# MODULE 1

# CRITICAL READING

## Introduction

The word *critical* has multiple meanings. As used in the title of this module, "Critical Reading," *critical* refers to making an informed analysis or evaluation of a text—to read something critically. But *critical* can also mean *vital* or *important,* and understanding what's important in a text is absolutely relevant to **critical reading**. Indeed, you should be examining the most important elements of a text to determine its major ideas and to summarize those ideas. You can then demonstrate the strength of your understanding by developing your own analytical reaction to the author's ideas and language as well as by writing critically about the reading.

## Lesson 1.1: Analyzing a Text

### Lesson 1.1 Introduction

You will not be able to think critically about the key points in a reading, or summarize them using your own words, unless you can identify those points. So, how do you determine what the key points of a reading are? The answer to that question is, ideally, you should **preview** and then read an entire text—from beginning to end—before you start to highlight certain passages or **annotate** the text in any way. Simply reading through the text will give you a general understanding of its content. After this initial reading, go back and reread the piece, one paragraph at a time, highlighting or annotating text after you have read each paragraph. Then, as you read it an additional time, you can consider its main points more analytically.

### Critical Reading and Thinking Strategies: Previewing and Reading Through

Critical reading is an essential skill needed for college. To read efficiently and critically, follow four steps: previewing, reading through, annotating, and thinking about the text.

***Step One: Previewing the text***

Previewing the text provides the reader with an idea of what to expect from the text. The preview should identify any key concepts or ideas as well as the basic layout of the argument. To preview the text, look at the title, the subtitle, any headings, the first and last paragraphs, the illustrations, and the visuals.

While you preview the text, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where is the text going? What do you think it is about?
2. What is its purpose? Audience? Genre?

***Step Two: Reading through and thinking about your initial response***

You will need to read the text several times. The first time you read it, pay attention to the content. This should be a surface-level reading only. Afterward, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is your initial reaction to the text?
2. What accounts for your reaction?

In your next read-through, you will start annotating, or marking up, the text.

## Critical Reading and Thinking Strategies: Annotating and Thinking

### *Step Three: Annotating the text*

You should preview and then read through the text before you begin annotating, or marking, it. If time does not allow for an initial read-through of the assigned material, you can mark text as you go, but do so only after you complete a paragraph. That way, you will be better able to decide what is important enough to mark. Students' biggest problem in highlighting or marking text is their tendency to mark too much. If you have marked almost everything on a page, you might as well have marked nothing, as the main ideas are still not set apart from the rest of the text.

To annotate, read the text again, but this time with a specific purpose. Now that you know what the text is about, you need to examine how it makes its point.

The first paragraph, and sometimes the first several paragraphs, of a reading often simply introduces the topic and thesis of the reading. Try to determine what that is, and summarize it in your own words in the margin. Then, when you get into the meat of the reading, look for the topic sentence of each paragraph. The topic sentence of a paragraph often occurs at the beginning of the paragraph, so that is a good place to look. However, finish the paragraph before you decide what to mark. Move through the reading one paragraph at a time, going back to mark the main points by highlighting or underlining.

As you re-read, identify any patterns in the text by examining the grammar, structure, and diction. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do these patterns reveal?
2. How do these patterns reinforce the explicit meaning of the text?

You should also mark the definitions, details, and examples that support the main ideas by "coding" them in some way, perhaps by putting the abbreviation "Def" for definition or "Ex" for example in the margin. After marking the key points and supporting details and examples, summarize the key points in your own words in the margins.

Some readings will give you clues to help you identify the main points by providing headings or by boldfacing or italicizing key terms or concepts. As when you are previewing, it is always a good idea to examine headings in a text when annotating, as these will communicate the general topic of a section of a longer reading segment. Boldface and italics draw the eye and usually signal something important.

### *Step Four: Thinking about how the text works*

As you read through the text again, pay attention to what each paragraph says and does. Write these thoughts down separately in sentence form. Later on, by identifying what each paragraph says in a sentence and putting those sentences together, you will be able to compose a summary of the content in the text.

### Critical Reading Review

Here are a few rules of thumb about how to approach a reading:

- Preview the text.
- Read the entire work through without marking anything.
- Try to state the author's main idea or thesis in your own words.
- Go back over the reading one paragraph at a time, looking for and marking the key concepts.
- Pay careful attention to any headings and to any boldfaced or italicized words. Mark the topic sentence of each paragraph. (The sentence that states the main point—the topic sentence—is often, but not always, the first sentence of the paragraph.)
- If you encounter an unfamiliar word, look up its meaning in the dictionary and insert a synonym for it in the text.
- Mark any definitions or examples with a *code*—the abbreviation "Ex" or "Def." Insert your code in the margin beside the definitions or examples.
- Summarize in your own words the main points of each paragraph in the margin. If you quote the author of the material directly, put quotation marks around the word or phrase you borrow.
- Complete a final reading of the text.

## Lesson 1.2: Summarizing a Text

### Lesson 1.2 Introduction

One common way to demonstrate that you understand a text is to **summarize** it. Summary, simply put, is when you put the source in your own words and in a more concise form than the original. Although this may seem easy enough, summarizing is actually a complex process. It requires you to analyze the text first. You need to identify the most important and relevant ideas and disregard the smaller details. To do this, you need to complete a critical reading of the text.

As you conclude your critical reading, it's likely you will already be summarizing small sections of the text. This is, of course, good preparation for writing an overall summary. You can also use other approaches, such as outlining, to prepare for summarizing. Consider summarizing individual paragraphs and making an **outline** before you compose a summary of the text overall.

### Outlining the Main Points

Let's walk through the process of summarizing a hypothetical article.

- Read the article carefully
- Highlight the main points
- Create an outline
- Write about each point in your own words

Read the article all the way through. Set it aside and think about it. Then read it again. This time, using a pen or highlighter, underline the main points in each paragraph. Focus on what the author is telling the reader in each paragraph.

Once you've highlighted or underlined the main points of each paragraph, copy those sentences onto paper. You'll be making list of the focus of each paragraph.

Then look at your list. You'll notice that the points probably follow some kind of order. The author may connect several points together in a few paragraphs. Circle or block together those points that seem to connect to each other. What's the overall thrust of each group of paragraphs? The overall thrust is a major point for that part of the article. Give that block of points a title. This is one main point of the article.

As you do this, you'll notice that your grouping begins to look like an outline of sorts. It is. The main points are used as a standard to then provide the details and examples that are included in the article. If you were to make a presentation in a public speaking class, you could use that article alone to inform your audience. Don't do this, though. Repeating someone else's ideas without including your own or giving credit is, of course, plagiarism. And you don't want the plagiarism beast to follow you around. It's nasty.

So, you've got an outline. This is the first step to creating a summary.

### Write about each point

Now look back at the outline you've created.

- What is the topic of the article? State it in your own words.
- What is the author's main purpose in writing this? Why is it important to her?
- What's her "thesis point"?  Her thesis connects to the overall point of the article.
- Next, identify those main points that you titled in your outline. A summary briefly lists the author's main points.
- Finally, examine the conclusion. What is the take-away the author provides to the reader?

A summary leaves your own ideas out and merely identifies the author's thesis and purpose and main points.

### Write about each point

Now look back at the outline you've created. What is the topic of the article? State it in your own words. What is the author's main purpose in writing this? Why is it important to her? What's her "thesis point"? Her thesis connects to the overall point of the article. Next, identify those main points that you titled in your outline. A summary briefly lists the author's main points. Finally, examine the conclusion. What is the take-away the author provides to the reader?

A summary leaves your own ideas out and merely identifies the author's thesis and purpose and main points.

## Writing a Summary

Remember, summaries are generally used to restate the main ideas of a text in your own words. They are usually substantially shorter than the original text because they don't include supporting material. Instead, they include overarching ideas of an article, a page, or a paragraph.

For example, in the first chapter of his 1854 book, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Henry David Thoreau wrote the following:

> Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true

> integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.

What is the main idea in the passage? The following is one way the passage might be summarized.

> In his 1854 text, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Henry David Thoreau suggests that the human fixation on work and labor desensitizes man to the world around him, to the needs of his own intellectual growth, and to the complexity and frailty of his fellow humans.

**NOTE:** The summary accomplishes two goals:

1. It contextualizes the information (who said it, when, and where).
2. It lists the main ideas of the passage without using quotations or citing specific supporting points of the passage.

You should use summaries of your source materials when you need to capture main ideas to support a point you are making.

### Summary as Skill Versus Genre

Depending on the depth and length of your summary, you might find that your summary is different from someone else's. For instance, if you were asked to summarize the movie *The Dark Knight* in one sentence, you could offer several different options: it is a love story that shows the ultimate sacrifice when Batman tries to save Rachel; it follows a sociopathic killer named the Joker as he wreaks havoc in Gotham City; it shows how DA Harvey Dent transforms into Two-Face. None of these summaries are wrong, they just show you analyzed the movie in different ways and pulled out main ideas that were most relevant to you, the viewer. But if you were asked to write a longer summary of the movie, you might include all three of the options and provide a more general statement summarizing the movie: *The Dark Knight* is the newest episode in the Batman movie franchise that interweaves battles with the Joker, a love triangle, and Two-Face's origin story.

Summary is a genre that can stand on its own as a paper, and it can also be used as a skill in other genres. Regardless, it will require critical reading, analysis, and interpretation skills. To summarize, first, you will need to complete a critical reading of the text that identifies the main ideas through analysis. Then, you will need to put those main ideas into your own language.

If you are writing a summary as a genre paper rather than using it as a skill, you will want to pay close attention that you discuss only what the author states, not your opinion of the text. Identify the main ideas in the text and explain how the author supports those main ideas. Refer to the author throughout the summary so that your reader knows that these are not your ideas—they are a summary of what the author says. By referring to the author, you can easily avoid problems with plagiarism that can occur in summary. For instance, if you are referring to an author, your sentence might read like this: "Wicker describes *The Dark Knight* as the newest episode in the Batman movie franchise that interweaves battles with the Joker, a love triangle, and Two-Face's origin story." You would provide the bibliographic information for Wicker in your Works Cited page, which lists all the sources you used to write your paper.

### Summary Checklist

Keep in mind the following tips for summarizing:

- Highlight or underline the thesis, topic sentences, and key supporting details as you read.
- Construct an outline to help you identify the main ideas.
- Start by writing the main idea.
- Review the major supporting ideas.
- Paraphrase information by putting it in your own words.
- Be brief and succinct so that your summary is accurate but significantly shorter than the original text by covering only the most important ideas in fewer words.
- Consider your purpose and audience. How detailed do you need to be? Do you need to define terms? Are you writing for yourself or for others? If you are writing for yourself, don't worry about sentence structure.
- Present ideas in the same order that the author does.
- If the author has a point of view, explain what it is in your summary.
- Leave your personal opinion out of the summary unless you are required to include it.
- Provide a citation if the summary is included in a formal writing assignment or publication.

## Lesson 1.3: Critiquing a Text

### Lesson 1.3 Introduction

What does it mean to critique another author's work? Writing a **critique** unites the skills (taught previously in this module) of reading critically and summarizing. It requires you to understand the author's major ideas, summarize them, and analyze how the author conveys or presents them. When preparing a critique, consider several important aspects of the text in your analysis. You will need to examine, among them, the author's language, the voice and tone she uses, the individuals or groups at whom she has directed the text, and her goals in developing the text.

### Rhetorical Analysis

The word *rhetoric* is most often used today with a negative connotation. You may hear people on opposite sides of an issue calling on another to "stop the rhetoric." But any speech meant to persuade is, in fact, **rhetoric**. And that can be a good thing! For centuries, students were trained in the ancient art of rhetoric.

#### The Rhetorical Context

Before you begin writing a critique, it is essential that you ask questions to thoroughly evaluate the **rhetorical context** of the text you are critiquing. This process is called **rhetorical analysis.** You need to ask yourself what the author's **purpose** for writing was—did he want to persuade, inform, or entertain the **audience**? And who is the audience? What backgrounds and perspectives are these people likely to have with regard to the subject of the writing? What is the subject of the writing? Is it something the author is very knowledgeable and passionate about? Is it of interest to others? Is it controversial?

#### The Rhetorical Situation

Rhetoric is the art of using language effectively. As Aristotle and others have explained, a writer's language is effective when all aspects of her message (including content and style) fit the subject, address the needs of the audience, and fulfill the purpose. For these reasons, before you put your fingers to the keyboard to write a critique of another author's text, you must think carefully about all three. By doing so, you're analyzing the **rhetorical situation**—the conditions or issues that affect writing decisions such as form (essay, report, etc.) and organizational strategy (cause/effect, chronological process, etc.)

These are questions you can ask to assess a rhetorical situation:

- What is the author's purpose? To inform? Persuade? Relate a personal experience?
- Who is the author's audience? Peers? The general public? Visitors to a website?
- What is the author's subject? How does the author present that subject?

## Identifying the Audience

Who is the author writing for? You want to ask yourself that question every time you begin a critique. Authors should keep the audience in mind as they go through the writing process because it will help them make decisions while they write. Such decisions should include what **voice** the author uses, what words he chooses, and what syntax he uses. Thinking of who the audience is and what their expectations are will also help the author decide what kind of introduction and conclusion to write.

### Writing for an Audience

Sometimes, it's difficult for an author to decide how much to explain or how much detail to go into in a piece of writing when considering audience. Remember that an author needs to explain the major concepts in a text and provide clear, accurate information. The reader should be able to make the necessary connections from one thought or sentence to the next. When the author doesn't explain, the reader can become confused or frustrated. Examine whether the author connects the dots and explains how the information she presents is relevant and how it connects with the other ideas she has put forth in the text.

When it's time to write a critique, read the piece looking for what is not well explained, clearly written, or linked to other ideas. The author's job is to communicate her thinking in a clear, thoughtful, and complete way.

## Finding the Author's Voice

In writing, just as in life, you're selective when choosing words and the tone of voice you use in various situations. When writing a thank-you note to Great Aunt Millie for the socks she sent you for your birthday, you probably use a polite, respectful voice. When you are having a fight with your partner or are gossiping with a friend, both your vocabulary and tone will be quite different. Likewise, you'll use a more formal voice in a research paper compared with a personal essay, an email, or a journal entry.

Deciding what kind of voice to use in writing depends entirely on who will be reading what the author writes and what his purpose is in writing. Is the author writing about the first time he ever drove a car? Explaining his theory about why yoga is such a popular exercise regimen and spiritual practice? Putting forth his informed opinion of why hybrid cars are problematic for the environment despite their increased gas mileage?

What creates voice is simply the words an author chooses and the way she uses them. What kind of voice an author uses in a piece depends on the purpose and the audience as well as the effect she wants to create. By making conscious choices about the words she uses to communicate with the reader, the author establishes a voice.

Note the two different voices here talking about the same subject. Which boss would you rather work for?

> Boss 1:
>
> It has come to my attention that computers are not being turned off at the end of the workday. This is a possible security breach, as well as a waste of electricity, and failure to shut down electronic equipment will not be tolerated. Please ensure that your computers are off before you leave each night or there will be consequences for individuals who do not comply.
>
> Boss 2:
>
> Hello, everyone! I know that here at Plants, Inc., we're all committed to a green work environment. So I'm asking for your help with respect to computers. We've seen a number of computers inadvertently left on in the evenings. I want to ask for your cooperation in turning off your computer before you leave, which helps conserve electricity. Thanks for your help!

Notice the different tones in the two passages. Tone is part of the voice and reveals the attitude of the writer, which can range from friendly to angry to cold to intimate.

If an author is writing a personal essay about an experience in his life, then the voice the author uses will reveal how he feels about the experience. The author will most likely write using the personal pronouns *I* or *we*. The author will let his personality emerge in the language he chooses.

If an author wants to convey a humorous or outrageous event, then her words and tone will reflect that. The author might exaggerate; use informal, even silly sounding words; or use acerbic, or understated, language. The author's sentences might be short and convey energy. If, on the other hand, the author is writing about a loss, the words will be more serious; the tone somber; and the sentences longer, more thoughtful, and reflective. As the writer, the author gets to decide how she wants to describe the experience.

Notice the different voices and sentence structure in the excerpts from these two popular memoirs.

> Memoir 1:
>
> We didn't call it the kitchen in our house. We called it the Burns Unit.
>
> "It's a bit burned," my mother would say apologetically at every meal, presenting you with a piece of meat that looked like something—a much-loved pet perhaps—salvaged from a tragic house fire. "But I think I scraped off most of the burned part," she would add, overlooking that this included every bit of it that had once been flesh.
>
> —from *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid* by Bill Bryson
>
> Memoir 2:
>
> Later I realized that I must have repeated the details of what happened to everyone who came to the house in those first weeks, all those friends and relatives who brought food and made drinks and laid out plates on the dining room table for however many people were around at lunch or dinner time, all those who picked up the plates and froze the leftovers and ran the dishwasher and filled our (I could not yet think my) otherwise empty house even after I had gone into the bedroom (our bedroom, the one in which there still lay on a sofa a faded terrycloth XL robe bought in the 1970s at Richard Carroll in Beverly Hills) and shut the door.

—from *A Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion

What do you think of the tone and voice used in each of these passages?

## Critique Checklist

When it's your turn to write a critique of a text—not just a summary of what was said but an argument for or against the text with logical reasons explaining "why"—use rhetorical analysis and keep tone, audience, and purpose in mind. As you write, don't forget:

- What is the author's rhetorical situation—his or her purpose, audience, subject?
- Does the author connect his or her ideas together in a coherent way? Is there anything that is not well explained or clearly written?
- Does your critique have a clear topic and opinion? Do you know what idea or perspective you want your reader to understand upon reading your critique?
- Is your critique well organized?
- Is each paragraph a building block in your critique? Does each explain or support your opinion?
- Does it need a different shape? Do parts need to be moved?
- Do you fully explain and illustrate the main ideas of your critique?
- Does your introduction grab the reader's interest?
- Does your conclusion leave the reader understanding your point of view?
- Are you saying in your critique what you want to say?
- What is the strength of your critique? What is its weakness?
- Does each paragraph contain solid, specific information, vivid description, or examples that illustrate the point you are making in the paragraph?
- Are there other facts, quotations, examples, or descriptions to add that can more clearly illustrate or provide evidence for the points you are making?
- Are there sentences, words, descriptions, or information that you can delete because they don't add to the points you are making or may confuse the reader?
- Are the paragraphs in the right order?
- Are your paragraphs overly long? Does each paragraph explore one main idea?
- Do you use clear transitions so that the reader can follow your thinking?
- Are any paragraphs or parts of paragraphs redundant, and do they need to be deleted?

# MODULE 2

# INTRODUCTION TO ACADEMIC RESEARCH

## Introduction

Writing a research paper is often the most complex writing task you'll engage in during your college career. The process of locating sources, note-taking, drafting, and editing offers you the opportunity to delve into a specific question on a topic. The result can be deeply rewarding; when you finish a well-researched and well-crafted paper, you'll feel as though you truly own your material and your assessment of the topic as an expert.

In some classes, your professor will assign a topic. In other classes, you may be asked to choose among selected topics. And sometimes the topic may be entirely up to you.

Whatever the case, you'll need to know how to get started and how to ultimately create a polished piece of writing. For your paper to be successful, you need to think through the steps of the research process and make sure that you allow yourself enough time for all the stages of research and writing.

Writing a research paper isn't hard if you consider the process, plan carefully, and keep yourself on task.

## Lesson 2.1: The Purpose of Academic Research

### Lesson 2.1 Introduction

In many ways, the Internet makes finding information quick and easy. If you want to know where your favorite team is in the standings, the answer is a click away. If you're unsure of the right word to use in an essay you're writing, you can type it into your browser and have the answer instantly.

But research, especially the type professors and scholars are interested in, requires more than just finding information. **Academic research** involves processing information—sometimes of many different types—and transforming that information into something new.

For example, a historian does not simply want to know when the Declaration of Independence was signed and by whom, but how that document influenced those who first read it, and how their decisions ultimately shaped the time in which they lived. In fact, a historian could come up with numerous ways to approach a study of the Declaration of Independence. Research then becomes a way of organizing potentially limitless information to serve a particular purpose.

As a college student, you'll need to understand the process of academic research and the types of knowledge it can produce. One of the best ways to do this is by incorporating research into a writing process with a specific focus. Even if your ultimate ambition has nothing to do with the study of history—or any other scholarly career—you'll still need to understand how to evaluate information. It will sharpen your critical thinking skills and possibly give you new insight into something you've always been curious about.

## Academic Rhetoric

Let's start by taking a step back. Before we even think about the purpose of our academic research, it's good to think about what a teacher is asking you to do by engaging in research in the first place.

When you receive a writing assignment try to stop and think about it. What are the requirements? What is the purpose of this assignment? What is your professor asking you to write? Who are you writing for? What is the question you're trying to answer? What is the purpose and feasibility of any academic research you might pursue in answering that question? All too often, students make the mistake of jumping into an assignment without stopping to think about it rhetorically.

What does it mean to think about an assignment rhetorically?

It means that you're considering the purpose of the assignment, the audience for the assignment, the voice you might want to use when you write, and the overall research approach you might use to complete the assignment effectively.

Each time you are presented with a writing assignment in college, you're being presented with a particular situation for writing. Learning about rhetoric can help you make good decisions about your writing. Rhetoric can be simply defined as figuring out what you need to do to be effective, no matter the writing situation.

Thinking rhetorically is an important part of any writing process because every writing assignment has different expectations. There is no such thing as right when it comes to writing; instead, try to think about good writing as being writing that is effective in that particular situation.

## Influence of Research

Whether you're doing research for your personal life, your work for an employer, or for academic purposes, the process always forces you to determine:

- what you're interested in finding out;
- what is feasible for you to find out (given your time, money, and access to information sources);
- how you can find it out, including what research methods will be necessary and what information sources will be relevant; and
- what kind of claims you'll be able to make or conclusions you'll be able to draw about what you found out.

For academic purposes, you may have to develop **research questions** to carry out both large and small assignments. A smaller assignment may ask you to do research for a class discussion or to, say, write a blog post for a class; a larger assignment may have you conduct research and then report it in a lab report, a poster, a term paper, or an article.

For large projects, the research question (or questions) you develop will define or at least heavily influence these things:

- Your topic, in that research questions effectively narrow the topic you've first chosen or been assigned to by your instructor

- What, if any, hypotheses you test
- Which information sources are relevant to your project
- Which research methods are appropriate
- What claims or conclusions you can make as a result of your research, including what thesis statement you should write for a term paper or what results you should write about the data you collected in your own science or social science study

Your research question drives your hypothesis, research methods, sources, and your claims or conclusions.

### The Purpose of Research Questions

Research questions are more than handy tools; they are the backbone of the research process since the purpose of research is to answer a compelling question. Whether you are a professional researcher or just a student striving for academic success, your research process will start with a good research question.

By defining exactly what the researcher is trying to find out, these questions influence most of the rest of the steps taken to conduct the research. That's true even if the research is not for academic purposes but for other areas of our lives.

For instance, if you're seeking information about a health problem to learn whether you have anything to worry about, research questions will make it possible for you to more effectively decide whether to seek medical help—and how quickly.

Or, if you're researching a potential employer, having developed and used research questions will mean you're able to more confidently decide whether to apply for an internship or job there.

The confidence you'll have when making such decisions will come from knowing that the information they're based on was gathered by conscious thought rather than serendipity and whim.

## Lesson 2.2: The Research Process

### Lesson 2.2 Introduction

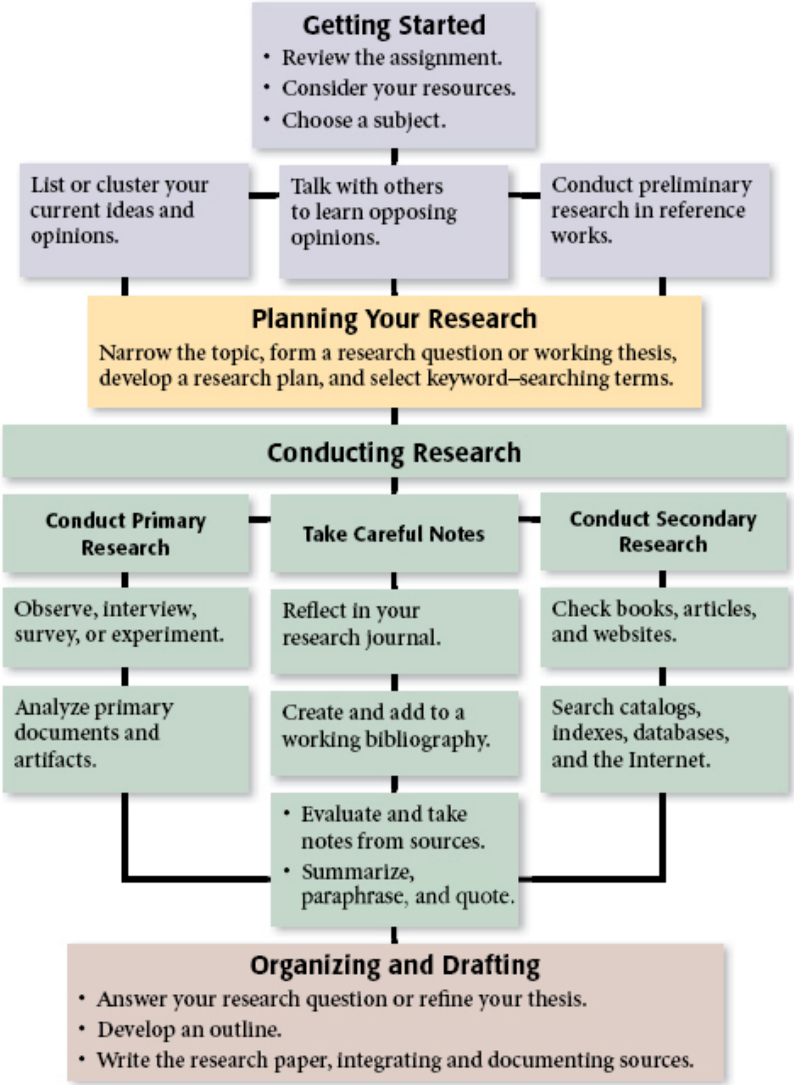
Having an idea for a research paper or a writing assignment can be daunting; a spark of interest can quickly be extinguished by the pressure of a deadline. With so much to read, observe, and process, how does anyone get around to presenting ideas in written form—an organized, polished essay submitted for evaluation, no less?

Understanding the steps of the **research process**, and welcoming the twists and turns that process can take, can reduce stress and lead to a plan. An effective set of research practices, which can involve highlighting quotations from key sources and writing notes about how those sources "talk" to one another, will help you build the authority essential to effective writing. It will also give you a point of entry into your topic, whether through a library, an Internet database, or a specific, observable environment.

Keep in mind also that the research process and the writing process are interrelated. Your topic and research question will help narrow your focus in the early stages, and you may find that more research is needed when drafting the essay itself. Whatever the case, knowing the steps to writing a research paper will help you deal effectively with any challenges.

## The Research Process

Writing a research paper is a multistep process that takes time to do well. Take a look at the research process flowchart:


Getting Started
• Review the assignment.
• Consider your resources.
• Choose a subject.
List or cluster your current ideas and opinions.
Talk with others to learn opposing opinions.
Conduct preliminary research in reference works.
Planning Your Research
Narrow the topic, form a research question or working thesis, develop a research plan, and select keyword–searching terms.
Conducting Research
Conduct Primary Research
Take Careful Notes
Conduct Secondary Research
Observe, interview, survey, or experiment.
Reflect in your research journal.
Check books, articles, and websites.
Analyze primary documents and artifacts.
Create and add to a working bibliography.
Search catalogs, indexes, databases, and the Internet.
• Evaluate and take notes from sources.
• Summarize, paraphrase, and quote.
Organizing and Drafting
• Answer your research question or refine your thesis.
• Develop an outline.
• Write the research paper, integrating and documenting sources.

Note how much of the process takes place before you actually draft your papers. With adequate time to plan and conduct research and to think about what you have to say about the subject you choose, you may find drafting the paper an easy part of the process.

### A Note on Note-Taking

Using a note-taking method will save you a great deal of time later on because you don't have to search for a lost source or double-check quotations. In addition, the system will help you avoid unintended plagiarism, which often arises from sloppy note taking.

Before you research, consider the four note-taking systems outlined here. Whichever method you use, or even if you use some combination of methods, you need to organize your sources and be prepared to cite them accurately.

- **Paper or electronic note cards.** Using paper note cards is the traditional method of note taking; however, note-taking software, such as EndNote Plus and TakeNote, is now available. *Upside*: Note cards are highly systematic, helping you categorize material and organize it for an outline and a first draft. *Downside*: This method can be initially tedious and time consuming.
- **Copy (or save) and annotate.** The copy-and-annotate method involves highlighting or marking up photocopies, print versions, or digital texts of sources. *Upside*: Copying, printing, and/or saving helps you record sources accurately; annotating encourages careful reading and thinking. *Downside*: Organizing material for drafting is inconvenient; when done poorly, annotating and highlighting involve skimming, not critical thinking.
- **Computer notebook or research log.** This method involves taking notes on a computer or on sheets of paper, using codes to identify which notes relate to which topic in your outline. *Upside*: Taking notes feels natural without being overly systematic. *Downside*: Outlining and drafting may require time-consuming paper shuffling.
- **Double-entry notebook.** The double-entry notebook system involves parallel note taking—notes from sources beside your own brainstorming, reaction, and reflection. *Upside*: With this method, you create accurate source records while encouraging thoughtful responses; also, it can be done on your computer. *Downside*: Organizing material for drafting may be a challenge.

## Getting Started

Most research assignments ask you to engage in one of two approaches:

1. Explore and evaluate (present an analysis)
2. Persuade (present an argument)

You may be able to choose between these strategies, and sometimes the strategies can be combined—a thorough analysis can be strong support for a persuasive argument. Either way, knowing what type of strategy you must engage in will help you pick the right type of research question to successfully drive your process forward.

### Analytical Papers

In a paper that explores and evaluates, you may present a specific analysis of a literary text, you may examine how a historical figure came to adopt his beliefs, or you may analyze how changes in a particular animal's habitat have affected its breeding patterns.

Your purpose isn't to rebut another critic's reading of that text, challenge another writer's analysis of that historical figure's growth, or disprove another experimenter's theorem. Instead, your focus is on researching and presenting your own analysis of a set of materials or experiments.

### Examples of Analytical Questions

- In what way is Coleridge's poem, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," an extended metaphor of colonial exploration?
- Why was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s stance against the Vietnam War late in his life so controversial in the Civil Rights movement?
- What methods are available to governments and zoos to ensure the preservation of endangered tigers?

### Argumentative Papers

An argumentative paper takes a position on a debatable question. Here, you review the various arguments surrounding that question and then present material arguing for a particular answer.

A good argument paper not only fairly and clearly presents the views of those with whom you disagree but also points out where and how you believe those arguments are flawed.

In this type of paper, you need to show why your argument presents a stronger response to the question than the responses of others who might disagree with your position.

### Examples of Argumentative Questions

- Should employers be allowed to monitor the content of their employees' email and Internet browsing?
- Should the US government subsidize the development of ethanol-based biofuels?

We will go deeper into the mechanics of developing a good research question in the next lesson.

### Choosing a Research Topic

Though research is all about answering a good research question, the first step in the process is really about choosing a topic. This can be tricky. When you pick a topic, you want it to be appropriate for the rhetorical situation and genre. Topics generally can transcend genre boundaries, but there are some topics that are better than others. The best topic is going to be something that you are interested in.

If you are not given a topic, how should you go about choosing one? First, think about your purpose and your audience. If you are writing an observation report for a biology class, then an analysis of *Hamlet* would be inappropriate. While this is an extreme example, it demonstrates the point.

Let's try a topic for the same situation that might be a little bit more difficult to figure out. You choose to write on infanticide in brown bear populations. Once you have a tentative topic in mind, you should ask yourself questions about the value of the topic. First, if you are writing an observation report, will you actually be able to observe the habits of this animal? Second, has anyone else written on this topic? What were their findings? How will your study be different? Thus, you are examining the value of the topic for the audience and the originality of the paper idea.

## Lesson 2.3: Essay Parameters

### Lesson 2.3 Introduction

An assigned research paper for a college course can have numerous requirements: minimum and maximum number of pages, minimum number of sources, types of sources, style of citation, and so on. Confronting the blank page with all of this in mind may at first appear to be your biggest challenge. But once the research process is underway, paring down your gathered notes and information to the essentials may prove to be where the real work begins.

Once you've determined a topic, how can you avoid becoming overwhelmed by all of the information out there? How can you ensure that a seven-page assignment doesn't sprawl to twice that length, leaving you with an unfocused paper and a due date to contend with? Or, conversely, how can you avoid running out of ideas at page two of that seven-page assignment?

Formulating a focused, specific research question, from a narrow (but not too narrow) topic, will help you adjust your approach before you even begin searching for specific sources. An effective research question will enable you to recognize the sources you need and ignore the rest.

## Narrowing a Topic

For many students, starting with a research question is the biggest difference between how they did research in high school and how they are required to carry out their college research projects. It’s a process of working from the outside in: You start with the world of all possible topics (or your assigned topic), and narrow them down until you’ve focused your interest enough to be able to tell precisely what you want to find out, instead of only what you want to write about.

### Process of Narrowing a Topic

Visualize narrowing a topic as starting with all possible topics and choosing narrower and narrower subsets until you have a specific enough topic to form a research question.

**All Possible Topics.** You’ll need to narrow your topic to do research effectively. Without specific areas of focus, it will be hard to even know where to begin.

**Assigned Topics.** Ideas about a narrower topic can come from anywhere. Often, a narrower topic boils down to deciding what’s interesting to you. One way to get ideas is to read background information in a source like Wikipedia.

**Topic Narrowed by Initial Exploration.** It’s wise to do some more reading about that narrower topic to (a) learn more about it and (b) learn the specialized terms used by professionals and scholars who study it.

**Topic Narrowed to Research Question(s).** A research question defines exactly what you are trying to find out. It will influence most of the steps you take to conduct the research.

### Why Narrow a Topic?

Once you have a need for research—say, an assignment—you may need to prowl around a bit online to explore the topic and figure out what you actually want to find out and write about.

For instance, maybe your assignment is to develop a poster about the spring season for an introductory horticulture course. The instructor expects you to narrow that topic to something you are interested in and that is related to your class.

Ideas about a narrower topic can come from anywhere. In this case, a narrower topic boils down to deciding what interests you most about spring that is also related to what you’re learning in your horticulture class and is small enough to manage in the time you have.

One way to get ideas would be to read about spring on Wikipedia, looking for things that seem interesting and relevant to your class, and then letting one thing lead to another as you keep reading and thinking about likely possibilities that are narrower than the enormous spring topic. (Be sure to pay attention to the references at the bottom of most Wikipedia pages, and pursue any that look interesting. Your instructor is not likely to let you cite Wikipedia, but those references may be citable scholarly sources that you could eventually decide to use.)

Or, instead, if it is spring at the time, you could start by just looking around. You might admire the blooming trees on campus and decide you'd like your poster to be about bud development of your favorite—the crabapple tree.

## Regular Versus Research Questions

Most of us look for information to answer questions every day, and we often act on the answers to those questions. Are research questions any different from most of the questions for which we seek information? Yes.

See how they're different by looking over the following examples of both kinds.

**EXAMPLES: Regular Versus Research Questions**

| Regular Question | Research Question |
|---|---|
| What time is my movie showing at Lennox on Friday? | How do "sleeper" films end up having outstanding attendance figures? |
| What can I do about my insomnia? | How do flights more than 16 hours long affect the reflexes of commercial jet pilots? |
| How many children in the US have allergies? | How does his or her country of birth affect a child's chances of developing asthma? |
| What year was metformin approved by the US Food and Drug Administration? | What nanomedicines, such as doxorubicin, are worth developing? |
| Could US citizens register to vote at branches of the Columbus Public Library in 2016? | How do public libraries in the United States support democracy? |
| What is the Whorfian hypothesis? | Why have linguists cared about the Whorfian hypothesis? |
| Where is the Apple, Inc., home office? | Why are Apple's marketing efforts so successful? |
| What is MERS? | How could decision making about whether to declare a pandemic be improved? |
| Does MLA style recommend the use of generic male pronouns intended to refer to both males and females? | How do age, gender, IQ, and socioeconomic status affect whether students interpret generic male pronouns as referring to both males and females? |

## Developing Your Research Question

You might worry that, because of all of their influence, research questions are very difficult to develop. Sometimes, it can seem that way, but we'll help you get the hang of it. Luckily, none of us has to come up with perfect ones right off. It's more like doing a rough draft and then improving it. That's why we talk about developing research questions instead of just writing them.

**Steps for Developing a Research Question**

These steps for developing a research question can help you organize your thoughts:

**Step 1:** Pick a topic (or consider the one assigned to you).

**Step 2:** Write a narrower/smaller topic that is related to the first.

**Step 3**: List some potential questions that could logically be asked in relation to the narrow topic.

**Step 4:** Pick the question that you are most interested in.

**Step 5:** Change that question you're interested in so that it is more focused.

**Practice**

Once you know the steps and their order, only three skills are involved in developing a research question:

1. Imagining narrower topics about a larger one
2. Thinking of questions that stem from a narrow topic
3. Focusing questions to eliminate their vagueness

Every time you use these skills, it's important to evaluate what you have produced—that's just part of the process of turning rough drafts into finished products.

Maybe you have a topic in mind but aren't sure how to form a research question around it. The trick is to think of a question related to your topic but is not answerable with a quick search. Also, try to be specific so that your research question can be fully answered in the final product for your research assignment.

Sometimes, the first draft of a research question is still too broad, which can make your search for sources more challenging. Refining your question to remove vagueness or to target a specific aspect of the topic can help.

## Lesson 2.4: Thesis Statements

### Lesson 2.4 Introduction

A **thesis statement** identifies the topic of your paper along with the claim you are making. A thesis should focus and drive the paper—or, looking at it from the other direction, the content of the paper should develop the thesis.

You might know your thesis before you begin writing, and you might not. Often, even if you think you have a complete thesis before you start writing, you find that it changes in the course of writing the paper. In such cases, you can rewrite the thesis toward the end of your writing process so that it accurately reflects what the paper is about.

Not all writing requires a thesis. Some research papers follow different formats, and you'll need to remember to focus on a key idea. However, some assignments may require a thesis statement or some kind of focusing sentence, so you should know how to develop at least a **working thesis**.

Developing a working thesis can also help keep you focused as you dig into what can sometimes be a large amount of research.

## Thesis Creation

Sometimes you know your thesis before you begin writing, and sometimes you figure out your thesis in the course of writing. In any event, you want to be able to formulate a thesis that states your claim, provides reasons for that claim, and makes any necessary qualifications for the claim and reasons. The claim and reasons should be described using specific language that directly addresses the focus of the paper. The thesis statement may need to be more than one sentence to do all of these things.

Answer the following questions to help in developing a thesis statement:

1. What is your claim?
2. What are your reasons?
    a. Reason 1
    b. Reason 2
    c. Reason 3
    d. [add more numbers as needed]
3. What qualifications do your claim and reasons need?
4. Write your working thesis statement.

Remember that the organizational structure of your paper and your thesis are related; use your answers to these questions, and your thesis, to help determine your organizational structure.

## Common Thesis Problems

Although you have creative control over your thesis sentence, you still should try to avoid the following problems, not for stylistic reasons but because they indicate a problem in the thinking behind the thesis sentence.

### Thesis Sentence Too Broad

*Hospice workers need support.*

This sentence is actually a thesis sentence; it has a topic (hospice workers) and a claim (need support). But the claim is very broad. When the claim in a thesis sentence is too broad, the writer may not have carefully thought through the specific support for the rest of the writing. A thesis claim that's too broad makes it easy to fall into the trap of offering information that deviates from that claim.

### Thesis Sentence Too Narrow

*Hospice workers have a 55% turnover rate compared to the general health care population's 25% turnover rate.*

This sentence isn't a thesis sentence because there's no claim to support. A narrow statistic, or a narrow statement of fact, doesn't offer the writer's own ideas or analysis about a topic. A clearer example of a thesis statement with a claim, or an angle of development, would be the following:

*The high turnover rate in hospice workers (55 percent) compared to the general health care population (25 percent) indicates a need to develop support systems to reverse this trend.*

### Where to Place a Thesis?

In the United States, it’s customary for most academic writers to put the thesis sentence somewhere toward the start of the essay or research paper. The focus here is on offering the main results of your own thinking in your thesis claim and then providing evidence in the writing to support your thinking.

A legal comparison might help to understand thesis placement. If you have seen television shows or movies with courtroom scenes, the lawyer usually starts out by saying, “My client is innocent!” to set the scene and then provides different types of evidence to support that argument. Academic writing in the United States is similar; your thesis sentence provides your main assertion to set the scene of the writing, and then the details and evidence in the rest of the writing support the assertion in the thesis sentence.

**NOTE:** Although the usual pattern is “thesis sentence toward the start,” there may be reasons to place the thesis elsewhere in the paper. You may decide to place the thesis sentence at the end if your purpose is to gradually induce a reading audience to understand and accept your assertion. You may decide to place the thesis sentence in the middle if you think you need to provide relatively complicated background information to your readers before they can understand the assertion in your thesis.

As the writer, you have the option of placing the thesis anywhere in the paper. But you also have the obligation to make the thesis sentence idea clear to your readers. Beginning writers usually stick with thesis sentence toward the start, because it makes the thesis prominent in the writing and also reminds them that they need to stick with providing evidence directly related to that thesis sentence’s claim.

## Thesis Checklist

When you draft a working thesis, review the guidelines for a strong thesis. The following checklist is a helpful tool you can use to check your draft.

**My thesis statement**

- is debatable.
- states an opinion or provides a claim on my topic.
- states my topic.
- lets my readers know the main idea of the essay.
- is specific but not so specific that I cannot develop it well for the length requirement of my assignment.

# MODULE 3

# EVALUATING RESEARCH

## Introduction

Evaluating research materials that you've gathered for a project is similar to piecing together a puzzle. A wealth of materials is readily available—for example, on the Internet and on your results pages of the library catalog, Google Scholar, and specialized databases—but it's up to you to think critically about those sources. You have to determine whether they're relevant and credible, and whether they'll fit together in a way that will meet the needs of your research project.

To **evaluate** a source, first answer the following questions about it:

- Is this source relevant to my research question?
- Is this source credible? That is, is it a source my audience and I should be able to believe?
- In what context was this source created? Is it coming to me firsthand, secondhand, or thirdhand?
- What is the author's purpose in creating this source? Does the author have an agenda?
- Where did I find this source? Does it seem to live among other **credible sources**?

Once you begin thinking critically about your sources—and understand where you find the most reliable sources—you can select those that complete your research project puzzle and weed out those that just don't fit.

## Lesson 3.1: Evaluating Sources

### Lesson 3.1 Introduction

**Relevant sources** are those that pertain to your research question. It's important to determine a source's relevance before its credibility, because no matter how credible a source is, if it's not relevant to your research question, it's useless to your research project.

You'll be able to figure out how relevant sources are fairly quickly by reading or skimming particular parts and taking notes. One thing to consider early on as you make **inferences** about relevancy is the effect that timeliness, or how current a source is, should have on deciding whether a source is relevant. Your research question will determine that.

After you've identified relevant sources, you will evaluate the credibility of each. What are the clues for inferring a source's credibility? They vary depending on the type of source you're using: The characteristics that define a credible website are different from those that define sources in other formats. With practice, you'll learn the specific places to look for clues and hone the critical thinking skills necessary to determine a source's worth to you.

### Thinking Critically About Sources

One of the most important things you learn at college is evaluating—or thinking critically about—sources. In fact, providing students with the opportunity to evaluate sources is one of the primary reasons professors assign research projects. And your future employers also will expect you to have learned how to think critically. For the rest of your professional and personal life, you will be using the skills that make choosing the best sources possible. So, learning and sharpening these skills is a good investment.

Perhaps you're worrying about how long evaluating sources is going to take. Rest assured that you won't have to read all of a source to decide whether it has value to you. (Later, of course, you'll need to complete a closer read to determine which direct quotes, paraphrases, and summaries you might want to use from the sources you have selected.) Here, you'll learn exactly which questions to ask and where to look to quickly identify relevant sources.

### Making Inferences: Good Enough for Your Purpose?

Sources should always be evaluated relative to your purpose—that is, why you're looking for information. But because there often aren't clear-cut answers when you evaluate sources, you have to rely on inferences—or educated guesses from available clues—to determine whether to use information from particular sources.

You'll be able to make logical inferences about sources by considering the purpose of your project. The purpose will dictate the following:

- Which kind of information will be useful
- How crucial it is to use timely, credible information
- The severity of the consequences you'll face if a source's information is inaccurate (When the consequences aren't very serious, you might decide that the source's information is good enough for your purpose. Of course, you should always seek out the most accurate information possible.)

Thus, your standards for choosing a source might vary, depending on your purpose. Consider the following purposes:

- You're seeking information about a personal health problem
- You're searching for an image you can use on a poster
- You'd like evidence to win a bet with a rival in the dorm
- You need the local showtimes for a movie
- You're searching for recommendations for a fun online game
- You're seeking support for your argument in a term paper

If your purpose is to conduct research for an assignment on a health problem, using information from an inaccurate source might have steep consequences. But if your purpose is simply to find the date and time a movie is playing at the local theater, the consequence for using an inaccurate source might only be that you miss the showing of the movie on that particular date.

Not only do you have to evaluate whether sources are relevant to your purpose, but you also have to ensure that they meet any other criteria that your professor might have given you for an assignment. For instance, professors often stipulate that some of your sources have to be scholarly sources or articles from a particular database. Make sure you have identified the kind of sources your professor has requested.

## Timeliness and Relevancy

When choosing your sources and determining whether they're relevant, you need to think about the argument you're making, the field (discipline) within which you're making it, and the role timeliness plays in the reliability of the source.

The best research draws on the most current work in the field. That said, depending on the discipline, some work has a longer shelf life than others. For example, important articles in literature, art, and music often tend to be considered current for years, or even decades, after publication. Articles in the physical sciences, however, are usually considered outdated within a year or two (or even sooner) after publication.

For example, if you're arguing that climate change is indeed anthropogenic (human-caused), do you want to use articles published more than four or five years ago? No. Because the science related to that topic has evolved very rapidly, you need to depend most heavily on research published within the past year or two.

However, suppose you're arguing that blues music evolved from the field songs of American slaves. In this case, you should look not only at recent writing on the topic (within the past five years) but also at historical assessments of the relationship between blues and slavery from previous decades.

Keep in mind that it's often difficult to gauge the timeliness of web resources, so websites need careful scrutiny. Look for dates of posting or the last time the website was updated. Some sites have been left up for months or years without their owner returning to update or monitor the sites. If a website does not appear to be maintained regularly, look for alternative sources for your research project.

## Authorship, Authority, and Credibility

When evaluating the credibility, or believability, of a source, consider the author (who might be an individual or an organization) and the authority of that author. Start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Who wrote the material?
- Is the author considered an expert in the field? If so, what are the author's credentials?
- Is that person or organization trustworthy?

For example, suppose after reading an article in a scientific journal and asking yourself the above questions, you discover that the author is not a scientist at all but rather an economist. You'd probably question the credibility of the source, even if the publication were highly regarded and the author were well-educated and well-known among economists. In this situation, you would be better off selecting a source written by a scientist who might not be as well-known as the economist and who might not be published in such high-profile journals, but who is considered an expert in the field about which she's writing.

### Publisher-Provided Bibliographical Information

Often, books and scholarly journals will provide a short biography of the author, outlining her credentials, including education, publications, and experience in the field.

Read the biography carefully. Does the content seem to suggest that the author has in-depth knowledge of the topic? What are the author's educational credentials and professional qualifications? Have other experts vouched for the author? Minimal qualifications or qualifications that seem unrelated to the topic are a warning sign to you that you might want to reconsider using the material.

Be aware that if an author is associated with a specific conservative or liberal think tank, the arguments presented probably will reflect the ideology of that organization. You don't necessarily need to avoid material with an ideological agenda; you simply need to read it with an awareness that the author is writing from a specific point of view.

#### Outside Bibliographical Information

If no biography is attached to the work, an advanced search on Google or another search engine can be very helpful. You also might check hard copy or online sources such as Contemporary Authors, Book Review Index, or Biography Index.

Many authors also have their own websites, which list information about their educational background, current and past research, and experience.

If you can find no or little information about a writer, be careful about using his material. You might want to consider replacing it altogether with a different source whose author has more readily available credentials.

#### No Author Listed

You want to be wary of sources without authors, but that doesn't mean you can't use them. Often, websites won't list an author. In that case, you need to evaluate the sponsoring organization.

Look for the following information:

- Does the website offer information about the organization?
- Is there a mission statement?
- Does the website offer any indication that the material has undergone an expert review, often called a **peer review**?
- Does the website provide a link with contact information such as an address, a phone number, and an email address?

If you answer *yes* to only some of the questions on the bulleted list, try filling in the blanks with an Internet search on the organization. Often, an encyclopedia—regardless of whether it's an online or hard-copy version—provides background information about an organization. Try to find out a little bit about who funds it, who its audience is, and what its objectives are.

Again, discovering that an organization has specific ideological ties does not mean that you need to discard the source material found there. You simply need to use it carefully and balance it with material from other sources.

If you answer *no* to all of the bulleted questions, then be careful! A site that provides no information about its sponsors is a site that you should avoid using for your research project. If no one is willing to put his name on the site and accept responsibility for its content, then the site is probably untrustworthy and the information found there unreliable.

## Lesson 3.2: Research Strategies

### Lesson 3.2 Introduction

Before you begin searching for and locating sources on your topic, develop a strategy for that research process. You should develop a plan that fits within your assignment expectations and considers your source requirements. Although general Internet searches are great for generating ideas, you might not be able to use web sources for all research projects. For example, if you're writing a formal research essay, you might be required to use only peer-reviewed journal articles; other research assignments might permit you to use a wider variety of sources, including those from the Internet.

Your research strategy should also take into consideration the research requirements your professor provides. If your professor has not established research requirements for your assignment, it's a good idea to ask.

### Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources

You'll encounter different categories of sources when looking for research materials: **primary sources**, **secondary sources**, and **tertiary sources**. Understanding these classifications and how they differ will help you quickly gauge a source's credibility and suitability for your project.

Here are examples to illustrate each source classification:

- **Primary Source**

  J.D. Salinger's novel, *Catcher in the Rye*

  This is the original work.

- **Secondary Source**

  A book review of *Catcher in the Rye*

  Even if the reviewer has a completely original opinion of the book, he is still just reviewing the original work. All of the information about the book here is secondary.

- **Tertiary Source**

  The Wikipedia page about J.D. Salinger

  This article has been created by combining information—and most likely by summarizing or paraphrasing that information—from various secondary sources. There is no original content.

Here's a breakdown of each category of source:

**Primary Sources (Firsthand Information).** These sources provide information in its original form that has not been translated or published in another form. They have reached us from their creators without going through any filter. Here are some examples of primary sources:

- Any literary work, including novels, plays, and poems
- Breaking news
- Diaries
- Advertisements
- Music and dance performances

- Eyewitness accounts, including photographs and recorded interviews
- Works of art
- Data
- Autobiographical blog entries
- Scholarly blogs that provide data or are highly theoretical, even though they contain no autobiography
- Artifacts such as tools, clothing, or other objects
- Original documents such as tax returns, marriage licenses, and transcripts of trials
- Websites that are owned and operated by the creators of the website content (i.e. blogs, a non-profit website, etc.)
- Buildings
- Correspondence, including emails
- Records of organizations and government agencies
- Journal articles that report new research and data

**Secondary Sources (Secondhand Information).** These sources restate, translate, interpret, or repackage information that is a primary source. Thus, the information comes to us secondhand, or through at least one filter. Here are some examples of secondary sources:

- All nonfiction books and magazine articles except autobiographies
- An article or a website that critiques a novel, play, painting, or piece of music
- An article or a website that synthesizes expert opinion and several eyewitness accounts for a new understanding of an event
- The literature review portion of a journal article

**Tertiary Sources (Thirdhand Information).** These sources index, condense, summarize, or further repackage information based on secondary sources. Typically, by the time tertiary sources are developed, many secondary sources already have been prepared on their subjects. Tertiary sources are usually publications that you are not intended to read from cover to cover but rather dip in and out of for the information you need. They are good places to find background information to start your research, but you shouldn’t heavily rely on them throughout the research process. Here are some examples of tertiary sources:

- Almanacs
- Dictionaries
- Guide books
- Survey articles
- Timelines
- Bibliographies
- Encyclopedias
- Wikipedia articles
- Most textbooks

Tertiary sources are usually not acceptable as cited sources in college research projects because they are so far from firsthand information. That’s why most professors don’t want you to use Wikipedia as a citable source; the information in Wikipedia is far from original. Other people have considered the original, decided what they think about it, rearranged it, and summarized it—all of which your professors want you, not another author, to do with information in your research projects.

When you make distinctions between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, you are relating the information itself to the context in which it was created. Understanding that relationship is an important skill that you'll need in college as well as in the workplace. Noting the relationship between creation and context helps us understand the big picture in which information operates and helps us figure out which information we can depend on. That's a big part of thinking critically, a major benefit of actually becoming an educated person.

## Library Databases

A specialized database—often called a **research** or **library database**—can help you identify and secure information across a range of subjects. Such information might include a chapter in a book, an article in a journal, a report, or a government document. These databases also allow you to conduct targeted searches on one or more specific subject areas (e.g., engineering, medicine, Latin American history), for a specific format (e.g., books, articles, conference proceedings, videos, images), or for a specific date range during which the information was published. For the most part, specialized databases contain information that cannot be found by conducting Google, Bing, or other regular web searches.

Several types of specialized databases are available:

- **Bibliographic:** Details about published works
- **Full text:** Details plus the complete text of the items
- **Multimedia:** Various types of media, such as images, audio clips, or video excerpts
- **Directory:** Brief, factual information
- **Numeric:** Data sources
- **Product:** Model numbers, descriptions, etc.
- **Mixed:** A combination of other types, such as multimedia and full-text

Information about the specific subject range, format, or date range a particular specialized database covers is called its **scope**. A specialized database may be narrow or broad in scope, depending on whether it, for instance, contains materials on one or many subject areas. Once you're aware of a database's scope, you'll be able to decide whether the database is likely to have what you want (for instance, journal articles as opposed to conference proceedings). This will prevent you from wasting time searching databases that do not contain what you need.

### Keyword Searches

When using a specialized database, you might want to use fewer search terms given that the optimal number of terms is related to database size. Google and Bing work best with several terms because they index billions of web pages and additional terms help narrow the results. Each scholarly database indexes a fraction of that number, so you are less likely to be overwhelmed by results even with one or two keywords than you would be with a search engine.

Phrase searching (putting multiple words in quotes so that Google or Bing will know to search them as a phrase) is also less helpful in specialized databases because they are smaller and more focused. Databases are better searched by beginning with only a few general search terms, reviewing your results and, if necessary, limiting them in some logical way.

### Subject Heading Searches

Searching subject headings (in databases that allow it) is one technique that helps produce precise results. **Subject heading searches** can be much more targeted than keyword searches because you are sure to retrieve only your intended concept.

Subject heading searches are helpful in the following situations:

- When there are multiple terms for the same topic you're interested in (for example, *cats* and *felines*).
- When there are multiple meanings for the same word (for example, *cookie* (the food) and *cookie* (the computer term).
- When there are terms used by professionals and terms used by the general public, including slang or shortened terms (for example, *flu* and *influenza*).

Here's how these targeted searches work: Database creators work with a defined list of subject headings, sometimes called a **controlled vocabulary**. This means that the creators have defined which subject terms are acceptable and assigned only those words to the sources the database contains. The resulting list of terms is often referred to as a *thesaurus.* When created thoughtfully and thoroughly, a thesaurus will not only list acceptable subject headings but also indicate related terms, broader terms, and narrower terms for a concept.

**TIP: Finding Useful Subject Headings**

One strategy for finding useful subject headings is to remember the acronym KISS:

- **K**eyword search your topic.
- **I**dentify a relevant item from the results.
- **S**elect subject terms relevant to your topic from that item's subject heading.
- **S**earch using these subject terms. (Some databases will allow you to simply click on those subject terms to perform another search. Others might require you to copy and paste a subject term into a search box and choose a subject field.)

### Records and Fields

The information researchers usually see first after searching a database are the **records** for sources contained in the database that also match what the search requested. Each record describes a source that can be retrieved and gives you enough information so that you can decide whether it meets your needs. The descriptions are in categories that provide different types of information about the item. These categories are called **fields**. Some fields might be empty of information for some items, and the fields that are available depend on the type of database.

Many databases allow you to choose which areas, or fields, to search for source materials. This helps you limit your search to include only the source features—such as titles, abstracts, and subject classifications—that you think will produce the most helpful results.

**Example: Database Fields**

A **bibliographic database** describes items such as articles, books, and conference papers. Common fields found in database records are as follows:

- Author
- Title (of book, article, etc.)
- Source title (journal title, conference name, etc.)
- Date
- Volume/issue
- Pages

- Abstract
- Descriptive or subject terms

In contrast, a product database record might contain the following fields:

- Product name
- Product code number
- Color
- Price
- Amount in stock

Databases are a researcher's best friend, but searching effectively can take a little practice. Be prepared to spend some time getting familiar with the databases you're working in, and don't be afraid to ask questions of your professor and librarians if you get stuck. They can teach you how to select search terms and select the specialized database that is the most appropriate for your project. (Keep in mind that most college libraries will only grant database access to registered students who have log-in credentials.) Becoming adept at searching online databases will give you the confidence and skills you need to gather the best sources for your project, no matter the topic.

## Internet Searches

When you are conducting research on the Internet, search engines are effective tools for locating web pages relevant to your projects, and they can save you time and frustration. However, to get the best results, you need a strategy and some basic knowledge of how search engines work.

Be careful that you use only the highest quality sources that are returned on your general Internet search. Your paper is only as good as the sources you use within it, so if you use sources that are not written by experts in their field, you might be incorporating inaccurate information into your research project.

As a rule, avoid Wikipedia as a source of its own. While it's fine to use this general knowledge website to look up information in a casual way and gain a better understanding of a subject, Wikipedia is not a recommended source for academic writing since the information found there is user-generated, and consequently, sometimes incorrect. But there is a citations section at the bottom of each Wikipedia page that can help you find some credible sources, so sometimes it's a great place to start! For academic writing, seek out sources—such as academic journals, news articles, magazines, or published books—that contain specific information written by experts and that have been subjected to peer review.

### Web Search Engines

Web search engines use special software programs (called robots, spiders, or crawlers) to find Web pages and list (or index) all words within each one to make searching large quantities of page faster. Indexes capture the largest amount of information on the Web, but no index lists everything on the Internet.

Commonly used search engines include Google (https://www.google.com) and Bing (http://www.bing.com).

In addition to search engines, there are also:

- Specialized web search engines – A tool that has a specialty, usually either a subject or format focus. It ignores the rest of the information on the web. Examples include science.gov (http://www.science.gov/) and TinEye Reverse Image Search (https://www.tineye.com).
- Metasearch engines – Tools that search multiple web search engines and gives you results from all of them. Some of these return the best results from the search engines they search. Examples include Dogpile (http://www.dogpile.com) and WebCrawler (https://www.webcrawler.com).
- Web directories – Tools created by editors or trained researchers who categorize or classify web sites by subject. Directories are more selective than search engines. An example includes Ipl2 (http://www.ipl.org).

## People as Sources

People don't just create the sources we use; they actually can serve as sources themselves. Most of us frequently use people as sources in our private lives, such as when we ask a friend for a restaurant recommendation or ask whether a movie is worth seeing. But you probably aren't using people as sources very often in your assignments unless you are a journalism major.

Interestingly, getting some experience with using people as sources is likely to help you not just with a current research assignment but also with your work in the future. Research indicates that employers such as Battelle, Nationwide Insurance, Microsoft, the FBI, the Smithsonian, the Port of Los Angeles, SS&G Financial Services, and Marriott International have been dissatisfied with the ability of new hires to gather information by talking with real people. These employers discovered that new hires were unwilling or unprepared to ask the experienced employee down the hall or the expert across town for information to solve a business problem. For instance, the study linked to the research mentioned quotes one employer, who said the following about new hires:

> *Here's something we're targeting in interviews now—the big thing is they believe the computer is their workspace, so basic interactions between people are lost. They won't get up and walk over and ask someone a question. They are less comfortable and have some lack of willingness to use people as sources and also have a lack of awareness that people are a valid source of information.*

### Who's an *Expert*?

The question to ask when trying to decide who can be a source is always, "Who can speak with authority about any part of the subject?" The answer—because it's determined by context—is usually, "it depends."

Experts aren't only researchers with PhDs doing academic work. People are able to speak with authority for different reasons. According to the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,* experts can have subject expertise (for example, individuals who have done scholarship in the field), societal position (for example, individuals who hold public office or have another relevant work title), or special experience (for example, individuals living or working in a particular situation of interest or those who have participated in a historical event).

People who have had firsthand experience living or working with a situation you are studying can offer a unique perspective unavailable elsewhere (imagine, for example, that you're able to interview a survivor of a school shooting for a paper on that topic). And it's that up-close, firsthand view of the situation that gives them authority, lends credibility to your research, and elicits a response from your audience.

Here are some examples of research questions and people who could potentially serve as experts:

| Research Question | Potential Expert | Potential Expert |
|---|---|---|
| How are tools originally developed for medicine, geology, and manufacturing being used to explore paintings and sculptures? | An art conservator who uses the aforementioned tools | The person who invented one of the tools used on the floor of the factory where he works |
| Why do most people who qualify to receive food at food banks not ask for food? | The director of a local food bank | A person (perhaps a fellow student) who qualifies to receive food at food banks but doesn't ask for food |
| How and why do city and county governments brand themselves? | A city or county official who has been involved in branding decisions | The director of a company that designs branding for cities and counties |

### Interviewing Sources

Once you've selected people to interview for your research project, but before the interview, you should do the following:

- Prepare for the interview by learning enough about your topic so that you can ask appropriate questions.
- Familiarize yourself with your expert's accomplishments in relation to your topic so that you don't seem unaware of that person's contributions.
- Contact your source to see if she agrees to an interview. If she is willing and available, schedule a convenient interview time and make sure to follow through.
- Recruit a friend or family member to participate in a mock interview. This will allow you to practice asking your interview questions and transitioning to new topics of discussion.

After you've done this bit of leg work, you can conduct your interview with your source via phone, email, or video chat, or meet the person face-to-face. Remember to put your expert at ease by employing good interview techniques: use active-listening techniques to encourage her to talk, ask follow-up questions, and thank her at the end of the interview.

### Citing People as Sources

Like with other sources, you typically should cite the people you use as sources in your final research project, but how you do this depends on the citation style you're using. If you're including source material gathered from interviews, make sure you're familiar with the citation requirements for whichever style you're using.

Of course, people being used as sources have to be evaluated just like any other source. Can experts be biased, or partial to a particular viewpoint? Of course. You just have to flex your critical thinking muscles and keep that potential **bias** in mind as you use the information in your own work.

Regardless of whether a source is biased or not, a source's firsthand experience usually can't be beat. And recognizing what this expert offers can help us open up to diverse ideas and worldviews that we would otherwise miss. Don't be surprised if this kind of source takes you off in completely new directions with your assignment, leading you down paths that turn out to be much more interesting than those you were following before. For many researchers, finding sources that really break open a topic is one of the most rewarding—and fun—things about conducting research.

## Lesson 3.3: Tools for Critical Evaluation

### Lesson 3.3 Introduction

As you gather sources for your research, you'll need to know how to assess the validity and reliability of the materials you find.

Keep in mind that the sources you find have all been put out there by groups, organizations, corporations, or individuals who have some motivation for delivering this information to you. To be a good researcher, you need to learn how to assess the materials you find and determine their reliability—before deciding if you want to use them. If you do decide to use particular sources, you also need to know *how* you want to use them.

### Degree of Bias

*Most of us have biases, and we can easily fool ourselves if we don't make a conscious effort to keep our minds open to new information. Psychologists have shown over and over again that humans naturally tend to accept any information that supports what they already believe, even if the information isn't very reliable. And humans also naturally tend to reject information that conflicts with those beliefs, even if the information is solid. These predilections are powerful. Unless we make an active effort to listen to all sides we can become trapped into believing something that isn't so, and won't even know it.*

—from *A Process for Avoiding Deception,* Annenberg Classroom

Probably all sources exhibit some bias, which is the author's personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment. It's nearly impossible for authors to avoid letting their life experiences and education influence their decisions about what to include in a source and what to say about it.

But that kind of unavoidable bias is very different from an author making a wholesale effort to shape the message so that the website (or other source) amounts to a persuasive advertisement for something important to the author. Even if the effort is not as strong as a wholesale effort, authors can find many—sometimes subtle—ways to shape communication until it loses its integrity. Such communication is too persuasive, meaning the author has sacrificed its value as information in an effort to persuade.

Interestingly, one thing that gets in the way of our identifying evidence of bias in sources is our own biases. Sometimes the things that look most correct to us are the ones that play to our own personal beliefs and values. While sifting through sources to find those that suit the purpose of your research project, keep a sharp eye out for these biases—both in the sources and in your own mind.

#### Clues About Bias

Carefully review your sources for evidence of bias. The following table demonstrates the characteristics to consider and the clues within each that indicate whether the source is unbiased or biased.

| Characteristic | Unbiased | Biased |
|---|---|---|
| **Coverage** | The information in this source is not drastically different from that in other sources. The source doesn't include an abundance of assertions or opinions, and the information doesn't appear to have been shaped to fit a particular agenda. | Compared with other sources about the same topic, this content appears to omit a lot of information, emphasize vastly different aspects of the material, and/or contain stereotypes or overly simplified information. Everything seems to align with the website's stance, even though you know there are various ways to look at the issue(s). |
| **Citations** | The source links to news articles or documents it references. | The source refers to other sources but does not provide links to that information. |
| **Textual evidence** | The author has supported statements with evidence and documentation. | The author provides little evidence or documentation to support statements but rather relies on making assertions whose intention is to persuade. |
| **Vested interest** | The source contains no overt evidence that the author will benefit from the reader's adoption of the author's particular viewpoint. | The author seems to have a vested interest in the topic. For instance, the author will most likely benefit from any contributions the website elicits. Or, perhaps the author might get to keep his job if the promoted topic receives attention or results in certain behaviors. |
| **Style and tone** | The source does not include strongly emphasized statements or provocative twists. The author does not include imperative calls to action or punctuate statements with exclamation points. | The source features many strongly worded assertions. (some of which might be inflammatory). The author uses strong language or fear tactics to encourage specific behaviors and/or actions and makes frequent use of exclamation points. |

| Characteristic (continued) | Unbiased (continued) | Biased (continued) |
|---|---|---|
| **Multiple viewpoints** | The author provides both pro and con viewpoints on controversial issues. | The author provides only one version of the truth about controversial issues. |

**Grading the Source**

After you have an idea of how biased a source is, decide if the source suits your project's purpose. It might help you to grade the source's suitability using a scale such as the following:

A—Very acceptable

B—Good, but could be better

C—OK in a pinch

D—Iffy

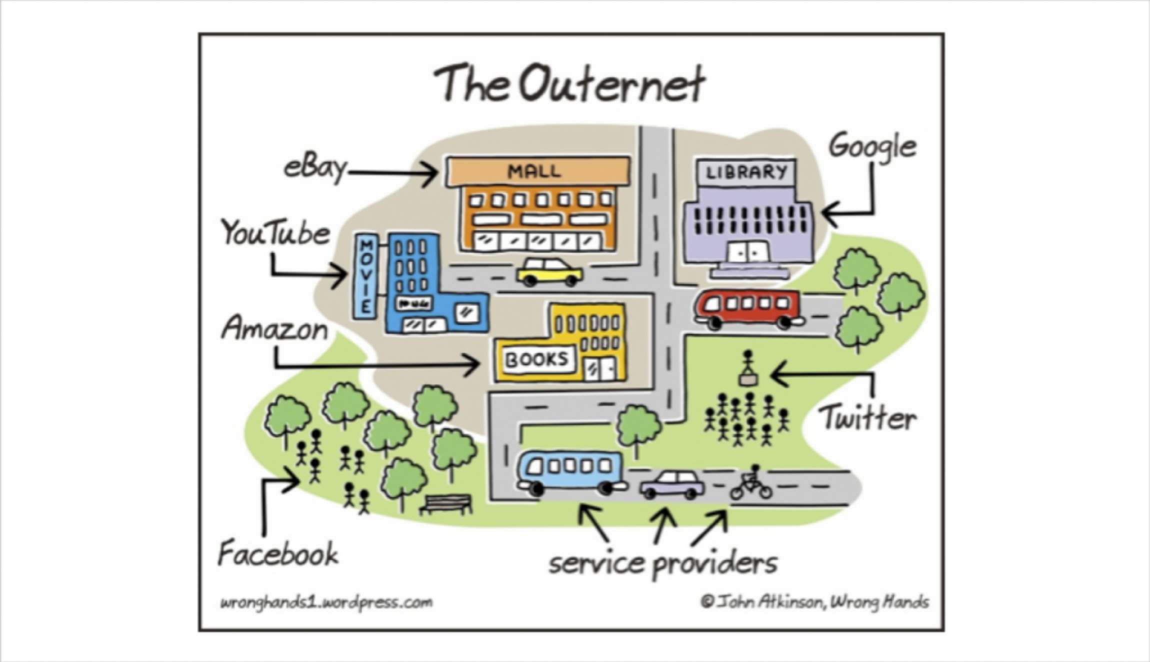
F—Unacceptable

Eliminate sources that you've deemed "Iffy" or "Unacceptable," and rely on those sources that have grades of "Very acceptable" or "Good." Keep sources that you've assigned a grade of "OK in a pinch" on standby.

## A Source's Neighborhood

What do we mean by a **source's "neighborhood"**? Imagine that all of the sites on the Internet constitute a community. Just like in a geographic community, the online community has specific districts and neighborhoods dedicated to different purposes: for example, social networking (Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram), buying goods and services (Amazon and eBay), and conducting research and gathering information (online encyclopedias and dictionaries, Wikis). On the Internet, these districts and neighborhoods are where individual sites "live."

John Atkinson depicts this concept perfectly in the comic "The Outernet." Here, common websites are shown as parts of a city: eBay is the mall, Google is the library, YouTube is the movie theatre, Facebook is the park, and Twitter is the town square. Transportation modes such as buses and bikes are Internet service providers.


The Outernet
eBay
MALL
LIBRARY
Google
YouTube
MOVIE
Amazon
BOOKS
Twitter
Facebook
service providers
wronghands1.wordpress.com
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Visualize the Internet as a community.

Thinking about what neighborhood a website is in on the Internet can help you decide whether the source is credible and suits your purpose.

**Clues About a Website's District or Neighborhood**

First, when vetting a website, check for web pages labeled "About Us," "About This Site," "Mission," "Site Index," and "Site Map." (If such pages or similarly labeled ones don't exist, this might be a sign that the site is less than trustworthy.)

Then, ask yourself the following questions to gather clues that will help you decide what district or neighborhood the website is in:

| Questions | Clues |
|---|---|
| Does the site sell products and/or services? (The site might include articles and other useful information, too.) | If the answer is *yes*, the site is in the business district; it's probably a retail, service center, or corporate site. |
| Does the site require you to pay for membership or access to other parts of the site? Does the site request contributions of money or time? | If the answer is *yes*, you might be on a site that's in the advocacy neighborhood, which contains sites that promote particular ideas or behaviors. Or, you might be on a site that is in the business district but wants to create the appearance of exclusivity. |

| Questions (continued) | Clues (continued) |
|---|---|
| Does the site include posts, articles, reports, and/or policy papers with one-sided views or multiple views on issues, people, and events? | If the answer is *yes*, and the content reflects only one side of any issue, the site is probably in the business district or in the advocacy neighborhood.<br>If the answer is *yes*, and the content is balanced and includes different sides of an issue, the site is probably in the reference, education, or news district. Sites in these districts usually provide information designed to educate rather than persuade. |

**TIP: Author's Purpose for Print Sources**

For print sources, you obviously won't attempt to determine their Internet neighborhood. Instead, examine them for their author's purpose. Skim the table of contents, and then read the introduction and conclusion to discern the author's purpose. Then, consider the following questions:

- Did the author create the source to inform or educate, persuade, sell, or entertain?
- Is the author's purpose compatible with the purpose of your research project?

### Grading the Website

After you have an idea of which district or neighborhood a website lives in, decide if the site suits your project's purpose. It might help you to grade the site's suitability just as you would with any other source.

A—Very acceptable

B—Good, but could be better

C—OK in a pinch

D—Iffy

F—Unacceptable

Again, eliminate sources that you've deemed "Iffy" or "Unacceptable," and rely on those sources that have grades of "Very acceptable" or "Good." Keep sources that you've assigned a grade of "OK in a pinch" on reserve.

## Source Evaluation Checklist

Use the following checklist as you evaluate your sources.

### Source Evaluation Checklist

| **Relevance and timeliness** | **Yes** | **No** |
|---|---|---|
| Is the subject matter of the source related to your topic? | | |
| Are you able to distinguish between fact and opinion provided by the source? | | |
| Can you tell when this source was published or revised? | | |
| Based on the source's publication or post date, will it provide you with current information? | | |

| **Authorship and credibility** | **Yes** | **No** |
|---|---|---|
| Are the author's educational credentials and professional qualifications made available by the source itself or through additional searching? | | |
| Does the source include a reference list or bibliography that shows where the information came from? | | |
| Can you find information about whether or not the source is reputable? | | |

| **Intended audience** | **Yes** | **No** |
|---|---|---|
| Is the information from the source appropriate for your audience? (For example, if you are writing for a formal, academic audience, is the source a scholarly publication from a journal or a reputable book? If you are writing for the general public, is the source more informal in nature?) | | |

| **Purpose** | **Yes** | **No** |
|---|---|---|
| Is the information from the source unbiased, and does the source provide multiple points of view? | | |
| Overall, is this source suitable for your research purposes? | | |

If you answered *no* to one or more of these questions, take a closer look at your source. Getting one *no* doesn’t mean you shouldn’t use the source, but it does mean that you should consider its overall quality.

## MODULE 4

# CITATIONS AND PLAGIARISM

## Introduction

This module covers two important, related aspects of responsible scholarship: using citations and avoiding plagiarism.

To cite correctly, you need to learn how to properly acknowledge—or document—the source material that you include in your writing in support of your ideas. You may include this material by directly quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing it, while always documenting its source. There are several different systems of documentation, including MLA (Modern Language Association) style, APA (American Psychological Association) style, and the Chicago Manual of Style system. All of these systems provide rules and guidelines for citation of a wide variety of sources according to the type of source.

There are many possible ways to plagiarize. For example, while deliberately leaving out citations is plagiarizing, citing incorrectly or forgetting to cite can also lead to plagiarism. Citing and documenting correctly minimize the chance of plagiarism.

## Lesson 4.1: Quoting and Paraphrasing

### Lesson 4.1 Introduction

While you may end up using MLA style for some papers and APA style for others, you must cite all of your sources in your writing in every style. To properly integrate source material into your essays, you will first need to decide whether to use a summary, a **direct quotation**, or a **paraphrase**. When quoting, you will have to make sure direct language from any source is correctly identified in quotation marks. Then you will appropriately document each summary, direct quotation, or paraphrase with a citation in the text along with a corresponding entry on an MLA-style Works Cited page or an APA-style References page.

### Quoting and Paraphrasing

#### Direct Quotations and Paraphrases

When you incorporate source material into your own writing, you can use either direct quotations—material taken **verbatim** (word for word) from the reading—or paraphrases. A *direct quotation* provides the exact wording of the original source, so it is enclosed in quotation marks.

> Jeffery Sheler writes, “Prayer has become familiar terrain in modern America. It is woven into the daily rhythms of life, its ethos embedded in the public and private experiences of millions. Indeed, a recent Roper poll found that nearly half of all Americans said that they pray or meditate every day."

Directly quoted material can be a word, a phrase, an entire sentence, or several sentences in succession, if the reading you are responding to is a lengthy one. As a general rule, these direct quotations should not stand alone. You should use a **signal phrase** or **tag** (a phrase that links a quotation to its source) to alert your reader to the fact that you are borrowing an author's exact word or words to communicate her ideas. Your signal phrase might be, *Thoreau states* or *According to Thoreau*, followed by the exact words of the author enclosed in quotation marks. Alternatively, you might simply insert quoted material into your sentence; this method of quoting directly is best suited to very brief passages of only several words. Regardless of how you weave direct quotations into your writing, you will need to document the source of those quotations.

A **paraphrase** rewords the information in the original source, so it is not enclosed in quotation marks.

> According to Jeffery Sheler, praying is a regular part of modern American life, both public and private. As a matter of fact, half of our country's citizens claim to pray or meditate on a daily basis.

A paraphrase allows you to incorporate only the pertinent facts or ideas into your work, without including any unnecessary words.

## When to Quote, Paraphrase, or Summarize

To write a research paper or essay, you will often use direct quotes from your sources and will paraphrase and summarize sources. But how should you choose which technique to use when?

**Choose a direct quote** when it is more likely to be accurate than summarizing or paraphrasing would be, when what you're quoting is the text you're analyzing, when a direct quote is more concise than a summary or paraphrase would be and conciseness matters, when the author is a particular authority whose exact words would lend credence to your argument, and when the author has used particularly effective language that is just too good to pass up.

**Choose to paraphrase or summarize** rather than quote directly when the meaning is more important than the particular language the author used and when you don't need to use the author's preeminent authority to bolster your argument at the moment.

**Choose to paraphrase instead of summarizing** when you need details and specificity. Paraphrasing lets you emphasize the ideas in source materials that are most related to your paper or essay instead of the exact language the author used. It also lets you simplify complex material, sometimes rewording to use language that is more understandable to your reader.

**Choose to summarize instead of paraphrasing** when you need to provide a brief overview of a larger text. Summarizing lets you condense the source material to draw out particular points, omit unrelated or unimportant points, and simplify how the author conveyed his message.

One final note about direct quotations: Use them sparingly. Your teachers are interested in how well you are able to demonstrate your understanding of a reading by using your own language—not someone else's. Directly quoting from a source is a good strategy to support ideas that you have put in your own words, but you should not overuse the strategy. Quote directly only when a word or phrase used by the author is particularly powerful or when paraphrasing or summarizing a passage will lessen its impact.

## Citing with Quotation Marks

There are three primary instances in which you will need to use quotation marks: to indicate the exact words of a speaker; to quote directly from a published work; and to indicate the title of a shorter work, such as an article, a poem, or a short story.

### Quoting a Speaker

First, quotation marks are used to indicate the exact words of a speaker that are recorded in print. Note that the quotation marks enclose the exact words of the speaker. Note, too, that quotation marks always come in pairs and that end punctuation—when it is part of the direct quotation—is always inside the last set of quotation marks. When they are not part of a direct quotation, question marks and exclamation points are outside the final set of quotation marks.

### Quoting Directly

Quotation marks are also used to indicate the exact words borrowed from a published work of some sort, such as a professional essay or a newspaper or journal article. Examine the following sentences:

> Martin Luther King Jr., said, “Justice too long delayed is justice denied.”
>
> Sherry Turkle, in “How Computers Change the Way We Think," an article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, states, “The tools we use to think change the ways in which we think."
>
> Richard Feynman, a Nobel prize-winning scientist, declared, “If we want to solve a problem that we have never solved before, we must leave the door to the unknown ajar."

In the preceding examples, the quoted material is reproduced verbatim, punctuation mark for punctuation mark. No words or phrases have been left out, and the quoted passage has not been altered in any way.

However, sometimes, a writer may want to quote a word or a phrase rather than an entire sentence, as in the following examples:

> The speaker in Frost's poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” remarks that the owner of the woods lives in the “village” (line 2).
>
> In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou states that as a small child, the store that her grandmother and uncle ran in Stamps, Arkansas, was her “favorite place to be” (16).

It is fine to quote only what you wish from a sentence or a passage. However, if you leave out a significant part of the passage, you may need to use an **ellipsis** (three dots) to indicate that words are omitted.

Students often have questions about how to use quotation marks and end punctuation with longer quotations and with quotations within quotations.

Direct quotations of more than four typewritten lines are formatted differently from shorter quotations. Called **block quotations**, they are indented five spaces on the left (tabbed over) and are typed without quotation marks. Furthermore, the period signaling the end of the quoted material goes before the parenthetical documentation. (With shorter quotations, the period goes after the citation.)

In your college-level writing, you may also encounter a situation where you must record a quotation within a quotation. If you are dealing with a block quotation, simply put standard quotation marks around the quotation within the quotation. For shorter quotations, insert single quotation marks around the quotation within the quotation, as in the following example, which contains a direct quote from Martin Luther King Jr.'s “Letter from Birmingham Jail":

> In his famous epistle from Birmingham City Jail, King wrote, “Was not Jesus an extremist for love? ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you’” (360).

In the preceding example, note that there are double quotation marks around the entire quotation and single quotation marks around what is quoted within the quotation. Note also that there is no space between the single quotation mark and the double quotation marks that conclude the quoted passage.

### Identifying a Title

Finally, quotation marks are also used to indicate titles of articles in newspapers and journals, titles of short stories, and titles of poems. In MLA style, they are not used for titles of books, magazines, newspapers, movies, plays, operas, paintings, or television shows, which are all italicized.

## Lesson 4.2: Proper Citation Format

### Lesson 4.2 Introduction

In this lesson, you will focus on MLA style, the system most often used for research papers or essays in the humanities. MLA style has two main components: (1) an **in-text (or in-line) citation**, enclosed in parentheses, that provides the author name(s) and page number (for print sources only) of the original source, and (2) a **Works Cited** list that provides complete bibliographic information for all of the sources cited in the paper. Each in-text citation must be accompanied by a corresponding entry on the Works Cited list.

### MLA Style Works Cited Page

For every source you cite in your research paper, you will need to have a corresponding entry in your Works Cited page. Writing in MLA style requires you to format your entries in a certain way, depending on the nature of the source. In the following section, you will find model entries for some of the sources students commonly use.

### Scholarly Journals

For scholarly journals, give the volume and the issue number. After the title of the journal, separate the volume number, issue number, date, and page range with commas.

> Dean, Tamara. “Blowdown: When a Tornado Tears Through a Beloved Landscape, Is It Possible to Just Let Nature Heal Itself?” *American Scholar,* vol. 79, no. 4, 2010, pp. 58–66.

### Articles in Magazines Published Weekly or Monthly

If a magazine is published monthly or weekly, it will have a specific date. Be sure to state the date after the title of the journal.

> Bartolomeo, Joey. “Father Knows Glitz.” *People,* 1 Nov. 2010, pp. 64–71.

Also, be aware that your sources are always set in hanging indention. This means that when each entry wraps, the subsequent lines are indented five spaces. Most word-processing programs can be set in hanging indention.

### Books

Here is the basic pattern for a book entry in the Works Cited page:

> Author's last name, first name. *Title*. City of Publication: Publisher, Date.
>
> Stovall, Jim. *The Ultimate Gift*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Distribution, 2001.

**NOTE:** Under the latest (8th) edition of the MLA Handbook, city of publication is only needed in a few particular circumstances. If more than one city of publication is given, cite the first one listed. If more than one date of publication is given, cite the most recent.

### A Book by Two Authors

Always begin with the author whose name appears first on the title page, inverted, and then give the other author's name in regular order.

> Gaetz, Lynne, and Suneeti Phadke. *The Writer's World*. 2nd ed. Pearson, 2009.

### A Book by Three or More Authors

List the first author's name (inverted), followed by et al. You may also list all of the authors, inverting the first author's name. Note that if you choose to do this, you will need to list all of the authors for your in-text citations as well as on your Works Cited page.

### More Than One Work by the Same Author

When you have used more than one work by the same author, alphabetize the titles and then put the author's name with the first title. Subsequent titles are preceded by three dashes and a period.

### Magazine and Scholarly Journal Articles Retrieved from a College Database

For magazine and scholarly journal articles accessed through online college databases, such as EBSCOhost or ProQuest, use basic rules but add the name of the database, DOI or URL, and the date you retrieved the article.

> Zakaria, Fareed. "How Will Obama Handle RyanCare?" *Time,* 18 Apr. 2011, pp. 29–30. *Academic Search Elite*. www.time.com. Accessed 22 May 2011.

### Magazines Published Online

After the author and the title of the article, give the title of the magazine, the sponsor or publisher of the website, the date of the article, URL, and the date you accessed it.

> Cowper-Coles, Sherard. "Why Talking to the Taliban is the Only Option." *Newsweek.com*. The Newsweek/Daily Beast Company, 29 May 2011, https://www.newsweek.com/why-talking-taliban-only-option-67797. Accessed 31 May 2011.

### Works Cited Page: Other Essentials

Here are a few final guidelines for constructing your Works Cited page:

- Begin a new page in your document.

- Give this page the title *Works Cited*; center this title left to right; do not underline, italicize, or use boldface print.
- Alphabetize your sources by the last name of the first author given or, if a work has no author listed, by the first word of the source title.
- Do not number the entries.
- Use double space both within and between entries.
- Indent the second and all subsequent lines of an entry with the hanging indent feature in your word-processing program.
- Paginate this page in the upper right-hand corner.

## MLA In-Text Citations

There are two main types of sources: print and online. To document these sources correctly, you will need to know how to cite a source in the text of your paper and how to list a source on your bibliography page (called *Works Cited* in MLA style).

Any time that you refer to resources within the text of your paper, such as by quoting directly or paraphrasing, you must cite your source.

### Print Sources

List the author's last name and the page number on which the borrowed material is located in parentheses with a period after the citation. In the example that follows, a direct quotation is used:

> "For the first several days Jason seemed like a stranger. But, eventually he settled into his duties as father, brother, teacher, and friend to three dozen boys" (Stovall 91).

If you identify the source of the borrowed material in your sentence, you only need to cite the page number on which that material is located in your citation.

> Stovall states that Jason "eventually settled into his duties as father, brother, teacher, and friend to three dozen boys" (91).

For paraphrases, cite the author and page number without using quotation marks.

> Although Jason was awkward around the boys at first, he adjusted into the role of parent and mentor quickly (Stovall 91).

### Print Sources: More Than One Author

For print sources by two authors, list both the authors' last names followed by the page number, as in the following examples:

> "Never fight an enemy that is already defeated" (Duplantis and Copeland 17).
>
> "Many Americans are suffering from sleep disorders and don't know it" (Johnson, Ngai, and Rubio 214).

To cite sources by three or more authors, give the first author's last name followed by the Latin abbreviation *et al.*, which means *and others*.

> "Amy Tan's novels just get better and better" (Hoffman et al. 27).

### Online Sources

Follow the same guidelines for online sources as for print sources with the exception that you need not supply a specific page number, as in the following examples:

> “Justice too long delayed is justice denied” (King).
>
> “A cowboy never really takes off his boots” (Hudson and Campbell).
>
> “When people mature they often gain a new appreciation for family interference” (Jacobs, Yoder, and Ford).
>
> “Most people want to live happily ever after” (Disney et al.).

Later on, you will learn more about how to incorporate direct quotations and paraphrases from other sources in your own writing. For now, to distinguish the borrowed material from your own ideas, make sure to clearly identify the source at both its beginning and its end. In the case of a direct quotation, a quotation mark will indicate the beginning of the material and a closing quotation mark followed by a parenthetical citation will indicate the end. Paraphrases are often introduced with the author’s name to indicate where the source material begins. In that case, the author’s name is not repeated in the citation.

## Citation Guidelines: In-Text Citations

To write a proper citation, follow these steps, which will help you maintain accuracy and clarity in acknowledging sources. Note that the examples in these steps illustrate the use of APA style rather than MLA style.

### Step 1: Choose Your Citation Style

Find out from your instructor the name of the citation style you must use, the directions for the assignment, or the expectations of your audience. Then, search for the style at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) or use Google or Bing to find the style guide/handbook; you may purchase it or borrow it from the library.

### Step 2: Review In-Text Citations

In the style guide, find and read the rules about in-text citations, which are very thorough. Luckily, there are usually examples provided that make it a lot easier to learn the rules.

### Example: Style Guides Are Usually Very Thorough

For instance, your style guide may have different rules for when you are citing

- quotations rather than summaries rather than paraphrases;
- long, as opposed to short, quotations;
- sources with one or multiple authors; and
- books, journal articles, interviews and emails, or electronic sources.

### Step 3: Create In-Text Citations

Now, begin creating the in-text citation by deciding what kind of source you have to cite (for example, book, film, journal article, webpage).

### Example: Using a Style Guide to Create an In-Text Citation

Imagine that you're using APA style and have the APA style guide rules for in-text citations open for reference. In your psychogeography paper, you want to quote Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan, the authors of the book *The Experience of Nature*, which was published in 1989. What you want to quote is from page 38 of the book.

Here's what you want to quote:

"The way space is organized provides information about what one might want to do in that space. A relatively brief glance at a scene communicates whether there is room to roam, whether one's path is clear or blocked."

1. You skim the headings in the style guide to remind yourself of the rules. Because it has rules about the length of quotations, you count the number of words in what you want to quote and find that your quote has 38 words—a count that is within the style's range for short quotations (fewer than 40 words). According to the rule for short quotations, you're supposed to *introduce the quote by attributing it to the author (last name only) and adding the publication date in parentheses*. You write the following:

   > **According to the Kaplans (1989)**, "The way space is organized provides information about what one might want to do in that space. A relatively brief glance at a scene communicates whether there is room to roam, whether one's path is clear or blocked."

2. You notice that the example in the style guide includes the page number on which you found the quotation. It appears at the end of the quote (in parentheses and outside the quotation marks but before the period ending the quotation), so you *add that page number as follows*:

   > According to the Kaplans (1989), "The way space is organized provides information about what one might want to do in that space. A relatively brief glance at a scene communicates whether there is room to roam, whether one's path is clear or blocked" **(p. 38)**.

3. You're feeling pretty good, but then you realize that you have overlooked the rule about having multiple authors. You have two, and their last names are both Kaplan. So, you *change the author attribution* to the following:

   > **According to Kaplan and Kaplan (1989),** "The way space is organized provides information about what one might want to do in that space. A relatively brief glance at a scene communicates whether there is room to roam, whether one's path is clear or blocked" (p. 38).

Here's the first in-text citation as your final product:

> *According to Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), "The way space is organized provides information about what one might want to do in that space. A relatively brief glance at a scene communicates whether there is room to roam, whether one's path is clear or blocked" (p. 38).*

After creating an in-text citation, you will prepare a bibliographic citation.

### Citation Guidelines: Bibliographic Citations

The remaining steps of the citation process relate to bibliographic citations.

### Step 4: Study Your Style's Rules for Bibliographic Citations

You'll need a full bibliographic citation for each source. This citation will appear on the References page or Bibliography page or Works Cited page. (APA style, which is used in this section, requires a page called *References*.) Bibliographic citations usually contain more publication facts than you needed for your in-text citation, and the formatting for all of them is very specific.

### Example: Bibliographic Citation Rules Are Very Specific

- Rules vary for sources, depending, for instance, on whether they are books, journal articles, or online sources.
- Sometimes, lines of the citation must be indented.
- Authors' names usually appear last name first.
- Authors' first names may be initials instead.
- Names of sources may or may not have to be in full.
- Names of some kinds of sources may have to be italicized.
- Names of some sources may have to be in quotes.
- Dates of publication appear in different places, depending on the style.
- Some styles require **Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs)** in the citations for online sources.

### Step 5: Identify Citation Elements

Figure out which bibliographic citation rules apply to the source you've just created an in-text citation for. Then, apply them to create your first bibliographic citation.

### Example: Using a Style Guide to Create a Bibliographic Citation

Imagine that you're using APA style and have the APA style guide rules for bibliographic citations open for reference. Your bibliographic citation will be for the book called *The Experience of Nature*, written by Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan and published in 1989.

1. You apply OWL's basic rules of APA style: The citation will start with the *last name of your author followed by her first initial*, and the second line of the citation will be indented. So you write, **Kaplan, R. and Kaplan, S.,** and remind yourself to indent the second line when you get there.
2. Because you have two authors, you look for a rule regarding that situation, which requires a *comma between the authors and an ampersand between the names*. So you write: **Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S.**
3. Because you know your source is a book, you look for style guide rules and examples about books. For instance, the APA style says that the *publication date goes in parentheses, followed by a period after the last author's name, and that the title of the book is italicized*. You apply the rules and examples and write the publication information you know about the source: Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S. **(1989).** ***The experience of nature.***
4. You look at the rules and examples of book citations and notice that they show the *city where the book was published and the publisher*. So you find that information about your source (in a book, this is usually on the title page or its back) and write: Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S. (1989). The experience of nature. **Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

Congratulations, especially about remembering to indent that line! You have created the first bibliographic citation for your final product (in-text citation).

### Step 6: Repeat the Steps for Creating In-Text Citations and Bibliographic Citations for Each Source

Create your bibliographic citation by arranging publication information to match the example you chose in step 4. Pay particular attention to what is and what is not capitalized and to what punctuation and spaces separate each part that the example illustrates.

## Lesson 4.3: Avoiding Plagiarism

### Lesson 4.3 Introduction

As you prepare to incorporate source material in your compositions, you will need to understand what the term **plagiarism** means. Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional use of someone else's ideas or words without giving proper credit to that individual and/or clearly acknowledging the original source.

**Intentional plagiarism**, the most blatant form, occurs when a writer knowingly transfers someone else's sentences or paragraphs into his own paper without providing any information about where the material came from. Word processing and the internet allow writers to copy and paste others' words into their documents, so computers have made it easier for people to plagiarize.

However, a writer can also be guilty of **unintentional plagiarism**. This occurs when she does not properly indicate the point at which borrowed material begins or ends or when she fails to provide source information. For example, if a writer does not express someone else's thoughts in her own words and ends up using too much of the wording of the original source, plagiarism can result. Likewise, a writer who forgets to acknowledge a source will be inadvertently plagiarizing.

What are the consequences of plagiarism? The practice of using someone else's words as your own is illegal and unethical. It is a lot like lying; you may not go to jail for telling a lie or plagiarizing a passage, but you will cast serious doubt on your own character and credibility if you commit either one of these moral transgressions. Plagiarizing will undermine your own ideas and arguments because if you are found to have "stolen" the ideas of others, readers will view you as an untrustworthy source of information. Most academic institutions are now imposing serious penalties for students who cheat by plagiarizing, so make sure that you always give credit where credit is due.

### Types of Plagiarism: Using or Reusing Others' Writing

Most students understand that it's wrong to plagiarize but are confused about what plagiarism really is. This lesson will provide you with a detailed explanation of several basic types of plagiarism. Some types of plagiarism may be referred to as *academic misconduct*. Understanding what plagiarism really is can help you avoid it.

For instance, the following three types of plagiarism are matters of overall authorship.

#### Submitting Another Person's Writing

It is plagiarism to submit another person's writing as if it were your own writing. Here's an example:

It's the end of the semester, and you're working on two research paper assignments. One is almost finished, but you haven't even started the other one for an American History course. Two friends invite you to a party, but you explain you can't go because you have a paper to write. One of them says, "I've got an idea! I wrote a paper for that same course last semester, and I got an A! Why don't you use mine?"

Later, your friend emails you her paper. It looks good, so you write a new title page with your name on it and hand it in.

### Submitting a Paper You Have Already Written

It is plagiarism if you submit a paper that you previously wrote for a different course. Here's an example:

Last semester, you wrote for your psychology course a research paper about the effects of gender on classroom achievement in high school math. This semester, you're taking an educational development course, and you've been assigned a research paper that addresses a problem faced by students in secondary education. You realize that the topic from your psychology course would fit this assignment, too. Because you spent a lot of time researching it and received a good grade, you decide to use it again. This time, you give it a new title, write a new introduction, and then submit the paper to your instructor.

### Paying Another Person to Write Your Paper

It is plagiarism if you pay another person or company to write a paper that you submit as your own. Here's an example:

You have just returned from spring break in Jamaica, and now you're trying to catch up on homework. You have three research paper assignments—all due in one month. One paper is about teenage marriage. After spending a day in the library reading articles about this topic, you feel overwhelmed. You tell a classmate, who says, "You're not actually going to WRITE the paper, are you?" Then, he mentions a website and says, "Everyone buys research papers from them!" You go to the website and find a perfect paper for your topic. It costs only $25, and they even take credit cards. No problem handing this paper in on time!

## Types of Plagiarism: Sources and Citation

The next few types of plagiarism show how plagiarism can also occur at the source level within a paper.

### Patchwriting or Copying Phrases from Various Sources

It is plagiarism if you use **patchwriting**, which means copying phrases from various sources and using them in your work. Here's an example:

You're writing a research paper about Leo Tolstoy for a literature course. In his novel *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy wrote, "All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." According to one critic, in Tolstoy's non-fiction work *Confession*, "Many of the themes of that work [*Anna Karenina*] are sourced from his own life experience…" Using these ideas, you write your opening paragraph:

> *One of the reasons I've always been attracted to the work of Leo Tolstoy is that I believe, as he did, that all happy families do in fact resemble one another. I also believe that each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. In this paper, I will show how these themes are sourced from his own life experience.*

A corrected version would be as follows:

> *One of the reasons I've always been attracted to the work of Leo Tolstoy is that I agree with his conclusion that, although contented families may have similarities, discontented*

> *families are different from each other. In this paper, I will show that Tolstoy used his own personal experiences in his novel* Anna Karenina*.*

### Not Using Quotation Marks Around Quoted Material

It is plagiarism if you do not use quotation marks around text that you quote directly. Here's an example:

In further research for your paper, you read from *The Crack-Up* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. "Family quarrels are bitter things. They don't go according to any rules. They're not like aches or wounds: they're more like splits in the skin that won't heal because there's not enough material." You decide to add the following to your paper (using APA style in the in-text citation):

> *If he had read F. Scott Fitzgerald's work, Tolstoy might have agreed with Fitzgerald when he said that family quarrels are bitter things and they don't go according to any rules (Fitzgerald, 1936).*

A corrected version (again using APA style) would be:

> *If he had read F. Scott Fitzgerald's work, Tolstoy might have agreed with Fitzgerald when the latter wrote, "Family quarrels are bitter things. They don't go according to any rules" (Fitzgerald, 1936).*

### Failing to Cite Sources

It is plagiarism if you fail to cite your sources. When you use someone's ideas, even when you have paraphrased and changed the words, you must still cite the source. If you do not include the source, you may be accused of plagiarism. Here's an example:

As you continue with your paper, you like the opening paragraph to *The Crack-Up*. Part of it reads: "Of course all life is a process of breaking down, but the blows that do the dramatic side of the work—the big sudden blows that come, or seem to come, from outside don't show their effect all at once." You decide to include some of these ideas in your paper, so you write:

> *Tolstoy would probably also agree with Fitzgerald's idea that serious upsets cause lives to fall apart, but it takes a while for the result to be felt.*

A corrected version (using APA style) would be as follows:

> *Tolstoy would probably also agree with Fitzgerald's idea that serious upsets cause lives to fall apart, but it takes a while for the result to be felt (1936).*

## When to Cite

Citing sources is often described as a straightforward, rule-based practice. But in fact, there are many gray areas around citation, and learning how to apply citation guidelines takes practice and education. If you are confused by it, you are not alone—in fact, you might be doing some good thinking. Here are some guidelines to help you navigate citation practices.

**Cite when you are directly quoting.** This is the easiest rule to understand. Remember, if you are stating verbatim what someone else has already written, you must put quotation marks around those words and you must give credit to the original author. Not doing so would mean that you are letting your reader believe these words are your own and represent your own effort.

**Cite when you are summarizing and paraphrasing.** This is a trickier area to understand. First of all, recall that summarizing and paraphrasing are two related practices, but they are not the same. Summarizing is when you read a text, consider the main points, and provide a shorter version of what you learned. Paraphrasing is when you restate what the original author said in your own words and in your own tone. Both summarizing and paraphrasing require good writing skills and an accurate understanding of the material you are trying to convey. Summarizing and paraphrasing are difficult to do when you are a beginning academic researcher, but these skills become easier to perform over time with practice.

**Cite when you are citing something that is highly debatable.** For example, if you want to claim that the Patriot Act has been an important tool for national security, you should be prepared to give examples of how it has helped and how experts have claimed that it has helped. Many US citizens concerned that it violates privacy rights won't agree with you, and they will be able to find commentary that the Patriot Act has been more harmful to the nation than helpful. You need to be prepared to show such skeptics that you have experts on your side, too.

### When Don't You Cite?

**Don't cite when you are saying your own insight**. Research involves forming opinions and insights around what you learn. You may be citing several sources that have helped you learn, but at some point, you must integrate your own opinion, conclusion, or insight into the work. The fact that you are not citing it helps the reader understand that this portion of the work is your unique contribution developed through your own research efforts.

**Don't cite when you are stating common knowledge**. What is common knowledge is sometimes difficult to discern. In general, quick facts like historical dates or events are not cited because they are common knowledge.

Examples of information that would not need to be cited include the following:

- The US Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776.
- Barack Obama became the 44th president of the United States in January 2009.

Some quick facts, such as statistics, are trickier. For example, the number of gun-related deaths per year probably should be cited, because there are a lot of ways this number could be determined (does the number include murder only or suicides and accidents as well?) and there might be different numbers provided by different organizations, each with an agenda about gun laws.

A guideline that can help with deciding whether or not to cite facts is to determine whether the same data is repeated in multiple sources. If it is not, it is best to cite.

The other thing that makes this determination difficult might be that what seems new and insightful to you might be common knowledge to an expert in the field. You have to use your best judgment, and probably err on the side of overciting, as you are learning to do academic research. You can seek the advice of your instructor, a writing tutor, or a librarian. Knowing what is and is not common knowledge is a practiced skill that gets easier with time and with your own increased knowledge.

# MODULE 5

# PLANNING FOR WRITING

## Introduction

Writing a research paper is a process of connecting what you know, or think you know, with what you are still discovering. Inspiration is helpful but not necessary and is frequently unavailable. A plan, or process, is much more reliable.

Students (and writers of all kinds) have numerous writing processes. Some begin their writing process early, taking copious notes on numerous sources, while others wait until the last minute, hoping to craft a compelling paper in one all-night session in front of a computer.

Waiting to write until the last minute leaves very little margin for error, and a college-level research paper is usually most successful when it has been given the opportunity to develop. Putting time in at the outset of the process, with a plan for getting all of the steps done, consistently pays off—and typically requires less caffeine.

## Lesson 5.1: The Writing Process

### Lesson 5.1 Introduction

Do you know what a Slinky is?

It's a toy that can serve as a metaphor for the writing process.

A Slinky is one piece of material that's coiled in many loops. Writing is a large process that's made up of smaller ones—processes that connect and loop around each other.

A Slinky, after the first nudge, travels down the stairs on its own, step by step. An experienced writer, after the first nudge of an idea or observation, moves through the writing process step by step, with the option to loop back up as well as down the stairs.

That's about as far as the metaphor stretches (and yes, that's a bad pun). But you get the idea through the example: *Writing is a process*.

### The Writing Process

Writing is the tangible result of thinking. And learning how to think—how to develop your own ideas and concepts—is the purpose of a college education. Even though the end result of writing is a product, writing itself is a process through which you ask questions; create, develop, hone, and organize ideas; argue a point; search for evidence to support your ideas; and so on.

The point here is that writing really involves creative and critical thinking processes. Like any creative process, it often starts in a jumble as you develop, sort, and sift through ideas. But it doesn't need to stay in disarray. Your writing will gain direction as you start examining those ideas. It doesn't just happen all at once. Writing is a process that happens over time. And like any process, there are certain steps or stages.

These are some of the major stages in a strong writing process:

1. Thinking about your assignment
2. Developing ideas (often called prewriting)
3. Narrowing a topic
4. Gathering information
5. Ordering and drafting
6. Revising and editing

In this lesson, we'll touch briefly on developing ideas, narrowing a topic, and gathering information. Other lessons and modules will go deeper into these stages and others.

### Developing Ideas

Writers need to have something to write about. In college, you'll be expected to provide your own observations and ideas. Even in a research paper on an assigned topic, you'll be expected to offer your own thinking about what your sources say. The purpose of writing in college is to show your own analysis and thought processes on the concepts that you're learning about.

Writers develop ideas in many ways, including the following:

- Journaling
- Freewriting
- Brainstorming
- Mapping or diagramming
- Listing
- Asking defining questions
- Noting pros and cons
- Responding to a text

### Gathering Information and Narrowing Ideas

Although researching, reading and gathering information may not feel like writing, make no mistake: they make up an essential part of the writing process. Taking notes about sources is often a great way to jumpstart ideas and determine evidence for arguments you may already be formulating.

At the beginning of the writing process, gathering information and narrowing your topic go hand in hand. It's often easier to gather information once you have a relatively narrow topic. A good analogy is when you conduct a search in an online database. You'll get thousands (if not more) of entries if you use the key words "Vietnam War," as opposed to fewer and more focused entries if you use terms related to the economic impact of the war on the United States.

Or, if you're analyzing *The Great Gatsby*, you'll be able to gather more specific information from the novel if you focus on a character or a theme, instead of all elements of the novel at once.

It may help to use the image of a hand fan to understand the concept of gathering information. Think of your narrow topic as the end of the fan—the point at which all of the slats are linked together. As you gather information about your narrow topic, the fan spreads out, but the information is still all connected to the narrow topic.

Let’s be clear, though. Sometimes, gathering information occurs before you narrow a topic, especially if you don’t have much knowledge of that subject. You might use a general reference source, such as an encyclopedia, a textbook, a magazine, or a website, to get a broad view of the issues related to a topic. This, in turn, helps you think of ways to narrow the topic to create a focused piece of writing.

However, it’s important to remember that sources like encyclopedias should be starting points only and should not be the kinds of sources you use in most college-level research papers or essays.

## Lesson 5.2: Prewriting Strategies

### Lesson 5.2 Introduction

Now we’ll get into some more detail about the “Developing Ideas” stage of the writing process, also known as prewriting.

We all know that criticism can be very helpful. We look to critics to help us decide which movies to see, which books to read, and whether to buy a band’s latest recording. Often, we get such recommendations from friends and acquaintances—which may, in part, inform the expression “Everyone’s a critic.”

When prewriting, however, the human tendency to criticize can be a hindrance. In particular, your inner critic can seem like a humorless judge, rejecting every appeal—which may, in part, inform another well-known expression, “I’m my own worst critic.”

Don’t judge yourself too harshly when prewriting; it works best when your ideas are allowed to flow. In later stages of the writing process, you’re a bit like a sculptor, shaping a draft and chipping away at its imperfections. But in the early stages, you’re more like a miner, digging for raw material. The more raw material you acquire in the early stages, the more you’ll have to sculpt later on.

### Brainstorming

**Brainstorming** is an important part of the prewriting process because it allows you to think about your topic and purpose before you start writing. You are able to explore different ideas that you have, examine the issues that each idea raises, and determine what ideas work better for your purpose.

There are a number of different brainstorming techniques, and you will probably find one technique more useful than others.

If you think globally (focusing on the big picture, but you aren’t sure how to get there), you might try some **idea mapping**. This can take a couple of different forms. You might use bubbles, wherein you identify a main idea in the center bubble and link similar ideas in the bubbles surrounding it. Sometimes, this technique is called **clustering**. Basically, it means associating ideas freely and seeing how they relate to each other.

Or, you might try using an **idea tree**. This is especially helpful if you find that your topic is too broad. You might start off with a broad idea, and then identify elements of the idea underneath it, narrowing as you go. Then, repeat the process for the smaller ideas.

If you think more linearly (knowing the parts but not the end), you might try **listing** or outlining. For listing, you simply list the parts that you can identify. This can help you see where any holes might be, especially if you keep your research paper goals in mind. In addition, by seeing all of your ideas listed, you can decide what they show.

Consider the following example of a list-style brainstorm:

Squirrels

- How to get them out of the garden
- How to get rid of them ethically (without killing)
- Squirrel traps
- Repellents for squirrels
- Types of squirrels
- Brown vs. black vs. red squirrels
- Flying squirrels
- What they eat
- Different types of play
- Training squirrels
- Hunting squirrels
- Squirrels and cats
- How they nest
- Build nests in the same place each year

What happens once you've brainstormed a topic? Look over the list. Are there items that group together? Are there items that catch your interest as a thinker, researcher, and writer—items you want to know more about? Are there items that seem unrelated or not useful? Use your list as a starting place; it creates ideas for you, as a writer, to work with.

Last, but not least, you can always discuss your ideas with a friend. Sometimes, talking through a topic with someone else can lead you to discover ideas that you might not have thought of otherwise. This may happen during classroom discussion, or you might sit down with a friend outside of class.

### Journaling

Many people write in personal journals (or online blogs). Writers not only record events in journals but also reflect and record thoughts, observations, questions, and feelings.

Journals are safe spaces to record your experience of the world.

Use a journal to write about an experience you've had, different reactions to the same situation you've observed, a current item in the news, an ethical problem at work, an incident with one of your children or family members, a memorable childhood experience, or really anything at all. Try to probe the why or how of the situation.

Reviewing a regularly kept journal can also unearth ideas and concerns related to a specific writing assignment. When you review your journal entries, you may find that you keep coming back to a particular topic, or that you have written a lot about one topic in a specific entry, or that you're really passionate about an issue. Those are the topics, then, about which you obviously have something to say. Those are the topics you might develop further in a piece of writing.

Here's one sample journal entry. You'll find ideas that the writer might develop further in a piece of writing:

> *The hot issue here has been rising gas prices. People in our town are mostly commuters who work in the state capitol and have to drive about 30 miles each way to and from work. One local gas station has been working with the gas company to establish a gas cooperative, where folks who joined would pay a bit less per gallon. I don't know whether I like this idea—it's like joining one of those stores where you have to pay to shop there. You've got to buy a lot to recoup your membership fee. I wonder if this is a ploy of the gas company???? Others were talking about starting a petition to the local commuter bus service, to add more routes and times, as the current service isn't enough to address workers' schedules and needs. Still others are talking about initiating a light rail system, but this is an alternative that will take a lot of years and won't address the situation immediately. I remember the gas crunch a number of years ago and remember that we simply started to carpool. In the Washington, DC area, with its huge traffic problems and large number of commuters, carpooling is so accepted that there are designated parking and pickup places along the highway, and it's apparently accepted for strangers to pull over, let those waiting know where they're headed, and offer rides. I'm not certain I'd go that far . . .*

### Freewriting

Freewriting is useful in many contexts, and it can be a valuable strategy for generating ideas for a specific writing assignment. Freewriting is just what it sounds like—writing freely whatever comes into your mind and without caring about spelling, punctuation, and the like. It's a way to free up your thoughts, help you understand where your interests lie, and get your fingers moving on the keyboard (and this physical act can be a way to get your thoughts flowing).

Try a series of timed freewriting sessions. Set a timer for five minutes. The object is to keep your fingers moving constantly, typing whatever thoughts come into your head during that time. If you can't think of anything to say, keep writing "I don't know" or "this is silly" until your thoughts move on. Stop when the timer rings. Shake out your hands, wait for a while, and then do more timed freewriting sessions. After you have five or so pieces of freewriting, review them to see if you've come back to certain topics or whether you recorded some ideas that might be the basis for a piece of writing.

Here's a sample freewriting that could yield a number of topics for writing:

> *I don't think this is useful or helpful in any way. This is stupid, stupid, stupid. I'm looking out of my window and it's the end of may and I can see that white cotton stuff flying around in the air, from the trees. One of my aunts was always allergic to that stuff when it started flying around in the spring. Don't know offhand what type of tree that comes from. That aunt is now 94 years old and is in a nursing home for a while after she had a bad episode. She seems to have one now every spring. It's like that old tree cotton triggers something in her body. Allergies. Spring. Trying to get the flowers to grow but one of the neighbors who is also in his 90s keeps feeding the squirrels and they come and dig up everyone's flowerbed to store their peanuts. Plant the flowers and within thirty minutes there's a peanut there. Wonder if anyone has grown peanut bushes yet? Don't know . . . know . . .*

Possible topics from this freewriting exercise are as follows:

- Allergy causes
- Allergies on the rise in the United States
- Consequences of humanizing wild animals
- Growing your own food

Freewriting is an especially helpful strategy when you do not have a particular writing prompt to respond to. If your instructor has given you free reign for the assignment, it's an excellent place to start. But it can also be useful when you do have a specific prompt. When given a prompt with less leeway, start by just writing anything you know about that topic, and see where your **freewrite** takes you!

### Asking Defining Questions

One more way to develop your ideas is to ask **defining questions**. If you have a broad topic you want to write about, but don't quite know how to narrow it, ask defining questions to help you develop your main idea for writing.

**Example:**

I want to write about school taxes.

- Why do only property owners (and not renters) in New York State pay school taxes?
- What percent of overall school funding comes from school taxes?
- Do other states fund schools in the same way?
- Does the state lottery system, initially designed to fund schools, actually support schools?
- Is there a limit to paying school taxes when one gets older and no longer has children in school?

Once you have your questions, you can work with the list to group related questions, and then decide whether your writing can logically deal with a number of the questions together or only one. Use questioning to help develop a focus for your writing.

## Lesson 5.3: Outlining

### Lesson 5.3 Introduction

Most books, especially nonfiction books, have a table of contents. Sometimes the table of contents is very detailed, with each chapter broken down into its various sections with corresponding page numbers, as is the case with some textbooks. In such cases, the table of contents is very much like an outline: It visually represents the structure of a text.

Outlining, then, is a good example of how to go about ordering and drafting your work, an essential stage in the writing process. You can create an outline to lend order and structure to your own ideas *before* they become part of a completed paper. The outline can act as a scaffolding for constructing your paper. Or you might think of the outline as a mold to be filled in with the shape of your argument. Once you're familiar with the basic structure of an outline, you may find that the structure itself can guide you in effectively arranging your ideas.

Ultimately, you'll need a strategy for transforming your thoughts, analyses, arguments, and research into an organized, logical paper. Outlining can help you get there.

### Anatomy of an Outline

In an outline, the information is laid out in an ordered system consisting of headings and subheadings as well as capitalized and uncapitalized Roman numerals, letters, and numbers. This method provides an efficient and logical way to present information and show how it is related.

**Sample Outline**

Title

A. Heading 1
B. Heading 2
    1. Subheading 1
    2. Subheading 2
        i. _________
        ii. _________
            a. _________
            b. _________
                1. _________
                2. _________

To use the outlining method correctly, you'll first need to understand the four rules it follows: parallelism, coordination, subordination, and division. Let's go over each rule.

**Parallelism**

The first rule of outlining is parallelism. This means headings of the same level should be of the same kind. For instance, if the first heading is a verb, the second heading should also be a verb.

**Example:**

1. Three types of muscle tissue
    A. Skeletal muscle
    B. Cardiac muscle
    C. Smooth muscle

In the example of an outline for a chapter on muscle tissue, the headings "Skeletal muscle," "Cardiac muscle," and "Smooth muscle" are of the same level because they are ordered with a capital letter. In this case, they obey the rule of parallelism by all being nouns.

**Coordination**

The second rule of outlining is coordination. This means that all of the information contained in Heading 1 should have the same significance as the information contained in Heading 2. The same goes for the subheadings. In other words, headings and subheadings of the same level should be of the same rank, which means the same level of importance.

**Example:**

A. Skeletal muscle
B. Cardiac muscle
C. Smooth muscle
    1. Definition
    2. Description
    3. Examples

In the example, the headings "A," "B," and "C" are of the same rank, while the numbers "1," "2," and "3" are also of the same rank.

**Subordination**

The third rule of outlining is subordination. This means that the information in the headings should be more general, while the information in the subheadings should be more specific. The movement from general to specific information is indicated by indenting from left to right.

**Example:**

A. Skeletal muscle
    1. Definition
        i. Found throughout the body
        ii. Voluntary
        iii. Responsible for movement

In this example, "Found throughout the body," "Voluntary," and "Responsible for movement" are specific examples of the more general category "Definition." This relationship is displayed by indenting from left to right.

### Division

The fourth and final rule of outlining is division. This means that each heading must have at least two subheadings in order to be divided. If you can't divide a heading into at least two parts, then it doesn't require subheadings.

**Example:**

I. Three types of muscle tissue
  A. Skeletal muscle
  B. Cardiac muscle
    i. Definition
        a. Found in the heart
        b. Involuntary
        c. Pump blood into circulatory system
    ii. Description

In the example, the heading "Three types of muscle tissue" is broken down into two subheadings—"A" and "B." "B" is further broken down into two subheadings—"i" and "ii." And "i" is even further refined by being broken down into three subheadings.

## Traditional Outlining

In many of your courses, you'll be asked to write a traditional, thesis-based research essay. In this structure, you provide a thesis (usually at the end of your introduction), body paragraphs that support your thesis with research, and a conclusion to emphasize the key points of your paper. You'll likely encounter this type of assignment in classes in the humanities, but you may also be asked to write a traditional research paper in business classes and some introductory courses in the sciences and social sciences.

In the following example, you'll see a basic structure that can be modified to fit the length of your assignment. It's important to note that in shorter papers, each point of your outline might correspond to a single paragraph, but in longer papers, you might develop each supporting point over several paragraphs.

### Sample Traditional Outline

I. Introduction
    i. background, context for topic

    ii. transition to thesis
    iii. thesis statement
II. Supporting Point 1
    i. supporting detail
        1. example 1
        2. example 2
    ii. supporting detail
        1. example 1
        2. example 2
    iii. supporting detail
        1. example 1
        2. example 2
III. Supporting Point 2
IV. Supporting Point 3
V. Supporting Point 4
VI. Conclusion
    i. review the central ideas presented in the body and make connection to the thesis
    ii. transition to closing thoughts
    iii. closing thoughts

## IMRAD Outlining

In many of your courses in the sciences and social sciences (such as sociology, psychology, and biology), you may be required to write a research paper using the IMRAD format. **IMRAD** stands for Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. In this format, you present your research and discuss your methods for gathering research. Each section of the IMRAD structure can take several paragraphs to develop.

This structure is also sometimes referred to as the *APA format*, but be sure not to confuse this with the APA style for documentation of your paper.

### Sample IMRAD Outline

I. Introduction
    i. provide research question
    ii. explain the significance
    iii. review background or known information on your topic
II. Methods
    i. describe your methods for gathering information
    ii. explain your sources of information, both primary and secondary
III. Results
    i. describe what you found out from your research
    ii. develop each point thoroughly, as this is the main section of your research paper
IV. Discussion
    i. explain the significance of your findings
    ii. describe how they support your thesis
    iii. discuss the limitations of your research

# MODULE 6

# ORGANIZATIONAL MECHANICS

## Introduction

Before you begin to draft a research paper or an essay, it's important to think about how you're going to organize your thoughts and ideas. This might involve creating an outline or using another prewriting strategy, such as idea mapping. The important thing is to list out your thesis as well as your main ideas to help you visualize where you are going with your paper and to determine whether you have enough support for your focus.

After you have a thesis and enough information to support it, you can begin drafting. **Drafting** involves developing the paragraphs of your writing—including an introduction and a conclusion—and establishing a relationship among them. You make choices about how much information to offer and what information to put where. When drafting, you might discover that you need to revise the order of information within a paragraph—or even whole paragraphs within the essay.

Consider the following points as you draft:

- Have you found enough evidence to support your assertions? Or do you need to gather more information?
- Do you need to present a basic idea first so that readers understand subsequent ideas?
- Can you identify related ideas that you should logically group together?
- Are some ideas more important than others and, if so, where in the essay should you emphasize those ideas?
- Can you establish logical links between ideas so that readers don't get lost moving between ideas?

## Lesson 6.1: Structure of an Essay

### Lesson 6.1 Introduction

In many of your courses, you'll be asked to write a traditional, thesis-based research paper. This structure includes the following elements:

- An **introduction** that captures your reader's attention and sets the stage for the rest of the essay.
- A **thesis sentence** (usually at the end of your introduction) that presents the topic of your essay and your main assertion about that topic.
- **Body paragraphs** featuring clear topic sentences that support your thesis with research and textual evidence.
- A **conclusion** that emphasizes the key points of your essay.

Your humanities instructors will likely assign these types of papers, but you also might be asked to write them in business classes and some introductory courses in the sciences and social sciences. Make sure you're familiar with traditional essay structure, the purpose of each element, and the role each plays in the larger objective of the essay.

## Traditional Essay Structure

An essay is based on a series of ideas and assertions in the thesis and topic sentences (which are like mini-thesis sentences). But an essay is more than a series of ideas. An essay expands on its thesis and topic sentence ideas with supporting evidence, such as examples, explanations, and information. An essay also leads the reader into the thesis sentence idea, supports that idea and convinces the reader of its validity, and then re-emphasizes the main idea. In other words, an essay has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

## Thesis and Topic Sentences

Although college essays can offer ideas in many ways, one standard structure for expository essays is to offer the main idea or assertion early in the essay and then provide categories of support.

Think about how a lawyer makes a case. One way to think about this standard essay structure is to compare it to a courtroom argument in a television drama. The lawyer asserts, “My client is not guilty.” Then, the lawyer provides different reasons for lack of guilt: no physical evidence placing the client at the crime scene, the client had an alibi, and the client had no motive for the crime.

In writing terms, the main idea or assertion is the **thesis sentence**, and the different examples of support are the **topic sentences**.

Recall that the thesis sentence is the key to most academic writing. This is important and worth repeating: The thesis sentence is the key to most academic writing.

The thesis sentence is the one sentence that encapsulates the result of your thinking, as it offers your main insight or argument in condensed form.

A basic thesis sentence has two main parts:

1. **Topic:** What you’re writing about
2. **Angle:** What your main idea is about that topic

Sample Thesis #1

- Thesis: A regular exercise regime leads to multiple benefits, both physical and emotional.
- Topic: Regular exercise regime
- Angle: Leads to multiple benefits

Sample Thesis #2

- Thesis: Adult college students have different experiences than typical, younger college students.
- Topic: Adult college students
- Angle: Have different experiences

Sample Thesis #3

- Thesis: The economics of television have made the viewing experience challenging for many viewers because shows are not offered regularly, similar programming occurs at the same time, and commercials are rampant.
- Topic: Television viewing
- Angle: Challenging because shows shifted, similar programming, and commercials

## Topic Sentences

In academic writing, many paragraphs or groups of paragraphs start with topic sentences, which are like mini–thesis statements. Topic sentences are idea indicators or *signs* that help guide a reader along from idea to idea.

Once you have determined what organizational strategy you will use and have an outline of your paper, drafting topic sentences for that outline will help you determine if your paragraphs are focused or if you need multiple paragraphs to discuss all of your supporting points. Realize that all paragraphs do not need topic sentences. Sometimes, if you have a lot of supporting information, you might need multiple paragraphs to help explain one topic sentence. You do need, however, a topic sentence for each group of paragraphs in a piece of academic writing.

Topic sentences have a topic and an angle, just like thesis sentences. But the **angle of topic sentences** usually is smaller in range than that of the thesis sentence. Often, the topic remains the same from thesis to topic sentence, while the angle shifts as the writer brings in various types of ideas and evidence to support the angle in the thesis.

Look at the following table that shows several topic sentences created from one thesis sentence. The topic (regular exercise) remains the same in all of the sentences, and the general angle (benefits of exercise) remains the same. But the angle narrows and shifts slightly from topic sentence to topic sentence as the writer brings in different supporting ideas and research.

| Thesis Sentence | Topic | Angle |
|---|---|---|
| A regular exercise regime creates multiple benefits, both physical and emotional. | Regular exercise | Physical and emotional benefits |

| Topic Sentence | Topic | Angle |
|---|---|---|
| One physical benefit of having a regular exercise regime is longevity. Recent studies have shown that… | Regular exercise | Physical benefit of longevity |
| Exercise reduces heart and cholesterol rates when done at least three times per week… | Regular exercise | Physical benefit of reduced cholesterol |
| Another physical benefit of regular exercise is that it results in a stronger heart and lungs… | Regular exercise | Physical benefit of stronger heart and lungs |
| People who exercise regularly have less trouble with sleep disorders… | Regular exercise | Physical benefit of less trouble sleeping |
| A benefit that spans the physical and emotional results of regular exercise is the release of endorphins, or substances produced by glands as a byproduct of exercise… | Regular exercise | Physical and emotional benefits of endorphins |

| Topic Sentence (continued) | Topic (continued) | Angle |
|---|---|---|
| In multiple studies, regular exercise has been shown to reduce stress… | Regular exercise | Physical and emotional benefits of reduced stress |
| Because regular exercise helps individuals maintain a healthy body weight and slows the effects of aging, people who exercise regularly experience the emotional benefits of having a positive self-image and improved confidence… | Regular exercise | Emotional benefit of positive self-image and improved confidence |

Here are a few more examples of how supporting topic sentences develop out of the main assertion in a thesis sentence. The topic sentences clarify the reasons the writer has taken a particular stance:

**Example:**

**Thesis sentence (assertion).**

The twenty-first century workforce requires a unique set of skills.

**Topic sentence (reason) 1.**

Because they're dealing with such rapid changes in the workplace, twentieth-century workers need to be flexible and adaptable.

**Topic sentence (reason) 2.**

To navigate constant updates to technology and products, twentieth-century workers need to get familiar with effective learning strategies.

**Topic sentence (reason) 3.**

Most of all, because many workers in the twentieth century are in remote offices spread across many locations, they need to develop good communication skills.

As you can see, the ideas in the supporting topic sentences in an essay should develop out of the main assertion or argument in the thesis sentence.

### Developing Body Paragraphs

As we have already discussed, a body paragraph should develop a single idea that relates to the main claim of the paper. This single idea should be identified in a topic sentence that appears at the beginning of the body paragraph. To achieve coherence in a body paragraph, you need a strong topic sentence that identifies the point the paragraph is trying to prove, and then you can repeat key terms or you can use transitions, pronouns, or parallel structure throughout the rest of the paragraph.

## Lesson 6.2: Building Body Paragraphs

## Lesson 6.2 Introduction

Body paragraphs are the heart and soul of your paper. That's why it's crucial that you examine them closely, both individually and as part of the larger whole.

The following questions will guide you through that examination:

- Does each paragraph contain specific information, vivid description, or solid examples that illustrate the point you are making?
- Can you add other facts, quotations, examples, or descriptions that will more clearly illustrate or provide evidence for your assertions?
- Can you delete any sentences, words, descriptions, or information that don't add value or that might confuse the reader?
- Are the paragraphs in the right order?
- Are your paragraphs overly long? Does each paragraph explore only one main idea?
- Do you need to eliminate redundancies in paragraphs or parts of paragraphs?
- Do you use clear transitions, so the reader can follow your thinking?

## Building Strong Paragraphs

When it's time to draft your research paper and bring your content together for your audience, you will be working to build strong paragraphs. Your paragraphs will focus on presenting the information you found in your source material and commenting on or analyzing that information. It's not enough to simply present the information in your body paragraphs and move on. You want to give that information a purpose and connect it to your main idea or thesis statement.

In an academic research paper, your body paragraphs will include summarized, paraphrased, and quoted source material. One way to effectively organize this information in your paragraphs is to use what Duke University has coined the **MEAL Plan**, explained as follows:

| MEAL | Explanation |
|---|---|
| **M = Main Idea** | Your first sentence should be a topic sentence that presents the main idea of your paragraph in your own words. This paragraph's main idea should connect to the overall main idea of your paper. |
| **E = Evidence** | Provide clear evidence that supports the main idea. You can summarize, paraphrase, or quote the evidence; just be sure to cite it. |
| **A = Analysis** | After you have presented the evidence, comment on it. Explain the evidence to your audience in your own words, connecting it to your overall main idea and helping the audience understand why the idea is relevant and important. |
| **L = Lead Out** | At the end of your paragraph, provide a wrap-up sentence or sentences that summarize the main idea of the paragraph, connect that idea to the larger main idea of your paper, and help transition to the next paragraph. |

How do you know when you have enough information in one paragraph and need to start a new one? Find places in the essay where the focus shifts, and put paragraph breaks in those places.

You can do your best to paragraph as you draft, but keep in mind that you'll need to revisit paragraphing during the revision process.

### Transitions

When writing, you need to lead your readers from one idea to the next, showing how your ideas—both within paragraphs and from one paragraph to the next—are logically connected. To do this, you use **transitions**—words or phrases that indicate links between ideas. Writers often check their transitions during the revising stage of the writing process.

All transitions prepare your audience for what's coming up next. For example, a transition can help you communicate to your reader that you're about to provide evidence to support your assertion. Or, a transition can tell your readers that the information they're about to read might counteract the information you've previously discussed.

Although all transitions demonstrate a relationship between ideas, you want to carefully select your transitions on the basis of the type of relationship you want to show. For example, if you're writing an academic research paper that deals with a sequence of events, you would want to select transitions that show how those events relate to each other in time.

Following are some common words and phrases that you can use to make clear transitions between ideas and even paragraphs:

**Transitions**

| To Show a Time Relationship | To Demonstrate Cause and Effect | To Compare and Contrast Ideas | To Introduce an Example | To Bring an Essay to a Close |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Previously | Consequently | In contrast | For example | In conclusion |
| Subsequently | Therefore | On the contrary | To illustrate | To summarize |
| First | As a result | Conversely | For instance | In summary |
| Last | For this reason | Instead | In fact | To sum up |
| Next | Because | Although | Indeed | In short |
| Meanwhile | Hence | However | Of course | As you can see |
| Concurrently | Thus | Likewise | That is | Clearly |

### Integrating Sources

As a scholar, you should demonstrate that you have carefully read and considered your source material by effectively integrating that material into your research papers. When you thoughtfully integrate your sources, your readers see not only your ideas but also your points contextualized by the conversations of others. In this way, you establish yourself as one of the members of the community of scholars engaged in the same idea.

As you know, when you develop your essay, you'll use source material to offer specific support for the points you're making. You're able to develop support using three different integration strategies:

1. **Summarizing** main ideas.
2. **Paraphrasing** supporting materials
3. **Quoting** specific text.

Let's take a closer look at each strategy.

### Summarizing

One way to integrate your source information is by using summaries. When you summarize a text, you restate the main ideas in your own words. Remember: summaries usually are substantially shorter than the original text because they don't include extensive supporting material. Instead, they only include the overarching idea of an article, a page, or a paragraph.

Consider the following paragraph, written in 2018:

> *Things feel strained these days in America. Both sides of the aisle are morally tied to their positions, and pretty much unwilling to budge on anything. Arguments—whether they be for common-sense gun laws, the protection of the second amendment, pro-life, pro-choice, fighting for the defense of the environment or fighting for mankind's rights towards comfort and progress—seem more polarized than ever, virtually unwinnable to anyone who is actually willing to engage in them. That said, most of us stay put, hidden in our corners of the ring, surrounded only by our closest allies, and never venturing to speak with the other side. We poo-poo the arguments that counter us and shut ourselves off to the possibility that there is any sense to be made in opinions of those with whom we disagree. The conduct of these rare conversations, furthermore, has gone down the toilet. We slam each other on social media, hiding behind fake screen names. And we gang up against each other in ways we don't even see our children do on the playground. Until we begin to reengage with one another—asking questions without trying to convince "the other" of our own points of view, undertaking projects with people of differing political beliefs—we don't stand a chance at finding unity.*

To summarize this passage, you first have to identify its main idea. Then you put that idea in your own words. The following is one way the passage might be summarized:

> *In this 2018 passage, the author argues that we need to do more listening and less talking in order to overcome the divisiveness of the current political climate; that if we keep acting like children and surrounding ourselves with only-like minded individuals, nothing will change.*

This summary accomplishes two goals:

1. It contextualizes the information (who said it, when, and where—if possible).
2. It lists the main ideas of the passage without using quotations or citing specific supporting points of the passage.

### Paraphrasing

When you want to use specific material from an argument to support a point you are making in your paper but want to avoid using too many quotes, you should paraphrase. Paraphrases are generally as long—and sometimes longer—than the original text. When you paraphrase, you use your own words to explain the specific points another writer has made. If the original text refers to an idea or term discussed earlier in the text, your paraphrase also needs to explain or define that idea.

Be careful not to add to your paraphrasing any information or commentary that isn't part of the original passage. You don't want to alter the meaning of the original passage. Present your comments and analysis after you have finished your paraphrase and cited it appropriately.

Paraphrases should begin by making it clear that the information to come is from your source. If you are using APA style, a year citation should follow your mention of the author.

Let's recall this excerpt of the first chapter from Henry David Thoreau's 1854 book, Walden; or, Life in the Woods:

> *Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.*

Using the Thoreau passage as an example, you might begin a paraphrase like this:

> *Even though Thoreau (1854) praised the virtues of the intellectual life, he did not consider….*

Paraphrases sometimes might include brief quotations, but most of the paraphrase should be in your own words.

What might a paraphrase of this passage from Thoreau look like? Here's an example:

> *Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market.*

To paraphrase this passage, you first have to identify its main ideas. Then, put *each* of those ideas in your own words. So, unlike a summary—which condenses meaning into a brief account—a paraphrase provides the entire meaning in another form.

The following is one way the Thoreau passage might be paraphrased:

> *In his text,* Walden; or, Life in the Woods, *Henry David Thoreau (1854) points to the incongruity of free men becoming enslaved and limited by constant labor and worry. Using the metaphor of a fruit to represent the pleasures of a thoughtful life, Thoreau suggests that men have become so traumatized by constant labor that their hands—as representative of their minds—have become unable to pick the fruits available to a less burdened life even when that fruit becomes available to them (p. 110).*

Note that the paraphrased passage is almost exactly the same length as the original text. It's also important to note that the paraphrase has a different structure and significant changes in wording.

The main ideas are the same, but the student has paraphrased effectively by putting the information into her own words.

This paraphrase accomplishes three goals:

1. Like the summary, it contextualizes the information (who said it, when, and where).
2. It restates all of Thoreau's supporting points that develop the idea that man is hurt by focusing too much on labor.
3. Because it uses the writer's own words, it retains the writer's strong voice while sharing important information from the source.

### Using Quotations

Quotations are another way to integrate source information into your paragraphs, but you should use them sparingly.

How do you know when you should use quotations in your essay? Essentially, quotations should function to support, comment on, or give an example of a point you are making in your own words. And, of course, you should keep in mind that quotes should be kept to a minimum. A good "rule" to remember is that you only want to use a quote when it's absolutely necessary, when your source puts something in a way that just needs to be put that way or when you need a quote from an expert to support a point you have already made.

You should also remember that you don't want to use quotations to make your point for you. Readers should be able to skip the quotations in your paper and still understand all your main points. This means, after each quote, you have to provide analysis for that quote. This works well if you follow the MEAL plan. The idea is to help your audience gather the meaning from the quote you want them to gather. It's your job as a writer to make the quote meaningful for your audience.

Integrating quotations smoothly and effectively is one sign of a truly polished writer. Well-chosen and well-integrated quotations add strength to an argument. But many new writers do not know how to do the choosing and integrating effectively. The following guidelines will help make your quotations operate not as stumbling blocks to a reader, but as smooth and easy stepping-stones through the pathways of your paper.

Use quotations in the following situations:

- When the wording is so specific to the meaning that you cannot change the wording without changing the meaning.
- When the wording is poetic or unique, and you want to maintain that unique quality of wording as part of the point you are making. This guideline may also apply when the wording is highly technically-specific.
- When you are doing a critical/literary analysis of a text.
- When you want to maintain the specific authority of the words of a well-known or highly-reputable author in order to add to the credibility of your own argument.
- In most other cases, you should use your own words, a summary, or a paraphrase of your source, to make your point.

## Lesson 6.3: Writing Introductions and Conclusions

### Lesson 6.3 Introduction

The introduction and conclusion of an essay serve an important purpose: They create a frame for the body of an essay that helps your audience better understand your writing. The introduction prepares your readers for the ideas that you discuss in the body. The conclusion provides important reminders about the key points from the body and gives you an opportunity to leave a lasting impression on your audience.

Just because the introduction comes at the beginning of any essay doesn't mean you have to write it first. Many writers compose their introductions last, after they are sure of the main points of their essay and have had time to construct a thought-provoking beginning and a clear, cogent thesis statement. But if you're able to draft an introduction as you begin your essay, it can certainly help you get going with your drafting and give you some nice direction as you develop your body paragraphs.

Most likely, you'll draft your conclusion after you've established the topics of your body paragraphs and have a firm sense of the essay's direction. Just like your introduction, your conclusion should fit well with the rest of your essay. It should logically—and organically—bring your discussion to a close.

## Create an Introduction with Purpose

A good introduction is important to any kind of writing. First, it captures your readers' attention and makes them want to read on. But it also has other, more important work to do. Following are several purposes that you might want your introduction to serve, along with example introductory statements for each:

- **To alert readers to what the central issue of the paper is.**
  **Example:** *Few people realize how much the overuse of antibiotics for livestock is responsible for the growth of antimicrobial-resistant bacteria, which are now found in great abundance in our waterways.*

- **To provide readers with important background information before the thesis is revealed.**
  **Example:** *One hundred years ago, there were only 8,000 cars in the United States and only 144 miles of paved roads. In 2005, the Department of Transportation recorded 247,421,120 registered passenger vehicles in the United States, and more than 5.7 million miles of paved highway. This change reflects how dramatically the automobile has changed our way of life during the last century.*

- **To describe why you have written the paper and what readers should understand about your topic and perspective.**
  **Example:** *Although history books have not always presented it accurately, operating the Underground Railroad was a biracial endeavor whereby black and white abolitionists coordinated secret escape routes for those who were enslaved.*

- **To tell readers what to expect and what to look for in your paper.**
  **Example:** *In 246 BCE, Ctesibius of Alexandria invented a musical instrument that would develop into what we know as the organ. Called a hydraulis, it functioned via wind pressure regulated by means of water pressure. The hydraulis became the instrument played at circuses, banquets, and games throughout Mediterranean countries.*

### Introductory Strategies

Although there is no one right way to craft your introduction, you can rely on several common introductory strategies if you are feeling stuck and having a difficult time getting started. Consider starting your essay with the following:

- An anecdote
- A pithy quotation
- An image or vivid imagery
- A question
- A startling fact or statistic

Any of these introductory items will spark your readers' interest. Just make sure that the introduction, as a whole, helps put your topic in some useful context for the audience. Let's take a closer look at a couple of these strategies.

**Anecdote Example:**

> *One day, while riding in the car, my five-year-old son asked me why my name was different from his daddy's. I welcomed the opportunity to explain some of my feminist ideas, especially my strong belief that women did not need to take their husband's name upon marriage. I carefully explained my reasons for keeping my own surname. My son listened intently and was silent for a moment after I finished.*
>
> *Then he nodded and said, "I think it's good you kept your own name, Mom!"*
>
> *"You do?" I asked, pleased that he understood my reasons.*
>
> *"Yep, because you don't look like a Bob."*

**Question Example:**

> *The study of anthropology and history reveals that cultures vary in their ideas of moral behavior. But are there any absolutes when it comes to right and wrong?*

Of course, these are just a couple of examples of how you might get your introduction started. Keep in mind that your introduction has to be more than just the initial strategy you employ; it has to orient and prepare the readers. Once you have your readers' attention, you want to provide a context for your topic and begin to transition to your thesis, which usually appears near or at the end of your introduction.

## A Note on Academic Tonality

When writing a formal research paper and other academic papers, you'll want to use what is typically called the **academic voice**, which is meant to sound objective, authoritative, rational, and reasonable. This is especially critical when it comes to your introductions and conclusions, as they provide the first and last flavor notes that your reader will begin and end on. If you can remind them through your tone that you're someone worth listening to, your essay will be stronger from the get-go.

When writing your introductions and conclusions, it's safe to assume that your audience will include an instructor. Using academic voice allows you to clearly demonstrate to that instructor your ability to articulate knowledge and experience, as if one intellectual were talking to another. Keep in mind that while you might feel strongly about your topic, and your essay might include your opinions, you should strive to maintain a professional tone, rather than a friendly or intimate one. Obviously, this is important throughout the essay; but especially so in the introduction and conclusion.

However, it's important to note that even the most formal academic voice does not need to include convoluted sentence structures or abstract, stilted language, as some believe. Academic voice does not have to be boring! All readers appreciate a vigorous, lively voice, so write clearly, using active sentence structures and avoiding jargon. For example, instead of writing, “The utilization of teams as a way of optimizing our capacity to meet and prioritize our goals will impact the productivity of the company.” Make the language more dynamic, eliminate the jargon, and instead write, “Teams will execute the goals and enhance the company’s output.”

And remember: Some academic writing will require a more personal tone, such as when you are writing a formal narrative essay or perhaps an ethnography (study of a culture) paper. In general, the academic voice is formal, but the extent of that formality might vary depending on the situation and assignment.

### Use Conclusions to Provide Closure

A conclusion achieves two objectives: It reiterates your main points, and it brings your essay to a satisfying close. But to truly make your conclusion successful, it should remind the readers of your clear argument and strong supporting evidence—and point out the importance or worthiness of your topic and perspective.

**TIP:** Your conclusions should not introduce any new ideas—though new insight or deeper introspection is welcome!

You must consider who the readers are and the conclusion you want them to reach. For example, are they unfamiliar to your topic? If so, you simply might want to restate your thesis and main points as a way to start the conclusion. But just restating the thesis isn’t enough. Ideally, you want your conclusion to have a **clincher** that leaves a strong impression on readers.

Here are a few examples of clinchers:

- A rhetorical question that urges the reader to consider how the world would be different, or lives would be changed, if people were to adopt your perspective, plan, or idea.
- A quote that demonstrates the validity of your judgment or stance.
- A statement that points out the limitations of the present understanding of your topic and calls for future research or analysis.

# MODULE 7

# ARGUMENT AND CRITICAL THINKING

## Introduction

Nearly all scholarly writing makes an argument. The purpose is to create and share new knowledge that can be debated to confirm, disconfirm, or improve that knowledge. This type of arguing takes place mostly in journals and scholarly books and at conferences. It’s called the **scholarly conversation**, and it’s this conversation that moves forward what we humans know.

Your scholarly writing for classes should do the same—make an argument—just like your professors’ journal article, scholarly book, or conference presentation writing does. (You may not have realized that the writing you’re required to do mirrors what scholars all over the university, country, and world must do to create new knowledge and debate it.) Of course, you may be a beginner at constructing arguments in writing, while most professors have been at it for some time. And your audience (for now) may be more limited than your professors’. But the process is much the same. As you complete your research and writing assignments, you, too, are entering the scholarly conversation. You are making arguments.

## Lesson 7.1: Types of Arguments

### Lesson 7.1 Introduction

Making an argument means trying to convince others that you are correct as you describe a thing, situation, relationship, or phenomenon and/or to persuade them to take a particular action. Important not just in college, this skill will be necessary for nearly every professional job you hold after college. So, learning how to make an argument is good job preparation, even if you do not choose a scholarly career.

To start your learning about how to construct arguments, this lesson introduces you to four types of arguments: causal argument, definition argument, narrative argument, and proposal argument.

### Causal Argument

A **causal argument** focuses on how something has caused, or has led to, some particular problem. A causal argument answers a how or why question: How did things get to be the way they are? Why did something happen?

A causal argument is an important argument type, as people are often looking for the reasons that things happened but may not be sure or have all of the necessary information. In your causal argument, you get the chance to make these things clear.

**Examples:**

- An argumentative essay stating why the United States has a high number of children who are food insecure

- An argumentative essay explaining why Facebook remains popular despite privacy complaints
- An argumentative essay exploring the specific causes of climate change

### Causal Structure

Creating a well-developed argumentative structure is similar to putting together a puzzle. Each piece has certain characteristics and belongs in a particular place to create the whole picture. Although there may always be variations, a good basic outline for a causal argument might look like this.

**First Piece:** In your introduction, which may be more than one paragraph, summarize the details of the issue. This may take one or two paragraphs. End with a thesis statement that makes an assertion about causes or what led to something.

**Second Piece**: Present your detailed support for your claim with a focus on the reasons something has happened or a sequence of events that led to something.

**Third Piece**: Address the opposing views. What problems exist with your claim? Be sure to bring the focus back to your points in relation to the causes or sequence of events you address.

**Fourth Piece**: Finally, in the conclusion, summarize the main points of your essay and relate your issue to the bigger picture. If you see the current situation as something that needs to change, you can call for change here, but your focus should be on emphasizing the causes of something.

**TIPS:** When writing a causal argument, it's important to keep your paper focused. Choose a narrow topic, one in which you can trace the reasons or the sequence of events clearly and succinctly.

Be sure to avoid connecting a series of improbable or illogical events in your argument. Be sure the sequence of events or reasons you provide make sense and are logical.

## Definition Argument

The **definition argument** focuses on clarifying a definition for a controversial term or concept. In other words, a definition argument asserts that we cannot make clear assertions or possess a clear understanding of an issue until we know exactly what the terms mean.

**Examples:**

- An argumentative essay reexamining the birth control requirements in the Affordable Care Act while explaining what birth control is, what the options are, and how these options work
- An argumentative essay calling for an end to the two-party system of government in the United States while defining what the two-party system is and what the laws are related to it
- An argumentative essay describing the benefits of organic foods while defining what organic means

### Definition Structure

Creating a well-developed argumentative structure is similar to putting together a puzzle. Each piece has certain characteristics and belongs in a particular place to create the whole picture.

Although there may always be variations, a good basic outline for a definition argument might look like this.

**First Piece**: In your introduction, which may be more than one paragraph, summarize the details of the problem. End with a thesis that presents your claim.

**Second Piece**: Provide detailed definitions of the key term or terms. This may take one or two paragraphs.

**Third Piece**: Present detailed support for your claim with a focus on how your claims work within the definition of the term. You should present at least three key ideas for support, so this section should be at least three paragraphs long.

**Fourth Piece**: Address the opposing views. What problems exist with your claim? Be sure to bring the focus back to your points in relation to the definition of the term.

**Fifth Piece**: Finally, in your conclusion, summarize your main points of your essay and relate your issue to the bigger picture. Make it clear to your audience that a new-found understanding of the issue leads to a better understanding and support for your claim.

**TIPS:** When writing a definition argument, it's important to keep your paper focused. Choose an issue in which there is a clear misunderstanding of a term or terms. Focus on those terms in relation to your claim.

If you're having trouble thinking of topics for a definition argument, read a little bit about what is going on in the world. Look for issues related to misunderstandings over what certain terms mean.

## Narrative Argument

A **narrative argument** focuses on a story, usually presented in chronological order, to make some kind of point. When you are writing a narrative argument, that point is persuasive or argumentative.

**Examples:**

1. You want to make a point about gun control and argue for stricter gun control laws. In this type of essay, you may not make this actual argument until the end. Instead, you could focus on telling a story about a child who was killed because someone should not have had access to a gun.
2. You want to write an essay about climate change but know your audience is emotional about the topic. Instead of presenting statistics, tell the story of one location that has experienced some negative effects of climate change. Focus on the story of the people who have been affected.

### Structure

You're likely to see a lot of variation in the structure of narrative arguments. In many cases, your professor may want you to write a traditional introduction with a thesis statement and then use the body of the paper to tell your story. You may also be asked to include a traditional conclusion at the end.

However, you may encounter opportunities to write narrative arguments that save the thesis statement until the end or even use an implied thesis statement.

When writing a narrative argument, you may have options, such as the following:

**Narrative Argument Structural Options**

| *Option 1* | *Option 2* | *Option 3* |
|---|---|---|
| • Traditional introduction (with thesis at the end)<br>• Body (story, usually following chronological order)<br>• Traditional conclusion (summarize main idea and emphasize thesis) | • Narrative story (usually following chronological order)<br>• Conclusion with a thesis | • Narrative story (usually following chronological order)<br>• Thesis not presented, just implied |

No matter which structure you follow, it's a good idea to review the elements of a good narrative.

**TIPS:** Be sure that your story has a clear theme or main idea and that it lines up exactly with your thesis. You don't want to send mixed messages to your audience.

You'll also want to check with your professor, ask her about your options, and review some sample narrative arguments (if they're available).

## Proposal Argument

A **proposal argument** focuses on presenting some kind of proposal as a solution to a problem, outlining the details of the proposal, and providing good reasons to support the proposal.

This type of essay works well if you see a problem you want to fix or see a change you want to make. For example, it's not enough to argue that cigarette smoking is bad for one's health. Most people would agree with that. But, you could make a good argument that a plan is needed to cut down smoking among teens who are becoming addicted to cigarettes.

### Proposal Structure

Creating a well developed argumentative structure is similar to putting together a puzzle. Each piece has certain characteristics and belongs in a particular place to create the whole picture. Although there may always be variations, a good basic outline for a proposal argument might look like this.

**First Piece**: In your introduction, which may be more than one paragraph, summarize the details of the problem. End with a thesis that presents your proposal.

**Second Piece**: Provide a detailed history of the problem. Give your audience background on the issue.

**Third Piece**: Present your proposal in detail. Explain how it would address the problem, be a better "fix" than current solutions, and exactly how your proposal would work. You need to think about the logistics—money, manpower, workability. This should take several paragraphs.

**Fourth Piece**: Address the opposing views. What problems might others see in your proposal? Address those and explain why your solution is the best solution to the problem.

**Fifth Piece**: Finally, in your conclusion, summarize your main points of your essay. This is a good place to give your audience something to do in order to make your proposal a reality.

**TIPS:** When writing a proposal argument, it's important not to take on too much, given the length of your assignment and the time you have to write your paper. Think about proposals that would work well given the constraints of the assignment.

If you have a choice in what to write, find something you feel passionately about. If you're going to be writing a specific proposal to solve a problem, it helps if you care about the problem.

Finally, think about your audience or readers as you plan and write. What kind of information do they need? What will be convincing to them?

## Lesson 7.2: Organizing Your Argument

### Lesson 7.2 Introduction

When most of us think of arguments, we think about winners and losers of arguments. Arguments— sometimes even academic arguments—can be strong and forceful. For example, an **Aristotelian,** or classical, argument is a strong *this is my assertion and here's why I am right* style of argument. But that approach isn't going to work in all situations. When your readers are really difficult—in the sense that you know they aren't going to completely agree with your side of the issue—it can be a good idea to try to find a middle ground. The **Rogerian argument** finds that middle ground, and it organizes ideas accordingly.

A third approach is the **Toulmin method**. The Toulmin method, developed by philosopher Stephen Toulmin, is essentially a structure for analyzing arguments. The Toulmin elements for analysis are so clear and structured that many professors now have students write argumentative essays with the elements of the Toulmin method in mind.

### Aristotelian Argument

The **Aristotelian argument** or classical argument is a style developed by the famous Greek philosopher and rhetorician Aristotle. In this style of argument, your goal as a writer is to convince your readers of something. You can do so by using strategies that persuade your audience to adopt your side of the issue. Although **ethos**, **pathos**, and **logos**—in brief, the appeal to ethics or credibility, emotions, and logic, respectively—play a role in any style of argument, they are used in the Aristotelian argument in the most persuasive ways possible.

Of course, your professor may require some variations, but here is the basic format for an Aristotelian or classical argumentative essay:

1. **Introduce your issue.** At the end of your introduction, most professors will ask you to present your thesis. The idea is to present your readers with your main point and then dig into it.
2. **Present your case.** Explain the issue in detail and why something must be done or why a way of thinking is not working. This explanation will take several paragraphs.
3. **Address the opposition.** Use a few paragraphs to explain the other side. Refute the opposition one point at a time.
4. **Provide your proof.** After you address the other side, provide clear evidence that your side is the best side.
5. **Present your conclusion.** In your conclusion, remind the readers of your main point or thesis and summarize the key points of your argument. If you are arguing for some kind

of change, this is a good place to give your audience a call to action. Tell them what they could do to make a change.

## Rogerian Argument

Based on the work of psychologist Carl Rogers, the **Rogerian argument** focuses on finding a middle ground between the author and the audience. This style of argument can be extremely persuasive and can help you, as a writer, understand your own biases and how you might work to find common ground with others.

Here is a summary of the basic strategy for a Rogerian argument:

1. Introduce the problem.
2. Acknowledge the other side before you present your side of the issue. This may take several paragraphs.
3. Carefully present your side of the issue in a way that does not dismiss the other side. This may also take several paragraphs.
4. Bring the two sides together. Help your audience see the benefits of the middle ground. Make your proposal for the middle ground here, and be sure to use an even, respectful tone. This should be a key focus of your paper and may take several paragraphs.
5. Conclude by reminding your audience of the balanced perspective you have presented and making it clear how both sides benefit when they meet in the middle.

## Toulmin Argument

The **Toulmin method** of argument works well when there are no clear truths or absolute solutions to a problem. Toulmin arguments take into account the complex nature of most situations.

There are six elements for analyzing and, in the case of writing, presenting arguments that are important to the Toulmin method. These elements can help you as both a reader and a writer. When you're analyzing arguments as a reader, you can look for these elements to help you understand the argument and evaluate its validity. When you're writing an argument, you can include these same elements to ensure your audience will see the validity of your claims.

1. **Claim.** The claim is a statement of opinion that the author is asking his audience to accept as true.

    **Example:**

    There should be more laws to regulate texting while driving in order to cut down on dangerous car accidents.

2. **Grounds.** The grounds are the facts, data, and reasoning on which the claim is based. Essentially, the grounds make the case for the claim.

    **Example:**

    The National Safety Council estimates that 1.6 million car accidents per year are caused by cell phone use and texting.

3. **Warrant.** The warrant is what links the grounds to the claim. This is what makes the audience understand how the grounds support the claim. Sometimes, the warrant is *implicit* (not directly stated), but the warrant can be stated directly as well. As a writer, you

are making assumptions about what your readers already believe, so you have to think about how clear your warrant is and if you need to state it directly for your audience. You must also think about whether or not a warrant is actually an unproven claim.

> **Example:**
>
> Being distracted by texting while driving is dangerous and causes accidents.

4. **Backing.** The backing gives additional support for the claim by addressing different questions related to your claim.

> **Example:**
>
> Imposing greater fines and more education about the consequences might make people think twice about texting while driving.

5. **Qualifier.** The qualifier is essentially the limits to the claim or an understanding that the claim is not true in all situations. Qualifiers add strength to claims because they help the audience understand that the author does not expect her opinion to be true all of the time or for her ideas to work all of the time. If writers use qualifiers that are too broad, such as *always* or *never*, their claims can be really difficult to support. Qualifiers like *some* or *many* help limit the claim, which can add strength to the claim.

> **Example:**
>
> There should be more laws to regulate texting while driving in order to cut down on *some* of the dangerous car accidents that happen each year.

6. **Rebuttal.** The rebuttal is when the author addresses the opposing views. The author can use a rebuttal to preempt counterarguments, making the original argument stronger.

> **Example:**
>
> Although police officers are busy already, making laws against texting while driving a priority saves time, money, and lives. Local departments could add extra staff to address this important priority.

## Lesson 7.3: Pitfalls of Argumentation

### Lesson 7.3 Introduction

Arguments can inspire passion in writers and readers. It’s a benefit to be passionate about the topic of your argumentative paper, but beware of letting your interest in or commitment to your argument’s assertions lead you to make errors in presenting them.

In thinking about what mistakes to *not* make in an argument, start by considering the areas of logic and your audience. For example, you do not want to strike the wrong note when addressing your audience or to make mistakes in your reasoning. To help prevent these errors, address your audience mindfully and check that you have logically presented all of the elements of your argument.

### Offending an Audience

Be thoughtful about the audience of your argumentative essay. Your writing isn't just for you; part of your role as a writer is to keep the audience in mind when you write. Some students struggle with writing with their readers in mind because it may feel like they just can't say what they want to say. You may feel the same and may want to share your ideas the way you want to share your ideas—no matter what your audience thinks.

However, you have to remember that, unless you're keeping a personal journal, your writing is always for someone else as well. In fact, most of the time, you're going to need to be highly aware of your audience's needs when you are writing for college—and for work. Moreover, when you're writing argumentative papers on controversial topics, if you want to be persuasive, you have to think about what is going to work well to be persuasive for your given audience. Will your readers listen to you if you offend them? Probably not.

With that in mind, you'll want to make good rhetorical decisions when you write. This means considering what language will work for your audience, what kind of evidence will be persuasive, and how that evidence can be presented in the most convincing manner possible.

If you offend your readers, they won't listen to what you have to say. Although you may not be able to always convince your audience to see your side of an issue, you should at least be able to get them to listen to you and consider your points.

Remember, when you're writing an argument, you are writing for someone else.

## Logical Fallacies

An argumentative essay must be based on strong, logical reasoning. Logical fallacies are errors in reasoning that are based on poor or faulty logic. When presented in a formal argument, they can cause you to lose your credibility as a writer, so you have to be careful of them.

Sometimes, writers will purposefully use logical fallacies to make an argument seem more persuasive or more valid than it really is. In fact, the examples of fallacies described here might be scenarios you have heard or read about. Using fallacies might work in some situations but doing so is irresponsible for a writer; chances are that an academic audience will recognize the fallacy.

However, most of the time, students accidentally use logical fallacies in their arguments, so being aware of logical fallacies and understanding what they are can help you avoid them. Plus, being aware of these fallacies can help you recognize them when you are reading and looking for source material. You wouldn't want to use a source as evidence if the author included some faulty logic.

Here, we explain the major types of fallacies (straw man fallacy, the false dilemma fallacy, the hasty generalization fallacy, and the appeal to fear fallacy), give you examples, and help you avoid them in your arguments.

### Straw Man Fallacy

A **straw man fallacy** occurs when someone takes another person's argument or point, distorts or exaggerates it, and then attacks the extreme distortion, as if that is really the claim the first person is making.

> **Example:**
>
> Person 1: I think pollution from humans contributes to climate change.

> Person 2: So, you think humans are directly responsible for extreme weather, like hurricanes, and have caused the droughts in the Southwestern U.S.? If that's the case, maybe we just need to go to the Southwest and perform a rain dance.

Be careful not to fall into this kind of fallacy, even on a smaller scale, because it's quite easy to do. Think about the times you may have even accidentally misrepresented the other side in an argument. Avoid even the accidental straw man fallacy.

### False Dilemma Fallacy

Sometimes called the *either-or fallacy*, a **false dilemma fallacy** presents only two options or sides when there are many options or sides. Essentially, a false dilemma presents a black-and-white kind of thinking when there are actually many shades of gray.

> **Example:**
>
> Person 1: You're either for the war or against the troops.
>
> Person 2: Actually, I do not want our troops sent into a dangerous war.

You have to be careful of this kind of fallacy as it can really turn your audience away from your position. The world is complex, and the way people think is complex. If you dismiss that, you could lose the respect and interest of your audience.

### Hasty Generalization Fallacy

The **hasty generalization fallacy** is sometimes called the *overgeneralization fallacy*. It is basically making a claim based on evidence that is just too small. Essentially, you can't make a claim and say that something is true if you have only one or two examples as evidence.

> **Example:**
>
> Some teenagers in our community recently vandalized the park downtown. Teenagers are so irresponsible and destructive.

In this instance, the fallacy may seem clear, but this kind of fallacious thinking is quite common. People will make claims about all kinds of things on the basis of one or two pieces of evidence, which is not only wrong but also can be dangerous. It's really easy to fall into this kind of thinking, but you must work to avoid it. You must hold yourself to higher standards when you are making arguments.

### Appeal to Fear Fallacy

This type of fallacy is one that, as noted in its name, plays on people's fear. In particular, this fallacy presents a scary future if a certain decision is made today.

> **Example:**
>
> Elizabeth Smith doesn't understand foreign policy. If you elect Elizabeth Smith as president, we will be attacked by terrorists.

This kind of claim seems outlandish, but similar claims have been made for years by political candidates during election campaigns. Obviously, this kind of claim isn't logical. No one can predict the future, but making a bold claim like this with no evidence at all is a clear logical fallacy.

## Additional Logical Fallacies

Four other important types of logical fallacies are the ad hominem fallacy, slippery slope fallacy, bandwagon fallacy, and guilt by association fallacy.

### Ad Hominem Fallacy

Ad hominem means "against the man," and this type of fallacy is sometimes called *name calling* or *personal attack fallacy*. **Ad hominem fallacy** occurs when someone attacks the person instead of attacking his argument.

> **Example:**
>
> Person 1: I am for raising the minimum wage in our state.
>
> Person 2: She is for raising the minimum wage, but she is not smart enough to even run a business.

When you attack the person instead of tackling the issue, your audience might think you don't understand the issue or can't disprove your opponent's view. It's better to stick to the issue at hand and avoid ad hominem fallacies.

### Slippery Slope Fallacy

A **slippery slope fallacy** occurs when someone makes a claim about a series of events that would lead to one major event—usually a bad event. In this fallacy, a person makes a claim that one event leads to another event and so on until some awful conclusion. Along the way, each step or event in the faulty logic becomes more and more improbable.

> **Example:**
>
> If we enact any kind of gun control laws, the next thing you know, we won't be allowed to have any guns at all. When that happens, we won't be able to defend ourselves against terrorist attacks, and when that happens terrorists will take over our country. Therefore, gun control laws will cause us to lose our country to terrorists.

The series of events in this example is extremely improbable, and you simply can't make claims like this and still have your arguments be taken seriously. This example is extreme, but you do need to make sure, if you are creating a line of reasoning in terms of events leading to other events, that you aren't falling into a slippery slope fallacy.

### Bandwagon Fallacy

The **bandwagon fallacy** is also sometimes called the *appeal to common belief* or *appeal to the masses* because it's about getting people to do or think something because everyone else is doing it or everything else thinks this way.

> **Example:**
>
> Everyone is going to get the new smart phone when it comes out this weekend. Why aren't you?

The problem with this fallacy is *not everyone* is actually doing this, but there is another problem that's important to point out: Just because a lot of people are thinking or doing the same thing does not mean it's the right or good thing to do. For example, in the 16th century, most people believed Earth was the center of the universe; of course, believing that did not make it true.

Avoid this fallacy, as it's easy to fall into this kind of thinking. Think about what your parents said when you insisted that "everyone" was doing something that you were not allowed to do: "If every one of your friends jumped off of a cliff, would you?" It's important to fight the urge to fall into a bandwagon fallacy.

### Guilt by Association Fallacy

A **guilt by association fallacy** occurs when someone connects an opponent to a demonized group of people or to a bad person in order to discredit her argument. The idea is that the person is guilty by simply being similar to this bad group and, therefore, should not be heard about anything.

> **Example:**
>
> We cannot have the educational reform that my opponent calls for because Dr. Unreliable has also mentioned this kind of educational reform.

Instead of dealing with the issue, this person in the example tries to just dismiss the point by connecting his opponent's ideas with the ideas of a person whom the audience wouldn't believe.

This is problematic, of course, because it doesn't deal with the issue at hand. Plus, just because Dr. Unreliable thinks the same thing or something similar doesn't mean we should automatically dismiss the point. We need to look more closely at the issue at hand, and it seems like the person using the guilt by association fallacy doesn't want us to.

## MODULE 8

# MODES OF PERSUASION

## Introduction

Writing can take many forms: a text message to a friend to arrange a meeting, an email with a résumé attached to a job recruiter, or a handwritten birthday note to a family member. You may have noticed that each of these forms has a different purpose: to get together with someone, to pursue a job, and to add a personal greeting to a special occasion.

Writing for college courses can also have a number of purposes; you're probably familiar with some of them, such as to inform, to explore, and to analyze.

Whatever the purpose, writing always seeks to persuade. What's at stake may not always be explicit—the goal may simply be to strengthen a connection, as in the example of the handwritten note. Yet, we often spend more time worrying about those handwritten notes because we know they can persuade someone about our character and our level of involvement.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose work on rhetoric remains influential, sought to understand and explain the modes of persuasion for any situation. *Rhetoric* literally refers to speaking, but today we apply insights from rhetoric extensively to writing. Although your goal in this module is to write persuasively for college, you should understand that the modes of persuasion can affect all areas of life.

## Lesson 8.1: Strategies for Persuasion

### Lesson 8.1 Introduction

Although we may not always be aware of it, we communicate with one another with purpose. For example, when an 8-year-old boy tells his parents he wants a videogame system as a holiday gift, his purpose is to make his parents aware of what he wants. And an 8-year-old will almost always address his parents differently from the way he addresses his friends or his teachers—an implicit awareness of audience.

In this case, crafting a message (desire for a particular holiday gift) for an audience (parents) is critical for the ultimate goal—to persuade. The 8-year-old will likely describe how great his behavior has been and how beneficial the gaming system will be for his hand-eye coordination and creativity—arguments that may or may not resonate with his parents.

When writing to persuade, you will need to make similar calculations about your audience or readers, purpose, and context to make the most effective argument possible. You will need to consider the sensibilities and priorities of your audience—even if it's just a single professor—as well as your ultimate purpose and the requirements of the assignment to make your claims and suggestions powerful, resonant, and relevant.

The specifics of what an 8-year-old and a college student want can vary significantly, but the desire to influence others is inherent in all of us. Your awareness of the strategies of persuasion can only enhance your influence.

## Choosing Your Position

When analyzing a text, it is helpful to identify the author's position. When working on your own writing, you will need to choose a position in relation to your topic. This will not only influence the paper's focus but also signal to the reader your paper's persuasive goals.

Your first step in writing a persuasive essay is to choose a subject. It is important that your subject be controversial enough that it elicits strong opinions—both from you (the writer) and from your readers. In fact, a good place to start in choosing a topic is to ask the following questions:

- What is important to me?
- What do I feel strongly about?
- Where do I see a need for change?
- What bothers me?

Suppose, after brainstorming, you come up with the topic of parenting. You strongly believe that people need to value their children and be good parents. Another idea you come up with is that people should be responsible pet owners. Or maybe you choose a more global issue, believing that we need international laws protecting children in all countries from sweatshop labor. Almost anything that you feel strongly about can be a good subject for a persuasive paper. A word of caution, however: Avoid topics that have been overworked, such as abortion or gun control. Try to choose a fresh topic, or at least focus on a fresh aspect of a common topic.

## Analyze the Audience

Because keeping your audience in mind as you engage in the writing process is important, it may be helpful to have a list of questions, such as the following, to help you think about your audience:

### Audience Description

Who is my audience for this? What do I know about them?

### Audience Knowledge

What does my audience need to know about this subject? How much are they likely to know already?

### What Is Important?

What aspect of my subject is most important to my audience?

### What Isn't Important?

What is my audience least likely to care about?

### Main Points

What do I want my audience to understand and care about?

### What Is Most Relevant?

What in my research have I found to be especially interesting or relevant to my audience?

### Audience Thoughts

How can I organize my essay so that my audience will think about my subject in new ways?

What do I want my audience to think or learn about this subject? About me as an author?

### Audience Impressions

What impression do I want to leave my audience with?

## Research Your Topic

Effective searching takes precision, especially if you're trying to write a persuasive argument. The steps described here will make your search more precise; you'll turn up more sources that are useful to you and, perhaps, sources that may even be crucial to your research question.

### Search Strategy

Starting with a research question helps you figure out precisely what you're looking for. Next, you'll need the most effective set of search terms, starting from main concepts and then identifying and alternating between related terms. Those search terms need to be arranged in the most effective way as search statements to be typed into a search box.

An important thing to remember is that searching is an iterative process. We try search statements; take a look at what we found; and, if the results weren't good enough, edit our search statements and search again—often multiple times. Most of the time, the first statements we try are not the best, even though Google or another search engine we're using may give us many results.

It pays to search further for the sources that will help you the most. Be picky.

Here are the steps for an effective search:

- Step 1: Identify the main concepts.
- Step 2: List related terms.
- Step 3: Form search statements.
- Step 4: Search iteratively.

Remember that relevant, quality sources bolster your credibility as a writer, making you more likely to persuade your readers.

# Lesson 8.2: Methods of Persuasion

## Lesson 8.2 Introduction

The **modes of persuasion** go back thousands of years to Aristotle, a Greek philosopher and rhetorician. His writings describe three basic modes of persuasion, or ways to persuade people. These modes appeal to human nature and continue to be used today in politics, advertisements, and writing of all kinds.

These modes are particularly important to argumentative writing. As a writer, you'll be constantly looking for the right angle to take to be persuasive with your audience. These modes work together to create a well-rounded, well-developed argument that your readers will find credible.

By thinking about the basic ways in which human beings can be persuaded and by practicing your skills, you can learn to build strong arguments and develop flexible argumentative strategies. Developing your flexibility as a writer is very important and is a critical part of making good arguments. Every argument should be different because every reader is different and every situation is different. As you write, you'll want to make decisions about how you appeal to your particular audience using the modes of persuasion.

## Ethos

Appealing to **ethos** is all about using **credibility**—either your own as a writer or your sources—to be persuasive. Essentially, ethos is about believability. Will your audience find you believable? What can you do to ensure that they do?

You can establish ethos—or credibility—in two basic ways: You can use or develop your own credibility on a topic, or you can use credible sources, which, in turn, build your credibility as a writer.

Credibility is extremely important in building an argument, so, even if you don't have a lot of built-in credibility or experience with a topic, it's important for you to work on your credibility by integrating the credibility of others into your argument.

Aristotle argued that ethos was the most powerful of the three modes of persuasion, and while you may disagree, you can't discount its power. After all, think about the way advertisers use ethos to get us to purchase products. Taylor Swift sells us perfume, and Peyton Manning sells us pizza. But, it's really their fame and name they are selling.

With the power of ethos in mind, here are some strategies you can use to help build ethos in your arguments:

- Mention in some way any specific experience or education you have related to your topic. (**NOTE:** Not all professors will be in favor of this strategy, as it will depend on the level of formality of the assignment, but, in general, this is an effective strategy.)
- Find authors who have specific experience or education related to your topic, if you don't have it yourself. When you integrate that source information, it's best if you can address the credibility of your sources. When you have credible sources, you want to let your audience know about them.
- Use a tone of voice that is appropriate to your writing situation and that will make you sound reasonable and credible as a writer. Controversial issues can often bring out some extreme emotions in us when we write, but we have to be careful to avoid sounding extreme in our writing, especially in academic arguments. You may not convince everyone to agree with you, but you at least need your readers to "listen" to what you have to say.
- Provide a good balance when it comes to pathos and logos, the other two modes of persuasion.
- Avoid flaws in logic—or logical fallacies.

## Logos

**Logos** is about appealing to your audience's logical side. You have to think about what makes sense to your readers and use that as you build your argument. As a writer, you can appeal to logos by presenting a line of reasoning in your arguments that is logical and clear. Use evidence, such as statistics and factual information, to appeal to logos.

To develop strong appeals to logos, you have to avoid faulty logic. Faulty logic can be anything from assuming one event caused another to making blanket statements based on little evidence. Logical fallacies should always be avoided.

Appeals to logos are an important part of academic writing, but you will see them in commercials as well. Although advertisers more commonly use pathos and ethos, they will sometimes use logos to sell products. For example, commercials based on saving consumers money, such as car commercials that tout efficient miles per gallon, are appealing to the consumers' sense of logos.

As you work to build logos in your arguments, here are some strategies to keep in mind:

- Use both experience and source material that provide you with evidence. Outside sources will provide you with excellent evidence in an argumentative essay, but in some situations, you can share personal experiences and observations to appeal to logos. Just make sure they are appropriate to the situation, and present them in a clear and logical manner.
- Think about your audience as you appeal to logos. Just because something makes sense in your mind doesn't mean it will make the same kind of sense to your audience. You need to try to see things from your readers' perspective. Having others read your writing, especially those who might disagree with your position, is helpful.
- Be sure to maintain clear lines of reasoning throughout your argument. One error in logic can negatively affect your entire position. When you present faulty logic, you lose credibility.

When presenting an argument based on logos, you must avoid emotional overtones and maintain an even tone of voice. Remember, your paper is not just a matter of *what* evidence you are presenting but also *how* you are presenting this evidence.

### Pathos

Appealing to **pathos** is about appealing to your audience's emotions. Because people can be easily moved by their emotions, pathos is a powerful mode of persuasion. When you think about appealing to pathos, you should consider all of the potential emotions people experience. We often see or hear arguments that appeal to sympathy or anger, but appealing to pathos is not limited to these specific emotions. You can also use emotions such as humor, joy, or even frustration, to note a few, to convince your audience.

It's important, however, to be careful when appealing to pathos because arguments with an overly strong focus on emotions are not considered as credible in an academic setting. This means you could, and should, use pathos, but you have to do so carefully. An overly emotional argument can cause you to lose your credibility as a writer.

You have probably seen many arguments based on an appeal to pathos. In fact, a large number of the commercials you see on television or the Internet actually focus primarily on pathos. For example, many car commercials tap into our desire to feel special or important. They suggest that, if we drive a nice car, we will automatically be respected.

With the power of pathos in mind, here are some strategies you can use to carefully build pathos in your arguments:

- Think about the emotions most related to your topic so that you can use those emotions effectively. For example, if you're calling for change in animal abuse laws, you would want to appeal to your audience's sense of sympathy, possibly by providing examples of animal cruelty. If your argument is focused on environmental issues related to water

conservation, you might provide examples of how water shortages affect metropolitan areas to appeal to your audience's fear of a similar occurrence.
- Use examples to illustrate your position. Just be sure the examples you share are credible and can be verified.
- Balance appeals to pathos with appeals to logos in academic argumentative papers, to maintain your ethos (or credibility) as a writer.
- Maintain an even tone of voice when presenting evidence based on emotions. If you sound too emotional, you might lose your audience's respect.

## Lesson 8.3: Maintaining Integrity

### Lesson 8.3 Introduction

You've probably heard the term **academic integrity** and you're aware that passing off someone else's writing as your own is strictly forbidden in college writing. But writing with integrity involves more than that.

In the context of an argument, admitting uncertainty can be difficult. Once we have staked out a position, we tend to feel obligated to defend that position at all costs. (Perhaps you've experienced something like this in the course of a disagreement with a friend, relative, coworker, or significant other.)

However, a truthful, fact-based discussion usually demands some openness to difficulty and contradiction. To establish and maintain the trust of your audience, you must be willing to acknowledge when the facts don't suit your position, and sometimes you must admit to a mistake so that you can change course for the better.

When writing a persuasive research paper, you are looking to establish a clear, arguable position without shortchanging the complexities of the issue or situation. The good news is that when this is done well, your writing will be that much more persuasive.

### Ethics of Persuasion

Persuasive paragraphs contain language designed to help sway the audience. The following words often are used in persuasive papers:

- Better
- Certainly
- Clearly
- Obviously
- Of course
- Ought to
- Should
- Should not

Persuasive papers are full of opinion, but they must avoid emotionalism. **Emotionalism** occurs when writers exaggerate or use emotionally charged words or slurs.

**Examples:**

Exaggeration: *If people do not take better care of Earth's resources, there will be no Earth.*

Better: *There could be dire consequences if people do not take better care of Earth's resources.*

Emotionally charged words or slurs: *Any parent who allows underage drinking in his home is an idiot.*

Better: *Parents who allow underage drinking in their homes should consider the consequences.*

Emotionally charged words or slurs: *Opponents of gay marriage are all homophobic bigots.*

Better: *Opponents of gay marriage should examine their grounds for opposition.*

### Credibility

You can present many kinds of facts that are difficult to refute. A personal example can be effective, but many people are more easily swayed by statistics and statements by authorities that are based in research. Examine the following paragraph, which contains several types of support.

> No one should even entertain the idea of not wearing a seatbelt. According to "Safety Belt Statistics," compiled by James Madison University, "one out of every five drivers will be involved in a traffic crash this year." The article notes that of the "approximately 35,000 people [who] die in motor vehicles each year," half would have been saved had they only been wearing their seatbelts. This was true for Shawn Leasing, a young man who was on his way to a party the night he graduated from high school. Reasoning that he was only traveling five minutes from his home, Shawn neglected to fasten his safety belt. Taking a corner a bit too fast, he lost control of his car, hit a ditch, and rolled over. He was killed instantly as he was thrown from the vehicle, hitting a tree. Officers on the scene remarked to Shawn's devastated father that the 18-year-old would have survived the accident had he only been wearing his seatbelt. What a tragedy! Furthermore, although some people worry about being trapped inside a vehicle, unable to free themselves from their seatbelts, the truth of the matter, according to Sheriff Buddy Gibson, is that "Motorists are much more likely to survive an accident when they are buckled up and remain inside their vehicle than when they are 'thrown clear.'" The facts are clear: If you want to survive an accident, wear your seatbelt.

The above paragraph is effective because it provides convincing support: statistics from a reliable source, a compelling narrative example, and a statement by an authority.

### Avoiding Circular Reasoning

Students sometimes fall into the trap of circular reasoning. **Circular reasoning** occurs when you simply repeat the same support in different words. For example, look at the following paragraph:

> All schools should teach sex education. For example, if teens are aware of the many types of birth control available, there will be fewer unplanned pregnancies. Crystal Hirshey, a sophomore at Lake Side Alternative School in Lake Side, Massachusetts, states that had she been given knowledge of the types of birth control available, she would not have become pregnant earlier this year. Furthermore, statistics show that knowledge of birth control devices reduces the number of teenage pregnancies.

This paragraph presents only one support: knowledge of birth control devices would help reduce teenage pregnancy. The writer presents that same support three times, creating circular reasoning. Avoid this tendency by planning your support carefully before you begin writing your paragraph.

### Arranging Supports Well

When you are planning a persuasive paragraph, arrange your support in a logical fashion. Some topics lend themselves to a chronological progression, moving from least recent to most recent. For example, a paragraph persuading parents to set clear boundaries for their children might begin with a discussion of why boundaries are important for toddlers. The paragraph would logically progress into a discussion of the importance of boundaries for school-aged children and finish with the vital reasons that teenagers need clearly defined boundaries.

A paragraph persuading people to safeguard their children from predators might begin with a discussion of what parents did to keep their children safe in the past and move chronologically into the reasons that parents must be extra vigilant about their children's safety today.

Another good organizational framework for a persuasive paragraph is to save the best for last. Readers tend to retain the last thing they read, so you can make your paragraph more effective by arranging your supports so that your most powerful one is the last one you present.

### Counterpoint

As you present your case, it may be necessary to consider **counterarguments**—viewpoints that are different from your own. If you can refute readers' objections as you argue your position, you stand a good chance of convincing them to accept your viewpoint. Look at the following example:

> Parents who allow underage drinking at their homes are damaging their children. The thinking behind allowing teenagers access to alcohol is the misguided belief that "They're going to drink anyway; if they drink at home, I can control what goes on." This is not true. Studies show that the earlier a child begins drinking, the more likely he or she is to develop drinking problems. This is supported by a June 25, 2007, article from *Newsweek*, which outlines many of the risk factors to which teens who drink are susceptible simply because their brains are still developing. Another commonly accepted myth is that children who grow up in countries where they are allowed to drink learn how to drink responsibly and, therefore, avoid the drinking problems typically experienced by Americans. However, the *Newsweek* article points out that the "highest rate of cirrhosis of the liver is in France," where the legal drinking age is 16. Parents should focus on being effective role models for their children and should establish clear expectations and consequences for them. Under no circumstances should parents allow their children (and certainly no one else's children) to drink in their homes.

Note how the author of the previous paragraph refutes two possible objections while presenting clear support for her position.

# MODULE 9

# REVISING AND EDITING THE FINAL DRAFT

## Introduction

Sometimes, students make the mistake of treating revising and editing as one task, but they are two separate activities. When you revise, you address the effectiveness of your overall message. When you edit, you take a closer look at the content and remedy issues at the sentence level.

Revision is about getting a fresh perspective on your writing. Ideally, you should allow enough time before your paper is due to put it aside for a bit. When you return to it, you are better able to see the content more objectively—similar to how your reader would see it. You can then start the revision process, starting with a big-picture view of the essay (its overarching ideas and organization) and gradually narrowing your focus to each paragraph (topic sentences and supporting evidence).

After you have completed your revisions and your content is more stable, you begin the editing stage of the revision process. This involves digging deep into the essay at the sentence level and looking for “smaller” errors such as those in sentence structure, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. You must recognize, too, that it’s almost impossible to catch every error during a single editorial pass. A thorough edit includes completing several readings of the essay. With that in mind, allow yourself enough time to do at least three careful readings of your work.

## Lesson 9.1: Revising and Editing

### Lesson 9.1 Introduction

Revising and editing are both important parts of the writing process, yet many students skip revising and don’t spend enough time editing. Although you might be tempted to skip these steps (especially if you are up against a deadline), don’t. Admittedly, revising and editing are time consuming, but they are crucial to developing an effective essay.

When you revise, you “re-see” a piece of writing by approaching the content in three stages. First, you take a big-picture view by stepping back, looking at the essay as a whole, and gauging whether you are effectively communicating your intended meaning. Next, you take a mid-view, moving in closer and looking at the content at the paragraph level. Finally, you take the closest look at your content. This is the editing stage, during which you review your essay line by line, correcting errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Your goal should always be to write clearly and concisely, and in an engaging way. Dedicating time to this three-stage approach can help you achieve this goal by revealing both larger structural issues and smaller mistakes that can weaken your essay.

### Stage 1: Seeing the Big Picture

When you first begin the revision process, you should focus on the big picture, or issues at the essay level that might need to be addressed. The following basic questions—which address the overall clarity, amount, and order of information in your essay—are what you should focus on during this first phase of the revision process:

- Does your introduction grab the reader's interest?
- Do you have a clear thesis?
- Does each paragraph serve as a building block in your essay? Does each explain or support your thesis?
- Is your essay well organized? Or does it need a different structure?
- Is your essay well researched? Does it need additional research to support the main ideas?
- Have you considered and addressed potential objections to your position?
- Do you fully explain and illustrate the main ideas of your paper?
- Does your conclusion leave the reader understanding your point of view?
- Does your essay address the assignment requirements?
- What are some of your essay's strengths? What are some of its weaknesses?

If you can't answer "yes" to all but the last of these questions, then you have at least one common big-picture error.

### Stage 2: Mid-View

The second stage of the revision process requires that you look at your content a little more closely. Examine each paragraph independently to see where you might need to revise. The following questions will guide you through the mid-view revision stage:

- Does each paragraph contain relevant facts, vivid descriptions, and/or specific research examples that illustrate the point you are making in the paragraph?
- Can you add other details or quotations that would more clearly illustrate—or provide evidence for—the points you are making?
- Can you delete any sentences, words, descriptions, or information that are confusing or that don't add to your argument?
- Are the paragraphs in the correct order?
- Are your paragraphs overly long? Does each paragraph explore one main idea?
- Do you use clear transition words and phrases to guide the reader through the essay?

### Stage 3: Editing Up Close

After you have completed the first two stages of revision and incorporated changes into your essay, it's time to begin editing. During this stage, you are taking a very careful look at the essay at the sentence level to identify errors in grammar and mechanics. The following questions will guide you through your editing:

- Are there any errors in grammar? (For example, are you using tense consistently? Do your subjects and verbs agree?)
- Have you used punctuation correctly and effectively?
- Are your verbs strong and active, and do you use adjectives and adverbs only when necessary (for example, to enhance descriptions)?
- Do you define any technical or uncommon terms? Can you eliminate jargon?
- Can you eliminate any extra words, redundancies, or clichés?
- Have you varied your sentence structure?
- Have you correctly copied—and appropriately cited—quotations?

- Are you using an appropriate voice and tone for the type of assignment and subject matter? (For example, if you're writing an academic research paper, have you maintained a formal, objective tone?)
- Have you proofread for typos and misspellings? (Remember, you can't always rely on your spellchecker to catch every error.)

The editing process takes time. You can't edit well by taking one big editing pass, so be prepared to take several thorough passes.

## Lesson 9.2: Fine-tuning Your Writing

### Lesson 9.2 Introduction

As a writer, you have several tools and techniques at your disposal that will help you fine-tune your writing.

One of the most helpful techniques is to work backward. Reading your essay from the end, starting with the last sentence first and continuing this process through the entire essay, is a great way to slow your reading pace so that you can see each sentence independently.

Another effective way to work backward is to complete a post-draft outline by writing down your thesis statement and the topic sentences of each of your paragraphs. Then, confirm that this "skeleton" of your paper reveals a clear organization and logical flow of ideas. If it doesn't, you need to make some changes. You might also compare your post-draft outline with your pre-draft outline to make sure you're on track.

Lastly, read your paper aloud. This will help you see and hear what you have actually written, not what you think you have written. Like reading your essay from the end, this technique slows down your reading pace so that you are more likely to catch errors. It's also helpful to have someone else read your essay aloud so that you can hear how well it flows.

Using other tools—such as peer reviews and editing checklists—will help you further refine your essay. Your peers, who also understand the writing assignment, can provide especially helpful feedback.

### Peer Review

Perhaps the most helpful tool in developing a logical, readable draft of an essay is a peer review. A **peer review** is effective for both the reviewer and the writer being reviewed: The reviewer develops close-reading skills and learns to deliver feedback constructively, and the writer learns that effective writing can communicate its message to diverse readers.

Remember these general rules when you are the reviewer:

- Attend to higher-order concerns first: thesis, audience, purpose, organization, and development (support).
- Attend to lower-order concerns next: sentence structure, punctuation, word choice, and spelling.
- Make comments in the spirit of helpfulness (and if you're the writer, take comments in the spirit of helpfulness). The *least helpful* comment a peer reviewer can offer is, "It looks good to me."

Then, use the following table to help you review your peers' work:

**Writer:** **Reviewer:**

| Criterion | Details |
|---|---|
| **C**<br>Congratulate | What does the writer do well in this assignment? (List one or more aspects.) Also, please write the writer's main claim or focus (thesis) according to what you have read. (It might not be the last sentence of the first paragraph, which is the traditional location of the thesis.) |
| **A**<br>Ask clarifying questions | What parts of the essay were a bit confusing? Why?<br>What specific suggestions (give three or fewer) do you have for revising the unclear parts of this writing? (See the sample suggestions.) |
| **R**<br>Request more | What other information about the topic would enhance the essay and support the thesis? |
| **E**<br>Evaluate its value | Which specific details do not work in the essay (for example, those that don't support the thesis) or could be moved? |
| **S**<br>Summarize | Overall, what new information have you learned, and/or how has this essay changed your thinking? |

Here are a few examples of suggestions to make as a peer reader (make sure you identify which paragraph you're referring to):

- The thesis needs to better identify the main point of the essay.
- The topic sentence needs to identify the main point of this paragraph.
- Each paragraph needs one overarching idea (or needs more specific evidence/needs more of the writer's commentary).
- Avoid repeating words, repeating ideas, or repeating sentence structures.
- Avoid using vague language or using slang.

- Provide clear transition words and phrases to guide the reader.
- Check for errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar.
- Clearly identify your sources (if used).
- Use the proper citation format.

### Revision Checklist

Before you revise your draft, set it aside for a bit so that when you go back to it, you'll see it with fresh eyes. This will help you approach the content more objectively and to see errors that you might have missed previously. The following checklist will help you focus on some key issues as you revise:

- Does my essay meet the assignment requirements?
- Have I conveyed the significance of my ideas to my readers? Is my purpose clear?
- Is my focus too broad? Have I narrowed my topic well?
- Is my organization effective?
- Can I make the concept I am discussing clearer and more focused?
- Is my voice and tone appropriate for my audience?
- Have I clearly defined any terms that I've used?
- If I've taken a position in this research essay, have I considered and addressed potential objections to my position?
- Do I provide clear transitions between my ideas? Are there any gaps between my points?
- Do any points need further explanation or detail?
- Do any points need to be cut because they are not related to my focus?
- Are my sources credible? Have I addressed this credibility in my writing?
- Have I integrated my source material smoothly and effectively by providing signal phrases and/or context for the information?
- Have I put source material in my own words as much as possible and used quotes only when necessary?
- Have I properly acknowledged and cited all of my source material, including paraphrases and summaries?

### Editing Checklist

The spellchecker and grammar-checker functions on your word-processing program are valuable tools, but they aren't perfect! Be aware that they don't catch everything, and they're definitely not substitutes for careful and thoughtful line editing.

After you have finished running these programs, it's time for you to get to work as an editor. The following checklist will help you focus on some key issues as you edit:

- Have I checked to make sure the spellchecker did not change any words to words I did not intend to write?
- Have I looked closely at my sentences to see if any words are missing?
- Did I review the rules for commas before editing for commas?
- Did I review other rules for punctuation before editing for punctuation?
- Is there something missing anywhere? Are all of my sentences complete?
- Did I include citations for all of my borrowed information?
- Have I tried reading my essay in reverse, from the last sentence, to see each sentence on its own?
- Have I tried reading my essay aloud to see how it sounds?