to compare apples and oranges. The more divergent the two subjects initially seem, the more interesting a compare-contrast essay will be. It is helpful to create a Venn diagram to help identify similarities (see [Figure 16.2](#)).

Structuring a Compare-Contrast Essay

The structure of a compare-contrast essay is partly determined by whether the writer wants to emphasize similarities, differences, or both.

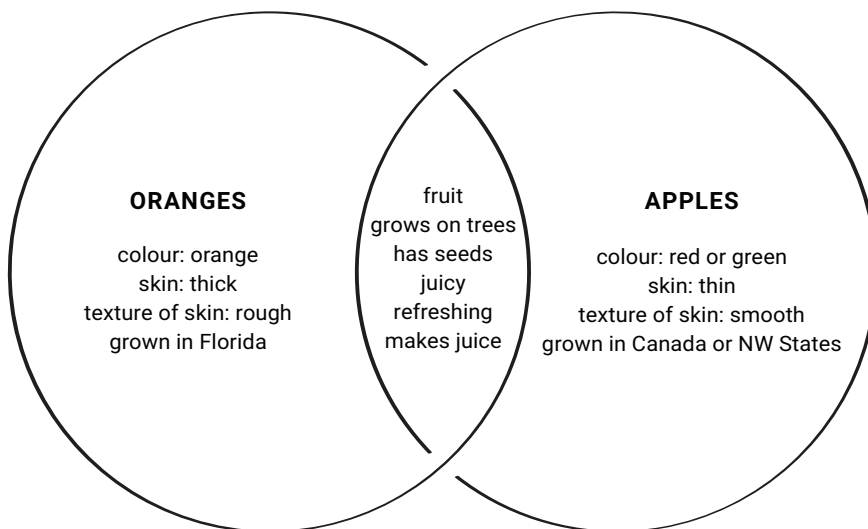
**Figure 16.2:** Venn Diagram: Apples and Oranges

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph of a compare-contrast essay should introduce the two (or more) subjects that you will be comparing. This paragraph should end with a thesis statement that states the two subjects being compared and the significance of doing so. What can be learned from the comparison? Use the following comparison thesis equation:

Thesis statement = two subjects + points of comparison + significance of comparing

The thesis could lean more toward either similarities or differences, or it could balance both. Remember, the point of comparing and contrasting is to provide useful knowledge to the reader. Take the following thesis as an example:

Thesis statement: Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny because they help consumers avoid exposure to chemicals, they are more nutritious, and they taste better.

The thesis statement sets up the two subjects to be compared (organic and conventionally grown vegetables), and it makes a claim about the results that might prove useful to the reader.

Sample introductory paragraph for a compare-contrast essay:

With inflation on the rise, many Canadians are wondering how to make the best use of their grocery budgets. While costly, organic produce is appealing, and many families believe that organic vegetables taste better and are more nutritious—not to mention the benefit of avoiding pesticides and other chemicals. However, many shoppers wonder whether the higher cost is actually worth it. Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny because they help consumers avoid exposure to chemicals, they are more nutritious, and they taste better.

The underlined thesis statement in this example states the two subjects being compared—organic vegetables and conventionally grown vegetables. It identifies characteristics that will provide a basis for comparison: chemicals, nutrition, and taste. Finally, it makes an argument based on a comparison of the two. In this essay, the writer aims to convince readers that organic vegetables are superior.

Body Paragraphs

The organizational structure you choose for a compare-contrast essay depends on the nature of the topic, your purpose in comparing the two subjects, and whether you want to emphasize similarities or differences—or both. There are two common approaches to structuring compare-contrast essays:

Subject-focused comparison:

Describe one subject, then the other.

Point-by-point comparison:

Structure the essay by focusing each body paragraph on one individual point or characteristic that relates to both subjects.

For example, [Figure 16.3: Planning a Compare-Contrast Essay](#) illustrates the two ways to organize an essay comparing organic versus conventional vegetables.

Some subjects might naturally lend themselves to one structure or the other, particularly depending on the nature of the two subjects themselves or the meaning you want to elicit from the comparison. While the subject-focused comparison may seem, at first glance, to be easier to write, and while it might be a good choice for some topics, in most cases, *a point-by-point comparison is a more sophisticated and effective way to approach a comparison.*

In a point-by-point structure, each body paragraph is dedicated to comparing the two subjects based on one characteristic or point identified in the thesis statement.

OUTLINE: ORGANIC VEGETABLES VERSUS CONVENTIONALLY GROWN VEGETABLES

- I. Introductory paragraph

Thesis statement: Organic vegetables may cost more than those that are conventionally grown, but when put to the test, they are definitely worth every extra penny because they help consumers avoid exposure to chemicals, they are more nutritious, and they taste better.
- II. Chemicals/pesticides
- III. Nutrition
- IV. Taste
- V. Concluding paragraph

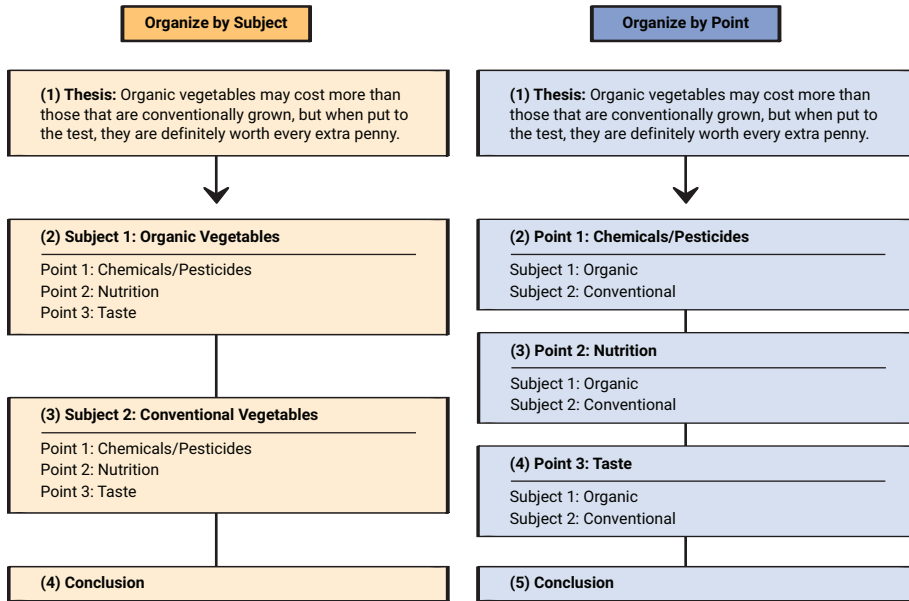


Figure 16.3: Planning a Compare-Contrast Essay

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Notice that this essay will require five paragraphs: one introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and a concluding sentence. Notice, too, that the points of comparison are presented in the same order they appear in the thesis statement.

Each body paragraph should fully analyze the two subjects in regard to one point of comparison. The topic sentence should introduce the point of comparison:

Third, organic vegetables taste better than conventionally grown vegetables do.

In the paragraph, include details that emphasize similarities and/or differences. Include examples to illustrate the comparison.

Concluding Paragraph

After you finish analyzing the subjects, write a concluding paragraph that reinforces your thesis and summarizes the main points of comparison that were analyzed in the body paragraphs. In the case of the essay comparing organic and conventional vegetables, this would mean summarizing the key points regarding chemical exposure, nutrition, and taste.

The concluding paragraph should also emphasize the *significance* of comparing the two subjects. In this example, the concluding paragraph will emphasize that organic vegetables are a better choice, even for cost-conscious shoppers.

Words That Emphasize Comparison

Given that compare-contrast essays analyze the relationship between two subjects, it is helpful to have some phrases on hand that will cue the reader to such analysis. Use these words and phrases to emphasize the relationship between the subjects. See [Table 16.2](#) for examples.

PRACTICE 16.3

- A. Choose one of the topics below. For the topic you've chosen, create a comparison table that indicates at least three shared characteristics. Then draw a Venn diagram to identify similarities and differences. Which would be more helpful in planning an essay?
- Dogs and cats
 - In-person and online learning
 - Apple cell phones and Android cell phones
 - Pop music and country-and-western music
- B. Based on either the table or the Venn diagram, create a brief outline for a well-organized compare-contrast essay. Include a thesis statement. Use a point-by-point comparison structure. Decide how many characteristics or points you will base the comparison on, and

Table 16.2: Phrases That Emphasize Comparison and Contrast

Comparison	Contrast
One similarity	One difference
Another similarity	Another difference
Both	Conversely
Like	In contrast
Likewise	Unlike
Similarly	While
In a similar fashion	Whereas

be sure the body of the essay has a corresponding number of body paragraphs.

C. Collaboration: Share your outline with a peer.

Cause-Effect Essay

Another type of expository essay is a **cause-effect essay**. A cause-effect essay analyzes the causes and/or the effects of a particular event or phenomenon. If you see one or more of the following words in an essay assignment, you are probably expected to write a cause-effect essay:

Causes
Reasons
Effect
Affect
Influence
Result
Why

Below are some examples of assignment instructions for cause-effect essays:

How did the Royal Proclamation of 1763 affect English fur traders' attitudes toward Indigenous people?
What are the primary causes of gun violence in America?
What are the primary causes and effects of volcanoes?

When you are specifically asked to write an expository cause-effect essay, you'll want to adhere to the cause-and-effect structure quite closely. Remember that the cause-and-effect structure might be useful in analysis essays, personal essays, and research papers. Cause-and-effect structures are often useful in fields like medicine, history, political studies, business, and many others.

The Purpose of Considering Cause and Effect in Writing

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

A **cause** is something that produces an event or condition; an **effect** is what results from an event or condition. The purpose of the cause-effect essay is to determine how various phenomena relate in terms of origins and results. Sometimes, the connection between cause and effect is clear, but more often, determining the exact relationship between the two is very difficult. For example, the effects of a cold may be easily identifiable: a sore throat, a runny nose, and a cough. But determining the cause of the sickness can be far more difficult. A number of causes are possible, and to complicate matters, these possible causes could have combined to cause the sickness. That is, more than one cause may be responsible for any given effect. Often it is not necessary or even possible to find the exact cause of an event or to name the exact effect. Therefore, cause-and-effect discussions are often complicated and frequently lead to debates and arguments.

Choosing a Topic for a Cause-Effect Essay

Often, your instructor will give you a specific topic for a cause-effect essay. In some cases, you will write about a subject for which the causes and effects have already been well established by experts—such as when you are asked to write about the causes of volcanoes or the causes of cholera.

In other cases, the causes and effects might be more open to interpretation—such as when you are asked to write about the causes of gun violence in the US or the causes of the opioid epidemic. In these cases, use the complex nature of cause and effect to your advantage. When formulating a thesis, you can claim one of a number of causes or effects to be the primary cause or effect. As soon as you claim that one cause or one effect is more crucial than the others, you have developed a thesis.

Having said that, be cautious about resorting to speculation. Speculation is unsubstantiated guessing. Writers are particularly prone to this trap in cause-and-effect arguments due to the complex nature of finding links between phenomena. For example, it can be tempting to speculate about the cause of gun violence or the causes of the opioid epidemic, and that speculation might lead you to make claims that can't be substantiated by logic or evidence. Be sure to have clear evidence to support the claims that you make.

Structuring a Cause-Effect Essay

The first step in structuring a cause-effect essay is to prewrite to identify a number of possible causes and effects. Freewriting is a good way to start generating ideas.

Then put those ideas into a flow chart to help you begin to plan the structure (see [Figure 16.4](#)).

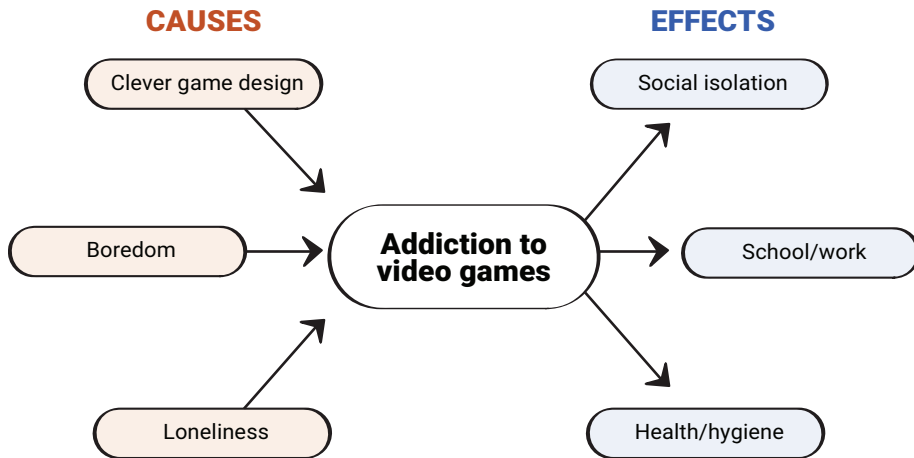


Figure 16.4: Cause-and-Effect Flowchart: Video Game Addiction

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

While the flowchart will help you determine a broad number of causes and effects, you have some important choices to make: First, will the essay focus on only causes, only effects, or both? Then, *which* of those causes, and which effects, will be included in the essay?

For example, referring to the flowchart above, the student could decide to write about three causes and three effects related to video game addiction. Alternatively, the student might want to focus on the role of game designers in creating addiction and therefore decide to focus on only one cause but multiple effects. The student revises the flow to remove the causes that will not be discussed in the essay (see [Figure 16.5](#)).

Now the flowchart indicates the essay will focus on one cause and three effects. By carefully choosing which causes and/or effects to include, you shape your thesis *and* you establish the structure of the essay.

Introductory Paragraph

A cause-effect essay opens with a general introduction to the topic, which then leads to a thesis statement that states the main causes and/or effects that will be examined in the essay. Remember that the argument makes a statement about the connection between the causes and/or effects. Use the following cause-and-effect thesis equation:

Thesis statement = topic + causes and/or effects + argument

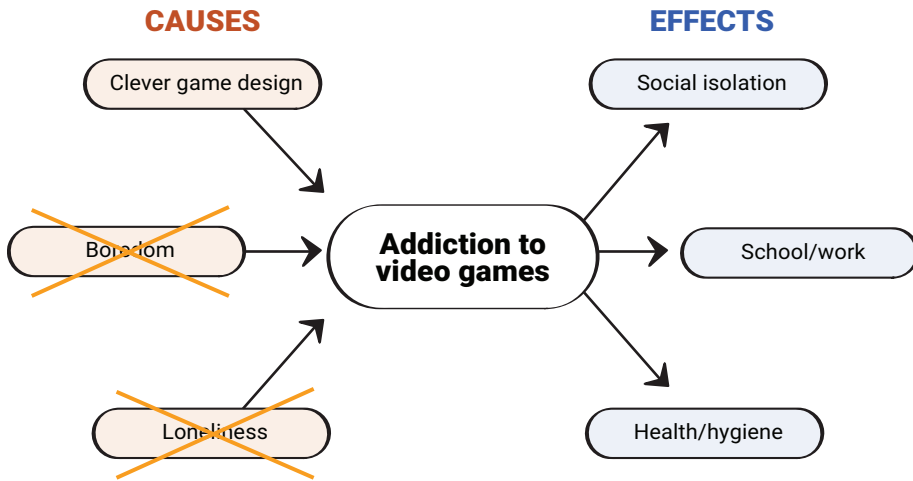


Figure 16.5: Revised Cause-and-Effect Flowchart: Video Game Addiction

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH FOR A CAUSE-EFFECT ESSAY:

Video game addiction is a serious problem in many parts of the world today and deserves more attention. It is no secret that children and adults in many countries throughout the world, including Japan, China, the United States, and Canada, play video games every day. Most players can limit their usage in ways that do not interfere with their daily lives, but others cannot. Thanks to the clever design of video games, many players have developed a gaming addiction and suffer detrimental effects, including social isolation, an inability to keep up with school or work, and a dangerous decline in health.

The underlined thesis statement in this example states the topic—gaming addiction—and it identifies one primary cause and three negative effects. The central argument is that video game design is to blame for the negative effects of gaming addiction.

Body Paragraphs

If a cause-effect essay is to discuss both causes *and* effects, it can be organized in one of two primary ways:

Start with the cause(s), and then describe the effects.

Start with the effect(s), and then describe the causes.

Organize the body of the essay by starting with either the cause-then-effect structure or the effect-then-cause structure. For example, if your essay is about the rise of type 2 diabetes, you could start by writing about the effect of type 2 diabetes and then discuss the causes, or you could start the essay by identifying the cause of type 2 diabetes and then move to the effects.

If you are writing about multiple causes or multiple effects, you may choose to sequence them in order of importance. In other words, order the causes from least to most important (or vice versa), or order the effects from least to most important (or vice versa).

Regardless of which structure you choose, within each body paragraph, clearly explain and support the causes and effects using a range of evidence. Explaining complex relationships requires the full use of evidence such as scientific studies, expert testimony, statistics, and anecdotes.

OUTLINE: THE EFFECTS OF VIDEO GAME ADDICTION

- I. Introductory paragraph
Thesis statement: Thanks to the clever design of video games, many players have developed a gaming addiction and suffer detrimental effects, including social isolation, an inability to keep up with school or work, and a dangerous decline in health.
- II. Cause: Sophisticated design of video games encourages addiction
- III. Effect: Social Isolation
- IV. Effect: Inability to keep up with responsibilities at work or school
- V. Effect: Decline in hygiene and health
- VI. Concluding paragraph

Notice that this essay will require six paragraphs: one introductory paragraph, four body paragraphs, and a concluding sentence. Each body paragraph will focus on the cause or one of the effects. Notice that in the body of the essay, the causes and effects are presented in the same order they appear in the thesis statement.

Each body paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that introduces a cause or an effect:

Another negative effect of video game addiction is that the gamer may become increasingly unable to keep up with responsibilities and commitments at work or at school.

Each body paragraph will contain details, examples, and evidence to illustrate the cause or the negative effects of addiction.

Concluding Paragraph

After you finish analyzing the causes and/or effects, write a concluding paragraph that reinforces the thesis and summarizes the causes and/or effects that were analyzed in the body paragraphs. In the case of the essay about video game addiction, this would mean summarizing both the primary cause of addiction and the primary negative effects: isolation, problems at work and school, and health.

The concluding paragraph should also emphasize the *significance* of considering the causes and/or effects. In this example, the concluding paragraph could emphasize that more needs to be done to address the effects of gaming addiction. The concluding paragraph should wrap up the discussion and reinforce the thesis, leaving the reader with a clear understanding of the relationship that was analyzed.

Words That Emphasize Causes and Effects

Use phrases of causation when forging connections between various events or conditions. This will help organize your ideas and orient the reader:

as a result
because
consequently
due to
hence
since
therefore
thus

PRACTICE 16.4

- A. Choose one of the topics below and freewrite or brainstorm to generate ideas about causes and effects. Then draw a flowchart that represents several main causes and several main effects.
- The causes and effects of plagiarism and cheating in schools
 - The effects of bullying
 - The causes of a phobia

- B. If you were to write an essay on this topic, would you focus on causes, effects, or both? Which causes or effects are most compelling? Cross out the ones that you would not examine in the essay.
- C. Create a brief outline for a well-organized cause-effect essay. Include a complete thesis statement. Decide how you will use order of importance to arrange the body paragraphs.
- D. Collaboration: Share your outline with a peer.

Process Essay

The last type of expository essay we will examine is a **process essay**, also called a **process analysis essay**, a **directional process essay**, a **directive process essay**, or a **procedural essay**. In a process essay, a writer describes the steps or stages required to successfully complete a process. A sub-genre of the process essay is the **how-to essay**, but not all process essays are how-to essays.

If your assignment instructions include one or more of these words, you are likely expected to write a process essay:

Process
Steps
Stage
Procedure
Events
Order
Chronology
How to

Below are some examples of assignment instructions for process essays:

What are the five stages of grief, according to Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, and in what order do they occur?

Describe the four primary stages of the scientific process.

Explain the key steps in the process of hydraulic fracturing.

When you are specifically asked to write an expository process essay, you'll want to adhere to the process analysis structure quite closely. However, this structure might be useful in analysis essays, personal essays, and research papers—anytime an assignment requires you to analyze a process.

The Purpose of Process Analysis in Writing

Almost everything we learn involves following a step-by-step process. From a child learning to ride a bike to an employee learning a difficult new procedure at work, we all initially need instructions to effectively execute a task.

Think back to the last time you tried to assemble a piece of furniture following poorly written instructions or tried to troubleshoot a computer problem following instructions that didn't match what you were seeing on the monitor, and you will remember how frustrating it is to try to follow instructions that are not well written and well organized.

On the other hand, all of us have had to teach a process to someone else, and it can be challenging to explain steps clearly and in the correct order to help someone succeed. Think back to a time when you tried to teach a process to a child or a co-worker—perhaps you thought you were being perfectly clear in your instructions, but the child or co-worker struggled to follow along, and one of you—or both of you—became very frustrated. Giving clear instructions is not as easy as it might seem.

The purpose of a process essay is to clearly explain and/or analyze how to do something or how something works. In either case, the process must be articulated into clear, definitive steps, which are carefully arranged in a logical way so that they can be followed to complete the process.

Choosing a Topic for a Process Essay

Choosing a suitable topic is the first step in writing a process essay. A process essay is best suited to the explanation of a process. Choose a process that is interesting, is relatively complex, and can be explained in a series of steps. Choose something you know well so that you can more easily describe the finer details about each step in the process.

Don't choose a process for which the instructions are too simple or too concrete—or if there is no room for interpretation. For example, the steps to baking a chocolate cake are better suited for a recipe card than for a process essay, and the process of setting up a new TV is better suited for an instruction manual than for a process essay. For one thing, no one will want to read an essay on these topics unless they are in the kitchen baking a chocolate cake or in the living room unpacking the exact same model of TV. For another thing, these processes aren't generally open to interpretation, so there is likely nothing interesting you can add that would justify writing an essay on the topic. Having said that, if your grandfather taught you some little-known baking secrets that apply to all cake-baking situations, and if these tips are not common knowledge and other bakers might want to know about them,

you *might* be able to make a case for writing an essay about baking cakes. Choose your topic thoughtfully.

Once you have chosen the process you want to explain, do some prewriting to help you generate ideas. You might want to create a timeline to identify the steps in the process.

“How-to” essays are a type of process essay, and they can sometimes be written from the second-person point of view, using the pronoun *you* as if the writer were directly giving the reader instructions to follow: for example, “First, you must gather the materials.” If you’re not sure if the use of second-person pronouns is permitted in your assignment, check with your instructor.

The Structure of a Process Essay

More so than in any other type of expository essay, structure is critical to a process essay. The steps or stages *must* be described in the correct order if they are to be successfully completed. The organization of a process essay is typically chronological. That is, the steps of the process are conveyed in the order in which they need to occur to achieve the desired outcome.

If a particular step is complicated and needs a lot of explaining, then it will likely take up a paragraph on its own. But if a series of simple steps is easier to understand, then the steps can be grouped into a single paragraph—as long as all the steps are arranged in a logical order. A common pitfall in writing process essays is to include lots of very short paragraphs, with each one- or two-sentence paragraph describing one distinct small step, so take time now to group the little steps into significant stages.

Drawing a flow chart or a timeline can help to ensure that the major steps are arranged in the best order (see [Figure 16.6](#)).

Introductory Paragraph

The introductory paragraph of a process essay should introduce the process that you will be explaining and the final outcome of that process. The introductory paragraph should end with a thesis statement that includes the process, the goal of the process, and the steps.

Use the following process thesis equation:

Thesis statement = process + desired outcome + steps/stages presented in order

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH FOR A PROCESS ESSAY:

These days, with the rising cost of groceries and the growing interest in fresh, organic produce, many people are learning how

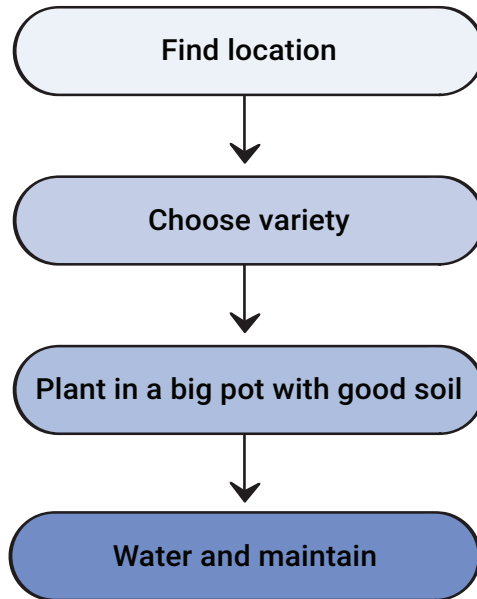


Figure 16.6: Timeline: Process for Growing Tomatoes

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

to grow vegetables at home. Tomatoes are one of the most popular vegetables to grow because homegrown tomatoes taste so much better than store-bought ones. Growing tomatoes at home is easier than many people think. To successfully grow your own delicious, nutritious tomatoes, follow these four simple steps: choose a suitable location that offers ample space and sunlight, choose a variety of seedling that will meet your needs, provide an appropriate pot and soil mixture, and then simply water and maintain.

The underlined thesis statement in this example states the process (growing tomatoes), the desired outcome (success), and the steps required, in order.

Body Paragraphs

The organization of a process analysis essay is dictated by the steps in the process. Each body paragraph is dedicated to explaining or describing one step or stage in the process, typically presented in chronological order. Each paragraph should be substantial, so that the essay does not consist of a series of very short paragraphs.

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Example

Outline: How to Grow Homegrown Tomatoes

I. Introductory paragraph

Thesis statement: To successfully grow your own delicious, nutritious tomatoes, follow these four simple steps: choose a suitable location that offers ample space and sunlight, choose a variety of seedling that will meet your needs, provide an appropriate pot and soil mixture, and then simply water and maintain.

II. Step one: Choose a location with enough space and sunlight

III. Step two: Choose a variety of seedling

IV. Step three: Plant in large pot with well-draining soil

V. Step four: Water and maintain

VI. Concluding paragraph

Concluding Paragraph

The conclusion should briefly summarize the steps in the process, and it should emphasize the desired outcome of the process. For example, the essay about growing tomatoes could end with a short, sensory description of how lovely it will be to enjoy a delicious tomato salad on the patio on a hot summer's day.

Terms That Emphasize Process and/or Time

Time-related transitional phrases are helpful in organizing process analysis essays. To help your reader follow the process, use words that emphasize the order that the steps or stages must occur in.

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

TIP: Ask a friend to read your process essay and to provide feedback on whether it's possible to successfully complete the process by following the steps that you've explained in the same order that you've presented them. This will help you identify any confusing spots in the essay.

PRACTICE 16.5

- A. Choose one of the topics below and freewrite to identify key steps in the process. Then draft a flowchart or a timeline to establish the correct sequence of those steps.
- Planning a successful first date
 - Tying a shoelace
 - Learning to give effective speeches
- B. Create a brief outline for a well-organized process essay. Include a thesis statement. Decide how many steps will need to be described, and carefully consider what order to present them in.
- C. Collaboration: Share your outline with a peer.

* * *

In this chapter, we've introduced four common types of expository essays, and we've emphasized how crucial it is to choose a structure that naturally suits your topic and purpose—and vice versa. For example, if you were assigned to write an essay on the topic of purchasing a condo, you would not choose a classification structure; conversely, if you were required to write a classification essay, you would not choose the topic of purchasing a condo. When the topic and the structure naturally match, essay writing is much easier.

We've also emphasized that each of these essay types requires special consideration regarding essay structure. There is a close relationship between the type of essay and the thesis statement. Take a moment to check your understanding of these relationships by completing [Practice 16.6](#) and [Practice 16.7](#).

PRACTICE 16.6

Read the thesis statements below. Determine which of the following types of expository essay each thesis statement is best suited for.

Cause-effect essay
Classification essay
Compare-contrast essay
Process essay

- A. The four most significant demographic groups of the past century have been the baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z.
- B. Although baby boomers and millennials share similarities in their attitudes toward family, members of the two generations differ in their attitudes toward work and technology.
- C. Baby boomers' values regarding family and work were shaped by World War II and the postwar economic boom.
- D. The attitudes and values of millennials are disrupting and reshaping corporate America in three important ways.
- E. In the West, yoga has branched off into a variety of subdisciplines, including, most predominantly, Iyengar yoga, kundalini yoga, Bikram yoga, ashtanga yoga, and vinyasa yoga.
- F. The yoga taught in the West today bears little resemblance to yoga as it has been practiced in India for five thousand years.
- G. The path to entering a yoga teacher training program requires four steps: choose a style of yoga that best suits you, develop a strong practice under respected teachers, find an appropriate teacher training program, and finally, review the program's entrance requirements and work toward meeting them.
- H. Although Bikram Choudhury and B. K. S. Iyengar are two of the most well-known yoga gurus in the West, the two influential teachers could not be more different in background, philosophy, and influence.

With a peer, discuss the subtle variations in the thesis statements above in relation to the chosen structures.

PRACTICE 16.7

If you were given each of the essay assignments below, which of the following types of expository essays would you choose?

Cause-effect essay
Classification essay

Compare-contrast essay

Process essay

- A. How has inflation impacted Canadian families?
- B. What factors contributed to Russia's invasion of Ukraine?
- C. What is the best way to plan a terrific trip to Europe?
- D. Who is the greatest NHL superstar of all time: Wayne Gretzky or Connor McDavid? Why?
- E. What are the main sub-genres of hip-hop music?
- F. Trace the development of today's piano from its origin in the fifteenth-century harpsichord.
- G. What factors led to the current opioid crisis?
- H. What are the main cultural groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada?
- I. What were some of the similarities and differences between the lifestyles of East Coast and West Coast Indigenous groups before the arrival of Europeans?
- J. What were the key differences in Jung's and Freud's approaches to psychology?

With a peer, discuss whether some of these topics might also suit a second type of essay structure—or not.

* * *

The classification essay, the compare-contrast essay, the cause-effect essay, and the process essay are not the only types of expository essays, but they are four of the most common ones you'll be asked to write. Other types of expository essays that your instructors may ask you to write include the descriptive essay, the definition essay, the illustration essay, and the problem-solution essay. Although not all expository essay assignments will fit the four types we've presented, many of the tips in this chapter apply to all types of expository essays.

These four modes can be used to write not only expository essays but also analysis and argumentative essays, which will be discussed in more detail in the next two chapters. You can choose the structures you learned for classification, comparison, cause and effect, or process analysis to develop your analysis or argument in more sophisticated and nuanced ways, even if your instructor doesn't specify that one of these structures must be used.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Expository essays primarily explain or describe a subject.
- A classification essay divides a whole subject into parts, categories, or sub-genres.
- A compare-contrast essay analyzes subjects by either comparing them, contrasting them, or both.
- A cause-effect essay determines how various phenomena are related.
- A process essay explains how to do something, how something works, or both.
- When writing an expository essay, begin with a standard essay structure, but adapt it to meet the purposes of the particular type of essay.
- Transitional words emphasize the relationships between parts of an expository essay.
- The structures associated with classification, comparison, cause and effect, and process analysis can be applied to other types of essays, such as analysis essays, argumentative essays, and research papers.

Argumentative Essay

Learning Objectives

- Determine the purpose of persuasion in writing
- Understand the elements of an argument
- Explain the importance and benefits of acknowledging opposing ideas
- Identify the purpose and audience of an argumentative essay
- Create an outline that constructs and follows a logical argument
- Determine whether it is appropriate to use first-person pronouns in an argumentative essay
- Identify the importance of establishing an appropriate tone in an argumentative essay
- Avoid diction that reveals bias
- Distinguish between fact and opinion
- Use visuals to strengthen arguments
- Develop an argumentative essay from topic to draft

When did you last try to persuade someone? Perhaps you tried to convince a spouse to go to an action movie instead of a romantic comedy. Perhaps you tried to talk a friend into going to your favourite restaurant rather than his. Or perhaps you tried to talk your teen out of getting a tattoo. Every day, we aim to persuade others.

In all writing, to a greater or lesser extent, the writer seeks to persuade the reader. For example, when you write an expository classification essay that divides parents into categories, you seek to persuade your reader that you have classified parents in the most useful and accurate way. When you write an expository process essay about the development of jazz music, you aim to persuade your reader that you have identified the most important stages in the

development of the genre. However, when you write an expository essay, your focus is more on content—explaining something as it is—than on persuasion. Nearly every discipline will ask you to arrive at a logical and compelling conclusion in your papers, but by and large, most academic writing requires you to be convincing but not necessarily persuasive. In contrast, in an **argumentative essay** (also called an **argumentation essay** or a **persuasive essay**), the art of persuasion takes centre stage.

This chapter will examine the arts of persuasion and argumentation. We will look at persuasion as a means of changing others' minds and argumentation as a form of convincing others of the possibility or even likelihood of your conclusion, whether it changes their minds or not. The distinction is an artificial one because the line between persuading and convincing is blurry. We will explore the forms persuasion and argumentation can take, the strategies you can apply to writing persuasively, and the pitfalls you should avoid. We'll begin with a closer look at persuasion: what it is and why it is. In the second section, we will look more closely at argumentation and the common forms you can apply in your work and also at the many persuasive tactics that you can use or should avoid.

The Art of Persuasion

The art of persuasion (also known as **rhetoric**) implies that more than one opinion or conclusion on the subject at hand can be argued. The purpose of persuasion is to influence, motivate, convince, or prompt others to adopt a certain point of view, opinion, or conclusion.

There are many ways to persuade. In an essay that aims to sway an audience's opinion on a topic, the arguments can draw on everything a writer has available to make the point, ranging from uncontested facts to emotional, moral, or ideological opinions and any other convictions or beliefs. Whatever the author uses, the explicit intent is to make the reader accept the truth of the expressed opinion. This type of persuasion can be very effective and useful in a variety of settings, but in a nondebate-style argument in an academic writing situation, it is less likely to be promoted to its fullest persuasive extent. In an argumentative essay in an academic setting, your instructor is likely to encourage you to argue your thesis with evidence rather than opinions to support your claims. Nevertheless, it is good to realize that almost all forms of writing hope to persuade or convince the reader to accept the argued point as true, likely, possible, or acceptable.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle defined **rhetoric** (the art of persuasion through language) and listed three core elements that a persuasive text must have: pathos, logos, and ethos. **Pathos** roughly translates as “passion” and includes appeals to emotion and imagination. **Logos** translates as “rationality”

and includes appeals to logic and reason. **Ethos** refers to the writer's character, credibility, and authority.

Effective persuasive writers employ all three rhetorical strategies—pathos, logos, and ethos—in perfect balance by being passionate, logical, and credible. They appeal to the reader's emotions, the reader's sense of what is rational, and the reader's acceptance of the credibility of the writer and the sources they refer to. Keep the pathos-logos-ethos tripod in mind in your own academic writing. By using these three modes to your advantage, you will make more convincing arguments.

Another way to think about the interplay of elements required for effective persuasion is to consider the relationship between the writer and the purpose of the writing, the topic of the writing (the content), and the reader (and the reader's expectations).

The concept of the rhetorical triangle is that all three elements are interconnected and intersupportive of one another in a piece of persuasive writing. To persuade anyone of anything, you need to know who your audience is and what is likely to influence them. As a writer, you also need to be aware of what you want to convince them of; that is, you must be aware of your purpose. This is much more likely to happen when you choose a topic that really engages you and that you have expertise in so that you can knowledgeably write about your topic. From that solid foundation, you can make a strong, persuasive argument.

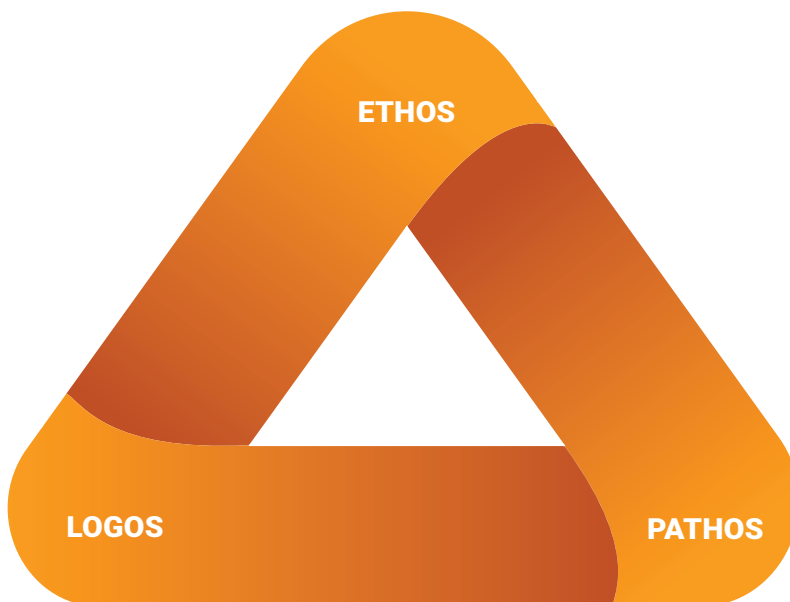


Figure 17.1: Aristotle's Modes of Persuasion

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

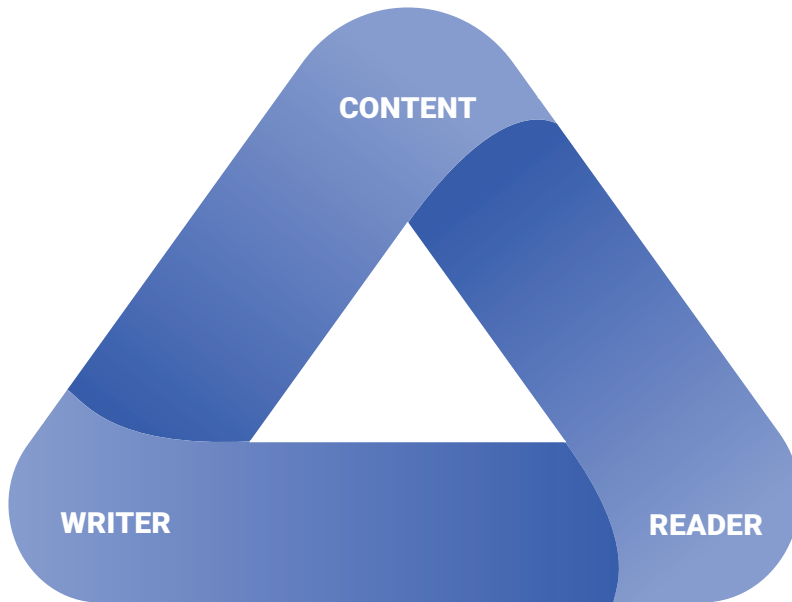


Figure 17.2: The Rhetorical Triangle

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Rhetorical Devices

Persuasive writers use specific rhetorical strategies to try to persuade the reader not only on the basis of evidence alone but also through the strategic use of language. Below is a list of some rhetorical strategies writers use to make their writing as appealing, clear, convincing, or even persuasive, as it can be. Keep in mind that you do not have to use all of these strategies all of the time or all at once. Be selective and choose those that make sense in the context of your argument.

- **Analogy:** Compares the relationship between two things to a similar relationship between two other things in order to explain the relationship
- **Cause and effect:** Analyzes why something happens and describes the consequences of a string of events
- **Comparison:** Discusses similarities and differences
- **Counterpoints:** Contrasts ideas such as black and white, dark and light, good and bad, and so on
- **Definition:** Provides the meanings of terms
- **Description:** Details sensory perceptions of a person, place, or thing in a straightforward way (see [Imagery](#))
- **Diction:** The author's choice of words

- **Division and classification:** Divides a whole into parts or sorts related items/aspects into categories
- **Exemplification:** Provides examples or cases in point
- **Flashback:** Recalls events in the past
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerates or overstates
- **Imagery:** Evokes one or all of the senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste)
- **Irony:** An expression or utterance marked by a deliberate contrast between apparent and intended meaning, often humorous
- **Juxtaposition:** Two things or ideas placed side by side for the sake of contrast
- **Metaphor:** Compares two essentially unlike things, implying that one *is* the other
- **Narration:** Recounts an event
- **Oxymoron:** The combination of contradictory or opposite words to create a phrase
- **Paradox:** Reveals a truth that at first seems contradictory
- **Parallelism:** Deliberate repetition of identical or equivalent constructions in corresponding clauses
- **Parody:** Imitates a writing style; meant to amuse
- **Personification:** Attributing human-like characteristics or forms to an abstract concept
- **Repetition:** Repeats certain words, phrases, or images
- **Sarcasm:** Ironic observations and commentary aimed at hurting feelings
- **Satire:** Ridicules the silliness of an idea, custom, vice, or habit
- **Simile:** Compares two essentially unlike things, often in a phrase introduced by *like* or *as*
- **Style, tone, and voice:** The writer's attitude toward the subject or character—serious, humorous, sarcastic, cynical, satirical, objective, solemn, tongue-in-cheek, and so on.
- **Symbolism:** Uses an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning

Source: Dubbelboer, Adien. "Step Two: Basic Rhetorical Strategies for Effective Communication." *OER Writing Resources*, Athabasca University, Oct. 2016, ocw.lms.athabascau.ca/mod/book/view.php?id=3873&chapterid=2767.

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Edited extensively, October 2016, Adien Dubbelboer, Athabasca University.

Logical Fallacies

The recognition of logical fallacies, often referred to by their Latin name *non sequiturs* (which translates to “it does not follow”), is a powerful tool in argumentation, logic, and rhetoric. When an arguer is able to identify their opponent’s fallacious positions, they can point the fallacies out and expose a weakness, thus undermining the opponent’s position. Arguers comfortable with fallacies have an easier time avoiding them, consequently making their positions more tenable.

Missteps in logic can be confusing for students—sometimes a fallacy will be called by its Latin name, while other times it will be referred to by a synonym. Some are grouped together, while others are overly specific. For example, an “argument against the person” is often called an “ad hominem” argument, a “complex question” can be referred to as a “loaded question,” an “appeal to the people” occasionally loses its distinction between direct and indirect (by being referred to only as a “bandwagon fallacy”), and “begging the question” often implies only its aspect of circular reasoning and not its other aspects. However, more important than agreeing on a name is recognizing these non sequiturs. While a logician might dedicate their life to the nuances of logical fallacies, as a student, you are expected only to avoid fallacies in your own writing and identify them in others.

The following is a comprehensive list of fallacies. Use it as a reference to ensure you do not accidentally create a logical fallacy as you are writing persuasively to an audience, and use it to identify fallacies in others’ arguments.

Table 17.1: Logical Fallacies

Fallacy	Definition	Example
Appeal to force	Arguer threatens reader/listener	If you do not agree with me, I will beat you up.
Appeal to pity	Arguer elicits pity from reader/listener	If you do not pass me in this course, I will get kicked out of school and have to flip burgers for the rest of my life.
Appeal to the people (direct)	Arguer arouses mob mentality	The calf has drowned in the well. Our only course of action is to fill the well with sand so no other calf can ever drown in it again.
Appeal to the people (indirect)	Arguer appeals to the reader’s/listener’s desire for security, love, respect, etc.	Of course you want to read my book; it is what all the intellectuals read.

Fallacy	Definition	Example
Abusive argument against the person (ad hominem)	Arguer verbally abuses the other arguer	That is a biscuit-brained idea; it is invalid.
Circumstantial argument against the person (ad hominem)	Arguer presents the other arguer as predisposed to argue in this way	Of course you would say I need braces—you're a dentist!
Consistency argument against the person (tu quoque)	Arguer suggests the other arguer is a hypocrite, but not necessarily about a similar thing	How can you complain about me not putting out the garbage when you never gave my brother his watch back?
Accident	General rule is applied to a specific case it was not intended to cover	Canadians are entitled to freedom of expression, so you cannot arrest me for yelling "fire" in the theatre.
Straw man	Arguer distorts opponent's argument and then attacks the distorted argument	Obviously, the university administrators who refuse to allow students to drink on campus are a bunch of puritans who do not speak for the majority and can be ignored.
Missing the point	Arguer draws a conclusion different from that supported by the premises	University education fees are rising exponentially; therefore, we should reduce the number of years needed to obtain a degree.
Red herring	Arguer leads reader/listener off track	People continually talk about the negative effects of tobacco, but did you know that Indigenous people used to smoke tobacco? Many Indigenous remedies are still used today in holistic medicine.
Appeal to unqualified authority	Arguer cites untrustworthy authority	My sixteen-year-old cousin Billy said there was no moon landing, and he wants to be an astronaut, so it must be true.

(continued)

Table 17.1: Logical Fallacies (continued)

Fallacy	Definition	Example
Appeal to ignorance	Arguer presupposes unknown or unknowable evidence and then draws a conclusion	There is no way of disproving the existence of God; therefore, he exists. Or conversely, there is no way of proving the existence of God; therefore, he does not exist.
Hasty generalization	Conclusion is drawn from an atypical sample	Ms. Dobson's rottweiler bit a neighbour boy; therefore, all rottweilers are violent dogs.
False cause	Conclusion depends on nonexistent or minor causal connection	Every time I change the channel, my sports team scores. Therefore, any time I want my team to score, I need only change the channel.
Slippery slope	Conclusion depends on unlikely chain reaction	If America maintains the right to bear arms, it will likely invade Canada or Mexico within the next five years.
Weak analogy	Conclusion depends on defective analogy	My cousin Billy is just like Yao Ming—he is tall and loves basketball. Therefore, he will be a pro player just like Yao Ming.
Begging the question	Arguer creates the illusion that inadequate premises are adequate by leaving out key premises, restating the conclusion as a premise, or reasoning in a circle	Of course animals have rights; just look at how they are being treated.
Complex question	Multiple questions are concealed in a single question	Have you stopped sleeping with your secretary?
False dichotomy	Arguer uses "either/or" statement that hides additional alternatives	Either you buy Axe body spray or you will not attract women.
Suppressed evidence	Arguer ignores important evidence that requires a different conclusion	That doctor cannot practice andrology because she is a woman.
Equivocation	Conclusion depends on a shift in the meaning of a word or phrase	A squirrel is a mammal, therefore when you squirrel things away you are being a mammal.

Fallacy	Definition	Example
Amphiboly	Conclusion depends on the wrong interpretation of a syntactically ambiguous statement	John rode his bike past the tree with a helmet. (The tree has a helmet?)
Composition	Attribute is wrongly transferred from parts to whole	Bleach and ammonia individually are strong chemical cleaners; therefore, if I mix them, I will have a more effective cleaner.
Division	Attribute is wrongly transferred from whole to parts	Our campus is over one hundred years old; therefore, every building on campus is over one hundred years old.

Source: Dubbelboer, Adien. "Logical Fallacies." *OER Writing Resources*, Athabasca University, Oct. 2016, <https://ocw.lms.athabascau.ca/mod/book/view.php?id=3873&chapterid=2773>.

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Edited extensively, October 2016, Adien Dubbelboer, Athabasca University

PRACTICE 17.1

Take a moment to test your ability to recognize rhetorical strategies. Advertisements are a good place to start because the purpose of an ad is usually obvious, and advertisers often use exaggerated rhetoric to sell a product.

Work with a friend or fellow student and choose three advertisements to analyze. The ads can be in print, online, or on TV. Consider the following questions, and jot down your answers on a sheet of paper.

1. What is the aim or message of this ad?
2. What is likely the target audience of this ad? Think about age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.
3. What tactics does the ad use to persuade the viewer/reader?
4. How do the advertisers use the tactic, and why might it be effective with the target audience?
5. Did you notice any logical fallacies in the ad, and if so, what type?
6. Is the ad effective in achieving its objective? Why or why not?

How to Write an Argumentative Essay

The next pages will take you through the process of preparing for and writing an argumentative essay. We will talk about the importance of considering your purpose and your audience; how to find and decide on a good topic; how to develop a solid argumentative thesis; how to distinguish between facts and opinions, including opposing ideas; and how to acknowledge the limits of your argumentation. When we come to creating an outline, we will also discuss the importance of style and tone, the effect of bias, and the strength and weakness of using the first-person perspective in argumentation.

Consider Your Purpose and Audience

In an argumentative essay, your main purpose is to provide an argument to persuade your audience that your thesis is true. Here the term *argument* refers not to an angry dispute but rather to a set of assertions in which one or more statements (the argument's *premises*) are given as reasons for thinking that another contention (the argument's *conclusion*) is true. Consequently, your aim in an argumentative essay is not simply to communicate information about a topic and express your point of view on it. You will also be trying to convince your audience that your point of view (i.e., your thesis) is right.

Given that your purpose is to convince your audience that your thesis is true, your intended audience should be people who don't necessarily agree with your thesis already. After all, if your intended audience consisted merely of people who already agreed with your thesis, there would be no need to try to persuade them that it is true. Your intended audience will, therefore, not be the same as the one you might have for types of writing in which you address people who share your beliefs and urge them to some kind of action.

Keeping this intended audience in mind should help you to decide what types of reasons you will give in your arguments. They will have to be reasons that are likely to persuade someone who doesn't already agree with you, and as such, they should be statements that any reasonable person would be inclined to agree with. Furthermore, you will need to ensure that any reasonable person would agree that your thesis follows logically from the explanations that you give to show it is true. Following these guidelines will, of course, help you avoid merely asserting that your thesis is obviously true and ridiculing any opposing point of view, which would be unlikely to convince anyone who doesn't already share your way of looking at things. However, it should also help you avoid less obvious weaknesses in your argument, such as logical fallacies.

Choose a Topic

The best topic for an argumentative essay is one that is controversial. A **controversial topic** is one that elicits strong opinions. Take a minute to think about arguments you have overheard recently—maybe about politics or pipelines or medical assistance in dying. These are the types of discussions that can become really heated if the subject is something people are passionate about.

In addition to being controversial, a good topic for an argumentative essay doesn't have an obvious right or wrong answer. If you can't think of any reasons against your stance, the topic probably isn't suitable. For a topic to be truly debated, there should be valid reasons on both sides of the debate. For example, this topic is not suitable for an argumentative essay because there is no valid argument against the statement:

The federal government has a responsibility to uphold the obligations set out in treaties with Indigenous groups.

An example of the kind of topic that you will find in assignment instructions for an argumentative essay would be the following:

Basing your argument on evidence from research, argue for or against switching to a vegan diet.

Because there is no clear “right” or “wrong” answer to whether people should become vegan, and because there are valid arguments for and against, this is a suitable topic for an argumentative essay.

When choosing a topic for an argumentative essay, it is easier if you choose a topic about which you feel very strongly. You probably have realized by this point that when you are writing, it is easier to write about a topic you already have some background knowledge on or something you are very interested in. This helps engage you and keep you interested in the writing process. However, being passionate about a particular issue can blind a writer to the merits of other points of view. Keep in mind that just like you, the person holding the opposite view likely arrived at that conclusion by looking at a collection of evidence from various sources and then synthesizing those ideas to develop that point of view. In order to understand or dispute it, you may have to retrace the steps that person took. It is not enough to simply discount it because it is not your view.

No matter the topic you choose, there are a few things to think about before you begin the writing process. First, ensure the topic is **significant**. Is a discussion of this topic one that has the potential to contribute to a field of study? Will it make an impact? This does not mean every discussion has to change lives,

but it needs to be something relatively important. For example, a significant topic would be to convince your reader that eating at fast-food restaurants is detrimental to people's cardiovascular systems. A less significant discussion would be if you were to try to convince your reader that one fast-food restaurant is better than another. That would just be an advertisement.

Next, the topic should be **singular**. This means you need to focus on *one* subject. Using the fast-food restaurant example, if you were to focus on the effects of fast food on both the cardiovascular *and* endocrine system, the discussion would lose its singular focus and there would be too much for you to cover.

A topic should be **specific**. The topic must be narrow enough that you can fully discuss it within the essay parameters (i.e., the maximum word count or page count). Many writers are afraid of getting too specific because they feel they will run out of things to say. If you develop the idea completely and give thorough explanations and plenty of examples, the specificity should not be a problem.

Finally, the thesis must be **supportable**. It's not enough to want to make an argument; you must be sure that reliable evidence for that argument actually exists. It's true that in the depths of the Internet, there is probably some form of evidence for the most obscure topics and the most unpopular points of view. However, someone's opinions posted on a blog about why one fast-food restaurant is the best do not count as credible support. You *must* use credible scholarly sources in an academic essay. To learn more about how to evaluate the reliability of evidence, turn to [Chapter 20: Thinking Critically About Information from Research](#).

Some appropriate topics for an argumentative essay could be:

- Illegal immigration in Canada
- Bias in the media
- Civility in political discourse
- The role of religion in educational systems
- Charter schools versus public schools
- Privatization of health care
- Modern-day slavery (e.g., human trafficking)
- Foreign policy
- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Gender roles and the workplace

PRACTICE 17.2

Brainstorm several possible topics, and then choose a controversial topic on which you could base an argumentative essay: _____

Check that the topic is

significant

singular

specific

supportable

Share your topic with a peer.

Develop a Thesis

An essential element of an argumentative essay is the thesis. The thesis is your *position* on the topic. For example, a student writing an argumentative essay on the topic of veganism could base the essay on this thesis:

It is best to switch to a vegan diet because it is healthier, better for the environment, and more ethical than a diet that includes meat, fish, and dairy products.

On the other hand, the student could also base the argumentative essay on this thesis:

People should not switch to vegan diets because human bodies evolved to depend on meat and because plant-based agriculture can cause more environmental harm than meat-based agriculture.

While both essays share the same topic—vegan diets—the essential argument *about* vegan diets would be very different in each essay.

Identify Claims and Provide Evidence

Once you've chosen a stance on the topic, identify at least three main reasons for your stance. The reasons will help you to convince your audience that your thesis is true. These reasons are the main *claims* that you make in your essay. In the case of the essay in favour of a vegan diet, the student could come up with the following main claims for thinking that their thesis is true:

- A vegan diet is healthier than other diets.
- A vegan diet is better for the environment than other diets.
- A vegan diet is more ethical than other diets.

You will notice that the student mentioned these three main claims in the thesis statement, making the thesis statement an example of what is called

a **direct-list thesis statement**. Not all argumentative essays will necessarily have a direct-list thesis statement, but it is usually a good idea to use one in your argumentative essay because it will help the reader follow your train of thought throughout the essay.

It will not be enough merely to state your main claims. You will also need to make sure that the reader understands what you mean by those claims. This will involve expressing your claims clearly and elaborating upon them when necessary. Furthermore, you will also have to defend the claims by providing evidence for thinking that they are true.

In the case of the essay promoting a vegan diet, each of the claims that the student gives for thinking that their thesis is true is something that itself needs to be backed up with evidence. For instance, the student would need to provide reasons to persuade the reader that a vegan diet is healthier than other diets. For that purpose, the student could provide the following three bits of evidence: a vegan diet reduces the risk of heart disease, a vegan diet promotes weight loss, and a vegan diet reduces the risk of diabetes.

You might have the impression that an argument of this kind would be very complex, but [Figure 17.1](#) indicates that its structure is relatively straightforward. In this diagram, T stands for the *thesis*; C1, C2, and C3 stand for the main *claims* that are given as reasons for thinking the thesis is true; and E1, E2, E3, and so on stand for the *evidence* given for thinking that the main claims (C1, C2, and C3) are true. An arrow from one circle to another indicates that one element of the argument is a reason for believing that another element is true (e.g., E1 is a reason for thinking C1 is true, and C1 is a reason for thinking that T is true).

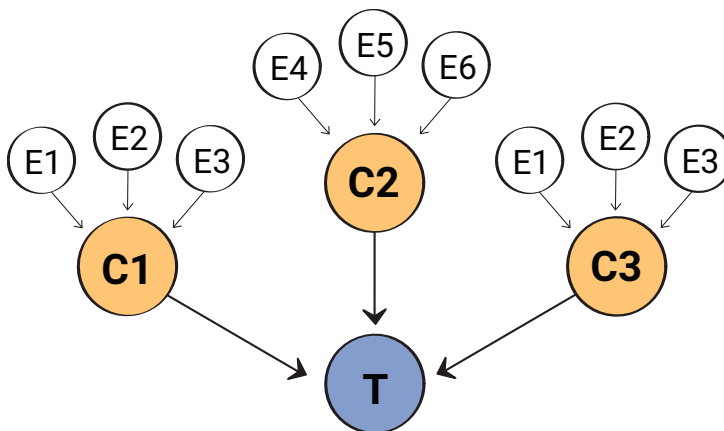


Figure 17.3: Argumentation Scheme

Adapted from Stuart Edgar. Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Of course, this diagram might not exactly reflect the final structure of your essay. You might not have exactly three main claims to support your thesis, and you might not include exactly three bits of evidence to support each of the main claims. However, you should have *at least* three main claims to support your thesis. For each of those main claims, you should also have at least one bit of evidence to persuade your audience that the claim is true.

These terms—*evidence*, *claims*, and *thesis*—are useful for clarifying the different levels of an argument. However, you may be familiar with the terms *premise* and *conclusion*, which are the terms used in logic. If we use that terminology, then we would say that each bit of evidence (E1, E2, E3, etc.) is a premise because it is a reason for thinking that one of the claims (C1, C2, or C3) is true. The claims (C1, C2, and C3) are therefore conclusions, as they are said to follow logically from the premises (E1, E2, E3, etc.). However, the claims (C1, C2, and C3) are also premises insofar as they are also given as reasons for thinking that the thesis (T) is true. You could therefore call the claims *premises/conclusions* or *subconclusions*. The thesis is the main conclusion of the argument.

Fact and Opinion

Facts are statements that can be definitely proven using objective data. The statement that is a fact is absolutely valid. In other words, the statement can be pronounced as true or false. For example, $2 + 2 = 4$. This expression identifies a true statement, or a fact, because it can be proved with objective data.

Opinions are personal views or judgments. An opinion is what an individual *believes* about a particular subject when it's not possible to *know*. In an argumentative essay, an opinion must have legitimate support based on adequate evidence from credible sources.

Consider the credibility of expert opinions, as experts in a given field have the knowledge and credentials to make their opinions meaningful to a larger audience. For example, you seek the opinion of your dentist when it comes to the health of your gums, and you seek the opinion of your mechanic when it comes to the maintenance of your car. Both have knowledge and credentials in those respective fields, which is why their opinions matter to you. But the authority of your dentist may be greatly diminished should they offer an opinion about your car, just as you would be less likely to follow the car mechanic's advice on the maintenance of your teeth.

In your writing, strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions. Relying solely on one or the other will likely lose more of your audience's goodwill than it gains. Make your argument convincing by using strong, peer-reviewed, reliable evidence from a variety of scholarly sources to support your ideas.

Consider Opposing Ideas

In addition to offering claims that directly support your thesis, it is a good strategy to discuss an *argument* against your thesis and then attempt to refute it. Make sure that you come up with the strongest argument against your thesis that you can think of, giving the best reasons someone might have for rejecting your thesis. That will make your essay more persuasive because you will show that you have seriously considered the case against your thesis but have still concluded that your thesis is true. Then you cannot be accused of committing the straw man fallacy, which you would commit if you offered a rebuttal only to an easily refuted caricature of the case against your thesis, not the strongest arguments that could be made against it.

If you discuss arguments against your thesis, a good method to use is the **concession-refutation approach**. In this approach, you first admit that there is some merit to the argument against your thesis, but after you discuss that merit, you explain why you still believe that your thesis is true. Addressing opposing arguments earlier rather than later in your essay allows you to better address ideas that conflict with your own, so you can spend the rest of the essay countering those arguments. This way, you leave your reader thinking about your argument rather than someone else's. You have the last word. This would be likely to persuade someone who does not already agree with your thesis because you give the impression not that you are merely holding on to your thesis dogmatically but rather that you have seriously considered the objections to your thesis and yet you still have good reasons for maintaining that your thesis is true.

In the essay about a vegan diet, the student could use the concession-refutation approach by first mentioning that some people argue that vegans have trouble obtaining enough iron and vitamin B12. The student could then admit that it is more difficult to get sufficient iron and vitamin B12 from plant-based food sources. However, the student would then provide a counterargument against that objection, probably noting that there are nonetheless foods that vegans can eat that will give them enough iron and vitamin B12 to be healthy.

Remember that after you discuss the strongest argument against your thesis, you always need to provide a counterargument, giving your reasons for thinking that there is something wrong with that argument against your thesis. This rebuttal is essential because in an argumentative essay, you are not just sharing your perspective and then mentioning other possible perspectives; you are trying to persuade the reader that your thesis is *true*. The point of discussing arguments against your thesis is to indicate that there is something mistaken about even the strongest argument against your thesis and thus to persuade the reader that your thesis is true.

Avoiding ideas that conflict with your own gives the reader the impression that you may be uncertain, fearful, or unaware of opposing ideas. Thus, it is essential that you not only address counterarguments but also do so respectfully. Acknowledging different points of view enhances your credibility with your audience. Your reader knows from the outset that you are aware of opposing ideas and that you are not afraid to give them space. To demonstrate that you are unbiased, present and refute at least one opposing idea.

Acknowledge the Limits of Your Argument

In terms of establishing credibility, it is also helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish. In effect, you concede early on that your argument is not the ultimate authority on a given topic. Such humility can go a long way toward establishing your credibility and earning the trust of your audience. Your reader will know that you are a reasonable writer and will thus be more likely to trust your argument. For example, in the following concessionary statement, the writer advocates for stricter gun control laws but admits it will not solve all of our problems with crime:

Although tougher gun control laws are a powerful first step in decreasing violence on Canadian streets, such legislation alone cannot completely eradicate violence because guns are not the only problem we face.

Such a concession will be welcomed by those who might disagree with this writer's argument at first glance. To effectively persuade readers, writers must be modest in their goals and humble in their approach to asking readers to consider their argument. Here are some useful phrases of concession.

although
granted
given that
of course
still
though
with that said

Create an Outline

The following is a template that you can use to create an outline for your argumentative essay. Note that it follows one particular argumentation pattern. Depending on the topic and preference, there are other patterns you could

follow. For example, for argumentative essays in which you first establish that the onus is on others to show that your essay's thesis is wrong, it is better to follow a different pattern. In that case, you could reasonably devote the rest of your essay to refutations of arguments against your thesis.

TEMPLATE FOR OUTLINE

- I. Introductory paragraph
 - The topic you have chosen
 - A brief summary of the debate or controversy
 - Your thesis statement (written as a full sentence)
- II. First body paragraph
 - A reasonable objection to your thesis (written in one or more full sentences)
 - The reasons to support this objection (can be written in point form)
 - Your reasons for rejecting this objection (can be written in point form)
- III. Second body paragraph
 - The first main claim to support your thesis (written as a full sentence)
 - The evidence to support your first main claim (can be written in point form)
- IV. Third body paragraph
 - The second main claim to support your thesis (written as a full sentence)
 - The evidence to support your second main claim (can be written in point form)
- V. Fourth body paragraph
 - The third main claim to support your thesis (written as a full sentence)
 - The evidence to support your third main claim (can be written in point form)
- VI. Concluding paragraph

As you work, collect a list of the research sources you plan to use for your essay.

For example, if someone is developing an outline for an argumentative essay with the thesis that the voting age should be lowered to sixteen, that author could first claim that we shouldn't deny the right to vote to anyone unless there is a good reason to deny them that right. Then the author could follow a pattern

that, after the thesis statement, devotes the rest of their essay to refuting the reasons given for keeping the voting age at eighteen (e.g., refuting the claim that people under eighteen don't have the knowledge or experience needed to vote meaningfully). Before you create an outline for your essay, you might want to revisit [Chapter 5](#).

TIP: In an argumentative essay, the writer's position should be clearly expressed at the beginning of each paragraph in the topic sentence, which should contain the main idea of the paragraph and the writer's controlling idea.

Sample Outline

The following is an example of an outline that a student could create for an argumentative essay written in response to this assignment: "Basing your argument on evidence from research, argue for or against switching to a vegan diet." Of course, as this is an outline, it provides only the bare bones of an argument that the student would have to flesh out in the essay. For example, the student would need to explain *how* a vegan diet reduces the risk of heart disease. This will generally involve citing one or more authoritative sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles. Therefore, at the end of this outline, there is a list of proposed research sources. Furthermore, throughout the outline, there are notes indicating where those sources would be cited in the essay.

I. Introductory paragraph

Introduction of the topic and the controversy: Switching to a vegan diet is wise.

Thesis statement: A vegan diet is healthier, better for the environment, and more ethical than diets that include meat, fish, and dairy products.

II. First body paragraph

Objection: Vegan diets do not provide sufficient iron and vitamin B12.

Reasons to support the objection: It is difficult to obtain sufficient iron and B12 from foods that aren't animal products.

Reasons for rejecting the objection: It is still possible to obtain enough iron and B12 to be healthy while maintaining a vegan diet. It is just necessary to be mindful of including these foods in your diet regularly (cite Cherpa).

III. Second body paragraph

First main claim: A vegan diet is healthier than other diets.

Evidence to support first main claim (citing Cherpa and Marto):

- A vegan diet reduces the risk of heart disease.
- A vegan diet promotes weight loss.
- A vegan diet reduces the risk of diabetes.

IV. Third body paragraph

Second main claim: A vegan diet is better for the environment than other diets.

Evidence to support second main claim (citing Poore and Nemecek):

- Raising livestock for meat and dairy contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.
- Raising livestock for meat and dairy requires more water than producing the equivalent plant protein does.

V. Fourth body paragraph

Third main claim: A vegan diet is more ethical than other diets.

Evidence to support third main claim (citing McPherson):

- Raising animals for meat causes those animals unnecessary suffering.
- Raising animals for dairy products causes those animals unnecessary suffering.

VI. Concluding paragraph

Restate the thesis and summarize the main reasons for the stance.

VII. List of sources

Cherpa, Clint. "Vegan for the Long Run: Fueling an Ultrarun." *American Fitness*, 1 Jan. 2012, pp. 66–69.

Marto, Anita. "Going Vegan." *Better Nutrition*, 1 June 2009, pp. 42–44.

McPherson, Tristram. "A Case for Ethical Veganism." *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 6, 2014, pp. 677–703.

Poore, Joseph and Thomas Nemecek. "Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts Through Producers and Consumers." *Science*, vol. 360, no. 6392, 2018, pp. 987–992.

Establish Tone and Style

As in any essay, the way you write and the tone you use in an argumentative essay are very important aspects of your argument. If you are arguing with a person who uses aggressive and inflammatory words, are you more or less likely to listen to the whole argument and ultimately be convinced? If someone

is waving his hands and swearing or yelling, the gestures and raised voice may actually distract you from what is being said. Also, when people are extremely animated in their discussions, their audience may become defensive if they do not agree with the ideas presented. In such a case, the audience may then respond in the same way, and no one ends up really hearing other points of view, and no one will be convinced.

On the other hand, if with someone who is calm and controlled, are you more likely to listen and consider the ideas? Also, if the person allows you to give your input and views, you might be more willing to listen to opposing views. While you may not be convinced to change your mind completely, the way the speaker presents the argument (calmly and substantively) creates an environment or situation in which you are more open to discussion.

The same is true when you write. If you choose inflammatory language not appropriate to your audience, the overall impact is almost “bloggish”—like someone ranting on a topic and stating their opinion. This becomes a bigger issue if no substantive evidence or support is given for the opinion. Then the writer seems like a radical expressing views, not someone you can use for credible support.

To effectively persuade your audience, choose your words carefully. While you will need to use assertive language to support your ideas, choose objective words.

Bias in Writing

Everyone has biases on any number of topics. For example, you might have a bias toward wearing black instead of brightly coloured clothes, or wearing jeans rather than formal wear. You might have a bias toward working at night rather than in the morning, or working to deadlines rather than getting tasks done in advance. These are examples of minor biases, of course, but they still indicate preferences and opinions.

Because we all have biases, bias can easily creep into our writing, and we can reveal those biases through the smallest choices. Choosing each word carefully is even more significant in a persuasive paper because you want your reader to view your presentation of ideas as logical and not just a tirade. Using objective and neutral language and evidence and acknowledging you have a possible bias will help you present a well-rounded and developed argument.

The strength of a personal bias is that it can motivate you to construct a strong argument. If you are invested in the topic, you are more likely to care about the piece of writing. Similarly, the more you care, the more time and effort you are apt to put forth and the better the final product will be. The weakness of personal bias is that it can take over the essay—when, for example, you

neglect opposing ideas, exaggerate your points, or repeatedly insert yourself ahead of the subject by using the word *I* too often. Being aware of all three of these pitfalls will help you avoid them.

Handling bias in writing and in daily life can be a useful skill. It will allow you to articulate your own points of view while also defending yourself against unreasonable points of view. The ideal in persuasive writing is to let your reader know your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: sound, thoughtful evidence and a respectful, reasonable acknowledgement of opposing views.

The Use of I

The use of the first-person pronoun *I* in academic and argumentative writing is often a topic of debate, and the acceptance of its usage varies from instructor to instructor. It is difficult to predict the preferences of all your present and future instructors, but consider the effects first-person pronouns can have on your writing. First-person pronouns can make an argument sound overly biased for two reasons:

- First, the excessive repetition of any word will eventually catch the reader's attention—and usually not in a good way. The use of *I* is no different.
- Second, the use of *I* in a sentence alters not only the way a sentence might sound but also the composition of the sentence itself. *I* is often the subject of a sentence. If the subject of the essay is supposed to be, say, smoking, then by inserting yourself into the sentence, you are effectively displacing the subject of the essay into a secondary position.

In the following examples, the subject of the sentence is bolded:

Smoking is bad.

I think smoking is bad.

In the first sentence, smoking—the rightful subject—is in the subject position in the sentence. In the second sentence, the insertion of *I* and *think* replaces *smoking* as the subject, which draws attention to *I* and away from the topic that is supposed to be discussed (smoking). The writer becomes the focus of the sentence. Remember to keep the message (the subject) and the messenger (the writer) separate.

Draft the Essay

With your tone in mind and your outline in hand, write a first draft of an argumentative essay. First, you might want to revisit [Chapter 6](#) to learn strategies for drafting. Use [Checklist 17.1: Using Sound Arguments](#) as you write your argumentative essay.

CHECKLIST 17.1: USING SOUND ARGUMENTS

Does the draft of the essay contain the following elements?

- An engaging introduction that introduces the topic and controversy
- An appropriate narrowed topic that is singular and specific
- A clear thesis statement that takes a stance on the controversy
- A thesis that can be supported by evidence
- At least three distinct claims, each presented in a separate body paragraph
- A varied range of evidence from credible sources
- Genuine and respectful acknowledgement and explanation of opposing ideas
- A style and tone appropriate for the subject and audience
- Acknowledgement of the argument's limits
- A conclusion that summarizes the claims and reinforces the thesis

TIP: The word *prove* is frequently used in the discussion of argumentative writing. Writers may claim that one piece of evidence or another proves the argument, but proving an argument is often not possible. No evidence proves a debatable topic one way or the other; that is why the topic is *debatable*. Facts can be proved, but opinions can only be supported, explained, and accepted.

Visual Elements

In some disciplines, it's common to see visual elements in an argumentative essay. Adding visual elements to a persuasive argument can strengthen its persuasive effect. However, because conventions in the use of visual elements vary from discipline to discipline, check with your instructor before adding visual elements to your essay. There are two main types of visual elements: quantitative visuals and qualitative visuals.

Quantitative visuals present data graphically. They allow the audience to see statistics spatially. The purpose of using quantitative visuals is to make logical

appeals to the audience. For example, sometimes it is easier to understand the disparity in certain statistics if they are displayed graphically. Bar graphs, pie charts, Venn diagrams, histograms, and line graphs are all ways of presenting quantitative data in spatial dimensions.

Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions. Photographs and pictorial images are examples of qualitative visuals. Such images often convey a story, and seeing an actual example can carry more power than hearing or reading about the example. For example, one image of a child suffering from malnutrition will likely have more of an emotional impact than pages dedicated to describing that same condition in writing or with graphs.

If you choose to use visual elements to enhance your argument, make sure they are

- **Relevant and essential:** Images should help your reader visualize your point.
- **Easy to follow:** The reader should not have to work too hard to understand the image.
- **Appropriate to audience, tone, and purpose:** Always keep the audience in mind.
- **Appropriately cited and referenced:** If you borrow an image from a source, be sure to cite the source.
- **Respectful:** If you include disrespectful images, your argument will seem unfair and nonbiased.
- **Limited:** If there are too many visual elements in an essay, the images will become more of a distraction than a focal point.

Remember, check with your instructor before adding visual elements to your essay.

Revise and Edit the Essay

After completing the first draft of your argumentative essay, set it aside for a day, and then begin the work of revising and editing, preferably with the help of a peer who can help you identify problems with the arguments. [Chapter 7](#) and [Chapter 8](#) will guide you through the process of revising and editing as well as the peer review process. In addition to following the checklists in those chapters, as you revise, watch for some of the most common mistakes in persuasive writing:

- Losing perspective
- Exaggerating so that your writing is so over the top in favour of or against something that you will only be convincing to someone who already thinks the same things

- Lying knowingly and deliberately: even if you are believed and not found out, you will have to live with the knowledge that apparently the truth would not have been enough to make your case in the eyes of your audience
- Being disingenuous: like lying, being disingenuous means using falsehoods or fudged truths that you know to be untrue or only partially true to make a case that you obviously do not quite believe in yourself
- Relying too much on intentional logical fallacies
- Making claims without evidence
- Not considering counterarguments

Remember, too, that there are many logical fallacies that can either help or hinder the strength of the persuasiveness of the case the writer is making. Mostly, though, it is best to avoid logical fallacies.

* * *

In an argumentative essay, the author intends to make a reader understand and accept the conclusion through a preponderance of evidence and reasoned argument. While it is artificial, more than factual, to fully distinguish argumentation from persuasion and vice versa, for our purposes, an academic argumentative essay aims to project a reasoned point of view supported and explained by evidence in order to advance knowledge and ideas. An argumentative essay can be excellent even when it ultimately fails to convince its reader as long as the reasoned and evidenced arguments logically lead to the conclusion reached.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The purpose of persuasion/argumentation in writing is to convince or move readers toward a certain point of view or opinion.
- An argument is a reasoned opinion supported and explained by evidence. To argue, in writing, is to advance knowledge and ideas in a positive way.
- An effective thesis for an argumentative essay is significant, singular, specific, and supportable.
- It is essential to address counterarguments and do so respectfully and genuinely.
- It is helpful to establish the limits of your argument and what you are trying to accomplish through a concession statement.

- To persuade a skeptical audience, use a wide range of evidence: Scientific studies, opinions from experts, historical precedent, statistics, personal anecdotes, and current events are all types of evidence that help develop an argument.
- Facts are statements that can be proven using objective data.
- A statement or claim is not (necessarily) a fact—it just sounds like one.
- Opinions are personal views or judgments that cannot be proven true or false.
- Strike a balance between credible facts and authoritative opinions.
- Word choice and writing style should be appropriate for both the subject and the audience.
- Acknowledge your bias, but do not let that bias blind you to the primary components of good argumentation: respectfully and reasonably addressing opposing ideas and providing sound, thoughtful evidence to support your stance.
- Be mindful of using the first-person pronoun *I* in your writing because it can make your argument sound more biased than it actually is.
- Quantitative visuals present data graphically and make logical appeals to the audience.
- Qualitative visuals present images that appeal to the audience's emotions.

Analytical Essay

Learning Objectives

- Explain what it means to analyze
- Demonstrate the ability to read closely and critically
- Recognize the steps in a successful analysis
- Compose a concise summary of your article
- Explain and apply the elements of the four analysis types
- Apply guiding questions to your own critical analysis
- Use two structural formulas to organize a critique
- Define *rhetoric* and *rhetorical strategies*
- Identify and analyze the rhetorical techniques employed in a text

You may not be aware of it, but you analyze every day. For example, after watching a movie with a friend, you might discuss the characters, the plot, and the special effects. Or you might examine your child's report card, carefully studying the teacher's words to read between the lines, trying to figure out how your child is behaving in class. At work, you might analyze data (such as financial records or soil samples or medical test results) to determine a course of action.

Most academic work, including academic writing, involves some form of analysis. Whether you are writing a summary, an expository essay, an argumentative essay, or a personal essay, each of these tasks requires you to analyze an object or an artifact. In a summary, for example, you must carefully examine an author's text to find its thesis and main points. That is a step in the process of analysis. However, what you subsequently *do* with that initial analysis will differ from essay type to essay type.

What Is Analysis?

In general terms, to **analyze** is to carefully and methodically examine something complex in order to understand and interpret its parts or features, its structure, and/or its nature. To analyze, begin by looking at the whole, and then separate it into its parts, examining each part individually and considering how each part relates to other parts and to the whole.

For example, the analysis of table salt 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 table salt. The purpose of analyzing is to better understand something complex by considering what it is made of.

In your courses, you will often be asked to analyze something, be it a novel, a historical account, a social situation, a computer program, a work of art, or a roof structure. Regardless of the object of your analysis, ask the following core questions:

- What is it?
- What does it *do* or *mean*?
- How does it *do* what it does or *mean* what it means?

Often, you will be required to focus on only one aspect or one part of the object or artifact, but the core questions will remain the same.

In the context of a post-secondary course, an **analysis** is the presentation of the results of analyzing, often in essay form. An analysis is a detailed and thorough explanation of the parts themselves, how they relate to one another, and how they contribute to the whole.

The purpose of an analysis is to demonstrate your discernment, your ability to look below the surface and identify or infer that which is not immediately obvious. The purpose is to inform and deepen your audience's understanding of the object within the particular analytical context in which you undertake the analysis. Thus, the purpose of an **analytical essay** is to present the *results of your analysis in essay form* for others to read. Before you begin writing, though, think first about how to analyze effectively.

The Process of Analyzing

The analysis process begins with an artifact or an object. An **artifact** is a piece of art, a tool, or any other object made or modified by humans. Thus, artifacts include books, stone carvings, paintings, clothing, hammers, airplanes, buildings—and thousands of other human-made things. Examples of written artifacts are poems, novels, short stories, articles, research papers, and essays.

The term **object** offers us even more flexibility, referring to something that can be seen, touched, or otherwise perceived—something to which a mental or physical action is directed. In the context of analysis, an object is anything that we direct the action of analyzing toward.

The analysis of any artifact or object—whether it’s a machine, a blood sample, a roof, or an article—has the same purpose: building an understanding of what (and how) the object is, *what* it does, and *how* it does it. To build that understanding comprehensively, the analyst works through five steps in the process of analyzing an object:

1. Observe the object as a complete entity; then pull a first layer off to uncover the core elements without which the object cannot be what it is and do what it does.
2. Begin to name and define the elements and the role they (potentially) play in the whole and in relation to one another.
3. Look at the occurrence of the various parts (where, how, how often, and so on) and begin to consider the elements’ importance to the whole.
4. Consider the spaces in between the core elements and their importance or meaning to the object, and formulate a (preliminary) understanding of how things work together to be the object.
5. Go back to the beginning to reconsider the observations and conclusions you arrived at the first time you worked through the steps to make sure you have captured all you need to capture to fully understand the meaning or being of the object.

The best way to understand the process of analyzing is to practice it yourself, so take a few minutes to complete [Practice 18.1](#).

PRACTICE 18.1

Complete the steps below to follow the process of analyzing an everyday object with the goal of understanding what the object is, what its parts are, and how the parts work together to perform a function.

Step 1: Look at [Figure 18.1](#). What object does the diagram depict?

What *parts* of that object can you identify? Pause here for a moment to examine the diagram and to jot down some initial notes about what you think the object is and what you think its parts are. Then continue reading.

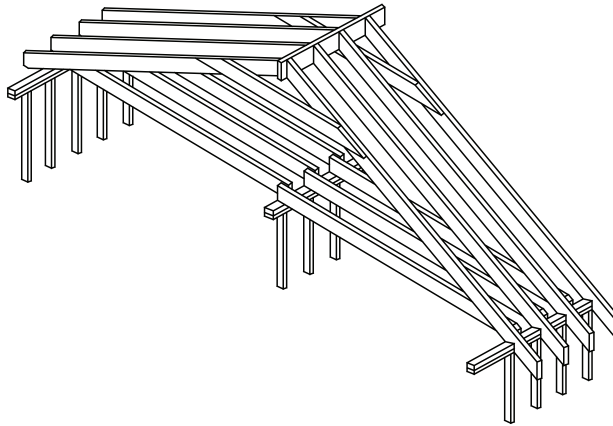


Figure 18.1: Roof Structure

You probably recognize the diagram as a representation of a particular object: a roof. For the purposes of this example, we will analyze the interior structure of the roof. (We could, of course, also analyze the covering, shingles, or tiles, but for now we will focus on the interior structure.)

What structural elements do you see? There are lots of wooden beams going in different directions, placed on top of or against one another. These are the most obvious elements that make up the object we are analyzing: the roof.

Step 2: Looking closely at the diagram, how would you describe the specific elements of the roof and their relationship to one another? Look for the most easily observable elements and how they relate to other elements.

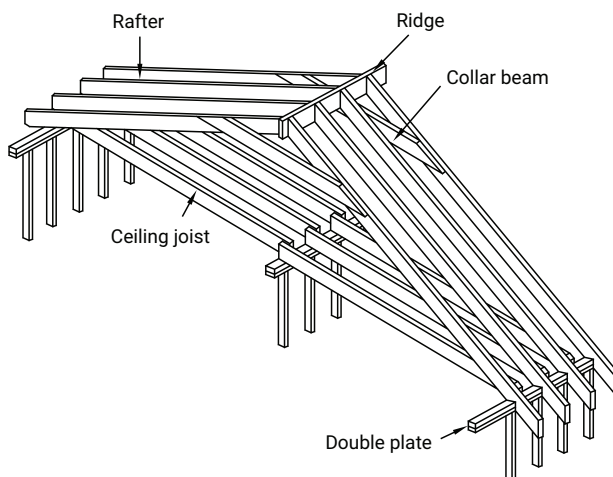


Figure 18.2: Roof Structure with Parts Labeled

You'll see that there are partially shown vertical wall studs, and there are double-plated beams on top of the studs. These double-plated beams form the base of the rest of the roof. The ceiling joists rest on the beams, as do the gable wall studs. The ridge sits on top of the tallest gable wall studs. The rafters rest on the double-plated beams and the gable wall studs, and they meet the ridge at an angle.

Step 3: Now consider the functions of the elements: What do they do, and how do they do it? Look for the easily observable functions. Re-examine the diagram in even more detail to consider how the parts work together to create the whole. Jot some notes. Then continue reading.

It is unlikely that the roof was built from the top down, so we'll start by examining the elements of the structure from the bottom up, considering their functions. First, the vertical wall studs hold up the double-plated beams, which hold up the whole roof structure. The double-plated beams provide stability to the wall studs so that they can support the weight of the roof, including the ceiling joists, the gable wall studs, and the rafters. Like the double-plated beams, the ceiling joists provide structure and stability to the wall studs and the double-plated beams. The gable wall studs provide support and structure to the end rafters. All together, the gable wall studs and the rafters hold up the ridge. The ridge holds the rafters in place and provides a supportive structure for the rafters while simultaneously resting on the rafters. The rafters connect the beams to the ridge and provide a supporting structure for a roof covering.

Step 4: Now consider the meaning of the empty spaces, the points of connection (or not), and their why and how. Look for the things that are not obvious but are nonetheless essential. Make inferences. It is in this step that you begin to formulate a (preliminary) understanding of the whole thing. Take a moment to jot some notes, and then continue reading.

There is no one "right" answer here, and there are hundreds of possible questions that might arise in step 4. For example, what is keeping the rafters in place? Should there be metal forms here that are either screwed or hammered in to keep the rafters from falling? Could the "bird's mouth" function as a support? Why is there so much empty space between the rafters? Wouldn't the roof be stronger if the rafters were closer together? Or would that create

so much extra weight that the structure would collapse? When you ask and answer these questions, you are making inferences on the *how* and the *why* of elements that are not directly clarified in the object under analysis.

Step 5: Consider the gaps in your understanding. After working through Steps 1 to 4 the first time, you probably have an idea of what goes into a roof in order for it to be a roof. However, it is unlikely that you will have considered all the ins and outs of the whole object. Take a moment to jot down some questions you still have about a roof and how it functions.

What questions remain?

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

For example, how is it that the whole thing does not come apart at the first gust of wind? How exactly do those rafters and that ridge stay up? What determines the number of rafters and the size of the spaces between the individual rafters? What is the ideal angle for the rafters? Why? Is the ideal angle based on structural stability or weather-related matters like rainfall or snowfall? In short, look at the gaps in your understanding to formulate a comprehensive response.

Now, in order to analyze more deeply and find more answers, go back to the first step and go through the whole process a second time. Keep your questions in mind, and look at what you can see, what you can infer, and what you can conclude. Take notes as you go.

What can you add to the analysis upon a second run through?

Step 1: _____

Step 2: _____

Step 3: _____

Step 4: _____

Step 5: _____

Keep going through the steps until you are confident that you have a solid understanding of what a roof is, what a roof does, how it does that, and what it means for that roof to do that within the context in which you have analyzed it. You might need to run through the steps more than two times.

After working through the steps again a second, third, or fourth time, we can use our findings to explain how a roof structure is assembled and to make inferences. For example, the roof will likely need metal plates and screws

to secure the structure. Also, it is likely that the angle of the rafters and the spaces between the ceiling joists, the gable wall studs, and the wall studs are of significant importance in creating a roof that can withstand wind, rain, and snow once the roof is covered with plywood and shingles or tiles.

Collaboration: Please share and discuss with a peer.

Analytical Context

When you analyzed the roof illustration in [Practice 18.1](#), we suggested that you work through the steps in the process of analysis until you were confident that you had a solid understanding of what a roof is, what a roof does, and what it means for a roof to do that within the context of your analysis. The last part of the sentence—“within the context of your analysis”—is important. The result you seek in your analysis will determine the type of analysis you do. The context does not change the steps or the essence of the questions; however, it changes what elements you find and name to support the answer you are looking for. Think for a moment of the research process and the importance of your research question when you start to do your research; the same is true in the analysis process.

For example, when you go for a blood test, your doctor gives you a form to bring along on which she indicates what she would like the lab analyst to look at and which particular test to run. Those notes provide the context for the blood analysis. Likewise, when your instructor asks you to analyze a painting of an animal to determine what kind of animal it is, perhaps the quality of the painter’s brushstroke is of lesser importance than the form the brushstroke gives to the shape of that animal. Similarly, if you are trying to determine who the bad guy is in a movie, perhaps the way the soundtrack changes when a character appears provides a better indicator of the character’s intentions than his bright smile does.

The analysis of the rooftop in [Practice 18.1](#) is deceptively easy because as an imagined and drawn illustration of a roof structure, it is *already* an analysis—a visual taking apart and (imaginary) putting back together of a roof. However, within the context of a chapter on analysis, the roof example works to illustrate the steps to take when analyzing, but it does not (or should not) make anyone think they can now confidently build a roof.

This brings us to another aspect of the analytical context: the analyst’s expertise in a particular field will strongly affect how effectively and comprehensively a particular object is analyzed. It should be obvious from the relatively shallow analysis we provided in [Practice 18.1](#) that this analysis was not written by someone with a lot of expertise in, say, carpentry, framing, geometry, or

engineering. Those areas of expertise would undoubtedly completely alter the ultimate understanding the analysis writer offers. Always be aware of the extent and limits of your knowledge when it comes to analyzing a text or object.

In the following two sections, we will focus on two different forms of analysis an instructor might ask you to produce in a university class. There are many more types of analysis, but these two types cover nearly all aspects you would be expected to do in a literary analysis, a historical analysis, or another textual analysis.

While all of these variations of analysis assignments require some process of analysis, each has a slightly different focus. While a rhetorical analysis will focus precisely on writing strategies employed (the *how*) in the article, a critical analysis is centred on the content (the *what*), while a literary or historical analysis could encompass one, the other, or both.

In any analysis essay, your discussion will centre on one primary source. Often, the instructor will provide you with a list of suggested texts, or you may first need to choose a topic that you can use to guide your search for an appropriate academic article to analyze.

As with any other essay, you may need to bring in supplemental secondary sources to support your ideas; perhaps those will be sources on the same topic or analyzing the same text. Secondary sources can be especially effective in helping you present opposing points of view or alternative observations. Even if your assignment calls for secondary sources, the primary text should remain in the forefront.

The rest of Chapter 18 will focus on the **critical analysis**, which focuses primarily on the ideas expressed (the content) in a text, and the **rhetorical analysis**, which focuses specifically on the language and textual strategies (the rhetoric) the author uses to express those ideas.

TIP: For a refresher on the differences between **primary sources** and **secondary sources**, please turn to [Chapter 20: Types of Research Sources](#).

Critical Analysis Essay

A **critical analysis essay** (sometimes called a **critique** or a **critical response**) is a written work critically inspecting and evaluating a piece of writing, such as an essay, a book, an article, or a poem.

Analyzing a primary text involves a close examination of each of the individual parts of the text and how they work together. A critical analysis deconstructs

the text and takes it apart point by point, concept by concept. It examines the main points of the text by examining individual points and identifying how they relate to one another.

When you see the word *critique*, the first thing you may think of is *to criticize*. However, a critical analysis does not need to look only at the negative aspects of a source or its failings; a critical analysis can also focus on the positive components—the text’s successes—or identify a mix of the positive and negative elements.

To begin to understand the role of the critical analysis essay, read the following short critical analysis essay, and identify the elements that make this a critique as opposed to an expository essay.

PRACTICE 18.2

A. Read the following critical analysis essay:

**Critical Analysis of *Perspectives on Terrorism* by
Harold J. Vetter and Gary R. Perlstein**

Harold J. Vetter and Gary R. Perlstein’s work on terrorism and its future is an excellent basis for evaluating views and attitudes toward terrorism before the tragic events of 9/11. Written in 1991, the book *Perspectives on Terrorism* provides an objective (but more theoretical) view on what terrorism is, how it can be categorized, and to what ideology it can be linked. The book offers a multifaceted review of numerous factors that impact and influence the global development of terrorism. Those studying sociology or criminal justice might find ample information regarding the ideological roots and typology of terrorism as a phenomenon and as a specific type of violent ideology that has gradually turned into a dominant force of political change.

Vetter and Perlstein begin their work with the words “It has almost become pro forma for writers on terrorism to begin by pointing out how hard it is to define the term *terrorism*.” However, the authors do not waste their time trying to define what terrorism is; rather, they look at terrorism through the prism of its separate elements, and they objectively evaluate the concept of public acceptability of terrorism as a notion. They pose two critical questions: “Why surrogate the war?” and “Who sponsors terrorism?” In answer, Vetter and Perlstein evaluate terrorism as an unjustifiable method of violence for the sake

of unachievable goals, tying the notion of terrorism to the notion of morality.

To define terrorism in its present form, it is not enough to determine the roots and the consequences of particular terrorist acts, nor is it enough to evaluate the roots and the social implications of particular behavioural characteristics beyond morality. On the contrary, it is essential to tie terrorism to the particular political conditions in which these terrorist acts take place. In other words, whether the specific political act is terrorist or nonterrorist depends on a thorough examination of the social factors beyond morality and law. In this context, even without an opportunity to find the most relevant definition of terrorism, the authors thoroughly analyze the most important factors and sociological perspectives of terrorism, including the notion of threat, violence, publicity, and fear.

Typology of terrorism is the integral component of our current understanding of what terrorism is, what form it may take, and how we can prepare ourselves to face the challenges of terrorist threats. Vetter and Perlstein state that “finding similarities and differences among objects and events is the first step toward determining their composition, functions, and causes.” Trying to evaluate the usefulness of various theoretical perspectives on terrorism, the authors offer a detailed review of psychological, sociological, and political elements that form several different typologies of terrorism. For example, Vetter and Perlstein refer to the psychiatrist Frederick Hacker, who classifies terrorists into crazies, criminals, and crusaders. Throughout the book, Vetter and Perlstein provide a detailed analysis of both the criminal and the crazy types of terrorists, paying special attention to who crusaders are and what role they play in the development and expansion of contemporary terrorist ideology. Vetter and Perlstein recognize that it is almost impossible to encounter an ideal type of terrorist, but the basic knowledge of terrorist typology may shed light on the motivation and psychological mechanisms that push criminals (and particularly crusaders) to commit acts of political violence.

Perspectives on Terrorism pays special attention to the politics of terrorism and the role that ideology plays in the development of terrorist attitudes in society. They write, “Violence or terrorism can be used both by those who seek to change or destroy the existing government or social order and those who seek to maintain the status quo.” In other words, the authors suggest that political ideology is integrally linked to the notion of terrorism. With ideology being the central element of political

change, it necessarily impacts the quality of the political authority within the state; as a result, the image of terrorism is gradually transformed into a critical triangle with political authority, power, and violence at its points. Vetter and Perlstein use this triangle as the basis for analyzing the political assumptions that are usually made in terms of terrorism, as well as the extent to which political authority may make violence (and, as a result, terrorism) legally permissible. The long sociological theme of terrorism that is stretched from the very beginning to the very end of the book makes it particularly useful to those who seek the roots of terrorism in the distorted political ideology and blame the state as the source of and the reason for terrorist violence.

Work Cited

Vetter, Harold J., and Gary R. Perlstein. *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1991.

- B. List three to five elements that make this a critique rather than an expository essay on terrorism.

- C. Collaboration: Share and compare your answers with a peer.

* * *

As you saw in [Practice 18.2](#), a critical analysis is different from an expository essay. An expository essay is centred on one *primary topic*, and the body of the essay discusses main points related to that topic. In contrast, an analytic essay focuses on one (sometimes more) *primary source*, and the body of the essay discusses the student's main ideas about that source. Compare [Figure 18.3](#) and [Figure 18.4](#), which represent the differences between expository essays and analytical essays.

Notice, too, that for the expository essay, the student consults several secondary sources, and those sources provide the supporting points about the topic that the student includes in the essay. Thus, the secondary sources have an important role in the essay. In contrast, an analytic essay principally focuses on one primary source; however, the student may also want to include a small number of secondary sources that can be compared to the primary source's

ideas. However, the secondary sources are typically in the background, and any material from secondary sources must directly relate to the discussion of the primary source.

Finally, the two-pointed arrows indicate that a critical analysis is also different from an expository essay because it does not simply repeat information from the source the way an expository essay might; instead, it considers how the points within the source relate to one another. By doing this, the student might uncover both relationships and discrepancies among the points.

As you learned earlier in this chapter, *any* artifact can become the object of an analysis. Thus far, we have provided examples of an analysis of a roof and an analysis of a book about terrorism. As we move on, we will focus on the process of analyzing a scholarly article. The next few exercises will prepare you to write your own analysis. It's much easier to write about an article if the topic/subject of the article interests you, so take a moment to think about the types of topics you are most interested in.

PRACTICE 18.3

Take a few minutes to prewrite to find a topic that you find interesting. Start by thinking broadly. Are you more interested in sciences or humanities or business, for example? Then think about the courses you like best. Biology? English? Sociology? Indigenous studies? Engineering? Then think about some of the topics that often come up in those courses. Use the technique of brainstorming and/or idea mapping to generate some preliminary ideas. Then identify keywords or specific areas within that topic. Write the keywords below. Later, you will use those keywords to find an article to analyze.

Keywords: _____

The Purpose of Critical Analysis

In a post-secondary environment, your instructors will expect you to demonstrate critical thinking skills that go beyond simply taking in another person's ideas and spitting out facts. They want you to show your ability to assess and analyze the information you use; they will also want to see that you have used sources to develop ideas of your own. Analysis demonstrates that you are able to connect ideas, arrive at your own conclusions, and develop new directions for discussion. You are also showing you have strong background knowledge on the topic in order to provide feedback on another person's discussion of the issue.

Critical analysis appears in many forms in the academic world. It is present when you select appropriate sources for your support; you practice it when you choose what information from those sources to include as evidence; you demonstrate it when you break down your topic to develop discussion points.

Very importantly, you also use critical analysis or thinking when you synthesize, or blend, your ideas with those of experts. This means you go beyond a statement of facts and take a stance on a topic. In the case of a critical analysis, you state your view not only on an idea or issue but also on one core source of information on that topic: you insert your ideas into the text's conversation.

TIP: A **synthesis** combines two or more items to create an entirely new item. Consider the electronic musical instrument the synthesizer, which was so popular in the 1980s. It looks like a piano keyboard, but with the flip of a switch, a musician can combine the sounds of a piano with a flute, guitar, or harp to create a new sound. The synthesizer blends together the notes from individual instruments to form a new, unique sound. The purpose of synthesis in academic work is to blend ideas from multiple sources into a new text (such as an essay or a presentation), to link the main ideas together to create a new idea, one not replicated in either source document.

The Elements of a Critical Analysis

Often, people go online to read reviews of services or products. They sometimes make personal choices based on those reviews, such as what movie to watch or which restaurant to visit. When you ask for a recommendation, the person you are asking will usually give you a brief summary of the experience, then break their opinion down into smaller aspects—good and bad. For example, imagine you want to visit a new restaurant, and you ask your friend to recommend a place. Here is a sample response:

There is an amazing Japanese restaurant called Mega Sushi at the corner of Main and 12th. The food, atmosphere, and service are great. The food is always excellent, and they have a lot of original creations or spins on traditional Japanese food, but it still tastes authentic. The ingredients are always incredibly fresh, and you never have to worry about ordering the sashimi. The decor is also very authentic and classic, and the entire place is exceptionally clean.

The service is generally very good—they even bring you a free sample roll while you wait for your food—but it can be a little slow during the dinner rush because it is such a popular place. Also, the prices are a little high—an average roll costs \$15—but for the amazing food you get, it is totally worth it! I love this place!

When you break this example into sections, you'll see the first sentence gives the reviewer's general opinion of the restaurant. The second sentence summarizes the main components the reviewer will cover. From there, the review addresses smaller categories or points, such as food, decor, and service. Not all the points are positive: while the food and the atmosphere are good, the service has both positive and negative aspects. The prices are high, but people who eat there get good value for their money.

Providing a generalized description first, the reviewer introduces the topic to the audience. She then analyzed individual aspects or components of the experience with examples to help convince the audience of her perspective. Not everyone may have the same positive experience, of course. What if it was someone's first time at this particular restaurant, and she arrived during the dinner rush feeling very hungry and had to wait a long time for a table? Not knowing how good the food is and that it is worth the wait, she may just leave, so her general impression of the restaurant would probably not be favourable. Whether the experience would be positive or negative would depend on an individual's personal experience and situation.

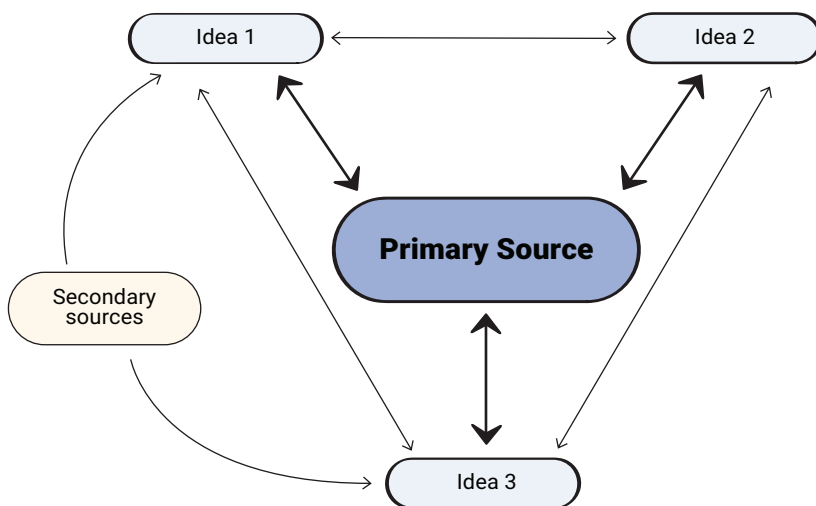


Figure 18.3: Expository Essay

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

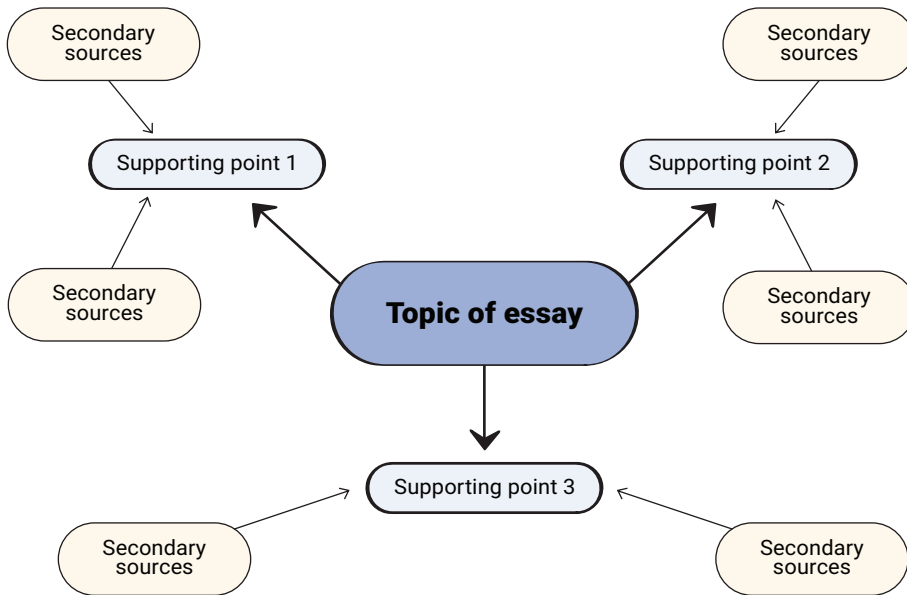


Figure 18.4: Analytical Essay

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

The same is true for any critique. No two people will have exactly the same response to a source because of who they are, the time they are reading it, and their prior experiences. When critiquing, you are responding to anything that sparks a response in *you* when you are reading a source. When reading the text, pay close attention to any time you have to reread a sentence or paragraph. Make note of this; at the time, you may not know why you have an issue with that section. Just realize that there was a point where you had to stop—make a notation of some sort on the paper. Once you have finished reading, go back and think about what the issue actually was. Maybe the vocabulary was difficult, maybe the author’s grammar was awkward and confusing, maybe the ideas did not make sense because of how they were organized, or maybe you completely disagreed with the idea the author presented.

Also note things you read that really spark your interest. Perhaps you have the same opinion as the author. Perhaps the vocabulary is academic but not overly challenging, so you didn’t need to use a dictionary. All of these responses are valid and are things you can write about in your critique.

Any critical analysis, no matter if it is of a book, an article, or a movie, needs to contain the following elements:

A thesis: This is a brief overview of the primary source. What is the thing you are analyzing?

Example: In the article, Smith effectively argues his case for the reinstatement of capital punishment in Canada.

A summary: Highlight the main points presented in the primary source. This part of the critical analysis would be the same as if you were writing a summary.

Critique: Point out the elements of the content of the primary source that you (as the reader of the primary text and the writer of the critical analysis) react to.

You can decide on these points based on your reactions and personal preferences using the guiding questions for each of the forms below as suggestions.

Choosing a Source for a Critical Analysis

Most expository essays and research papers focus on a *topic* and require a number of secondary sources that provide supporting points or ideas, offering information about the topic. A critical analysis of the text, by contrast, typically focuses on *one primary source* of information. This is the key difference between a critical analysis essay and a research paper, and this distinction will have an impact on your choice of primary and secondary sources.

For a critical analysis essay, the primary source you base your critical response on needs to meet the criteria outlined in [Table 18.1: Source Selection Criteria for a Critical Analysis](#). [Table 18.1](#) provides the technical criteria to meet when choosing a source for a critical analysis.

PRACTICE 18.4

Use the list of keywords you created in [Practice 18.3](#) to conduct a search to find scholarly articles about your topic. (You might want to conduct your search through your library's academic databases and/or Google Scholar.) Once you have found some articles, remember to take note of the titles and the places you found them. Scan the content of each article. Then choose an article that fits your topic best and meets the criteria in [Table 18.1](#). This article will be the primary source for your critical analysis.

How to Write a Critical Analysis Essay

It is always important to ensure that you understand the information presented in primary and secondary sources. However, because a critical analysis essay focuses almost entirely on your interpretation of a primary source, it

Table 18.1: Source Selection Criteria for a Critical Analysis**The source for a critical analysis essay . . .**

Should:	Should not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be on a topic interesting to you. It is better if it is something you react to strongly (positively or negatively) because it is easier to generate ideas of what to critique when you have an emotional response. However, be careful not to be overly invested in your opinion on the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be on a topic on which you have no opinion or background information.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be from an academic source, such as a scholarly journal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be from a website because this makes it more difficult for citations and referencing (unless your instructor has made a particular article available to you). • Be from a newspaper (print or online) because these can be biased.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contain language that is relatively straightforward—some challenging vocabulary would be all right because you can critique this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a lot of challenging vocabulary, forcing you to constantly refer to a dictionary—you may get bogged down in doing that and miss the main points the author is presenting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be five to ten pages in length, giving you enough content to choose a few points to discuss in depth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be closer to three or as high as twenty pages—this will either provide too little content, and you will be stuck for ideas, or it will give you too much, and you will only cover the points superficially.

is especially important that you have a solid grasp on the ideas presented in the text you're analyzing.

Do not jump right into analyzing the primary source. Instead, follow the steps for active reading that were introduced in [Chapter 2: Reading Strategies](#). Take time to survey, read closely, and mark up the text.

Then write a summary to confirm you understand the author's thesis and main points. Do not leave out any important points. Remember that if your audience does not have a strong understanding of the overall content of the source, they may have difficulty following your critique.

Often, what we share verbally when summarizing a source highlights the main points of our impression of the material; we capture all the necessary

points, but we do so concisely. In [Practice 18.5](#), you will work with a partner to compose a succinct summary of your article.

PRACTICE 18.5

- A. Using the article you chose in [Practice 18.4](#), complete the following steps on your own. (Refer to [Chapter 2: Reading Strategies](#) as needed.)
1. Check to see if there is an abstract. If so, scan it.
 2. Scan the introductory paragraph, the headings, the topic sentences, the graphics, and the concluding paragraph.
 3. Read the article in its entirety. Read closely and mark up the text as you go.
 4. Make note of any areas you struggled with or had a reaction to. (This step is important: you will need these notes for subsequent exercises later in this chapter.)
 5. Write a restatement of the thesis and the main points.
 6. Compose a short summary of the article in two to four sentences. Then put your summary aside, and do not refer to it in Step B.
- B. Work with a peer, and complete the following steps.
1. In thirty to sixty seconds, verbally summarize your article for your partner. Your partner should take very brief notes on the verbal summary. Then switch roles and repeat.
 2. Once you have both summarized verbally and taken notes for each other, show the summary paragraph you wrote in Part A to your partner. Have your partner read your summary paragraph and compare it to the notes they took from the verbal summary. Then switch roles and repeat.
 3. Ask your partner to prepare feedback based on the following questions:
 - What were the differences between the verbal and written summaries?
 - Did the written summary contain anything unnecessary or miss anything important?
 - Which one was organized more logically?
 4. Ask your partner to give you their feedback. Listen carefully and ask for clarification if necessary. Then switch roles and repeat.
 5. Revise your summary to make it more complete and accurate. You will need this summary later when you turn it into the first paragraph of your critical analysis.

6. Come up with a working thesis statement for your critical analysis essay. What was your overall first impression of the article you read? You will likely revise this working thesis statement later, but for now, it will give you a basis to begin your analysis.

* * *

Later, you will choose one of two formulas to follow when composing your critical analysis. If you choose to use formula 1, you will need to include an independent summary paragraph, which you have now already completed and may only require a little fine tuning. If you choose formula 2, you will not include the summary as its own paragraph, but you will need to break it apart when you introduce the points you are going to discuss within the critical analysis.

The following sections will discuss the different critiquing forms and what you can look for when deciding what points you would like to discuss in your critical analysis.

Forms for Critical Analysis

Again, critically analyzing does not mean you are looking only for the negative points in a primary source; you can also discuss elements you like or agree with in the article. Also, you may generally get a positive impression from the source but have issues with some aspects for which you can provide constructive criticism—perhaps what the author could have done better, in your opinion, to make a stronger and more effective impact.

There are three critical analysis forms on which you can structure your analysis of a source. These are **idea base**, **rhetoric base**, and **blended base**. The critical elements you will be required to apply to each assignment will vary depending on your instructor's directions, the purpose of the assignment, and the writer (you). In some cases, your instructor will want to see very little of your own voice in the paper, so you will want to avoid using personal reflection; on the other hand, some instructors will only want to see how your personal experiences connect to the content. You will need to confirm with your instructor what their preferences and expectations are.

If the writer intended to convince or persuade the reader to a particular point of view, you may ask if they used credible sources to support the ideas or if they used primarily newspapers and blogs. We have seen, and will do so again later, that the types of evidence can affect how convincing an argument is.

Furthermore, if the writer has only presented a limited discussion without much evidence, and the discussion is mostly opinion based, will the reader be convinced? Probably not. Conversely, if the author considered all points of

view in the discussion and provided suitable, trustworthy evidence, the reader will more likely be convinced, and the writer will have successfully achieved the purpose.

When coming up with a thesis statement, start by considering all points of view. This will demonstrate to the reader of your analysis what your overall impression was when you examined the original source. If you look back at the sample critical analysis in [Practice 18.2](#), you'll see that the thesis is stated in the first sentence:

Harold J. Vetter and Gary R. Perlstein's work on terrorism and its future is an excellent basis **for evaluating views and attitudes toward terrorism before the tragic events of 9/11.**

This thesis statement emphasizes the authors' purpose (bold) and the critique writer's opinion of the work (underlined). From the exercise you completed earlier, you saw not everything in the critique was positive; however, this first sentence provides the overall impression the analysis writer has. Like in any other essay, the content in the rest of the essay will connect back to this thesis, explaining how the thesis supports or goes against the authors' purpose.

Once you choose an article that meets the required criteria, scan the article and make note of some answers to the guiding questions below. You can then choose three to four of the questions/answers you feel you can support, and these will become your essay's main points.

Idea Base

When discussing the ideas of a source, examine the topic presented. Explore how the author's ideas mesh with your own and state whether you agree or disagree. You are essentially joining the discussion on that topic. You may find you agree with some parts of the discussion but not others, or you may completely agree or disagree, or you may think the author has great points but does not develop them adequately. Also, you may want to provide differing points of view from other sources to show you have not just accepted what the first author wrote; you have explored the topic further and will present a thorough discussion in your own critique.

GUIDING QUESTIONS: IDEA BASE

On which points do I agree or disagree with the author? And why?

(Remember, you do not always have to only agree or disagree on all points.)

What new ideas has the author introduced on the topic? How has the author contributed to the field?

How narrow or broad is the author's discussion? Did the author consider multiple points of view? Is there anything the author overlooked?

What could the author have done differently to provide a stronger discussion?

How do other experts approach a discussion on this topic?

PRACTICE 18.6

Look back to [Practice 18.5](#), where you made notations whenever you were struck by something remarkable within the article you're analyzing. Decide which, if any, of your notes connect to the idea-related guiding questions above, and make brief notes of the relevant idea-related points in the space below.

If none of your notations matched the questions, read the questions (and the article) again and then try again to answer the questions. At this point, you may identify more than two questions; later, you will have the opportunity to assess which are your strongest points.

Rhetoric Base

In the section about rhetorical analysis, we will provide much more detail about rhetoric, but for the purposes of the critical analysis, here is a brief overview of what rhetoric can entail within a critical analysis.

Here, **rhetoric** refers to the author's ways of using writing techniques. The term **rhetorical** refers to the *way a source is constructed and organized and which writing techniques are used*.

In the context of a critical analysis, a rhetorical consideration will almost always also evaluate how effectively an author has achieved the purpose or intended goals. If the writer intended to convince or persuade the reader, what writing strategies did they use to make the reader accept these intentions? The

wording, the examples, and the imagery all can impact how the reader feels about the point the writer is making and how convincing that point is.

For example, if the writer only offered dispassionate facts without relatable anecdotes or only used one type of sentence structure and a monotone rhythm, will the reader be convinced? It seems unlikely. Conversely, if the author animates the writing with some humour and colourful examples alongside strong evidence, the reader is more likely to be swayed, and the writer will have effectively achieved their purpose.

Once you choose an article that meets the required criteria, scan the article and make note of some answers to the guiding questions below. You can then choose two or three of the questions/answers that will best support your analysis.

GUIDING QUESTIONS: RHETORIC BASE

Focusing on the rhetorical elements when critiquing means you are looking at the construction elements of a source. Use the following questions as a reference point when you are going through your article to provide you with some focus and help you generate ideas for your paper (not all may be relevant to your article).

What is the author's purpose?

For whom is the author writing? Who is the audience?

What type of language does the author use? Technical?

Straightforward? Too informal?

How logical/reasonable is the argument?

What kind of evidence does the author use to support the thesis? Is it reputable, relevant, and current—and is there enough?

To what degree does the author engage or interest the reader in the topic?

How much bias does the author reveal?

Is there anything about the writing style you did or did not like?

How are the ideas organized? How may that affect the reader?

A note of warning when using these questions: you should *not* use more than two of these in a short critique. If you include brief answers to all of the questions, you will not have space to develop your ideas or show you have really engaged with the content. By choosing just one or two to focus on, you will be able to really explain the impact and significance of what you have decided to discuss, showing that you have thoroughly considered the meaning and importance of your points and demonstrating excellent critical analysis skills.

PRACTICE 18.7

In [Practice 18.5](#), you read an article, and you were asked to make note of any content in the article that you had a strong reaction to—whether it struck you as remarkable or confusing. Now look back at those notations and decide which, if any, connect to the rhetoric-related guiding questions above, and make brief notes of the relevant rhetorical points in the space below.

If none of your notations matched the questions, read the questions (and the article) again. Then try again to answer the questions. At this point, you may identify more than two questions; later, you will have the opportunity to assess which are your strongest points.

Blended Base

In a blended form, an analysis can evolve however you want it to. You can take certain elements from each of the two previous forms: whichever questions are the easiest for you to discuss and are the most interesting. This shows how paying attention to your reactions when you initially read the source is helpful; once you have made note of where and what you reacted to, you can go back to each list of guiding questions and decide which best relates to each of your notations.

There are no guiding questions for the blended form because you mix and match some of the questions already provided in the earlier sections. In a blended critique, you demonstrate an extremely high level of critical thinking ability because you not only synthesize your ideas with potential external sources; you also connect personally to one source, external sources, *and* different forms or aspects of analyzing written works.

PRACTICE 18.8

Look back at the points you came up with in [Practices 18.5](#), [18.6](#), and [18.7](#). Now select the points—at least one from each category—that you think you can discuss the most thoroughly.

Collaboration: Now collaborate with a peer. Share your points, and discuss how you would expand on them. Ask your partner to suggest any other ways they think you could expand on those points.

How to Structure a Blended Critical Analysis Essay

Once you have chosen a source and used the guiding questions to help generate points to discuss in your blended critique, you will need to decide how to best organize your ideas. There are two formulas you can apply as a framework when organizing your ideas. Remember that although the formulas below show each section as an individual paragraph, you may actually need to create more than one paragraph to fully develop your ideas.

Critical Analysis Essay: Outline Template 1

This is a straightforward way to organize an analysis, as there is not much overlap between the sections. You may want to choose this formula if you are feeling unsure about how to organize your ideas and prefer a guided structure.

I. Introductory paragraph

- Hook
- Title of the text and name of the author
- Optional: relevant background on the author and/or the text
- Summary of content of the text (two or three sentences) that focuses only on points significant to your body paragraphs
- Paraphrase of thesis of the text
- Thesis statement

II. First body paragraph: Idea base

- Topic sentence: main point the essay will make about the article's ideas

- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: essay's main point about the article's ideas

III. Second body paragraph: Rhetoric base

- Topic sentence: main point the essay will make about the article's rhetoric
- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: essay's main point about the article's rhetoric

IV. Concluding paragraph

- Title of the text and the name of the author
- Summary of the main points in your body paragraphs
- Restatement of thesis statement

Critical Analysis Essay: Outline Template 2

This model allows you more freedom in how you organize your analysis. Template 2 differs from template 1 because the discussion points are not divided by critiquing points (ideas and rhetoric) but rather by *topic*. You use both critiquing forms to develop one topic point. This approach makes it a little more challenging to stay organized, so when you use this template, remember to keep referring to your outline and to thoroughly develop ideas by connecting one critiquing form to another.

I. Introductory paragraph

- Hook
- Title of the text and name of the author
- Optional: relevant background on the author and/or the text
- Summary of content of the text (two or three sentences) that focuses only on points significant to your body paragraphs
- Paraphrase of thesis of the text
- Thesis statement that includes the main points of body paragraphs

II. First body paragraph

- Topic sentence: a main point about the text
- Ideas and rhetoric related to this topic
- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: essay's main point about the article's ideas and rhetoric

III. Second body paragraph

- Topic sentence: a second main point about the text
- Ideas and rhetoric related to this topic

- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: essay's main point about the article's ideas and rhetoric

IV. Third body paragraph

- Topic sentence: a third main point about the text
- Ideas and rhetoric related to this topic
- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: essay's main point about the article's ideas

V. Concluding paragraph

- Title of the text and the name of the author
- Summary of the main points in body paragraphs
- Restated thesis statement

Template 1 is useful in providing an easy-to-follow plan for organizing a critical analysis. Template 2 allows more flexibility in organization, and it promotes a greater complexity of thought development and synthesis of ideas, both of which your instructor will appreciate. However, because it's easier for a writer to veer off topic with template 2, you must make sure you have a solid formal sentence outline before you begin the writing process, or your reader may struggle to follow the development of your argument. The key is to connect the ideas together.

PRACTICE 18.9

Look at the templates and the points you came up with in [Practice 18.6](#) and [Practice 18.7](#). Narrow those points down—to three or four at most—to help you stay focused and develop those points (as opposed to just giving answers to many of the guiding questions without developing them). Compose an informal topic outline based on template 1 or template 2.

PRACTICE 18.10

Now expand on the informal topic outline you created in [Practice 18.9](#). In the introductory paragraph, insert the summary you composed in [Practice 18.5](#). Remember to start integrating specific examples from the primary source. Make sure you note the page numbers for later when you need to add citations.

Rhetorical Analysis Essay

The second form of analysis you may be asked to write is a rhetorical analysis. A rhetorical analysis takes apart a primary text (an essay, a book, an article, a poem, etc.) and examines the author's rhetorical strategies.

There are many definitions of **rhetoric**, some dating back more than two thousand years, but a basic definition is that rhetoric is *the art of persuading through visual, oral, or written communication*.

We study rhetoric to become better critical thinkers and writers. Rhetoric teaches us to dig deeply, to investigate carefully, and to appreciate how much we *are* influenced by what we see, hear, and read. Likewise, rhetoric teaches us to be better communicators who are highly aware of our power to influence a select audience.

Rhetorical analysis is the study of a text to determine how a communicator gets a message across to the intended audience. Remember, a **text** is anything that is constructed to convey a message, such as an essay, article, speech, book, restaurant menu, website, advertisement, novel, or poem. Sometimes a rhetorical analysis also evaluates how *well* the message is conveyed.

As you saw earlier in the chapter, the process of analysis breaks down a text into smaller elements in order to gain an intimate understanding of that text. In a critical analysis, you focus on breaking down the content; in a rhetorical analysis, you examine the writer's use of language.

A rhetorical analysis always, in some way, examines the *rhetoric*: the way the writer seeks to convey the overall message to the reader. However, there are a variety of approaches to rhetorical analysis, and the approach students will be asked to take will depend on which course they are taking and which instructor they have. Here are two examples:

1. Sometimes, a rhetorical analysis assignment will ask for an assessment (evaluation) of the writer's rhetoric, but others will ask students to *avoid* any kind of assessment.
2. Sometimes, a rhetorical analysis assignment asks students to discuss **ethos**, **logos**, and **pathos** (the classical Aristotelian appeals you learned about in [Chapter 17: The Art of Persuasion](#)), but others do not. Think of ethos, logos, and pathos as big umbrella terms under which there are many elements at work. Some rhetorical analyses, then, are written by examining three or four elements under just one of those umbrellas, without necessarily even mentioning the words *ethos*, *logos*, or *pathos*.

Much of the information in the section on critical analysis applies to rhetorical analysis, too, so be sure to read that section thoroughly first to provide a foundation. In this section, we'll focus on the aspects that make a rhetorical analysis different from a critical analysis.

Like the critical analysis essay, the rhetorical analysis essay is based on one primary source, though secondary sources may be helpful to explain particular observations you have made in the source text. Below are some criteria to consider when you are required to write a rhetorical analysis.

Table 18.2: Source Selection Criteria for a Rhetorical Analysis Essay

The source for a rhetorical analysis essay . . .	
Should:	Should not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be on a topic that is interesting to you. It is easier if you notice some rhetorical strategies right away because it will be easier to generate ideas of what to discuss when you have more of an immediate insight. • Be from an academic source, such as a scholarly journal. • Contain language that is relatively straightforward—some challenging vocabulary would be all right because that can be part of your analysis. • Be five to ten pages in length, giving you enough room to choose a few strategies to discuss in some depth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be about something you feel deeply about, since that is likely to push or pull you toward a more critical approach. • Be from a website because this makes it more difficult for citations and referencing (unless your instructor has made a particular article available to you). • Be from a newspaper (print or online) because these are often too simple to offer enough complexity for a thorough analysis. • Have a lot of challenging vocabulary, forcing you to constantly refer to a dictionary—you may get bogged down in doing that and miss the main strategies the author employs. • Be closer to three or as high as twenty pages—this will either provide too little content, and you will be stuck for strategies to discuss, or it will give you too much to work with, and you will only cover the strategies superficially.

Consider this analogy: imagine you are taking a tour of Edmonton, and the tour guide said, “This is a house. It is built of wood and stucco. The basement

has a concrete foundation.” Wouldn’t you wonder why on earth he chose this house and why he was telling you these things?

Now imagine that instead he said, “This house is historically significant for the Edmonton area. While most homes now have concrete basements, this was the first to have one. At the time, they believed that the cold would lead to cracks. This house proved otherwise, which revolutionized building in the city. The wood and stucco, so familiar to the area, were typical of the 1920s postwar building boom. Wood was plentiful and stucco cheap, allowing for affordable housing for war veterans. Thus, even though this house seems typical today, it is really the first of its kind.”

Note the difference! The second explanation is much better because it conveys the same essential information (stucco, cement, wood) but also draws on historical context to explain why those elements are significant. This, then, conveys why the house is important.

This analogy illustrates that it’s not enough to list the rhetorical strategies you identify in the text you’re analyzing. Instead, in a rhetorical analysis, you must demonstrate *why* those elements are important to the text as a whole and *how* they serve to impact the intended audience.

How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis Essay

When you craft a rhetorical analysis, your job is to examine the rhetoric of a given text—the way the writer conveys the overall message of that text. Here we will build up your frame of reference for rhetorical analysis, with the help of some examples.

Before we get started on what you should be writing about in a rhetorical analysis essay, let’s identify three things that you should *not* be writing about:

1. Don’t focus on whether the reader is “engaged” or not. The focus should *not* be on a hypothetical reader’s experience with the text; instead, the focus should be on the *text* itself.
2. Don’t evaluate whether the writer’s opinions about the topic are correct or not. The *subject/topic* of the essay is not our concern; instead, our focus is the *text* itself.
3. Do not write about your own feelings and opinions about the writer’s topic. Again, the topic of the essay isn’t our concern, and this should be an objective analysis, *not* a personal response.

For example, let’s say you are writing a rhetorical analysis of the argumentative essay titled “Legalize Prostitution” by anthropologist Patty Kelly (source: *LA Times*, 13 Mar. 2008, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-mar-13-oe-kelly13)

-story.html). (As you might guess from the title, the thesis of the essay is that prostitution should be decriminalized for the sake of the health and safety of sex workers.) Your essay should *not* focus on prostitution (the topic), nor should it focus on your own opinions on prostitution or on your opinions of Kelly's article. Instead, your essay should focus on the *text* (the article itself), objectively identifying its rhetorical devices.

Follow these three steps to write an effective rhetorical analysis essay:

Step 1: Using the close-reading strategies discussed in [Chapter 2: Introduction to Academic Reading](#), read the article so that you truly understand it, can identify and restate the thesis, and can make an assumption about who the intended audience is.

Step 2: Since it's important to understand the rhetorical situation, look up the author and find out who they are and what they bring to the table. This information might be just for your benefit and not something you choose to include in your analysis, but if you do include biographical information in your essay, remember that you must cite the source for it.

Then look up where the article was published so you understand what typical publications for this venue look like and who the typical audience is. Between your thorough reading / critical thinking about the article and what you learn about the author, venue, and general audience, you will be in a good position to understand who within that group of typical readers would be drawn to this article in particular. Again, this information is primarily for you, but it might, under some circumstances, be information you choose to include in your analysis (accompanied by proper citations).

Step 3: Once you have all the basic information, investigate *how* the writer gets the message across. Ask yourself, "What is striking or interesting about the essay? What makes this essay unlike the other essays I have read?"

Look for anything that really stands out—and is *repeated*. Identify several *big* things the writer does to get the message to the reader. These things might be ethos, pathos, and logos, but not necessarily. Use the following guiding questions to get you thinking about the text:

- What is the author's purpose?
- For whom is the author writing? Who is the audience?

- What type of language does the author use? Technical? Straightforward? Formal? Informal? Too informal?
- How appropriate is the language, sentence structure, and complexity for the intended audience?
- What is the genre, and how has it impacted the writing style?
- How logical/reasonable is the argument?
- What kind of evidence does the author use for support? Is it reputable, relevant, or current, and is there enough?
- To what degree did the author engage or interest the reader in the topic?
- Does the text present multiple points of view, or is bias evident?
- How is the text organized? How does that affect the development of the thesis?

In [Chapter 17: Rhetorical Devices](#), we provided a long list of rhetorical devices, and these will become the focus of a rhetorical analysis. When you reread the text you have chosen for your rhetorical analysis, ask the questions below.

- **Analogy:** Are there any comparisons made that attempt to exemplify or clarify a relationship between two things?
- **Cause and effect:** Is there an examination of past events or their outcomes? Is there an explanation of the “why” of something?
- **Comparison:** Are there two or more related subjects, people, places, processes, events, and so on that are evaluated and analyzed?
- **Counterpoints:** Does the writer acknowledge opposing points?
- **Definition:** Are there important words that are defined or clarified?
- **Description:** Do sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch play a role in the text? Is the description straightforward or flowery?
- **Diction:** Why do you think the author chooses particular words? What are the connotations or implications?
- **Division and classification:** Does the essay reduce the subject into more manageable parts or group various parts?
- **Exemplification:** Are there examples—facts, statistics, personal experiences, interview quotations, and so on—that help develop ideas?
- **Flashback:** Does the writer recall a brief memory of a past event or experience?
- **Hyperbole:** Does the writer make seemingly outrageous claims? To what effect?
- **Imagery:** Does the writer use language that calls upon the reader’s senses in an indirect way?

- **Irony:** Do any of the writer's terms or concepts seem to obviously clash?
- **Juxtaposition:** Are objects or ideas placed side by side for emphasis or contrast?
- **Metaphor and simile:** Does the essay make comparisons between unlike things to evoke or illustrate an idea?
- **Narration:** Are there anecdotes, experiences, stories, process explanations, or directions?
- **Oxymoron:** Are apparently contradictory terms used together?
- **Paradox:** Does the writer reveal a truth that at first seems contradictory (e.g., "Red wine is both good and bad for us")? Are there contradictions that contain some truth?
- **Parallelism:** Does the writer seem to deliberately repeat particular grammatical constructions?
- **Parody:** Does the writer seem to emulate a particular writing style for a humorous effect?
- **Personification:** Are ideas or concepts presented in human-like form?
- **Repetition:** Why, with the availability of so many words and phrases, does the writer use the same ones multiple times?
- **Sarcasm:** Does the writer use irony to taunt someone?
- **Satire:** Does the essayist point out the folly of someone or something?
- **Style, tone, and voice:** What is the tone of the essay? What is the writer's attitude toward the text? Does the writer make choices that reveal a position?
- **Symbolism:** Does the writer refer to objects or actions that seem to have meanings beyond their literal meanings?

Of course, you cannot and should not aim to examine *all* the rhetorical devices used in a particular text. Choose a couple that stand out, and focus on them. Make sure that you fully understand what the device is and how the author uses it, and always provide an example as evidence.

How to Structure a Rhetorical Analysis Essay

The structure of a rhetorical analysis is based on the standard essay structure you learn in [Chapter 12: Essay Essentials](#). Therefore, take a few minutes to review [Chapter 12](#) before you proceed. Then carefully review the template below:

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY TEMPLATE

I. Introductory paragraph

- Hook
- Title of the text and name of the author
- Optional: relevant background on the author and/or the text
- Summary of the content of the text (in just two or three sentences)
- Paraphrase of the thesis of the text
- Thesis statement and rhetorical devices analyzed

II. First body paragraph

- Topic sentence: the first rhetorical device analyzed
- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: the effect of this rhetorical device

III. Second body paragraph

- Topic sentence: the second rhetorical device analyzed
- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: the effect of this rhetorical device

IV. Third body paragraph

- Topic sentence: the third rhetorical device analyzed
- Two to three supporting points
- Explanations and examples for each point (quote from the text)
- Closing sentence: the effect of this rhetorical device

V. Concluding paragraph

- Title of the text and name of the author
- Summary of the main points in your body paragraphs
- Restated thesis statement

Introductory Paragraph and Thesis

In a rhetorical analysis essay, the introductory paragraph will name the author, the title, and any background information you think is necessary, such as biographical information about the author or the name and typical audience of the publication in which the article was published. (If you include such background information, cite the source[s] where you found that information). The introduction should also include a brief synopsis (summary) of the text and then a restatement of the text's thesis. The introductory paragraph should end with a thesis statement—*your* thesis statement. Together, the restatement of the article's thesis and your own thesis might look something like this:

In “Title of the Text,” [Author]’s thesis is that _____. She conveys this message through A, B, and C.

Here is a sample introductory paragraph:

In her essay “Don’t Pick Up,” published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Terry Castle writes primarily to educators, scholars, and parents to express concern over young adults’ growing reluctance to become independent. She points out that in past generations, kids couldn’t wait to be free from the yoke of paternalism, and couldn’t wait for the chance to decide everything for themselves. Now, however, Castle believes that college-aged kids consult with their parents daily. She fears that society is heading back to a pre-Enlightenment view of authority, where power is vested in a select few, and the old decide the fate of the young. As hard as it may be, she concludes, kids must “defy, debunk, or just plain old disappoint” their parents if they hope to fully mature as individuals (Castle). To defend this thesis, Castle uses a balance of humour, colourful language, and illustrative examples from post-Enlightenment literature.

This introductory paragraph introduces the author and text being analyzed, and it gives an indication of the author’s overall point of view, which is followed by a brief synopsis. The second-to-last sentences of the introductory paragraph restates Castle’s thesis. The last sentence presents the student’s thesis and tells the reader which rhetorical strategies will be examined.

Body Paragraphs

Body paragraphs in a rhetorical analysis are straightforward. The first body paragraph will be about one of the author’s primary writing techniques. In the example above, the first body paragraph will be about Castle’s use of humour. The second body paragraph will be about a second important technique (colourful language, in this case), and so on.

Begin with a simple topic sentence. For example, the first body paragraph could begin with this topic sentence:

One of the most obvious of the author’s techniques is her use of humour.

The topic sentence of the second body paragraph could start with a transition:

In addition to humour, Castle also uses colourful language.

The remainder of each body paragraph would be devoted to providing examples of the rhetorical device. If you were writing about Castle's article, you could write that the author shares a funny story, and you would quote from parts of that story.

Within that same body paragraph, go on to offer a second example of humour and provide several examples, in context. As you go through this process, make sure to vary your language and sentence structure. At the end of all your examples, you might, if it hasn't been clarified already, have a sentence or two explaining the ultimate effect of the rhetorical technique—but again, only if necessary.

As you write the body of the essay, remember that everything you include should be there to demonstrate how the writer uses a device to make the audience think, feel, or understand. Writing is about transmitting ideas to an audience, so make sure to keep the rhetorical triangle in mind (the relationship between the subject [topic], the writer, and the reader; see [Figure 18.5](#)).

Then, as you write each paragraph, remember to emphasize how the writer's rhetorical choices impact readers.

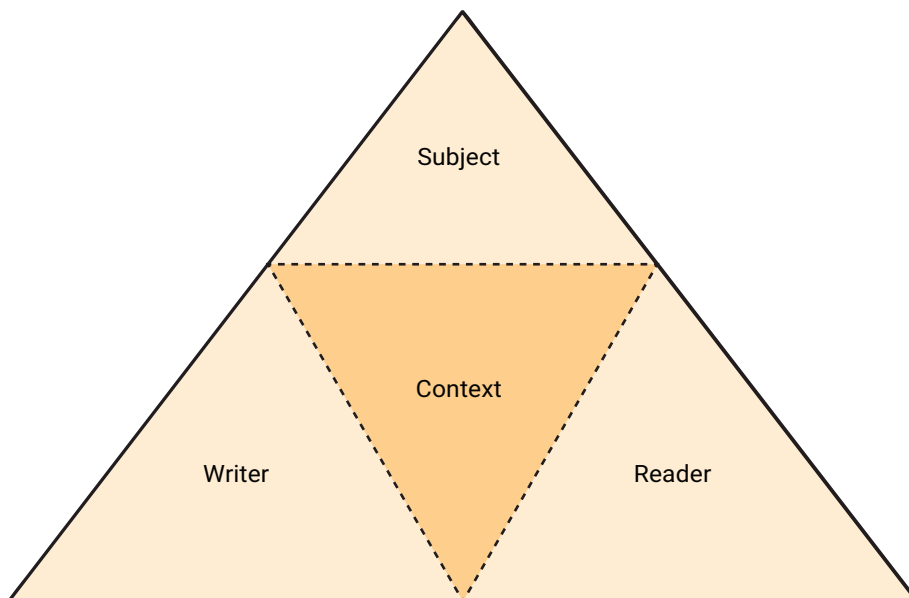


Figure 18.5: The Rhetorical Triangle

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

The concluding paragraph should not repeat the points you have already made, but it should briefly summarize what you've written about the main writing techniques. It should also comment on the overall impact of the article. What does the article leave readers thinking about?

SAMPLE RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

A Rhetorical Analysis of "Remarks by the First Lady at the Democratic National Convention"

In her "Remarks by the First Lady at the Democratic National Convention," Michelle Obama tells the American people what type of person the next president of the United States should be. First, however, she recalls what it was like moving into the White House, the struggles her family endured in adjusting to their new roles, and the admirable traits that her husband portrayed during his term. She discusses how important the nation's children are, how they are always watching and learning, and how integral a role model the president can be. Obama then endorses Hillary Clinton as the candidate who should be the next president; she explains how Clinton's devotion, advocacy, and perseverance will lead to a better future for all American children. By relating to the audience, using repetitive language, and satirizing the opposition, Obama seeks to persuade her audience that Hillary Clinton should be the next president of the United States.

Obama uses relatable, specific examples and experiences to convince the audience that she is someone who understands their perspectives and ideals, especially when it comes to future generations. She talks about her daughters and "how they are the heart of [her heart], the center of [her] world," a sentiment most parents can share. She reminisces about seeing them "set off for their first day at . . . school." She recalls observing them "playing with their dogs on the . . . lawn." She remembers "watching them grow from bubbly little girls into poised young women." She then attributes great value to "folks who volunteer to coach [a] team, or to teach [a] Sunday school class because they know it takes a village." Obama appeals to Americans not only through experiences they can relate to but also through shared hopes for the future; she does this by emphasizing the collective wish for "a leader who will be guided every day by the love and hope and impossibly big dreams that we all have for our children." By humbly appealing to shared values, Obama becomes a trustworthy, empathetic voice of reason.

Obama also uses repetitive language to reinforce essential presidential traits. Her list includes “*someone* with the proven strength to persevere,” “*someone* who knows [the] job and takes it seriously,” “*someone* who understands that the issues a President faces are not black and white,” and “*someone* whose life’s work shows our children that . . . we fight to give everyone a chance to succeed” (my emphasis). The repetition of *someone* becomes increasingly emphatic, leading the audience to understand just how important these qualities are. Obama also talks about how she “*want[s]* a President with a record of public service,” how she “*want[s]* a President who will teach our children that everyone in [the] country matters,” and how she “*want[s]* someone with the proven strength to persevere” (my emphasis). Having established her oneness with the audience in the first part of her speech, Obama’s repetition of what *she* *wants* resonates and becomes what those in the audience want too. After listing the qualities that she believes the next president should have, she shifts to discussing how the only candidate to demonstrate all of those traits is the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton. By relating to her listeners personally and by convincing them, through repetition, that she cares about the same things they do, Obama makes a convincing case.

To further her argument that Clinton should be president, Obama satirically alludes to the Republican nominee. Although she never identifies Donald Trump by name, she does hint at how he “questioned [Barack Obama’s] citizenship or faith,” regularly speaks “hateful language,” and “acts like a bully.” When she refers to “someone who understands that the issues a President faces . . . cannot be boiled down to 140 characters,” she is poking fun at how Trump’s main form of communication to the American people is through Twitter. Obama argues that the next president “can’t have thin skin or a tendency to lash out” or “chase fame and fortune,” suggesting that Trump is not just retaliatory but a megalomaniac as well. Near the end of her speech, Obama attacks Trump’s campaign slogan by announcing, “Don’t let anyone ever tell you that this country isn’t great, that somehow we need to make it great again. Because this, right now, is the greatest country on Earth.” Obama’s intentional satirizing of Trump serves to undermine him while simultaneously enhancing the audience’s perspective of Clinton.

She concludes her speech with a powerful challenge for voters “to pour every last ounce of [their] passion, [their] strength and [their] love for this country into electing Hillary Clinton as President of the United States of America.” Michelle Obama’s speech at the 2016 Democratic National

Convention was a tremendous achievement, despite the outcome of the election later that year.

Work Cited

Obama, Michelle. "Remarks by the First Lady at the Democratic National Convention." *The White House*, 25 Jul. 2016, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/25/remarks-first-lady-democratic-national-convention.

Adapted from Athabasca University, *ENGL 255 Introductory Composition Study Guide*, "Unit 6 Rhetorical Analysis," Rev 8, November 6, 2020.

Analytical essays come in many more types than the two described here. However, all analytic essays are based on the same fundamental principle: the analyzer undertakes a process of observation, describing, naming, and inferring in order to (a) identify and describe the elements that make up the whole text and (b) explain how the parts work together to create that text.

Sometimes you will be asked to specifically pay attention to *how* a text is put together, which will call for rhetorical analysis. Other times, you will be asked to focus on what the text *means*, which will take the form of critical analysis.

It is usually the context in which the analysis takes place that will determine which specific elements are likely to take centre stage in the analysis. For example, in history class, you could analyze a historical event, or you could analyze a historical text. In nursing, you could be asked to analyze a description of best practices for dialysis, or you could be asked to analyze dialysis itself. In computing science, you might be asked to analyze a particular piece of software for its functionality or for its code. In a literature course, you might be asked to conduct a literary analysis of the structure, the narrative, the plot, the characters, the aesthetic, or other literary elements.

Regardless of the writing situation, this chapter provides a solid foundation in how to approach the work of analyzing and how to present the results of that analysis in essay form.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In the context of analysis, an object is any thing, text, or concept that you analyze.

- The process of analyzing requires you to examine, to observe, to discern, to describe, to infer, and to rethink.
- Analysis also requires looking at relationships, spaces, and gaps.
- You can analyze the “what” (ideas, arguments, opinions) of an object, the “how” (rhetoric, structure, organization), or a combination of the two.
- An analysis can evaluate the qualities of elements and judge them good or bad, but it does not always need to; make sure you know when evaluation is and is not required.
- Every analysis occurs in a context, and the analytical context determines what you will be looking for and, hence, what you will find.
- In analysis, consider the relationship between the writer, the reader, and the subject.

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Personal Essay

Learning Objectives

- Describe the purpose and function of personal essays
- Determine when a personal essay is—and isn't—a suitable choice for a post-secondary assignment
- Identify the purpose and audience in preparation for writing a personal essay
- Choose a topic suitable for the purpose and audience—and narrow it effectively
- Choose an appropriate tone for the topic, purpose, and audience
- Choose an effective organizational mode for a personal essay
- Write an effective personal essay

When did you last tell a story? What was the story about? Perhaps you told a co-worker a story about a hilarious debacle with an Airbnb rental. Or perhaps you told your spouse a story about a funny thing your dog did. Humans have been storytelling for many millennia—ever since they began telling stories around campfires and recording stories on cave walls.

We love to tell our stories. Ojibwe writer Richard Wagamese said, “We all carry a yearning to be heard. And we need to remind each other that’s the truth of who we are as human beings; we’re hardwired to tell stories” (source: Wagamese, Richard. Qtd in John Threlfall, “Ricard Wagamese on the Power of Stories.” University of Victoria Fine Arts, 15 Mar. 2011, finearts.uvic.ca/research/blog/2011/03/15/149/). Our stories help us understand ourselves, our families, our communities, and our cultures. They help us determine our place in the world. Telling our stories helps us make meaning of our lives and find the value in our experiences. Stories help us understand who we are.

We also love other people's stories. That is why we read novels, watch films, and listen to podcasts. When they're well told (or well written), others' stories make us laugh or make us cry. They teach us, and they shift our perspectives to help us see through another person's eyes with empathy and understanding. Stories connect us.

Another word for story is **narrative**, which is a spoken or written record of an account of events. **Narration** is the act of telling the story. Anytime you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident, you engage in narration.

While there are many genres of writing that employ narration, in this chapter, we will focus on the **personal essay**, also called a **narrative essay**, which is the type of narrative writing you'll most likely encounter in university—at least, outside of creative writing classes.

What Is (and Isn't) a Personal Essay?

These days, personal essays are having a moment. You can't open a magazine—or a website like *CBC News* or *BuzzFeed* or *HuffPost*—without encountering essays based on personal experience, written from the first-person point of view (using the pronouns *I/me*).

Like other essays, personal essays are nonfiction: that is, a personal essay is about true events and experiences. This distinguishes a personal essay from fictional genres of writing, including novels, short stories, plays, and films. If you present your ideas in the form of a personal essay, your reader will expect to read things that are true. If you stray from the truth, you will break the bond of trust between you and your reader.

Unlike other types of essays, though, a personal essay tells a story. While all writing is narrative, to some degree, a personal essay emphasizes storytelling in a way that distinguishes it from expository essays, analytical essays, and research essays. A personal essay focuses the idea of a story in a way that the others don't. [Figure 19.1](#) illustrates how the personal essay resides in the fascinating—and sometimes unsettling—space between truth- and storytelling.

The personal essay and the **memoir** occupy the same space at the intersection of truth-telling and storytelling. Personal essays and memoirs are both nonfiction narratives. The only difference is in length. A personal essay is typically less than twenty-five pages long and is published within a book, a magazine, or a website. A memoir is published as a stand-alone book that is divided into chapters.

Of course, we are oversimplifying somewhat for the sake of clarity. There certainly are films and plays that depict true events, and writers of analysis

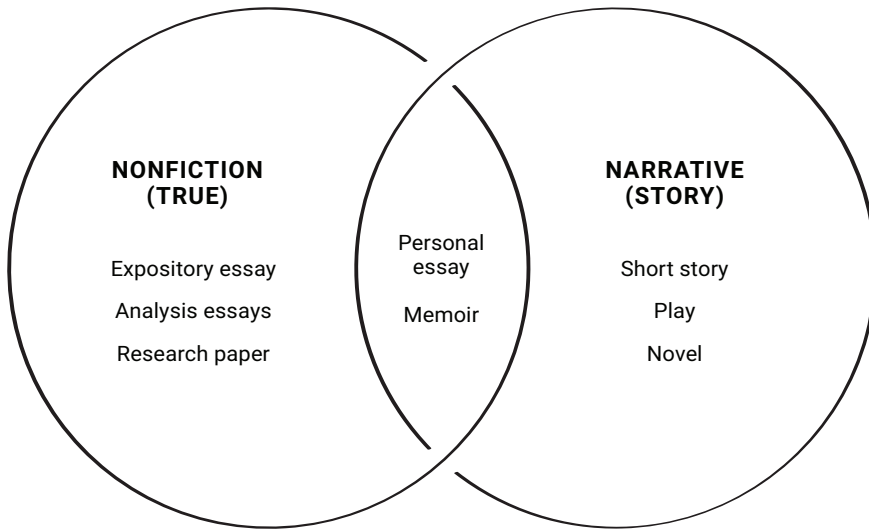


Figure 19.1: The Intersection of Truth-Telling and Storytelling

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

essays and research essays sometimes employ aspects of storytelling. However, despite the oversimplification, [Figure 19.1](#) represents the distinct position of the **personal essay / memoir** genre.

Personal essays and memoirs are a bit different from **autobiographical writing**. An autobiography relates all of the major events of a person's life, typically in chronological order. Think, for example, of President Bill Clinton's book *My Life*. An autobiography is typically interesting to a reader only if the writer is famous or is a family member.

A memoir, on the other hand, doesn't convey all the events of a lifetime. It might focus on one life-changing event or one significant period—or it might focus on a particular theme that runs throughout a lifetime. The writer of a memoir typically omits events and details that don't relate to the particular event or theme. For example, in each of these book-length memoirs, the author focuses on a specific theme or event:

- *Angela's Ashes*, by Frank McCourt, explores the effects of poverty on children.
- *From the Ashes*, by Jesse Thistle, focuses on his lifelong experiences with addiction.
- *In My Own Moccasins*, by Helen Knott, explores the roots of intergenerational trauma in her family.
- *The Skin We're In*, by Desmond Cole, examines his experiences as a Black Canadian.

- *To the River*, by Don Gillmour, reflects on the effects of his brother's suicide.
- *Still*, by Emma Hansen, focuses on a life-changing, devastating event: the death of her baby.

In all these cases, the writer does not recount their entire life, event by event, from start to finish. Instead, the writer focuses on a defining event or a theme, omitting all unrelated details, in order to focus the memoir and to develop and emphasize the theme.

Keep this important point in mind when it is time to write your own personal essay because, due to limited space, the event or theme chosen for a personal essay will need to be even narrower.

How to Write a Personal Essay

Writing a personal essay for your own blog is very different from writing a personal essay for a post-secondary course because of the *context*: the purpose for which you're writing and the audience for whom you're writing. If you are writing for your instructor and possibly your classmates, that context will affect decisions about which topic to choose, which content to include, and the tone you will take.

Choose Your Topic

It goes without saying that to write a personal essay, you should write about events or experiences that actually happened to you. Given the rich experiences you've had thus far in life, you will have plenty of topics to choose from!

Because personal essays are based on individuals' experiences, there is no end to the potential topics available to the writer. To get a sense of the wide range of subjects for a personal essay, read the following selection of titles of personal essays:¹

- "Fatherhood" by Marcello Di Cintio
- "How a Century of Turmoil in Russia and Ukraine Shaped My Family" by Bogdan Pospelovsky
- "How a Tourette's Diagnosis Helped Me Understand Who I Am" by Leyland Cecco
- "How I Proposed to My Girlfriend" by Kathryn Schulz

¹ These essays appeared in several magazines that regularly publish personal essays: *Alberta Views*, the *Atlantic*, *Ms.*, the *Walrus*, and the *New Yorker*.

- “How I Tried to Stop Snoring, Fix My Sleep Habits, and Confront My Mortality” by Jordan Foisy
- “I Want a Wife” by Judy Brady Syfers
- “In Defence of Grief” by Jessica Waite
- “I’ve Quit Writing Personal Essays About Quitting Things: A Personal Essay” by Jake Tuck
- “My Failed Attempts to Hoard Anything at All” by David Sedaris
- “My First-Nations Identity Feels Like an Absence” by Benjamin Doxtdator
- “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant” by Jose Antonio Vargas
- “Nearby and Familiar: A Strategy for Picking Restaurants” by Calvin Trillin
- “On Being a Bad Mother” by Sandra Tsing Loh
- “Stalking a Rustically Hip Family on Instagram” by Emily Flake
- “The Price of Black Ambition” by Roxane Gay
- “Things You Can’t Do with a Broken Left Arm” by Cynthia Scott Wandler
- “Who Gets to Be Mentally Ill?” by K. J. Aiello
- “Who Was Uncle Nick?” by Myrna Kostash
- “Why I Developed a Roll of Film I Found on the Curb” by Christine Estima
- “Why I Write” by Joan Didion

The beauty of personal essays is that a particular topic is interpreted differently by each writer because each writer has their own unique personal experience related to that topic, and each writer has a unique perspective. For example, a hundred writers could write a personal essay about fatherhood, and each of those essays would offer a different perspective. When writing is rooted in personal experience, each new variation on a theme is as interesting as the last.

Good subjects for personal narrative essays include the following:

- the impact of a move, a death, a birth, a gender transition, or a milestone birthday
- the impact of a trip to another country, if it changed you
- a coming-out story or a coming-of-age story
- an experience battling racism, sexism, classism, or ageism
- the significance of a prized possession or a special place
- the impact of a significant person in your life
- how a book or a film changed your view of the world
- a journey, literal or figurative
- how you learn a challenging skill, such as moving on or letting go
- a moment of triumph or defeat

Remember, though, that you don't have time or space to write an entire book! Don't choose a subject that is too big for a short narrative essay. For example, "Life with an alcoholic father" is likely a topic for a full-length memoir, not a four-page essay. However, "The day my father hit rock bottom" might be sufficiently limited.

A personal essay must have a central point: often, the central point is what you have learned from your experience or what others can learn from reading about your experience. If you find yourself writing about an experience and there seems to be no such point in what you're writing, it must be worth reconsidering your topic. For example, let's say you want to vent about a road rage incident. As you write, you realize that there is nothing to be learned, and you simply want to vent your anger. Maybe the rant is more suited to a social media post or a conversation with a friend than to a personal essay.

Or perhaps you want to write cathartically about a traumatic event that you're still processing. If you're still so deep in the details of this trauma that you haven't even begun to process it yet or figure out how it's shaped you, maybe at that stage, this event is best told to your psychologist or written about in your diary or blog as part of the process of healing. This is not to say that this topic is *never* going to be suitable for a personal essay, but perhaps it's not quite ready yet because you still need some time to process it and begin to make sense of it. Once you make meaning of it—once you know what you've learned, or how it's changed you, or what others can learn from your story—then that trauma might be ready to become a personal essay.

Consider Your Purpose

A personal essay can be written for a variety of purposes: to entertain, to inform, or to reflect. For example, you could write a humorous essay about a disastrous Airbnb rental simply to entertain your friends and family. Or you could write a serious and informative essay on the same topic in order to help other potential renters avoid your bad experience. Or you could write a reflective essay on the same topic, thinking about your response to the debacle in order to understand yourself better.

Therefore, the first crucial question to ask is, What is my purpose in this essay? Is my purpose to reflect on my experiences to improve my professional skills? Is my purpose to reflect on my experience so that I can learn about myself?

Increasing self-understanding through reflection is perhaps one of the most interesting purposes for writing a personal essay. For example, the British writer George Orwell and the American writer Joan Didion both wrote essays titled "Why I Write" in which they reflected on the role of writing in their lives.

While the two essays don't "tell a story" in the conventional sense of narrating a series of chronological events, each essay does tell the story of why writing is so important to the author.

Of course, when we share our writing about ourselves, we offer readers ways to understand us better. While Orwell and Didion reflected on their experiences for their own sakes, they also shared those reflections with an audience so that readers might consider what writing means to them.

Perhaps you simply want to make your readers laugh. Perhaps your primary goal is to evoke emotion: you want your audience to be moved by your story, to experience joy, sympathy, fear, or anger. We often tell our stories so others can be encouraged, motivated, or comforted.

Perhaps you want to inform readers so that they will learn from your mistakes. Perhaps you will include information about what you have learned from your experience or what you wish you'd done differently.

Your purpose for writing will shape the content you choose to include and the way you tell the story, so clearly identify your purpose before you begin. In the example of the Airbnb debacle, the purpose of your essays (whether it is to entertain, to inform, or to reflect) will affect what content you choose to include in the essay and what tone you choose to take. First, though, consider your audience.

Consider Your Audience

No matter the topic you choose, be certain that you consider your audience before you begin writing. Who am I writing for? What is an appropriate topic for this particular audience? What do they expect from my essay? What kinds of information should I provide?

Although we've just said that almost any experience can provide material for a personal essay, not every topic is appropriate in every context. As a writer, you must consider both the purpose for writing and the needs of the audience. Think about where your essay will be published. Will it be published on your blog, shared with friends, or submitted to your instructor? Some topics might be too private to share in a post-secondary context, and some topics might not be suitable to meet the requirements of a particular assignment. For example, if your biology professor asks you to write a personal essay reflecting on your experience during a class trip to a marsh, obviously it's not appropriate to write a personal essay that explores an unrelated childhood trauma. Some topics that might be suitable to share with a friend might not be suitable to share with classmates or professors. Some information might be too private to be shared with an academic audience.

Also, consider what your audience already knows about you and your topic. If you're writing any essay about your mother, and your audience is your sister, you will need to include less contextual information than you would if your audience were someone who has never met your mother.

There is little that is worse for readers than slogging through a personal essay that has no apparent purpose or relevance. Readers should be motivated in some capacity by your essay. In other words, we all have stories, but if we share them, we have to have a reason (as far as readers are concerned) for doing so. Make sure that you are clear about your purpose and your thesis.

Before you begin writing, keep your audience in mind as you ask yourself, What do I want the reader to take away from the essay, and what does the reader need to know—and in what order—to move toward that conclusion?

Topics That Trigger

Have you ever been listening to a friend tell a story when you held up your hands and said, “Whoa! Too much information!”?

Nowadays, most students are well attuned to the concept of *triggering*, the notion that a stimulus (such as hearing a story) might prompt a student to relive a trauma and thus be retraumatized—and this incident may even deepen the trauma. Students tend to be on the lookout for course materials that might trigger them. However, sometimes students might not be aware that the materials they themselves create may trigger others.

Imagine, for example, that you're writing a personal essay that graphically describes the death of a loved one. If you were publishing this essay on your blog or in a magazine, a reader who came across your essay would have the choice to simply close the article, not read it, and move on. In that context, a reader can make a wise decision to avoid texts that might be triggering.

However, in a post-secondary context, you are writing for an audience who doesn't get to choose whether to read or not to read. Your instructor is *required* to painstakingly read your essay—and your classmates might be too. Imagine that your instructor or classmate has recently experienced the suicide of a loved one. Your essay might trigger them, but they might not have the option to stop reading. Therefore, while a personal essay about a traumatic event in your life might be completely appropriate in some contexts, it might be inappropriate in a different context.

The nature of trauma is that although many people might experience the same event, different individuals will be traumatized by it to greater and lesser degrees—or perhaps not at all. Thus, it's hard for you, as a writer, to know for certain—or even to guess—whether a particular topic might be triggering to your instructor or classmates. Generally, though, be cautious with these topics:

abortion, miscarriage, child abuse, domestic abuse, sexual assault, and suicide. If you're not sure if your topic is suitable, ask your instructor.

Consider Your Thesis

Have you ever struggled to focus while listening to a friend's story conveying a sequence of events (“*this* happened, then *this* happened, then *this* happened!”) because you could not see any point to the story? Perhaps you even thought “So what?” or “Who cares!” When that happens, it's likely that the storyteller hasn't put enough effort into making the point of the story clear.

Now that you've chosen a suitable topic for a personal essay and identified your audience, consider your thesis. In [Chapter 12: Thesis Statements](#), you learned effective thesis statements not only introduce a *topic* but also present a *controlling idea* about that topic. While the term *thesis* doesn't apply to a personal essay as well as it does to more academic essays, even an informal, event-based personal essay should have a central controlling idea. For a personal essay, the thesis often involves an understanding of what an experience taught you or what others can learn from your experience. What is the “lesson learned” or the “lesson to be learned” from this experience? Perhaps you will refer to this as a *theme* or a *message* instead of a *thesis*.

Like in other essays, the central idea will help you decide what to include in the essay—and, more importantly, what to leave out. The essay must have a central idea that anchors it. Otherwise, you are likely to include extraneous details or simply recite a series of events and lose your reader's interest.

In many personal essays written by established authors and published in magazines, the thesis is not explicitly stated anywhere in the essay, but it is clearly conveyed nonetheless so that the reader is left with a deeper understanding of the theme—whether that is the effects of poverty on children, the effects of racism on Black Canadians, or the effects of colonization on Indigenous families.

Other times, the thesis is explicitly stated. For example, in her essay “Why I Write,” Joan Didion reflects, “I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.” The thesis of her essay, then, is that upon reflection, she realizes that writing tells her who she is.

Regardless of whether the thesis is implied or explicitly stated for the reader, it is essential that *you* know exactly what your thesis is. Having a clear sense of your intended thesis will help you make important directions about content and structure so that you can achieve your purpose. Once you've written the first draft of your essay, ask yourself the all-important questions “So what?” and

“Who cares?” Answer honestly. If you can’t figure out what the point of your essay is, your reader will not be able to figure it out either.

In a personal essay, the writer must walk a fine line: on one hand, she must ensure that the central message is clearly conveyed; on the other hand, she must avoid preaching or moralizing, which tends to turn off a reader. It is not necessary (or desirable) for your essay to have a “moral of the story,” but it is essential that it contains a guiding idea or theme that directs and unifies it.

If you are writing a personal essay for a university class, you might be expected to explicitly state the central message in a thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph. If you’re not sure whether a specific thesis statement is required, ask your instructor.

Consider Your Evidence

In other types of essays, much of the content of the essay will be taken from research. In contrast, the content of a personal essay is primarily the writer’s own experiences.

When writing a personal essay, you’ll need to think about the concept of *evidence* a little differently than you would when writing another kind of essay. In a personal essay, *your experience* is the evidence that proves your thesis—the same way that information from research proves the thesis of a research paper or quotations from a novel prove the thesis of a literary analysis essay.

In a personal essay, the more detailed the evidence is, the better. Use specific place names and dates. Include people’s names (or aliases if you want to protect their privacy). Include sensory details like sights, sounds, tastes, and scents to bring your writing to life.

Sometimes, you will want to bring in a little bit of evidence from research—perhaps a relevant statistic or a compelling quotation. However, don’t let other people’s ideas take over the essay. A personal essay must remain firmly grounded in your experience. Your narrative should remain in the forefront.

Consider Your Tone

Tone refers to the writers’ attitude toward the subject. When writing an expository research essay, a writer faces restrictions in tone: the expected tone would be serious, objective, and neutral, and the essay would be written from the third-person point of view.

When writing a personal essay, though, you have much more freedom. By nature, a personal essay will be written from the first-person perspective—so you can use the pronouns *I, me, mine, myself*—and by nature, a personal essay is subjective.

Personal essays certainly *can* be written with a formal tone and elevated diction, and in the past, they often *were*. Think, for example, of Michel de Montaigne’s essay “Apology for Raimond Sebond,” written in the late 1500s, in which the author ponders the difficulties in communicating with his cat, or Jonathan Swift’s essay “A Modest Proposal,” written in 1729, in which he proposes (satirically) that a solution to poverty and starvation in Ireland is for rich British landlords to eat the children of their impoverished tenants.²

Nowadays, though, a personal essay is much more likely to be written in an informal, conversational style. However, under that broad umbrella—*subjective, informal*—there are myriad possibilities for tone:

Words That Describe Tone

amused	hopeful
angry	hopeless
apologetic	humorous
appreciative	imploring
bitter	inspiration
breezy	intimate
candid	ironic
cautionary	irreverent
celebratory	jaded
childlike	joyful
comic	lighthearted
concerned	loving
curious	mocking
cynical	mourning
defeated	naive
defensive	nostalgic
defiant	optimistic
disappointed	outraged
earnest	pensive
empathetic	pessimistic
enthusiastic	philosophical
flippant	playful
frank	regretful
frustrated	resentful
gloating	resigned

² These essays are available in the Project Gutenberg library at <https://www.gutenberg.org/>.

sarcastic	triumphant
scathing	uneasy
sentimental	victorious
sincere	vindictive
skeptical	whimsical
solemn	witty
sulking	worried
thoughtful	

Remember that tone reveals your attitude toward your topic, so your purpose—and the message or theme you want to convey about it—will direct your tone. Tone is not merely about writing outright, “I was sad,” but it’s about carefully choosing words and details that *convey* sadness, which is even more impactful.

In many cases, the topic itself will determine the tone. For example, if you are writing about your experience with depression, you will probably choose a serious tone. If you’re writing about an entertaining debacle with an Airbnb, you might choose a more humorous approach.

Having said that, it can also be effective to write about a topic in an unexpected tone. For example, while most people write seriously about depression, there are well-known writers who have written very humorous accounts about depression, such as Jenny Lawson’s memoir *Furiously Happy: A Funny Book About Horrible Things*. The oxymoron in the title lets the reader know that this book will take a different approach to writing about depression, and the reader will expect humour and irony, which might entice the reader to pick up the book.

For some topics, you might choose to go either way! Consider these essay titles, and imagine how you might write an essay on this topic with a very serious tone or how you might write another essay on the topic with a very humorous (even sarcastic) tone:

A Day That Started Bad and Got Worse
Car Shopping: How I Bought a Lemon
The Time I Got Lost in Paris
Tips for “Breaking Up” with Your Roommate

Once you’ve chosen a topic, a purpose, a thesis, and a tone, it’s time to consider the structure of the essay.

How to Structure a Personal Essay

Personal essays offer the writer a lot of structural freedom. As we mentioned, in the “real world,” a personal essay might not have an explicitly stated thesis. It also might not look much like a college essay. It might not have a formal introductory paragraph, a concluding paragraph, or body paragraphs. Having said that, any narrative needs some structure if it is to be effective.

In an academic setting, you might be expected to structure your story according to the standard essay structure you learned in [Part 3](#). Alternatively, you might have the freedom to structure the essay in a more story-like way, focusing on plot.

Either way, give careful consideration to how to structure your personal essay so that it effectively conveys your experience and achieves your desired purpose. If your personal essay primarily conveys a series of events, chronological order will be a logical choice. However, many personal essays do *not* narrate a series of events. For example, Joan Didion’s essay “Why I Write” reflects on a concept rather than telling a story. Some of the structures you’ve learned in [Part 4](#) might be good starting points for structuring your personal essay, whether you adhere to them rigidly or not.

Introductory Paragraph

In the introductory paragraph of a personal essay, be creative! Begin with a hook that will pique your reader’s interest. The hook could be a brief description of a key event or person. Vivid imagery appealing to the five senses could be used to introduce a place. The introductory paragraph could even begin with a quotation or a bit of dialogue. Whatever approach you choose, aim to get the story going and entice your reader to keep reading.

As we’ve mentioned, the thesis of a personal essay is often implied rather than explicitly stated. However, if you’re writing the essay for a university course, your instructor may require a conventional thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph. If you’re not sure whether or not a thesis statement is required, ask!

If you are required to include a thesis statement, construct the sentence as you would for any other essay: introduce the topic, state the controlling idea, (optionally) introduce the main supporting points, and (optionally) indicate the structure of the body of the essay.

The birth of my first baby [*topic*] changed me [*controlling idea*].
The birth of my first baby [*topic*] changed me [*controlling idea*],
 making me more patient and loving [*two supporting points*].

Three types of vacations [*topic*] are on my bucket list [*controlling idea*]: a safari, a beach vacation, and a mountain trek [*three supporting points*].

For tips on writing effective thesis statements, refer to [Chapter 12: Thesis Statements](#).

Once you've written an effective introductory paragraph that hooks the reader's interest, introduces the topic, and implies or states the thesis, it's time to turn your attention to the body of the essay. You might find it useful to use one of the following organizational modes as a starting point.

Chronological Order in a Personal Essay

In **chronological order**, the events are presented in the order they occurred, from first to last. Chronological order is best suited for an essay that recounts a series of events in a story-like manner. These types of topics might benefit from a chronological structure:

How I learned to dance/ski/knit

A series of key events leading up to a particular moment or outcome

An important trip or a journey

The process of grieving a death / becoming a parent / transitioning

Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and these events may be organized by time. In fact, some personal essays emphasize storytelling to the extent that they use the plot elements we typically see in novels and films: exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, and falling action. This is not always necessary, though. Sometimes you will simply convey events in the order they occurred, without worrying about plot devices. And it is possible to use other narrative strategies to convey a story.

For a refresher on how to effectively use chronological order, refer to [Chapter 5: Methods of Organization](#). Remember, even within the order suggested by the chronology of events as they happened, you have choices. Perhaps you will describe all the events in the order they actually happened. However, it is also possible to sequence events differently to build a specific tension, like forewarning the reader, or by letting the reader know right away what the outcome of the story is.

Or perhaps you will begin the essay with an event that happened later, and then you'll go back and describe the events that led up to it. This strategy could build suspense because the reader will wonder how you got there. Make these choices carefully based on the topic, the audience, and the purpose. Use the time-related transitional words you learned in [Chapter 16: Process Essay](#) to guide your reader through the sequence of events.

TIP: To create strong details, keep the human senses in mind. Immerse your reader in the world that you create by focusing on details related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch as you describe people, places, and events in your narrative.

Spatial Order in a Personal Essay

Some topics will be well suited to spatial order, which you learned about in [Chapter 5: Methods of Organization](#). Recall that in spatial order, you describe parts of a whole in relation to one another. These topics would benefit from a structure based on spatial order:

Memories of my grandmother's house
The campground where I learned to love nature
Across Europe by bus

In the case of developing a guiding main idea for a personal essay, you must also consider why this whole and its parts are significant to you. Why do they matter? How did they change you? What did you learn?

A spatial approach often establishes a clear dominant impression that helps convey the thesis. All the details in the description should fit with this dominant impression. Remember that spatial order requires careful consideration of the order in which the parts are discussed. Move logically. Use the transitional words you learned in [Chapter 5](#) to help guide your reader through the space. When possible, use sensory details to create a picture in your reader's mind. Describe the knick-knacks in your grandmother's kitchen, the presence or absence of light in the living room, the scent of bread in the oven. Above all, keep the description grounded in the overall significance of this place to you.

Classification Structure in a Personal Essay

Sometimes a classification structure will help you organize the ideas in a personal essay. As you learned in [Chapter 16](#), *classification* refers to the process of dividing a subject or concept into smaller parts—into subgroups or categories. These topics would benefit from a classification structure.

four ways yoga has made me healthier
the types of people I've met on online dating sites
the kinds of vacations on my bucket list

Refer back to [Chapter 16: Classification Essay](#) to review how to use a classification structure effectively. However, be sure that you don't get too caught up in the details of your classification strategy. For example, if you choose the third topic, don't get carried away by the criteria for categorizing *all* vacations. This is a personal essay, not an expository one! In an expository essay, you might need to use objective criteria to classify *all* types of vacations, you might need to justify your choice of criteria, and you might need to ensure that you don't omit any categories. In a personal essay, though, the focus is not on categories of vacations in general—it is on categories of vacations *you* want to take. Stay focused on how these categories can help you better articulate *your* experiences and *your* dreams. Why would *you* (in particular) enjoy a beach vacation? What would *you* hope to get out of an African safari?

Use words that emphasize classification (see [Chapter 16](#)) to help your reader understand the differences between categories.

Comparison Structure in a Personal Essay

A comparison structure might be a good choice for certain personal essay topics, such as these:

my experience living in Japan versus my experience living in
Germany
how my mother's and father's parenting styles messed me up
my two sisters: different as night and day

In [Chapter 16: Compare-Contrast Essay](#), you learned that specific comparison structures can be used to effectively emphasize two subjects' similarities or differences—or both. Again, be sure to not get carried away in the comparison. You are not comparing Japan and Germany *overall*; you are comparing *your experiences* in Japan and Germany, and—most importantly—how those experiences shaped or changed you. Use words that emphasize similarities and differences to help your reader make connections.

Cause-and-Effect Structure in a Personal Essay

As you learned in [Chapter 16](#), a cause-effect essay structure emphasizes the causes and effects of a particular event or circumstance. This structure can be very useful in personal essays, for topics such as these:

the reasons for a move to another country
the cause and/or effects of a divorce
the effects of a medical diagnosis

As you learned in [Chapter 16](#), a cause-effect essay might focus on only causes, only effects, or a combination. In the case of developing a guiding main idea for a personal essay, you must also make clear how these causes and/or effects impacted you.

For a refresher on how to effectively use cause-and-effect structure, refer to [Chapter 16: Cause-Effect Essay](#). Remember, you must choose which causes and/or effects to focus on and which order to present them in to develop your thesis. Make these choices carefully based on the topic, the audience, and the purpose. Use words that emphasize causes and effects (listed in [Chapter 16](#)) to help your reader make connections.

Concluding Paragraph

Like the introductory paragraph, the concluding paragraph of a personal essay allows more freedom than you might be used to in writing expository essays.

The concluding paragraph should reinforce the central theme of the essay. If you're writing the essay for a university course, you might need to explicitly state the thesis. More often, the concluding paragraph of a personal essay reinforces the thesis through implication. Either way, don't forget the most important part of a personal essay: emphasizing how these events shaped you, changed you, or guided you. What did you learn from the experience? What can others learn? If your essay hasn't already made the answers to these questions clear, the concluding paragraph should do so.

At the end, the reader should feel satisfied that the story has come to an end and everything has been wrapped up.

PRACTICE 19.1

Write a personal essay, following these steps:

- A. Choose a topic from the list you generated in [Practice 4.1](#) or brainstorm from one of these prompts:

Childhood

School

Work

Love

Family

Friends

Vacation

Nature

Success/failure

Growing up

Review your list, and choose a topic. Narrow the topic so that it focuses on a single well-defined event or theme.

- B. Starting from the narrowed topic, freewrite for a full five minutes: Do not stop and think about what to write.
- C. Consider the significance of this experience: What did you learn about yourself, another person, or life itself? Write a working thesis statement, considering what you learned or how you changed. Decide whether or not that sentence needs to appear in the essay.
- D. Choose a tone for your essay. Serious? Funny? Sincere? Sarcastic? Earnest? Flippant?
- E. Choose an essay structure—chronological, spatial, classification, comparison, cause and effect, or other—that will provide a rough framework for the body of the essay. Sketch out a brief plan or outline, but give yourself permission to adapt it in order to fulfill the purpose of your essay.
- F. Collaborate with a peer to receive feedback on your working thesis statement, your plan, and your intended tone.
- G. Write the first draft of the essay, referring to [Chapter 6](#) as necessary.
- H. Ask a peer for feedback to improve organization, coherence, and unity, referring to the checklists in [Chapter 7](#).
- I. Revise, referring to [Chapter 7](#) as needed.
- J. Share with a peer and ask for feedback to improve style and mechanics, referring to the checklists in [Chapter 8](#) and [Chapter 9](#) as needed.
- K. Edit the essay, referring to [Chapter 8](#) as needed.
- L. Proofread the essay, referring to [Chapter 9](#) as needed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Personal essays are more story based than other types of essays are.
- A personal essay should focus on a thesis or guiding theme, but that thesis might be implied rather than stated.
- Consider your purpose and audience when choosing a topic, and be sure the topic is sufficiently narrow.
- Personal essays allow for a wide range of tones; consider your topic, purpose, and audience when choosing a tone.

- A strong introduction hooks the reader.
- Choose a structure based on the topic and the purpose; personal essays may follow the structure loosely.
- The use of sensory details is crucial to emotionally engaging the reader.
- A strong conclusion should add resolution to the conflict and evoke and strengthen the personal narrative's theme.
- Personal essays written in a post-secondary context may require a stricter adherence to standard essay structure.

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PART V

Research and Documentation

Many of the assignments you will encounter in your post-secondary courses will require you to include information from research in your essays. In this section, you will consider how to choose appropriate research sources; how to select material to include in your essay; how to integrate that information into your essay by quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing; and how to document research sources appropriately so that you don't accidentally plagiarize.

As you will learn in Part 5, the correct documentation of research sources involves dozens of small details, all of which vary depending on which style guide you're using. Therefore, Part 5 offers only an overview of the basics. Throughout, we will direct you to resources that provide more detailed information.

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Research Sources

Finding and Selecting Relevant, Reliable Sources

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources
- Determine when to use primary or secondary sources for support
- Identify and apply criteria for finding academic journal articles
- Identify key terminology on your topic to guide your article search
- Identify strategies for locating relevant print and electronic resources
- Identify instances when it is appropriate to use human sources, such as interviews or eyewitness testimony
- Identify criteria for evaluating the credibility of research resources
- Understand that not all electronic resources are equally reliable
- Analyze information from research to determine how relevant it is and how effectively it supports the thesis
- Identify connections between source materials
- Eliminate research materials that are irrelevant, unreliable, or redundant

If an assignment requires you to include research in your essay, the first step is to ensure that you have chosen an appropriate topic and narrowed it effectively, which we explored in [Chapter 10](#). If your topic is too general, the research will seem overwhelming because you will end up browsing through entire sections of the library rather than focusing on specific sources that relate to your essay.

Thus, it is important to have a suitably specific topic or a research question before you begin to conduct research on that subject.

During the prewriting stage, you may have conducted some preliminary research to stimulate your thinking about the topic. When you created an outline for your essay, you may have noted some ideas about how to conduct research on this topic—for instance, interviewing an expert in the field or analyzing the content of popular magazines. You may have already identified a few potential sources. Now it is time to conduct a more focused, systematic search for informative primary and secondary sources.

This phase can be both exciting and challenging. This chapter will help you find a credible source, one that is an appropriate academic source. 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 effectively.

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. However, how can you tell whether a source is reliable? You cannot rely on basic Internet searches to help you find the best support available. It is important to choose appropriate sources. This section will discuss strategies for evaluating sources critically so that you can be a media-savvy researcher.

Identifying Keywords for a Research Search

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

Using the library's online catalogue to find books

Using periodicals, indexes, and databases to find articles

Conducting online searches

After completing prewriting for your topic, you likely already have some keywords in mind based on your preliminary research and writing. 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.

Another way to identify useful keywords is to visit the Library and Archives Canada's website at www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Pages/home.aspx. This site allows you to search for a topic and see the related subject headings used by the Library and Archives Canada, including broader terms, narrower terms, and related

terms. Other libraries use these terms to classify materials. Knowing the most-used terms related to your subject will help you speed up your keyword search.

Also, the reference librarian at your public library or university library can help you identify keywords to help you search more effectively.

PRACTICE 20.1

Look at the instructions for an upcoming essay assignment. What is the topic?

- A. Visit the Library and Archives Canada website at www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Pages/home.aspx to identify keywords that will help you locate research sources relevant to this topic.
- B. Use your library's catalogue and/or databases to conduct searches based on the keywords.
- C. Review your search results and identify six to eight additional terms you might use when you conduct further research.
- D. Print out the search results or save the results to your research folder on your computer or portable storage device.

Types of Research Sources

These days, there is almost endless information available to a researcher: books, magazines, newspapers, scholarly journals, websites, blogs, videos, and more. On the one hand, it is exciting to have some much information at your fingertips. On the other hand, it is easy to feel overwhelmed in a sea of information. This section examines some of the most common types of research sources available to students, but first, we distinguish between primary and secondary sources so that you can decide what kinds of information you're looking for.

Primary and Secondary Research Sources

Researchers classify research resources in two categories: primary sources and secondary sources. **Primary sources** present information obtained first-hand. **Secondary sources** present another writer's analysis or interpretation *about* primary source material, so they are one step removed from primary sources. How you balance primary and secondary source material in your paper will depend on the topic and assignment.

Primary Sources

Some types of research papers must include information from primary research sources to achieve their purpose. **Primary sources** are direct, firsthand sources of information or data, such as

- Research findings published in scholarly journals
- Literary texts (novels, poems, plays, or short stories)
- Historical documents (diaries, letters, reports, or photographs)
- Autobiographies or other personal accounts

Here are some examples of types of essays in which the writer must analyze a primary text or present their own experimental research:

- An essay for a literature course analyzing Michelle Good's novel *Five Little Indians* (the poems are the primary sources)
- A paper for a political science course comparing televised speeches delivered by two candidates for prime minister (the text of the speeches is the primary source)
- An essay about the Charter-based freedom of religion in Canada (the text of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the primary source).
- A paper for a communications course discussing gender bias in television commercials (the scripts of the commercials are the primary sources)
- A report 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 (the survey data are the primary source)
- An essay 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 (the experiment results are the primary source)

For these types of papers, primary research is the main focus. If you are writing about a text such as a novel, a poem, or a short story (or a nonprint text such as a film or a painting), it is crucial that you gather information and ideas from the original work itself and that you interpret and analyze it yourself—rather than rely solely on others' interpretations. This is especially important in English literature courses in which you are expected to analyze literary texts.

Although you may use secondary sources to support your ideas, your own analysis of the text should be first and foremost in your essay.

In papers for science or social sciences courses, 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 the results of your research in detail. For example, the interviews may provide interesting responses that you want to share with your reader.

Secondary Sources

Other essays may require you to consult secondary research sources. **Secondary sources** discuss, interpret, analyze, summarize, consolidate, or otherwise rework information from primary sources. In other words, secondary sources are written *about* primary sources. The following are some types of secondary sources:

- Magazine articles
- Critical articles in scholarly journals
- Biographical books
- Textbooks
- Literary and scientific reviews
- Television documentaries
- Reviews

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

- An article written by a literary critic containing an analysis of Michelle Good's novel.
- A biographer's book about Margaret Atwood's life.
- An article written by a political scientist containing commentary on two candidates' election speeches.
- A film critic's review of Sarah Polley's films.
- Editorials expressing commentary on freedom of religion.
- A book written by a gender studies professor on the representation of gender in advertisements.
- An article written by an education professor that summarizes several research studies into methods of mathematics instruction.

When using secondary sources, aim to choose 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.

Primary or Secondary? Context Matters!

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 Idle No More movement contributed to the reconciliation movement in Canada, a *Maclean's* 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 Idle No More movement. In that case, articles about the movement in news magazines like *Maclean's*, *Windspeaker*, and the *Walrus* would be primary sources. They provide firsthand examples of the media coverage the writer is analyzing.

Choosing Primary or Secondary Sources for Your Essay

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. For example, if you are writing an essay for an English literature course, you will need to rely mostly on primary sources—the novel, play, poem, or story you are required to analyze—and you will need to quote directly from the text throughout your essay.

Even if your paper is largely based on primary sources, you may use secondary sources to develop your ideas. For instance, an analysis of Sarah Polley's films would focus on the films themselves as primary sources, but it might also cite commentary from critics. A paper that presents an original experiment (a primary source) would include some discussion of similar prior research in the field (secondary sources). If you are writing a research paper about reality television shows, you will need to use some reality shows as primary sources, 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, which are primary sources, 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 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.

Print Sources

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 likely use electronic sources as well, but it is not wise to limit yourself to electronic sources entirely because some potentially useful sources may be available only in print form.) [Table 20.1: Library Print Resources](#) lists different types of print resources available at public and university libraries.

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

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 you will find. On the other hand, restricting yourself to dense, scholarly works could make the process of researching extremely time-consuming and frustrating.

PRACTICE 20.2

Thinking about the topic you explored in [Practice 20.1](#), make a list of five types of print resources you could use to find information about your topic. Include at least one primary source. Be as specific as possible.

Periodicals, Indexes, and Databases

A **periodical** is a newspaper, magazine, or journal published at a regular interval (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually).

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.

Table 20.1: Library Print Resources

Resource Type	Description	Examples
Reference works	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. Note that reference works are many steps removed from original primary sources and are often brief, so they should be used only as a starting point when you gather information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2023</i> by Sarah Janssen • <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual</i>, published by the American Psychiatric Association
Nonfiction books	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The 30-Day Low-Carb Diet Solution</i> by Michael R. Eades • <i>Fundamentals of Nutrition</i> by Lewis E. Lloyd
Periodicals and news sources	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new article from the <i>Globe and Mail</i> • An article in <i>Macleans</i> magazine • An article from <i>CMAJ</i>, the Canadian Medical Association journal
Government publications	Federal, provincial, 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics Canada • Juristat
Business and non-profit publications	Businesses and non-profit organizations produce publications designed to market a product, provide background information 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"> • A company's instruction manual explaining how to use a specific software program • A news release published by UNICEF Canada

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 general 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 with this type of source.

Because of these differences, scholarly journals are more challenging to read. That does not mean you should avoid them. On the contrary, they are valuable resources for your research because they provide in-depth information that is unavailable elsewhere. Because knowledgeable professionals carefully review the content before publication (in a process called **peer review**), scholarly journals provide far more reliable information 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.

Library catalogues can help you locate book-length sources as well as some types of nonprint holdings, such as CDs, DVDs, and audiobooks. 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 catalogues, 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 20.2: Commonly Used Online Databases](#) describes some indexes and databases that are frequently used.

Table 20.2: Commonly Used Online Databases

Resource	Contents
Academic Search (EBSCOhost)	General content from magazines, journals, and books
Canadian Newsstand (ProQuest)	News and current event–related content from magazines and newspapers
Business Source Complete (EBSCOhost)	Business-related content from magazines and journals
Criminal Justice (ProQuest)	Content from journals in criminology and law
MEDLINE (EBSCOhost); PubMed (OPEN ACCESS)	Articles in medicine and health
PsycINFO (EBSCOhost)	Content from journals in psychology and psychiatry
SocINDEX (EBSCOhost)	General content from magazines, journals, and books

TIP: In the **peer review process**, an author submits an article to a scholarly journal for publication. The editor of the journal asks peer reviewers—other experts in the field—to read and carefully evaluate the article, ensuring the thesis and research to make sure it is accurate and original. To reduce bias, the reviewers don’t know the name of the author, and the author doesn’t know the names of the reviewers. Only once peer reviewers have approved the article is it accepted for publication in the journal. The peer review process helps ensure that work published in scholarly journals is valid, reliable, and objective.

Search Tips for Electronic Databases

One way to refine your keyword search is to use Boolean operators. These 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 **or** to find synonyms. For example, *prison or jail*. The phrase “Or is more” may help you remember that using this will show you more results.

- 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 *stress fractures not geological* locates materials on fractures of *bones* but excludes materials on fractures of *stones*. Use this one cautiously because it may exclude useful sources.
- Enclose a phrase in **quotation marks** to search for an exact phrase, such as “*ulcerative colitis*,” “*use of force*,” or “*law enforcement*.”
- Use **parentheses** to direct the order of operations in a search string. For example, since type 2 diabetes is also known as adult onset diabetes, you could search (*type II or adult onset or type 2*) 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 *gang** to search for information on *gang*, *gangs*, and *gangland*. The specific symbol used varies with different databases.

Reference Librarians

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.

PRACTICE 20.3

Visit the website of your school library 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.

- A. Search the catalogue for your topic and related keywords. Print out or bookmark your search results.
- B. Identify at least one to two relevant periodicals, indexes, or databases. Conduct a keyword search to find potentially relevant articles on your topic. 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.
- C. 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 your library soon to locate the articles you need.

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 television documentaries, 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

Popular Web search engines

Websites maintained by businesses, universities, non-profit organizations, or government agencies

Newspapers, magazines, and journals published on the Web

E-books

Audiobooks

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 have computers, audiobooks, and audio and video recordings available. You can locate these materials in the catalogue 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:

1. Results do not always appear in order of reliability. The first few hits that appear in search results may include sites with unreliable content, such as advertisements, sponsored articles, and online encyclopedias (e.g., Wikipedia). Because websites are created by third parties, the search engine cannot tell you which sites have accurate information.
2. Results may be too numerous to be useful. 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.

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 like Google Scholar (scholar.google.ca/), 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 home page 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 “favourites” feature of your Web browser to save and organize sites that look promising.

TIP: When searching for information on the Internet, remember that some websites are more reliable than others. Websites ending in *.gov* or *.edu* are generally more reliable than websites ending in *.com* or *.org*. Wikis and blogs are not reliable sources of information because they are subject to inaccuracies and are usually very subjective and biased. That said, Wikipedia can be a good starting point to begin your research on a particular topic, but only when the entry provides a significant number of sources to back up its assertions. Then rely on those sources to draw your own conclusions.

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 phone or video interview or asking your subject to respond to your questions via email. 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 Sources

As you review the sources you've gathered, examine them with a critical eye. Smart researchers 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 question. 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 a writer 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 it is time to be ruthless. Critically review the sources you've collected, and begin to reduce the number of sources you'll use in your essay, focusing only on those that are most relevant and—as we'll get to in the next section—most reliable.

Reading closely and taking notes take valuable time and energy, so you should 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 20.3: 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.

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 that have not lost their currency.

When using websites for research, check to see when the site was last updated. Many sites publish this information on the home page, and some,

Table 20.3: Tips for Skimming Books and Articles

Tips for Skimming Books	Tips for Skimming Articles
Read the dust jacket and table of contents for a broad overview of the topics covered.	Skim the introduction and conclusion for summary material.
Use the index to locate more specific topics and see how thoroughly they are covered.	Skim through subheadings and text features such as sidebars.
Flip through the book and look for subtitles or key terms that correspond to your research.	Look for keywords related to your topic.
	Journal articles often begin with an abstract or summary of the contents.
	Read it to determine the article's relevance to your research.

such as news sites, are updated daily or weekly. Many nonfunctioning links, for example, are a sign that a website is not regularly updated.

Do not be afraid to ask your instructor 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.

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 websites with glaring typos and odd illustrations. Sometimes, however, a source's reliability—or lack of it—is not so obvious.

To evaluate your research sources, use critical thinking skills consciously and deliberately. Consider criteria such as the type of source, its intended purpose and audience, the author's 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.

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 20.4: Source Rankings](#) ranks different source types.

Evaluating Credibility and Reputability

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

Table 20.4: Source Rankings

High-Quality Sources

These sources provide the most in-depth information. They are researched and written by subject matter experts and are carefully reviewed.

- Scholarly books and articles in scholarly journals
- Trade books and magazines geared toward an educated general audience, such as *Police Chief* magazine, *Canadian Paramedicine*, or *Harvard Business Review*
- Government documents, such as books, reports, and web pages
- Documents posted online by reputable organizations, such as universities and research institutes
- Textbooks and reference books, which are usually reliable but may not cover a topic in great depth

Varied-Quality Sources

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 these sources with caution.****

- News stories and feature articles (print or online) from reputable newspapers, magazines, or organizations, such as *The Economist* or the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
- Popular magazine articles, which may or may not be carefully researched and fact checked
- Documents published by businesses and non-profit organizations

Questionable Sources

These sources are often written primarily to attract a large readership or present the authors' opinions and are not subject to careful review. ****Avoid using these sources!****

- Loosely regulated or unregulated media content, such as Internet discussion boards, blogs, free online encyclopedias, talk radio shows, television news shows with obvious political biases, personal websites, and chat rooms
-

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 reputation. **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 *Globe and Mail* or the *New York Times*, 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 is 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 give you a rough indication of the article's quality or, at the very least, of its influence and reputation among other scholars.

Check for Biases and Hidden Agendas

Whenever you consult a source, always think carefully about the author's 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 favouritism 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 each case, the author would likely have a hidden agenda (in the first case, to encourage people to eat more beef, and in the second, to encourage people to stop eating beef). An article written by a registered dietitian would be more objective.

In another example, you might read several research studies in which scientists found significant benefits to following a low-carbohydrate diet. But then you notice that many of these studies were sponsored by a foundation associated with the author of a popular series of low-carbohydrate diet books. You can keep reading, but do so with a critical eye, knowing that a hidden agenda might be shaping the researchers' conclusions.

PRACTICE 20.4

Read this excerpt from the Wikipedia entry for the “Battle of Batoche,” which describes a battle between Canadian soldiers and Métis fighters in Saskatchewan in 1885, and then answer the questions below.

“A very dangerous situation developed when a group of Métis rushed the artillery. Only Howard’s directing a heavy stream of Gatling fire at the attackers prevented a disaster. . . . After noon, the artillery was ordered forward again, and it began fruitlessly bombarding the invisible Métis rifle pits. The gunners were under heavy fire, in a very unsafe position. Throughout, the Gatling gun was used to good effect, providing covering fire . . . and dispersing another attempt by Gabriel Dumont to capture the guns.”

Source: “Battle of Batoche.” *Wikipedia*, 2023. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Batoche. Accessed 1 Mar. 2023.

- A. Which “side” is the writer on: the side of the Métis or the side of the soldiers?
- B. Which specific words in the paragraph convey the bias of the writer? List them below:

- C. Which words could be changed to make the paragraph more objective?
- D. If you were writing a research essay on the Battle of Batoche, would you consider this article a reliable source? Why or why not?

Wikipedia

Because so many students turn to Wikipedia first when conducting research, Wikipedia deserves its own section here. Wikipedia usually comes up first in a Google search, and because the articles are brief and written in easy-to-understand language, many students are tempted to begin—and end—their research with Wikipedia. However, this is a mistake.

These sites have no control system for researching, writing, and reviewing articles. Instead, they rely on a community of users to police themselves.

Many people don’t realize that *anyone* can make a Wikipedia page. The author of a Wikipedia entry might be an expert on the topic—but more likely, they are not. An article on the Canadian parliamentary system may have been written by a grade 6 student as a social studies project—not by a political scientist or a civil servant. The entry on the Toronto Raptors may have been written by a Raptors fan—not by members of the Raptors staff. An entry on a drug

that is sold for weight loss may be written by a CEO trying to sell that drug for profit—not by a doctor or a pharmacist.

Also, many people don't realize that anyone can *edit* a Wikipedia page. An angry taxpayer could edit the entry on the Canadian parliamentary system and slander members of Parliament. An avid fan of the New York Knicks could edit the Raptors entry and falsify the players' stats. An angry customer could edit the article for the weight-loss drug and reveal that it is a fraudulent product.

Wikipedia writers and editors don't need to provide their names, so they are not accountable for what they write. There have been many cases of Wikipedia contributors editing others' articles—either for fun or for more malicious reasons. Even when an article is written more-or-less factually, it can contain bias, as does the “Battle of Batoche” entry quoted above. Therefore, you cannot count on the information being accurate.

The bottom line on Wikipedia is that when you are beginning your research, it is OK to look at Wikipedia to get the general gist of a topic as long as you read carefully and critically, watching out for errors and bias. Look at the references listed below the entry, and if there are reputable sources listed, you might want to read those articles next.

However, Wikipedia is *not* reliable enough to be used as a research source in an academic essay. If you find an intriguing idea or bit of information on Wikipedia, take that idea and look for reliable academic sources that expand on it. Read the scholarly article carefully to make sure you understand it—do not base your understanding on the Wikipedia article. If you use the idea in your essay, cite the scholarly source—not the Wikipedia article. If you see information in a Wikipedia article that you cannot corroborate in other more reputable sources, do *not* include that information in your essay.

Student Sample: Evaluating Research Source

Mariah is a student who has decided to write an essay on music piracy for her communications class. During the process of prewriting to choose a topic, Mariah conducts a Google search on “music piracy.” The search results are in [Figure 20.1](#). Now it is time for Mariah to choose which research sources to use in her essay, thinking about whether the sources she's found are relevant and reliable.

When she was prewriting, Mariah used this search to generate ideas. However, now she reviews the results of the Internet search more critically in order to determine which resources will be suitable for her essay. Figuring out which sources are both relevant and reliable will help her determine which resources are worth spending more time on.

The first result is a Wikipedia article. However, just because Wikipedia comes up first, it doesn't mean it's the most reliable source. When she first

The image shows a Google search results page for the query "music piracy". At the top, the Google logo is on the left, and the search bar contains "music piracy" with a search icon on the right. Below the search bar are navigation tabs for "All", "Images", "News", "Videos", "Maps", and "More", along with a "Tools" link. The search results indicate "About 29,100,000 results (0.37 seconds)".

The first result is the Wikipedia entry for "Music piracy", which is highlighted in blue. The text reads: "Music piracy is the copying and distributing of recordings of a piece of music for which the rights owners (composer, recording artist, or copyright-holding record company) did not give consent."

Below this are several "Scholarly articles for music piracy":

- "A behavioral model of digital music piracy" by Gopal - Cited by 396
- "The antecedents of music piracy attitudes and ..." by Chiou - Cited by 443
- "Music piracy on the web—how effective are anti-piracy ..." by d'Astous - Cited by 326

Next is a result from RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) titled "About Piracy". The text states: "Music theft—or piracy—is constantly evolving as technology changes. · Many different actions qualify as piracy, from downloading unauthorized versions of ..."

Following is a result from the University of Chicago titled "Music Piracy and Its Effects on Demand, Supply, and Welfare" by J Waldfogel · 2012 · Cited by 46. The text says: "We can analyze the possible effects of piracy with a demand curve representing the distribution of consumers' maximum willingness to pay for..."

Then is a result from Forbes titled "Pirate Flags: Music Business Says Piracy Still Threatens Its ...". The text says: "Feb 15, 2022 — 'These sites accounted for 39.2% of music piracy in 2021, up from 33.9% in 2020,' it noted. For the first decade and a half of the 21st century, ..."

Finally, there is a result from GradesFixer titled "From Napster's Music Piracy to Spotify: [Essay Example] ...". The text says: "Jul 7, 2022 — These platforms allowed people to listen and download music for free, but illegally — so that was a kind of music piracy. However, over time ..."

Figure 20.1: Internet Search Results for “Music Piracy”

began thinking about this topic, Mariah skimmed the Wikipedia article to get an overview of the topic. However, she knows that Wikipedia is not an acceptable source for her final essay, and she’s learned plenty more about music piracy in the course of her research, so she doesn’t return to Wikipedia or use any information from the article in her essay.

The second result is from the Recording Industry Association of America. This source might have useful information about musicians’ and record companies’ perspectives on piracy. The website might also have some useful

facts that she could use in her essay. However, since this source will be biased toward the interests of those musicians and companies, she can't consider it to be an objective source. She will be mindful of that potential bias.

Mariah also notices some scholarly articles listed—one from the University of Chicago and others listed above. These are likely to be good sources for an academic essay. She knows they will be more difficult to read than some of the other possible sources, but she knows that the information will likely be research based, objective, and peer reviewed. To find suitable scholarly articles on her topic, Mariah knows that her university library's databases will be more helpful than a Google search, and she makes a note to ask a reference librarian for assistance with her search.

Next, Mariah notices an article from *Forbes* magazine. She's not familiar with *Forbes*, but another Google search tells her that *Forbes* is a well-known business magazine. If she wants to research the economics of music piracy, this source might be useful. However, *Forbes* is not a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, so Mariah needs to check whether she is required to use only peer-reviewed sources. Even if she isn't, Mariah knows that because *Forbes* is owned by a company and published for profit, she can't count on this being an objective source.

The final source is from GradeSaver. Mariah isn't familiar with GradeSaver, but a quick look at the website tells her that this is what her professor calls a "cheat site"—a site for students who want to buy essays. Mariah knows that there is no way to tell who wrote this essay or how reliable it is—it might be written by a student who knows even less about mass media than Mariah does, and the student might have received an F on it! It's not a reputable source, so Mariah closes the page without reading the essay or taking any notes.

PRACTICE 20.5

Use a search engine to conduct a Web search on your topic. Refer to the tips provided earlier to help you streamline your search. Then 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.

Evaluate Research Sources 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 their statements. Stay actively engaged—do not simply accept an author's words as truth. Ask questions to

determine each source's value. [Checklist 20.1](#) lists ten questions you, as a critical reader, can ask about potential research sources.

CHECKLIST 20.1: 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 far 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.)

Managing Information from Research

Think ahead to a moment a few weeks from now when you will have written your final research paper and are almost ready to submit it for a grade. There is just one task left: compiling 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. Also, 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 reference page. With a sinking feeling, you realize that finding this information and preparing your references will require hours of work.

This stressful scenario can be avoided by managing and organizing as you conduct research. As you determine which sources you will rely on most, 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 notes.

As you conduct research, add each source to a **working bibliography**—a preliminary list of sources that you will later use to develop the final list of sources in your essay. *Bibliography* is a general term that refers to a list of all the resources you looked at as you conducted your research—whether or not you ended up using all the sources on the list.

Bibliographic information is all the reference information about a source that you are considering using for your paper. Any time you look at a source, you should make note of all the reference information. You may later decide to change direction or simply choose not to use that source as you develop your paper, but if you do decide to use that source, you will have all the details you need to compile your list of sources.

All of the information in your working bibliography will likely not make it into the final draft of your essay, but at least it will be available when you need it. When you submit the final draft of your essay, you will need to submit a complete list of sources. You will learn more about this in [Chapter 22](#), but for now, simply carefully keep track of your sources.

Keeping Track of Research Sources

As you conduct research, take time to organize source information to 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. These programs are not usually reliable enough to depend on to format the final list of sources, but they can be useful for recording information as you go.

The following tables show which specific details you should record in the working bibliography. Although it's not necessary at this stage, you may wish to record information using the formatting system of the Modern Language

Association (MLA) or the American Psychological Association (APA), which will save a step later on.

Table 20.5: Required Bibliography Details for Commonly Used Sources in MLA Style

Source Type	Necessary Information
Book	Author(s), title and subtitle, edition, publisher, city of publication, year of publication
Essay or article published in a book	All the information you would need for a book in addition to the essay's or article's title and author(s), the pages on which it appears, and the name of the book's editor(s)
Periodical	Author(s), article title, periodical title, date of publication, volume and issue number, and page numbers
Online source	Author(s) if available, article or document title, site name (container name), other contributors (editors, translators), version/edition number, publisher, date of publication, URL, and retrieval/access date if the information is likely to change over time
Interview	Name of person interviewed, method of communication, date of interview

Table 20.6: Required Bibliography Details for Commonly Used Sources in APA Style

Source Type	Necessary Information
Book	Author(s), title and subtitle, edition, publisher, city of publication, year of publication
Essay or article published in a book	All the information you would for any other book in addition to the essay's or article's title and author(s), the pages on which it appears, and the name of the book's editor(s)
Periodical	Author(s), article title, periodical title, date of publication, volume and issue number, and page numbers
Online source	Author(s) if available, article or document title, site name, date of publication, retrieval/access date if information is likely to change over time, and URL
Interview	Name of person interviewed, method of communication, date of interview

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 will 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).

PRACTICE 20.6

As you conduct research for an essay in progress, record the required information in [Table 20.5](#) or [Table 20.6](#) for each source. Continue to add sources to your working bibliography throughout the research process.

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 between 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 into three categories: summary notes, paraphrased information, and direct quotations from your sources. Effective researchers make

choices about which is most appropriate for their purpose. You will learn more about techniques for paraphrasing and quoting in [Chapter 21](#), but for now, focus on these points as you take notes:

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. For a refresher on how to summarize effectively, refer to [Chapter 15: Summary](#).

Paraphrased information restates a specific fact or idea from a source using your own words and sentence structure. Paraphrase when you want to convey ideas or information from the source in your own words. Make *very* sure that you are using your own words and grammar so that you don't accidentally plagiarize later! To ensure you're not tempted to copy the author's wording, close the book or article before you write your paraphrased sentences. Next to the information, write the source and page number. You will need this information later so that you can appropriately cite the source of the idea.

Direct quotations use the exact wording from 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. As you research, if you copy word for word, enclose the words in quotation marks so that you don't forget that you copied these words. You might want to highlight quotations in yellow to help you remember that they are indeed quotations or perhaps enclose them in very large quotation marks if you are taking notes by hand. In your notes, write the source and page number next to the quotation.

Most of your notes should be paraphrased from the original source. Paraphrasing 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 correctly attributing 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, perhaps in a different column in your notes.

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. (You will learn more about this in [Chapter 21](#).) 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 one technique is necessarily better than another; it is simply 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 colour 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 as you gather information for your research essay. Remember to record full bibliographic information for each source.

Thinking Critically About Information from Research

At this point in your research project, you have identified relevant and reliable sources, you have begun to read and take notes, and you have kept track of your sources in an organized manner. You have gathered much of the information you will use, and you are ready to draft your research paper. At this stage, the big question is this: “*How* do I use all of this information from research in my essay?”

Beginning writers sometimes attempt to transform a pile of note cards into a formal research paper without any intermediary step. This approach is problematic. The writer’s original question and thesis may be buried in a flood of disconnected details taken from research sources. The first draft may present redundant or contradictory information.

You have already critically evaluated your sources, and you have kept only those that are relevant and reliable. Now you must critically evaluate the *information* you gathered from those sources to determine which information makes it into your essay and which does not.

When you conduct research, you keep an open mind and seek out many promising sources. You take notes on any information that looks like it might help you answer your research questions. Often, new ideas and terms come up in your reading, and these, too, find their way into your notes. You may record facts or quotations that catch your attention even if they did not seem immediately relevant to your research question. By now, you have probably amassed an impressively detailed collection of notes. You will not use all of your notes in your paper. Which information, statistics, examples, ideas, or quotations from the sources are most relevant and useful to your topic and purpose? Which should be tossed away?

After doing so much work, it can be hard to discard information and sources. However, your essay will be better for it. Aim to eliminate more than you keep. Otherwise, your ideas and your voice may be lost in a flood of information from research. Contrary to what some students think, instructors are not impressed by a flood of statistics, details, and quotations that obscure the writer's ideas.

An effective research paper focuses on the writer's ideas—from the question that sparked the research process to how the writer answers that question based on the research findings. Before beginning a draft or even an outline, good writers and researchers pause and reflect. They ask themselves questions:

1. How has my thinking changed based on my research? What have I learned?
2. Was my working thesis on target? Do I need to rework my thesis based on what I have learned?
3. How does the information in my sources mesh with my research questions and help me answer those questions? Have any additional important questions or subtopics come up that I will need to address in my paper?
4. How do my sources complement each other? What ideas or facts recur in multiple sources?
5. Where do my sources disagree with each other, and why?

Select Only the Most Relevant Information from Sources

Good researchers are thorough. They look at multiple perspectives, facts, and ideas related to their topic, and they gather a great deal of information. Effective writers, however, are selective. They determine which information is most relevant and appropriate for their purpose. They include details that develop or explain their ideas—and they leave out details that do not. The writer, not the pile of notes, is the controlling force. The writer shapes the content of the research paper.

Earlier in this chapter, you used strategies to weed out irrelevant or unreliable sources. Now apply your critical thinking skills to the *information* you recorded. Analyze it to evaluate how it is relevant, to determine how it meshes with your ideas, and to identify connections and patterns.

Identify Information That Supports Your Thesis

Begin by identifying the information (details, statistics, facts, quotations, etc.) that clearly support your thesis. Mark or group these either physically or using the cut-and-paste function in your word-processing program. As you identify the crucial details that support your thesis, make sure to analyze them critically. Ask the following questions to focus your thinking:

Is this detail from a reliable, high-quality source? Is it appropriate for me to cite this source in an academic paper? The bulk of the support for your thesis should come from reliable, reputable sources. If most of the details that support your thesis are from less-than-reliable sources, you may need to do additional research or modify your thesis.

Is the link between this information and my thesis obvious, or will I need to explain it to my readers? Remember, you have spent more time thinking and reading about this topic than your audience has. Some connections might be obvious to both you and your readers. More often, however, you will need to provide an analysis or explanation that shows how the information supports your thesis. As you read through your notes, jot down ideas you have for making those connections clear.

What personal biases or experiences might affect the way I interpret this information? No researcher is perfectly objective. We all have personal opinions and experiences that influence our reactions to what we read and learn. Good researchers are aware of this human tendency. They keep an open mind when they read opinions or facts that contradict their beliefs.

Having said that, don't completely ignore information that contradicts your thesis. It can be tempting to disregard information that does not support the point you are making. However, such information is important. At the very least, it gives you a sense of what has been written about the issue. More importantly, it can help you question and refine your own thinking so that writing your research paper is a true learning process. In some cases, it can even tell you that your thesis is off track.

Reconsider Your Thesis

At the beginning of the process of writing a research paper, you developed a **working thesis statement**. Although a working thesis statement is, by nature, meant to evolve, many students become very attached to their initial thesis statement, and they become very reluctant to change course, even when obvious red flags come up.

At this stage in the process, you've selected only the most relevant, reliable research sources, and from those sources, you've chosen only the most relevant, reliable information. Now it's time to revisit your thesis to ensure that your central argument is consistent with the evidence from research.

Keeping in mind all of the information you've found in the course of your research, critically reread your working thesis statement. Does it convey a central argument that can be proven by the research you've found? Does it need to be revised at all? (Hint: almost every working thesis statement needs to be revised at least once!) If the central argument is still sound, take some time to revise the thesis statement to make it even more consistent with the evidence you've found in your sources. You might want to refer to [Chapter 12: Thesis Statements](#) for tips on how to strengthen a thesis statement.

On the other hand, if evidence from reputable research tells you that your thesis may be wrong, don't ignore this big red flag. It might be necessary to reconsider your argument. For example, perhaps you set out to write a research paper about the relationship between the MMR vaccine and autism. On the Internet, you found plenty of websites that claim that the MMR vaccine causes autism. However, now that you review this evidence more critically, you realize that it is not reliable because it didn't come from reputable sources. In fact, there is *no* evidence in reputable scholarly journals, written by expert researchers and doctors, that makes a connection between the vaccine and autism. If you proceed with the research paper, intent on arguing your thesis despite the lack of credible scholarly evidence, your essay will be unsuccessful.

Remember, the thesis of a research essay should *not* be based on your own opinions. In fact, although it can be rather unsettling, one of the most valuable aspects of conducting research is that writers sometimes find that evidence from research does not support their previously held opinions. For example, perhaps your opinion is that safe-injection sites are an ineffective way to deal with drug addiction. However, through the research process, you learn that there is plenty of strong, reputable evidence that proves safe-injection sites *are*, in fact, effective in reducing the harms of drug addiction. Based on evidence from research, you might revise your working thesis statement and make the argument that safe-injection sites reduce harm:

Working Thesis Statement (Opinion Based)	Safe-injection sites are a waste of money because they don't help drug addicts and they encourage even more drug use.
Revised Thesis Statement (Evidence Based)	Safe-injection sites effectively reduce harm by decreasing the incidence of overdose, reducing the spread of infectious diseases, and offering a path to rehabilitation and recovery.

The bottom line is that the thesis of a research essay must be based on valid, reliable evidence from reputable academic sources. If your argument cannot be supported with evidence from reputable scholarly sources, reconsider—and rewrite—your thesis.

Make Connections

As you find connections between your ideas and the information in your sources, also look for information that connects your sources. Do most sources seem to agree on a particular idea? Are some facts mentioned repeatedly in many different sources? What key terms or major concepts come up in most of your sources regardless of whether the sources agree on the finer points? Identifying these connections will help you identify important ideas to discuss in your paper.

Look for subtle ways your sources complement one another too. Does one author refer to another's book or article? How do sources that are more recent build upon the ideas developed in earlier sources? Synthesize (put together) different pieces of information that help you answer your research questions.

Be aware of redundancies in your sources. If you have amassed solid support from a reputable source, such as a scholarly journal, there is no need to cite the same facts from a Wikipedia article that is many steps removed from the primary research. When two sources contain the same information, cite the more reliable, credible, and impressive source to enhance the credibility of your essay.

Determine how you will address any contradictions found among different sources. For instance, if one source cites a startling fact that you cannot confirm anywhere else, it is safe to dismiss the information as unreliable. However, if you find significant disagreements among reliable sources, you will need to review them and evaluate each source. Which source presents a more sound argument or more solid evidence? It is up to you to determine which source is the most credible and why.

Finally, do not ignore information simply because it does not support your thesis. Carefully consider how that information fits into the big picture of

your research. You may decide that the source is unreliable or the information is not relevant, or you may decide that it is an important point you need to bring up. What is important is that you give it careful consideration. What matters is that you have thought critically about the information from your research sources.

In this chapter, you've learned how to find information from a variety of reputable scholarly sources. You've learned how to collect and organize the information you've gathered from those sources. You've learned how to determine whether that information is relevant enough and reliable enough to make it into your essay. Next, in [Chapter 21](#), you'll learn how to effectively integrate that information into your essay to maximize its impact.

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 catalogues 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 source's writing, research, logic, and design.
- In their notes, effective researchers record organized, complete, accurate information. This includes bibliographic information about each source as well as summarized, paraphrased, or quoted information from the source.

Integrating Research

Paraphrasing and Quoting

Learning Objectives

- Determine when to paraphrase information and when to quote from research sources
- Effectively paraphrase source material by changing wording and sentence structure
- Apply guidelines for integrating and citing paraphrased material
- Demonstrate understanding of the principles of quoting
- Evaluate when to use a short or long quotation
- Integrate quotations effectively into sentences using attributive tags
- Incorporate short and long quotations with correct formatting
- Use square brackets and ellipses to indicate alterations to a quotation
- Apply guidelines for citing the sources of quotations

One of the challenges of writing a research paper is successfully integrating your own ideas with information from your research 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?

An effective research essay focuses primarily on the student's ideas. Throughout the essay, you should retain control of your central argument and main points. One way to do this is to write the introductory paragraph, the thesis statement, the topic sentences, the closing sentences, and the concluding paragraph in your own words.

In the body paragraphs, though, you'll bring in research that supports your central argument and your main supporting points. This demonstrates to your reader that your ideas are reliable because they can be supported by the opinions of experts, by statistics and other facts, and by examples.

In order for an essay to be coherent, the research must be effectively integrated at the sentence level and at the paragraph level. At the sentence level, think carefully about how to introduce paraphrased and quoted material. Make clear the significance of any facts, details, or quotations that are included in the body paragraphs. Include sentences that transition between your own ideas and your research, both within paragraphs and between paragraphs. End each body paragraph with a closing sentence that sums up the significance of the research in relation to your thesis.

In this chapter, you will learn how to weave information and ideas from research into your essay to support your ideas. There are two primary ways of incorporating research in your essay: paraphrasing and quoting.

What Is Paraphrasing?

In [Chapter 2: Improve Your Reading Comprehension](#), you practiced identifying main and supporting ideas, which is a necessary first step in understanding and then paraphrasing the information you find in your research. You might want to review that section before you move on to the task of paraphrasing.

Paraphrasing is expressing information from research sources in **your own words** using your own **sentence structures**. It is an important skill to develop because when you paraphrase, you not only show you understand what you have read, but you also demonstrate your ability to process and adapt that information to your writing purpose.

In most situations, a research essay should contain much more paraphrased material than quoted material. Occasional quotations can certainly be useful and impactful, but in order to show you understand what you have read, you should paraphrase more often than you quote in essays.

When you paraphrase, you must include a citation that acknowledges the original source of the ideas. Although the words are yours, the ideas belong to the original author(s), and you must give that person credit for the ideas. We will come back to this point later in this chapter, but for now, let's focus on how to paraphrase effectively.

How to Paraphrase Effectively

When you paraphrase material from a source, you restate the information in your own words, using your own sentence structure.

Paraphrasing differs from summarizing (which we discussed in detail in [Chapter 15: Summary](#)) because in paraphrasing, you focus on *restating* the ideas, not necessarily condensing them like you would in a summary. Having said that, as you integrate research into your essays, you may find it useful to combine the techniques of paraphrasing *and* summarizing, expressing information in your own words *and* making it more concise than it was in the research source.

Students sometimes use the “**thesaurus method**” of paraphrasing: that is, they simply rewrite a sentence from the source material, switching out most of the nouns, verbs, and adjectives with synonyms but retaining the essential grammatical structure of the sentence. However, this approach is not effective, and it often leads a student into accidental plagiarism.

To paraphrase effectively—and avoid plagiarizing—use your own words, grammar, and style to convey the ideas from the research source. At times, you may have to rewrite a sentence more than once to make sure you are paraphrasing the idea effectively.

Below is an example of a student’s paraphrasing process. Mia is writing an essay about the evolution of literature written by Albertans. She goes through several steps to paraphrase the information and express it effectively in her own words using her own sentence structure.

First, read the excerpt from the source material, from the anthology *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature* by Donna Coates and George Melnyk:

RESEARCH SOURCE: BOOK EXCERPT

The idea that a province in Canada, other than Quebec, could have a distinct literary identity is novel and debatable, just as 80 years ago the idea that Canada itself had a distinct literary identity was novel and debatable. By the 1970s, Canadian literature as a concept had become commonplace. In the same decade, the concept of Prairie literature also became an accepted label to distinguish regional writing in Canada. . . .

. . . The PrairieLit concept had grown out of an era in Canadian history that linked the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba into a single agrarian political economy with a common cultural base. This unity began to unravel after World War II, when Alberta became the centre of Canada’s energy industry. The resulting urbanization, industrialization, and new wealth distinguished Alberta from its two sister “Prairie”

provinces, which remained, until the twenty-first century, have-not provinces. With a population in 2008 that was almost triple each of the other provinces and with an oil and gas economy (extraction, processing, and transportation) that was booming, Alberta evolved into a different kind of entity. The term “Prairie” made little sense when applied to post-1980 Alberta because the geographic designation was at odds with the economic and social realities of the province.

Source: Coates, Donna, and George Melnyk, editors. *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*. AU Press, 2009, pp. viii–ix.

Mia wants to include these ideas in her essay, and she begins with an initial attempt at paraphrasing the excerpt from the book. As you read, notice that it reads like a summary. Mia has paraphrased one or two lines at a time and presented the ideas in the same order that Coates and Melnyk did:

First Attempt at Paraphrasing

According to Donna Coates and George Melnyk, the notion that any Canadian province, outside Quebec, might have a unique literary identity is new and moot. It was the same eighty years ago when the notion that Canada had a unique literary identity was new and controversial. However, by the 1970s, people readily accepted that Canadian literature was distinct. At the same time, people also accepted the idea of Prairie literature being distinct. The Prairie literature idea arose from a time in Canadian history when Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba were all agricultural and culturally similar. However, after World War II, Alberta became the fulcrum of Canada’s energy industry. Urbanization, industrialization, and new wealth made Alberta different from Manitoba and Saskatchewan. With a resounding energy industry and population, Alberta changed into an inconsistent kind of establishment. After 1980, because Alberta was no longer like the other Prairie areas, the term *Prairie* no longer was understandable.

In Mia’s first attempt, she has conveyed Coates and Melnyk’s ideas, one after the other, without applying any of her own critical thinking skills to what she’s read. This is problematic, as you’ll learn in [Chapter 22](#) in the section on “fair dealing” as it applies to the use of research sources.

Also, notice that in this first draft, Mia uses wording that is too similar to the source material. Let’s look at two sections placed next to each other:

Source	<u>the idea that a province in Canada, other than Quebec</u>
Paraphrase	<u>the notion that an area in Canada, outside Quebec</u>

Look closely at the two sections above, and notice similarities and differences. What looks most problematic to you?

It might surprise you to know that the fact that Mia used the words *Canada* and *Quebec*, which appear in the original, is not the problem. These words are essential for conveying the authors' ideas.

However, notice that Mia has swapped the following nonessential words:

idea → notion
 province → area
 other than → outside

As we have mentioned, this is often referred to as the **thesaurus method** of paraphrasing. Despite the swaps, the grammar is identical to the original. Look at how the grammar compares:

Source	the [noun] that a [noun] in Canada, [preposition] Quebec
Paraphrase	the [noun] that an [noun] in Canada, [preposition] Quebec

The sentence structure is identical. Let's look at another section:

Source	<u>the idea that Canada had a distinct literary identity was novel and debatable</u>
Paraphrase	<u>the notion that Canada had a unique literary identity was new and controversial</u>

Again, the primary problem is not that Mia copied the words *Canada* and *literary identity*, which are essential to conveying the main ideas. Part of the problem is the way Mia has swapped out nonessential words:

idea → notion
 distinct → unique
 novel → new
 debatable → controversial

Despite swapping out these words with synonyms, Mia has copied the sentence structure from the source:

Source	the [<i>noun</i>] that Canada had a [<i>adjective</i>] literary identity was [<i>adjective</i>] and [<i>adjective</i>]
Paraphrase	the [<i>noun</i>] that Canada had a [<i>adjective</i>] literary identity was [<i>adjective</i>] and [<i>adjective</i>]

Again, Mia's grammar is identical to the original. Because she has copied the sentence structure, Mia is plagiarizing! The thesaurus method is *not* an effective way to paraphrase. Carefully read Mia's first draft again. Can you find other examples of grammatical plagiarism?

Also, because Mia was using the thesaurus method, she used an online dictionary to find synonyms for some of Coates and Melnyk's words. As a result, she used some words she was not familiar with and didn't carefully consider some subtle but important differences in meaning between the synonyms. Look at this list of words Mia chose to replace words in the original source. Do the synonyms have exactly the same meaning? Or do they have different connotations?

debatable → moot
distinct → unique
centre → fulcrum
booming → resounding
different → inconsistent
province → establishment
province → area

Because some of these so-called synonyms significantly change the intended meaning, Mia is misrepresenting Coates and Melnyk's ideas, which is another type of academic misconduct. To resist the temptation to copy Coates and Melnyk's grammar, Mia closes the book—and sets aside her first attempt at paraphrasing—so that she can't see it as she writes the next draft.

Mia makes another attempt at paraphrasing and comes up with a single sentence that not only concisely paraphrases but also accurately represents the main ideas of the source material:

Revised Paraphrasing

According to Donna Coates and George Melnyk, up until the mid-1900s, people didn't think that Alberta had its own literary identity (viii).

Because of its agricultural history, Alberta was grouped with Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and the genre of Prairie literature developed (viii).

However, as the hub of Canada's energy industry, Alberta hasn't been similar to Manitoba and Saskatchewan in almost a century (ix). Now a wealthy urban province, Alberta has a distinct culture that is reflected in its literature (Coates and Melnyk ix).

Mia has now successfully paraphrased the information by using her own wording, creating her own sentence structure, and condensing the information. These paraphrased sentences demonstrate that Mia has truly understood the ideas—not merely parroted them.

Notice that Mia has included some of the same terms from the original source, including *Alberta*, *literary identity*, *agricultural*, *Prairie literature*, *energy industry*, *wealthy*, *distinct*, and *culture*. This is acceptable—and even required—because these keywords are essential to conveying the meaning of the source material. Without these words, the student could not effectively or accurately convey the meaning: if Mia were to use the thesaurus method to swap these nouns and adjectives with synonyms, she would likely misrepresent Coates and Melnyk's ideas. Thus, this is not plagiarism because Mia has changed other nonessential words and used her own sentence structure.

After writing the final draft, there are three more essential steps in paraphrasing: First, read the source material one more time and double-check that your paraphrasing accurately conveys the author's ideas. Also, double-check that you have used your own sentence structure. Finally, add citations that acknowledge the source of the ideas, as Mia has by including Coates and Melnyk's names in the first sentence and by including the page numbers in parenthetical citations.

How to Introduce Paraphrased Material

An **attributive tag** is a phrase that shows your reader you got the information from a source and you are giving the author attribution, or credit, for their ideas. An attributive tag includes the author's name and a verb such as *states* or *writes*.

Example: Annie Chang states that weight-bearing exercise has many health benefits for women.

In this example, the attributive tag is underlined; this statement is giving Chang credit for her ideas. Using an attributive tag allows you to provide a citation at the same time as integrating the paraphrased material smoothly into your sentence.

Because the attributive tag includes the author's name, it's not necessary to repeat the author's name in the parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence.

This citation technique also conveys that you are actively engaged with your source material.

Unfortunately, during the process of writing your research paper, it is easy to fall into a rut and use the same few dull verbs repeatedly, such as “Chang writes,” “Chang states,” and so on. Punch up your writing by using strong verbs that help your reader understand how the source material presents ideas. There is a world of difference between an author who “suggests” and one who “claims,” one who “questions” and one who “criticizes.” You do not need to consult your thesaurus every time you cite a source, but do think about which verbs will accurately represent the ideas and make your writing more engaging. Below are some examples of strong verbs for introducing paraphrased material.

ask	propose
suggest	compare
question	contrast
recommend	evaluate
determine	conclude
insist	find
explain	study
assert	sum up
claim	believe
hypothesize	warn
measure	point out
argue	assess

TIP: When writing, whether at school or at work, be mindful of the connotations of the words you use to describe someone’s tone. Do not say a source “argues” a particular point unless an argument is, in fact, presented. Use lively language, but avoid language that is emotionally charged. Doing so will ensure you have represented other people’s ideas in an authentic and accurate way.

How to Cite Paraphrased Material

It is important to remember that even though you are paraphrasing from another source—rather than quoting—you *must* include a citation to acknowledge that the idea is not your original idea but someone else’s. Citing the source for paraphrased information demonstrates your academic integrity and bolsters

your argument. In the citation, include the last name(s) of the author(s) and the page number, if one is provided.

In the examples below, the student acknowledges the source within the paraphrased sentence. This is called an in-text citation, which you'll learn more about in [Chapter 22](#). Note that while the authors' names appear in the attributive tags within the sentences themselves, the page numbers are placed in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

Leibowitz found that low-carbohydrate diets often help subjects with type 2 diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood sugar levels (36).

Additionally, Ogborne et al. argue that cannabis burning creates toxins; this strategy is counterproductive, and there are numerous individual hazards associated with using the plant as medicine (1685).

Another option is to cite the source in a **parenthetical citation** at the end of the sentence, as in the sentences below. Note that the parenthetical citation contains both the author's name and the page number, enclosed in parentheses, at the end of the sentence, followed by a period.

Researchers have found that low-carbohydrate diets often help subjects with type 2 diabetes maintain a healthy weight and control blood sugar levels (Leibowitz 36).

Additionally, cannabis burning creates toxins; this strategy is counterproductive, and there are numerous individual hazards associated with using the plant as medicine (Ogborne et al. 1685).

Notice that the period at the end of the sentence comes *after* the parentheses, not before. You will learn more about parenthetical citations in [Chapter 22](#).

Example taken from *Writing Commons*, July 2023, Open Text, writingcommons.org/section/citation/apa-7th-edition/apa-citations/apa-quoting/#:~:text=APA%20Style%20has%20these%20formatting,and%20is%20double%2Dspaced%20throughout.

TIP: The abbreviation “et al.” (“and others” in Latin) indicates that a text was written by a group of authors. In the case of multiple authors, include the name of the first author listed on the article or book, and use “et al.” to represent the rest of the group.

PRACTICE 21.1

Carefully read the following paragraph from *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*, in preparation for paraphrasing it. You will probably need to read it at least twice. If possible, mark up the text to identify key ideas.

Because the study of Alberta writing is not a regular feature of academe, though Alberta writers are studied in other contexts and under different rubrics, acceptance of the concept of Alberta literature as a valid field of study remains an uphill struggle. The weight of historical prejudice and conventional negativity toward provincial identity in literature is a significant barrier. So the concept of Alberta literature remains contested by other boundary concepts and so becomes a work in progress.

Source: Coates, Donna, and George Melnyk, editors. *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*. AU Press, 2009, p. x.

- A. In a first draft, paraphrase the paragraph above.
- B. Reread the source paragraph, and reread your paraphrased paragraph. Revise your paragraph, aiming to paraphrase the authors' ideas even more concisely this time. Hint: you may need to revise more than once before you have a final draft you are happy with.
- C. Reread the final draft you wrote and check that you have paraphrased effectively:
 - The paraphrased paragraph accurately conveys Coates and Melnyk's ideas without misrepresenting them in any way.
 - The paraphrased paragraph is written in my own words, as much as possible, but uses Coates and Melnyk's keywords when necessary.
 - The sentence structure in the paraphrased paragraph is not copied from the source paragraph.
- D. Add a citation that acknowledges the source of the ideas.

What Are Quotations?

Most of the time, you will summarize or paraphrase information instead of quoting directly from the source. Paraphrasing shows that you understand the information from research well enough to write about it confidently in your own words. With that said, direct quotations can be powerful when used sparingly and with purpose. You might decide, after much critical thought, that you have

found an amazing, well-suited quotation that cannot be paraphrased, and you want to incorporate that quotation into your paper.

A **quotation** consists of words and phrases copied word for word from the source and placed in your essay. The copied words must be enclosed in quotation marks to indicate that they are someone else's words—not your own. When quoting, maintain the same wording, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. To avoid accidentally plagiarizing, attribute the quoted words to the source by adding citations, which you'll learn more about in [Chapter 22](#).

There are different ways to integrate a quotation into your essay depending on how long the quotation is; there are also a number of formatting requirements.

TIP: In the context of a research essay, *quote* is a verb, and *quotation* is a noun:

- ✗ The essay includes **quotes** from Chang's article.
- ✓ The essay includes **quotations** from Chang's article.
- ✓ The student **quotes** Chang.

When to Quote

Quoting directly can sometimes help you make a point in a colourful 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. Also, 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.

When deciding to include quotation instead of paraphrasing, make sure the quotation is a statement that the original author has worded so beautifully that it would be less effective if you changed it into your own words.

Less experienced writers sometimes overuse direct quotations in research papers because it seems easier than paraphrasing. A paper that consists of mostly quotations pieced together does not demonstrate original thought but rather indicates that you are good at cutting and pasting. At best, this reduces the effectiveness of the quotations. At worst, it results in a paper that seems haphazardly pasted together from outside sources.

What you write in essays should be primarily your own words; your instructors want to know what your ideas are and for you to demonstrate your own critical thinking. Therefore, strive to state your ideas, develop them thoroughly,

and then insert supporting quotations from experts only when necessary to support your ideas. Use quotations sparingly for greater impact.

Guidelines for Quoting

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

- Only use a quotation when the original writer has phrased a statement so perfectly that you could not rephrase it any better without getting away from the writer's point.
- Represent the author's ideas honestly and accurately. Never use a quotation out of context in a way that suggests a different meaning.
- Make sure you have transcribed the original statement accurately.
- Quote only as much of the text as needed.
- Never use a stand-alone quotation—also called a “dropped” or “floating” quotation. Instead, integrate quoted material into your own sentence.
- Use an attributive tag to lead into the quotation, and provide a citation.
- Indicate a quotation by enclosing it in double quotation marks.
- To represent a quotation within a quotation, use single quotation marks.
- Use ellipses and/or square brackets to indicate an alteration to a quotation.
- Include a correctly formatted citation that indicates whose words you are quoting.

We will examine each of these guidelines in more detail in this chapter.

TIP: These guidelines apply to most research papers, but keep in mind that in English literature courses, essays are expected to contain numerous quotations from the primary source—the novel, poem, or play being analyzed.

Short Quotations

When you find a quotation you would like to include **verbatim** (word for word) from a source, decide if you should include the whole paragraph or section or a smaller part. Generally, it is better to choose shorter quotations rather than longer ones.

A short quotation can be one word, a phrase, or a complete sentence. Generally, a short quotation is one that is fewer than forty words or four lines of text.

You might want to include a quoted sentence as a whole. If so, you can use an **attributive tag** to incorporate a quotation fluidly into your sentence:

According to Marshall, “Before the creation of organized governmental policing agencies, it was citizens possessing firearms who monitored and maintained the peace” (712).

In the example above, the attributive tag is underlined. The attributive tag acknowledges the source of the quotation, giving Marshall credit for his words and ideas. The tag also integrates the quotation smoothly into the paragraph. Because the attributive tag includes the author’s name, it’s not necessary to repeat the author’s name in the parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence, and the parenthetical citation includes only the page number. Here is another example of an attributive tag:

Chang asserts, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

Note the use of the strong verb *asserts* to introduce the direct quotation. Avoid using the same attributive tags over and over again; refer to [Table 21.1](#) for some examples.

TIP: In MLA style, use present-tense verbs to introduce a quotation: for example, “Chang **emphasizes** . . .” In APA style, use past-tense verbs to introduce a quotation: for example, “Chang **emphasized** . . .”

Alternatively, you might want to break the quotation in two and place the author’s name between the two parts:

“Engaging in weight-bearing exercise,” Chang asserts, “is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

It is often more effective to break up the original sentence and choose to quote only the part that is most well written and/or most relevant to the point you are making in your essay. Paraphrase the rest:

According to Annie Chang’s research, weight-bearing exercise is “one of single best things” for women’s wellness (49).

Including the title of a source is optional. If you think that including the title will enhance the credibility of the ideas, you might want to include it the first time you refer to the source.

In *Weight Training for Women*, Chang asserts, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

TIP: The first time you refer to a source in your essay, include the author’s first name (e.g., Annie Chang). After that first time, refer to the author by her last name only (e.g., Chang).

If you do not use an attributive tag because the quotation already fits smoothly into your sentence, the quotation can be integrated directly into your sentence:

Vigilantism in the Wild West was committed by “citizens possessing firearms who monitored and maintained the peace” (Marshall 712).

Notice that because there is no attributive tag in the sentences to introduce the name of the source, you must acknowledge the source of the quotation by adding a parenthetical citation that includes the author’s name and the page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

Table 21.1: Direct Quotation Introduction

acknowledge	comment	grant	refute
admit	compare	illustrate	report
argue	contend	imply	respond
assert	deny	note	suggest
believe	dispute	point out	write
claim	emphasize	reason	

TIP: Each documentation style guide has its own rules for what information to include in the parenthetical citation. MLA style requires the author's last name and the page number. APA style requires the author's last name, the year of publication, and the page number (preceded by the abbreviation "p."), separated by commas. Chicago style requires the same information as APA, but only one comma and no "p."

MLA: (Marshall 712)

APA: (Marshall, 2010, p. 712)

Chicago: (Marshall 2010, 712)

Learn and follow the guidelines for your discipline. See [Chapter 22](#) for more information on citations.

Avoid redundancy. If you name the author(s) in the sentence, do not repeat the name(s) in your parenthetical citation.

Unnecessary repetition:

Chang emphasizes that "engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health" (Chang 49).

A quotation that is not integrated into one of the sentences of your essay is called a **dropped quotation** or a **floating quotation**. As you revise your essay, look for any quotation that takes up an entire sentence on its own. Here is an example of a dropped quotation in a student's paragraph:

After my father died, I went through all the classic stages of grief. "Bargaining comes from a feeling of helplessness and gives us a perceived sense of control over something that feels so out of control" (Clarke). All I wanted was to get my father back again.

Notice how the quotation interrupts the flow of the student's narrative about her father's death. It appears to be dropped out of the blue into the essay, and the student hasn't made clear the connection between the quotation and her experience. Therefore, the dropped quotation is jarring for the reader, and it interferes with the coherence of the paragraph. This is why it's important to always integrate quotations.

Quotations and Capitalization

It can be tricky to decide whether the first word of the quotation should be capitalized. The decision depends on how you choose to integrate the quotation into your sentence.

In the example below, notice that the quoted material is

- a. introduced by a “verb of saying” (the type of verb that is used to introduce dialogue in stories, such as *says*, *insists*, *states*, *claims*, *asks*);
and
- b. the verb of saying is followed by a comma; *and*
- c. the quotation itself forms a complete sentence.

Example:

According to Marshall, “Before the creation of organized governmental policing agencies, it was citizens possessing firearms who monitored and maintained the peace.”

In other words, if a sentence is constructed similarly to dialogue, starting with a verb that indicates someone said something, the first word of the quotation should be capitalized.

However, in the example below, the quoted material does *not* form a complete sentence: it is only a portion, or fragment, of the complete sentence in the student’s essay. It is not preceded by a comma. Thus, it does not function like dialogue. Instead, it functions as part of the grammatical structure of the student’s sentence. Therefore, the first word of the quotation is *not* capitalized:

Marshall argues that vigilantism in the Wild West was committed by “citizens possessing firearms who monitored and maintained the peace” (712).

You must make the decision about capitalization based on how the quotation fits and functions in your sentence. However, if this results in the capitalization being different in your sentence from the original, you may need to indicate that you’ve made an alteration to capitalization. Otherwise, you may accidentally misquote the author.

While APA style allows you to change an initial capital letter without indicating that you’ve done so, MLA style requires you to add square brackets to

indicate you've made a change to capitalization. For more on this, see [Altering Quoted Material](#) later in this chapter.

Quotations and Punctuation

For short quotations, use double quotation marks to indicate where the quoted material begins and ends, and cite the name of the author(s) and the page number:

Chang emphasizes that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

Use single quotation marks to indicate a quotation within a quotation. If you quote a passage that already contains a quotation, change the original double quotation marks to single quotation marks and enclose the entire quotation in double quotation marks.

Source: Excerpt from Thomas King's book *The Truth About Stories*

I was invited by a small college in Northern California to be on a panel as part of their “Indian Awareness Week.” There was a “Black Awareness Week” and a “Chicano Awareness Week,” which left, if I've done the math correctly, forty-nine “White Awareness Weeks.”

Student Essay

Thomas King recalls, “I was invited by a small college in Northern California to be on a panel as part of their ‘Indian Awareness Week.’ There was a ‘Black Awareness Week’ and a ‘Chicano Awareness Week,’ which left, if I've done the math correctly, forty-nine ‘White Awareness Weeks’” (62).

Note that in the student's essay, single quotation marks replace the double quotation marks that appeared in King's book. In this example, notice that before the citation, the closing single quotation mark and the closing double quotation mark appear side by side, without space between them.

If the source author is quoting words from another source, it might be necessary to clarify (a) whose words are in quotation marks and (b) which source you found the quotation in. See this example:

Source: Excerpt from Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories*

William Morrell, in his terse verse history of New England, imagined Native people as dangerous:

“They’re wondrous cruel.”

Student Essay

Historians like “William Morrell . . . imagined Native people as dangerous: ‘They’re wondrous cruel’” (qtd. in King 75).

Or

Some historians “imagined Native people as dangerous: ‘They’re wondrous cruel’” (William Morrell qtd. in King 75).

Note that when a parenthetical citation appears at the end of the sentence, it comes *after* the closing quotation marks and *before* the period. Notice that there is no period after *health* and before the citation.

In *Weight Training for Women*, Annie Chang claims that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

Weight Training for Women claims that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise consistently is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (Chang 49).

Long (Block) Quotations

The definition of a “long” quotation varies according to which documentation style you’re using:

- In APA style, a long quotation is more than forty words long.
- In Chicago style, a long quotation is one hundred words or more.
- In MLA style, a long quotation is four or more lines long.

Long quotations should be used even more sparingly than shorter ones. In the majority of your essays, you likely won’t need to include any long quotations at all.

A long quotation should *never* be as long as a page. There are two reasons for this: First, by including a long quotation, you are essentially letting another author do all the thinking and/or writing for you. Remember that your audience wants to read *your* ideas, not someone else’s.

Second, unless all the information and every word in the long quotation is essential and could not be paraphrased (which is unlikely with a long passage), you are not showing your audience you have processed or evaluated the importance of the source's critical information and weeded out the unnecessary information.

If you believe you have found the perfect paragraph to support your ideas, and you decide you really want or need to use the long quotation, see if you can shorten it by removing unnecessary words or complete sentences and putting ellipses in their place. (See [Altering Quoted Material](#) later in this chapter.) This will show your reader that you have put a lot of thought into the use of the quotation.

Formatting Long Quotations

When you quote a longer passage from a source, use special formatting to set off the quoted material. This format is called a **block quotation**:

- Begin the quotation on a new line.
- Indent the left side of the quotation five spaces from the left margin.
- Double-space the quotation.
- Maintain left justification.
- Do not italicize the quotation.
- Do not enclose the block quotation in quotation marks (they are unnecessary because the indentation indicates that this is a quotation).
- The parenthetical citation comes *after* the period that ends the sentence.
- If the quotation contains a paragraph break, indent the first line of the second paragraph another five spaces.

Although Canadian readers are increasingly interested in *regional* literature, scholars have not fully embraced the notion of *provincial* literature:

Because the study of Alberta writing is not a regular feature of academe, . . . acceptance of the concept of Alberta literature as a valid field of study remains an uphill struggle. The weight of historical prejudice and conventional negativity toward provincial identity in literature is a significant barrier. So the concept of Alberta literature remains contested by other boundary concepts and so becomes a work in progress. (Coates and Melynck x)

However, writers/scholars like Pamela Banting and Aritha van Herk are working to break down these barriers. In their work, Banting and

van Herk both *create* specifically Alberta literature and *theorize* about what makes . . .

Integrating Long Quotations

As with short quotations, ensure a long quotation fits into your paragraph. To introduce a long quotation, include a **stem** that is a complete sentence (this can include an attributive tag) followed by a colon (:). The stem is underlined in the example below.

Marshall uses the example of towns in the Wild West:

Much of the population—especially younger males—frequently engaged in violence by participating in saloon fights and shootouts and gun fights. [However,] crimes committed by females, the elderly, or the infirm were rare occasions were much rarer [*sic*] because of those individuals being less likely to frequent such drinking establishments. (725)

This example shows that crime was tied to the consumption of alcohol and, as a result, much of the crime.

In this example, the stem clearly and fluidly introduces the quotation in a grammatically correct way.

TIP: Be wary of quoting from sources at length. Remember, *your* ideas should drive your thesis, and quotations should be used to support and enhance your points. Make sure any lengthy quotations you include serve a clear purpose. Generally, no more than 10 to 15 percent of a paper should consist of quoted material.

How to Alter Quotations

Whether you quote a complete sentence or only part of one, make sure it blends in smoothly with your own sentence or paragraph. Sometimes, that requires making a change to a quotation. For example, if your paragraph is written in the present tense but the quotation is in the past tense, you might need to change the verb tense in the quotation so it will fit into your sentence.

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, and always indicate that you have made a change to the quotation.

Omitting Material

Sometimes, there will be parts of the middle of a quotation that do not directly relate to your point. You can omit these unnecessary words so that the reader will focus on the parts of the quotation that *do* relate to your point. This shows your reader that you have critically and thoroughly examined the contents of this quotation and have chosen only the most important and relevant information. However, you must be sure that the omission doesn't change the essential meaning of the quotation. Use three periods—an ellipsis (. . .)—to indicate that you've omitted a word or phrase; use four (. . . .) when you are removing a section—maybe a complete sentence—that would end in a period.

Original

According to Marshall, “Before the creation of organized governmental policing agencies, it was citizens possessing firearms who monitored and maintained the peace” (712).

With ellipses to indicate an omission

According to Marshall, “Before the creation of organized governmental policing agencies, . . . citizens possessing firearms . . . monitored and maintained the peace” (712).

Notice that the second sentence omits unnecessary words in order to make the quotation more concise.

Remember: you must *not* change the meaning of the quotation or change its context, and you *must* replace the omitted words with ellipses. Otherwise, you are misquoting the author. Remember, misquoting is an academic offense.

For more on the mechanics of ellipses, refer to [Part 6: Ellipses](#).

TIP: Ellipses are normally not necessary at the beginning or the end of a quotation, even when you are only quoting part of a sentence.

Adding Clarifying Material

Occasionally, for the sake of clarity, you'll need to add a word or two to a quotation. Do this sparingly, though, and be careful that you don't change the essential meaning of the quotation.

Use square brackets [] to indicate that you've added material to a quotation. When you add words or phrases to a quotation, you *must* enclose the addition in square brackets to let your reader know you've made changes to the source material you're quoting. Otherwise, you are misquoting the author. In the example below from a student essay, the student's sentence contains a quotation:

Thomas King writes, "Maybe you don't think we deserve the things we have. . . . You don't think we've earned them" (147).

The student realizes that the reader might not be sure whom *we* refers to. To clarify, the student adds explanatory words enclosed in square brackets:

Thomas King writes, "Maybe you don't think we [Indigenous people] deserve the things we have. . . . You don't think we've earned them" (147).

The student adds the term *Indigenous people* to ensure the reader knows whom *we* refers to. The student encloses the term in square brackets to indicate that the term did not appear in the original text—it was added by the student.

Altering Quoted Material

Occasionally, for the sake of clarity or grammatical correctness, you'll need to change a word or a part of a word in a quotation.

When you alter a quotation, you *must* enclose the alteration in square brackets [] to let your reader know you've made changes to the source material you're quoting. Be careful that you don't change the meaning of the quotation. Otherwise, you risk misquoting the author.

Consider the examples below from a student essay about Sean Michaels's novel *Us Conductors*, which addresses matters of verb tense, pronoun agreement, and capitalization.

Altering Verb Tense

You may need to alter verb tense to make a quotation fit with the rest of your sentence in a grammatically correct way.

Original Text

I hesitated. I glanced back into the safety of the tavern, where drunks were slouched against the tables.

In this sentence from the student’s essay, there is a verb tense error because the student is writing in the present tense, but the story is told in the past tense:

Almost immediately, Lev stops and “glanced back into the safety of the tavern” (Michaels 8), which foreshadows his regret.

To fix the verb tense error, the student must change the tense of the verb *glanced*:

Almost immediately, Lev stops and “glance[s] back into the safety of the tavern” (Michaels 8), which foreshadows his regret.

Notice that the student encloses the *s* in square brackets to indicate the alteration. Only the part of the word that has been changed should be enclosed in brackets.

Altering Pronouns

You may need to alter a pronoun to make a quotation fit with the rest of your sentence in a grammatically correct way.

Original Text

I kept seeing the whirl of the crowd, the way I had clutched my fists and run. My mindless fear.

In this sentence from the student’s essay, there is a pronoun agreement error because the student is writing from the third-person point of view, but Michaels writes the story from the first-person point of view:

After the incident, Lev finds that he cannot forget “the way I clutched my fists” (Michaels 10).

The mixed pronouns are sure to create confusion for the reader. To fix the pronoun agreement error, the student must change the first-person pronouns *I* and *my* to the third-person pronouns *he* and *his*:

After the incident, Lev finds that he cannot forget “the way [he] clutched [his] fists” (Michaels 10).

Notice that the student encloses the altered pronouns in square brackets.

Altering Capitalization

Different style guides have different guidelines for changing capitalization in a quotation. For example, APA style allows a writer to change the capitalization

of the initial word in a quotation without indicating the alteration. However, MLA-style guidelines require a writer to indicate changes to capitalization with square brackets. Consider this example, again from Sean Michaels's *Us Conductors*:

Original Text

The song never strains or falters; it persists, stays, keeps, lasts, lingers.
It will never abandon you.

In this sentence from the student's essay, the capital letter in *the* is not correct midsentence:

Michaels writes that "The song never strains or falters" (18).

To fix the capitalization error, the student must change the capitalization:

Michaels writes that "[t]he song never strains or falters" (18).

Notice that the student encloses only the letter *t* in square brackets to indicate the change in capitalization.

Adding Emphasis

Occasionally a student will want to add emphasis to a quotation by italicizing one or two words. You *must* indicate that the italics have been added and were not part of the original quotation. You cannot simply bold or italicize part of a quotation without indicating that you've done so.

For example, in a gender studies paper, a student may want to point out that a Jack London quotation uses the word *man* rather than being gender inclusive. Note the addition of the words "emphasis added" in parentheses, according to MLA-style guidelines:

Jack London wrote, "The proper function of *man* is to live, not to exist"
(emphasis added).

Jack London wrote, "The proper function of *man* is to live, not to exist"
(qtd. in Smith 412; emphasis added).

In APA style, the phrase "emphasis added" is to be placed immediately after the word emphasized and enclosed in square brackets:

Jack London wrote, “The proper function of *man* [emphasis added] is to live, not to exist.”

Jack London wrote, “The proper function of *man* [emphasis added] is to live, not to exist” (qtd. in Smith, 2023, p. 412).

Notice that the simple addition of italics changes the reader’s focus and the meaning of the sentence. No longer is the reader focused on the ideas implied in the words *live* and *exist*, which are at the essence of the meaning of the original sentence. Now the reader’s attention is focused on London’s use of the word *man*.

Add emphasis to quotations very sparingly, if at all—only when necessary for a particular purpose.

Avoiding the Overuse of Square Brackets

While square brackets are required for alterations to quotations, a sentence with a lot of square brackets can be distracting.

The main five types of people found on online dating platforms are
 “[t]he [p]laya[,] [t]he [r]escuer[,] [t]he [r]omantic[,] [t]he [l]iar[,]
 [and] [t]he [n]arcissist” (Jones).

See how tiring it is to read a sentence cluttered by square brackets? When possible, reduce the number of square brackets by reconstructing sentences:

Michaels writes that “[t]he song never strains or falters” (18).

Better: Michaels writes that the “song never strains or falters” (18).

In the example below, a student makes an appropriate number of alterations to a quotation. The student interviewed a dietitian named Dana Kwon, whom the student quoted verbatim in his research paper. Read an excerpt from the interview and the writer’s use of it, which follows:

Source Interview

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.

Integrated Altered Quotation

Registered dietitian Dana Kwon admits, “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 the writer smoothly integrates the quoted material by starting the sentence with an introductory phrase. She uses ellipses to indicate that she’s removed some words. She uses square brackets to indicate that she’s replaced the pronoun *they* with *low-carbohydrate diets* for the sake of clarity. The use of an ellipsis and brackets does not change the source’s meaning, and they are not so numerous that they will distract the reader.

Indicating an Error in a Quotation

The Latin word *sic* (meaning “thus, so”) in a quotation indicates a spelling error or grammatical error in the original quotation. This shows your reader that the mistake is not yours—it appeared in the original text.

A famous typo in a published work is from Karen Harper’s novel *The Queen’s Governess*: “I tugged on the gown and sleeves I’d discarded like a wonton [*sic*] last night to fall into John’s arms.”

However, essay writers should use discretion when using *sic* because it can give the impression that the essay writer is unnecessarily and pretentiously pointing out another writer’s error. Often, it is more tactful and professional to find ways to avoid using *sic*, such as paraphrasing instead of quoting. Or if you’re sure that you know what the intended word was, simply provide the correct word/spelling in square brackets.

Sic can also be used for more political reasons, to indicate an old-fashioned or out-of-date idea. For example, in this case, the student uses *sic* to indicate that the original quotation is not gender inclusive:

Jack London wrote, “The proper function of man [*sic*] is to live, not to exist.”

However, unless this paper is written for a gender studies class and is specifically about gender, it might be better *not* to draw attention to the word *man*, which might distract the reader. Otherwise, the reader will focus more on the use of the word *man* than on the key idea of the quotation: the difference between *living* and *existing*.

Better alternative:

Jack London wrote, “The proper function of [humans] is to live, not to exist.”

Better yet:

Jack London wrote that a human's purpose "is to live, not to exist."

Finally, *sic* should not be used to point out slang or nonstandard English.

PRACTICE 22.1

Carefully read the following paragraph from the book *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*, in preparation for quoting from it.

Because the study of Alberta writing is not a regular feature of academe, though Alberta writers are studied in other contexts and under different rubrics, acceptance of the concept of Alberta literature as a valid field of study remains an uphill struggle. The weight of historical prejudice and conventional negativity toward provincial identity in literature is a significant barrier. So the concept of Alberta literature remains contested by other boundary concepts and so becomes a work in progress.

Source: Coates, Donna, and George Melnyk, editors. *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*. AU Press, 2009, p. x.

- A. As you read the paragraph, identify a particular phrase that you would like to quote. Look for a phrase that not only contains an important idea but is also written in such a way that you could not do it justice by paraphrasing it. Don't choose an entire sentence; choose only the most important phrase.
- B. Write a sentence of your own that incorporates the quoted phrase. Enclose the quoted words in quotation marks.
- C. Reread your sentence and the original sentence to ensure that you quoted accurately. Consider the following:
 - The quotation accurately replicates Coates and Melnyk's phrasing word for word.
 - The quotation flows smoothly within the rest of my sentence. (Hint: read the sentence aloud, ignoring the quotation marks for a moment. Is the grammar of the sentence, including the quotation, correct?)
 - If any alterations to the quotation are required for the sake of grammar or clarity, I have used ellipses or square brackets to indicate the alterations.

- The way I've presented the quotation in my sentence does not misrepresent Coates and Melnyk's original meaning.
 - The sentence structure in the rest of my sentence—the part I wrote myself—is not copied from Coates and Melnyk's paragraph.
- D. Add a citation that acknowledges the source of the ideas.

* * *

Paraphrasing and quoting are necessary skills for writing research papers. Paraphrasing requires you think critically about the source material so that you can express it in your own words and with your own sentence structures. As we've said, in most situations, aim to paraphrase more than you quote. Quote only when the author's wording is so good that you couldn't do the idea justice by paraphrasing it. If you paraphrase and quote wisely and integrate the ideas and words smoothly into your sentences and paragraphs, your research papers will become more sophisticated and convincing.

In [Chapter 22](#), we'll explore the last step of the process of writing a research paper: documentation. Documentation involves ensuring that you've avoided accidental plagiarism and that you've correctly acknowledged and cited all the research material.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- To paraphrase effectively, use your own wording and sentence structure.
- Cite the source of paraphrased ideas or information.
- Use attributive tags to introduce quotations and paraphrased material.
- Quotations should be integrated, not dropped.
- Short quotations are enclosed in quotation marks.
- Long quotations are presented in block format, which requires special indentation and punctuation.
- Ellipses and brackets must be used to indicate words that are omitted or changed for conciseness or grammatical correctness. Alterations should not change the meaning of the quotation.
- Single quotation marks indicate a quotation within a quotation.
- Each quotation requires a citation (either in text or in parentheses) that includes the author's last name and the page number, if available.
- In a research essay, quote less and paraphrase more!

Documentation

Plagiarism, Citations, and the List of Sources

Learning Objectives

- Identify two forms of plagiarism and how to avoid them
- Explain the importance of academic integrity and the potential consequences of academic dishonesty
- Identify when citations are needed
- Construct effective in-text citations and parenthetical citations
- Construct a complete list of research sources
- Consult documentation style guides for guidance on formatting details

Documentation refers to the practice of acknowledging where you found the ideas, information, and words you present in your essay so that your reader knows exactly which ideas are your own and which ideas came from other sources—and in the case of information from other sources, documentation tells your reader precisely who that information came from and exactly where you found it.

This information is presented in a standardized way among all members of a particular field—whether they are authors, professors, or students—so that all members of the community can easily interpret one another’s work. This standardized way of communicating information about research is called a **documentation style**. There are many documentation styles, but three of the most common are

APA style: developed by the American Psychology Association, this style is used in nursing, education, Indigenous studies, psychology, and other social sciences.

Chicago style: developed by the University of Chicago Press, this style is used in business, fine arts, and publishing.

MLA style: developed by the Modern Languages Association, this style is used in language and literature courses and cultural studies.

While APA, Chicago, and MLA are the most commonly used formatting styles in post-secondary studies, there are many other formatting styles, including APSA, IEEE, AMA, NLM, ACS, and AP. If you're not sure which style you're required to use, ask your instructor early on in your research process because the required style will affect many aspects of your research and writing.

Each documentation style has specific guidelines for what information to include about a research source and how to present that information, including rules for format, capitalization, punctuation, italicization, and spacing. The conventions are published in **style guides:** handbooks for researchers that explain the details of each documentation style. The more carefully you follow these conventions, the more easily members of your academic community, including classmates and instructors, will be able to interpret your essay.

A well-documented essay tells your reader that the ideas found in your essay are reliable. It conveys that you have honestly acknowledged the source of all words and ideas that are not your own. A well-documented essay indicates that you have conducted your work with integrity and professionalism.

If you followed the advice offered in [Chapter 20](#), you already have all the information you need to document the sources for your essay. In this chapter, you will learn how to avoid misusing sources, and you will learn how to identify and avoid plagiarism. You will learn how to cite sources correctly throughout the body of an essay, and you will learn how to compile the final list of sources to be submitted with your essay.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

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.

What Is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is the act of presenting someone else's intellectual property as your own. Put more simply, plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas or words and pretending that they are your own. Plagiarism is considered intellectual theft, so it is a serious academic offense that can result in a failing mark on an essay, a failing grade in a course, or expulsion from a university.

Sometimes a writer plagiarizes on purpose—for instance, by copying and pasting or purchasing an essay from a website and submitting it as original work. This often happens because a student has not managed their time and has left the paper to the last minute or has struggled with the writing process or the topic. Any of these can lead to desperation, which tempts a student to take someone else's ideas and submit them as the student's own.

In other cases, a writer may accidentally plagiarize due to carelessness, haste, or misunderstanding. For instance, a writer may be unable to provide a complete, accurate citation because of neglecting to 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.

It is important for students to know that *intentional and accidental plagiarism are both treated the same way* by instructors and institutions. It is not a valid defense to say that plagiarism was accidental. Once you submit an assignment, you are responsible for any plagiarism it contains—whether it was intentional or not.

The concepts and strategies discussed in this section connect to a larger issue—academic integrity. Like most other segments of society, the academic community highly values honesty. It is a point of honour taken seriously in every academic discipline and career field. 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.

Consequences of Plagiarism

Not only can plagiarism result in a failing mark on an essay, a failing grade in a course, or expulsion from a university, but there are other consequences of plagiarism, whether or not the student is caught:

- Plagiarism infringes on the moral rights and legal rights of the original author.
- A student who plagiarizes may gain an unfair advantage over other students.

- A student who plagiarizes may not learn or understand the course material and may not be well prepared for further studies or for a career.
- Plagiarism damages trust between the student and the reader and between the student and the instructor.
- The investigation of plagiarism takes up a lot of an instructor's time—time that would be better spent teaching or researching.
- The investigation of plagiarism costs an institute a great deal of time and money.
- Plagiarism damages the reputation of not only the student but also others in the field or the institution.
- Academic integrity violations have serious educational and professional consequences. Students who are found guilty of academic integrity violations face consequences ranging from a failing grade to expulsion. Even when cheating and plagiarism go undetected, they still result in a student's failure to learn necessary research and writing skills. Employees may be fired for plagiarism and do irreparable damage to their professional reputations. In short, plagiarism is never worth the risk.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Carefully organize your time, your research notes, and your writing process to guard against plagiarism. As you conduct research, maintain a detailed working bibliography, and take careful and accurate notes, keeping track of the sources of all ideas and noting when you've paraphrased and when you've quoted. Allow plenty of time to write your essay so there is no temptation to cut corners. After you've written your essay, check the original sources again to clear up any uncertainties. Double-check that you've included all sources on your references list.

To avoid plagiarism, follow these guidelines:

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

The principles of plagiarism and academic integrity are consistent across disciplines and across post-secondary institutions. However, it's also a good idea to carefully study your institution's policies on plagiarism so that you know what is expected of you.

When to Cite

Any idea or fact taken from a research source must be cited in both the body of your paper and the list of sources. The only exceptions are facts or general statements that are common knowledge.

Common Knowledge

Common knowledge refers to facts or general statements that are frequently 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.

One method that can help you determine what is common knowledge is to imagine you are surveying one hundred average Canadians on the street. You ask them about a fact that is in a sentence in your essay. If 90 percent of the people would know the information, it is likely common knowledge. If only 10 percent of the people would know the information, it is likely *not* common knowledge.

For example, if you asked one hundred average people on the streets of a Canadian city who the current prime minister of Canada is, 90 percent of people would know the answer. This is common knowledge, so there is no need to cite a source.

However, if you ask those same people what the current prime minister's policy is on the Safe Third Country Agreement, only 10 percent of the people might know the answer. Therefore, this is not common knowledge, so you must cite a source.

Sometimes, when writing about subjects they know very well, students assume that their own knowledge is common knowledge. As you write, imagine the scenario above: interviewing people on the street. This will help you determine whether your knowledge is indeed common knowledge or whether you need to cite a source to corroborate your knowledge.

When in doubt, cite!

Fair Dealing

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 dealing are reasonably straightforward.

Writers may quote from or paraphrase material from previously published works without formally obtaining the copyright holder's permission. **Fair dealing** in copyright law allows a writer to legitimately use brief excerpts from source material to support and develop their own ideas. However, the writer *must* cite the source of those 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 excessively, to the extent that large sections of the writing are unoriginal, is not fair dealing.

We watched Jorge begin to write about Indigenous storytelling and culture in [Chapter 8](#). As he continues to write his essay about the importance of storytelling in Indigenous culture, Jorge is careful to enclose all quoted words in quotation marks and to cite sources correctly. Occasionally, however, he catches himself quoting a source at length. As he reviews the first draft, Jorge notices that he quotes extensively from one source in the first body paragraph:

Cajete writes, "Storytelling and experience form the foundation for much traditional Native American teaching" (128). Through stories, "skills in listening, thinking, and imaging are creatively moulded" (128). Stories teach "models of behaviour, the significance of ritual, the basic realities of human existence, and natural creative processes" (128). Many Indigenous myths concern "paradigms of proper relationships to plants, animals, and all of nature, as well as to the consequences of a poor relationship to nature" (129). Thus, "myth provides a vehicle for the transmission of generations of 'understandings' concerning the natural environment" (Cajete 130).

Source: Cajete, Gregory. *Igniting the Sparkle: An Indigenous Science Education Model*. Kivaki Press, 1999.

Upon reviewing the paragraph, Jorge realizes that he has drifted into unoriginal writing. Most of the paragraph is taken verbatim from a couple of pages of a book by a single source: Tewa scholar Gregory A. Cajete. Although Jorge enclosed the quoted material in quotation marks, he knows this is not an appropriate way to use the research in his paper. This paragraph does not demonstrate any critical thought about the topic of education via Indigenous storytelling. Instead, Jorge is merely parroting the ideas of one source. Jorge has lost control of the direction of his paragraph and his argument because the quotations have taken over. The paragraph is more Cajete's paragraph than it is Jorge's.

Jorge realizes he does not need to quote the source so extensively. As he revises the paragraph, he paraphrases the most important ideas. He also includes a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph and a closing sentence at the end.

First, storytelling is integral to the Indigenous approach to education and learning. Tewa scholar Gregory A. Cajete explains that through storytelling, Indigenous people learn skills needed in daily life, such as listening skills, thinking skills, creativity, and rituals (128). Moreover, the telling of stories is the key method for imparting important knowledge about the bigger aspects of life, such as the best ways for humans to interact with nature and the repercussions of failing to interact with nature properly (Cajete 129). Thus, stories convey essential information about all aspects of life, from daily survival skills to more abstract principles about how to live and be in the world to maintain harmony with the environment—but this is not the only role of stories in Indigenous cultures.

The revised paragraph begins with a topic sentence that states the main idea of the paragraph and relates it to the thesis. While the bulk of the paragraph still comprises information from Cajete's book, Jorge has paraphrased and summarized the main ideas to show that he has understood them and reflected on them. He adds a closing sentence that sums up and transitions to the next body paragraph in the essay. This way, Jorge uses his research sources fairly and appropriately. He has also retained control of his argument: the paragraph now seems like *Jorge's*, even with the inclusion of ideas from research. Therefore, it functions more effectively in his essay.

Citations

Documentation has two components: (a) citations placed throughout the essay to indicate which ideas came from which sources and (b) a bibliography or reference list at the end of the essay that provides the complete list of research sources used in the essay—and tells the reader how to find the source.

Throughout the research and writing process, you must be scrupulous about documenting information, ideas, and words taken from research sources for these reasons:

- To clearly distinguish between your ideas and the ideas of other authors
- To give credit to authors or researchers for their ideas and words

- To make it easy for your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic
- To avoid accidental plagiarism

As you learned in [Chapter 20: Managing Information from Research](#), as you conduct research, it's important to maintain a working bibliography that includes all the required information about each research source. You will need the information as you write the essay and begin to document sources.

Always make sure you know exactly which style guide or formatting guide (and which edition of it) your instructor wants you to use. Style guides are regularly updated and revised, which is why this book does not include an extensive section on the details of using specific guides.

Citations are placed throughout an essay to tell the reader which information in the essay came from which source. Essentially, a citation has two purposes:

1. It tells your reader that the information, idea, or words in a particular sentence of your essay came from another source.
2. It tells your reader which entry on the references list contains more information about the source.

This section covers the nitty-gritty details of citations. You will learn how to format citations for different types of source materials, whether you are citing brief quotations, long quotations, or paraphrased ideas. You will also learn techniques to introduce quoted and paraphrased material effectively. Keep this section handy as a reference.

The Basics

A citation usually contains one or two key pieces of information to link the citation to a source. It doesn't contain more information than that because a longer citation would interrupt the flow of an essay. Think of a citation as a code or a shortcut that leads the reader to the list of sources, where there is more detailed information about the source.

Here are some guidelines for constructing a typical citation:

- Citations include the last name(s) of the author(s).
- APA-style citations include the year of publication, but MLA style does not.
- For paraphrasing, MLA-style citations require the page number (if the source is paginated), but APA style does not.
- For quoting, both MLA style and APA style require page numbers (if the source is paginated).

Here are sample citations for information found on page 128 of Gregory A. Cajete's book *Igniting the Sparkle: An Indigenous Science Education Model*:

	MLA Style	APA Style
For paraphrased information	Cajete 128	Cajete, 1999
For quoted words	Cajete 128	Cajete, 1999, p. 128

Note that the MLA-style citation does not contain commas between the author and page number, but the APA-style citation requires commas between each element of the citation.

TIP: Although APA-style guidelines do not require writers to provide page numbers for material that is not directly quoted, your instructor may wish you to do so. Check with your instructors about their preferences.

There are two main types of citations that appear within an essay, distinguished by their function and placement in a sentence. The two types are in-text citations and parenthetical citations.

In-Text Citations

In-text citations appear within a sentence in the essay. An in-text citation

- a. tells your reader that the idea in the sentence came from a particular source
- b. links to a specific entry on the references list.

An in-text citation is a good choice when you want to emphasize the source of the information—especially if the source is a reputable expert or is famous.

The first word(s) in the in-text citation must be exactly the same as the first word(s) of the corresponding entry on the list of sources. The reader will see the word in the citation, and to get more information about the source, he will turn to the list of sources, scan the left margin, and look for the word that appeared in the citation. If the citation and the entry don't match, the reader will struggle to identify the correct source.

MLA-Style In-Text Citations

An MLA-style in-text citation includes the name(s) of the author(s), placed in the sentence:

Chang asserts, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health.”

Brundage and Lahey write, “Any loose or hasty attitude toward full and accurate citation of your sources may lead to charges of plagiarism.”

If the source is paginated (i.e., has page numbers), place the page number at the end of the sentence, enclosed in parentheses:

Chang asserts, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

Brundage and Lahey write, “Any loose or hasty attitude toward full and accurate citation of your sources may lead to charges of plagiarism” (257).

Note that the period comes *after* the parenthetical citation, not before.

TIP: The first time you refer to an author in one of your sentences, include the author’s first name:

Personal trainer Annie Chang asserts, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (49).

After that first time, the last name is sufficient.

To see more variations in MLA-style citations, refer to the [Sample List of Sources](#) at the end of this chapter.

APA-Style In-Text Citations

An APA-style in-text citation includes the name(s) of the author(s) followed by the year of publication in parentheses:

Chang (2008) asserted, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health.”

Brundage and Lahey (2012) wrote, “Any loose or hasty attitude toward full and accurate citation of your sources may lead to charges of plagiarism.”

If the source is paginated (i.e., has page numbers), place the page number at the end of the sentence, enclosed in parentheses and preceded by the abbreviation “p.”:

Chang (2008) asserted, “Engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (p. 49).

Brundage and Lahey (2012) wrote, “Any loose or hasty attitude toward full and accurate citation of your sources may lead to charges of plagiarism” (p. 257).

Note that the period comes *after* the parenthetical citation, not before.

TIP: While MLA style asks for present-tense verbs (e.g., *asserts*) to introduce quotations, APA style asks for past-tense verbs (e.g., *asserted*).

To see more variations in APA-style citations, refer to the [Sample List of Sources](#) at the end of this chapter.

Parenthetical Citations

Parenthetical citations appear at the end of a sentence in the essay, and the entire citation is enclosed in parentheses. Like an in-text citation, a parenthetical citation

- a. tells your reader that the idea in the sentence came from a particular source
- b. links to a specific entry on the references list.

A parenthetical citation is a good choice when you want to minimize interruptions in the sentence and when you want your reader to focus on the ideas in the sentence rather than the source. Let’s look at the same sentences from the

previous section with the source information placed in parenthetical citations instead of in-text citations.

Remember: the first word(s) in the citation must be exactly the same as the first word(s) of the corresponding entry on the list of sources. The reader will see the word in the citation, and to get more information about the source, he will turn to the list of sources, scan the left margin, and look for the word that appeared in the citation. If the citation and the entry don't "match," the reader will struggle to identify the correct source.

MLA-Style Parenthetical Citations

A basic MLA-style citation includes the author's last name and the page number (if the source is paginated).

Many experts believe that "[e]ngaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health" (Chang 49).

As you learned in [Chapter 22](#), MLA style requires you to indicate that you've changed the capitalization of the initial word of the quotation.

If the source was written by two authors, include both authors' names and insert the word *and*:

It is worth remembering that "[a]ny loose or hasty attitude toward full and accurate citation of your sources may lead to charges of plagiarism" (Brundage and Lahey 257).

If the source was written by three or more authors, include the first author's name and then the abbreviation "et al." to indicate the other authors:

The teaching of composition has been greatly affected by recent developments in media (Wysocki et al. 4).

If no author is listed for an article, begin with a shortened version of the article title, enclosed in quotation marks. In the case of a book or report, use italics instead of quotation marks.

Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild asked the provincial government to create a council for reconciliation ("Former Treaty 6").

APA-Style Parenthetical Citations

A basic APA-style citation includes the author's last name, the year of publication, and for quotations, the page number (if the source is paginated).

Many experts believe that “engaging in weight-bearing exercise is one of the single best things women can do to maintain good health” (Chang, 2008, p. 49).

As you learned in [Chapter 22](#), APA style does not require you to indicate that you've changed the capitalization of the initial word of the quotation.

If the source was written by two authors, include both authors' names and insert an ampersand:

It is worth remembering that “[a]ny loose or hasty attitude toward full and accurate citation of your sources may lead to charges of plagiarism” (Brundage & Lahey, 2012, p. 257).

Note that the final period comes *after* the parenthetical citation, not before.

If the source was written by three or more authors, include the first author's name and then the abbreviation “et al.” to indicate the other authors:

The teaching of composition has been greatly affected by recent developments in media (Wysocki et al., 2004).

Note that in this case, because the writer is paraphrasing, no page number is required in APA style.

If no author is listed for an article, begin with a shortened version of the article title, enclosed in quotation marks. In the case of a book or report, use italics instead of quotation marks.

Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild asked the provincial government to create a council for reconciliation (“Former Treaty 6,” 2023).

List of Sources

The second important component of documentation is the list of sources at the end of the essay. Here, you will provide your readers with complete information about each source so that if they wish to, they can look up the articles and books that you've cited.

To create your list of sources, start with the working bibliography you kept as you conducted your research. Now carefully cross-reference this list with the content of your essay. Any source that you cited in your essay must remain on the list. Any source that you did not cite in your essay should be removed. In both MLA- and APA-style assignments, you are required to only list the sources you directly referred to or cited within your essay. Omit any sources that you didn't mention in your essay.

TIP: Keep a backup copy of your working bibliography in another file in case you delete a source that you end up needing.

Now that you've identified which research sources need to be on the list, you will need to format the list of sources according to the documentation style that you've chosen.

In MLA style, the list of sources is titled **Works Cited**. In APA style, it is titled **References**. For both MLA and APA style, follow these general guidelines for formatting:

- Each entry should begin with the name(s) of the author(s).
- If no author is listed, begin with the title of the source.
- Arrange all the entries in alphabetical order according to the first letter of the first word of the entry.
- Evenly double-space the entire page, but do not insert extra blank lines between entries.
- Apply a hanging indent to each entry (your word-processing software will do this for you: first click and drag to select the entries, then select Format > Paragraph > Indentation > Special > Hanging).
- Each entry should contain all the required information for that source (see [Table 20.5](#) and [Table 20.6](#)) formatted according to the guidelines of your chosen documentation style.
- Insert only one space after a period or comma.
- Italicize the titles of longer stand-alone texts, such as books, magazines, newspapers, and scholarly journals.
- Do not italicize the titles of shorter texts that appear within larger ones, such as articles, poems, or stories.
- Pay special attention to the style guide's requirements for punctuation, capitalization, spacing, and italicization.

Carefully examine the sample lists of sources on the next two pages. The samples illustrate how to format entries for the following common types of research sources:

- Book with one author
- Book, edition other than the first
- Edited anthology
- Article/chapter in an anthology
- Article in a scholarly journal
- Article in a print newspaper or magazine
- Article in an online newspaper or magazine
- Article on a website
- Article with no author listed
- Source with multiple authors listed

Although both lists contain the same research sources, one is formatted in MLA style and one is formatted in APA style. Carefully examine differences in

- the order of items within each entry
- the inclusion of first names or initials
- the representation of multiple authors and use of et al.
- the position of the date of publication
- the use of the word *and* or the ampersand symbol between authors' names
- the use of quotation marks
- the use of capitalization
- the use of italicization
- the use of punctuation, particularly quotation marks, commas, and periods
- the use of abbreviations
- the use of boldface

These details matter! The more closely the format of your list of sources matches the conventions of the style you've chosen, the more easily your reader will be able to read and interpret your list of sources.

TIP: Before formatting the documentation of your essay, refer to the assignment instructions and the most recent edition of the style guide. If you have questions, ask your instructor. Avoid assuming you already know how to format the documentation in your essay. Look it up!

Sample MLA-Style List of Sources and Citations

Study the sample MLA-style works cited list, which has been formatted according to the guidelines in the 9th edition of the *MLA Handbook*, which came out in 2021. Style guides are updated every few years, so to find up-to-date information, refer to the most recent *MLA Handbook* or to Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) at owl.purdue.edu/.

WORKS CITED

- Booth, Wayne C. "The Rhetorical Stance." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1963, pp. 139–145.
- Coates, Donna, and George Melnyk, editors. *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*. AU Press, 2009.
- "Former Treaty 6 Grand Chief Calls for Council on Reconciliation." *CBC News*, 20 Apr. 2023, www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/wilton-littlechild-unpfii-alberta-reconciliation-1.6816883. Accessed 2 May 2023.
- Hill, Don. "Listening to Stones: Learning in Leroy Little Bear's Laboratory." *Alberta Views*, 1 Sep. 2008, pp. 40–45.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. "I Have a Dream." 28 Aug. 1963. *National Public Radio*, 16 Jan. 2023, www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety. Accessed 1 Mar. 2023.
- King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Anansi Press, 2003.
- Ruffo, Armand Garnet, and Katherena Vermette, editors. *An Anthology of Indigenous Literatures in English*. 4th ed., Oxford UP, 2013.
- Seesequasis, Paul. "The Republic of Trickster." *An Anthology of Indigenous Literatures in English*, edited by Armand Garnet Ruffo and Katherena Vermette, 4th ed., Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 428–433.
- Wysocki, Anne Frances, et al. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Utah State UP, 2004.

TIP: In an MLA-style article title or book title, capitalize all nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns. Enclose the titles of shorter texts in quotation marks.

Note the correct MLA-style citation for each of the above sources, to be used in cases of both paraphrasing and quoting:

Table 22.1: Sample MLA-Style Citations

Citation	Notes
(Booth 140)	For a standard citation, include the author's last name and the page number (if available).
(Coates and Melnyk ix)	When a source has two authors/editors, include both authors'/editors' last names.
("Former Treaty 6")	If no author is listed, include the first few words of title, enclosed in quotation marks. (This source is not paginated.)
(Hill 42)	If a magazine or newspaper article is paginated, include the page number.
(M. L. King) (T. King)	(This source is not paginated.) When citing two authors with the same last name, include the authors' initials to distinguish between the two.
(Ruffo and Vermette 3)	When citing a book in an edition other than the first, the edition number is not included in the citation.
(Seesequasis 431)	When citing an article in an anthology, cite the name of the author who wrote the words/ideas you're citing, not the editors of the book.
(Wysocki et al. 29)	When a source lists three or more authors, list the first author's name, then the abbreviation <i>et al.</i>

Sample APA-Style List of Sources and Citations

Study the sample APA-style references list, which has been formatted according to the guidelines in the 7th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, which came out in 2019. Style guides are updated every few years, so to find up-to-date information, refer to the most recent *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* or to Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) at owl.purdue.edu/.

REFERENCES

- Booth, W. C. (1963). The rhetorical stance. *College Composition and Communication*, 14(3), 139–145.
- Coates, D., & Melnyk, G. (Eds.). (2009). *Wild words: Essays on Alberta literature*. AU Press.

- Former Treaty 6 grand chief calls for council on reconciliation.* (2023, April 20). CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/wilton-littlechild-unpfii-alberta-reconciliation-1.6816883>.
- Hill, D. (2008, September 1). "Listening to stones: Learning in Leroy Little Bear's laboratory." *Alberta Views*, 40–45.
- King, M. L., Jr. (2023, January 16). *I have a dream*. National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety> (Original work published 1963).
- King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: A Native narrative*. Anansi Press.
- Ruffo, A. G., & Vermette, K. (Eds.). (2013). *An anthology of Indigenous literatures in English* (4th ed.). Oxford UP.
- Seesequasis, P. (2013). The Republic of Trickster. In A. G. Ruffo & K. Vermette (Eds.), *An anthology of Indigenous literatures in English* (4th ed., pp. 428–433). Oxford UP.
- Wysocki, A. F., Johnson-Eilola, J., Selfe, C. L., & Sirc, G. (2004). *Writing new media: Theory and applications for expanding the teaching of composition*. Utah State UP.

TIP: In an APA-style article title or book title, capitalize only the first word of the title, the first word of the subtitle, and proper nouns (if any).

Note the correct APA-style citation for each of the sources on the references list.

TIP: Remember, the first word of a citation must be the same as the first word of the corresponding entry in the list of sources.

Table 22.2: Sample APA-Style Citations

Citation for Paraphrasing	Citation for Quoting	Notes
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Citation for Paraphrasing	Citation for Quoting	Notes
(Booth, 1963)	(Booth, 1963, p. 140)	For a standard citation, include the author's last name, the year, and the page number (if available).
(Coates & Melnyk, 2009)	(Coates & Melnyk, 2009, p. ix)	When a source lists two authors, include both authors' last names. Note the ampersand.
("Former Treaty 6," 2023)	("Former Treaty 6," 2023)	When no author is listed, include the first few words of the article title, enclosed in quotation marks.
(Hill, 2008)	(Hill, 2008, p. 42)	If a newspaper or magazine article is paginated, include the page number in the citation for a quotation.
(King, 1963/2023)	(King, 1963/2023)	For republished texts, first include the original date of publication, then the year of the source you used.
(King, 2003)	(King, 2003, p. 67)	When citing two authors with the same last name, the year of publication distinguishes the two sources.
(Ruffo & Vermette, 2013)	(Ruffo & Vermette, 2013, p. 3)	When citing a book in an edition other than the first, the edition number is not included in the citation.
(Seesequasis, 2013)	(Seesequasis, 2013, p. 431)	When citing an article in an anthology, cite the name of the author who wrote the words/ ideas you're citing, not the editors of the book.
(Wysocki et al., 2004)	(Wysocki et al., 2004, p. 29)	When a source lists three or more authors, include the first author's name, then the abbreviation <i>et al.</i>

Of course, these brief examples do not include all types of sources that you might encounter in your essay or all the variations that may appear within sources. Also, formatting guidelines change with each new edition of a style guide, so to get up-to-date information about formatting requirements, refer to the official style guide for your documentation style or to Purdue University's Online Writing Lab website: owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ideas, information, and words taken from other sources must be cited in the body of the paper and in the references section.
- Always represent material from research sources accurately.
- Plagiarism has serious academic and professional consequences. To avoid accidental plagiarism, keep research materials organized, understand guidelines for fair dealing, common knowledge, and the appropriate citation of sources, and review the paper to make sure these guidelines are followed.
- Accidental and intentional plagiarism are treated equally by most institutions.
- Citations tell a reader where ideas, information, or quoted words came from.
- A list of sources shows a reader all the materials you used to write the essay, and it helps the reader access them.
- Carefully follow the guidelines of the documentation style you've chosen to ensure documentation is clear and correct. Refer to appropriate resources for complete, up-to-date guidelines.

PART VI

Writer's Handbook

Although this part of *Read, Think, Write* is not meant to be a fully comprehensive guide to English grammar, mechanics, and style, we do hope that it will serve as a useful support for those who are relatively new to the language, those who learned to write some time ago, and those who just want to brush up on their awareness of all these peculiarly English conventions and the many mistakes everyone can make. Be it comma splices or a misplaced modifier, the wrong word in the right place, or when it's “*i* before *e*” or “*e* before *i*,” it is easy to make mistakes. This guide will help you choose words more carefully and reduce the number of distracting errors in your writing so that you can present your good ideas in their very best form in preparation for being read by others.

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Writing Style

Learning Objectives

- Use a dictionary and thesaurus to ensure the words you use have the meaning that best matches the intended meaning of your sentence
- Identify connotations and decide whether a word, based on its connotations, is suitable for your purpose and audience
- Determine how to avoid slang, jargon, colloquialisms, clichés, and vague words in your writing
- Identify commonly confused words and use strategies to avoid them
- Effectively choose words and sentence structures to communicate tone and create a relationship between the writer and their audience
- Identify how different wording can change angles of vision and impact readers
- Apply techniques to demonstrate different angles of vision and create objective writing regardless of the specific point of view

Just as a mason uses bricks to build sturdy homes, writers use words to build successful sentences, paragraphs, and essays. Consider the construction of a building. Builders need to use tough, reliable materials to build a solid and structurally sound skyscraper. From the foundation to the roof and every floor in between, every part is necessary. Writers need to use strong, meaningful words from the first sentence to the last and in every sentence in between.

Effective writing involves making conscious word choices. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some freewriting exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, written an outline, and even selected your sources. When it is time to write your

first draft, begin to consider which words to use to best convey your ideas to the reader, and when you edit your essay, double-check your tone, diction, and style.

Some writers are picky about word choice as they start drafting. They may practice some specific strategies, such as using a dictionary and thesaurus, using words and phrases with proper connotations, and avoiding slang, clichés, and overly general words. Other writers wait until the editing stage to attend to these matters.

Once you understand these tricks of the trade, you can move ahead confidently in writing your assignment. Remember, the skill and accuracy of your word choice is a major factor in developing your writing style. Precise selection of words will help you be more clearly understood—in both writing and speaking.

Experienced writers know that deliberate, careful word selection and usage can lead to more polished, more meaningful writing. This chapter introduces word choice and vocabulary-building strategies that will improve your writing.

Words and Their Meanings

Sometimes, writers get stuck trying to find just the right word to convey their meaning. Other times, they use a word because they think they know its meaning and its connotations, but they actually don't. In either case, it's important to be sure of a word's dictionary meaning *and* its connotations. Often, being sure will require looking up a word in the dictionary.

Using a Dictionary

Even professional writers need help with the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, and uses of particular words. In fact, they *rely* on dictionaries to help them write better. No one knows every word in the English language and their multiple uses and meanings, so all writers, from novices to professionals, benefit from using a dictionary.

Most dictionaries provide the following information:

- **Spelling:** How the word and its different forms are spelled
- **Pronunciation:** How to say the word
- **Part of speech:** The grammatical function of the word
- **Definition:** The meaning of the word
- **Synonyms:** Words that have similar meanings
- **Etymology:** The history of the word
- **Capitalization:** Whether the word should be capitalized or not
- **Punctuation:** Whether the word contains a hyphen

The dictionary often recommended for Canadian university students is the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. Consider purchasing a paper-copy dictionary to keep on your desk for quick reference.

PRACTICE 23.1

Look at the following sample dictionary entry and see which information you can identify:

myth /mith/ n. (1) A traditional story, usually focusing on the deeds of gods or heroes, often in explanation of some natural phenomenon, as the origin of the sun, etc. It purports to be historical, but is useful to historians principally for what it reveals of the culture of the peoples it describes or among whom it was current. (2) A theme, motif, character type, etc., in modern literature that expresses or is felt to express significant truths about human life or human nature: the myth of the alienated man. (3) Myths collectively. (4) An imaginary or fictitious person, thing, event, or story. (5) A collective opinion, belief, or ideal that is based on false premises or is the product of fallacious reasoning. (6) An allegory or parable used to explain or illustrates philosophic concept, as in Plato's dialogues. Other forms of the word: mythic, mythical.

Source: *Funk & Wagnalls Canadian College Dictionary*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1989, p. 896.

Spelling: _____
Pronunciation: _____
Part of speech: _____
Origin: _____
Definition: _____
Other forms: _____

Using a Thesaurus

Like a dictionary, a thesaurus is another indispensable writing tool. A thesaurus includes a list of **synonyms**—words with similar meanings. It also lists **antonyms**—words with the opposite meaning. It usually also provides an example of the word used in a sentence. A thesaurus will help you when you are looking for the perfect word with just the right meaning to convey your ideas. It will also help you learn more words and use the ones you already know better.

PRACTICE 23.2

Look at the following sample thesaurus entry and see which of the following information you can identify:

Precocious ▶ adj. (*formal*) advanced, ahead, bright, developed, forward, quick, smart

ANT: backward, dense, dull, slow, underdeveloped, unresponsive

Source: *Collins Paperback Thesaurus*. 3rd ed. HarperCollins, 1995, p. 481.

Part of speech: _____

Formal or informal connotations: _____

Definition: _____

Synonyms: _____

Antonyms: _____

Sample sentence: _____

Be Connotation Aware

While a **denotation** is the dictionary definition of a word, a **connotation** is the emotional or cultural meaning attached to a word. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral. Look at the examples below and notice that all the words have a very similar denotation but different connotations.

Word: *arrogant*

Word used in a sentence: People consider her arrogant because she never stops to talk to anyone in the hallways.

Denotation: Showing an exaggerated sense of self-worth.

Connotation: Negative

In this sentence, the word *arrogant* may have a negative connotation in the readers' minds. They might find it to be a personal flaw.

Word: *self-assured*

Word used in a sentence: She is self-assured in her lecture to her peers.

Denotation: Sure of one's own abilities and knowledge.

Connotation: Positive

Based on cultural and personal impressions of what it means to be self-assured, the reader may have positive connotations of the word.

Word: *confident*

Word used in a sentence: After many years of research and fact-checking, she is confident in her findings.

Denotation: Believing in one's knowledge.

Connotation: Neutral

In this sentence, *confident* is a neutral description of the person's belief in herself and the knowledge she has gathered. It does not imply the happiness of *self-assurance*, nor does it imply the exaggerated sense of self-importance or cultural impression of the word *arrogant*.

One of the biggest challenges for relatively new writers or those writing in a second language is figuring out words' connotations, especially when you are building and expanding your vocabulary by using a thesaurus. Using a dictionary to check the (more exact) meaning of a new word from the thesaurus will help you choose words with appropriate connotations. Keeping the connotative meaning in mind when choosing a word is always important.

PRACTICE 23.3

In each of the following lists, you will find words with similar denotations. Identify the words' connotations as positive, negative, or neutral by writing the word in the appropriate box. Use the table below.

curious, nosy, interested

lazy, relaxed, slow

courageous, foolhardy, assured

new, newfangled, modern

shack, residence, mansion

spinster, unmarried woman, career woman

giggle, laugh, cackle

boring, routine, prosaic

noted, notorious, famous

assertive, confident, pushy

Newfoundlanders, African Americans, athletes, or rappers—to create feelings of belonging within that group. Slang includes the abbreviations used in text messages and on social media platforms. Slang often changes with passing fads. Once the wider community catches on to the meanings of slang words, they lose their purpose and are replaced with new ones.

groovy	bro
far out	24/7
gnarly	lol
rad	vibe
stoked	lit
dude	salty

By its nature, slang is used to include certain people in a group while excluding everyone else. Therefore, slang hinders effective communication with a broader audience. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing.

Frequent exposure to media and popular culture has desensitized many of us to slang. In certain situations, using slang at work may not be problematic, but keep in mind that words can have a powerful effect. Slang in professional emails or during meetings may convey the wrong message or even accidentally offend someone.

In academic writing, use objective, accurate words. For example, the words *grass*, *weed*, *pot*, *dope*, *reefer*, *ganga*, and *Mary Jane* are a few of the many slang terms for cannabis. In an academic essay about the health effects of cannabis, use the term *cannabis*, not slang.

PRACTICE 23.4

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying “like” and “um,” and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I’ve been practising this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was 10 minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don’t enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I’m surprised that people didn’t boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous

their first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech-giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

Collaboration: Share and compare your answers with a peer.

Jargon

Jargon refers to specialized language that is used within a particular work setting or professional group such as lawyers, businesspeople, doctors, politicians, military personnel, or IT workers. Like slang, jargon is used to create feelings of belonging—in this case, belonging at work.

Many jargon words from corporate offices and human resources departments have infiltrated everyday language outside the field, such as these words:

actionable	leverage
deep dive	onboard
deliverable	resonate
downsize	resources
game changer	synergize
incentivize	traction
issues	utilize
learnings	

Jargon words tend to be vague, “fuzzy” words that are so overused that they have become almost meaningless; therefore, they are not appropriate in academic writing, which requires precision and objectivity.

With that said, some of these words are very useful when they are chosen for their specific denotations and used in a specific context. For example, if you’re writing about a piano concerto or an electrical crystal, the word *resonate* will be very useful. But if you’re using *resonate* to describe your feelings about a poem, choose a more appropriate word.

In contexts of business and politics, jargon is often used by people in power to make a negative truth seem more neutral and palatable.

Jargon The company is downsizing its resources.

Plain English The company is firing many people.

Jargon The military is mobilizing citizens for a special operation.

Plain English The military is forcing everyday citizens to become soldiers in an invasion of another country.

To learn more about the use of jargon in politics, search for George Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language" online.

Like slang, jargon can have the effect of alienating others. Also, because jargon is often used to mask unpleasant truths, jargon can have the effect of creating distrust: your reader will wonder if you're hiding or misrepresenting something. Both are good reasons to avoid the use of jargon in your university essays.

PRACTICE 23.5

Review a piece of writing that you have completed for school. Circle any sentences that contain slang and rewrite them using more specific, accessible language.

Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused to the point that the imagery disappears from the listener's or reader's mind. For example, if your co-worker tells you that your boss is beating a dead horse with his proposal, do you stop for a moment to imagine the sight of a dead horse being beaten? Or do you automatically know that your co-worker means that your boss's proposal will not succeed? In the latter case, because the metaphor does not create an image in your mind, and you skip ahead to recognizing the well-established meaning, the metaphor has become a cliché. The cliché doesn't add any meaning to the sentence that wouldn't have been conveyed by your co-worker saying that your boss's proposal will not succeed.

Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways. As with connotations, clichés can be more difficult to recognize when you are a relatively new writer or writing in a second language. What may seem like vivid imagery to you may be a faded expression for another. Practice—and a lot of reading—will help you to get better at recognizing them.

Cliché	Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my blood boil.
Literal Meaning	Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me really angry.
A More Creative Version	Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

PRACTICE 23.6

On a sheet of paper, edit the following sentences by replacing the clichés with fresh, original descriptions.

- She is writing a memoir in which she will air her family's dirty laundry.
 Priya had an axe to grind with Benny, and she planned to confront him that night at the party.
 Mr. Muller was at his wit's end with the rowdy class of seventh graders.
 The bottom line is that Jean-Paul was fired because he missed too many days of work.
 Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet with just one paycheque.
 My brain is fried from pulling an all-nighter.
 Maria left the dishes in the sink all week to give Jeff a taste of his own medicine.
 While they were at the carnival, Linh exclaimed, "Time sure does fly when you are having fun!"
 Jeremy became tongue-tied after the interviewer asked him where he saw himself in five years.

Collaboration: Share and compare your answers with a peer.

Overly General Words

When possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with specific nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring your words to life. Add words that provide colour, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| General | My new puppy is cute. |
| Specific | My new puppy, Bingo, has an adorably goofy face; her tongue hangs out of her mouth, and she looks like she is grinning. |
| General | My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad. |
| Specific | My teacher, Ms. Atwater, created a presentation detailing exactly how plagiarism is illegal and unethical. |

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting.

PRACTICE 23.7

Edit the following sentences by replacing the overly general words with more precise and interesting ones. Write the new sentences on a sheet of paper.

Reilly got into her car and drove off.

I would like to travel to outer space because it would be amazing.

Maryam came home after a bad day at the office.

I thought Milo's essay was fascinating.

The dog walked up the street.

The coal miners were tired after a long day.

The tropical fish are pretty.

I sweat a lot after running.

The goalie blocked the shot.

I liked my meal.

Collaboration: Share and compare your answers with a peer.

Gender-Biased Language

The Canadian Department of Justice offers good, clear advice on the importance and necessity of gender-neutral language. While it used to be common practice to refer to humanity as *mankind*, to refer to the mail carrier as the *mailman*, and to use many other terms where “man” acted as the stand-in for all genders—thereby assuming an odd gender neutrality by being anything but gender-neutral—growing awareness of systemic inequality of people who do not identify as a “man” or “male” has led to changes in terminology and changes in writing conventions.

Initially, the changes in terminology were met with ridicule—anger, even—and it took time for the new terms to become commonplace and normalized. Nowadays, we think nothing of it when we write *chairperson*, *firefighter*, *server*, *flight attendant*, or *police officer* when talking about specific professional groups. Of course, we can still write a sentence like “My brother-in-law was a policeman,” but even then we may be more inclined now to call the brother-in-law a police officer.

Nevertheless, there is still a—perhaps even growing—pushback against a more inclusionary or gender-neutral use of pronouns.

Twenty-five years ago, writing instructors would advise students not to use the singular third-person pronoun *he* to refer to a person whose gender was unmentioned or irrelevant; instead, students were told to use *he or she*, and

while this certainly meant progress at the time, *he or she* did not include people who identify as neither he nor she.

In an effort to replace the awkward and inaccurate *he or she*, it has, in the last decade, become more and more common to use the traditionally third-person plural pronouns *they/them* as third-person singular pronouns—both in everyday speech and in formal writing. At first, it was a simpler way to refer to gender-unspecified persons, but more recently, many people have started to use *they/them* as their preferred pronouns to indicate they identify as nonbinary.

In terms of writing, we think it is good to follow the Canadian Department of Justice's advice:

Gender-specific words should be replaced with gender-neutral words that have the same meaning. In addition, the following writing techniques should be considered to avoid using a gender-specific pronoun:

1. use the singular *they* and its other grammatical forms (*them*, *themselves*, and *their*) to refer to indefinite pronouns and singular nouns;
2. replace the masculine pronoun with an article;
3. use the plural;
4. use a neutral word or phrase such as *person*, *any person*, *every person*, or *no person*;
5. repeat the noun;
6. rewrite the sentence in order to eliminate the pronoun completely.

Source: Government of Canada. "Gender-Neutral Language." *Department of Justice*, 20 Jan. 2023, www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/legis-redact/legistics/p1p15.html#:~:text=use%20a%20neutral%20word%20or,to%20eliminate%20the%20pronoun%20completely.

Commonly Confused Words

Sometimes we accidentally mix up words. Imagine you are writing a grocery list to purchase the ingredients for a guacamole in preparation for a Grey Cup party, but you accidentally write down *parsley* when the recipe calls for *cilantro*. Even though parsley and cilantro look remarkably alike, each produces a very different effect in food. This seemingly small error will radically alter the flavour of the guacamole, and your guests might be disappointed.

Likewise, when a writer chooses the wrong word in a sentence, it can make a reader's experience confusing. Some words in English cause trouble for writers because the words share a similar pronunciation, meaning, or spelling with another

word. These are called commonly confused words. For example, read aloud the following sentences containing the commonly confused words *new* and *knew*:

I liked her knew sweater.

I new she would wear that sweater today.

If you were speaking, no one would catch the error. However, although the two words sound the same when spoken, they have entirely different roles, usages, and meanings. *New* is an adjective that describes the sweater, and *knew* is the past tense of the verb *to know*.

New and *knew* are just one of many pairs of words that can be confusing because of their similarities. Familiarize yourself with the following list of commonly confused words. Recognizing these words in your own writing and in other pieces of writing can help you choose the correct word to avoid confusing the reader and, ultimately, being incorrect in your writing. Effective writers know not to assume that they already know the meanings of words, and they use resources like this list to improve their ability to choose words effectively.

A, AN, AND

A (article). *A* is used before a word that begins with a consonant.

Placing a wrist support in front of your keyboard can reduce wrist strain.

An (article). *An* is used before a word that begins with a vowel or a vowel sound.

An ergonomic assessment of your workstation indicates changes are necessary.

He has an MA in design.

And (conjunction). *And* connects two or more words or clauses.

Your pens and pencils can be placed further away if you rarely reach for them.

Be sure to take frequent breaks, and do regular stretches.

ACCEPT, EXCEPT

Accept (verb). Means to take or agree to something offered.

They accepted our proposal for the conference.

Except (conjunction). Means “only” or “but.”

We could fly there except the tickets cost too much.

AFFECT, EFFECT

Affect (verb). Means to create a change.

Hurricane winds affect the amount of rainfall.

Effect (noun). Means an outcome or result.

The heavy rains will have an effect on the crop growth.

ARE, OUR

Are (verb). A conjugated form of the verb *to be*.

My cousins are all tall and blonde.

Our (pronoun). Indicates possession, usually follows the pronoun *we*.

We will bring our cameras to take pictures.

BY, BUY

By (preposition). Means “next to.”

My glasses are by the bed.

Buy (verb). Means “to purchase.”

I will buy new glasses after the doctor’s appointment.

CITE, SITE

Cite (verb). Means to quote, name, or mention.

Always make sure to cite your sources properly.

Site (noun). Means a place.

The accreditors asked for a site visit.

IMPLY, INFER

Imply (verb). Means to suggest.

Are you implying that this is not true?

Infer (verb). Means to deduce, conclude, or suppose.

Based on historical records, we can infer that this is the likely outcome.

ITS, IT'S

Its (pronoun). A form of *it* that shows possession.

The butterfly flapped its wings.

It's (contraction). Joins the words *it* and *is*.

It's the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

KNOW, NO

Know (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.

I know the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.

No (adverb). Used to make a negative.

I have no time to visit the zoo this weekend.

LAY, LAID

Lay (verb). Means to carefully put down.

I lay the Japanese carving knife back on its pillow.

Laid (verb). Past tense of *lay*.

I laid down my arms.

LED, LEAD

Led (verb) past tense of *lead*.

He led the horse to water but could not make it drink.

Lead (verb) Means to guide.

You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink.

LOOSE, LOSE

Loose (adjective). Describes something that is not tight or is detached.

Without a belt, her pants are loose on her waist.

Lose (verb). Means to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something.

She will lose even more weight after finishing the marathon training.

OF, HAVE

Of (preposition). Means "from" or "about."

I studied maps of the city to know where to rent a new apartment.

Have (verb). Means to possess something.

I have many friends to help me move.

Have (linking verb). Used to connect verbs.

I should have helped her with that heavy box.

PEEK, PEAK, PIQUE

Peek (verb): Means to look briefly.

Please take a peek at that report before lunch.

Peak (noun): Means the highest point.

Avoid driving downtown during peak traffic.

Pique (verb): Means “stimulate.”

The introductory paragraph should pique the reader’s interest.

QUITE, QUIET, QUIT

Quite (adverb). Means “really” or “truly.”

My work will require quite a lot of concentration.

Quiet (adjective). Means not loud.

I need a quiet room to complete the assignments.

Quit (verb). Means to stop or to end.

I will quit when I am hungry for dinner.

RIGHT, WRITE

Right (adjective). Means “proper” or “correct.”

When bowling, she practices the right form.

Right (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.

The ball curved to the right and hit the last pin.

Write (verb). Means to communicate on paper.

After the team members bowl, I will write down their scores.

SET, SIT

Set (verb). Means to put an item down.

She set the mug on the saucer.

Set (noun). Means a group of similar objects.

All the mugs and saucers belonged in a set.

Sit (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place.

I’ll sit on the sofa while she brews the tea.

SUPPOSE, SUPPOSED

Suppose (verb). Means to think or to consider.

I suppose I will bake the bread because no one else has the recipe.

Suppose (verb). Means to suggest.

Suppose we all split the cost of the dinner.

Supposed (verb). The past tense of the verb *suppose*, meaning “required” or “allowed.”

She was supposed to create the menu.

THAN, THEN

Than (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing.

Registered nurses require less schooling than doctors.

Then (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.

Doctors first complete medical school and then obtain a residency.

THEIR, THEY'RE, THERE

Their (pronoun). A form of *they* that shows possession.

The dog walker feeds their dogs every day at two o'clock.

They're (contraction). Joins the words *they* and *are*.

They're the sweetest dogs in the neighbourhood.

There (pronoun). Indicates the presence of something.

There are more treats if the dogs behave.

TO, TWO, TOO

To (preposition). Indicates movement.

Let's go to the circus.

To (part of verb). A word that completes an infinitive verb.

To play, to ride, to watch.

Two (adjective or pronoun). The number after *one*. It describes how many.

Two clowns squirted the elephants with water.

Too (adverb). Means “also” or “very.”

The tents were too loud, and we left.

USE, USED

Use (verb). Means to apply for some purpose.

We use a Weedwacker to trim the hedges.

Used (verb). The past-tense form of the verb *to use*.

He used the lawnmower last night before it rained.

Used to (verb). Indicates something done in the past but not in the present.

He used to hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.

WHO'S, WHOSE

Who's (contraction). Joins the words *who* and either *is* or *has*.

Who's the new student? Who's met him?

Whose (pronoun). A form of *who* that shows possession.

Whose schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?

YOUR, YOU'RE

Your (pronoun). A form of *you* that shows possession.

Your book bag is unzipped.

You're (contraction). Joins the words *you* and *are*.

You're the girl with the unzipped book bag.

The English language contains so many words; no one can say for certain how many words exist. In fact, many words in English are borrowed from other languages. Many words have multiple meanings and forms, further expanding the immeasurable number of English words. Although the list of commonly confused words serves as a helpful guide, even these words may have more meanings than shown here. When in doubt, consult an expert: the dictionary!

PRACTICE 23.8

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct word:

1. My niece turns (to, too, two) tomorrow, and I'm going (to, too, two) her party.
2. The next-door neighbour's dog is (quite, quiet, quit) loud; I wish he'd (quite, quiet, quit) barking.
3. (Your, You're) mother called this morning to talk about the party.
4. I would rather eat a slice of chocolate cake (than, then) eat a chocolate muffin.

5. Before the meeting, he drank a cup of coffee and (than, then) brushed his teeth.
6. Do you have any (loose, lose) change to pay the parking meter?
7. Mom must (have, of) left her briefcase at the office.
8. I was (suppose, supposed) to read the contract, but I only skimmed it, which may (affect, effect) my case.
9. Tonight she will (set, sit) down and (right, write) a cover letter to accompany her résumé.
10. It's fall, and the leaves (are, our) changing, and (it's, its) getting darker earlier.

* * *

When choosing between commonly confused words, choose the correct word according to its spelling and meaning in the context. Not only does selecting the correct word improve your vocabulary and your writing, but it also helps reduce confusion and improve clarity. It also makes a good impression on your readers. The following strategies can help you avoid misusing confusing words:

Use a dictionary. Keep a dictionary at your desk while you write. Look up words when you are uncertain of their meanings or spellings. Many dictionaries are also available online, and the Internet's easy access will not slow you down. Check out your cell phone or smartphone to see if a dictionary app is available.

Keep a list of words you commonly confuse. Be aware of the words that often confuse you. When you notice a pattern of confusing words, keep a list nearby, and consult the list as you write. Check the list again before you submit an assignment to your instructor.

Study the list of commonly confused words. You may not yet know which words confuse you, but before you sit down to write, study the words on the list. Prepare your mind for working with words by reviewing the commonly confused words identified in this chapter.

Commonly confused words appear in many locations, not just at work or at school. Be on the lookout for misused words wherever you find yourself throughout the day. Make a mental note of the error and remember its correction for your own pieces of writing.

Most of us have particular pairs of words that we commonly confuse. Perhaps you can't imagine how someone could mix up *there* and *their*, but you commonly use *affect* and *effect* incorrectly. The first step to correcting these errors is figuring out what to look for.

PRACTICE 23.9

The following paragraph contains fourteen errors. Find each misused word and replace it with the correct word.

The original United States Declaration of Independence sets in a case at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom as part of the National Archives in Washington, DC. Since 1952, over one million visitors each year of passed through the Rotunda too snap a photograph to capture they're experience. Although there use to be signs stating "Know Flash Photography," and tourists know they are not suppose to, they accidentally leave the flash on, an a bright light flickers for a millisecond. This millisecond of light may not seem like enough to effect the precious document, but imagine how much light could be generated when all those milliseconds are added up. According to the National Archives administrators, its enough too significantly damage the historic document. So now the signs display quit a different message: "No Photography." Visitors continue to travel to see the Declaration that began they're country, but know longer can personal pictures serve as mementos. The administrators' compromise, they say, is a visit to the gift shop for a preprinted photograph.

Collaboration: Share and compare your answers with a peer.

PRACTICE 23.10

Have the list of commonly confused words on hand as you review the last assignment you completed for school or for work. Does it contain any commonly confused words? As you read, circle each one. Then use the circled words to create your own checklist of commonly confused words. Continue to add to your checklist each time you complete an assignment and find a misused word.

Point of View

Point of view, also called **perspective** or **angle of vision**, refers to the position from which you view a subject. Point of view is an important consideration in writing, but first, as a starting point, let's look at a concrete example that illustrates just how important point of view is.

Look at the two illustrations in [Figure 23.1](#). What is your first response? Do you recognize these images?

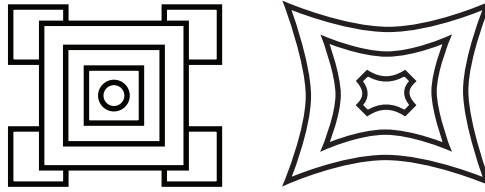


Figure 23.1: Point of View

At first glance, you probably don't recognize the images, and it may surprise you to learn that these illustrations represent an iconic landmark: the Eiffel Tower.

The images don't match the mental picture we all have of the Eiffel Tower, which is based on a photo taken from the side view, from several blocks away. However, what if you had never seen the Eiffel Tower before, and the first view you had of it was from directly below it? It would look like the image on the left. What if your first view of the Eiffel Tower was from a hot-air balloon directly above it? It would look like the image on the right.

Now imagine that you must write a description of the Eiffel Tower, but you must base the description on only what you can see from your position—either directly below or directly above. Would your description accurately convey all that the Eiffel Tower is, or would your point of view restrict you?

Next, imagine that someone who has never seen the Eiffel Tower reads your description, which you wrote based only on what you saw from your particular standpoint, in an effort to learn about the famous landmark. From your description, would that reader be able to gain an accurate sense of what the Eiffel Tower actually *is*? Its size? Its height? Its lines? Its emotional effect? Probably not. The point of view of the writer (you) would impact the reader's ability to fully understand what the subject—the Eiffel Tower—truly is.

Even when you're writing about a subject that is not as concrete as the Eiffel Tower is, your point of view will impact how you write, and it will impact how your reader interprets the subject.

On occasion, you will be asked to write an emotionally expressive or sensory piece of writing, similar to a diary entry, in which a subjective point of view is acceptable, even expected. More often, though, your instructors will ask you to write essays that are fact and evidence based and academic in tone. This means you will only be able to show your opinions by the choice of ideas you discuss and how you present your evidence.

Your instructors will expect you to compose relatively emotion-free papers, which means you have to choose your words carefully. When you write a piece full of emotion without facts, the reader is less likely to accept your point. Imagine that you feel very strongly about an issue but do not use facts to support your argument. What if the reader disagrees with you? Since you have not provided factual supporting evidence, the reader will not be convinced of your point of view.

In this section, we explore the impact of emotional writing and the effect on the reader; we will also explore word choices and their possible connotations. Simple changes in word choice will impact the reader, as will the inclusion of lots of personal opinions. For example, look at the two paragraphs below, which reveal two different angles of vision or points of view, and notice your reaction to each.

EXAMPLE 1

What a glorious day! The beautiful sun is shining down on those basking, hoping to absorb its wonderful rays. The surf is playfully nudging the young children who are frolicking in the waves. A group of smiling young people laugh joyously as they plan an exciting game of volleyball. As I watch their rousing game, I enjoy the feel of the warm sand playing between my toes. I love summer at the beach!

PASSAGE 2

It is way too hot! The sun is mercilessly beating down on all those foolish enough to think it is healthy to get a suntan. They will be sorry when they burn. I see unsupervised children getting knocked down by the strong waves, and their negligent parents are nowhere to be seen. Nearby, some rowdy teenagers keep laughing obnoxiously every time one in their group misses the volleyball; they are really terrible volleyball players. I would like to move from where I am sitting, but the sand is scorching hot and will burn my feet. I wish I had stayed home!

PRACTICE 23.11

Reread the two paragraphs above, and answer these questions:

What are the differences in the physical settings that these passages are describing?

Are they in different locations or happening at different times of day?

Are there different people involved?

What evidence beyond sensory perceptions and personal opinion do the writers provide?

Which one are you more likely to agree with? Why? Is this because it matches your personal opinion of the beach or because it is combined with supporting facts?

It is clear that the two authors like or appreciate conditions and experiences differently. In paragraph 1, the writer likes warm weather and does not mind noise, but in paragraph 2, the writer would probably prefer to be at home in air conditioning. Ultimately, the passage that you connect with more is probably based on how you personally feel about going to the beach. Because the passages are based solely on opinion, there is nothing in them to convince the reader that other perspectives or angles of vision are valid or less valid or not valid at all. This is why you need to use facts to back up your ideas when writing.

However, before looking at objective, fact-based writing, practice choosing your words to show differing perspectives. This will also help you see how changing words can completely change the effect of the writing.

PRACTICE 23.12

Choose a place where you can sit and observe for fifteen to twenty minutes. You might choose a place indoors or out. Then write two descriptions of the same scene that will enable the reader to see what you see. One will be of the scene from a positive or favourable perspective; the other needs to convey a negative or unfavourable impression.

Both descriptions must contain only factual details and must describe exactly the same scene from the same location at the same time. This means that you cannot just change the facts, like making the weather cloudy instead of sunny; your descriptive words need to do the work for you.

Start with either the positive or negative paragraph, but remember, do not merely substitute antonyms, or opposite words, when writing from the opposite angle. Step back from the scene, so to speak, and visualize how aspects of what you are experiencing or witnessing would appear to someone who did not feel the same way you do.

Collaboration: Share your paragraphs with a peer and discuss the effects of changing the point of view.

This exercise demonstrates that changing your wording even slightly can completely change the impact or effect. It also showed you what it is like to create **subjective writing**—writing that is writer centred and often based on the writer’s sensory perceptions or emotions.

The reader’s point of view may differ from the writer’s, and since there are no facts to give the reader a solid and believable perspective, the reader could be unconvinced. Now we will look at **objective writing**, which is based on quantifiable, factual, or scientific observations. First, reread the subjective paragraphs about the beach:

SUBJECTIVE PARAGRAPHS

What a glorious day! The beautiful sun is shining down on those basking, hoping to absorb its wonderful rays. The surf is playfully nudging the young children who are frolicking in the waves. A group of smiling young people laugh joyously as they plan an exciting game of volleyball. As I watch their rousing game, I enjoy the feel of the warm sand playing between my toes. I love summer at the beach!

It is way too hot! The sun is mercilessly beating down on all those foolish enough to think it is healthy to get a suntan. They will be sorry when they burn. I see unsupervised children getting knocked down by the strong waves, and their negligent parents are nowhere to be seen. Nearby, some rowdy teenagers keep laughing obnoxiously every time one in their group misses the volleyball; they are really terrible volleyball players. I would like to move from where I am sitting, but the sand is scorching hot and will burn my feet. I wish I had stayed home!

Now read an objective description of the same scene. Notice the writer’s use of quantifiable, measurable data and factual or scientific observations.

OBJECTIVE PARAGRAPH

On the morning of Saturday, June 10, I visited the beach. The sky was clear, with no clouds visible in the sky. I arrived at the beach at about 12:30, and it was already quite warm. I had to drive with the windows open, and it read 25°C on the car’s temperature display. Just before getting out of the car, I remembered to grab my SPF-30 sunscreen because I got burned so badly last year, and I do not want to experience that blistering again this year. In front of me, there were five children, about six years old, playing in the foot-high waves; it looked like their parents were sitting watching

them from about four metres away, probably in case the waves got too high and they needed to dash to their children quickly. I chose a spot ten metres to the right, away from a group of young people, maybe sixteen years old, playing volleyball, close enough to watch them having fun but far away enough to not get hit by any stray balls. These teenagers must have been playing just for fun because it seemed like someone missed every second ball, and the entire group started laughing when they did. Thankfully, I wore my sandals, so I could feel the warmth of the sand between my toes, but the sandals protected my feet when it felt too hot.

PRACTICE 23.13

In response to the paragraphs above, answer the questions below:

How is the objective paragraph different from the subjective paragraphs?

What evidence beyond sensory perceptions and personal opinion does the writer of the objective paragraph provide?

Is the objective paragraph more positive or negative? Does it discuss both good and bad things?

What is different about how the perspectives are presented?

In the objective paragraph, the writer presents situations that could be interpreted to be positive or negative, but the language she uses is neutral and without judgment. She also provides enough detail (measurements, temperatures, distances, etc.) to present a more complete description, so the reader can visualize where everyone was situated in the scene, how hot it was, and how high the waves were.

Essentially, the writer presented a complete, unemotional, and objective perspective that is supported by quantifiable evidence. This is the type of writing you'll be expected to do in your university courses, and choosing words carefully will help you achieve the desired tone.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Effective writers strive to add more words to their vocabulary and to use the words they already know more effectively.

- Choosing precise words with the correct meaning increases the clarity of your message and leaves a positive impression on your readers.
- Use a dictionary and thesaurus as you write to improve word choice and thus improve the clarity of your writing.
- Denotations are the dictionary definitions of words.
- Connotations of words may be positive, neutral, or negative.
- Nonstandard English, slang, clichés, jargon, and overly general words should be avoided in academic writing.
- Use gender-neutral language.
- Although commonly confused words may look alike or sound alike, their meanings are very different, and if a writer chooses the wrong word, the reader may be confused.
- Keep a list of commonly confused words nearby when you write, or study the chart in this section.
- Make a list of the particular words that you commonly confuse, and work toward using them correctly.
- Think carefully about point of view, and choose words that convey an objective, convincing point of view.

Grammar Handbook

Learning Objectives

- Identify the components of a grammatically correct sentence
- Identify and correct the four most serious sentence errors
- Define subject-verb agreement and correct errors in subject-verb agreement
- Use verb tense to effectively convey time
- Identify pronouns and their antecedents
- Avoid errors in pronoun agreement
- Use adjectives and adverbs correctly to modify nouns and verbs
- Identify modifiers and avoid misplaced and dangling modifiers

Imagine you are reading a book for school. You need to find specific information that you can use for an assignment. However, when you begin to read, you notice that the book has very little punctuation. The sentences aren't organized into paragraphs. Instead, there is one block of text in which sentences seem randomly ordered. Most likely, this book would frustrate and confuse you. Without clear and concise sentences, it is difficult to find the information you need.

For students, academics, and professionals, clear communication is important. Whether you are typing an email, a paper, or a report, it is your responsibility to present your thoughts and ideas clearly, coherently, and precisely.

In university classes or in the workplace, you should aim to present a professional image. Your clothes say something about you when meeting face-to-face, and your writing represents you in your absence. Grammatical mistakes in your writing or even in speaking can make a negative impression on professors, classmates, co-workers, clients, and potential employers.

Writing in complete sentences is one way to ensure that you communicate well. This section explains how to recognize basic sentence structures and write clear sentences and how to avoid some common writing errors.

Components of a Sentence

A complete sentence needs to make sense on its own. All complete sentences contain at least one independent clause. A clause is a group of words that contains a **subject** (a noun that identifies who is acting) and a **predicate** (a verb that indicates the main action). An independent clause can stand alone as a grammatically correct complete thought. Identify an independent clause by reading it on its own to see if it contains a complete thought and looking for the subject and the verb. The following sentence contains an independent clause:

The inspector arrived at 4:00 p.m.

Subject

When you read a sentence, you may first look for the subject, or what the sentence is about. The subject usually appears at the beginning of a sentence. The subject is usually a noun or a pronoun. A **noun** is a word that identifies a person, place, thing, or idea (for example, a car, a project, a woman, Beth, a university, Athabasca, money, hope, love). A **pronoun** is a word that replaces a noun. Common pronouns are *I, he, she, it, you, they, and we*.

In the examples throughout this section, subjects will be underlined. In the following examples, the subject is underlined:

Ahmed is the project manager for this project. He will give us our assignments.

In the first sentence, the subject is a person: *Ahmed*. In the second sentence, the pronoun *he* replaces the noun and refers back to *Ahmed*.

The computer lab is where we will work. It will be open twenty-four hours a day.

In the first sentence, the subject is a place: *computer lab*. In the second sentence, the pronoun *it* substitutes for *computer lab* as the subject.

The project will run for three weeks. It will have a quick turnaround.

In the first sentence, the subject is a thing: *project*. In the second sentence, the pronoun *it* stands in for the *project*.

Compound Subjects

A sentence may refer to more than one person, place, or thing as the subject. These subjects are called compound subjects. Compound subjects are useful when you want to discuss more than one subject. For example,

Desmond and Maria have been working on that design for almost a year.
Books, magazines, and online articles are all good resources.

Two people (Desmond and Maria) are the subjects of the first sentence. The second sentence has three subjects: books, magazines, and online articles.

Prepositional Phrases

A sentence often has more than one noun or pronoun in it. You may encounter a group of words that includes a preposition with a noun or a pronoun. **Prepositions** connect a noun, pronoun, or verb to another word that describes or modifies that noun, pronoun, or verb. Common prepositions include *in*, *on*, *under*, *near*, *by*, *with*, and *about*. A group of words that begins with a preposition is called a **prepositional phrase**. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and modifies or describes a word. It cannot act as the subject of a sentence. The following bolded phrases are examples of prepositional phrases.

We went **on a trip**. That pizza place **with the famous pizza** was **on the way**. We stopped **for lunch**.

PRACTICE 24.1

In the following sentences, underline the subjects, and circle the prepositional phrases.

1. The gym is open until nine o'clock tonight.
2. We went to the store to get some ice.
3. The student with the most extra credit will win a homework pass.
4. Maya and Tia found an abandoned cat by the side of the road.
5. The driver of that pickup truck skidded on the ice.
6. Anita won the race with time to spare.

7. The people who work for that company were surprised about the merger.
8. Working in haste means that you are more likely to make mistakes.
9. The soundtrack has over sixty songs in languages from around the world.
10. His latest invention does not work, but it has inspired the rest of us.

Predicate

Once you locate the subject of a sentence, you can move on to the next part of a complete sentence: the main verb. A **verb** is often an action word that shows what the subject is doing. A verb can also link the subject to a describing word. There are three types of verbs that you can use in a sentence: action verbs, linking verbs, or helping verbs. In the examples throughout this section, verbs will be italicized.

Action Verbs

A verb that connects the subject to an action is called an **action verb**. An action verb answers the question *what is the subject doing?* In the following sentences, the action verbs are in italics.

The dog *barked* at the jogger.

He *gave* a short speech before we ate.

Linking Verbs

Linking verbs connect the subject of the sentence to a describing word or phrase. The most common linking verb is the verb *to be*, in any of its forms (such as *am, are, is, was, were*). The verb *to be* simply indicates that a situation exists. In the following sentences, the linking verbs are in italics.

The coat *was* old and dirty.

The clock *seemed* broken.

If you have trouble distinguishing between action verbs and linking verbs, remember that an action verb shows that the subject is *doing* something, whereas a linking verb simply connects the subject to another word that describes or modifies the subject, often describing a state of being. A few verbs can be used as either action verbs or linking verbs.

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

Linking verb: The boy *looked* tired.

Although both sentences use the same verb, the two sentences have completely different meanings. In the first sentence, the verb describes the boy's *action*. In the second sentence, the verb describes the boy's *appearance*, his *state of being in that moment*. In other words, while the verb *look* appears the same, it functions differently within each sentence. To some extent, then, the function and meaning of the verb are determined by what follows it.

Helping Verbs

A third type of verb is a helping verb. **Helping verbs** are verbs that work with the main verb to describe a mood or tense. Helping verbs are usually a form of *be*, *do*, or *have*. The word *can* is also a helping verb.

The restaurant **is** *known* for its variety of dishes.

She **does** *speak up* when prompted in class.

We **have** *seen* that movie three times.

She **can** *tell* when someone walks on her lawn.

Is, *does*, *have*, and *can* are helping verbs and *known*, *speak up*, *seen*, and *tell* are action verbs.

TIP: Whenever you write or edit sentences, keep the subject and verb in mind. As you write, ask yourself these questions to keep yourself on track:

Subject: Who or what is the sentence about?

Verb: Which word shows an action or links the subject to a description?

PRACTICE 24.2

Identify the verb(s) in the following sentence. Identify the type of each verb: linking verb (LV), helping verb (HV), or action verb (AV).

1. The cat sounds ready to come back inside. _____
2. We have not eaten dinner yet. _____
3. It took four people to move the broken-down car. _____
4. The book was filled with notes from class. _____
5. We walked from room to room, inspecting for damage. _____

6. Harold was expecting a package in the mail. _____
7. The clothes still felt damp even though they had been through the dryer twice. _____
8. The teacher who runs the studio is often praised for his restoration work on old masterpieces. _____

Sentence Structure

Now that you know what makes a complete sentence—a subject and a verb that convey a complete thought—you can use other parts of speech to build on this basic structure. Good writers use a variety of sentence structures to make their writing more interesting. This section introduces different sentence structures that you can use to make longer, more complex sentences.

Sentence Patterns

Enhance your writing by using a variety of sentence patterns. There are six basic subject-verb patterns. A sample sentence is provided for each pattern. As you read each sentence, take note of where each part of the sentence falls. Notice that some sentence patterns use action verbs and others use linking verbs.

Subject–Verb

Computers (subject) *hum* (verb)

Subject–Linking Verb–Noun

Computers (subject) *are* (linking verb) tools (noun)

Subject–Linking Verb–Adjective

Computers (subject) *are* (linking verb) expensive (adjective)

Subject–Verb–Adverb

Computers (subject) *calculate* (verb) quickly (adverb)

Subject–Verb–Direct Object

When you write a sentence with a direct object (DO), make sure that the DO receives the action of the verb.

Sally (subject) *rides* (verb) a motorcycle (direct object)

Subject–Verb–Indirect Object–Direct Object

In this sentence structure, an indirect object explains *to whom* or *to what* the action is being done. The indirect object is a noun or pronoun, and it comes before the direct object in a sentence.

My co-worker (subject) *gave* (verb) me (indirect object) the reports
(direct object)

PRACTICE 24.3

- A. On a sheet of paper, write six sentences, each of which demonstrates one of the six basic sentence patterns discussed above. When you have finished, label each part of the sentence (S, V, LV, N, adj., adv., DO, IO). The combination possibilities for these sentences are endless, of course, so there are many correct solutions. Do this exercise with a friend.
- B. In a newspaper or magazine or on a website, find an article that interests you. Identify one example of each part of a sentence (S, AV, LV, N, adj., adv., DO, IO). Do this exercise with a friend, sharing articles and results.

Fragments

The sentences you have encountered so far have been independent clauses. As you look more closely at your past writing assignments, you may notice that some of your sentences are not complete. A sentence that is missing a subject or a verb is called a **fragment**. A fragment may include a description or may express part of an idea, but it does not express a complete thought.

Fragment: Making a mess in the kitchen (missing a subject).

Complete sentence: The children are making a mess in the kitchen.

Fragment: Children in the kitchen with their toys.

You can easily fix a fragment by adding the missing subject or verb. In the second example, the sentence was missing a verb. Adding *often make a mess* creates an S-V-N sentence structure.

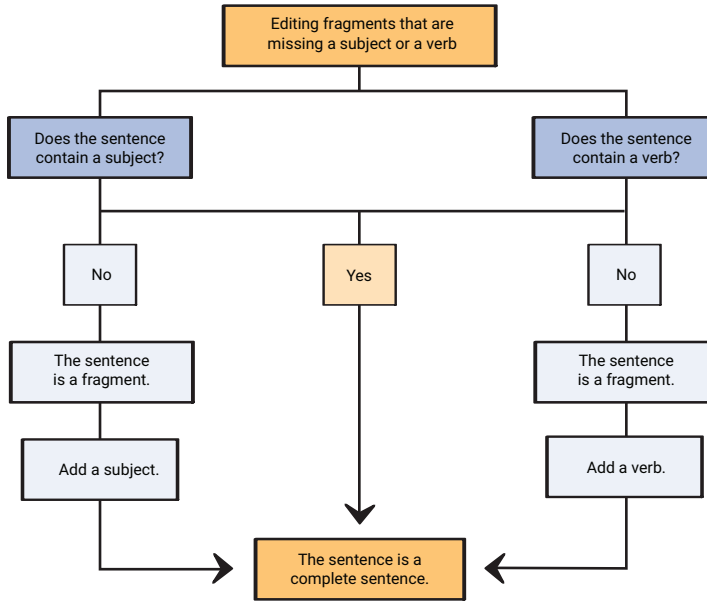


Figure 24.1: Editing Fragments That Are Missing a Subject or a Verb

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Can you identify what is missing in the following fragments?

Fragment: Told her about the broken vase.

Complete sentence: I told her about the broken vase.

Fragment: The store down on Main Street.

Complete sentence: The store down on Main Street **sells music**.

Common Sentence Errors

Fragments often occur because of common errors such as starting a sentence with a preposition, a dependent word, an infinitive, or a gerund. If you use the six basic sentence patterns when you write, you should be able to avoid these errors and thus avoid writing fragments.

When you see a preposition, check to see that it is part of a sentence containing a subject and a verb. If it is not connected to a complete sentence, it is a fragment, and you will need to fix this type of fragment by combining it with another sentence. You can add the prepositional phrase to the end of the sentence. If you add it to the beginning of the other sentence, insert a comma after the prepositional phrase.

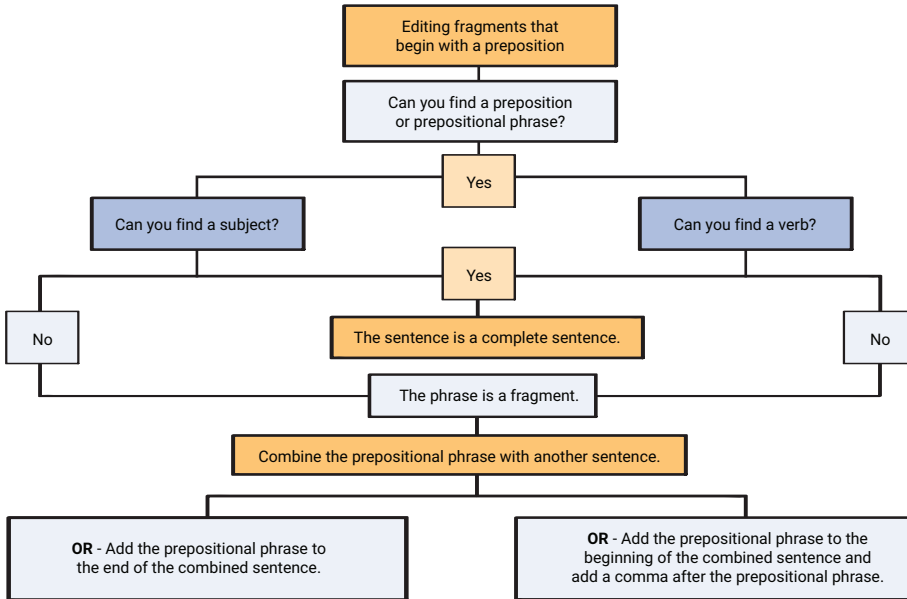


Figure 24.2: Editing Fragments That Begin with a Preposition

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

EXAMPLE A

Incorrect: After walking over three kilometres. John remembered his wallet.

Correct: After walking over three kilometres, John remembered his wallet.

Correct: John remembered his wallet after walking over three kilometres.

EXAMPLE B

Incorrect: The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner. When it was switched on.

Correct: When the vacuum cleaner was switched on, the dog growled.

Correct: The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner when it was switched on.

A clause that starts with a dependent word—such as *since*, *because*, *without*, or *unless*—is similar to a prepositional phrase. Like prepositional phrases, these clauses can be fragments if they are not connected to an independent clause containing a subject and a verb. To fix the problem, add such a fragment to the beginning or end of a sentence. If the fragment is added at the beginning of a sentence, add a comma.

Incorrect: Because we lost power. The entire family overslept.

Correct: Because we lost power, the entire family overslept.

Correct: The entire family overslept because we lost power.

Incorrect: He has been seeing a physical therapist. Since his accident.

Correct: Since his accident, he has been seeing a physical therapist.

Correct: He has been seeing a physical therapist since his accident.

When you encounter a word ending in *-ing* in a sentence, identify whether or not this word is used as a verb in the sentence. You may also look for a helping verb. If the word is not used as a verb or if no helping verb is used with the *-ing* verb form, the verb is being used as a noun. An *-ing* verb form used as a noun is called a **gerund**.

Verb: I *was* (helping verb) *working* (verb) on homework until midnight.

Noun: Working until midnight makes me tired the next morning.

Once you know whether the *-ing* word is acting as a noun or a verb, look at the rest of the sentence. Does the entire sentence make sense on its own? If not, it is a fragment. Add the parts of speech that are missing or combine the fragment with a nearby sentence.

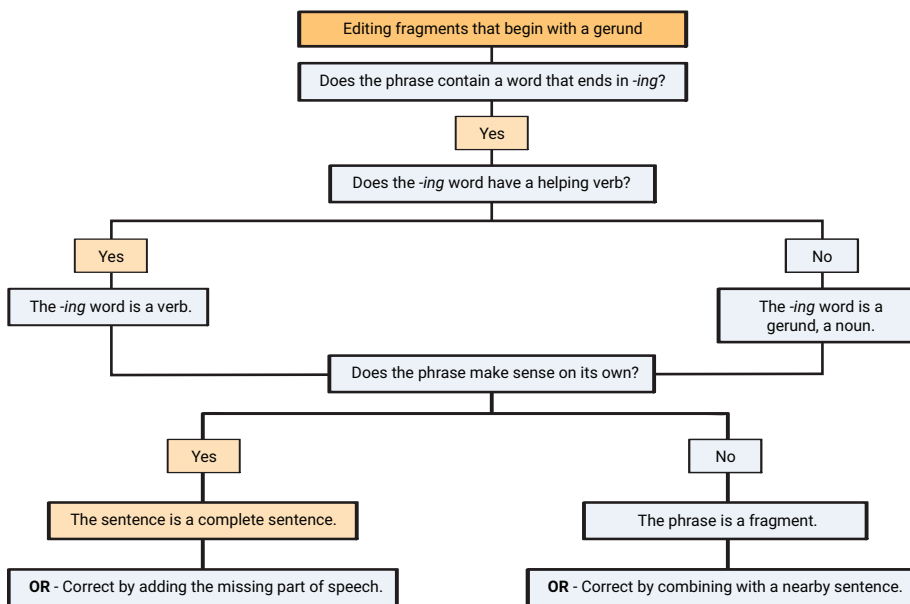


Figure 24.3: Editing Fragments That Begin with Gerunds

Illustration by Jessica Tang.

Incorrect: Taking deep breaths. Saul prepared for his presentation.

Correct: Taking deep breaths, Saul prepared for his presentation.

Correct: Saul prepared for his presentation. He **was taking** deep breaths.

Incorrect: Congratulating the entire team. Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Correct: Sarah was congratulating the entire team. She raised her glass to toast their success.

Correct: Congratulating the entire team, Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Another error in sentence construction is a fragment that begins with an infinitive. An infinitive is a verb paired with the word *to*—for example, *to run*, *to write*, or *to reach*. Although infinitives are verbs, they can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. Correct a fragment that begins with an infinitive by either combining it with another sentence or adding the parts of speech that are missing.

Incorrect: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes.
To reach the one-thousand mark.

Correct: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes **to**
reach the one-thousand mark.

Correct: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes. **We**
wanted to reach the one-thousand mark.

PRACTICE 24.4

Copy the following sentences onto a sheet of paper and circle the fragments. Then combine the fragment with the independent clause to create a complete sentence.

1. Working without taking a break. We try to get as much work done as we can in an hour.
2. I needed to bring work home. In order to meet the deadline.
3. Unless the ground freezes too early this fall. We will be planting tulips this year.
4. Turning the lights off after he was done in the kitchen. Robert tries to conserve energy whenever possible.
5. You'll find what you need if you look. On the shelf next to the potted plant.
6. To find the perfect apartment. Deidre searched online each day.

Run-On Sentences

Just as short, incomplete sentences can be problematic, lengthy sentences can be problematic too. A reader can get lost or lose interest in material that is too dense and rambling. Sentences with two or more independent clauses that have been incorrectly combined are known as run-on sentences. A run-on sentence may be either a fused sentence or a comma splice.

Fused sentence: When two complete sentences are combined into one without any punctuation, the result is a fused sentence.

A family of foxes lived under our shed young foxes played all over the yard.

Comma splice: When two complete sentences are joined by a comma, the result is a comma splice.

We looked outside, the kids were hopping on the trampoline.

Both errors can easily be fixed.

Punctuation

One way to correct run-on sentences is to correct the punctuation. For example, adding a period will correct the run-on sentence by creating two separate sentences.

Run-on: There were no seats left, we had to stand in the back.

Correct: There were no seats left. We had to stand in the back.

Using a semicolon between the two complete sentences will also correct the error. A semicolon allows you to keep the two closely related ideas together in one sentence. When you punctuate with a semicolon, make sure that both parts of the sentence are independent clauses. For more information on semicolons, see [Chapter 25: Semicolon](#).

Run-on: The accident closed both lanes of traffic we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

Complete sentence: The accident closed both lanes of traffic; we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

When you use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses, you may wish to add a transitional word to show the connection between the two thoughts. After the semicolon, add the transition word and follow it with a comma. For more information on transitional words, see [Chapter 25: Semicolon](#).

Run-on: The project was put on hold we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Complete sentence: The project was put on hold; **however**, we didn't have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Coordinating Conjunctions

You can also fix run-on sentences by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction. A **coordinating conjunction** acts as a link between two independent clauses. These are the seven coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. (The acronym *FANBOYS* will help you remember this group of coordinating conjunctions.) Use these words appropriately when you want to link the two independent clauses.

Run-on: The new printer was installed, no one knew how to use it.

Complete sentence: The new printer was installed, **but** no one knew how to use it.

Dependent Words

Adding dependent words is another way to link independent clauses. Like the coordinating conjunctions, dependent words show a relationship between two independent clauses.

Run-on: We took the elevator, the others still got there before us.

Complete sentence: **Although** we took the elevator, the others got there before us.

Run-on: Cobwebs covered the furniture, the room hadn't been used in years.

Complete sentence: Cobwebs covered the furniture **because** the room hadn't been used in years.

Read the sample email below. Identify three fragments and two comma splices in Isabelle's email to Mr. Blankenship.

Dear Mr. Blankenship:

The invoice we received yesterday. From your office was dated February 25. This date is incorrect, the date should read February 28, attached is the original invoice with the incorrect date. Please correct the date and resend the invoice. We will be able to send the funds promptly. By the end of the day.

Sincerely,

Isabelle

Isabelle’s email opens with two fragments and two run-on sentences containing comma splices. The email ends with another fragment. What effect would this email have on Mr. Blankenship or other readers? Mr. Blankenship may not think highly of Isabelle’s communication skills or—worse—may not understand the message at all! Communications written in precise, complete sentences are not only more professional but also easier for a reader to understand. Before you hit the “send” button, read your email carefully to make sure that the sentences are complete, do not run together, and are correctly punctuated.

PRACTICE 24.5

Use what you have learned about run-on sentences to correct the following passages:

1. The report is due on Wednesday but we’re flying back from Vancouver that morning. I told the project manager that we would be able to get the report to her later that day she suggested that we come back a day early to get the report done and I told her we had meetings until our flight took off. We emailed our contact, who said that he would check with his boss, she said that the project could afford a delay as long as they wouldn’t have to make any edits or changes to the file our new deadline is next Friday.
2. Anna tried getting a reservation at the restaurant, but when she called they said that there was a waiting list so she put our names down on the list when the day of our reservation arrived we only had to wait thirty minutes because a table opened up unexpectedly which was good because we were able to catch a movie after dinner in the time we’d expected to wait to be seated.
3. Without a doubt, my favourite artist is Leonardo da Vinci, not because of his paintings but because of his fascinating designs, models, and sketches, including plans for scuba gear, a flying machine, and a life-size mechanical lion that actually walked and moved its head. His paintings are beautiful too, especially when you see the computer-enhanced versions researchers use a variety of methods to discover and enhance the paintings’ original colours, the result of which are stunningly vibrant and yet delicate displays of the man’s genius.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement is one of the most common sentence errors. Having a solid understanding of this concept will help ensure that your ideas are communicated clearly.

Agreement

Agreement refers to the proper grammatical match between words and phrases. Parts of sentences must agree, or correspond, with other parts in number, person, case, and gender.

- **Number.** All parts must match in singular or plural forms.
- **Person.** All parts must match in first-person (*I*), second-person (*you*), or third-person (*he, she, it, they*) forms.
- **Case.** All parts must match in subjective (*I, you, he, she, it, they, we*), objective (*me, her, him, them, us*), or possessive (*my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, their, theirs, our, ours*) forms.
- **Gender.** All parts must match in male or female forms. This is no longer an absolute. Given the preference of nonbinary people to use they/them/theirs as their preferred pronouns, this has to be taken into account.

Subject-verb agreement describes the match in number between subjects and verbs. Subjects and verbs are either singular or plural. That is, they either refer to *one* thing (e.g., a cat) or *more than one* thing (e.g., two or more cats). The subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must agree with each other in number. That is, a singular subject belongs with a singular verb form, and a plural subject belongs with a plural verb form. For more information on subjects and verbs, turn back to the section on [Subjects](#) earlier in this chapter.

Singular: The cat *jump*s over the fence.

Plural: The cats *jump* over the fence.

Regular Verbs

Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern. For example, in the third-person singular, regular verbs always end in *-s*. Other forms of regular verbs do not end in *-s*. Study the following regular verb forms in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First person	I live.	We live.
Second person	You live.	You live.
Third person	He/She/It lives.	They live.

Singular: My mother *walks* to work every morning.

In this sentence, the subject is *mother*. Because the sentence only refers to one mother, the subject is singular. The verb in this sentence must be in the third-person singular form.

Plural: My friends *like* the same music as I do.

In this sentence, the subject is *friends*. Because this subject refers to more than one person, the subject is plural. The verb in this sentence must be in the third-person plural form.

TIP: Add an *-es* to the third-person-singular form of regular verbs that end in *-sh*, *-x*, *-ch*, and *-s*. (I wish/he wishes, I fix/she fixes, I watch/it watches, I kiss/he kisses.)

Singular: I *read* every day.

Plural: We *read* every day.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the first-person singular and the first-person plural.

Singular: You *stretch* before you go to bed.

Plural: You *stretch* before every game.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the second-person singular and the second-person plural. In the singular form, the pronoun *you* refers to one person. In the plural form, the pronoun *you* refers to a group of people, such as a team.

Many singular subjects can be made plural by adding an *-s*. Most regular verbs in the present tense end with an *-s* in the third-person singular. This does not make the verbs plural.

Singular subject, singular verb: The cat *races* across the yard.

Plural subject, plural verb: The cats *race* across the yard.

PRACTICE 24.6

Choose the correct verb form for each of the following sentences.

1. I (brush/brushes) my teeth twice a day.
2. You (wear/wears) the same shoes every time we go out.
3. He (kick/kicks) the soccer ball into the goal.
4. She (watch/watches) foreign films.
5. Catherine (hide/hides) behind the door.
6. We (want/wants) to have dinner with you.
7. You (work/works) together to finish the project.
8. They (need/needs) to score another point to win the game.
9. It (eat/eats) four times a day.
10. David (fix/fixes) his own motorcycle.

Irregular Verbs

Not all verbs follow a predictable pattern. Verbs that do not follow the pattern described above are called irregular verbs. Some of the most common irregular verbs are *be*, *have*, and *do*. Learn the forms of these verbs in the present tense to avoid errors in subject-verb agreement.

Be

Study the different forms of the verb *to be* in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First person	I am.	We are.
Second person	You are.	You are.
Third person	He/She/It is.	They are.

Have

Study the different forms of the verb *to have* in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First person	I have.	We have.
Second person	You have.	You have.
Third person	He/She/It has.	They have.

Do

Study the different forms of the verb *to do* in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First person	I do.	We do.
Second person	You do.	You do.
Third person	He/She/It does.	They do.

PRACTICE 24.7

Choose the correct present-tense form of *be*, *have*, or *do* to complete the following sentences.

- I _____ sure that you will succeed.
- They _____ front-row tickets to the show.
- He _____ a great Elvis impersonation.
- We _____ so excited to meet you in person!
- She _____ a fever and a sore throat.
- You _____ not know what you are talking about.
- You _____ all going to pass this class.
- She _____ not going to like that.
- It _____ appear to be the right size.
- They _____ ready to take this job seriously.

Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

Errors in subject-verb agreement can occur when

- a sentence contains a compound subject;
- the subject of the sentence is separate from the verb;

- the subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun, such as *anyone* or *everyone*;
- the subject of the sentence is a collective noun, such as *team* or *organization*; or
- the subject appears after the verb.

Recognizing the sources of common errors in subject-verb agreement will help you avoid these errors in your writing. The next section explains subject-verb agreement errors in more detail.

Compound Subjects

A compound subject is formed by two or more nouns and the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *or*, or *nor*. A compound subject can be made of singular subjects, plural subjects, or a combination of singular and plural subjects.

Compound subjects combined with *and* take a plural verb form.

Two singular subjects: Alicia and Miguel *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Two plural subjects: The girls and the boys *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Singular and plural subjects: Alicia and the boys *ride* their bikes to the beach.

Compound subjects combined with *or* and *nor* are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb.

Two singular subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor Rianna *wants* to eat at that restaurant.

Two plural subjects: Neither the kids nor the adults *want* to eat at that restaurant.

Singular and plural subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor the kids *want* to eat at that restaurant.

Plural and singular subjects: Neither the kids nor Elizabeth *wants* to eat at that restaurant.

Two singular subjects: Either you or Jason *takes* the furniture out of the garage.

Two plural subjects: Either you or the twins *take* the furniture out of the garage.

Singular and plural subjects: Either Jason or the twins *take* the furniture out of the garage.

Plural and singular subjects: Either the twins or Jason *takes* the furniture out of the garage.

TIP: If you can substitute the word *they* for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third-person-plural verb form.

Separation of Subjects and Verbs

As you read or write, you may come across a sentence that contains a phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Often, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses add more information to the sentence and appear between the subject and the verb. However, the subject and the verb must still agree.

If you have trouble finding the subject and verb, cross out or ignore the phrases and clauses that begin with prepositions or dependent words. The subject of a sentence will never be in a prepositional phrase or dependent clause.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a prepositional phrase:

The students with the best grades *win* the academic awards.

The puppy under the table *is* my favourite.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a dependent clause:

The car that I bought *has* power steering and a sunroof.

The representatives who are courteous *sell* the most tickets.

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to an unspecified person, thing, or number. When an indefinite pronoun serves as the subject of a sentence, you will often use a singular verb form.

However, keep in mind that exceptions arise. Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form. To determine whether to use a singular or plural verb with an indefinite pronoun, consider the noun that the pronoun would refer to. If the noun is plural, then use a plural verb with the indefinite pronoun. View the chart to see a list of common indefinite pronouns and the verb forms they agree with.

Indefinite Pronouns That Always Take a Singular Verb	Indefinite Pronouns That Can Take a Singular or Plural Verb
anybody, anyone, anything	all
each	any
everybody, everyone, everything	none
much	some
many	
nobody, no one, nothing	
somebody, someone, something	

Singular: Everybody in the kitchen *sings* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *everybody* takes a singular verb form because *everybody* refers to a group performing the same action as a single unit.

Plural: All the people in the kitchen *sing* along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun *all* takes a plural verb form because *all* refers to the plural noun *people*. Because *people* is plural, *all* is plural.

Singular: All the cake *is* on the floor.

In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun *all* takes a singular verb form because *all* refers to the singular noun *cake*. Because *cake* is singular, *all* is singular.

Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and considers those people, places, or things one singular unit. Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb. Some commonly used collective nouns are *group*, *team*, *army*, *flock*, *family*, *government*, and *class*.

Singular: The class *is* going on a field trip.

In this sentence, *class* is a collective noun. Although the class consists of many students, the class is treated as a singular unit and requires a singular verb form.

The Subject Follows the Verb

You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. In other words, the subject of the sentence may not appear where you expect it to appear. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb.

HERE OR THERE

In sentences that begin with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb.

Here *is* my wallet!

There *are* thirty dolphins in the water.

If you have trouble identifying the subject and the verb in sentences that start with *here* or *there*; it may help to reverse the order of the sentence so the subject comes first.

My wallet *is* here!

Thirty dolphins *are* in the water.

Questions

When you ask questions, a question word (*who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, or *how*) appears first. The verb and then the subject follow.

Who *are* the people you are related to?

When *am* I going to go to the grocery store?

TIP: If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in a question, try answering the question being asked:

When *am* I going to the grocery store? I *am* going to the grocery store tonight!

PRACTICE 24.8

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following sentences. If there are no errors in subject-verb agreement, write *OK*.

1. My dog and cats chases one another all the time.
2. The books that are in my library is the best I have ever read.
3. Everyone are going to the concert except me.
4. My family are moving to Nova Scotia.
5. Here is the lake I told you about.
6. There is the newspapers I was supposed to deliver.
7. Which room is bigger?
8. When are the movie going to start?
9. My sister and brother cleans up after themselves.
10. Some of the clothes is packed away in the basement.

PRACTICE 24.9

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following paragraph.

Dear Hiring Manager,

I feels that I am the ideal candidate for the receptionist position at your company. I has three years of experience as a receptionist in a company that is similar to yours. My phone skills and written communication is excellent. These skills and others that I have learned on the job helps me understand that every person in a company helps make the business a success. At my current job, the team always say that I am very helpful. Everyone appreciate when I go the extra mile to get the job done right. My current employer and co-workers feels that I am an asset to the team. I is efficient and organized. Is there any other details about me that you would like to know? If so, please contact me. Here are my résumé. You can reach me by email or phone. I looks forward to speaking with you in person.

Thanks,

Felicia Potvin

Verb Tense

Suppose you have to give an oral presentation about what you did last summer. How do you make it clear that you are talking about the past and not about the present or the future? Using the correct verb tense can help you do this. Mistakes in tense often leave a listener or reader confused about timelines.

Verbs indicate actions or states of being in time: the past, present, or future. **Verb tense** identifies the time of action described in a sentence. Verbs take different forms to indicate different tenses. Verb tenses indicate

- an action or state of being in the present,
- an action or state of being in the past, or
- an action or state of being in the future.

Helping verbs, such as *be* and *have*, also work to create verb tenses, such as the future tense.

Present tense: Tim *walks* to the store. (Singular subject)

Present tense: Sue and Kimmy *walk* to the store. (Plural subject)

Past tense: Yesterday, they *walked* to the store to buy some bread.
(Plural subject)

Future tense: Tomorrow, they *will walk* to the store again. (Plural subject)

PRACTICE 24.10

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tenses.

1. Severe dry spells (have always been, had always been, will always be) a feature of prairie settlement, appearing on average every twenty years or so.
2. The 1930s, however, (are, were, will be) forever remembered for both the persistence and extent of the drought.
3. While other provinces—in particular, Ontario and Quebec—(are recovering, were recovering, will be recovering) from the Great Depression, Saskatchewan (experiences, experienced, will experience) its most far-reaching drought in 1937.
4. Saskatchewan's total wheat production (drops, dropped, will drop) by a third during the 1930s even though wheat acreage (increases,

- increased, will increase) by more than a million acres during the same period.
5. In other words, more cropped land (is actually producing, was actually producing, will actually produce) less wheat during this time.
 6. Hot, drying winds (scoop up, scooped up, will scoop up) loose topsoil into dust blizzards that (makes, made, will make) outside activity nearly impossible.
 7. An estimated quarter of a million acres of Saskatchewan land (is blowing, was blowing, will blow) out of control by the mid-1930s.
 8. Darkness at noon (is, was, will be) not uncommon at this time, while churning dirt (piles up, piled up, will pile up) in drifts along buildings, fence lines, and ridges.
 9. Homemakers (face, faced, will face) a frustrating battle trying to keep the dust out of their homes, placing wet rags on windowsills and hanging wet sheets over doorways.
 10. But it still (manages, managed, will manage) to seep through, depositing a thick film on everything.
 11. Tables (are, were, will be) often set with the cups and bowls upside down, a temporary response that eventually (becomes, became, will become) a lifelong habit for some.

Regular Verbs

Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from the present to past tense. For example, to form a past-tense or past-participle verb form, add *-ed* or *-d* to the end of a verb. Below are just a few of the many regular verbs; this list is not complete.

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
walk	walked	talk	talked
end	ended	cook	cooked
start	started	clean	cleaned
repeat	repeated	wash	washed
ask	asked	need	needed

Irregular Verbs

The past tense of irregular verbs is not formed using the patterns that regular verbs follow.

Table 24.1: Irregular Verbs

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
am/is/are	was/were	lose	lost
become	became	make	made
begin	began	mean	meant
blow	blew	meet	met
break	broke	pay	paid
bring	brought	put	put
build	built	quit	quit
burst	burst	read	read
buy	bought	ride	rode
catch	caught	ring	rang
choose	chose	rise	rose
come	came	run	ran
cut	cut	say	said
dive	dove (dived)	see	saw
do	did	seek	sought
draw	drew	sell	sold
drink	drank	send	sent
drive	drove	set	set
eat	ate	shake	shook
fall	fell	shine	shone (shined)
feed	fed	shrink	shrank
feel	felt	sing	sang
fight	fought	sit	sat

Simple Present	Past	Simple Present	Past
find	found	sleep	slept
fly	flew	speak	spoke
forget	forgot	spend	spent
forgive	forgave	spring	sprang
freeze	froze	stand	stood
get	got	steal	stole
give	gave	strike	struck
go	went	swim	swam
grow	grew	swing	swung
have	had	take	took
hear	heard	teach	taught
hide	hid	tear	tore
hold	held	tell	told
hurt	hurt	think	thought
keep	kept	throw	threw
know	knew	understand	understood
lay	laid	wake	woke
lead	led	wear	wore
leave	left	win	won
let	let	wind	wound

To create the future tense, combine *will* with the present-tense form of the verb.

Present tense: Lauren *keeps* all her letters.

Past tense: Lauren *kept* all her letters.

Future tense: Lauren *will keep* all her letters.

TIP: The best way to learn irregular verbs is to memorize them. With the help of a friend, create flashcards of irregular verbs and test yourselves until you master them.

PRACTICE 24.11

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the irregular verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tense. Copy the corrected sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Marina finally (forgived, forgave, will forgive) her sister for snooping around her room.
2. The house (shook, shook, shakes) as the airplane rumbled overhead.
3. I (bused, bought, buy) several items of clothing at the thrift store on Wednesday.
4. She (put, putted, puts) the lotion in her shopping basket and proceeded to the checkout line.
5. The prized goose (laid, laid, lay) several golden eggs last night.
6. Mr. Batista (tached, taught, taughted) the class how to use correct punctuation.
7. I (drink, drank, will drink) several glasses of sparkling cider instead of champagne on New Year's Eve next year.
8. Although Hector (growed, grew, grows) three inches in one year, we still called him "Little Hector."
9. Yesterday our tour guide (lead, led, will lead) us through a maze of people in West Edmonton Mall.
10. The rock band (burst, bursted, bursts) onto the music scene with their catchy songs.

PRACTICE 24.12

Write a sentence using the correct form of the verb tense shown below.

1. Throw (past)
2. Paint (simple present)
3. Smile (future)

4. Tell (past)
5. Share (simple present)

Maintaining Consistent Verb Tense

Consistent verb tense means the same verb tense is used throughout a sentence or a paragraph. As you write and revise, it is important to use the same verb tense consistently and to avoid shifting from one tense to another unless there is a good reason for the tense shift. In the following box, see whether you notice the difference between a sentence with consistent tense and one with inconsistent tense.

Inconsistent tense: The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line. (Present + past)

Consistent tense: The crowd *started* cheering as Melina *approached* the finish line. (Past + past)

Consistent tense: The crowd *starts* cheering as Melina *approaches* the finish line. (Present + present)

TIP: In some cases, clear communication will call for different tenses. Look at the following example:

When I was a teenager, I *wanted* to be a firefighter, but now I *am studying* computer science.

If the time frame for each action or state is different, a tense shift is appropriate.

PRACTICE 24.13

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the inconsistent verb tense.

In the Middle Ages, most people lived in villages and work as agricultural labourers, or peasants. Every village has a “lord,” and the peasants worked on his land. Much of what they produce go to the lord and his family. What little food was left over goes to support the peasants’ families. In return for their labour, the lord offers them protection. A peasant’s day usually began before sunrise and involves long hours of back-breaking work, which includes ploughing the

land, planting seeds, and cutting crops for harvesting. The working life of a peasant in the Middle Ages is usually demanding and exhausting.

Pronouns

If there were no pronouns, all types of writing would be tedious to read. We would soon be frustrated by reading sentences like *Bob said that Bob was tired* or *Christina told the class that Christina received an A on Christina's exam*.

Pronouns help a writer avoid constant repetition. Knowing just how pronouns work is an important aspect of clear and concise writing.

Pronoun Agreement

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of (or refers back to) a noun or another pronoun. The word or words a pronoun refers to is called the **antecedent** of the pronoun.

1. *Lani* complained that *she* was exhausted.
 - *She* refers to *Lani*.
 - *Lani* is the antecedent of *she*.
2. *Jeremy* left the party early, so I did not see *him* until Monday at work.
 - *Him* refers to *Jeremy*.
 - *Jeremy* is the antecedent of *him*.
3. *Marina and Rosalie* have been best friends ever since *they* were freshmen in high school.
 - *They* refers to *Marina and Rosalie*.
 - *Marina and Rosalie* is the antecedent of *they*.

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun and the antecedent do not match or agree with each other. There are several types of pronoun agreement.

TIP: When writing an essay, don't use a pronoun as the subject in the first sentence of a body paragraph. It's good practice to not require your reader to refer back to a previous paragraph to find the antecedent of a pronoun. For example, let's say you're writing an essay about Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Even if you've already mentioned Atwood's name several times in the essay, don't begin a new paragraph with this sentence: *She also uses symbolism in the novel*. Instead, write this: *Atwood also uses symbolism in the novel*.

Agreement in Number

If the pronoun takes the place of or refers to a singular noun, the pronoun must also be singular. The only exception is *they*, which can also function as a gender-neutral singular pronoun.

For example, it is no longer incorrect to say: If a *student* (sing.) wants to return a book to the bookstore, *they* (gender-neutral sing.) must have a receipt.

Also correct: If a *student* (sing.) wants to return a book to the bookstore, *he or she* (sing.) must have a receipt.

*If it seems too wordy to use *he or she*, change the antecedent to a plural noun.

And also correct: If *students* (pl.) want to return a book to the bookstore, *they* (pl.) must have a receipt.

Table 24.2: Agreement in Person

	Singular Pronouns			Plural Pronouns		
First person	I	me	my (mine)	we	us	our (ours)
Second person	you	you	your (yours)	you	you	your (your)
Third person	he, she, it, they	him, her, it, they	his, her, its, their(s)	they	them	their (theirs)

If you use a consistent person, your reader is less likely to be confused.

Incorrect: When a *person* (third) goes to a restaurant, *you* (second) should leave a tip.

Correct: When a *person* (third) goes to a restaurant, *he or she* (third) should leave a tip.

Correct: When a *person* (third) goes to a restaurant, *they* (third) should leave a tip.

Correct: When *we* (first) go to a restaurant, *I should* (first) should leave a tip.

In informal conversations, we often use the second-person pronoun *you* to refer to “people in general.”

Example: If you run for public office, you should expect scrutiny of your private life.

Unclear or Vague Pronoun Reference

In formal academic writing, avoid this habit. Choose the formal third-person pronoun *one* instead.

Example: If one runs for public office, one should expect scrutiny of one's private life.

While using pronouns such as *it* and *they* helps reduce unnecessary repetition, it is important to make sure it's clear what or whom the pronouns refer to.

Example: At the hospital, they said I might be suffering from dehydration. (Who, exactly, does *they* refer to?).

Example: The researchers found that it was an expensive policy. (What, exactly, does *it* refer to?).

As you proofread, check that the antecedent has been clearly stated. Otherwise, your instructor may indicate “unclear pronoun reference” or “vague pronoun reference.”

Indefinite Pronouns and Agreement

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person or thing and are usually singular. Note that a pronoun that refers to an indefinite singular pronoun should also be singular—again, with the exception of *they*, which can be used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. The following are some common indefinite pronouns.

all	anything
each one	everybody
few	nobody
nothing	oneself
several	someone
any	both
each other	everyone
many	none
one	other
some	something
anybody	each
either	everything
neither	no one
one another	others
somebody	anyone

INDEFINITE PRONOUN AGREEMENT

Correct: *Everyone* (sing.) should do what *they* (gender-neutral sing.) can to help.

Correct: *Everyone* (sing.) should do what *he or she* (sing.) can to help.

Correct: *Someone* (sing.) left *their* (gender-neutral sing.) backpack in the library.

Correct: *Someone* (sing.) left *his or her* (sing.) backpack in the library.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns suggest more than one person but are usually considered singular. See the following examples of collective nouns.

audience

faculty

public

band

family

school

class

government

society

committee

group

team

company

jury

tribe

COLLECTIVE NOUN AGREEMENT

Collective nouns are considered singular, so they require singular pronouns. In these sentences below, the two entities (a company and the government) are single organizations, so they require singular pronouns.

Incorrect: Lara's *company* (singular) will have *their* (plural) annual picnic next week.

Correct: Lara's *company* (singular) will have *its* (singular) annual picnic next week.

Incorrect: I'm mad at the **government** (singular) because **they** (plural) always change policies.

Correct: I'm mad at the **government** (singular) because **it** (singular) always changes policies.

Because *company* refers to one company and *government* refers to one government, each entity is singular, so the pronouns must be singular too. In this context, using the gender-neutral pronoun *they* doesn't make sense.

PRACTICE 24.14

In order to choose the correct pronoun for each blank, first circle the noun the pronoun replaces. Then fill in the blank.

1. In the current economy, nobody wants to waste _____ money on frivolous things.
2. If anybody chooses to go to medical school, _____ must be prepared to work long hours.
3. The plumbing crew did _____ best to repair the broken pipes before the next ice storm.
4. If someone is rude to you, try giving _____ a smile in return.
5. My family has _____ faults, but I still love them no matter what.
6. The school of education plans to train _____ students to be literacy tutors.
7. The commencement speaker said that each student has a responsibility toward _____.
8. My mother's singing group has _____ rehearsals on Thursday evenings.
9. No one should suffer _____ pains alone.
10. I thought the flock of birds lost _____ way in the storm.

Subject and Object Pronouns

Subject pronouns function as subjects in a sentence. Object pronouns function as the object of a verb or of a preposition.

Singular Pronouns		Plural Pronouns	
Subject	Object	Subject	Object
I	me	we	us
you	you	you	you
he/she/it	him/her/it	they	them

The following sentences show pronouns as subjects:

1. *She* loves the Blue Ridge Mountains in the fall.
2. Every summer, *they* picked up litter from national parks.

The following sentences show pronouns as objects:

1. Marie leaned over and kissed *him*.
2. Jane moved *it* to the corner.

A pronoun can also be the object of a preposition.

Near *them*, the children played.
My mother stood between *us*.

The pronouns *us* and *them* are objects of the prepositions *near* and *between*. They answer the questions, *Near whom?* And *between whom?*

Compound subject pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the subject of the sentence. The following sentences show pronouns with compound subjects:

- Incorrect:** *Me and Harriet* visited the Grand Canyon last summer.
Correct: *Harriet and I* visited the Grand Canyon last summer.
Correct: Jenna accompanied *Harriet and me* on our trip.

Note that object pronouns are never used in the subject position. One way to remember this rule is to remove the other subject in a compound subject, leave only the pronoun, and see whether the sentence makes sense. For example, *Me visited the Grand Canyon last summer* sounds immediately incorrect.

Compound object pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the object of the sentence.

- Incorrect:** I have a good feeling about *Janice and I*.
Correct: I have a good feeling about *Janice and me*.

It is grammatically correct to write either *Janice and me* or *me and Janice*, but it is considered more polite to refer to yourself last.

In casual conversation, people sometimes mix up subject and object pronouns. For instance, you might say, “*Me and Donnie* went to a movie last night.” However, when you are writing or speaking at work or in any other formal situation, you should remember the distinctions between subject and object pronouns. These subtle grammar corrections will enhance the clarity and professionalism of your writing.

PRACTICE 24.15

Revise the following sentences in which the subject and object pronouns are used incorrectly. Write *OK* for each sentence that is correct.

1. Me and Meera enjoy doing yoga together on Sundays.
2. She and him have decided to sell their house.
3. Between you and I, I do not think Jeffrey will win the election.
4. Us and our friends have game night the first Thursday of every month.
5. Them and me met while on vacation in Mexico.
6. Napping on the beach never gets boring for Alice and I.
7. New Year's Eve is not a good time for she and I to have a serious talk.
8. You exercise much more often than me.
9. I am going to the comedy club with Yolanda and she.
10. Us students need to stick together.

Who Versus Whom

Who or *whoever* is always the subject of a verb. Use *who* or *whoever* when the pronoun performs the action indicated by the verb.

Who won the marathon last Tuesday?
I wonder *who* came up with that terrible idea!

On the other hand, *whom* and *whomever* serve as objects. They are used when the pronoun does *not* perform an action. Use *whom* or *whomever* when the pronoun is the direct object of a verb or the object of a preposition.

Whom did Frank marry the third time? (direct object of verb)
From *whom* did you buy that old record player? (object of preposition)

If you are having trouble deciding when to use *who* and *whom*, try this trick. Take the following sentence:

Who/Whom do I consider my best friend?

Reorder the sentence in your head, using either *he* or *him* in place of *who* or *whom*.

I consider *him* my best friend.
I consider *he* my best friend.

Which sentence sounds better? The first one, of course. So if you could use *him*, you should use *whom*.

PRACTICE 24.16

Complete the following sentences by adding *who* or *whom*.

1. _____ hit the home run?
2. I remember _____ won the Academy Award for Best Actor last year.
3. To _____ is the letter addressed?
4. I have no idea _____ left the iron on, but I am going to find out.
5. _____ are you going to recommend for the internship?
6. With _____ are you going to Hawaii?
7. No one knew _____ the famous actor was.
8. _____ in the office knows how to fix the copy machine?
9. From _____ did you get the concert tickets?
10. No one knew _____ ate the cake Mom was saving.

Reflexive Pronouns

Have you ever heard someone say something like this?

Please return the completed report to myself.

Melisa and myself are driving to the gala.

In speaking, people often incorrectly use a reflexive pronoun with the mistaken assumption that it sounds polite or formal. In fact, reflexive pronouns have a very specific grammatical role, and in academic writing, they should be used correctly.

Myself is a reflexive pronoun. Here are the other reflexive pronouns:

	First person	Second person	Third person
Singular	myself	yourself	himself, herself, itself, oneself
Plural	ourselves	yourselves	themselves

TIP: *Ourselves* and *themselves* are **incorrect** forms of plural reflexive pronouns.

Reflexive pronouns should be used only when the subject and object of the sentence are both the same person (or entity). In other words, they are used when a person (or entity) is both the “doer” and the “receiver” of the action in the verb. As a result, a reflexive pronoun can only take the object position in a sentence, not the subject position.

Jérôme accidentally hit himself with the hammer.

In this sentence, Jérôme is both the subject and the object of the verb *hit*: Jérôme hit Jérôme. Therefore, *himself* is used correctly.

Melisa drove herself to the gala.

Melisa is both the subject and the object of the verb *drove*: Melisa drove Melisa. Therefore, *herself* is used correctly.

The executives paid themselves well.

The executives are both the subject and the object of the verb *paid*: the executives paid the executives. Therefore, *themselves* is used correctly.

The cat lazily licked itself.

The cat is both the subject and the object of the verb *licked*: the cat licked the cat. Therefore, *itself* is used correctly.

Incorrect: Vivian and myself are driving to the gala.

In this case, we have compound subjects because two people are driving to the gala. As you learned above, a reflexive pronoun cannot be the subject of a sentence. As you learned in the previous section, *I* is a subjective pronoun, so this is the correct sentence:

Vivian and I are driving to the gala.

Incorrect: Marian, please return the completed report to myself.

In this case, the subject and object of the sentence are two different people. Marian is the subject. As you learned in the previous section, *me* is an objective pronoun, so this is the corrected sentence:

Marian, please return the completed report to me.

The same guideline applies to a compound object:

Incorrect: Please return the book to Shannon and myself.

Correct: Please return the book to Shannon and me.

Reflexive pronouns can also take on the role of intensive pronouns, which emphasize a noun or pronoun.

I myself will take on this incredible challenge.

Can you believe the premier herself spoke at the banquet?

He himself is to blame.

It was the snowboarders themselves who finally fixed the ramp.

PRACTICE 24.17

In the following sentences, first, circle the reflexive pronoun. Then determine whether the reflexive pronoun is used correctly or incorrectly. If it is used correctly, write *OK*. If it is used incorrectly, write the corrected sentence.

1. I enrolled myself in an English class.
2. The project was completed by Kara and myself.
3. Michael and myself are responsible for editing the report.
4. Jo-Ann and Cathy, please submit the application to myself.
5. Sharren prided herself on her work ethic.
6. Francis and Stuart found themselves in a difficult situation.
7. We have only ourself to blame, Paul!
8. The seals sunned themselves on the beach.
9. Make your lunch yourself!
10. The bear made itself visible to Cornelia and Robert.

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are descriptive words that bring writing to life by describing nouns and verbs to make them more specific and interesting.

Adjectives and Adverbs

An **adjective** is a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. It often answers questions such as *which one*, *what kind*, or *how many*?

The *green* sweater belongs to Iris.
She looks *beautiful*.

In the first sentence, the adjective *green* describes the noun *sweater*. Which sweater is Iris's? The green one. In the second sentence, the adjective *beautiful* describes the pronoun *she*. How does she look? She looks beautiful.

An **adverb** is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs frequently end in *-ly*. They answer questions such as *how*, *to what extent*, *why*, *when*, and *where*.

Bertrand sings *horribly*.
My sociology instructor is *extremely* wise.
He threw the ball *very* accurately.

In the first sentence, *horribly* describes the verb *sings*. How does Bertrand sing? He sings *horribly*. In the second sentence, *extremely* describes the adjective *wise*. How *wise* is the instructor? *Extremely* wise. In the third sentence, *very* describes the adverb *accurately*. How *accurately* did he throw the ball? *Very* accurately.

PRACTICE 24.18

Complete the following sentences by adding a correct adjective or adverb. Identify the word as an adjective (adj.) or an adverb (adv.).

1. Frederick _____ choked on the piece of chicken when he saw Margaret walk through the door.
2. His _____ eyes looked at everyone and everything as if they were specimens in a biology lab.
3. Despite her pessimistic views on life, Lauren believes that most people have _____ hearts.
4. Although Stefan took the criticism _____, he remained calm.
5. The child developed a _____ imagination because he read a lot of books.
6. Madeleine spoke _____ while she was visiting her grandmother in the hospital.

7. Hector's most _____ possession was his father's bass guitar from the 1970s.
8. My definition of a _____ afternoon is walking to the park on a beautiful day, spreading out my blanket, and losing myself in a good book.
9. She _____ eyed her new co-worker and wondered if she was single.
10. At the party, Denise _____ devoured two pieces of pepperoni pizza and several slices of ripe watermelon.

Comparative Versus Superlative

Comparative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare two people or things.

Jorge is *thin*.

Steven is *thinner* than Jorge.

The first sentence describes Jorge with the adjective *thin*. The second sentence compares Jorge to Steven, stating that Steven is *thinner*. *Thinner* is the comparative form of *thin*.

Comparatives can be formed in one of the following two ways:

1. If the adjective or adverb is a one-syllable word, add *-er* to it to form the comparative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *bigger*, *faster*, and *shorter* in the comparative form.
2. If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *more* in front of it to form the comparative. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *more happily*, *more comfortable*, and *more jealous* in the comparative.

Superlative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare more than two people or more than two things.

Jackie is the *loudest* cheerleader on the squad.

Kenyatta was voted the *most confident* student by her graduating class.

The first sentence declares that Jackie is not just *louder* than one other person, but she is the *loudest* of all the cheerleaders on the squad. The second sentence shows that Kenyatta is not just more confident than one or two other students; she was voted the *most confident* student of all the students in her class.

Superlatives can be formed in one of the following two ways:

1. If the adjective or adverb is a one-syllable word, add *-est* to form the superlative. For example, *big*, *fast*, and *short* would become *biggest*, *fastest*, and *shortest* in the superlative form.
2. If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word *most* in front of it. For example, *happily*, *comfortable*, and *jealous* would become *most happily*, *most comfortable*, and *most jealous* in the superlative form.
3. Exception: If the word has two syllables and ends in *-y*, change the *-y* to an *-i* and add *-est*. For example, *happy* would change to *happiest* in the superlative form; *healthy* would change to *healthiest*.

PRACTICE 24.19

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the errors in comparative and superlative adjectives.

It all started on the most sunny afternoon that I have ever experienced. Max and I were sitting on the porch. I told him that my dog, Jacko, was more smart than his dog, Merlin. Merlin never comes when he's called, and he chases his tail and barks at rocks! I said Merlin was the most dumbest dog on the block. I guess I was angrier about a bad grade that I received, so I decided to pick on poor little Merlin. Even though Max insulted Jacko too, I felt I had been more mean. The next day I apologized to Max and brought Merlin some treats. When Merlin placed his paw on my knee and licked my hand, I was the most sorry person on the block.

Irregular Adjectives and Adverbs: *Good, Well, Bad, and Badly*

Good, well, bad, and badly are often used incorrectly. Study the following chart to learn the correct usage of these words and their comparative and superlative forms.

		Comparative	Superlative
Adjective	good	better	best
Adverb	well	better	best
Adjective	bad	worse	worst
Adverb	badly	worse	worst

Good Versus Well

Good is always an adjective—that is, a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. The second sentence is correct because *well* is an adverb that tells how something is done.

Incorrect: Cecilia felt that she had never done so *good* on a test.

Correct: Cecilia felt that she had never done so *well* on a test.

Well is always an adverb that describes a verb, adverb, or adjective. The second sentence is correct because *good* is an adjective that describes the noun *score*.

Incorrect: Cecilia’s team received a *well* score.

Correct: Cecilia’s team received a *good* score.

Bad Versus Badly

Bad is always an adjective. The second sentence is correct because *badly* is an adverb that tells how the speaker did on the test.

Incorrect: I did *bad* on my accounting test because I didn’t study.

Correct: I did *badly* on my accounting test because I didn’t study.

Badly is always an adverb. The second sentence is correct because *bad* is an adjective that describes the noun *thunderstorm*.

Incorrect: The coming thunderstorm looked *badly*.

Correct: The coming thunderstorm looked *bad*.

Better and Worse

The following are examples of the use of *better* and *worse*:

Correct: Tyra likes sprinting *better* than long-distance running.

Correct: The traffic is *worse* in Toronto than in Regina.

Best and Worst

The following are examples of the use of *best* and *worst*:

Correct: Tyra sprints *best* of all the other competitors.

Correct: Peter finished *worst* of all the runners in the race.

Remember *better* and *worse* compare two persons or things. *Best* and *worst* compare three or more persons or things.

PRACTICE 24.20

Choose, *well*, *bad*, or *badly* to complete each sentence.

1. Donna always played _____ if she didn't warm up beforehand.
2. The school board president gave a _____ speech for once.
3. Although my dog, Comet, is mischievous, he always behaves _____ at the dog park.
4. I thought my back injury was _____ at first, but it turned out to be minor.
5. Steve was shaking _____ from the extreme cold.
6. Apple crisp is a very _____ dessert that can be made using whole grains instead of white flour.
7. The meeting with my son's math teacher went very _____.
8. Juan has a _____ appetite, especially when it comes to dessert.
9. Magritte thought the guests had a _____ time at the party because most people left early.
10. She _____ wanted to win the writing contest prize, which included a trip to Vancouver.

PRACTICE 24.21

Choose the correct comparative or superlative form of the word in parentheses.

1. This research paper is _____ (good) than my last one.
2. Tanaya likes country music _____ (well) of all.
3. My motorcycle rides _____ (bad) than it did last summer.
4. That is the _____ (bad) joke my father ever told.
5. The hockey team played _____ (badly) than it did last season.
6. Tracey plays guitar _____ (well) than she plays the piano.
7. It will go down as one of the _____ (bad) movies I have ever seen.
8. The deforestation in the Amazon is _____ (bad) than it was last year.
9. Movie ticket sales are _____ (good) this year than last.
10. Laetitia says mystery novels are the _____ (good) types of books.

TIP: The irregular words *good*, *well*, *bad*, and *badly* are often misused along with their comparative and superlative forms *better*, *best*, *worse*, and *worst*. You may not hear the difference between *worse* and *worst* and therefore type it incorrectly.

Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

A **modifier** is a word, phrase, or clause that clarifies or describes another word, phrase, or clause. Sometimes writers use modifiers incorrectly, leading to odd and unintentionally humorous sentences. The two common types of modifier errors are called misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. If either of these errors occurs, readers can no longer read smoothly. Instead, they become stumped trying to figure out what the writer *meant* to say.

A writer's goal must always be to communicate clearly and to avoid distracting the reader with odd sentences or awkward sentence constructions. The good news is that these errors can be easily overcome.

Misplaced Modifiers

A **misplaced modifier** is a modifier that is placed too far from the word or words it modifies. Misplaced modifiers make the sentence awkward and sometimes unintentionally humorous.

Incorrect: Bella wore a bicycle helmet on her head *that was too large*.

Correct: Bella wore a bicycle helmet *that was too large* on her head.

In the incorrect sentence, it sounds as if Bella's *head* was too large. Of course, the writer is referring to the helmet, not to Bella's head. The corrected version of the sentence clarifies the writer's meaning.

Look at the following two examples:

Incorrect: They bought a kitten for my brother *they call Shadow*.

Correct: They bought a kitten *they call Shadow* for my brother.

In the incorrect sentence, it seems that the *brother's* name is Shadow. That's because the modifier is too far from the word it modifies, which is *kitten*.

Incorrect: The patient was referred to the physician *with stomach pains*.

Correct: The patient *with stomach pains* was referred to the physician.

The incorrect sentence reads as if it is the *physician* who has stomach pains! What the writer means is that the patient has stomach pains.

Simple modifiers like *only*, *almost*, *just*, *nearly*, and *barely* often get used incorrectly because writers often stick them in the wrong place.

Confusing: Tyler *almost* found fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

Repaired: Tyler found *almost* fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

How do you *almost* find something? Either you find it or you do not. The repaired sentence is much clearer.

PRACTICE 24.22

In the following sentences, correct the misplaced modifiers.

1. The young woman was walking the dog on the telephone.
2. I heard that there was a robbery on the evening news.
3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller for the baby that he called “Speed Racer.”
4. Rolling down the mountain, the explorer stopped the boulder with his foot.
5. We are looking for a babysitter for our precious six-year-old who doesn’t drink or smoke and owns a car.
6. The teacher served cookies to the children wrapped in aluminum foil.
7. The mysterious woman walked toward the car holding an umbrella.
8. We returned the wine to the waiter that was sour.
9. Charlie spotted a stray puppy driving home from work.
10. I ate nothing but a cold bowl of noodles for dinner.

Dangling Modifiers

A **dangling modifier** is a word, phrase, or clause that describes something that has been left out of the sentence. When there is nothing that the word, phrase, or clause can modify, the modifier is said to dangle.

Incorrect: *Riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

Correct: As Jane was *riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

In the incorrect sentence, *riding in the sports car* is dangling. The reader is left wondering who is riding in the sports car. The world? The writer must tell the reader!

Incorrect: *Walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: As Jonas was *walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: The trees looked like spooky aliens as Jonas was *walking home at night*.

In the incorrect sentence *walking home at night* is dangling. Who is walking home at night? The trees? Jonas? Note that there are two different ways the dangling modifier can be corrected.

Incorrect: Damaged by the wind, James was sure the tree would not survive.

Correct: James was sure that the tree that was damaged by the wind would not survive.

Correct: Noting the damage done to the tree by the wind, James was sure it would not survive.

In the incorrect sentence, *damaged by the wind* appears to describe James. If it is not James who was damaged by the wind, what was? Who might not survive the damage? The tree!

The following three steps will help you quickly spot a dangling modifier:

1. Look for an *-ing* modifier at the beginning of your sentence or another modifying phrase:

Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.

Painting is the *-ing* modifier. Not all dangling modifiers contain an *-ing* verb. The verb may end in *-ed* or be an irregular verb.

2. Underline the first noun that follows it (the first noun after the comma):

Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.

Kitchen is the subject of the sentence. Has the kitchen been painting for three hours? Make sure the modifier is describing the entity represented by the noun. If not, the sentence likely contains a dangling modifier.

3. Rewrite the sentence so that the subject of the modifier appears directly after the comma:

Painting for three hours at night, Maggie finally finished the kitchen.

PRACTICE 24.23

Identify the dangling or misplaced modifier in each sentence, and rewrite the following sentences, eliminating the error.

1. Making discoveries about new creatures, this is an interesting time to be a biologist.
2. Walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.
3. Playing guitar in the bedroom, the cat was seen under the bed.
4. Packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.
5. While looking in the mirror, the towel swayed in the breeze.
6. Driving to the vet's office, the dog nervously whined.
7. When walking into the museum, the priceless painting drew large crowds.
8. Piled up next to the bookshelf, I chose a romance novel.
9. Chewed furiously, the gum fell out of my mouth.
10. Despite marking the assignments quickly, the students were disappointed with the grades the professor assigned.

PRACTICE 24.24

Rewrite the following paragraph correcting all the misplaced and dangling modifiers.

I bought a fresh loaf of bread for my sandwich shopping at the grocery store. Wanting to make a delicious sandwich, the mayonnaise was thickly spread. Placing the cold cuts on the bread, the lettuce was placed on top. I cut the sandwich in half with a knife turning on the radio. Biting into the sandwich, my favourite song blared loudly in my ears. Humming and chewing, my sandwich went down smoothly. Smiling, my sandwich will be made again, but next time I will add cheese.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A sentence is complete when it contains a subject, a verb, and a complete idea.
- A subject, which usually appears at the beginning of the sentence, is the noun (a person, place, or thing) or pronoun that the sentence is about.

- A verb indicates what the subject is doing, and a verb may be an action, linking, or helping verb.
- The parts of a sentence must agree in number, person, case, and gender.
- In some sentences, the subject and verb may be separated by a phrase or clause, but the verb must still agree with the subject.
- Variety in sentence structure and length improves writing by making it more interesting and more complex.
- Fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences are three common sentence errors.
- Verb tense expresses when an event takes place.
- Irregular verbs do not follow regular, predictable patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Pronouns and their antecedents need to agree in number and person.
- Most indefinite pronouns and collective nouns are singular.
- Pronouns can function as subjects or objects.
- Subject pronouns are never used as objects, and object pronouns are never used as subjects.
- Reflexive pronouns can be used only when the subject and object of a sentence are both the same person (or entity).
- Adjectives describe a noun or a pronoun.
- Adverbs describe a verb, adjective, or another adverb.
- Comparative adjectives and adverbs compare two persons or things.
- Superlative adjectives or adverbs compare more than two persons or things.
- Misplaced and dangling modifiers make sentences confusing and distracting.

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Mechanics

Punctuation, Capitalization, and Spelling

Learning Objectives

- Identify the uses of commas, semicolons, colons, quotation marks, apostrophes, parentheses, dashes, hyphens, ellipses, and square brackets
- Correctly use commas, semicolons, colons, quotation marks, apostrophes, parentheses, dashes, hyphens, ellipses, and square brackets in sentences
- Learn the basic conventions of capitalization, and identify common capitalization errors
- Identify common spelling rules, and use correct spelling to enhance the clarity of your writing
- Identify commonly misspelled words, and choose the correct spelling to enhance the clarity of your writing
- Identify commonly misused homonyms, and choose the correct spelling to enhance the clarity of your writing

In writing, *mechanics* doesn't refer to the people who fix our cars! In writing, *mechanics* refers to matters of punctuation, spelling, italicization, and capitalization.

A lot of people underestimate the power of mechanics. However, mechanics can cost you a fortune, even if they didn't fix your car! Rogers Communications of Toronto found that out the hard way in 2005 when it lost a one-million-dollar

case against Bell Aliant over one comma in a fourteen-page contract. This is the offending sentence: “This agreement shall be effective from the date it is made and shall continue in force for a period of five (5) years from the date it is made, and thereafter for successive five (5) year terms, unless and until terminated by one year prior notice in writing by either party.” The problem is the second comma: without the comma, the phrase “unless and until terminated” would tie it firmly and only to the “thereafter for successive five years” phrase; with it there, however, the first five years are ruled by the same “unless and until” phrase. Go figure! The bottom line is that mechanics are important.

After you’ve put a lot of time and work into generating ideas, conducting research, and writing your essay, it would be a shame to have readers struggle with—or even dismiss—your writing because errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization interfered with the reader’s ability to understand your good ideas. Like it or not, sloppy mechanics convey a message about the professionalism of the writer and the validity of the writer’s ideas. By paying close attention to mechanics, you can ensure that your ideas are conveyed so that your reader will focus on the ideas themselves without being distracted by mechanical problems.

Comma

One of the punctuation marks you will encounter most often is the comma. The comma typically indicates a pause in a sentence. Commas can be used in a variety of ways that can, at first, seem confusing to students. However, remember that almost every comma you see is used in one of the following seven ways. Look at the following examples to see how you might use a comma.

	Purpose	Examples
1	To set off an introductory word, phrase, or clause	Tomorrow, I will give you your allowance. Before you go out, please tidy your room.
2	To separate items in a list or series	I need to buy milk, eggs, and butter. The barn, the tool shed, and the back porch were destroyed by the wind.
3	To separate coordinate adjectives	I gave the tired, hungry child some water. The big, decrepit red barn will be demolished.
4	To coordinate two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction	The bedroom door was closed, so the children knew their mother was asleep. The company made an offer, and Immanuel accepted the position.

	Purpose	Examples
5	To set apart interrupting words and parenthetical expressions	I knew where it was hidden, of course, but I wanted them to find it themselves. Anne Murray, born in Nova Scotia, has been making music for decades.
6	To set apart elements of dates and addresses	The enclosed letter was postmarked December 8, 1945, and mailed from Paris, France, just after World War II ended.
7	To set off greetings and closings in emails and letters	Dear Frank, Please see the enclosed letter. Regards, Bertha

Once you have learned the seven primary ways commas are used, you'll find commas aren't quite so confusing. We will examine each of these in more detail in the following sections. Aim to read one section a day, and in one week, you will have commas mastered!

1. Place a Comma After an Introductory Word, Phrase, or Clause

A comma that appears near the beginning of the sentence after an introductory word or phrase tells the reader where the introductory phrase ends and where the main sentence begins.

Without spoiling the surprise, we need to tell her to save the date.

In this sentence, *without spoiling the surprise* is an introductory phrase, and *need to tell her to save the date* is the main sentence. Notice that they are separated by a comma. Likewise, when a single introductory word precedes the main part of the sentence, a comma follows the introductory word.

Unfortunately, she already had plans for that day.

Sometimes, the introductory material is an entirely dependent clause. If a dependent clause precedes an independent clause, you must add a comma between it and the independent clause because the dependent clause is not strong enough to support the independent clause without a little help. In the example, the independent clauses are double-underlined, and the dependent clauses are underlined once.

Because it is cold outside, I wore a warm coat.

However, when the independent clause comes first, it is strong enough to carry the dependent clause at the end without any helping punctuation.

I wore a warm coat because it is cold outside.

PRACTICE 25.1

On a sheet of paper, copy each sentence and add a comma after the introductory word or phrase.

1. Suddenly the dog ran into the house.
2. In the blink of an eye the kids were ready to go to the movies.
3. Confused he tried opening the box from the other end.
4. Every May long weekend we go camping in the woods.
5. Without a doubt green is my favourite colour.
6. Hesitating she looked back at the directions before proceeding.
7. Fortunately the sleeping baby did not stir when the doorbell rang.
8. Believe it or not the criminal was able to rob the same bank three times.
9. Even though Marti would have preferred to come to the party she stayed home to study.
10. Marti stayed home to study even though she would have preferred to come to the party.

2. Place Commas Between Items in a List

When listing three or more nouns in a series, separate the words or phrases with comma, then add the word *and* before the last item. This tells the reader that each of the items in the list is separate from the others.

We'll need to get **flour, tomatoes, and cheese** at the store.

The pizza will be topped with **black olives, red peppers, and pineapple chunks**.

Notice that the comma comes before *and*, not after. Also notice that there is no comma *after* the last item in the list (*cheese* in the first sentence).

TIP: The comma before *and* preceding the final item in a list is known as the Oxford comma. While most writing instructors will insist on its use in formal writing, not every other instructor or writer will. If you wish to omit the Oxford comma, check with your instructor. Either way, be consistent throughout the assignment.

PRACTICE 25.2

Correctly add commas to the following sentences containing items in a list.

1. On his birthday list, my son asked for video games an Amazon gift card and a new cell phone.
2. Don't forget, I need to borrow a suitcase a travel pillow and a passport holder for my trip.
3. Elsie Olga Katrina and Cornelia will work on the project.
4. My all-time favourite singers include Jann Arden Sarah McLaughlin Loreena McKennitt and Nelly Furtado.

3. Place Commas Between Coordinate Adjectives

Use commas to separate coordinate (equal) adjectives that come before the noun they modify when they are presented in a list-like manner and not joined with *and*.

It was a **bright, windy, clear** day.
The **tired, hungry** child asked for water.

Note that commas are not needed between cumulative adjectives.

The **large black male** bear stood on its hind legs.

To determine whether adjectives are coordinate or cumulative, consider whether you could, if you wish, insert *and* in between them. If so, the adjectives are coordinate. If not, they are cumulative.

It was a bright and windy and clear day. (Coordinate)
The large **and** black **and** male bear stood on its hind legs. (Cumulative)

PRACTICE 25.3

Correctly add commas to the following sentences containing adjectives.

1. Monday Tuesday and Wednesday are all booked with meetings.
2. It was a quiet uneventful unproductive day.
3. We'll need to prepare statements for the Franks Todds and Smiths before their portfolio reviews next week.
4. Michael Nita and Desmond finished their report last Tuesday.
5. With cold wet aching fingers he was able to secure the sails before the storm.
6. He wrote his name on the board in clear precise delicate letters.
7. The tired old grizzled man paused before he spoke.

4. Place Commas Before a Coordinating Conjunction in a Compound Sentence

When two independent clauses are joined with a coordinating conjunction to create a compound sentence, the comma comes after the first independent clause and is followed by the coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*).

He missed class today, **and** he thinks he will be out tomorrow too.
He says his fever is gone, **but** he is still very tired.

Not that the comma comes before the conjunction, not after.

This applies only when the clauses in the two sentences are both independent and could stand on their own as complete sentences.

He missed class today. He thinks he will be out tomorrow too.
He says his fever is gone. He is still very tired.

PRACTICE 25.4

Create a compound sentence by combining the two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction. Place the comma correctly.

1. The presentation was scheduled for Monday. The weather delayed it for four days.
2. He wanted a snack before bedtime. He ate some fruit.

3. The patient is in the next room. I can hardly hear anything.
4. We could go camping for vacation. We could go to the beach for vacation.
5. I want to get a better job. I am taking courses at night.
6. I cannot move forward on this project. I cannot afford to stop on this project.
7. Patrice wants to stop for lunch. We will take the next exit to look for a restaurant.
8. I've got to get this paper done. I have class in ten minutes.
9. The weather was clear yesterday. We decided to go on a picnic.
10. I have never dealt with this client before. I know Leonardo has worked with her. Let's ask him for his help.

5. Place Commas Before and After Interrupting Words

In conversations, you might interrupt your train of thought by giving more details about what you are talking about or by adding an aside. In a sentence, you might interrupt your train of thought with an interrupting word or phrase. These interrupting elements, also called parenthetical elements, must be set off with commas.

When interrupting words appear in the middle of a sentence, they are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. You can determine where the commas should go by looking for the part of the sentence that is not essential for the sentence to make sense. This is known as a non-restrictive word, clause, or phrase.

Galileo, **of course**, proved that Earth orbited the sun.

Galileo, **an Italian astronomer**, proved that Earth orbited the sun.

Interrupting words can also come at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. When the interrupting words appear at the beginning of the sentence, one comma is placed after the word or phrase. When they appear at the end, one comma is placed before the interrupting word or phrase.

If you can believe it, people once thought the sun and planets orbited around Earth.

Some people questioned that theory, **fortunately**.

Sometimes the interrupting words form a **non-restrictive clause**, also called a **nonessential clause**. In a non-restrictive clause, the information in the clause is

not essential for the reader to understand the meaning of the sentence. Because this information is nonessential, enclose it in commas.

I'll wear my warm coat, **which is blue**, because it's so cold out.

The main sentence is this: "I'll wear my warm coat because it's so cold out." The fact that the coat is blue is not relevant to the fact that the coat is warm or that it is necessary to wear a coat. Because the clause is not essential and just provides extra information, it is enclosed in commas. Non-restrictive clauses often begin with relative pronouns such as *which*, *who*, and *whom*.

PRACTICE 25.5

Correctly add commas to the following sentences that contain interrupting elements.

1. I asked my neighbors the retired couple from Nova Scotia to bring in my mail.
2. Without a doubt his work has improved over the last few weeks.
3. Our professor Dr. Singh drilled the lessons into our heads.
4. The meeting is at noon unfortunately which means I will be late for lunch.
5. We came in time for the last part of dinner but most importantly we came in time for dessert.
6. All of a sudden our network crashed, and we lost our files.
7. Alex hand the wrench to me before the pipe comes loose again.
8. My father who is eighty helped me fix my car.
9. My neighbour's big Dalmatian which is wearing a red collar is loose again.
10. The Dalmatian with the red collar is the one that got away.

6. Place Commas Between Parts of Dates and Addresses

We also use commas to separate the parts of dates and addresses.

If you are writing out the full date, add a comma after the day and before the year. You do not need to add a comma when you write the month and day or when you write the month and year. If you need to continue the sentence after you add a date that includes the day and year, add a comma after the end of the date.

The letter is postmarked May 4, 2001.

Her birthday is May 5.

He visited the country in July 2009.

I registered for the conference on March 7, 2020, so we should get our confirmation soon.

Also use commas to separate items in addresses and locations. When a sentence contains an address, place a comma after the street and after the city. Like a date, if you need to continue the sentence after adding the address, simply add a comma after the address.

We moved to 4542 Boxcutter Lane, Okotoks, Alberta.

After moving to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Eric used public transportation to get to work.

Trevor is from London, Canada, not London, England.

7. Use Commas in the Greetings and Closings of Letters

In letters and emails, we also use commas after a greeting and after a closing (the word or phrase before your signature). If you are writing a formal letter that contains the full sender's and/or recipient's mailing address in block format at the top of the letter, do not put commas at the end of each line of the address because the line breaks separate the components. Do put a comma after the city. Insert two spaces after the province.

Formont Enterprises
8989-190 Street NW
Calgary, AB T3L 0Y1
April 1, 2023

Anita Al-Sayf
111 Main Street
Carbon, AB T0M 0L0

Dear Ms. Al-Sayf,

Thank you for your letter. Please read the attached document for details.

Sincerely,

Jack Formont

PRACTICE 25.6

Correctly use commas as you edit the following letter.

14 Taylor Drive
Victoria BC V8W 1Y2
March 27 2023

Morris Timmons
25 Front Street
Calgary AB T2L 2Y1

Dear Mr. Timmons

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am currently in Victoria British Columbia but I will be available on Monday April 5 after 11 a.m. Is your address still 25 Front Street Calgary Alberta or do you have a new address? Please get back to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you

Alexa

PRACTICE 25.7

Use what you have learned about commas to correctly punctuate the following paragraphs.

1. My brother Nathaniel is a collector of many rare unusual things. He has collected lunchboxes limited-edition books and hatpins at various points in his life. His current collection of unusual bottles has over fifty pieces. Usually he sells one collection before starting another.
2. Our meeting is scheduled for Thursday March 20. At that time we will gather all our documents. Alice is in charge of the timetables and schedules. Tom is in charge of updating the guidelines. I am in charge of the presentation. To prepare for this meeting please print out any emails faxes or documents you have referred to while writing your sample.
3. It was a cool crisp autumn day when the group set out. They needed to cover several miles before they made camp so they walked at a

brisk pace. The leader of the group Garth kept checking his watch and their GPS location. Isabelle Raoul and Maggie took turns carrying the equipment while Carrie took notes about the wildlife they saw. As a result no one noticed the darkening sky until the first drops of rain splattered on their faces.

4. Please have your report completed and filed by April 15 2019 at the latest. In your submission letter please include your contact information the position you are applying for and two people we can contact as references. We will not be available for consultation after April 10 but you may contact the office if you have any questions. Thank you HR Department.

Spotlight on Commas

- Commas indicate a pause in a sentence.
- Place a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or clause to separate it from the main sentence.
- Place a comma between each item in a list or series.
- Place a comma before the coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence.
- Place a comma between coordinate adjectives.
- Commas can be used to separate the two independent clauses in compound sentences as long as a coordinating conjunction follows the comma.
- Use commas to separate interrupting words from the main sentence.
- Place commas between the elements of dates and addresses.
- In emails and letters, insert commas after the greeting and closing.



Semicolon

Compared to commas, semicolons are simple because they are used in only two main ways. Learn the two ways, and you'll have mastered semicolons!

1. A Semicolon Connects Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to connect two closely related independent clauses when they are not already connected by a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *or*, *but*, *nor*, *so*, *for*, *yet*.

I like pizza; I like pasta too.

Because there is no conjunction to hold the clauses together, if you were to try to connect the two independent clauses with a comma, it would create a comma splice.

Comma splice: I like pizza, I like pasta too.

Although a comma isn't strong enough to hold two independent clauses together, a semicolon is.

While a period would also be correct, relying on a period to separate the related clauses into two shorter sentences could lead to choppy writing.

Correct but choppy: I like pizza. I like pasta too.

Using a semicolon to combine the clauses can make your writing more interesting by creating a variety of sentence lengths and structures while preserving the flow of ideas.

Do *not* use a semicolon between an independent clause and a dependent clause, which would create a sentence fragment.

Sentence fragment: I like pizza; and pasta too.

Because "and pasta too" is not a complete sentence, the semicolon is incorrect.

2. A Semicolon Connects Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to connect two closely related independent clauses when one independent clause contains a transitional expression. Transitional expressions are words like these:

besides	meanwhile
certainly	moreover
consequently	nevertheless
conversely	next
finally	nonetheless
furthermore	on the other hand
hence	similarly
however	subsequently
in contrast	therefore
indeed	thus
instead	

Examine the following example, in which two independent clauses, one beginning with the transitional expression *also*, are joined with a semicolon. A comma follows the transitional expression.

I like pizza; also, I like pasta.

If you were to try to connect the two independent clauses with a comma, it would create a comma splice.

Comma splice: I like pizza, also, I like pasta.

A period would also be correct and would be a better choice if the two independent clauses weren't closely related.

I like pizza. Incidentally, I like meat pies too.

If the transitional sentence appears midclause, the semicolon still goes between the two independent clauses:

I like pizza; I, similarly, like pasta.

Note the commas around the transitional expression.

3. Semicolons Separate Items in a List

Use a semicolon to separate items in a list only when the items in the list already include commas. In this case, semicolons help the reader distinguish between items in the list.

Confusing: The colour combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey, green, brown, and black, or red, green, and brown.

Correct: The colour combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey; green, brown, and black; or red, green, and brown.

Thanks to the semicolons in this sentence, the reader can easily distinguish between the three sets of colours.

PRACTICE 25.8

Correct the following sentences by adding semicolons. If the sentence is correct as it is, write *OK*.

1. I did not notice that you were in the office I was behind the front desk all day.
2. Do you want turkey, spinach, and cheese roast beef, lettuce, and cheese or ham, tomato, and cheese?
3. Please close the blinds there is a glare on the screen.
4. Unbelievably, no one was hurt in the accident.
5. I cannot decide if I want my room to be green, brown, and purple green, black, and brown or green, brown, and dark red.
6. Let's go for a walk the air is so refreshing.

Spotlight on Semicolons

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
- Use a semicolon to separate items in a list when those items already include commas.

Colon

Like a period, a colon indicates a full stop. Use a colon to introduce lists, quotations, examples, and explanations.

1. Use a Colon to Introduce a List That Follows an Independent Clause

Use a colon to introduce a list of items *only* if that list follows an independent clause (i.e., complete sentence).

Correct: The team will tour three provinces: Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

Incorrect: The team will tour: Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

Correct: I have to take four classes this semester: composition, statistics, ethics, and Italian.

Incorrect: I have to take: composition, statistics, ethics, and Italian.

2. Use a Colon to Introduce a Quotation That Follows an Independent Clause

You can use a colon to introduce a quotation *only* if that quotation follows an independent clause (i.e., complete sentence).

My mother loved this line from *Hamlet*: “To thine own self be true.”
Mark Twain said it best: “When in doubt, tell the truth.”

TIP: In an essay, if a quotation is longer than forty words, it is called a block quotation, and it requires special formatting. Put a colon at the end of the sentence that introduces a block quotation. Then on a new line, begin the quotation, indenting each line of the quotation five spaces.

3. Use a Colon to Introduce an Example or Explanation

Use a colon to introduce an example or to further explain an idea presented in the first part of a sentence *only* if that list follows an independent clause (i.e., complete sentence).

There are drawbacks to modern technology: my brother’s cell phone died and he lost a lot of phone numbers.

Do not use a colon after phrases like *such as* or *for example*. Doing so creates a sentence fragment.

Correct: Our company offers many publishing services: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Incorrect: Our company offers many publishing services, such as: writing, editing, and reviewing.

TIP: Capitalize the first letter following a colon if it is the beginning of a quotation or if it introduces a question or a series of independent clauses. Do *not* capitalize if the information following the colon is not a complete sentence.

4. Use a Colon in Formal Correspondence

Use a colon after the greeting in business letters and memos.

Dear Hiring Manager:
To: Human Resources
From: Deanna Dean

PRACTICE 25.9

On a sheet of paper, correct the following sentences by adding semicolons or colons where needed. If the sentence does not need a semicolon or colon, write *OK*.

1. Don't give up you never know what tomorrow brings.
2. Our records show that the patient was admitted on March 9, 2010 January 13, 2010 and November 16, 2009.
3. Allow me to introduce myself I am the greatest ice carver in the world.
4. Where I come from, there are three ways to get to the grocery store by car, by bus, and by foot.
5. Listen closely you will want to remember this speech.
6. I have lived in Vancouver, Red Deer, and Toronto.
7. The boss's message was clear lateness would not be tolerated.
8. Next term, we will read some more contemporary authors, such as Vermette, Atwood, and Edugyan.
9. My little sister said what we were all thinking "We should have stayed home."
10. Trust me I have done this before.

Spotlight on Colons

- Use a colon to introduce a list, quotation, or example *only* if it follows an independent clause.
- Use a colon after a greeting in business letters and memos.

“ ” Quotation Marks

Quotation marks set off a group of words from the rest of the text. Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotations of another person’s words, spoken (direct speech) or written (direct quotation), or to indicate a title. Quotation marks always appear in pairs.

1. Quotation Marks Indicate Direct Quotations

A **direct quotation** is an exact account of what someone said or wrote. To include a direct quotation in a sentence, enclose the words in quotation marks and place a comma after the introductory phrase.

Direct quotation: Carly said, “I’m not ever going back there again.”

Quotation marks show readers another person’s exact words, so you will want to identify who is speaking. You can do this at the beginning, middle, or end of the quote. Notice the use of commas and the capitalized initial words.

Beginning: Madison said, “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Middle: “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market,” Madison said, “to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

End: “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner,” Madison said.

Speaker not identified: “Let’s stop at the farmers’ market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

In dialogue, always capitalize the first letter of a quotation, even if it is not the beginning of the sentence. When using identifying words in the middle of the quote, the beginning of the second part of the quote does not need to be capitalized unless it is a second independent clause.

Use commas between identifying words and quotations. Quotation marks must be placed *after* commas and periods. Place quotation marks after question marks and exclamation points only if the question or exclamation is part of the quoted text.

Question is part of quoted text: The new employee asked, “When is lunch?”

Question is not part of quoted text: Did you hear her say you were “the next Picasso”?

Exclamation is part of quoted text: My supervisor beamed, “Thanks for all of your hard work!”

Exclamation is not part of quoted text: He said I “single-handedly saved the company thousands of dollars”!

An **indirect quotation** is a restatement of what someone said or wrote. An indirect quotation does *not* use the person’s exact words. Instead, the writer paraphrases. You do not need to use quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Indirect quotation: Carly said that she would never go back.

TIP: In many cases, the difference between exact wording and paraphrase is extremely important. For legal purposes or for the purposes of doing a job correctly, it can be important to know exactly what the instructor, student, client, customer, or supervisor said. Sometimes, important details can be lost when instructions are paraphrased. Use quotation marks to indicate exact words where needed, and let your co-workers know the source of the quotation within a parenthetical source reference when necessary.

2. Quotations Within Quotations

Use single quotation marks (‘ ’) to indicate a quotation within a quotation.

Theresa said, “I wanted to take my dog to the festival, but the man at the gate said, ‘No dogs allowed.’”

“When you say, ‘I can’t help it,’ what exactly does that mean?”

“The instructions say, ‘Tighten the screws one at a time.’”

3. Quotation Marks Enclose Short Titles

Use quotation marks around titles of short works of writing, such as

an essay

a chapter of a book

an article in a newspaper, magazine, or journal

a poem or a short story in an anthology

an episode of a TV show or radio program

a song

Usually, titles of longer works, such as books, magazines, albums, newspapers, and novels, are italicized, not enclosed in quotation marks. The quotation marks indicate that a short text appears within a larger one.

“Annabelle Lee” is one of my favourite poems. Did you know it was published in *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art*? Did you read the *Globe and Mail* article “Drone Attacks Hit Moscow”? My favourite episode of *Friends* is “The One with the Jellyfish.”

4. Avoid Misused Quotation Marks

Don’t use quotation marks in these situations:

- To identify a brand, a company, or a store (these are proper nouns that should be capitalized)
- To point out slang
- To enclose idioms or figures of speech
- To excuse the use of clichés in formal writing
- To justify or excuse inappropriate irony or humour in a formal essay

Incorrect: I like to shop for “Vans” shoes at “Winners.”

Incorrect: The participant in the study uses “weed” three times a week.

Incorrect: Some people don’t begin to recover until they “hit rock bottom.”

TIP: Most word-processing software is designed to catch errors in spelling and punctuation. While this can be a useful tool, it is better to be well acquainted with the rules of punctuation than to leave the thinking to the computer. Properly punctuated writing will convey your meaning clearly. Consider the subtle shifts in meaning in the following sentences:

- The client said he thought our manuscript was garbage.
- The client said, “He thought our manuscript was garbage.”

The first sentence reads as an indirect quotation in which the client does not like the manuscript. But did he actually use the word *garbage*? (This would be alarming!) Or has the speaker paraphrased (and exaggerated) the client’s words? The second sentence reads as a

direct quotation from the client. But who is “he” in this sentence? Is it a third party?

Word-processing software would not catch this because the sentences are not grammatically incorrect. However, the meanings of the sentences are not the same. Understanding punctuation will help you write what you mean, and in this case, could save a lot of confusion around the office!

PRACTICE 25.10

Add quotation marks, single quotation marks, and commas to correct the sentences below. If the sentence does not need any quotation marks, write *OK*.

1. Yasmin said, I don't feel like cooking. Let's go out to eat.
2. Where should we go? said Russell.
3. Yasmin said it didn't matter to her.
4. I know, said Russell, let's go to the Two Roads Juice Bar.
5. Perfect! said Yasmin.
6. Did you know that the name of the Juice Bar is a reference to a poem? asked Russell.
7. I didn't! exclaimed Yasmin. Which poem?
8. The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost Russell explained.
9. Oh! said Yasmin, Is that the one that starts with the line, Two roads diverged in a yellow wood?
10. That's the one said Russell.

Spotlight on Quotation Marks

- Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotations and titles of short works.
- Use single quotation marks to enclose a quotation within a quotation.
- Do not use any quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Apostrophe

An apostrophe is used with a noun to show possession. It is also used in a contraction to indicate where a letter has been left out.

1. Apostrophes Indicate Possession

An apostrophe and the letter *s* indicate who or what owns something. To show possession with a singular noun, add *'s*.

The student's exam fell to the floor.
 Jen's dance routine mesmerized everyone in the room.
 Jen's dog's party tricks kept us entertained.
 The dog's leash is hanging on the hook beside the door.
 Bev Jones's dog barks all night.
 Jess's sister is also coming to the party.

Notice that singular nouns that end in *s* still take the apostrophe *s* (*'s*) ending to show possession. To show possession with a plural noun that ends in *-s* or *-es*, simply add an apostrophe (*'*).

The students' exams all need to be marked by Friday.
 The drummers' sticks all moved in unison, like a machine.
 The ladies' room is down the hall to the left.
 The Joneses' dog barks all night.

If the plural noun does not end in *-s* or *-es*, add an apostrophe and an *s* (*'s*).

The people's votes clearly showed that no one supported the management decision.
 The women's retreat filled up the same day registration opened.
 The cattle's trough is empty.

To indicate joint possession, use an apostrophe with the last subject only. In the example below, one car belongs to both Amal and Sharma:

Amal and Sharma's car broke down.

To indicate individual possession, use an apostrophe in all nouns. In the example below, Amal owns a car, and Sharma owns another car:

Amal's and Sharma's cars both broke down the same day!

2. Apostrophes in Contractions

A contraction is a word that is formed by combining two words into one. In a contraction, an apostrophe shows where one or more letters have been left out. Contractions are commonly used in informal writing but not in formal writing.

I **don't** like ice cream.

The words *do* and *not* have been combined to form the contraction *don't*. The apostrophe shows where the *o* in *not* has been left out.

We'll see you later.

The words *we* and *will* have been combined to form the contraction *we'll*. The apostrophe shows where the *w* and *i* in *will* have been left out.

Here are some more commonly used contractions.

aren't	are not
can't	cannot
doesn't	does not
don't	do not
isn't	is not
he'll	he will
I'll	I will
she'll	she will
they'll	they will
you'll	you will
it's	it is, it has
let's	let us
she's	she is, she has
there's	there is, there has
who's	who is, who has

3. *Its* and *It's* and *Whose* and *Who's*

Be careful not to confuse *it's* with *its*. *It's* is a contraction of the words *it* and *is*. *Its* is a possessive pronoun.

It's cold and rainy outside. (It is cold and rainy outside.)

The cat was chasing **its** tail. (The tail belongs to the cat.)

When in doubt, substitute the words *it is* in the sentence. If the sentence still makes sense, use the contraction *it's*.

It is cold and rainy outside.

The cat was chasing **it is** tail.

Because the grammar in the second sentence doesn't make sense, *its* is required. Likewise, don't confuse the possessive pronoun *whose* with the contraction *who's* (*who is*).

Heather, **who's** the chair of our condo board, is ill. (Heather is the chair.)

Whose cat is that? (To whom does the cat belong?)

When in doubt, substitute the words *who is* in the sentence. If the sentence still makes sense, use the contraction *who's*.

Heather, **who is** the chair of our condo board, is ill.

Who is cat is that?

Because the grammar in the second sentence doesn't make sense, *whose* is required.

4. Avoid Misusing Apostrophes

Apostrophes are not required in the following circumstances:

A. Do not use an apostrophe to form the plural of a noun.

Incorrect: I met the lady's for lunch.

Correct: I met the ladies for lunch.

B. Do not use an apostrophe in a plural noun that is not possessive.

Incorrect: I met the ladies' for lunch.

Correct: I met the ladies for lunch.

C. Do not use an apostrophe to make a number or letter plural.

Incorrect: Did you hear Destiny got all A's this term?

Correct: Did you hear Destiny got all As this term?

Incorrect: The 1920's were known as the Jazz Age in America.

Correct: The 1920s were known as the Jazz Age in America.

Incorrect: I was healthiest in my 30's.

Correct: I was healthiest in my 30s.

PRACTICE 25.11

Correctly add apostrophes to indicate possession or contractions. If the sentence is correct as it is, write *OK*.

1. "What a beautiful child! She has her mothers eyes."
2. My brothers wife is one of my best friends.
3. I couldnt believe it when I found out that I got the job!
4. My supervisors informed me that I wouldnt be able to take the days off.
5. Each students response was unique.
6. All of the students lockers need cleaning.
7. Wont you please join me for dinner tonight?
8. Its too bad that the cat can't find its toy.
9. Excuse me, where is the ladies' room?
10. Is that Jeremy Smiths car or Kelly Jones car?

Spotlight on Apostrophes

- Use apostrophes to show possession: add 's to singular nouns and plural nouns that do not end in s. Add ' to plural nouns that end in s.
- Use apostrophes in contractions to show where letter(s) have been omitted.

Dash

A dash is used to set off extra information in a sentence with emphasis. If the information appears midsentence, enclose text between two dashes. If it appears at the beginning or end, use just one dash.

Arrive for the interview early—but not too early.

Any of the suits—except for the purple one—should be fine to wear.

Because dashes can be used more flexibly than other punctuation marks, students sometimes overly rely on them. When dashes are overused, the effect can be disorienting for the reader. Also, a dash is considered an informal punctuation mark, so use it very sparingly in formal writing. Often a comma, a colon, a semicolon, or parenthesis can be used in place of a dash, and commas and colons are more suited to formal writing. Save dashes for very special cases. They are dramatic—more dramatic than a comma or colon—and when they are used sparingly, they can be used to great effect.

When setting off an expression, parentheses de-emphasize the expression, while dashes emphasize the expression.

She said (can you believe it?) that I am underqualified for the job.

She said—can you believe it?—that I am underqualified for the job.

To create a dash in Microsoft Word, type two hyphens together. To create a dash in Apple's Pages, use shift+option+hyphen. Do not put a space between a dash and the word that precedes or follows it.

PRACTICE 25.12

Add dashes to enhance clarity in the sentences below. If the sentence is clear as it is, write *OK*.

1. Which hairstyle do you prefer short or long?
2. I don't know I hadn't even thought about that.
3. Guess what I got the job!
4. I will be happy to work over the weekend if I can have Monday off.
5. You have all the qualities that we are looking for in a candidate intelligence, dedication, and a strong work ethic.
6. Has anyone (besides me) read the assignment?

PRACTICE 25.13

Rewrite the sentences from [Practice 25.12](#) and replace the dashes with more formal punctuation. In some cases, there is more than one possible solution.

Spotlight on Dashes

- Dashes emphasize a shift or a pause in a sentence.
- Dashes emphasize information that is set off in a sentence.
- Avoid overusing dashes in formal writing.

Hyphen

A hyphen looks similar to a dash but is shorter and is used in different ways. Hyphens and dashes have different jobs and are not interchangeable.

1. A Hyphen as Part of a Word

Many words contain hyphens, particularly those with certain prefixes, as well as numbers.

self-reflection
self-esteem
ex-husband
mother-in-law
editor-in-chief
vice-president
know-it-all
check-in
word-of-mouth
twenty-one
three-quarters

If you are not sure whether a particular word contains a hyphen, look up the word in a dictionary.

2. A Hyphen Connects Two Modifiers That Work as One

Use a hyphen in compound modifiers, in which two or more words work together to form a single description of a noun.

The fifty-five-year-old athlete was just as qualified for the marathon as his younger opponents.

My doctor recommended against taking the habit-forming medication.

My study group focused on preparing for the mid-year review.

I just got my first full-time job!

A compound adjective is hyphenated only when it appears *before* the word it modifies.

That is a **well-organized essay!**

The **essay** is **well organized**.

An exception is compound modifiers that contain an -ly word. These modifiers are not hyphenated, even when they come before the noun.

The **nearly finished project** was scrapped.

His **poorly defined goals** were not achieved.

Spotlight on Hyphens

- Some words always contain hyphens (e.g., *self-esteem*). If you're not sure, check a dictionary.
- Hyphens are added to some words that work together to form a modifier, if that modifier comes before the noun it modifies (e.g., *a well-organized essay*).
- Hyphens and dashes are not interchangeable.

() Parentheses

Parentheses are always used in pairs and contain material that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence. Parentheses must never contain the subject or verb of a sentence. A sentence should make sense if you delete the parentheses and the text within parentheses.

Has anyone (besides me) read the assignment?

Attack of the Killer Potatoes has to be the worst movie I have seen (so far).

Your spinach and garlic salad is one of the most delicious (and nutritious) foods I have ever tasted!

Are you going to the seminar this weekend (I am)?

I recommend that you try the sushi bar (unless you don't like sushi).

In academic writing, you will more likely use parentheses to add explanatory information. However, avoid overusing parentheses in formal writing. They can be distracting for the reader, and they can be confusing in research essays that already contain parentheses for citation purposes.

According to Gilroy (2019), the best approach (dare we say it?) is to take the (old) hard drive and hit it (hard) with a hammer (but be sure to wear safety glasses, of course) and ensure it is (completely) destroyed (p. 214).

Parentheses are also used in special ways in citations in research essays. To learn more about this, refer to [Chapter 22: Citations](#).

PRACTICE 25.14

Add parenthesis to improve clarity in the sentences below. If the sentence is clear as it is, write *OK*.

1. Are you skipping the lecture this afternoon I am?
2. I highly recommend the oyster bar unless you don't like oysters.
3. I was able to solve the puzzle after taking a few moments to think about it.
4. Please complete the questionnaire at the end of this letter.
5. Did anyone else besides me watch all seasons of *House*?
6. Please be sure to circle not underline the correct answers.

□ Square Brackets

Although square brackets and parentheses look similar, they are *not* interchangeable in academic writing. Each has a distinct purpose, and each conveys a different message to your reader.

In academic writing, square brackets have a very specific function: to indicate an alteration to a quotation. The square brackets set off your modifications to a quotation to make it very clear which words came from your source and which words are your alterations. For more on the use of square brackets in quotations, refer to [Chapter 21: How to Alter Quotations](#).

1. Square Brackets Indicate an Addition to a Quotation

Square brackets indicate a clarifying word has been added to a quotation by the student writer.

Original sentence: Thomas King writes, “Maybe . . . you don’t think we deserve the things we have. . . . You don’t think we’ve earned them” (147).

Altered sentence with a clarifying word added: Thomas King writes, “Maybe . . . you don’t think we [Indigenous people] deserve the things we have. . . . You don’t think we’ve earned them” (147).

Square brackets are also used to enclose the word *sic*, another type of addition to a quotation. *Sic* (Latin for *thus, so*) indicates that an error in the quotation is not your own: it appeared that way in the original text.

A famous typo in a published work is from Karen Harper’s novel *The Queen’s Governess*: “I tugged on the gown and sleeves I’d discarded like a wonton [*sic*] last night to fall into John’s arms.”

For more on the nuances of square brackets to indicate additions to a quotation, refer to [Chapter 21: How to Alter Quotations](#).

2. Square Brackets Indicate an Alteration to a Quotation

Square brackets indicate a section of a quotation changed by the student writer.

Original quoted sentence: “The song never strains or falters” (18).

Altered quotation: Michaels writes that “[t]he song never strains or falters” (18).

For more on the nuances of square brackets to indicate changes to a quotation, refer to [Chapter 21: How to Alter Quotations](#).

● ● ● Ellipses

In academic writing, ellipses have a very specific function: to indicate an omission from a quotation. Use three dots to indicate an omission of a word or phrase. Note that there is a space before the ellipsis, a space in between each dot, and a space after the ellipsis.

ORIGINAL QUOTATION

According to Marshall, “Before the creation of organized governmental policing agencies, it was citizens possessing firearms who monitored and maintained the peace” (712).

WITH ELLIPSES TO INDICATE OMISSIONS

According to Marshall, “Before the creation of organized governmental policing agencies, . . . citizens possessing firearms . . . monitored and maintained the peace” (712).

Normally, ellipses are only used midquotation. It is not usually necessary to include ellipses at the beginning or end of a quotation.

Use four dots (more accurately, with a period and ellipsis) to indicate the omission of a complete sentence or multiple sentences that contain a period in the original text.

ORIGINAL QUOTATION

Thomas King writes, “Within the North American imagination, Native people have always been an exotic, erotic, terrifying presence. Much like the vast tracts of wilderness that early explorers and settlers faced. But most of all, Native people have been confusing” (79).

ELLIPSIS + A PERIOD TO INDICATE THE OMISSION OF A COMPLETE SENTENCE (OR MORE)

Thomas King writes, “Within the North American imagination, Native people have always been an exotic, erotic, terrifying presence. . . . But most of all, Native people have been confusing” (79).

Note that the first of the four-dot sequence is the sentence-ending period, and there is no space between the last word of the sentence (*presence*) and the period. The three dots that follow the period are the actual ellipsis. Insert a space between the period and the first dot and each subsequent dot. Also insert one space after the ellipsis, before the second word of the second sentence (*But*).

Be cautious about omitting large chunks of text from a quotation. Be very sure you have not changed the author’s meaning by omitting words. For more on the use of ellipses, refer to [Chapter 21: How to Alter Quotations](#).

Slash

Slashes are one of the punctuation marks you'll use least often, unless you are majoring in poetry. Slashes have two specific uses in academic writing.

1. A Slash Indicates a Line Break in Poetry

The slash is often used when quoting poetry. The slash represents a line break in a poem. For example, these are the first four lines of William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 138":

When my love swears that she is made of truth
I do believe her though I know she lies.
That she might think me some untutored youth,
Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties.

When quoting the first two lines of the sonnet in an essay, a student would use a slash to indicate the line break:

William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 138" begins with irony: "When my love swears that she is made of truth / I do believe her though I know she lies" (1-2).

Notice the spacing before and after the slash (one space on each side).

When quoting three or more lines of poetry, use block formatting, as described in [Chapter 21: Long \(Block\) Quotations](#).

2. Paired Words

A slash is also sometimes used to connect two closely related paired words:

producer/director
editor/publisher

In the two examples above, the slash indicates that one person takes on two roles. Notice that there are no spaces before or after the slash.

The slash can also indicate an alternative between two paired words:

pass/fail
cause/effect
and/or
he/she
sir/madam

Use slashes very sparingly in academic writing, and don't use slashes as a shortcut to avoid making more careful, nuanced choices about gendered language.

Italics

Italics are used in a number of ways in academic writing.

1. Italicize for Emphasis

Use italics to emphasize certain words in a sentence.

Did you hear Drake is *not* coming to Calgary now?

Use italics for emphasis sparingly in formal academic writing.
Titles of larger stand-alone texts should be italicized.

Books: *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Moneyball*

Newspapers: the *Globe and Mail*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*

Magazines: *Mclean's*, the *Walrus*, *Canadian Geographic*

Scholarly Journals: *Journal of Canadian Studies*, *Ecology and Society*,
Canadian Literature

Works of Art: *Mona Lisa*, *The Starry Night*, *The Last Supper*

Films: *Titanic*, *Avatar*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

Television shows and radio programs: *Friends*, *Game of Thrones*, *Quirks and Quarks*

When you are handwriting (during an exam, for instance), you can underline titles. When you are typing, always use italics, not underlining, for a title—and never use both.

The title of a short text that appears within a larger text should *not* be italicized; it should be enclosed in quotation marks instead. See the section [Quotation Marks](#) earlier in this chapter.

Documentation styles differ in their guidelines for italicizing the titles of websites and web pages. Refer to your style guide for more information.

2. Italicize a Word Referred to as a Word

Use italics to indicate a word, number, or letter referred to as a word:

The word *mother* has many connotations. *Mother* can refer to not only a role but an identity.

The vandal had spray-painted 420 on the gymnasium wall.
In some Newfoundland dialects, the *h* is removed from the beginning of certain words.

3. Italicize Foreign Words

Italicize non-English words that have *not* become part of the English language:

On Christmas Eve, Baba would serve delicious *varenyky*, *kutia*, and *holubtsi*.

Do not italicize foreign-language words that are now part of English vocabulary:

dejá vu, per diem, bonafide, poutine, vice versa

If you're not sure whether a foreign-language word should be italicized, check an English dictionary. If the word appears in the dictionary, it should not be italicized. If it does not appear in the dictionary, it should be italicized.

4. Italicize the Names of Certain Vehicles

Italicize the names of sea craft, aircraft, and spacecraft.

RMS Titanic, *Sputnik*, the *Hindenburg*, *Challenger*

Capitalization

Text messages, casual emails, and instant messages often ignore the rules of capitalization. In fact, it can seem unnecessary to capitalize in these contexts. In more formal forms of communication, however, following the basic rules of capitalization and using capitalization correctly helps your reader easily understand your meaning, and it gives the reader the impression that you choose your words carefully and care about the ideas you are conveying.

1. Capitalize the First Word of a Sentence

The first word of a sentence is always capitalized. Also, capitalize the first word of a sentence that appears as dialogue.

The museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

Cooking can be therapeutic.

Johan said, "Tomorrow is a better time to play ball."

2. Capitalize Proper Nouns

Proper nouns—the names of specific people, places, objects, streets, buildings, events, or titles of individuals—are always capitalized.

He grew up in **R**iverdale, **E**dmonton, **A**lberta.

The **CN T**ower really stands out in the **T**oronto skyline.

Do not capitalize nouns for people, places, things, streets, buildings, events, and titles when the noun is used in a general or common way. See the following chart for the difference between proper nouns and common nouns.

Common Noun	Proper Noun
museum	the Royal Alberta Museum
theatre	Queen Elizabeth Theatre
store	Real Canadian Superstore
country	Malaysia
uncle	Uncle Javier
grandmother	Grandma Taylor
doctor	Dr. Jackson
book	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
college	NorQuest College
war	the Boer War
historical event	the Renaissance
shoe	Adidas

TIP: Always capitalize nationalities, races, languages, and religions. For example, Canadian, African American, Hispanic, German, Syrian, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on.

PRACTICE 25.15

On a sheet of paper, write five proper nouns for each common noun that is listed.

Common noun: river

1. Nile River
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Common noun: musician

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Common noun: magazine

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

3. Capitalize Days of the Week, Months of the Year, and Holidays

On Wednesday, July 1, I will be travelling to Calgary for a music festival.

Canada Day is my favourite holiday.

4. Capitalize Titles

In titles, capitalize the first word and all nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns. Do not capitalize articles (*the, a, an*) or prepositions (*in, on, with*) unless one is the first word of the title or subtitle or unless required by a style guide or publisher, as is sometimes the case for certain prepositions.

The play Billy Bishop Goes to War, by Eric Peterson and John Gray, is one of my favourites.

Prime Minister Trudeau will be speaking at my university.

TIP: Computer-related words such as *Internet* and *World Wide Web* are usually capitalized; however, *email* and *online* are never capitalized.

PRACTICE 25.16

Edit the following sentences by correcting the capitalization of the titles or names.

1. The prince of england enjoys playing polo.
2. "Ode to a nightingale" is a sad poem.
3. My sister loves to read magazines such as the *new yorker*.
4. *The bone cage* is an excellent novel written by Angie Abdou.
5. My physician, dr. alvarez, always makes me feel comfortable in her regina office.
6. At home sense, I bought nike, columbia, and dkny T-shirts.

PRACTICE 25.17

Edit the following paragraph and correct the errors in capitalization and italicization. (As you read, notice how much more work the reader has to do when a writer doesn't use conventional capitalization and italicization!)

By the 1970s, canadian literature as a concept had become commonplace. in the same decade, the concept of prairie literature also became an accepted label to distinguish regional writing in canada. the idea had been first articulated by edward mccourt in the canadian west in fiction (1949) and was reiterated by laurie ricou in vertical man / horizontal world (1973) and dick harrison in unnamed country: the struggle for canadian prairie fiction (1977). a special prairie poetry issue of essays on canadian writing (1980) edited by dennis cooley of the university of manitoba, who spoke at the 2005 wild words conference twenty-five years later, confirmed the validity and viability of the prairie literature concept. . . . the prairielit concept had grown out of an era in canadian history that linked the provinces of alberta, saskatchewan, and manitoba into a single agrarian political economy with a common cultural base. this unity began to unravel after world war II, when alberta became the centre of canada's energy industry.

Source: Coates, Donna, and George Melnyk, editors. *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*. AU Press, 2009, pp. viii–ix.

TIP: Did you know that if you use all capital letters to convey a message, the capital letters come across as shouting? In addition, all capital letters are actually more difficult to read and may annoy the reader. To avoid “shouting” at or annoying your reader, follow the rules of capitalization and find other ways to emphasize your point.

Spelling

One essential aspect of good writing is accurate spelling. With computer spell-checkers at your disposal, spelling may seem simple, but these programs fail to catch every error. Commonly confused words, for example, are spelled correctly but still wrong within the context of the sentence. Spell-checkers identify some errors, but writers still have to consider the flagged words and suggested replacements. Writers are responsible for the errors that remain.

For example, if the spell-checker highlights a word that is misspelled and gives you a list of alternative words, you may choose a word that you never intended, even though it is spelled correctly. This can change the meaning of your sentence. It can also confuse your reader. Computer spell-checkers are useful editing tools, but they can never replace human knowledge of spelling rules, homonyms, and commonly misspelled words.

Common Spelling Rules

The best way to master new words is to understand the key spelling rules. Keep in mind, however, that some spelling rules have exceptions. A spell-checker may catch these exceptions, but knowing them yourself will prepare you to spell accurately on the first try. You may want to try memorizing each rule and its exceptions like you would memorize a rhyme or lyrics to a song. For example, you might remember this rhyme from elementary school:

i before *e*
except after *c*
unless it sounds like an *a*
as in *neighbour* or *weigh*

Correct spellings:

i before *e*: *achieve, alien, friend, field, niece*

except after *c*: *receive, deceive, receipt*

sounds like an *a*: *eight, weight*

As always in the English language, there are many exceptions, which simply need to be memorized, including *either, heir, height, leisure, their, and weird*.

1. **When a word ends in a consonant plus y**, drop the *y* and add an *i* before adding another ending.
happy + er = happier
cry + ed = cried
2. **When a word ends in a vowel plus y**, keep the *y* and add the ending.
delay + ed = delayed
Memorize the following exceptions to this rule: day, lay, say,
pay = daily, laid, said, paid.
3. **When adding an ending that begins with a vowel**, such as -able, -ence, -ing, or -ity, drop the last *e* in a word.
write + ing = writing
pure + ity = purity
4. **When adding an ending that begins with a consonant**, such as -less, -ment, or -ly, keep the last *e* in a word.
hope + less = hopeless
advertise + ment = advertisement
5. **For many words ending in a consonant and an o**, add -s when using the plural form.
photo + s = photos
soprano + s = sopranos
6. **Add -es to words that end in s, ch, sh, and x**.
church + es = churches
fax + es = faxes

PRACTICE 25.18

Identify and correct the nine misspelled words in the following paragraph.

Sherman J. Alexie Jr. was born in October 1966. He is a Spokane / Coeur d'Alene Native American and an American writer, poet, and filmmaker. Alexie was born with hydrocephalus, or water on the brain. This condition led doctors to predict that he would likly suffer

long-term brain damage and possibly mental delay. Although Alexie survived with no mental disabilities, he did suffer other serious side effects from his condition that plagued him throughout his childhood. Amazingly, Alexie learned to read by the age of three, and by age five, he had read novels such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Raised on a reservation, Alexie often felt alienated from his peers due to his avid love of reading and also from the long-term effects of his illness, which often kept him from socializing with his peers on the reservation. The reading skills he displayed at such a young age foreshadowed what he would later become. Today, Alexie is a prolific and successful writer with several story anthologies to his credit, notably *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *The Toughest Indian in the World*. Most of his fiction is about contemporary Native Americans who are influenced by pop culture and powwows and everything in between. His work is sometimes funny but always thoughtful and full of richness and depth. Alexie also writes poetry, novels, and screenplays. His latest collection of stories is called *War Dances*, which came out in 2009.

TIP: Use these eight tips to improve your spelling skills:

1. Read the words in your assignment carefully, and avoid skimming over the page. Focusing on your written assignment word by word will help you pay close attention to each word's spelling. Skimming quickly, you may overlook misspelled words.
2. Use mnemonic devices to remember the correct spellings of words. Mnemonic devices, or memory techniques and learning aids, include inventive sayings or practices that help you remember. For example, the saying "It is important to be a beautiful person inside and out" may help you remember that beautiful begins with "be a." The practice of pronouncing the word *Wednesday* Wed-nes-day may help you remember how to spell the word correctly.
3. Use a dictionary. Many professional writers rely on the dictionary—either in print or online. If you find it difficult to use a regular dictionary, ask your instructor to help you find a "poor speller's dictionary."
4. Use your computer's spell-checker. The spell-checker will not solve all your spelling problems, but it is a useful tool. See the introduction to this section for cautions about spell-checkers.

5. Keep a list of frequently misspelled words. You will often misspell the same words again and again, but do not let this discourage you. All writers struggle with the spellings of certain words; they become aware of their spelling weaknesses and work to improve. Be aware of which words you commonly misspell, and add them to a list to learn to spell them correctly.
6. Look through your marked assignments for misspelled words that your teacher has identified. Add these words to your list and practice writing each word four to five times. Writing instructors will especially notice which words you frequently misspell, and it will help you excel in your classes if they see your spelling improve.
7. Test yourself with flash cards. Sometimes the old-fashioned methods are best, and for spelling, this tried-and-true technique has worked for many students. You can work with a peer or alone.
8. Review the common spelling rules explained in this chapter. Take the necessary time to master the material; you may return to the rules in this chapter as needed.

TIP: Remember to focus on spelling during the editing step of the writing process.

Commonly Misspelled Words

Below is a list of some commonly misspelled words. You probably use these words every day in either speech or writing. Refer to this list as needed before, while, and after you write.

across	definite
address	describe
answer	desperate
argument	different
athlete	disappoint
beginning	disapprove
behaviour	eighth
calendar	embarrass
career	environment
conscience	exaggerate
crowded	familiar

finally	possible
government	prefer
grammar	prejudice
height	privilege
illegal	probably
immediate	psychology
important	pursue
integration	reference
intelligent	rhythm
interest	ridiculous
interfere	separate
jewellery	speech
judgment	similar
knowledge	since
maintain	strength
mathematics	success
meant	surprise
necessary	taught
nervous	temperature
occasion	thorough
opinion	thought
optimist	tired
particular	until
perform	weight
personnel	written
possess	writing

TIP: Use these two techniques to help you master these troublesome words:

- Copy each word a few times and underline the problem area.
- Copy the words onto flash cards and have a friend test you.

PRACTICE 25.19

Correct the spelling errors in these sentences:

1. It was a reel priveldge to have taut you writting this year.
2. I'm sorry to disapoint you, but you'll have to weight until tommorrow for the suprise.
3. Your exagerrated and ridiculous stories embarass me.
4. His strethg is the reason for his suces in his carer.
5. Please send the refrence letter to the head of personel.
6. He will preform tonite with the rythm section.
7. Is it relistic to pusue a psycology degre?
8. A seperate branch of the goverment is responsibel for that.
9. On Wedesday, an ilegal stricke is posible.
10. The temprature will drop imediately, acording to Enviroment Canada.

Homonyms

Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different spellings and different meanings.

COMMONLY MISUSED HOMONYMS**Lead, Led**

Lead (noun). A type of metal used in pipes and batteries.

The lead pipes in my home are old and need to be replaced.

Led (verb). The past tense of the verb *lead*.

After the garden, she led the patrons through the museum.

Lessen, Lesson

Lessen (verb). To reduce in number, size, or degree.

My dentist gave me medicine to lessen the pain of my aching tooth.

Lesson (noun). A reading or exercise to be studied by a student.

Today's lesson was about mortgage interest rates.

Passed, Past

Passed (verb). To go away or move.

He passed the slower cars on the road using the left lane.

Past (noun). Having existed or taken place in a period before the present.

The argument happened in the past, so there is no use in dwelling on it.

Patience, Patients

Patience (noun). The capacity of being patient (waiting for a period of time or enduring pains and trials calmly).

The novice teacher's patience with the unruly class was astounding.

Patients (plural noun). Individuals under medical care.

The patients were tired of eating the hospital food, and they could not wait for a home-cooked meal.

Peace, Piece

Peace (noun). A state of tranquility or quiet.

For once, there was peace between the argumentative brothers.

Piece (noun). A part of a whole.

I would like a large piece of cake.

Principle, Principal

Principle (noun). A fundamental concept that is accepted as true.

The principle of human equality is an important foundation for all nations.

Principal (noun). The original amount of debt on which interest is calculated.

The payment plan allows me to pay back only the principal amount, not any compounded interest.

Principal (noun). A person who is the main authority of a school.

The principal held a conference for both parents and teachers.

Sees, Seas, Seize

Sees (verb). To perceive with the eye.

He sees a whale through his binoculars.

Seas (plural noun). The plural of *sea*, a great body of salt water.

The tidal fluctuation of the oceans and seas are influenced by the moon.

Seize (verb). To possess or take by force.

The king plans to seize all the peasants' land.

Threw, Through

Threw (verb). The past tense of *throw*.

She threw the football with perfect form.

Through (preposition). A word that indicates movement.

She walked through the door and out of his life.

Where, Wear, Ware

Where (adverb). The place in which something happens.

Where is the restaurant?

Wear (verb). To carry or have on the body.

I will wear my hiking shoes tomorrow.

Ware (noun). Articles of merchandise or manufacture (usually, *wares*).

When I return from shopping, I will show you my wares.

Which, Witch

Which (pronoun). Replaces one out of a group.

Which apartment is yours?

Witch (noun). A person who practices sorcery or who has supernatural powers.

She thinks she is a witch, but she does not seem to have any powers.

PRACTICE 25.20

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct homonym.

1. Do you agree with the underlying (principle, principal) that ensures copyrights are protected in the digital age?
2. I like to (where, wear, ware) unique clothing from thrift stores that do not have company logos on them.
3. Marjorie felt like she was being (led, lead) on a wild goose chase, and she did not like it one bit.
4. Sarina described (witch, which) house was hers, but now that I am here, they all look the same.
5. Seeing his friend without lunch, Miguel gave her a (peace, piece) of his apple.
6. Do you think that it is healthy for Mother to talk about the (passed, past) all the time?
7. Eating healthier foods will (lessen, lesson) the risk of heart disease.
8. Daniela (sees, seas, seize) opportunities in the bleakest situations and (sees, seas, seizes) them, and that is why she is successful.
9. Everyone goes (through, threw) hardships in life regardless of who they are.

TIP: In today's world, email has become a means by which many people correspond. Emails to prospective professors or employers require thoughtful word choice, accurate spelling, and perfect punctuation. Professors' and employers' inboxes are inundated with countless emails daily. If the subject line of an email contains a spelling error, it will likely be overlooked, and someone else's email will take priority.

The best thing to do after you proofread and run the spell-checker on an important email is to have an additional set of eyes go over it with you; one of your friends, colleagues, or instructors may be able to read the email and give you suggestions for improvement. Most colleges and universities have writing centres, which may also be able to assist you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Punctuation marks provide visual cues to readers to tell them how to interpret a sentence.
- Missing or incorrect punctuation marks may make writing harder to decipher.
- By following punctuation rules, you will avoid creating sentence fragments and comma splices, which will improve your writing.
- Some punctuation marks have special purposes in academic writing.
- Capitalization and italicization convey meaning.
- Missing or incorrect italicization and capitalization may make writing harder to decipher.
- Learning and applying the basic rules of capitalization are fundamental aspects of good writing.
- Identifying and correcting errors in capitalization are important writing skills.
- Accurate, error-free spelling enhances your credibility with the reader.
- Mastering the rules of spelling may help you become a better speller.
- Studying a list of commonly misspelled words is one way to improve your spelling skills.
- Knowing the commonly misused homonyms may help you prevent spelling errors.

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Answer Key

Chapter 2

Practice 2.2

Passage 1 main idea: The population of communities is really made up of a set of publics.

Passage 2 main idea: Marketing research is a major component or subsystem within a marketing information system.

Passage 3 main idea (implied): According to psychiatrist Richard Moscott, the ability to work well is one key to a balanced life (main elements: psychiatrist, R. M., four keys, balanced life).

The answer is 4: The unstated main idea is that, according to Moscott, there are four keys to a balanced life.

1: Too detailed to be the main idea; it expresses just one key

2: A detail of the third key

3: Too detailed to be the main idea; it is only one of four keys

Practice 2.3

Main term: eidetic imagery

Definition: photographic memory

Main idea: can recall every detail of a memory as clearly as if they were looking at a paragraph

Supporting detail (example): a law student with eidetic imagery was accused of cheating on an examination because his test paper contained exactly the words in his textbook.

Practice 2.4

- childhood shame
- rage
- anger turned against self out of guilt

- dependence on others' opinions of us for worth
- rejection or outrageous demands from partners or employers
- anger
- guilt
- anger turned against self, resulting in depression

Practice 2.5

- A. 4
- B. 4
- C. 2
- D. 1
- E. 4

Chapter 5

Practice 5.1

- A. evaluate
- B. summarize
- C. synthesize
- D. analyze

Practice 5.3

Possible answers: urgent, concerned, sincere, serious, candid, direct

Chapter 7

Practice 7.2

1. A and B indicate that *in spite of* low profits, the company will hire new staff. Implication: profits and hiring are unrelated.
2. C and D indicate that *because of* low profits, the company will hire new staff. Implication: hiring may increase profits.
3. The transitions in E, F, and G don't make sense. They create confusion rather than clarifying meaning because instead of focusing on the message of the sentence, the reader must try to figure out what is implied by the words *moreover*, *additionally*, and *meanwhile*. The reader must guess at the connection between the sentences.

Chapter 11

Practice 11.1

- A. Exercising three times a week is the only way to maintain good physical health.
- B. Sexism and racism are still rampant in today's workplace.
- C. Raising (the legal driving age) to twenty-one would decrease road-traffic accidents.
- D. Owning a business is the only way to achieve financial success.
- E. Dog owners should be prohibited from taking their pets on public beaches.

Practice 11.2

- A. b
- B. a
- C. a
- D. a

Practice 11.4

This season, the plague of reality television continues to darken our airwaves.

Practice 11.5

Cats and dogs have amazing senses that humans do not have and cannot yet understand.

Practice 11.6

Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a technique for controlling my anxiety: breathing exercises.

Practice 11.7

F, R, R, E, Q, Q

Practice 11.9

Topic sentence: One of the few mammals that can survive in a harsh desert environment, the kangaroo rat has made some fascinating adaptations to a dry climate.

Supporting sentence: Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool.

Supporting sentence: Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a minuscule amount of water.

Supporting sentence: Unlike other desert creatures, the kangaroo rat does not store water in its body but instead is able to convert the dry seeds it eats into moisture.

Closing sentence: Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Chapter 12

Practice 12.2

- A. W
- B. S
- C. W
- D. W
- E. S
- F. W

- A. 1
- C. 2
- D. 3
- F. 4, 5

Practice 12.3

- A. Classification / 4
- B. Compare-contrast / 3
- C. Cause-effect / 2
- D. Argumentative / 3
- E. Process / 4

Chapter 14

Practice 14.5

- A. ii
- B. i
- C. iv

- D. v
- E. iii
- F. vii
- G. vi

Practice 14.6

- A.
 - i. Nurse Practitioners
 - ii. Should Nurse Practitioners Work in Rural Health Care Settings?
 - iii. Providing Better Rural Health Care
 - iv. Nurse Practitioners: Partners in Providing Effective Health Care in Rural Alberta
 - v. Nurse Practitioners: Yes or No?
 - vi. Ways to Provide Better Health Care in Rural Alberta

- B.
 - i. ✗
 - ii. ✗
 - iii. ✗
 - iv. ✓
 - v. ✗
 - vi. ✗

C. iv

- D.
 - i. Does not include a controlling idea and does not make an assertive statement
 - ii. Does not make an assertive statement
 - iii. Does not include the specific topic (nurse practitioners)
 - v. Does not include a controlling idea and does not make an assertive statement
 - vi. Does not include the specific topic (nurse practitioners) and does not include a specific controlling idea

Chapter 15

Practice 15.1

- A. Environmental factors influence our behaviour:
 1. Temperature: extremes in temp. make concentration difficult

2. Lighting: inappropriate lighting is disorientating and affects function
 3. Colour: colour affects mood (calm/stimulating)
- B. Three environmental aspects affect human behaviour: temperature impacts concentration, light changes the ability to function, and colour influences mood.

Practice 15.2

A.

Vitamin C is important to our health.

Vitamin C can repair and prevent damage to the cells in our bodies and heal wounds.

It also keeps our teeth and gums healthy.

It protects our body from infections such as colds and flu and also helps us get better faster when we have these infections.

This wonderful vitamin is also good for our hearts.

Lack of vitamin C can lead to scurvy.

- B. Vitamin C, which is found in many fruits and vegetables, is essential to human health. Vitamin C helps the body heal and repair damage. It contributes to good dental health. Vitamin C helps us fight off infections. It also contributes to heart health. Insufficient levels of vitamin C can cause serious disease, including scurvy.

Chapter 16

Practice 16.6

- A. Classification
- B. Comparison
- C. Cause and effect
- D. Cause and effect
- E. Classification
- F. Comparison
- G. Process
- H. Comparison

Practice 16.7

- A. Cause and effect
- B. Cause and effect
- C. Process

- D. Comparison
- E. Classification
- F. Process
- G. Cause and effect or process
- H. Classification
- I. Comparison
- J. Comparison

Chapter 20

Practice 20.4

- A. The paragraph is clearly written with bias in favour of the Canadian soldiers.
- B. In the first sentence, the writer mentions that the attack of the Métis was “a very dangerous situation,” implying that it was dangerous for the Canadian soldiers. In the second sentence, the writer states that the soldiers’ gunfire “prevented a disaster.” While it may have prevented “disaster” for the soldiers, it did not “prevent a disaster” for the Métis soldiers who were killed or injured by the Gatling gun (the first machine that rapidly fired multiple bullets). The paragraph asserts that the gun was used “to good effect”—again implying that the results were “good” for the Canadian soldiers (but surely the effect was not so good for the Métis men killed or wounded by the Gatling gun). Unlike the soldiers, the Métis didn’t have cannons or a Gatling gun.
- C. “The Gatling gun was used to good effect, providing covering fire.”
- D. Read a more balanced description of the battle—and notice the different word choices—in the *Canadian Encyclopedia* entry “The Battle of Batoche”: www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/battle-of-batoche-feature.

Chapter 23

Practice 23.1

Spelling: myth

Pronunciation: mith

Part of speech: noun

Origin: the Greek word *mythos*

Definition: (1) A traditional story, usually focusing on the deeds of gods or heroes, often in explanation of some natural

phenomenon, as the origin of the sun, etc. It purports to be historical, but is useful to historians principally for what it reveals of the culture of the peoples it describes or among whom it was current. (2) A theme, motif, character type, etc., in modern literature that expresses or is felt to express significant truths about human life or human nature: the myth of the alienated man. (3) Myths collectively. (4) An imaginary or fictitious person, thing, event, or story. (5) A collective opinion, belief, or ideal that is based on false premises or is the product of fallacious reasoning. (6) An allegory or parable used to explain or illustrates philosophic concept, as in Plato's dialogues. Other forms of the word: mythic, mythical.

Practice 23.2

Spelling: precocious

Part of speech: adjective

Formal or informal connotations: formal

Definition: not provided

Synonyms: advanced, ahead, bright, developed, forward, quick, smart

Antonyms: dense, dull, slow, underdeveloped, unresponsive

Sample sentence: She's such a precocious little girl!

Practice 23.3

Positive	Negative	Neutral
curious	nosy	interested
relaxed	lazy	slow
courageous	foolhardy	assured
modern	newfangled	new
mansion	shack	residence
career woman	spinster	unmarried woman
giggle	cackle	laugh
prosaic	boring	routine
famous	notorious	noted
confident	pushy	assertive

Practice 23.8

1. two / to
2. quite / quit
3. your

4. than
5. then
6. loose
7. have
8. supposed / affect
9. sit / write
10. are / it's

Practice 23.9

The original United States Declaration of Independence **sits** in a case at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom as part of the National Archives in Washington, DC. Since 1952, over one million visitors each year **have** passed through the Rotunda **to** snap a photograph to capture **their** experience. Although there **used** to be signs stating, “No Flash Photography,” and tourists know they are not **supposed** to, they accidentally leave the flash on, **and** a bright light flickers for a millisecond. This millisecond of light may not seem like enough to **affect** the precious document, but imagine how much light could be generated when all those milliseconds are added up. According to the National Archives administrators, **it's** enough **to** significantly damage the historic document. So now the signs display **quite** a different message: “No Photography.” Visitors continue to travel to see the Declaration that began **their** country, but **no** longer can personal pictures serve as mementos. The administrators’ compromise, they say, is a visit to the gift shop for a preprinted photograph.

Chapter 24

Practice 24.1

1. The gym is open until nine o'clock tonight.
2. We went to the store to get some ice.
3. The student with the most extra credit will win a homework pass.
4. Maya and Tia found an abandoned cat by the side of the road.
5. The driver of that pickup truck skidded on the ice.
6. Anita won the race with time to spare.
7. The people who work for that company were surprised about the merger.
8. Working in haste means that you are more likely to make mistakes.

9. The soundtrack has over sixty songs in languages from around the world.
10. His latest invention does not work, but it has inspired the rest of us.

Practice 24.2

1. sounds **LV**
2. have **HV** / eaten **V**
3. took **LV**
4. was **HV** / filled **V**
5. walked **V**
6. was **HV** / expecting **V**
7. felt **LV** / had **HV** / been **V**
8. is **HV** / praised **V** / runs **V**

Practice 24.4

1. Working without taking a break, we try to get as much work done as we can in an hour.
2. I needed to bring work home in order to meet the deadline.
3. Unless the ground freezes too early this fall, we will be planting tulips this year.
4. Turning the lights off after he was done in the kitchen, Robert tried to conserve energy whenever possible.
5. You'll find what you need if you look on the shelf next to the potted plant.
6. To find the perfect apartment, Deidre searched online each day.

Practice 24.5

1. The report is due on Wednesday, but we're flying back from Vancouver that morning. I told the project manager that we would be able to get the report to her later that day, but she suggested that we come back a day early to get the report done. I told her that we had meetings until our flight took off. We emailed our contact, who said that he would check with his boss, and she said that the project could afford a delay as long as she wouldn't have to make any edits or changes to the file. Our new deadline is next Friday.
2. Anna tried getting a reservation at the restaurant. When she called, they said that there was a waiting list, so she put our names down on it. When the day of our reservation arrived, we only had to wait thirty minutes because a table opened up unexpectedly. This was great because we were able to catch a movie after dinner in the time we had expected to wait to be seated.

3. Without a doubt, my favourite artist is Leonardo da Vinci. I like his work not because of his paintings but because of his fascinating designs, models, and sketches, which include plans for scuba gear, a flying machine, and a life-size mechanical lion that actually walked and moved its head. His paintings are beautiful too, especially when you see the computer-enhanced versions. Researchers use a variety of methods to discover and enhance the paintings' original colours. The results are stunningly vibrant and yet delicate displays of the man's genius.

Practice 24.6

1. brush
2. wear
3. kicks
4. watches
5. hides
6. want
7. work
8. need
9. eats
10. fixes

Practice 24.7

1. am
2. have
3. does
4. are
5. has
6. do
7. are
8. is
9. does
10. are

Practice 24.8

1. My dog and cats chase one another all the time.
2. The books that are in my library **are** the best I have ever read.
3. Everyone **is** going to the concert except me.
4. My family **is** moving to Nova Scotia.
5. OK

6. There **is** the newspaper I was supposed to deliver.
7. OK
8. When **is** the movie going to start?
9. My sister and brother **clean up** after themselves.
10. Some of the clothes **are** packed away in the basement.

Practice 24.9

I **feel** that I am the ideal candidate for the receptionist position at your company. I **have** three years of experience as a receptionist in a company that is similar to yours. My phone skills and written communication **are** excellent. These skills and others that I have learned on the job **help** me understand that every person in a company helps make the business a success. At my current job, the team always **says** that I am very helpful. Everyone **appreciates** when I go the extra mile to get the job done right. My current employer and co-workers **feel** that I am an asset to the team. I **am** efficient and organized. **Are** there any other details about me that you would like to know? If so, please contact me. Here **is** my résumé. You can reach me by email or phone. I **look** forward to speaking with you in person.

Practice 24.10

1. have always been
2. will be
3. were recovering / experienced
4. dropped / increased
5. was . . . producing
6. scooped up / made
7. was blowing
8. was / piled up
9. faced
10. managed
11. were / became

Practice 24.11

1. forgave
2. shook
3. bought
4. put
5. laid
6. taught
7. will drink

8. grew
9. led
10. burst

Practice 24.12

Possible answers:

1. Jordan Romano threw the ball to begin the ninth inning.
2. He paints a rosy picture of the situation.
3. He will smile when he remembers this day.
4. We all told him his actions are unconscionable.
5. We share our lunches every day.

Practice 24.13

In the Middle Ages, most people lived in villages and worked as agricultural labourers, or peasants. Every village had a “lord,” and the peasants worked on his land. Much of what they produced would go to the lord and his family. What little food was left over would go to support the peasants’ families. In return for their labour, the lord offered them protection. A peasant’s day usually began before sunrise and involved long hours of back-breaking work, which would include ploughing the land, planting seeds, and cutting crops for harvesting. The working life of a peasant in the Middle Ages was usually demanding and exhausting.

Practice 24.14

In questions 1, 2, 4, 7, and 9, there are three possible correct answers. In each case, the first sentence is grammatically correct but is not gender-neutral. The second is gender-neutral but might seem less clear due to the combination of singular nouns and plural pronouns. In the third, the singular antecedent is replaced by a plural one that agrees with the plural pronoun. Carefully examine each of the possible answers. Notice the slightly different nuances in meaning. Which sentence would you choose in each case?

1. **Correct:** In the current economy, nobody wants to waste **his or her** money on frivolous things.
Correct and gender-neutral: In the current economy, nobody wants to waste **their** money on frivolous things.
Correct and gender-neutral: In the current economy, **people don’t want** to waste **their** money on frivolous things.

2. **Correct:** If anybody chooses to go to medical school, **he or she** must be prepared to work long hours.
Correct and gender-neutral: If anybody chooses to go to medical school, **they** must be prepared to work long hours.
Correct and gender-neutral: If **students choose** to go to medical school, **they** must be prepared to work long hours.
3. **Correct:** The plumbing crew did **its** best to repair the broken pipes before the next ice storm.*
4. **Correct:** If someone is rude to you, try giving **him or her** a smile in return.
Correct and gender-neutral: If someone is rude to you, try giving **them** a smile in return.
Correct and gender-neutral: If **people are** rude to you, try giving **them** a smile in return.
5. **Correct:** My family has **its** faults, certainly, but I love my parents dearly.*
6. **Correct:** The school of education plans to train **its** students to be literacy tutors.*
7. **Correct:** The speaker said that each student has a responsibility toward **his or her** community.
Correct and gender-neutral: The speaker said that each student has a responsibility toward **their** community.
Correct and gender-neutral: The speaker said that **students have** a responsibility toward **their communities**.
8. **Correct:** My mother's singing group has **its** rehearsals on Thursday evenings.*
9. **Correct:** No one should suffer **his or her** pains alone.
Correct and gender-neutral: No one should suffer **their** pains alone.
Correct and gender-neutral: **People should not** suffer **their** pains alone.
10. **Correct:** I thought the flock of birds lost **its** way in the storm.*

*Note: In 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10, the pronoun *its* is already a nongendered, nonbinary pronoun, so it would be incorrect to change *its* to *their* in these sentences because doing so would create unnecessary confusion.

Practice 24.15

1. Meera and **I**
2. She and **he**
3. you and **me**
4. **We** and our friends

5. **They** and **I**
6. Alice and **me**
7. **her** and **me**
8. than **I**
9. Yolanda and **her**
10. **We** students

Practice 24.16

1. who
2. who
3. whom
4. who
5. who
6. whom
7. who
8. who
9. whom
10. who

Practice 24.17

1. OK
2. The project was completed by Kara and **me**.
3. Michael and **I** are responsible for editing the report.
4. Jo-Ann and Cathy, please submit the application to **me**.
5. OK
6. Francis and Stuart found **themselves** in a difficult situation.
7. We have only **ourselves** to blame, Paul!
8. OK
9. OK
10. OK

Practice 24.18

Possible answers:

1. nearly (**adv.**)
2. bright (**adj.**)
3. kind (**adj.**)
4. badly (**adv.**)
5. vivid (**adj.**)
6. softly (**adv.**)

7. valued (**adj.**)
8. great (**adj.**)
9. admiringly (**adv.**)
10. hungrily (**adv.**)

Practice 24.19

It all started on the **sunniest** afternoon that I have ever experienced. Max and I were sitting on the porch. I told him that my dog, Jacko, was **smarter** than his dog, Merlin. Merlin never comes when he's called, and he chases his tail and barks at rocks! I said Merlin was the **dumbest** dog on the block. I guess I was **angry** about a bad grade that I received, so I decided to pick on poor little Merlin. Even though Max insulted Jacko, too, I felt I had been **meaner**. The next day I apologized to Max and brought Merlin some treats. When Merlin placed his paw on my knee and licked my hand, I was the **sorriest** person on the block.

Practice 24.20

1. badly
2. good
3. well
4. bad
5. badly
6. good
7. well
8. good
9. bad
10. badly

Practice 24.21

1. better
2. best
3. worse
4. worst
5. worse
6. better
7. worst
8. worse
9. better
10. best

Practice 24.22

1. The young woman **on the telephone** was walking the dog.
2. I heard **on the evening news** that there was a robbery.
3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller **he called “Speed Racer”** for the baby.
4. With his foot, the explorer stopped the boulder **rolling down the mountain**.
5. We are looking for a babysitter **who doesn’t drink or smoke and owns a car** for our precious six-year-old.
6. The teacher served cookies **wrapped in aluminum foil** to the children.
7. The mysterious woman **holding an umbrella** walked toward the car.
8. We returned the wine **that was sour** to the waiter.
9. **Driving home from work**, Charlie spotted a stray puppy.
10. **For dinner**, I ate nothing but a bowl of **cold** noodles.

Practice 24.23

1. This is an interesting time to be a biologist making discoveries about new creatures.
2. As I was walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.
The picture fell off the wall as I was walking in the dark.
3. While I was playing guitar in the bedroom, I saw the cat under the bed.
I saw the cat under the bed while I was playing guitar in the bedroom.
4. While I was packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.
A cockroach scurried down the hallway while I was packing for a trip.
5. While I was looking in the mirror, the towel swayed in the breeze.
The towel swayed in the breeze while I was looking in the mirror.
6. While I was driving to the vet’s office, the dog nervously whined.
The dog nervously whined while I was driving to the vet’s office.
7. The priceless painting drew large crowds that were walking into the museum.
8. I chose a romance novel that was piled up next to the bookshelf.
9. As I chewed furiously, the gum fell out of my mouth.
The gum fell out of my mouth as I chewed furiously,
10. Even though the professor marked the assignments quickly, the students were disappointed with the grades.
The students were disappointed with the grades the professor assigned even though she marked the assignments quickly.

Practice 24.24

Possible answer:

Shopping at the grocery store, I bought a fresh loaf of bread for my sandwich. Wanting to make a delicious sandwich, I thickly spread the mayonnaise. I then placed the cold cuts on the bread with the lettuce on top. I cut the sandwich in half with a knife and turned on the radio. Biting into the sandwich, I heard my favourite song blaring loudly in my ears. Humming and chewing, I thoroughly enjoyed my sandwich. Smiling, I know I will make this sandwich again, but next time I will add cheese.

Chapter 25

Practice 25.1

1. **Suddenly**, the dog ran into the house.
2. **In the blink of an eye**, the kids were ready to go to the movies.
3. **Confused**, he tried opening the box from the other end.
4. **Every May long weekend**, we go camping in the woods.
5. **Without a doubt**, green is my favourite colour.
6. **Hesitating**, she looked back at the directions before proceeding.
7. **Fortunately**, the sleeping baby did not stir when the doorbell rang.
8. **Believe it or not**, the criminal was able to rob the same bank three times.
9. **Even though Marti would have preferred to come to the party**, she stayed home to study.
10. Marti stayed home to study even though she would have preferred to come to the party. **No comma necessary.**

Practice 25.2

1. On his birthday list, my son asked for **video games, an Amazon gift card, and a new cell phone.**
2. Don't forget, I need to borrow **a suitcase, a travel pillow, and a passport holder** for my trip.
3. **Elsie, Olga, Katrina, and Cornelia** will work on the project.
4. My all-time favourite singers include **Jann Arden, Sarah McLaughlin, Loreena McKennitt, and Nelly Furtado.**

Practice 25.3

1. **Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday** are all booked with meetings.
2. It was a **quiet, uneventful, unproductive** day.

3. We'll need to prepare statements for the **Franks, Todds, and Smiths** before their portfolio reviews next week.
4. **Michael, Nita, and Desmond** finished their report last Tuesday.
5. With **cold, wet, aching** fingers he was able to secure the sails before the storm.
6. He wrote his name on the board in **clear, precise, delicate** letters.
7. The **tired, old, grizzled** man paused before he spoke.

Practice 25.4

Possible answers:

1. The presentation was scheduled for Monday, **but** the weather delayed it for four days.
2. He wanted a snack before bedtime, **so he** ate some fruit.
3. The patient is in the next room, **but** I can hardly hear anything.
4. We could go camping for vacation, **or we** could go to the beach for vacation.
5. I want to get a better job; **therefore**, I am taking courses online at night.
6. I cannot move forward on this project, **but** I cannot afford to stop on this project **either**.
7. Patrice wants to stop for lunch, **so we** will take the next exit to look for a restaurant.
8. I've got to get this paper done, **since** I have class in ten minutes.
9. The weather was clear yesterday, **hence we** decided to go on a picnic.
10. I have never dealt with this client before, **but** I know Leonardo has worked with them, **so** let's ask him for his help.

Practice 25.5

1. I asked my neighbours, **the retired couple from Nova Scotia**, to bring in my mail.
2. **Without a doubt**, his work has improved over the last few weeks.
3. Our professor, **Dr. Singh**, drilled the lessons into our heads.
4. The meeting is at noon, **unfortunately**, which means I will be late for lunch.
5. We came in time for the last part of dinner, but **most importantly**, we came in time for dessert.
6. **All of a sudden**, our network crashed, and we lost our files.
7. **Alex**, hand the wrench to me before the pipe comes loose again.
8. My father, **who is eighty**, helped me fix my car.

9. My neighbour's big Dalmatian, **which is wearing a red collar**, is loose again.
10. The Dalmatian with the red collar is the one that got away. **No comma necessary.**

Practice 25.6

4 Taylor Drive
Victoria, BC V8W 1Y2
March 27, 2023

Morris Timmons
25 Front Street
Calgary, AB T2L 2Y1

Dear Mr. Timmons,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am currently in Victoria, British Columbia, but I will be available on Monday, April 5, after 11 a.m. Is your address still 25 Front Street, Calgary, Alberta, or do you have a new address? Please get back to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you,

Alexa

Note: In a more formal situation, the comma after the greeting (*Dear Mr. Timmons*) could be replaced with a colon.

Practice 25.7

1. My brother, Nathaniel, is a collector of many rare, unusual things. He has collected lunch boxes, limited-edition books, and hatpins at various points in his life. His current collection of unusual bottles has over fifty pieces. Usually, he sells one collection before starting another.
2. Our meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 20. At that time, we need to gather all our documents together. Alice is in charge of the timetables and schedules, Tom is in charge of updating the guidelines, and I am in charge of the presentation. To prepare for this meeting, please print out any emails, faxes, or documents you have referred to while writing your sample.
3. It was a cool, crisp autumn day when the group set out. They needed to cover several miles before they made camp, so they walked at a

brisk pace. The leader of the group, Garth, kept checking his watch and their GPS location. Isabelle, Raoul, and Maggie took turns carrying the equipment, while Carrie took notes about the wildlife they saw. As a result, no one noticed the darkening sky until the first drops of rain splattered on their faces.

4. Please have your report completed and filed by April 15, 2019. In your submission letter, please include your contact information, the position you are applying for, and the names of two people we can contact as references. We will not be available for consultation after April 10, but you may contact the office if you have any questions. Thank you, HR Department.

Practice 25.8

1. I did not notice that you were in the office; I was behind the front desk all day.
2. Do you want turkey, spinach, and cheese; roast beef, lettuce, and cheese; or ham, tomato, and cheese?
3. Please close the blinds; there is a glare on the screen.
4. OK
5. I cannot decide if I want my room to be green, brown, and purple; green, black, and brown; or green, brown, and dark red.
6. Let's go for a walk; the air is so refreshing.

Practice 25.9

1. Don't give up; you never know what tomorrow brings.
2. Our records show that the patient was admitted on March 9, 2010; January 13, 2010; and November 16, 2009.
3. Allow me to introduce myself: I am the greatest ice carver in the world.
4. Where I come from, there are three ways to get to the grocery store: by car, by bus, and by foot.
5. Listen closely: you will want to remember this speech.
6. I have lived in Vancouver; Red Deer, Alberta; Toronto; and Whitehorse, NWT.
7. The boss's message was clear: lateness would not be tolerated.
8. OK
9. My little sister said what we were all thinking: "We should have stayed home."
10. Trust me; I have done this before.

Practice 25.10

1. Yasmin said, "I don't feel like cooking. Let's go out to eat."
2. "Where should we go?" said Russell.
3. Yasmin said it didn't matter to her.
4. "I know," said Russell, "Let's go to the Two Roads Juice Bar."
5. "Perfect!" said Yasmin.
6. "Did you know that the name of the Juice Bar is a reference to a poem?" asked Russell.
7. "I didn't!" exclaimed Yasmin. "Which poem?"
8. "'The Road Not Taken,' by Robert Frost," Russell explained.
9. "Oh!" said Yasmin, "Is that the one that starts with the line, 'Two roads diverged in a yellow wood'?"
10. "That's the one," said Russell.

Practice 25.11

1. "What a beautiful child! She has her mother's eyes."
2. My brother's wife is one of my best friends.
3. I couldn't believe it when I found out that I got the job!
4. My supervisors informed me that I wouldn't be able to take the days off.
5. Each student's response was unique.
6. All of the students' lockers need cleaning.
7. Won't you please join me for dinner tonight?
8. It's too bad that the cat can't find its toy.
9. Excuse me, where is the ladies' room?
10. Is that Jeremy Smith's or Kelly Jones's car?

Practice 25.12

1. Which hairstyle do you prefer—short or long?
2. I don't know—I hadn't even thought about that.
3. Guess what—I got the job!
4. I will be happy to work over the weekend—if I can have Monday off.
5. You have all the qualities that we are looking for in a candidate—intelligence, dedication, and a strong work ethic.
6. Has anyone—besides me—read the assignment?

Practice 25.13

1. Which hairstyle do you prefer: short or long?
Which hairstyle do you prefer, short or long?

2. I don't know; I hadn't even thought about that.
I don't know. I hadn't even thought about that.
3. Guess what? I got the job!
4. I will be happy to work over the weekend, if I can have Monday off.
I will be happy to work over the weekend if I can have Monday off.
5. You have all the qualities that we are looking for in a candidate:
intelligence, dedication, and a strong work ethic.
6. Has anyone (besides me) read the assignment?

Practice 25.14

1. Are you skipping the lecture this afternoon (I am)?
2. I highly recommend the oyster bar (unless you don't like oysters).
3. I was able to solve the puzzle (after taking a few moments to think about it).
4. OK
5. Did anyone else (besides me) watch all seasons of *House*?
6. Please be sure to circle (not underline) the correct answers.

Practice 25.16

1. The Prince of England enjoys playing polo.
2. "Ode to Nightingale" is a sad poem.
3. My sister loves to read magazines such as the *New Yorker*.
4. *The Bone Cage* is an excellent novel written by Angie Abdou.
5. My physician, Dr. Alvarez, always makes me feel comfortable in her Regina office.
6. At Home Sense, I bought Nike, Columbia, and DKNY T-shirts.

Practice 25.17

By the 1970s, Canadian literature as a concept had become commonplace. In the same decade, the concept of Prairie literature also became an accepted label to distinguish regional writing in Canada. The idea had been first articulated by Edward McCourt in *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1949) and was reiterated by Laurie Ricou in *Vertical Man / Horizontal World* (1973) and Dick Harrison in *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1977). A special Prairie Poetry issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* (1980) edited by Dennis Cooley of the University of Manitoba, who spoke at the 2005 Wild Words conference twenty-five years later, confirmed the validity and viability of the Prairie Literature concept. . . . The PrairieLit concept had grown out of an era in Canadian history that linked the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba into a single agrarian political economy with a common cultural

base. This unity began to unravel after World War II, when Alberta became the centre of Canada's energy industry.

Practice 25.18

Sherman J. Alexie Jr. was born in October 1966. He is a Spokane / Coeur d'Alene Indian and an American writer, poet, and filmmaker. Alexie was born with hydrocephalus, or water on the brain. This condition led doctors to predict that he would **likely** suffer long-term brain damage and possibly mental retardation. Although Alexie survived with no mental **disabilities**, he did suffer other serious side effects from his condition that **plagued** him throughout his childhood. Amazingly, Alexie learned to read by the age of three, and by age five he had read novels such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Raised on an Indian reservation, Alexie often felt **alienated** from his peers due to his avid love of reading and also from the long-term effects of his illness, which often kept him from **socializing** with his peers on the reservation. The reading skills he **displayed** at such a young age foreshadowed what he would later become. Today, Alexie is a prolific and successful writer with several story **anthologies** to his credit, **notably** *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *The Toughest Indian in the World*. Most of his fiction is about contemporary Native Americans who are influenced by pop culture and powwows and everything in between. His work is sometimes funny but always thoughtful and full of richness and depth. Alexie also writes poetry, novels, and screenplays. His latest collection of **stories** is called *War Dances*, which came out in 2009.

Practice 25.19

1. It was a **real privilege** to have **taught** you **writing** this year.
2. I'm sorry to **disappoint** you, but you'll have to **wait** until **tomorrow** for the **surprise**.
3. Your **exaggerated** and **ridiculous** stories **embarrass** me.
4. His **strength** is the reason for his **success** in his **career**.
5. Please send the **reference** letter to the head of **personnel**.
6. He will **perform tonight** with the **rhythm** section.
7. Is it **realistic** to **pursue** a **psychology degree**?
8. A **separate** branch of the **government** is **responsible** for that.
9. On **Wednesday**, an **illegal strike** is **possible**.
10. The **temperature** will drop **immediately**, **according** to **Environment Canada**.

Practice 25.20

1. principle
2. wear
3. led
4. which
5. piece
6. past
7. lessen
8. sees / seizes
9. through