Reading and Writing Successfully in College: A Guide for Students [Revised Edition]

Reading and Writing Successfully in College: A Guide for Students [Revised Edition]

PATRICIA LYNNE

ROTEL (REMIXING OPEN TEXTBOOKS WITH AN EQUITY LENS) PROJECT
FRAMINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

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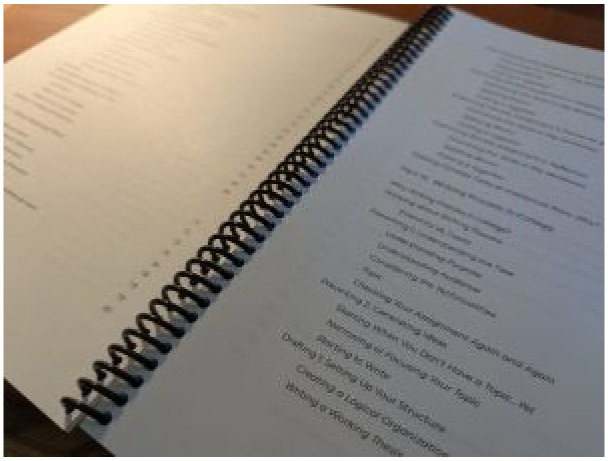
Welcome, Students!

Too often, I hear from students that they "can't write," even as I see them sending text messages and writing song lyrics. Clearly they *can* write, but what I think they mean is that they feel stuck or stifled or even silenced in academic writing situations. In high school, you may have been told what your thesis should be or what to put in each paragraph, but in college, your professors usually want to know what you think, so those guardrails come off.

When we write, we are usually trying to communicate something to someone, even if we are only communicating with ourselves through our journals and grocery lists. More often, though, we are trying to communicate ideas and information to people who cannot read our minds. We know what we mean, but trying to make that meaning clear to another human being can be difficult, so we need to make choices about how best to convey our message.

Writing, at least in college, is less about learning the rules and more about learning to make successful choices that help your reader understand whatever it is that you want to say.

About This Book



I have crafted *Reading and Writing Successfully in College* to help you improve your ability to make successful choices while writing specifically in an academic setting. There's no formula for good writing that applies to every setting because writing situations are so variable. However, there are strategies and techniques that you can practice. This text is designed to provide you with a range of approaches for you to try so that you can find the ones that work for you.

I've organized the book in four sections, designed to help you locate the strategies and techniques you need as you work on your assignments:

- **Writing as Intellectual Work** helps you think about writing assignments as more than just a demonstration of your knowledge. Using a model of learning called "Bloom's Taxonomy," this section helps you figure out the kinds of thinking that your professor is looking for when they give you a writing assignment.
- **Successful College Reading** provides a guide for reading actively, including strategies for choosing where and when to read, annotating texts, and identifying main points. This section focuses on non-fiction texts because these make up the majority of what you will read in college.
- **Writing Process in College** offers a range of techniques for managing the writing process, some of which

may already be familiar and some of which may be new. I'm a big fan of leveraging technology to help us write more effectively, so a number of exercises rely on features in your word processor, but many of these same techniques can be done with paper and pen if you prefer.
- **Writing with Sources** focuses on how to find credible sources and use them well in academic writing. Here you'll find guides for evaluating your sources, with a focus on internet sources, as well as information about summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, and citing.

The writing choices you make will help others better understand your ideas and help you think and learn more effectively—and not only in college. I sincerely hope that you find this text useful in helping you make those choices.

Most of the ideas and activities in this book have been developed and refined through work with my students over nearly 30 years of teaching. During the last few years, students have actively helped me with this book through an open pedagogy assignment. I asked students to work in groups to revise sections of this text: to change the language, make ideas clearer, define unfamiliar words, add visuals and examples, and generally to help me make this book more effective for you. Where they have given me permission, I have included their names, and I am grateful for their help. I plan to continue using this assignment, and I will include their work in future versions of this book.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to email me. I welcome your feedback!

About Me

When I first entered graduate school at Virginia Tech, I thought I was going to study postmodern novels. I took a job teaching writing just to pay for my tuition, which I could not afford without working. Virginia Tech is a bit of a weird place to study English—or at least it was at the time—because the school is known for engineering, science, and agriculture. And I had been a "math and science kid" who started out as an engineering student, even though I later found my home in English. I chose Virginia Tech because the school was familiar to me, and as a first-generation college graduate nervous about grad school, I needed familiarity.

As my first semester of teaching progressed, I found myself much more interested in what was going on with my first-year writing students than in the novels I was reading. I was taking a class in writing **theory** and **pedagogy**, and I was seeing some of what I was learning in my students' work. But not everything matched, and there was so much more to learn. I was hooked!

I have been learning about writing ever since. Nearly every semester of my academic career, I have taught first-year writing. When I first started teaching in the late 1980s, my students were overwhelmingly white and working-class, like me. Over the years, they have become much more diverse—racially, of course, but also in terms of their genders and family backgrounds—though I still teach many first-gens and mostly working-class students. This change has been been such a gift!

I know it sounds clichéd, but I learn so much from my students. My students have taught me to see them each as individuals with something of their own to say. They have taught me that no one strategy for writing works for everyone, which has forced me to be agile in my suggestions and guidance. My students have also given me ideas about using highlighters and the concepts of "rainbow paragraphs" and "final-ish drafts" (the drafts they submit for my feedback before revising them for portfolios).

In addition to teaching writing, I grow vegetables, especially green beans and tomatoes. I knit lots of scarves and holiday ornaments for my family. I read, mostly urban fantasy and science fiction. I play online puzzle games with one of my children and MMORPGs with my partner and another child (right now, it's classic World of Warcraft). I have fostered dogs in recent years, though I'm not doing that right now because my dog has gotten older and less tolerant—I'm not going to make him share our attention during his golden years. I enjoy and collect wooden jigsaw puzzles, both classic and modern.

When I was a child, I would come home from school and teach my younger sister everything that I had learned that day—all the math, all the science, all the history, and all the reading and writing. She ended up skipping a grade as a result. It's no surprise that I became a teacher and landed in a career where I can have the first day of school twice a year. Thank you to my students and my colleagues for sharing this ride with me!

Media Attribution

Student Writing, Photo by Brad Neathery on Unsplash

Headshot of Patricia Lynne, Photo by Framingham State University *Gatepost*

Welcome, Instructors!

With so many writing textbook choices available to you, I'm pleased that you have decided to use this one. I wrote this text for myriad reasons, but here are a few:

- I believe in low- and no-cost educational materials, particularly for general education and introductory courses.
- I wanted a textbook that focused writing as intellectual work and that didn't rely on modes or a list of genres, but I couldn't find one.
- Over nearly 30 years of teaching writing, I have developed many exercises that my students tell me are helpful. I wanted to share those.

While I wrote this for me and my students, I sincerely hope that you and yours find this text useful, in whole or in part. I also encourage you to adapt what doesn't fit. After all, that's what OER is all about!

As I wrote to the students in my welcome to them, if you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to email me. I welcome your feedback!

Open Pedagogy Assignment

I developed an open pedagogy assignment for use with this book, but which could be adapted to any OER materials. As you'll see below, in that assignment, I asked teams of students to choose a section and make revisions, and you will find their contributions acknowledged in the sections they chose. Based on my experiences, teams of either three or four students could be successful, but larger or smaller sizes tended to struggle.

I opted for a grading scheme that would provide points for each contribution. I used a combination of team and individual points, as you'll see below, setting different levels of points for teams of different sizes.

While the assignment was not without glitches (and I continue to revise it), most of the students became invested in the revision work that they did. As one of them wrote, "I expected none of my criticisms to be taken seriously because I wasn't at the same level as the writer of the book, but my feedback was actually appreciated." What fabulous feedback on an assignment!

I used to have a link on this page to the assignment as it appears on my website; however, I realized that I didn't want the assignment to depend on my ability to maintain that site (after I broke the link, of course!). So I am including it here, minus some of the details that were only relevant to my class. If you are not interested in the assignment, please feel free to skip the rest of this page.

Assignment (as written for students)

As you know, the textbook we've been using this semester, *Reading and Writing Successfully in*

College (RWS), is an open education textbook that I developed. In this assignment, I'm asking you to help me improve the book for students just like you in the future.

For this project, you will work with a small group of your classmates to choose a section of RWS to revise and augment. You will then write an individual reflection on your experiences with this project.

During this unit, you'll learn about writing for a real public audience (you are reading material revised by other students, too!). You'll also learn about Open Education Resources, Creative Commons licensing, and copyright, as well as a bit about accessibility in publishing.

Part 1: Team Contributions

Choosing a Section

Your team will choose either a chapter or a part of a chapter if the chapter is long. You should choose a section that you believe you could make stronger and that all of you are interested in working on.

You must also choose a section that hasn't already been worked on by other students. You can tell if a section has been worked on by former students by looking at the end of the chapter. If they have, you'll see a note about their assistance under "Text Attributions" at the end of the chapter. Look at the end of the chapter on Proofreading for an example.

No two groups will be allowed to work on the same section. By the end of the first class period in this unit, you should have settled on a selection, and I'll check in with you then.

Contributing to RWS

In contributing to this text, you should be thinking about the students who will next use this textbook in a course like ours. What would most help them to understand the ideas? What would encourage them to read the text carefully? What would help them practice the skills explained in the book?

Required Contributions

For an A on this project, your group must contribute the following:

- Two Visuals: At least two appropriately licensed visuals for their chapter with appropriate alt-text. We will talk about what that means in class. Visuals can be photographs or drawings, but they can also be diagrams or infographics or screenshots. You can either create these yourself or find them online.
- One Textbox: One example, pullout, or activity — something that would be appropriate for one of the textboxes (the purple, teal, or orange boxes in the text).

Optional Contributions

There are multiple other contributions your group can make:

- Revise the writing in the section
- Locate new outside resources and link them
- Identify words that could use definition (and provide those definitions)
- Create links between sections that aren't already there

Don't feel limited by the lists I've created. If you can think of something that would strengthen this textbook, please include it!

Your Contributions and Permissions

RWS is an open education resource (OER), which means that the content of the book is freely shareable and editable, as long as the user gives me credit for my work and does not change the licensing that I have assigned to this project.

Because RWS is an OER, all material in the book needs to be licensed appropriately. During this unit, you'll learn what that means, but I will require that everything you submit be licensed so that I could use it, assuming that you give me permission and that I choose to use it.

Work Done by Others

You may decide to submit work that has been done by others. You could, for example, choose images from Unsplash, a collection of photos that are Creative Commons licensed. You could also choose an activity from a source like OER Commons or MERLOT for me to incorporate.

Any contributions by others must be licensed under Creative Commons in a way that I can use them before I could add them to the book. Again, you'll learn what this means during this unit.

Giving Permission

Some of what your team creates may be of your own design. For instance, you may take photographs of your own to add to the text, or you may develop examples that are from your own writing and experiences in this class or in others. You may create an infographic or diagram. These creations are yours.

While I would like the option to use what you submit, I will only do that if you give me permission. I will ask (but not require) that you give me permission to incorporate your material into the text. I will provide a form for your team to complete and submit with your contributions that lets me know whether you are willing for me to use your material.

If you choose not to give me permission, I will not use your work in the textbook, but it will still count toward your grade for this unit. Permission is not required.

Revisions

In addition to adding images and such to the text, your team might choose to revise the text itself. You could, for example, provide a longer explanation of a concept — or a shorter one. You could make some of the language clearer or more accessible for students like you. You could update some of my explanations based on work you have done during the semester.

Revisions like this are welcome. I am doing my best to write a textbook for students, but I am not a student. I do not want you to hesitate to revise something because you are worried that I will be offended. I won't be. Honestly, I'll be honored that you care enough about the material to try to make it better. Please do!

If you are giving me permission to use the revisions you make and your revisions are incorporated into the book, they will need to have a compatible Creative Commons license. Again, we'll talk more about what that means in class.

My Choice and Your Attribution

I am retaining authorship of this project, so ultimately the choice of whether to include your contributions or not will rest with me. If you give me permission and I choose to use the submissions, I will give you credit for your work; that is, I will attribute the work to you in RWS. I will also let you know my decision.

If you do not choose to give me permission, you will still get credit for this work in this class; I just won't add that work to RWS.

Part 2: Individual Reflection

Your team will make decisions about changes to the section you've chosen together, but I also want to hear from you individually about your experiences with this project. So in addition to submitting your team's contributions, I am asking each of you to submit a reflection (300-500 words) on your experiences working on this project. The specifics of this reflection are up to you, but here are some questions you might consider:

- What did you learn as you worked on this project?
- What was your experience with your teammates? What worked well? What could have worked better?

- What contributions are you most proud of? Most unsure of? Why?

Remember that these questions are just ideas. You are not required to answer these, and you may choose to reflect on something different. The only requirement is that you write specifically about your experiences with this project, not with the textbook as a whole or the course or something else. If you choose to write about something else or you don't meet the minimum word count, you may not get full credit for this part of the project.

Assignment Grading (as written for students)

Grading for this unit will work a little differently, since this is a team project, and I am not setting homework and peer response assignments (though you may choose to do so).

Grading Levels for the Team Project

	A	B	C
Points for 3-person teams	10+	8-9	6-7
Points for 4-person teams	12+	10-11	8-9

The grade for this unit is based on the number and type of contributions your team makes, as well as the focus of your own reflection. Please note that this assignment is **not** an invitation simply to add comments and make suggestions, like I have done on your papers. Instead, this assignment asks you to actually create a final-ish version of the chapter, with copies of any assets (such as photographs or infographics) and URL links to material not created by your group.

Required Contributions

Each submission must meet all of the requirements in order for your group to get credit. Partial credit will not be given.

Visuals

You are required to submit a minimum of two visuals.

3 points = Infographics, diagrams, and other visuals that you have created.

1 point = Photographs, screenshots, memes*, videos**, and other visuals created by others or that require minimal work on your part to prepare for this project.

Your visuals will only be accepted if they also meet the following requirements:

- If they are not your creation, they must be licensed under a compatible Creative Commons license.
- They must include alt-text.

For each visual, please submit the following:

- The visual file in a PNG, GIF, or JPG format.
- A word processing file (DOCX, ODT, or RTF) including the alt-text and any extra information.
- A link to the original source (if not of your own creation).
- Information about how you would like the attribution to appear (if the visual is of your own creation).

** A word of warning about memes: Be sure that the image used for the meme is one that is properly licensed. Many meme generators do not pay attention to the image licensing.*

*** Because of file storage concerns, the only videos that can be accepted are those (with proper licensing) available on YouTube or other video platform that doesn't require a login.*

Textboxes

You are required to submit a minimum of one textbox.

3 points = Textboxes that introduce new ideas, examples, and/or activities that your group creates.

1 point = Textboxes that rely on material created by others.

These must include the following:

- A title that includes what kind of textbox you have (Example, Activity, Pullout) and identifies the content.
- All material (that isn't your own) cited properly in the text with a properly formatted Works Cited list.
- Links for any material that isn't of your own creation.

For each textbox, please submit the following:

- A link to the original source (if not of your own creation)
- The content of the textbox, including citations, in a DOCX, ODT, or RTF format.

Note that there may be overlap with the textbox creation and the visuals: you could create a textbox that includes visuals. If you do this, you should make sure that information about which visual should be included in the textbox is clear to me.

Optional Contributions

These are additional contributions that your group could make to the text.

2 points = Large contributions that add something substantial to the text. The only example I can think of is revising a large section of the text in substantial way, but you may come up with something I haven't thought of.

0.25 points = Small contributions that make very little change in the text (though they may still be helpful!). Here are some examples:

- Adding a definition of a term that students are not likely to understand.
- Editing a sentence to make it stronger or clearer.
- Adding small design elements, such as bolding.

Keep in mind that the only contributions that will "count" are ones that are have appropriate licensing.

Reflection

Your team grade will be the same for all members of your team, but your reflection counts separately just for you. Your reflection can add up to one additional point, as follows:

1 point = a reflection that meets the length requirement and that is focused on your experiences with this project, as directed in the assignment.

0.5 point = a reflection that meets the length requirement and that is focused on the course or the textbook generally, but not on the project specifically.

0 points = a reflection focused on something else, or a reflection that doesn't meet the length requirement, or no reflection at all.

Here's an example of how the reflection grading will work, if your group generates 9 points worth of contributions and you write a 400-word reflection that focuses on your experiences with this project, your total points for this project will be 10. If you are part of a three-person team, that's an A. If you are part of a four-person team, that's a B.

Acknowledgements

ROTEL Grant

The leaders of the ROTEL Project grant gave me this opportunity to make a sabbatical project a reality. I am particularly grateful to Millie Gonzalez, Dean of Framingham State's Whittemore Library, as well as Marilyn Billings, Faculty Advisor and Advocate for the grant, and the publishing support team of Vicky Gavin, Minh Le, and Rick Lizotte. I am also grateful to Barbara Ambos for her help editing the second version. Thank you all for your support and guidance!

My Own Land Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that the land on which I live, work, learn, and play is the original homelands of the Nipmuc tribal nations. I acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory, and I honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

Fellow Instructors

A number of instructors were willing to use this textbook in their Fall 2022 first-year writing classes and give me feedback, including Marianne McGowan, Lee Okan, Arlene Wilner, and Sarah Young. In particular, I would like to thank Lorianne Disabato and Leah Van Vaerenewyck for their reviews and Chris Payson for not only her review but also the feedback from her students.

Former Students

Students from my classes over the past two semesters have given me generous feedback and suggestions for making improvements. Thanks to James Bushard, Lando Concepcion, Jude Ejiofor, Tia Lidonde, Lorenzo Locks Azeredo, Christopher Ortega, Joseph Payne, and Geoffrey Pierre for suffering through the first version of this available only through a Google Doc. The process was more painful than I wished, and I appreciate your willingness to work with me.

Thanks also to Waldy Baez, Wilmani Castillo, Paul Goggin, Max Jeremic, Ameir Mahmoud, Eddileidy Tejeda, Latrell Williams, and a small group of students who wished to remain nameless for their help with Fall 2022 Pressbooks test drive. And to Alexandre Francois, Ramire Johnson, Elizabeth Mahoney, and Christal Page, students in my class during Fall 2023. Your contributions helped me reshape parts of this book significantly.

As you read, you may notice sections where these students are credited with revisions or other changes. In an open pedagogy assignment, I invited students to suggest changes and make contributions as part of their work for my course. I am particularly grateful for those contributions.

Behind the Scenes

I would also like to recognize two other people who have helped this book become a reality.

Rebecca Dowgiert, Framingham State's Open Education Resources Liaison, helped me to locate resources and readings and to navigate Creative Commons licensing. Rebecca also helped me implement the open pedagogy assignment I developed in conjunction with this text. Most importantly, if Rebecca hadn't pushed me to apply for a ROTEL grant, this book might have remained a partially completed project.

Vicky Gavin, my editor, helped me to move my overly long Google Doc into Pressbooks and gave me plenty of design advice, all while keeping accessibility and consistency in mind. Her help in the pre-publication stages of this textbook has been invaluable. I also appreciate the gif-trading and moral support!

Land Acknowledgement

Land Acknowledgement Statement for the ROTEL Grant

As part of ROTEL Grant's mission to support the creation, management, and dissemination of culturally-relevant textbooks, we must acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. We acknowledge that the boundaries that created Massachusetts were arbitrary and a product of the settlers. We honor the land on which the Higher Education Institutions of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are sited as the traditional territory of tribal nations. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from their territory, and other atrocities connected with colonization. We honor and respect the many diverse indigenous people connected to this land on which we gather, and our acknowledgement is one action we can take to correct the stories and practices that erase Indigenous People's history and culture.

Identified Tribes and/or Nations of Massachusetts

Historical Nations

- Mahican
- Mashpee
- Massachuset
- Nauset
- Nipmuc
- Pennacook
- Pocomtuc
- Stockbridge
- Wampanoag

Present-Day Nations and Tribes

- Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe
- Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah
- Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe
- Assawompsett-Nemasket Band of Wampanoags
- Pocasset Wampanoag of the Pokanoket Nation
- Seaconke Wampanoag Tribe
- Chappaquiddick Tribe of the Wampanoag Indian Nation
- Nipmuc Nation (Bands include the Hassanamisco, Natick)
- Nipmuck Tribal Council of Chaubunagungamaug
- Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag

At the time of publication, all links were active.

Suggested Readings

Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness
A guide to Indigenous land acknowledgment
'We are all on Native Land: A conversation about Land Acknowledgements' (YouTube video)
Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land (mapping of native lands)
Beyond territorial acknowledgments – âpihtawikosisân
Your Territorial Acknowledgment Is Not Enough

This land acknowledgement is based on the land acknowledgement of the [Massachusetts] Digital Commonwealth.

Icons, Textboxes, and Images

Icons and Textboxes

Throughout the text, there are textboxes of various colors with icons to differentiate them, as follows:

Examples

These boxes work through examples.

Activities

These boxes provide instructions and guidance for activities for you to try.

Pull Outs

These boxes include additional information and interesting side notes that aren't crucial to the text but that might be interesting.

Key Points

These boxes, which appear at the end of most chapters, list the key takeaways from the chapter. Short chapters don't have these.

Sometimes you will see textboxes with an arrow. I have used these when the textbox is long.

Examples

Click for more information.

Clicking on the arrow will open the box so that you can get the full information. Most of the ones that are closed are long.

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PART I

DOING INTELLECTUAL WORK

What Is Intellectual Work?

When instructors give you writing assignments, they want you to do intellectual work. If you can understand what this means, you'll be better able to understand what your professors are looking for and how to complete your assignments successfully.

If something is intellectual, it's about thinking, so understanding information and ideas. And as soon as we talk about using something, we are working with it. So "intellectual work" is about thinking actively (in the ways that your professor is asking you to think) and demonstrating that thinking through whatever your professor asks you to produce.

You already do intellectual work, even if you haven't used that phrase. For example, memorization is a kind of intellectual work you've almost certainly done: being able to identify the parts of a plant, for example, or remembering vocabulary words in a language class. While memorization can be important, it is rarely an endpoint in college (and, to be honest, probably not in most of your recent education either). Memorization at this level just serves as a starting point for more complex tasks, such as propagating plants or holding a conversation in a new language.

Writing assignments are one way that professors get you to practice more complex intellectual tasks. They certainly aren't the only way, but in college (and professionally) writing is a common way of working through and then sharing complex ideas.

In a later chapter, I talk about how to analyze specific writing assignments for a range of factors, including the purpose and audience of the assignment. In this section, I'm hoping to help you develop a stronger understanding of the kind of thinking that different writing tasks ask of you.

Understanding Bloom’s Taxonomy

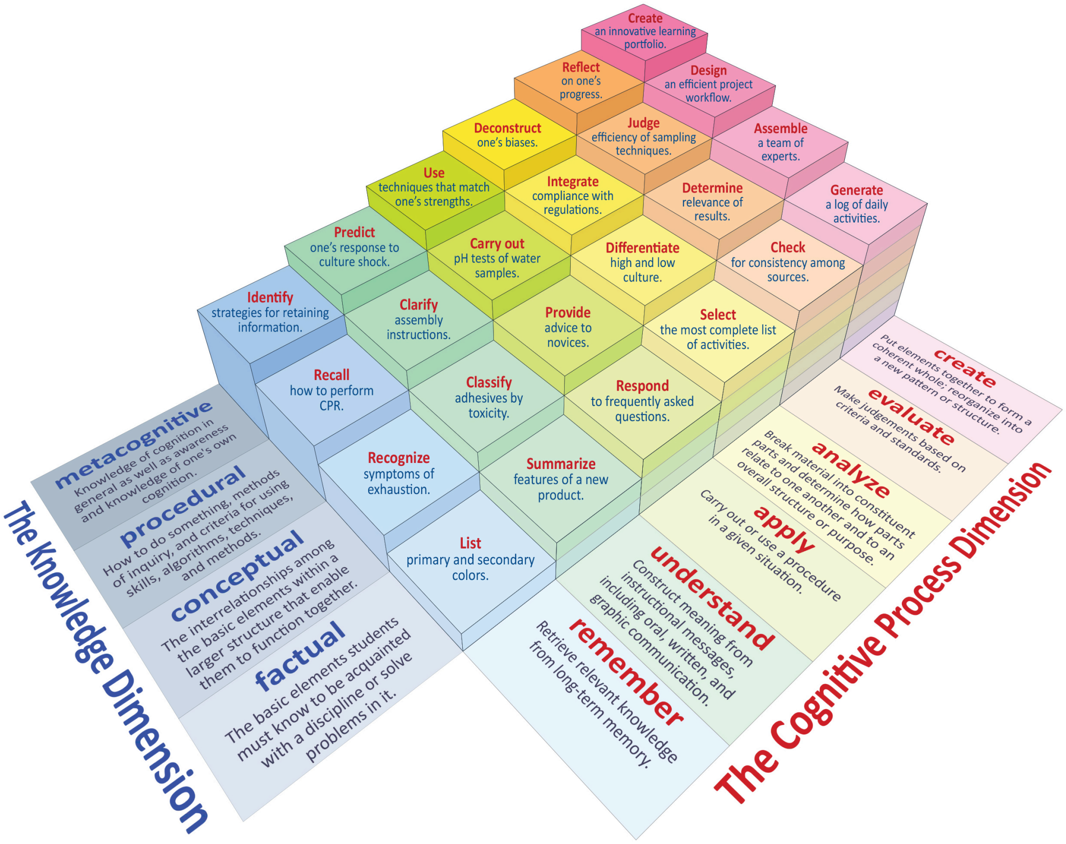
Educators often use a model of learning called “Bloom’s Taxonomy.” This **taxonomy** divides learning into categories that instructors can use to specify the learning that they wish to see in their students—and to build assignments and assessments that target those types of learning.

As a student, you can use this model as a way to think more deeply about what you are trying to accomplish when you do an assignment and to understand better the kinds of learning that your professors are asking you to do, even if your professor isn’t using this model intentionally.

A Brief History of Bloom’s Taxonomy

This model was originally developed in the 1950s and 60s by a group of researchers led by educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom—a model that became known as “Bloom’s Taxonomy.” Bloom’s work was revised in 2001 by another group of researchers led by Lorin W. Anderson, a former student of Bloom’s, and David R. Krathwohl. To distinguish between the two, writers sometimes add the word “revised,” but most people just call it “Bloom’s Taxonomy,” no matter which version they are using.

Let’s take a look at one depiction of this model:


Create
an innovative learning portfolio.
Reflect
on one's progress.
Design
an efficient project workflow.
Deconstruct
one's biases.
Judge
efficiency of sampling techniques.
Assemble
a team of experts.
Use
techniques that match one's strengths.
Integrate
compliance with regulations.
Determine
relevance of results.
Generate
a log of daily activities.
Predict
one's response to culture shock.
Carry out
pH tests of water samples.
Differentiate
high and low culture.
Check
for consistency among sources.
Identify
strategies for retaining information.
Clarify
assembly instructions.
Provide
advice to novices.
Select
the most complete list of activities.
Recall
how to perform CPR.
Classify
adhesives by toxicity.
Respond
to frequently asked questions.
Recognize
symptoms of exhaustion.
Summarize
features of a new product.
List
primary and secondary colors.
metacognitive
Knowledge of cognition in general as well as awareness and knowledge of one's own cognition.
procedural
How to do something, methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods.
conceptual
The interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function together.
factual
The basic elements students must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems in it.
The Knowledge Dimension
create
Put elements together to form a coherent whole; reorganize into a new pattern or structure.
evaluate
Make judgements based on criteria and standards.
analyze
Break material into constituent parts and determine how parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose.
apply
Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation.
understand
Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication.
remember
Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory.
The Cognitive Process Dimension

A Model of Learning Objectives–based on A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives by Rex Heer, Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Iowa State University is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution-ShareAlike) 4.0 International License.

I like this model because it incorporates examples of tasks that a professor might ask for, something we will explore in more depth in most of the rest of this section. Before we get into detail, though, take a look at how the model works.

There are four types of knowledge in the revised version, and they move along a continuum from concrete factual knowledge through conceptual and procedural knowledges to metacognition, which is much more abstract than the other types. Then, there are six cognitive processes, listed as verbs: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create.

These are depicted in this figure as a grid, which emphasizes how these dimensions intersect. Notice how the stacks get higher as you move from the factual/remember grid block to the metacognition/create block. This implies that these tasks become more complex as you move "up" the axes. However, as we'll see, this isn't always true.

First, let's look at each of the dimensions.

The Knowledge Dimension

The knowledge dimension lays out the types of knowledge that professors expect students to acquire.

Factual knowledge includes terms, locations, and other listable knowledge. This kind of knowledge often serves as a base for more advanced knowledge.

Conceptual knowledge includes ways of organizing information and ideas, including knowledge of theories and principles. This type of knowledge helps you structure factual knowledge, as well as understand the relationships among information and ideas.

Procedural knowledge includes knowledge of techniques and methods, as well as when to use those techniques. This type of knowledge tends to be subject-specific, so, for example, different majors will use different procedures for identifying and solving problems.

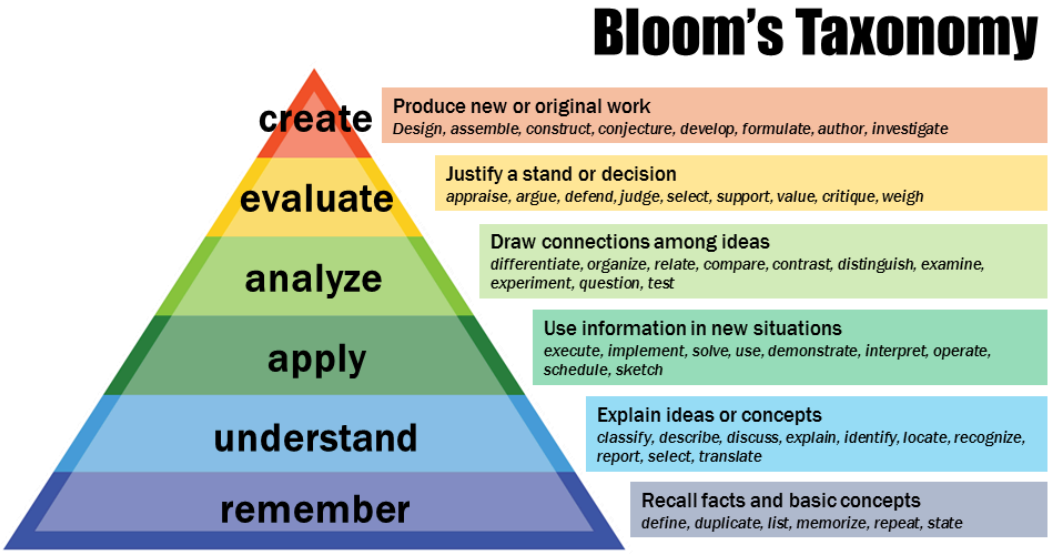
Metacognitive knowledge is sometimes described as "thinking about thinking." This kind of knowledge involves your ability to take a step back and understand how you think and learn, which is why it's considered abstract knowledge. You will often be asked to do reflective work in college, and every time you are explaining how you know what you know, you're practicing metacognition.

You can think about the knowledge dimension as the type of information or ideas that you are supposed to demonstrate and/or work with when you get to the cognitive processes dimension.

The Cognitive Processes Dimension

Notice that the cognitive processes are labeled with verbs (e.g., apply, evaluate). These words indicate action, something you are doing.

If you search online, you will often see Bloom's Taxonomy presented as a pyramid, like this:


Bloom's Taxonomy
create
Produce new or original work
Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate
evaluate
Justify a stand or decision
appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh
analyze
Draw connections among ideas
differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test
apply
Use information in new situations
execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch
understand
Explain ideas or concepts
classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate
remember
Recall facts and basic concepts
define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state

"Bloom's Taxonomy." Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved July 9, 2022, from https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/. Licensed under a CC BY (Attribution) license.

This version of the model focuses on the cognitive processes and ignores the knowledge dimension, but it's helpful here.

Remembering involves recalling information and ideas. This kind of thinking regularly serves as base for the work you are asked to do in college, but it is rarely an endpoint—and almost never an endpoint in writing assignments.

Understanding asks you to explain information or ideas. Again, this type of thinking often serves as a base for college-level work, but you will see this a bit more often in writing assignments than remembering; frequently, it is the first part of a two-part question (e.g., explain Bloom's taxonomy and then use it to develop a sample writing assignment).

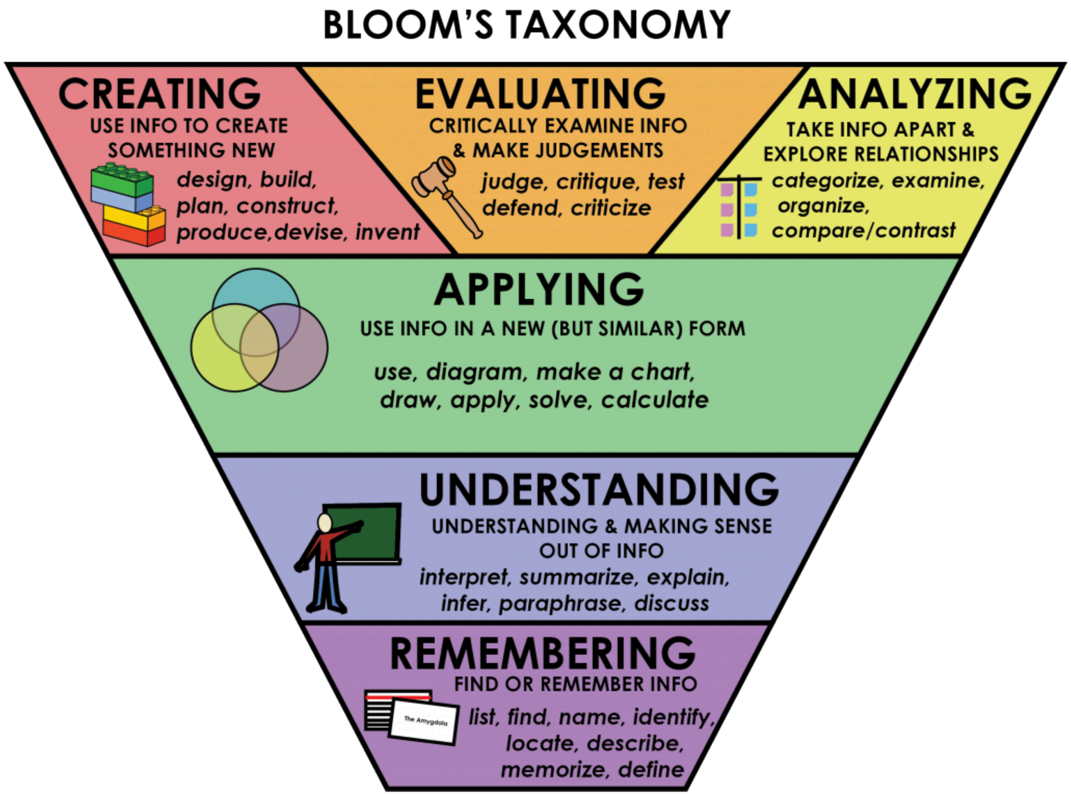
Applying asks you to take information and ideas from one context and use them in a different context, a somewhat more complex cognitive task than the first two. This kind of cognitive task often takes the form of a writing assignment because instructors are looking for explanations along the way (e.g., describe the learning objectives for this course using Bloom's taxonomy).

Analyzing asks you to take something apart as a way of understanding it. Analyzing involves showing how your object of study works or how its parts are related or how it is similar to or different from something else. As with applying, analyzing is often done in writing assignments because instructors are looking for explanation (e.g., explain the differences between the original version of Bloom's taxonomy and the revised version).

Evaluating asks you to make a judgement based on some kind of criteria. Because you have to explain why you believe something is good/bad or better/worse, evaluating is often done in writing (e.g., explain which version of Bloom's taxonomy is more effective and why).

Creating asks you to make something new. What you make and whether you create it in writing depends heavily on your discipline. Painting a self-portrait, for example, would not be done in writing, though a professor might ask you to write about your experiences. While designing a biology experiment would be done with some writing, you'd focus more on the hypothesis, data gathering methods, and calculations—though, you would almost certainly be expected to write up the results. However, some creating is done entirely in writing (e.g., create a handout explaining Bloom's taxonomy to other education students).

I don't favor the pyramid because it implies that "remember" is the least important and "create" is the most, but the last three especially are all fairly complex intellectual tasks. To get at this idea, some renditions use an inverted pyramid with analyzing, evaluating, and creating on an equal footing at the top.


BLOOM'S TAXONOMY
CREATING
USE INFO TO CREATE SOMETHING NEW
design, build, plan, construct, produce, devise, invent
EVALUATING
CRITICALLY EXAMINE INFO & MAKE JUDGEMENTS
judge, critique, test defend, criticize
ANALYZING
TAKE INFO APART & EXPLORE RELATIONSHIPS
categorize, examine, organize, compare/contrast
APPLYING
USE INFO IN A NEW (BUT SIMILAR) FORM
use, diagram, make a chart, draw, apply, solve, calculate
UNDERSTANDING
UNDERSTANDING & MAKING SENSE OUT OF INFO
interpret, summarize, explain, infer, paraphrase, discuss
REMEMBERING
FIND OR REMEMBER INFO
The Amygdala
list, find, name, identify, locate, describe, memorize, define

© Rawia Inaim. "Bloom's Taxonomy." Retrieved July 12, 2022, from https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess/chapter/effective-questions/. Licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license.

LOTS and HOTS

Many educational professionals call remembering, understanding, and applying “lower order thinking skills” (sometimes abbreviated “lots”) and analyzing, evaluating, and creating “higher order thinking skills” (“hots”). The difference is primarily the complexity of the intellectual work required to do one or the other.

In writing assignments and other complex tasks, the “hots” often build on the “lots” so ultimately multiple levels appear in any given work product.

In addition to the depictions I’ve included here, you can find Bloom’s taxonomy in many forms: a chart, a circle, even a rose! If the representations I’ve included here don’t work for you, do a quick search online.

Embrace the Power of “And”

These groupings and categorizations are not hard and fast. When you think about the assignments your professor gives you, don’t worry about trying to force that assignment into one category or another. Embrace the power of “and.” Writing is a complex task, so your professor almost certainly is asking you to do more than one kind of intellectual work.

Taxonomies Break Down

Taxonomies are classification systems, but classifications are rarely as clean as we might like. Think, for example, about the classification of animal species into vertebrates and invertebrates depending on whether an animal has a backbone or not. There are multiple levels of classification that become more and more specific, such as whether a vertebrate is a mammal or a reptile. Each animal can then be sorted.

But then we have the platypus (part mammal, part reptile). Or the bat (part mammal, part bird).

Most taxonomies—and maybe all—eventually breakdown. We run into an edge case that should fit into the categories but doesn’t, not really. How much of a problem that is depends on what you are doing. In our case, it’s not a problem, as long as writers remember that they are being asked to do complex tasks.

Image of a Platypus, Public Domain Files.

Key Points: Understanding Bloom's Taxonomy

- Bloom's Taxonomy is one way to understand the intellectual work that your professors are asking you to do. This method works whether your professor is using this model intentionally or not.
- Bloom's consists of two dimensions: The Knowledge Dimension and the Cognitive Process Dimension.
- The Knowledge Dimension identifies the kinds of information and ideas that you should be working with: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive.
- The Cognitive Process Dimension identifies the kinds of work that assignments call for: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.
- The work you produce in response to your assignments are considered "complex performances," so they will almost certainly be asking you to do multiple kinds of work with multiple kinds information and ideas.

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Bloom's and Generative AI

AI is a growing part of our landscape, and some of the new tools are amazing. AI is helping to detect and diagnose disease earlier and more accurately. It's central to the development of self-driving cars. And it's helping to reduce the environmental impact of agriculture. Other uses are more mundane, like helping to plan meals or workouts.

At first, I heard from students and educators who thought that AI might take over writing for us. Now, while some folks might wish that were true, we're finding that it's really not. Writing is a skill that is intimately connected with thinking, and while AI can help, it can't think for us.

So where can AI help with writing? This chapter uses Bloom's Taxonomy to guide our understanding about which parts of writing tasks AI can help with and which are better left to us humans.

AI, GenAI, and LLMs

People are talking about "AI," but that's really a misnomer. AI, artificial intelligence, isn't really intelligent. It doesn't think, and it isn't conscious or self-aware.

The type of "AI" that produces text is a subset of AI called generative AI (genAI), which simply means that the AI produces (generates) output in response to a prompt. GenAI technologies for writing, like ChatGPT, are really just supercharged autocompletion programs. They predict the next word in a sentence and the next, and then predict what the next sentence will be and the one after that. Those predictions are made by large language models (LLMs) which combine a vast quantity of written text with a numerical analysis of what typically follows a given word or phrase.

In this chapter, I'll use "generative AI" or "genAI" rather than the more general and less accurate term, "AI." If you'd like to understand the terminology better, I recommend look at a site like CNET's "ChatGPT Glossary" (Khan).

Bloom's and GenAI

GenAI can't think for us, but it can assist with our intellectual work, as long as we understand the kinds of work it does well. Bloom's Taxonomy can help us break this down.

The Cognitive Process Dimension and GenAI

This chart[1] identifies GenAI's strengths and human strengths using the revised version of Bloom's cognitive dimension:

	Traditional Description	What GenAI Does Well	What Humans Do Well
CREATE	Put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure	Remix or merge based on pre-existing patterns; suggest a range of alternatives	Formulate original content, incorporating divergent thinking and human judgement; collaborate; integrate content from human emotions, experiences, and cultural contexts
EVALUATE	Make judgements based on criteria and standards	Make basic judgements when provided a set of criteria; describe pros and cons of various positions or courses of action that are part of its dataset	Critique options and make judgements that involve ethical, cultural, and emotional considerations, including appraising consequences; engage in metacognitive reflection; use instinct
ANALYZE	Break material into its constituent parts and determine how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose	Break down content into component parts; compare and contrast data; detect trends and themes; predict patterns based on historical data	Think critically, use reason, and apply emotional intelligence to determine which analytic tools are most useful and which aspects of an analysis are meaningful; interpret results and relate those to authentic problems, decisions, and choices
APPLY	Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation	Suggest application of known patterns, processes, models, or methods to new situations	Apply creativity, imagination, and intuition to idea and solution development; carry out processes in the physical world
UNDERSTAND	Construct meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communication	Rephrase a concept in different words; match up a related example; translate	Construct meaning using thought processes such as inference, interpretation, and comparison; integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge; contextualize information within emotional, moral, or ethical considerations
REMEMBER	Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory	Recall data and information; list possible answers; define a term; construct a basic chronology	Recognize relevant information; recall current events; recall information in situations where technology is not readily accessible

The table gives you an overview. Let's look a little deeper at each of the dimensions, working from the bottom up.

---

1. The language in the "Traditional Description" column comes directly from Anderson and Krathwohl (67-68). Information and ideas that appear in the other columns derives from a combination of sources. I used two guides written for instructors: Oregon State University Ecampus's "Bloom's Taxonomy Revisited" and Fort Hays State University's "AI Supported Learning Activities and Assignments." I also used Vriti Saraf's exploration of the intersection of Bloom and AI, and I returned directly to Anderson and Krathwohl, especially the material in Chapter 5, which explicates the revised cognitive process dimension in their model.

Remember: GenAI is useful for retrieving information, but you'll need to verify the output.

GenAI excels at retrieving data and information. For example, if you need some basic background information on an author or an organization, genAI can collect that for you, though you will need to decide whether the information is relevant for your purposes. In addition, for information that isn't **common knowledge**, you will want to check the sources that your LLM provides to be sure that those sources exist, say what the genAI claims, and are reliable. As long as you verify the information, genAI is useful for tasks that require you to retrieve information.

Understand: GenAI doesn't understand, but it may help you understand.

GenAI doesn't understand anything and cannot make meaning. Those are human skills. GenAI can help *you* understand ideas by providing explanations or examples, but only a human is going to know whether an explanation makes sense. Think, for example, about the infamous advice that Google's AI gave for gluing cheese on pizza to make it stick. I don't recommend relying on genAI as anything more than an assistant for tasks involving understanding.

Apply: GenAI can help, but you are better at innovating in new situations.

GenAI is good at identifying patterns in data (see Analyze), and it can suggest applications of those patterns. When there is no established procedure to apply, humans are better at applying concepts and theories, in part because choosing the best method or the process with the least negative consequences is a judgement call (see Evaluate).

Analyze: GenAI excels at identifying patterns; you are better at using the output.

GenAI is very good at sifting through data to detect patterns. When it comes to writing, LLMs like ChatGPT can help you identify useful criteria for an analysis and make suggestions about lines of analytic reasoning. Keep in mind that genAI cannot make meaning, so determining which analytic approach to use and which results are relevant are up to you.

Evaluate: You do this much better than genAI.

Making judgements is not a strength of genAI. While LLMs can provide pros and cons of various positions, for example, genAI has no ability to move beyond providing quantifiable metrics or restating what others have said. It cannot critically examine those pros and cons, nor can it consider emotions or cultures or contexts. Only humans can really determine whether something is positive or not.

Create: You do this much much better than genAI.

While genAI output may seem “new” to us, it only produces derivative work, remixing what already exists. It can suggest alternative approaches, but it has no emotional or cultural experiences to draw on that would allow it to truly “create.” Humans are much better at this one.

In short, if you are looking for information or trying to identify patterns or processing lots of data, AI can help. But even in the tasks that AI is good at, you’re better off treating it as an assistant; your intellectual work really needs your brainpower.

The Knowledge Dimension and GenAI

understanding
critical thinking
comprehension
facts
courses
education
exploration
expertise
knowledge
projects
tutorials
inquiry
learning

The knowledge dimension is much more direct than the cognitive process dimension. In short, if the knowledge is established, genAI can help. If the work requires new knowledge or personal knowledge, genAI is not particularly useful.

Factual Knowledge. GenAI retrieves information very well, as long as you keep the cautions below in mind.

Conceptual Knowledge. GenAI can provide information about well-established theories and principles. It may be able to help structure ideas according to established lines of reasoning, but it doesn’t have the ability to come up with new theories or organizational structures. That’s a human skill.

Procedural Knowledge. Like conceptual knowledge, genAI can produce information on established procedures, but it doesn’t produce new methods. Again, that’s a human skill.

Metacognitive Knowledge. GenAI doesn’t help much here. Because genAI doesn’t think, it’s not going to be able to explain how you are thinking, though it may be able to give you some ideas about approaches to metacognition. Of all of kinds of knowledge in Bloom’s taxonomy, genAI is the least helpful here.

GenAI has another strength in this dimension, no matter the specific type of knowledge you are using: its ability to pull together information that you may not have thought of. The knowledge may not be “new,” but it may be new to you, which can give you ideas you haven’t previously thought of.

Cautions about Using AI

I've briefly suggested some cautions about using genAI, but I want to say a little more here about some that are particularly relevant to writing.

Hallucinations

GenAI sometimes makes stuff up. For reasons I don't understand, while summarizing Ross Gay's "Some Thoughts on Mercy," genAI turned the bees—a metaphor for a perceived threat—into rabbits, which are no threat at all except to my garden. It's also been known to make up sources that don't exist. Make sure you verify information produced by genAI.

Current Events

GenAI is trained on data "scraped" from the internet, but so far, it is not continuously updated. As of June 2024, ChatGPT-4, the current free version, has a cutoff date of January 2022. It knows nothing of the most recent war in Ukraine or the death of Queen Elizabeth II or the state of abortion laws in the United States after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. If you are looking for current events, you won't find it here.

Bias

Bias exists. A preference for one flavor (chocolate!) over another is a bias—an innocuous one, to be sure, but a bias nonetheless. We haven't figured out how to completely eliminate bias, even when we want to, such as in medical studies or in our justice system.

GenAI has biases, too, most of them stemming from the data on which the LLM was trained. For example, LLMs that have been trained on historical data tend to favor stereotypical gender roles, make racist claims, and ignore cultural differences. Further, most LLMs are trained in English, so work in other languages is simply missing.

Unlike my preference for chocolate, these biases are not innocuous, and you need to watch for them.

Generic Results

GenAI produces polished writing: a focused thesis, developed paragraphs with topic sentences, no grammatical problems or spelling errors. It looks great—and the writing is completely bland. GenAI can help us strengthen our writing, but human thinking is what makes the written word interesting. You can let genAI help you strengthen your writing, but don't ask it to write for you. It's not very good at it.

GenAI's Source Handling

As of this writing, ChatGPT-4, the latest free version, provides links to sources in its responses. For example, when I asked it about how much we spend on gardening in the United States each year, it gave me two informative sources (This Old House and Garden Pals). On the one hand, neither of these would qualify as acceptable sources for most college-level academic writing. On the other hand, the first of these included sources that would be credible. However, to know this, I needed to check out the sources themselves.

The sources chosen by genAI are not necessarily strong. Why cite *This Old House* instead of the National Gardening Association's survey data and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's economic projections, both cited in the *This Old House* piece? This goes back to the point about genAI and evaluation. Evaluation is not a genAI strength, but you can use your own judgement (and the skills you are gaining in your classes) to determine what is a useful source.

One more note on source handling: ChatGPT doesn't always do a good job with citation formatting. I tested it on the citations for this chapter, and while it handled Sidney Dobrin's book just fine, what it gave me back Vriti Saraf's website was missing the author, and parts were just plain wrong.

AI as a Support in Your Writing Process

So how can genAI help? We'll talk more about your writing process in another section, but there are some concrete writing tasks where you can use genAI to help (assuming your professor approves). This part of the chapter provides a quick overview, but if you are looking for a more detailed guide, I recommend reading Sidney Dobrin's *AI and Writing*.

Pre-Writing

GenAI is probably most helpful while you are producing ideas and gathering resources. A good chunk of the work in pre-writing involves Bloom's remembering, something that genAI tends to do well. Here are some tasks that it's good at:

- Generating ideas, focusing your topic, and coming up with different angles on your subject matter
- Locating sources, particularly if those sources are older and part of the data used in the LLM
- Collecting data and information on your topic, as long as you verify the results

In short, genAI can be helpful in getting you started, shaping your ideas, and getting you unstuck if you're having trouble coming up with ideas.

Drafting

GenAI can help with strengthening a working thesis statement or suggesting organizational strategies based on a thesis or the assignment. Both of these tasks involve identify patterns (analysis), something that genAI does well.

Just be aware that genAI does not produce *drafts*. It produces final, polished prose that can be difficult to take apart. You are better off not using it to draft even parts of your paper unless your professor has told you to do this.

Revision

Revision relies on *your* judgement. However, because of its strengths in analysis, genAI can provide some useful feedback to help improve your draft work. You can—again, if your professor allows it—use AI to check everything from your reasoning to your style.

To get useful feedback, you will need to be specific in your prompts, and you may need to feed the genAI your assignment and any other instructions you have received. As with any request for feedback, the more specific your questions, the better.

Just keep in mind that you are the author, and just because genAI makes a suggestion doesn't mean you have to follow it.

Editing and Proofreading

Because of its strengths in recalling information and analysis, GenAI can check grammar quite well. It can also do things like identify the verbs in your sentences and make suggestions for stronger ones, or help you reword a sentence that isn't saying exactly what you want it to.

AI, Plagiarism, and Permission

When ChatGPT first became widely available in November 2022, like any new technology, some people embraced it and some rejected it. In colleges and universities, professors worried most about plagiarism, about students copying writing from ChatGPT and turning it in as if it's their own.

This concern has not gone away, and as a student writer, you will need to limit your genAI use to whatever your professor allows. If your professor says no AI, then don't use it. If they say you can use it for idea generation, don't start copying paragraphs. If you aren't sure what's acceptable, ask.

If your professor says that you can use it, check the professor's requirements for documenting your use of genAI. Some of them may want you to include a statement explaining how you used it, and some may ask for citations. If you need to cite it, the major style guides all have instructions.

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- Supported Tree, Photo by Neil Thomas on Unsplash
- Raising Hands, Photo by Artem Maltsev on Unsplash

Understanding Writing Assignments as Intellectual Work

To better understand the type of intellectual work that your professors are looking for, you can turn to Bloom's Taxonomy. Remember that Bloom's was originally developed to help teachers better articulate the work that they hope to see from their students.

Even if Bloom's hasn't been intentionally employed by your instructor, you can still use this model. Those four types of knowledge and six types of cognitive processes are embedded in the assignments because these are the types of knowledge and intellectual activity that professors want to see. No intention required.

This section is about looking at Bloom's Taxonomy in action.

- In this chapter, we'll look at general principles for how to approach writing assignments using Bloom's.
- In the next four chapters, we'll examine some actual writing assignments using this model.
- In the final chapter in this section, I'll talk about why understanding the intellectual work of assignments matters.

“Is This Right?”

I frequently hear this question from students about their writing assignments, and most of the time, I cringe. “Right” and “wrong” have little to do with writing in general because except for technical matters like grammar and citation, there is little about writing that involves correctness.

I am almost never interested in whether my students can follow step-by-step instructions or write something the way I would write it. Instead, I want to see how they approach the writing tasks and topics I've assigned. I'm interested in their thinking and how that thinking shows up in their writing.

And there are definitely better questions to ask:

> “I think [x] would be a good topic for this assignment. Do you agree?”
>
> “I'm trying to communicate [x]. Am I doing that in this paragraph (or paper or sentence)?”
>
> “I think [Author Y] is wrong about [x], and here's why. Am I missing something?”

Do you see how these questions get at intellectual work? Better questions get better answers!

Using Bloom's Taxonomy to identify the intellectual work of an assignment involves three parts:

- Finding the key sentences in an assignment
- Identifying the verbs in those sentences
- Identifying the kinds of knowledge those verbs are asking you to work with.

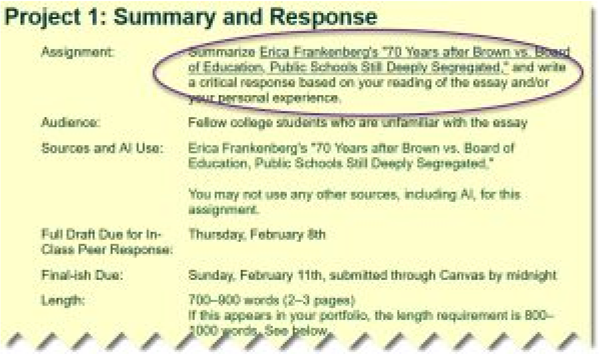
We'll take each of these in turn.

Finding Key Sentences

First, we need to find key sentences, the ones that describe the task(s) in an assignment. When I say "key sentence," I'm looking for sentences that tell me (the writer of the assignment) the job that I have to do.

Look for sentences that do the following (though not necessarily all of these):

- Give you directions
- Describe what the final project will include or do
- Use the words "should" or "must"



Project 1: Summary and Response

Assignment:	Summarize Erica Frankenberg's "70 Years after Brown vs. Board of Education, Public Schools Still Deeply Segregated," and write a critical response based on your reading of the essay and/or your personal experience.
Audience:	Fellow college students who are unfamiliar with the essay
Sources and AI Use:	Erica Frankenberg's "70 Years after Brown vs. Board of Education, Public Schools Still Deeply Segregated." You may not use any other sources, including AI, for this assignment.
Full Draft Due for In-Class Peer Response:	Thursday, February 8th
Final-ish Due:	Sunday, February 11th, submitted through Canvas by midnight
Length:	700–900 words (2–3 pages) If this appears in your portfolio, the length requirement is 800–1000 words. See below.

Generally, you will only find a handful of key sentences, maybe three or four—and sometimes only one or two. You'll usually find them at key points in the assignment:

- These often appear as first sentences in paragraphs.
- Sometimes, they are set off by themselves.
- Sometimes, professors will highlight or bold words.
- Sometimes these sentences use **imperative verbs**.

While the assignments you get may be long, much of that length is detail to make the directions clearer or more specific, and you won't find key sentences in those details. Don't ignore those details—you'll definitely need them as you work on your project. But when you are trying to understand the key intellectual work of an assignment, you won't find it in the specifics, much like you won't find the main point of a reading in the examples.

The key sentences you locate should give you two kinds of information: the kinds of work the assignment is asking you to do and the kinds of knowledge you are expected to use as you do that work.

Identifying Verbs

Once you have the key sentences, you can find the intellectual work of the assignment in the verbs of those sentences.

Both pyramid models I've included in the previous chapter—and most of the models you'll find online—provide a list of verbs that are connected with specific cognitive process dimensions. Since verbs are about actions, it makes sense that verbs would be important for understanding the kinds of tasks that professors want students to do.

This means that you have to be able to find the verbs in your assignments.

I have a longer section on finding verbs in the chapter on editing, but here's the short version: Change the time. In the English language, verbs hold most (though not all) of the sense of time in a sentence, so if you change a sentence from past to present or vice versa, look for the words that change. There you'll find the verb(s).

Example: Finding the Verb

View the example.

Let’s take a key sentence from one of my assignments to see how we can use changes in time to locate verbs:

> “As a whole, your paper should effectively explain the barriers.”

What kind of time is this sentence operating in? That “should” gets us to think about something that isn’t done yet, something that will happen in the future, but “should” doesn’t always mean future. Think about how you *should* eat your spinach, but you don’t.

Still, words like “should” (and “could” and “might” and other **modals** appear a lot in assignments, but they are never the main verb in a sentence. Therefore, we can eliminate them:

> “As a whole, your paper effectively explains the barriers.”

Notice that when we get rid of “should,” we have to change “explain” to “explains” to make the sentence grammatically correct. That’s a clue, but let’s keep going.

We now have a sentence that is clearly set in the present time . Now change it to the past:

> “As a whole, your paper effectively explain*ed* the barriers.”

We have now located the verb: explain.

The verbs hold the key to understanding the cognitive process(es) that your professor is looking for. If the cognitive process of the verbs isn’t obvious, you can compare those verbs to the lists of verbs in the diagrams of Bloom’s Taxonomy. And bingo! You’ll better understand the intellectual work of the assignment.

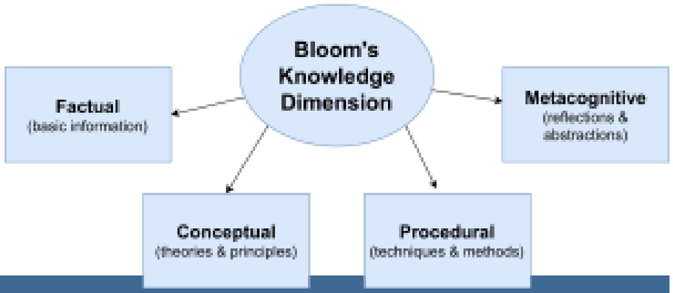
Identifying Kinds of Knowledge

The kinds of knowledge will often be found in the nouns in the key sentences. Look for words that signal specific topics or subject matter.

Using the verbs you have found, ask yourself questions like the following:

- What are you supposed to explain or demonstrate or compare or critique?
- What are you supposed to demonstrate as part of your experiment or argument or design?
- What ideas or concepts from class or your readings are you supposed to use?

With these topics in mind, you can think about them in relation to the knowledge dimension of Bloom's. Are you working with factual, conceptual, procedural, or metacognitive knowledge? Determining the kinds of knowledge will help you make sure that you are doing the kind of intellectual work that the assignment is asking for.



Key Points: Understanding Writing Assignments as Intellectual Work

- To figure out the intellectual work of writing assignments, you need to identify key sentences. Then you need find the verbs in those sentences and determine the information you need to be working with to do the work implicit in those verbs.
- To identify key sentences, look for the sentences that give you directions, describe what the project does or includes, and/or that use words like "should" and "must."
- To identify the verbs in those sentences, change the time of the sentence. Usually it's easiest to change present to past or vice versa. The word that changes is the verb.
- Compare those verbs to the cognitive process dimension of Bloom's Taxonomy to better understand the kinds of work that your professor wants you to do.
- To identify the kinds of knowledge that you need to work with for your assignment, find the topic or subject matter to which you are supposed to apply the verbs in the key sentences. Usually these will be the nouns in those sentences.
- Compare those topics to the descriptions of the categories in the knowledge dimension of Bloom's Taxonomy to better understand the kinds of knowledge your professor wants you to demonstrate or produce as part of the assignment.

Media Attribution

Alexandre Francois provided the inspiration for the diagram of Bloom's knowledge dimension.

Text Attribution

Text in this section was revised with the help of Alexandre Francois, Ramire Johnson, Elizabeth Mahoney, and Christal Page, students in my class during Fall 2023.

Examining Sample Assignment 1: Summary and Analysis

In this chapter and in the next three, I walk through example assignments and how you might analyze them to better understand your task.

This assignment comes from one of my first-year writing classes. It's a fairly typical early assignment in my first-year writing classes, one that asks students to read a text and engage with it in some way. In this case, the readings include the same one I use as a model in the first section of this book, though the actual assignment differs a bit.

Example: Summary and Analysis

Assignment	Summarize the ideas of "segregated coexistence" and "living in community" from Mitchell's essay and analyze how those ideas apply to the situation described in an additional article (see sources below).
Audience	Fellow college students who are unfamiliar with either of the essays or the terms that Mitchell uses
Sources	"The First Battle in the Culture Wars: The Quality of Diversity" by Nicholas Ensley Mitchell Your choice of the following: • "City Compost Programs Turn Garbage into 'Black Gold' That Boosts Food Security and Social Justice" by Kristen DeAngelis, Gwynne Mhuireach, and Sue Ishaq • "Sustainable Cities Need More Than Parks, Cafes, and a Riverwalk" by Trina Hamilton and Winifred Curran • "How Food Became the Perfect Beachhead for Gentrification" by Pascale Joassart-Marcelli
Length	700-900 words (2-3 pages)

The ability to read critically and summarize accurately is a crucial academic skill. The ability to use ideas from one text to guide understanding in another text is similarly crucial. This assignment helps you practice both of these skills.

Summaries

Your summary will need to explain the key concepts in Mitchell's article and to explain the main points in the article that you choose to work with. In class, we will work specifically on critical reading strategies to understand how authors make claims and connect those claims to one another. We will also work on techniques for writing strong summaries that accurately represent an author's work.

Your summaries of these texts should be between 300 and 400 words of your final paper.

Analysis

In this part of your paper, you will make connections between Mitchell's concepts and the specific situation described in the article you have chosen. Specifically, you must try to explain the situation in your article using the terms “segregated coexistence” and “living in community” as Mitchell explains them. Think about questions like the following:

- Does the article you have chosen describe a situation that could be considered “segregated coexistence”? If so, what is that situation and how well does it align with “segregated coexistence” as Mitchell describes it?
- Similarly, does the article you have chosen describe a situation that could be considered “living in community”? If so, what is that situation and how well does it align with “living in community” as Mitchell describes it?
- Are there ways in which Mitchell’s terms don’t apply or don’t cover the issue well enough? How so?

Note that this part of your paper should be between 400 and 500 words long, longer than your summaries. While accurately summarizing is important, readers at the college level are more interested in seeing your thinking, so this part should be longer than your summary.

Feedback

When I comment on your summary and analysis, I will be looking to see how well you have met the goals of the assignment. That is, I will be looking for how accurately and thoroughly you have summarized the articles and how well you have explained and provided support for your analysis. If you only provide summaries of the articles without analysis, your project will not be successful. Instead, your project should demonstrate your critical reading and thinking skills.

Your summary and analysis will also need to meet the standard expectations of good college-level academic writing, which we will be working on during the term. Your purpose and focus will need to be clear and well explained. You will need to provide your reader with sufficient detail in your summary and your response so that your explanations are clear and thorough. You will also need to provide structural cues that enable your reader to follow the logic of your thinking. And your prose will need to be well written both stylistically and grammatically.

Examining the Verbs in Key Sentences

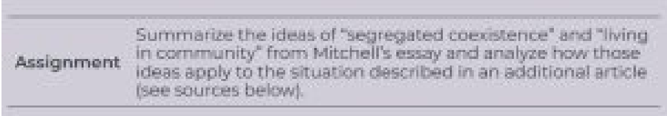
When I read this assignment, I find three key sentences that tell us what we’re supposed to do in this assignment.

Activity: Identify the Key Sentences

Before going on, try to find the key sentences in the Summary and Analysis assignment. Then, read on to see if you agree with my choices.

Let’s look at them.

First Sentence for Examination



Assignment Summarize the ideas of "segregated coexistence" and "living in community" from Mitchell's essay and analyze how those ideas apply to the situation described in an additional article (see sources below).

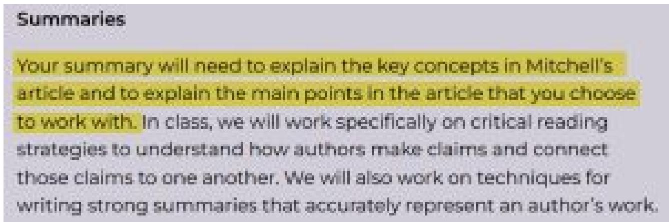
To start, there is a sentence summarizing the assignment at the top. Sentences pulled out like this are often important:

> *Summarize* the ideas of “segregated coexistence” and “living in community” from Mitchell’s essay and *analyze* how those ideas apply to the situation described in an additional article (see sources below).

The verbs here are pretty direct: summarize and analyze.

- What are you summarizing? Mitchell’s ideas
- What are you analyzing? How those ideas apply to the situation in the second article you have chosen

Second Sentence for Examination



Summaries

Your summary will need to explain the key concepts in Mitchell's article and to explain the main points in the article that you choose to work with. In class, we will work specifically on critical reading strategies to understand how authors make claims and connect those claims to one another. We will also work on techniques for writing strong summaries that accurately represent an author's work.

There’s another key sentence at the beginning of the “Summaries” section:

> Your summary will *need* to explain the key concepts in Mitchell’s article and to explain the main points in the article that you *choose* to work with.

The verbs here are less helpful, at least until we look at the words around them.

When someone tells you that you “will need” to do something, you know that they mean that you “must” do it. If we substitute “must” for “will need,” we get a bit more help:

> Your summary *must explain* the key concepts in Mitchell’s article and *must explain* the main points in the article that you *choose* to work with.

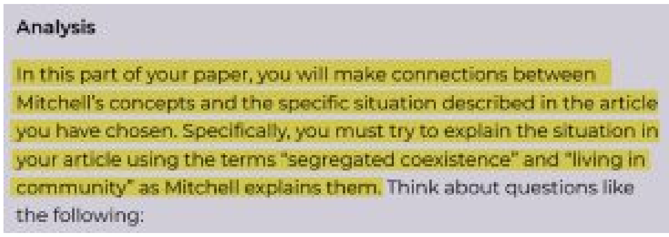
“Choose” is not terribly important for our purposes because it’s just identifying the second source that we are working with. “Explain,” however, seems to be very important.

Here we get a focus for our summary work:

- Explain the key concepts in Mitchell’s article (which have been identified in the first sentence we analyzed)
- Explain the main points in the article we’ve chosen

In this sentence, we have more detail about what “summarizing” looks like for this assignment.

Third Sentence for Examination



Analysis

In this part of your paper, you will make connections between Mitchell's concepts and the specific situation described in the article you have chosen. Specifically, you must try to explain the situation in your article using the terms "segregated coexistence" and "living in community" as Mitchell explains them. Think about questions like the following:

To understand the "analyzing" part of the assignment, we have a couple of sentences at the beginning of the "Analysis" section. I'm including two sentences since the second sentence begins with "specifically," which indicates that it's providing more detail about the first:

> In this part of your paper, you *will make* connections between Mitchell's concepts and the specific situation described in the article you *have chosen*. Specifically, you *must try* to explain the situation in your article using the terms "segregated coexistence" and "living in community" as Mitchell *explains* them.

These verbs require a bit of adjustment before our task will be clear. "Will make" doesn't tell us much without the following word "connections," without which we don't know what we are making. However, "will make connections" can also be understood as simply "connect." Here's the sentence with this adjustment (eliminating a few more words to make the sentence grammatically correct:

> In this part of your paper, you *will connect* Mitchell's concepts and the specific situation described in the article you *have chosen*. Specifically, you *must try* to explain the situation in your article using the terms "segregated coexistence" and "living in community" as Mitchell *explains* them.

Similarly, "must try" doesn't help us until we look at the words that tell us what we are trying to do. In this case, "must try to explain" is the idea we need to focus on. "Must try" in this sentence is an indication that our professor wants us to make effort, but explaining is really the work here:

> In this part of your paper, you *will connect* Mitchell's concepts and the specific situation described in the article you *have chosen*. Specifically, you *must explain* the situation in your article using the terms "segregated coexistence" and "living in community" as Mitchell *explains* them.

As with the sentence earlier, "have chosen" just indicates our second article, which is why I skipped that one.

The last "explains" is worth looking at in a bit more detail. In this case, the verb is not about your doing the explaining, but rather the fact that Mitchell has done some. From this sentence, we know that we must use the two identified terms in the same way that Mitchell does.

So, in the analysis part of our paper, we need to do the following:

- Connect Mitchell's concepts, which we summarized in the summary section of the paper, to the situation in our second article.
- To do this effectively, we need to use Mitchell's terms.

Applying Bloom

Having done this analysis, we now have a better sense of the intellectual work of this assignment:

- Summary Part 1: Explain Mitchell's key ideas
- Summary Part 2: Explain the main points in our second article
- Analysis: Use Mitchell's ideas to explain the situation in our second article.

Activity: You Apply Bloom First

Before jumping into the next section, take what you know about the task in the sample assignment and see which types of knowledge and which cognitive processes you believe the assignment is looking for.

After you read the rest of this chapter, decide whether or not you agree with my analysis.

Kinds of Cognitive Processes

First, the verbs.

The summary section of the assignment focused on explaining the key ideas in both articles. It can be helpful to move "up" the pyramid or the side of the grid with the cognitive processes to help us figure this out.

We aren't being asked to remember, since we can look up the information, but we are being asked to **understand** both Mitchell's concepts and the main points from the second article. Notice that on the grid version, summarizing appears at the intersection of factual knowledge and the cognitive process of understanding.

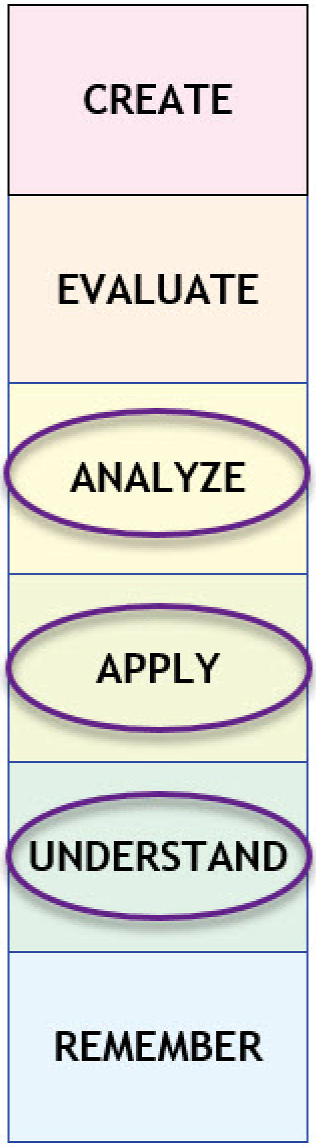
When we look at connections, though, "understanding" doesn't seem to be enough. Yes, we have to understand, but we're trying to make those connections (remember the original wording?), and "understanding" seems to be more about making sense of ideas that others have already put together.

The next step is "**applying**." If we look only at the grid, applying doesn't seem to work, but the pyramids explain this one a bit differently. If applying means to "use information in new situations" or "use information in a new (but similar) form," the term seems to work, right? The assignment asks us to use Mitchell's terms to explain the situation in the second article. That sounds like an application to me!

But what about "analysis" in the title of the assignment? Look at the explanation of analyzing on the grid: "Break material into constituent parts and determine how parts relate to one another and to an overall structure of purpose." Similarly, the pyramids describe analyzing as making connections and exploring relationships.

We aren't doing this kind of work if we look only at Mitchell's article; there, we are simply explaining what Mitchell means (i.e., summarizing). But when we get to the second article, we have to do more than just apply Mitchell's terms. We have to divide up the ideas in that article into ideas that are connected to "segregated coexistence" and ideas that are connected to "living in community."

To do this successfully, we need to explain how these connections work. This means that it's not enough to identify specific ideas as either one or the other. We also need to make those connections clear to our reader. Those explanations are kinds of **analysis**.



The verbs in the assignment do not ask us to make arguments or critique ideas, so Bloom's "evaluate" doesn't apply in this assignment. Similarly, we aren't really "creating" something new, beyond the vague idea that what we write should be in our own words for the most part. These two cognitive processes don't apply much, if at all, here.

To summarize, looking at the verbs and assignment, we seem to be working in the cognitive realms of understanding, applying, and analyzing.

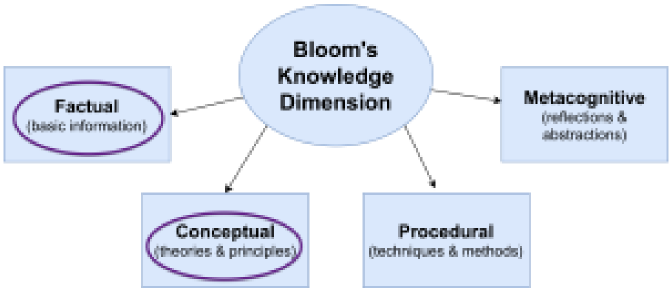
Kinds of Knowledge

While the verbs tell us about the cognitive processes that we are being asked to use, the examination of those key sentences can also help us focus on the information that we will need to complete the task. While much of this was obvious as we explored the verbs, I'll break it down a bit here to complete the example.

In this case, we will need to know/understand the following:

- Mitchell's key terms ("segregated coexistence" and "living in community")
- The main ideas in our second article

- The connections between Mitchell's concepts and the ideas in our second article



The first two would be **factual** knowledge, according to Bloom's Taxonomy. We should be able to go to the article and find those ideas. We aren't developing those terms or ideas; we are simply recording them. To do that, we have to understand them, but that's a cognitive process, and we'll come back to that in a minute.

The connections, however, aren't factual. Our chosen article doesn't use Mitchell's terms directly, so we have to create those connections ourselves. If you look at the descriptions, you'll see that this type of knowledge is called "**conceptual**," which specifically is about organizing factual knowledge.

I don't see anything here that is asking us to work with procedural (how to) knowledge or metacognition (thinking about thinking), so we are just working with the first two types of information.

Putting It Together

In this assignment, we are being asked to use factual and conceptual knowledge to understand, apply, and analyze.

The assignment comes in two parts. The first part is focused on summarizing Mitchell's two key concepts and the main points from the second article. This part, then, stays firmly in the factual realm. We're not supposed to talk about our opinions of any of these ideas or start making connections between them in this section. If we fail to present the factual information (e.g., we are missing one summary or the other; or we misread the article so our summary isn't accurate), we will not succeed at this part. Also, because this is the more basic part of the assignment (lower on the pyramids and grid), if we don't do this part accurately, odds are good that our analysis part won't be as successful as we would like.

The second part, what the assignment calls "analysis," is really a combination of applying and analyzing. We have to understand the main points, too, but mostly, we would do that in the first part of the assignment. In the "analysis," we need to explain how the ideas in the second article can be categorized using Mitchell's terms. We're applying Mitchell, but we also have to explain if our assignment is going to be successful.

At this point, I have beaten this assignment into submission, but I'm hoping you can see the value in taking an assignment apart like this.

Examining Sample Assignment 2: Position Paper

Let's examine another, more advanced assignment, still from a first-year writing class. As with the previous example, I have left out some of the irrelevant particulars, but otherwise the assignment is complete. For a little context, this is an assignment given late in the term after students have explored writing **conventions** in the natural and social sciences.

Example: Position Paper

Assignment	Make an argument (take a position) on a controversial issue in U.S. society.
Audience	Other researchers in the humanities interested in the issue you are addressing
Sources	ProCon.org AND at least one additional reputable and relevant web source
Length	1200-1500 words (4-5 pages)

Unlike the natural sciences and the social sciences where objectivity is a goal, the humanities look specifically at the ways in which people make meaning. Research in the humanities thus involves looking at values, investments, and reasoning, among other things. Meanings are not objective, but that does not mean that all positions are equally valuable. Researchers in the humanities not only work to understand how people make meaning, but they also evaluate those meanings according to a range of criteria depending on the particular discipline. In this assignment, you'll be analyzing the logic and support that people use to make a claim and support a position, and you'll use your analysis to take a position of your own.

Choosing and Researching a Topic

Think about issues in our society where reasonable, rational people disagree. The possibilities are myriad, but for this assignment, I'm asking you to choose one from ProCon.org. Choose one in which you are interested, but do not choose any of the archived topics from that site (archived topics are not currently active and their information is out-of-date).

Read the information on ProCon.org carefully, paying particular attention to the kinds of logic and evidence that are used to support each side in a controversy. While you likely already have a position on the topic you have chosen, pay particular attention to the arguments that you find most convincing and the ones you find least convincing on both sides. Why does one point make more sense than another? You'll be doing this kind of analysis in your paper.

You will supplement the information on this site with information from another source, one of your choosing from the web. Given that your issue is a current subject of debate in our society, the web can be an excellent resource for information—if you know how to search effectively and evaluate what you find. In class we'll talk about how to do this. Your source can either support your position or oppose it; that choice is yours.

Once you have selected at least one relevant and reputable source, you'll want to read that piece carefully, too, again paying particular attention to the logic and evidence the source uses. This source will supplement what you find on ProCon.org.

Making an Argument

When you write a position paper, you are making an argument, also called making a claim. In order to successfully make an argument, you must do a number of things:

- Provide a clear explanation of the issue at hand. Do not assume that your reader already understands the points of disagreement or the background on the issue you are discussing. Explain it.
- Clearly state your position in your thesis. Without a definite statement about your position, you aren't making an argument, and your reader will likely be confused about what you think.
- Provide reasons for your position that are both clearly explained and well supported by evidence. You have to have enough evidence and enough explanation for your reader to understand your position. Do not assume that your reader will simply "get it" if you present a general idea or some evidence.
- Address at least one key opposing argument. If you ignore opposing positions, your reader will wonder what you are hiding or if that other argument is better than yours.
- Use a reasonable tone throughout your writing. Keep in mind that your purpose in making an argument is to convince your readers that your position is valid. They may not agree with you, but if you are reasonable throughout, your readers are more likely to understand your point.

Like the experience-based theory critique, this kind of essay has no set structure, and in class we'll talk about how to make organizational decisions about this material.

Evaluation

When I evaluate your position statement, I will be looking to see how well you have met the goals of this assignment. That is, I will be looking for how well you presented and supported your claim with both evidence and reasoning. In addition, I will be looking for how well you address counterarguments and the tone you have used. If all you do is assert that your position is right or if you take no clear position, your paper will not be successful.

In addition, your comparison will need to meet the general criteria of any good academic writing: a clear focus, logical and purposeful organization, strong use of supporting evidence, and thoughtful development of the ideas you are presenting. And it will need to be well written both stylistically and grammatically.

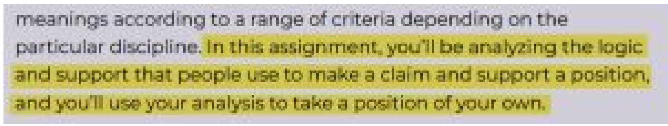
Examining the Verbs in Key Sentences

Activity: Identify the Key Sentences

Before going on, try to find the key sentences in the Summary and Analysis assignment. Then, read on to see if you agree with my choices.

In this assignment, we have a few more key sentences that give us information about what we are supposed to do in this assignment.

The first statement ("Make an argument (take a position) on a controversial issue in U.S. society.") isn't really one of them. This sentence doesn't help much unless we already know what it makes to make an argument in college. When I run into sentences like this, I make note of that sentence and then keep looking for guidance.

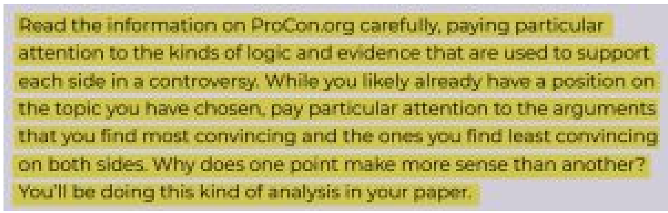

meanings according to a range of criteria depending on the particular discipline. In this assignment, you'll be analyzing the logic and support that people use to make a claim and support a position, and you'll use your analysis to take a position of your own.

We find some in the last sentence in the first paragraph:

> In this assignment, you'*ll be analyzing* the logic and support that people *use* to make a claim and support a position, and you'*ll use* your analysis to take a position of your own.

The first part is reasonably clear: we are analyzing, and the first "use" refers to what other people do, not us.

The second "use" is a little more complex. We are supposed to use the analysis we have done in the first part to "take a position," also referred to as "make an argument" in the opening description. Again, unless we already know how to make an argument, this one isn't as clear, so again, I'll hold onto this one but plan to come back.


Read the information on ProCon.org carefully, paying particular attention to the kinds of logic and evidence that are used to support each side in a controversy. While you likely already have a position on the topic you have chosen, pay particular attention to the arguments that you find most convincing and the ones you find least convincing on both sides. Why does one point make more sense than another? You'll be doing this kind of analysis in your paper.

The section about "Choosing a Research Topic" gives us guidance on which topic to use for this assignment and about finding an additional source, and the second paragraph tells us a bit about how we are supposed to think about the reading that we are doing:

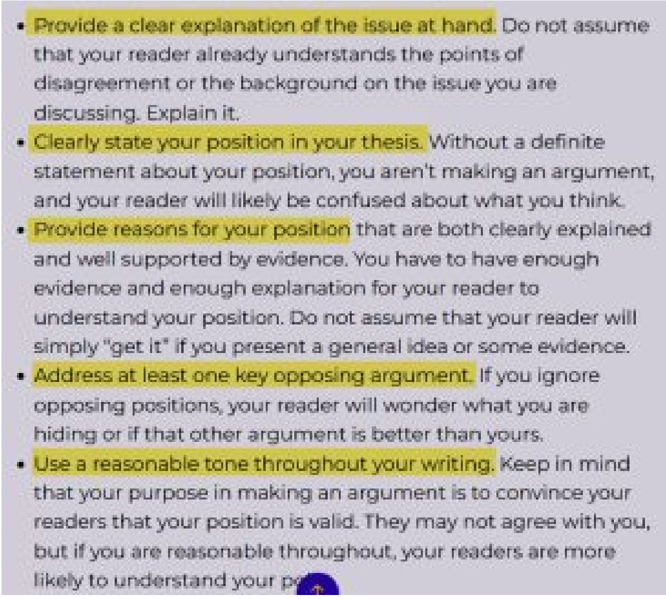
> *Read* the information on ProCon.org carefully, paying particular attention to the kinds of logic and evidence that *are used* to support each side in a controversy. While you likely already *have* a position on the topic you *have chosen*, *pay* particular *attention* to the arguments that you *find* most convincing and the ones you *find* least convincing on both sides. Why *does* one point *make* more sense than another? You'*ll be doing* this kind of analysis in your paper.

The verbs are a little less helpful in this paragraph, but the verb phrase "pay attention" helps us focus ("pay" by itself doesn't make sense as the verb; this is an **idiom**, so we need the whole phrase). We can see that we are supposed to read all of our sources for the logic and evidence they use, and think about why we find some positions more convincing than others.

The section "Making an Argument" is actually much more helpful (as we might expect) because it explicitly tells us what we have to do in order to make an argument. We can see this in the verbs that begin each of the bullet points:

- *Provide* a clear explanation of the issue at hand.
- Clearly *state* your position in your thesis.
- *Provide* reasons for your position….
- *Address* at least one key opposing argument.
- *Use* a reasonable tone throughout your writing.

That looks like a blueprint.



- Provide a clear explanation of the issue at hand. Do not assume that your reader already understands the points of disagreement or the background on the issue you are discussing. Explain it.
- Clearly state your position in your thesis. Without a definite statement about your position, you aren't making an argument, and your reader will likely be confused about what you think.
- Provide reasons for your position that are both clearly explained and well supported by evidence. You have to have enough evidence and enough explanation for your reader to understand your position. Do not assume that your reader will simply "get it" if you present a general idea or some evidence.
- Address at least one key opposing argument. If you ignore opposing positions, your reader will wonder what you are hiding or if that other argument is better than yours.
- Use a reasonable tone throughout your writing. Keep in mind that your purpose in making an argument is to convince your readers that your position is valid. They may not agree with you, but if you are reasonable throughout, your readers are more likely to understand your p

Applying Bloom

Once again, let's summarize the tasks in this assignment:

- Read and understand the kinds of logic and evidence used by both sides in arguments around a controversial issue.
- Explain that issue to our audience, including both sides (although we can emphasize the position we favor in our explanation because we only have to include one opposing argument).
- Take a position about that issue and explain our reasons for taking that position.
- Be sensible in our language use, not overly emotional.

Activity: You Apply Bloom First

Before jumping into the next section, take what you know about the task in the sample assignment and see which types of knowledge and which cognitive processes you believe the assignment is looking for.

After you read the rest of this chapter, decide whether or not you agree with my analysis.

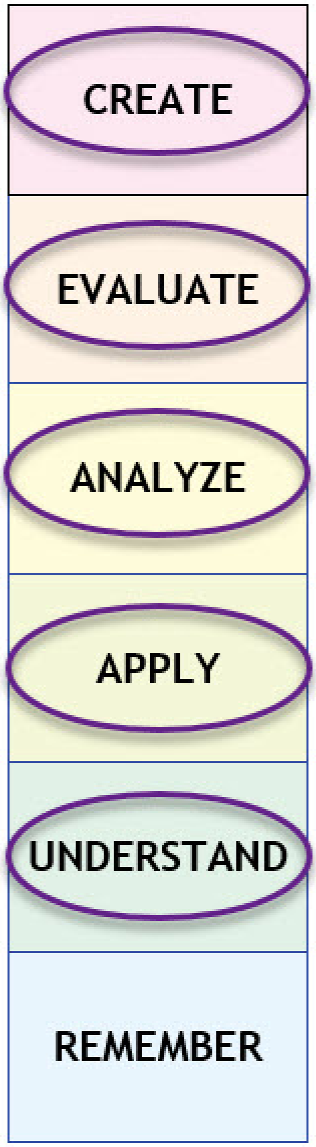
Kinds of Cognitive Processes

To determine the kinds of cognitive tasks, again, let's look at the verbs and again, let's walk up the list of cognitive tasks.

As with most writing tasks in college, the assignment isn't asking us to remember because we can reference our sources.

We are being asked to **understand** because we have to explain the sides of the argument. We also need to understand procedural knowledge – how logic and evidence are used in the arguments that we are reading.

This assignment asks us to **apply** the knowledge that we have gained about logic and evidence in our own argument, but notice that this task is implicit rather than explicit in the assignment. Direct application would ask us to use **rhetorical principles** like *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* to support a position, but that's not what this assignment asks for. This assignment asks us to use our knowledge of how the sides make their arguments as we make our own.



Similarly, while we are doing some **analysis**—breaking the argument down into logic and types of evidence—this work is not the focus of this assignment. We will have to do some of this type of thinking, but only in the service of explaining our own position.

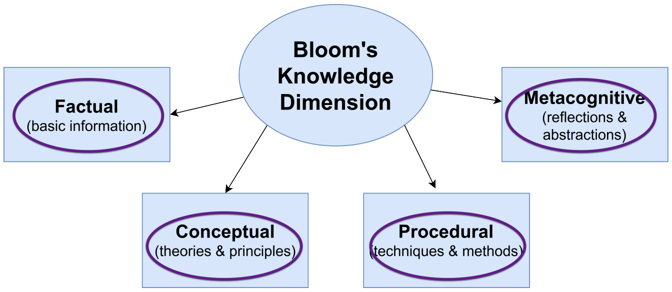
On the other hand, **evaluating** is a key cognitive process in this assignment. We are being asked to make a claim and support that claim with logic and evidence from our sources. Choosing a side (or even arguing for the merits of both sides) is making a judgement about which position is better. Notice that evaluation on [the grid] relies on "criteria and standards." In other words, part of evaluating is articulating why we value what we value.

This assignment also asks us to **create** because we are expected to explain our own position and reasoning. We are not simply reporting someone else's ideas and agreeing or disagreeing with those (though there may be some of that in our work). Articulating our own ideas is a creative act—albeit not as obviously creative as writing something like a poem or short story.

To summarize, **this assignment asks us primarily to evaluate, but also to understand, apply, analyze, and create.**

Kinds of Knowledge

Using our understanding what we need to discuss, we can use Bloom's to help us understand the [kinds of knowledge] we need to demonstrate.



Just as with [the previous assignment], we're going to have summarize; in this case, though, we're summarizing the opposing arguments involved in an issue. Some of the knowledge we'll be working with will be **factual** because we are simply reporting information and ideas held by others. But some will be **conceptual**, since we have to explain the differences between the sides.

We're also looking at **procedural** knowledge when we examine the kinds of logic and evidence that the different sides use in their arguments. In this case, the procedure isn't what we normally think of (e.g., how to make our own argument) but rather understanding how someone else has made one.

And finally, there is an element of **metacognitive** knowledge here. When the assignment asks us to think about why we are convinced by some arguments, the professor is asking us to reflect on the basis for our judgments when we think about the merits of someone's position.

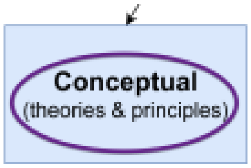
So, for this assignment, **we are using all four types of knowledge in Bloom's Taxonomy**.

Notice that most of our guidance about the kinds of knowledge we're using comes in the section when the professor explains our sources and how we're supposed to use them. This is true for many writing assignments in college, since many of them require that we use sources.

Putting It Together

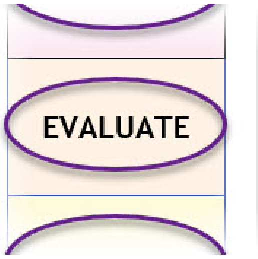
This assignment is more complex than the previous one. **It's asking us to use all four kinds of knowledge and all but one of the cognitive processes.** But part of the trick for doing this assignment well is to pay attention to the emphasis put on these elements.

Of the types of knowledge, conceptual and procedural appear to be most important. Yes, we need to relay factual information from the various positions, but it's more important that we understand how those positions use logic and evidence so that we can apply those to our own position.



Procedural
(techniques & methods)

Evaluating is the most important cognitive process when making arguments. Arguments require constant judgment and justification, which in turn require that we evaluate sources, the ways in which sources are used, and logical statements and implications, among other elements. We have to be able to analyze and create to make a successful argument, too. But if we don't do the evaluative work, our argument could be seen as baseless and without merit.



Examining Sample Assignment 3: Article for a Public Audience

Let’s do one from a more advanced class. This is the final assignment in my science writing course, a junior-level advanced writing course. As I have done with the previous two, I’m leaving out some of the procedural details and in this case, I’m also leaving out information about the visuals and citations, neither of which are important for our purposes.

Example: Article for a Public Audience

Assignment	Write a public piece on a topic of your choosing.
Audience	The “science-public” of a popular magazine or newspaper like *Time* or *Scientific American* or the *New York Times*
Sources	Scientific research reports (at least two); an interview (at least one); any other sources you would like to use, but all sources must be reputable
Length	1800-2100 words

During the last part of the term (and occasionally before this point), we will be looking at articles written for public audiences. These articles differ from the research reports and literature reviews written for expert audiences in many ways, which we will talk about in class.

Topic and Purpose

Your topic for this article will be grounded in the annotated bibliography you have already done. That is, you should already be familiar with the most recent scientific research necessary for this piece by the time you write your public article. You are not required to write about everything that you covered in the last project, however. You may choose any aspect of this research to focus on, even if it doesn’t completely overlap with your literature review.

You may choose to write either an informative piece or an argumentative piece. We will talk in class about how to use your choice to guide your approach to this assignment.

Audience

Audience makes all the difference in this assignment. Instead of assuming an audience already familiar with the concepts, background, methodology, significance, and the like, authors of scientific articles written for the public must explain their work for readers who are not steeped in the jargon and who are not automatically engaged with the material. Thus, you will need to generate their interest and stimulate their understanding.

For this assignment, you will choose a magazine that publishes scientific articles (e.g., *Time*, *Scientific American*, *Discover*). You will need to find at least one model article from the publication you have chosen; we will use this article for audience analysis and discussion of visuals appropriate for your article.

Sources and Citations

I am requiring a minimum of three sources for this piece: two research reports and one interview. You are already familiar with research reports, and we will talk about interviews in this unit. Your interview should be with someone knowledgeable about the research topic you are exploring; this may include researchers (including professors), local authorities, activists, government officials, or anyone else with the knowledge you need. Keep in mind that not all interviews need to (or can) take place face-to-face.

Note, though, that authors of this kind of article use many sources — as many as they need to make their point — and sources from many locations, including the Internet. We will discuss how to evaluate sources, including online sources, as part of this unit.

Evaluation

When I evaluate your public article, I will be looking to see how well you have taken scientific subject matter and made it appropriate and engaging for a public audience. In particular, I will be looking at your explanation of scientific concepts, your use of adaptations (as presented in class), and the logic of your piece as a whole. As part of my evaluation, I will consider your use of narrative, as well as the smooth integration of your source material. If all you do is remove jargon and simplify explanations from an otherwise scientific piece, your public article will not be successful.

In addition, your article will need to meet general standards for good writing: a clear focus and organization, well-developed paragraphs with sufficient detail, and strong and grammatically correct sentences.

Examining the Verbs in Key Sentences

Activity: Identify the Key Sentences

Before going on, try to find the key sentences in the Summary and Analysis assignment. Then, read on to see if you agree with my choices.

Here are the key sentences, the ones that tell us what we are supposed to be doing in this assignment:

> *Write* a public piece on a topic of your choosing.
> You *may choose* any aspect of this research [research done in a previous assignment] to focus on….
> You *may choose* to write either an informative piece or an argumentative piece.
> Thus, you *will need to generate* their interest and *stimulate* their understanding.

This assignment differs from the previous two in that there's not a lot of guidance the body of the assignment. There is a bit more in the evaluation section, where students are directed to do the following:

- *Explain* scientific concepts, using adaptations (a concept from class) and logic to make it engaging for the audience

- *Narrate* at least part of the article (though this doesn't seem to be required)
- *Integrate* sources

I'm cheating a bit on these last verbs because the evaluation section doesn't have this exact phrasing, but after we modify the sentences to be more direct, we can see these elements.

Applying Bloom

Here's a summary of the tasks explained in the assignment:

- Gather research we've already done on a topic we've already chosen, plus at least one interview.
- Write an article (either informational or argumentative) explaining that topic to a non-expert audience.
- In that article, use adaptations (a concept explained during class), logic, and possibly narrative to create that article, integrating our source material as we go.

Activity: You Apply Bloom First

Before jumping into the next section, take what you know about the task in the sample assignment and see which types of knowledge and which cognitive processes you believe the assignment is looking for.

After you read the rest of this chapter, decide whether or not you agree with my analysis.

Kinds of Cognitive Processes

Once again, verbs help us understand the kinds of cognitive tasks we are being asked to do.

We can mostly ignore remembering in this writing assignment, as usual. You don't need to remember what you can look up, though we will need to keep in mind the adaptations that we have learned about in class.

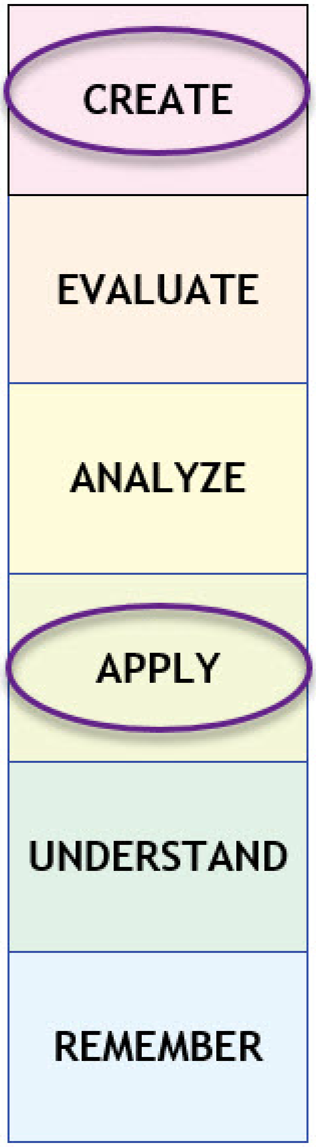
We will have to understand the science enough to relay it, as well as the writing concepts (adaptation, logic, and narration) from the course. But understanding isn't the primary emphasis in this assignment. We know this because the one place where explaining is important (the science), we are also required to use the writing concepts, and *using* those would not be simply understanding.

We absolutely have to apply those writing concepts, making **applying** a key cognitive task in the assignment. Can we successfully use adaptations, logic, and narration in our article? The requirement to use concepts from the course material signals an emphasis on application.

Analyzing might happen as part of our explanations, but this assignment is not asking us to break down the writing concepts.

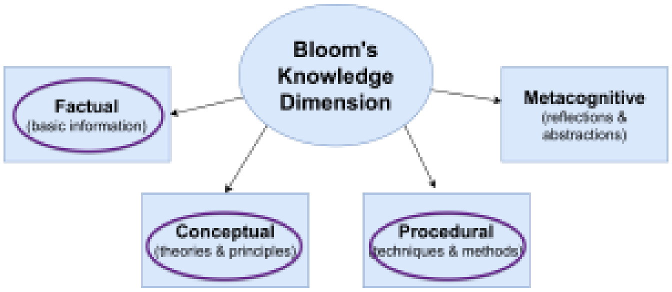
Similarly, we aren't being asked to evaluate anything beyond the evaluation necessary to make choices about the focus of our article and the type of article (informational or persuasive).

Creating, however, seems as central as applying in this assignment. Notice how few directives there are in the first part of the assignment. We have a handful of parameters, but, for example, we have almost no direction about selecting source material (other than to have two research studies and an interview) and no advice about organization (other than to make it logical). The end result is largely up to us. It's our job to figure out what this will ultimately look like.



Kinds of Knowledge

The key sentences also help us identify the [kinds of knowledge]() we will need to include.



To write this assignment, we have to know the science behind our topic and the audience of the magazine we've chosen, so there is **factual** information. Similarly, depending on our topic, we may be explaining conceptual and/or procedural knowledge from the science.

More importantly, though, we are expected to demonstrate **conceptual** knowledge and **procedural** knowledge for writing an article such as this. While most of this knowledge isn't spelled out in the assignment, we see references to adaptations, logic, narrative, and source integration that point to this kind of knowledge, both the concepts involved in and the procedures for writing such an article.

Think about the description of the course at the start of this section. It's an advanced writing course. In this context, conceptual and procedural knowledge about writing are going to be more important than conceptual and procedural knowledge about the scientific topic of this article.

There's not much in the way of metacognition in this assignment. We might end up reflecting on our own understanding of the science or writing techniques, but this is not a self-reflective assignment.

Putting It Together

This assignment asks us to use what we have learned about writing techniques to create an article written for an audience of non-experts.

We have to understand those techniques both conceptually and procedurally, so those types of knowledge are most important in this assignment.

We are applying those concepts to the topic we want to write about, and in doing so, we are supposed to create own original article.

Thus, **the intellectual work of this assignment is to apply the concepts and procedures we've learned about in class as we create our own piece of writing**.

Examining Sample Assignment 4: Reflection

We've looked at writing assignments that emphasize different aspects of Bloom's Taxonomy, with one exception: **metacognitive** knowledge. Yet, I have said that metacognition shows up frequently in certain types of assignments.

This assignment is a final reflection for a portfolio in my first-year writing class. Students submit two revised final papers, plus a reflection. I'm only giving you the instructions for the reflection part of the assignment.

Example: Reflection

Assignment	Write a reflection that introduces your portfolio and discusses your work in this course for the term.
Audience	Your professor or any other writing teacher interested in your best work and your own understanding of your writing
Length	750-1000 words

Your reflection introduces and explains both of the papers in your portfolio and your writing in general. That is, this document is both a self-assessment and a reflection on your writing this semester. It should include in some form the following information:

- The larger part should focus on the specific essays you have selected and how those pieces demonstrate that you have met the goals for the course. Consider questions like the following:
  - How do these essays demonstrate that you have met the course goals?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the essays?
  - To what extent are you satisfied with these essays as representative of your writing ability?
  - What have you learned from working with these essays?
- In addition, you should discuss your writing process generally and the progress you have made this semester:
  - How has your writing changed, and where do you see those changes?
  - What new ways of writing have you tried, and what did you learn from those attempts?
  - Have you learned anything in particular about your writing process?

I strongly recommend that you refer directly and substantively to the course goals in your reflection, as these are the concepts that have been driving your work (and my planning) for the term.

You may feel free to cover issues and ideas beyond these questions, and you should not feel the need to answer all of them (although you must address both major parts above). You should choose the elements that are most relevant to your writing for the semester and deal specifically with those. In addition, you should feel free to talk about problems and successes common to both of the essays you have chosen to include.

Examining the Verbs in Key Sentences

Activity: Identify the Key Sentences

Before going on, try to find the key sentences in the Summary and Analysis assignment. Then, read on to see if you agree with my choices.

Here are the sentences that let us know what we are supposed to be doing in this assignment:

> *Write* a reflection that *introduces* your portfolio and *discusses* your work in this course for the term.
>
> The larger part *should focus* on the specific essays you *have selected* and how those pieces *demonstrate* that you *have met* the goals for the course.
>
> In addition, you should *discuss* your writing process generally and the progress you *have made* this semester….

This assignment has two other elements that make it different from the ones we've examined in previous chapters. First, it includes a lot of questions guiding us through thinking about the course and our work, but as the assignment says, we do not have to answer all of the questions. Second, and related to the first point, there are a number of statements that indicate we have a range of choices:

- Choose which questions you'd like to deal with, including none at all.
- Add aspects of the course and your writing that aren't suggested by the questions if you'd like.
- Feel free to talk about both successes and issues in your writing.

I'm not marking the verbs here, but these elements help us understand the task.

Applying Bloom

What does this assignment ask us to do? We actually have a sentence that names the task in two parts:

> …[T]his document is both a self-assessment and a reflection on your writing this semester.

The verb here ("is") doesn't help us, but this sentence identifies the two parts of the work: assess and reflect if we convert those nouns into verbs.

Activity: You Apply Bloom First

Before jumping into the next section, take what you know about the task in the sample assignment and see which types of knowledge and which cognitive processes you believe the assignment is looking for.

After you read the rest of this chapter, decide whether or not you agree with my analysis.

Kinds of Cognitive Processes

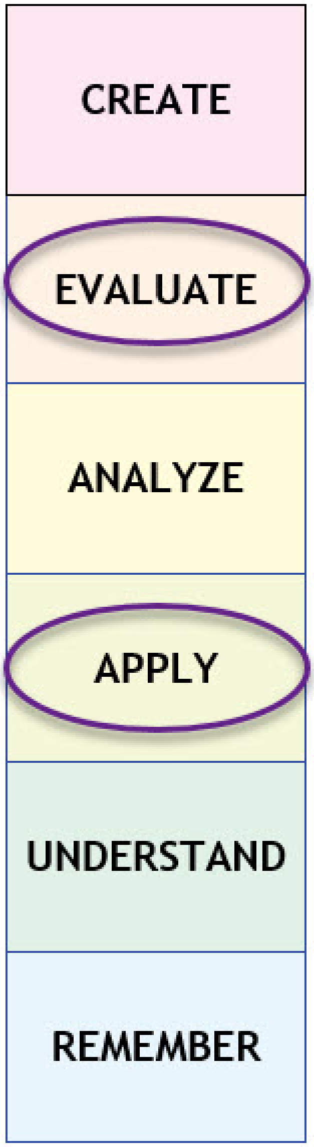
Let's look at those verbs to understand the cognitive processes involved. We are being asked to reflect as we introduce our work and discuss it. We should focus on the essays we have selected for our portfolio and how those demonstrate that we have met the course goals. We should discuss our process.

Remembering is more important here than in the other assignments we've examined. Not everything that we reflect on will exist in some form that we can look up. And if we look at the grid of Bloom's Taxonomy, we see that at the intersection of remember and metacognitive knowledge, we are doing tasks like identifying strategies—in this case, strategies that have worked for us, or not. Still, remembering isn't central to this assignment.

How much we demonstrate our understanding and how much we analyze depends on the questions that we choose to focus on in our reflection. These aren't explicitly part of the assignment, though. Similarly, creating is a part of the assignment primarily through the freedom we have to choose what we would like to present and how we do that.

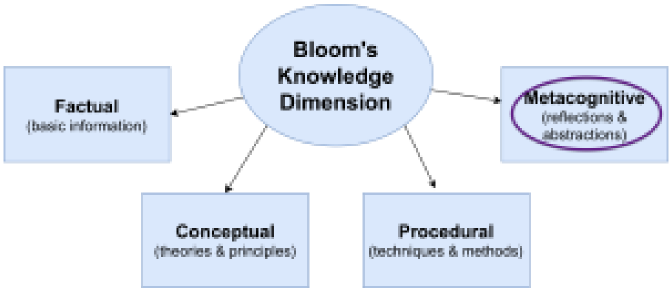
Applying, however, is part of this assignment because we are asked to demonstrate how we have met the course goals using our portfolio essays. Whenever we are asked to use one thing to help explain another, we're in the realm of application.

Evaluating is a primary task in this assignment—and in many reflective assignments. Reflections ask you to judge, for example, your progress or your work or your learning. It is not enough to describe your work; you must also assess it.



Kinds of Knowledge

And the key sentences, as always, also point to the kinds of knowledge we are supposed to demonstrate in the assignment.



Any time a professor is asking you to reflect, they are asking for **metacognitive** knowledge. You might reference specific factual elements or describe key concepts or processes, but in a reflection, these types of knowledge are all in the service of metacognition. What have you learned? How do you know that you have learned that? How does this learning connect with other ideas and information that you have? Why are these ideas and connections important? These are metacognitive questions.

In this assignment, we will also use factual knowledge (for example, about the course goals or our own writing), and when we talk about our writing process, we would use our procedural knowledge of what writing processes can look like. We might even use conceptual knowledge as we explain how we learned about characteristics of a good thesis statement or a strong body paragraph.

But these are all secondary. Metacognition is central here.

Putting It Together

This assignment asks us to evaluate our work according to the course goals and according to our own sense of what has been most important to our learning. These **rely heavily on metacognitive knowledge and on the tasks of applying and evaluating**.

Thus, the intellectual work of this assignment is to demonstrate our own awareness of our performance in the course, specifically examined in relation to an external system (the course goals) and an internal one (our own sense of our accomplishments).

Treating Complex Tasks as Intellectual Work: Why?

Analyzing assignments for kinds of knowledge and conceptual processes may seem a little tedious and perhaps I've gone overboard here. However, as you get practice, you'll get faster and become more accurate in understanding the intellectual work that your professors are asking of you.

Why treat writing assignments as intellectual work?

Because if you don't, you can end up doing the wrong thing.

Professors complain that students do not do what we ask them to. We ask for analysis, but we get summary. We ask for evaluation, but we get reflection. We ask for an argument (which requires sources and support), but we get a personal opinion. These missteps mean that students aren't learning what we want them to—and thus those students don't succeed.

Understanding the intellectual work of your assignments will help you better understand what your professor wants to see, which increases your chances of success. Win-win.

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PART II

SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE READING

Why Reading in a College Writing Textbook?

This text is designed for a college *writing* course, so why talk about *reading*?

Here's the short answer: Reading and writing are integrally connected, and you will be doing a lot of both in college, probably at a more advanced level than in the past. You may also be expected to use texts in more sophisticated ways.

You've been reading for a long time, and you have lots of practice at it. Over many years of schooling, you have learned how to identify main ideas and an author's purpose. You've summarized and quoted from poems and novels and essays. You've used background knowledge and made connections among ideas in different sources. You'll use all of these skills at this level, too.

However, reading at the college level raises the bar. You'll encounter essays and books with more complex ideas than you may have read in the past. You'll be assigned research articles written for scholars and scientists that aren't easily read by students or other novices. And you'll be asked to read texts that you might not agree with or at least find uncomfortable.

The way you read in prior schooling may have served you well, but these more challenging texts will ask you to strengthen your existing reading skills and to develop new ones. The strategies in this section are designed to help you do that.

Difficulty and Learning

We don't really learn much when we do the same thing that we're already able to do well. Learning occurs on the edges of our existing competencies. You've been knitting scarves for a while; you learn to knit hats. You've been knitting hats for a while; you learn to knit socks. Reading works like this, too.

Using Texts

In my short answer, I said that you will need to "use texts." Let's explore this idea a bit, beginning with "using."

College reading is not usually pleasure reading, though you may find some of it quite enjoyable. Most of the time, though, you will be reading specifically because you need to *use* the ideas or language in the service of your own work.

You will be doing many of the same tasks you have done in the past (e.g., identifying the main point, pulling together ideas from multiple sources), but when coupled with more difficult readings, these tasks can become more challenging, too. Moreover, in college, your professors are interested in your thinking. We want to understand what you understand, but simply regurgitating ideas from class or from texts aren't going to be enough. We want to see what you can *do* with those ideas.

Using *Texts*

Traditionally, the word "text" has meant written material, usually in print form. Most people think of a text as a book or a magazine or other collection of words on a page or screen.

In college, however, "text" has a bigger meaning. Many texts will still be traditional: books, articles, essays, stories, poems, and so on. But you will also have professors who ask you to treat movies, social media posts, architecture, music, fashion, and so many other things as texts.

When I use the word "text" here, I'm meaning any artifact of communication that can be shared with others. An artifact can be preserved in some way, including electronic formats, and for an artifact to be a "text," it must also communicate something to someone.

For the purposes of this textbook, we're going to focus on more traditional texts (with an emphasis on academic texts), but the strategies here can often be used with any kind of text.

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White Pencil Beside Book, Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash
Desk, Photo by Humairah L. on Unsplash

Reading Effectively

Reading is much more than letting your eyes skim across the words on a page or screen. When a professor assigns a reading, they don't much care whether your eyes have tracked every word in every sentence. They care that you understand what you have read. Unless you focus on that understanding, though, you are more likely to forget the ideas, even right after you have read them.

If you want to remember more of what you read, you need to pay attention while you do it. Reading is an activity, and as such, it requires your engagement if you are going to do it well.

People who read effectively use a variety of skills and techniques:

- They create an optimal setting for reading, picking the best time and place—particularly one with minimal distractions.
- They engage in pre-reading strategies to get an overview of the text before starting to read.
- They focus their reading: They know why they are reading before they start, and they use that knowledge to guide their reading.
- They annotate or take notes as they read, writing directly on the text if at all possible.
- They do quick research to gain familiarity with unfamiliar references.
- They work to discover the main point of the piece and to distinguish that point from supporting points and counterarguments.
- They work carefully through difficult sections of text.
- They expect to reread at least the most important or difficult parts of a text.
- They keep track of their responses to the text as they read.
- They summarize the text and reflect on what it means to them in order to internalize that meaning.

We'll take each of these ideas in turn in the following chapters.

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Creating an Optimal Setting for Reading

La Trobe reading room at State Library, Melbourne, Australia – 02/05/2017

Different kinds of reading require different settings.

Some kinds of reading happen quickly—no matter the setting. You use your phone to look up information on the band you hear on the radio. You skim the headlines in the newspaper while you're eating breakfast. You read the message your best friend posted as you wait for class to start.

How do these acts of reading differ from moments when you have to read something that requires you to do something? Think about how you might read differently if you receive a letter from your school about your financial aid, or if you read the safety protocols in your employee manual.

Other times, we read because we want to be immersed in the world of the author, so we curl up with a new novel in our favorite chair and tell everyone to leave us alone.

We also read because we want to fully understand something, like how DNA and RNA work for the biology test on Friday or how climate change is likely to affect our town as we prepare to talk to our representative in Congress. The concentration required for these reading tasks may, in turn, require a different setting.

Activity: Reflect on Your Reading

Take a few minutes to reflect on your reading experiences and ideals.

- What do you read on the fly?
    - Where and when do you do that reading?
    - How much of that reading do you remember?
    - Why do you think you remember so much or so little?
- What was the last thing you remember reading because you needed to use the information (e.g., a set of instructions or a guide, an official letter requiring your action)?
    - Where and when did you read it?
    - How much of that reading do you remember?
    - Why do you think you remember so much or so little?
- Think about the last time you really needed to focus on a reading (e.g., for a test or presentation).
    - Where and when did you read that text?

- How much of that reading do you remember?
- Why do you think you remember so much or so little?

I'm using these scenarios and questions to suggest that different types of reading demand different settings. Casual reading, such as social media, doesn't demand much; we can read pretty much wherever and whenever we wish, even amid distractions. Reading for practical benefit, such as instructions, requires more concentration, but we're usually trying to read that material where and when we need it.

Reading for intellectual work is more demanding, which means you want to actively control the time, place, and circumstances of your reading as much as you possibly can.

Activity: Imaging Your Reading Ideal

What does it look like when you are able to do your best reading, when you are best able to concentrate and engage with the texts you are reading?

Instead of writing this out, try drawing a picture of that setting.

Choosing When to Read

Think about time. What time of day are you best able to focus on what you are reading so that you get the most out of it?

Many college students study late into the night, whether out of necessity or habit, but here's a simple truth: not everyone reads most effectively at 2:00 a.m.—or at 2:00 p.m., for that matter.

Diurnal Cycles and Circadian Rhythms

You may already know that the human body works via a series of diurnal cycles—cycles that move through peaks and valleys over each twenty-four-hour period. During these cycles, levels of circulating hormones and chemicals rise and fall, creating circadian rhythms. Typically, this starts with a big chemical "push awake" in the morning, a peak of energy in the afternoon, and then a gradual lowering through the evening.

However, these are not consistent for every person. We all know "morning people" or "night owls" who seem to function when the rest of us can't. Personally, I get the most done between about 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

We also know that these cycles differ with characteristics like gender and age. How easy was it for you to get out of bed at 6:30 a.m. when you were five years old? How easy is it now?

Understanding your own diurnal cycles and circadian rhythms can be helpful in finding effective times to read and study. This is important because as a college student, if you can find the best times for these activities *for you*, you can cut your reading and studying time down significantly while also finding it more enjoyable.

Activity: Experiment with Time

Divide up a reading assignment for one of your classes into three or four different blocks of about the same length. Read each of those blocks at a different time of the day and night but in the same location (without disrupting your sleep!). Choose times that reasonably might work for you. If you are not a morning person, for example, don't choose 6:00 a.m. unless you really want to see the difference.

Make notes on the following:

- How well did you understand the material?
- How long did it take you to gain that level of understanding?
- How did you feel about doing the reading? In particular, were you relieved to stop, or did you want to keep reading?

Look over your notes. Which times seem to work best for you?

Choosing Where to Read

Location matters. Consider your ideal spot for reading. Is it a favorite chair in your living room? Your bed? A coffee shop? Sitting outside in the shade of a big tree? Different kinds of reading might call for different locations. Your favorite place to read a novel or the sports scores may not be the best place for focusing on material in a textbook. I love reading for pleasure in my recliner or in bed, but I read texts I'm planning to *use* at my desk in my office.

Activity: Experiment with Location

Divide up a reading assignment into three or four different blocks of about the same length. Read each of those blocks in a different location (but keep the time of day about the same).

Make notes on the following:

- How well do you feel you understood the material?
- How long did it take you to gain that level of understanding?
- How did you feel about doing the reading? In particular, were you relieved to stop, or did you want to keep reading?

Look over your notes. What locations and noise types seem to work best for you?

Part of location is sound. Some people work best in an absolutely silent setting, while others prefer the background noise of people. Others prefer music. When I'm working seriously, I usually prefer silence, but sometimes I will read to alternative classical music, like music by Ludovico Einaudi and Zoë Keating. I absolutely cannot read, even for pleasure, while people are talking around me.

Music and Reading?

Students tell me all the time that they prefer to work with music, and I allow them to bring earbuds for the times when everyone is working individually. But is this really good for them?

Research published in 2018 by Vasilev et al. shows that noise of all kinds can have a detrimental effect on reading comprehension. Background noise, such as indistinct speech or traffic, can have some negative effects, mostly on the speed of reading. Background speech is more disruptive, affecting reading comprehension and proofreading because the brain appears to be trying to make sense of the language, even as the reader is trying to ignore it.

Vasilev et al. found that the effects of music are inconsistent. Music that is very familiar to the reader and that doesn't have words may not distract readers much at all. However, the combination of music and lyrics—which invites the brain to process the words just like with background speech—seems particularly disruptive to reading comprehension.

Activity: Experiment with Music

Use what you learned from the last activity about location to choose where to read.

Step 1: Find three articles or short stories to read, all of about the same length.

Step 2: Find a familiar song with lyrics and an unfamiliar song without lyrics.

Step 3: Get a timer.

Step 4: TIME YOURSELF as you read each article or short story, as follows:

- One with the familiar song with lyrics
- One with the unfamiliar song without lyrics
- One with no music at all

Step 5: When you finish each reading, make a note about how long it took you to read and how well you think you understood the text.

Check your results and decide what works best for you!

Reading in relative silence or with only the background noise of people or music without lyrics may be uncomfortable at first, but if you are reading more efficiently, you'll be able to get back to the music or the conversation more quickly.

Choosing Your Format

There's one more thing to consider: What format do you prefer: paper copies, electronic texts, or audio books?

Sometimes you don't have a choice, such as when the edition of a textbook only comes in a print version. Other times, such as with this textbook, you could print out a hard copy or use an electronic version on your computer, phone, or tablet. Which format works best for you?

Your preferred method for annotating the text will play a role here. You will often need to take notes on what you read, so you need a format that supports your preferred note-taking method.

Sometimes we get into ruts, doing things the same old way because that has always worked for us. College can be a good time to try different approaches, so experiment with format when you have a chance. If you think that hearing a text read to you will help you use it more effectively, try that. If you have always read paper texts, try an e-book.

Beware of using audio books alone, however. While many students prefer to get their information through their ears, the structure of the text can be hard to follow in that format. It's also hard to take notes when you don't have a good way to locate a specific place in a text. If you prefer audio books, have a print or electronic version available at the same time for note-taking purposes.

Hearing the Text

If you are one of those people who takes in information better through your ears, you may be able to set up your computer to read out loud to you. There are text-to-speech features in Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Word, and most computer and phone systems have the ability to read text out loud. Use your favorite search engine to find instructions!

Activity: Reflect on Format

Think about your preferred format for reading texts. Why do you think you prefer that format? List the reasons.

Then, try a different format, just for experimentation. In what ways is the alternative format useful or otherwise positive? In what ways is it not useful or otherwise negative?

What does this experimentation tell you about the ways in which format makes a difference for your reading? What might you do if you are required to use a format that doesn't work as well for you?

Limiting Distractions

As the research on background noise shows, any distraction can interfere with reading, slowing down the process and interrupting comprehension, creating what researchers call "fragmented reading." In short, you will understand less the more you let your reading be interrupted.

What to do about your phone? Many students find it difficult, even distracting, *not* to pay attention to their phones, so someone telling you to shut them off is a non-starter. You aren't going to do it.

However, if you want to improve your reading and if you are regularly distracted by your phone, you need to change something. Try the following activity.

Activity: Plan Interruptions

Plan your interruptions rather than letting your phone decide when you are going to stop reading. When you next read, do the following:

- Set your phone to DND (Do Not Disturb).
- When you come to the end of a section in your reading, take a moment to check your phone for messages that you *need* to address.
- Leave the others alone until you are done with your reading.

Each time you read, try to stretch out the time between phone checks.

Ideally, you'll be able to check your messages only after you are done with your reading, but if that's not often enough for you, at least you'll end up with more continuous reading time. Continuous reading is both faster and more effective, and the faster and more effectively you get your reading done, the sooner you'll be able to pay attention to those notifications.

DND and Ring Tones

If you have children or others who depend on you, silencing your phone just may not be an option. However, the use of ring tones can quiet the non-essential notifications while leaving you connected to those who need you.

Most phones can be set to allow calls and texts from specific numbers to ring through on DND. This feature allows you to keep getting calls from your kids, but not your best friend who just wants to chat.

Distractions happen where we live, too, so you may need to remove yourself from your usual daily setting in order to get your reading done. I know many people who can't work at home because their dog, child, or roommate is constantly interrupting them. Even when these interruptions are unintentional, they more or less destroy your focus. Don't hesitate to escape to a local coffee shop, a campus library (fact: most college libraries are open to the public), or another quiet spot to get your reading done. If you're in an optimal setting, you'll finish faster, and then you can get back to whatever else is on your list.

Using Your Optimal Setting

In this section, you should be hearing a theme: efficiency and effectiveness. While many of us have reading that we want to savor, most academic reading does not fall into that category. Students are busy, and classes can be demanding. The more efficient you can make your reading process, the more time you'll have for the non-reading tasks on your list.

But speed is not the only standard you're aiming for. You want your reading to be effective. That is, you want to comprehend what you are reading and have the kinds of notes that will make the text useful. If you aren't reading effectively, there's nothing efficient about it.

Once you've found the best setting for your reading, use it. Develop a routine of reading and studying at about the same time and in the same place as much as you can. Doing this will help the activity become a habit, and once that happens, reading will be even easier and more effective.

Key Points: Creating an Optimal Setting for Reading

- Find a time, place, and format for reading that helps you focus on the text.
- To read effectively, limit your distractions, including your phone.

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Material in this section was revised with the help of Wilmani Castillo, Paul Goggin, Max Jeremic, Tia Lidonde and Eddileidy Tejeda, students in my class during Fall 2022.

Examining a Sample Assignment

People often learn better through examples, and even better still if they are doing something active as they learn. So, for this section on reading, we'll do both.

The example assignment below asks the student to read two texts and write an explanation of how the ideas of one text can be applied to the other. Note that the assignment is incomplete, without length or due date information. For the purposes of this textbook, we're focusing on reading strategies, so such technical details are not important.

Your instructor will let you know if you will actually do this assignment in your class, but for our purposes, I will use the article by Nicholas Ensley Mitchell throughout this section to demonstrate the strategies that I'm discussing. Then, you can use one of the three articles (or some other reading you are working with) to practice these skills.

Example: An Assignment with Readings

In "The First Battle in the Culture Wars: The Quality of Diversity," Nicholas Ensley Mitchell argues that we have two options for understanding the quality of diversity: "segregated coexistence" and "living in community." Using Mitchell's descriptions of these options, describe how the "quality of diversity" plays a role in the situation described in one of the following three articles:

- "City Compost Programs Turn Garbage into 'Black Gold' That Boosts Food Security and Social Justice" by Kristen DeAngelis, Gwynne Mhuireach, and Sue Ishaq
- "Sustainable Cities Need More Than Parks, Cafes, and a Riverwalk" by Trina Hamilton and Winifred Curran
- "How Food Became the Perfect Beachhead for Gentrification" by Pascale Joassart-Marcelli

Consider questions like the following:

- How has segregated coexistence contributed to the problem described in the article you have chosen?
- What must be done—either according to the author(s) or according to yourself—to change the situation in that article to a community-based quality of diversity?
- What might be the outcomes or effects of choosing living in community in that situation?
- Do you accept Mitchell's framework (that there are two options: segregation and community)? Why or why not? If not, what alternative framework would you offer and how might that framework apply in this situation?

Finally, your paper *must* address the following questions:

Do you believe that the option of living in community is viable in the situation described in the article you have chosen? Why or why not? And what does your answer say about the quality of diversity in the United States?

Using Pre-Reading Strategies

Academic reading is not like reading a novel. You aren't starting at the beginning and looking forward to being surprised and delighted as you turn the page. And you certainly aren't going to wait until the last chapter to know how it ends, like you would with a mystery. You want to understand as much as you can about the reading right from the beginning so that you can read efficiently.

This is called "pre-reading" or sometimes "previewing." When you pre-read a text, you'll turn into a temporary sleuth, examining the text for clues as to its meaning.

Start with the Title

A good title will inform you about the text's content. Titles can also be interesting, catchy, or clever, but the most important job of a title is to let the reader know what the text will be about.

Example: Clever but Confusing Title

For instance, imagine you're reading a magazine article entitled "Three Hundred Sixty-five Properly Poofy Days." Reading that title, do you have any idea what this article is going to be about?

- It could be written by a meteorologist, reporting on a year of observing cloud formations.
- It might be a biopic (a biographical story) about an eccentric salon that specializes in "big hair" dos.
- Perhaps it's a set of guidelines for using poofy cotton balls to apply cosmetics.
- Or it could be a story about a dog groomer who grooms poodles, the poofiest of dogs.

This title doesn't give enough information about the content of the text. Keep this in mind when you are writing your own titles!

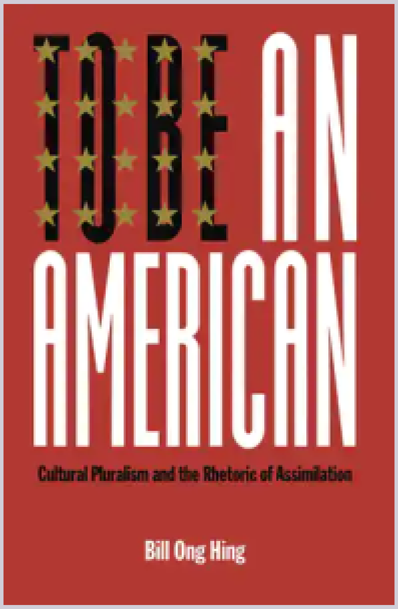
Take a look at the important words in the title, usually the nouns. Those words should tell you about the content of the article. If you aren't familiar with a word in the title, this is a good time to look it up (and make a note of the definition). That word will almost certainly be important in your understanding of the reading.

Sometimes, you will see titles with two parts. In books and magazine articles, a second title often appears in smaller and sometimes different font under the main title. The second title is called a "subtitle," and it's usually more informative than the main title. In academic research articles, also known as scholarly articles, these titles usually follow the main title after a colon.

Example: Two-Part Titles

Let's look at a couple of two-part titles.

In the case of the image on the right, the main title, To Be an American, could mean quite a few different things, but the phrases "cultural pluralism" and "rhetoric of assimilation" give us a hint that the book will be about how and whether minority communities maintain their own cultures or assimilate. If you read the description of the book, you'll see that this one focuses specifically on immigrants, a point which isn't clear from the title, though it is implied a bit in the idea of the main title about being American. This is an example of a title that could be a bit clearer to help readers understand the focus of the book.



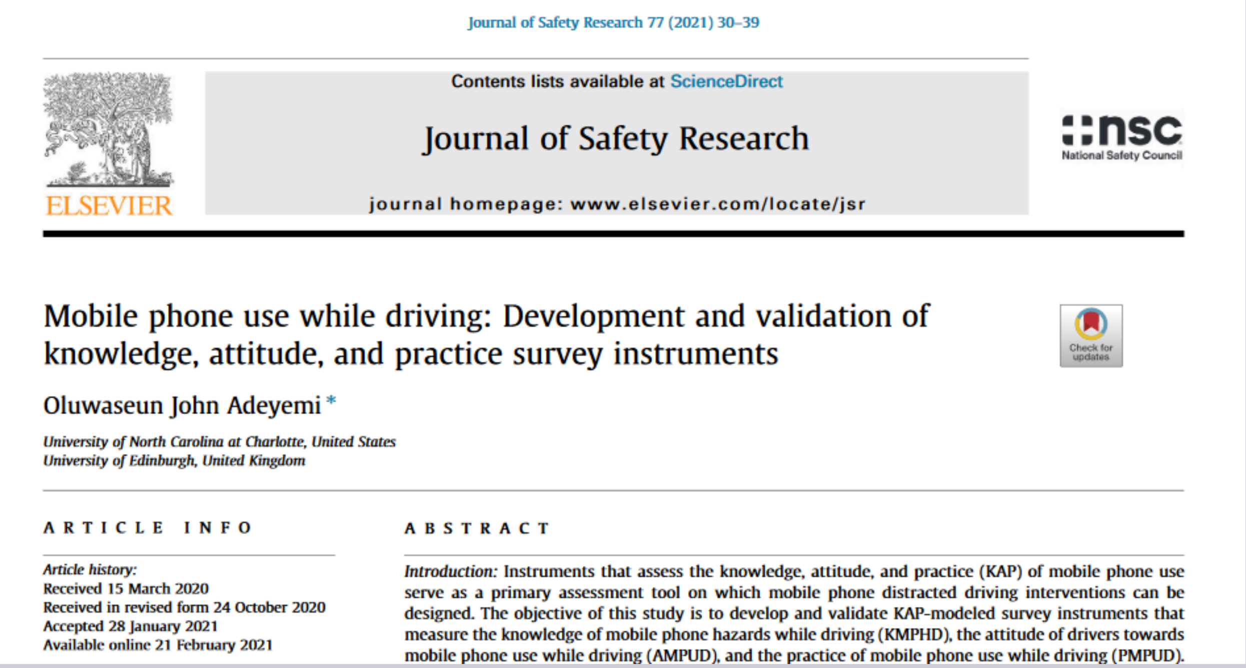
TO BE AN AMERICAN

Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation

Bill Ong Hing

This book has a subtitle in smaller print under the large title.

Article titles also use subtitles, though this is much more common in scholarly articles than in popular articles. The first part of the title "Mobile Phone Use While Driving" (below) leads us to believe that the article will focus on something about using phones while we drive, but the subtitle tells us that the article will be about the surveys that gather information about mobile phone use.



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Mobile phone use while driving: Development and validation of knowledge, attitude, and practice survey instruments

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Instruments that assess the knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) of mobile phone use serve as a primary assessment tool on which mobile phone distracted driving interventions can be designed. The objective of this study is to develop and validate KAP-modeled survey instruments that measure the knowledge of mobile phone hazards while driving (KMPHD), the attitude of drivers towards mobile phone use while driving (AMPUD), and the practice of mobile phone use while driving (PMPUD).

This article has a subtitle following a colon. This article can be found online, but you will need to use your college library's databases to access the full version.

Typing Out Titles

When you use two-part titles in your academic writing, you will usually separate them with a colon. The example book title, for instance, would be typed *To Be an American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation* (italicized because it's a book).

You would not use a colon if another piece of punctuation separates the two parts. For example, in the article titled "Attention or Distraction? The Impact of Mobile Phone on Users' Psychological Well-Being" by Chu et al., you don't change the question mark to a colon, nor do you add a colon (and the title is in quotation marks because it's an article).

Be aware that the specifics about which words get capitalized and when varies a bit by style guide.

Identify the Author's Expertise

Have you heard of the author? Even if you haven't, sometimes you'll find a short bio about the author at the beginning or end of a text. You can always search the internet to look for more details.

Ideally, the author should be an acknowledged expert on the subject or should have degrees, training, or credentials that make them an expert. Particularly if you are going to be writing about the text, you might want to make some notes about the author so that you can include information about their expertise in your own writing.

When there are two or three authors, you should take a look at the credentials of all of them. Sometimes, however, such as in scientific studies, you will see a long list of authors. When this happens, it's generally enough to look at the credentials of the first author, who is usually the lead researcher of the group. But keep in mind that these texts are not just written by that first author. When you write about these texts, you'll need to refer to all of the authors. Check your style guide for how to do this.

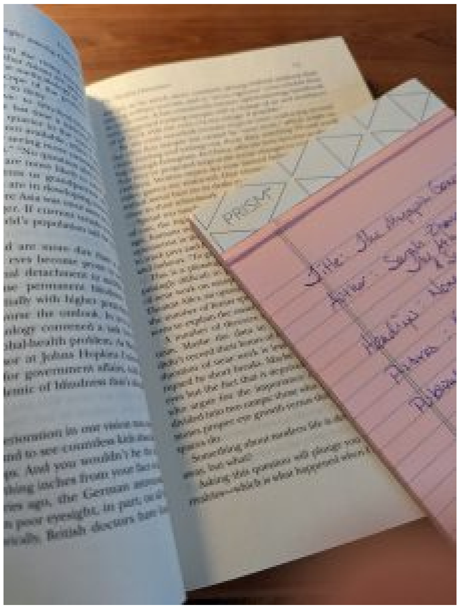
Skim the Headings

Headings, if present, will often give you clues as to the text's content. As with the main title, if there are words you don't already know, take a moment to look them up and write the definition down in your annotations.

Headings will also show you how the text has been divided into sections. This includes chapter breaks and subsections within chapters and articles. Textbooks often number these subsections or use some kind of outlining structure.

Also pay attention to the typeface of the headings. Headings of the same size and font are all at the same level of importance. Compare, for example, the heading styles for this textbook with the structure in the table of contents.

Scan the Images and "Pull-Outs"



Images—and their captions—will often give you valuable information about the topic. Images include photographs, charts, graphs, maps, and illustrations. While this is not (yet) the time to study those images, previewing them will help you understand what you are about to read.

Similarly, "pull-outs" (content that is pulled off to one side or highlighted in a box) will tell you a bit about information that the author considered interesting or important but ultimately peripheral to the main text. This supplementary content can give you clues about the main ideas. Again, you're not reading these carefully yet—just taking a quick look to get an overview of the text.

Check the Publication Date

When was this text written? While this won't necessarily help you preview the contents of the text, it will give you a sense of what else was going on at the time this text was written. This can also help you think about whether there have been significant events since the publication date that might influence current thinking on the subject. For example, think about the ways in which a book about wildfires written in 1995 might differ from one written in 2020.

Using Your Preview

After working through these strategies, make note of the central idea or argument you believe the text to be about. Then, as you read, you'll be able to use this knowledge to guide your understanding of the details in the text.

This seems like a lot, but it generally only takes a few minutes, especially once you practice the skills. Pre-reading will save you lots of time and frustration because you'll already have a general understanding of the text before you start reading.

Example: Previewing Mitchell

Details of the previewing work

Let's go back to the sample assignment and preview Mitchell's article:

- Title—The complete title is "The First Battle in the Culture Wars: The Quality of Diversity."
    - The first part tells me that Mitchell is going to discuss the "culture wars," and when I look

    this up, I see that these are conflicts between cultures about which one is going to be dominant. Given the picture that appears in the original publication of this article, I'm assuming he's talking about racial conflict in the United States. I wonder why he's talking about a "*first"* battle, though, since that war has been going on for a long time.
    - This subtitle tells me that Mitchell is going to talk about diversity, but he is using the phrase "quality of diversity." When I try searching for that phrase, I don't get much. I know generally what diversity is, so I look up "quality" just to try to find a definition that fits here. I find two that might fit: a standard for how something is measured or a distinctive characteristic.

- Author—The author is Nicholas Ensley Mitchell. Near the top of the article, there is a link and his title. He's an assistant professor of curriculum studies at the University of Kansas. When I click on the link, I find out that he has a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University, that he has worked as a policy and research fellow at Loyola University, and that he researches the ways in which race appears in school curricula. This article doesn't appear to be about school curricula (at least not so far), but it is about race relations.
- Headings—There are two headings in this article: "Segregated Coexistence" and "Living in Community." "Segregated coexistence" sounds like people living near each other without integrating. They get along mostly by ignoring each other. "Living in community" sounds like something a minister would say, meaning living together in ways that are connected. Without reading the article, I don't really know if this is what Mitchell means, but these are central ideas in the text, since they each get their own heading.
- Pictures and Pullouts—There are two pictures with the original publication of this article.
    - The first shows mostly Black people walking with arms linked. The printing on some of their shirts indicate that they are protesting restrictions on voting rights, and the caption says that this is what they were doing in Washington, D.C. on July 15, 2021. This reinforces my sense that Mitchell is focusing on Black equity issues in the U.S.
    - The second shows protesters arguing across a police line. The caption tells me that one is a white supremacist and the other is a Black man, and the picture was taken in New York City on September 3, 2020. This picture echoes the use of "war" in the title of the article.
    - There are no pull-outs in this article.

- Publication Date—This article was published on October 14, 2021. This is pretty recent, and issues like voting rights and how voting restrictions hurt minorities were in the news at that time. Around the same time, particularly with the COVID pandemic, there was a lot of discussion about racial disparities and how so many Blacks are killed by police (and others). There was (and still is, as of this writing) a lot of tension around race in the U.S. at this time.

Going into this reading, I know that the article will deal with race relations in the United States. Because of the assignment, I know that I need to focus most on what Mitchell means by "the quality of diversity," "segregated coexistence," and "living in community."

It took me much longer to write this preview up than it did to do the actual previewing. Pre-reading this article took less than five minutes. Writing this up took about thirty.

Activity: Practicing Your Pre-Reading Skills

Now it's your turn. Choose one of the three articles from the sample assignment (or another reading you are working on) and preview that article. In fact, pre-reading can be so quick that you can use it as a way to figure out which article you want to use. Be sure to look at the features I've discussed in this section:

- The title
- The author's expertise
- The headings
- The images and pull-outs
- The publication date

After you have looked at all of these features, make some notes for yourself about what you think the article is going to be about and what questions you have for when you start reading.

Reflection After Reading: After you have finished reading the article, reflect on how useful this pre-reading was in helping you understand the article. What parts were most helpful? What weren't particularly helpful? What would you change the next time you have a reading to preview?

Key Points: Using Pre-Reading Strategies

- Pre-reading (also called previewing) saves you time and makes your reading more effective.
- Start with the title and author, but also look at any headings, images, and pull-outs.
- The date of publication can help you think about what else was going on at the time.

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Focusing Your Reading

Reading for your academic work differs from reading for pleasure. When you pick up that mystery novel or that article about last Sunday's game, you're reading for your own amusement, interest, and information. What you read may be useful, too, but you aren't reading specifically to use material from the text. When you are reading for your academic work, you may be interested in the text, but your enjoyment is not a primary purpose.

Think about what the professor's purpose could be and how you can use that to guide your reading so that it's more efficient. Here are some of the common purposes for reading assignments in college:

Your professor has assigned the reading, and they want you to get something out of that material.

- Are you going to be tested on that material? If so, what concepts or other information will you need to understand (and remember) as you read?
    - Look over the syllabus to find out what kind of information will be on the relevant test and how this particular text fits into that unit.
    - Make notes about the concepts and information that you should focus on. It can be particularly helpful to create these notes as you use pre-reading strategies.
    - As you read, update those notes with specific information from the text.
- Are you going to write about that text? If so, what should you understand about the text and what evidence will you need to gather as you read?
    - Read the assignment in advance to understand how the professor will be asking you to use the text.
    - Make notes about the kinds of understanding and evidence you should be gathering before you start reading.
    - As you read, update those notes with the actual information, evidence (including quotations and paraphrases), or other material you are finding.
- Are you supposed to make connections to other materials in the course?
    - Read in advance any assignments that ask you explicitly to make connections. What kinds of connections is the professor asking you to make?
    - Look at the other materials assigned in that unit. Where do you think connections might exist? Make notes about possible connections before you start reading.
    - As you read, update those notes with the actual connections you are finding.

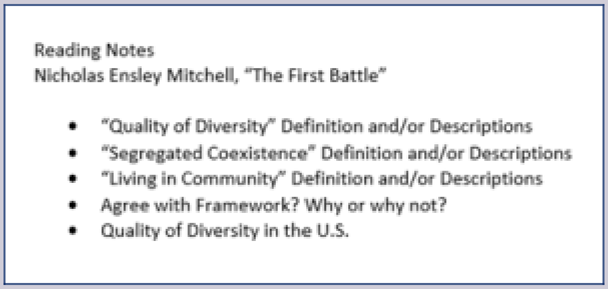
Of course, if you aren't sure what the professor's purpose is, you can—and should—ask. Asking for clarification can save you (and your classmates) lots of time and ultimately save the professor some frustration since you'll be focusing on the aspects of the text that the professor wants you to.

Notice that in all of these, I'm suggesting that you make notes. Making notes as you read, which we'll discuss more when we get to annotating in the next section, can save you time and help you focus your attention.

Example: Mining an Assignment

We're going to use the assignment I introduced earlier, and here I'll focus on the parts that are about Mitchell's article.

Looking over the assignment, I have to understand what Mitchell means by "segregated coexistence" and "living in community," since I need to apply those ideas to the article I pick. It would also be a good idea to understand what he means by "quality of diversity," since I need to think about that for the last question about how this works in the United States.



Reading Notes
Nicholas Ensley Mitchell, "The First Battle"

- "Quality of Diversity" Definition and/or Descriptions
- "Segregated Coexistence" Definition and/or Descriptions
- "Living in Community" Definition and/or Descriptions
- Agree with Framework? Why or why not?
- Quality of Diversity in the U.S.

While I don't have to answer every bulleted question (I know this because I'm asked to "consider questions like"), I want to think about whether I agree with Mitchell's framework or have ideas of my own. I also have to think about the connection between Mitchell's ideas and the quality of diversity in the US.

Mining the assignment this way gives me a list of ideas to focus on as I read and take notes.

Activity: Focusing Your Reading

It's your turn again. Using a text you've been assigned or the article that you've chosen from the example assignment, create a list of what you will need to focus on as you read the article you have chosen.

Compare your list with one written by a classmate working on the same article. Talk through any differences in your lists so that you both end up with a stronger focus as you start reading.

Reflection After Reading: After you have read the article, reflect on how useful your list was in helping you stay focused on the professor's purpose. What worked? What didn't? What would you change, if anything, about how you created your list?

Between your pre-reading and your understanding of why the professor assigned the reading in the first place, your reading will be much more efficient.

Key Points: Focusing Your Reading

- Before you start reading, plan for what you should focus on.
- Be sure to use this information to take notes as your read.
- If you don’t know what the professor wants you to focus on, ask!

Annotating and Note-Taking

If you do not take notes as you read, you are wasting time and energy. Without notes, you will almost certainly have to reread substantial parts of the text to find passages that are important, and you will almost certainly lose track of the ideas you had as you were reading. While note-taking does slow down your reading, it greatly increases your overall reading efficiency.

There are many ways to take notes, and you need to find methods that work for you and your reading situation. Your annotation method will almost certainly vary depending on whether you are reading a hard copy or an e-version of a text.

If you don't make notes as you go, today's great observation will likely become tomorrow's forgotten detail.

You may also find that you need to take notes differently depending on the kind of text you are reading. For example, do you need the same kinds of notes for a textbook that contains information you will be tested on as you do for an article that you are going to write about? Be ready to alter your note-taking strategy so that your notes are most useful to you.

Understanding What to Take Notes About

You want to make sure you are capturing the main ideas in a text, but you also want to record your reactions to the text, particularly where they relate to your purpose for reading. For example, it doesn't make sense to spend lots of time making notes about the history of an idea when your professor wants you to focus on the implications of that idea.

If you've been following the activities in this section, you already have two helpful guides as you read:

- First, you have any notes you made while pre-reading. Even if you didn't take notes during this phase, you have information about the reading that you might decide to add to your notes as you go.
- You also have the list you made when you were focusing on the purpose for the reading. Refer to that list as you read to help you stay on task.

As you read, here are some particularly useful types of notes:

- Summaries or paraphrases of key ideas in the text
- Your responses, including your questions, points of agreement and disagreement, and notes about connections you see
- Informational notes, including definitions of words you aren't familiar with and references to other sources
- Your comments on passages that are significant and that you might use in your own writing

Understanding How to Take Notes

Note-taking doesn't look the same for everyone, and the method you choose will depend on the medium of the text (print or electronic), whether you can write on the text or not, and your preferences for things like color. It will also depend on what accommodations work best for you. Take the time to find the best method for you!

Writing Directly on Hard-Copy Texts

Through most of your K-12 education (and mine), you were probably told never to write in your textbooks, but now that you're a college student, your teachers will tell you just the opposite. Writing in your texts as you read—annotating them—is encouraged! It's a powerful strategy for engaging with a text.

Bookstore Purchases and Textbook Rentals

Most college and university bookstores approve of textual annotation and don't think it decreases a textbook's value. In other words, you can annotate a college textbook and still sell it back to the bookstore later on if you choose to. You won't get the full price you paid for the book, but you wouldn't get that even if you don't write in it at all, so you might as well take notes! Note that I say *most*—if you have questions and plan to sell back any textbooks, be sure to ask at the bookstore before you annotate.

Most textbook rental companies will let you do some limited writing and highlighting, but they often allow less than college bookstores. Be sure to read the fine print and FAQs about marking up a rental.

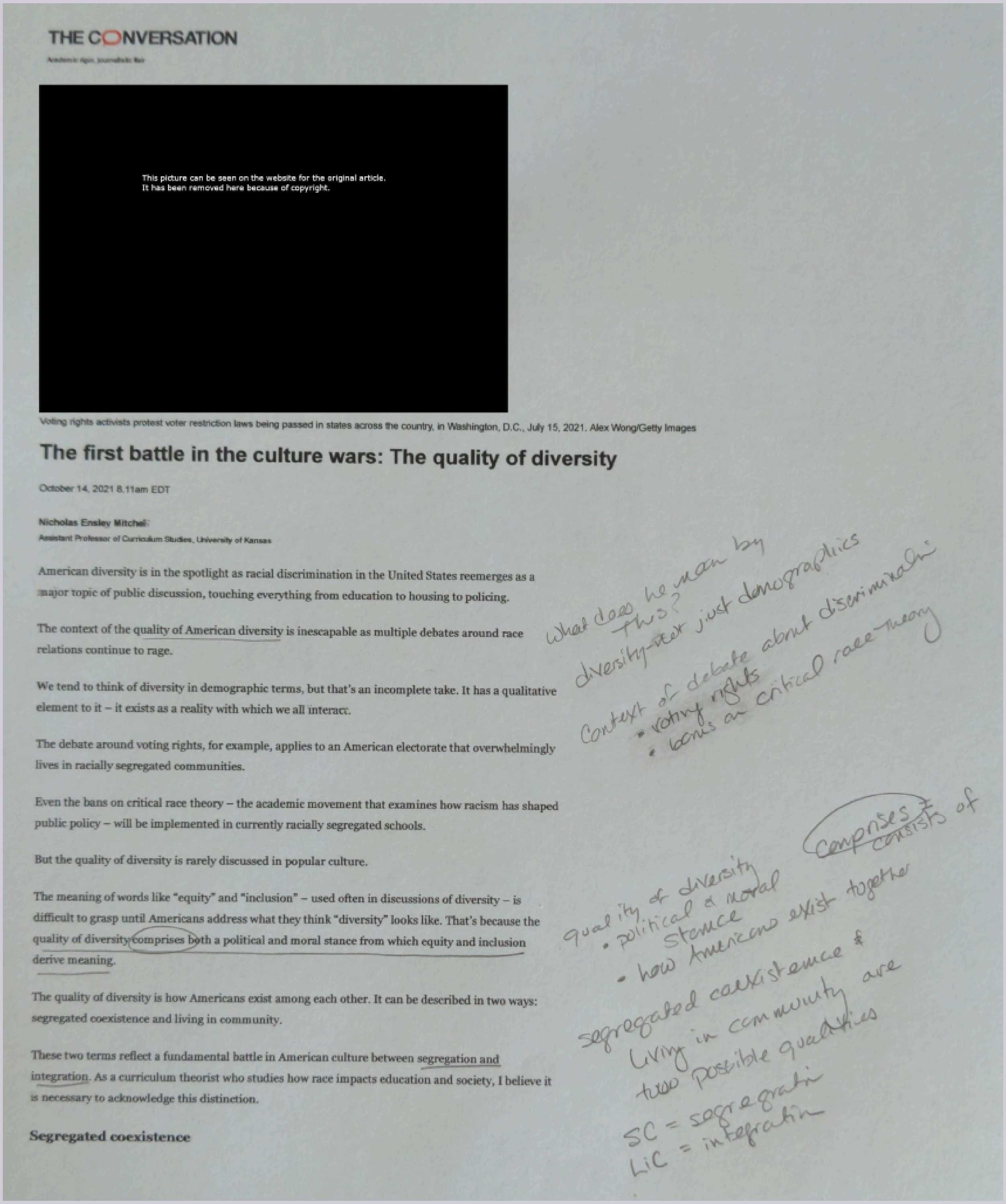
When annotating in a textbook or other double-sided printed material, pencil often works best. It won't soak through the pages, which matters when you need to read the text or take notes on the other side. In addition, you can erase marks if you decide that what you originally wrote isn't helpful. If you want to use ink, choose a ball-point pen rather than gel or permanent marker, since ball point ink is less likely to soak through. If using erasable pens, test in an inconspicuous area to make sure they actually erase on that paper.

Many students use brightly-colored highlighting pens to mark passages in texts. Highlighting alone, though, isn't particularly helpful. Using highlighters creates big swaths of color in your text, but when you later go back to them, you may not remember why those passages were highlighted. If you want to use highlighters, be sure that every time you do, you *also* make a note so that you know why you highlighted that passage in the first place.

Example: Handwritten Notes

View the example.

Here is a photograph of my notes on the first printed page of Mitchell's article. I've done the notes in pencil, and if you look closely, you can see where I had to erase a mistake or two.



THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair

This picture can be seen on the website for the original article.
It has been removed here because of copyright.

Voting rights activists protest voter restriction laws being passed in states across the country, in Washington, D.C., July 15, 2021. Alex Wong/Getty Images

The first battle in the culture wars: The quality of diversity

October 14, 2021 8.11am EDT

Nicholas Ensley Mitchell
Assistant Professor of Curriculum Studies, University of Kansas

American diversity is in the spotlight as racial discrimination in the United States reemerges as a major topic of public discussion, touching everything from education to housing to policing.

The context of the quality of American diversity is inescapable as multiple debates around race relations continue to rage.

We tend to think of diversity in demographic terms, but that's an incomplete take. It has a qualitative element to it – it exists as a reality with which we all interact.

The debate around voting rights, for example, applies to an American electorate that overwhelmingly lives in racially segregated communities.

Even the bans on critical race theory – the academic movement that examines how racism has shaped public policy – will be implemented in currently racially segregated schools.

But the quality of diversity is rarely discussed in popular culture.

The meaning of words like "equity" and "inclusion" – used often in discussions of diversity – is difficult to grasp until Americans address what they think "diversity" looks like. That's because the quality of diversity comprises both a political and moral stance from which equity and inclusion derive meaning.

The quality of diversity is how Americans exist among each other. It can be described in two ways: segregated coexistence and living in community.

These two terms reflect a fundamental battle in American culture between segregation and integration. As a curriculum theorist who studies how race impacts education and society, I believe it is necessary to acknowledge this distinction.

Segregated coexistence

What does he mean by this?

diversity—not just demographics

Context of debate about discrimination
- voting rights
- bans on critical race theory

comprises = consists of

quality of diversity
- political & moral stance
- how Americans exist together

segregated coexistence & living in community are two possible qualities

SC = segregation
LiC = integration

A photograph of my handwritten annotations on the first page of my PDF of Mitchell's article.

Taking Notes on Digital Texts

ns.
ology meant
s a face or
nerate media.
king, reasoning,
ough

Many electronic books, particularly textbooks, often have on-board tools for note-taking as well as looking up words in dictionaries and encyclopedias. When they offer these tools, the companies usually provide guides or demos for using them. It's worth taking a few minutes to look through those guides to learn what you can do.

Some annotation tools allow you to work collaboratively with others. This means that you will have not only your own annotations, but those of other students working on the same text. Currently, Perusall and Hypothes.is are popular in higher education, and your professors may ask you to use them. Again, take a few minutes to learn how the note-taking system works before you start.

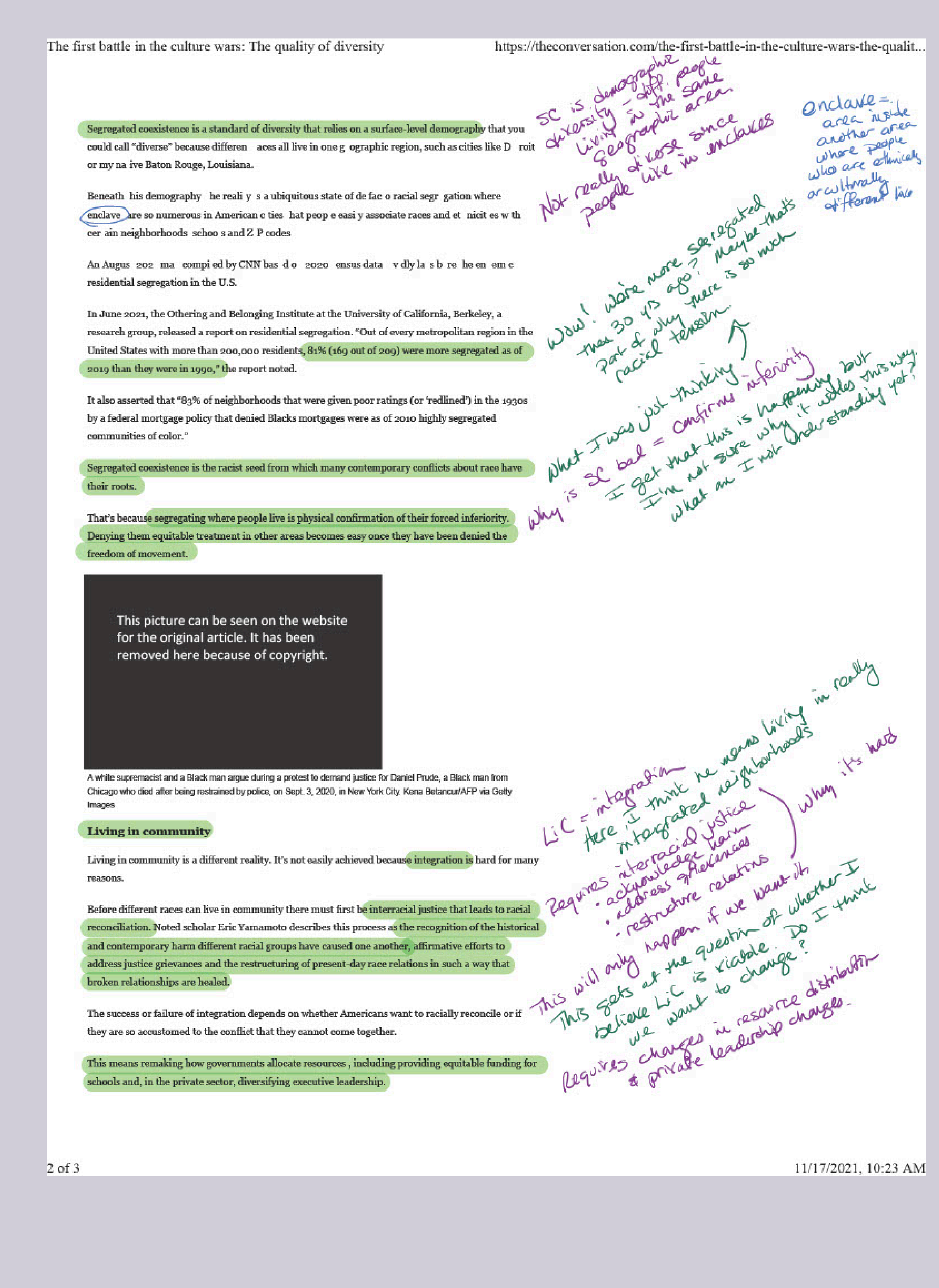
There are also many apps for annotating electronic files, including PDFs and web pages. You'll probably need to try different ones to find something that works for you. I personally use Goodnotes (usable on all major platforms), but some others to consider include Explain Everything (for Android and iOS tablets and phones; also usable on a computer) and Notability (for iOS tablets and phones). These apps (and others sure to come) go well beyond making notes in the margins, allowing you to change colors, draw, and take pictures of material to include, among other features. They can be particularly useful for those with learning disabilities and attention disorders since you can readily vary your note-taking approach. While these apps can cost some money, if they make your annotating more productive, they are well worth it.

Keep in mind that the purpose of annotation on digital texts is exactly the same as on hard-copy texts. You want to make sure that you can use ideas and passages from the text for your learning and your assignments. If the tool gets in the way of that (and your professor isn't requiring a specific tool), try something else.

Example: Notes on an Electronic Text

View the example.

Here is a copy of my notes on the second page of the PDF of Mitchell's article. These notes were done on my iPad with the app GoodNotes, which is my preferred notetaking method as of this writing. I use different colors: purple to indicate summary notes and green to indicate my responses, as well as blue for information I looked up.



The first battle in the culture wars: The quality of diversity https://theconversation.com/the-first-battle-in-the-culture-wars-the-qualit...

Segregated coexistence is a standard of diversity that relies on a surface-level demography that you could call "diverse" because different races all live in one geographic region, such as cities like Detroit or my native Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

SC is demographic diversity - diff. people living in the same geographic area.
Not really diverse since people live in enclaves

Beneath this demography the reality is a ubiquitous state of de facto racial segregation where enclave are so numerous in American cities that people easily associate races and ethnicities with certain neighborhoods, schools and ZIP codes.

Enclave =
area inside another area where people who are ethnically or cultrally different live

An Augus 202 ma compi ed by CNN bas d o 2020 ensus data v dly la s b re he en em c residential segregation in the U.S.

In June 2021, the Othering and Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley, a research group, released a report on residential segregation. "Out of every metropolitan region in the United States with more than 200,000 residents, 81% (169 out of 209) were more segregated as of 2019 than they were in 1990," the report noted.

Wow! We're more segregated than 30 yrs ago? Maybe that's part of why there is so much racial tension.

It also asserted that "83% of neighborhoods that were given poor ratings (or 'redlined') in the 1930s by a federal mortgage policy that denied Blacks mortgages were as of 2010 highly segregated communities of color."

Segregated coexistence is the racist seed from which many contemporary conflicts about race have their roots.

That's because segregating where people live is physical confirmation of their forced inferiority. Denying them equitable treatment in other areas becomes easy once they have been denied the freedom of movement.

What I was just thinking
Why is SC bad = confirms inferiority
I get that this is happening but I'm not sure why it works this way. What am I not understanding yet?

This picture can be seen on the website for the original article. It has been removed here because of copyright.

A white supremacist and a Black man argue during a protest to demand justice for Daniel Prude, a Black man from Chicago who died after being restrained by police, on Sept. 3, 2020, in New York City. Kena Betancur/AFP via Getty Images

Living in community

Living in community is a different reality. It's not easily achieved because integration is hard for many reasons.

LiC = integration
Here, I think he means living in really integrated neighborhoods
why it's hard

Before different races can live in community there must first be interracial justice that leads to racial reconciliation. Noted scholar Eric Yamamoto describes this process as the recognition of the historical and contemporary harm different racial groups have caused one another, affirmative efforts to address justice grievances and the restructuring of present-day race relations in such a way that broken relationships are healed.

Requires interracial justice
- acknowledge harm
- address grievances
- restructure relations

The success or failure of integration depends on whether Americans want to racially reconcile or if they are so accustomed to the conflict that they cannot come together.

This will only happen if we want it
This gets at the question of whether I believe LiC is viable. Do I think we want to change?

This means remaking how governments allocate resources, including providing equitable funding for schools and, in the private sector, diversifying executive leadership.

Requires changes in resource distribution & private leadership changes.

2 of 3 11/17/2021, 10:23 AM

A copy of my notes on page 2 of Mitchell's article done on the electronic version.

Taking Notes Indirectly on Hard-Copy Texts

If you can't write on the text itself, such as when you are using a library book, you can try copying or scanning the pages you need; however, if you need a lot of pages, this can become time consuming (and potentially expensive). Instead, you can take notes outside of the text—either by hand or electronically.

One way to do this is with sticky notes. Sticky notes give you the ability to attach your notes to the relevant pages and passages. The space is limited, but you can use multiple stickies if need be.

Alternatively, you can take notes on your own paper or in your word processor or an app. These methods give you as much space as you need. There is a risk of notes being separated from the text, but if you are careful about your organization, you should be able to find them when you need them.

Double-entry journaling is particularly useful when you need to keep track of both the main ideas in a text and your reactions, thoughts, and writing ideas as you are reading. In some ways, this can work even better than taking notes directly on the text because you aren't bound by the size of the margins.

Example: Creating a Double-Entry Reading Journal

View the example.

To set up a double-entry journal, create three columns. If you are doing this on paper, you can simply draw lines down the page. If you are doing this in a word processing document, you can set up a three-column table.

In the furthest left-hand column, make note of the location in the text. For print sources, pages and paragraph numbers are usually most helpful (which is what the ¶ symbol means in the first column, below). For electronic sources, paragraph numbers are often most helpful.

In the middle column, you write summary only. This is so that you can clearly differentiate what the author is saying from your ideas. In the right-hand column, you write your responses and ideas. Your journal will look something like this:

Location	Summary	Response
Intro ¶ 1-2, 4-5	Diversity is pervasive in American culture now, in voting rights and housing and education.	I hear and read about it all the time.
Intro ¶ 3	We usually think about diversity in terms of demographics.	How else would we think about it?
Intro ¶ 6-8	Quality of diversity should be part of the conversation. Quality of diversity is "a political and moral stance from which equity and inclusion derive meaning." It's "how Americans exist among each other."	Quality of diversity here sounds like we have choices about how we understand diversity and that if we understand it different ways, we can have things different from how they currently are. If this is true, then the definition of "quality" that Mitchell is using sounds a bit more like a characteristic than a standard, but there's a bit of both here. Definition Comprises = consists of
Intro ¶ 8-9	Mitchell lists two possible qualities of diversity: "segregated co-existence" and "living in community." He equates SC with segregation and LiC with integration.	This gets at the question whether I buy his framework. Do I think these are the only two options? SC sounds like what we live in now. Are there other options? I can't think of any right now, but I want to come back to this as I work on the paper.

Notice that every time you add a summary element, you also respond. Your journal will be most useful to you if you summarize frequently (at least every two or three paragraphs) and if you make a point of responding every time you summarize. If you are diligent about summarizing and responding, you will have a strong record of both your reading and your ideas for a paper when you are done reading. As a result, you will be in good shape to both understand and use what you have read.

Activity: Your Annotations and Notes

Once again, it's your turn, but this time, you should experiment. Using the guidance above, try at least two different ways of taking notes on a reading.

Once you've done taken the notes, reflect on the methods you tried. Which method(s) seem to work well for you? Why do you think it/they worked? Which method(s) did not work well for this reading? Why not?

Can you think of another reading situation where a different method would be better? What is that situation and what method(s) do you think would work better? Why?

Key Points: Annotating and Note-Taking

- No matter what you are reading for academic work, take notes!
- Take notes on the ideas in the text, but also take notes on your ideas as you read and any words or concepts you looked up. Also make sure that you are marking passages that might be useful for any project you are working on.
- Find note-taking methods that work for you, whether you write in books, on digital texts, or in your own notebooks or apps.

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Taking Notes, Photo by Flipsnack on Unsplash

Text Attribution

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Doing Quick Research

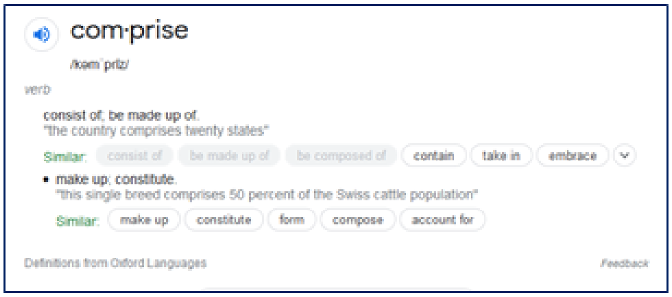
As you read, you might run into ideas, words, or phrases you don't understand, or the text might refer to unfamiliar people, places, or events. It's tempting to skip over those and keep reading, and sometimes you can glean enough information from the context to make that approach work.

However, if you do this, you run the risk of missing something specific or important. Keep in mind that professional writers and academics tend to write with such precision that every word carries meaning and contributes to the whole. Therefore, skipping over words or ideas could change the meaning of the text or leave the meaning incomplete.

Looking these up doesn't take long, and if you use your note-taking skills, you'll have the information right where you need it!

Handling Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Sometimes, texts have glossaries in the back or access to dictionaries built in. Use these, of course, and if there isn't a built-in system, resources like dictionary.com or merriam-webster.com can be very helpful. But if you want to remember the vocabulary, it would be even better to write the definition out, preferably where you need it in your notes.



com·prise

/kəmˈprīz/

verb

consist of; be made up of.
"the country comprises twenty states"

Similar: consist of · be made up of · be composed of · contain · take in · embrace

- make up; constitute.
  "this single breed comprises 50 percent of the Swiss cattle population"

  Similar: make up · constitute · form · compose · account for

Definitions from Oxford Languages

Sometimes, though, the vocabulary is more specialized. This is particularly true for scholarly research articles, where the language is often quite precise. If you aren't finding a definition that makes sense in the context, use what you know about context clues to look beyond the meanings you find in regular dictionaries. Reference librarians may be able to point you to specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias, and you may also find your textbooks helpful. You can always confirm your understanding of the term with your professor.

Improve Your Vocabulary and Your Sentence Structure

Almost every year, I have at least one student who asks me how they can improve their vocabulary. They tell me that they want to stop sounding like a high school student, and they want their writing to sound more sophisticated.

Here’s the short answer: Read!

When you take the time to look up words you don’t know as you are reading, you are expanding the language you have access to. When you read, you are also absorbing the rhythms of the sentences you’re reading, which can influence how you write. If you stop and pay attention to how the author has put the sentence together, you can help yourself even more.

The best part? It doesn’t really matter what you read, as long as it’s written by professionals (people who are paid to write). Professional work not only will have been written by someone who cares about the ideas and the language, it will also have been edited by someone who wants to make those sentences clear and correct.

So, if you love sports, don’t just watch the games or scan the scores; read articles from *ESPN* or *Sports Illustrated*. If you are into music, listen to your favorites, of course, but also read *Rolling Stone* or the website *Pitchfork*. If you’re a gamer, skip Reddit because it’s written by amateurs, but read articles from *Edge* or *PC Gamer*.

Handling Unfamiliar References

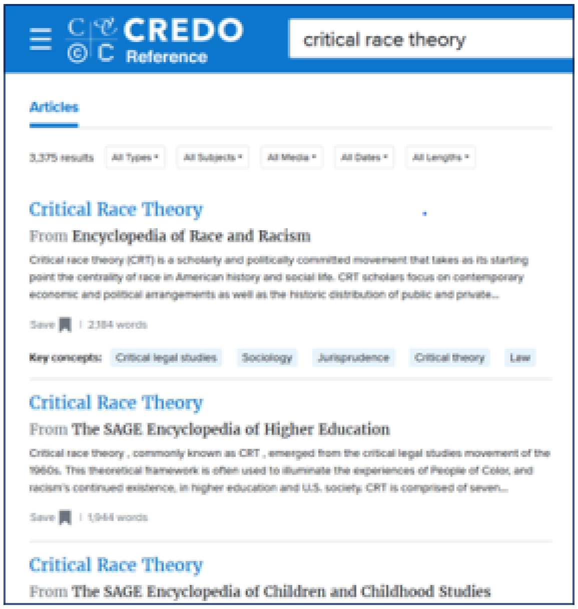
When texts refer to people, places, or events that you haven’t heard of, do a quick internet search. Even a Wikipedia article can be useful to give you a basic understanding, which is often all that you need.

In digital texts, you will also sometimes find embedded links. Don’t hesitate to follow those: they’ll often lead you to resources that will help you better understand the article.

Sometimes, however, the unfamiliar references can be more complex or your search made more difficult by current events. For example, “critical race theory” has been in the news as I’m writing this, so a search for the phrase may not get you a clear description. This is where more specialized reference sources can be helpful.

Your university may have a subscription to a general reference resource like Credo Reference or Gale Virtual Reference Library or Oxford Reference Online. These resources pull together information from multiple reference sources, including specialized encyclopedias, so that you can more easily access them. Because these services cost money, you’ll almost certainly need to access them using your college or library login. Check on your institution’s library website.

Just as with definitions, it can be helpful to jot down in your notes a short version of the information you find. You should also include a note about where you got that information so that you can find it again if you need to.



Critical Race Theory

From Encyclopedia of Race and Racism

Critical race theory (CRT) is a scholarly and politically committed movement that takes as its starting point the centrality of race in American history and social life. CRT scholars focus on contemporary economic and political arrangements as well as the historic distribution of public and private...

2,184 words

Critical Race Theory

From The SAGE Encyclopedia of Higher Education

Critical race theory , commonly known as CRT , emerged from the critical legal studies movement of the 1960s. This theoretical framework is often used to illuminate the experiences of People of Color, and racism's continued existence, in higher education and U.S. society. CRT is comprised of seven...

1,944 words

Critical Race Theory

From The SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies

Activity: Look It Up

In text that you are reading, choose one word to look up. Preferably, you'll choose one that you aren't familiar with (and expand your vocabulary!), but if you feel like you know the definitions for all of the words, choose one that you think would benefit from some clarification. Write the definition(s) in your notes.

Do the same thing for a concept or person or place that is new to you or that you aren't entirely sure of. First, try a basic internet search, and make note of what you get. Try searching for the same phrase in a specialized reference collection available through your college or university library. Write a brief explanation in your notes.

Reflect on looking up the term in different resources. Which did you find more helpful? Why?

Key Points: Doing Quick Research

- Look up words, concepts, people, and places as you run into them in your reading.
- Take notes of what you find in the same place as the rest of your notes so that you have the information where you need it.

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Glasses and Book, Photo by Dmitry Ratushny on Unsplash

Text Attribution

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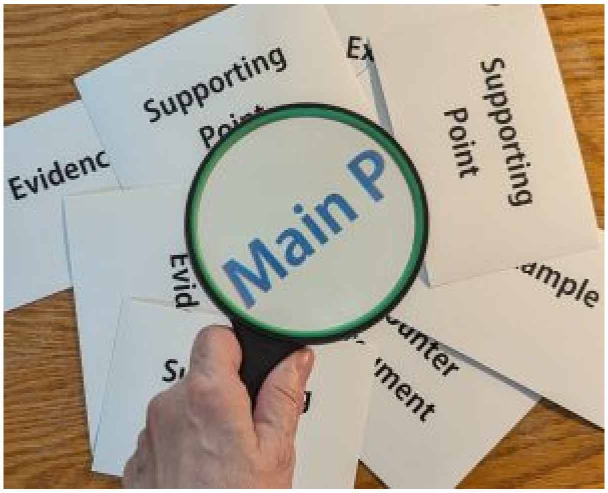
Finding the Main Point



No matter what you are reading or why you are reading it, you want to make sure that you understand the main point. The main point is the key idea that the author is trying to convey in the text.

The techniques in this chapter apply best to nonfiction work, including scholarly articles, informational texts, textbooks, and arguments. While they can also be used for fiction or **creative nonfiction**, strategies for reading literature often work better for these types of texts because literary texts don't always have a clear main point. If you are reading fiction or creative nonfiction, I recommend asking your professor for guidance.

The techniques in this section can be used separately, but they can also be used together.

Break the Reading into Sections

Just like chapters in a novel, informative and other nonfiction texts are often made up of sections. A section of a text has a point of its own. You can think of sections in a text like building blocks, each adding to the structure and content of the whole. In this fashion, each section should contribute at least one key idea to the main point.

Keep in mind that it often takes several paragraphs to work through the explanation of a single point. A section might be as short as a single paragraph, but it also might be much longer—six, eight, ten paragraphs long.

You can treat each section as its own little mini-text and work to find the main point of that section. If you understand the point of each section, you can often piece together the main point by combining the points of the sections.

It is usually helpful to try to summarize each section of text in one or two sentences. When you read those sentences together, you can often more easily see the main point. This approach can also get you started on a full summary of the text.

Texts with Obvious Section Breaks

Sometimes sections will be obvious because they will be labeled with headings. You'll see this in textbooks, for example. These headings work like titles in that they can give you clues about the contents of that section.

Sometimes, headings are **conventional** . For example, in scholarly research essays in many fields, headings such as "**method**," "**results**," and "**discussion**" tell an experienced reader what kind of information to expect in each of those sections.

Even if you don't find any headings, sometimes you'll see extra space between paragraphs, often with a decorative symbol (like ‡ or ***). Even though these dividers have no heading, you can still treat them as sections, but without the information that a heading would provide.

Using Sections to Plan Your Reading

When you have a long text—longer than you can read in one sitting—you can use sections to divide up your time. Think about how long it takes you to read a page of that kind of text and estimate how much reading you can or want to do at one time. If you are taking good notes as you go, you'll have reminders of what you have read, which means you'll be able to pick the text back up quickly. However, it's easier to pick up at a section break than in the middle of a section.

Texts Without Obvious Section Breaks

Sometimes, there are no headings or spacing to guide you in dividing up a text. That doesn't mean that there aren't sections. You just have to look harder for them.

Look first for changes in topics. In some texts, authors will talk about a series of topics that are related but are clearly distinct from one another. For example, a text that describes harms caused by climate change might discuss different kinds of harm—harm to plants, harm to animals, and harm to people—and each of those could be considered a different section.

Other times, however, the changes in topics aren't obvious. In these cases, your best approach is to look at the opening sentences of paragraphs for the **transitions**:

- Transitions that show similarity (e.g., "also," "likewise") or example (e.g., "for instance," "specifically") usually do not indicate a section change. These signal that the author is continuing the same point.
- Transitions that show contrast (e.g., "however," "on the other hand") or sequence (e.g., "first," "second," "next") frequently do indicate a section change. These signal a change in perspective or topic.
- Other types of transitions, such as those dealing with time (e.g., "before," "recently") or consequence (e.g., "therefore," "accordingly") may or may not signal a section change. You'll have to read further or look for other clues.

Transitions are not always just single words, so you may have to look at the structure and meaning of those opening sentences to see how they are setting up the topic of the current paragraph.

Example: Transitional Ideas

Let's take the following sentence and assume that it appears at the beginning of a paragraph: "While some may agree with Jones, others disagree." Technically, there is no transition word in that sentence, but there is a transition idea. The first part of the sentence ("Some may agree with Jones") gestures backward to what has already been discussed (Jones's ideas). The second part ("others disagree") signals that disagreement with Jones will be the subject of at least this paragraph, and maybe more.

Once you have identified sections, you can start working on understanding the point in each one and how that point contributes to the main point of the text.

Example: Mitchell's Breaks

View the example.

A quick glance at Mitchell's text shows three sections. Two of them have headings: "Segregated Coexistence" and "Living in Community." The other section appears at the beginning of the article, so you could think of this one as "Introduction." By the time I reached this point in the reading process, I've already read the article, so I should be able to identify the key ideas in each section.

Given these headings, I would expect that the introduction would set up the article as a whole and would introduce key terms and concepts—the kind of work that introductions do in just about any article. The introduction explains that diversity is not just demographics. It also explains that the "quality of diversity" is a term that Mitchell is using to think about how Americans live together and how we handle the fact that there are differences among us. He says that there are two "stances": "segregated coexistence" and "living in community," which are the other two headings in this article.

"Segregated Coexistence" is the state of affairs now. He points out statistics and census data that show that we live in enclaves, grouped by race and ethnicity. He claims that such segregation creates a base for racism since it places some people in worse conditions than others and grouping like this makes other kinds of discrimination easier.

"Living in Community" is integration. Mitchell says that this is hard because we will have to acknowledge genuinely the race-based harms that have been done, address those harms, and make real changes in our current society so that such harms are avoided. This will only happen if we want it to work.

The last few paragraphs of this section aren't describing "living in community." Instead, they are doing some conclusion work, and I'll talk about this in the next section. Because I believe that I'll need the points in those last four paragraphs to explain the main point, I'll save my thoughts about the main point for the next section. However, notice that my division between this section "Breaking the Reading into Sections" and the next "Focusing on the Ending and the Beginning" is artificial. That is, you would look at the ending and beginning of Mitchell's article as part of breaking the reading into sections.

If I'm taking notes on the sections, I would almost certainly see that the last four paragraphs are really a separate section, just without a section break. Why do I see it as a separate section? At the paragraph beginning with "Doing that work," Mitchell changes topics from explaining the work of living in community to talking about the foundational question we need to answer, "How should we treat those whom we see as different from us?"

Activity: Breaks in Your Article

Using an article you are working on or the article that you've chosen from the example assignment, identify the sections, and write out notes on the key ideas in each one.

Compare your notes with those of a classmate working on the same article. Talk through any differences to help you understand the focus of each section and ultimately identify the main point of the article.

Focus on the Ending and the Beginning

When we read, we remember best what we read last. Authors know this, so they often make sure that they provide some kind of clarity about their main point at the end of a text. If a text is intended to be read through to the end, you are very likely to find the main point there.

Exceptions to the Rule

Not all genres put their main points at the end.

Some, like newspaper articles, put their main point up front—usually in the first sentence. Newspaper articles are written with the expectation that most readers will read the headline and a few paragraphs of the story, so the main point is put right at the beginning (in what is called the "lead," sometimes spelled "lede").

This is also true for articles that use IMRD structure. IMRD stands for Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, and this structure is very common in scholarly research articles in the natural and social sciences. In those articles, the main point can be found in the abstract, within the first couple of paragraphs of the discussion section, and sometimes in the introduction.

If you aren't sure whether you are reading something that places the main point in an unusual place, you should ask your professor for more guidance.

We remember best what we read last, but we also tend to remember what we read first. If you don't see a main point at the end of a text, look back at the beginning to see if it's there. It may also be in both places and a repeated idea is usually a pretty big signal that you have found the central idea.

Example: Mitchell's Ending and Beginning

View the example.

In my example set of notes in the last section, I noted that the last few paragraphs of Mitchell's article aren't really focused on "living in community." In the last four paragraphs, he talks mostly about the debates in our society about how we should treat people from races and ethnicities that are not our own. He says that we should figure out what we want our real-world lives to be like when we think about diversity and that diversity is not just a theoretical issue for debate.

He doesn't give us an answer directly, but it's pretty clear that he thinks living in community is a better option than segregated coexistence. First, he puts living in community last, which is a signal that he thinks it's more important. Second, he talks about things like "domestic stability" in ways that imply that we'll be more stable if we were integrated rather than segregated.

Even though I was pretty sure I had found his main point, I checked the beginning, too, just to be thorough. The beginning focuses on the idea of the quality of diversity in America and how that concept is central to the debates about race relations happening at the time he wrote this article. In other words, he thinks we need to deal with this choice if we want our circumstances to get better.

So, when I put the beginning together with the ending, I see him focused on this central point: that Americans need to think actively about the real-world effects of choosing segregation (our current situation) over integration, which has a much better chance of providing stability in our society. He also suggests that we'll be better people for choosing living in community.

Activity: Your Endings and Beginnings

Using the article that you're working on or the one that you've chosen from the example assignment, examine the ending and then the beginning, and write out notes on the key ideas in each one. Coupled with your notes from the sections, you should be able to write a sentence or two that explains the main point of your article.

Compare your notes and your sense of the main point with those of a classmate working on the same article. Talk through any differences that will help you strengthen your understanding of the main point.

Follow the Topic Sentences

Topic sentences are the sentences that sum up the main idea in a paragraph. In longer paragraphs, they help readers (and writers) remain focused on the key point. But topic sentences can also be read together to get a clearer idea of the main point of an article or chapter or even a section of a text.

Topic sentences are often, though not always, the first sentence in a paragraph, but they can appear anywhere. Since there is no hard and fast rule about their location, you want to watch for them. After you read a paragraph, go back and look specifically for that summary idea, the one that pulls together the specific information in a paragraph.

When you string topic sentences together, you get the gist of the author's point in a text. You can highlight those sentences in your text, but it might also help to copy those sentences into a separate document and read them together. They won't sound coherent, but if you focus on the ways in which the ideas develop, you should be able to identify the main point of the article.

Short Paragraphs

Using topic sentences to identify the main point will only work if the paragraphs are long enough to present fully developed ideas. Newspaper articles, for example, often have only one or two sentences in each paragraph, so trying to read first sentences alone will effectively mean that you're reading the whole article. There's not much point in that.

Example: Not Mitchell's Topic Sentences

View the example.

This approach doesn't work with Mitchell's text. None of his paragraphs are longer than two sentences, so I wouldn't bother trying to identify the main point this way.

Just to show you what this approach looks like, though, let's take the introduction to the book To Be An American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation by Bill Ong Hing, one of the titles I used to discuss subtitles.

The introduction is made up of fourteen paragraphs, averaging just under five sentences per paragraph. Here, I have copied those topic sentences, including information after each about which sentence number it is (the first number) and how many sentences there are in the paragraph (the number after the slash).

¶1 This paragraph has no topic sentence. Instead, there are three sentences of examples of proposals and legislation that would limit immigration and services for immigrants and undocumented residents.

¶2 "Is there any doubt that we are experiencing one of the most potent periods of anti-immigrant fervor in the United States?" (1/6)

¶3 "Much of America is hurting economically, insecure about its economic future.... To many who make up this part of America, the explanation that restrictionists (those who would severely reduce immigrant visas) offer up—the immigrant as culprit—makes sense." (1/7 and 4/7)

¶4 "Since 1965, America has experienced significant demographic changes." (1/5)

¶5 "Not since the first decade of the twentieth century—when southern and eastern Europeans entered in large numbers for the first time—has there been such a dramatic change in the ethnic composition of the nation.” (7/7)

¶6 “These demographic trends, altering the ethnic composition of America, have defined the debate for many modern-day restrictionists on what it means to become an American.” (1/5)

¶7 “Underlying the debate over immigrants and American identity is a concern about the interaction, or lack of interaction, among different racial groups.” (3/3)

¶8 “The current level of anti-immigrant rhetoric is simply not justified on economic grounds.” (3/3)

¶9 “Until we can understand the real causes of our fears about job loss and public bankruptcy, we cannot evaluate immigrants’ actual collective role in our economy.” (2/7)

¶10 “Because the principal complaint of restrictionists today is culturally and socially premised, the primary purpose of my efforts here is to analyze the positions of two broad groups: first, the assimilationists, whose opposition to current immigration is chiefly grounded in cultural or social complaints, and second, the cultural pluralists, the counterpart to the assimilationists, who promote diversity or multiculturalism.... We must all be encouraged to consider a new approach to cultural pluralism which respects diverse views and cultures, which is constantly attentive to race relations, and which shares a common core set of values.” (1/7 and 6/7)

¶11 “In their current attack on the influx of Asian and Latino immigrants and criticism of interethnic group conflict and separatism, assimilationists essentially posit two solutions: terminate or drastically curtail immigration; and Americanize those who are here. In response to these proposals that are couched in a rhetoric of culture, I set forth my own constantly evolving notions of cultural pluralism and what it means to be an American.” (1/2 and 2/2)

¶12 “Immigrant adaptation, and the creation of a common core, must be viewed as the dual responsibility of the immigrant and the mainstream.” (8/8)

¶13 “As I consider these issues, my experiences growing up in a multicultural community and working with immigrants seem relevant.” (1/4)

¶14 “Restrictionists and pro-immigrant advocates do agree on one critical point: we face a defining moment in the nation’s history. The course we choose will tell us much about ourselves.” (1/2 and 2/2)

Notice that sometimes I need to identify more than one sentence to get the point of a paragraph, and when there are two-sentence paragraphs, I really need both of them to be sure about the point.

It also helps to think about where in this book this part of the text appears. The introduction to a book, much like the introduction of an article, should give an overview of the text and lay out the central terms or concepts.

From reading these sentences, especially after reading the full introduction, I can see that the book is going to focus on the positions of “restrictionists” (defined by Hing as “those who would severely reduce immigrant visas” in paragraph 3; a group which includes those who believe that anyone who immigrates here should assimilate with American culture) and cultural pluralists (“who promote diversity or multiculturalism” in paragraph 10). According to this introduction, Hing’s book will be examining these positions in light of his own experiences and in relation to the idea that there are (or should be) a set of core values that define what it means to be American. Hing plans to argue the need for immigrants to be involved in defining that set of core values.

Activity: Topic Sentences in Your Article

Using an article that you're working on or one that you've chosen from the example assignment, first decide whether this approach will help. Remember that it really only works when you have long-ish paragraphs with topic sentences.

If your article has this kind of paragraph structure, copy out the topic sentences into a new document. Using these sentences as a guide, explain the main idea of that article.

If your article does not, locate another reading that you are working on, perhaps for another class, and try this approach. Again, using the sentences that you copy out, explain the main idea of the text.

Compare your notes and your sense of the main point with those of a classmate working on the same text, even if it's not one of the texts here. Talk through any differences that will help you strengthen your understanding of the main point.

Eliminate the Examples

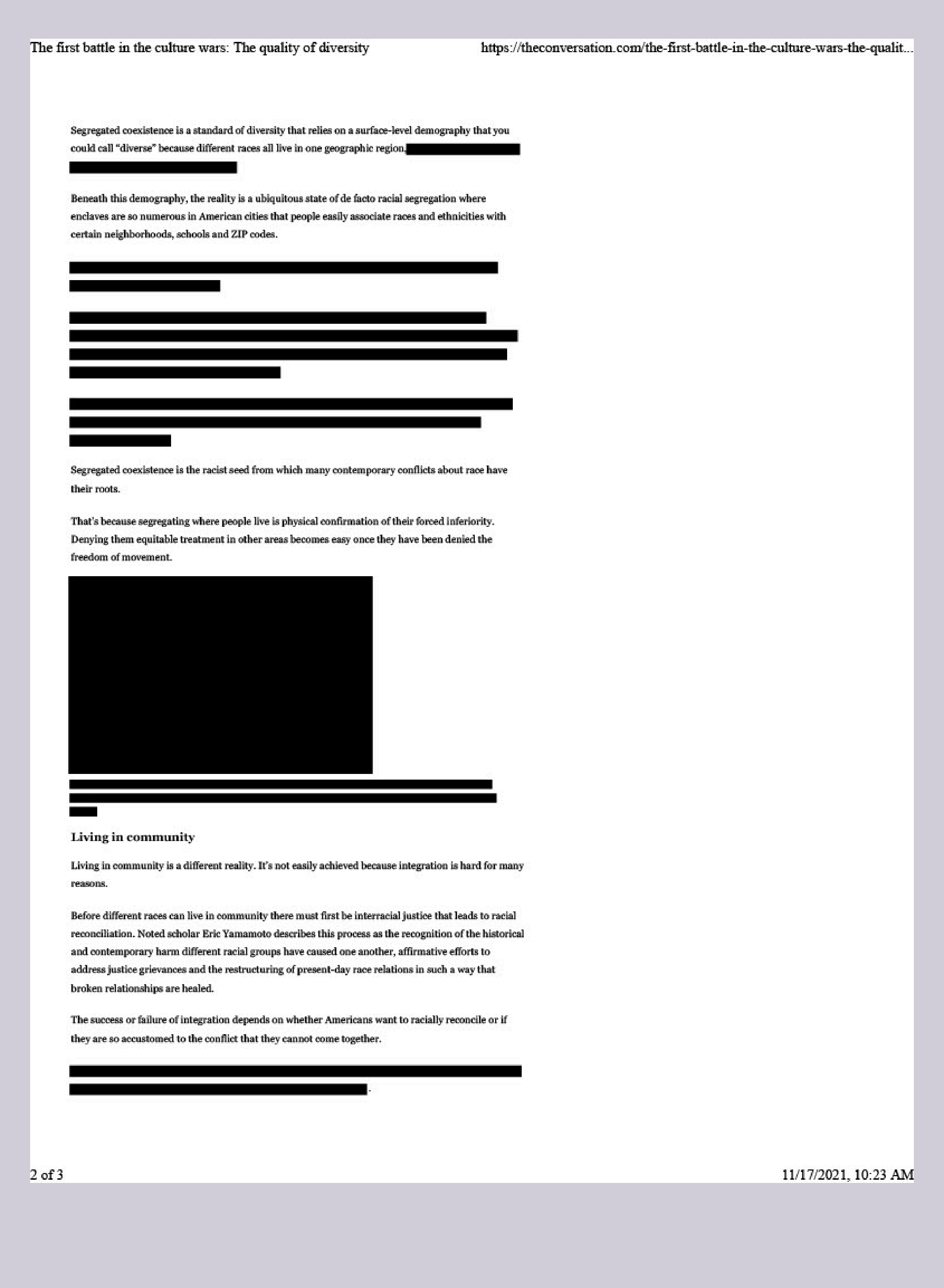
Some texts use a lot of examples. While examples help us understand the point, they will never actually contain the main point of a text. If you find yourself getting caught up in the details or the stories in an article, you can temporarily get those out of the way.

Try printing out a hard copy or copying the article (or the difficult part of it) into a word processor. Then cross or black out everything that is an example. What you are left with will be the author's explanations, and while what's left won't give you a coherent explanation, it should help you find the main point.

Example: Mitchell's Examples Eliminated

View the example.

Here's what happens when I remove the examples from Mitchell's "Segregated Coexistence" section:



Segregated coexistence is a standard of diversity that relies on a surface-level demography that you could call "diverse" because different races all live in one geographic region.[redacted]

Beneath this demography, the reality is a ubiquitous state of de facto racial segregation where enclaves are so numerous in American cities that people easily associate races and ethnicities with certain neighborhoods, schools and ZIP codes.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Segregated coexistence is the racist seed from which many contemporary conflicts about race have their roots.

That's because segregating where people live is physical confirmation of their forced inferiority. Denying them equitable treatment in other areas becomes easy once they have been denied the freedom of movement.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Living in community

Living in community is a different reality. It's not easily achieved because integration is hard for many reasons.

Before different races can live in community there must first be interracial justice that leads to racial reconciliation. Noted scholar Eric Yamamoto describes this process as the recognition of the historical and contemporary harm different racial groups have caused one another, affirmative efforts to address justice grievances and the restructuring of present-day race relations in such a way that broken relationships are healed.

The success or failure of integration depends on whether Americans want to racially reconcile or if they are so accustomed to the conflict that they cannot come together.

[redacted].

With the examples out of the way, we can see more clearly the explanation of what segregated coexistence means and why Mitchell believes that it matters.

Activity: Black Out

Working on a copy of one section from the article that you are working on, eliminate the examples. Using a black pen or highlighter, cross out or cover over everything that is an example, whether it's a complete paragraph, a sentence, or part of a sentence. Read what's left, and write a brief description of the main point of that section.

Identify Who Is Talking

Most authors include viewpoints other than their own in their writing, and if you are going to understand an author's point, you must know when the author is speaking in their own voice and when they are using the words and ideas of others. Most of the time this can be seen through citation or attribution, which is when credit is given to a source even when no citation is provided.

To determine when the author is speaking and when the author is using the voices of others, look for the following:

- Quotation marks and the **attributive tags** that go with them: *Jones says, "The sky is gray today."*
- References to specific people or organizations in the same sentence or in the sentences immediately around the point, even without the quotation marks: *United Airlines has made a point of saying that the sky is gray.*
- Vague references to groups of people, with or without sources provided: *Some say that the gray has a yellow tint.*
- Citations or links to other sources for the information: *The yellow tint to the gray can be caused by the sun (Jones and Smith, 2016).*

You might find it helpful to identify in your annotations or notes how the author is using these voices, either as supporting or opposing voices.

Supporting Voices

Frequently, these viewpoints are supporting the author's position or providing authority for their claims. In effect, the author is saying, "See? These other important and knowledgeable people agree with me!"

While these supporting viewpoints are helpful and even necessary, they are not the same as the author's viewpoint, and so you won't find the main point in these supporting voices.

Example: Supporting Voices in Mitchell

View the example.

Mitchell uses a number of sources to support the ideas he is presenting. Here are a couple of examples:

- He quotes the Othering and Belonging Institute report on the ways that most people living in metropolitan areas feel they are more segregated now than in 1990 and how the legacy of the redlining practices of the 1930s can be seen in present-day segregation. This supports his claim that we currently live in segregated coexistence.
- He paraphrases Eric Yamamoto to explain what would be involved in the process of interracial justice that would lead to racial reconciliation. This supports his point that a change to living in community would be difficult.

Notice that in both of these, Mitchell himself still has to make his own points. In other words, the Othering and Belonging Institute isn't making a specific claim about segregated coexistence—that's Mitchell's claim. And Yamamoto is not explaining living in community. Again, that's Mitchell's point. The sources just provide support for the point that Mitchell wants to make.

Opposing Voices

Sometimes it can seem like an author is contradicting themselves. While sometimes this is true, instead the author is usually presenting someone else's viewpoint as part of their argument. This is called a **counterargument**.

In a counterargument, an author will present an opposing idea in order to respond, usually in a way that explains why the author's idea is better. For example, an author who wants to argue against the use of facial recognition technology might explain what others see as the benefits before making the case that this technology is too racially biased. You want to make sure that you understand when you are reading the author's point and when you are reading the point of a source.

Example: Opposing Voices in Mitchell

View the example.

Mitchell does not directly cite or attribute any opposing arguments. There are no quotations or paraphrases from people who oppose his position. However, the opposing positions are still there. Here are a couple of examples:

- “We tend to think of diversity in demographic terms….” That “we tend” is vague, and it becomes more clearly a point Mitchell opposes when in that same sentence he writes “but that’s an incomplete take.” By offering a contrasting position immediately, we know that Mitchell doesn’t think that it’s enough to use demography to determine diversity.
- At the beginning of the “Segregated Coexistence” section, he writes, “Segregated coexistence is a standard of diversity that relies on a surface-level demography that you could call ‘diverse’ because different races all live in one geographic region….” We know that this isn’t his position, even though there isn’t a citation or attribution because he says, “that you could call ‘diverse.’” This phrasing, plus the use of the **scare quotes** around “diverse,” tell us that he doesn’t buy that position, even though some people do.

There could be several reasons why Mitchell chooses not to identify specific sources for opposing positions in his article. He might, for example, prefer to focus on the alternative he proposes instead of getting caught up in the specific arguments around segregation. Or he might want to imply that these beliefs are vague, something we all seem to “know” without really knowing where the ideas come from. There could be other reasons, too.

Finding the Main Point in the Author’s Voice

Authors bring in other voices to support their ideas or to explain where their ideas are preferable. These voices serve as evidence in their writing, but just like examples, the evidence cannot speak on behalf of the author. The author must do their own speaking, particularly on their main points.

Keep this in mind as you read and make note of who is speaking at any given point in a text. The voices of others are *not* the author’s voice—and thus will *not* contain the author’s main point. These voices will be support and evidence, and they can help you identify the main point, but they cannot *be* the main point.

Activity: Find the Voices

In the article that you are working on, use the techniques in this section to identify places where the author is bringing in other voices. For each of these other voices, decide whether they are supporting the author’s point or opposing it.

Missing Voices

Sometimes, as you read a text, you will notice that perspectives are missing. There can be many reasons for this. Perhaps the author doesn't want to complicate the issue or wants to focus on a different point. Or perhaps they could be simply overlooking or even intentionally excluding a perspective.

Arguably, some of our significant problems stem from ignoring or silencing alternative viewpoints. Think about how medicine has been tested on men's bodies, but not as frequently on women's. Or how Indigenous peoples have been excluded from conversations about climate change. Or how we are currently seeing attempts to erase LGBTQ+ people entirely in many parts of the world, including the United States.

As you read, you would be wise to pay attention to those whose voices don't appear in the text. When you find those moments, speculate about why that might be.

For example, Mitchell does not offer the perspective of Black people who believe that they would be better off with increased segregation. Why might that be so? He may believe that that position is not reasonable or likely to happen. It's also a very small movement in the United States.

To me, this missing voice doesn't detract from Mitchell's point, but in some texts, the absence of particular voices is significant. For example, if you watch the nightly news, you can get a very skewed view of Black people in the United States since that demographic group is over-represented in crime stories and under-represented in positive stories. Where do Black people get to share their perspectives, and where are they silenced?

While you are not likely to find the author's main point in these silences, these moments can often turn into important points for your own analysis and arguments. Make sure that you make note of these!

Key Points: Finding the Main Point

- The main point in a text is the key idea that the author is trying to convey.
- There are a number of techniques for finding the main point:
    - Break the reading into sections, and identify the main point of each section. Put those together to figure out the main point of the entire piece.
    - Look at the ending and beginning of the text, especially the ending.
    - Examine the topic sentences of each paragraph, particularly when the paragraphs are long.
    - Eliminate the examples.
- Be sure that you locate the main point in a section where the author is making their own point.
- You won't find the main point in the following places:

- Where the author is using a source to support their points
- Where the author is using a source to refute an argument (counterargument)
- Where the author is making vague claims about what others know or believe
- Where the author has missed one or more perspectives

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Finding the Main Point, Photo by Patricia Lynne and Carl Hommel
Two Students Debating by SereDim, used under a CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Text Attribution

This section of this chapter headed "Follow the Topic Sentences" contains material taken from the chapter "Paragraph Analysis" from *The Word on College Reading and Writing* by Carol Burnell, Jaime Wood, Monique Babin, Susan Pesznecker, and Nicole Rosevear and is used under a CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Working Carefully Through Trouble Spots

All of us run into passages or even whole sections of a text that are difficult to understand, even after we look up the unfamiliar words and references. For these sections, we need additional strategies.

Slow Down

While it may be tempting just to push past trouble spots and hope they will not matter for the test or your project, this approach limits both your learning and your success. Instead, try slowing down your reading and working through the sentences one by one.

If you are only dealing with a few sentences, sometimes it can help to identify the verbs and their subjects, separating out each **independent clause** to figure out what it means before moving to the next independent clause.

Follow the Topic Sentences

Reading the topic sentences can help you identify the main point, but it can also be a technique for working through a difficult section, particularly if that section is long.

Eliminate the Examples

Just as with the “follow the topic sentences” technique, you can eliminate the examples to help you work through difficult sections, even if you don’t need to do this for the whole text.

Come Back to the Section

If slowing down doesn’t help—or doesn’t help as much as you’d like—mark the difficult place and move on. Sometimes the meaning of a passage or section becomes clearer after you have finished reading the whole text. Once you have finished reading the section, go back to the trouble spot and see if it makes more sense. Make sure you update your annotations on that section to reflect your new understanding.

Ask Your Classmates or Professor

Sometimes a passage doesn't make sense to you no matter what you do. Don't pretend you understand the material when you don't. Instead, ask a classmate to read through the passage with you. Or if you are using **collaborative annotation tools**, ask a question in that space. Or bring the passage up with your professor—either privately in office hours or in class. Odds are good that if you are struggling with the text, others in the class are, too!

Example: Mitchell's Introduction

When I read Mitchell's article for the first time, I struggled with what he means by "the quality of diversity." This meant that I really didn't understand the introduction much at all. I started by rereading that section slowly a couple of times and looking up "quality" to try to understand this phrase. Ultimately, I gave up and decided to come back to the introduction after I had finished the article. Once I had read the ending, the introduction made sense, and I updated my annotations to reflect that.

Activity: Dealing with Trouble Spots in Your Reading

If you ran into any sections that weren't clear in the text you are working on, try using one (or more) of these strategies to work through the difficult part.

Once you have done that, take a moment to reflect on your experience:

- What did you have difficulty with?
- Which strategy (or combination) helped most?
- Why do you think that strategy was helpful in this case?

Key Points: Working Carefully Through Trouble Spots

- Don't ignore the difficult parts.

- Try slowing down, and if that doesn't help, use some of the strategies you tried for finding the main point; examining topic sentences and eliminating examples can work well in many cases.
- If you're still stuck, mark the passage and come back to it after you've read the whole thing.
- Ask your classmates and/or your professor for help.

Media Attribution

Student Working, Photo by Tim Gouw on Unsplash

Rereading

There is plenty of text in the world that we only read once: texts from friends, billboards, magazine or **webzine** stories, novels we're reading for fun. But when we are reading to further our learning and to work with the material in the texts, it pays to reread.

Don't let yourself think that rereading is a deficiency or weakness.

Ask your professors. We reread material for our classes, even though we may have taught it for years. Why? Two of the big reasons are (1) to refresh our memory and (2) to review the material in light of what we know now that we didn't know when we read the text the last time. I regularly notice ideas in a text on a second or third reading that I didn't notice the first time through.

This doesn't mean that you will need to reread everything from beginning to end, and if you have taken good notes, you won't have to. But you should expect that you will need to reread difficult or important sections of a text to confirm your understanding and glean new insight. And you'll definitely need to reread at least the parts of the texts you are going to write about. For example, in writing this chapter, I have reread Mitchell's article in whole or in part at least five times. Probably more, but I wasn't keeping track.

Good readers reread. Professional readers reread. Experts reread. You should reread, too.

Activity: Reflecting on Rereading

In the previous section, I asked you to use some strategies to work carefully through difficult sections. This meant that you almost certainly reread at least some material. But even if you didn't, try rereading a section now, and answer the following questions:

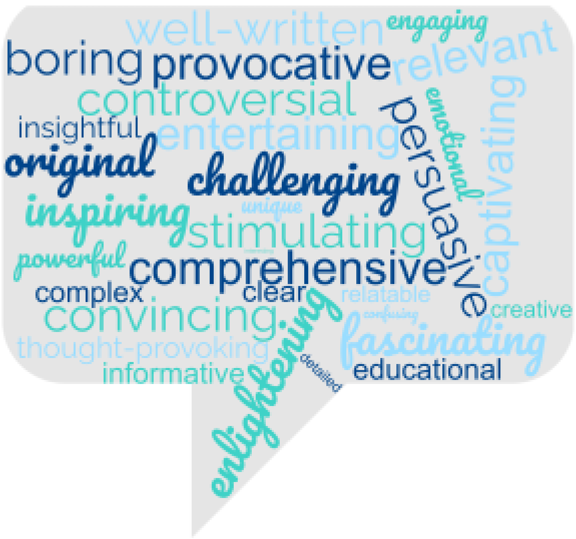
- What do you understand better as a result of your rereading?
- What did you notice during the rereading that you missed before?
- What, if anything, did you learn from rereading the text?

Key Point: Rereading

- Reread

Responding to What You Are Reading

Reading may seem like a solo activity, but in fact, when you work with a text, even if you are the only one reading it, you enter into a conversation with it, responding with your thoughts, ideas, and feelings. As you read, your annotations can and should include these responses, particularly the ones that are significant to you. Those responses can help you learn the material because we remember better the things that we care about. They can also help you process the ideas in the text, which can help you develop your own. Working through your response can also help you prepare for class discussions.


well-written
engaging
boring
provocative
relevant
controversial
insightful
entertaining
persuasive
emotional
captivating
original
challenging
unique
inspiring
stimulating
powerful
comprehensive
complex
clear
relatable
convincing
confusing
creative
thought-provoking
fascinating
detailed
informative
educational
enlightening

The way each of us responds to any text has a lot to do with who we are: our age, gender, education, cultural background, religion, ethnicity, and so on. Those responses are also grounded in our experiences: what we have done and seen, where we have lived, who we have known. Our identities and experiences form a context for engaging with a text.

While it is possible to misunderstand a text, there is no such thing as a "wrong" reaction. You feel what you feel, and your experiences with the text are your own. But when working with a text, you want to do more than let those feelings and experiences float by on the surface. Instead, try to think them through a bit.

These responses can help us both process a text and use it. Our responses can help us identify questions, concerns, and issues involved in the text, which can become elements in our learning.

Here are some guiding questions to help you:

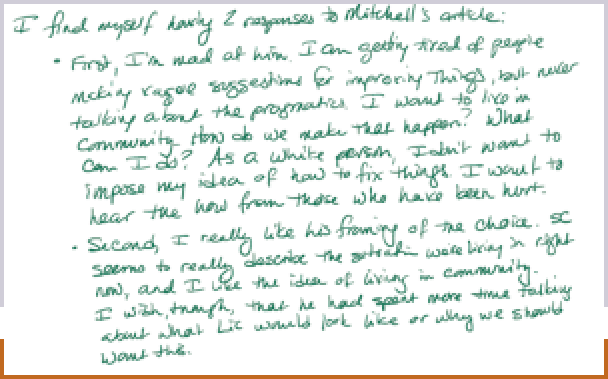
- Do you find yourself responding with a strong emotion? If so, why do you think that may be happening?
  - Are there ideas that challenge ones you have held in the past?
  - Can you identify with the text's central idea or the information it's sharing?
  - Have you had any experiences like those being described?
  - Are you finding the ideas or even the language of the text uncomfortable or even disturbing?
- What questions do you have about the ideas and the text itself?
  - Are there areas in the text where you want more information or additional examples from the author?
  - Are there circumstances or perspectives that the author didn't consider?
  - Are there questions you would want to ask the author?
- Are you reading easily and fluidly, or are you finding it difficult to navigate the text? Why do you believe this is so?
  - Does the organization of the text make sense to you?
  - Are you seeing connections among ideas easily or are those connections difficult for you to make?
  - Does the language use (e.g., punctuation, dialect or jargon, complex sentence structure) affect your ability to work through the text?

Example: My Response to Mitchell

I wrote my responses (in the image to the right) on the last page of the PDF file of Mitchell’s article.

This has the advantage of being right where I need them when I’m thinking about the text.

Also, writing a response doesn’t have to take a lot of time; I wrote mine in about ten minutes.



I find myself having 2 responses to Mitchell's article:
- First, I'm mad at him. I am getting tired of people
making vague suggestions for improving things, but never
talking about the pragmatics. I want to live in
community. How do we make that happen? What
can I do? As a white person, I don't want to
impose my idea of how to fix things. I want to
hear the how from those who have been hurt.
- Second, I really like his framing of the choice. SC
seems to really describe the situation we're living in right
now, and I like the idea of living in community.
I wish, though, that he had spent more time talking
about what LC would look like or why we should
want this.

Writing to Learn

I didn’t realize that I was mad about Mitchell’s lack of specificity until I wrote about it. This kind of thing happens frequently to me. I don’t necessarily think about my responses until I write about them. In writing down our ideas, we figure out what we mean, what we care about, and what we think.

You may hear this called “writing to learn.” Instructors sometimes assign short, low-stakes writing assignments (like free writes or journals) to get students thinking about their ideas in a space that doesn’t have a big impact on your grade. But even if an instructor doesn’t require this kind of writing, you can use it for yourself.

Activity: Your Responses

Take a few minutes and write out your responses to the article you have been working on. These can be in the form of a paragraph like I did, but they could also be in notes or drawings or even part of your annotations.

Once you have written your response, take a moment to think about what you have learned or otherwise gained specifically through that response. Do you better understand something about the article? Do you have an idea for a paper topic? Do you see a connection that you didn’t before? Something else?

Key Points: Responding to What You Are Reading

- Your responses to texts can be very helpful as you try to use them.
- Include your responses in your notes and annotations.

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Summarizing and Reflecting on a Text

Once you have finished reading and annotating the text—and responding to it either in your annotations or in a separate writing—it's a good idea to put that text into the context of the course and your learning. Doing work like this helps cement the ideas in our memory.

Summarize

When you take the time to summarize, you are gathering up what you know about the author's main point and putting it into words. Elsewhere in this textbook, I have more guidance for writing summaries, but even if you aren't being asked to write a formal summary, taking the time to answer key questions about the text will help you use the text more effectively later.

Read back through your annotations and notes, and jot down answers to questions like the following:

- What is the author's main point?
- What are the supporting points that lead to that main point?
- What evidence does the author provide to support those points?
- What examples does the author use, and how well do those examples explain and clarify the point?

Topic vs. Main Point

Be sure that you answer the first of these questions with something other than a topic. For example, I could say that Mitchell's text is about the choices we have regarding racism. While this statement is true, it doesn't tell me much about Mitchell's main point, only his topic.

Example: Summarizing Mitchell

View the example.

I'm not going to write a full-blown summary here so that you have the opportunity to write your own if your instructor has decided to assign this. However, here are my answers to the questions:

- Main point: Mitchell argues that we need to choose between "segregated coexistence," where people of different races and ethnicities live in enclaves but mostly stay separated from one another, and "living in community," which he calls integration. He favors the latter.

- Supporting points: Mitchell explains that we have been living in segregated coexistence for a long time and argues that this status feeds inequity and racism in our society. He claims that living in community is difficult to achieve and that we can only do this if we decide that we don't want to live in conflict any more.
- Two examples of evidence:
  - He uses statistical demographic data from the Othering and Belonging Institute to support his claim that we currently live in enclaves.
  - He uses Eric Yamamoto's description of the process of interracial justice that leans to racial reconciliation. Eric Yamamoto is a professor of law and social justice at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He's internationally known as an expert on racial justice.
- Two examples of examples:
  - He gives Detroit and Baton Rouge as examples of cities that appear to be demographically diverse but that are really made up of enclaves.
  - He gives the example of "equitable funding for schools" as something that the government must do if we are going to be able to live in community.

Activity: Your Summarizing Work

Again, using an article you are working on or the article you have chosen from the sample assignment, answer the questions that are listed earlier to help you summarize the main point and understand how the supporting points, evidence, and examples work in that article.

Reflect on Your Purpose

In your notes from when you were focusing your reading, you should have information about why you were assigned this text in the first place. Take a moment and review those notes. Then think about how this text can be used in light of that focus.

You might find it helpful to jot down answers to questions like the following:

- Given what I know now, why was I asked to read this text?
- What parts of the text will be most useful for the purposes I've identified? Make sure to note specific passages where appropriate.
- How does this text fit in with other texts that we're reading in this course or that I'm reading for this

assignment?

Example: Reflecting on the Purpose for Reading Mitchell

View the example.

When I go back to the assignment, I see that I am being asked to think about Mitchell's terms and apply those to one of the readings from the list in the assignment. The assignment lists three terms, so I need to make sure I understand the following:

- "Segregated coexistence"
- "Living in community"
- "Quality of diversity"

If I'm going to use this text successfully, I must make sure I understand what Mitchell means by these terms—not just what I think they mean. In my annotations, I have already marked some passages that deal with these terms, but it would be helpful for me to write my own **paraphrases** of them.

As for why I was asked to write about Mitchell, this assignment is a kind of analysis in which the professor wants me not only to understand terminology from a text, but also to apply those terms in a context where they are not necessarily used.

Some of my reflection will depend on what else has been going on in the class. Here are some examples:

- If we've covered quotations and paraphrases, then the professor is probably expecting me to use those well.
- If we've covered paragraph development, then the professor is probably expecting me to make sure I am using enough evidence and enough explanation to make my point clear.
- If we've covered thesis statements, then the professor is probably expecting me to develop a clear thesis that makes an arguable claim and that provides the reader with some idea of the reasoning behind that claim.

One way to reflect on what I should be focusing on would be to review the syllabus and my notes up to that point.

Notice that this part of my reflection isn't about Mitchell's text. This is a writing class after all, so a good part of the purpose of the assignment would be to practice skills relevant to writing in college.

Activity: Reflecting on Your Purpose

Again, using your own article or the one that you have chosen to work with, answer the questions that are listed earlier to help you link the article to the purpose you were given for reading the article. Focus not only on the assignment, but also look over the syllabus to think about what you have been working on in class.

Reflect on Your Learning

Many of the texts we read hold meaning for us in ways that we don't expect and that aren't necessarily related to our coursework and projects.

Explore this possibility through questions such as the following:

- What did you learn from this text or from the experience of reading this text?
- What surprised you about this text?
- What would you like to learn more about?

Example: Learning from Reading Mitchell

View the example.

Reading Mitchell's article taught me a number of things:

I hadn't really thought about diversity in something other than demographic terms before. The possibility of "living in community" is intriguing to me, and I am thinking about what I can do to foster that kind of integration in my teaching, in the university, and in my work in the community. For example, as I am writing this textbook, I am thinking about assignments and activities that would help all of my students feel represented in what they read here. Specifically, I am considering having students add images and examples to this text that speak to them.

I already knew that I was pragmatic, but Mitchell helped me solidify my desire to understand concrete changes and actions that I can take. My resentment at the vagueness of how we get to "living in community" makes me want to talk to people who do this kind of work to get better ideas. I would like to learn more about how I can support this kind of change.

Activity: Reflecting on Your Learning

Using your own article or the article you have chosen to work with, answer the questions that are listed earlier to help you think about what you have learned both from the content of the article and your experience reading the text.

Key Points: Summarizing and Reflecting on a Text

- To make sure that you understand what you are reading, be sure to summarize the text, focusing on the main point, but also including some of the details.
- Go back to the notes you have on the purpose for reading the text to make sure that you are able to address that purpose as fully as possible.
- Take a moment to reflect on your learning, including your experiences with the text. This can help you generate ideas and remember the text better when you need to.

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Reading in College and Elsewhere

As you almost certainly know by now, you will be asked to do a lot of reading in college. It is not enough, though, to let your eyes skim over the words. You're routinely going to be asked to use what you are reading, so you need to make sure that you are understand both the texts and the uses your professor asks you to make of them. I hope that in this section you have learned some strategies that will help you read more effectively and more efficiently.

I also hope that you can also see how these strategies can also help you beyond college. Whether it's reading the latest medical advice about a condition that one of your parents has developed or instructions for filing your taxes or suggestions for taking on leadership roles so that you can do more for your favorite local nonprofit, reading well will serve you and your needs for much of your life.

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PART III

WRITING PROCESS IN COLLEGE

Why Writing Process in College?

Writing is like lots of other -ing words: It is both a thing and an activity. Think about skiing, for example. Dictionaries define it as a noun (which means that it's a thing), usually as a sport. But isn't it also a verb kind of word? That verb-ness of -ing words pulls the notion of action into the noun.

Where there's action, there's usually a process, but the process will look different depending on the activity.

Activity: Describing a Process You Know Well

Pick an -ing that you know how to do well (e.g., singing, juggling, running, playing a sport). Describe the process of doing that activity. What are the steps or stages?

Now think about trying to teach that process to someone else.

- How would you start a beginner, someone who doesn't know the activity at all?
- How would you teach someone who is at an intermediate level—they've done the activity before, but only at a basic level?
- What could you teach someone who is an expert themselves?
- What could you learn from someone who is an expert?

This text does not presume that you are a beginner at writing. After all, you have probably been writing for most of your life at this point. This would put you at least at the intermediate level. However, if you are reading this book as part of a college writing course, you probably aren't at the expert level yet. At the very least, you probably don't have much experience with writing at the college level.

Because you are not a beginner, you probably have strategies that have worked for you in the past, and some of those will continue to work for you in college. Others, however, may not serve you quite so well. For example, pulling an all-nighter (which we've all done at one time or another, myself included) will not work for many of the longer and more involved writing assignments you are likely to see in college.

This section of *Reading and Writing Successfully* is intended to guide you in thinking about your own writing process. While much of the advice here will apply in other venues—including workplace writing—the focus in this section is to help you develop a strong process for your college writing assignments.

Thinking about Writing Process

Writing has a trajectory. You begin with an assignment or a desire to write, and you end with a final product. The in-between parts vary substantially from person to person and even task to task, which means that you may have multiple processes. But the overall trajectory for writing tasks is similar enough that we can talk about it.

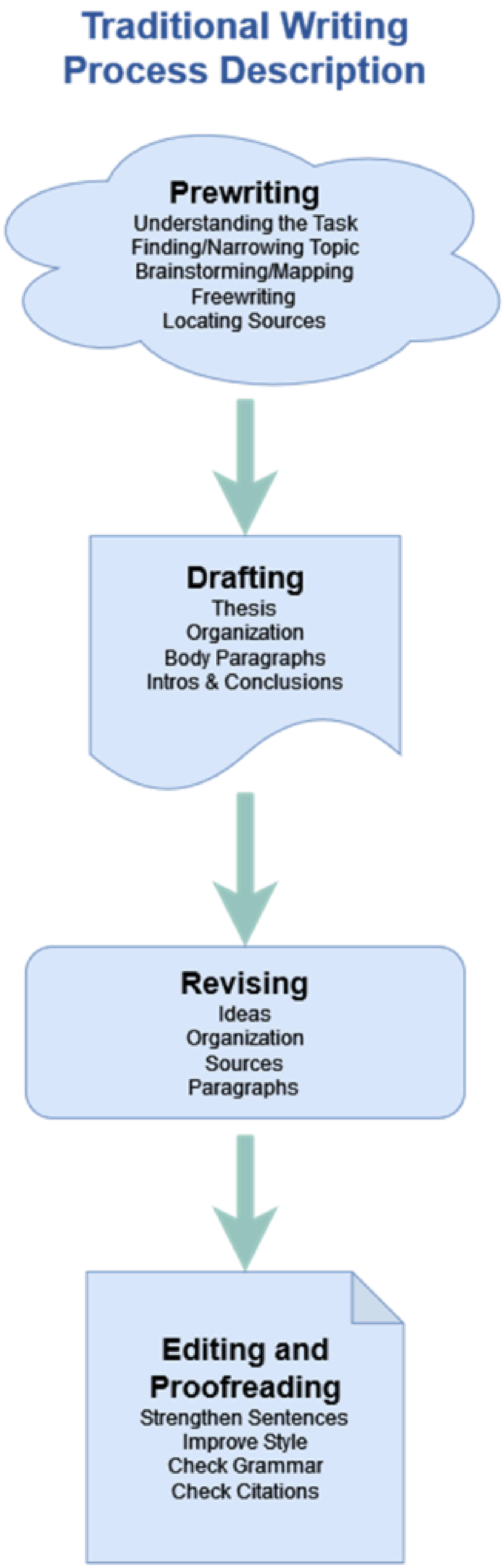
You may have seen diagrams of the process that look something like the one on the right. It's a bit over simplified, but in general, the writing process has frequently been described in relatively linear terms as a movement from prewriting to drafting to revising to editing and proofreading.

You may also have heard that this process is **recursive**. This means that writers frequently go back to earlier stages when, for example, they discover a new idea that needs additional prewriting and drafting work before it can be incorporated in a revision. Sometimes such recursion will appear as arrows linking the stages in reverse.

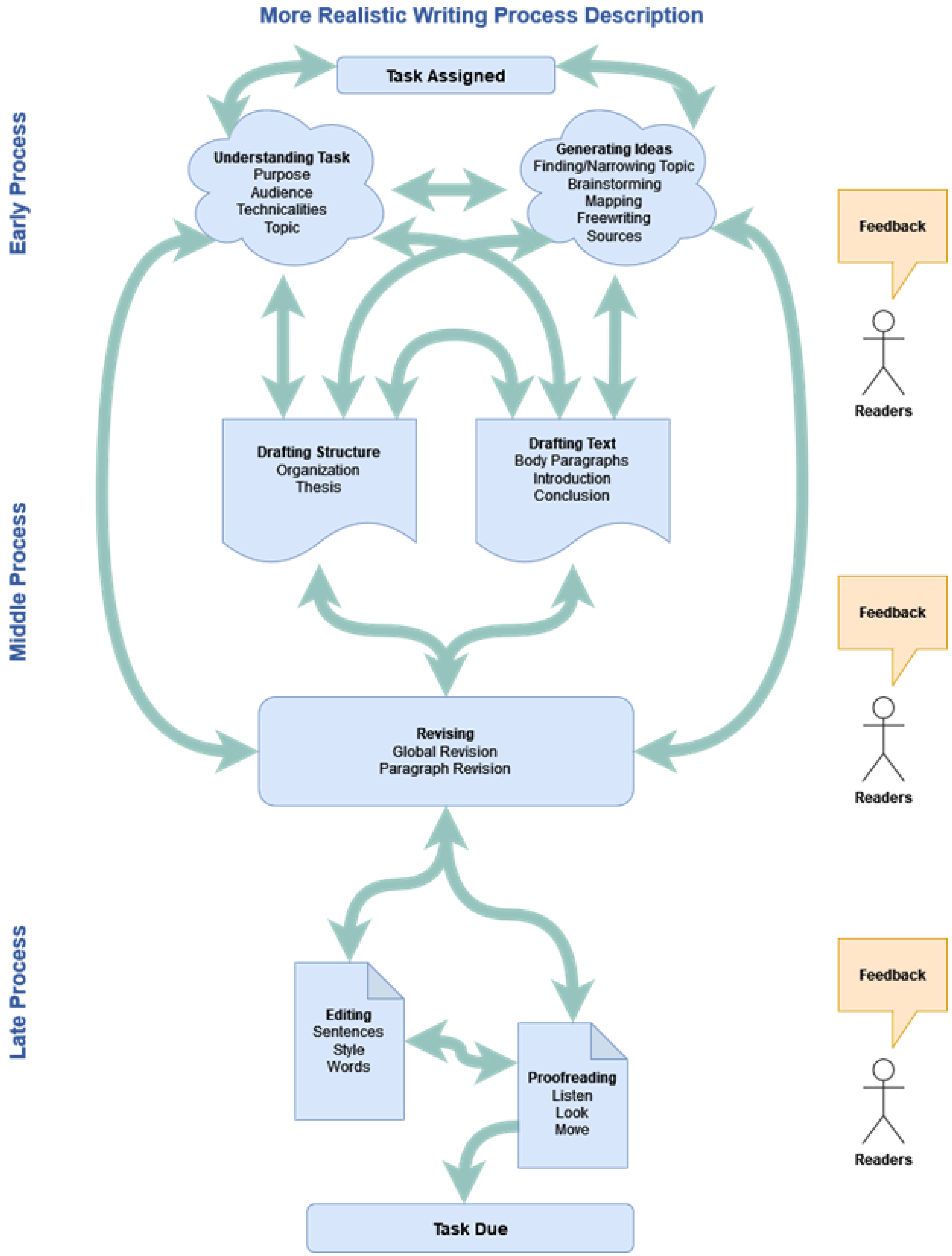
Some models will include feedback from readers, usually in between the drafting and revising stage. Feedback at this stage usually helps writers refine their drafts and produce better revisions.

This image presents a relatively neat process, and it implies that if you just follow the steps, you'll come out with a finished project. But the process is rarely this neat—or even neat at all.

Compare this with the model depicted in the image below.


Traditional Writing Process Description
Prewriting
Understanding the Task
Finding/Narrowing Topic
Brainstorming/Mapping
Freewriting
Locating Sources
Drafting
Thesis
Organization
Body Paragraphs
Intros & Conclusions
Revising
Ideas
Organization
Sources
Paragraphs
Editing and Proofreading
Strengthen Sentences
Improve Style
Check Grammar
Check Citations

Traditional image of the writing process. Image created by Patricia Lynne, ©2022 CC BY-NC 4.0.


More Realistic Writing Process Description
Early Process
Middle Process
Late Process
Task Assigned
Understanding Task
Purpose
Audience
Technicalities
Topic
Generating Ideas
Finding/Narrowing Topic
Brainstorming
Mapping
Freewriting
Sources
Drafting Structure
Organization
Thesis
Drafting Text
Body Paragraphs
Introduction
Conclusion
Revising
Global Revision
Paragraph Revision
Editing
Sentences
Style
Words
Proofreading
Listen
Look
Move
Task Due
Feedback
Readers
Feedback
Readers
Feedback
Readers

A more realistic model of the writing process. Image created by Patricia Lynne, ©2022 CC BY-NC 4.0.

The trajectory stays the same (assignment to final version), but there can be a lot of variation as we move through the "stages" in between:

- Some writers like to get their ideas out on paper or screen quickly, collapsing prewriting into writing and revising.
- Some writers like to think long and hard about what they are going to write before ever touching the keyboard.
- Some writers like to write the perfect introduction before they do anything else.
- Some like to skip the introduction until the end of the first draft.
- Some want to read everything they are going to write about first; some want to read as they go.

None of these approaches is "right" or "wrong."

This text describes a writing process trajectory as represented in this image. At each "stage," I present a range of techniques and strategies for that kind of work.

As you use this text, try focusing more on what you are trying to accomplish by writing instead of the order of the stages. While it is important to keep making progress on an assignment, it is actually more important to recognize, for example, whether you are ready to revise or whether you need to go back to the assignment itself to focus on your purpose.

With each of the strategies I suggest, your mileage may vary. My recommendation is that you try them with an open mind, particularly the ones that your instructor recommends. Be ready to consider approaches that have not worked for you in the past or that you have never tried. You might find something new that will help you write more successfully.

Procrastination

Some writers like to wait until the last minute, cramming all of the stages into one draft done quickly, declaring, "I do my best work under pressure!" Here's a secret: If this describes you, consider changing your habits. One-night-wonders (the results of such procrastination) may be enough to get by, but they will *never* be your best work. Particularly in your major, you want your best work to shine.

Economy vs. *Copia*

Before we get too far into "the process," I want to think about general attitudes and habits toward writing.

Let's start with the "I hate writing" attitude that quite a few students have expressed to me over the years. If you hate writing now, I'm not going to promise that you'll come out on the other side of this text or this course loving writing—or even necessarily hating it less. But I have designed this book to help you feel more comfortable with writing because you'll know more about how to succeed in the writing tasks that you'll be given in college.

Even if you don't hate writing, you may have developed an attitude or habit around writing that is particularly harmful: **economy** in writing. Students are very busy people. Technically, if you are taking a full load of courses, you should be working more than forty hours a week on your academics. As a result, students tend to think that they should only write only to the minimum word count and then stop.

More than 40 hours?

According to federal regulation 34 CFR 600.2, a credit hour is defined as one hour of instruction plus two hours of work outside of instruction (Code). While there are adjustments and exceptions (for courses like labs), in short, this means that each credit hour requires three hours of work from you—generally one in the classroom with the instructor and two outside on your own.

I know this is a writing textbook, but let's do a little math. If you are taking a 3-credit course, then, you should be putting in nine hours, and if you are taking a 4-credit course, you should be putting in twelve.

If you are taking five 3-credit courses (a typical full load in many institutions), you're expected to put in 45 hours between class and preparation time.

If you are taking four 4-credit courses (again, a typical full load), you're expected to put in 48 hours.

So, yes, really. More than 40 hours.

Students who write economically rarely produce more than a first draft. Remember what I said about one-night wonders? Those first drafts might be good enough, but they won't be your best work. Not everything in our first drafts is really that good. In the process of writing this book, for example, I have probably thrown out nearly as many words as I have written—if not more.

In an economic approach, you end up turning in subpar work, keeping words you have produced just because you have produced them.

In ***copia*** (from Latin, meaning "abundance"), writers write a lot. They produce words freely, writing more than the assignment requires so that they can find the best 900 words in the 1500 that they have produced. When writers—including students—take this approach, we are able to produce better writing because we have more to choose from.

One key thing to know here is that *copia* doesn't really take more time than economy. If you have ever written economically, think about how long you stared at a blank screen or piece of paper, agonizing over what to say and how to say it "right." You probably didn't save any time over jumping in and writing whatever you were thinking, even if those thoughts weren't very coherent and didn't quite fit into the project at hand.

If you had jumped in and started writing, you might have pushed your thinking into better territory faster, and some of what you wrote might have actually been good enough for your final version, even if you ended up throwing out a bunch of words.

If you have been an economic writer in the past, this might be a good moment for change.

Key Points: Thinking about Writing Process

- There is no single writing process.
- Your process is likely to be complex, but that’s not a problem.
- You will never produce your best writing at the last minute.
- If you allow yourself to produce more words than you need for the assignment, you will have choices.

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Prewriting 1: Understanding the Task

Sometimes, you define the writing task, but in college, it's more likely that a professor gives you a writing assignment. Either way, if you do not understand the **parameters** of the project, you will almost certainly struggle with it. When I use the word "parameters," I am referring to the guidelines of the assignment. Mostly, these will be determined by your professor, but sometimes you have a say in those guidelines.

For your writing assignments, you want to make sure you understand the following:

- The purpose(s) of the assignment
- The audience(s) for the final project
- Technical information such as sources and length
- Your topic

We'll talk about all of these in this chapter.

Understanding Purpose

What are you supposed to do? And why? These questions are central to any writing task.

Too often, students think about the first question in technical terms: "I'm supposed to write a four-page paper on a significant issue in my hometown." While the number of pages does matter (and we'll talk about this kind of technical requirement shortly), there are more significant questions that this kind of simplification doesn't answer. What are you supposed to say about that issue?

- Are you explaining the issue?
- Arguing for a solution?
- Trying to identify points of compromise?
- Providing a historical overview?
- Something else?

If you don't understand what you are trying to accomplish in the assignment, you are unlikely to be successful.

Identify the primary purpose

Specific assignments differ, but at the core, we can identify three **primary purposes** for writing:

- To inform: Informative writing provides information and explanations to the reader.
- To persuade: Persuasive writing works to convince the reader.
- To entertain: Entertaining writing provides the reader with enjoyment.

These aren't mutually exclusive. Can you imagine a successful argument, for example, without good information to back up the claims? Similarly, information can be persuasive, even if the writer isn't actively trying to convince the reader of anything. Finally, think about how many novels have been written to make a case for something.

But one of these purposes will be *primary*. That is, the professor will be most interested in seeing you focus on *one* of these things. It may be fine for you to do more than one (check with your professor), but one will be more important than the others.

For most college writing assignments, the primary purpose will probably be either to inform or to persuade. Be sure you know which you are being asked to do, and if you aren't sure, ask your professor.

Find the Verbs

Remember the whole "-ing" discussion at the beginning of this section? Writing is an action, and verbs are action words. Examining the verbs in an assignment can help you understand its purpose.

One way to get started is to locate the verbs—and sometimes the verb-like words—in your assignment. It can be helpful to underline, circle, or highlight those words. You can annotate assignments just like you can **annotate** any other text! If you need help identifying verbs, look at the section of the Editing chapter with that name.

What, exactly, is your professor asking you to *do*?

Different verbs indicate different purposes:

- Verbs such as "summarize" and "compare" are asking you to demonstrate your understanding (which is primarily an informative task).
- Verbs such as "examine" and "analyze" are asking you to break your topic down and explain how it works (which is primarily an informative task).
- Verbs such as "assess" and "recommend" are asking you to evaluate something related to your topic (which is primarily a persuasive task).
- Verbs such as "synthesize" and "combine" are asking you to bring together multiple sources and/or viewpoints (which is primarily an informative task).

Keep in mind that there may be more than one purpose for a writing assignment. For example, a professor may ask you to summarize an event and evaluate the public's response to it. These would be two different acts in your paper, one of which would be informative and the other persuasive.

Sometimes the verbs in the assignment you have been given are vague, using words like "write" or "create." When that happens, you'll need to look beyond the verbs to identify the primary purpose. You can also use the guidance in the section on Intellectual Work to help.

Activity: Setting up a Reminder Note

Using a writing assignment that you are currently working on, create a sticky note (on paper or on your computer) or some similarly sized message reminding yourself of the primary purpose of that assignment. The post-it message should list the primary purpose and the key verbs that identify what you are supposed to do in the assignment. Place the post-it where you will see it while you work on that assignment.

Considering Your Professor's Reasons

You are being asked to write something for a reason (or you have a reason yourself). Understanding what that reason is—and there are probably multiple reasons—can help you write successfully.

When you are writing for yourself, you are more likely to know your reasons. Perhaps you are trying to write a song to capture the feeling of a bad breakup. Perhaps you are journaling to work through a difficult transition from home to college. Perhaps you are writing a grocery list so that you won't forget what you need at the store. Perhaps you are taking notes in your biology class so that you will better understand the material.

Professors have lots of reasons for asking students to write, but these reasons may not be obvious to students. Often, professors want to see essays or lab reports or business plans because these types of tasks ask students to do multiple things at once. For example, a lab report may be asking you to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge related to the experiment, familiarity with the conventions of scientific writing, and critical thinking about the connections between the experiment and the results. These kinds of assignments are called "complex" and "performance-based" because they are asking for evidence of multiple competencies at the same time.

Try looking for a statement of the objectives of the assignment. Language like "by the end of this assignment, you will…" can give you clues about the learning that the professor would like to see demonstrated in the final project. Sometimes, you'll see statements about how you are expected to use prior knowledge; this will be a purpose, too. And if you don't see these statements and you aren't sure what you are supposed to be learning from the assignment, ask!

Activity: Why Are You Writing This?

With a current assignment, make two lists:

- The first should contain your reasons for completing the assignment. What do you want to get out of the writing project?
- The second should contain the reasons you believe the professor has given this assignment. What does the professor hope you will be able to demonstrate by the final version?

Compare your lists with a classmate. If your first lists differ substantially, consider why that might be (people have *lots* of individual reasons for writing).

More importantly, compare your second lists. If there are significant differences, discuss those, and consider bringing questions about the assignment's purpose to the professor.

Understanding Audience

Once you know your purpose, you need to think about your audience.

You may have heard the term "general audience," which implies that there is a set of general characteristics that most people fit. This idea is a fiction. While we have lots in common with other people, we have very little in common with *everybody*. People have different passions, experiences, and demographic characteristics. These all influence what a person reads *and* how they read it.

Instead of a general audience, think about a ***target* audience**. These are the people that you are trying to reach.

Example: Target Audiences

Think about the target audience for the following:

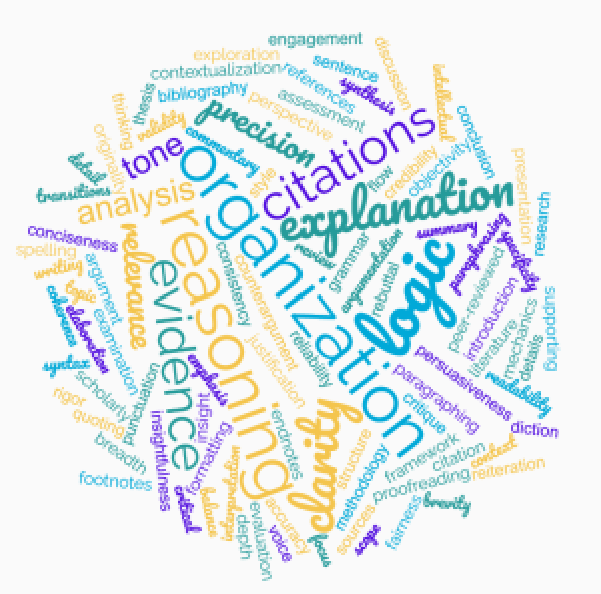
- The Halloween films: People who enjoy being scared and at least somewhat grossed out. These people are mostly men and mostly under 25.
- *Sports Illustrated*: People who follow sports, particularly in the United States. These people are mostly men and their ages vary.
- The Harry Potter books: People who enjoy fantasy worlds and adolescent fiction. These people are mostly women who were young when the series began, but who have continued reading the books.

All of these were written for a “general audience,” but not everyone would enjoy all of these texts.

Writing for Academic Audiences

Many of your assignments in college will be written for academic audiences. What does this mean?

Regardless of their age or gender or personal passions or discipline, academic audiences tend to care about a set of similar characteristics in writing:


engagement
exploration
contextualization
references
sentence
discussion
synthesis
bibliography
assessment
perspective
intellectual
thesis
thinking
validity
precision
conclusion
citations
originality
tone
commentary
credibility
objectivity
presentation
debate
transitions
analysis
style
flow
explanation
research
conciseness
summary
specificity
spelling
writing
relevance
reasoning
organization
review
grammar
argumentation
paraphrasing
logic
consistency
counterargument
rebuttal
peer-reviewed
introduction
topic
evidence
argument
coherence
elaboration
examination
supporting
literature
mechanics
details
syntax
justification
reliability
scholarly
rigor
emphasis
persuasiveness
readability
punctuation
paragraphing
quoting
critique
diction
breadth
insight
endnotes
clarity
framework
context
citation
footnotes
insightfulness
formatting
structure
reiteration
proofreading
methodology
critical
balance
brevity
evaluation
accuracy
depth
voice
sources
scope
fairness
focus

- Logical and critical thinking so that the ideas are contributing some kind of insight. **Critical thinking** is something that you will be asked to develop in most,

if not all, of your college courses.
- Clear organization of ideas so that readers can follow the logic of an entire text
- Careful and complete explanations of your reasoning so that readers can follow the logic of the supporting ideas in a text
- Evidence from credible sources, with an emphasis on sources that are **peer reviewed**, so that the information is trustworthy and significant
- Complete citations so that readers can find the original source material and so that proper credit is given to people for their intellectual work
- Clear and grammatically correct sentences that treat the audience respectfully
- Careful proofreading so that sentence-level errors do not get in the way of the meaning

Academic audiences will have some differing investments, too. For example, your chemistry professor is likely to care about the precision and accuracy of your graphs and charts more than your literature professor, who will care more about your careful and creative uses of language. The more you understand about the particular field you are studying, the more you will understand these expectations.

Writing for Non-Academic Audiences

Even in college, you won't always be asked to write for an academic audience. For example, you may be asked to prepare documents like the following:

- A brochure on the importance of sleep for your peers
- A social media post for a local non-profit organization to advertise their services
- A presentation on a proposed law change for state legislators

Sometimes, you will be asked to deliver these final products to the actual intended audience, which can be a great opportunity to experience the importance of strong communication skills in a live setting.

Other times, you will simply deliver the final product to your professor. However, do not make the mistake of thinking that you should always write as if your professor is your audience. Most professors are very good at putting on the hats of the readers that they want you to write for, and they will read as if they are members of that audience. If you want your writing to be successful, you should always identify your target audience and write as if that audience is the only one who matters.

Considering the Technicalities

Technicalities matter. For example, if you are being asked to produce a text using at least six sources, you need six, not five. Also, you'll want to make sure you know what kind of sources the professor wants you to use and where to find them.

Moreover, using those six sources in a five-page paper is different from using them in a two-page handout or a research poster.

The key technicalities that you need to pay attention to are the following:

- Number and kind of sources
- Length
- Due date

Each of these will influence your writing process in both direct and indirect ways.

Sources

The number and kind of sources will impact the amount of time you spend preparing to write. If you need to locate your own sources, you will need more time to find credible sources, but even if the instructor is providing you with sources, you will need to spend time and energy reading all of your sources carefully.

Length

Students often focus on length to the exclusion of other technical considerations, and they frequently see a high word count or page requirement as a major challenge. However, length requirements can help you address what may be one of your key questions: What does the professor want?

When the assignment is brief, the professor is probably looking for you to focus on what is essential for the assignment. When the assignment is longer, the professor is looking for you to explain your ideas more fully. What is brief, and what is long? This varies by discipline, but in general anything less than 1000 words could be considered brief. In some fields (like history or literature), however, "brief" may be more like 1500 words.

It's also important to know that professors set length requirements as a way to say, "You will need to write at least this much (or this little) to do a good job on this assignment." If you find yourself substantially under or over the length requirement as you write, you should show your professor your work for additional guidance.

The tutors in your writing center can also help you think about the content of your paper and how to meet the length requirements.

Due Date

You can use the due date to plan out your writing process. If you set interim dates for completing various tasks (e.g., locating and evaluating sources, writing a first draft), you'll make each step easier and less panic-inducing.

Your professor may help by providing some of those interim dates, particularly for activities like first drafts and peer responses. But you also know from past experience how long it takes you to do certain tasks. Use your own experience to help you create a plan that doesn't involve you desperately writing your paper in the hours before it's due.

Instead of waiting until the day or two before the assignment is due, you can break down the work and ultimately be more successful.

Assignment Calculators

There are a number of freely available assignment calculators designed for college students. These tools can give you a rough outline of what you should do be a particular date based on the type of assignment and the due date. I like two in particular: one by the Digital Scholarship Unit of the University of Toronto Scarborough Library (Digital) and the other from the University of Waterloo Library (University). I like these because they list multiple types of writing assignments (not everything is a research essay!). If you don't like either of these, try searching the internet for "assignment calculator," and look for one that works for you.

Topic

Normally when students think about their assignments, they think first about the topic: What am I going to write about? I'm putting it last in this section for one very simple reason: All of the other elements in this section can and should influence your choice of topic.

Your assignment is likely to give you **parameters** for a topic choice, but even if it doesn't, you already know that you should write about something relevant to the course. Even if you absolutely love music, you're likely to struggle if you try to connect your love of music to the essay you need to write about the effects of climate change on sea life for your marine biology class.

If you know that you are going to have to make an argument, you'll want to choose a topic that allows you to take a position. It can be hard to take a position on water lilies, even if it's a topic you are deeply interested in. And if you know that you need to provide a logical and objective explanation, it might be best to avoid highly controversial topics, particularly when you have an emotional investment in those topics.

Similarly, if you know you are writing for scholars, you'll want to think long and hard before choosing a personal topic like your experiences with skateboarding—unless you can find an academic angle. And if you have been given a word count of 1200-1500 words, you're going to need a smaller topic than race relations in the United States.

If you decide you want to take on a challenge like those I've described here, I strongly recommend that you talk with your professor early in the process so that you don't find yourself scrambling at the end.

The Generating Ideas chapter will give you some techniques to help you come up with a topic if you are stuck and to help you refine your topic if you think you have a good one.

Checking Your Assignment Again and Again

As you write, return to your assignment and your notes about the tasks to make sure that you are accomplishing what the professor is asking for. It's a good idea to do this at several key points in your process:

- As you are gathering your ideas and sources, check to make sure that your topic is in line with the assignment and that you are gathering the number and types of sources that your professor wants you to use.
- Once you have a working thesis statement and perhaps some early draft material, check to make sure that your thesis is setting your paper up to accomplish the purpose of the assignment.
- Once you have a solid first draft, check again that your paper matches the purpose, and check that you have pitched your paper to the audience you've been assigned or chosen.
- As you revise, check again that you are writing on a topic, for a purpose, and to an audience that matches the assignment. Also start checking the technicalities, particularly source and length requirements.
- As a final check before you submit the paper, make sure that your paper meets technical requirements that we have discussed (like length) and those that we haven't (like citation style).

Each of these checkpoints doesn't need to be long or involved. The few minutes involved in these checks may save you considerable time later. Just read through the assignment again to make sure that you're on track. It's a terrible feeling to get to the revision stage only to discover that you have written a paper that doesn't match the assignment.

Key Points: Understanding the Task

- Before you start writing, be sure that you understand the purpose and audience for the assignment.
- Don't assume that you will always be writing for your professor, even if they are the only ones

who will read it.

- Keep the technical requirements, like length and number of sources, in mind as you write.
- Let the purpose, audience, and technical requirements guide your choice of topic.
- Check your assignment throughout your process so that you stay on track.

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Checking Assignment, Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

Prewriting 2: Generating Ideas

In general, it's best to understand your task first and then start digging in to the assignment and your topic. Once you understand your writing task, you'll be ready to start working on your ideas and your sources.

Keep in mind that the process and strategies described in this section are not intended to be overly **sequential** or rigid. Sometimes, you may find that you get new ideas for your paper as you read a source. There is nothing that says that you can't work on developing those ideas *while* reading and annotating your sources. Other times, you may find that you have a new idea to add to your paper while you're revising. Don't let an overly rigid view of the process keep you from jumping to whatever stage is most productive for you.

Also, while you are prewriting especially, tell your inner critic to shut up and go take a nap. You need to be producing ideas, not shutting them down, even if some of them won't work. If you censor yourself too much, you can talk yourself out of any possible topic and get stuck.

Starting When You Don't Have a Topic…Yet

Sometimes the ideas for a paper come to us quickly. We know what we want to write about, or our problem may be too many ideas, rather than not enough. If that's the case, you can skip this section (at least for this project), but you'll want to pick up again when we get to narrowing your focus.

You may feel anxious if you don't yet have a topic, and that anxiety may encourage you to latch onto the first topic that seems vaguely connected to the assignment, even if you don't think it will work. Resist that urge. Finding a workable topic doesn't take much time, and trying to work with a topic that isn't viable or that you hate will ultimately cost you much more time.

So, first, take a breath. Ideas for topics are all around you. You just need to try some strategies to bring out the ones that can work for you.

Activity: Generate Ideas

View the instructions.

If you are stuck for a topic, in 15 minutes or so, make quick notes on the following questions, without worrying about how these notes connect to the assignment (yet):

- Your major: What do you find interesting about your major (or a major you are considering)? What makes you want to pursue that field of study?

- Class topics: What intriguing topics have come up in this class or in other classes? What are you curious about?
- Popular topics: What ideas or issues are people talking about on social media, on the internet, or in popular magazines/newspapers that you would like to know more about?
- Your own knowledge: What are you already familiar with and know well? What do you spend your time on?
- Your passions: What do you care deeply about? What makes you angry or upset? What makes you excited or happy?
- Your experiences: What has happened to you that warrants further exploration?

It's very important not to censor yourself as you write your notes. Don't cross out a topic while you are generating ideas.

Now make a short list. Circle or highlight the topics that are the most likely to work for this assignment. If you have more than one, don't worry. You'll be able to try out the techniques in the next section on more than one topic, which should help you focus in on what you want to write about.

It's also worth doing a quick internet search to get a sense of whether there is information available on your topic. While you won't necessarily use those sources, this search can give you a sense of whether the topic has been hashed over thoroughly and whether it's a recent topic. That search might also give you some additional ideas.

Narrowing or Focusing Your Topic

When writers choose their own topics, they frequently begin with broad topics: stem cell research, child abuse, or climate change, for example. These are all potentially fine topics, but they are far too broad to be covered effectively in most college-level writing assignments. While you can begin with a broad topic, you need to narrow your topic down (also called "focusing") before you'll be able to produce a successful essay or other project.

To narrow your topic, you need to find ways to look at your topic from specific angles or through specific lenses. Let's take, for example, remote learning:

Narrowing Method	**Example of a Narrowed Approach**
A specific time span or era	Remote learning effects during the COVID-19 pandemic
A specific location	Remote learning options and limitations for students in rural areas
The perspective of a specific discipline or subject area	Effectiveness of remote lab exercises for introductory biology
A specific problem, solution, or question	Whether high school students suffer “learning loss” in remote learning situations
A specific subdivision or category within the topic	Effective uses of Zoom classrooms for remote learning
Points to argue for or against	The need for continued remote learning options, particularly for neurodivergent populations
Points of comparison or contrast	Benefits of synchronous online classrooms vs. asynchronous courses for remote learning
Cause and effect	Relationship between remote courses and college retention and persistence

Don’t lock yourself into a narrowed topic too soon. Sometimes, you will figure out the best way to focus your topic along the way, particularly if you are required to use sources. If you start finding too much information, consider narrowing your topic even further. If you are not finding enough information, look for ways to broaden your topic in the research you have done thus far.

Activity: Narrowing a Topic

If you have a broad topic, try using the chart above. Try to find at least one narrowed version of your topic using each method.

Then, highlight, circle, or otherwise mark the topics that you think will work best, given the parameters of the assignment. Length will be important here, but so will sources.

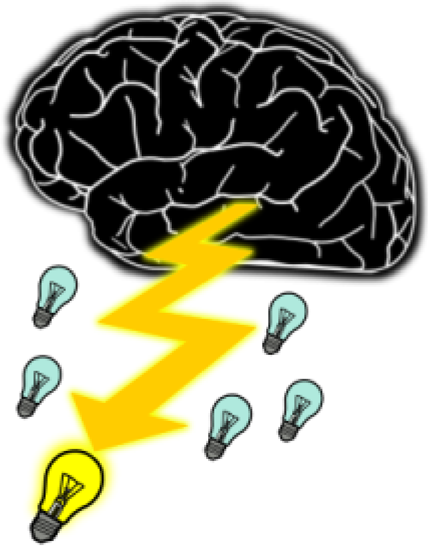
For each topic you think is workable, try doing a quick internet search to see if there are relevant discussions and to see if you get any more ideas for narrowing.

If you aren’t sure whether a topic will work, see your professor!

Starting to Write

It’s never too early to start writing down your ideas. At this phase, you aren’t worried about how strong the ideas are or whether there is research to back them up—or even whether your ideas are good ones. Instead, you are just getting ideas down so that you can more easily examine them.

You are probably already familiar with at least some of the techniques I describe in this section.



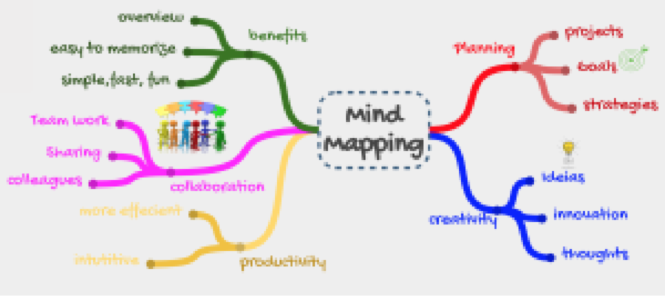
Brainstorming

Write out in a list all of the ideas you have while thinking about your topic. Use the assignment as a guide. If you are supposed to examine the pros and cons of an issue, try to keep your attention on whether something is positive or negative. If you are supposed to explain the reasons that people have for holding a particular position, try to keep your list focused on reasons. But don't worry if you stray. You can always ignore that idea later.

By the way, **brainstorming** can also be used to choose a topic in the first place.

Mind mapping

Also called bubbling or clustering, this technique has you write your topic in the center of a page and draw a circle around it. Then, you start adding ideas to the page, drawing circles around the topics and subtopics and adding lines to connect ideas to one another. The resulting map can give you ideas for details and organization as well as supporting ideas. There are also apps that can help you do this kind of prewriting.


overview
easy to memorize
simple, fast, fun
benefits
Team work
Sharing
colleagues
collaboration
more effecient
intuitive
productivity
Mind Mapping
Planning
projects
goals
strategies
ideias
creativity
innovation
thoughts

Freewriting

Set a timer for 5 or 10 minutes. Put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and write. Don't stop. If you really can't think of anything, write "I can't think of anything" until the time is up or you think of something.

Freewriting is like brainstorming, but in more detail. Just let the ideas flow, and definitely don't worry about grammar and spelling and punctuation. If you write perfect sentences, great! If you write really messy sentences, great! The point is to get the ideas out. If you like the ideas you produce, you can always fix the sentences later.

Controlling Your Inner Editor

Remember your inner editor—you know, the one that I told you to tell to shut up? On many word processors, that inner editor has a friend. Squiggles or underlines appear whenever the software thinks we've made an error. It's easy to get distracted by these marks and to feel the need to fix your writing so that they go away.

While you can turn them off, there is a simpler way to shut the editor down: turn your monitor off. If you cannot turn your monitor off because you are working on a laptop, try opening your laptop flat on the table or putting a piece of paper over the screen. If you can't see the text as it appears, you can't see the lines either!

This can be disconcerting at first, and you will probably still try to correct your mistakes. But eventually, you'll settle in and focus on what you want to say, which is the point.

If freewriting works for you, consider adjusting it to meet your needs. For example, if you might find that 5-10 minutes isn't enough time, try writing for longer periods.

Or try using it in specific situations. For example, I use this technique when I find myself getting stuck trying to write clear explanations. I flip to a new screen and write like I'm explaining the idea to my sisters, who aren't familiar with my topic. Once I find the flow of the explanation again, I copy the part that works into my draft, and I'm back on track!

Using Sources for Ideas

In the fourth section, I talk in more detail about locating and using sources, but for the purposes of prewriting, I want you to think about how you can use sources to generate ideas.

As you read the sources that you are planning to use for your project, use note-taking and reflection strategies in particular, to make sure you are keeping track of things like the following:

- Passages that might be useful in your project
- Ideas for your paper that you get while reading
- Responses to the ideas that you are reading
- Connections between ideas in different sources
- Contradictions between ideas in different sources

Don't just mark passages in a reading that you might use. Take notes on how what you think about those passages and how you might use them. You also might find it helpful to copy these passages and notes into a document where you can start drafting.

Key Points: Generating Ideas

- It's better to understand the assignment, including your purpose and audience, before you start generating ideas.
- If you don't have a topic, explore ideas from other classes, areas you are interested in, your experiences, and issues that you care about for possible topics.
- If you have a topic but need to narrow it down, try taking a specific angle on your topic. There's a list of ways to focus your topic in the table in this chapter.
- Try different ways to get started writing about your topic:
    - Brainstorming
    - Mindmapping
    - Freewriting
    - Taking notes as you read your sources

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"Memorize Mind Map" by Fernandosca is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. The original work was edited slightly for inclusion in this chapter.

Text Attribution

This chapter was revised with the help of students in my class during Fall 2022 (who wished to remain nameless). I am particularly grateful for the idea to include the "Key Points" section here, which I have added most chapters.

Drafting 1: Setting Up Your Structure

At some point in your writing, you will need to think about the order of your ideas. There is no “right” time to do structural work on your writing, but it must be done.

For some writers and some projects, organization happens very early in the process. For example, I tend to write out a kind of rough outline of any long project (like this text) before I generate the content for those sections. For other writers and other projects, this happens later, after some text has been written. I know writers who spend a lot of time freewriting their ideas first and then organizing those ideas afterward.

There are two parts to the organization of academic writing: overall organization and the **thesis statement**. This section talks about both. I discuss the overall organization first because we frequently don’t have a good handle on what our thesis is going to be until we’ve started to organize our ideas. However, there’s nothing wrong with developing your **working thesis** at any point in the process.

Creating a Logical Organization

You are almost certainly familiar with the **five-paragraph theme**. In your opening paragraph, you introduce your topic, and your thesis makes three points about that topic. In the body of your paper, you explain those three points, each in its own paragraph. In the conclusion, you sum up what you just wrote.

This format has probably served you well on exams and standardized tests, and it still can—sometimes. This ready-made structure focuses on clarity and simplicity, which is why it works in testing situations, for example. However, most of the writing you will do in college is more complex, asking you to make more sophisticated connections among ideas. The five-paragraph theme isn’t up to this kind of complexity.

So, if you aren’t using a five-paragraph theme, what do you do instead?

Focusing on Your Reader

Most importantly, think about your reader. What does your reader need to understand first? What do they need to understand after that? And after that? If you focus on what your reader needs to know and when they need to know it, you are likely to end up with an essay that works logically.

Put yourself in your audience’s shoes and imagine their experience reading your work. Try anticipating their questions and challenges. Ideally, you want to address those as close as possible to the moment they would occur during the reading experience.

When you focus on your reader, your organization tends to grow organically out of your topic.

Something else to keep in mind: We remember best what we read last. This means that, most of the time, your most important point should occur late in your essay. You’ll definitely want to highlight this point in your conclusion, but you’ll also want to try to put the details of that point late in your paper, perhaps just before your conclusion, if you can.

Using Standard Structures, as Needed

Some common organizational approaches can also help you think about ways to order your ideas. These should not be used in place of anticipating your reader, but they can be used to help you think about ways to make your logic easier to follow.

Chronological or Sequential Order

When time is important for understanding your point, put first things first and last things last. This kind of order appears frequently in narratives, both full-essay narratives and anecdotes that appear in part of an essay. This order is also useful for explaining processes or historical developments.

Spatial Order

When place is a central feature of your writing, move your reader through that space in a logical way: top to bottom, bottom to top, east to west, west to east, etc. This order is used most frequently in descriptions of locations, but it can also work to explain visuals.

Climactic Order

When you have a series of points that are increasingly important, explain the least important first and progressively move through your points until you get to the most important. This kind of order can be helpful when you need to order a set of similar ideas, such as causes or effects of a problem.

Problem/Solution

When you are trying to propose a solution, you have to explain the problem before any explanation of a solution will make sense. This structure appears frequently in proposals and arguments. Note that the two parts do not necessarily get equal weight in a piece of writing. If the reader is already very familiar with the problem, there is no point belaboring it. If the problem is unfamiliar, the reader will need much more explanation, and you may not get to spend as much time on the solution.

Comparison/Contrast

When you need to address similarities and/or differences, you can organize your ideas either (1) point-by-point, where you alternate between the two things you are comparing or (2) in two main sections, where you explain all about one of the things you are comparing first and then the other. The second approach can also be structured so that you are explaining all of the similarities together and then all of the differences (or differences then similarities, depending on what you want to emphasize).

Conventional Structures

Sometimes, you will run into conventional structures, organizational patterns for texts that have become routine and expected by readers. Usually, your instructor will make clear when you should use a structure like this.

Here are two examples:

IMRD or IMRaD (pronounced as a word: im-RAD)

IMRD is a standard structure for research reporting in many fields, including most natural and social sciences. The initials stand for Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, and each part serves a specific purpose. You've probably already used a version of this in lab reports, and often professors will give you specific instructions about what to include in each part.

Grants or Project Proposals

Grant or project proposals are written in many fields, from business to science to education. They often include many of the same sections: an executive summary, an introduction of the person or organization writing the proposal, a problem statement, a statement of goals and objectives, an explanation of the project design, an evaluation section, and a section on other funding sources and the budget request of the proposal. The specific sections and the order of those sections will almost always be provided by the funding or supervising organization, but the parts are fairly regular.

Writing a Working Outline

It can be helpful to draft a list of the ideas that you know you need to cover and the order in which you plan to cover them. If you draft this kind of outline, you can use it as a guide while you are generating your own writing, moving about in your paper so that you keep your ideas flowing.

For instance, while I was drafting this section, I started by writing a working list of topics. As I started writing in each section, I would sometimes divide up the topic, and sometimes I would move sections around as I thought about what you would need to read and when you would need to read it. I also jumped around as I wrote, writing in different sections as ideas came to me.

Example: Changing My Structure

The section you are reading wasn't originally in this part of the text. I thought I would talk about this in the Getting Words Out section, when I planned to talk about ways to keep yourself writing. However, I realized that ending the Logical Organization section on formal structures would send the message that formal structures are the most important part of organizing your ideas. Instead, I realized that I wanted to focus on what you can do with a working structure, so I moved that section to here.

Writing a Working Thesis

A thesis statement is an explanation of the key point in a piece of writing. For relatively short pieces (roughly 1500 words or fewer), it is usually only one sentence. For longer pieces, it may take two or three sentences to explain, and in very long pieces (like a **master's thesis** or **dissertation**), these can take paragraphs or even a full chapter.

No matter the length, if your reader reads nothing else, they should be able to identify your topic and your main idea from reading your thesis statement alone.

Academic writing almost always has a thesis statement, but not all writing does. You may or may not find thesis statements in personal essays and magazine stories. You probably won't find them in works of fiction.

Characteristics of a Good Thesis

Good thesis statements have a number of qualities:

- They make claims that are arguable.
- They are specific.
- They give your reader some sense of your reasoning.
- They do not express mere preference.
- They make statements; they do not ask questions.

Let's talk about each of these for a minute.

Arguable Claims

CHOOSE
YOUR
BATTLES

A thesis makes a claim that reasonable people might disagree with. This is true whether you are writing a position statement (which, by definition, makes a clear claim about an arguable issue) or whether you are writing a report, which is more focused on objective presentation of information.

In the case of the position statement, the idea of an arguable claim is fairly obvious. For example, "The United States should take in more refugees" is obviously a claim that not everyone agrees with.

But what about a thesis such as "Refugees require substantial resources from the countries that they enter"? This seems fairly obvious, but it is still arguable. An opponent could claim that the resources are relatively small, not substantial, even if they want to talk about the same resources that an opponent would discuss (e.g., food, clothing, and shelter).

A thesis is not a statement of fact. The statement "Refugees leave their home countries because of war, personal danger, and natural disasters" is really just a definition, and so there is nothing to argue here. There is no sense of "so what?" in this statement.

"Reasonable People"

Let's talk about "reasonable people" for a moment. In an academic setting, you are almost never writing to people who will dismiss your ideas out of hand (unless your professor has specifically given you that kind of audience). More importantly, though, in an academic context, you can assume an audience that takes a reasonable approach to the issue. Thus, for example, you could assume that your reader will not take the position that there is never any good reason for a person to leave their home country.

Specific Claims

Thesis statements make specific claims, not vague statements. A claim such as "It is important for the United States to take in refugees" is a weak thesis because it relies on the word "important," which can have almost as many definitions as there are readers. Look for other abstract words and phrases, such as "good," "bad," "things," "important," and "a lot" in your thesis statement. If you see those, try to find ways to be more specific about what you mean.

Similarly, look for places where you want to use "etc." or "and so on" (or other phrases like this). These signal a list that extends beyond what you have written. While these appear sometimes in academic writing, when they appear in your thesis statement, you are signaling that you couldn't be bothered to group ideas from a long list.

As a result, your reader can't determine what you are actually going to talk about and what you are going to leave out. Your thesis statement should be more definite than that.

Reasoning

Your reader wants to know a bit about why you think what you do in your thesis. Let's take the claim "The United States should take in more refugees." If you stop there, your reader immediately thinks, "Why?" Giving your reader some sense of your answer to that question in your thesis will strengthen the opening of your text.

Notice that providing some sense of reasoning can also help make your thesis more specific. For example, with the thesis statement "It is important for the United States to take in refugees," as soon as you add "because" and then at least one reason, your thesis not only presents your reasoning, but it also becomes more specific.

Not Mere Preference

Thesis statements must do more than express personal preference. When I say "I like the addition of refugees to my community," I'm not making an arguable claim because you can't tell me that I don't like something.

These kinds of claims don't necessarily require the first person ("I" or "my"). Saying that "Chocolate is the best flavor" is also a statement of personal preference, as many students and my family have explained to me over the years. In this case, though, it's OK because it means that I get more chocolate.

Not Questions

Sometimes, students want to ask questions to lead into the rest of their paper. While that can work, those questions cannot serve as a thesis statement because your reader needs to know what you are claiming. "Why should the United States allow in more refugees?" doesn't provide your reader with any sense of your claim (do you think that it's a good idea or not?) and doesn't provide any reasoning. This leaves your reader with too many questions.

Remember that your reader should be able to read just your thesis statement and understand the gist of your paper. A question cannot do that work.

Activity: Sample Working Thesis Statements

For each of the following thesis statements, indicate whether it is a good working thesis and if not, why it isn't.

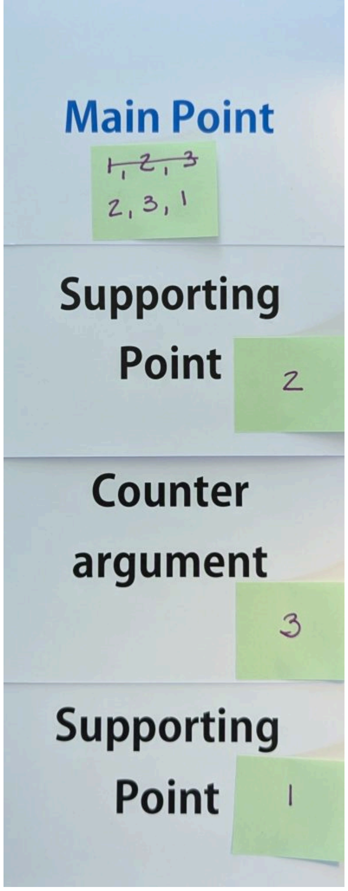
1. Recreational marijuana is legal in more than ten states.
2. How does a state decide that making recreational marijuana legal is a good idea?
3. Legalizing recreational marijuana is a smart choice for states because it provides additional revenue for state and local governments.
4. Legalizing recreational marijuana makes sense.
5. Legalizing recreational marijuana will make it easier for minors to start using this drug, leading to increased use and use of harder drugs later in life.
6. Legalizing recreational marijuana poses interesting problems for politicians.

Placing Your Thesis

The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the introduction, which is where your audience is expecting you to transition from introducing your topic to explaining your points about that topic.

However, this isn't a hard-and-fast rule. In some cases, the thesis works well as an opening sentence. In some pieces, like lab or research reports, the thesis presents the key finding of the study, but it may not appear in the introduction at all. And if you are writing to a hostile audience (one that opposes your ideas), it can be wise to save the thesis for your conclusion. However, normally, your thesis will make the most sense to your reader at the end of your introduction.

Using Your Thesis to Guide Your Structure



Remember that your thesis is part of the structure of your paper. In addition to introducing your topic and claim, your thesis statement gives your reader some indication of the points you will cover and the order in which you will cover them.

Sometimes the order is obvious, as in the thesis for a five-paragraph theme. If you tell your reader that “The reasons to accept refugees include contributions to the economy, cultural enrichment, and moral decency,” but you begin with cultural enrichment, your reader will likely be confused. You said that you were going to talk about economic benefits and you indicated that that reason would be first by its placement in your thesis statement.

But even in more sophisticated thesis statements that avoid listing, there is an implied order. For example, let’s say your working thesis is “Safety concerns make it necessary for countries hosting refugees to thoroughly investigate people coming from hostile nations.” There is an implied order in that statement:

- First, you’re going to talk about safety concerns regarding refugees.
- Then, you’re going to talk about the investigations that are necessary.
- Then you’re going to talk about why this is particularly important for people coming from hostile nations.

But let’s rearrange this statement a bit: “When countries host refugees from hostile countries, they must investigate those refugees to allay safety concerns.” Here’s the implied order in this statement:

- First, you’re going to talk about the situation in which countries host refugees from hostile countries.
- Then you are going to talk about the investigations that are necessary.
- Finally, you are going to talk about how those investigations help people in the hosting country feel safer.

Don’t be afraid to play around with the order of your working thesis statement.

Activity: Rearrange a Thesis Statement

Using a thesis statement that you are currently working on, try reordering the parts of that statement. Even if you cannot come up with the wording you want to do, identify the pieces you plan to cover in your paper and move those around. Try to come up with at least two different structures.

Then, think about your options. Which order do you like better? Specifically, try thinking about which thesis statement sets up your organization so that the most important idea is emphasized at the end of your paper, where your reader will best remember it.

Creating a *Working* Thesis

At some point in your education thus far, you may have been told that you should write your thesis statement before you write the rest of your paper. I have even had students tell me that they have been told that they are not allowed to change their thesis statement after they have submitted it to the teacher. There may have been good reasons for those guidelines in the past, but at the college level, your first (or second or seventh) draft of your thesis statement needs to be able to change as you work on your paper.

- As you write, you may find that the order of ideas that you thought was going to work when you originally drafted your thesis doesn't make sense any more—so you change your thesis.
- As you write, you may find that a new idea has taken over the bulk of your paper and changed your focus—so you change your thesis.
- As you write, you may find that you completely change your mind about your topic—so you change your thesis.
- As you write, you may find that your thesis is trying to cover too much and you need to narrow your topic—so you change your thesis.

You need this flexibility, so in college, it's highly unlikely that you will be asked to keep your thesis statement exactly as you originally drafted it. In fact, you may find yourself writing and rewriting your thesis statement multiple times during your drafting process. These changes indicate evolution in your thinking. In college, that's good stuff!

Eventually, your thesis will have to become settled, but that doesn't need to happen until the revision phase.

Thesis vs. Hypothesis

A thesis can be modified throughout the drafting process, but a **hypothesis** cannot be modified once the study is underway. Once you have designed your research study to determine the accuracy of your hypothesis, you cannot change your hypothesis without changing your entire study. Changing your hypothesis to better fit your results runs the risk of your finding statistical significance where there is none. It's also a kind of falsification of your research.

The purpose of a hypothesis is to guide a research study, so it is a part of a research process. The purpose of a thesis is to guide a reader through the ideas in a piece of writing, but in the final piece of writing, any research has already been done.

Key Points: Setting Up Your Structure

- Your structure consists of two parts: the order of your ideas and your thesis statement. These two must work together for your organization and logic to make sense to your reader.
- The order of your ideas needs to make sense to your reader. Plan to give your reader information when they need it and anticipate their questions and objections.
- When the situation calls for it, use a standard organizational strategy or formal structure (see above), but keep your reader's needs in mind at all times.
- Working outlines can help you plan your writing and keep track of your ideas.
- Treat your thesis statement as a *working* thesis, one that can be modified as you write your paper.
- A strong thesis statement makes specific claims that are arguable and give the reader some sense of your reasoning. They do not express mere preference, and they do not take the form of questions.
- Your thesis statement will usually appear in your introduction—and usually as the last sentence.
- Make sure that the order of ideas in your thesis statement matches the order of ideas in your paper.

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Drafting 2: Producing Text

The previous section focused on the structural part of your drafting work. This section focuses on producing text, turning your ideas into actual paragraphs that serve as the basis for your project.

Keep in mind, though that there is no "right" order to the process here. You may be one of those writers who likes to produce a bunch of freewriting on your way to your draft. In that case, you probably already have lots of paragraphs to work with before you start organizing those ideas. I can't emphasize enough that while there is a trajectory from assignment to final submission, what happens between those points can vary widely. The only "right" process is the one that helps you write successfully.

Getting Words Out

As I was writing this chapter, I found myself getting bogged down in some of the earlier sections. While I had a lot of ideas and material to pull together (as you can probably tell!), I was struggling to write the prewriting sections. The section on reading, which I had drafted first, had gone so smoothly as I worked from beginning to end. This section, not so much.

So, I changed my process. I put together a working outline of this entire section, and then I started jumping around, moving from section to section as the ideas struck me. Sometimes, whole paragraphs emerged. Sometimes it was only a note or two to remind myself of what I wanted to talk about in that section.

If the words won't come easily, there are many strategies you can use simply to generate text.

Put Yourself in the Mood

Try developing a writing ritual. For example, before I write, I clear the desk in front of me except for a handful of fidget toys, and I get something to drink, usually coffee or tea, but sometimes just water. I play one quick game of Sudoku (not more than 10 minutes). If I'm listening to music—which I really only do when my family is being distracting—I have a specific playlist of alternative classical music without any words and which I associate with getting intellectual work done. These rituals help put me in the frame of mind to write.

I've had students tell me that they find writing most successful after they have taken a walk or worked out at the gym. They've described using the same kind of pen or notebook every time (and making sure they had a ready supply of them). Others describe needing to get into sweats or yoga pants. Others find going to one of the quiet floors in the library especially productive.

Think about the circumstances in which you write most productively, and try to set that up for yourself!

A picture of my desk while working on this text.

Avoid Distractions

Put away your phone. Close the messenger and social media apps on your computer. One student I know has a separate login on her computer, one without her social media and game apps, so that she can focus on her work. I shut down my email.

Give yourself the gift of a distraction-free period of time in which to write. You can always reward yourself by letting yourself look at your social media accounts for 10 minutes after you've worked on your writing project for 30 minutes.

Talk to Someone

A conversation with a classmate about your project can be helpful. I'm not talking about a gripe session (though those can help a bit, too) but rather a conversation about the ideas for your paper.

You can also try meeting with your professor to talk through your ideas. If that's too intimidating, visit the writing tutors on your campus. Students seem to think that they need to have a complete essay or at least full-blown paragraphs before meeting with a tutor, but writing tutors can help you think through the ideas for your papers even before any of them are actually written down.

Sometimes that conversation doesn't have to be in person. For example, when I'm stuck, one trick I use is to imagine that I'm explaining my ideas to one of my sisters. One's a business owner and an artist, and the other is an executive assistant. Both are smart, but both usually aren't familiar with what I'm writing about. However, they are also people who know me well, which means that my words tend to flow easily when I'm explaining it to them.

Write Out of Order

Readers (usually) read from beginning to end, but that does not mean that writers must write in that order. Just because your reader reads the introduction first does not mean that you have to write it first. If that perfect introduction is eluding you, perhaps it's time to work on a different section of the project. Try writing out a rough structure for your paper if you haven't already, and then jump to a section where you have some ideas. Even just making notes on different sections can get you going.

Try Freewriting

If you find yourself stuck or unsure how best to say what you mean, try setting a timer for ten minutes and freewrite. Don't forget the strategies that help you ignore the spelling and grammar checkers.

Pace Yourself

If you don't procrastinate, you'll have the time to write a paragraph or two each time you sit down to work on your paper instead of feeling like you have to draft the whole paper at once. It's usually much easier to write 150 words in a sitting than to write 1500. Write some, then take a break and do something else.

Building Body Paragraphs

Academic writing, like most texts, is made up of paragraphs. Body paragraphs are the places where your ideas are explained to your reader, so they do the most work in your papers. If you are writing good paragraphs and those good paragraphs all contribute to your main idea, your likelihood of success increases.

Defining a Paragraph

When I ask students to tell me what a paragraph is, they tell me that a paragraph is a group of sentences that explains an idea in a piece of writing. They know that a paragraph needs to focus on a single idea and that it's where evidence is presented and explained. This is all accurate.

But then we talk about length. They tell me that paragraphs are supposed to be at least five sentences. Or seven sentences. Or eight sentences. Nope. *There is no set length for a paragraph.*

Paragraph Length

If you aren't convinced about the number of sentences in a paragraph, try looking at the first paragraph in a news story. Usually, those are single-sentence paragraphs. Magazine articles might have a few sentences, but they might also have one. Now look at the number of sentences in later paragraphs. Again, the numbers will vary, and you will probably find many paragraphs with fewer than five sentences.

This is true even of academic writing. Look at this textbook and see how many short paragraphs there are. Choose a **scholarly article** in your field and count the number of sentences in the paragraphs. You will almost certainly find at least one paragraph with fewer than five sentences—and probably several.

How long does a paragraph need to be? Long enough to get the job done.

What's the job? Each body paragraph needs to contribute something substantial to your main idea, so they function as building blocks. Introductions and conclusions are also building blocks, but they have special jobs. Body paragraphs do the bulk of the work in a paper.

Paragraphing is necessary to help your reader understand how you want information to be grouped. If you don't write in paragraphs, your reader will almost certainly struggle to understand where ideas separate and how those ideas are connected. As we read, we find it easier to hold onto the ideas if we are able to group them, and paragraphs tell us which ideas the writer thinks should be grouped. We can then string together the core idea of each paragraph to better understand the whole text.

You can think of a paragraph as a simple way to chunk information for your reader, making it easier to understand your thesis as your paper develops.

Each body paragraph needs to make a supporting point or help make a supporting point. This means that each one has to have a controlling idea (i.e., a **topic sentence**), support in the form of evidence or explanation (or both), and **transitions** that link the idea in this paragraph to the ideas in other paragraphs. Let's work through each of these in more detail.

Developing Topic Sentences

Topic sentences, in effect, summarize the main idea of a paragraph, and a reader should be able to get the gist of your paragraph just from reading that sentence. Like your thesis statement, they make the central point clear, so you can think about a topic sentence like a mini-thesis for a paragraph.

However, topic sentences often do more than summarize. Topic sentences frequently link the point in that paragraph to the controlling idea for the project—or for a section of that project, if the piece is long and complex enough—usually through presenting a more specific angle or focus on your thesis statement. If you are explaining the causes of a problem, a topic sentence might identify one specific cause that the paragraph would then explain in more detail. If you are proposing a solution, a topic sentence might acknowledge that your proposal has limitations, and the paragraph would explain those limitations. If you are describing your research findings, a topic sentence might provide an overview of how you collected your data, and the paragraph would provide specific process information.

Examples: Topic Sentences

View the examples.
Let's look at a few topic sentences from this text:

- **Academic writing almost always has a thesis statement, but not all writing does**. You may or may not find thesis statements in personal essays and magazine stories. You probably won't find them in works of fiction (from "Writing a Working Thesis").
- Sometimes, students want to ask questions to lead into the rest of their paper. While that can work, **those questions cannot serve as a thesis statement because your reader needs to know what you are claiming.** "Why should the United States allow in more refugees?" doesn't provide your reader with any sense of your claim (do you think that it's a good idea or not?) and doesn't provide any reasoning. This leaves your reader with too many questions (from "Not Questions").
- What's the job? Each body paragraph needs to contribute something substantial to your main

idea, so they function as building blocks. Introductions and conclusions are also building blocks, but they have special jobs. **Body paragraphs do the bulk of the work in a paper** (from “Definition of a Paragraph”).

Notice that in all of these cases, the bold sentences summarize the key point in the paragraph. If you go back and look at the sections in which these paragraphs appear, you’ll see that they are also contributing to the point of the section, reminding the reader (you!) about the ideas in that section and making connections to the ideas around them.

Thesis statements need to appear in a place where your reader expects them: usually the end of the introduction, but occasionally at the beginning. Topic sentences have no such restrictions. Topic sentences *often* appear at the beginning of body paragraphs, but not always. Sometimes it makes more sense to present your evidence and explanation first, and only after that, would you present your overview of the point. Sometimes, you want to explain some of your points first, and then present your topic sentence, followed by more evidence or explanation. And sometimes, you’ll want to make your topic sentence clear at the end of the paragraph, even though your reader should be able to guess your point.

Example: Topic Sentence Placement

View the example.

Let’s look at what happens when we move a topic sentence around. I’ll use a paragraph from earlier in this section on topic sentences:

- **However, topic sentences often do more than summarize.** Topic sentences frequently link the point in that paragraph to the controlling idea for the project—or for a section of that project, if the piece is long and complex enough—usually through presenting a more specific angle or focus on your thesis statement. If you are explaining the causes of a problem, a topic sentence might identify one specific cause that the paragraph would then explain in more detail. If you are proposing a solution, a topic sentence might acknowledge that your proposal has limitations, and the paragraph would explain those limitations. If you are describing your research findings, a topic sentence might provide an overview of how you collected your data, and the paragraph would provide specific process information.

This paragraph begins with the topic sentence, but that sentence could have appeared in other places in the portfolio. I could have put it in the middle, for example:

- Topic sentences frequently link the point in that paragraph to the controlling idea for the project—or for a section of that project, if the piece is long and complex enough—usually through presenting a more specific angle or focus on your thesis statement. **Thus, topic sentences often do more than summarize.** If you are explaining the causes of a problem, a topic sentence might identify one specific cause that the paragraph would then explain in more detail. If you are proposing a solution, a topic sentence might acknowledge that your proposal has limitations, and the paragraph would explain those limitations. If you are describing your research findings, a topic sentence might provide an overview of how you collected your data, and the paragraph would provide specific process information.

Or I could have put it at the end:

- Topic sentences frequently link the point in that paragraph to the controlling idea for the project—or for a section of that project, if the piece is long and complex enough—usually through presenting a more specific angle or focus on your thesis statement. If you are explaining the causes of a problem, a topic sentence might identify one specific cause that the paragraph would then explain in more detail. If you are proposing a solution, a topic sentence might acknowledge that your proposal has limitations, and the paragraph would explain those limitations. If you are describing your research findings, a topic sentence might provide an overview of how you collected your data, and the paragraph would provide specific process information. **Thus, topic sentences often do more than summarize.**

Part of my job as the writer is to determine which placement is most effective at conveying what I want to convey. And sometimes, it is just a matter of your writing style.

The point is not where you place a topic sentence, but rather that you have one—most of the time. Upon rare occasion, you will want to have your reader infer the main point of the paragraph rather than get that point directly from you. A couple of cautions. First, most instructors will prefer explicit topic sentences. Second, when you take this approach, you run the risk that your point will be misunderstood.

Narration is an exception. Narrators rarely lay out their points in obvious ways. How much would it have taken away from *Star Wars IV: A New Hope* for someone on the Death Star to announce that Darth Vader is the movie's bad guy? But since you won't be writing narration for most of your academic projects, this technique is best used sparingly.

Incorporating Evidence

The bulk of your body paragraphs will be made up of two parts: evidence and explanation. When someone says that a paragraph or project is well-developed, they tend to mean that there is enough of both of these to support the author's point.

Evidence is the material from others; you may have heard this called "support." Evidence is often in the form of quotations and paraphrases, but it also includes facts and statistics, and even just other people's ideas.

To be clear, in this section, I am talking about evidence from texts created by other people. While data you have gathered for a lab or research report would also be "evidence," your professors frequently expect you to use writings and other textual sources to support your claims. In another chapter, I get into the technical aspects of using material from sources, but here, I want to discuss more generally how evidence from other sources functions in a piece of writing.

I prefer the term evidence because "evidence" is neutral until you do something with it. A fingerprint at a crime scene doesn't mean anything until investigators connect that fingerprint with a particular person. The fingerprint itself is neutral until we make meaning with it.

How much evidence do you need in a successful body paragraph? The answer is layered, so bear with me. The short answer is “enough,” with the understanding that “enough” is mostly determined by your reader. You will have to provide enough evidence to convince your reader that what you are claiming is accurate, reasonable, and well documented. Sometimes, a simple paraphrase from a researcher will suffice. Sometimes, you will need to provide a pile of statistical information or quotations from multiple sources. Think about what your reader already knows. The more familiar the information, the less time you will have to spend presenting evidence.

Your reader is the first determiner, but you also have to consider your purpose. If you are writing an informative piece where your primary job is to provide information from reputable sources, your reader is going to expect lots of evidence from your sources. If you are writing an argumentative piece where you are primarily presenting your ideas, your reader is going to expect a bit less from other sources and more explanation from you.

The next layer is that evidence may not be distributed evenly over the course of your paper. As an obvious example, you rarely present evidence in your introduction and conclusion. But you may have some paragraphs in which you need to present a case from a source in detail. You may have other paragraphs that are spent entirely in your explaining your own ideas. So, when you are thinking about how much evidence you need, you’ll want to think about that amount in terms of your entire project, not necessarily in each paragraph.

Next layer: Your professor doesn’t want to hear your sources; your professor wants to hear you. We have a saying, “The evidence speaks for itself.” This is not, in fact, true—at least not in academic writing. You cannot assume that your audience will reach the same conclusions you do just because you point out a fact. You have to provide explanation, and probably more of it than you believe you need.

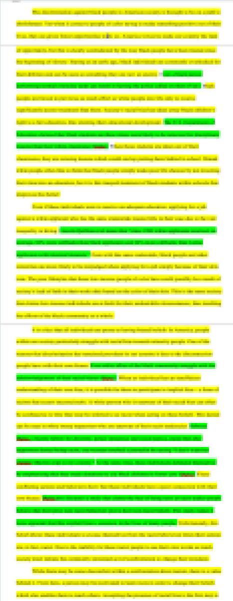
Taking all of these layers together, we can identify some general guidelines:

- In general, you should expect evidence from other sources to occupy 25-50% of your project.
    - For informative pieces, your evidence level may be closer to 50%.
    - For argumentative pieces, your evidence level may be closer to 25%.
- If you are writing a project in which the evidence is coming from something other than textual sources (such as your own experiment results), you will almost certainly have less than 25% and maybe as little as 0% coming from textual sources, depending on the assignment.

Guidelines are not rules, so you should not treat these as absolutely. Instead, if you see yourself veering too far from these, do a check-in. Do I really need that much evidence? Do I need more?

Activity: Evidence/Explanation Balance

This activity can help you visualize the amount of evidence in your draft. Once you have a draft that you think has enough material in it, do the following:



1. Highlight (either with the highlighter feature in your word processor or with a pen) all of the material that is coming from some source other than you.
2. Take a bird's eye view of your paper. Scroll out until you can see the color but you cannot read the text, or lay the paper out on a surface and step back until you get that kind of distance.
3. Do a rough percentage estimate of the amount of evidence you have.

Now consider what this means for adjusting the amount of evidence in your writing, given the audience and purpose for your project:

- Is the overall percentage too much, too little, or about right?
- Identify any sections of your project with too much evidence (and thus too little of you).
- Identify sections of your project with too little evidence (and thus too much of you).

You can use this analysis to guide your revision work.

Providing Explanation

The other half of development is explanation. Evidence presents material from others; explanation presents your own ideas and reasoning. In college-level assignments, your professors are not usually interested in just hearing you piece together the ideas of others. Instead, they want to hear your points about those ideas. Why are they important? Where do *you* think that the authors of those sources are drawing strong conclusions and where are they missing the boat? How do the ideas from your sources apply to your points, given your experiences and your point-of-view? All this and more are involved in your explanations.

If evidence involves between 25% and 50% of your paper, the other 50-75% must come from you. Even the most informative pieces are not simply regurgitations of someone else's ideas. You must be articulating the significance of those ideas, making connections among them, arguing in favor of or in opposition to specific points, and otherwise making your voice prominent in what you write, even when you aren't writing a personal essay.

This seems like a tall order. If the sources are making a good case, what do you have to add? Students seem to struggle most with this in heavily informative assignments. In high school, for example, you may have been asked to construct a report on a given topic that synthesizes multiple sources and your voice might not have been important in that report.

But in college, your professor wants to understand how *you* see the evidence. What makes sense to you, and how does it make sense? If it doesn't, where are the gaps or contradictions? This all gets at **critical thinking**, a topic much larger than this text can cover, but suffice it to say that your professor is less interested in whether you can correctly list all of the facts and more interested in whether you can effectively explain what those facts could mean. This means you cannot rely on evidence to carry you through. Instead, you need to explain your ideas.

Examples: Ways of Explaining

View the examples.
There are many ways to explain—and not all of them involve evidence. Here are some ideas:

Examples of Evidence-Focused Explanations

- Explain the connection between a piece of evidence you are presenting and the point you are making in that paragraph or in the project as a whole.
- Explain how the evidence presented is accurate or how it isn't accurate.
- Provide additional detail to explain how the idea in the evidence works.
- Make connections between pieces of evidence.
- Explain the significance of the evidence you have presented.
- Explain the context of or background behind a piece of evidence.

Examples of Other Kinds of Explanations

- Present your own position and the reasoning for that position.
- Analyze the ideas and/or language of others.
- Walk your reader through the logic of your claim.
- Tie together different parts of your project so that the connections among the ideas are explicit.
- Provide details, examples, or other specific information based on your experience.
- Provide your response to others' ideas.

There are plenty of other ways of explaining your point to your reader. Think about what you want your reader to understand and use that to guide your choices.

Sometimes, students have difficulty figuring out what to say, particularly when writing with sources. When you are writing with textual sources, it can be easy to let your sources do the talking for you. This approach won't work in college—and may even cause you to plagiarize inadvertently. If you've already done a bunch of reading and thinking about your topic, you have the ideas to work with, but if you leave your sources open in front of you, you are more likely to simply repeat what they say.

Activity: Put Your Sources Away

This exercise will help you generate draft explanations in your own words without relying directly on your sources.

After you have become familiar with the ideas in your sources, choose a body paragraph that you haven't yet written that will need information from one or more of those sources.

1. Close your sources, and think about the purpose of the paragraph that you are working on and what your reader already knows.
2. Draft your explanation without opening your sources. Your goal is to explain as much as you can in your own words.
3. If you come to a place where you need specific information from a source, do not open that source (yet). Instead, make a note (e.g., "Need quote from Smith about the number of pigeons in NYC") and keep writing your explanation.
4. Once you have finished drafting your explanation, open your sources and fill in the information.

One more note on the development of your body paragraphs. In much of your academic writing prior to college, you could probably explain your ideas in a single paragraph. In college-level writing, however, sometimes you will need two, three, or even more paragraphs to thoroughly explain a single idea. If you try to cram too much material into a single paragraph, you are very likely to end up with insufficient explanation *and* a paragraph that is way too long.

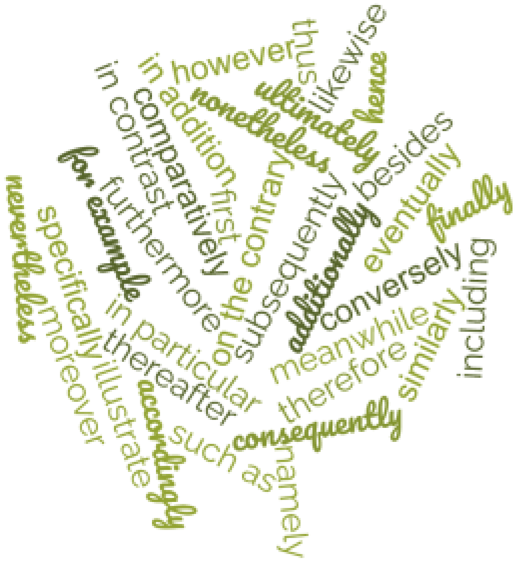
Paragraph Length Revisited

While there is no "correct" number of sentences in a paragraph, your paragraphs can be too short or too long.

In general, you will find that body paragraphs in academic papers will be at least half a page in length when you format your papers for your instructor (usually double-spaced, 11-12-point font, 1" margins). This is because it usually takes at least half a page to present a topic sentence plus enough evidence and explanation to make your point. If you have one or more paragraphs of less than half a page, look to see if they make sense joined with any of the paragraphs around them. You might find that you really need the short paragraph, but make sure you check.

Similarly, if paragraphs take up a complete page or more, you are asking your reader to hold on to a lot of detail without providing them with a way to chunk the information and thus without a way to fully understand your point. Overly long paragraphs can undermine your message. If you find yourself with a paragraph that runs more than a full page, look for a place where you can split the paragraph into two or three sections. You can use **transitions** of similarity to help your reader understand that you are talking about the same topic over multiple paragraphs. See the next section for more on transitions.

Including Transitions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consequently
namely

Transitions make connections among the ideas in our writing. These are the words and phrases that help our writing "flow," a word I commonly hear students use. Transitions do much more, though, than make our writing sound smooth. They provide our readers with logical connections, information about how the ideas in your writing are connected to one another. As such, they are part of your explanations in a text.

Most students are familiar with "transition words," such as "first" and "however." Transition words have a logic to them. For example, words like "also" and "similarly" indicate similarity, while words like "however" and "but" indicate difference or contrast. You can find many good lists of these words and their logic on the internet. One that I recommend is available from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Writing Center ("Transitions").

Sometimes, though, transitions are longer than single words. In long essays, for example, there may be entire transition paragraphs, paragraphs that sum up what has been explained before and that make a connection to the upcoming ideas. Transitions of this length become more common in long academic essays—at least 3000 words and usually more like 6000—so you are unlikely to need to create them until you are doing advanced coursework in your major, and perhaps not even then.

Transition sentences, however, are common in essays of all lengths. These sentences are almost always the first sentence in a paragraph, and they include two logical moves: a "gesture backward" and a "gesture forward."

The "gesture backward" part of a transition sentence references something that has already been discussed, usually an idea that was just discussed in the previous paragraph, though not always. It provides a kind of summary or highlight of a key point that the writer wants the reader to keep in mind as they move into the next point.

Your reader needs you to use transition sentences to help them understand how the old information (what you've already discussed) connects with the new information (what you are about to discuss).

The "gesture forward" part of a transition sentence introduces the next point. Sometimes, this introduction also serves as a topic sentence, but not always.

Unlike topic sentences, which can appear anywhere in a paragraph, transition sentences usually need to be the first sentence of a paragraph (or very occasionally, the last sentence in the previous paragraph) because that is the moment when you are shifting focus.

Example: Breaking Down a Transition Sentence

Let's look at a sentence from earlier in this section: "Sometimes, though, transitions are longer than single words."

- In this sentence, “though” is a transition word that indicates contrast. This tells your reader that you are going to talk about something different from what you have just discussed.
- What will the contrast involve? The reference to “single words” is the gesture backward because this sentence appears right after a discussion of “transition words” that are mostly single words.
- The use of “Sometimes” and “longer than” serve as the gesture forward (and the other side of the contrast), indicating that this upcoming paragraph will discuss times when transitions are longer than single words.

All of these parts work together to help you (the reader) understand the logic that I am using as I explain how transition sentences work.

Transition sentences connect ideas across paragraphs. Readers are better able to understand what connection the writer wants them to make because of both gestures. Notice that the gestures do not need to be of equal weight. It is quite common for the gesture backward—the one that sums up what the reader has already read—to be much shorter than the gesture forward. But there is no hard rule on this.

Transition sentences almost always occur at the beginning of paragraphs because a complete transition sentence must include the gesture forward, which means that it is introducing a new topic. If a new topic appears in a paragraph, it requires explanation in that paragraph or some indication that the topic will be handled later. This happens, for example, when a paragraph introduces two or three subtopics, but details only the first of these in the current paragraph.

Activity: Examining a Transition Sentence

Choose a body paragraph in a draft of a paper that you have been working on, and examine the first sentence. Does that sentence function as a transition sentence from the previous paragraph to the current one? If not, try drafting a sentence that does this work.

Once you have a transition sentence, look for the following parts:

- Is there a gesture backward (some reference to what you have discussed earlier, preferably in the previous paragraph)? If not, could you add one?
- Is there a gesture forward (some reference to what you discuss in the current paragraph)? If not, could you add one?
- What is the logical relationship between this paragraph and the paragraph before? Are there any transition words or phrases that could help make the relationship clearer for your reader?

You can check these opening sentences throughout your work, but this is most effective once you have a solid draft of your project.

Writing Introductions

The job of any introduction is to move your audience from their world into the world of your creation, whether that is a piece of music, an argument, a novel, or a report.

Academic introductions specifically need to do the following three things:

- Introduce your topic
- Explain your position in your **thesis statement**
- Get your reader interested in what you have to say

Introducing your topic tends to be easy and can happen as you do the other two. Just make sure that by the end of your introduction, your reader knows the subject matter of your project. Academic writing is not mystery writing.

The thesis statement is particularly important, and in an academic paper, it must appear in your introduction. Placement in that introduction matters, too. It's almost always clearest to put your thesis statement last. If you place your thesis statement last, you are priming your reader to start understanding the reasons behind that statement. If you put it earlier, your reader might not be sure exactly what you are starting to explain at the beginning of the body of your paper.

If your thesis is buried in the middle of your first paragraph, you run the risk of confusing your reader.

Getting your reader interested is sometimes called a "hook," but before you try thinking about how to get your cousin the basketball player to be interested in your paper on the effects of climate change on aquifers in China, remember what I've said about audience. You aren't writing for a "general audience"; in academic contexts, you are usually writing for a reader who is already at least generally interested in the topic. This means that you won't have to create some kind of catchy way to get them to read your ideas. You will still want to make that topic interesting and relevant, but your opening doesn't need to try to appeal to *everyone*. Instead, think actively about who your reader is and what they already know. How can you get that already-somewhat-interested reader to enter the world of your paper?

There are a number of techniques you can use to open a paper, and the one(s) that you choose will depend on your audience and purpose:

- **Use a quotation, statistic, anecdote, or example, particularly one that might surprise your reader.** If they are surprised by what you say, they are more likely to keep reading. Be careful, though, not to use extremes here. If you do, you are encouraging your reader to doubt your position right from the beginning.
- **Present an overview of the topic.** This could be a (brief) explanation of the background or history of your topic or a description of the sides that people take if you are writing about a controversy.
- **Explain a key term or concept central to your paper.** Doing this kind of explanatory work at the beginning can help your reader understand the more detailed position you are going to take up in your paper. Be careful, though, about opening with a definition from a standard dictionary. Unless you are going to do something with the way that the common understanding is too limited or otherwise misses the mark, these definitions are usually too generic to be useful for academic writing.
- **Ask a question.** Questions can be effective as an invitation to get your reader to start thinking of how they

would answer the question. Make sure, though, that if you ask a question in your introduction, you answer it in your paper. And remember that your thesis statement cannot be a question.

Example: A Good Working Introduction

There are many ways to write an introduction, but here's one example. It introduces the topic and has a strong thesis statement, and it makes the reader curious about the specific barriers:

> The transition to renewable sources of energy is mainly hampered by major political barriers which reduce access to funding, although there are also physical and environmental constraints. In the United States specifically, the financial roadblocks, political manipulation, misinformation, technological barriers, as well as the lack of efficiency of renewable energy sources play a critical role in hindering the goals of transitioning away from fossil fuel sources. In fact, acquisition of capital investments within the American financial system can be politically manipulated despite the U.S. being an open capitalist market. The interplay between inadequate funding, political manipulation, and misinformation presents unique challenges that hinder our transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

Writing Introductions Last

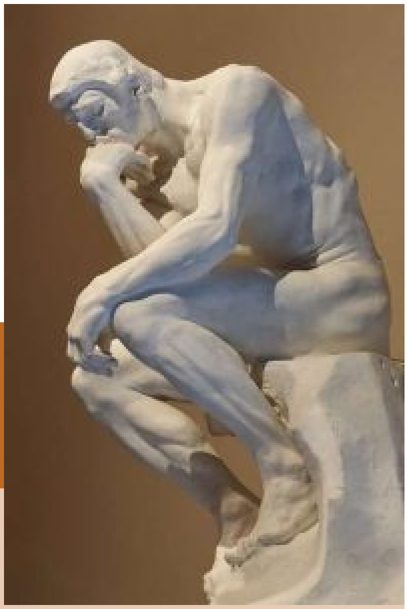
Some writers think that they must write their introductions first, but it is often better to wait until at least most of your paper is drafted. Think of it this way: how will you know what you are introducing and how best to do so before you have actually worked through your project? Personally, I draft my introductions last, after the body and after the conclusion, so that I know my introduction connects well with the rest of my project.

Writing Conclusions

Conclusions are designed to move your reader back out of the world of your paper and into their own world. Ideally, you want your reader changed in some way—at the very least, more knowledgeable about the topic than when they began.

Academic conclusions specifically have two key jobs:

- Remind your reader of your key point
- Move your reader toward some kind of action or change



Not a Summary

In the past, you may have been told to use your conclusion to sum up your paper: say what you said. At the college level, this is not the primary work of a conclusion, and sometimes, you don't need to do any summarizing at all. Think of it this way: if your reader is intelligent—and we're usually assuming they are—do they really need a summary of the two or three pages they just read?

Instead, it is much more important to get your reader to take your ideas back out into their world, so that part should take up the bulk of your conclusion.

Generally, you will want to remind your reader of your main point. This often takes the form of a restated thesis, but you want to make sure that you are not using the same wording as your thesis in your introduction. Sentences that simply repeat what you've said earlier can bother the reader and make you seem lazy, like you haven't done enough thinking about your topic to have more than one way to explain your point.

Depending on how long your project is, you might be able to skip that restatement. For very short projects (500-1000 words), a summary, even a brief one, usually isn't necessary. For papers between 1000 and 2000 words, a sentence or two at most is enough to remind your reader of your key points.

Academic conclusions need a "so what?" answer. You should give your reader a clear understanding of why the topic matters and, where appropriate, what needs to be done. Here are some ways to do that:

Sometimes, you can remind your reader of your point at the same time as you make a case for why your ideas matter.

- **Explain the subject's significance.** Explain why this topic and your position on it matter in the larger world. This approach can work well if you have a topic that your reader might underestimate or minimize.
- **Offer a solution or recommendation.** If you have spent most of your paper analyzing a problem, it is perfectly fine—and even recommended—to offer some sense of a solution in your conclusion.
- **Speculate.** Speculation can work well if you have been analyzing a problem that has no obvious solution or one that people would be resistant to accept. Speculation can also work well if your paper has been proposing a solution. In those cases, the conclusion can emphasize why your proposal is needed.

- **Make a call for more research.** This approach tends to work well when you are exploring a new area of research or a recent phenomenon. Note that you can really only make this kind of call in a project for which you have done extensive research into what is already published. If you don't know the research that is available on the subject, you can sound foolish for asking for more research that has already been done.

A word of caution on all of these. Writers often have the desire to make their topic sound like it is of supreme importance or a matter of life or death. Don't overstate the significance. A college-level academic audience doesn't need extremes to understand the importance of an analysis or the value of a proposal.

Example: A Good Working Conclusion

Just as there are many ways to begin your paper, there are many ways to end it, too. Here is an example of a good working conclusion in three sentences. The first sentence summarizes the paper. The second sentence pushes the reader to act on the issue presented in the paper—or at least keep the issue in mind. The final sentence gives the reader an idea of how the issue can be fixed:

> Renewable energy can be achieved in the U.S.; however, there are critical barriers to this infrastructure. We need to act as soon as possible if we want our planet to survive for the next generation. Most of the responsibility falls onto politicians because they hold the power to change policies and limit misinformation, which would then make it easier for the public and investors to support renewable energy.

Spicing Up Your Conclusion

Some of the techniques that work in introductions can also work in conclusions.

You can, for example, ask a question (and either answer it in your conclusion or make it clear that the audience should answer it for themselves). Be warned, though, that questions like "What would you do?" or "What are you going to do?" are cliched and likely to irritate your reader.

One technique that can be quite effective is to use your conclusion to echo, extend, or answer something that you set up in your introduction. For example, you might open with an anecdote about a person and then close with an explanation of what happened to that person as a result of issues you discuss in your paper. Or you could reiterate a statistic with some discussion about how we can better understand that statistic based on your analysis in the project.

However, these approaches are spice—added flavoring that can make your conclusion more engaging and more memorable. They cannot replace the core work of a college-level academic conclusion.

Key Points: Producing Text

- Especially early in your process, it is more important to get words flowing than to worry about producing perfect paragraphs. Help yourself do this by writing in a comfortable setting, limiting distractions, writing out of order, talking with people about your project, freewriting, and pacing yourself.
- Strong academic body paragraphs usually include a topic sentence (which can also be a transition sentence) and enough evidence and explanation to convince your reader of your point.
  - Evidence presents ideas from your sources.
  - Explanation presents your ideas.
- Your reader needs transitions to understand how you are making connections among the ideas in your writing.
- Introductions must include your thesis statement and an introduction to your topic. They also generate interest in what you have to say.
- College-level conclusions may include a restatement of your thesis, but they do not summarize your paper. Instead, they suggest changes in your reader's thinking or actions based on the ideas in the paper.

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Text Attributions

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The example introduction and conclusion, with some revision by me, are provided by Geoffrey Pierre, a student in my class during Spring 2022.

Getting Feedback

Writers need readers, so audience is central to most writing situations. Academic writing is no exception, so having someone else give you feedback on your writing is crucial for your success.

If you get no feedback during your writing process, especially when the assignment is unfamiliar or the ideas are complex, you run the risk of writing a text that is only comprehensible to you. You don't want to wait to find out that your reader cannot understand your ideas until after you have handed in the assignment, so getting feedback should be a normal part of your process.

Finding a Reader

You have a number of choices of people you can ask for feedback:

- Especially in writing classes, your professors will frequently require some kind of peer response from your classmates. Even if this isn't required, you can connect with at least one classmate and offer to exchange drafts.
- Your campus almost certainly has writing tutors. These tutors may be professional tutors or they may be students, but either way, they will be strong writers. They also will have gone through training to enable them to provide helpful guidance for writers.
- Your professor may be willing to read drafts of material, though I recommend going to office hours (or setting up an appointment) with a draft rather than trying to email it. I know that I turn away emailed requests for me to review a draft because if I do that for one student, I need to do it for all of them, and there simply aren't enough hours in the day. However, a student showing up with a draft sends the message that they are willing to put in the work with me, instead of asking me to do the work for them.
- Many students have friends or family members that they trust to read their writing. While this audience can be helpful—and my partner does this for me regularly—keep in mind that these readers are usually not members of the intended audience for the piece. They are not likely to be familiar with the assignment or the expectations, which means that you have to be cautious and critical as you consider their recommendations. In addition, these are people who care about you, and they may be more concerned about hurting your feelings than giving you constructive criticism.

When you have a choice about who to ask, choose wisely. If there is a tutor you work particularly well with, find out that tutor's hours and sign up for their sessions. Find the classmate who asks good questions in class. Seek out your dorm mate down the hall who writes for the school newspaper.

We have all had the experience of working with someone who doesn't do a good job. If you have ended up with one of those people, make sure you seek out other feedback. And if this happens in a class setting, don't hesitate to let the professor know that you would rather not work with that person again, even if you think the professor already knows.

Activity: Identify Some Readers

Identify at least two people who might be able to give you feedback on a writing project.

- Locate the writing tutors on your campus, including the hours when they are available. If you already have a draft to work with, sign up for a tutoring session.
- Identify at least one classmate that asks good questions and takes the class seriously. Talk to them either before or after class and suggest working together to give each other feedback.
- Check out your professor's office hours. Sign up or drop by (depending on how your professor handles office hours) to talk about your ideas or share your draft.
- Find someone in your dorm who writes well, and ask them if they'd be willing to take a look at your writing. Be sure to offer them a return favor with something that you're good at.

Choosing Your Moment

Feedback can occur at any point in your writing process, but the most common point is once you have a working draft. However, if you need feedback on a working thesis statement, there is no reason to wait. You can bring ideas or outlines or freewriting or thesis statements to writing tutors and professors, and you may even be required to get feedback on early pieces of a project.

No matter when in your process you solicit feedback, make sure you are allowing enough time to revise your work based on the feedback. When you ask for someone to review a draft a few hours before it's due, you aren't going to be able to do anything significant to fix an organization that doesn't make sense or, worse, a source that needs to be replaced. You can ask for a review close to the deadline if all you want is for someone to check your grammar and citations, but this is really proofreading, not feedback on your writing.

If you are asking a friend or classmate to review your writing, be respectful of their time, too. Don't give them the piece with so little time to spare that you put pressure on them. You don't want someone who is doing you a favor to be in the position of having to say no or of doing a shoddy job because you didn't allow enough time.

If you don't allow enough time to revise, tutors and professors will probably tell you so directly. Don't wait until the last minute!

Getting Useful Feedback

How familiar is the following scenario?

> "Can you read my paper and let me know if it's okay?"
>
> "Sure." Your roommate takes about five minutes to read over your paper. "I really like your introduction.

> You might want to say a little more about this point in the second paragraph. I also think this comma is wrong."
>
> "Thanks!" You keep your introduction as-is. You add a sentence to the second paragraph, and you fix the comma that they noticed.
>
> When your professor gives you back the project, there are comments about problems with your use of sources and about your overall organization being confusing, things your roommate said nothing about. Hurt feelings ensue.

What happened? Rather than blame your roommate for giving you weak feedback, though, think about what you asked them to do. You asked them to read, and they did. But you didn't give them enough guidance to give good feedback.

When I get the "Can you read my paper?" question from students, I respond by asking, "What would you like me to focus on?" When you are requesting feedback, you should have some goals, and you should give your reader some direction. Without those goals and directions, you are likely to get vague comments that are of little help.

When professors assign peer responses, they generally provide some guidelines, but even if they don't, you can use information from the assignment to create some. Specifically, try looking at the rubric or other information given to you about how the assignment will be evaluated. Then, make a list of the areas you most want feedback on. What do you want to know about your draft? Here are some possible questions:

- Can you identify my thesis statement? Does it make sense? If not, what's confusing?
- Does the overall organization of my project make sense? If not, what doesn't seem logical?
- Are there paragraphs that are confusing or difficult to follow? If so, which one(s) and what's confusing or difficult?
- Do my sources meet the requirements of the assignment? Am I using those sources well?
- Does my introduction do a good job setting up my topic and thesis statement?
- Does my conclusion do more than summarize and seem like a logical extension of the rest of my paper?

You can come up with more specific questions based on the actual assignment and areas that you believe need attention.

As you become a more advanced writer, you'll be better able to formulate questions that give readers some direction. For example, I asked my daughter, a technical writing student (at the time, close to finishing her degree) to review some of the early work on this book. When I did so, I asked her to ignore line-editing and sentence-level issues, such as grammar and style, and to focus on two things: whether she felt I was missing anything for each section and whether my explanations made sense (and would make sense to my intended reader, a first-year writing student).

Activity: Formulate Some Questions

Using a draft that you still have time to revise, prepare at least three questions and then take your work to one of the readers you've chosen. Be sure to ask about substantive matters (like organization or evidence) and not just about sentence-level issues (like grammar and citation).

Using Feedback

You are the author of your project. This means that all of the decision-making about what to include and exclude, about what sources to use, about what arguments to make, about what words to use are all yours. This is true no matter what feedback you receive or who you receive it from.

Many times, you will want to make changes based on the feedback. You didn't notice, for example, that you had four quotations in the same paragraph with only one sentence of your own until your reader pointed it out.

Sometimes, though, feedback can leave us feeling defensive. Good writers find ways to work through that defensiveness to determine whether there is something to the point the reader is making.

When you get comments and suggestions on your work, come at those with an open mind. Look at your own writing critically and try to determine why the respondent gave the feedback they did.

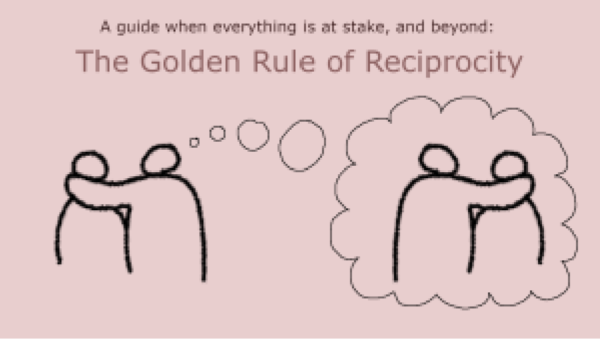
Feeling Defensive

When I was working on a chapter on the history of writing assessment, I vividly remember being told that I was making a claim that wasn't accurate. I knew I was right, and I seethed at that response. But when I stepped back, I realized that I hadn't provided enough support to convince someone who wasn't living in my head. No wonder they didn't believe me! The comment didn't change my claim, but it did help realize that I needed to provide more evidence.

Still other times, we reject the feedback. When we do this, it should not be because we don't have time to make the changes or because the changes are too hard—though I fully recognize that this happens sometimes. Instead, we should base our rejection on whether we believe that making the changes suggested would make the project better. I know that if I don't think it will improve my work, I still thank the reader, even though I ignore their suggestion.

After all, I am the author.

When You’re Giving Feedback


A guide when everything is at stake, and beyond:
The Golden Rule of Reciprocity

During your college career (and probably after), you’ll be asked to give feedback, sometimes as part of a required assignment and sometimes informally. Here is some advice about handling these situations.

First, **follow an ethic of reciprocity**: When you are giving feedback to someone else, give them feedback with the same care and attention that you would like to receive. “Good job” doesn’t really tell a writer much. What’s good about that part? Your response should include some details so that the writer gets specific information about what you think they are doing well.

Second, when you see a problem, say so, but **make your criticism constructive**. Telling the writer that you think their argument is wrong isn’t helpful, even if that’s what you believe. Instead, point out specific places where their argument isn’t supported well enough or where their logic doesn’t quite make sense. You can let them know you disagree, but help them make their argument better anyway.

Third, **ask questions**. I love when my reader asks questions. For example, my partner regularly asks me, “What does this mean?” Every time they do that, I am forced to think about my intended readers and whether they would understand what I’ve written—reflection prompted by a simple question.

Finally, **use this as an opportunity to think about your own work**. Pay attention to how that writer has done the assignment, particularly the parts of the draft that you admire. For example, if you really like their conclusion, think about whether you could use a similar strategy for your conclusion—if not on this project, then perhaps on the next.

Key Points: Getting Feedback

- As a college student, you have lots of potential readers available: classmates, tutors, professors, and other students.
- You can get feedback at any point in your process. You don’t need to have a complete draft!
- Be sure to request feedback with plenty of time to make changes.
- Don’t just ask someone to read your paper. Instead, ask your reader to comment on aspects of your project that you most want help with.
- Remember that you are the author, so you decide whether and how much to use the feedback you receive.
- When you are giving feedback to someone else, give them the kind of feedback you’d like to receive, make sure your criticism is constructive, and ask questions. Also use this as an opportunity to read like a writer. How has this writer done something that you admire, and can you use this approach in your own work?

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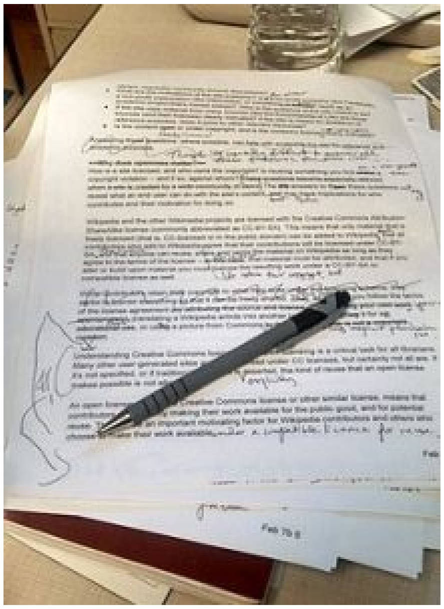
Revising 1: Revising Globally



Revision is not the process of reading through your paper strengthening your sentences (which is really editing) or looking for errors right before you turn it in (which is really proofreading). Instead, revision focuses on meaning-making.

Think about the word for a moment: re-vision. It literally means "see again." To be able to revise well, you need to be willing and able to rethink what you've written. It is one of the most crucial parts of your writing process. Good writers are good revisers, and revising at this level can make the biggest difference in whether or not your project succeeds.

Global revision involves looking at big-ticket items, like your thesis and organization. At this stage, you should also examine how well your draft project meets the assignment. The strategies in this chapter are designed to get you thinking about any large changes that your project may need to be successful, and so these should be done early in your revision process.

First, some general advice:

- Give yourself TIME, TIME, TIME.
  - Give yourself at least 24 hours away from your writing. The more time away from your text, the easier it will be for you to see it as a reader would.
  - For long, complex projects, try to start revising a week (or more) before the project is due.
- Get feedback.
  - A set of eyes outside of your own can tell you what's working and what's not working.
  - Getting feedback can also be a good way to get time away from your text.
- Start with global revisions and then move to paragraph-level changes.
  - Look first for aspects of your writing that could involve major changes to your final project, like your thesis and overall organization.
  - Then check the focus, development, and coherence of your paragraphs (see the next chapter for more on these areas).

In this chapter, I am providing a range of strategies—some that I recommend highly and others that I suggest you try to see if they work for you. You need to determine for yourself which strategies work best for you. The more you practice the useful ones, the better you'll get at using them, and the stronger your writing will become.

Remember that you are working to develop a writing process that works for you and the flexibility to change that process as your writing tasks change.

Revision and Me

Revision can be some of the most challenging work on a writing project, but it can also be some of the most rewarding. Personally, I find the initial drafting to be the most difficult phase, but revising is… well, I won't say fun, but certainly more enjoyable. I really like seeing changes that improve my text and make it communicate what I want to communicate.

Prioritizing Your Revisions

After you have had some time away from your project, start your revision process by rereading the assignment in its entirety, paying particular attention to the project's requirements.

Then, read your draft, **annotating** as you go. At this stage, it can be helpful to print out your project if you can, even when the final version will be electronic. Looking at your text in a different medium can help you see things you might miss on screen.

On your first read-through, I recommend not making any changes beyond very small ones (like typos). Instead, make notes about changes you want to make.

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff (at First)

It might be tempting to go through your paper looking for the easy changes: typos, grammatical problems, sentences that are worded strangely or don't quite say what you mean.

However, there's a problem with this approach. If you spend 15-20 minutes fixing these sentence-level problems in a paragraph, how likely are you to delete that paragraph, even if it turns out that the paragraph doesn't fit your thesis? While some writers can, most students tend to write in an economic mode, so they usually are not willing to waste time that way.

Instead, put off sentence-level work until the content of your paper is solid. You'll probably still make some sentence-level edits as you go, but don't let those edits pull you away from content-level revision work.

Once you have given yourself a set of notes about changes to make to the draft, try prioritizing those revisions. Here are some guidelines as you make this list:

- **Highest priority: Revisions that will help your project meet the assignment requirements.** If your project doesn't meet the requirements, it's unlikely to be successful, no matter what else you do. Revisions of this caliber could include adding another point to meet a length requirement, changing or adding sources, and revising a thesis to match the purpose of the assignment.
- **Second priority: Thesis changes.** While sometimes you need to change your thesis so that it better fits the assignment (making it a first priority), other times you may find that the thesis you originally wrote is not

exactly what you want to claim any more. You might change your mind completely, which would definitely require major revision work; however, it's more likely that you have learned something in the process of writing your first draft that could help make your paper stronger. Since your thesis guides your whole paper, you will want to start there.

- **Third priority: Major additions or deletions.** Since you produced your draft, you may have determined that you missed a point you would like to explain or that you have included something that doesn't belong. Changes like this may also affect your thesis, but not necessarily.
- **Fourth priority: Large organizational revisions.** Changes to the structure of your project can make your text more effective, but they can also require you to adjust your transitions between paragraphs and to rethink the order of the ideas inside paragraphs so that your reader can follow your points. Changes of this kind need to be considered if you are changing your thesis or making additions or deletions, but even if you aren't, sometimes reorganizing your ideas can strengthen your claims.

Once you have your list, start tackling your revisions based on this priority order.

Example: A Revision Plan

When you reread your work after some time away, you'll see things that need changing. It can be helpful to create a bulleted list of the changes you want to make, prioritizing the big changes first. Your list might look something like this:

- Change thesis to match paper
- Split up paragraph 2
- Add evidence to paragraphs 3 and 4
- Redo conclusion
- Check citations
- Fix commas

Then, as you make the changes, you can cross them out.

Activity: Create a Revision Plan

Read through a project that is ready for revision at least twice, making notes about changes you think you should make.

Turn those notes into a list.

Then, using the guide above, prioritize those changes.

Deleting: A Strategy to Clear Away Extraneous Material

All of us write junk sometimes. Junk includes words, sentences, or even paragraphs that don't really belong in the final project. Maybe you were trying to meet a length requirement, or maybe you made a point that no longer seems relevant.

If something doesn't fit when you are reading it in the revision phase, cut it out.

This can be difficult. Students usually don't like seeing their word count drop, particularly when they feel like they have put so much effort in. I get it. But those 200 words that don't really fit your argument aren't going to help it succeed. Your professor will recognize them as junk, and your project will be better for deleting them and replacing them with 200 words that actually contribute to your point.

Activity: Deleting Junk

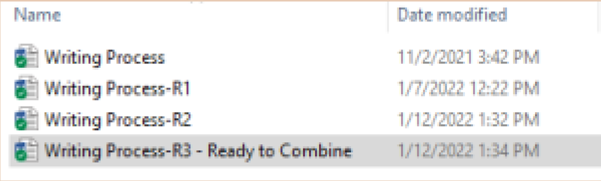
Using a project that you are revising, read your draft with an eye for what doesn't belong and delete that material.

As you are deleting, help yourself make effective revisions by doing the following:

- Leave notes for yourself about the content you plan to add in place of the text you're deleting. For instance, if you need to replace an example that isn't working with a better one, make a note about any ideas you have for the replacement example.
- If you aren't sure what to add, be sure to talk with your peers, a writing tutor, and/or your professor.

Deleting Without Really Deleting

Deleting text doesn't have to mean that your words are gone for good. There are ways of "deleting" that will let you hang onto those words in case you change your mind later.



Name	Date modified
Writing Process	11/2/2021 3:42 PM
Writing Process-R1	1/7/2022 12:22 PM
Writing Process-R2	1/12/2022 1:32 PM
Writing Process-R3 - Ready to Combine	1/12/2022 1:34 PM

- Save your document under a new name. For example, when I'm revising a document, I often keep the same name but add "-R1" or "-R2" to indicate which revision I'm working on. Then, when you delete, you are deleting on a copy instead of the original.
- Try highlighting that text in black so that you can't see the actual words. Then, when you reread the text, you can see whether it makes sense to remove that material.

- Cut and paste larger deletions (like whole paragraphs) into a new document. You can save this document separately so that you don't lose the text.
- If you are working with paper and pen, cross out the parts that need to be deleted.

Creating a Topic Sentence Outline: A Strategy to Strengthen Structure

Your **thesis statement** is a summary of your paper, and your **topic sentences** are summaries of your body paragraphs. In academic writing, your reader should be able to get the gist of your paper from reading just those parts.

Do the following activity to create a topic sentence outline (also called a reverse outline) and to review that outline, ideally with a partner. Once you have completed this review, make notes to yourself about the changes you believe are necessary.

Activity: Topic Sentence Outline

This activity works best with a partner who is familiar with the assignment but who is not particularly familiar with your paper. You can ask someone who doesn't know the assignment to help with this, but be sure to give them the assignment, too.

Step 1: Create the Outline (done by you)

View the instructions.

1. Copy your thesis statement from your introduction into a new document.
2. Skipping lines between sentences, copy the topic sentence from each body paragraph into the same document. If you cannot find a topic sentence in a paragraph, create one or at least some kind of statement about the focus of that paragraph. Every body paragraph in your paper should have a sentence in this outline.
3. Copy your restated thesis from your conclusion to the bottom of that same document.

Step 2: Review the Outline (done by your partner)

View the instructions.

Ideally, swap with a partner to do the following steps. The instructions are written for that partner, but you can do this for yourself.

1. Read the thesis statement, and check the assignment. Does the thesis statement meet the purpose of the assignment?

    - Place the answer to this question on the line after the thesis statement in a different color font.
    - If you think changes need to be made to the thesis statement so that it meets the assignment, suggest those changes here, too.

2. For each topic sentence, create a color-coded match to the thesis statement to identify the part of the thesis statement that each topic sentence is addressing:
    - Each in a different color, highlight the parts of the thesis statement that you expect to see explained in more detail in the paper.
    - Highlight each topic sentence in the color that corresponds to that part of the thesis statement. Note: You might have more than one topic sentence that needs to be the same color. It is also possible to have topic sentences that refer to multiple parts of the thesis. Both of these situations are not necessarily problems.
    - If there are any topic sentences that do not have a counterpart in the thesis statement, do not color them, but give the author at least one suggestion about how to revise. Remember that one possible option is to delete the paragraph attached to that topic sentence.
3. Compare the first and last versions of the thesis statement. Are there any substantial differences between them? If so, make a note of those differences after the restated thesis at the bottom.
4. Look over the outline, including both versions of the thesis statement, and try rewriting the thesis statement in your own words at the bottom of the page. Do this in a different font/color so that the author knows this one is yours.

Step 3: Evaluate the Results (done by you)

View the instructions.
Read through the responses you have received, paying particular attention to the following:

- Does your current thesis statement match the assignment? If not, make notes about how to revise it.
- Does your current thesis statement match the order of the paragraphs in your paper? If not, make notes about rearranging either the points in the thesis statement or the paragraphs in the paper.
- Do you have any paragraphs with topic sentences that aren't clearly connected to your thesis statement? If so, check to see whether these should be deleted or whether the topic sentence should be revised so that the connection is clearer.
- Look at any comments about your restated thesis from your conclusions. Make notes about any changes you want to make based on the feedback on that sentence.
- Does the thesis statement written by your partner match your main idea in the paper?
    - If so, consider whether any of the ideas in that revised thesis statement could be incorporated into your existing thesis statement.
    - If not, make notes about what isn't accurate and whether there are ways you could adjust your thesis to make your point clearer for your reader.

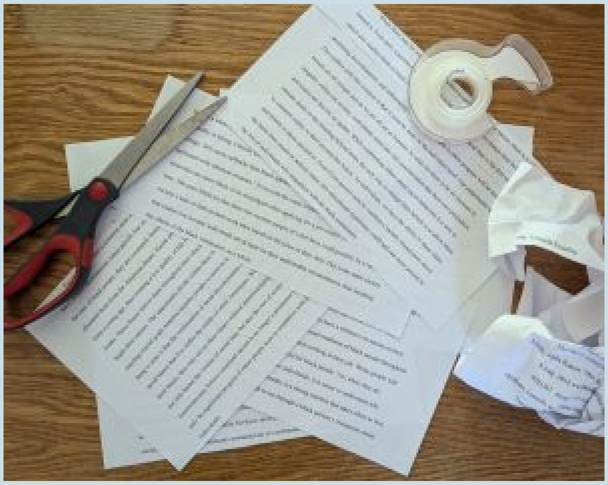
And then, of course, work on making these changes!

Reordering Your Paper: A Strategy to Strengthen Organization

Sometimes, it helps to pull your paper apart and get another opinion about how to put it back together. It can be easy to get stuck in the organization that we originally devise for a project, but that order is not necessarily the best or only option. This strategy is intended to give you feedback specifically on the order you have created.

Activity: Pile O'Paragraphs

As with the previous strategy, this activity works best when you work with a partner. Unlike the last one, though, knowing the assignment is not crucial, so readers who aren't familiar with the assignment can be helpful here.



For this strategy, I encourage students to use a physical copy of their paper. Print it out, and use scissors and tape. Even for writers who work well on screen, this strategy can help you see your paper as building blocks that don't necessarily go in the order you originally thought.

Step 1A: Prepare Your Draft (print version; scissors and tape needed; done by you)

View the instructions.

1. Print out a clean (no annotations or comments), single-sided copy of your paper.
2. Cut your paper apart into paragraphs.
    - Cut off your heading and title from the beginning and your Works Cited or References list from the end of your paper.
    - Cut off any headers and page numbers.
    - If a paragraph runs across a page break, tape the parts of the paragraph together.
3. Mix up your paragraphs and stack them up so that you have a pile of paragraphs in a random order.

Step 1B: Prepare Your Draft (electronic version; done by you)

View the instructions.

1. Save a copy of your paper under another name so that you have the original version intact.
2. Delete your header, your title, and your Works Cited or References list.
3. Rearrange the order of the paragraphs, including the introduction and conclusion. The point is to mix them up so the entire essay is a jumble of paragraphs.

Step 2: Organize the Pile O'Paragraphs (done by your partner)

View the instructions.

1. Put the paragraphs in an order that makes sense to you.
    - **Don't worry about being "right."** Instead, think about the logic of the paper as a whole. As a reader, what do you expect to read first, second, etc.?
    - **Check paragraphs that are a full page long or more.** If you see a paragraph that seems too long, see if you can find a place to split that paragraph. If you do, either cut the paragraph apart (print) or and add a paragraph break (electronic). In a comment or note right at that paragraph break, make any suggestions you have for transitions that would help a reader understand how these parts are related.
    - **Make connections among short paragraphs that seem to belong together.** If you see paragraphs that are too short and that belong together (or that belong with another longer paragraph), tape those pieces together (print) or put them together in a paragraph (electronic) in the order you think the ideas should appear. In a comment or note where you joined the paragraphs, make any suggestions for helping the blended paragraph hold together well, including any additions or deletions you think are needed.
    - **Make suggestions for short paragraphs that don't connect.** If you see a short paragraph that doesn't belong with another paragraph but that you think is important enough to keep, make suggestions for developing the paragraph more fully. You should still place that paragraph where you think it belongs logically.
    - **Point out junk.** If you see a paragraph that you think doesn't belong, make a note of that and why you think it shouldn't be in the paper. Put this paragraph at the bottom of the pile (print) or leave that paragraph at the very end with some spaces between it and the rest of the paper (electronic).
    - **Feel free to leave your partner other notes**, but keep the focus on the organization.
2. Once you have an order that you think works, number the paragraphs (print) or save the file (electronic), and return the version with your organization to your partner.

Part 3: Review the Organization (done by you)

View the instructions.

1. Compare the order in which you received the paper from your partner with the order it was in before you jumbled it. Make note of any differences and whether or not you like the changes.
2. Ask your partner about any of their decisions that you want to understand better.
3. Write up notes on what, if anything, you are going to change based on this feedback.

Balancing Your Evidence and Explanation: A Strategy to Strengthen Development

This strategy is designed to help you determine whether you are providing your reader with enough **evidence** and enough **explanation** to make your case. While much of the actual **development** work needs to be done in your body paragraphs (and so we'll talk about that in the next chapter), it can be helpful to know if your paper as a whole is out of balance.

Keep in mind that most college-level academic papers include between 25% and 50% evidence. These percentages are rough and will depend on the type of assignment you have. For example, summaries will have a much higher percentage of evidence.

Activity: Performing an Evidence/Explanation Balance Analysis

Unlike some of the activities, I've suggested, this one tends to work better if you do it yourself. This is because you know best which sentences (or parts of sentences) are your ideas and which are coming from sources.

Part 1: Highlighting

View the instructions.

Using the highlighting feature in your word processor or actual highlighters on print versions, do the following:

1. Highlight or otherwise mark all the supporting evidence in the body of your paper in one color. For the purposes of this analysis, ignore your introduction and conclusion.
    - From textual sources, this would include quotations and paraphrases, facts, examples, and background information. Include the attributive tags and citations in these highlights.
    - You can also do this with evidence from personal experience and observations or data that you have personally collected. These would be considered evidence in projects that don't rely heavily on published sources.
2. Using a different color, highlight or otherwise mark differently all of the explanations of that evidence that you have provided. This material should all be coming from your own ideas. *Note: You may have sentences that are part evidence and part explanation. That is perfectly fine.*
3. Be sure that you have highlighted every sentence in the body of your paper.

Part 2: Analyzing Your Balance

View the instructions.

1. Determine the rough percentage.
    - You can eyeball this by scrolling out the view on your screen so that you can see all of the pages in your project.
    - If you are working on a print version, you can lay out all of the pages side-by-side.
    - If you'd like to be more precise, you can count up the number of lines of text in your paper and then the number of lines of each color (though this probably isn't necessary and could be a waste of time).
2. If the percentage is weighted too heavily in favor of either evidence or explanation, make notes about what you might alter to bring the project closer to where you want it, keeping these notes handy when you shift to paragraph-level revisions.
3. If there are particular paragraphs that may be too heavy in one or the other, make note to

examine those paragraphs in more detail when you are revising paragraphs. Keep in mind that sometimes you will need paragraphs that are heavily weighted in one direction or the other, so specific paragraphs may not be a problem, as long as the overall balance is what you want.

Key Points: Revising Globally

- Strong global revisions can make the biggest difference in the success of your project.
- Global revision focuses on big-ticket items like your thesis, organization, and overall development. This is also a good moment to make sure that your project meets the assignment requirements.
- A good starting point is to read over your draft and make notes about changes you think would improve your work. Once you have those notes, turn them into a list, and prioritize them so that you are working on the biggest changes first.
- When you revise at the global level, you want to check the following areas (activity suggestions above):
    - Delete any material that isn't contributing to your point or to the purpose of the assignment.
    - Make sure that cover all of the topics in your thesis statement and that you do so in an order that matches your thesis statement.
    - Make sure that the order of ideas in your paper is clear and logical.
    - Make sure that your evidence and your explanations are balanced appropriately for the type of paper you are writing.

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Text Attributions

The introduction to this chapter, "Prioritizing Your Revisions," and "Deleting: A Strategy to Clear Away Extraneous Material" were revised with the help of Tia Lidonde and Joseph Payne, students in my class during Spring 2022.

Revising 2: Revising Paragraphs

While making global revisions, you have probably also worked on revising paragraphs to clarify your point or add more explanation. That work is important, but the strategies in this section are designed to help you make sure that your individual paragraphs are solid by looking at the specific qualities of good paragraphs: **focus**, **development**, and **coherence**. These can be particularly useful for paragraphs that don't seem to be working well.

Color Coding Topics: A Strategy to Strengthen Focus

A **focused** paragraph has one main idea that usually appears in a **topic sentence** (at least in academic writing), and the rest of the paragraph elaborates on that idea. If your paragraph isn't focused, your reader may struggle to follow your point and the connections among the ideas in your paragraph.

Activity: Checking Focus in an Individual Paragraph

This activity works on body paragraphs, but not really on introductions or conclusions. As with previous activities, you can do this with the highlighter feature in your word processor or with actual highlighters on a printed copy of your paper.

Part 1: Highlighting

View the instructions.

1. Identify the paragraph's topic sentence and highlight it in one color.
2. Look at the next sentence (or the first sentence in the paragraph if the topic sentence isn't the first sentence), and decide if it's on the same topic. If it is, highlight it in the same color. If it isn't, highlight it in a different color.
3. Continue highlighting this way, matching the highlight color to the sentence topic, until all of the sentences in the paragraph are marked. *Note that you can have split sentences (sentences that have more than one topic in them). In those cases, highlight the parts of the sentence in different colors accordingly.*

Part 2: Analyzing Your Highlighting

View the instructions.

- **If your paragraph is all one color**, then you have a well-focused paragraph.
- **If your paragraph contains two colors**, it's probably fine. Paragraphs can shift focus sometimes, so a paragraph that has two colors may still work as a single paragraph. Look carefully at the topics to make sure that they are connected and that you haven't dropped in a new topic in that really belongs in a different paragraph.

- **If your paragraph has three or more colors**, you probably need to think about separating the topics.
    - I frequently see this problem when the writer starts a paragraph on one idea, realizes that they need to explain a specific point before getting into the original topic, and then shifts back to the first topic, with an additional shift in topic later in the paragraph. Often, that second topic can be pulled out and developed into a new paragraph that is placed before the current one.
    - This can also happen when the paragraph is very long and simply isn't broken into chunks to make reading easier. Look for those moments when the colors shift, which can indicate good places for paragraph breaks. The new paragraphs might also need a little **development** (see the next strategy).

Examples: Color-Coded Paragraphs

View the examples.

Here are some examples of paragraphs with one, two, and three colors.

Example 1

> If you look up at the sky, you'll notice it's blue during the day. The reason why the sky is the color we see is because of how the light bounces, causing us to see a light blue instead of red. The light blue we see is also very beautiful, and an activity that some people enjoy doing is looking up at the sky.

While the paragraph above is relatively short, every sentence ties in with one another. Of course, the paragraph could use more work, but the paragraph is well focused.

Example 2

> If you look up at the sky, you'll notice it's blue during the day. A question that children often ask adults is why this is. However, not many people can come up with an answer, even if they're taught in school. The reason why the sky is the color we see is because of how the light bounces, causing us to see a light blue instead of red. By the time people become adults, they tend to forget how and why this is, causing them to simply state that they don't know when children ask. The light blue we see is also very beautiful, and an activity that some people enjoy doing is looking up at the sky.

This is an example of a paragraph that shifts focus but sticks with the main point. While this one probably doesn't need to be broken up (though it could benefit from some reorganization), you can have a paragraph that has two colors where the different sentences shift focus drastically. Such a paragraph would need to be broken up.

Example 3

> If you look up at the sky, you'll notice it's blue during the day. A question that children often ask adults is why this is. However, not many people can come up with an answer, even if they're taught in school. But did you know that in California, the sky has sometimes turned orange due to fires? Residents couldn't even leave their homes, even if the sky looked hauntingly beautiful. The reason why the sky is the color we see is because of how the light bounces, causing us to see a light blue instead of red. By the time people become adults, they tend to forget how and why this is, causing them to simply state that they don't know when children ask. The light blue we see is also very beautiful, and an activity that some people enjoy doing is looking up at the sky.

While this paragraph has mostly the same focus points as the previous example, look at the blue section. These two sentences would work better as a topic sentence in a new paragraph due to the focus shifting away from the sky being blue to the sky being orange in California.

Rainbow Paragraphs

Occasionally, multiple colors in the same paragraph indicate a larger problem with topic organization throughout the paper. When this happens, the same topics appear in small clumps throughout the paper. One of my former students called these "rainbow paragraphs."

As you can see in the example below, there's a glaring issue with the focus of the paragraph. While the yellow and green sentences could work together, the other three colors would work best as their own paragraphs.

> If you look up at the sky, you'll notice it's blue during the day. A question that children often ask adults is why this is. However, not many people can come up with an answer, even if they're taught in school. But did you know that in California, the sky has sometimes turned orange due to fires? Residents couldn't even leave their homes, even if the sky looked hauntingly beautiful. A great way to learn about major fires is the news. Time and again, forest fires in the United States are shown on the news. People who have done gender reveal parties have recently been responsible for fires. These parties tend to involve fireworks or other explosives, and the people handling them don't think of taking any precautions.

Rainbow paragraphs are really a global-level revision problem rather than a paragraph-level revision problem, and you can find them by doing a more complete version of this focus activity.

If you suspect you have a rainbow paragraph problem, create a key where you color code different topics in your paper, and then highlight according to that key. You can then gather all of the sentences that deal with each topic to work together in one or more paragraphs.

Revisiting the Evidence/Explanation Balance: A Strategy to Strengthen Development

A paragraph that is sufficiently developed has enough **evidence** and enough **explanation**, with “enough” being defined mostly by the reader. You can use the same kind of highlighting activity that you did for your entire paper to make sure that you are balancing evidence and explanation at the paragraph level, too. This strategy can help you identify paragraphs with too little evidence or too little explanation.

In the case of too little evidence, you may find that you thought your reader would already understand your point. To you, the point seems obvious, but keep in mind that your reader has not been working with the evidence that you have. Show them the source material that supports your ideas.

In the case of too little explanation, students commonly try to let the evidence speak for itself. But, as I said earlier, evidence itself is neutral. Evidence exists out in the world and doesn’t mean anything until we start interpreting and explaining it. You need to provide your reader with some of that explanation.

Activity: Paragraph Balancing

This activity can help when you have a paragraph that you believe is out of balance (something you might have noticed if you did the full project evidence/explanation balance activity).

Part 1: Highlighting

View the instructions.

Using the highlighting feature in your word processor or actual highlighters on print versions, do the following:

1. Highlight or otherwise mark all the supporting evidence in the your paragraph.
    - From textual sources, this would include quotations and paraphrases, facts, examples, and background information. Include the attributive tags and citations in these highlights.
    - You can also do this with evidence from personal experience and observations or data that you have personally collected. These would be evidence in projects that don’t rely heavily on published sources.
2. Using a different color, highlight or otherwise mark differently all of the explanations of that evidence that you have provided. This material should all be coming from your own ideas.
3. Be sure that you have highlighted every sentence in the body of your paragraph. *Note: You may have sentences that are part evidence and part explanation. That is perfectly fine.*

Part 2: Analyzing Your Balance

View the instructions.

Your focus here is a bit different from the earlier balancing activity where you examined the balance in your entire paper. Here you are looking for large-ish blocks of one color or the other in a single paragraph, usually three or more sentences. Those blocks are potential problem spots.

- **Blocks of evidence can indicate the need for more explanation**. While sometimes you will spend the majority of a paragraph providing a summary or an extended example from a source, much more often, you will want to present a little evidence (perhaps a sentence or two) and then explain how that evidence relates to your thesis or your point in that paragraph.
- **Blocks of explanation can indicate the need for more evidence.** Work through your sentences and determine whether a skeptical reader (one who doesn't automatically agree with you) would be inclined to ask "How do you know?" If you find any of those moments, look for evidence you can bring in to support your point.

Don't assume that you need to make a change every time you have one of these blocks, particularly when the blocks are explaining one of your points. Sometimes, these larger blocks are necessary.

Mapping Paragraphs: A Strategy to Strengthen Logical Coherence

A coherent paragraph holds together logically and stylistically; the ideas flow from sentence to sentence so that the reader can understand the author's line of thought. Stylistic coherence is discussed in the editing section, but logical coherence is a paragraph-level matter.

When a paragraph coheres, it holds together topically—like a focused paragraph does—but its sentences logically lead your reader, step-by-step, through your thinking.

The activity below can pick up problems with focus as well as coherence, so if you don't have substantial difficulties with focus, this activity might be a better choice for you. Also, unlike the focus activity, this one works on all paragraphs, including introductions and conclusions.

Activity: Paragraph Mapping

This activity can work well when you have a paragraph that feels jumbled or jumpy. It may be all on the same topic (so it may pass the focus test), but it still isn't connecting well from point to point.

This exercise can be done on a computer, but it is probably easier to draw the map on a piece of paper.

Here, I'll use an example paragraph:

View the example.

> **(1)** The technology barrier is what humanity will need to work on. **(2)** Even if we could convince everyone to pay the enormous prices of installation and switch to clean energy, we still would not have the technology to support this substantial change. **(3)** Nevshehir states that the technology that we have today is still expensive and not powerful enough compared with what fossil fuels deliver. **(4)** Fossil fuels have one major advantage over renewable resources: Oil-based

fuels are stable and predictable. **(5)** On the other hand, solar and wind electricity production can vary, which can leave people's homes vulnerable to energy shortages. **(6)** Moradiya brings another barrier into the technology issue when he states "Although the development of a coal plant requires about $6 per megawatt, it is known that wind and solar power plants also required high investment. In addition to this, storage systems of the generated energy are expensive and represent a challenge in terms of megawatt production." **(7)** In these sentences, Moradiya shows that in addition to the costs of installing the power generators (e.g., solar panels and wind turbines), the costs to store excess energy can be a major hurdle, since the technology that we have today makes large batteries that could sustain cities expensive.

Works Cited

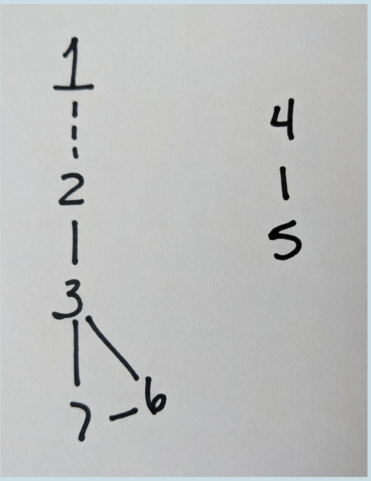
Moradiya, Meet A. "The Challenges Renewable Energy Sources Face." *AZoCleantech*, 11 Jan. 2019, www.azocleantech.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=836.

Nevshehir, Noel. "These Are the Biggest Hurdles On The Path to Clean Energy." *World Economic Forum*, 19 Feb. 2021, www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/02/heres-why-geopolitics-could-hamper-the-energy-transition/.

Part 1: Create the Map

View the instructions.

1. Number all the sentences in your paragraph. Notice that sentences in a quotation are considered all part of one sentence (sentence 6 in the example).
2. For each sentence after the first one, draw lines to indicate which sentence that one logically follows from. Looking at the topic of each sentence can help.
    - Use solid lines to indicate a clear logical connection between sentences.
    - Use dashed/dotted lines to indicate a connection that isn't as clear or strong as it could be.
    - It is possible that a sentence may connect to more than one sentence.
    - Sentences that are disconnected from all of the others in the paragraph should have no lines.



To the right, you'll see a map of the paragraph above. In this map, sentence 1 is only loosely connected to 2. Sentences 2 and 3 are solidly connected and sentences 6 and 7 are solidly connected to each other and to sentence 3. Sentences 4 and 5, however, are connected to each other, but not to the rest of the map.

Part 2: Analyze the Map

View the instructions.
Once you have created the map, you can use it to identify and correct trouble spots.

- Here are some of the most common problems:
    - **Sentences that aren't connected to any others in paragraph** (sentences 4 and 5 in the diagram). These usually indicate a sentence or group of sentences that belong in another paragraph. I see this most frequently with transition sentences that appear at the end of a paragraph instead of the beginning of the next. I also see this with ideas that need more explanation, sometimes in a separate paragraph.
    - **Sentences connected by dashed/dotted lines** (sentences 1 and 2 in the diagram). These sentences probably belong together, but the logic between isn't as clear as it needs to be for the reader to follow. These connections can often be strengthened by adding a little more explanation to one of the two sentences—or sometimes in a sentence between them.
    - **Sentences whose connection jumps over sentences** (sentences 3 and 6 in the diagram, which skip over sentences 4 and 5). Usually, this means that the sentences are out of order. Try moving the sentences so that those that are connected on your map are next to each other. You may have to adjust the wording of the sentences, including transitions, as you do this.
- Not everything in a map is necessarily a problem:
    - **A single sentence with multiple sentences connected to it** (sentence 3 in the diagram). This probably indicates an important sentence for helping your reader understand the relationships among the ideas in your paragraph. Usually, these don't need any revision—at least not because of this.
    - A **late sentence that comes back to an early sentence in your paragraph** (not seen in this diagram). This is often a way of either wrapping up an explanation and making the connection clear to your reader or starting a new explanation from a key central sentence in the paragraph. Usually, these don't need any revision.
    - **Long chains of sentences in the same paragraph** (not seen in this diagram). These *may* be a problem if your paragraph is very long. Look at whether one or more of those chains should be turned into a separate paragraph.

Checking Introductions and Conclusions

Whether we draft our introductions first, last, or somewhere in the middle, we are often at a different place in our thinking when we draft our conclusions. As a result, sometimes the ideas in the two paragraphs don't align.

Also, sometimes a conclusion sounds more like an introduction. When I ask students to do the mixed-up paragraph exercise, about 20% of the students in any given class end up with the introduction and conclusion switched. This usually happens when the conclusion does too much summary work and not enough gesturing forward.

The following activity can help you identify problems with both paragraphs and check the alignment between the two.

Activity: Checking Introductions and Conclusions

The first part of this activity can be more effective with a partner who knows the assignment but who isn't familiar with your paper, but you can do this with someone who doesn't know the assignment, or you can do it for yourself as long as you have given yourself enough time to come back to your paper as a reader.

Part 1: Thesis and Content Work (done by a partner, ideally)

View the instructions.

Use the highlighter feature in your word processor or an actual highlighter on paper to do the following (be sure to set up a key to the color-coding):

1. Analyze the introduction:
    - Highlight the sentence you believe is the **thesis statement**.
    - If there is more than one sentence that you believe could be the thesis or that you think need to be together to make the thesis, make a note of the issue.
2. Analyze the conclusion:
    - Highlight/mark the restated thesis in the same color as you did the thesis in the introduction.
    - Highlight/mark (in another color) any other sentences that seem to be summarizing the paper.
    - Highlight/mark the **gesture forward** in a third color, and identify which approach you think the author is using in that gesture. Information about possible gestures appears in the conclusions section.
    - Make note of any suggestions you have for strengthening the conclusion.
3. Make a list of what you expect to see in the paper based just on the introduction and conclusion:
    - Add a few spaces between the introduction and the conclusion paragraphs.
    - In the space you have created, make a list of the topics you expect the author to cover, based on what you see in the introduction and conclusion.

Part 2: Reviewing the Feedback (done by the author)

View the instructions.

1. Look at the highlighting of the thesis in your introduction. If the identified sentence was not what you thought your thesis was, think about whether and how to revise it so that it is clearer.

2. Look at the highlighting of the restated thesis. If the identified sentence was not what you thought your restated thesis was, think about whether and how to revise it so that it is clearer.
3. Compare the two statements of the thesis. Are they making essentially the same claim? Are they using distinct phrasing? You want both of these answers to be “yes.”
4. Look at any additional summary that was highlighted in the conclusion. Try deleting that summary. Remember that the reader of a college-level paper is expecting a gesture forward, not a recap, unless the paper is long (more than about 2000 words).
5. Look at the material marked as your gesture forward. Was this material identified in the way you had intended? If not, what could you do to make it clearer?
6. Look at the list of topics that your partner thinks would be covered in this paper. Make note of any that differ from your actual organization. Significant differences could signal a need to return to global revision.

Once you have looked at all of these aspects of the feedback you have received, ask your partner about any of his/her feedback that you don’t understand. Then, write up notes on what, if anything, you are going to change and what you are not going to change based on this feedback.

Checking Paragraph-Level Transitions

During your revision process, you may have moved sentences and paragraphs around to make your meaning clearer. At this point, it is a good idea to check your **transition sentences** to make sure that they are conveying the logic and connections you want to make.

Remember that transition sentences almost always begin paragraphs, and they should make a gesture backward and a gesture forward so that your reader understands the connections between those paragraphs. While there may be a transition between your introduction and your first body paragraph, transition sentences are more important in later paragraphs, where you should be using them to help your reader see how the ideas in different paragraphs connect.

Activity: Checking Paragraph Transitions

To make sure that your transition sentences are doing the work you want, do the following for each paragraph after the introduction:

1. Identify the transition sentence. Remember that this will almost always be the first sentence of the paragraph.
2. Check the gesture backward. Does the sentence give your reader some information that they already know from the previous paragraph(s)? It can sometimes help to highlight this part of the transition sentence to make sure that you can identify it. These parts may include the following:

    - Repeated words, phrases, or even clauses from the previous paragraph
    - Transition words
    - Summaries of ideas previously discussed
    - A reminder of the thesis of the project or the main point of a section of the paper

3. Look at the remainder of the transition sentence. Is it providing some kind of gesture forward or introduction to new information?

Key Points: Revising Paragraphs

- Strong paragraphs are focused, developed, and coherent. There are activities (explained in this chapter) that you can try to help you find weaknesses in these areas.
- Make sure that your introduction and conclusion are aligned and that your conclusion doesn't waste time summarizing a paper shorter than about 2000 words.
- Check transition sentences by making sure that the first sentence in each paragraph after the introduction includes a reference to ideas already covered *and* an introduction to new ideas to be explained in the paragraph that includes the transition.

Text Attributions

"Color Coding Topics: A Strategy to Strengthen Focus" was revised with the help of James Bushard, a student in my class during Spring 2022, who also provided the examples, including the example in "Rainbow Paragraphs."

"Mapping Paragraphs: A Strategy to Strengthen Logical Coherence" was revised with the help of Lorenzo Locks Azeredo, a student in my class during Spring 2022, who also provided the example. The map provided is my recreation of his map.

Editing

Editing allows you to focus on making your sentences say exactly what you want them to say. Here, you'll examine the structure of your sentences and the words you have chosen.

Editing vs. Proofreading

I've separated editing and proofreading because they require different work. Editing frequently involves rewriting sentences; proofreading is about finding small errors, like missing words or incorrect citations.

That said, proofreading techniques can help you find sentences that need editing, so they aren't entirely separate. As I have said repeatedly throughout this text, find the strategies that work for you, and use them.

I've talked about a writing trajectory, and while "stages" like revision and drafting may occur throughout the process, editing is best left until late in the process. While you are still forming your ideas and getting those thoughts out in logical forms that a reader will understand, it doesn't make sense to spend much time strengthening sentences. Imagine putting lots of effort into the sentences in a paragraph only to find out that the paragraph has to be rewritten substantially because there isn't enough evidence or explanation in it.

Seeing Patterns

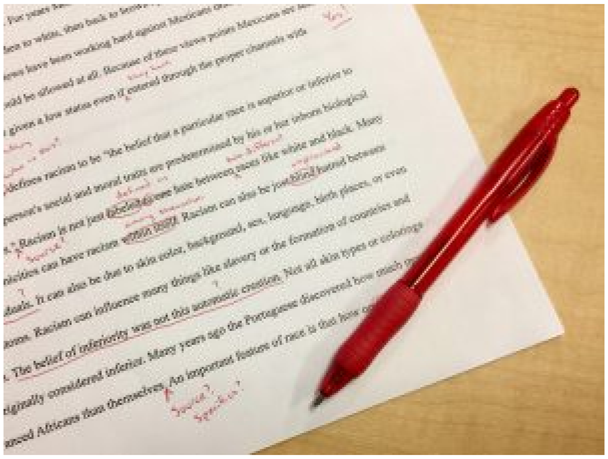
Editing requires careful attention to your sentences, but as you become more proficient at it, you will start to see patterns.

For example, I tend to write what most teachers would call "baggy sentences," especially in my first drafts. When I am busy getting the ideas out, I don't worry about weak verbs or too many prepositional phrases. As part of my editing process, though, I look for these weaknesses and work to fix them. On the other hand, I don't usually have trouble with stylistic coherence, so I don't spend much time on that.

With some practice, you'll end up with your own list of areas to check.

The strategies in this section are based on my experiences with students. I am not trying to be comprehensive; instead, I'm focusing on the areas that, I believe, will help you make the most significant improvements. As with all of the strategies in this section, you need to identify which ones are useful for you.

Strengthening Sentences



Often, we write like we talk. However, speech is full of repetition, informal phrasing, and vague word choice that gets explained as we talk. In written text, those "features" become "bugs" that irritate readers because we can always reread if we need clarification.

The strategies here are designed to help you create stronger and clearer sentences.

Strengthening the Most Important Words

The single most important word in any given sentence is the verb. The verb holds the action in a sentence and lets the reader know how ideas work. Strengthening your verbs can make a world of difference in the clarity and sophistication of your prose.

There are two types of verbs: action and state of being.

Action – Usually Preferred	**State-of-Being – Sometimes Needed**
Some kind of activity is taking place	*No activity is happening; a sort of verbal equals sign*
Examples: Think Explain Argue Consider Look • She looks out of the window. • She looks to her friends for help.	**Examples:** Is/Are Was/Were Seem Appear Look • She looks angry. • She looks tired.

Notice that you cannot always tell whether a word is an action verb just by looking at it. In the examples, the verb "look" can be an action verb when it indicates the action of using sight or considering, but a state-of-being verb when it indicates appearance. One way to tell is to substitute a form of the verb "to be" in the sentence: "She is angry," or "She is tired." While the meaning isn't exactly the same, these sentences make grammatical sense, unlike "She is out of the window" or "She is to her friends for help."

You generally want to use action verbs unless you are specifically equating two things. Action verbs let you put the most important work of the sentence into the word that is designed for that work.

Verbs vs. Verbals

There are words that look like verbs, but that aren't actually verbs. For example, look at this sentence: "Strengthening your verbs can make a world of difference in the clarity and sophistication of your prose." The very first word, "strengthening," looks like a verb, but it actually isn't. The verb in that sentence is "make" (with "can" as an auxiliary verb), and "strengthening" is functioning as a subject in that sentence, so it's a noun.

There are three kinds of verbals in English:

- Gerunds always end in *-ing* and function as nouns.
  Knitting is one of my favorite activities.
- Infinitives are the base form of a verb plus *to*. These can function as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.
  To knit well just requires yarn, needles, patience, and a bit of dexterity.
  Hats are an easy project ***to knit***.
  It's fun ***to knit*** winter clothes for yourself and your family.
- Participles take either present form (ending in *-ing*) or past form (ending in *-ed*, or any of the other myriad past forms that go with "have" in forming verbs). Participles function as adjectives.
  Knitted hats are warm and functional.
  I sometimes attend ***knitting*** circles, where many crafters meet together.

None of the words in italics here are actually verbs. They just look like verbs.

Identifying Verbs

To be able to strengthen your verbs, you first need to be able to identify them, and with verbals throughout the English language, that can sometimes be difficult. However, there is an easy way to find verbs: Change the time.

In English, most indications of time appear in our verbs. We have words like "today" or "tomorrow" that indicate present or future, but the verbs do a much better job. Take, for example, these sentences and their meanings:

"Today, I am working on my paper."

"Today, I worked on my paper."

These are the same sentence with only a change in the verb, but the first sentence indicates that the activity (working) is happening either in the immediate future or it is going on as the person is speaking. We would know which from the context. The second sentence indicates that the activity is done, even though it happened on the same day.

To identify the verbs in your sentences, change the time. Usually the easiest is to change past to present or present to past. The words that change are your verbs.

Activity: Identify the Verbs

In the following paragraphs (from earlier in this section), exchange past and present in each sentence, and highlight the words that change. It may help to add words like “yesterday” and “today” to help you change the time. I’ve also separated out the contractions so that they don’t get in the way.

> For example, I tend to write what most teachers would call “baggy sentences,” especially in my first drafts. When I am busy getting the ideas out, I don’t worry about weak verbs or too many prepositional phrases. As part of my editing process, though, I look for these weaknesses and work to fix them. On the other hand, I don’t usually have trouble with stylistic coherence, so I don’t spend much time on that.

View the answers. Don’t peek until you try it for yourself.

> For example, I ***tend*** to write what most teachers ***would* call*** “baggy sentences,” especially in my first drafts. When I ***am*** busy getting the ideas out, I ***do**** not ***worry*** about weak verbs or too many prepositional phrases. As part of my editing process, though, I ***look*** for these weaknesses and ***work*** to fix them. On the other hand, I ***do**** not usually ***have*** trouble with stylistic coherence, so I ***do**** not ***spend*** much time on that.

* There are a number of auxiliary verbs in this paragraph. To give you some of the technical language, “would” is a modal auxiliary that expresses possibility. “Do” is an auxiliary verb that helps us, in this case, to express the negative. When you run into auxiliary verbs, look nearby to see if there is a main verb. You’ll find it if you can get rid of the auxiliary (and the negative), and the sentence still makes sense.

And now that you’ve practiced here, try some of your own writing!

Helping Verbs

In English, we have a category called helping (or more technically, auxiliary) verbs. These often include words like “is” and “was” plus a present participle form of the verb: e.g., “is studying” or “was studying.” These forms indicate that the activity is ongoing, either in the present or the past. You should count helping verbs as part of the verb for technical purposes, but for strengthening your sentences, they aren’t as important as making sure you know whether your verbs are action verbs or state-of-being verbs. Just don’t assume that every “is” you see is a state-of-being verb.

When you see these with the past participle, you are looking at one form of the passive voice: “is studied,” for example, indicates that a subject is being studied, but the person doing the studying has disappeared from the sentence. I discuss passive voice a little later.

Strengthening Verbs

Once you have identified your verbs, you can look at each one to determine whether it needs strengthening. There are a few things to consider as you do this:

- Every time you use a state-of-being verb, check that you really are trying to equate (at least roughly) the subject of the sentence with the idea that appears after the verb. If you aren't, look for ways to convert that verb to an action verb:
    - Is there another word in the sentence that could become a verb?
      "She is a manager" could become "She manages three stores."
    - Could that entire sentence become a **dependent clause** or **phrase** in another sentence?
      "She is a manager" could become "A manager of three stores, she works long hours."
- Check the specificity of the verb you are using. Sometimes we rely on general verbs when more specific ones would be better. Do we mean "write," or do we mean "scribble" or "create" or "expound" or something else entirely?
- Check your repetition. No matter whether you are using state-of-being verbs intentionally or action verbs, you want to provide some variety for your reader. Look for way to change at least some of the verbs.

Using a Thesaurus

A thesaurus can be a really helpful tool, but it has to be used wisely. Think about the difference between saying that someone's mother is a "big" woman and calling her "huge." Those words are synonyms, but the latter one could land you in a fight. Feel free to use a thesaurus, but take the time to look up the meaning of the synonym that you are thinking of using.

Using Passive Voice Purposefully

You've probably heard that you shouldn't use the passive voice. In a passive voice sentence, the person or thing doing the action—what should be the subject of the sentence—is moved to a prepositional phrase, if it appears in the sentence at all.

To explain the concept, textbooks will often include examples like "The ball was thrown by Sam." But no one really writes like that.

Passive voice usually results in a weaker sentence structure because your reader is left guessing who or what is doing the action. While verbs are the most important words in sentences, subjects are usually the second most important, and the passive voice buries the subject. When writers do this unnecessarily, their sentences are weaker.

However, there are appropriate uses of the passive voice:

- When you want to emphasize the thing that was acted upon rather than the actor. For example, "The oldest quasar to-date, J0313-1806, was discovered in January 2021 by an international team of researchers." The quasar is more important than the research team.
- When you want to emphasize the action or the result rather than the actor. This is particularly common in

scientific writing. For example, “The liquid was heated to 100 °C.” No one cares which researcher lit the Bunsen burner, only that the liquid was heated to that temperature.
- When the person or thing doing the action isn’t important, only that the action was done. For example, “Barack Obama was reelected.” The fact that voters reelected Obama is not as important as the fact that he was elected to another term.
- When you don’t know who did the action. For example, “The Lascaux Caves were painted sometime before 15,000 BCE.” We don’t know who made those paintings, so we simply can’t talk about the actor.

Sometimes, though, use of the passive voice is just obfuscation. For example, when Ronald Reagan claimed that “mistakes were made” in relation to the Iran-Contra scandal, his statement avoided indicating who made the mistakes. In this case, the passive voice is being used to avoid taking responsibility or laying blame.

Sometimes, however, even obfuscations are appropriate. Businesses will use this kind of language to focus on the problem or the fact that there is a solution rather than focusing on the employee responsible for the problem. In other cases, the passive points attention where we want it. For example, “Seventeen students were killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018.” This passive sentence deliberately avoids naming the person who did the shooting to emphasize the victims.

Activity: Identifying and Checking the Passive Voice

You can check your use of the passive voice by reviewing the verbs you have identified.

1. Look for some form of “to be” and a past participle: “is written,” “was walked,” “were discussed,” “have been examined.”
2. When you find one of these constructions, identify who is doing the action of that verb. For example, who is doing the discussing?
3. If that actor is known (or knowable) and important, try rewriting the sentence so that the actor occupies the subject position in the sentence.
4. If that actor isn’t known or isn’t important, make sure that your choice of the passive voice meets one of the “appropriate uses” listed above.

Strengthening Sentence Structure and Variety

When we write well, we make our writing interesting to our reader. You’ve probably heard of sentence variety as one way to make your writing interesting, but sentence variety also gives you more tools to increase the sophistication of your writing and to allow you to explain complex ideas more effectively. To work on this kind of sophistication and complexity, we start with sentence types.

Sentence types are determined by the number and kind of clauses that a sentence has.

- A clause is a grammatical structure that includes a subject and predicate.
- Independent clauses are complete sentences and express complete thoughts. They do not need additional sentence parts in order to make sense.

Example: She looks tired although she has been sleeping well.

- Dependent clauses have a subject and predicate, but they also have words that mark them as dependent on another clause, often a subordinating conjunction. They do not express a complete thought and require another clause to make sense.

Example: Although she has been sleeping well.

As you probably remember from earlier years of your education, there are four sentence types:

Type	Description of the number and types of clauses
Simple	one independent clause
Compound	two or more independent clauses
Complex	one independent clause *and* one or more dependent clauses
Compound-Complex	two or more independent clauses *and* one or more dependent clauses

Notice that identifying verbs can help you identify sentence types. Each verb (actual verb, not verbal) generally indicates a separate clause. Once you identify the verbs, you can start to figure out which kind of clause—independent or dependent—you have. Once you know that, you can figure out which kind of sentence you have.

The sentence types are more than just labels. Each type of sentence does a particular kind of work that helps you make meaning.

- **Simple sentences** create emphasis by focusing on a single idea expressed in a single, focused clause. These are a good choice for when you want to make sure your reader gets your point.
- **Compound sentences** use a concept called "coordination" to give equal weight to the ideas in each of the independent clauses in the sentence. These are a good choice for when you want to present ideas that are linked and that are of similar importance or value.
- **Complex sentences** use a concept called "subordination" to give differential weight to the ideas in each of the clauses. Dependent clauses present ideas that are less important than the ideas in the independent clauses in the same sentence. These are a good choice for when you want to emphasize one idea over another.
- **Compound-complex sentences** use both coordination and subordination to explain relationships among ideas. These are a good choice for when you have complex ideas to explain.

It's easy to think that as a college-level writer, you should be using mostly compound-complex sentences. While it is true that you will probably need this sentence type more than you have in the past, it is not true that every sentence should become compound-complex.

Honestly, too many of any one kind of sentence, particularly when they appear in a row, creates difficulties for your reader:

- Too many simple sentences in a row can make your writing seem "choppy." Look for sentences that you could combine so that two or three sentences become one sentence. Look especially for ways that you can turn some sentences into dependent clauses or even phrases in other sentences.

- Too many compound sentences in a row can make your reader feel like they are running a marathon, plodding along where every step is the same as every other step. Try turning some of the compound sentences into complex sentences by identifying places where subordination is appropriate. Alternatively, try separating some of the sentences into simple sentences.
- Too many complex sentences in a row, particularly when they all begin or end with the dependent clause, can create a kind of rhythm to your prose that distracts from the meaning, almost like poetry or song lyrics. Try turning one or more of the dependent clauses into an independent clause or combining two of these sentences into a compound-complex sentence.
- Too many compound-complex sentences in a row can make your ideas dense and hard to follow. Try breaking some of those sentences up into two or three sentences of other types.

Instead of choosing too many of one kind, think about the kind of work that you need your sentence to do, and use that kind of sentence. But don't pile on too many at once. Your reader wants to be interested in your writing. Sentence variety makes that easier.

Activity: Checking Variety

Choose any single paragraph from a piece of writing you are editing, and do the following:

1. Identify all of the verbs (not verbals), and mark them with a highlighter.
2. Based on those verbs, identify the clauses in each sentence, and make note of whether they are independent or dependent.
3. Based on those clause types, identify and make a list, sentence-by-sentence, of the types of sentences you have in the paragraph.
4. If you have too many of one type in a row or not enough use of complex or compound-complex sentences, use the strategies in this section to make changes.

Checking Stylistic Coherence

In the paragraph revision chapter, I talk about logical coherence in paragraphs, which is the concept that ideas connect logically sentence-to-sentence in a sequence that makes sense to readers. Stylistic coherence does similar work, but the focus here is on how words literally connect sentences together.

In any given paragraph, after the first sentence, each sentence should contain words that connect to the ideas in the previous sentence. There are many ways to do this:

- Repeated words or phrases
- Synonyms
- Pronouns
- Parallel structures
- Transition words

Activity: Checking Stylistic Coherence

Choose a paragraph to work on and do the following:

1. Read the first sentence and then the second sentence.
2. In the second sentence, circle the words that connect back to the first sentence and draw an arrow to the words that they connect to in the first sentence.
3. Read the third sentence, and circle the words that connect back to the second sentence. Draw an arrow from those words to the words they connect to in the second sentence.
4. Continue doing this for all of the sentences in the paragraph.
5. Note any sentences that do not have a connection to the previous sentence and rewrite those so that there is a connection.

Eliminating Wordiness

Wordiness plagues a lot of written texts. My first drafts are always wordy, full of what I have described as "baggy" sentences. There's nothing wrong with this in a first draft, but as you get closer to submitting your work, you want to find and eliminate wordiness so that your ideas are sharper and clearer for your reader.

Activity: Identifying and Fixing Wordiness

If you have a problem with wordiness—and not everyone does—you want to look specifically for the following signals:

- Words (or synonyms) that are repeated unnecessarily in the same sentence. Try to rewrite the sentence so that you only use the word once or twice.
- Search for "there is," "there are," and "it is." These are sometimes called "dummy subjects" because they fill in the subject in a sentence but they aren't actually the subject. These sentence openers often function as placeholders to signal that you are about to introduce a topic (e.g., "There are two problems with this approach."), but they don't actually say anything about the topic. Try to write the sentence to eliminate those placeholders, keeping in mind that sometimes you will want to use those for emphasis.
- Reduce the number of **prepositional phrases** (phrases that begin with words like "of," "for," "in," and "at"). If you have too many of these in a row, your reader can struggle to follow your meaning. Try rewriting the sentence by moving the meaning in those phrases to single word adjectives and

adverbs or by making your nouns and verbs more specific to incorporate the meaning from the prepositional phrases.

- Vague phrasing. Vague phrasing often requires more words than phrasing that is more concrete and precise—and more interesting! Look for places where you have used longer phrases that could be replaced with single words.

Wordiness and Word Counts

Students are prone to wordiness in part, I believe, because they are worried about meeting word count or page length requirements. The problem is that wordiness doesn't actually help. Wordy prose doesn't add much to the content, and readers—especially experienced readers, like professors—can see when students are padding their writing.

While you may need to meet a minimum word count, you can do that more effectively with substantive additions to your writing. If you are struggling with the word count, try meeting with a writing tutor or your professor to make sure that you have something substantial to say.

Checking Your Person

Most academic writing uses third person, but there are occasional uses for first and second.

- First person relies on the perspective of the writer or narrator (in the case of literary works). First person writing relies on the use of "I," "me," "we," "our," and so forth.
- Second person points attention at the reader, using "you," "your," and "yours."
- Third person uses the perspective of the person or thing being discussed. There is limited (or no) use of first person and instead, the pronouns used are "she," "his," "it," "their," and so on.

As you edit, you will want to make sure you are using the person that you should for the type of writing that you are doing.

YOU&ME
ME&YOU
YOU&ME

First Person

When you are being asked to discuss your experiences, reflect on readings, or otherwise write about your personal responses, you cannot avoid the use of first person—nor will your professors expect you to. You may have been told in high school that you should not use "I," but honestly that probably had more to do with the need for you to practice writing outside of yourself. If your teacher had let you write in first person at age 15, how likely is it, for example, that you would have focused on the experiment or the background information that your paper required?

So even in projects that are primarily written in the third person, the occasional "I" is usually fine. Just be sure that you actually need it. For example, saying "I think" and "I believe" frequently in your paper can undermine your points. You wrote the piece, so your reader is already assuming that these are your thoughts and beliefs. Do you really need those phrases? At this stage of your writing process, it might be time to edit those out.

Note, though, that this is not true in some disciplines. For example, writing in chemistry—at least as of the time I'm writing this textbook—does not allow for first person at all. Some areas of biology do, but some don't. You want to become familiar with the expectations for the course you're in and the type of project you're doing.

Second Person

When your assignment asks you to write instructions, the use of second person is necessary. After all, in those circumstances, you are giving directions to your reader. "You" should be used when you are talking directly to your reader.

However, this situation is rare in academic writing. Students tend to use "you" when they actually are presenting a hypothetical situation.

Example: "You" and a Hypothetical

Take the following sentence: "When you have cancer, there are several treatment options."

While it seems innocent enough, the use of "you" here forces your reader into the position of having cancer. As it does that, it draws attention away from the true emphasis in that sentence: "treatment options." If the reader in fact has cancer, they are now thinking about that cancer. If the reader doesn't, they are saying, "no, I don't"; arguing with you a little instead of paying attention to what you want them to.

Notice how this structure also sets you up to use a dummy subject ("there are"), which can be a weaker sentence structure.

Compare this with "Patients have several treatment options for cancer."

Luckily, the second person can be very easy to find in your writing. Just search for "you"!

Third Person

Third person is needed most often in academic writing because the focus is on something outside of the writer and outside of the reader. Academic work focuses on concepts, phenomena, objects, processes, and the like, so third person is the most common.

In college-level writing, you can use first and second person sometimes; just make sure that use is purposeful.

Key Points: Editing

- Strengthening your sentences helps you make your meaning more precisely and makes your **prose** more interesting for your reader.
- Strengthening your verbs can be particularly effective because verbs are the most important words in English sentences.
- You can also strengthen your writing by creating variety in your choice of sentence structure.
- Stylistic coherence makes connections at the word level between sentences, which makes it easier for your reader to understand the links between your ideas.
- Wordiness may seem to help your word count, but it irritates your reader.
- Be sure you are using first person only when appropriate (you need to talk about yourself) and second person only when talking to your reader directly (like instructions). Most academic writing is done in third person.

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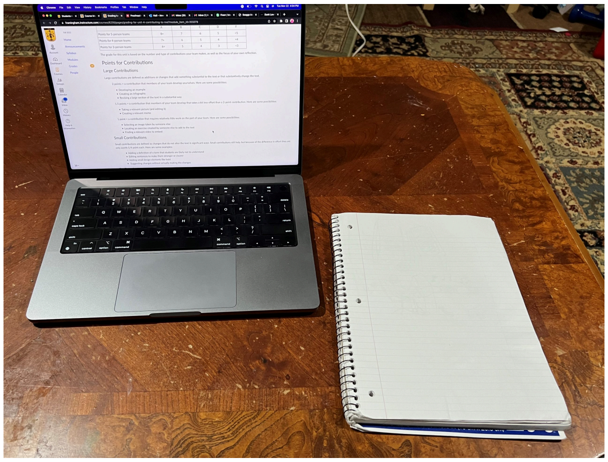
Proofreading



This is a good environment for proofreading (or studying in general), far from distractions and with a nice open table to better concentrate.

When I ask students about their proofreading strategies, they frequently tell me that they read over the paper before they hand it in. When I ask them how well that has worked for them in the past, they shrug. When I ask them to reread something they have handed in a while ago, they get embarrassed and sometimes even mad at themselves because they are seeing errors that they believe they should have caught. The problem, I tell them, is their proofreading strategy, and we get to work trying out alternatives.

In this section, I present a number of proofreading strategies that students have told me work for them. Not all of them work for me; not all of them will work for you. I recommend, though, that you try them, particularly some that you haven't tried before. You might be able to find more error than you have in the past.

Proofreading vs. Editing

Editing and proofreading require different work, but both require attention to detail. Proofreading is about finding small errors, like typos or missing commas, while editing often involves more substantial work on sentence structure.

However, as I noted in the last section, proofreading and editing are not entirely separate. Be wary, though, of treating them as if they are the same task. If you start proofreading, but switch to editing a few rough sentences, be sure that you switch back to proofreading mode so that you don't miss the typos!

Hearing the Text: Strategies for Good Ears

Some people can hear problems in their writing much more easily than they can see them, so these variations all rely on you being able to hear what you have written. The strategies below tend to work better when you are able to make marks on a hard copy of your paper, so I recommend that you print your paper out, no matter which you try.

- **You can try reading out loud to yourself**—if you are good at reading out loud exactly what you have written, mistakes and all. Make corrections as you go, or leave marks (highlighting, underlines, circles) to make corrections later.

- **You can ask a friend to read your text out loud to you.** This will work best with someone who hasn't worked with you on other revisions, so they don't know in advance what you mean. This time, you want to mark places where your reader stumbles or has to back up to read a sentence, as well as places where one or the other of you sees errors. This strategy often works best with two hard copies, one for you and one for your partner.
- **You can have your computer read the text out loud to you** (see "Tech Talk," below). Keep in mind that a computer won't stumble or back up. It also won't stop until you tell it to. You'll need to be ready to use some quick-marking techniques if you use this strategy.

Tech Talk

Most word-processing software and operating systems have methods for turning text into speech. Microsoft Word® has a "Read Aloud" feature on the Review tab. Google Docs™ has an option to turn on speech under "Accessibility Options" in the Tools menu. Windows® includes a "Narrator" feature in the Ease of Access tools. Apple® computers include a speech option in the Accessibility section of the System Preferences menu.

By the time you read this, however, these options may have changed, and specific instructions may vary for the version of software and/or browser that you are using.

If you'd like to try computer reading and these instructions don't work, search online for specific instructions for your system and software.

Seeing the Text: Strategies for Good Eyes

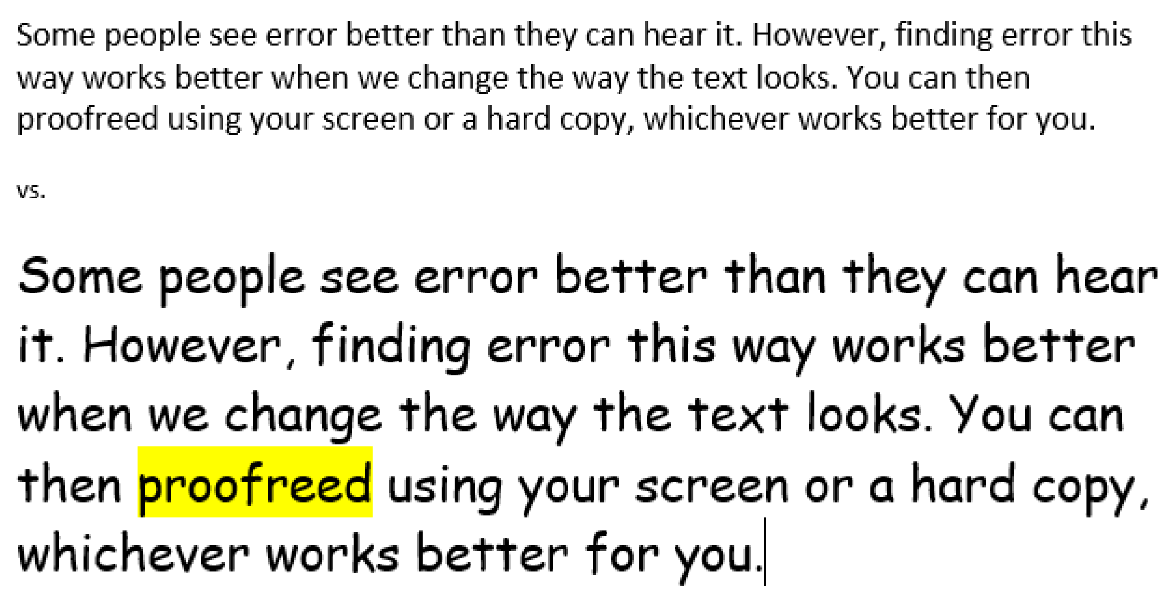
Some people see error better than they can hear it. However, finding error this way works better when we change the way the text looks. You can then proofread using your screen or a hard copy, whichever works better for you.

- **Change the size or typeface of the font you are using.** Changing font types and sizes changes where the beginnings and endings of lines appear, which means that you're more likely to see errors.
    - Most word processors default to using a sans serif font; try a serif font or a different typeface.
    - Make the entire text 18-point or even larger.
- **Shrink your window size so that you can only see a few lines at a time.** This can help you focus on the words in those lines instead of the flow of the paragraph.
- **Make every sentence into a separate paragraph** (see the activity below).
    - This approach can work well in conjunction with shrinking your window size, since each sentence will be separated from the ones around it.
    - For an added bonus, this approach can also help you see when you have sentences that begin the same way or too many sentences of the same length in a row.

- It can also help you find dropped quotations.

Example: Changing Font Size

Compare these two versions:



Some people see error better than they can hear it. However, finding error this way works better when we change the way the text looks. You can then proofreed using your screen or a hard copy, whichever works better for you.

vs.

Some people see error better than they can hear it. However, finding error this way works better when we change the way the text looks. You can then proofreed using your screen or a hard copy, whichever works better for you.

The first sample was done in Calibri, the default font in Microsoft Word®, though I made the point size 14 so that it would be a little more readable.

In the second sample, you can better see errors. I changed the size font to 20, as well as set the font to Comic Sans to better read the work. As you can see, you can better see I mistyped "proofread" and I'm now able to fix that.

Serif vs. Sans Serif

Serif fonts have little decorative strokes on the letters. Examples of serif fonts include Times New

Roman, Palatino, and Garamond. These fonts tend to work better in print than on screen for most readers.

Sans Serif fonts have no such decorations. Examples of sans serif fonts include Arial (the default font for Google Docs™) and Calibri (the default font for Microsoft Word®).

Activity: Turning Sentences into Paragraphs

First, a few cautions:

- As of this writing, this doesn't work in Google Docs, so the instructions below are for Microsoft Word only. If you are using Word on a Mac, you will need to use the Advanced Find and Replace.
- Follow these instructions carefully. If you misplace or forget a period, it can be hard to put your paper back in essay format. Some students opt to do this on a copy of their paper, using the spaced-out version to make notes about changes, but making the changes on the original version.
- If you are doing this on the original copy of your paper, be sure to double-check it after you have completed your revisions and converted your paper back to essay format. You want to be sure that your paragraphs are all as they should be.
- Do not try to fix your Works Cited or References list with this technique. This process makes a mess of that list.

Step 1: Convert Your Paper

View the instructions.
Open your paper in Word, and take the following steps:

1. Click on the "Replace" button on the right side of the Home tab.
2. In the dialog box that opens, type the following:
   a. In the "Find what" blank: Type a period and a space.
   b. In the "Replace with" blank: Type a period, a caret (Shift-6), the letter "p", another caret (Shift-6), and another letter "p."
   Note: If you have trouble with the ^p^p part, choose "More" (which becomes "Less" when you click on it) and then "Special" and then "Paragraph Mark" twice. Make sure your cursor is in the "Replace with" blank before you click on the "Paragraph Mark."
3. Click "Replace All."

Step 2: Edit and Proofread

View the instructions.
Using this version, do your editing and proofreading work. Be careful as you edit. Try not to add

periods or spaces between sentences, which can also make returning your paper to essay format more difficult.

Step 3: Put Your Paper Back in Regular Format

View the instructions.

Assuming you are doing your edits on the same copy you intend to use, you can put it back in regular paragraph form. You just need to reverse the search:

1. Click on the “Replace” button on the right side of the Home tab.
2. In the dialog box that opens, type the following:
   a. “Find what:” Type a period, a caret (Shift-6), the letter “p”, another caret (Shift-6), and another letter “p.”
   b. “Replace with:” Type a period and a space.
      Again: If you have trouble with the ^p^p part, choose “More” (which becomes “Less” when you click on it) and then “Special” and then “Paragraph Mark” twice. Make sure your cursor is in the “Find what:” blank before you click on the “Paragraph Mark.”
3. Click “Replace All.” Once your paper is back in essay format, double-check to make sure that all of your paragraphs return to the way you want them.

Moving: Strategies for Kinesthetic Writers

Some people think better when they are moving around or when they are moving things around. If this describes you, try these strategies.

- **Pace.** Get a clipboard, print out your paper, and walk around while you read. Make notes or marks for later changes as you go.
- **Print out your paper and cut it up so that you only have one paragraph to work with at a time.** Tape together paragraphs that bridge pages. Then pick a paragraph, and start marking it up. For some added benefit, choose paragraphs at random so that the ideas are always moving around, too.

Checking Details

Sometimes, we know where the trouble spots are. We know that we have particular problems with commas or an author’s name or there/their/they’re. It can be helpful to create a checklist for yourself of specific things to look for. For many of these, you can leverage your word processor’s search function to locate the problem spots more efficiently.

Here are some common trouble spots.

Author's names

Some authors have names that show up as misspellings, so it's easy to skip over those red squiggles in your word processor. One trick is to add the correct spelling to your word processor's dictionary so that it will only mark the ones that are truly misspelled.

Commas

Commas are a confusing mark of punctuation for many people, and **comma splices** are one of the most common errors for early college writers.

If you struggle with commas, first, become familiar with the most important comma rules. Tons of sites online have this information; don't worry about the number of rules they list, just choose a reputable one like the Excelsior OWL, the Purdue OWL or other university website. Then, you can search for commas and carefully proofread to make sure that the ones you have are in the correct place. You'll have to read carefully, though, to add the ones you're missing. If you aren't sure, check with a tutor, your professor, or a friend who seems to understand commas well.

Example: Comma Splices

Comma splices happen because writers know that the ideas in two independent clauses belong closer together than an "and" can bring them, but they aren't sure about how to do this grammatically. Here is a comma splice:

> "Solar winds are made up of charged particles originating from the Earth's Sun, these winds can disrupt satellites and power grids."

When you have a pair of clauses like this, the comma isn't strong enough to hold these ideas together—or splice them.

View some options for correcting this error.

To fix this error, you can do a number of things:

Join them with a coordinating conjunction.

> "Solar winds are made up of charged particles originating from the Earth's Sun, and these winds can disrupt satellites and power grids."

This solution doesn't work particularly well because the "and" makes the two parts feel too separated.

Use subordination to turn one of the clauses into a dependent clause.

> "Solar winds, which are charged particles originating from the Earth's Sun, can disrupt satellites and power grids."
>
> OR

“Solar winds, which disrupt satellites and power grids, are made up of charged particles originating from the Earth’s Sun.”

This solution is better in this case, but the one you choose would depend on what you want to emphasize.

Turn one of the independent clauses into a phrase, in this case, one that modifies “solar winds.”

“Solar winds, charged particles originating from the Earth’s Sun, can disrupt satellites and power grids.”

OR

“Solar winds, disrupters of satellites and power grids, are made up of charged particles originating from the Earth’s Sun.”

Again, this solution is better, and you would make a choice depending on what you want to emphasize.

Turn the sentences into a simple sentence with a compound verb.

“Solar winds are made up of charged particles originating from the Earth’s Sun and can disrupt satellites and power grids.”

Again, this one is better than the original. Because it depends on **coordination**, you would be giving equal emphasis to the two parts.

I have provided a handful of solutions here, but there are many more. The point is for you to understand that when you run into a comma splice, you will want to think actively about how to create the emphasis you want in your sentence.

Quotations

Double-check your quotations. Keep in mind that everything inside of quotation marks (with a few minor exceptions) needs to be *exactly* what is in the original text. Errors in quotations can indicate a kind of carelessness, particularly since these kinds of errors are avoidable. When you are checking your quotations, it is also a good time to check that you have the correct citation information.

Just as there are specific rules for commas, there are specific rules for quotation marks, but these are simpler:

- **Periods and commas go inside quotation marks.** This is true even if they aren’t part of the original sentence.
- **Question marks, semicolons, and all other punctuation marks can go either inside or outside**, depending on whether they are part of your sentence or part of the sentence you are quoting. If they are part of your sentence, they go outside. If they are part of the original sentence, they go inside.
- **Citations do not belong inside of quotation marks.** They are your marks about where the source is located; they are not part of the original.

If you search for quotation marks, you can find these easily.

Key Points: Proofreading

- Do not just “read over” your writing. Choose a proofreading technique that works for you, such as reading aloud, changing the text’s appearance, or moving while you proofread.
- Check for specific details, including the spelling of authors’ names and comma usage. Also check that everything inside of quotation marks is exactly what’s in the original and that you have used punctuation around quotation marks correctly.

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“Good Proofreading Environment” by Waldy Baez, Ameir Mahmoud, and Latrell Williams is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. The original photograph was cropped slightly by Patricia Lynne.

The idea for “Change Text Size” came from work by Waldy Baez, Ameir Mahmoud, and Latrell Williams. The original file would not display correctly, so Patricia Lynne has redone the work. Credit should be given to both the original student contribution and, if copied, to my work, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Text Attribution

Material in this section was revised with the help of Waldy Baez, Ameir Mahmoud, and Latrell Williams, students in my class during Fall 2022.

Owning Your Process

Throughout this section of *Reading and Writing Successfully in College*, I have reminded you to find processes that work for you. There is no one "right" or "best" process; there are only processes that work for you.

Good writers are flexible writers. They have their usual methods for producing good final products, but they also find that sometimes techniques that have worked before no longer help. Successful writers know how to try a different approach when a process stops working.

Successful writers also recognize that different writing tasks can require different processes. The process that I used for this textbook is very different from the process I used, for example, in composing the emails I sent out today.

Good process doesn't stop after college, either. If your professional work requires writing at all, you'll want to keep refining and adjusting your processes so that you can be successful in those settings, too.

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PART IV

WRITING WITH SOURCES

How Are Sources Used in College?

Professors often ask you to write based on texts written by others. While there can be other sources of information for your writing—e.g., empirical data (like data from experiments or surveys), personal experiences and reflections, films and other video materials—published sources (like articles and books) are frequently required in college writing assignments.

This section consists of two parts: gathering sources and using sources.

Gathering Sources

For those assignments that require you to find your own textual sources, you will need to go beyond a quick internet or library search. You'll also need to make sure that the sources you find are the kinds that your professor wants and evaluate their credibility. The first three chapters of this section explain the different types of sources you might use, as well as how to locate and evaluate potential sources.

Using Sources

The rest of this section provides guidance for using the sources that you have located and evaluated.

For all of your sources, including any provided by your professor, you'll need to make sure you read them carefully, taking notes as you go (see Successful College Reading). If you don't understand your sources, you'll struggle to use them.

The seven chapters in the second part of this section are designed to strengthen your abilities with the three key ways in which textual sources are used—summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting—and to help you understand how to incorporate material from your sources well and avoid plagiarism.

Your professors will expect you to use them to do things like the following:

- Provide background information on a topic
- Present information or arguments that serve as a foundation for you to extend your own ideas
- Present information or arguments that serve as a position against which you argue
- Provide examples of points
- Lend authority to your claims

Using sources in your work tells your reader about the intellectual heritage of your ideas. Strong thinkers build on the ideas of others, and they give credit to those who came before.

Notice that in all of these, your sources support your points by providing **evidence** for your own points.

What that support looks like varies somewhat by **discipline**. In the humanities—in literature or philosophy classes, for example—you will be expected to quote from your sources. However, in the natural sciences—biology or physics, for example—you will almost never quote, and you'll rarely even paraphrase. As you gain experience in your major, you'll become accustomed to the expectations of that discipline. At the same time, you need to be aware of the different expectations when you take classes outside of your major.

In many ways, though, these differences are only on the surface. What's important is that you understand the kinds of work that sources can do and how to integrate them into your own work. That's what this section is designed to help you do.

"Writer" and "Author"

Throughout this section, when I use the word "writer," I am referring to you, the writer of the current project you are working on. When I use the word "author," I am referring to the author(s) of the sources you are using.

Authors (your sources) have already written something. Writers (you) are currently writing something. If I mean otherwise, I'll try to be clear about the change.

You should also read "author" as either singular or plural. Many pieces of writing, particularly scholarly articles, are written by multiple authors. For the sake of simplicity, I'm using the singular form.

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Photo by Clay Banks on Unsplash

Understanding Sources Types

Odds are good that your professor wants you to use certain types of textual sources in your writing. The three broad categories—popular, trade, and scholarly—have varying degrees of reliability and usefulness in college-level writing.

Recognizing Popular Sources

Popular sources are written for an interested audience without any specialized knowledge. This is the kind of source that you'll find on magazine racks or at the grocery store check-out.

Here are some examples of popular sources:

- Magazines like *Time* and *National Geographic*
- Newspapers like *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*
- Popular websites like *Politico* and *ESPN.com*
- Radio and television sources like NPR (National Public Radio) and CNN (Cable News Network)
- Encyclopedias like *Britannica* and *WebMD*

While many of these sources are reputable, they often won't be acceptable for college-level writing because they aren't written by subject-matter experts, and they often don't have references. Don't plan to use these unless your professor explicitly tells you that you can or should.

Recognizing Trade Sources

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
IHE Inside Higher Ed
edutopia
EducationWeek

Trade publications are written for professional audiences. Most industries have print and/or electronic resources designed specifically for people working in that field. In higher education, for example, there is *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Insider Higher Ed*, both of which provide news and information relevant for those working in colleges and universities. There are also websites like *Edutopia* and *AAC&U* (American Association of Colleges and Universities).

Many trade sources are published by professional organizations. Professional organizations provide support for people working in a particular field, and as you move into advanced classes in your major, you should ask your professors about these.

As with popular sources, many of these are quite reputable. While they are considered more useful for college-level research than popular sources, they are often not acceptable because the writing does not undergo **peer review** (see below), and there may be no citations. Like popular sources, check with your professor.

Recognizing Scholarly Sources

Scholarly sources are considered the gold standard because they are written by researchers for researchers. Scholarly sources rely on a process called "peer review" whereby research articles are evaluated by other researchers in the same field for the appropriateness of their methods and accuracy of their findings. Scholarly articles generally do not get published unless they make a contribution to research in the field.

You can often identify scholarly articles because they appear in publications with titles that include words like "journal" and "research." Articles from these publications do not include images designed to draw interest; instead, they often include data-driven graphics, like charts and tables, though not in all **disciplines**. They also tend to have lots of citations and reference lists at the end.

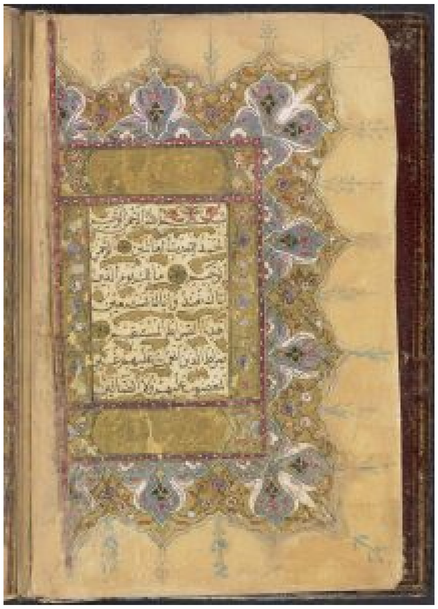
While some of these articles are freely available on the internet, many of them can only be found through library databases or journal websites, and if you aren't a subscriber, you'll be asked to pay for access to these articles. Fortunately, college and university libraries are usually subscribers—and when they aren't, they can still get the articles through a process called **interlibrary loan**. Check your library's website for the specifics.

These sources are highly reputable, and particularly in your upper-level major courses, you will almost certainly be expected to use these for most of your textual sources. Be warned, though. These can be very difficult to read because novices and students aren't the audience—experts are. Be sure to allow extra time to read these sources.

Understanding Primary and Secondary Sources

Beyond whether a source is scholarly or not, writers and researchers make a distinction between primary and secondary sources. Popular, trade, and scholarly sources all can be either primary sources or secondary sources. For example, a news story reporting events would be a primary source, and commentary on that reporting would be a secondary source, but both would be popular sources. Even among scholarly sources, there are primary and secondary sources.

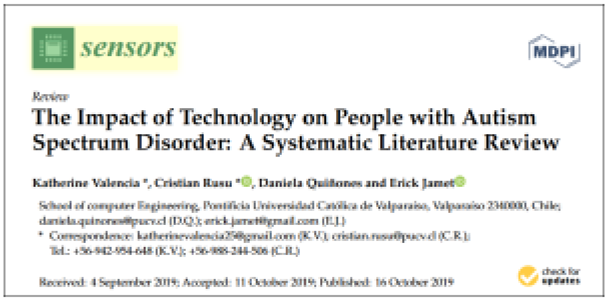
Primary Sources



Primary sources are first-hand accounts or documents created in historical real-time. They include texts of laws, speeches, letters, photographs, works of literature and art, and newspaper reports in which the reporter was an actual witness to the event or reporting the words of those who witnessed it. These sources are also considered highly reputable, and you may often be asked to use primary sources in your writing.

Reports of original research are also primary sources because the researchers are presenting data that they have collected. A report on the findings from a study of changes in the diving behavior and habitats of whale sharks and the implications for tourism, for example, is a primary source because it explains findings based on data gathered by Gonzalo Araujo, Jessica Labaja, Sally Snow, Charlie Huveneers, and Alessandro Ponzo.

Secondary Sources



sensors

MDPI

Review

The Impact of Technology on People with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Literature Review

Katherine Valencia *, Cristian Rusu *, Daniela Quiñones and Erick Jamet

School of computer Engineering, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Valparaíso 2340000, Chile;

Received: 4 September 2019; Accepted: 11 October 2019; Published: 16 October 2019

Secondary sources involve some kind of interpretation, which means that the author is determining what is valuable about the ideas in the source.

Secondary scholarly sources include review articles and meta-analyses. Review articles pull together research findings from multiple studies to explain what is known and what needs further research in a field. For example, Katherine Valencia, Cristian Rusu, Daniela Quiñones and Erick Jamet synthesized the findings in ninety-four published studies looking at how technology affects the learning of people with autism spectrum disorder, finding that particular elements of technology, including artificial intelligence and virtual reality, promote learning for people with ASD.

Meta-analysis articles use statistics to combine smaller research studies. For example, Xue-Lei Fu, Lin Du, Yi-Ping Song, Hong-Lin Chen, and Wang-Qui Shen combined the statistical data of twenty-two smaller studies on injuries in professional snow sports to determine, among other things, that freestyle skiing has the highest rate of injury.

Don't get caught up in whether a source is primary (original research) or secondary (interpretive). Think about which sources are going to be most useful for the intellectual work of the project you are working on. If your task is to research the effects of climate change on forests in the northeastern United States, it would be better to look at forestry data and scientific research articles than to use commentary in local newspapers about the changes.

Using Encyclopedias (Including *Wikipedia*)—Or Not

LANGUAGE & LINGUISTICS
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If you head to your college's library or library website, you are likely to find that there are lots of respected and specialized encyclopedias available. Dictionaries and encyclopedias can be very helpful sources for getting yourself oriented, particularly on a new topic. If you do not know much about the topic, for example, a quick read through *Wikipedia*'s entry on light rail can help you figure out what light rail is and how it is different from heavy rail or subway systems.

However, your professor will almost certainly tell you that you cannot use *Wikipedia* as a source, and you've probably heard that message from your high school teachers, too. The usual reason given is that *Wikipedia* is crowd-sourced. Lots of people contribute to *Wikipedia* articles, and while there are checks on the veracity of the material, there is no guarantee that the person writing the article—or any part of the article—has any expertise on that topic.

But there's more to it than that, at least at the college level, and the problem actually extends to all encyclopedias. These sources contain predigested information. That is, someone else has already decided what is most important about that topic and presented that information to you. In college, your professors are interested in what you think is important, and if you use an encyclopedia as a source, you aren't doing that.

Use the References

Much more valuable than the encyclopedia articles themselves are their reference lists. While the articles contain predigested information, the sources used for those articles frequently aren't. So, if you are using *Wikipedia* to get oriented on a topic, for example, you might want to look up some of the sources for that article that you can find at the bottom.

Feel free to use *Wikipedia* or *Britannica* or *WebMD* (or any other encyclopedic source) to get oriented or generate ideas or narrow topics or locate other sources. But don't use them as sources unless your professor expressly tells you to.

Textbooks

Textbooks are like encyclopedias, and in fact, both are considered tertiary sources. Tertiary sources summarize or synthesize information that is considered established: well-known, well-respected, and well-understood. However, established information is not where most intellectual work and critical thinking occur, so your professors will also generally not want you to use your textbooks as sources either.

Key Points: Understanding Source Types

- Popular sources are written for an interested public who has no specialized knowledge. While they may be reputable, your professors usually won't want you to use them.
- Trade sources are written for professionals working in a relevant field. Like popular sources, they are often reputable, but your professors usually won't want you to use these either.
- Scholarly sources are written by researchers for researchers, and your professors will often want you to use these.
- Primary sources report first-hand knowledge, including reports of research. These are often useful for college writing.
- Secondary sources interpret ideas and information in primary sources. These are also often useful for college writing.
- Tertiary sources, including encyclopedias and textbooks, contain predigested information, and generally cannot be used as sources for college writing.
- All three types of sources can be primary, secondary, or tertiary.

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Finding Sources

Once you understand the type of source your professor wants you to use, you can start searching. Your professor and your librarians are going to be your best resources on where and how to search, and they may give you specific guidance. Start with what they tell you.

What I'm including in this section is intended to supplement their guidance. Here, I focus on searching tips in three large areas: internet sources, library databases, and Google Scholar.

First, though, a distinction. Just because you see your source through Chrome or Firefox does not mean that the source is on the internet. For example, you will often access your library's databases through your browser (see library databases, below), but these databases are not actually on the internet, even if you use the internet to access them. Libraries pay subscriptions for these databases, and you will only be able to access them with login credentials from your college or university. Thus, these are not "internet sources."

All three types of sources—popular, trade, and scholarly—can be found both through the internet and through library databases. The internet has more popular sources, and the databases have more scholarly, but you will need to judge each source individually to determine what kind it is and whether it meets the requirements of your assignment.

Make a List

As you gather your sources, it's a good idea to keep a record of the ones you plan to use, even if you aren't sure you'll keep all of them. Make sure your record includes enough information that you could find the source again. I know (from experience!) that it can be incredibly frustrating to lose track of a source while working on a project.

Some people keep journals or logs of all of their searches, but I find it easier to save a PDF of each source in a dedicated folder. I also keep a running list of author's names and titles (not worrying about citation formatting).

Hint: If you are working in the databases, do not just copy the URL. If you look closely at that URL, you will see that it includes information about your search. If you try to use that one again, it won't work! Either copy the static URL or download the PDF version.

Locating Internet Sources

In some ways, finding internet sources is very easy. Plug your topic into the search bar of your favorite search engine, and voilà!

However, you don't always get the best results that way. For example, your searches will be influenced by your personal search history and by **search engine optimization** processes that companies use to get you to their websites.

Use Key Terms

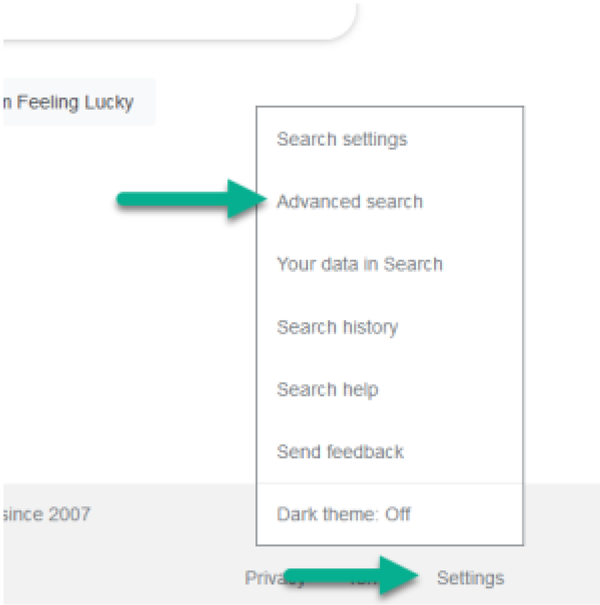
Part of what you find depends on your search terms, or what researchers call "key words" or "key terms." The more specific you can be in your search terms, the more likely you are to find what you are looking for. If you are not finding what you need, try adding more specific words or even using a question.

Use Advanced Search Options

There are, however, other ways you can make your search more productive. Search engines usually have ways to limit your searches so that, for example, your results only include sites updated in the past year or sites from .gov domains. Google has an advanced search; as of this writing, you'll find "Advanced search" in the settings menu on the main search page (see the picture on the right).

If you use a different search engine, try searching for the name of that engine and "advanced search" to find out how to access these options.

Advanced searches will also let you avoid certain terms. In my research, for instance, I frequently search for "composition," but if I don't limit the terms, I end up seeing sites about composition in music and painting. Not what I'm looking for!



How to find the advanced search setting on Google's home search page

Go Directly to Relevant Sites

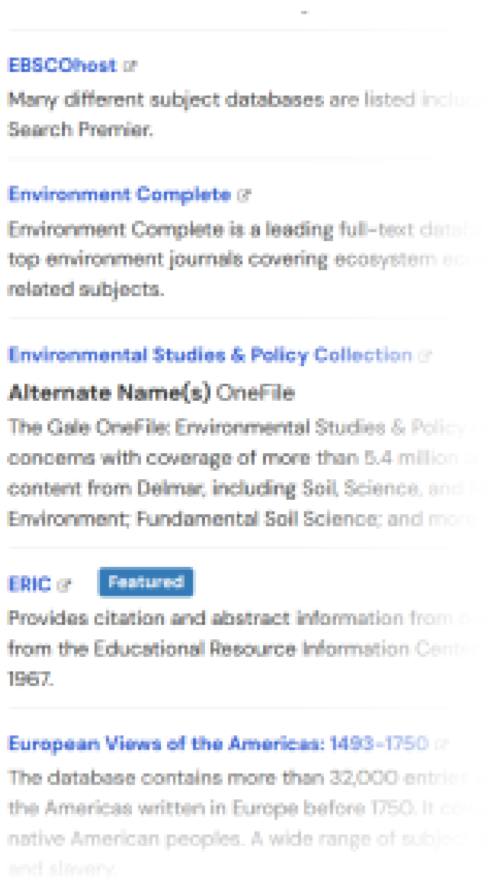
You can also search by thinking critically about the information you are looking for. If you are looking for information about achievement gaps in education, think about the organizations and government agencies that might have information on that (in this case, try the U.S. Department of Education).

Use Your Sources' Sources

Finally—and this will apply to all sources, both print and electronic—try looking at the sources that your source uses. In online materials, these sources are usually linked. These sources might lead you to more sources than you originally found.

Using Library Databases

Your library will have subscriptions to multiple databases, and they have instructions and librarians to help you navigate these systems. Rather than replicating what you can find there, I want to share a few tips to make your searching more productive.



EBSCOhost

Many different subject databases are listed
Search Premier.

Environment Complete

Environment Complete is a leading full-text
top environment journals covering ecosystem
related subjects.

Environmental Studies & Policy Collection

Alternate Name(s) OneFile

The Gale OneFile: Environmental Studies & Policy
concerns with coverage of more than 5.4 million
content from Delmar, including Soil, Science, and
Environment; Fundamental Soil Science; and

ERIC

Provides citation and abstract information from
from the Educational Resource Information
1967.

European Views of the Americas: 1493-1750

The database contains more than 32,000
the Americas written in Europe before 1750.
native American peoples. A wide range of
and slavery.

Use the Options

First, be sure to take advantage of the options in the databases to limit your search. I've never seen a database that doesn't let you limit your search to only scholarly articles or to change the date of publication.

Use Key Words, Not Natural Language

Second, key words matter more in databases than in search engines. If I put in a question like "How reliable are multiple choice tests?" even without the punctuation I can get very confusing results, and I may get no results at all. But if I focus on the key words ("multiple choice" test reliab*), I can get hundreds of results that are actually relevant.

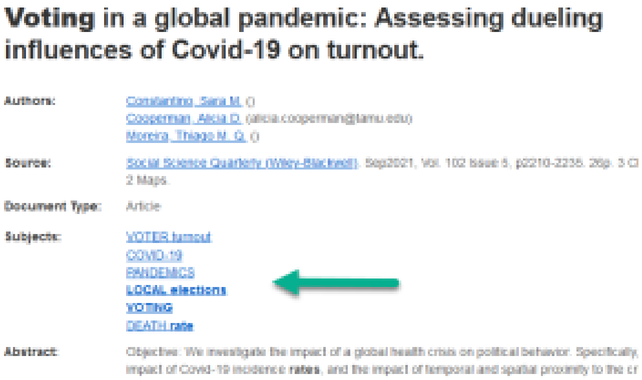
You can also use Boolean searching, which helps narrow or broaden results, to get you closer to what you are looking for. Here's a useful video explanation of "Boolean Searching Basics":

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/readwritesuccess/?p=134#oembed-1

Use Your Sources’ Sources

Finally, when you find a good source, one that is giving you the kind of information you want, you can use that source to find other similar sources. Obviously, if it’s a scholarly source, you can look for possibilities in the references at the end of the article.

Less obviously, you can use the database record to find additional search terms. In most databases, you can jump right to the article, but you can also get to the record view, often by clicking on the title. In the record for that article, you can see a list of key terms or descriptors that show you how the article was indexed. Clicking on those links will bring you to all of the articles using that term or descriptor alone—probably not what you want. But you can add the relevant terms to your search to make it more effective.



Voting in a global pandemic: Assessing dueling influences of Covid-19 on turnout.

Authors: Constantino, Sara M. ()
Cooperman, Alicia D. (alicia.cooperman@tamu.edu)
Moreira, Thiago M. Q. ()

Source: Social Science Quarterly (Wiley-Blackwell). Sep2021, Vol. 102 Issue 5, p2210-2235. 26p. 3 C
2 Maps.

Document Type: Article

Subjects: VOTER turnout
COVID-19
PANDEMICS
LOCAL elections
VOTING
DEATH rate

Abstract: Objective: We investigate the impact of a global health crisis on political behavior. Specifically,
impact of Covid-19 incidence rates, and the impact of temporal and spatial proximity to the cr

The terms in the “Subjects” section of this article record could be used to refine a search on this topic.

Use Interlibrary Loan

When you search in the library’s databases, you may be tempted to select the option to search only for what is available in full text. Don’t!

First, it is possible that the article you are looking for is available in full text in another database that your library has access to. Many libraries give you the ability to search other databases for the same article. If you aren’t sure how, check with a reference librarian.

Even if your library doesn’t have the full-text version available, you can use your library’s **interlibrary loan** service to get access to articles that your library doesn’t have. While this can take a few days, if you have built in sufficient time to your process, you should still have time to include that article.

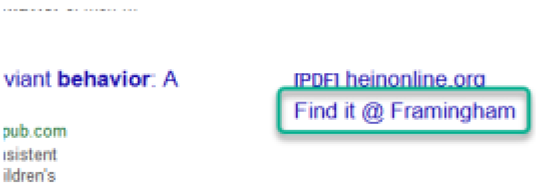
If you don’t know how to use interlibrary loan, check out your college library’s website, or ask a librarian!

Using Google Scholar™

[Google Scholar](#) is a special case, somewhere between the open web and library databases. Google Scholar lets you search for scholarly sources using natural language phrasing (instead of strict key terms), just like you can in your favorite search engine, but it focuses on scholarly sources. Here are a few tips.

Link to Your Library

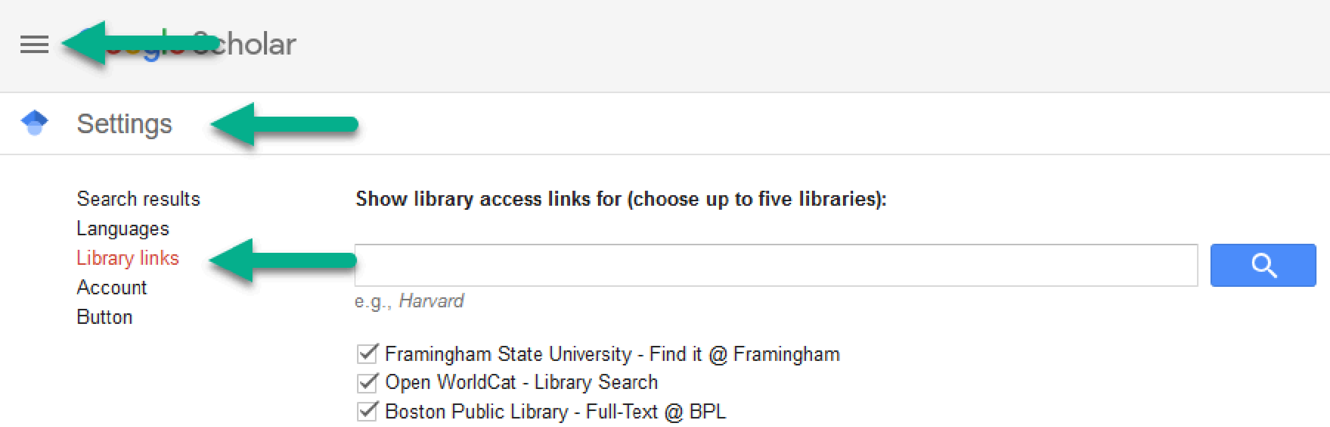
Google Scholar will link to articles available on the internet, but many times, these articles are not freely available. Many of the article links only provide abstracts (and they will ask you to pay to get the full version—which you should NOT do; see the box on using interlibrary loan, above).


viant **behavior**: A
pub.com
ısistent
ildren's
[PDF] heinonline.org
Find it @ Framingham

If you link Google Scholar to your college or university library, you'll be able to search for materials in the databases there by clicking that link.

The options can be different once you link Google Scholar to your university library. While not every article will be available in the databases that your library subscribes to, you'll start seeing "Find it @" links in the right column when the article might be there.

You connect to your university library by searching for it under the Google Scholar hamburger menu under settings. Choose the library links option and type in the name of your institution. Check the box to make the connection. Once you make the connection, you'll be asked to log in to your library whenever you use Google Scholar.

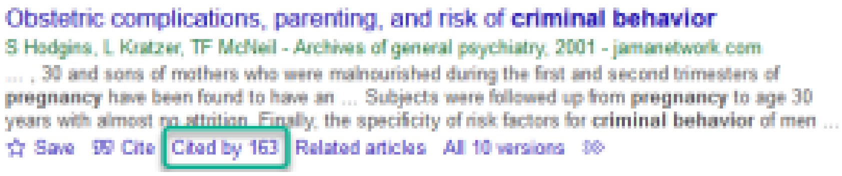


Show library access links for (choose up to five libraries):

e.g., *Harvard*

☑ Framingham State University - Find it @ Framingham
☑ Open WorldCat - Library Search
☑ Boston Public Library - Full-Text @ BPL

Search Forward


Obstetric complications, parenting, and risk of **criminal behavior**
S Hodgins, L Kratzer, TF McNeil - Archives of general psychiatry, 2001 - jamanetwork.com
… , 30 and sons of mothers who were malnourished during the first and second trimesters of **pregnancy** have been found to have an … Subjects were followed up from **pregnancy** to age 30 years with almost no attrition. Finally, the specificity of risk factors for **criminal behavior** of men …

Google Scholar also helps you connect to other relevant articles. In addition to using the references at the end of the article as you can with any article, you can see other articles that use the one you have found as a source. Click on the "Cited by" link under an entry and you will get a list of the scholarly sources that include that article in their reference lists. This feature allows you to search forward in time using an article, something you cannot do in a library database.

Be Careful: It's Not All Scholarly

Be careful using this search engine, however. Not everything indexed in Google Scholar is actually scholarly because the algorithms that Google uses can pick up articles like book reviews and government reports, which aren't peer reviewed. While it does a good job most of the time, you'll want to evaluate each source.

Use the Databases, Too

Also, don't assume that because you have searched using Google Scholar that you have found everything. Accessing the databases through your library will result in more thorough and specialized results, so you'll want to check there, too.

Checking Your Sources

No matter what method you use for locating sources, make sure that you have found the kinds of sources that your professor wants you to use. If you aren't sure, check!

Key Points: Finding Sources

- To find good internet sources, be sure to use good key terms and to narrow your search using advanced search options. You can also go directly to relevant sites instead of relying on search engines.
- Library databases require that you use key terms, and your searches will be more effective if you understand Boolean searching (see the video embedded above).
- Google Scholar allows you to use natural language searching, and it can be linked to your library databases to make locating sources more efficient.
- You can use your sources to find more sources. Check the links in internet sources and the reference lists in scholarly articles no matter where you find them. If you use Google Scholar, you can also find out where your article has been cited by others.
- Don't limit your searching to one location. Even if you are finding useful sources through Google Scholar, check the library databases directly, too.
- Always make sure that you understand the kind of source you have found and whether it is appropriate for your assignment.

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Evaluating Sources

EVALUATION

Sometimes, the first source that shows up on our search results is great. It's relevant and recent, and it's written by someone who really knows what they are talking about. Much more often, however, the first source is not actually reliable. And sometimes it can be hard to tell.

Part of being a critical thinker is learning to evaluate your sources. Arguments built on lousy sources won't hold up, so you need to know if you are using sources that are reliable. It's not enough to find a source that addresses your topic. It has to be a *good* source.

So how can you tell the difference between a good source and a not-so-good source?

You may have heard of the CRAAP test for evaluating sources: Currency, Reliability, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. This system, developed by Molly Beestrum, asks you to look at how recent your source is (and how much that matters), whether the source is too one-sided or lacking sources of its own, who the author is and what their credentials are, and what the source is trying to accomplish. These are all excellent areas for investigation. Here's a quick video explaining the process:

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/readwritesuccess/?p=136#oembed-1

This system is really useful, but I recommend rearranging the order. I treat "authority" as the most important criterion for determining the credibility of a source. If the source doesn't have authority, move on to another source. If the information is sound, another source with more authority will also discuss those ideas. And if you only find the ideas in one source, consider that a red flag.

Here are some of the red flags to look for:

- Authority
  - You cannot find an author and the organization is questionable.
  - The author has experience or credentials, but their credentials aren't relevant to the material they are writing about.
  - The site is a .com or .net, and seems to be more focused on selling you something than on providing accurate information.
- Currency
  - The site was published before recent events relevant to your topic.
  - The site has not been updated in recent years, which may mean you are looking at an unmaintained and out-of-date site.
  - The sources used by the site are too old for your topic.
- Relevance/Intended Audience
  - The information isn't really related to your topic, even if the information itself seems good.

  - The information is presented in a simplistic way or ignores complexities that you know exist.
  - The site is written for children or adolescents and may be oversimplifying the information in ways that aren't appropriate for college-level work.
- Accuracy
  - You can only find the information in this one source.
  - The site doesn't have any links to outside sources or citations.
  - The site has links, but the links only go to pages on the same site or the same few sites.
  - When you check the sources, they don't seem to be saying what the site says they do.
- Purpose/Objectivity
  - The site has an identifiable conflict of interest. In particular, examine any advertising on the site. Would the revenue stream interfere with objectivity and balance in the presentation of information?
  - The site is trying to make people angry or arouse other strong emotions.
  - The site provides arguments on only one side of an issue or presents opposing arguments unfairly or in too simplistic a fashion.

Activity: Evaluating a Source

Use the questions below to help you evaluate one of the sources you are considering using. Try writing out the answers, even if your instructor doesn't require it.

Step 1: Provide Source Information

View the instructions.

If your instructor is collecting this, be sure to start your evaluation with the title of the page you are evaluating and the URL. Even if the evaluation is only for yourself, it will help to note which source you are evaluating.

Step 2: Do the Evaluation

View the instructions.

Answer the following questions about the site:

Authority

- Who is the author and what are his/her/their credentials?
- Are those credentials verifiable?
- Can you contact the author?
- What organization is sponsoring the site?
- What kind of domain is it (.com, .org, .edu, .gov)?

Currency

- Is there a date on the page?
- How recently has the site been updated?
- How up-to-date is the information?

Relevance/Intended Audience

- How is the site relevant for your project?
- Who is the target audience?
- Is the information presented at an appropriate level of complexity for your purposes?

Accuracy

- Does the author provide complete citations for sources or links to reliable information on other sites?
- If so, look at one of those sources. Where is it? Does it say what the author says it says?
- Can you find another source that presents some of the same information?

Purpose/Objectivity

- What is the purpose of the page?
- How objective or biased is the author's position?
- If there is bias, does the bias get in the way of a clear and fair position?
- What alternative viewpoints does the author present, and are they treated fairly?
- Is there any identifiable conflict of interest?
- What's the relationship between the content and the advertising (if any)?

You may not be able to answer all the questions, but you should be able to answer enough to come to a conclusion for each section about how credible that aspect of the site is.

Step 3: Take a Step Back

View the instructions.

After you have answered these questions, write a general statement about how credible you think the source is and why.

This may seem like a long and tedious process, but after you practice this for a while, you will get much better at quickly determining whether a site is trustworthy or not. I can evaluate about 95% of all sites I see as reputable or not in less than a minute. You can get this quick, too.

Key Points: Evaluating Sources

- Evaluate sources using five criteria: authority, currency, relevance/intended audience, accuracy, and purpose/objectivity.
- If a source's authority is in question, pass it by. If the information is good, you'll find it elsewhere.
- Many internet sources will have weaknesses in some of these categories, but using all of the categories will help you locate the most reputable sources.
- If you practice this kind of evaluation, you will be able to do it quickly.

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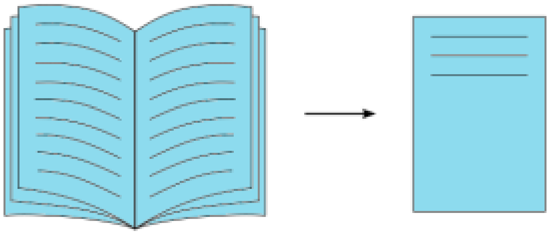
Summarizing

The first three chapters in this section of *Reading and Writing Successfully in College* provide guidance for locating and evaluating sources. The rest of this section provides guidance for using the sources you have located. All of this guidance assumes that you understand the sources you are trying to use. If you don't, review Part 1: Successful College Reading for reading techniques and/or talk with a classmate, your professor, or a tutor for help.



A summary is, by definition, a condensed version of the original. It's shorter, and it must focus on the original's main point(s) to be accurate.

Summaries vary in length. Some will be very short, even just a phrase. For example, if I write, "A coming-of-age story set in a fictional Southern town, *To Kill a Mockingbird* explores issues of racism and discrimination," the phrase "a coming-of-age story set in a fictional Southern town" is a kind of summary. It doesn't provide any details at all, but it still encapsulates the book. Notice that the idea that the book takes up issues of racism and discrimination is not a summary. That's an interpretation.

Some summaries will be long. For example, in graduate school, I was asked to write 500-word summaries of major theories of literary criticism. In academic settings, professors sometimes assign long summaries to make sure that you understand the texts that you are working with, which is exactly what my graduate instructor wanted.

More often, though, summaries are somewhere in between. From a sentence or two to a paragraph, writers usually offer summaries to make sure that reader and writer are on the same page, metaphorically speaking, before the writer uses the source to support their own work.

Writers summarize in order to make sure our readers understand the text in the same way we do. To accomplish this, our summaries need to be honest.

To write a summary well, we cannot misrepresent the ideas in a text, either by accident or on purpose, nor can we write a summary as if a minor point is the central idea of a text. Even if we are going to argue with an author's points, the summary must accurately represent the ideas in the original.

Using Summaries to Improve Your Understanding

Writing a summary can help you better understand the material that you are reading. Whether you write summary annotations in the margins of your textbook or write summary paragraphs for every reading, summarizing can help you by clarifying what is really important in a reading—even if you aren't going to write about it.

Honest summaries start with careful reading. You won't be able to summarize well if you don't understand what you are reading. Once you have a good understanding, you'll be able to write a good summary.

Activity: Writing a Summary

View the instructions.

The following activity will help you write a successful summary that covers the entire text. This activity assumes that you have carefully read the text and that you understand it.

1. **Divide the text into sections.** Sometimes those sections are marked for you by headings or extra spaces between paragraphs. If they aren't, look especially for **transitions** that indicate contrast or sequence, which frequently indicate a shift in focus. Don't worry about getting these sections "right"; instead, make sure that you understand why you are grouping those particular paragraphs together.
2. **For each section, determine the main point of that section.** Separate that point from examples, **counterarguments**, and **subordinate points**. Write a one- or two-sentence summary of each section, focusing on that point.
3. **Write a one- or two-sentence summary of the entire piece** based on your understanding of the whole text. It can help to read over the sentences you have written in Step 2.
4. **Check your high-level summary (Step 3) against the original text.** Are you accurately representing the author's main idea? If not, revise your overall summary sentence.
5. **Consider the length of summary that you need.** Do you just need a sentence or two? If so, the work you did in Steps 3 and 4 should probably serve you well. If you need a longer summary, though, keep going!
6. **Combine your summary of the entire piece with your section summaries into a paragraph** (or more, depending on how long the original is). As you combine these sentences, eliminate repetition and details that you don't need.
7. **Check what you have written against the original text.** Are you accurately representing the author's ideas? If not, revise your summary to increase your accuracy.
8. **Consider length again.** If you need a shorter summary than your draft, look for details or more minor points that you can eliminate. If you need a longer summary, go back to the original for additional details or even examples.

Writing Strong Summaries

Here are some tips for writing good summaries:

- **Be sure to refer to the author as you write your summary.** A good rule of thumb is to reference the author by name at or near the beginning of your summary, and then to reference them at least one more time in every summary paragraph. This practice reminds your reader that the ideas you are describing are not your ideas.
- In general, **don't quote in summaries unless the quotations are very short or the summary is long** (more

than a page). Quotations require a lot of extra material and are usually too specific to be useful in summaries. In addition, quoting gets in the way of your comprehension of the text since you are relying on the author's words instead of your understanding.

- **If there is an introductory narrative, skip (or at least minimize) that as you write your summary.** These introductory narratives are usually a way to draw the reader in. They hint at the main point, but they rarely spell that point out. Moreover, you can end up spending far too much time summarizing that narrative and miss the main point entirely.

You should be able to summarize every source that you use, even if you aren't required to write a summary. If you can summarize a text successfully, you both understand that text and you are able to put it into your own words.

Key Points: Summarizing

- A summary condenses a text, so it is always shorter than the original, though the summary itself can be very short, somewhat long, or in between.
- Summaries identify the main point of a text and provide as much information about the supporting points and specific examples as the writer (and reader) need, given the purpose of the summary.
- An effective way to write an accurate summary is to divide a text up into sections, summarize each of those sections, and combine those smaller summaries with a statement summarizing the overall point of the text.
- When you write a summary, be sure to refer to the author's name so that your reader knows which ideas belong to you and which belong to the author.
- Generally, you won't quote in summaries, except for very short quotations.

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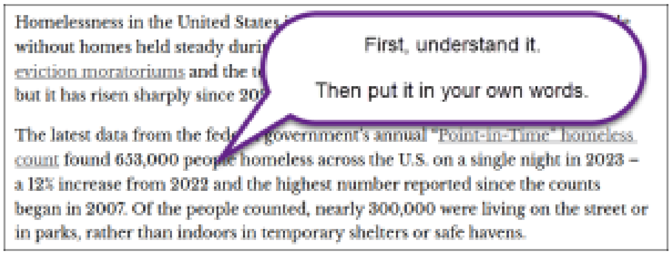
Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is taking the ideas from a source and putting them in your own words. You won't always be able or want to quote a source word-for-word, and paraphrasing is a way to relay the author's ideas to your audience without relying on their actual language.

This skill is critical for your academic success. First, learning to paraphrase will help you better understand what you are reading. Moreover, some **disciplines** only use quotations rarely—and some not at all. In most academic writing, you'll use paraphrasing more than quoting, and frankly, if you quote, you usually need to include a paraphrase anyway.

Using a Two-Part Process

First, you need to understand the passage. Of course, you need to understand the text as a whole, but to paraphrase well, you also have to make sure that you understand more precisely the ideas in the passage you want to reference. Careful reading will help you do this.



Homelessness in the United States
without homes held steady duri
eviction moratoriums and the t
but it has risen sharply since 20

The latest data from the fed government's annual "Point-in-Time" homeless count found 653,000 people homeless across the U.S. on a single night in 2023 – a 12% increase from 2022 and the highest number reported since the counts began in 2007. Of the people counted, nearly 300,000 were living on the street or in parks, rather than indoors in temporary shelters or safe havens.

First, understand it.

Then put it in your own words.

The second part is putting the passage in your own words, frequently the more difficult part. It is not enough to substitute a few synonyms—even really good ones—to paraphrase well. Instead, you have to both alter the vocabulary where possible and avoid using the same sentence structure.

Let's unpack that a bit.

- **Alter the vocabulary.** To alter the vocabulary, you need to use different words to describe the author's point except where the specific words are necessary. Specific words to hang onto would mostly be technical language: the word itself is the most appropriate word because it is the most accurate. (Usually, this applies to nouns, but it can also apply to verbs and less frequently to adjectives and adverbs.) If the technical terms are really long or uncommon phrases, sometimes it makes sense to quote those, just so your reader knows that the phrasing comes from the author. If the words aren't technical, you should be looking for other language.
- **Change the sentence structure.** Ultimately, your sentence should not look like the original, even when you are using some of the technical language. If your reader were to read the two sentences side-by-side, they should be able to see the same idea, but not the same way of phrasing that idea.

How to do this? Here's a process to try:

Activity: Writing a Paraphrase

To write a strong paraphrase, try the following steps:

1. Make sure that you understand the passage.
2. Close the book or put away the article.
3. Do something else for five or ten minutes—perhaps work on the rest of the paragraph.
4. Without looking back at the original text, write your paraphrase. Go ahead and add it directly to the paragraph you are working on. But DON'T look at the text again until you are ready to check your paraphrase.
5. Check your paraphrase against the original both to make sure your paraphrase is accurate and to make sure that you haven't written a paraphrase that is too close to the original.

Another trick I sometimes use is imagining that I am having to explain the idea in the passage to one of my sisters. Both of them are smart people, but neither of them has the kind of detailed knowledge of the topics I write about. So, I start writing my explanation to one of them. I have to put it in relatively plain language to start, but this also helps me confirm my understanding. And those explanations can produce some pretty solid paraphrases.

Example: Good Paraphrasing

View the example.

Here's an example of a paraphrase that keeps the ideas in the original source, but not the language. Notice that the paraphrase also includes citation.

Original Text

"The average cost in 2017 to install solar systems ranged from a little over $2,000 per kilowatt (kilowatts are a measure of power capacity) for large-scale systems to almost $3,700 for residential systems. A new natural gas plant might have costs around $1,000/kW. Wind comes in around $1,200 to $1,700/kw."

Paraphrase

Though ultimately making the case that long-term savings outweigh initial costs, the Union of Concerned Scientists points out that it costs between $2000 and $3700 per kilowatt to install different types of solar systems and between $1200 and $1700 to install wind systems. Solar and wind systems might be better environmentally, but big companies think about the money spent, especially when natural gas plants are only $1000 per kilowatt (Union).

Source

Union of Concerned Scientists. "Barriers to Renewable Energy Technologies." *Union of Concerned Scientists*, 6 June 2014, www.ucsusa.org/resources/barriers-renewable-energy-technologies.

Patchwriting

When a writer paraphrases by relying too heavily on the existing sentence structure and vocabulary of the original, this is called "patchwriting." Patchwriting can be considered a form of plagiarism because the writer takes the wording of someone else and claims it as their own.

Patchwriting most commonly occurs when writers keep their sources open in front of them as they write a paraphrase. It can also happen when writers memorize passages or try to write paraphrases too soon after they have put away the text. Readers are influenced not just by the ideas of writers, but also by the words that authors use to explain those ideas.

As you practice paraphrasing, you will get better at it, and it can become an excellent way to improve your understanding of difficult material. In the meantime, put your sources away, and if you find yourself patchwriting anyway, try paraphrasing your patchwriting. Every time you do it, you should find yourself a little further away from the original text.

Key Points: Paraphrasing

- Good paraphrasing keeps the author's idea, but changes both the words used by the author and the sentence structure.
- If you struggle with paraphrasing, you can get better by following a few steps: make sure you understand the passage, close the source and do something else for a little while, and then write your paraphrase without looking back at the source.
- Once you have written your paraphrase, check it against the original to make sure that you have captured the idea without relying too heavily on the language and sentence structure of the original.
- You can add short quotations to paraphrases, particularly of technical terms.
- Patchwriting, attempts at paraphrasing that stick too close to the original text, can be considered a form of plagiarism. Don't look at the text when you write a paraphrase!

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The paraphrase image was created by Patricia Lynne using text from Clare Pastore's "Supreme Court to Consider Whether Local Governments Can Make It a Crime to Sleep Outside If No Inside Space Is Available," published in *The Conversation*, April 16, 2024.

Text Attribution

This chapter was revised with the help of Lando Concepcion and Jude Ejiofor, students in my class during Spring 2022. Jude also provided the example of good paraphrasing.

Quoting

You quote when you need the exact language rather than just the idea of a passage (see the next chapter for a bit more on making this choice). Quoting seems easy, but there are some rules and guidelines that you need follow. Failure to follow them can land you in **plagiarism** trouble.

Understanding the Rules and Guidelines for Quoting

These should help you as you quote.

Quote Exactly

Quotations *must* be exact. When your reader sees quotation marks, they are assuming that everything between the quotation marks is exactly what is in the original. This means that you can't change anything in the text between your quotation marks, except what's explained in the section below on altering quotations.

Quote Minimally

You should only quote the parts of a sentence that you absolutely need to make your point. Sometimes you need an entire sentence, but more often, you really only need to quote a few words, and the rest of the sentence could be paraphrased. Don't quote more than you need.

Connect Quotations to Your Own Sentences

If you stick a quotation into a paragraph without connecting it to one of your own sentences, you have what's called a "dropped quotation." **Dropped quotations** confuse your reader. Without some connection to what you are saying, your reader doesn't know why this source has suddenly appeared in your paragraph. Even when you need to quote an entire sentence, be sure to begin with something like the following:

Smith claims that "[insert quotation here]."

As Jones makes clear, "[insert quotation here]."

Even better, though, would be to paraphrase and include a minimal quotation if at all possible:

Smith claims that all students would do better in school if "[insert quotation here]."

As Jones makes clear, students who "[insert quotation here]" do far better academically than those who don't.

Altering Quotations

There are three changes that you can make to the words between sets of quotation marks. Only three.

Using an Ellipsis (…)

An ellipsis is three periods in a row. Informally, we use ellipses (the plural form) to indicate that an idea is unfinished or that the next statement is so obvious that the reader can fill it in. But ellipses indicate something different when they appear in a quotation. Ellipses tell your reader that something has been left out.

Note that you must not change the meaning of a quotation by leaving out something relevant. This is called taking a quotation out of context. For example, you cannot remove a "not" in a sentence to change the meaning. This would obviously alter the author's meaning.

An ellipsis is only three dots. When you see four dots, you are really seeing an ellipsis and a period. Some style guides require you to put a space between each dot; others require you to keep the dots together but put spaces on either side of the set, just as you would a word (except when there's another mark of punctuation, in which case, there usually isn't a space). If you aren't sure, ask your professor.

It's Only One

An ellipsis is considered a single mark of punctuation, even though it looks like three periods. If you doubt this, try typing … and then a space in your word processor. Then delete twice. The first delete removes the space. The second removes all three dots at once!

Examples: Ellipses in Action

View the examples.

Ellipses can appear anywhere in a sentence. Let's look at this using the following example, which comes from a research study by Jose Mora-Gonzalez, Isaac J. Pérez-López, Irene Esteban-Cornejo, and Manuel Delgado-Fernández on the use of gamification through a mobile app to increase physical activity (and thus cardiorespiratory fitness) in college students.

Here's the original sentence:

> "Given the unhealthy lifestyle of young adults and the implementation difficulty of several PA [physical activity] interventions, using gamification (i.e., the application of game design elements in non-game contexts) might be of help to motivate college students and to promote changes in health behaviors such as PA" (Mora-Gonzalez et al. 37-38).

In the Middle

Usually an ellipsis appears in the middle when the passage you want to quote includes a part of a sentence that isn't relevant to your point or that is redundant:

> Mora-Gonzalez et al. point out that "Given the unhealthy lifestyle of young adults and the implementation difficulty of several PA [physical activity] interventions, using gamification … might be of help to motivate college students and to promote changes in health behaviors such as PA" (37-38).

At the Beginning

Ellipses only appear at the beginning or the end of quotations (or both) when your reader might think that what you are quoting is a complete sentence, but in the original, it's not.

> Mora-Gonzalez et al. point out that "… using gamification (i.e., the application of game design elements in non-game contexts) might be of help to motivate college students and to promote changes in health behaviors such as PA [physical activity]" (37-38).

At the End

> Mora-Gonzalez et al. point out that "Given the unhealthy lifestyle of young adults and the implementation difficulty of several PA [physical activity] interventions, using gamification (i.e., the application of game design elements in non-game contexts) might be of help to motivate college students …" (37-38).

At the Beginning and the End

> Mora-Gonzalez et al. point out that "… using gamification (i.e., the application of game design elements in non-game contexts) might be of help to motivate college students …" (37-38).

You do not need ellipses at all if your reader will understand that what you are quoting is not a complete sentence in the original. Using the same example, your reader would not need ellipses in the following sentence: Mora-Gonzalez et al. define gamification as "the application of game design elements in non-game contexts" (37). No one would mistake the words inside the quotation marks as a complete sentence.

Using Square Brackets [ ]

Square brackets are used to indicate that you are adding something to the text. Usually these occur when the original uses a pronoun or abbreviation and you need to make sure your reader knows who or what the original author was referring to. Sometimes these are used to change capitalization or verb tense, as well.

Example: Using Square Brackets

View the example.
You can actually see an example of this in my original quotation from Mora-Gonzalez et al.:

> "Given the unhealthy lifestyle of young adults and the implementation difficulty of several PA [physical activity] interventions, using gamification (i.e., the application of game design elements in non-game contexts) might be of help to motivate college students and to promote changes in health behaviors such as PA" (Mora-Gonzalez et al. 37-38).

I added the [physical activity] to the original quotation. The authors abbreviate physical activity and indicate this abbreviation in the very first sentence of the article. From there on out, they use "PA" to stand in for "physical activity." However, if we are only looking at the quotation I have selected, the meaning of PA may not be clear without the explanation I offer in the brackets.

Using [*Sic*]

Putting the Latin word *sic* in square brackets (italicized because it's a foreign word) tells your reader that whatever was right before [*sic*] was exactly like that in the original. This is usually used for typos or grammatical errors in the original, but can also be used for foreign spellings of English words. [*Sic*] must be placed immediately after the word or parts of the sentence that it refers to. Note that this means that you *never* make corrections to what you are quoting.

We don't often need to use [*sic*] in quotations from scholarly sources because these sources tend to be edited as they are reviewed. However, popular sources—especially those published quickly and on the internet—are more prone to errors. And when those sources use English as it is spoken in another country, we sometimes get cultural differences in the way that spelling and punctuation are used. If your reader might believe that you have made a mistake in transcribing your source, you would use [*sic*].

As a note: Capitalize [*sic*] when it is part of a title, otherwise it is lowercase! However, the letters are usually italicized.

Examples: Using [Sic]

View the examples.

Let's take this quotation from the British news source, *The Guardian*:

> "Warmer ocean waters are helping supercharge storms, hurricanes and extreme rainfall, the paper states, which is escalating the risks of severe flooding" (Milman).

In American English, we use what is called an "Oxford comma" to separate three items in a series. British English does not use this comma. In an American classroom, it would make sense to use [*sic*] right after the word "hurricanes," where the comma is missing:

> Milman writes that "Warmer ocean waters are helping supercharge storms, hurricanes [*sic*] and extreme rainfall, the paper states, which is escalating the risks of severe flooding."

Similarly, when we run into British spelling, it's appropriate to use [*sic*]. Another story from *The Guardian*, opens with the sentence, "Labour has accused the government's flagship national tutoring programme (NTP) of failing children and taxpayers after official figures revealed take-up rates way below target."

"Labour" refers to a political party (Labour Party) in Britain and is a proper noun so the spelling is not an issue, but "programme" is spelled "program" in American English. To avoid confusion, it would be appropriate to put [*sic*] after "programme," like this:

> Weale and Adams report that the British government's "flagship national tutoring programme [*sic*]" has failed to reach enough students.

Key Points: Quoting

- You must quote exactly from your source (with a few exceptions, see the last bullet here).
- You should only quote what you actually need, not necessarily complete sentences, and what you quote must be connected to your own sentences.
- There are only three changes you can make to a quotation:
    - Ellipses to indicate that you have left something out.
    - Square brackets to add explanatory text (for an abbreviation or pronoun, for example) or to change capitalization or verb tenses.
    - [*Sic*] to indicate that an error or non-standard spelling or punctuation was in the original.

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Choosing Between Quotations and Paraphrases

You should paraphrase when you need the ideas from the text but not the exact words. Note that when you quote, you usually need to paraphrase that quotation, too, so you should take every opportunity to practice your paraphrasing skills.

You should quote when you need not only the ideas but also the specific language from the text.

The Dangers of Too Much Quotation

If you quote more than you need to, you may find it easier to reach the word count, but your professor may not count those words. They aren't your words, after all.

In general, your writing should stand on its own without the quotations. You still need to include quotations when the assignment, genre, or discipline calls for them, but your analysis or other use of what you are quoting is more important than the quoted words.

Try reading your paragraphs while skipping over any long quotations. Grammatically and stylistically, this may be awkward, but does your point still make sense? If not, you may need to provide more explanation of that quoted material.

Quoting for a Reason

There are four conditions under which you will normally choose a quotation over a paraphrase:

Memorable Language

We quote when the specific wording is so strong and so remarkable that we want our reader to see that exact language. Note that this does not mean that you are quoting the material because the author said it better than you could. Memorable language should be quoted because the language is special in some identifiable way. Think about language like "I have a dream" (Martin Luther King, Jr.) and "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country" (President John F. Kennedy).

Technical Language

We quote when the source has explained a difficult or technical concept clearly and trying to paraphrase it would only make that explanation confusing. We do this frequently when we want to explain the definition of a key term used by a source or when we want to explain a technical concept or process.

Authoritative Language

We quote when we need to use the exact words from the source to point out that an expert makes a particular point. We often do this when we want to use the source as support for our own points or as examples of opposing positions. Note, though, that frequently a paraphrase works just as well if all we are trying to do is include information from an expert or show that an expert shares our position.

Language for Analysis

We quote when we are explaining how the specific language works in a particular passage and we need to refer to the author's exact words in order to demonstrate or provide an example. You've probably done this frequently in analyses of literature, and you will also do it when you do rhetorical analyses.

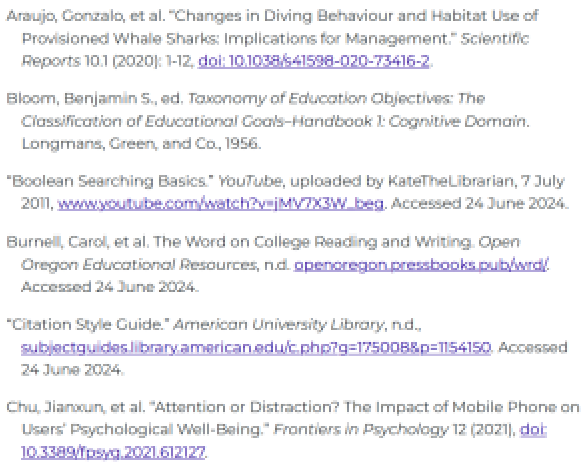
Paraphrasing Instead

If the part you want to quote doesn't meet one of these conditions, you should be paraphrasing instead.

Key Points: Choosing Between Quotations and Paraphrases

- Paraphrase when you need the idea from the source, but not the language.
- Quote when you need the idea *and* the language.
- There are four types of language to quote:
  - Memorable language
  - Technical language
  - Authoritative language
  - Language for analysis
- If the quote you are considering doesn't match one of these types, paraphrase!

Citing Your Sources



Araujo, Gonzalo, et al. "Changes in Diving Behaviour and Habitat Use of Provisioned Whale Sharks: Implications for Management." *Scientific Reports* 10.1 (2020): 1-12, doi: 10.1038/s41598-020-73416-2.

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Burnell, Carol, et al. The Word on College Reading and Writing. *Open Oregon Educational Resources*, n.d. openoregon.pressbooks.pub/wrd/. Accessed 24 June 2024.

"Citation Style Guide." *American University Library*, n.d., subjectguides.library.american.edu/c.php?g=175008&p=1154150. Accessed 24 June 2024.

Chu, Jianxun, et al. "Attention or Distraction? The Impact of Mobile Phone on Users' Psychological Well-Being." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021), doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.612127.

When I ask students why we cite sources, they usually tell me two things: so that we don't get accused of plagiarism and so that we give credit to other people for their work. While the former is true, the latter is much more important.

People who are honest about their intellectual work want to get credit for that work, and they want to give credit to those who have helped shape their ideas. If you write something that makes a difference and is worth quoting, wouldn't you want to get credit?

In addition, we cite so that others can find our sources. Frequently, as I am reading someone else's research, I see a source that I want to understand better. The citations help me locate that source for my own use.

The desire to give credit means that we need to acknowledge our sources. The desire to help others locate our sources means that we need to follow style guides. Those guides provide **conventions** for citing, and if we follow those guides, readers familiar with those conventions should have no trouble locating the sources.

Citation is one of the few places in academic writing where the ideas "right" and "wrong" apply. There are rules, and you should follow them to the best of your ability.

In this section, I'm not going to provide a guide for using any specific style. You can find those guides in lots of places, including on the internet. Instead, I'm going to explain how citation works so that you can apply these principles to your projects.

Understanding Citation Styles

APA
APSA
MLA
Chicago
CSE
Turabian
AMS
ASA
AMA
Harvard
ACS
CSEO

There are many citation styles, usually specific to different disciplines. For example, disciplines like psychology and education use the American Psychological Association (APA) style, while literature uses the Modern Language Association (MLA) style and biology uses the Council of Science Editors (CSE) style. Some disciplines use more than one. Business, for example, might use APA, the Chicago Manual of Style (usually just called "Chicago"), or Harvard Business School style (usually just called "Harvard"). You can find a number of guides for choosing styles online, like this one from the American University Library.

You won't need to learn all of these, even when you are taking classes in those fields. You should plan to learn the primary style (or styles) for your discipline, but for specific classes, your professor can tell you which style you should use. And many professors of general education courses will just tell you that you need to follow a style guide, but they are indifferent about which one.

There are so many different styles in part because different disciplines have need for different information about sources. For example, many styles include the year of publication of the source in the in-text citation, but MLA doesn't. That's because for the disciplines that use MLA, the date of the research is not terribly important. As another example, many sources in the sciences use a note numbering system and highly abbreviated reference list entries because publishing in the sciences can be expensive, and no one wants this kind of information to take up much space.

Starting with Reference Lists

Most citation styles require two parts: (1) the list of references at the end of your text and (2) the in-text citations. These two parts must work together in order for citations to do the work they need to.

Citation Footnotes

A few styles fold the reference and the in-text citation together into footnotes. In Chicago, for example, one of the citation options allows you to put full bibliographic information into a references list at the end and a shortened version of that information in a footnote on the page where you are using the source.

The list of references goes by a few different titles. MLA uses "Works Cited" (or "Work Cited" when there is only one source). Styles like APA use "References." Some, like Chicago, use either "References" or "Bibliography," depending on whether you are using the note version of the style or not. You can find specific information about the style you are using online at sites like the Excelsior OWL or through your university library website. You can also often buy guides for specific styles designed for students, but I wouldn't bother purchasing these unless you know that you will need them for your major.

Until you are familiar with how a style works, you should plan to do your list of references first because the in-text citations for those styles depend on your reference list entries. Many styles, including MLA and APA (two very common styles in college-level work), rely on the author's names or an abbreviated version of the first words of the reference list entry. If you don't know what begins an entry, you'll have trouble writing an accurate in-text citation. Once you become comfortable using that citation style, you may be able to draft your in-text citations without the reference list entries.

Sometimes It's Better the Other Way Around

For styles that rely on numbering, like the American Medical Association (AMA) style or some versions of the Council of Science Editors (CSE) style, your citations appear in the list in the order that they appear in your paper. In these cases, it may be better to order your reference list as you draft and revise—and work on finalizing your list later.

Your complete list of references includes all of the bibliographic information necessary to allow your reader to find your source. The style guide you are following tells you what information to include and how to arrange it.

To help your reader locate the proper source in your list, style guides that use a references list following one of two organizational strategies:

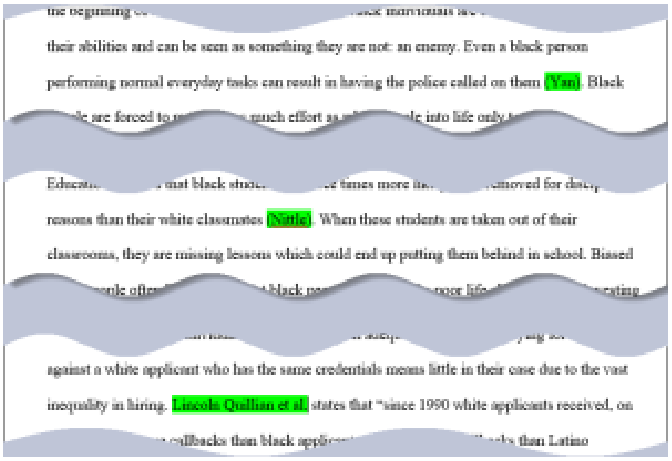
- Alphabetical order by whatever is first in the entry. While this is usually an author's name, sometimes you may be using sources written by institutions or other organizations and you don't have a person's name. For the purposes of alphabetization, you treat the first words in the entry just like an author's name. This is the most common strategy, and the one you are almost certainly going to be asked to use in the course where you are using this textbook.
- Numerical order according to the order in which the sources appear in your project. This ordering appears mostly in scholarly articles in the natural sciences, but you may see it in other places.

The organizational method you use will be dictated by the style guide that your professor requires. And you should follow it, even if you only have two or three sources.

Respect the Order!

While you have to arrange reference list entries in alphabetical order by the last name of the first author, DO NOT change the order in which the authors of an article appear. The order of the authors' names in a multi-author article has been arranged by the authors and has meaning in the field. In most cases, the first author is the "lead author," the one who has the most responsibility for the research and writing of the study. But these decisions are convention and they vary by discipline—and even by laboratory (Venkatraman).

Creating In-Text Citations



their abilities and can be seen as something they are not: an enemy. Even a black person performing normal everyday tasks can result in having the police called on them (Yan). Black

reasons than their white classmates (Nittle). When these students are taken out of their classrooms, they are missing lessons which could end up putting them behind in school. Biased

against a white applicant who has the same credentials means little in their case due to the vast inequality in hiring. Lincoln Quillian et al. states that "since 1990 white applicants received, on

The other half of a complete citation is the in-text citation. There are three kinds of in-text citations:

- The first, often called parenthetical citation, provides information inside of parentheses that indicates the corresponding source from your reference list. This is the most common form in both the humanities and the social sciences.
- The second kind is a superscript number. This is only used in styles that use a numbering system, and just like a parenthetical citation, the number indicates a corresponding reference. You will see this more frequently in the natural sciences.
- The final kind is a reference in the sentence itself, usually as part of an introductory phrase or other **attributive tag**. Like the other kinds of in-text citation, you must include enough information that your reader can locate the source in your list of references. This kind is sometimes used in conjunction with the first two kinds. It is most common in the humanities and relatively rare in the natural sciences.

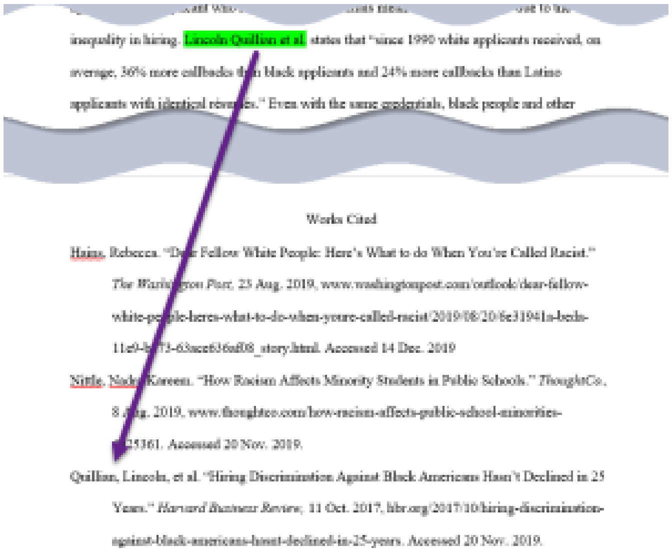
You will use parenthetical in-text citation in most of your early college coursework, so I am focusing on it here. Keep in mind that you should check on the rules if you are being asked to use an unfamiliar style.

Both quotations and paraphrases require in-text citation, though the specifics vary depending on the style guide you are using:

- Most styles want the author's name or names when there is more than one, though they have some differences about how to refer to multiple authors. You will sometimes see "**et al.**" following an author's last name. This indicates that there is more than one author, and almost always it means that there are more than two.
- Many styles ask you to include the year of the source in the parentheses. This is so that readers can know immediately how current the source is.
- Most style guides require page numbers for every quotation, even a partial quotation.
- Some style guides, such as MLA, require page numbers for paraphrases as well as quotations. Even when a style doesn't require page numbers for paraphrases (e.g., APA), your professor may want them anyway. Be sure to check.

For details about what should go in the parenthetical citations, head for a reference like the Excelsior OWL's Citation and Documentation section. And be sure to check with your instructor and/or a writing tutor if you have any questions.

The Jobs of In-Text Citation



inequality in hiring. Lincoln Quillian et al. states that "since 1990 white applicants received, on average, 36% more callbacks than black applicants and 24% more callbacks than Latino applicants with identical résumés." Even with the same credentials, black people and other

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Quillian, Lincoln, et al. "Hiring Discrimination Against Black Americans Hasn't Declined in 25 Years." *Harvard Business Review*, 11 Oct. 2017, hbr.org/2017/10/hiring-discrimination-against-black-americans-hasnt-declined-in-25-years. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

All three kinds of in-text citation have three primary jobs in your text:

The first job is technical: It must **lead your reader to the correct complete citation that appears in your list of references**. This is why, for example, a parenthetical citation *must* start with the same information as the full reference list entry. If your reference list entry starts with an author's name, your in-text citation for that source must start with the same name so that your reader can find it in your alphabetical list of entries.

The second job of an in-text citation is to **acknowledge your sources at the moment you are using them**. Knowledgeable readers—which probably include your professors—may recognize the source you have chosen just from the citation. But even if a reader doesn't recognize the source, your citations make clear that what you have just presented is someone else's idea and may give a little information (such as the year) to contextualize that source.

The final job of an in-text citation is to **clarify which ideas are yours and which belong to someone else**. This is why you must be careful with your placement of citations. If you have a sentence begins with a paraphrase from a source followed by your own idea, you cannot put the citation at the end of the sentence. That placement would indicate that your idea is actually an idea from the source. This need for clarification is why most sentences only contain ideas from sources or ideas from the writer, but not both. Citation placement is much simpler and, more importantly, the meaning is clearer when a sentence only contains one or the other.

Checking Citations

Arguably, checking citations could be considered part of proofreading as much as editing because citations are highly technical. However, I decided to put this section in this part of *Reading and Writing Successfully in College* instead of in the process section because it is too easy to make mistakes in citation. Those mistakes can get in the way of a successful project—and even end up in accusations of plagiarism. Here, I focus on some trouble areas and some tricks for checking citations.

Checking the List of References

Start with the entries themselves. Pay attention to things like the following:

- How authors' names are spelled
- Where italics are used—and where they aren't
- Where periods and commas go—and where they don't
- Whether you have included all of the required information, including things like publication dates and accessed dates (where required)

If at all possible, you want to look at a sample list of references for that style (or from your professor) and make that your list looks as much as possible like that one. Here are some specific areas to check in the formatting:

- Have you given your list a heading (e.g., "Works Cited" or "References")?
- Have you used a hanging indent? If you don't know how to do this, Bibliography.com has pretty clear instructions for both Word and Google Docs (Mathewson).
- Are the sources in alphabetical order by the first word in the entry?
- Is this list double-spaced without extra spaces between the entries?
- Does this list start on a new page if that is what your style requires?
- Does the list appear in the same fonts and type size as the rest of your paper? Sometimes, if you copy and paste all or part of an entry, you'll end up with different fonts.

Checking Your In-Text Citations

Keeping in mind that your in-text citations must match your reference list entries, you will want to check every in-text citation to make sure that it's accurate. Do the following to check your in-text citations:

- Use the search feature to find all of your in-text citations. Highlight the citations as you find them so that you can more easily see them as you work.
  - Search for "(" to find all of them that appear in parentheses.
  - Search for the names of authors to locate any that appear only in introductory phrases or **attributive tags**.
  - Search for quotation marks to find any quotations (all of which should have a citation).
- Scan your text to find anything you missed. Look, in particular, for the following:
  - References to authors that don't appear in your list of references
  - Paraphrases that you did not cite

As you go, make corrections if you find mistakes.

Once you have located and highlighted all of your in-text citations, you can look for these specific problem areas:

- Every source that appears in your list of references *must* also have some kind of in-text citation. If the source is not cited in your text, it doesn't belong on your list.
- Every in-text citation *must* match an entry on your list of references.
    - Be sure to check the spelling of authors' names so that you are accurate each and every time.
    - Be sure that whatever is in your in-text citation also starts your reference list entry.
- Check your sources, especially the page numbers. It is worth taking a little time to be sure that you can locate the point in the original source that you are referencing.

While this may seem tedious, as you become more adept at working with citations at the college level, you will find yourself better able to do this work efficiently. You'll also know better where your trouble spots are, and you can focus your efforts there.

Key Points

- We use to citation to give credit to our sources and to help our readers locate those sources if they are interested. Citation is necessary to avoid accusations of plagiarism, but that's not a primary reason for citation.
- There are many citation styles The ones you will need to use are dictated by your professor and your **discipline**.
- Citation consists of two parts: a reference list and in-text citations.
- The reference list entries will include all bibliographic information (per the style guide) and will usually be arranged alphabetically by the first word in the citation (usually an author's last name).
- The in-text citations usually appear in parentheses and those citations must match the first word in the reference list entry so that a reader can find the source in the references list.
- In-text citations also clarify which ideas are yours and which belong to your sources, at the same time as they give credit to those sources.
- Be sure to check that your citations are correct and that you have a complete match between in-text citations and reference list entries.

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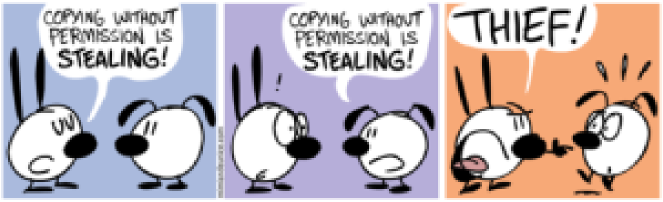
Plagiarizing


COPYING WITHOUT PERMISSION IS STEALING!
COPYING WITHOUT PERMISSION IS STEALING!
THIEF!

You know the definition of plagiarism—using someone else's words, work, or ideas and passing them off as your own. Some plagiarism is intentional. Using an essay-writing service, for example, is obviously and intentionally plagiarism. So is using AI to write your paper when your instructor has told you not to. These acts are wrong, and we all know it, so I don't have much to say about them here.

However, the majority of plagiarism—at least in first-year college classes—is inadvertent. It usually happens when a student is trying to paraphrase, quote, or cite a source, but they fail to do so correctly. Let's take each of these in turn.

Paraphrasing and Plagiarizing

Paraphrase is the biggest culprit. When a student tries to paraphrase, but ends up patchwriting instead, the language sticks too close to the original. The best way to avoid this, at least until you become more expert with paraphrasing, is the process I describe in the section on paraphrasing:

- Understand the passage
- Close the source
- Give yourself a short break
- Write the paraphrase
- Check it against the original

If your paraphrase is still too close to the original in either word choice or sentence structure (or both), try paraphrasing your paraphrase.

Quoting and Plagiarizing

Quotations make it easier to avoid plagiarism, but you can still make mistakes.

The most common mistake I see is a student's failing to use quotation marks when the words come directly from the source. When you use exact language from a source, even if it is a phrase of just a few words, you *must* use quotation marks. You don't need to do this around commonly used language and phrasing, but if the wording is at all specific to the source, you need to include the quotation marks. If you don't have quotation marks around that exact language, you are claiming the language as your own, which could be considered plagiarism.

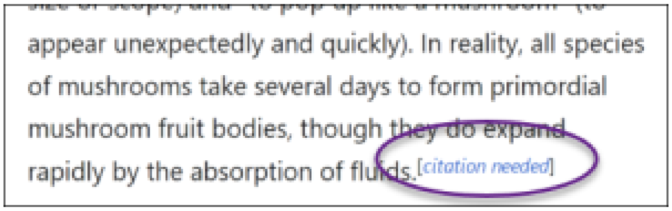
Citing and Plagiarizing

Sometimes students forget to include the citations themselves, which can be considered plagiarism. Every time you quote and every time you paraphrase, you need to give credit to your source. The specifics of what the citation will look like vary, but if you don't have a citation, you could be accused of plagiarism.

This is especially true of in-text citations. Most professors will see a source missing from your list and assume a mistake, but missing in-text citations, particularly when citing paraphrases, aren't as obviously mistakes.

This problem seems to happen most to students who think that they will add the citations later. While this strategy can work to help you keep drafting, if you don't leave yourself some kind of reminder that you need to add the citations, you can have a serious problem later on. If you draft this way, I recommend that you add parentheses as a reminder. It can be even more helpful if you put some kind of reminder about which source you are using.

Another common problem I see is students thinking that it's enough to include a citation at the end of a paragraph, particularly when there are several sentences from the same source that require citation. I've also seen this at the end of slide decks, where students skip the in-text citations.



appear unexpectedly and quickly). In reality, all species of mushrooms take several days to form primordial mushroom fruit bodies, though they do expand rapidly by the absorption of fluids.[citation needed]

This is not sufficient! While there are more elegant and sophisticated ways to cite, you are better off adding a parenthetical citation to the end of every sentence than to leave one off. Look at it this way: If you cite too much, at worst, your professor will tell you that you don't need so much citation. If you cite too little, you can be accused of plagiarism.

If you have a long-ish section of material coming from the same source, such as when you are writing a summary, your best bet is to open that section with a reference to the author (in the sentence itself if your style guide and/or professor allows this), and then reminding your reader that the ideas are coming from that author another one or two times during the section by using pronouns and **attributive tags** to signal that these ideas are not yours. And remember that you must include page numbers whenever your quote or paraphrase (again, unless directed otherwise by your style guide and/or professor).

Plagiarizing Sources Other Than Writing

Written words are not the only things that can be plagiarized. If you include images, videos, sound clips, or other media that you did not create yourself, you need to give credit to the creator of those texts. Usually, this is done in a caption, particularly if the final product is a paper. Different style guides will have instructions for citing in captions, but if you aren't sure how best to do this, ask your professor.

Copyright, Creative Commons, "Fair Use," and Plagiarism

Click for more information.
To understand plagiarism, it helps to understand a bit about the idea of intellectual property

Copyrighted work is owned by that work's creator until and unless they assign their rights to someone else or until they apply a license. The technicalities are not terribly important for our purposes, but as a student, you should assume that all written text, audio files, images, and video you have access to is copyrighted, whether you see a © symbol or not. Normally, you have to ask permission to use a copyrighted work.

However, as a student, you usually don't because of a concept called "fair use." Among other things, "fair use" allows students to use copyrighted material for educational purposes without asking permission. So, you can pick up copyrighted images, videos, or audio files from the internet and include them in your final projects, as long as those final pieces are not going to be shared publicly. You still have to cite them, though!

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No matter whether you are using material under the "fair use" doctrine or Creative Commons licensing, you still have to give credit to the creator of the work you are using. If you do not give credit—if you do not attribute the work to its creator—you could be plagiarizing. We'll leave it to the courts to sort out the legal technicalities, but as a student, you need to provide attribution for all ideas and work that is not your own.

Key Points: Plagiarizing

- You can plagiarize by paraphrasing, quoting, or citing poorly.
- Poor paraphrasing, also called **patchwriting**, leaves the language too close to the original. This would be considered plagiarism.
- Failure to include quotation marks around exact phrasing from a source would be considered plagiarism.
- Failure to include citations—usually in-text, but also reference list entries—can be considered plagiarism.
- It is not enough to include a citation at the end of a paragraph or slide deck. You need to make sure your reader knows where you are getting your ideas all the way through your text. It is better to cite too much than not enough.
- You can also plagiarize images, videos, audio files, and other intellectual property, particularly if

you do not cite them properly.

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Integrating Source Material with Your Ideas

When style guides want you to list sources at the end, they only want you to list the sources that you have actually *cited* in your work. It is not enough to have the required number of sources in the list of references at the end of your project. Instead, you must actually use those sources in the text. This means that the sources cannot simply be decoration.

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You can use the instructions for checking citations as a technical way to check that you have referenced all of your sources; however, more is involved in using sources well.

Quoting and Paraphrasing Successfully

Every time you use information from another source, you have to cite that material. But what else do you have to include? It depends on how many sources you are bringing together, but in general, you will need to have these elements:

- Some attribution for the source, usually in the form of an **attribute tag** and/or a citation
- The quotation itself (only if you are quoting; you don't need this if you are just paraphrasing)
- A **paraphrase** of the text you are using
- A connection to your claim in the paragraph or in the paper as a whole

Attributive Tags and Citations

An attributive tag is usually a quick phrase that indicates who said the words you are quoting or where the information comes from. For example, you could begin your introduction of the source material with "Jones argues …," or "According to the National Institutes of Health …." This approach works best when you are using a single source.

However, sometimes, you don't want to highlight the source, or you are following a style guide that only wants references to sources in citations. Citations can serve the same purpose in many circumstances, and they work particularly well when you are paraphrasing multiple sources.

Quotations and Paraphrases

If you are quoting, you need the quotation, obviously. Less obvious, however, is that you usually need a paraphrase even when you are quoting from a source—simply because your reader needs to understand how you understand the quotation you've selected. Sometimes, the quotation is so plain that a paraphrase is simply redundant, but more often, you need the paraphrase to point out what you think is important about the quotation.

It may seem easier to quote complete sentences, even if you need to write additional sentences of paraphrase. However, one way to increase the level of sophistication in your writing is to quote the bare minimum of what you need from the passage you have selected and to use a paraphrase to explain the idea behind the full passage. This mixture of paraphrase and quotation demonstrates very well your understanding of the material, and it shows your reader that you are working actively to explain what the original says.

Example: Increasing Your Sophistication

View the example.

Let's look at an example of the kind of difference in sophistication level that I am talking about. Nikk Ogasa reported on "ghost games" in soccer and the effects on referees for the site *ScienceNews*. Here's a paragraph from that story:

> "Referees indeed give advantage to the home teams, because of the crowds," Leitner [a sports psychologist who is one of the researchers on this study] says. But the findings suggest that referee bias tends to disappear when fans do. While it's natural for people to change their opinions under pressure from others, Leitner says, hopefully this work can help referees become more aware of their biases. "When you know it, you can train against it."

The ideas in this paragraph are central to the point that referees have bias when fans are present. I could choose to quote full sentences from this paragraph:

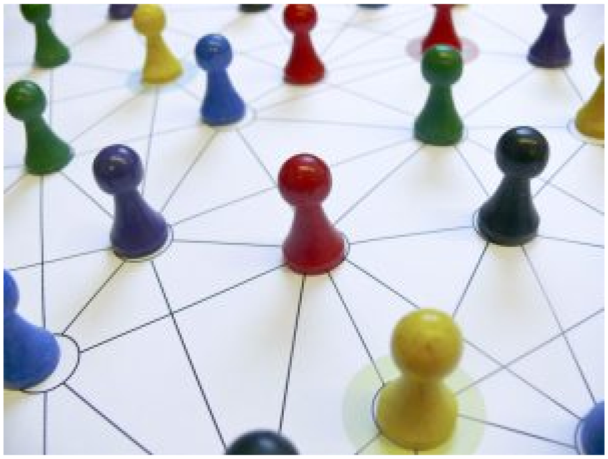
> Ogasa reports that "'Referees indeed give advantage to the home teams, because of the crowds,' Leitner [a sports psychologist who is one of the researchers on this study] says. But the findings suggest that referee bias tends to disappear when fans do."

However, if I choose just the words I really want to quote and blend in paraphrase, my explanation will be clearer and my own writing will be stronger:

> According to research by sports psychologists at the University of Salzburg in Austria, referees are affected by the presences of fans. They found that referees favor home teams when crowds are present, but "that referee bias tends to disappear when the fans do" (Ogasa).

Most of my paragraph is paraphrase, but I have kept a little quotation, selected specifically because it is phrased so well (remember the reasons for quoting!). The result is a much more sophisticated version of the material.

Making Connections Between the Source and Your Ideas



Finally, your reader needs you to make a connection between the source you have quoted and/or paraphrased and the claim you are making. In other words, it is not enough to drop a quotation in and expect your reader to understand, even if you properly paraphrase and cite it. Your reader also needs to know how you think this source is connected to your point.

Students sometimes tell me that they don't include this because they think the quotation speaks for itself. But in academic writing, you cannot make that assumption. Your readers need that explanation, even if the connection seems obvious to you. Remember that readers (including your professor!) want to hear you, not just your sources, so make your ideas clear. You can also use this as an opportunity for paragraph development, which will help you meet your word count.

There are no rules about where this explanation appears. Sometimes it appears after you have presented the source material, but it can also appear before—or both. The connections you make can also appear in your topic sentence.

Differing Numbers of Sources

What you need to include changes a bit depending on how many sources are involved.

Using a Single Source

If you are focusing attention on one source in a paragraph, you need to have all of the elements listed above. Your reader needs to know why you have focused attention on this particular source, so your explanations may be more specific or involved. Don't be afraid to give your reader a little extra information about the source itself or the background behind the material you are using. And definitely make a clear connection between that source and your point in the paragraph.

Using Multiple Sources

If you are focusing an idea and using multiple sources in the same paragraph, what you need to include changes a bit, though the parts are all still present:

- Attribution, which usually comes in the form of citation for all sources when there are multiple sources
- Information from the sources, usually in the form of paraphrase, but quotations can also be appropriate, if used sparingly
- Explanatory sentences that connect the source material to your claim in the paper

When you are using multiple sources in the same paragraph, it can be easy to get caught up in using those sources, and forget the explanation. Don't! Your reader needs that explanation.

Sometimes, though, you may need to use a couple of paragraphs to fully present the ideas from multiple sources and the explanation to go with it. There is nothing wrong with that. Remember that some topics take more than one paragraph to explain.

Key Points: Integrating Source Material with Your Ideas

- Each time you use source material in your writing, you need the following
    - A reference to the source in a citation or attributive tag
    - A quotation (if you are quoting)
    - A paraphrase, even if you are quoting, unless the meaning of the quotation would be completely obvious to your reader
    - An explanation that connects the idea of your source to the point in your paragraph or in your paper as a whole.
- Your quotation use can be more sophisticated if you minimize the number of words you quote and incorporate them into paraphrases.
- When you are using only one source, you can provide your reader with additional information about that source, assuming the style you are using allows for that.
- When you are using multiple sources in a paragraph, you will rarely quote, and your citations will often contain references to multiple entries in your references list.

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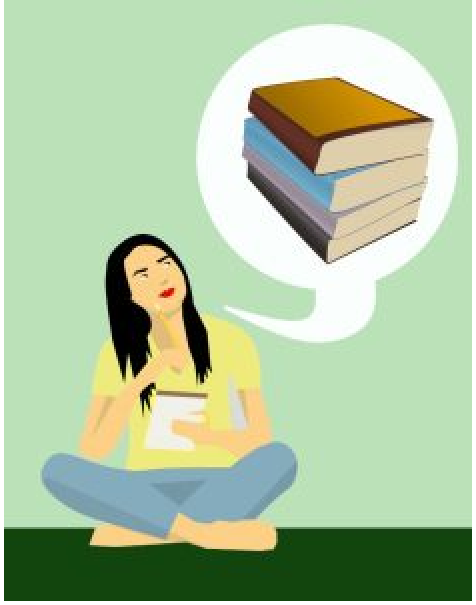
Thoughtful Source Use



Finding good sources and using them well is central to college-level academic work. All disciplines acknowledge their intellectual debt to thinkers before them. Those acknowledgements are a form of respect, even in the moments when we criticize or oppose those ideas.

When you can find and use good source material, you strengthen not only your ability to write, but also your ability to think. Using sources well requires that you understand those sources, and the better you understand them, the better you are able to build on those ideas. Remember that college is not about regurgitating what someone else thought or said. It's about learning how to apply and extend those ideas. It's about your thinking.

While the techniques I've described in this section of *Reading and Writing Successfully in College* apply primarily to academic settings, source gathering and use doesn't stop after college. Think of all of the circumstances in which you could be asked to provide evidence to support your ideas. You could, for example, be asked to provide a presentation or company memo on best practices in an area of your field. Or you could be asked to summarize recent research for your boss. Or you could be headed for a field where source use is crucial, like law or government or journalism. In all of these cases, your ability to find good sources and use them well matters. College is an excellent place to practice those skills.

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Glossary

annotate

Make notes on or otherwise mark up a text.

attributive tag

A phrase embedded in a sentence that indicates the source of the information in that sentence. Sometimes these tags can serve as citations, particularly when there are no page numbers to reference.

brainstorming

A technique for generating ideas that involves listing as many as you can think of quickly.

coherence

A characteristic of writing that, when successful, moves the reader smoothly and logically from beginning to end. Students sometimes call this "flow." This term applies to both full projects and to individual paragraphs.

collaborative annotation tools

Apps like Perusall and Hypothes.is that allow multiple people to annotate the same text and respond to one another.

comma splice

A grammatical error in which two independent clauses are linked together with a comma, which is not a strong enough piece of punctuation for this work.

common knowledge

Information that an educated reader would accept without having to look it up or that can be easily found in sources like dictionaries and encyclopedias.

convention

A usual or customary way of doing something. In writing, the term is most commonly applied to grammar and citation.

conventional

Normal or usual for a given field or community. See also "convention."

coordinating conjunction

A word that joins parts of sentences or whole sentences that are of equal importance. There are only seven of them: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (FANBOYS). See also "coordination."

coordination

A sentence structure that gives equal weight to the ideas in each of the parts of a sentence.

copia

An approach to writing in which the writer generates a lot of writing and then selects the best, given their purpose and audience. This word is written in italics because it's a foreign word. This approach stands in contrast to economy.

counterargument

An argument that opposes the argument that an author is making; also used to describe an author's response to that opposing argument.

creative nonfiction

Storytelling about real-life people or events.

critical thinking

A kind of thinking characterized by logical, objective analysis and evaluation based on evidence.

dependent clause

A group of words containing a subject and a verb that cannot stand on its own as a sentence, as opposed to an independent clause.

development

A characteristic of writing that provides the reader with enough evidence and enough explanation to support the claim that the writer is making. This term applies to both full projects and to individual paragraphs.

discipline

An area of study, very similar to a major in college.

discussion

The section of a research article describing the most important results and what those results mean.

dissertation

A piece of original scholarship, generally between 100 and 300 pages, written as a requirement for a doctoral degree.

double-entry journaling

A method for taking notes about a text that uses columns to differentiate summary from response.

dropped quotation

A quotation that appears by itself in a text without any connection to writer's text. These usually take the form of complete sentences in quotation marks without any of the writer's own words.

economy

An approach to writing in which a person only does as much writing as is required to complete the task and the person includes all of their writing in the final product. This approach stands in contrast to *copia*.

ellipsis

A mark of punctuation made up of three periods (…) that indicates that something has been left out of a quotation. Plural form: ellipses.

et al.

An abbreviation used to indicate additional authors. Formally, it is an abbreviation for "et alia," which is Latin for "and others."

evidence

Material from sources other than yourself and your own experiences, as distinct from explanation, which is where you explain your own ideas (including your understanding of your sources). See also "explanation."

explanation

Material in which you explain your ideas, as distinct from evidence, which is material from outside sources. See also "evidence."

five-paragraph theme

A highly structured organization for writing in academic settings that includes an introduction with a three-part thesis, three body paragraphs each explaining one part of the thesis, and a conclusion that summarizes the paper.

focus

A characteristic of writing in which the text stays on topic. This term applies to both full projects and to individual paragraphs.

gesture forward

Statements made in a conclusion that move beyond summary to invite your reader to think or do something different as a result of reading your work.

hypothesis

A proposed explanation that serves as a basis for research designed to determine the accuracy of that explanation.

idiom

A group of words that has an established meaning in a culture or language that doesn't necessarily reflect the combination of the individual words.

imperative verb

A verb that gives a command. In “Wash the dishes,” “wash” is the imperative verb.

IMRD

The acronym (pronounced im-RAD) for organization of research reporting in many of the social and natural sciences. Also written "IMRAD" or "IMRaD."

independent clause

A group of words containing a subject and a verb that can stand on its own as a sentence.

interlibrary loan

A service that college and university libraries offer that allows community members to request books and other materials that the library does not have from other libraries. This service is usually free.

kinesthetic

Relating to a person's awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body.

master's thesis

A piece of original scholarship, generally between 50 and 100 pages, written as a requirement for a master's degree.

metacognition

A kind of knowledge that is self-aware and that focuses on how a thinker thinks. It is sometimes called "thinking about thinking."

method

The section of a research article describing the materials and procedures of the study at hand.

modal

An auxiliary verb that helps indicate what is needed or what is possible in the action of the main verb. Examples include "should" and "might."

parameters

In the context of writing, the expectations and/or requirements of a writing task.

paraphrase

A rewording of someone else's ideas so that the ideas are accurately represented, but the language and sentence structure are different.

patchwriting

A weak paraphrase that relies too heavily on the language of the original text. Patchwriting is usually considered a form of plagiarism.

pedagogy

The methods that teachers use to teach.

peer review

A process by which research articles are evaluated by other researchers in the same field for the appropriateness of their methods and accuracy of their findings.

peer reviewed sources

Sources that have been evaluated by experts in the field, also sometimes called "scholarly sources"; these sources are considered the most reputable in academic settings.

phrase

A small group of words in a sentence that form an idea but that do not make up a sentence on their own. See also "independent clause" and "dependent clause."

plagiarism

A serious violation of academic honesty in which the writer makes it appear as though ideas and language from a source are their own. Plagiarism can be intentional (e.g., buying papers or having someone else write a paper), but it can also happen inadvertently through poor paraphrasing or a failure to follow rules around the use of quotations.

prepositional phrases

Short parts of sentences that begin with prepositions (words like "at" and "to") and that serve as adjectives or adverbs.

primary purpose

The most important goal for a piece of writing, usually determined by the author. There are three primary purposes: inform, persuade, and entertain.

primary sources

First-hand accounts or documents created in historical real-time, including texts of laws, speeches, letters, photographs, works of literature and art, and newspaper reports in which the reporter was an actual witness to the event or reporting the words of those who witnessed it. Reports of original research are also primary sources in many disciplines.

prose

Words written in regular sentence structure and word order, as opposed to poetry.

recursive

In writing, the understanding that the process tends to loop back so that while a writer moves through stages, they also frequently come back to earlier stages to improve their writing.

results

The section of a research article describing the findings of the study.

rhetorical principles

Concepts used to explain how persuasion works, particularly in oral and written language.

scare quotes

Quotation marks around a word used to draw attention to that word, not as a quotation from a source, usually indicating skepticism.

search engine optimization

A process that website designers use to increase traffic to their sites. The process involves the use of keywords and other techniques to raise the rank of sites in response to particular searches on the internet.

secondary sources

Sources that interpret primary sources. These sources include scholarly research review articles and meta-analyses.

sequential

Forming or following in a logical order or sequence.

subordinate point

A less important point, as distinct from the main point.

subordination

A sentence structure that gives differential weight to the ideas in each of the clauses, with one idea being less important than the other.

target audience

The group of readers who would be interested in a particular text, as opposed to a general audience who would be able to read the text, but may or may not be interested in it.

taxonomy

A system of classification, a way of organizing elements into groups or categories, that is often, though not always, hierarchical.

tertiary sources

Sources that summarize or synthesize information that is considered established, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and textbooks.

theory

A set of principles or concepts that is intended to explain something, usually abstract and applied to concrete situations.

thesis statement

The controlling idea for an academic text, though some other kinds of texts may have such a statement, too. See also "working thesis statement."

topic sentence

A sentence that summarizes the main point of a paragraph.

transition

A word or group of words that guide the reader logically from one idea to the next in a text.

transition sentence

A sentence usually at the beginning of a paragraph that makes a connection between the ideas in the previous paragraph(s) and the idea in the next one. See also "transition."

webzine

A magazine published online.

working thesis statement

An early version of a thesis statement that helps in focusing and organizing ideas. See also "thesis statement."

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For more information about the ROTEL Project, please visit our project website.

Version History

Below is the version history for Reading and Writing Successfully in College.

Version	Publication Date	Changes
First Edition: link to first edition	January 4, 2023	—
Revised Edition: link to revised edition	August 30, 2024	The revised edition of *Reading and Writing Successfully* incl revisions by students who participated in the open pedagog assignment, additional images to help break up the text, an changes that keep instructions and long examples tucked a they are needed. Most significantly, this edition includes a n chapter that examines generative AI and writing through th Bloom's taxonomy.