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About This Book

This College Writing Handbook is a modified version of the Guide to Writing by Vallerie Mott and a writer listed as “Alexis.” The original version of this book was released under a CC-BY license and is copyright by Lumen Learning. The changes to this book listed are released under a CC-BY-SA license and are copyright by Joshua Dickinson of Jefferson Community College.

List of Changes

- Added Instructor Resources in private view.
- Renumbered all the Parts to accommodate the addition of Parts 1 & 7.
- Created Part 1: Thinking Through the Disciplines and reordered the remaining sections.
- Added ESL Writing Online Workshop page (from the Excelsior OWL site) to Part 4: Usage.
- Added Sentence Style page to Part 5: Sentence Structure.
- Reordered Part 6, adding the following pages: Active Writing vs. Passive Writing; The Writing Process; Thesis Hints; How not to Write the Introduction and Conclusion; Transitions Placemat; Outlining; Taking Notes, Quoting, Summarizing, and Paraphrasing; Quote Sparingly, Checklist: Using Quotations Effectively; The One-Sentence Paraphrase Rule; How Instructors View Paraphrases; Moves for Providing Commentary; How Might I Avoid Letting Source Use Take Over?; and Peer Editing is Inherently Self-Interested.
- Added Part 7: Diction.
- Expanded Part 8: Research to include the following Pages: SUNY Jefferson Information Literacy Tutorial; Argument Pointers: Some Basics…; Why Mark Up Your Texts?; U of Southern Mississippi Avoiding Plagiarism Tutorial; Avert the Goblin Threat in this Interactive Plagiarism Game!; Citing FAQs, Research Worksheet: Types of Evidence; The Annotated Bibliography Exercise.
- Expanded Part 9: MLA Citations to include MLA Style and What to Include When Citing, and Citing Sources in MLA LibGuide.

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Instructor Resources
Download in Other Formats

The course is currently available to download in the following formats:

- PDF

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To locate quality, relevant and informative sources for your essay, you will need to generate good search terms and think about the places where to look for this information. To aid you in this task, complete the table below:

**Tentative Thesis Claim:**

Main Reason 1:
Main Reason 2:
Main Reason 3:

### Reason 1

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Overview

Focus on immediate causes rather than remote causes, where possible. Immediate causes would be those causes for an action that are closest at hand. For instance, I fell because I slipped on the ice. I slipped on the ice because my shoes were too smooth. I fell because I was carrying the heavy suitcase. I was carrying the heavy suitcase because I was traveling. I was traveling because I needed to get to my job interview. Because I am ambitious, I had a job interview, etc. Do you see how these reasons form what we call a chain of causation? It’s tough to separate out the causes and effects, then. I could keep going, asking “Why am I ambitious?”

Making one false step (pun on the ice walker intended) at this point can alienate readers. Focus them on the immediate causes, which they are more likely to agree upon.

Define, describe, exemplify (also division/classification).

Advise readers of what you are going to do (but avoid “I am going to”). Then do it.

Be cautious. One assumption you can make safely is that readers will tend to disagree with you. This knowledge lets you check your work to see whether you have done enough to convince them.

Avoid circular reasoning: “The freeways are crowded because there are too many cars.”

Beware of assumptions and ideology when assigning a cause.

The great British writer E.M. Forster once said, “Only connect.” That’s what writers are all about when they do causal argumentation. Connect events, make us understand the logical connections.

With these essays, there is even more need for interpreting strongly throughout. Examine the credibility of your source, and establish why readers should believe the source. If you don’t what is the likely effect on readers?

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Research Project Proposal

Directions

Narrowing your subject and deciding upon your approach to it are crucial elements of the prewriting and drafting stages. Do this argument proposal worksheet, answering all the questions in complete sentences.

What is the subject of your argumentative essay? Write a rough statement of your opinion on this subject.

Why are you interested in this topic? Is it important to your personal, civic, or professional life? State at least one reason for your choice of topic.

Is this a significant topic of interest to others? Why? Is there a particular audience you would like to address?

At this point, can you list at least two reasons that support your opinions of your topic?

Who opposes your opinion? Can you state clearly at least one of your opposition’s major criticisms of your position?

What difficulties, if any, might arise during drafting? For example, might you need to collect any additional evidence through reading, research, or interviewing to support your points or to refute your opposition? (Be specific for full credit.)

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Part 1: Thinking Through the Disciplines
Writing as a College Student

As a college student, you have been writing for years, so you probably think that you have a clear understanding about academic writing. High school and college writing, however, differ in many ways. This chapter will present some of those core differences along with a general overview of the college writing process.

11.1 Meeting College Writing Expectations

Learning Objectives

Understand and describe differences between high school and college writing.
Recognize some of the core principles and values of higher education.

If you’re like most first-year college students, you’re probably anxious about your first few writing assignments. Transitioning from being a successful high school writer to being a quality college writer can be difficult. You have to adjust to different learning cultures. You have to accept that college writing is different from high school writing and come to understand how it is different.

These students relay a typical range of first-year college experiences:

Emma: I always got As on my high school papers, so I thought I was a good writer until I came to college and had to completely rewrite my first paper to get a C–.

Javier: I received an F on my first college paper because I “did not include one original thought in the whole paper.” I thought I was reporting on information I had researched. I didn’t know that I was supposed to add my own thoughts. Luckily, the professor had a policy to throw out each student’s lowest grade of the semester.

Danyell: The professor in my Comp 101 class said that he didn’t want us turning in anything meaningless or trite. He said that we were to show him that we had critical thought running through our heads and knew how to apply it to the readings we found in our research. I had no idea what he was talking about.

Pat: I dreaded my first college English class since I had never done well in English classes in high school. Writing without grammatical and mechanical errors is a challenge for me, and my high school teachers always gave me low grades on my papers due to all my mistakes. So I was surprised when I got a B+ on my first college paper, and the professor had written, “Great paper! You make a solid argument. Clean up your grammar and mechanics next time and you will get an A!” Suddenly it seemed that there was something more important than grammar and punctuation!

What’s “Higher” about Higher Education?

Despite the seeming discrepancy between what high school and college teachers think constitutes good college writing, there is an overall consensus about what is “higher” about higher education.
Thinking with flexibility, depth, awareness, and understanding, as well as focusing on how you think, are some of the core building blocks that make higher education “higher.” These thinking methods coupled with perseverance, independence, originality, and a personal sense of mission are core values of higher education.

Differences between High School and College Culture

The difference between high school and college culture is like the difference between childhood and adulthood. Childhood is a step-by-step learning process. Adulthood is an independent time when you use the information you learned in childhood. In high school culture, you were encouraged to gather knowledge from teachers, counselors, parents, and textbooks. As college students, you will rely on personal assistance from authorities less and less as you learn to analyze texts and information independently. You will be encouraged to collaborate with others, but more to discuss ideas and concepts critically than to secure guidance.

How the Writing Process Differs in College

It’s important to understand that no universal description of either high school or college writing exists. High school teachers might concentrate on skills they want their students to have before heading to college: knowing how to analyze (often literary) texts, to develop the details of an idea, and to organize a piece of writing, all with solid mechanics. A college teacher might be more concerned with developing students’ ability to think, discuss, and write on a more abstract, interdisciplinary level. But there are exceptions, and debates rage on about where high school writing ends and college writing begins.

Key Takeaways

- Requirements and expectations for high school and college writing vary greatly from high school to high school and college to college.
- Some general differences, however, are fairly consistent: College students are expected to function more independently than high school students are. College students are encouraged to think with a deep awareness, to develop a clear sense of how they think, and to think on a more abstract level.

Exercises

Write a brief essay or a journal or blog entry about your personal experience with higher education so far. Consider, especially, what sort of misconceptions you have discovered as you compare your expectations with reality.

Study the following two sets of writing standards. The first is the result of a recent nationwide project to create core standards for language arts students in eleventh and twelfth grades. It outlines what students should be able to do by the time they graduate high school. The second describes what college writing administrators have agreed students should be able to do by the time they finish their first year of college writing courses. What differences do you see? What might account for those differences? How well do you think your skills match up with each set of standards?

Discovering and Using Strategies for Writing College Essays

Learning Objectives

Use time-management skills to lay out a work plan for major writing assignments.
Develop strategies for reading college assignments strategically.

As a college student, you must take complete responsibility for your writing assignments. Your professors are assessing your ability to think for yourself, so they’re less likely to give you ready-made templates on how to write a given essay. This lack of clarity will be unsettling, but it’s part of an important growth process. By using strategies, you can systematically approach each assignment and gather the information you need for your writing requirements.

Plotting a Course for Your Writing Project

Once you know you have an upcoming writing project, you have some basic decisions to make. The following list of questions will lead you to make some preliminary choices for your writing project.

- **What am I trying to accomplish?** Writing can serve a variety of purposes, such as to explain, to persuade, to describe, to entertain, or to compare. Your assignment might specifically dictate the purpose of the writing project. Or the assignment might simply indicate, for example, that you are to show you understand a topic. In such a situation, you would then be free to choose a writing purpose through which you could demonstrate your understanding.

- **Who do I want my readers to be?** Traditionally the audience for a college student’s paper has been the instructor, but technology is rapidly changing that. Many instructors actively make use of the web’s collaborative opportunities. Your fellow students (or even people outside the class) may now be your audience, and this will change how you approach your assignment. Even if your instructor is the only person who will see your finished product, you have the right (and even the responsibility) to identify an ideal reader or readership for your work. Whoever your audience is, take care to avoid writing too far above or too far beneath their knowledge or interest level.

- **What am I writing about?** Your topic might be set by your instructor. If so, make sure you know if you have the option of writing about different angles of the topic. If the topic is not preset, choose a topic in which you will be happy to immerse yourself.

- **What’s my position on this topic?** Analyze your ideas and opinions before you start the writing project, especially if the assignment calls for you to take a position. Leave room for new ideas and changes in your opinion as you research and learn about the topic. Keep in mind that taking a stand is important in your efforts to write a paper that is truly yours rather than a compilation of others’ ideas and opinions, but the stand you take should evolve from encounters with the opinions of others. Monitor your position as you write your first draft, and attend to how it changes over the course of your writing and reading. If your purpose is to compare ideas and opinions on a given topic, clarifying your opinion may not be so critical, but remember that you are still using an interpretive point of view even when you are “merely” summarizing or analyzing data.

- **How long does this piece of writing need to be? How much depth should I go into?** Many assignments have a predetermined range of page numbers, which somewhat dictates the depth of the topic. If no guidance is provided regarding length, it will be up to you to determine the scope of the writing project. Discussions with other students or your instructor might be helpful in making this determination.

- **How should I format this piece of writing?** In today’s digital world, you have several equally professional options for completing and presenting your writing assignments. Unless your professor dictates a specific method for awareness and learning purposes, you will probably be free to make these format choices. Even your choice of font can be significant.

- **How or where will I publish this piece of writing?** You are “publishing” every time you place an essay on a course management system or class-wide wiki or blog, or even when you present an essay orally. More likely than not, if your writing means something to you, you will want to share it with others beyond your instructor in some manner. Knowing how you will publish your work will affect some of the choices you
make during the writing process.

- **How should my writing look beyond questions of format and font?** College essays used to be completely devoid of visuals. Nowadays, given the ease of including them, an essay that does not include visuals might be considered weak. On the other hand, you do not want to include a visual just for the sake of having one. Every visual must be carefully chosen for its value-adding capacity.

Planning the basics for your essay ahead of time will help assure proper organization for both the process and the product. It is almost a certainty that an unorganized process will lead to an unorganized product.

**Reading Assignments Closely and Critically**

A close and careful reading of any given writing assignment will help you sort out the ideas you want to develop in your writing assignment and make sense of how any assigned readings fit with the required writing.

Use the following strategies to make the most of every writing assignment you receive:

- Look for key words, especially verbs such as *analyze, summarize, evaluate, or argue*, in the assignment itself that will give clues to the genre, structure, and medium of writing required.
- Do some prewriting that establishes your base of knowledge and your initial opinions about the subject if the topic is predetermined. Make a list of ideas you will need to learn more about in order to complete the assignment.
- Develop a list of possible ideas you could pursue if the topic is more open.

Use the following strategies to help you make the most of readings that support the writing assignment:

- Make a note if you question something in any assigned reading related to the writing assignment.
- Preview each reading assignment by jotting down your existing opinions about the topic before reading. As you read, monitor whether your preconceived opinions prevent you from giving the text a fair reading. After finishing the text, check for changes in your opinions as result of your reading.
- Mark the locations of different opinions in your readings, so you can easily revisit them. (For more on how this works with research, see *Chapter 7 “Researching”, Section 7.8 “Creating an Annotated Bibliography”*.)
- Note the points in your readings that you consider most interesting and most useful. Consider sharing your thoughts on the text in class discussions.
- Note any inconsistencies or details in your readings with which you disagree. Plan to discuss these details with other students or your professor.

Above all, when questions or concerns arise as you apply these strategies, take them up with your professor directly, either in class or during office hours. Making contact with your professor by asking substantive questions about your reading and writing helps you stand out from the crowd and demonstrates that you are an engaged student.

**Connecting Your Reading with Your Writing**

College writing often requires the use of others’ opinions and ideas to support, compare, and ground your opinions. You read to understand others’ opinions; you write to express your opinions in the context of what you’ve read. Remember that your writing must be just that—yours. Take care to use others’ opinions and ideas only as support. Make sure your ideas create the core of your writing assignments. (For more on documentation, see *Chapter 22 “Appendix B: A Guide to Research and Documentation”, Section 22.5 “Developing a List of Sources”*. )
Here's an example from an American Literature course of how one student, Jessica, weaves quotation and paraphrase of a primary text (John Smith's *A Description of New England*) together with quotations from classmates' posts to her group's discussion board in order to advance her own analysis of Smith's text:

On the other hand, John Smith's writing completely cuts to the chase of populating the New World. Unlike Harriot's writing, Smith takes very little time explaining the lesser lifestyle of the Native Americans. Instead, in his writing from *A Description of New England* he portrays the New World as a nation of prosperous opportunity. He starts off his description stating, "Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes; or but his merit to advance his fortune, then to tread, and plant that ground he hath purchased by the hazard of his life?" (p. 264). Here, he asks the reader, what is more desirable than coming to this place and getting rich off of your very own plot of land? With this, he begins to paint a picture in the reader's mind of all that is available, and according to Smith, very accomplishable in the New World. As Bill, a classmate, puts it, "He wants to let people know that they can have a new lease on life, a new home, new beginning, clean slate, and so forth" (RR2). Smith continues in his advertisement for the New World as he reiterates all the wonderful possibilities. He asks, "What pleasure can be more, then to recreate themselves before their owne doores, in their owne boates upon the Sea; where man, woman, and childe, with a small hooke and line, by angling, may take diverse sorts of excellent fish, at their pleasures?" (p. 265). Here, Smith includes not just men, but also women, and even more unique, children. With this, he leaves the door of opportunity open to all that come knocking as he entices the reader through his use of questions, in which it is the reader, the settler, to choose the answer. Throughout the remainder of the text, Smith addresses a large crowd of audience members as he specifically mentions the "Gentlemen," the "labourers," and the "Masters," telling each of the possibilities that lie ahead in the New World. As Smith concludes his text, he recaps all the reasons as to why this New World is worth the while. He stresses three motives, the last of which will benefit everyone: religion, which "should move us (especially the Clergie) if wee were religious, to shewe our faith by our worke; in converting those poore salvages to the knowledge of God..."; honor, which "might move the Gentrie, the valiant, and industrious"; and lastly, wealth, "the hope and assurance of wealth, all" (p. 266). As Laura, a classmate, so perfectly sums up Smith and his work, "He basically said that no matter what type of person you were, there was a purpose for you in the New World and that you would love it there" (RR2). Thus, Smith uses the drive and motivation of economic, religious, and prosperous opportunities to attract colonists to the New World. Herewith, he distinguishes the New World as an area unlike any other, different from the old, and better than the rest. As a result, the New World would begin to populate and people would start consuming at a faster rate. However, given the egotistical and, as previously demonstrated, superior mind-set of many of the colonists, it was unheard of that they would take part in all the manual labor. Hence, the need for workers—slaves—would quickly arise.
Sharing and Testing Your Thinking with Others

Discussion and debate are mainstays of a college education. Sharing and debating ideas with instructors and other students allows all involved to learn from each other and grow. You often enter into a discussion with your opinions and exit with a widened viewpoint. Although you can read an assignment and generate your understandings and opinions without speaking to another person, you would be limiting yourself by those actions. Instead it is in your best interest to share your opinions and listen to or read others’ opinions on a steady, ongoing basis.

In order to share your ideas and opinions in a scholarly way, you must properly prepare your knowledge bank. Reading widely and using the strategies laid out in the Section 11.2.3 “Connecting Your Reading with Your Writing” are excellent methods for developing that habit.

Make sure to maintain fluidity in your thoughts and opinions. Be prepared to make adjustments as you learn new ideas through discussions with others or through additional readings. You can discuss and debate in person or online, in real time or asynchronously. One advantage to written online discussions and debates is that you have an archived copy for later reference, so you don’t have to rely on memory. For this reason, some instructors choose to develop class sites for student collaboration, discussion, and debate.

Key Takeaways

- The assignments you receive from your instructors in college are as worthy of a close and careful reading as any other texts you are assigned to read. You can learn to employ certain strategies to get the most out of the assignments you are being asked to perform.
- Success in college and life depends on time- and project-management skills: being able to break large projects into smaller, manageable tasks and learning how to work independently and collaboratively.

Exercise

For every assignment you receive with an open topic, get into the habit of writing a journal or blog entry that answers the following four questions:

- What are some topics that interest you?
- What topics will fit within the time frame you have for the project?
- Of the possible topics, which have enough depth for the required paper?
- For which topics can you think of an angle about which you are passionate?

Figure 11.1 Sample Assignment with Student Annotations
Part 1: Check out these websites:
- University of Virginia: http://www.virginia.edu
- University of Phoenix: http://www.phoenix.edu
- J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College: http://www.reynolds.edu

Analyze and write about each website’s use of the three rhetorical appeals we’ve discussed: logos, ethos, and pathos.

Follow the links to some of the internal pages under each of the subcategories. Study the image each college is trying to portray about its campus and faculty, its students and student life, and its academics and administration. Answer the following questions:

- What are the exact audiences each college is addressing through its website?
- Which audience seems to be the priority and why?
- How would you suggest improving each if you were the webmaster?

Part 2: Next, choose a website from a different college, perhaps one you’ve thought about attending in the past or future. Using materials from this college’s website, mailings, advertisements, brochures, and/or tours, study and write about each college’s image or brand.

Using some reliably objective sources, gather and review some basic facts about this college. Analyze and write about the college’s or university’s image, with a special focus on any discrepancies between facts you have gathered independently about the college (e.g., from the US News & World Report or Forbes rankings) and claims the college makes for itself in its own marketing.

Address how the college presents itself to its public constituencies (parents, students, alumni, faculty and staff, state legislatures/governors, boards of trustees).

Address how the college presents itself to its public constituencies (parents, students, alumni, faculty and staff, state legislatures/governors, boards of trustees).

Questions to ask in class:
1. How does part 1 fit with part 2? Are they two separate essays?
2. Who’s my main audience for each part?
3. Can I write part 2 as if I’m the webmaster for the college?
4. Can I use my own college for part 2?
5. Are there any requirements on length?
6. Are visuals required?

11.3 Collaborating on Academic Writing Projects
Learning Objectives

Understand how cooperative and collaborative learning techniques, with the help of technology, can enhance college-level writing projects.
Learn how to give and receive effective and meaningful feedback.

How do you feel about group projects in your college classes? Are you like many students who resist group projects because you prefer to work alone? Do you know why college-level work often requires collaboration and how that collaborative work might be conducted differently than how it’s done in a K–12 environment?

Different Types of Group Work

You might not think of a typical writing assignment as a group project, but you begin collaborating on a writing assignment the moment you discuss your topic with someone else. From there, you might ask classmates to read your paper and share their opinions or to proofread your work. Some students form study groups to assure they have reviewers for their work and to have a collaborative atmosphere in which to work. These are just a few examples of effective college students voluntarily engaging in collaboration.

Choosing to collaborate is not always left up to you, since some instructors often require it, whether through simple group discussion boards or through more complex interactions, such as a semester-long project. Whether or not it starts out as something that’s required, or “part of your grade” for the course, collaboration is something successful college students eventually learn to do on their own.

If your instructor gives you a collaborative writing assignment, don’t assume the worst possible outcome, where one or two people end up doing all the work. Decide and document who will do what and when it will happen. As a group, you are taking on nearly total responsibility for the project when you are involved in a collaborative learning situation. Because of their complexity, collaborative writing projects still tend to be fairly uncommon, but they are becoming increasingly popular ways of developing and testing your collective ability to think, work, and communicate interdependently as part of a team—certainly an essential skill in the workplace.

The Dynamics of Interpersonal Communication

If collaboration is required, making a plan at the beginning of the assignment is essential. Decide if you will meet in person, online, or both. If the level of collaboration is at the reviewing and proofreading level, agree on a date to turn in or post drafts for review and set a clear timeline for completing reviews. For more involved collaborative efforts, such as a joint paper or project, begin by agreeing on a vision for the overall project. Then set up a schedule and split up the work evenly and equally, but with a sense of strategy as well. Figure out each other’s strengths and play to them. Make sure the schedule allows for plenty of time to regroup in case a group member does not meet a deadline.

During group meetings, discuss the direction and scope of the overall project as well as individual components. If any group members are struggling with their parts of the project, keep in mind that the success of all depends on the success of each, so meet to address problems. When group members disagree—and there will almost always be some differences of opinion—talk through the problems with a willingness to compromise while being careful to protect the overall integrity of the assignment. Choose an individual deadline for completion that allows time for all group members to read through the draft and suggest further revisions. If your project includes a presentation, make sure to leave time to plan that as well. Decide if one or more people will present and schedule at least one practice session to assure the group members are happy with the final presentation.
General Group Work Guidelines

- **Make sure the overall plan is clear.** A group project will only come together if all group members are working toward the same end product. Before beginning to write, make sure the complete plans are fleshed out and posted in writing on the group website, if one is available. Within the plan, include each member’s responsibilities.

- **Keep an open mind.** You will undoubtedly have your ideas, but listen to other ideas and be willing to accept them if they make sense. Be flexible. Don’t insist on doing everything your way. Be tolerant. Hold back from criticizing others’ errors in an insulting way. Feel free to suggest alternatives, but always be polite. If you think someone is criticizing you unfairly or too harshly, let it go. Retaliating can create an ongoing problem that gets in the way of the project’s completion.

- **Be diplomatic.** Even if you think a coparticipant has a lousy idea and you are sure you have a better idea, you need to broach the topic very diplomatically. Keep in mind that if you want your opinion to have a fair hearing, you’ll need to present it in a way that is nonoffensive.

- **Pay attention.** Make sure you know what others are saying. Ask for clarification when needed. If you are unsure what someone means, restate it in your words and ask if your understanding is correct.

- **Be timely.** Don’t make your coparticipants wait for you. As a group, agree to your timing in writing and then do your part to honor the timeline. Allow each person ample time to complete his or her part. Tight schedules often result in missed deadlines.

Managing Consistency of Tone and Effort in Group Projects

Human nature seems to naturally repel suggestions of change from others. It is wise to remember, however, that no one is a perfect writer. So it is in your best interest to welcome and at least consider others’ ideas without being defensive. Guard against taking feedback personally by keeping in mind that the feedback is about the words in your paper, not about you. Also show appreciation for the time your classmate took to review your paper. If you do not completely understand a suggestion from a classmate, keep in mind the “two heads are better than one” concept and take the time to follow up and clarify. In keeping with the reality that it is your paper, in the end, make only the changes with which you agree.

When you review the work of others, keep the spirit of the following “twenty questions” in mind. Note that this is not a simple checklist; the questions are phrased to prevent “yes” or “no” answers. By working through these questions, you will develop a very good understanding about ways to make the writer’s draft better. You’ll probably also come up with some insights about your draft in the process. In fact, you’re welcome to subject your draft to the same review process.

When you have an idea that you think will help the writer, either explain your idea in a comment box or actually change the text to show what you mean. Of course, only change the text if you are using a format that will allow the author to have copies of both his or her original text and your changed version. If you are working with a hard copy, make your notes in the margins. Make sure to explain your ideas clearly and specifically, so they will be most helpful. Do not, for example, note only that a sentence is in the wrong place. Indicate where you think the sentence should be. If a question comes into your mind while you are reading the paper, include the question in the margin.

Twenty Questions for Peer Review

What sort of audience is this writer trying to reach? Is that audience appropriate?  
What three adjectives would you use to describe the writer’s personality in the draft?  
How well does the draft respond to the assignment?  
What is the draft’s purpose (to persuade? to inform? to entertain? something else?) and how well does it accomplish that purpose?  
Where is the writer’s thesis? If the thesis is explicit, quote it; if it is implicit, paraphrase it.  
What points are presented to support the thesis?  
How do these points add value in helping to support the thesis?  
How does the title convey the core idea in an interesting way?
Assessing the Quality of Group Projects

Instructors assess group projects differently than individual projects. Logically, instructors attribute an individual assignment’s merits, or lack thereof, completely to the individual. It is not as easy to assess students fairly on what they contributed individually to the merits of a group project, though wikis and course management systems are making individual work much easier to trace. Instructors may choose to hold the members of a team accountable for an acceptable overall project. Beyond that, instructors may rely on team members’ input about their group for additional assessment information.

For an in-depth collaborative project, your instructor is likely to ask all students in the group to evaluate their own performance, both as individuals and as part of the larger group. You might be asked to evaluate each individual group member’s contributions as well as the overall group efforts. This evaluation is an opportunity to point out the strong and weak points of your group, not a time to discuss petty disagreements or complain about group plans that did not go your way. Think about how you would feel if group members complained about your choices they did not like, and you can easily see the importance of being flexible, honest, and professional with group evaluations. For a clear understanding of how an instructor will grade a specific collaborative assignment, talk to the instructor.

Key Takeaways

- Online tools and platforms like course management systems and wikis allow students to collaborate by sharing information and by editing, revising, and publishing their finished work.
- Collaborative learning approaches are increasingly prevalent in higher education, as colleges attempt to prepare students for the demands of increasingly collaborative work environments.

Exercises

If the writing course in which you are currently enrolled is not using a wiki, write a rationale to your instructor for how the course might benefit from having such a collaborative platform. (Check out two of the most popular wikis for which free educational versions are currently available: http://www.wikispaces.com and http://www.pbworks.com.) Include an evaluative comparison in your proposal and suggest to your class and instructor which would be the best to use for your writing course and why. Make sure you take into account how you would observe the syllabus and assignments currently in place for your course, and consider how they might be adjusted to meet the demands of a more collaborative context.

As part of your proposal, you could set up a free wiki online and create a one-page essay explaining the process of setting up a free wiki. Publish your essay in your wiki and then give the rest of the class and your instructor permission to see your essay. If your writing course is already using a wiki, consider how you would draw up a similar proposal to an instructor in another discipline. For example, how would a history, biology, psychology, business, or nursing course benefit from a wiki?

Choose an essay you have written for a previous assignment in class. Exchange the paper with a classmate.
If possible, exchange an electronic version rather than a hard copy. Answer each of the “Twenty Questions for Peer Review” in this section. When necessary, make notes in the margins of the paper (by using Insert Comment if you are working in Word, then resaving the draft before returning it electronically).

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Joining the Conversation

Thus far we’ve established why it’s important to slow down your thinking and avoid rushing to judgment about topics. We’ve demonstrated how a close, careful, critical reading of texts can produce greater insights. We’ve explored the interplay among academic disciplines and shown how using various disciplinary lenses can lead us to see the world in different ways. We haven’t yet turned these private thinking exercises into public writing. It’s time to go public and join the conversation.

Because they have presented critical thinking strategies, the first three chapters have only occasionally touched on the stakes involved in actually presenting your ideas publicly. In this final chapter, you will learn what’s involved in using rhetoric to write for a specific audience and purpose.

Raising the Stakes by Going Public

Learning Objectives

- Appreciate the fact that rhetoric is value-neutral and ever present.
- Understand the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric.
- Learn about the differences between low-stakes private writing and high-stakes public writing.

The word rhetoric, like critical, has taken on a negative connotation in recent years. Politicians are fond of using the (ironically rhetorical) technique of boasting that they will “not indulge in rhetoric,” or accusing their opponents of “being rhetorical,” as if it were possible to communicate at all without using rhetoric. Rhetoric is simply a value-neutral term for communication that has a purpose. It can be used in the service of good or evil, or something in between, but it is always used. Communicating publicly without using rhetoric is like driving across town without a car.

Just as you used writing to think in the first three chapters, when you write publicly in this chapter and beyond, you shouldn’t stop thinking. Sometimes public and academic writing is presented as a fixed, sterile transcript or translation of already completed thoughts. But the more faithfully you depict your thinking process in front of your readers, the more engaged your audience will be, and the more they will want to share in your journey.

Dialectic and Rhetoric

In Chapter 3 “Thinking through the Disciplines”, we explored how disciplines navigate between binary oppositions to sustain dialogue, debate, and the possibility of new discoveries. The classical term for sustaining a productive tension between binary oppositions is dialectic, from the Greek word meaning “dialogue.” We have been suggesting that you could use dialectic in your academic pursuits as a way of understanding concepts and perhaps even producing new insights.

A good working knowledge of the methods and strategies of rhetoric will put you in position to apply, translate, and convey publicly the insights you generate through dialectic thinking. In classical terms, dialectic and rhetoric were considered to be complementary counterparts. If you merely think dialectically without eventually using public rhetoric, your insights will be isolated and irrelevant. On the other hand, if you use only rhetoric without first going through some rigorously dialectical thinking, your communication will be undisciplined, shallow, overly partial and subjective, and lacking in perspective. An educated, ethical person needs to use both dialectic and
Moving from Low-Stakes to High-Stakes Writing

Let’s bring these ideas down to earth with an example of how a semiprivate journal entry was partially but not completely transformed into a piece of public communication in an academic setting. In the first couple of weeks of the semester, Zach, a first-year college writing student, wrote the following entry in his electronic writing journal (a space that had been set up for “semiprivate” communication between students and their instructor, with an understanding that the instructor would neither grade the entries nor comment on them unless invited to do so):

Two days ago, when my mother got laid off, I was notified that my paycheck was now, not only the primary and bread-winning income, but the ONLY income. This is really putting stress onto me and because of this means two of everything, for example two car payments, twice the insurance, the entire phone bill, and the entire rent amount.

Later in the term, when students were invited to post suggestions for the next year’s entering class of students on a class-wide wiki, Zach decided to go public with his story (embeedded in his new, now public post).

Strategies for Success in Community College

Many incoming community college students enter into their freshman year with the part-time job that they acquired in their senior year of high school. For me, entering into the new college environment with a full-time job has been a bit of a hassle as well as being quite stressful. When I started my freshman year, my job paid my share of the rent and phone bill as well as my car payment and insurance payment.

Early in the semester, when my mother got laid off, I was notified that my paycheck was now, not only the primary and bread-winning income, but the ONLY income. This is really putting stress onto me and because of this means two of everything, for example two car payments, twice the insurance, the entire phone bill, and the entire rent amount.

When you start your college careers, you must pace yourself when you take your first semester of classes. It is best to put your job on the back burner. You do not want to start following me down the bumpy road of life. The path I have chosen has been extremely stressful. In choosing this path, I am close to not only losing my job but I am also dangerously close to failing out of some of my classes. A full-time job as well as being a full-time student is NOT recommended, especially for a first-time student.

Going public with his personal difficulty and addressing an audience (other than himself and his professor) has prompted Zach to begin considering in some detail the dialectic tensions many of his fellow students face between school and work, school and family, and family and work. This deepening of his thinking from pure narrative (“x happened, then y happened”) into analysis (“this is why x and y happened and how they relate to each other”) is an example of how rhetorical responsibility can raise the stakes and the quality of a piece of writing.

However, Zach hasn’t yet moved fully into a rhetorical mode with this post because he is still working through the various dialectics he has raised. He has actually gone public too early in the process, before he has come up with some reasonably meaningful and complete ideas to convey to his newly recruited audience. He has closed with an incontrovertibly true statement: “A full-time job as well as being a full-time student is NOT recommended, especially for a first-time student.” But he hasn’t yet worked out an alternative to that arrangement that also meets the needs of his family. The wiki post is, more realistically, step two of a multistep process. Now that he has an audience in mind and a clear sense of his dilemma, he needs to explore a realistic and sustainable solution to this problem on a wider scale.

Key Takeaways

- Rhetoric is the public application of dialectical thinking.
- Low-stakes, private writing that explores the terms of a dialectic can be transformed into high-stakes,
public writing meant for an audience, but that process may take several stages or drafts.
- The process of going public involves a balance between meeting your audience’s expectations and honoring your original thinking process.

Exercises

Uncover a dialectic tension in a piece of your journal writing. Lay out a plan for how you could move from dialectic to rhetoric. How would you explore this dialectic further and ultimately present it rhetorically to an audience of your choosing? If appropriate, execute your plan.

Review a piece of “finished” text, either an essay you’ve already produced for an audience or grade or a published piece by another writer. Identify a dialectic tension in the piece that was oversimplified or dismissed in the interest of “going public” prematurely. Use your findings to lay out a plan to move from rhetoric back to dialectic and then move back to a more balanced, effective, meaningful use of rhetoric.

Revise the following semiprivate journal entry about juggling work, family, and school into a public wiki post for an audience of entering college students. Use the following steps:
- Examine the journal for any dialectic tensions and identify them.
- Decide whether you have fully worked out those dialectics in the current draft.
- As you go public, figure out how to present the dialectics with rhetorical effectiveness.

Sometimes going to school full time and trying to make money is difficult and to do it I have to juggle my responsibilities and manage my time appropriately. A big problem I have is when I am working I am often too exhausted to spend the necessary amount of concentration I need to on my school work. I work for my parents remodeling my house which includes a lot of physical labor such as painting, putting down flooring, refinishing cabinets, and so forth. These things drain a lot of energy out of me and make it hard to study and focus at night. I have been doing a mediocre job keeping up with school and work but would like to be able to make improvements in both without being so tired.

To do this I started alternating between doing school work in the afternoons and working in the mornings. Instead of during a bunch of physical labor early in the day and tiring my self out by night time when it was time to do my homework I switched the two. I started my day out by making a list of all the homework I needed to do that day and then did half of it. After I completed half of my homework I would do the work I was suppose to around my house until everything that needed to be done that day was done. After I finished my work I took a break and ate. I left myself a couple hours to relax or socialize before I had to finish the rest of my homework. This schedule left me with a lot more energy at night and less homework to do which let me put more attention and focus into actually understanding the homework and completing the assignments. Alternating between different things depending on my energy level and time of day has been a helpful strategy for me to overcome my major time-management problem for this week.

Recognizing the Rhetorical Situation

Learning Objectives

- Outline and illustrate the elements of the rhetorical triangle.
- Explore the uses and abuses of rhetorical appeals.
- Show how to develop the habit of thinking rhetorically.

The term argument, like rhetoric and critical, is another term that can carry negative connotations (e.g., “We argued all day,” “He picked an argument,” or “You don’t have to be so argumentative”), but like these other terms, it’s really just a neutral term. It’s the effort to use rhetorical appeals to influence an audience and achieve a certain set of purposes and outcomes.
The Rhetorical Triangle

The principles Aristotle laid out in his *Rhetoric* nearly 2,500 years ago still form the foundation of much of our contemporary practice of argument. The rhetorical situation Aristotle argued was present in any piece of communication is often illustrated with a triangle to suggest the interdependent relationships among its three elements: the **voice** (the speaker or writer), the **audience** (the intended listeners or readers), and the **message** (the text being conveyed).

If each corner of the triangle is represented by one of the three elements of the rhetorical situation, then each side of the triangle depicts a particular relationship between two elements:

- **Tone.** The connection established between the **voice** and the **audience**.
- **Attitude.** The orientation of the **voice** toward the **message** it wants to convey.
- **Reception.** The manner in which the **audience** receives the **message** conveyed.
Rhetorical Appeals

In this section, we’ll focus on how the rhetorical triangle can be used in service of argumentation, especially through the balanced use of ethical, logical, and emotional appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos, respectively. In the preceding figure, you’ll note that each appeal has been placed next to the corner of the triangle with which it is most closely associated:

- **Ethos.** Appeals to the credibility, reputation, and trustworthiness of the speaker or writer (most closely associated with the voice).
- **Pathos.** Appeals to the emotions and cultural beliefs of the listeners or readers (most closely associated with the audience).
- **Logos.** Appeals to reason, logic, and facts in the argument (most closely associated with the message).

Each of these appeals relies on a certain type of evidence: ethical, emotional, or logical. Based on your audience and purpose, you have to decide what combination of techniques will work best as you present your case.

When using a logical appeal, make sure to use sound inductive and deductive reasoning to speak to the reader’s common sense. Specifically avoid using emotional comments or pictures if you think your audience will see their use as manipulative or inflammatory. For example, in an essay proposing that participating in high school athletics helps students develop into more successful students, you could show graphs comparing the grades of athletes and nonathletes, as well as high school graduation rates and post–high school education enrollment. These statistics would support your points in a logical way and would probably work well with a school board that is considering cutting a sports program.

The goal of an emotional appeal is to garner sympathy, develop anger, instill pride, inspire happiness, or trigger other emotions. When you choose this method, your goal is for your audience to react emotionally regardless of what they might think logically. In some situations, invoking an emotional appeal is a reasonable choice. For example, if you were trying to convince your audience that a certain drug is dangerous to take, you might choose to show a harrowing image of a person who has had a bad reaction to the drug. In this case, the image draws an emotional appeal and helps convince the audience that the drug is dangerous. Unfortunately, emotional appeals are also often used unethically to sway opinions without solid reasoning.

An ethical appeal relies on the credibility of the author. For example, a college professor who places a college logo on a website gains some immediate credibility from being associated with the college. An advertisement for tennis shoes using a well-known athlete gains some credibility. You might create an ethical appeal in an essay on solving a campus problem by noting that you are serving in student government. Ethical appeals can add an important component to your argument, but keep in mind that ethical appeals are only as strong as the credibility of the association being made.

Whether your argument relies primarily on logos, pathos, ethos, or a combination of these appeals, plan to make your case with your entire arsenal of facts, statistics, examples, anecdotes, illustrations, figurative language, quotations, expert opinions, discountable opposing views, and common ground with the audience. Carefully choosing these supporting details will control the tone of your paper as well as the success of your argument.

Logical, Emotional, and Ethical Fallacies

Rhetorical appeals have power. They can be used to motivate or to manipulate. When they are used irresponsibly, they lead to fallacies. Fallacies are, at best, unintentional reasoning errors, and at worst, they are deliberate attempts to deceive. Fallacies are commonly used in advertising and politics, but they are not acceptable in academic arguments. The following are some examples of three kinds of fallacies that abuse the power of logical, emotional, or ethical appeals (logos, pathos, or ethos).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logical Fallacies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Begging the question</strong> (or <strong>circular reasoning</strong>): The point is simply restated in different words as proof to support the point.</td>
<td>Tall people are more successful because they accomplish more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Fallacies</td>
<td>Examples</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Either/or fallacy:</strong> A situation is presented as an “either/or” choice when in reality, there are more than just two options.</td>
<td>Either I start to college this fall or I work in a factory for the rest of my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>False analogy:</strong> A comparison is made between two things that are not enough alike to support the comparison.</td>
<td>This summer camp job is like a rat cage. They feed us and let us out on a schedule.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hasty generalization:</strong> A conclusion is reached with insufficient evidence.</td>
<td>I wouldn’t go to that college if I were you because it is extremely unorganized. I had to apply twice because they lost my first application.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>non sequitur:</strong> Two unrelated ideas are erroneously shown to have a cause-and-effect relationship.</td>
<td>If you like dogs, you would like a pet lion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>post hoc ergo propter hoc</strong> (or <strong>false cause and effect</strong>): The writer argues that A caused B because B happened after A.</td>
<td>George W. Bush was elected after Bill Clinton, so it is clear that dissatisfaction with Clinton lead to Bush’s election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red herring:</strong> The writer inserts an irrelevant detail into an argument to divert the reader’s attention from the main issue.</td>
<td>My room might be a mess, but I got an A in math.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-contradiction:</strong> One part of the writer’s argument directly contradicts the overall argument.</td>
<td>Man has evolved to the point that we clearly understand that there is no such thing as evolution.</td>
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<td><strong>Straw man:</strong> The writer rebuts a competing claim by offering an exaggerated or oversimplified version of it.</td>
<td>Claim—You should take a long walk every day. Rebuttal—You want me to sell my car, or what?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Emotional Fallacies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Apple polishing:</strong> Flattery of the audience is disguised as a reason for accepting a claim.</td>
<td>You should wear a fedora. You have the perfect bone structure for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flattery:</strong> The writer suggests that readers with certain positive traits would naturally agree with the writer’s point.</td>
<td>You are a calm and collected person, so you can probably understand what I am saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group think</strong> (or <strong>group appeal</strong>): The reader is encouraged to decide about an issue based on identification with a popular, high-status group.</td>
<td>The varsity football players all bought some of our fundraising candy. Do you want to buy some?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Riding the bandwagon:</strong> The writer suggests that since “everyone” is doing something, the reader should do it too.</td>
<td>The hot thing today is to wear black socks with tennis shoes. You’ll look really out of it if you wear those white socks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scare tactics</strong> (or <strong>veiled threats</strong>): The writer uses frightening ideas to scare readers into agreeing or believing something.</td>
<td>If the garbage collection rates are not increased, your garbage will likely start piling up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotyping:</strong> The writer uses a sweeping, general statement about a group of people in order to prove a point.</td>
<td>Women won’t like this movie because it has too much action and violence. OR Men won’t like this movie because it’s about feelings and relationships.</td>
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Ethical Fallacies

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<th>Ethical Fallacies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Argument from outrage:</strong> Extreme outrage that springs from an overbearing reliance on the writer’s own subjective perspective is used to shock readers into agreeing instead of thinking for themselves.</td>
<td>I was absolutely beside myself to think that anyone could be stupid enough to believe that the Ellis Corporation would live up to its commitments. The totally unethical management there failed to require the metal grade they agreed to. This horrendous mess we now have is completely their fault, and they must be held accountable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>False authority</strong> (or hero worship or appeal to authority or appeal to celebrity): A celebrity is quoted or hired to support a product or idea in efforts to sway others’ opinions.</td>
<td>LeBron James wears Nikes, and you should too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guilt by association:</strong> An adversary’s credibility is attacked because the person has friends or relatives who possibly lack in credibility.</td>
<td>We do not want people like her teaching our kids. Her father is in prison for murder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal attack</strong> (or ad hominem): An adversary’s personal attributes are used to discredit his or her argument.</td>
<td>I don’t care if the government hired her as an expert. If she doesn’t know enough not to wear jeans to court, I don’t trust her judgment about anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poisoning the well:</strong> Negative information is shared about an adversary so others will later discredit his or her opinions.</td>
<td>I heard that he was charged with aggravated assault last year, and his rich parents got him off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scapegoating:</strong> A certain group or person is unfairly blamed for all sorts of problems.</td>
<td>Jake is such a terrible student government president; it is no wonder that it is raining today and our spring dance will be ruined.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do your best to avoid using these examples of fallacious reasoning, and be alert to their use by others so that you aren’t “tricked” into a line of unsound reasoning. Getting into the habit of reading academic, commercial, and political rhetoric carefully will enable you to see through manipulative, fallacious uses of verbal, written, and visual language. Being on guard for these fallacies will make you a more proficient college student, a smarter consumer, and a more careful voter, citizen, and member of your community.

Key Takeaways

- The principles of the rhetorical situation outlined in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* almost 2,500 years ago still influence the way we look at rhetoric today, especially the interdependent relationships between voice (the speaker or writer), message (the text being conveyed), and audience (the intended listeners or readers).
- The specific relationships in the rhetorical triangle can be called tone (voice–audience), attitude (voice–message), and reception (audience–message).
- Rhetorical appeals can be used responsibly as a means of building a persuasive argument, but they can also be abused in fallacies that manipulate and deceive unsuspecting audiences.

Exercises

Apply what you’ve learned about the uses and abuses of rhetorical appeals (logos, pathos, and ethos) to a text from the *Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts”*. For good examples from advertising, politics, history, and government, try the Ad Council, the Avalon Project, From Revolution to Reconstruction, The Living Room Candidate, or the C-SPAN Video Library. For example, The Living Room Candidate site allows you to survey television ads from any presidential campaign since 1952. You could study five ads for each of the major candidates and subject the ads to a thorough review of their use of rhetorical techniques. Cite how and where each ad uses each of the three rhetorical appeals, and determine whether you think each ad
uses the appeals manipulatively or legitimately. In this case, subject your political biases and preconceptions to a review as well. Is your view of one candidate’s advertising more charitable than the other for any subjective reason?

Find five recent print, television, or web-based advertisements and subject them to a thorough review of their use of rhetorical techniques. Determine whether you think each advertisement uses rhetorical appeals responsibly and effectively or misuses the appeals through fallacies. Identify the appeals employed in either case.

In the following passage from Thomas Paine’s famous 1776 pamphlet, *Common Sense*, discuss Paine’s use of rhetorical appeals. Which of the three appeals (logos, pathos, or ethos) predominates, and why? For the context of this passage, go to From Revolution to Reconstruction in the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” and search for Paine, or click on http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/D/1776-1800/paine/CM/sense04.htm to go to the passage directly:

Europe is too thickly planted with kingdoms to be long at peace, and whenever a war breaks out between England and any foreign power, the trade of America goes to ruin, because of her connection with Britain. The next war may not turn out like the Past, and should it not, the advocates for reconciliation now will be wishing for separation then, because, neutrality in that case, would be a safer convoy than a man of war. Every thing that is right or natural pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, ‘TIS TIME TO PART. Even the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America, is a strong and natural proof, that the authority of the one, over the other, was never the design of Heaven.

American colonists faced a dialectic between continuing to be ruled by Great Britain or declaring independence. Arguments in favor of independence (such as Paine’s) are quite familiar to students of American history; the other side of the dialectic, which did not prevail, will likely be less so. In the following passage, Charles Inglis, in his 1776 pamphlet, *The True Interest of America Impartially Stated*, makes a case for ending the rebellion and reconciling with Great Britain. At one point in the passage, Inglis quotes Paine directly (calling him “this author”) as part of his rebuttal. As in the preceding exercise, read the passage and discuss its use of rhetorical appeals. Again, which of the three appeals (logos, pathos, or ethos) predominates, and why? For a link to the entire Inglis document, search for Inglis in From Revolution to Reconstruction in the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts”, or click on http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/D/1776-1800/libertydebate/inglis.htm to go to the link directly:

By a reconciliation with Britain, a period would be put to the present calamitous war, by which so many lives have been lost, and so many more must be lost, if it continues. This alone is an advantage devoutly to be wished for. This author says, “The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, Tis time to part.” I think they cry just the reverse. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries—It is time to be reconciled; it is time to lay aside those animosities which have pushed on Britons to shed the blood of Britons; it is high time that those who are connected by the endearing ties of religion, kindred and country, should resume their former friendship, and be united in the bond of mutual affection, as their interests are inseparably united.

**Rhetoric and Argumentation**

**Learning Objectives**

Recognize the various methods, types, and aims of argumentation used in academic and professional texts. Understand how to adjust your approach to argumentation depending on your rhetorical situation and the findings of your research.

True argumentation is the most important kind of communication in the academic and professional world. Used effectively, it is how ideas are debated and shared in discourse communities. Argumentation holds both writers and readers to the highest standards of responsibility and ethics. It is usually not what you see on cable news shows or, sadly, even in presidential debates. This section will show how rhetoric is used in service of argumentation.
Induction and Deduction

Traditionally, arguments are classified as either inductive or deductive. Inductive arguments consider a number of results and form a generalization based on those results. In other words, say you sat outside a classroom building and tallied the number of students wearing jeans and the number wearing something other than jeans. If after one hour, you had tallied 360 students wearing jeans and 32 wearing other clothes, you could use inductive reasoning to make the generalization that most students at your college wear jeans to class. Here’s another example. While waiting for your little sister to come out of the high school, you saw 14 girls wearing high heels. So you assume that high heels are standard wear for today’s high school girls.

Deductive arguments begin with a general principle, which is referred to as a major premise. Then a related premise is applied to the major premise and a conclusion is formed. The three statements together form a syllogism. Here are some examples:

- Major premise: Leather purses last a long time.
- Minor premise: I have a leather purse.
- Conclusion: My purse will last a long time.
- Major premise: Tara watches a lot of television.
- Minor premise: Tara is a very good student.
- Conclusion: A teenage can be a good student even if he or she watches a lot of television.

Although these simple inductive and deductive arguments are fairly clean and easy to follow, they can be flawed because of their rigidity.

Let’s revisit the “college students wear jeans” argument. What if you happened to be counting jeans wearers on a day that has been declared Denim Appreciation Day? Or conversely, what if you had taken the sample on the hottest day of the year in the middle of the summer session? Although it might be true that most students in your sample on that day wore jeans to class, the argument as it stands is not yet strong enough to support the statement.

Now consider the purse argument. The argument is not strong since a variety of possible exceptions are obvious. First, not all leather purses last a long time since the leather could be strong, but the workmanship could be shoddy (challenge to major premise). Second, the quality of the leather in your particular purse could be such that it would not hold up to heavy use (challenge to minor premise). Third, a possible exception is that the argument does not take into account how long I have had my purse: even though it is made of leather, its lifespan could be about over. Since very few issues are completely straightforward, it is often easy to imagine exceptions to simplistic arguments. For this reason, somewhat complex argument forms have been developed to address more complicated issues that require some flexibility.

Types of Argumentation

Three common types of argumentation are classical, Toulmin, and Rogerian. You can choose which type to use based on the nature of your argument, the opinions of your audience, and the relationship between your argument and your audience.

The typical format for a classical argument will likely be familiar to you:

- **Introduction**
  - Convince readers that the topic is worthy of their attention.
  - Provide background information that sets the stage for the argument.
  - Provide details that show you as a credible source.
  - End with a thesis statement that takes a position on the issue or problem you have established to be arguable.

- **Presentation of position**
  - Give the reasons why the reader should share your opinion.
  - Provide support for the reasons.
  - Show why the reasons matter to the audience.
• Presentation and rebuttal of alternative positions
  ○ Show that you are aware of opposing views.
  ○ Systematically present the advantages and disadvantages of the opposing views.
  ○ Show that you have been thorough and fair but clearly have made the correct choice with the stand you have taken.

• Conclusion
  ○ Summarize your argument.
  ○ Make a direct request for audience support.
  ○ Reiterate your credentials.

Toulminian argumentation (named for its creator, Stephen Toulmin) includes three components: a claim, stated grounds to support the claim, and unstated assumptions called warrants. Here’s an example:

• Claim: All homeowners can benefit from double-pane windows.
• Grounds: Double-pane windows are much more energy efficient than single-pane windows. Also, double-pane windows block distracting outside noise.
• Warrant: Double-pane windows keep houses cooler in summer and warmer in winter, and they qualify for the tax break for energy-efficient home improvements.

The purest version of Rogerian argumentation (named for its creator, Carl Rogers) actually aims for true compromise between two positions. It can be particularly appropriate when the dialectic you are addressing remains truly unresolved. However, the Rogerian method has been put into service as a motivational technique, as in this example:

• Core argument: First-semester college students should be required to attend three writing sessions in the college writing center.
• Common ground: Many first-semester college students struggle with college-level work and the overall transition from high school to college.
• Link between common ground and core argument: We want our students to have every chance to succeed, and students who attend at least three writing sessions in the university writing lab are 90 percent more likely to succeed in college.

Rogerian argumentation can also be an effective standard debating technique when you are arguing for a specific point of view. Begin by stating the opposing view to capture the attention of audience members who hold that position and then show how it shares common ground with your side of the point. Your goal is to persuade your audience to come to accept your point by the time they read to the end of your argument. Applying this variation to the preceding example might mean leading off with your audience’s greatest misgivings about attending the writing center, by opening with something like “First-semester college students are so busy that they should not be asked to do anything they do not really need to do.”

Analytical and Problem-Solving Argumentation

Arguments of any kind are likely to either take a position about an issue or present a solution to a problem. Don’t be surprised, though, if you end up doing both. If your goal is to analyze a text or a body of data and justify your interpretation with evidence, you are writing an analytical argument. Examples include the following:

• Evaluative reviews (of restaurants, films, political candidates, etc.)
• Interpretations of texts (a short story, poem, painting, piece of music, etc.)
• Analyses of the causes and effects of events (9/11, the Civil War, unemployment, etc.)

Problem-solving argumentation is not only the most complicated but also the most important type of all. It involves several thresholds of proof. First, you have to convince readers that a problem exists. Second, you have to give a convincing description of the problem. Third, because problems often have more than one solution, you have to convince readers that your solution is the most feasible and effective. Think about the different opinions people might hold about the severity, causes, and possible solutions to these sample problems:

• Global warming
• Nonrenewable energy consumption
• The federal budget deficit
• Homelessness
• Rates of personal saving
Argumentation often requires a combination of analytical and problem-solving approaches. Whether the assignment requires you to analyze, solve a problem, or both, your goal is to present your facts or solution confidently, clearly, and completely. Despite the common root word, when writing an argument, you need to guard against taking a too argumentative tone. You need to support your statements with evidence but do so without being unduly abrasive. Good argumentation allows us to disagree without being disagreeable.

Research and Revision in Argumentation

Your college professors are not interested in having you do in-depth research for its own sake, just to prove that you know how to incorporate a certain number of sources and document them appropriately. It is assumed that extensive research is a core feature of a strong essay. In college-level writing, research is not meant merely to provide additional support for an already fixed idea you have about the topic, or to set up a “straw man” for you to knock down with ease. Don’t fall into the trap of trying to make your research fit your existing argument. Research conducted in good faith will almost certainly lead you to refine your ideas about your topic, leading to multiple revisions of your work. It might cause you even to change your topic entirely.

Revision is part of the design of higher education. If you embrace the “writing to think” and “writing to learn” philosophy and adopt the “composing habits of mind” with each draft, you will likely rethink your positions, do additional research, and make other general changes. As you conduct additional research between drafts, you are likely to find new information that will lead you to revise your core argument. Let your research drive your work, and keep in mind that your argument will remain in flux until your final draft. In the end, every final draft you produce should feel like a small piece of a vast and never ending conversation.

Key Takeaways

- Argumentative reasoning relies on deduction (using multiple pieces of evidence to arrive at a single conclusion) and induction (arriving at a general conclusion from specific facts).
- You must decide which type of argumentation (classical, Toulmin, or Rogerian) is most appropriate for the rhetorical situation (voice, audience, message, tone, attitude, and reception).
- Analytical argumentation looks at a body of evidence and takes a position about it, while problem-solving argumentation tries to present a solution to a problem. These two aims of argumentation lead to very different kinds of evidence and organizational approaches.
- In argumentation, it’s especially important for you to be willing to adjust your approach and even your position in the face of new evidence or new circumstances.

Exercises

Drawing from one of your college library databases, find two texts you consider to be serious efforts at academic or professional argumentation. Write up a report about the types of argumentation used in each of the two texts. Answer the following questions and give examples to support your answers:

- Does the text use primarily inductive or deductive argumentation?
- Does it use classical, Toulmin, or Rogerian argumentation?
- Is it primarily analytical or problem-solving argumentation?

With your writing group or in a large-class discussion, discuss the types of argumentation that would be most appropriate and effective for addressing the following issues:

- Capital punishment
- Abortion
- The legal drinking age
- Climate change
- Campus security

Come up with a controversial subject and write about how you would treat it differently depending on whether you used each of the following:

- Inductive or deductive reasoning
- Classical, Toulmin, or Rogerian argumentation
- An analytical or a problem-solving approach
4.4 Developing a Rhetorical Habit of Mind

Learning Objectives

Get into the habit of thinking about the all texts in rhetorical terms.
Learn about the statement of purpose and how it can be used as a tool for your future academic and professional writing.
Develop a rhetorical habit of mind by enhancing your awareness of how language works.

The habit of thinking rhetorically starts with being comfortable enough with the rhetorical triangle to see it in practically every form of communication you produce and consume—not only those you encounter in academic settings but also those you encounter in everyday life.

Besides familiarizing yourself with the elements of the triangle and how they function, you’ll also need to consider the rhetorical moves writers make so you can begin to use language more creatively in your writing. Good writers learn to improvise with the language, to make it work both as a tool for thinking and as a vehicle for communication. Here are four categories of rhetorical moves you will encounter and begin to use as you develop a rhetorical habit of mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical Move and Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connotative language: Using a word beyond its denotation (or primary definition) to suggest or incite a desired response in readers. Sometimes a connotation can be a euphemism designed to make something sound better than it really is; at other times, a connotation can put a negative spin on something.</td>
<td>“welfare” (or “entitlement”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“economic stimulus” (or “recovery”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“death panel” (or “managed care”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“pro-choice” (or “pro-abortion”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“estate tax” (or “death tax”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“global warming” (or “greenhouse effect”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Rhetorical Move and Definition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figurative language: Using metaphors, similes, and analogies can help you and your readers uncover previously unseen connections between different categories of things.</td>
<td>“That professor’s lecture was like a metronome.” (Similes use like or as.) “That test was a bear.” (Metaphors don’t.) “The current panic in education about students’ addiction to texting and video games is reminiscent of concerns in earlier eras about other kinds of emerging technology.” (Analogies can lead to entire essay topics.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorous language: Audiences who are entertained are more likely to receive your message. Within reason and boundaries of taste, there’s nothing wrong with using wit to help you make your points. Examples include plays on words (like puns, slang, neologisms, or “new words”), as well as more elaborate kinds of humor (such as parody and satire).</td>
<td>Recent additions to the dictionary (like “telecommuting,” “sexting,” and “crowdsourcing”) usually began as plays on words. Parody and satire are ironic ways of imitating a subject or style through caricature and exaggeration. Note: These kinds of humor require precise knowledge of your audience’s readiness to be entertained in this way. They can easily backfire and turn sour, but when used carefully, they can be extremely effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive language: Thinking about your thinking (metacognition) can help you step outside yourself to reflect on your writing (the equivalent of “showing your work” in math).</td>
<td>“At this point, I’d like to be clear about my intentions for this essay…” “Before I began this research project, I thought...but now I’ve come to believe…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you survey this table, remember that clear, simple, direct communication is still your primary goal, so don’t try all these techniques in the same piece of writing. Just know that you have them at your disposal and begin to develop them as part of your toolkit of rhetorical moves.

**Key Takeaways**

- Developing a rhetorical habit of mind will help you consider voice, audience, message, tone, attitude, and reception in all the texts you read and write.
- The rhetorical habit of mind will also help you recognize rhetorical moves in four categories of language use: connotative, figurative, humorous, and metacognitive.
- In the process of developing the rhetorical habit of mind, you will also develop your creativity, sense of humor, and self-awareness.

**Exercises**

Use the chart at the end of this section to find at least one example from each of the four categories of rhetorical moves in a reading of your choice. Be prepared to present your findings in a journal entry, a blog post, or as part of a group or class-wide discussion.

Take a piece of your writing in progress and try to incorporate at least one rhetorical move from each category into it, using the chart at the end of this section as a guide.

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Agree, Disagree, or Modify

In academic writing, there are three main writing moves. Knowing the available options, we can choose among them.

If you agree with some writer or view on a topic, there is little to say or to add. This can result in stale writing that patches together quotes from some other voice—often not even established as being credible (before source use) or interpreted in anyway afterward. Agreeing wholeheartedly with someone may not let the writer into the discussion, or her readers. . .


Yes. Yes, he does. There is no argument here. What about those concepts of violence or small-town secrets? Do they combine in some way? Is there some stereotypical view of Southern small towns being violent with which Faulkner—or I—can play?

Disagreeing is common, but even here 100% disagreement is rare. For instance, if a writer claims that we should view the small percentage of Neanderthal DNA most of us carry as a fact that’s unsurprising and the opposition just goes “No!”, then where are we? Monty Python’s “The Argument Sketch” satirizes those who just state the opposite of a position.

https://youtu.be/kQFKtI6gn9Y

The third option is to modify _______. So we would establish our authority by being “with it” enough to indicate which aspects of a statement are worthy of support and which are not.

Although most critics view Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” as being a Freudian story of displaced childhood rage, actually the story is most relevant if we apply those aspects to current North vs. South struggles, and not just conflicts of the past.” See how I modified this while also showing an awareness of what most other people think? Basically, I told them that—while not incorrect—they were at least missing some relevant point about this story.

If we modify something, we show under what conditions it obtains, or is valid.

Perhaps this will be easier to see if we consider Hamlet. Hundreds of years of scholarship on one play? When writing about the play, this is what we’re competing with. No professor expects you to discover some aspect of the play that nobody has ever considered. What they do expect, however, is that you show a working awareness of what some other people may have thought. They want you to add your voice to an ongoing conversation. In this case, if you’re not excited by the fact that around four hundred years of arguments, then your lack of interest or confidence will show. Think of how amazing it is that one’s voice gets added to these debates. They continue after you leave, too! So by modifying some ideas or combining aspects of this or that critic’s take on Hamlet, we can fashion our own stance.

That stance, by the way, makes you more important than either Shakespeare or the critics you employed! So modifying to some greater or lesser extent is the basic best move. (“Yes it is.” “No it is not!” See how those binaries (yes/no, is/is not, and even right/wrong) can be limiting?

To what extent? This is a useful question to follow the basic question when entering into prewriting or argument. Crafting those follow-up questions and creating a habit of knowing to ask are vital academic survival skills.
Improve Your Writing: Tips

1. Be patient. Improving skills takes time.
2. Expect to get stuck. “Get nowhere fast.”
3. Remember that writing is really rewriting.
4. Be aware of what you do when you write.
5. Talk to other writers.
6. Study the responses to your writing.
7. Read, read, read. Playing word games and reading challenging text are two ways to improve test scores.
8. Do not fear mistakes. Make spectacular mistakes!

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Inquiry Model

What’s Inquiry?

Inquiry is investigation. We engage in inquiry pretty much all of the time—unless we’re watching television. (I’m kidding about the television part... sort of. We are probably most inactive when watching TV.) Inquiry fixes us on questions, on figuring things out. Since we live in a rapidly changing world, the skills we can develop when paying attention to how we inquire are important.

Each of your essays is an inquiry. They take different forms. Your thesis tells us the answer you wish to arrive at. Because you also hope that readers agree with your opinion, you are inviting them to share your inquiry. The organization and development of your “answer,” then, is social.

You can look at anything through the eyes of inquiry. Take, for instance, The National Inquirer. What is its motto? That’s right: “Inquiring minds want to know.” How mysterious. Still, it sounds an awful lot like “Everything’s an argument.” Just like those pesky reporters, inquiry is everywhere. You engage in it. To be taken seriously, though, is another matter.

Q, T, Tw/F, Th: What Are These?

Look at the graphic below. (The graphic is used with permission from Larry Weinstein, author of Writing at the Threshold.) It models, very roughly, how we tend to think.

![Inquiry image used with permission from Larry Weinstein's Writing at the Threshold](Image)

The Q stands for question. The H stands for hunch or hypothesis. This is an educated guess, an idea of what we think we’ll find, what might happen.

T w/F represents testing with facts. Don’t we do this all the time, when we’re driving or walking? Why wouldn’t the same thing happen when we journal, then?

Th represents thesis. Remember, the thesis is the arguable opinion we present when arguing or inquiring. It could be wrong, but we think it’s so. We think so because of _______ and _______ and _______. We got those supporting details/reasons because we tested with facts.

Are you starting to see the benefits of this model? It’s elegant, it’s something we already do, and it gives names to our ways of thinking. Now, we don’t always follow this. The arrows represent those fits and starts, those dead ends. They curl back in many directions, even back upon themselves.

The thesis in our papers gets put in the introduction, right? Here, the thesis is arrived at. The whole model is what we call recursive, which means “curling back upon itself.” It’s not linear. You won’t get far as a writer if you go from start to finish, editing as you go.(Some people work like that, but they must not be too sane!)

Why is the model above so valuable?

I’ll refer to this model often throughout the course.

What’s Appropriate?

When you write your journals, you are engaging in a different form of inquiry than you do when writing an essay. Journals may get you the ideas for excellent essays, but their purpose and audience differ from essays. Essays are “dressed up,” while journals are causal and informal. This makes a lot of difference. For one thing, people will judge you differently based on how well you meet their expectations, and the expectations of the situation. If you showed up to a softball game wearing a pink tuxedo, you are unlikely to receive a positive reaction. The same thing applies in this course. When figuring out what it takes to get an “A” on a given assignment, you engage in inquiry, right?
So, the journals you do in here will each represent an inquiry. Let’s see how you can develop your skills as a questioner and as a question answerer.

**There’s a Method to His Madness. . .**

If you’re doing this right, then expect confusion
Now, why would I say that?

Isn’t writing supposed to be all neat? If I am a messy thinker, I can’t be a good writer, right? The truth is that writing is inherently chaotic. Enjoy that! Writing is full of stops and starts, diversions and confusion. The trick is to attend to the process for long enough to get a workable result. Journals offer a great starting point for this sort of messy inquiry.

Be practical. Practice. Find out the methods that work for you. They will change, and you will change as well (hopefully). By the time you do your research paper, you will be operating differently than you did when you started the course. If you don’t, then something is going wrong here.

I hope you have a better idea of what inquiry is all about. The next trick will be for you to place yourself in situations where you can think—and to think about how you think.

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- Inquiry Model. **Authored by:** Joshua Dickinson and Larry Weinstein. **Provided by:** Jefferson Community College. **Located at:** https://secure.ncte.org/store/writing-at-the-threshold. **Project:** College Writing Handbook. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
Binary Patterns

This or that? Me or you? I or thou? Subject or object?

Along with these basic either/or questions, Western thought is built on other key binaries.

A binary is an either/or choice like the zeroes and ones making up DVDs or other digital codes. While some things lend themselves to “this or that” choices, we know that the world is often much more complicated. The answer “Pepsi or Coke?” might define a person privately, but whether you like one or the other may not carry much public meaning. Ironically, it did carry meaning in the 80s during the Cola Wars.

These either/or choices often have strange histories. For instance, the tragedy/comedy binary informs genres on television and in literature. It is based on a thinker, Aristotle, who was not even approving of literature. Dig into the history of tragedy and comedy and you will find some strangeness. For instance, tragedy was supposed by Aristotle to feature someone making a choice which leads inevitably to their downfall, which we witness and feel catharsis, a sense of purging out of both ends. . .! Weird enough for you? It makes a certain amount of sense, just as listening to a blues song makes us feel happy, but it’s what we’d call contingent: based on a quirky, particular set of happenings that did not have to occur. So binaries are contingent. (Call this the non-tragic theory of approaching binaries.) And comedy was supposed to involve a mating and joining offstage in early Greek comedies—which were held at the festival of the god Dionysus, at which, originally, his devotees called Maenads were said to mate with willing victims on mountainsides, after which they would rend apart the sacrificial victim. And this is what informs our genres—and has done so for 2,500 years. So I’d add necessary vs. contingent as a binary that can be useful.

For more on the strangeness of binaries, you might do a search for humor theory or look at the history of academia (gowns, gavels, graduations. . .). Or if you’re talking good or evil, one might look at how evil always comes back (Sauron, Voldemort). Weirdly enough, this even contributes to a type of cannibalism whereby an enemy’s body is eaten so that his soul can be erased—for a time—from the eternal battlefield. As the cliche goes, “The truth is stranger than fiction.” In fields like literary analysis, there is no “capital-T Truth.” That idea of there being one would go back to Plato and his theory of Forms.

So these issues have histories of which we should become aware. As a critical reader, it is important for you to take note of binaries and gauge their effects. Though they may exclude other choices, it is the case that humans notice contrasts and oppositions.

Binaries are crutches, tools. They can work but can put blinders on what we notice. Early in stages of the writing or critical thinking processes, they can be useful.

| Which side of a binary does the author notice or value more? |
| Which views are portrayed as negative? |
| What is undervalued or missing from a given text? |

In a writing course, then, you might create a persuasive essay that argues one side against another. We contribute to these ongoing debates most thoughtfully if we realize that they arguments will continue, however well we write about them! Just don’t fall into the trap of thinking that the world is either/or, comforting as that notion may be. CC licensed content, Original
Know the Rhetorical Modes: Beware the Nine!

Yes, I’m a J.R.R. Tolkien fan, so the nine here means the Black Riders or else the Nine Walkers bringing the Ring to its destruction. Seriously, though, nine is a significant number in many cultures, and hopefully we can remember the nine modes.

- narration
- description
- definition
- illustration
- process

-These are the building blocks, the ones we experience all the time. Your day is a story. Teens are protagonists in a melodrama where “stuff happens” to them. Going with these basics, we can move into the other modes that rely upon these foundations.

- comparison and contrast
- cause and effect
- classification and division

Think on this: For 2,500 years, the rich have been studying these, using these to get or keep power. Now we are using them. That’s powerful. Stuffy old rhetoric is still valuable, still relevant. The three appeals are Greek (logos, ethos, pathos). Each has advantages and disadvantages. Appealing to ethos may make one look biased—especially if the audience doesn’t share the writer’s characters and values. Emotions are strong and immediate, which can backfire—but, then again, so can appearing coldly objective through overuse of logos.

These last three modes involve two things or groups of things (note the and) and are obviously more complex. Cause and effect, I’d argue, is the toughest mode to master. Why? That’s right! Anytime you ask “Why?” or “What happened because of X?”, you’ll be doing cause/effect. It’s arguable. There are direct and indirect causes. There are ultimate causes. Some cultures call their god(s) “the ultimate cause.” There are proximate causes, close to us. There are effects with these same names. There are visible and hidden causes and effects. Wow! It’s likely that cause and effect is the toughest mode.

- argument

Speaking of logic, the last mode is argument. With this, we deal with appeals (hopefully to logic, but more often in pop culture we get the appeals to emotion or to ethics, which is character and values).

There they are: Nine different modes which writers use in concert, often without an awareness that they are switching from one to the other:
What do you make of this very old system we continue to teach and use?

Know the Rhetorical Modes: Beware the Nine!. **Authored by:** Joshua Dickinson; Purvis image used from CC [https://ccsearch.creativecommons.org/image/detail/1_n8vo1eJlsa5xTnp4VkA==.](https://ccsearch.creativecommons.org/image/detail/1_n8vo1eJlsa5xTnp4VkA==). **Provided by:** Jefferson Community College. **Located at:** [http://www.sunyjefferson.edu](http://www.sunyjefferson.edu). **Project:** Writers' Handbook. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)
Exploring Academic Disciplines

Most college writing has some basic features in common: a sense of ethical responsibility and the use of credible and credited sources, critical thinking, and sound argumentation. In addition to these common features, each academic discipline, over many generations, has developed its own specific methods of asking questions and sharing answers. This chapter will show you how to use the lenses of various academic disciplines to develop your writing, reading, and thinking.

3.1 Exploring Academic Disciplines

Learning Objectives

Survey the landscape of academic disciplines.
Appreciate how academic disciplines help shape how we understand the world.
Understand that academic disciplines are constantly in flux, negotiating the terms, conditions, and standards of inquiry, attribution, and evidence.

The following table shows one version of the main academic disciplines and some of their branches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Branch Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Art, history, languages, literature, music, philosophy, religion, theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and applied sciences</td>
<td>Biology, chemistry, computer science, engineering, geology, mathematics, physics, medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>Anthropology, education, geography, law, political science, psychology, sociology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the makeup of the different branches is always in flux and since the history of any institution of higher education is complicated, you will likely find some overlapping and varying arrangements of disciplines at your college.

Part of your transition into higher education involves being aware that each discipline is a distinct discourse community with specific vocabularies, styles, and modes of communication. Later in your college career, you will begin your writing apprenticeship in a specific discipline by studying the formats of published articles within it. You will look for the following formal aspects of articles within that discipline and plan to emulate them in your work:

- Title format
- Introduction
Different disciplines tend to recommend collecting different types of evidence from research sources. For example, biologists are typically required to do laboratory research; art historians often use details from a mix of primary and secondary sources (works of art and art criticism, respectively); social scientists are likely to gather data from a variety of research study reports and direct ethnographic observation, interviews, and fieldwork; and a political scientist uses demographic data from government surveys and opinion polls along with direct quotations from political candidates and party platforms.

Consider the following circle of professors. They are all asking their students to conduct research in a variety of ways using a variety of sources.
What’s required to complete a basic, introductory essay might essentially be the same across all disciplines, but some types of assignments require discipline-specific organizational features. For example, in business disciplines, documents such as résumés, memos, and product descriptions require a specialized organization. Science and engineering students follow specific conventions as they write lab reports and keep notebooks that include their drawings and results of their experiments. Students in the social sciences and the humanities often use specialized formatting to develop research papers, literature reviews, and book reviews.

Part of your apprenticeship will involve understanding the conventions of a discipline’s key genres. If you are reading or writing texts in the social sciences, for example, you will notice a meticulous emphasis on the specifics of methodology (especially key concepts surrounding the collection of data, such as reliability, validity, sample size, and variables) and a careful presentation of results and their significance. Laboratory reports in the natural and applied sciences emphasize a careful statement of the hypothesis and prediction of the experiment. They also take special care to account for the role of the observer and the nature of the measurements used in the investigation to ensure that it is replicable. An essay in the humanities on a piece of literature might spend more time setting a theoretical foundation for its interpretation, it might also more readily draw from a variety of other disciplines, and it might present its “findings” more as questions than as answers. As you are taking a variety of introductory college courses, try to familiarize yourself with the jargon of each discipline you encounter, paying attention to its specialized vocabulary and terminology. It might even help you make a list of terms in your notes.

Scholars also tend to ask discipline-related kinds of questions. For example, the question of “renewable energy” might be a research topic within different disciplines. The following list shows the types of questions that would accommodate the different disciplines:
Business (economics): Which renewable resources offer economically feasible solutions to energy issues?
Humanities (history): At what point did humans switch from the use of renewable resources to nonrenewable resources?
Natural and applied sciences (engineering): How can algae be developed at a pace and in the quantities needed to be a viable main renewable resource?
Social sciences (geography): Which US states are best suited to being key providers of renewable natural resources?

Key Takeaways

- Most academic disciplines have developed over many generations. Even though these disciplines are constantly in flux, they observe certain standards for investigation, proof, and documentation of evidence.
- To meet the demands of writing and thinking in a certain discipline, you need to learn its conventions.
- An important aspect of being successful in college (and life) involves being aware of what academic disciplines (and professions and occupations) have in common and how they differ.

Exercises

Think about your entire course load this semester as a collection of disciplines. For each course you are taking, answer the following questions, checking your textbooks and other course materials and consulting with your instructors, if necessary:

- What kinds of questions does this discipline ask?
- What kinds of controversies exist in this discipline?
- How does this discipline share the knowledge it constructs?
- How do writers in this discipline demonstrate their credibility?

After you’ve asked and answered these questions about each discipline in isolation, consider what underlying things your courses have in common, even if they approach the world very differently on the surface.

Based on the example at the end of this section, pick a topic that multiple disciplines study. Formulate four questions about the topic, one from each of any four different disciplines. Ideally choose a topic that might come up in four courses you are currently taking or have recently taken, or choose a topic of particular interest to you. Here are just a few examples to get you started:

- Alcoholism
- Child abuse
- Poverty in developing nations
- Fast food
- Women in the workforce

Drawing from the synopses of current research on the Arts and Letters Daily website (see the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” in Chapter 2 “Becoming a Critical Reader”), read the article referenced on a topic or theme of interest to you. Discuss how the author’s discipline affects the way the topic or theme is presented (specifically, the standards of inquiry and evidence).

3.2 Seeing and Making Connections across Disciplines

Learning Objectives

Learn how to look for connections between the courses you are taking in different disciplines. Witness how topics and issues are connected across disciplines, even when they are expressed differently. Understand how to use disciplines to apply past knowledge to new situations.
Section 3.1 “Exploring Academic Disciplines” focused on the formal differences among various academic disciplines and their discourse communities. This section will explore the intellectual processes and concepts disciplines share in common. Even though you will eventually enter a discipline as an academic specialization (major) and as a career path (profession), the first couple of years of college may well be the best opportunity you will ever have to discover how disciplines are connected.

That process may be a rediscovery, given that in the early grades (K-5), you were probably educated by one primary teacher each year covering a set of subjects in a single room. Even though you likely covered each subject in turn, that elementary school classroom was much more conducive to making connections across disciplines than your middle school or high school environment. If you’ve been educated in public schools during the recent era of rigid standardization and multiple-choice testing conducted in the name of “accountability,” the disciplines may seem more separate from one another in your mind than they actually are. In some ways, the first two years of your college experience are a chance to recapture the connections across disciplines you probably made naturally in preschool and the elementary grades, if only at a basic level at the time.

In truth, all disciplines are strikingly similar. Together, they are the primary reason for the survival and evolution of our species. As humans, we have designed disciplines, over time, to help us understand our world better. New knowledge about the world is typically produced when a practitioner builds on a previous body of work in the discipline, most often by advancing it only slightly but significantly. We use academic and professional disciplines to conduct persistent, often unresolved conversations with one another.

Most colleges insist on a “core curriculum” to make sure you have the chance to be exposed to each major discipline at least once before you specialize and concentrate on one in particular. The signature “Aha!” moments of your intellectual journey in college will come every time you grasp a concept or a process in one course that reminds you of something you learned in another course entirely. Ironically the more of those “Aha!” moments you have in the first two years of college, the better you’ll be at your specialization because you’ll have that much more perspective about how the world around you fits together.

How can you learn to make those “Aha!” moments happen on purpose? In each course you take, instead of focusing merely on memorizing content for the purposes of passing an exam or writing an essay that regurgitates your professor’s lecture notes, learn to look for the key questions and controversies that animate the discipline and energize the professions in it. If you organize your understanding of a discipline around such questions and controversies, the details will make more sense to you, and you will find them easier to master.

Key Takeaways

- Disciplines build on themselves, applying past knowledge to new situations and phenomena in a constant effort to improve understanding of the specific field of study.
- Different disciplines often look at the same facts in different ways, leading to wholly different discoveries and insights.
- Disciplines derive their energy from persistent and open debate about the key questions and controversies that animate them.

Exercises

Arrange at least one interview with at least one of your instructors, a graduate student, or a working professional in a discipline in which you are interested in studying or pursuing as a career. Ask your interviewee(s) to list and describe three of the most persistent controversies, questions, and debates in the field. After absorbing the response(s), write up a report in your own words about the discipline’s great questions.

Using a textbook or materials from another course you are taking, describe a contemporary controversy surrounding the ways a discipline asks questions or shares evidence and a historical controversy that appears to have been resolved.

Using one of your library’s disciplinary databases or the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” in Chapter 2 “Becoming a Critical Reader”, find a document that is at least fifty years old operating in a certain discipline, perhaps a branch of science, history, international diplomacy, political science, law, or medicine. The Smithsonian Institution or Avalon Project websites are excellent places to start your search.

Knowing what you know about the current conventions and characteristics of the discipline through which this document was produced, how does its use of the discipline differ from the present day? How did the standards of the discipline change in the interim to make the document you’ve found seem so different?
Have those standards improved or declined, in your opinion?

### 3.3 Articulating Multiple Sides of an Issue

#### Learning Objectives

Explore how to recognize binary oppositions in various disciplines.
Learn the value of entertaining two contradictory but plausible positions as part of your thinking, reading, and writing processes.
Appreciate the productive, constructive benefits of using disciplinary lenses and borrowing from other disciplines.

Regardless of the discipline you choose to pursue, you will be arriving as an apprentice in the middle of an ongoing conversation. Disciplines have complicated histories you can’t be expected to master overnight. But learning to recognize the long-standing binary oppositions in individual disciplines can help you make sense of the specific issues, themes, topics, and controversies you will encounter as a student and as a professional. Here are some very broadly stated examples of those binary oppositions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Binary Oppositions (Binary A—Binary B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>production—consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>labor—capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and applied sciences</td>
<td>empiricism—rationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observer—subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>nature—nurture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>free will—determinism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>artist—culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>text—context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These binary oppositions move freely from one discipline to another, often becoming more complicated as they do so. Consider a couple of examples:

- The binary opposition in the **natural and applied sciences** between **empiricism** (the so-called scientific method) and **rationalism** (using pure reason to speculate about one’s surroundings) originated as a debate in philosophy, a branch of the **humanities**. In the **social sciences**, in recent years, empirical data about brain functions in neuroscience have challenged rationalistic theories in psychology. Even disciplines in **business** are using increasingly empirical methods to study how markets work, as rationalist economic theories of human behavior increasingly come under question.

- The binary opposition between **text** and **context** in the **humanities** is borrowed from the **social sciences**. Instead of viewing texts as self-contained creations, scholars and artists in the humanities began to appreciate and foreground the cultural influences that helped shape those texts. Borrowings from **business** disciplines, such as economics and marketing, furthered the notion of a literary and artistic “marketplace,” while borrowings from the **natural and applied sciences** helped humanists examine more closely the relationship between the observer (whether the critic or the artist) and the subject (the text).

Of course, these two brief summaries vastly oversimplify the evolution of multiple disciplines over generations of intellectual history. Like the chart of binary oppositions, they’re meant merely to inspire you at this point to begin to note the connections between disciplines. Learning to think, write, and function in interdisciplinary ways...
requires practice that begins at the level of close reading and gradually expands into the way you interact with your surroundings as a college student and working professional.

For a model of how to read and think through the disciplines, let’s draw on a short but very famous piece of writing (available through the Avalon Project in the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts”), Abraham Lincoln’s “Address at the Dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery,” composed and delivered in November of 1863, several months after one of the bloodiest battles in the American Civil War.

Let’s imagine how a military historian, a social psychologist, and a political scientist would read this text. Follow the color-coding below to find which words and phrases a practitioner in each discipline might emphasize:

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

- A military historian (red passages) might focus on Lincoln’s rhetorical technique of using the field of a previous battle in an ongoing war (in this case a victory that nonetheless cost a great deal of casualties on both sides) as inspiration for a renewed, redoubled effort.
- A social psychologist (blue passages) might focus on how Lincoln uses this historical moment of unprecedented national trauma as an occasion for shared grief and shared sacrifice, largely through using the rhetorical technique of an extended metaphor of “conceiving and dedicating” a nation/child whose survival is at stake.
- A political scientist (green passages) might focus on how Lincoln uses the occasion as a rhetorical opportunity to emphasize that the purpose of this grisly and grim war is to preserve the ideals of the founders of the American republic (and perhaps even move them forward through the new language of the final sentence: “of the people, by the people, for the people”).

Notice that each reader, regardless of academic background, needs a solid understanding of how rhetoric works (something we’ll cover in Chapter 4 “Joining the Conversation” in more detail). Each reader has been trained to
use a specific disciplinary lens that causes certain passages to rise to prominence and certain insights to emerge.

But the real power of disciplines comes when these readers and their readings interact with each other. Imagine how a military historian could use social psychology to enrich an understanding of how a civilian population was motivated to support a war effort. Imagine how a political scientist could use military history to show how a peacetime, postwar governmental policy can trade on the outcome of a battle. Imagine how a social psychologist could use political science to uncover how a traumatized social structure can begin to heal itself through an embrace of shared governance.

As Lincoln would say, “It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.”

Key Takeaways

- Disciplines have long-standing binary oppositions that help shape the terms of inquiry.
- To think, read, and write in a given discipline, you must learn to uncover binary oppositions in the texts, objects, and phenomena you are examining.
- Binary oppositions gain power and complexity when they are applied to multiple disciplines.

Exercises

Following the Gettysburg Address example at the end of this section, use three disciplinary lenses to color-code a reading of your choice from the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” in Chapter 2 “Becoming a Critical Reader”.

Find a passage in one of the textbooks you’re using in another course (or look over your lecture notes from another course) where the main discipline appears to be borrowing theories, concepts, or binary oppositions from other disciplines in order to produce new insights and discoveries.

Individually or with a partner, set up an imaginary two-person dialogue of at least twenty lines (or two pages) that expresses two sides of a contemporary issue with equal force and weight. You may use real people if you want, either from your reading of specific columnists at Arts and Letters Daily or of the essayists at the Big Questions Essay Series (see the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” in Chapter 2 “Becoming a Critical Reader”). In a separate memo, indicate which side you lean toward personally and discuss any difficulty you had with the role playing required by this exercise.

Show how one of the binary oppositions mentioned in this section is expressed by two writers in a discipline of your choosing. Alternatively, you can come up with a binary opposition of your own, backing it up with examples from the two extremes.

Briefly describe how an insight or discovery applied past disciplinary knowledge to a new situation or challenge. How might you begin to think about addressing one of the contemporary problems in your chosen discipline?

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Self-Diagnosis of One's Writing Ailments can be Fun!

Is using plain language the law?

The following humorous site, “How to Write Good,” is located on the Plainlanguage.gov page. It lists and breaks several writing rules. In breaking the rules, they illustrate them. It is an engaging way to learn the rules of English—especially since they always seem to have exceptions.

Note that not all of the rules are really rules anymore. For instance, the one about ending a sentence on a preposition is one we have largely gotten out of. (Get it?)

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Writing to Think and Writing to Learn

Which Comes First? A Chicken-or-the-Egg Question

You’ve probably had moments as a writing student when you’ve said to yourself, “I know what I think about this topic; I just can’t get it down on paper.” This frustration comes from the notion that writing comes after thinking, that it merely represents or translates thoughts that are already fully formed in your head. But what if the act of writing helps sharpen your thinking? What if the act of putting thoughts into words changes those thoughts for the better? Are there ways to make that transformation happen consistently enough so that writing becomes not an end but a beginning, not a chore but a revelation? That’s what this first chapter is about.

1.1 Examining the Status Quo

Learning Objectives

Understand your roles and responsibilities as a person engaged in higher education.
Explore the relationship between higher education and the status quo.
Learn ways to examine the status quo in your surroundings consistently and productively.

Why are you here?

The question sounds simple enough, and you may well have developed some stock answers by now.

I’m here because...

- I want to be a __________ when I grow up.
- college graduates make more money.
- my parents wanted me to go here.
- my boyfriend or girlfriend got accepted here.
- I couldn’t get in anywhere else.
- I just got laid off.

Maybe the truth is, deep down, that you don’t really know yet why you’re here, and that’s OK. By the end of your college experience, you’ll have developed several good answers for why you were here, and they won’t necessarily look anything like your first stock response.

But what does this personal question about your motivations for being in college have to do with examining the status quo? Well, the first way to learn how to examine the status quo (literally, “the state in which”) is to examine
your place in it. By enrolling in higher education, you’re making a choice to develop your skills and intellect beyond a baseline level of proficiency. Choosing to become a college-educated person obligates you to leave your mark on the world.

You’re investing time and money into your college education, presumably for the real benefits it will provide you, but it’s important to remember that others are investing in you as well. Perhaps family members are providing financial support, or the federal government is providing a Pell Grant or a low-interest loan, or an organization or alumni group is awarding you a scholarship. If you’re attending a state school, the state government is investing in you because your tuition (believe it or not) covers only a small portion of the total cost to educate you.

So what is the return a free, independent, evolving society expects on its investment in you, and what should you be asking of yourself? Surely something more than mere maintenance of the status quo should be in order. Rather, society expects you to be a member of a college-educated citizenry and workforce capable of improving the lives and lot of future generations.

Getting into the habit of “examining” (or even “challenging”) the status quo doesn’t necessarily mean putting yourself into a constant state of revolution or rebellion. Rather, the process suggests a kind of mindfulness, a certain disposition to ask a set of questions about your surroundings:

- What is the status quo of _______? (descriptive)
- Why is _______ the way it is? (diagnostic)
- What (or who) made _______ this way? (forensic)
- Was _______ ever different in the past? (historical)
- Who benefits from keeping _______ the way it is? (investigative)

Only after these relatively objective questions have been asked, researched, and answered might you hazard a couple of additional, potentially more contentious questions:

- How could or should _______ be different in the future? (speculative)
- What steps would be required to make _______ different? (policy based)

These last two types of questions are more overtly controversial, especially if they are applied to status-quo practices that have been in place for many years or even generations. But asking even the seemingly benign questions in the first category will directly threaten those forces and interests that benefit most from the preservation of the status quo. You will encounter resistance not only from this already powerful group but also from reformers with competing interests who have different opinions about where the status quo came from or how it should be changed.

Before you risk losing heart or nerve for fear of making too many enemies by roiling the waters, think about the benefits the habit of privately examining the status quo might have for your thinking, writing, and learning.

Since we began this section with a discussion about education and your place in it, let’s close by having you exercise this habit on that same subject. For starters, let’s just apply the questioning habit to some of what you may have been taught about academic writing over the years. Here is one description of the status quo thinking on the subject that might be worth some examination.

What Is the Status Quo of Academic Writing?

- Writing can and should be taught and learned in a certain, systematic way.
- Writing has been taught and learned in much the same way over time.
- Becoming a good writer is a matter of learning the forms (genres, modes, etc.) of academic writing.
- Students are blank slates who know next to nothing about how to write.
- Writing done outside of academic settings (e-mail, texting, graffiti, comics, video game design, music lyrics, etc.) is not really writing.
- Knowing what you think is a must before you turn to writing.
- Writing is largely a solitary pursuit.
- Good writing can happen in the absence of good reading.
- Using agreed-on norms and rubrics for evaluation is how experts can measure writing quality based on students’ responses to standardized prompts.

Your list might look a little different, depending on your experience as a student writer. But once you have amassed your description of the status quo, you’re ready to run each element of it through the rest of the
mindfulness questions that appear earlier in the section. Or more broadly, you can fill in the blanks of those mindfulness questions with “academic writing” (as you have just described it):

- Why is academic writing the way it is?
- What (or who) made academic writing this way?
- Was academic writing ever different in the past?
- Who benefits from keeping academic writing the way it is?
- How could or should academic writing be different in the future?
- What steps would be required to make academic writing different?

Asking these kinds of questions about a practice like academic writing, or about any of the other subjects you will encounter in college, might seem like a recipe for disaster, especially if you were educated in a K–12 environment that did not value critical questioning of authority. After all, most elementary, middle, and high schools are not in the business of encouraging dissent from their students daily. Yes, there are exceptions, but they are rare, and all the more rare in recent years thanks to the stranglehold of standardized testing and concerns about school discipline. In college, on the other hand, even at the introductory level, the curriculum rewards questioning and perspective about the development and future of the given discipline under examination. Certainly, to be successful at the graduate, postgraduate, and professional level, you must be able to assess, refine, and reform the practices and assumptions of the discipline or profession of which you will be a fully vested member.

Key Takeaways

- You don’t have to know exactly why you’re here in college, but you do have to get into the habit of asking, reasking, and answering that question daily.
- Society’s expected return on its investment in you as a college student (and your expectation of yourself) is that you will be in a position to examine the status quo and when necessary, help change it for the better.
- Learning to ask certain kinds of questions about the status quo will establish a habit of mindfulness and will lead to more productive thinking and writing about your surroundings.

Exercises

So why are you here? (Be honest, keep it private if you want, but repeat the exercise for the next twenty-eight days and see if your answer changes.)

Near the end of this section, you were invited to apply the mindfulness questions to traditional practices in the teaching and learning of academic writing. Now it’s time to try those questions on a topic of your choice or on one of the following topics. Fill in the blank in each case with the chosen topic and answer the resulting question. Keep in mind that this exercise, in some cases, could require a fair amount of research but might also net a pretty substantial essay.

The Mindfulness Questions
- What is the status quo of ______? (descriptive)
- Why is ______ the way it is? (diagnostic)
- What (or who) made ______ this way? (forensic)
- Was ______ ever different in the past? (historical)
- Who benefits from keeping ______ the way it is? (investigative)
- How could or should ______ be different in the future? (speculative)
- What steps would be required to make ______ different? (policy based)

Some Possible Topics
- Fashion (or, if you like, a certain fashion trend or fad)
- Sports (or, if you like, a certain sport)
- Filmmaking
- Video games
- Music (or a particular genre of music)
- Electoral politics
- Internet or computer technology
- US foreign policy
- Health care
- Energy consumption
- Parenting
Advertising

A specific academic discipline you are currently studying in another course

Do some research on an aspect of K–12 or college-level education that you suspect has maintained the status quo for too long. Apply the mindfulness questions to the topic, performing some research and making policy recommendations as necessary.

1.2 Posing Productive Questions

Learning Objectives

Broaden your understanding of what constitutes a “text” worthy of analysis or interpretation.
Learn how self, text, and context interact in the process of critical inquiry.
Explore whether and when seemingly unproductive questions can still produce meaning or significance.

In Section 1.1 “Examining the Status Quo”, we examined the status quo by asking a set of mindfulness questions about a variety of topics. In this section, we’ll explore other ways to open up thinking and writing through the systematic process of critical inquiry. Essentially three elements are involved in any act of questioning:

The self doing the questioning
The text about which the questions are being asked
The context of the text being questioned

For our purposes, text should be defined here very broadly as anything that can be subjected to analysis or interpretation, including but certainly not limited to written texts. Texts can be found everywhere, including but not limited to these areas:

- Music
- Film
- Television
- Video games
- Art and sculpture
- The Internet
- Modern technology
- Advertisement
- Public spaces and architecture
- Politics and government

The following Venn diagram is meant to suggest that relatively simple questions arise when any two out of three of these elements are implicated with each other, while the most complicated, productive questions arise when all three elements are taken into consideration.
Asking the following questions about practically any kind of text will lead to a wealth of ideas, insights, and possible essay topics. As a short assignment in a journal or blog, or perhaps as a group or whole-class exercise, try out these questions by filling in the blanks with a specific text under your examination, perhaps something as common and widely known as “Wikipedia” or “Facebook” or “Google” (for ideas about where to find other texts, see the first exercise at the end of this section).

**Twenty Questions about Self, Text, and Context**

**Self-Text Questions**

- What do I think about _______?
- What do I feel about _______?
- What do I understand or what puzzles me in or about _______?
- What turns me off or amuses me in or about _______?
- What is predictable or surprises me in or about _______?
Text-Context Questions

- How is ___________ a product of its culture and historical moment?
- What might be important to know about the creator of ___________?
- How is ___________ affected by the genre and medium to which it belongs?
- What other texts in its genre and medium does ___________ resemble?
- How does ___________ distinguish itself from other texts in its genre and medium?

Self-Context Questions

- How have I developed my aesthetic sensibility (my tastes, my likes, and my dislikes)?
- How do I typically respond to absolutes or ambiguities in life or in art? Do I respond favorably to things more clear-cut?
- With what groups (ethnic, racial, religious, social, gendered, economic, nationalist, regional, etc.) do I identify?
- How have my social, political, and ethical opinions been formed?
- How do my attitudes toward the “great questions” (choice vs. necessity, nature vs. nurture, tradition vs. change, etc.) affect the way I look at the world?

Self-Text-Context Questions

- How does my personal, cultural, and social background affect my understanding of ___________?
- What else might I need to learn about the culture, the historical moment, or the creator that produced ___________ in order to more fully understand it?
- What else about the genre or medium of ___________ might I need to learn in order to understand it better?
- How might ___________ look or sound different if it were produced in a different time or place?
- How might ___________ look or sound different if I were viewing it from a different perspective or identification?

We’ve been told there’s no such thing as a stupid question, but to call certain questions “productive” is to suggest that there’s such a thing as an unproductive question. When you ask rhetorical questions to which you already know the answer or that you expect your audience to answer in a certain way, are you questioning productively? Perhaps not, in the sense of knowledge creation, but you may still be accomplishing a rhetorical purpose. And sometimes even rhetorical questions can produce knowledge. Let’s say you ask your sister, “How can someone as intelligent as you are do such self-destructive things?” Maybe you’re merely trying to direct your sister’s attention to her self-destructive behavior, but upon reflection, the question could actually trigger some productive self-examination on her part.

Hypothetical questions, at first glance, might also seem unproductive since they are usually founded on something that hasn’t happened yet and may never happen. Politicians and debaters try to steer clear of answering them but often ask them of their opponents for rhetorical effect. If we think of hypothetical questions merely as speculative ploys, we may discount their productive possibilities. But hypothetical questions asked in good faith are crucial building blocks of knowledge creation. Asking “What if we tried something else?” leads to the formation of a hypothesis, which is a theory or proposition that can be subjected to testing and experimentation.

This section has focused more on the types of genuinely interrogative questions that can lead to productive ideas for further exploration, research, and knowledge creation once you decide how you want to go public with your thinking.

Key Takeaways

- At least two out of the following three elements are involved in critical inquiry: self, text, and context. When all three are involved, the richest questions arise.
- Expanding your notion of what constitutes a “text” will greatly enrich your possibilities for analysis and interpretation.
- Rhetorical or hypothetical questions, while often used in the public realm, can also perform a useful function in private, low-stakes writing, especially when they are genuinely interrogative and lead to further productive thinking.
Exercises

Use the Twenty Questions about Self, Text, and Context to develop a researched essay topic on one of the following types of texts. Note that you are developing a topic at this point. Sketch out a plan for how you would go about finding answers to some of the questions requiring research.

- An editorial in the newspaper
- A website
- A blog
- A television show
- A music CD or video
- A film
- A video game
- A political candidate
- A building
- A painting or sculpture
- A feature of your college campus
- A short story or poem

Perform a scavenger hunt in the world of advertising, politics, and/or education for the next week or so to compile a list of questions. (You could draw from the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” in Chapter 2 “Becoming a Critical Reader” to find examples.) Label each question you find as rhetorical, hypothetical, or interrogative. If the questions are rhetorical or hypothetical, indicate whether they are still being asked in a genuinely interrogative way. Bring your examples to class for discussion or post them to your group’s or class’s discussion board.

Apply the Twenty Questions about Self, Text, and Context to a key concept in an introductory course in which you are currently enrolled.

1.3 Slowing Down Your Thinking

Learning Objectives

- Learn the benefits of thinking more slowly.
- Learn the benefits of thinking of the world in smaller chunks.
- Apply slower, more “small-bore” thinking to a piece of student writing.

Given the fast pace of today’s multitasking world, you might wonder why anyone would want to slow down their thinking. Who has that kind of time? The truth is that college will probably present you with more of an opportunity to slow down your thinking than any other time of your adult life. Slowing down your thinking doesn’t mean taking it easy or doing less thinking in the same amount of time. On the contrary, learning to think more slowly is a precondition to making a successful, meaningful contribution to any discipline. The key is to adjust your perspective toward the world around you by seeing it in much smaller chunks.

When you get a writing assignment in a broad topic area asking for a certain number of words or pages (let’s say 1,000 to 1,250 words, or 4 to 5 double-spaced pages, with 12-point font and 1-inch margins), what’s your first reaction? If you’re like most students, you might panic at first, wondering how you’re going to produce that much writing. The irony is that if you try to approach the topic from a perspective that is too general, what you write will likely be as painful to read as it is to write, especially if it’s part of a stack of similarly bland essays. It will inevitably be shallow because a thousand words on ten ideas works out to about a hundred words per idea. But if you slow down your thinking to find a single aspect of the larger topic and devote your thousand words to that single aspect, you’ll be able to approach it from ten different angles, and your essay will distinguish itself from the pack.

Let’s try this with an excerpt of student writing on high school dropouts that was conducted at warp speed. Either the writer was eager to complete the assignment or she hurried to a conclusion without examining the elements of her topic that she was taking for granted. Every sentence or phrase that could benefit from slower thinking in smaller chunks is set in **bold blue font**.
In today’s world it is extremely difficult to get a decent well-paying job without a high school degree. Although there are many things that may serve as obstacles it is vital that everyone receives this degree. What exactly can we do to help teens stay in school and achieve that diploma they have spent so much time working toward? First and foremost, parents need to be informed of just how difficult it will soon be to go anywhere in life without an education. Ultimately, the parents must make the decision whether the student is going to be allowed to drop out or not. Having parental support can also make a huge difference in how successful the student is. Secondly, guidance counselors should do all they can to help the student stay in school. Some students may be looked upon as a challenge, but they need to be helped just as much as any other student. If students are forced for other reasons to have to drop out they should have a plan, whether it be to get a job or carry on with some kind of alternative education that leads to a GED. In conclusion, schools should do everything they can to help their students succeed, whether it is creating extra help classes or interims to help keep students in check with how they are doing in classes.

This example is not given to find fault with the student’s approach, however rushed it might have been. Each of the bold blue passages is not technically a mistake, but rather a missed opportunity to take a deeper, more methodical approach to a complicated problem. From this one paragraph, one could imagine as many as eight completely researched, full-length essays emerging on the following topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missed Opportunity</th>
<th>Possible Essay Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Today’s world”</td>
<td>A historical comparison with other job markets for high school dropouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Many things that may serve as an obstacle” or “students are forced for other reasons to have to drop out”</td>
<td>A study of the leading causes of the high school dropout rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The parents must make the decision whether the student is going to be allowed to drop out or not”</td>
<td>A study of the dynamics of parent-teen relationships in households where the teen is at risk academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Guidance counselors should do all they can”</td>
<td>An analysis of current practices of allocating guidance counseling to a wide range of high school students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some students may be looked upon as a challenge”</td>
<td>A profile of the most prominent characteristics of high school students who are at risk academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Get a job”</td>
<td>A survey of employment opportunities for high school dropouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some kind of alternative education”</td>
<td>An evaluation of the current GED (General Educational Development) system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed Opportunity</td>
<td>Possible Essay Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Schools should do everything they can”</td>
<td>A survey of best practices at high schools across the country that have substantially reduced the dropout rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions you’ve encountered so far in this chapter have been designed to encourage mindfulness, the habit of taking nothing for granted about the text under examination. Even (or especially) when “the text under examination” happens to be your own, you can apply that same habit. The question “What is it I am taking for granted about ____________?” has several variants:

- What am I not asking about ____________ that I should be asking?
- What is it in ____________ that is not being said?
- Is there something in ____________ that “goes without saying” that nonetheless should be said?
- Do I feel like asking a question when I look at ____________ even though it’s telling me not to?

Slowing down your thinking isn’t an invitation to sit on the sidelines. If anything, you should be in a better position to make a real contribution once you’ve learned to focus your communication skills on a precise area of most importance to you.

**Key Takeaways**

- Even in a world of high-speed multitasking, thinking deliberately about small, specific things can pay great academic and professional dividends.
- Disciplines and professions rely on many participants thinking and writing about many small-bore topics over an extended period of time.
- Practically any text, especially an early piece of your writing or that of a classmate, can benefit from at least one variation on the question, “What is it I am taking for granted?”

**Exercises**

Take a piece of your writing from a previous class or another class you are currently taking, or even from this class, and subject it to a thorough scouring for phrases and sentences that exhibit rushed thinking. Set up a chart similar to the one that appears in this section, listing every missed opportunity and every possible essay topic that emerges from the text once your thinking is slowed down.

Now try this same exercise on a classmate’s piece of writing, and offer up one of your own for them to work on.

Sometimes texts demonstrate thinking that is sped up or oversimplified on purpose, as a method of misleading readers. Find an example of a text that’s inviting readers or listeners to take something for granted or to think too quickly. (You might look in the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” in Chapter 2 “Becoming a Critical Reader” to find examples.) Subject the example you find to the questions in this section. Bring the example and your analysis of it to class for discussion or include both the example and your analysis in your group’s or class’s discussion board. Choose from among one of the following categories or come up with a category of your own:

- An editorial column
- A bumper sticker
- A billboard
- A banner on a website
- A political slogan or speech
- A financial, educational, or occupational document
- A song lyric
- A movie or television show plotline
- A commercial advertisement
- A message from a friend or family member
1.4 Withholding Judgment

Learning Objectives

- Appreciate the value, power, and authority derived from paying attention to detail before moving on to evaluative judgment.
- Consider the danger of a judgment reached prematurely.
- Investigate the cultural and educational forces that may have encouraged you to rush to judgment.

We live in a culture that values taking a stance, having an opinion, making a judgment, and backing it up with evidence. Being undecided or even open-minded about an issue can be seen as a sign of weakness or sloppiness or even as a moral or ethical failing. Our culture also privileges action over the kind of reflection and contemplation this chapter is advocating.

If you’ve encountered mostly traditional writing instruction, you’ve probably been encouraged to make judgments fairly early in the writing process. Well before you have fully examined an issue, you’ve been told to “take a position and defend it.” You might make an effort to understand an issue from multiple sides (a process discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 “Thinking through the Disciplines”, Section 3.2 “Seeing and Making Connections across Disciplines” and Chapter 3 “Thinking through the Disciplines”, Section 3.3 “Articulating Multiple Sides of an Issue”) only after you have staked your claim in a half-hearted effort to be “fair to both sides.”

If you’ve been subjected to standardized tests of writing ability (often key factors in decisions about college acceptance and placement and earlier, in assessments of competence at various levels of K–12 education), you’ve probably noticed they rely on essay prompts that put heavy emphasis on argumentation. Some evaluative rubrics for such essays require the presence of a thesis statement by the end of the introductory paragraph in order to earn a high score for organization.

Here’s an introductory paragraph of a student writer who has been trained by the “point–counterpoint” culture of sound bites and perhaps encouraged by writing teachers over the years to believe that he has very little time to get to his thesis statement.

Today the media and paparazzi are out there more than ever before. They both try to capture everyone’s mistakes. Pictures and quotes of not being politically correct can make you lose your job and be frowned upon by the rest of the nation. Political correctness is the most outrageous thing that I have ever heard of. It takes away our right to freedom of speech. If the Founding Fathers were still alive today they would be furious with this political correctness. I believe that America is taking two giant steps backward to what our Founding Fathers were trying to accomplish. Political correctness has gone way too far in America and not only is it taking our God-given freedoms away, it is also silencing a nation and letting the government take control.

The rush to judgment has caused this student to fall into the same quick-thinking trap of the student in Section 1.3 “Slowing Down Your Thinking”. The remedy (isolating the phrases worthy of further examination, indicated here, as in Section 1.3 “Slowing Down Your Thinking”, with bold blue font) is similar. This student may yet make something useful out of his concerns about political correctness, but he will do so only by making a meaningful effort to withhold his judgment on what is actually a much more complicated issue.
Much of the pressure to reach judgments prematurely comes from elements of society that do not necessarily have our best interests in mind. The last exercise of Section 1.3 “Slowing Down Your Thinking” hinted at the strategic reasons why corporations, politicians, ideologues, popular entertainers, authority figures, or even friends and family might try to speed up your thinking at precisely the moment when you should be slowing it down. While inaction and dithering can be cited as the cause of some of history’s worst moments, the “rush to judgment” that comes from rash thinking can be cited as the cause of many more. A good rule of thumb when you are asked to make an irrevocable judgment or decision is to ask yourself or your questioner, “What’s your hurry?”

### Key Takeaways

- Our sound-bite, point–counterpoint culture and even our reductive definitions of effective writing place a heavy emphasis on taking a position early and sticking to it.
- One must eventually take action after a period of contemplation, but history is full of examples of judgments made in haste.
- Withholding judgment, like slowing down your thinking, can be an effective strategy for revision and peer review.

### Exercises

Take a piece of your writing from a previous class or another class you are currently taking, or even from this class, and look for phrases and sentences that suggest a “rush to judgment.” Set up a chart similar to the one that appears in this section, listing every possible essay topic that emerges from the complicating questions you write in response to each premature judgment.

Now try this same exercise on a classmate’s piece of writing and offer up one of your own for him or her to work on.

Compare the pace with which a writer makes a judgment in the each of the following rhetorical settings. Discuss whether you think there are certain conventions about making, presenting, and defending judgments in each of these genres. Draw from the Note 2.5 “Gallery of Web-Based Texts” in Chapter 2 “Becoming a Critical Reader” to find examples.

- A television commercial for a political candidate, a pharmaceutical company, or an investment firm
- A Supreme Court majority opinion
- A presidential address on a topic of national security
- A journal article in a field you are studying

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Stereotyping and Practical Reading and Writing

How Stereotyping Works
Stereotyping acts as a shortcut to thinking. It sounds innocent enough. All humans stereotype—even you. Instead of actively seeing or observing, when we stereotype we make an assumption that the individual fits our notion of what the group is like. For example, I’m Scottish. I know that, in America, Scottish people are stereotyped as being frugal to the point of stinginess. (Think Scrooge McDuck.) While this might seem like an innocent stereotype, it has its consequences.

We put things into neat categories so that they don’t arrest our attention. If you were driving home and noticed every new thing, you wouldn’t be able to function. Having stated this, it is likely that your next drive home will be cursed by noticing something new! Our minds operate through the notion of grouping. (I won’t get into this here, but I would like to recommend a great book, Steven Pinker’s How the Mind Works. It was published by Norton in 1997.) Do you know people whose lives are especially guided by stereotyping?

In this sense, stereotyping is a survival skill. People get into trouble when they apply stereotypes to race, class, ethnicity and gender. We need look no farther than the Holocaust to see the disastrous effects of stereotyping. But in any college-level course, we ask students look further.

We all have been stereotyped at one point, whether it is for our height, weight, eyebrows, shoes, speech patterns, etc. See if you can relate to our readings through your own experiences.

Interesting question: How does nationalism play upon stereotypes? This is a complex issue, isn’t it? Writers can avoid this tendency toward stereotyping by knowing their preferred prewriting techniques while also having a few back-up approaches. For instance, I might use clustering and listing, with reporters’ questions as my go-to in case these don’t work well. I can also be aware that I tend to like certain approaches to the ways I get into arguments. Changing up those tired approaches can help me refine them or even scrap them when they are counterproductive. I can also get a better idea of my opponents’ approaches if I’m not using a single way of writing.

This applies as well to reading. Everyone should mark up the text in some fashion—whether it’s with pen/pencil or a device’s annotation tools.

Read Flexibly
Can a flexible approach to a topic be managed if the writer is closed-minded? What if the writer puts on blinders, only seeing what they wish to? You’ll be frustrated as a reader and writer if you approach any of response assignment only from a fixed perspective. Often, one has to “check weapons at the door” and be prepared to learn something new. Those figurative weapons are the stereotypes we gather.

Writers invite you into a version of their world. Think about the ability for you to read a sonnet from Shakespeare now in pretty much the same breathing patterns in which he created it. Exciting stuff!

Stereotyping is something we all do. It allows us to go through the world without
stopping at every new thing we see in order to examine and categorize it.

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Part 2: Grammar
Why Is Grammar Important?

Take a moment and try to imagine a world without language: written, signed, or spoken. It’s pretty hard to conceptualize, right? Language is a constant presence all around us. It’s how we communicate with others; without language it would be incredibly difficult to connect people.

Many people are self-conscious of their speech and worry that the way they talk is incorrect: this simply isn’t true. There are several different types of English—all of which are equally dynamic and complex. However, each variety is appropriate in different situations. When you’re talking to your friends, you should use slang and cultural references—if you speak in formal language, you can easily come off as uptight or rude. If you’re sending a quick casual message—via social media or texting—you don’t need to worry too much about capitalization or strict punctuation. Feel free to have five exclamation points standing alone, if that gets your point across.

However, there’s this thing called Standard American English. This type of English exists the sake of communication across cultural lines, where standardized rules and conventions are necessary. How many times have you heard people of older generations ask just what smh or rn mean? This is where grammar comes in. Grammar is a set of rules and conventions that dictate how Standard American English works. These rules are simply tools that speakers of a language can use. When you learn how to use the language, you can craft your message to communicate exactly what you want to convey.
Additionally, when you speak or write with poor grammar, others will often make judgements about who you are as a person. As Williams and Colomb say, “Follow all the rules all the time because sometime, someone will criticize you for something.”[1]

**Code Switching**

*Code switching* is the ability to use two different varieties (or dialects) of the same language. Most people do this instinctively. If you were writing a paper, you might say something like “The experiment requires not one but four different procedures” in order to emphasize number. In an informal online setting, on the other hand, you might say something like “I saw two (2) buses drive past.”

The most important facet of code switching is knowing when to use which variety. In formal academic writing, standardized English is the correct variety to use. As you go through this module, remember that these are the rules for just one type of English.

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Introduction to Nouns

Nouns are a diverse group of words, and they are very common in English. Nouns are a category of words defining *things*—people, places, items, concepts. The video below is brief introduction to them and the role they play:

https://youtu.be/UejW-WQpujs

As we’ve just learned, a noun is the name of a person (Dr. Sanders), place (Lawrence, Kansas, factory, home), thing (scissors, saw, book), or idea (love, truth, beauty, intelligence).

Let’s look at the following examples to get a better idea of how nouns work in sentences. All of the nouns have been bolded:

- The one *experiment* that has been given the most *attention* in the *debate* on *saccharin* is the 1977 Canadian *study* done on *rats*.
- The multi-fuel *capacity* of the Stirling *engine* gives it a versatility not possible in the internal combustion *engine*.
- The regenerative cooling *cycle* in the *engines* of the Space *Shuttle* is made up of high pressure *hydrogen* that flows in *tubes* connecting the *nozzle* and the combustion *chamber*.

Types of Nouns

Of the many different categories of nouns, a couple deserve closer attention here.

Common vs. Proper Noun

Common nouns are generic words, like *tissue*. They are lower-cased (unless they begin a sentence). A proper noun, on the other hand, is the name of a specific thing, like the brand name *Kleenex*. Proper nouns are always capitalized.

- common noun: name
- proper noun: Ester

Concrete vs. Abstract Noun
Concrete nouns are things you can hold, see, or otherwise sense, like book, light, or warmth.

Abstract nouns, on the other hand, are (as you might expect) abstract concepts, like time and love.

- concrete noun: rock
- abstract noun: justice

The rest of this section will dig into other types of nouns: count v. non-count nouns, compound nouns, and plural nouns.

### Practice

Look at each of the following nouns and determine if they are common or proper and if they are concrete or abstract. For example:

- *justice* is a common abstract noun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Common/Proper</th>
<th>Concrete/Abstract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathedral</td>
<td>Proper</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent</td>
<td>Proper</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Show Answer]
Regular Plural Nouns

A plural noun indicates that there is more than one of that noun (while a singular noun indicates that there is just one of the noun). Most plural forms are created by simply adding an -s or -es to the end of the singular word. For example, there’s one dog (singular), but three dogs (plural). However, English has both regular and irregular plural nouns. Regular plurals follow this rule (and other similar rules), but irregular plurals are, well, not regular and don’t follow a “standard” rule.

Let’s start with regular plurals: regular plural nouns use established patterns to indicate there is more than one of a thing.

Recognize nouns marked with plural form –s.

As was mentioned earlier, we add the plural suffix –s to most words:

- cat → cats
- bear → bears
- zebra → zebras

However, after sounds s, z, sh, ch, and j, we add the plural suffix –es:

- class → classes
- sash → sashes
- fox → foxes

Some words that end in z also double their ending consonant, like quizzes.

Practice

Do you know how to spell the plurals for the following words?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>book</td>
<td>peach</td>
<td>buzz</td>
<td>watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>picture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show Answer
After the letter o.

We also add the plural suffix -es to most words that end in o:

- potato → potatoes
- hero → heroes
- mosquito → mosquitoes

However, when the words have a foreign origin (e.g., Latin, Greek, Spanish), we just add the plural suffix -s

- taco → tacos
- avocado → avocados
- maestro → maestros

Note: While you won’t be expected to know which words have a foreign origin, being familiar with (or memorizing) some common words that use this plural can be really helpful. And remember, if you’re ever in doubt, the dictionary is there for you!

Practice

What are the correct plurals for the following words?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>solo</td>
<td>portfolio</td>
<td>veto</td>
<td>memo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>echo</td>
<td>radio</td>
<td>avocado</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>studio</td>
<td>potato</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show Answer

After -y and -f, -fe

When a word ends in y and there is a consonant before y, we change the y to i and add -es.

- sky → skies
- candy → candies
- lady → ladies

However, if the y follows another vowel, you simply add an -s.

- alloy → alloys
- donkey → donkeys
- day → days
What are the correct plurals for the following words?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>supply</td>
<td>key</td>
<td>fly</td>
<td>play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ally</td>
<td>boy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a word ends in \(-f\) or \(-fe\), we change the \(f\) to \(v\) and add \(-es\).

- leaf → leaves
- life → lives
- calf → calves

However, if there are two terminal \(fs\) or if you still pronounce the \(f\) in the plural, then you simply add an \(-s\):

- cliff → cliffs
- chief → chiefs
- reef → reefs

What are the correct plurals for the following words?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wolf</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>sheaf</td>
<td>roof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knife</td>
<td>thief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Irregular Plural Nouns

Irregular plurals, unlike regular plurals, don’t necessarily follow any particular pattern—instead, they follow a lot of different patterns. Because of this, irregular plurals require a lot of memorization; you need to remember which nouns belong to which type of pluralization. Mastering irregulars uses a different region of your brain than regular pluralization: it’s an entirely different skill set than regular pluralization. So don’t get too frustrated if you can’t remember the correct plural. If you’re ever in doubt, the dictionary is there for you.

No Change (Base Plurals)

The first kind of irregular plural we’ll talk about is the no-change or base plural. In these words, the singular noun has the exact same form as the plural. Most no-change plurals are types of animals:

- sheep
- fish
- deer
- moose

Mid-Word Vowel Change

In a few words, the mid-word vowels are changed to form the plural. This video lists all seven of these words and their plurals.

https://youtu.be/VdL0P9teko4

Note: The plural for a computer mouse (as opposed to the fuzzy animal) can either be mice or mouses. Some people prefer mouses as it creates some differentiation between the two words.

Plural –en

And last we have plural –en. In these words –en is used as the plural ending instead of -s or -es.

- child → children
- ox → oxen
- brother → brethren
- sister → sistren

Note: Brethren and sistren are antiquated terms that you’re unlikely to run into in your life; however, since these are the only four words in English that use this plural, all four have been included above.
Practice

What are the correct plurals for the following words?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>goose</td>
<td>moose</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>tooth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show Answer

Borrowed Words –i, –en, –a, –es, –ae

The last category of irregular plurals is borrowed words. These words are native to other languages (e.g., Latin, Greek) and have retained the pluralization rules from their original tongue.

**Singular –us; Plural –i**

- cactus → cacti
- fungus → fungi
- syllabus → syllabi

In informal speech, *cactuses* and *funguses* are acceptable. *Octopuses* is preferred to *octopi*, but *octopi* is an accepted word.

**Singular –a; Plural –ae**

- formula → formulae (sometimes *formulas*)
- vertebra → vertebrae
- larva → larvae

**Singular –ix, –ex; Plural –ices, –es**

- appendix → appendices (sometimes *appendixes*)
- index → indices

**Singular –on, –um; Plural –a**

- criterion → criteria
- bacterium → bacteria
- medium → media

**Singular –is; Plural –es**

- analysis → analyses
- crisis → crises
- thesis → theses
Practice

What are the correct plurals for the following words?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>memorandum</td>
<td>emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus</td>
<td>basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nucleus</td>
<td>phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appendix</td>
<td>curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parenthesis</td>
<td>hypothesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stimulus</td>
<td>vertebra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show Answer

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- Image of geese. **Authored by:** Sarah JOY. **Provided by:** The Noun Project. **Located at:** https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=geese&i=334679. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
Count vs. Non-Count Nouns

A count noun (also countable noun) is a noun that can be modified by a numeral (three chairs) and that occurs in both singular and plural forms (chair, chairs). The can also be preceded by words such as a, an, or the (a chair). Quite literally, count nouns are nouns which can be counted.

A non-count noun (also mass noun), on the other hand, has none of these properties. It can’t be modified by a numeral (three furniture is incorrect), occur in singular/plural (furnitures is not a word), or co-occur with a, an, or the (a furniture is incorrect). Again, quite literally, non-count nouns are nouns which cannot be counted.

Example: Chair vs. Furniture

The sentence pairs below compare the count noun chair and the non-count noun furniture.
There are chairs in the room. (correct)
There are furnitures in the room. (incorrect)
There is a chair in the room. (correct)
There is a furniture in the room. (incorrect)
Every chair is man made. (correct)
Every furniture is man made. (incorrect)
All chair is man made. (incorrect)
All furniture is man made. (correct)
There are several chairs in the room. (correct)
There are several furnitures in the room. (incorrect)
Determining the Type of Noun

In general, a count noun is going to be something you can easily count—like rock or dollar bill. Non-count nouns, on the other hand, would be more difficult to count—like sand or money. If you ever want to identify a singular non-count noun, you need a phrase beforehand—like a grain of sand or a sum of money.

Practice

Select the correct word to complete each sentence. Determine whether the correct word is a count or a non-count noun.

The internet is contains a lot of (information / fact).
The internet contains a lot of (informations / facts).
We each have a (work / job) to do.
We each have (work / job) to do.

Show Answer

Less, Fewer, Many, and Much

The adjectives less and fewer are both used to indicate a smaller amount of the noun they modify. Many and much are used to indicate a large amount of something. People often will use these pairs words interchangeably; however, the words fewer and many are used with count nouns, while less and much are used with non-count nouns:

- The pet day care has fewer dogs than cats this week.
- Next time you make these cookies, you should use less sugar.
- Many poets struggle when they try to determine if a poem is complete or not.
- There’s too much goodness in her heart for her own good.

You may have noticed that much has followed the adverb too in this example (too much). This is because you rarely find much by itself. You don’t really hear people say things like “Now please leave me alone; I have much research to do.” The phrase “a lot of” has taken its place in current English: “I have a lot of research to do.” A lot of can be used in the place of either many or much:

- A lot of poets struggle when they try to determine if a poem is complete or not.
- There’s a lot of goodness in her heart for her own good.

Practice

Read the following sentences. Decide if the bolded words have been treated correctly as count or non-count nouns.

Satya has a lot of clothings. Her mother has told her that before she can buy any more, she must get rid of five shirts and two pants.
There were much types of food at the event, including different soups, salads, and desserts.
Miguel loved studying outer space—especially the different galaxy.

Show Answer

Choose the correct word to fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

You can only be in this line if you have fifteen items or ____.
Evelyn was disappointed in the weather forecast; there was ____ rain predicted. She preferred dry weather.
I had a lengthy list of my ____ ideas for the project.
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Compound Nouns

A **compound noun** is a noun phrase made up of two nouns, e.g. *bus driver*, in which the first noun acts as a sort of adjective for the second one, but without really describing it. (For example, think about the difference between *a black bird* and *a blackbird*.)

![Figure 1. A crow is a black bird, while a blackbird is a specific species of bird.](image)

**Compound nouns** can be made up of two or more other words, but each compound has a single meaning. They may or may not be hyphenated, and they may be written with a space between words—especially if one of the words has more than one syllable, as in *living room*. In that regard, it’s necessary to avoid the over-simplification of saying that two single-syllable words are written together as one word. Thus, *tablecloth* but *table mat*, *wine glass* but *wineglassful* or *key ring* but *keyholder*. Moreover, there are cases which some people/dictionaries will write one way while others write them another way. Until very recently we wrote *(the) week’s end*, which later became *week-end* and then our beloved *weekend*.

**Types of Compound Nouns**

Short compounds may be written in three different ways:

- **The solid or closed forms** in which two usually moderately short words appear together as one. Solid compounds most likely consist of short units that often have been established in the language for a long time. Examples are *housewife, lawsuit, wallpaper, basketball*, etc.

- **The hyphenated form** in which two or more words are connected by a hyphen. This category includes compounds that contain suffixes, such as *house-build(er)* and *single-mind(ed)(ness)*. Compounds that contain articles, prepositions or conjunctions, such as *rent-a-cop* and *mother-of-pearl*, are also often hyphenated.

- **The open or spaced form** consisting of newer combinations of usually longer words, such as *distance learning, player piano, lawn tennis*, etc.

Hyphens are often considered a squishy part on language (we’ll discuss this further in **Hyphens and Dashes**). Because of this, usage differs and often depends on the individual choice of the writer rather than on a hard-and-fast rule. This means open, hyphenated, and closed forms may be encountered for the same compound noun, such as the triplets *container ship/container-ship/containership* and *particle board/particle-board/particleboard*. If you’re ever in doubt whether a compound should be closed, hyphenated, or open, dictionaries are your best reference.
Plurals

The process of making compound nouns plural has its own set of conventions to follow. In all forms of compound nouns, we pluralize the chief element of a compound word (i.e., we pluralize the primary noun of the compound).

- fisherman → fishermen
- black bird → black birds
- brother-in-law → brothers-in-law

The word hand-me-down doesn’t have a distinct primary noun, so its plural is hand-me-downs.

Practice

What are the correct plurals for the following words?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>do-it-yourself</td>
<td>rabbit’s foot</td>
<td>have-not</td>
<td>time-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spoonful</td>
<td>lieutenant general</td>
<td>runner-up</td>
<td>passerby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show Answer

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Practice Activities: Nouns

Plural Nouns

Here are some additional exercises to practice using nouns:

Regular Plural Nouns

Look at each plural word in the table below. Write the singular version of the word and explain which rule the plural has used in its formation. For example:

- *vultures* is the plural of *vulture*. Despite *vultures* ending in *-es*, you simply add an *-s* to form the plural, as the *e* is a part of the singular word.
- *fries* is the plural of *fry*. To form the plural, the *y* was changed to an *i*, and we added *-es*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>trees</th>
<th>sopranos</th>
<th>watches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tomatoes</td>
<td>waltzes</td>
<td>wrists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reefs</td>
<td>leaves</td>
<td>flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cafes</td>
<td>caves</td>
<td>boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Irregular Plural Nouns

Look at each plural word in the table below. Write the singular version of the word and explain which rule the plural has used in its formation. For example:

- *oxen* is the plural of *ox*. This is an *-en* noun. To form the plural, an *-en* was added.
- *stimuli* is the plural of *stimulus*. The singular ends with a *-us*, so the plural ends with an *-i*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Childr en</th>
<th>moo se</th>
<th>t ee th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Squ id</td>
<td>m en</td>
<td>li ce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mem oran da</td>
<td>hyp o the se s</td>
<td>phen o men a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paren th es es</td>
<td>em ph a se s</td>
<td>nu cle i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foci</td>
<td>ve rte bra e</td>
<td>ap pend i ces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show Answer

**Regular and Irregular Plural Nouns**

Look at each word in the table below. Identify if the words is singular or plural, then write the other version of the word and explain which rule the plural has used in its formation. For example:

- *stimuli* is the plural of *stimulus*. The singular ends with a *-us*, so the plural ends with an *-i*.
- *ox* is the singular of *oxen*. This is an *-en* noun. To form the plural, an *-en* was added.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chief s</th>
<th>t oys</th>
<th>q u iz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Count v. Non-Count Nouns

Many? Much? Fewer? Less?

Read the following sentences. Choose the correct words to complete each sentence.

There was (many / much) food at the event. There were (less / fewer) soups than salads and even (less / fewer) desserts.
As a geologist, Liam spends a lot of time around (rock / rocks) and (dirt / dirts).
Arturo had too much (water / drinks) before his workout.

Compound Nouns

Read the following sentence. Are the compound nouns in each being used correctly? How would you create the plural form of each compound noun?

Idrissa has two sister in laws and one brother in law.
High blood pressure can lead to multiple types of heart disease.
When I was four, I was determined to be an astronaut, a fire-fighter, and a sous chef.

Nouns

Identify errors in the following as you read the passage:

- pluralization
- count vs. non-count nouns
- common vs. proper nouns
• compound nouns

Explain why each error is incorrect, and explain how to correct the error. The sentences have been numbered to help you organize your comments.

(1) Marie Curie, who conducted pioneering research on radio-activity, was the first woman to win a nobel prize, the first person to win twice, and the only person to win twice in multiple sciences (she won in physics and chemistries). (2) She was also the first woman to become a professor at the University of Paris.

(3) In 1910—four years after the death of her husband—Curie succeeded in isolating radium; she also defined an international standard for radioactive emissions that was eventually named for her and Pierre: the curie. (4) Her achievementes included the development of the theory of radioactivity (a term that she coined), the creation of techniques to isolate radioactive isotopes, and the discovery of two elements: a polonium and a radium.

Show Answer

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Introduction to Pronouns

Anna decided at the beginning of Anna’s first semester of college that Anna would run for thirty minutes every day. Anna knew that Anna would be taking a literature class with a lot of reading, so instead of buying print copies of all the novels Anna’s teacher assigned, Anna bought the audiobooks. That way Anna could listen to the audiobooks as Anna ran.

Did this paragraph feel awkward to you? Let’s try it again using pronouns:

Anna decided at the beginning of her first semester of college that she would run for thirty minutes every day. She knew that she would be taking a literature class with a lot of reading, so instead of buying hard copies of all the novels her teacher assigned, Anna bought the audiobooks. That way she could listen to them as she ran.

This second paragraph is much more natural. Instead of repeating nouns multiple times, we were able to use pronouns. You’ve likely hear the phrase “a pronoun replaces a noun”; this is exactly what a pronoun does. Because a pronoun is replacing a noun, its meaning is dependent on the noun that it is replacing. This noun is called the antecedent. Let’s look at the two sentences we just read again:

- Because a pronoun is replacing a noun, its meaning is dependent on the noun that it is replacing. This noun is called an antecedent.

There are two pronouns here: its and it. Its and it both have the same antecedent: “a pronoun.” Whenever you use a pronoun, you must also include its antecedent. Without the antecedent, your readers (or listeners) won’t be able to figure out what the pronoun is referring to. Let’s look at a couple of examples:

- Jason likes it when people look to him for leadership.
- Trini brushes her hair every morning.
- Billy often has to clean his glasses.
- Kimberly is a gymnast. She has earned several medals in different competitions.

So, what are the antecedents and pronouns in these sentences?

- Jason is the antecedent for the pronoun him.
- Trini is the antecedent for the pronoun her.
• *Billy* is the antecedent for the pronoun *his*.
• *Kimberly* is the antecedent for the pronoun *she*.

## Practice

Identify the antecedent in the following examples:

- The bus is twenty minutes late today, like it always is.
- I would never be caught dead wearing boot sandals. They are an affront to nature.

Show Answer

There are several types of pronouns, including personal, demonstrative, indefinite, and relative pronouns. The next few pages will cover each of these.

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Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are what most people think of when they see the word *pronoun*. Personal pronouns include words like *he*, *she*, and *they*. The following sentences give examples of personal pronouns used with antecedents (remember, an antecedent is the noun that a pronoun refers to):

- **That man** looks as if *he* needs a new coat. (the noun phrase *that man* is the antecedent of *he*)
- **Kat** arrived yesterday. I met *her* at the station. (*Kat* is the antecedent of *her*)
- When **they** saw us, the lions began roaring (*the lions* is the antecedent of *they*)
- **Adam and I** were hoping no one would find *us*. (*Adam and I* is the antecedent of *us*)

**Note:** Pronouns like *I*, *we*, and *you* don’t always require an explicitly stated antecedent. When a speaker says something like “I told you the zoo was closed today,” it’s implied that the speaker is the antecedent for *I* and the listener is the antecedent for *you*.

Pronouns may be classified by three categories: person, number, and case.

**Person**

**Person** refers to the relationship that an author has with the text that he or she writes, and with the reader of that text. English has three persons (first, second, and third):

- **First-person** is the speaker or writer him- or herself. The first person is personal (*I*, *we*, etc.)
- **Second-person** is the person who is being directly addressed. The speaker or author is saying this is about you, the listener or reader.
- **Third-person** is the most common person used in academic writing. The author is saying this is about other people. In the third person singular there are distinct pronoun forms for male, female, and neutral gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td><em>I</em>, <em>me</em>, <em>we</em>, <em>us</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td><em>you</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Male: <em>he</em>, <em>him</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female: <em>she</em>, <em>her</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral: <em>it</em>, <em>they</em>, <em>them</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practice

Select the response from the list that best completes the sentence.

Sandra often put other people’s needs before her own. That’s why people loved (her / me) so much. Vindira and Frank always let us know when (he / they) were coming into town. I told Bruno (he / it) will need three things in order to be successful: determination, discipline, and dexterity.

Show Answers

Number

There are two numbers: singular and plural. As we learned in nouns, singular words refer to only one a thing while plural words refer to more than one of a thing (I stood alone while they walked together).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>I, me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>we, us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>he, him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>she, her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>they, them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case

English personal pronouns have two cases: subject and object (there are also possessive pronouns, which we’ll discuss next). Subject-case pronouns are used when the pronoun is doing the action. (I like to eat chips, but she does not). Object-case pronouns are used when something is being done to the pronoun (John likes me but not her). This video will further clarify the difference between subject- and object-case:

https://youtu.be/q5HmV3Czl6g

Practice

Select the response from the list that best completes the sentence.

I don’t know if I should talk to (he / him). (He / Him) looks really angry today. Enrico and Brenna are coming over for dinner tomorrow night. (They / Them) will be here at 6:00. Melissa loves music. (She / Her) listens to it when I drive (she / her) to work.
Reflexive Pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are a kind of pronoun that are used when the subject and the object of the sentence are the same.

- Jason hurt himself. (Jason is the antecedent of himself)
- We were teasing each other. (we is the antecedent of each other)

This is true even if the subject is only implied, as in the sentence “Don’t hurt yourself.” You is the unstated subject of this sentence.

https://youtu.be/Zoh8XpfcF-c

Practice

Read at the following sentences. Should the reflexive pronoun be used? Why or why not?

Aisha let (her / herself) in when she arrived.
Feel free to let (you / yourself) in when you get here!
Andrés asked Jada if she would let (him / himself) in when (she / herself) arrived.

Show Answer

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns are used to indicate possession (in a broad sense). Some occur as independent phrases: mine, yours, hers, ours, yours, theirs. For example, “Those clothes are mine.” Others must be accompanied by a noun: my, your, her, our, your, their, as in “I lost my wallet.” His and its can fall into either category, although its is nearly always found in the second.

Both types replace possessive noun phrases. As an example, “Their crusade to capture our attention” could replace “The advertisers’ crusade to capture our attention.”

This video provides another explanation of possessive pronouns:

https://youtu.be/bzh8VDykc4

Practice

Select the response from the list that best completes the sentence.

Hey, that’s (my / mine)!
Carla gave Peter (her / hers) phone number.
Remember to leave (their / theirs) papers on the table.

Show Answer

Review

The table below includes all of the personal pronouns in the English language. They are organized by person, number, and case:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Reflexive</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>myself</td>
<td>my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>ourselves</td>
<td>our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>yourself</td>
<td>your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>yourselves</td>
<td>your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td></td>
<td>he</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>himself</td>
<td>his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>she</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>herself</td>
<td>her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>it</td>
<td>it</td>
<td>itself</td>
<td>its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>themselves</td>
<td>their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Practice Activities: Personal Pronouns

Determining Person

In the following sentences, determine the person for each pronoun:

Don’t forget to give Marieke her keys.
Itzel and Camila were the top ranking doubles team at OSU. They hadn’t been defeated all year.
You will need three things in order to be successful: determination, discipline, and dexterity.

Show Answer

Classifying Pronouns

In the following sentences, identify the person, case, and number of each pronoun:

Even though he knew he might regret it, Dirron decided to let himself ignore his responsibilities for a day.
Elena knew she should have spent more time on homework this semester, but binge-watching TV had tripped her up again and again.
Next Saturday, I have to take all three of my little sisters to the zoo. It’s certainly going to be an ordeal.

Show Answer

Possessive Forms

In each sentence, select the correct possessive pronoun. Identify why you selected the pronoun you did:

Eloá was positive that it was (her / hers) pie that I was eating.
I was sure it was (my/ mine).
Jake and Suren refused to give (their / theirs) opinions on the subject.

Show Answer

Choosing the Right Pronoun

In each sentence, fill in the blank with the correct pronoun. Identify why you selected the pronoun you did:

André told me that it was ___ box of cereal, but I couldn’t remember having bought ___.
Amelia and Ajani still haven’t arrived. I should make sure ___ texted ___.
You shouldn’t be so worried about what other people think. The only person ___ need to please is ___.
George Washington was the first president of the United States. ___ set the standard of only serving two terms of office. However, ___ wasn’t illegal to serve over two terms until 1951.
Practice Activities: Personal Pronouns. Provided by: Lumen Learning. License: CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike
Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns substitute for things being pointed out. They include this, that, these, and those. This and that are singular; these and those are plural.

The difference between this and that and between these and those is a little more subtle. This and these refer to something that is “close” to the speaker, whether this closeness is physical, emotional, or temporal. That and those are the opposite: they refer to something that is “far.”

- Do I actually have to read all of this?
  ○ The speaker is indicating a text that is close to her, by using “this.”
- That is not coming anywhere near me.
  ○ The speaker is distancing himself from the object in question, which he doesn’t want to get any closer. The far pronoun helps indicate that.
- You’re telling me you sewed all of these?
  ○ The speaker and her audience are likely looking directly at the clothes in question, so the close pronoun is appropriate.
- Those are all gross.
  ○ The speaker wants to remain away from the gross items in question, by using the far “those.”

Note: these pronouns are often combined with a noun. When this happens, they act as a kind of adjective instead of as a pronoun.

- Do I actually have to read all of this contract?
- That thing is not coming anywhere near me.
- You’re telling me you sewed all of these dresses?
- Those recipes are all gross.

The antecedents of demonstrative pronouns (and sometimes the pronoun it) can be more complex than those of personal pronouns:

- Animal Planet’s puppy cam has been taken down for maintenance. I never wanted this to happen.
- I love Animal Planet’s panda cam. I watched a panda eat bamboo for half an hour. It was amazing.

In the first example, the antecedent for this is the concept of the puppy cam being taken down. In the second example, the antecedent for it in this sentence is the experience of watching the panda. That antecedent isn’t explicitly stated in the sentence, but comes through in the intention and meaning of the speaker.

Practice

In the following sentences, determine if this, that, these, or those should be used.

Lara looked at her meal in front of her. “____ looks great!” she said.
Tyesha watched the ‘67 Mustang drive down the street. “What I wouldn’t give for one of ____.”
“What do you think of ____?” Ashley asked, showing me the three paint samples she had picked out.

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Indefinite Pronouns

These pronouns can be used in a couple of different ways:

- They can refer to members of a group separately rather than collectively. *(To each his or her own.)*
- They can indicate the non-existence of people or things. *(Nobody thinks that.)*
- They can refer to a person, but are not specific as to first, second or third person in the way that the personal pronouns are. *(One does not clean one’s own windows.)*

Please note that all of these pronouns are singular. The table below shows the most common indefinite pronouns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>anybody</th>
<th>anyone</th>
<th>anything</th>
<th>each</th>
<th>either</th>
<th>every</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>everybody</td>
<td>everyone</td>
<td>everything</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>no one</td>
<td>nobody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nothing</td>
<td>nobody else</td>
<td>somebody</td>
<td>someone</td>
<td>something</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Sometimes third-person personal pronouns are sometimes used without antecedents—this applies to special uses such as dummy pronouns and generic *they*, as well as cases where the referent is implied by the context.

- You know what *they* say.
- *It’s* a nice day today.

Please note that all of these pronouns are singular. Look back at the example “To each his or her own.” Saying “To each their own” would be incorrect, since *their* is a plural pronoun and *each* is singular. We’ll discuss this in further depth in *Antecedent Agreement.*

**Practice**

Identify the indefinite pronouns in the following sentences. Is the best indefinite used, or is there another indefinite that would fit better?

Everyone should take the time to critically think about what he or she wants out of life.
If I had to choose between singing in public and swimming with leeches, I would choose neither.
Yasmin knew everything was wrong, but she couldn’t figure out what.
If nobody else enrolls in this class, it will be cancelled this semester.
Relative Pronouns

There are five relative pronouns in English: who, whom, whose, that, and which. These pronouns are used to connect different clauses together. For example:

- Belen, who had starred in six plays before she turned seventeen, knew that she wanted to act on Broadway someday.
  - The word who connects the phrase “had starred in six plays before she turned seventeen” to the rest of the sentence.
- My daughter wants to adopt the dog that doesn’t have a tail.
  - The word that connects the phrase “doesn’t have a tail” to the rest of the sentence.

These pronouns behave differently from the other categories we’ve seen. However, they are pronouns, and it’s important to learn how they work.

Two of the biggest confusions with these pronouns are that vs. which and who vs. whom. The two following videos help with these:

That vs. Which

https://youtu.be/6Js8tBCfbWk

Who vs. Whom

https://youtu.be/bPqMLKXoEac

Practice

Does the following paragraph use relative pronouns correctly? Explain why or why not for each relative pronoun.

(1) Katerina, whom had taken biology once already, was still struggling to keep the steps of cellular respiration straight. (2) She knew the process took place in animals, which take in oxygen and put out carbon dioxide. (3) She also knew that plants underwent the process of photosynthesis. (4) However, the individual steps of the process seemed beyond her understanding.

Show Answer
Antecedent Clarity

We’ve already defined an antecedent as the noun (or phrase) that a pronoun is replacing. The phrase “antecedent clarity” simply means that it should be clear who or what the pronoun is referring to. In other words, readers should be able to understand the sentence the first time they read it—not the third, forth, or tenth. In this page, we’ll look at some examples of common mistakes that can cause confusion, as well as ways to fix each sentence.

Let’s take a look at our first sentence:

Rafael told Matt to stop eating his cereal.

When you first read this sentence, is it clear if the cereal Rafael’s or Matt’s? Is it clear when you read the sentence again? Not really, no. Since both Rafael and Matt are singular, third person, and masculine, it’s impossible to tell whose cereal is being eaten (at least from this sentence).

How would you best revise this sentence? Type your ideas in the text frame below, and then look at the suggested revisions.

Show Possible Revisions

Were those revisions what you expected them to be?

Let’s take a look at another example:

Zuly was really excited to try French cuisine on her semester abroad in Europe. They make all sorts of delicious things.

When you read this example, is it apparent who the pronoun they is referring to? You may guess that they is referring to the French—which is probably correct. However, this is not actually stated, which means that there isn’t actually an antecedent. Since every pronoun needs an antecedent, the example needs to be revised to include one.

How would you best revise this sentence? Type your ideas in the text frame below, and then look at the suggested revisions.

Show Possible Revisions

As you write, keep these two things in mind:

- Make sure your pronouns always have an antecedent.
- Make sure that it is clear what their antecedents are.

Practice

Use the context clues to figure out which pronoun to use to complete the sentences. Select the response from...
the list that best completes the sentence.

Pat is fifteen and Robin is thirteen. (Pat / he / she) likes swimming, but (Robin / he / she) doesn’t know what he likes. Because (Robin / he) can swim now, (Robin / he) can join the swim team.

Show Answer

Let’s try a more complicated paragraph:

When my identical twin girls, Andrea and Renee, were about a month old, (she / Renee) developed a very high temperature, so I took her to the hospital where (she / Renee) spent the night. Meanwhile, at home, (she / Andrea) was twisting and turning; (she / Andrea) was unable to sleep. The next night, (she / Andrea) was the same.

Show Answer
Antecedent Agreement

As you write, make sure that you are using the correct pronouns. When a pronoun matches the person and number of its antecedent, we say that it agrees with it antecedent. Let’s look at a couple of examples:

- I hate it when Zacharias tells me what to do. He’s so full of himself.
- The Finnegans are shouting again. I swear you could hear them from across town!

In the first sentence, Zacharias is singular, third person, and masculine. The pronouns he and himself are also singular, third person, and masculine, so they agree. In the second sentence, the Finnegans is plural and third person. The pronoun them is also plural and third person.

When you select your pronoun, you also need to ensure you use the correct case of pronoun. Remember we learned about three cases: subject, object, and possessive. The case of your pronoun should match its role in the sentence. For example, if your pronoun is doing an action, it should be a subject:

- He runs every morning.
- I hate it when she does this.

However, when something is being done to your pronoun, it should be an object:

- Birds have always hated me.
- My boss wanted to talk to him.
- Give her the phone and walk away.

Practice

Replace each bolded word with the correct pronoun:

Hannah had always loved working with plants.
People often lost patience with Colin.
Justin was unsure how well Justin and Terry would together.
Alicia and Katie made a formidable team.

Show Answer

However, things aren’t always this straightforward. Let’s take a look at some examples where things are a little more confusing.
Person and Number

Some of the trickiest agreements are with indefinite pronouns:

- Every student should do his or her best on this assignment.
- If nobody lost his or her scarf, then where did this come from?

As we learned earlier in this outcome, words like every and nobody are singular, and demand singular pronouns. Here are some of the words that fall into this category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>anybody</th>
<th>anyone</th>
<th>anything</th>
<th>each</th>
<th>either</th>
<th>every</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>everybody</td>
<td>everyone</td>
<td>everything</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td>no one</td>
<td>nobody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nothing</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>somebody</td>
<td>someone</td>
<td>something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of these may feel “more singular” than others, but they all are technically singular. Thus, using “he or she” is correct (while they is incorrect).

However, as you may have noticed, the phrase “he or she” (and its other forms) can often make your sentences clunky. When this happens, it may be best to revise your sentences to have plural antecedents. Because “he or she” is clunky, you’ll often see issues like this:

The way each individual speaks can tell us so much about him or her. It tells us what groups they associate themselves with, both ethnically and socially.

As you can see, in the first sentence, him or her agrees with the indefinite pronoun each. However, in the second sentence, the writer has shifted to the plural they, even though the writer is talking about the same group of people. When you write, make sure your agreement is correct and consistent.

Practice

Here’s a paragraph that uses “he or she” liberally:

Every writer will experience writer’s block at some point in his or her career. He or she will suddenly be unable to move on in his or her work. A lot of people have written about writer’s block, presenting different strategies to “beat the block.” However, different methods work for different people. Each writer must find the solutions that work best for him or her.

How would you best revise this paragraph? Type your ideas in the text frame below, and then look at the suggested revisions.

Show Possible Revisions
Were those revisions what you expected them to be?

Singular They

As we’ve just seen, indefinite pronouns demand singular pronouns, like in “To each his or her own.” However, in informal speech, you’ll often hear things like “To each their own” or “Someone is singing in the hallway. If they haven’t stopped in five minutes, I’m going to have to take drastic measures.” If you think about your own speech, it’s very likely that you use they as a singular pronoun for someone whose gender you don’t know.

So why do people use they this way, even though it’s a plural? It likely stems from the clunkiness of the phrase “he or she.” It is also possible that they is following the same evolution as the word you. In Early Modern English, you was used as either a plural, second-person pronoun or as a polite form for the more common, singular thee. However, you eventually overtook almost all of the second-person pronouns, both singular and plural.

While this use of the singular they is still not “officially” correct—and you definitely shouldn’t use this in your English papers—it’s interesting to watch English change before our very eyes.
Case

Some of the most common pronoun mistakes occur with the decision between “you and I” and “you and me.” People will often say things like “You and me should go out for drinks.” Or—thinking back on the rule that it should be “you and I”—they will say “Susan assigned the task to both you and I.” However, both of these sentences are wrong. Remember that every time you use a pronoun you need to make sure that you’re using the correct case.

Let’s take a look at the first sentence: “You and me should go out for drinks.” Both pronouns are the subject of the sentence, so they should be in subject case: “You and I should go out for drinks.”

In the second sentence (Susan assigned the task to both you and I), both pronouns are the object of the sentence, so they should be in object case: “Susan assigned the task to both you and me.”

- Text: Antecedent Agreement. Provided by: Lumen Learning. License: CC BY: Attribution

Practice Activities: Pronouns

Identifying Pronouns

As you read the following passage, identify all of the pronouns, as well as what type of pronoun each is. Remember, there are four types of pronouns we learned about: personal, demonstrative, indefinite, and relative pronouns.

(1) Louis Charles Joseph Blériot (1872–1936) was a French aviator, inventor, and engineer. (2) In 1909, he became world famous for making the first flight across the English Channel in a heavier than air aircraft, winning a prize of £1,000 offered by the *Daily Mail* newspaper. (3) The prize was widely seen as a way to gain cheap publicity when it was first announced by the paper—no one thought this feat could actually be accomplished. (4) The Paris newspaper *Le Matin* commented that there was no chance of the prize being won. (5) Blériot would prove everyone wrong.

Finding the Antecedent

Identify the antecedents and pronouns in the following examples:

- Somebody must have found my cell phone. He or she has been using up all my data!
- People asked Jorge to review their papers so often that he started a small editing business.
- He’s been talking for over two hours. This is unbearable.
- Henry called his parents every week.
- There are forty bracelets in this box. Are you telling me you made all of those?

Antecedent Clarity

Read the following passage, then re-write it using as many pronouns as possible, while still retaining clarity.

Marina and Marina’s twin sister Adriana often fought over small things. Marina frequently took Adriana’s clothes without asking and never returned them. Adriana always ate the last piece of dessert, even if Mariana had saved it for Mariana. However, Mariana always made sure Adriana knew about the sales at Adriana’s favorite stores, and Adriana baked Mariana’s favorite cookies at least once a month.

Show Answer

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- Modification of Louis Bleriot. **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Bl%C3%A9riot. **License:** CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike
Introduction to Verbs

Identify Verb Types and Their Correct Conjugation

From 2002 to 2006, The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) ran a media campaign entitled “Verb: It’s What You Do.” This campaign was designed to help teens get and stay active, but it also provided a helpful soundbite for defining verbs: “It’s what you do.”

Verbs are often called the “action” words of language. As we discuss verbs, we will learn that this isn’t always the case, but it is a helpful phrase to remember just what verbs are.

Traditionally, verbs are divided into three groups: active verbs (these are “action” words), linking verbs, and helping verbs (these two types of verbs are not “action” words). In this outcome, we’ll discuss all three of these groups. We’ll also learn how verbs work and how they change to suit the needs of a speaker or writer.

Outcome: Verbs. Provided by: Lumen Learning. License: CC BY: Attribution

Active Verbs

Active verbs are the simplest type of verb: they simply express some sort of action. Watch this video introduction to verbs:

https://youtu.be/0T9xMqvjdLk

Let’s look at the example verbs from the video one more time:

- contain
- roars
- runs
- sleeps

All of these verbs are active verbs: they all express an action.

Practice

Identify the active verbs in the following sentences:

Dominic paints the best pictures of meerkats.
Sean’s hair curled really well today.
Elephants roam the savanna.
Billy ate an entire loaf of bread in one sitting.

Show Answer

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Active verbs can be divided into two categories: transitive and intransitive verbs. A **transitive verb** is a verb that requires one or more objects. This contrasts with intransitive verbs, which do not have objects.

It might be helpful to think of it this way: transitive verbs have to be *done to* something or someone in the sentence. Intransitive verbs only have to be *done by* someone.

Let’s look at a few examples of transitive verbs:

- We are going to **need** a bigger boat.
  - The object in this sentence is the phrase “a bigger boat.” Consider how incomplete the thought would be if the sentence only said “We are going to need.” Despite having a subject and a verb, the sentence is meaningless without the object phrase.
She hates **filling out** forms.

- Again, leaving out the object would cripple the meaning of the sentence. We have to know that *forms* is what she hates filling out.
- *Hates* is also a transitive verb. Without the phrase “filling out forms,” the phrase “She hates” doesn’t make any sense.

Sean **hugged** his brother David.

- You can see the pattern... *Hugged* in this sentence is only useful if we know who Sean squeezed. David is the object of the transitive verb.

Intransitive verbs, on the other do not take an object.

```
John **sneezed** loudly.
```

- Even though there’s another word after *sneezed*, the full meaning of the sentence is available with just the subject *John* and the verb *sneezed*: “John sneezed.” Therefore, *sneezed* is an intransitive verb. It doesn’t have to be done to something or someone.

```
My computer completely **died**.
```

- Again, *died* here is enough for the sentence to make sense. We know that the computer (the subject) is what died.

This video provides a more in-depth explanation of transitive and intransitive verbs and how they work:

https://youtu.be/CFdl1oC1vtQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intransitive</th>
<th>Transitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The fire has <strong>burned</strong> for hundreds of years.</td>
<td>Miranda <strong>burned</strong> all of her old school papers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t let the engine stop <strong>running!</strong></td>
<td>Karl <strong>ran</strong> the best horse track this side of the river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The vase <strong>broke</strong>.</td>
<td>She <strong>broke</strong> the toothpick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your dog <strong>bite</strong>?</td>
<td>The cat <strong>bit</strong> him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water <strong>evaporates</strong> when it’s hot.</td>
<td>Heat <strong>evaporates</strong> water.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** there are some verbs that can act as both transitive and intransitive verbs (the video defined these as bitransitive verbs):

**Practice**

Read the following sentences. Are the verbs in each transitive or intransitive?

Liv fell out of the car.
Ian has written over four hundred articles on the subject.
Christopher sings really well.
Marton wondered about a lot of things.
Cate gave great gifts.

**Multi-Word Verbs**

Multi-word verbs a subclass of active verbs. They are made up of multiple words, as you might have guessed. They include things like *stirfry*, *kickstart*, and *turn in*. Multi-word verbs often have a slightly different meaning than their base parts. Take a look at the difference between the next two sentences:
Ben carried the boxes out of the house.
Ben carried out the task well.

The first sentence uses a single word verb (carried) and the preposition out. If you remove the preposition (and its object), you get “Ben carried the boxes,” which makes perfect sense. In the second sentence, carried out acts as a single entity. If you remove out, the sentence has no meaning: “Ben carried the task well” doesn’t make sense.

Let’s look at another example:

- She’s been shut up in there for years.
- Dude, shut up.

Can you see how the same principles apply here? Other multi-word verbs include find out, make off with, turn in, and put up with.

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Linking Verbs

A linking verb is a verb that links a subject to the rest of the sentence. There isn’t any “real” action happening in the sentence. Sentences with linking verbs become similar to math equations. The verb acts as an equal sign between the items it links.

https://youtu.be/4dPbciiZSbo

As the video establishes, to be verbs are the most common linking verbs (is, was, were, etc.). David and the bear establish that there are other linking verbs as well. Here are some illustrations of other common linking verbs:

- Over the past five days, Charles has become a new man.
  - It’s easy to reimagine this sentence as “Over the past five days, Charles = a new man.”
- Since the oil spill, the beach has smelled bad.
  - Similarly, one could also read this as “Since the oil spill, the beach = smelled bad.”
- That word processing program seems adequate for our needs.
  - Here, the linking verb is slightly more nuanced than an equals sign, though the sentence construction overall is similar. (This is why we write in words, rather than math symbols, after all!)
- This calculus problem looks difficult.
- With every step Jake took, he could feel the weight on his shoulders growing.

Practice

Read each sentence and determine whether its verb is a linking verb or not:

- Terry smelled his yogurt to see if it was still good.
- Rosa looks intimidating.
- Amy looked over at the clock to check the time.
- Gina smelled like chrysanthemums and mystery.
- Raymond is a fantastic boss.

Show Answer

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Helping verbs (sometimes called auxiliary verbs) are, as the name suggests, verbs that help another verb. They provide support and add additional meaning. Here are some examples of helping verbs in sentences:

- Mariah is looking for her keys still.
- Kai had checked the weather three times already, but he looked one more time to see if the forecast had changed.
- What ever happens, do not let the water level drop below this line.

As you just saw, helping verbs are usually pretty short, and they include things like is, had, and do (we’ll look at a more complete list later). Let’s look at some more examples to examine exactly what these verbs do. Take a look at the sentence “I have finished my dinner.” Here, the main verb is finish, and the helping verb have helps to express tense. Let’s look at two more examples:

- By 1967, about 500 U.S. citizens had received heart transplants.
  - While received could function on its own as a complete thought here, the helping verb had emphasizes the distance in time of the date in the opening phrase.
- Do you want tea?
  - Do is a helping verb accompanying the main verb want, used here to form a question.
- Researchers are finding that propranolol is effective in the treatment of heartbeat irregularities.
  - The helping verb are indicates the present tense, and adds a sense of continuity to the verb finding.
- He has given his all.
  - Has is a helping verb used in expressing the tense of given.

The following table provides a short list of some verbs that can function as helping verbs, along with examples of the way they function. A full list of helping verbs can be found here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helping Verb</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>Express tense (the tense depends on the conjugation of to be; is is present, was is past, will be is future, etc.) and a sense of continuity.</td>
<td>He is sleeping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They were seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>Express ability</td>
<td>I can swim. Such things can help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could</td>
<td>Express possibility</td>
<td>That could help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>do</strong></td>
<td>Express negation (requires the word <em>not</em>)</td>
<td>You <strong>do</strong> not understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ask a question</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Do</strong> you want to go?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>have</strong></td>
<td>Express tense (the tense depends on the conjugation of <em>to be</em>; <em>are</em> is present, <em>were</em> is past, <em>will be</em> is future, etc.) and indicate a sense of completion</td>
<td>They <strong>have</strong> understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>might</strong></td>
<td>Express possibility</td>
<td>We <strong>might</strong> give it a try.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>must</strong></td>
<td>Express confidence in a fact</td>
<td>It <strong>must</strong> have rained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>should</strong></td>
<td>Express a request</td>
<td>You <strong>should</strong> listen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Express likelihood</td>
<td>That <strong>should</strong> help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>will</strong></td>
<td>Express future tense</td>
<td>We <strong>will</strong> eat pie. The sun <strong>will</strong> rise tomorrow at 6:03.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>would</strong></td>
<td>Express future likelihood</td>
<td>Nothing <strong>would</strong> accomplish that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The negative forms of these words (*can’t*, *don’t*, *won’t*, etc.) are also helping verbs.

**Note:** The helping verbs *to be*, *to have*, and *would* are used to indicate tense. We’ll discuss exactly how they function in more depth in *Text: Complex Verb Tenses*.

### Practice

Identify the helping verbs in the sentences below:

- Damian can’t work tonight. Do you want his shift?
- Cassandra couldn’t afford to give up.
- Richard was exercising when Barbara finally found him.

**Show Answer**

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- Auxiliary verb. **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auxiliary_verb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auxiliary_verb). **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)
- Basic Patterns and Elements of the Sentence. **Authored by:** David McMurrey. **Located at:** [https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/twsent.html](https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/twsent.html). **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
- Image of helping figures. **Authored by:** BenPixels. **Provided by:** The Noun Project. **Located at:** [https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=help&i=462225](https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=help&i=462225). **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
Simple Verb Tenses

What is tense? There are three standard tenses in English: past, present and future. All three of these tenses have simple and more complex forms. For now we’ll just focus on the simple present (things happening now), the simple past (things that happened before), and the simple future (things that will happen later).

Tenses

Present Tense

Watch this quick introduction to the present tense:
https://youtu.be/gRlrZrDL5QI

Past Tense

Watch this quick introduction to the past tense:
https://youtu.be/zS6N5EqXpCY

Future Tense

Watch this quick introduction to the future tense:
https://youtu.be/LvlpEPHPhpI

Note: You may have noticed that in the present tense video David talked about “things that are happening right now” and that he mentioned there were other ways to create the past and future tense. We’ll discuss these in further depth in Advanced Verb Tenses.

Conjugation

Most verbs will follow the pattern that we just learned in the previous videos:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>verb + ed</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>will verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>verb + ed</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>will verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>verb + ed</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>will verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It</td>
<td>verb + ed</td>
<td>verb + s (or es)</td>
<td>will verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>verb + ed</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>will verb</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To Walk

Let’s look at the verb *to walk* for an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walks</td>
<td>will walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>walked</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>will walk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practice

Change the tense of each sentence as directed below. You can type your answers in the text field below:

- Make this sentence present tense: Alejandra directed a play.
- Make this sentence past tense: Lena will show me how to use a microscope.
- Make this sentence future tense: Gabrielly eats a lot of hamburgers.

Show Answer

Irregular Verbs

There are a lot of irregular verbs. Unfortunately, there’s a lot of memorization involved in keeping them straight. This video shows a few of the irregular verbs you’ll have to use the most often (*to be*, *to have*, *to do*, and *to say*):

https://youtu.be/ZKr–3HpP_A

Here’s a list of several irregular past tense verbs.

Practice

Change the tense of each sentence as directed below. You can type your answers in the text field below:

- Make this sentence present tense: Ysabella was really good at getting others to open up.
- Make this sentence past tense: Rodrigo will have a B+ in his math class.
- Make this sentence future tense: Amanda said she didn’t want to go to the party.
- Make this sentence past tense: Jordan does five hundred sit-ups.
- Make this sentence present tense: Marcela ran a car wash down the street from my house.

Show Answer

Subject & Verb Agreement

The basic idea behind sentence agreement is pretty simple: all the parts of your sentence should match (or agree). Verbs need to agree with their subjects in number (singular or plural) and in person (first, second, or third). In order to check agreement, you simply need to find the verb and ask who or what is doing the action of that verb.

Person

Agreement based on grammatical person (first, second, or third person) is found mostly between verb and subject. For example, you can say “I am” or “he is,” but not “I is” or “he am.” This is because the grammar of the language requires that the verb and its subject agree in person. The pronouns I and he are first and third person respectively, as are the verb forms am and is. The verb form must be selected so that it has the same person as the subject.

Number

Agreement based on grammatical number can occur between verb and subject, as in the case of grammatical person discussed above. In fact the two categories are often conflated within verb conjugation patterns: there are specific verb forms for first person singular, second person plural and so on. Some examples:

- I really am (1st pers. singular) vs. We really are (1st pers. plural)
- The boy sings (3rd pers. singular) vs. The boys sing (3rd pers. plural)

More Examples

Compound subjects are plural, and their verbs should agree. Look at the following sentence for an example:

- A pencil, a backpack, and a notebook were issued to each student.

Verbs will never agree with nouns that are in prepositional phrases. To make verbs agree with their subjects, follow this example:

- The direction of the three plays is the topic of my talk.

The subject of “my talk” is direction, not plays, so the verb should be singular.

In the English language, verbs usually follow subjects. But when this order is reversed, the writer must make the verb agree with the subject, not with a noun that happens to precede it. For example:

- Beside the house stand sheds filled with tools.
The subject is *sheds*; it is plural, so the verb must be *stand*.

**Agreement**

All regular verbs (and nearly all irregular ones) in English agree in the third-person singular of the present indicative by adding a suffix of either *-s* or *-es*.

Look at the present tense of *to love*, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td><em>I love</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td><em>you love</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td><em>he/she/it loves</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highly irregular verb *to be* is the only verb with more agreement than this in the present tense:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td><em>I am</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td><em>you are</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td><em>he/she/it is</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Practice**

Choose the correct verb to make the sentences agree:

- Ann (walk / walks) really slowly.
- You (is / am / are) dating Tom?
- Donna and April (get / gets) along well.
- Chris and Ben (is / am / are) the best duo this company has ever seen.

Show Answer

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Verb Tense Consistency

One of the most common mistakes in writing is a lack of tense consistency. Writers often start a sentence in one tense but ended up in another. Look back at that sentence. Do you see the error? The first verb start is in the present tense, but ended is in the past tense. The correct version of the sentence would be “Writers often start a sentence in one tense but end up in another.”

These mistakes often occur when writers change their minds halfway through writing the sentence, or when they come back and make changes but only end up changing half the sentence. It is very important to maintain a consistent tense, not just in a sentence but across paragraphs and pages. Decide if something happened, is happening, or will happen and then stick with that choice.

Read through the following paragraphs. Can you spot the errors in tense?

If you want to pick up a new outdoor activity, hiking is a great option to consider. It’s a sport that is suited for a beginner or an expert—it just depended on the difficulty hikes you choose. However, even the earliest beginners can complete difficult hikes if they pace themselves and were physically fit.

Not only is hiking an easy activity to pick up, it also will have some great payoffs. As you walked through canyons and climbed up mountains, you can see things that you wouldn’t otherwise. The views are breathtaking, and you will get a great opportunity to meditate on the world and your role in it. The summit of a mountain is unlike any other place in the world.

What errors did you spot? Let’s take another look at this passage. This time, the tense-shifted verbs have been bolded, and the phrases they belong to have been underlined:

If you want to pick up a new outdoor activity, hiking is a great option to consider. It’s a sport that is suited for a beginner or an expert—it just depended on the difficulty hikes you choose. However, even the earliest beginners can complete difficult hikes if they pace themselves and were physically fit.

Not only is hiking an easy activity to pick up, it also will have some great payoffs. As you walked through canyons and climbed up mountains, you can see things that you wouldn’t otherwise. The views are breathtaking, and you will get a great opportunity to meditate on the world and your role in it. The summit of a mountain is unlike any other place in the world.

As we mentioned earlier, you want to make sure your whole passage is consistent in its tense. You may have
noticed that the most of the verbs in this passage are in present tense—this is especially apparent if you ignore those verbs that have been bolded. Now that we’ve established that this passage should be in the present tense, let’s address each of the underlined segments:

- It’s a sport that is suited for a beginner or an expert—it just depended on the difficulty hikes you choose.
  - depended should be the same tense as is; it just depends on the difficulty
- if they pace themselves and were physically fit.
  - were should be the same tense as pace; if they pace themselves and are physically fit.
- Not only is hiking an easy activity to pick up, it also will have some great payoffs.
  - will have should be the same tense as is; it also has some great pay offs
- As you walked through canyons and climbed up mountains
  - walked and climbed are both past tense, but this doesn’t match the tense of the passage as a whole. They should both be changed to present tense: As you walk through canyons and climb up mountains.
- The views are breathtaking, and you will get a great opportunity to meditate on the world and your role in it.
  - will get should be the same tense as are; you get a great opportunity

Here’s the corrected passage as a whole; all edited verbs have been bolded:

If you want to pick up a new outdoor activity, hiking is a great option to consider. It’s a sport that can be suited for a beginner or an expert—it just depends on the difficulty hikes you choose. However, even the earliest beginners can complete difficult hikes if they pace themselves and are physically fit.

Not only is hiking an easy activity to pick up, it also has some great payoffs. As you walk through canyons and climb up mountains, you can see things that you wouldn’t otherwise. The views are breathtaking, and you get a great opportunity to meditate on the world and your role in it. The summit of a mountain is unlike any other place in the world.

---

**Practice**

Read the following sentences and identify any errors in verb tense. Type your corrections in the text frame below:

Whenever Maudeline goes to the grocery store, she had made a list and stick to it.
This experiment turned out to be much more complicated than Felipe thought it would be. It ended up being a procedure that was seventeen steps long, instead of the original eight that he had planned.
I applied to some of the most prestigious medical schools. I hope the essays I write get me in!

Show Answer
Introduction to Non-Finite Verbs

Just when we thought we had verbs figured out, we’re brought face-to-face with a new animal: the non-finite verbs. These words look similar to verbs we’ve already been talking about, but they act quite different than those other verbs.

By definition, a non-finite verb cannot serve as the root of an independent clause. In practical terms, this means that they don’t serve as the action of a sentence. They also don’t have a tense. While the sentence around them may be past, present, or future tense, the non-finite verbs themselves are neutral. There are three types of non-finite verbs: gerunds, participles, and infinitives.

- Gerunds all end in -ing: skiing, reading, dancing, singing, etc. Gerunds act like nouns and can serve as subjects or objects of sentences.
- A participle is used as an adjective or an adverb. There are two types of participle in English: the past and present participles.
  - The present participle also takes the -ing form: (e.g., writing, singing, and raising).
  - The past participle typically appears like the past tense, but some have different forms: (e.g., written, sung and raised).
- The infinitive is the basic dictionary form of a verb, usually preceded by to. Thus to go is an infinitive.

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Gerunds

Gerunds all end in -ing: skiing, reading, dancing, singing, etc. Gerunds act like nouns and can serve as subjects or objects of sentences. Let’s take a look at a few examples:

The following sentences illustrate some uses of gerunds:

- **Swimming** is fun.
  ○ Here, the subject is swimming, the gerund.
  ○ The verb is the linking verb is.
- I like **swimming**.
  ○ This time, the subject of this sentence is the pronoun I.
  ○ The verb is like.
  ○ The gerund swimming becomes the direct object.
- I never gave **swimming** all that much effort.
  ○ break these down too
- Do you fancy **going out**?
  ○ break these down too
- After **being elected president**, he moved with his family to the capital.
  ○ break these down too

Gerunds can be created using helping verbs as well:

- **Being deceived** can make someone feel angry.
- **Having read the book once before** makes me more prepared.

Often the “doer” of the gerund is clearly signaled:

- We enjoyed **singing** yesterday (we ourselves sang)
- The cat responded by **licking** the cream (the cat licked the cream)
- His heart is set on **being** awarded the prize (he hopes that he himself will be awarded the prize)
- Tomás likes **eating** apricots (Tomás himself eats apricots)

However, sometimes the “doer” must be overtly specified, typically in a position immediately before the non-finite verb:

- We enjoyed their **singing**.
- We were delighted at Bianca **being** awarded the prize.

**Practice**

Identify the gerunds and their roles in the following sentences:

Sam was really bad at gardening.
Studying is one of Jazz’s favorite things to do.
Danny just wanted to go skateboarding.

Show Answer
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A participle is a form of a verb that is used in a sentence to modify a noun, noun phrase, verb, or verb phrase, and then plays a role similar to an adjective or adverb. It is one of the types of nonfinite verb forms.

The two types of participle in English are traditionally called the present participle (forms such as writing, singing and raising) and the past participle (forms such as written, sung and raised).

The Present Participle

Even though they look exactly the same, gerunds and present participles do different things. As we just learned, the gerund acts as a noun: e.g., “I like sleeping”; “Sleeping is not allowed.” Present participles, on the other hand, act similarly to an adjective or adverb: e.g., “The sleeping girl over there is my sister”; “Breathing heavily, she finished the race in first place.”

The present participle, or participial phrases (clauses) formed from it, are used as follows:

- as an adjective phrase modifying a noun phrase: The man sitting over there is my uncle.
- adverbially, the subject being understood to be the same as that of the main clause: Looking at the plans, I gradually came to see where the problem lay. He shot the man, killing him.
- more generally as a clause or sentence modifier: Broadly speaking, the project was successful.

The present participle can also be used with the helping verb to be to form a type of present tense: Marta was sleeping. (We’ll discuss this further in Advanced Verb Tenses.) This is something we learned a little bit about in helping verbs and tense.

The Past Participle

Past participles often look very similar to the simple past tense of a verb: finished, danced, etc. However, some verbs have different forms. Reference lists will be your best help in finding the correct past participle. Here is one such list of participles. Here’s a short list of some of the most common irregular past participles you’ll use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to be</td>
<td>was/were</td>
<td>been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to become</td>
<td>became</td>
<td>become</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to come</td>
<td>came</td>
<td>come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to do</td>
<td>did</td>
<td>done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to give</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to go</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to know</td>
<td>knew</td>
<td>know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Verb | Simple Past | Past Participle
---|---|---
to run | ran | run
to see | saw | seen
to speak | spoke | spoken
to take | took | taken
to write | wrote | written

**Note:** Words like *bought* and *caught* are the correct past participles—not *boughten* or *caughten*.

Past participles are used in a couple of different ways:

- as an adjective phrase: The chicken *eaten* by the children was contaminated.
- adverbially: *Seen* from this perspective, the problem presents no easy solution.
- in a nominative absolute construction, with a subject: The task *finished*, we returned home.

The past participle can also be used with the helping verb to have to form a type of past tense (which we’ll talk about in [Advanced Verb Tenses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participle)): The chicken has *eaten*. It is also used to form the passive voice: Tianna was *voted* as most likely to succeed. When the passive voice is used following a relative pronoun (like *that* or *which*) we sometimes leave out parts of the phrase:

- He had three things *that were taken* away from him
- He had three things *taken* away from him

In the second sentence, we removed the words *that were*. However, we still use the past participle *taken*. The removal of these words is called *elision*. Elision is used with a lot of different constructions in English; we use it to shorten sentences when things are understood. However, we can only use elision in certain situations, so be careful when removing words! (We’ll discuss this further in [Using the Passive Voice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participle).)

### Practice

Identify the participles in the following sentences, as well as the functions they perform:

- Tucker had always wanted a pet dog.
  - Having been born in the 1990s, Amber often found herself surrounded by nostalgia.
  - Rayssa was practicing her flute when everything suddenly went wrong.

Show Answer
Infinitives

To be or not to be, that is the question.

—Hamlet

The to-Infinitive

The infinitive is the basic dictionary form of a verb, usually preceded by to (when it’s not, it’s called the bare infinitive, which we’ll discuss more later). Thus to go is an infinitive. There are several different uses of the infinitive. They can be used alongside verbs, as a noun phrase, as a modifier, or in a question.

With Other Verbs

The to-infinitive is used with other verbs (we’ll discuss exceptions when we talk about the bare infinitive):

- I aim to convince him of our plan’s ingenuity.
- You already know that he’ll fail to complete the task.

You can also use multiple infinitives in a single sentence: “Today, I plan to run three miles, to clean my room, and to update my budget.” All three of these infinitives follow the verb plan. Other verbs that often come before infinitives include want, convince, try, able, and like.

As a Noun Phrase

The infinitive can also be used to express an action in an abstract, general way: “To err is human”; “To know me is to love me.” No one in particular is completing these actions. In these sentences, the infinitives act as the subjects.

Infinitives can also serve as the object of a sentence. One common construction involves a dummy subject (it): “It was nice to meet you.”

As a Modifier

Infinitives can be used as an adjective (e.g., “A request to see someone” or “The man to save us”) or as an adverb (e.g., “Keen to get on,” “Nice to listen to,” or “In order to win”).

In Questions

Infinitives can be used in elliptical questions as well, as in “I don’t know where to go.”

Note: The infinitive is also the usual dictionary form or citation form of a verb. The form listed in dictionaries is the bare infinitive, although the to-infinitive is often used in referring to verbs or in defining other verbs: “The word amble means ‘to walk slowly’”; “How do we conjugate the verb to go?” Certain helping verbs do not have infinitives, such as will, can, and may.
Split Infinitives?

One of the biggest controversies among grammarians and style writers has been the appropriateness of separating the two words of the to-infinitive as in “to boldly go.” Despite what a lot of people have declared over the years, there is absolutely nothing wrong with this construction. It is 100 percent grammatically sound.

Part of the reason so many authorities have been against this construction is likely the fact that in languages such as Latin, the infinitive is a single word, and cannot be split. However, in English the infinitive (or at least the to-infinitive) is two words, and a split infinitive is a perfectly natural construction.

Try to versus Try and

One common error people make is saying try and instead of try to, as in “I’ll try and be there by 10:00 tomorrow.” However, try requires a to-infinitive after it, so using and is incorrect. While this construction is acceptable in casual conversation, it is not grammatically correct and should not be used in formal situations.

Practice

Identify the infinitives in the following sentences:

- Paulina is the girl to beat.
- It was really nice to hear from you again.
- It looks like Dash wants to fail.

Show Answer

The Bare Infinitive

As we mentioned previously, the infinitive can sometimes occur without the word to. The form without to is called the bare infinitive (the form with to is called the to-infinitive). In the following sentences both sit and to sit would each be considered an infinitive:

- I want to sit on the other chair.
- I can sit here all day.

Infinitives have a variety of uses in English. Certain contexts call for the to-infinitive form, and certain contexts call for the bare infinitive; they are not normally interchangeable, except in occasional instances like after the verb help, where either can be used.

As we mentioned earlier, some verbs require the bare infinitive instead of the to-infinitive:

- The helping verb do
  - Does she dance?
  - Zi doesn’t sing.
- Helping verbs that express tense, possibility, or ability like will, can, could, should, would, and might
  - The bears will eat you if they catch you.
  - Lucas and Gerardo might go to the dance.
  - You should give it a try.
- Verbs of perception, permission, or causation, such as see, watch, hear, make, let, and have (after a direct object)
  - Look at Caroline go!
  - You can’t make me talk.
  - It’s so hard to let someone else finish my work.

The bare infinitive can be used as the object in such sentences like “What you should do is make a list.” It can
also be used after the word why to ask a question: “Why reveal it?”

The bare infinitive can be tricky, because it often looks exactly like the present tense of a verb. Look at the following sentences for an example:

- You lose things so often.
- You can lose things at the drop of a hat.

In both of these sentences, we have the word lose, but in the first sentence it’s a present tense verb, while in the second it’s a bare infinitive. So how can you tell which is which? The easiest way is to try changing the subject of the sentence and seeing if the verb should change:

- She loses things so often.
- She can lose things at the drop of a hat.

### Practice

Identify the infinitives in the following sentences:

- What you should do is stop talking for a moment and listen.
- Oh, that must be Lebo at the door.
- Why walk when I could run?

Show Answer
Advanced Verb Tenses

Now we’ve mastered the different pieces that we need to understand in order to discuss some more advanced tenses. These advanced tenses were mentioned briefly in Helping Verbs, and they came up again in Participles. These forms are created with different forms of to be and to have:

- He had eaten everything by the time we got there.
- She is waiting for us to get there!
- He will have broken it by next Thursday, you can be sure.
- She was singing for eight hours.

When you combine a form of to be with the present participle, you create a continuous tense; these tenses indicate a sense of continuity. The subject of the sentence was (or is, or will be) doing that thing for awhile.

- **Present**: is working
- **Past**: was working
- **Future**: will be working (You can also say “is going to be working.”)

### Practice

Convert these sentences from simple tenses to continuous tenses:

Ivone wrote a collection of short stories entitled *Vidas Vividas*.
As a pilot, Sara will fly a lot of cross-country flights.
Zachi reads all of the latest articles on archeology.

When you combine a form of to have with the past participle of a verb, you create a perfect tense; these tenses indicate a sense of completion. This thing had been done for a while (or has been, or will have been).

- **Present**: has worked
- **Past**: had worked
- **Future**: will have worked
Practice

Convert these sentences from simple tenses to perfect tenses:

Ivone wrote a collection of short stories entitled *Vidas Vividas.*
As a pilot, Sara will fly a lot of cross-country flights.
Zachi reads all of the latest articles on archeology.

Show Answer

You can also use these together. *To have* must always appear first, followed by the past participle *been.* The present participle of any verb can then follow. These **perfect continuous tenses** indicate that the verb started in the past, and is still continuing:

- **Present:** has been working
- **Past:** had been working
- **Future:** will have been working

Practice

Convert these sentences from simple tenses to perfect continuous tenses:

Ivone wrote a collection of short stories entitled *Vidas Vividas.*
As a pilot, Sara will fly a lot of cross-country flights.
Zachi reads all of the latest articles on archeology.

Show Answer

Sometimes these verb tenses can be split by adverbs: “Zachi has been **studiously** reading all of the latest articles on archeology.”

Now that we’ve learned about how we create each of these tenses, let’s practice using them. In this exercise, you will be asked to create some original writing. As you do so, use both simple and complex verb tenses.

Practice

Look at the following schedule for a Writer’s Workshop. Write a passage about the schedule as if it were Tuesday at 12:30.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Check-In</td>
<td>Genre Speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Group Orientation</td>
<td>Genre Speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>Peer-to-Peer Critique</td>
<td>Professional Critiques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Key-Note Speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Show Answer

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Practice Activities: Verbs

Verb Types

Read the following sentences. In each sentence, identify the active, linking, and helping verbs.

Guilherme should arrive in the next three minutes.
The buffet looked delicious as we walked by.
Harper couldn’t afford another missed assignment.
Pietra has an extensive rock collection. She is particularly proud of her obsidian samples.

Show Answer

Non-Finite Verbs

As you read the following passage, identify the different non-finite verbs and their roles in the text.

The Australian magpie is a medium-size black and white bird native to Australia. Feeding magpies is a common practice among households around the country, and there generally is a peaceful co-existence. However, in the spring a small minority of breeding magpies (almost always males) become aggressive and swoop and attack passersby. Being unexpectedly swooped while cycling can result in loss of control of the bicycle, which may cause injury. Cyclists can deter attack by attaching a long pole with a flag to a bike. Using cable ties on helmets has become common as well, and it appears to be an effective deterrent.

Show Gerunds
Show Participles
Show Infinitives

Simple Tenses to Advanced Tenses

Follow the instructions in each item:

Convert this sentence from a simple tense to a continuous tense: Calebe will file a complaint against the city.
Convert this sentence from a simple tense to a perfect tense: Cecília swore to never again eat another slice of carrot cake.
Convert this sentence from a simple tense to a perfect continuous tenses: Avi sings with his friends at least once a week.

Show Answer

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Introduction to Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs describe things. For example, compare the phrase “the bear” to “the harmless bear” or the phrase “run” to “run slowly.”

In both of these cases, the adjective (harmless) or adverb (slowly) changes how we understand the phrase. When you first read the word bear, you probably didn’t imagine a harmless bear. When you saw the word run you probably didn’t think of it as something done slowly.

Adjectives and adverbs modify other words: they change our understanding of things.

For a catchy introduction to these words in song, watch the following videos.

https://youtu.be/c_TmWCIYse0

https://youtu.be/FQPDk_fMcs0

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Functions of Adjectives

An adjective modifies a noun; that is, it provides more detail about a noun. This can be anything from color to size to temperature to personality. Adjectives usually occur just before the nouns they modify. In the following examples, adjectives are in bold, while the nouns they modify are in italics (the big bear):

- The generator is used to convert mechanical energy into electrical energy.
- The steel pipes contain a protective sacrificial anode and are surrounded by packing material.

Adjectives can also follow a linking verb. In these instances, adjectives can modify pronouns as well. In the following examples, adjectives are still bold, while the linking verb is in italics this time (the sun is yellow):

- The schoolhouse was red.
- I looked good today.
- She was funny.

Numbers can also be adjectives in some cases. When you say “Seven is my lucky number,” seven is a noun, but when you say “There are seven cats in this painting,” seven is an adjective because it is modifying the noun cats.

Practice

Identify the adjectives in the following sentences:

Of the four seasons, fall is my favorite; I love the red leaves, the cool weather, and the brisk wind. My roommate, on the other hand, thinks that summer is the best season. I think she is crazy. Fall is better than summer. Summer is too hot and muggy to be enjoyable.

Show Answer

Comparable Adjectives
Some adjectives are **comparable**. For example, a person may be polite, but another person may be more polite, and a third person may be the most polite of the three. The word *more* here modifies the adjective *polite* to indicate a comparison is being made (a **comparative**), and *most* modifies the adjective to indicate an absolute comparison (a **superlative**).

There is another way to compare adjectives in English. Many adjectives can take the suffixes *–er* and *–est* (sometimes requiring additional letters before the suffix; see forms for *far* below) to indicate the comparative and superlative forms, respectively:

- *great, greater, greatest*
- *deep, deeper, deepest*
- *far, farther, farthest*

Some adjectives are **irregular** in this sense:

- *good, better, best*
- *bad, worse, worst*
- *little, less, least*

Another way to convey comparison is by incorporating the words *more* and *most*. There is no simple rule to decide which means is correct for any given adjective, however. The general tendency is for shorter adjectives to take the suffixes, while longer adjectives do not—but sometimes *sound* of the word is the deciding factor.

- *more beautiful* not *beautiFULLer*
- *more pretentious* not *pretentiouser*

While there is no perfect rule to determine which adjectives will or won’t take *–er* and *–est* suffixes, this video lays out some “sound rules” that can serve as helpful guidelines:

https://youtu.be/Mxblg8xKBoc

### A Note about *Fun*

The adjective *fun* is one of the most notable exceptions to the rules. If you follow the sound rules we just learned about, the comparative should be *funner* and the superlative *funnest*. However, for a long time, these words were considered non-standard, with *more fun* and *most fun* acting as the correct forms.

The reasoning behind this rule is now obsolete (it has a lot to do with the way *fun* became an adjective), but the stigma against *funner* and *funnest* remains. While the tides are beginning to change, it’s safest to stick to *more fun* and *most fun* in formal situations (such as in academic writing or in professional correspondence).

### Practice

What are the correct comparative and superlative forms for the adjectives below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fun</td>
<td><em>more fun</em> (or <em>funner</em>, conversationally)</td>
<td><em>most fun</em> (or <em>funnest</em>, conversationally)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
Non-Comparable Adjectives

Many adjectives do not naturally lend themselves to comparison. For example, some English speakers would argue that it does not make sense to say that one thing is “more ultimate” than another, or that something is “most ultimate,” since the word ultimate is already an absolute. Such adjectives are called non-comparable adjectives. Other examples include dead, true, and unique.

Note: Native speakers will frequently play with non-comparable adjectives. Although pregnant is logically non-comparable (someone is pregnant or she is not), you may hear a sentence like “She looks more and more pregnant each day.” Likewise extinct and equal appear to be non-comparable, but one might say that a language about which nothing is known is “more extinct” than a well-documented language with surviving literature but no speakers, and George Orwell once wrote “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

Practice

Look at the following list of adjectives. Are they comparable or non-comparable? Explain your reasoning why. If the adjective is comparable, list its comparative and superlative forms. For example:

- Tall is a comparable adjective. Height exists on a scale: there are many different heights. The comparative is taller, and the superlative is tallest.
- Dead is a non-comparable. You are either dead or alive. However, this concept is played with in the movie The Princess Bride. Miracle Max says Wesley is “only mostly dead.” Max is expressing the fact that Wesley is still alive, despite being very close to death’s door.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shimmery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fresh</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>popular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>squishy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

impossible    large
pretty         nuclear
• Basic Patterns and Elements of the Sentence. **Authored by:** David McMurrey. **Located at:** https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/twsent.html#adj. **License:** CC BY: Attribution

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• Image with square and triangle. **Authored by:** Anna Vital. **Provided by:** The Noun Project. **Located at:** https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=difference&i=433002. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
Functions of Adverbs

Adverbs can perform a wide range of functions: they can modify verbs, adjectives, and even other adverbs. They can come either before or after the word they modify. In the following examples, adverbs are in bold, while the words they modify are in italics (the quite handsome man):

- The desk is made of an especially corrosion-resistant industrial steel.
- The power company uses huge generators which are generally turned by steam turbines.
- Jaime won the race, because he ran quickly.
- This fence was installed sloppily. It needs to be redone.

An adverb may provide information about the manner, place, time, frequency, certainty, or other circumstances of the activity indicated by the verb. Some examples, where again the adverb is in bold and the words modified are in italics:

- Suzanne sang loudly (loudly modifies the verb sang, indicating the manner of singing)
- We left it here (here modifies the verb phrase left it, indicating place)
- I worked yesterday (yesterday modifies the verb worked, indicating time)
- He undoubtedly did it (undoubtedly modifies the verb phrase did it, indicating certainty)
- You often make mistakes (often modifies the verb phrase make mistakes, indicating frequency)

They can also modify noun phrases, prepositional phrases, or whole clauses or sentences, as in the following examples. Once again the adverbs are in bold, while the words they modify are in italics.

- I bought only the fruit (only modifies the noun phrase the fruit)
- Roberto drove us almost to the station (almost modifies the prepositional phrase to the station)
- Certainly we need to act (certainly modifies the sentence as a whole)

Practice

Identify the adverbs in these paragraphs:

Mass extinctions are insanely catastrophic—but important—events that punctuate the history of life on Earth. The Jurassic/Cretaceous boundary was originally thought of to represent a mass extinction, but has subsequently been “downgraded” to a minor extinction event based on new discoveries.

However, compared to other important stratigraphic boundaries, like the end-Triassic or the end-Cretaceous, the Jurassic/Cretaceous boundary remains really poorly understood.
Intensifiers and Adverbs of Degree

Adverbs can also be used as modifiers of adjectives, and of other adverbs, often to indicate degree. Here are a few examples:

- You are quite right (the adverb quite modifies the adjective right)
- Milagros is exceptionally pretty (the adverb exceptionally modifies the adjective pretty)
- She sang very loudly (the adverb very modifies another adverb—loudly)
- Wow! You ran really quickly! (the adverb really modifies another adverb—quickly)

Other intensifiers include mildly, pretty, slightly, etc.

This video provides more discussion and examples of intensifiers:

https://youtu.be/_2htRrOPiDE

Adverbs may also undergo comparison, taking comparative and superlative forms. This is usually done by adding more and most before the adverb (more slowly, most slowly). However, there are a few adverbs that take non-standard forms, such as well, for which better and best are used (i.e., “He did well, she did better, and I did best”).

**Note:** When using intensifiers alongside the adverb also, also should always appear first: “He also really loved pie” is correct, while “He really also loved pie” is not.

Very

Some people are of the opinion that the words very and really indicate weak writing. You’ve probably seen lists of adjectives to use instead of these adverbs (along with an adjective). While this can be true in some cases (enormous or gigantic would probably serve better than “really big”), very and really aren’t terrible words. As in most cases, you just need to be conscious of your choices. When you use these adverbs, pause and see if there’s a better way to word what you’re saying.

Relative Adverbs

Relative adverbs are a subclass of adverbs that deal with space, time, and reason. In this video, David gives a quick intro to the three most common relative adverbs: when, where, and why.

https://youtu.be/5Ub0Qu4uxpc

As we just learned, we can use these adverbs to connect ideas about where, when, and why things happen.

Practice

Read the following questions and turn them into statements using relative adverbs:

- Where did Nina last see her keys?
- When are the repairmen going to get here?
- Why did the desk just collapse?

Show Answer

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• Intensifiers and adverbs of degree. **Authored by:** David Rheinstrom. **Provided by:** Khan Academy. **Located at:** https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/partsofspeech/the-modifier/v/intensifiers-and-adverbs-of-degree-modifiers-the-parts-of-speech. **License:** *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*

• Why I think the Jurassic/Cretaceous boundary is super important. **Authored by:** Jon Tennant. **Provided by:** European Geosciences Union. **Located at:** http://blogs.egu.eu/network/palaeoblog/2016/02/26/why-i-think-the-jurassiccretaceous-boundary-is-super-important/. **Project:** Green Tea and Velociraptors. **License:** *CC BY: Attribution*

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• Relative adverbs. **Authored by:** David Rheinstrom. **Provided by:** Khan Academy. **Located at:** https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/partsofspeech/the-modifier/v/relative-adverbs. **License:** *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
Differences between Adjectives and Adverbs

As we’ve learned, adjectives and adverbs act in similar but different roles. A lot of the time this difference can be seen in the structure of the words:

- A clever new idea.
- A cleverly developed idea.

Clever is an adjective, and cleverly is an adverb. This adjective + ly construction is a short-cut to identifying adverbs.

https://youtu.be/b4KybdSi1Fc

While -ly is helpful, it’s not a universal rule. Not all words that end in -ly are adverbs: lovely, costly, friendly, etc. Additionally, not all adverbs end in -ly: here, there, together, yesterday, aboard, very, almost, etc.

Some words can function both as an adjective and as and adverb:

- Fast is an adjective in “a fast car” (where it qualifies the noun car), but an adverb in “he drove fast” (where it modifies the verb drove).
- Likely is an adjective in “a likely outcome” (where it modifies the noun outcome), but an adverb in “we will likely go” (where it modifies the verb go).

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Common Mistakes with Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives

If you’re a native English speaker, you may have noticed that “the big red house” sounds more natural than “the red big house.” The video below explains the order in which adjectives occur in English:

https://youtu.be/7sHbB9VQBgo

Practice

Select the adjectives that are in a natural sounding word order for each sentence.

A(n) ________ sports car was parked in front of the restaurant.

- a. beautiful, new, Italian
- b. Italian, new, beautiful
- c. Italian, beautiful, new

A ________ barber pole was next to the front door of the barber shop.

- a. red and white, striped, big
- b. big, red and white, striped
- c. striped, red and white, big

We put an ________ tree in the corner of their office.

- a. ugly, tiny, artificial
- b. artificial, ugly, tiny
- c. ugly, artificial, tiny

The elf lived in a ________ house in the forest.

- a. little, charming, mushroom
- b. mushroom, little, charming
- c. charming, little, mushroom

Show Answers

Adverbs

Only

Have you ever noticed the effect the word only can have on a sentence, especially depending on where it’s placed? Let’s look at a simple sentence:

She loves horses.

Let’s see how only can influence the meaning of this sentence:
• *Only* she loves horses.
  ○ No one loves horses but her.
• She *only* loves horses.
  ○ The one thing she does is love horses.
• She loves *only* horses.
  ○ She loves horses and nothing else.

*Only* modifies the word that directly follows it. Whenever you use the word *only* make sure you’ve placed it correctly in your sentence.

**Literally**

A linguistic phenomenon is sweeping the nation: people are using *literally* as an intensifier. How many times have you heard things like “It was literally the worst thing that has ever happened to me,” or “His head literally exploded when I told him I was going to be late again”? Some people love this phrase while it makes other people want to pull their hair out.

So what’s the problem with this? According to *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*, the actual definition of *literal* is as follows:

1. involving the ordinary or usual meaning of a word
2. giving the meaning of each individual word
3. completely true and accurate: not exaggerated

According to this definition, *literally* should be used only when something actually happened. Our cultural usage may be slowly shifting to allow *literally* as an intensifier, but it’s best to avoid using *literally* in any way other than its dictionary definition, especially in formal writing.

**Practice**

Which of the following sentences use the adverb *literally* correctly?

- A pirate *only* sails the seas.
- Daveed often takes things too *literally*.
- Tommy *literally* died when he heard the news.
- In their vows, they promised to love *only* each other.
- Teddy is *literally* the best person on the planet.

Show Answer

**Mistaking Adverbs and Adjectives**

One common mistake with adjectives and adverbs is using one in the place of the other. For example:

- I wish I could write as neat as he can.
  ○ The word should be *neatly*, an adverb, since it’s modifying a verb.
- Well, that’s *really* nice of you.
  ○ Should be *really*, an adverb, since it’s modifying an adjective

Remember, if you’re modifying a noun or pronoun, you should use an adjective. If you’re modifying anything else, you should use an adverb.

**Good v. Well**

One of the most commonly confused adjective/adverb pairs is *good* versus *well*. There isn’t really a good way to remember this besides memorization. *Good* is an adjective. *Well* is an adverb. Let’s look at a couple of sentence where people often confuse these two:
• She plays basketball good.
• I’m doing good.

In the first sentence, *good* is supposed to be modifying *plays*, a verb; therefore the use of *good*—an adjective—is incorrect. *Plays* should be modified by an adverb. The correct sentence would read “She plays basketball well.”

In the second sentence, *good* is supposed to be modifying *doing*, a verb. Once again, this means that *well*—an adverb—should be used instead: “I’m doing well.”

**Note:** The sentence “I’m doing good” can be grammatically correct, but only when it means “I’m doing good things,” rather than when it is describing how a person is feeling.

**Practice**

Select the correct modifier for each sentence:

- Billy has to work (real / really) hard to be (healthy / healthily).
- Kate is really (good / well) with bows. She shoots really (good / well).
- Eli reads (quick / quickly), and he retains the information (good / well).

Show Answer


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- Adjective Order. **Authored by:** Julie Sevastopoulos. **Provided by:** Grammar-Quizzes. **Located at:** http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/adj_order.html. **License:** *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*
Adjectives

Comparable or Non-Comparable?

Read the following passage. Identify the adjectives, and categorize them by comparable and non-comparable.

The Principality of Sealand has been described as the world’s smallest nation. However, it is more accurate to describe it as an unrecognized micronation. It claims Roughs Tower, an offshore platform located approximately 7.5 miles off the coast of Suffolk, England, as its territory. Roughs Tower is a disused Maunsell Sea Fort, originally called HM Fort Roughs, built as an anti-aircraft defensive gun platform by the British during World War II.

Since 1967, the decommissioned HM Fort Roughs has been occupied by family and associates of Paddy Roy Bates, who claim that it is an independent sovereign state. However, Sealand is not officially recognized by any established sovereign state. Bates moved to the mainland when he became elderly, naming his son Michael regent.

Adjective Order

Read the following sentences. Are the adjectives in the correct order? Type any corrections in the text frame below:

Ramin was throwing a party out at his ancient stone big house.
Can you believe James lost his leather dumb Italian wallet?
Sofía was transfixed by that green big singing fish.
He bought a pink new nice bouquet of flowers.

Adverbs

Intensifiers and Adverbs of Degree

Read the following passage and identify the adverbs. Are the intensifiers and adverbs or degree being used well? Or would you suggest revision? The sentences have been numbered to aid you in your comments.
(1) Wojtek (usually spelled Voytek in English) was a Syrian brown bear found in Iran and literally adopted by soldiers of the 22nd Artillery Supply Company of the Polish II Corps. (2) Wojtek initially had problems swallowing and was fed with condensed milk from an old vodka bottle. (3) Later in life, he was oftenly rewarded with beer, which became his favorite drink. (4) He really also enjoyed smoking (or eating) cigarettes.

(5) To get him onto a British transport ship when the unit sailed from Egypt, Wojtek was officially drafted into the Polish Army as a Private and was listed among the soldiers of the 22nd Artillery Supply Company. (6) As an enlisted soldier of the company, with his own paybook, rank, and serial number, he lived either with the other soldiers in tents or by himself in a special wooden crate, which was transported by truck. (7) According to numerous accounts, Wojtek helped by carrying ammunition during the Battle of Monte Cassino—he never dropped a single crate. (8) In recognition of the bear’s immensely popularity, the HQ approved a depiction of a bear carrying an artillery shell as the official emblem of the 22nd Company.

Show Answer
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We’ve covered the majority of parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. So, what’s left?

What remains are the little connecting word categories: conjunctions, prepositions, and articles. These small words may not seem as important as verbs, nouns, and adjectives, but they are the backbone of English: these are the words that give our language structure.

- Conjunctions connect words and ideas together.
- Prepositions indicate relationships.
- Articles provide information about nouns.

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Conjunctions

Conjunctions are the words that join sentences, phrases, and other words together. Conjunctions are divided into several categories, all of which follow different rules. We will discuss coordinating conjunctions, adverbial conjunctions, and correlative conjunctions.

Coordinating Conjunctions

The most common conjunctions are and, or, and but. These are all coordinating conjunctions. Coordinating conjunctions are conjunctions that join, or coordinate, two or more equivalent items (such as words, phrases, or sentences). The mnemonic acronym FANBOYS can be used to remember the most common coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so.

- For: presents a reason (“They do not gamble or smoke, for they are ascetics.”)
- And: presents non-contrasting items or ideas (“They gamble, and they smoke.”)
- Nor: presents a non-contrasting negative idea (“They do not gamble, nor do they smoke.”)
- But: presents a contrast or exception (“They gamble, but they don't smoke.”)
- Or: presents an alternative item or idea (“Every day they gamble, or they smoke.”)
- Yet: presents a contrast or exception (“They gamble, yet they don’t smoke.”)
- So: presents a consequence (“He gambled well last night, so he smoked a cigar to celebrate.”)

Here are some examples of these used in sentences:

- Nuclear-powered artificial hearts proved to be complicated, bulky, and expensive.
- In the 1960s, artificial heart devices did not fit well and tended to obstruct the flow of venous blood into the right atrium.
- The blood vessels leading to the device tended to kink, obstructing the filling of the chambers and resulting in inadequate output.
- Any external injury or internal injury put patients at risk of uncontrolled bleeding because the small clots that formed throughout the circulatory system used up so much of the clotting factor.
- The current from the storage batteries can power lights, but the current for appliances must be modified within an inverter.

Practice

Are the correct coordinating conjunctions being used in each of the following sentences? Explain your reasoning why or why not:

I love boxing or sewing. They’re both a lot of fun.
Martin is pretty good at writing, for Jaden is better.
Juana had to choose. Would she join the red team and the blue team?

Show Answer
As you can see from the examples above, a comma only appears before these conjunctions sometimes. So how can you tell if you need a comma or not? There are three general rules to help you decide.

**Rule 1: Joining Two Complete Ideas**

Let’s look back at one of our example sentences:

> The current from the storage batteries can power lights, but the current for appliances must be modified within an inverter.

There are two complete ideas in this sentence. A complete idea has both a subject (a noun or pronoun) and a verb. The subjects have been italicized, and the verbs bolded:

- the *current* from the storage batteries *can power* lights
- the *current* for appliances *must be modified* within an inverter.

Because each of these ideas could stand alone as a sentence, the coordinating conjunction that joins them must be preceded by a comma. Otherwise you’ll have a run-on sentence.

---

**Rule 2: Joining Two Similar Items**

So what if there’s only one complete idea, but two subjects or two verbs?

- Any external injury or internal injury put patients at risk of uncontrolled bleeding because the small clots that formed throughout the circulatory system used up so much of the clotting factor.
  - This sentence has two subjects: *external injury* and *internal injury*. They are joined with the conjunction *and*; we don’t need any additional punctuation here.
- In the 1960s, artificial heart devices did not fit well and tended to obstruct the flow of venous blood into the right atrium.
  - This sentence has two verbs: *did not fit well* and *tended to obstruct*. They are joined with the conjunction *and*; we don’t need any additional punctuation here.

---

**Rule 3: Joining Three or More Similar Items**

So what do you do if there are three or more items?

- Anna loves to run, David loves to hike, and Luz loves to dance.
- Fishing, hunting, and gathering were once the only ways for people do get food.
- Emanuel has a very careful schedule planned for tomorrow. He needs to work, study, exercise, eat, and clean.

As you can see in the examples above, there is a comma after each item, including the item just prior to the conjunction. There is a little bit of contention about this, but overall, most styles prefer to keep the additional comma (also called the serial comma). We discuss the serial comma in more depth in [Commas](#).

---

**Starting a Sentence**

Many students are taught—and some style guides maintain—that English sentences should not start with coordinating conjunctions. This video shows that this idea is not actually a rule. And it provides some background for why so many people may have adopted this writing convention:

https://youtu.be/r8KHJxsCkg
Adverbial Conjunctions

Adverbial conjunctions link two separate thoughts or sentences. When used to separate thoughts, as in the example below, a comma is required on either side of the conjunction.

The first artificial hearts were made of smooth silicone rubber, which apparently caused excessive clotting and, **therefore**, uncontrolled bleeding.

When used to separate sentences, as in the examples below, a semicolon is required before the conjunction and a comma after.

- The Kedeco produces 1200 watts in 17 mph winds using a 16-foot rotor; **on the other hand**, the Dunlite produces 2000 watts in 25 mph winds.
- For short periods, the fibers were beneficial; **however**, the eventual buildup of fibrin on the inner surface of the device would impair its function.
- The atria of the heart contribute a negligible amount of energy; **in fact**, the total power output of the heart is only about 2.5 watts.

Adverbial conjunctions include the following words; however, it is important to note that this is by no means a complete list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>therefore</th>
<th>however</th>
<th>in other words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>thus</td>
<td>then</td>
<td>otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nevertheless</td>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td>in fact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practice

Fill in the missing punctuation marks for the sentences below. Type the corrected sentences in the text frame below:

My roommate decided to drive to work ___ therefore ___ I decided to get a ride with her.

We needed to turn left on 140th Street. That street ___ however ___ was under construction.
In other words __ we couldn’t turn on the street we needed to.

Show Answer

Correlative Conjunctions

**Correlative conjunctions** are word pairs that work together to join words and groups of words of equal weight in a sentence. This video will define this types of conjunction before it goes through five of the most common correlative conjunctions:

https://youtu.be/R74Ly00UygU

The table below shows some examples of correlative conjunctions being used in a sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlative Conjunction</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>either...or</td>
<td>You <strong>either</strong> do your work <strong>or</strong> prepare for a trip to the office. (Either do, or prepare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither...nor</td>
<td><strong>Neither</strong> the basketball team <strong>nor</strong> the football team is doing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not only...but (also)</td>
<td>He is <strong>not only</strong> handsome, <strong>but also</strong> brilliant. (Not only A, but also B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Not only</strong> is he handsome, <strong>but also</strong> he is brilliant. (Not only is he A, but also he is B.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both...and</td>
<td><strong>Both</strong> the cross country team <strong>and</strong> the swimming team are doing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whether...or</td>
<td>You must decide <strong>whether</strong> you stay <strong>or</strong> you go. (It’s up to you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Whether</strong> you stay <strong>or</strong> you go, the film must start at 8 pm. (It’s not up to you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>just as...so</td>
<td><strong>Just as</strong> many Americans love basketball, <strong>so</strong> many Canadians love ice hockey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as much...as</td>
<td>Football is <strong>as much</strong> an addiction <strong>as</strong> it is a sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no sooner...than</td>
<td><strong>No sooner</strong> did she learn to ski, <strong>than</strong> the snow began to thaw.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rather...than</td>
<td>I would <strong>rather</strong> swim <strong>than</strong> surf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the...the</td>
<td><strong>The</strong> more you practice dribbling, <strong>the</strong> better you will be at it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as...as</td>
<td>Football is <strong>as</strong> fast <strong>as</strong> hockey is (fast)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rewrite the following items. Your new sentences should use correlative conjunctions. Type your revisions in the text frame below:

She finished packing right when the moving truck showed up.
There are two shifts you can work: Thursday night or Saturday afternoon.
Chemistry and physics are both complex.

Subordinating Conjunctions

**Subordinating conjunctions**, are conjunctions that join an independent clause and a dependent clause. Here are some examples of subordinating conjunctions:

- The heart undergoes two cardiac cycle periods: diastole, **when** blood enters the ventricles, and systole, **when** the ventricles contract and blood is pumped out of the heart.
- **Whenever** an electron acquires enough energy to leave its orbit, the atom is positively charged.
- **If** the wire is broken, electrons will cease to flow and current is zero.
- **I’ll be here as long as** it takes for you to finish.
- **She did the favor so that** he would owe her one.

Let’s take a moment to look back at the previous examples. Can you see the pattern in comma usage? The commas aren’t dependent on the presence subordinating conjunctions—they’re dependent on the placement of clauses they’re in. Let’s revisit a couple examples and see if we can figure out the exact rules:

- The heart undergoes two cardiac cycle periods: diastole, **when** blood enters the ventricles, and systole, **when** the ventricles contract and blood is pumped out of the heart.
  - These clauses are both extra information: information that is good to know, but not necessary for the meaning of the sentence. This means they need commas on either side.
- **Whenever** an electron acquires enough energy to leave its orbit, the atom is positively charged.
  - In this sentence, the dependent clause comes before an independent clause. This means it should be followed by a comma.
- **She did the favor so that** he would owe her one.
  - In this sentence, the independent clause comes before an dependent clause. This means no comma is required.

The most common subordinating conjunctions in the English language are shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>after</th>
<th>although</th>
<th>as</th>
<th>as far as</th>
<th>as if</th>
<th>as long as</th>
<th>as soon as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as though</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>even if</td>
<td>even though</td>
<td>every time</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in order that</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td>than</td>
<td>though</td>
<td>unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>until</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>whenever</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>whereas</td>
<td>wherever</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://youtu.be/IKrRuDWEP68
Practice

All of the commas have been removed from the following passage. Re-type the passage in the text frame below, adding in the correct punctuation. Identify all of the subordinating conjunctions as well. 

Thales came to the silent auction in order to win the chance to be drawn by his favorite artist. Before anyone else could bid Thales went to the bidding sheet and placed an aggressive bid. He knew he would have to come back and check on it while the auction was still open but he felt confident in his ability to win. He was determined to win the auction even if it took all of his money to do so.

Show Answer
Practice Activities: Conjunctions

Coordinating Conjunctions

In this practice, you will combine multiple sentences into a single sentence. For example, look at the sentences “Clint was very skilled at his job. Wade was very skilled at his job.” You would combine these two sentences into something like this, using coordinating conjunctions:

- Clint and Wade were both very skilled at their jobs.
- Clint was very skilled at his job, and Wade was too.

When you combine sentences, you can remove repeated information. As you complete this exercise, type your answers in the text frame below.

Wade was really impressed by Clint. Wade was anxious about working with him. Clint thought Wade was annoying. Clint thought Wade was unpredictable. Clint thought Wade was possibly dangerous.

In the end, Clint worked well with Wade. In the end, Wade worked well with Clint.

Show Answer

Different Types of Conjunctions

All of the conjunctions have been removed from the following passage. Which conjunctions would best fill the gaps? Explain your reasoning why. The sentences have been numbered to aid you in your comments.

(1) Karni’s roommate, Joana, decided to drive to work; ____, Karni rode into the city with her. (2) They needed to turn left on 140th Street, ____ that street was under construction. (3) ____ Karni could say anything, ____ Joana had already found an alternate route.

(4) ____ did Karni arrive at work, ____ her boss told her she would be working with her coworker Ian on her next project. (5) Karni was really impressed by Ian’s professional accomplishments, ____ she was anxious about working with him. (6) Karni thought Ian was annoying, unpredictable, ____ reckless.

(7) ____, Karni was willing to put aside her opinions to get the job done. (8) She knew Ian would put in his best effort ____ they worked together, ____ she felt she could do no less— ____ he frustrated her. (9) Personal relationships are often ____ important ____ professional skills.

Show Answer
Prepositions

Prepositions are relation words; they can indicate location, time, or other more abstract relationships. Prepositions are noted in bold in these examples:

- The woods **behind** my house are super creepy **at** night.
- She sang **until** three in the morning.
- He was happy **for** them.

A preposition combines with another word (usually a noun or pronoun) called the complement. Prepositions are still in bold, and their complements are in italics:

- The woods **behind** my **house** are super creepy **at** night.
- She sang **until** three **in** the morning.
- He was happy **for** them.

Prepositions generally come before their complements (e.g., **in** England, **under** the table, **of** Jane). However, there are a small handful of exceptions, including **notwithstanding** and **ago**:

- **Financial limitations notwithstanding**, Phil paid back his debts.
- He was released **three days ago**.

Prepositions of location are pretty easily defined (**near**, **far**, **over**, **under**, etc.), and prepositions about time are as well (**before**, **after**, **at**, **during**, etc.). Prepositions of “more abstract relationships,” however, are a little more nebulous in their definition. The video below gives a good overview of this category of prepositions:

https://youtu.be/RPiAT-Nm3JY

**Note:** The video said that prepositions are a closed group, but it never actually explained what a closed group is. Perhaps the easiest way to define a closed group is to define its opposite: an open group. An open group is a part of speech allows new words to be added. For example, nouns are an open group; new nouns, like **selfie** and **blog**, enter the language all the time (verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are open groups as well). Thus a closed group simply refers to a part of speech that doesn’t allow in new words. All of the word types in this section—prepositions, articles, and conjunctions—are closed groups.

So far, all of the prepositions we’ve looked at have been one word (and most of them have been one syllable). The most common prepositions are one-syllable words. According to one ranking, the most common English prepositions are **on**, **in**, **to**, **by**, **for**, **with**, **at**, **of**, **from**, **as**.

There are also some prepositions that have more than one word:

- in spite of (She made it to work in spite of the terrible traffic.)
- by means of (He traveled by means of boat.)
- except for (Joan invited everyone to her party except for Ben.)
- next to (Go ahead and sit down next to Jean-Claude.)
Practice

Identify the prepositions in the following sentences:

I love every painting by Vermeer except for *The Girl with the Pearl Earring.*
In spite of their fight, Beatriz wanted to know if she would still see Alexandre before lunch.
He only talks about two things: his band and his dogs.

Show Answer

Using Prepositions

A lot of struggles with prepositions come from trying to use the correct preposition. Some verbs require specific prepositions. Here’s a table of some of the most commonly misused preposition/verb pairs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>different from</th>
<th>comply with</th>
<th>dependent on</th>
<th>think of or about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>need of</td>
<td>profit by</td>
<td>glad of</td>
<td>bestow upon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some verbs take a different preposition, depending on the object of the sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>agree with a person</th>
<th>agree to a proposition</th>
<th>part from (a person)</th>
<th>part with (a thing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>differ from (person or thing)</td>
<td>differ from or with an opinion</td>
<td>confide in (to trust in)</td>
<td>confide to (to intrust to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reconcile with (a person)</td>
<td>reconcile to (a statement or idea)</td>
<td>confer on (to give)</td>
<td>confer with (to talk with)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compare with (to determine value)</td>
<td>compare to (because of similarity)</td>
<td>convenient to (a place)</td>
<td>convenient for (a purpose)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When multiple objects take the same preposition, you don’t need to repeat the preposition. For example, in the sentence “I’ll read any book by J.K. Rowling or R. L. Stine,” both J. K. Rowling and R. L. Stine are objects of the preposition *by,* so it only needs to appear once in the sentence. However, you can’t do this when you have different prepositions. Let’s look at this using a common phrase: “We fell out of the frying pan and into the fire.” If you leave out one of the prepositions, as in “We fell out of the frying pan and the fire,” the sentence is saying that we fell out of the frying pan and out of the fire, which would be preferable, but isn’t the case in this idiom.

Prepositions in Sentences

You’ll often hear about **prepositional phrases.** A prepositional phrase includes a preposition and its complement (e.g., “behind the house” or “a long time ago”). These phrases can appear at the beginning or end of sentences. When they appear at the beginning of a sentence, they typically need a comma afterwards:

- You can drop that off behind the house.
- A long time ago, dinosaurs roamed the earth.
- As the saying goes, hard work always pays off.
Ending a Sentence with a Preposition

https://youtu.be/NhGQYjXMgsY

As we just learned, it is totally okay to end a sentence with a preposition. And, as we saw, it can often make your writing smoother and more concise to do so.

However, it’s still best to avoid doing it unnecessarily. If your sentence ends with a preposition and would still mean the same thing without the preposition, take it out. For example:

- Where are you at?
- That’s not what it’s used for.

If you remove at, the sentence becomes “Where are you?” This means the same thing, so removing at is a good idea. However, if you remove for, the sentence becomes “That’s not what it’s used,” which doesn’t make sense.

Practice

Read each sentence and determine if the prepositions are being used correctly. If they are not, re-write the sentence.

Do you have any idea why Olivia keeps calling for?
You have no idea how much trouble you’re in.
Luiz agreed with hand his credit card over to the cashier.
Last week Ngozi reconciled to the new prices and her new co-worker.

Show Answer

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Articles

There are three articles in the English language: *the*, *a*, and *an*. These are divided into two types of articles: definite (*the*) and indefinite (*a*, *an*). The definite article indicates a level of specificity that the indefinite does not. “An apple” could refer to any apple; however “the apple” is referring back to a specific apple.

Thus, when using the definite article, the speaker assumes the listener knows the identity of the noun’s referent (because it is obvious, because it is common knowledge, or because it was mentioned in the same sentence or an earlier sentence). Use of an indefinite article implies that the speaker assumes the listener does not have to be told the identity of the referent.

There are also cases where no article is required:

- with generic nouns (plural or uncountable): *cars have accelerators, happiness is contagious*, referring to cars in general and happiness in general (compare *the happiness I felt yesterday*, specifying particular happiness);
- with many proper names: *Sabrina, France, London*, etc.

Watch this quick introduction to indefinite and definite articles and the difference between the two:

https://youtu.be/TSD0uByBoTo

Indefinite Article

The indefinite article of English takes the two forms *a* and *an*. These can be regarded as meaning “one,” usually without emphasis.

Distinction between *a* and *an*

You’ve probably learned the rule that *an* comes before a vowel, and that *a* comes before a consonant. While this is generally true, it’s more accurate to say that *an* comes before a vowel *sound*, and *a* comes before a consonant *sound*. Let’s look at a couple of examples with *a*:

- *a box*
- *a HEPA filter* (HEPA is pronounced as a word rather than as letters)
- *a one-armed bandit* (pronounced “won. . . “)
- *a unicorn* (pronounced “yoo. . . “)
Let’s try it again with an:

- an apple
- an EPA policy (the letter E read as a letter still starts with a vowel sound)
- an SSO (pronounced “es-es-oh”)
- an hour (the h is silent)
- an heir (pronounced “air”)

**Note:** Some speakers and writers use an before a word beginning with the sound h in an unstressed syllable: an historical novel, an hotel. However, where the h is clearly pronounced, this usage is now less common, and a is preferred.

### Practice

Look at the following words. When they require an indefinite article, should it be a or an?

- ewe
- SEO specialist
- apple
- URL
- herb

Show Answer

### Definite Article

The definite article the is used when the referent of the noun phrase is assumed to be unique or known from the context. For example, in the sentence “The boy with glasses was looking at the moon,” it is assumed that in the context the reference can only be to one boy and one moon.

The can be used with both singular and plural nouns, with nouns of any gender, and with nouns that start with any letter. This is different from many other languages which have different articles for different genders or numbers. The is the most commonly used word in the English language.
Practice

Choose the article that should go in each sentence:

Every day, I eat (a / an / the) egg salad sandwich.
I love looking at (a / an / the) stars with you.
Dani was planning to buy (a / an / the) book she had been eyeing as soon as she got paid.
(A / An / The) brain like that will get you far in life.

Show Answer

Word Order

In most cases, the article is the first word of its noun phrase, preceding all other adjectives and modifiers.

*The* little old red bag held *a* very big surprise.

There are a few exceptions, however:

- Certain determiners, such as *all, both, half, double*, precede the definite article when used in combination (*all the team, both the girls, half the time, double the amount*).
- *Such* and *what* precede the indefinite article (*such an idiot, what a day!*).
- Adjectives qualified by *too, so, as and how* generally precede the indefinite article: *too great a loss, so hard a problem, as delicious an apple as I have ever tasted, I know how pretty a girl she is*.
- When adjectives are qualified by *quite* (particularly when it means “fairly”), the word *quite* (but not the adjective itself) often precedes the indefinite article: *quite a long letter*. **Note:** the phrase *a quite long letter* is also a correct construction. However the two have different meanings:
  - In *quite a long letter*, *quite* modifies *letter*: it’s quite a letter.
  - In *a quite long letter*, *quite* modifies *long*: the letter is quite long.

Practice

Read the following passage and make any necessary changes. Explain your reasoning for each change.

A Hubble Space Telescope (HST) is a space telescope that was launched into low Earth orbit in 1990, and remains in operation. Although not the first space telescope, Hubble is one of the largest and most versatile, and is well known as both a vital research tool and an public relations boon for astronomy. The HST is named after the astronomer Edwin Hubble.

Hubble’s orbit outside the distortion of Earth’s atmosphere allows it to take extremely high-resolution images. Hubble has recorded the some of most detailed visible-light images ever, allowing the deep view into space and time.

Show Answer
Part 3: Punctuation
Introduction to Punctuation

Identify Common Punctuation Marks and Their Rules for Correct Usage

In this short skit, comedian Victor Borge illustrates just how prevalent punctuation is (or should be) in language.

https://youtu.be/Qf_TDuhk3No

As you’ve just heard, punctuation is everywhere. While it can be a struggle at first to learn the rules that come along with each mark, punctuation is here to help you: these marks were invented to guide readers through passages—to let them know how and where words relate to each other. When you learn the rules of punctuation, you equip yourself with an extensive toolset so you can better craft language to communicate the exact message you want.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this module, different style guides have slightly different rules for grammar. This is especially true when it comes to punctuation. This outcome will cover the MLA rules for punctuation, but we’ll also make note of rules from other styles when they’re significantly different.

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- Victor Borge - Phonetic Punctuation. **Authored by:** Charles Bradley II. **Located at:** https://youtu.be/Qf_UDhkk3No. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License
There are three common punctuation marks that come at the end of a sentence: the period ( . ), the question mark ( ? ), and the exclamation point ( ! ). A sentence is always followed by a single space, no matter what the concluding punctuation is.

Periods

Periods indicate a neutral sentence, and as such are by far the most common ending punctuation mark. They’ve been at the end of every sentence on this page so far.

Question Marks

A question mark comes at the end of a question. A question is a request for information. The information requested should be provided in the form of an answer.

A rhetorical question is asked to make a point, and does not expect an answer (often the answer is implied or obvious). Some questions are used principally as polite requests (e.g., “Would you pass the salt?”).

All of these questions can be categorized as direct questions, and all of these questions require a question mark at their ends.

Indirect Questions

Indirect questions can be used in many of the same ways as direct ones, but they often emphasize knowledge or lack of knowledge:

- I can’t guess how Tamika managed it.
- I wonder whether I looked that bad.
- Cecil asked where the reports were.
Such clauses correspond to **direct questions**, which are questions actually asked. The direct questions corresponding to the examples above are *How did Tamika manage it? Did I look that bad? Where are the reports?* Notice how different word order is used in direct and indirect questions: in direct questions the verb usually comes before the subject, while indirect questions the verb appears second. Additionally, question marks should not be used at the end of indirect questions.

**Practice**

Are the following sentences declarative or indirect sentences? Which need a question mark at the end?

- Jackie wondered where her keys were
- Can you pass the butter
- Is anyone here
- She asked how you were doing
- Why won’t you admit I’m right

**Exclamation Points**

The exclamation point is a punctuation mark usually used after an interjection or exclamation to indicate strong feelings or high volume, and often marks the end of a sentence. You’ve likely seen this overused on the internet:

!!!!!! I’m jUST SO!!!!!!

While this kind of statement is excessive, there are appropriate ways to use exclamation points. A sentence ending in an exclamation mark may be an exclamation (such as “Wow!” or “Boo!”), or an imperative (“Stop!”), or may indicate astonishment: “They were the footprints of a gigantic duck!” Exclamation marks are occasionally placed mid-sentence with a function similar to a comma, for dramatic effect, although this usage is rare: “On the walk, oh! there was a frightful noise.”

Informally, exclamation marks may be repeated for additional emphasis (“That’s great!!!”), but this practice is generally considered only acceptable in casual or informal writing, such as text messages or online communication with friends and family.

The exclamation mark is sometimes used in conjunction with the question mark. This can be in protest or astonishment (“Out of all places, the water-hole?!”).

Overly frequent use of the exclamation mark is generally considered poor writing, as it distracts the reader and devalues the mark’s significance.

Cut out all these exclamation points... An exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke.
— F. Scott Fitzgerald

Some authors, however, most notably Tom Wolfe and Madison Acampora, are known for unashamedly liberal use...
of the exclamation mark. In comic books, the very frequent use of exclamation mark is common.

**Practice**

Are exclamation points used appropriately in these sentences? Explain why or why not.

Wow! Simone gave each of her friends fifty dollars!
Is it too much if I send a text that says, “Hey!!! I loved the play last night!!!!!”?
Juanita fell down the stairs!

Show Answer

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Commas

Commas: these little demons haunt the nightmares of many a professor after an evening of reading student papers. It seems nearly impossible to remember and apply the seventeen or so comma rules that seem to given out as the standard. (For example: “Use commas to set off independent clauses joined by the common coordinating conjunctions.” or “Put a comma before the coordinating conjunction in a series.”)

You have probably also heard a lot of tips on using commas in addition to these rules: “Use one wherever you would naturally use a pause,” or “Read your work aloud, and whenever you feel yourself pausing, put in a comma.” These techniques help to a degree, but our ears tend to trick us, and we need other avenues of attack.

Perhaps the best and most instructive way for us to approach the comma is to remember its fundamental function: it is a separator. Once you know this, the next step is to determine what sorts of things generally require separation. This includes most transition words, descriptive words or phrases, adjacent items, and complete ideas (complete ideas contain both a subject and a verb).

Transition Words

Transition words add new viewpoints to your material; commas before and after transition words help to separate them from the sentence ideas they are describing. Transition words tend to appear at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence. By definition, a transition word creates context that links to the preceding sentence. Typical transition words that require commas before and after them include however, thus, therefore, also, and nevertheless.

- Therefore, the natural gas industry can only be understood fully through an analysis of these recent political changes.
- The lead prosecutor was prepared, however, for a situation like this.

**Note:** As was mentioned, these words require commas at the beginning or middle of a sentence. When they appear between two complete ideas, however, a period or semicolon is required beforehand:

- Clint had been planning the trip with his kids for three months; however, when work called he couldn’t say no.
- Sam was retired. Nevertheless, he wanted to help out.

As you can see from these examples, comma is always required after transition words.
Descriptive Phrases

Descriptive phrases often need to be separated from the things that they describe in order to clarify that the descriptive phrases are subordinate (i.e., they relate to the sentence context, but are less responsible for creating meaning than the sentence’s subject and verb). Descriptive phrases tend to come at the very beginning of a sentence, right after the subject of a sentence, or at the very end of a sentence.

- **Near the end of the eighteenth century**, James Hutton introduced a point of view that radically changed scientists’ thinking about geologic processes.
- James Lovelock, **who first measured CFCs globally**, said in 1973 that CFCs constituted no conceivable hazard.
- All of the major industrialized nations approved, **making the possibility a reality**.

In each example, the phrase separated by the comma could be deleted from the sentence without destroying the sentence’s basic meaning. If the information is necessary to the primary sentence meaning, it should **not** be set off by commas. Let’s look at a quick example of this:

- Jefferson’s son, Miles, just started college.
- Jefferson’s son Miles just started college

You would write the first sentence if Jefferson only has one son and his name is Miles. If Jefferson only has one son, then *Miles* is not needed information and should be set off with commas.

You would write the second sentence if Jefferson has multiple sons, and it is his son Miles who just got into college. In the second sentence, *Miles* is necessary information, because until his name is stated, you can’t be sure which of Jefferson’s sons the sentence is talking about.

This test can be very helpful when you’re deciding whether or not to include commas in your writing.

Adjacent Items

Adjacent items are words or phrases that have some sort of parallel relationship, yet are different from each other in meaning. Adjacent items are separated so that the reader can consider each item individually.

The river caught fire on July 4, 1968, in Cleveland, Ohio.

The dates (July 4, 1968) and places (Cleveland, Ohio) are juxtaposed, and commas are needed because the juxtaposed items are clearly different from each other. This applies to countries as well as states: “Paris, France, is beautiful this time of year.”

Practice

The commas have been removed from the following sentences. Re-type them, adding the correct commas back in.

Sergi Sousa the top-ranked shoe designer in Rhode Island is going to be at the party tonight.
Sergi only wears shoes that he created himself.
Nevertheless he is incredibly courteous and polite to everyone he meets.
He was born in Barcelona Spain on April 19 1987.

Show Answer
Coordinating Conjunctions: FANBOYS

We learned about coordinating conjunctions earlier in the course. These are words that join two words or phrases of equal importance. The mnemonic FANBOYS helps us remember the seven most common: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.*

When these conjunctions join two words or phrases, no comma is necessary (for more than two, take a look at “Commas in Lists” just below):

- Paula and Lucca had a great time on their date.
  - “Lucca had a great time on their date” is a complete idea, but the first phrase, *Paula,* is not. No comma is required before *and.*
- Minh turned off the lights but left the door unlocked.
  - “Minh turned off the lights” is a complete idea; “left the door unlocked.” No comma is required before *but.*
- Danny studied the lifespan of rhinoceroses in their native Kenya and the lifespan of rhinoceroses in captivity.
  - “Danny studied the lifespan of rhinoceroses in their native Kenya” is a complete idea; “the lifespan of rhinoceroses in captivity” is not. No comma is required before *and.*

When these conjunctions are used to join two complete ideas, however, a comma is required:

- We could write this as two separate sentences, but we’ve chosen to join them together here.
  - Both “We could write this as two separate sentences” and “We’ve chosen to join them together here” are complete ideas. A comma is required before the *but.*

Practice

The commas have been removed from the following sentences. Re-type them, adding the correct commas back in.

Aamir and Tyesha went on a trip to California.
Aamir was nervous but Tyesha was excited.
They had been to East Coast before but never to the West.
Aamir became less nervous after he looked up a few tourist guides and journals online.
When they came home Tyesha had not enjoyed herself but Aamir had.

Show Answer

Commas in Lists

The serial comma is used to separate adjacent items—different items with equal importance—when there are three or more. This is so the reader can consider each item individually. Let’s look at a few examples

- Weathering may extend only a few centimeters beyond the zone in *fresh granite,* *metamorphic rocks,* *sandstone,* *shale,* and *other rocks.*
- This approach *increases homogeneity,* *reduces the heating time,* and *creates a more uniform microstructure.*

In the first sentence, the commas are important because each item presented is distinctly different from its adjacent item. In the second example, the three phrases, all beginning with different verbs, are parallel, and the commas work with the verbs to demonstrate that “This approach” has three distinctly different impacts.
The Serial Comma (a.k.a the Oxford Comma)

Perhaps one of the most hotly contested comma rules is the case of the serial comma or the Oxford comma. MLA style (as well as APA and Chicago) requires the use of the serial comma—AP style highly recommends leaving it out. But what is the serial comma?

The serial comma is the comma before the conjunction (and, or, and nor) in a series involving a parallel list of three or more things. For example, “I am industrious, resourceful, and loyal.” The serial comma can provide clarity in certain situations. For example, if the and is part of a series of three or more phrases (groups of words) as opposed to single words:

Medical histories taken about each subject included smoking history, frequency of exercise, current height and weight, and recent weight gain.

The serial comma can also prevent the end of a series from appearing to be a parenthetical:

I’d like to thank my sisters, Beyoncé and Rhianna.

Without the serial comma, it may appear that the speaker is thanking his or her two sisters, who are named Beyoncé and Rhianna (which could be possible, but isn’t true in this case). By adding the serial comma, it becomes clear that the speaker is thanking his or her sisters, as well as the two famous singers: “I’d like to thank my sisters, Beyoncé, and Rhianna.”

By always using a comma before the and in any series of three or more, you honor the distinctions between each of the separated items, and you avoid any potential reader confusion.

Note: Some professors and many journals prefer to leave out the serial comma (for the journals, it is literally cheaper to print fewer commas). Because of this, the serial comma is not recommend in AP style.

Practice

The commas have been removed from the following sentences. Re-type them, adding the correct commas back in.

Ava’s favorite meals are cauliflower soup, steak and eggs, lasagna and chicken parmigiana.
 Victor tried to make dinner for her. Unfortunately, his skills are mostly limited to eating, buying or serving food.
 Victor and Ava decided to choose a restaurant and go out to eat.

Comma Overuse

A sure way to irritate educated readers of your work is to give them an overabundance of commas. It is easy but dangerous to take the attitude that Sally once did in a Peanuts comic strip, asking Charlie Brown to correct her essay by showing her “where to sprinkle in the little curvy marks.”

Perhaps the best way to troubleshoot your particular comma problems, especially if they are serious, is to identify and understand the patterns of your errors. We tend to make the same mistakes over and over again; in fact, many writers develop the unfortunate habit of automatically putting commas into slots such as these:

- between the subject and verb of a sentence
- after any number
- before any preposition
- before or after any conjunction
Practice

Read the following sentences. How many of them have unnecessary commas? Type your corrected sentences in the text frame below?

The bushings, must be adjusted weekly, to ensure that the motor is not damaged.
Many botanists still do not fully appreciate these findings even after 22 years, following the publication of the discovery paper.
Other manufactured chemicals that also contain bromine are superior for extinguishing fires in situations where people, and electronics are likely to be present.
The price of platinum will rise, or fall depending on several distinct factors.

Show Answer

Just as it is common for someone to have to look up the same tricky word dozens of times before committing its proper spelling to memory, you may need to reference comma rules multiple times before they feel natural to use. As with spelling, commas (or the absence of commas) must be repeatedly challenged in your writing.

As you perfect your comma usage, you will learn to recognize and reevaluate your sentence patterns, and the rewards are numerous. There is no foolproof or easy way to exorcise all of your comma demons, but a great place to start is reminding yourself of the comma’s basic function as a separator and justifying the separation of elements. In the end, you simply must make a habit of reading, writing, and revising with comma correctness in mind.

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Semicolons

The semicolon is one of the most misunderstood and misused punctuation marks; in fact, it is often mistaken for the colon (which we’ll discuss next). However, these two punctuation marks are not interchangeable. A semicolon connects two complete ideas (a complete idea has a subject and a verb) that are connected to each other. Look at this sentence for example:

Anika’s statue is presently displayed in the center of the exhibit; this location makes it a focal point and allows it to direct the flow of visitors to the museum.

The first idea tells us where Anika’s statue is, and the second idea tells us more about the location and it’s importance. Each of these ideas could be its own sentence, but by using a semicolon, the author is telling the reader that the two ideas are connected. Often, you may find yourself putting a comma in the place of the semicolon; this is incorrect. Using a comma here would create a run-on sentence (we’ll discuss those more in Run-on Sentences). Remember: a comma can join a complete idea to other items while a semicolon needs a complete idea on either side.

The semicolon can also be used to separate items in a list when those items have internal commas. For example, say you’re listing a series of cities and their states, or you’re listing duties for a resume:

- As a photographer for National Geographic, Renato had been to a lot of different places including São Paulo, Brazil; Kobe, Japan; Kyiv, Ukraine; and Barcelona, Spain.
- As an engineering assistant, I had a variety of duties: participating in pressure ventilation surveys; completing daily drafting, surveying, and data compilation; and acting as a company representative during a roof-bolt pull test.

Practice

Do the following sentences need a comma or a semicolon?

Kieran never throws anything away __ he’s convinced he’ll need these things someday.
Because I left my keys at my apartment __ I had to stay on campus and wait for my roommate.
Zebras are the most popular animals at my local zoo __ however __ elephants are my favorite animal.
The company had four primary locations: Boston, Massachusetts __ San Antonio, Texas __ Chicago, Illinois __ and Little Rock, Arkansas.

Show Answers

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Colons

The colon: well-loved but, oh, so misunderstood. The colon is not just used to introduce a list; it is far more flexible. The colon can be used after the first word of a sentence or just before the final word of a sentence. The colon can also be used to introduce a grammatically independent sentence. Thus, it is one of the most powerful punctuation marks.

The colon is like a sign on the highway, announcing that something important is coming. It acts as an arrow pointing forward, telling you to read on for important information. A common analogy used to explain the colon is that it acts like a flare in the road, signaling that something meaningful lies ahead.

Use the colon when you wish to provide pithy emphasis.

To address this problem, we must turn to one of the biologist’s most fundamental tools: the Petri dish.

Use the colon to introduce material that explains, amplifies, or summaries what has preceded it.

The Petri dish: one of the biologist’s most fundamental tools.

In low carbon steels, banding tends to affect two properties in particular: tensile ductility and yield strength.

The colon is also commonly used to present a list or series, which comes in handy when there is a lot of similar material to join:

A compost facility may not be located as follows: within 300 feet of an exceptional-value wetland; within 100 feet of a perennial stream; within 50 feet of a property line.

Practice

Is the colon used correctly in the following sentences?

Stores need strict rules for making returns: consumers abuse them.
A store refund may be, for example: a cash refund, a store credit, or a gift card.
A store may charge a restocking fee in the following circumstances: (1) If the item is removed from plastic wrapping, (2) If the box is torn, (3) If tags or labels have been removed from the item.
If a store’s policy differs from the state-wide 7-day policy, then the store must: place a written notice about their policies, in language that consumers can understand, so that it can be easily seen and read.
California law is very exact about posting store policy: The policy must be displayed either at each entrance to the store, at each cash register and sales counter, on tags attached to each item, or on the company’s order forms, if any.

Commas and Semicolon

Read the following sentences. Determine if the empty spaces need a semicolon, a comma, or no punctuation. Type your answers in the text frame below:

*Pyura spinifera* __ commonly called the sea tulip __ is a species of ascidian that lives in coastal waters at depths of up to 260 feet. As with almost all other ascidians __ sea tulips are filter feeders. Its name comes from the organism’s appearance __ it looks like a knobby “bulb” or flower attached to a long stalk. Sea tulips come in a variety of colors, including white, pink, yellow, orange, and purple. __ note that __ the coloration of sea tulips depends upon their association with a symbiotic sponge that covers their surface.

You may spot this in ocean waters near Sydney __ Australia __ Central Coast __ Australia __ and Newcastle __ Australia.

Show Answers

Semicolons and Colons

Are the semicolons and colons used correctly in the following sentences? Write your corrections and comments in the text frame below. The sentences have been numbered to aid in your comments.
(1) The Antikythera mechanism is an ancient analogue computer likely used for several purposes including: predicting astronomical positions and eclipses and calculating Olympiads: the cycles of the ancient Olympic Games. (2) The device is a complex clockwork mechanism composed of at least 30 meshing bronze gears. (3) Its remains were found as one lump; it was recovered from a shipwreck, and the device was originally housed in a wooden box. (4) This lump was later separated into 82 separate fragments after extensive conservation work.

(5) The artifact was recovered probably in July 1901 from the Antikythera shipwreck off the Greek island of Antikythera. (6) Believed to have been designed and constructed by Greek scientists; the instrument has recently been dated to 205 BC. (7) After the knowledge of this technology was lost at some point in antiquity, technological artifacts approaching its complexity and workmanship did not appear again until the development of mechanical astronomical clocks in Europe in the fourteenth century.

(8) All known fragments of the Antikythera mechanism are kept at the National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Show Answer

Colons

Is the colon used correctly in the following sentences? If not, write the corrected sentence in the text frame below.

There are three methods of attracting earthworms from the ground: worm charming, worm grunting, and worm fiddling.
The activity can be performed: to collect bait for fishing or as a competitive sport.
As a skill and profession worm charming is now very rare: with the art being passed through generations to ensure that it survives.
In most competitions, the collector of the most worms in a set time is declared as the winner: they usually have a zone in which to perform their charming, measuring three yards square.
The activity is known by several different names and the apparatus and techniques vary significantly: (1) Most worm charming methods involve vibrating the soil, which encourages the worms to the surface, (2) Worm grunting generally refers to the use of a “stob,” a wooden stake that is driven into the ground, and a rooping iron, which is used to rub the stob, (3) Worm fiddling also uses a wooden stake but utilizes a dulled saw which is dragged along its top.

Show Answer

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- Modification of Antikythera mechanism (errors added). **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antikythera_mechanism. **License:** CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike
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Hyphens and Dashes

Hyphens

*The Oxford Manual of Style* once stated, “If you take hyphens seriously you will surely go mad.” Hyphens belong to that category of punctuation marks that will hurt your brain if you think about them too hard, and, like commas, people disagree about their use in certain situations. Nevertheless, you will have to use them regularly because of the nature of academic and professional writing. If you learn to use hyphens properly, they help you to write efficiently and concretely.

The Hyphen’s Function

Fundamentally, the hyphen is a joiner. It can join several different types of things:

- two nouns to make one complete word (kilogram-meter)
- an adjective and a noun to make a compound word (accident-prone)
- two words that, when linked, describe a noun (agreed-upon sum, two-dimensional object)
- a prefix with a noun (un-American)
- double numbers (twenty-four)
- numbers and units describing a noun (1000-foot face; a 10-meter difference)
- “self” words (self-employed, self-esteem)
- new word blends (cancer-causing, cost-effective)
- prefixes and suffixes to words, in particular when the writer wants to avoid doubling a vowel or tripling a consonant (anti-inflammatory; shell-like)
- multiple adjectives with the same noun (blue- and yellow-green beads; four- and five-year-olds)

A rule of thumb for the hyphen is that the resulting word must act as one unit; therefore, the hyphen creates a new word that has a single meaning. Usually, you can tell whether a hyphen is necessary by applying common sense and mentally excluding one of the words in question, testing how the words would work together without the hyphen. For example, the phrases “high-pressure system,” “water-repellent surface,” and “fuel-efficient car” would not make sense without hyphens, because you would not refer to a “high system,” a “water surface,” or a “fuel car.” As your ears and eyes become attuned to proper hyphenation practices, you will recognize that both meaning and convention dictate where hyphens fit best.

Examples of Properly Used Hyphens

Some examples of properly used hyphens follow. Note how the hyphenated word acts as a single unit carrying a meaning that the words being joined would not have individually.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>small-scale study</th>
<th>two-prong plug</th>
<th>strength-to-weight ratio</th>
<th>high-velocity flow</th>
<th>frost-free lawn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*College Writing Handbook* 173
When Hyphens Are Not Needed

By convention, hyphens are not used after words ending in -ly, nor when the words are so commonly used in combination that no ambiguity results. In these examples, no hyphens are needed:

- finely tuned engine
- blood pressure
- sea level
- real estate
- census taker
- atomic energy
- civil rights law
- public utility plant
- carbon dioxide

**Note:** Phrases like containing the word well like well known are contested. Well is an adverb, and thus many fall into the school of thought that a hyphen is unnecessary. However, others say that leaving out the hyphen may cause confusion and therefore include it (well-known). The standard in MLA is as follows: When it appears before the noun, well known should be hyphenated. When it follows the noun, no hyphenation is needed.

- She is a well-known person.
- She is well known.

Prefixes and Suffixes

Most prefixes do not need to be hyphenated; they are simply added in front of a noun, with no spaces and no joining punctuation necessary. The following is a list of common prefixes that do not require hyphenation when added to a noun:

- after
- anti
- bi
- bio
- co
- cyber
- di
- down
- hetero
- homo
- infra
- inter
- macro
- micro
- mini
- nano
- photo
- poly
- stereo
- thermo

**Note:** The prefix re generally doesn’t require a hyphen. However, when leaving out a hyphen will cause confusion, one should be added. Look at the following word pairs, for example:

- resign (leave a position) v. re-sign (sign the paper again)
- recreation (an activity of leisure) v. re-creation (create something again)

Common suffixes also do not require hyphenation, assuming no ambiguities of spelling or pronunciation arise. Typically, you do not need to hyphenate words ending in the following suffixes:

- able
- less
- fold
- like
- wise
Commonly Used Word Blends

Also, especially in technical fields, some words commonly used in succession become joined into one. The resulting word’s meaning is readily understood by technical readers, and no hyphen is necessary. Here are some examples of such word blends, typically written as single words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Blend</th>
<th>Word Blend</th>
<th>Word Blend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>blackbody</td>
<td>groundwater</td>
<td>airship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>downdraft</td>
<td>longwall</td>
<td>upload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>setup</td>
<td>runoff</td>
<td>blowout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practice

Students can participate in (self paced/self-paced) learning. Rather than sit in a (two hour-long/two-hour long/two-hour-long) class, students can study at their convenience. Would you like the (three or four-course/three- or four-course) meal tonight? He’s behaving in a very (childlike/child-like) manner.

Show Answers

Dashes

The dash functions almost as a colon does in that it adds to the preceding material, but with extra emphasis. Like a caesura (a timely pause) in music, a dash indicates a strong pause, then gives emphasis to material following the pause. In effect, a dash allows you to redefine what was just written, making it more explicit. You can also use a dash as it is used in the first sentence of this paragraph: to frame an interruptive or parenthetical-type comment that you do not want to de-emphasize.

- Jill Emery confirms that Muslim populations have typically been ruled by non-Muslims—specifically Americans, Russians, Israelis, and the French.
- The dissolution took 20 minutes—much longer than anticipated—but measurements were begun as soon as the process was completed.

There is no “dash” button on a computer keyboard. Instead, create it by typing the hyphen button twice in a row; or use the “symbol” option in your word processor; or use the Mac shortcut option + shift + —.

Practice

Is the dash used correctly in the following sentences?

A good leader should be—passionate, patient, productive and positive. Politicians want to serve and improve the lives of people—really! Life is ninety per cent perspiration—my kindergarten teacher told me—and ten per cent inspiration.
Mayor Lee wants all city employees to ride bicycles to work—what is he thinking—on fair-weather days.

The dash we typically use is technically called the “em dash,” and it is significantly longer than the hyphen. There is also an “en dash”—whose length is between that of the hyphen and the em dash, and its best usage is to indicate inclusive dates and numbers:

- July 6–September 17
  - The date range began on July 6 and ended on September 17.
- Barack Obama (1961–)
  - This indicates the year a person was born, as well as the fact that he or she is still alive.
- pp. 148–56
  - This indicates pages 148 through 156. With number ranges, you can remove the first digit of the second number if it’s the same as the first number’s.

It can also be used for flight or train routes.

- The London–Paris train will be running thirty minutes late today.

Like the em dash, the en dash is not on the standard computer keyboard. Select it from word processor’s symbol map (or if you have a Mac, you can type option + -), or it may even be inserted automatically by your word processor when you type inclusive numbers or dates with a hyphen between them. In most contexts, a hyphen can serve as an en dash, but in professional publications—especially in the humanities—an en dash is correct.

When you type the hyphen, en dash, and em dash, no spaces should appear on either side of the punctuation mark.

Practice

Read the following passage. Identify any errors with hyphens or dashes. Type the corrected version of the passage in the text frame below:

John Milton Cage Jr. (1912-1992) was an American composer, music theorist, writer, and artist. A pioneer of indeterminacy in music and the non-standard use of musical instruments, Cage was one of the leading figures of the post—war avant-garde. Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential American composers of the twentieth-century.

Cage is perhaps best known for his 1952 composition 4′33″ a performance of the absence of deliberate sound. Musicians who present this piece do nothing aside from being present for the duration specified by the title. The content of the composition is not “four minutes and 33 seconds of silence”—as is often assumed, but rather the sounds of the environment heard by the audience during performance.

Show Answer
Apostrophes

Possession

With possessives, the apostrophe is used in combination with an s to represent that a word literally or conceptually possesses what follows it.

- a student’s paper
- the county’s borders
- a nation’s decision
- one hour’s passing

Apostrophes with Words Ending in s and with Plurals

Singular words whether or not they end in s, are made possessive by adding an apostrophe + s. For plural words, we typically indicate possession simply by adding the apostrophe without an additional s. However, a plural that does not end in an s (e.g., bacteria), we would add an apostrophe + s.

- Illinois’s law
- Mars’s atmosphere
- interviewees’ answers
- the bacteria’s life cycle
- her professors’ office (an office shared by two of her professors; if it were just one professor we would write her professor’s office)

Note: Practices vary from style to style, so be sure to check the rules in your course’s discipline for this.

Contractions

A contraction is a shortened phrase. He will becomes he’ll, are not becomes aren’t, would have becomes would’ve, and it is becomes it’s. In all of these cases, the apostrophe stands in for the missing letters.

You may find yourself being steered away from using contractions in your papers. While you should write to your
teacher’s preference, keep in mind that leaving out contractions can often make your words sound over formal and stilted. (And don’t eliminate contractions in your papers just to up your word count!)

**Note:** Double contractions, like wouldn’t’ve or I’d’ve are considered non-standard and should be avoided in formal written language.

### Some Common Errors

Now that we’ve learned about both contraction and possession, let’s take a look at some of the most common (or at least most called out) errors people make.

**Its versus It’s**

https://youtu.be/Yhaa214UKvA

This rule also applies to your vs. you’re and their vs. they’re. The best way to use these correctly is to remember that possessive pronouns never have an apostrophe: if there’s an apostrophe with a pronoun, it’s a contraction, not a possessive.

**Should’ve versus Should of**

- Should of, would of, could of
- Should’ve, would’ve, could’ve

This mistake is due to the pronunciation. Out loud both of these phrases sound exactly the same. However, remember that the original phrase is should have, as in “I should have done that.” The phrase should of should never occur. Unfortunately, the only way to remember this is rote memorization (or perhaps a closer examination of the word of).

### Acronyms and Numbers

In technical writing, acronyms and numbers are frequently pluralized with the addition of an apostrophe + s, but this is falling out of favor, and there is typically no need to put an apostrophe in front of the s. Therefore, SSTs (sea surface temperatures) is more acceptable than SST’s when your intention is simply to pluralize.

Ideally, use the apostrophe before the s with an acronym or a number only to show possession (i.e., “an 1860’s law”; “DEP’s testing”) or when confusion would otherwise result (“mind your p’s and q’s”).

When talking about a specific decade the 1920s should be shortened to the ’20s. Notice that the apostrophe curls away from the numbers, indicating that the missing characters originally appeared prior to the apostrophe.

### Practice

Select the response from the list that best completes the sentence.

- Betty Crocker actually came from an (employees/employee’s/employees’) imagination.
- Back in the (1930s/1930’s/1930s’), Betty Crocker was a name everyone knew.
- A television commercial asked, “(Who’s/Whose) the person (who’s/whose) cookies we love?”
- As (woman’s/women’s/womens’) fashions changed, the company updated (Betty Crocker’s/Betty Crockers’) image.
- A commercial told us, “Buy Betty Crocker. (It’s/Its) quality you can trust!”

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Quotation Marks

There are three typical ways quotation marks are used. The first is pretty self-explanatory: you use quotation marks when you're making a direct quote.

- He said “I’ll never forget you.” It was the best moment of my life.
- Yogi Berra famously said, “A nickel ain’t worth a dime anymore.”

If you’re just writing an approximation of something a person said, you would not use quotation marks:

- She told me about Pizza the three-toed sloth yesterday.
- He said that he would be late today.

The second is when you’re calling attention to a word. For example:

- I can never say “Worcestershire” correctly.
- How do you spell “definitely”?

Note: It is this course’s preference to use italics in these instances:

- I can never say Worcestershire correctly.
- How do you spell definitely?

However, using quotes is also an accepted practice.

The last use is scare quotes. This is the most misused type of quotation marks. People often think that quotation marks mean emphasis.

- Buy some “fresh” chicken today!
- We’ll give it our “best” effort.
- Employees “must” wash their hands before returning to work.

However, when used this way, the quotation marks insert a silent “so-called” into the sentence, which is often the opposite of the intended meaning.

Where do Quotation Marks Go?

Despite what you may see practiced—especially in advertising, on television, and even in business letters—the fact is that the period and comma go inside the quotation marks all of the time. Confusion arises because the British system is different, and the American system may automatically look wrong to you, but it is simply one of the frequently broken rules of written English in America: The period and comma always go inside the quotation marks.

- Correct: The people of the pine barrens are often called “pineys.”
• Incorrect: The people of the pine barrens are often called “pineys”.

However, the semicolon, colon, dash, question mark, and exclamation point fall outside of the quotation marks (unless, of course, the quoted material has internal punctuation of its own).

• This measurement is commonly known as “dip angle”; dip angle is the angle formed between a normal plane and a vertical.
• Built only 50 years ago, Shakhtinsk—“minetown”—is already seedy.
• When she was asked the question “Are rainbows possible in winter?” she answered by examining whether raindrops freeze at temperatures below 0 °C. (Quoted material has its own punctuation.)
• Did he really say “Dogs are the devil’s henchmen”? (The quote is a statement, but the full sentence is a question.)

Practice

Has the following passage been punctuated correctly? Type any corrections in the text frame below:

Gabrielly and Marcelo both knew a lot of “fun facts” that they liked to share with each other. Yesterday Gabrielly said to Marcelo, “Did you know that wild turkeys can run up to twenty-five miles per hour?”
“Well, an emu can run twice that speed,” Marcelo responded.
“Did you know that there’s a dinosaur-themed park in Poland called JuraPark Bałtów”? Gabrielly asked.
Marcelo then told her about “Rusik, the first Russian police sniffer cat, who helped search for illegal cargoes of fish and caviar”.

Show Answer
Brackets

Brackets are a fairly uncommon punctuation mark. Their main use is in quotations: they can be used to clarify quotes. For example, say you want to quote the following passage:

“I finally got to meet Trent today. I had a really great time with him. He was a lot taller than expected, though.”

However, you only want to relay the fact that Trent was taller than the speaker expected him to be. In order to do this, you would write the following: “[Trent] was a lot taller than expected.”

The brackets let the reader know that while the word Trent wasn’t in the original quote, his name was implied there. When using brackets, you need to be careful not to change the original meaning of the quote.

Another use of brackets is when there is a spelling or informational error in the original quote. For example, “Gabriel sat down on the river bank to fed [sic] the ducks.” (The term sic means that the typo was in the original source of this quote.)

Practice

Read the following passages. Imagine you want to quote the numbered sentences. Each sentence would appear separately. Use brackets to indicate the best way to do so.

1. Mont Vesuvius is a stratovolcano in the Gulf of Naples, Italy, about 5.6 mi east of Naples and a short distance from the shore. It is one of several volcanoes which form the Campanian volcanic arc. (2) It consists of a large cone partially encircled by the steep rim of a summit caldera caused by the collapse of an earlier and originally much higher structure.
2. (3) Mount Vesuvius is best known for its eruption in CE 79 that led to the burying and destruction of the Roman cities of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and several other settlements.

Show Answer

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Ellipses

An ellipsis (plural *ellipses*) is a series of three periods, as you can see in the icon to the right.

As with most punctuation marks, there is some contention about its usage. The main point of contention is whether or not there should be a space between the periods ( . . . ) or not (…). MLA, APA, and *Chicago*, the most common style guides for students, support having spaces between the periods. Others you may encounter, such as in journalism, may not.

Quotes

Like the brackets we just learned about, you will primarily see ellipses used in quotes. They indicate a missing portion in a quote. Look at the following quote for an example:

Sauropod dinosaurs are the biggest animals to have ever walked on land. They are instantly recognized by their long, sweeping necks and whiplashed tails, and nearly always portrayed moving in herds, being stalked by hungry predators.

In recent years, a huge amount of taxonomic effort from scientists has vastly increased the number of known species of sauropod. What we now know is that in many areas we had two or more species co-existing alongside each other.

A question that arises from this, is how did we have animals that seem so similar, and with such high energy and dietary requirements, living alongside one another? Was there some sort of spinach-like super plant that gave them all Popeye-like physical boosts, or something more subtle?

It’s a lengthy quote, and it contains more information than you want to include. Here’s how to cut it down:

Sauropod dinosaurs are the biggest animals to have ever walked on land. They are instantly recognized by their long, sweeping necks and whiplashed tails. . . .

In recent years . . . [research has shown] that in many areas we had two or more species co-existing alongside each other.

A question that arises from this, is how did we have animals that seem so similar, and with such high energy and dietary requirements, living alongside one another?

In the block quote above, you can see that the first ellipsis appears to have four dots. (“They are instantly recognized by their long, sweeping necks and whiplashed tails. . . .”) However, this is just a period followed by an ellipsis. This is because ellipses do not remove punctuation marks when the original punctuation still is in use;
they are instead used in conjunction with original punctuation. This is true for all punctuation marks, including periods, commas, semicolons, question marks, and exclamation points.

By looking at two sympatric species (those that lived together) from the fossil graveyards of the Late Jurassic of North America . . . , [David Button] tried to work out what the major dietary differences were between sauropod dinosaurs, based on their anatomy.

One of the best ways to check yourself is to take out the ellipsis. If the sentence or paragraph is still correctly punctuated, you’ve used the ellipsis correctly. (Just remember to put it back in!)

**Practice**

Read the paragraphs below:

*Camarasaurus*, with its more mechanically efficient skull, was capable of generating much stronger bite forces than *Diplodocus*. This suggests that *Camarasaurus* was capable of chomping through tougher plant material than *Diplodocus*, and was perhaps even capable of a greater degree of oral processing before digestion. This actually ties in nicely with previous hypotheses of different diets for each, which were based on apparent feeding heights and inferences made from wear marks on their fossilized teeth. *Diplodocus* seems to have been well-adapted, despite its weaker skull, to a form of feeding known as branch stripping, where leaves are plucked from branches as the teeth are dragged along them. The increased flexibility of the neck of *Diplodocus* compared to other sauropods seems to support this too.

In terms of their morphological disparity (differences in mechanically-significant aspects of their anatomy), *Camarasaurus* and *Diplodocus* appear to vary more than almost any other sauropod taxa, representing extremes within a spectrum of biomechanical variation related to feeding style.

Do the following quotes use ellipses (and surrounding punctuation) correctly?

This suggests that *Camarasaurus* was capable of chomping through tougher plant material than *Diplodocus*. . . This actually ties in nicely with previous hypotheses of different diets for each.

*Diplodocus* seems to have been well-adapted, . . . to a form of feeding known as branch stripping, where leaves are plucked from branches as the teeth are dragged along them.

---

**Pauses**

The ellipsis can also indicate . . . a pause. This use is typically informal, and is only be used in casual correspondence (e.g., emails to friends, posts on social media, texting) or in literature. Because this use occurs in literature, you may find yourself quoting a passage that already has an ellipsis in it. For example, look at this passage spoken by Lady Bracknell, in *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailment goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

If you were to quote the passage, it may appear that something has been removed from the quote. So how can we indicate that this is not the case? If you think back to the bracket rules we just discussed, you may remember that [sic] can be used to show that an error was in the original. In a similar practice, we can enclose the ellipsis in brackets to show it appeared in the original work:

Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he
was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice [...] as far as any improvement in his ailment goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

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- They might be giants, but how could they live with each other?. **Authored by:** Jon Tennant. **Provided by:** European Geosciences Union. **Located at:** http://blogs.egu.eu/network/palaeoblog/2015/03/05/they-might-be-giants-but-how-could-they-live-with-each-other. **Project:** Green Tea and Velociraptors. **License:** CC BY: Attribution

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- The Importance of Being Earnest. **Authored by:** Oscar Wilde. **Located at:** https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/844. **Project:** Project Gutenberg. **License:** Public Domain: No Known Copyright
Parentheses

Parentheses are most often used to identify material that acts as an aside (such as this brief comment) or to add incidental information.

Other punctuation marks used alongside parentheses need to take into account their context. If the parentheses enclose a full sentence beginning with a capital letter, then the end punctuation for the sentence falls inside the parentheses. For example:

Typically, suppliers specify air to cloth ratios of 6:1 or higher. (However, ratios of 4:1 should be used for applications involving silica or feldspathic minerals.)

If the parentheses indicate a citation at the end of a sentence, then the sentence’s end punctuation comes after the parentheses are closed:

In a study comparing three different building types, respirable dust concentrations were significantly lower in the open-structure building (Hugh et al., 2005).

Finally, if the parentheses appear in the midst of a sentence (as in this example), then any necessary punctuation (such as the comma that appeared just a few words ago) is delayed until the parentheses are closed.

You can also use parentheses to provide acronyms (or full names for acronyms). For example, “We use the MLA (Modern Language Association) style guide here” or “The Modern Language Association (MLA) style guide is my favorite to use.”

Remember, parentheses always appear in pairs. If you open a parenthesis, you need another to close it!

Note: In technical writing, there are additional rules for using parentheses, which can be more nuanced. While we won’t discuss those rules here, it’s important to bear their existence in mind, especially if you’re considering going into a more technical field.

Practice

Have the parentheses been used correctly in the following sentences? Correct any errors you find.

(Escobar et al., 2014) wrote about this phenomenon in their most recent paper.
NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) just announced three new initiatives. Michael lost the wrestling competition. (He also lost his temper). Helena took the chocolate bars (her favorites) and gave Davi the sour candies.
The speech below is given by Gwendolen in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Act 1, Scene 1). Imagine you want to quote this speech in a paper, leaving out the bolded portions. How would you insert this quote into your paper? Be sure to correctly cite the quotation as well.

Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. **It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations** . . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. **She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment’s solitude.** The only really safe name is Ernest.

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Punctuation Clusters

Occasionally, you’ll come across an instance that seems to require multiple punctuation marks right next to each other. Sometimes you need to keep all the marks, but other times, you should leave some out.

- You should never use more than one ending punctuation mark in a row (period, question mark exclamation point). When quoting a question, you would end with a question mark, not a question mark and a period:
  - Carlos leaned forward and asked, “Did you get the answer to number six?”
- If an abbreviation, like etc., ends a sentence, you should only use one period.
  - I think we’ll have enough food. Mary bought the whole store: chips, soda, candy, cereal, etc.
- However, you can place a comma immediately after a period, as you can see above with etc.
- Periods and parentheses can also appear right next to each other. Sometimes the period comes after the closing parenthesis (as you can see in the first bullet), but sometimes it appears inside the parentheses. (This is an example of a sentence where the period falls within the parentheses.) We talked about this in Parentheses.

Practice

Identify punctuation errors in the following sentences. Type the corrected sentences in the text frame below:

Dana had a lot of skills: reading, writing, note-taking, listening, etc.
My sister looked over and asked, “Why do you have so many grapes in the shopping cart?”
Lucinda was the reigning Spring Queen (i.e. she had won the student vote at the last spring dance).

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Practice Activities:

Punctuation

Ending Punctuation

Are ending punctuation marks used appropriately in these sentences? Explain why or why not. The sentences have been numbered to aid in your comments:

(1) One famous eighteenth-century Thoroughbred racehorse was named Potooooooo, or Pot-8-Os!
(2) He was a chestnut colt bred by Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of Abingdon, in 1773, and he was known for his defeat of some of the greatest racehorses of the time. (3) With a well-to-do background like this, where do you suppose his strange name came from.
(4) The horse once has a stable lad, who facetiously misspelled Potatoes. (5) Apparently, the owner thought the misspelling was funny enough to adopt it as the horse's real name!

Show Answer

Hyphens

Identify the compounds in the following sentences. All compounds have been treated as open compounds. Correct any compounds that this is incorrect for:

Have you ever seen someone with such a stereo typical appearance?
This is all publicly available information.
I bought a new yellow orange skirt last week.
One half of participants failed to complete the study.

Show Answer

Apostrophes

Read the following passage. Identify any errors with apostrophes. Type the corrected words in the text frame below:

Thanks to NASAs’ team of sniffers, led by George Aldrich, astronauts can breathe a little bit easier. Aldrich is the “chief sniffer” at the White Sands Test Facility in New Mexico. His’s job is to smell items before they can be flown in the space shuttle.

Aldrich explained that smells change in space and that once astronauts are up there, their stuck with whatever smells are onboard with them. In space, astronauts aren’t able to open the window for extra ventilation. He also said that its important not to introduce substances that will change the delicate balance of the climate of the International Space Station and the space shuttle.
- Practice Activities: Punctuation. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

- Modification of Potooooooooo (errors added). **Provided by:** Wikipedia. **Located at:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potooooonnn. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

- George Aldrich (errors added). **Provided by:** NASA. **Located at:** http://spaceflight.nasa.gov/shuttle/support/people/galdrich.html. **Project:** Behind the Scenes: Meet the People. **License:** [Public Domain: No Known Copyright](https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/).
Part 4: Usage
Usage is similar to grammar: it helps determine how you should use a language and which words you should use in a specific context. However, usage focuses more on the meaning of words than on their mechanical function within the language. For example, if you're trying to decide if you should use the numeral 17 or spell out the word seventeen, that decision falls under usage. Usage also deals with commonly confused words, spelling, and capitalization.

Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of hard and fast rules when it comes to usage. Additionally, there aren't often reasons behind the correct answers either—especially when it comes to spelling. This section will provide you with resources to help guide your decisions as you write.

- Introduction to Usage. Provided by: Lumen Learning. License: CC BY: Attribution
Commonly Misused Terms and Phrases

When I woke up this morning my girlfriend asked me, “Did you sleep good?” I said, “No, I made a few mistakes.”

—Steven Wright

Everyone struggles at one time or another with finding the right word to use. We’ve all sent out that email only to realize we typed there when we should have said their. How many times have you found yourself puzzling over the distinction between affect and effect or lay and lie? You can also find billboards, road signs, ads, and newspapers with usage errors such as these boldly printed for all to see:

- “Man Alright After Crocodile Attack” (Alright should be All Right)
- “This Line Ten Items or Less” (Less should be Fewer)
- “Auction at This Sight: One Week” (Sight should be Site)
- “Violent Storm Effects Thousands” (Effects should be Affects)

Perhaps there is little need here to preach about the value of understanding how to correctly use words. Quite simply, in formal writing, conventions have been established to aid us in choosing the best term for the circumstances, and you must make it your business to learn the rules regarding the trickiest and most misused terms.

This PDF contains a list of several commonly confused words—as well as how to tell which word you should use.

You can also dig up style handbooks with recommendations on using tricky terminology within your discipline. For instance, Geowriting: A Guide to Writing, Editing, and Printing in Earth Science, by Robert Bates explains terms commonly used in the field; medical students can turn to The Aspen Guide to Effective Health Care Correspondence or Writing, Speaking, and Communication Skills for Health Professionals.

The Chicago Manual of Style answers almost every conceivable style question—it is essentially a bible for book publishers. Never hesitate to look up a term for its proper usage if you are uncertain—there is a lot to be said for being correct.

On the Web

For a searchable and comprehensive list of commonly misused words and phrases and some practice quizzes, visit these sites:

- Common errors in English usage page from Washington State University
- “Notorious Confusables” page from Capital Community College

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviations (the shortened form of a word or phrase) and acronyms (words formed from the initial letters of a phrase) are commonly used in technical writing. In some fields, including chemistry, medicine, computer science, and geographic information systems, acronyms are used so frequently that the reader can feel lost in an alphabet soup. However, the proper use of these devices enhances the reading process, fostering fluid readability and efficient comprehension.

Some style manuals devote entire chapters to the subject of abbreviations and acronyms, and your college library no doubt contains volumes that you can consult when needed. Here, we provide just a few principles you can apply in using abbreviations and acronyms.

Abbreviations

- Typically, we abbreviate social titles (like Ms. and Mr.) and professional titles (like Dr., Rev.).
- Titles of degrees should be abbreviated when following someone’s name. However, in resumes and cover letters, you should avoid abbreviations
  - Gloria Morales-Myers, PhD
- Most abbreviations should be followed with a period (Mar. for March), except those representing units of measure (mm for millimeter).
- Typically, do not abbreviate geographic names and countries in text (i.e., write Saint Cloud rather than St. Cloud). However, these names are usually abbreviated when presented in “tight text” where space can be at a premium, as in tables and figures.
- Use the ampersand symbol (&) in company names if the companies themselves do so in their literature, but avoid using the symbol as a narrative substitute for the word and in your text.
- In text, spell out addresses (Third Avenue; the Chrysler Building) but abbreviate city addresses that are part of street names (Central Street SW).
- Try to avoid opening a sentence with an abbreviation; instead, write the word out.

Acronyms

- With few exceptions, present acronyms in full capital letters (FORTRAN; NIOSH). Some acronyms, such as scuba and radar, are so commonly used that they are not capitalized.
- Unless they appear at the end of a sentence, do not follow acronyms with a period.
  - NOAA is a really great organization.
  - I want to work for the USGS.
- Acronyms can be pluralized with the addition of a lowercase s
  - Please choose between these three URLs.
- Acronyms can be made possessive with an apostrophe followed by a lowercase s:
  - The DOD’s mandate will be published today.
- As subjects, acronyms should be treated as singulars, even when they stand for plurals; therefore, they require a singular verb
  - NASA is committed to . . .
- Always write out the first in-text reference to an acronym, followed by the acronym itself written in capital
letters and enclosed by parentheses. Subsequent references to the acronym can be made just by the capital letters alone. For example:

- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is a rapidly expanding field. GIS technology . . .
- The acronym US can be used as an adjective (US citizen), but United States should be used when you are using it as a noun.

Spelling, Capitalization, and Punctuation

Different abbreviations and acronyms are treated differently. You can review this PDF to check the proper treatment of some commonly used abbreviations and acronyms. For a much more detailed listing of abbreviations and acronyms, you can check in the back pages of many dictionaries, or consult the free online version of the United States Government Printing Office Style Manual.

Writing with Numbers

The General Rule

The rules for expressing numbers are relatively simple and straightforward. When you’re writing in a nontechnical subject (like English or art), numbers ninety-nine and below should be written out with letters, not numerals:

- There were sixty dogs in the competition.
- I don’t think it’s possible to get 264 bracelets made in one week.

In technical fields (like math or science), you spell out numbers ten and below. Numbers above this should be written as numerals:

- This study is based on three different ideas
- In this treatment, the steel was heated 18 different times.

Other Rules

If a sentence begins with a number, the number should be written out:

- Fourteen of the participants could not tell the difference between samples A and B.
- Eighteen hundred and eighty-eight was a very difficult year.
  - You may want to revise sentences like this so the number does not come first: “The year 1888 was quite difficult.”

You should treat similar numbers in grammatically connected groups alike:

- Two dramatic changes followed: four samples exploded and thirteen lab technicians resigned.
- Sixteen people got 15 points on the test, thirty people got 10 points, and three people got 5 points.
  - In this sentence, there are two different “categories” of numbers: those that modify the noun people and those that modify the noun points. You can see that one category is spelled out (people) and the other is in numerals (points). This division helps the reader immediately spot which category the numbers belong to.

When you write a percentage the number should always be written numerically (even if its ten or under). If you’re
writing in a technical field, you should use the percentage symbol (%):

- This procedure has a 7% failure rate.

If you’re writing in a nontechnical field, you should spell out the word percent:

- The judges have to give prizes to at least 25 percent of competitors.

All important measured quantities—particularly those involving decimal points, dimensions, degrees, distances, weights, measures, and sums of money—should be expressed in numeral form:

- The metal should then be submerged for precisely 1.3 seconds.
- On average, the procedure costs $25,000.
- The depth to the water at the time of testing was 16.16 feet.

In technical settings, degree measures of temperature are normally expressed with the ° symbol rather than by the written word, with a space after the number but not between the symbol and the temperature scale:

- The sample was heated to 80 °C.

Unlike the abbreviations for Fahrenheit and Celsius, the abbreviation for Kelvin (which refers to an absolute scale of temperature) is not preceded by the degree symbol (i.e., 12 K is correct).

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**On the Web**

Check out these handy resources related to expressing numbers and numerals in text:

- Technical writing tips for using numbers from a company president offering online technical writing courses
- “Using Numbers, Writing Lists” advice from Capital Community College website

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Capitalization

Capitalization Rules

Writers often refer to geographic locations, company names, temperature scales, and processes or apparatuses named after people: you must learn how to capitalize these items. There are ten fundamental rules for capitalization:

1. Capitalize the names of major portions of your paper and all references to figures and tables. Note: Some journals and publications do not follow this rule, but most do.
   - Table 1
   - Appendix A
   - see Figure 4
2. Capitalize the names of established regions, localities, and political divisions.
   - the French Republic
   - Lancaster County
   - the Arctic Circle
3. Capitalize the names of highways, routes, bridges, buildings, monuments, parks, ships, automobiles, hotels, forts, dams, railroads, and major coal and mineral deposits.
   - the White House
   - Highway 13
   - Alton Railroad
4. Capitalize the proper names of persons, places and their derivatives, and geographic names (continents, countries, states, cities, oceans, rivers, mountains, lakes, harbors, and valleys).
   - British
   - Rocky Mountains
   - Chicago
   - Howard Pickering
5. Capitalize the names of historic events and documents, government units, political parties, business and fraternal organizations, clubs and societies, companies, and institutions.
   - the Civil War
   - Congress
   - Ministry of Energy
6. Capitalize titles of rank when they are joined to a person’s name, and the names of stars and planets. Note: The names earth, sun, and moon are not normally capitalized, although they may be capitalized when used in connection with other bodies of the solar system.
   - Venus
   - Professor Walker
   - Milky Way
7. Capitalize words named after geographic locations, the names of major historical or geological time frames, and most words derived from proper names.
   - Middle Jurassic Period
   - the Industrial Revolution
   - Petri dish
   - Coriolis force
   - Planck’s constant

Note: The only way to be sure if a word derived from a person’s name should be capitalized is to look it up in the dictionary. For example, “Bunsen burner” (after Robert Bunsen) is capitalized, while “diesel engine” (after Rudolph Diesel) is not. Also, referring to specific geologic time frames, the Chicago Manual of Style says not to capitalize the words “era,” “period,” and “epoch,” but the American Association of Petroleum Geologists says that these words should be capitalized. I choose to capitalize them, as those who write in
the geological sciences should by convention.

Capitalize references to temperature scales, whether written out or abbreviated.

10 ºF
Celsius degrees

Capitalize references to major sections of a country or the world.

the Near East
the South

Capitalize the names of specific courses, the names of languages, and the names of semesters.

○ Anatomy 200
○ Spring semester 2016
○ Russian

Common Capitalization Errors

Just as important as knowing when to capitalize is knowing when not to. Below, I set forth a few instances where capital letters are commonly used when they should not be. Please review this advice carefully, in that we all have made such capitalization errors. When in doubt, simply consult a print dictionary.

Do not capitalize the names of the seasons, unless the seasons are personified, as in poetry (“Spring’s breath”):

○ spring
○ winter

Do not capitalize the words north, south, east, and west when they refer to directions, in that their meaning becomes generalized rather than site-specific.

○ We traveled west.
○ The sun rises in the east.

In general, do not capitalize commonly used words that have come to have specialized meaning, even though their origins are in words that are capitalized.

○ india ink
○ pasteurization
○ biblical

Do not capitalize the names of elements. Note: This is a common capitalization error, and can often be found in published work. Confusion no doubt arises because the symbols for elements are capitalized.

○ oxygen
○ californium
○ nitrogen

Do not capitalize words that are used so frequently and informally that they have come to have highly generalized meaning.

○ north pole
○ midwesterner
○ big bang theory
○ arctic climate

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Spelling

Far too many of us use spell checkers as proofreaders, and we ultimately use them to justify our own laziness. I once received a complaint from an outraged professor that a student had continually misspelled *miscellaneous* as *mescaline* (a hallucinogenic drug). The student’s spell checker did not pick up the error, but the professor certainly did.

So proceed with caution when using spell checkers. They are not gods, and they do not substitute for meticulous proofreading and clear thinking. There is an instructive moment in a M*A*S*H episode, when Father Mulcahy complains to Colonel Potter about a typo in a new set of Bibles—one of the commandments reads “thou shalt commit adultery.” Father sheepishly worries aloud that “These lads are taught to follow orders.” For want of a single word the intended meaning is lost. Always proofread a hard copy, with your own two eyes.

Six Rules for Spelling

I have a crusty old copy of a book called *Instant Spelling Dictionary*, now in its third edition but first published in 1964, that I still use frequently. I adapted the six basic spelling rules that appear below from that dictionary. Even without memorizing the rules, you can improve your spelling simply by reviewing them and scanning the examples and exceptions until the fundamental concepts begin to sink in. When in doubt, always look up the word. And do not forget that desktop dictionaries work just as well as electronic ones.

**Rule 1**

In words ending with a silent *e*, you usually drop the *e* when you add a suffix that begins with a vowel:

- *survive* + *al* = *survival*
- *divide* + *ing* = *dividing*
- *fortune* + *ate* = *fortunate*

Here are a few common exceptions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>manageable</th>
<th>singeing</th>
<th>mileage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advantageous</td>
<td>dyeing</td>
<td>acreage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peaceable</td>
<td>canoeing</td>
<td>lineage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rule 2**

In words ending with a silent *e*, you usually retain the *e* before a suffix than begins with a consonant.

- *arrange* + *ment* = *arrangement*
- *forgive* + *ness* = *forgiveness*
- *safe* + *ty* = *safety*

Here are a few common exceptions:

- *ninth* (from *nine*)
- *argument* (from *argue*)
- *wisdom* (from *wise*)
• wholly (from whole)

Rule 3

In words of two or more syllables that are accented on the final syllable and end in a single consonant preceded by a single vowel, you double the final consonant before a suffix beginning with a vowel.

- refer + ing = referring
- regret + able = regrettable

However, if the accent is not on the last syllable, the final consonant is not doubled.

- benefit + ed = benefited
- audit + ed = audited

Rule 4

In words of one syllable ending in a single consonant that is preceded by a single vowel, you double the final consonant before a suffix that begins with a vowel. (It sounds more complex than it is; just look at the examples.)

- big + est = biggest
- hot + er = hotter
- bag + age = baggage

Rule 5

In words ending in y preceded by a consonant, you usually change the y to i before any suffix that does not begin with an i.

- beauty + ful = beautiful
- accompany + ment = accompaniment
- accompany + ing = accompanying (suffix begins with i)

If the final y is preceded by a vowel, however, the rule does not apply.

- journeys
- obeying
- essays
- buys
- repaying
- attorneys

Rule 6

Use i before e except when the two letters follow c and have an e sound, or when they have an a sound as in neighbor and weigh.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i before e (e sound)</th>
<th>e before i (a sound)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>shield</td>
<td>vein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>believe</td>
<td>weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grieve</td>
<td>veil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mischievous</td>
<td>neighbor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are a few common exceptions:

- weird
- either
Everyday Words that are Commonly Misspelled

If you find yourself over-relying on spell checkers or misspelling the same word for the seventeenth time this year, it would be to your advantage to improve your spelling. One shortcut to doing this is to consult this list of words that are frequently used and misspelled.

Many smart writers even put a mark next to a word whenever they have to look it up, thereby helping themselves identify those fiendish words that give them the most trouble. To improve your spelling, you must commit the words you frequently misspell to memory, and physically looking them up until you do so is an effective path to spelling perfection.

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ESL Writing Online Workshop

Excelsior OWL, an excellent writing guide, has a section on English as a Second Language which covers some of the major challenges faced by ESL learners. Once you are in the site, use the Next buttons to navigate through the section.

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Part 5: Sentence Structure
Introduction to Sentence Structure

Language is made up of words, which work together to form sentences, which work together to form paragraphs. In this section, we’ll be focusing on sentences: how they’re made and how they behave. Sentences help us to organize our ideas—to identify which items belong together and which should be separated.

So just what is a sentence? Sentences are simply collections of words. Each sentence has a subject, an action, and punctuation. These basic building blocks work together to create endless amounts and varieties of sentences.

It’s important to have variety in your sentence length and structure. This quote from Gary Provost illustrates why:

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety. Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader’s ear. Don’t just write words. Write music.\(^{[1]}\)

You can also listen to the difference in the video below:

https://youtu.be/k7ccnFw84cQ

In order to create this variety, you need to know how sentences work and how to create them. In this section we will identify the parts of sentences and learn how they fit together to create music in writing.


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- This Sentence Has Five Words. Authored by: Nick Schneider. Located at: https://youtu.be/k7ccnFw84cQ. License: All Rights Reserved. License Terms: Standard YouTube License
Basic Parts of a Sentence

I like the construction of sentences and the juxtaposition of words—not just how they sound or what they mean, but even what they look like.

—author Don DeLillo

Subject and Predicate

Every sentence has a subject and a predicate. The subject of a sentence is the noun, pronoun, or phrase or clause the sentence is about:

- Einstein’s general theory of relativity has been subjected to many tests of validity over the years.
- Although a majority of caffeine drinkers think of it as a stimulant, heavy users of caffeine say the substance relaxes them.
  - Notice that the introductory phrase, “Although a majority of caffeine drinkers think of it as a stimulant,” is not a part of the subject or the predicate.
- In a secure landfill, the soil on top and the cover block storm water intrusion into the landfill. (compound subject)
  - There are two subjects in this sentence: soil and cover.
- Surrounding the secure landfill on all sides are impermeable barrier walls. (inverted sentence pattern)
  - In an inverted sentence, the predicate comes before the subject. You won’t run into this sentence structure very often as it is pretty rare.

The predicate is the rest of the sentence after the subject:

- The pressure in a pressured water reactor varies from system to system.
- In contrast, a boiling water reactor operates at constant pressure.
- The pressure is maintained at about 2250 pounds per square inch then lowered to form steam at about 600 pounds per square inch. (compound predicate)
  - There are two predicates in this sentence: “is maintained at about 2250 pounds per square inch” and “lowered to form steam at about 600 pounds per square inch”

Practice

Identify the subject and predicate of each sentence:

Daniel and I are going to go to Hawaii for three weeks.
Raquel will watch the dogs while we’re on vacation.
She will feed the dogs and will make sure they get enough exercise.

A predicate can include the verb, a direct object, and an indirect object.
Direct Object

A direct object—a noun, pronoun, phrase, or clause acting as a noun—takes the action of the main verb. A direct object can be identified by putting what?, which?, or whom? in its place.

- The housing assembly of a mechanical pencil contains the mechanical workings of the pencil.
  - The action (contains) is directly happening to the object (workings).
- Lavoisier used curved glass discs fastened together at their rims, with wine filling the space between, to focus the sun’s rays to attain temperatures of 3000° F.
  - The action (used) is directly happening to the object (discs).
- A 20 percent fluctuation in average global temperature could reduce biological activity, shift weather patterns, and ruin agriculture. (compound direct object)
  - The actions are directly happening to multiple objects: reduce activity, shift patterns, and ruin agriculture.
- On Mariners 6 and 7, the two-axis scan platforms provided much more capability and flexibility for the scientific payload than those of Mariner 4. (compound direct object)
  - The action (provided) is directly happening to multiple objects (capability and flexibility).

Indirect Object

An indirect object—a noun, pronoun, phrase, or clause acting as a noun—receives the action expressed in the sentence. It can be identified by inserting to or for.

- The company is designing senior citizens a new walkway to the park area.
  - The company is not designing new models of senior citizens; they are designing a new walkway for senior citizens. Thus, senior citizens is the indirect object of this sentence.
  - Walkway is the direct object of this sentence, since it is the thing being designed.
- Please send the personnel office a resume so we can further review your candidacy.
  - You are not being asked to send the office somewhere; you’re being asked to send a resume to the office. Thus, the personnel office is the indirect object of this sentence.
  - Resume is the direct object of this sentence, since it is the thing you should send.

Note: Objects can belong to any verb in a sentence, even if the verbs aren’t in the main clause. For example, let’s look at the sentence “When you give your teacher your assignment, be sure to include your name and your class number.”

- Your teacher is the indirect object of the verb give.
- Your assignment is the direct object of the verb give.
- Your name and your class number are the direct objects of the verb include.

Practice

Identify the objects in the following sentences. Are they direct or indirect objects?

The cooler temperatures brought about by nuclear war might end all life on earth.
On Mariners 6 and 7, the two-axis scan platforms provided much more capability and flexibility for the scientific payload than those of Mariner 4.
In your application letter, tell the potential employer that a resume accompanies the letter.
Phrases and Clauses

Phrases and clauses are groups of words that act as a unit and perform a single function within a sentence. A phrase may have a partial subject or verb but not both; a dependent clause has both a subject and a verb (but is not a complete sentence). Here are a few examples (not all phrases are highlighted because some are embedded in others):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrases</th>
<th>Clauses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity has to do with those physical phenomena involving electrical charges and their effects when in motion and when at rest. (Involving electrical charges and their effects is also a phrase.)</td>
<td>Electricity manifests itself as a force of attraction, independent of gravitational and short-range nuclear attraction, when two oppositely charged bodies are brought close to one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 1833, Faraday’s experimentation with electrolysis indicated a natural unit of electrical charge, thus pointing to a discrete rather than continuous charge. (To a discrete rather than continuous charge is also a phrase.)</td>
<td>Since the frequency is the speed of sound divided by the wavelength, a shorter wavelength means a higher wavelength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The symbol that denotes a connection to the grounding conductor is three parallel horizontal lines, each of the lower ones being shorter than the one above it.</td>
<td>Nuclear units planned or in construction have a total capacity of 186,998 KW, which, if current plans hold, will bring nuclear capacity to about 22% of all electrical capacity by 1995. (If current plans hold is a clause within a clause)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two types of clauses: dependent and independent. A dependent clause is dependent on something else: it cannot stand on its own. An independent clause, on the other hand, is free to stand by itself.

So how can you tell if a clause is dependent or independent? Let’s take a look at the clauses from the table above:

- when two oppositely charged bodies are brought close to one another
- Since the frequency is the speed of sound divided by the wavelength

All of these clauses are dependent clauses. As we learned in Conjunctions, any clause with a subordinating conjunction is a dependent clause. For example “I was a little girl in 1995” is an independent clause, but “Because I was a little girl in 1995” is a dependent clause. Subordinating conjunctions include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>after</th>
<th>although</th>
<th>as</th>
<th>as far as</th>
<th>as if</th>
<th>as long as</th>
<th>as soon as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as though</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>even if</td>
<td>even though</td>
<td>every time</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in order that</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td>than</td>
<td>though</td>
<td>unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>until</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>whenever</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>whereas</td>
<td>wherever</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s look at the other clause from our examples:

- which, if current plans hold, will bring nuclear capacity to about 22% of all electrical capacity by 1995

This clause starts with the relative pronoun which (see Relative Pronouns for more information on these). Any clause prefaced with a relative pronoun becomes a dependent clause.

Practice

In each of the following sentences, identify their phrases, dependent clauses, and independent clauses:
Because Dante won the steamboat competition, he let Maxwell win the rowing race.
That truck with the missing tires looks really old.
Why can’t I read *The Martian*?
Swimming across the English Channel in nearly twenty-three hours, Lais set a new personal record.
Whenever I see Alice and Armando’s Instagram account, *The Two of Us*, I’m overwhelmed with feelings.

Show Answer

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Common Sentence Structures

Basic Sentence Patterns

**Subject + verb**

The simplest of sentence patterns is composed of a *subject* and *verb* without a direct object or subject complement. It uses an **intransitive verb**, that is, a verb requiring no direct object:

- Control **rods remain** inside the fuel assembly of the reactor.
- The **development** of wind power practically **ceased** until the early 1970s.
- The **cross-member** exposed to abnormal stress eventually **broke**.
- Only two **types** of charge **exist** in nature.

**Subject + verb + direct object**

Another common sentence pattern uses the **direct object**:

- **Silicon conducts electricity** in an unusual way.
- The anti-reflective **coating** on the silicon cell **reduces reflection** from 32 to 22 percent.

**Subject + verb + indirect object + direct object**

The sentence pattern with the **indirect object** and **direct object** is similar to the preceding pattern:

- **I am writing her** about a number of **problems** that I have had with my computer.
- **Austin, Texas, has built** its **citizens** a **system** of bike lanes.

### Practice

Identify the basic sentence pattern of the sentences below:

- All amplitude-modulation (AM) receivers work in the same way.
- The supervisor mailed the applicant a description of the job.
- We have mailed the balance of the payment in this letter.

**Sentence Types**
Simple Sentences

A simple sentence is one that contains a **subject** and a **verb** and no other independent or dependent clause.

- **One** of the tubes is attached to the manometer part of the instrument indicating the pressure of the air within the cuff.
- There **are** basically two **types** of stethoscopes.
  - In this sentence, the subject and verb are inverted; that is, the verb comes before the subject. However, it is still classified as a simple sentence.
- To measure blood pressure, a **sphygmomanometer** and a **stethoscope** are needed.
  - This sentence has a compound subject—that is, there are two subjects—but it is still classified as a simple sentence.

Command sentences are a subtype of simple sentences. These sentences are unique because they don’t actually have a subject:

- **Clean** the dishes.
- **Make** sure to take good notes today.
- **After completing the reading**, **answer** the following questions.

In each of these sentences, there is an implied subject: *you*. These sentences are instructing the reader to complete a task. Command sentences are the only sentences in English that are complete without a subject.

Compound Predicates

A **predicate** is everything in the verb part of the sentence after the subject (unless the sentence uses inverted word order). A **compound predicate** is two or more predicates joined by a coordinating conjunction. Traditionally, the conjunction in a sentence consisting of just two compound predicates is not punctuated.

- Another library media specialist has been using Accelerated Reader for ten years and has seen great results.
- This cell phone app lets users share pictures instantly with followers and categorize photos with hashtags.

Compound Sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two or more **independent clauses** joined by a **coordinating conjunction** (and, or, nor, but, yet, for) and a comma, an adverbial conjunction and a semicolon, or just a semicolon.

- In sphygmomanometers, too narrow a cuff can result in erroneously high readings, and too wide a cuff can result in erroneously low readings.
- Some cuff hook together; others wrap or snap into place.

Practice

Identify the type of each sentence below:

The sphygmomanometer is usually covered with cloth and has two rubber tubes attached to it. There are several types of sentences; using different types can keep your writing lively. Words, sentences, and paragraphs are all combined to create a book. Before giving up, take a deep breath and look at things from a different perspective.

Show Answer

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Sentence Punctuation Patterns

While there are infinite possibilities for sentence construction, let’s take a look at some of the most common punctuation patterns in sentences. In order to do this, let’s first look at this passage about Queen Elizabeth I. You don’t need to pay attention to the words: just look at the punctuation.

Elizabeth I was Queen of England and Ireland from 17 November 1558 until her death on March 24, 1603. Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, his second wife, who was executed two and a half years after Elizabeth’s birth. Sometimes called The Virgin Queen, the childless Elizabeth was the fifth and last monarch of the Tudor dynasty.

Elizabeth’s reign is known as the Elizabethan era. The period is famous for the flourishing of English drama, led by playwrights (such as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe) and for the seafaring prowess of English adventurers (such as Francis Drake). Towards the end of her reign, a series of economic and military problems weakened her popularity. Elizabeth is acknowledged as a charismatic performer and a dogged survivor in an era when government was ramshackle and limited, and when monarchs in neighboring countries faced internal problems that jeopardized their thrones.

After the short reigns of Elizabeth’s half-siblings, her 44 years on the throne provided welcome stability for the kingdom and helped forge a sense of national identity.

Now let’s look at the passage with the words removed:

As you can see, this passage has a fairly simple punctuation structure. It simply uses periods, commas, and parentheses. These three marks are the most common punctuation you will see. Some other common sentence patterns include the following:

• ______; ______.
  ○ Elizabeth was baptized on 10 September; Archbishop Thomas Cranmer stood as one of her godparents.
• ______; however, ______.
The English took the defeat of the armada as a symbol of God’s favor; however, this victory was not a turning point in the war.

- The period is famous for the flourishing of English drama, led by several well-known playwrights: William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Francis Beaumont.

While your sentence’s punctuation will always depend on the content of your writing, there are a few common punctuation patterns you should be aware of.

- Simple sentences have these punctuation patterns:
  - ____________, ____________, and ____________.  
- Compound predicate sentences have this punctuation pattern:
  - ____________, and ____________.  
- Compound Sentences have these punctuation patterns:
  - ____________, and ____________.  
  - ____________; ____________.

As you can see from these common patterns, periods, commas, and semicolons are the punctuation marks you will use the most in your writing. As you write, it’s best to use a variety of these patterns. If you use the same pattern repeatedly, your writing can easily become boring and drab.

**Practice**

The sentences in this passage follow a single punctuation pattern: ______________________________. Revise the passage to create variety.

Johann Sebastian Bach wrote six Cello Suites. The Cello Suites are suites for unaccompanied cello. They are some of the most frequently performed and recognizable solo compositions ever written for cello. Each movement is based around a baroque dance type. This basis is standard for a Baroque musical suite. The cello suites are structured in six movements each. Each includes a prelude; an allemande; a courante; a sarabande; two minuets, two bourrées, or two gavottes; and a final gigue. The Bach cello suites are considered to be among the most profound of all classical music works.

Show Answer
Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence is a sentence that goes on and on and needs to be broken up. Run-on sentences occur when two or more independent clauses are improperly joined. (We talked about clauses in Parts of a Sentence.) One type of run-on that you’ve probably heard of is the comma splice, in which two independent clauses are joined by a comma without a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, etc.).

Let’s look at a few examples of run-on sentences:

- Often, choosing a topic for a paper is the hardest part it’s a lot easier after that.
- Sometimes, books do not have the most complete information, it is a good idea then to look for articles in specialized periodicals.
- She loves skiing but he doesn’t.

All three of these have two independent clauses. Each clause should be separated from another with a period, a semicolon, or a comma and a coordinating conjunction:

- Often, choosing a topic for a paper is the hardest part. It’s a lot easier after that.
- Sometimes, books do not have the most complete information; it is a good idea then to look for articles in specialized periodicals.
- She loves skiing, but he doesn’t.

Note: Caution should be exercised when defining a run-on sentence as a sentence that just goes on and on. A run-on sentence is a sentence that goes on and on and isn’t correctly punctuated. Not every long sentence is a run-on sentence. For example, look at this quote from The Great Gatsby:

Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

If you look at the punctuation, you’ll see that this quote is a single sentence. F. Scott Fitzgerald used commas and semicolons is such a way that, despite its great length, it’s grammatically sound, as well. Length is no guarantee of a run-on sentence.

Common Causes of Run-Ons

We often write run-on sentences because we sense that the sentences involved are closely related and dividing them with a period just doesn’t seem right. We may also write them because the parts seem to short to need any division, like in “She loves skiing but he doesn’t.” However, “She loves skiing” and “he doesn’t” are both independent clauses, so they need to be divided by a comma and a coordinating conjunction—not just a coordinating conjunction by itself.

Another common cause of run-on sentences is mistaking adverbial conjunctions for coordinating conjunctions. For example if we were to write, “She loved skiing, however he didn’t,” we would have produced a comma splice. The correct sentence would be “She loved skiing; however, he didn’t.”

Fixing Run-On Sentences

Before you can fix a run-on sentence, you’ll need to identify the problem. When you write, carefully look at each part of every sentence. Are the parts independent clauses, or are they dependent clauses or phrases? Remember,
only independent clauses can stand on their own. This also means they have to stand on their own; they can’t run together without correct punctuation.

Let’s take a look at a few run-on sentences and their revisions:

Most of the hours I’ve earned toward my associate’s degree do not transfer, however, I do have at least some hours the University will accept.

The opposite is true of stronger types of stainless steel they tend to be more susceptible to rust.

Some people were highly educated professionals, others were from small villages in underdeveloped countries.

Let’s start with the first sentence. This is a comma-splice sentence. The adverbial conjunction however is being treated like a coordinating conjunction. There are two easy fixes to this problem. The first is to turn the comma before however into a period. If this feels like too hard of a stop between ideas, you can change the comma into a semicolon instead.

• Most of the hours I’ve earned toward my associate’s degree do not transfer. However, I do have at least some hours the University will accept.
• Most of the hours I’ve earned toward my associate’s degree do not transfer; however, I do have at least some hours the University will accept.

The second sentence is a run-on as well. “The opposite is true of stronger types of stainless steel” and “they tend to be more susceptible to rust.” are both independent clauses. The two clauses are very closely related, and the second clarifies the information provided in the first. The best solution is to insert a colon between the two clauses:

The opposite is true of stronger types of stainless steel: they tend to be more susceptible to rust.

What about the last example? Once again we have two independent clauses. The two clauses provide contrasting information. Adding a conjunction could help the reader move from one kind of information to another. However, you may want that sharp contrast. Here are two revision options:

• Some people were highly educated professionals, while others were from small villages in underdeveloped countries.
• Some people were highly educated professionals. Others were from small villages in underdeveloped countries.

Practice

Identify the run-on sentences in the following paragraph:

I had the craziest dream the other night. My cousin Jacob and I were on the run from the law. Apparently we were wizards and the law was cracking down on magic. So, we obviously had to go into hiding but I lost track of Jacob and then I got picked up by a cop. But I was able to convince him that the government was corrupt and that he should take me to my escape boat.

Show Answer
Sentence Fragments

Fragments are simply grammatically incomplete sentences—they are phrases and dependent clauses. We talked about phrases and clauses a bit in Basic Parts of a Sentence. These are grammatical structures that cannot stand on their own: they need to be connected to an independent clause to work in writing. So how can we tell the difference between a sentence and a sentence fragment? And how can we fix fragments when they already exist?

Common Causes of Fragments

Part of the reason we write in fragments is because we often speak that way. However, there is a difference between writing and speech, and it is important to write in full sentences. Additionally, fragments often come about in writing because a fragment may already seem too long.

Non-finite verbs (gerunds, participles, and infinitives) can often trip people up as well. Since non-finite verbs don’t act like verbs, we don’t count them as verbs when we’re deciding if we have a phrase or a clause. Let’s look at a few examples of these:

- Running away from my mother.
- To ensure your safety and security.
- Beaten down since day one.

Even though all of the above have non-finite verbs, they’re phrases, not clauses. In order for these to be clauses, they would need an additional verb that acts as a verb in the sentence.

Words like since, when, and because turn an independent clause into a dependent clause. For example “I was a little girl in 1995” is an independent clause, but “Because I was a little girl in 1995” is a dependent clause. This class of word includes the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>after</th>
<th>although</th>
<th>as</th>
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<th>as if</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as though</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>even if</td>
<td>even though</td>
<td>every time</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in order that</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td>than</td>
<td>though</td>
<td>unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>until</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>whenever</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>whereas</td>
<td>wherever</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relative pronouns, like that and which, do the same type of thing as those listed above.

Coordinating conjunctions (our FANBOYS) can also cause problems. If you start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction, make sure that it is followed a complete clause, not just a phrase!

As you’re identifying fragments, keep in mind that command sentences are not fragments, despite not having a subject. Commands are the only grammatically correct sentences that lack a subject:

- Drop and give me fifty!
- Count how many times the word fragrant is used during commercial breaks.
Fixing Sentence Fragments

Let’s take a look at a couple of examples:

Ivana appeared at the committee meeting last week. And made a convincing presentation of her ideas about the new product.
The committee considered her ideas for a new marketing strategy quite powerful. The best ideas that they had heard in years.
She spent a full month evaluating his computer-based instructional materials. Which she eventually sent to her supervisor with the strongest of recommendations.

Let’s look at the phrase “And made a convincing presentation of her ideas about the new product” in example one. It’s just that: a phrase. There is no subject in this phrase, so the easiest fix is to simply delete the period and combine the two statements:

Ivana appeared at the committee meeting last week and made a convincing presentation of her ideas about the new product.

Let’s look at example two. The phrase “the best ideas they had heard in years” is simply a phrase—there is no verb contained in the phrase. By adding “they were” to the beginning of this phrase, we have turned the fragment into an independent clause, which can now stand on its own:

The committee considered her ideas for a new marketing strategy quite powerful; they were the best ideas that they had heard in years.

What about example three? Let’s look at the clause “Which she eventually sent to her supervisor with the strongest of recommendations.” This is a dependent clause; the word which signals this fact. If we change “which she eventually” to “eventually, she,” we also turn the dependent clause into an independent clause.

She spent a full month evaluating his computer-based instructional materials. Eventually, she sent the evaluation to her supervisor with the strongest of recommendations.

Practice

Identify the fragments in the sentences below. Why are they fragments? What are some possible solutions?

The corporation wants to begin a new marketing push in educational software. Although, the more conservative executives of the firm are skeptical.
Include several different sections in your proposal. For example, a discussion of your personnel and their qualifications, your expectations concerning the schedule of the project, and a cost breakdown.
The research team has completely reorganized the workload. Making sure that members work in areas of their own expertise and that no member is assigned proportionately too much work.

Show Answer

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Parallel Structure

What exactly is parallel structure? It’s simply the practice of using the same structures or forms multiple times: making sure the parts are parallel to each other. Parallel structure can be applied to a single sentence, a paragraph, or even multiple paragraphs. Compare the two following sentences:

- Yara loves running, to swim, and biking.
- Yara loves running, swimming, and biking.

Was the second sentence easier to comprehend than the first? The second sentence uses parallelism—all three verbs are gerunds, whereas in the first sentence two are gerunds and one is an infinitive. While the first sentence is technically correct, it’s easy to trip up over the mismatching items. The application of parallelism improves writing style and readability, and it makes sentences easier to process.

Compare the following examples:

- Lacking parallelism: “She likes cooking, jogging, and to read.”
  - Parallel: “She likes cooking, jogging, and reading.”
  - Parallel: “She likes to cook, jog, and read.”
- Lacking parallelism: “He likes to swim and running.”
  - Parallel: “He likes to swim and to run.”
  - Parallel: “He likes swimming and running.”

Once again, the examples above combine gerunds and infinitives. To make them parallel, the sentences should be rewritten with just gerunds or just infinitives. Note that the first nonparallel example, while inelegantly worded, is grammatically correct: “cooking,” “jogging,” and “to read” are all grammatically valid conclusions to “She likes.”

- Lacking parallelism: “The dog ran across the yard, jumped over the fence, and down the alley sprinted.”
  - Parallel: “The dog ran across the yard and jumped over the fence, and down the alley he sprinted.”
  - Parallel: “The dog ran across the yard, jumped over the fence, and sprinted down the alley.”

The nonparallel example above is not grammatically correct: “down the alley sprinted” is not a grammatically valid conclusion to “The dog.” The second example, which does not attempt to employ parallelism in its conclusion, is grammatically valid; “down the alley he sprinted” is an entirely separate clause.

Parallelism can also apply to names. If you’re writing a research paper that includes references to several different authors, you should be consistent in your references. For example, if you talk about Jane Goodall and Henry Harlow, you should say “Goodall and Harlow,” not “Jane and Harlow” or “Goodall and Henry.” This is something that would carry on through your entire paper: you should use the same mode of address for every person you mention.

You can also apply parallelism across a passage:

Manuel painted eight paintings in the last week. Jennifer sculpted five statues in the last month. Zama wrote fifteen songs in the last two months.

Each of the sentences in the preceding paragraph has the same structure: Name + -ed verb + number of things + in the past time period. When using parallelism across multiple sentences, be sure that you’re using it well. If you aren’t careful, you can stray into being repetitive. Unfortunately, really the only way to test this is by re-reading the passage and seeing if it “feels right.” While this test doesn’t have any rules to it, it can often help.
Practice

Do the following sentences correctly employ parallelism? If not, revise the sentences in the text frame below.

- Kya is really good at writing poems and making pottery. Atswei is a good singer and a good dancer.
- Don’t forget to let the dog out or to feed the cats.
- In this paper, we will reference the works of Walton and Sir John Cockcroft.
- Whenever he drives, Reza pays attention to what he’s doing and is watching the drivers around him.

Show Answer

Rhetoric and Parallelism

Parallelism can also involve repeated words or repeated phrases. These uses are part of “rhetoric” (a field that focuses on persuading readers). Here are a few examples of repetition:

- “The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries.” —Winston Churchill
- “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” —John F. Kennedy
- “And that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” —Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

When used this way, parallelism makes your writing or speaking much stronger. These repeated phrases seem to bind the work together and make it more powerful—and more inspiring. This use of parallelism can be especially useful in writing conclusions of academic papers or in persuasive writing.

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Practice Activities: Parallel Structure

Parallelism

Read the following passage. Correct any errors in parallelism that you find. Remember, non-parallel things are typically grammatically correct, but making things parallel will improve your writing style. Type your correct answer in the text frame below:

“The Bone Wars” refers to a period of intense fossil speculation and discovery in American history (1872–1892). The wars were marked by a heated rivalry between Edward Drinker Cope and Othniel Charles Marsh. At one time, Edward and Marsh were amicable: they even named species after each other. Over time, however, their relationship soured, likely due in part to their strong personalities. Cope was known to be pugnacious and possessed a quick temper. Marsh was slower, more methodical, and introverted. Eventually, each of the two paleontologists would resort to underhanded methods to try to out-compete the other in the field, resorting to bribery, theft, and destroying bones.

By the end of the Bone Wars, both Cope and Marsh were financially and socially ruined by their attempts to disgrace each other, but their contributions to science and the field of paleontology were massive. Several of Cope’s and Marsh’s discoveries are the most well-known of dinosaurs: Triceratops, Allosaurus, Diplodocus, and Stegosaurus. Their cumulative discoveries defined the then-emerging field of paleontology. Before Cope’s and Marsh’s discoveries, there were only nine named species of dinosaur in North America. Judging by pure numbers, Marsh “won” the Bone Wars: Cope discovered a total of 56 new dinosaur species, but Marsh had found 80.

Academic Sentences

Look at the following items. Identify and address any issues with parallelism.

Low self-esteem can manifest itself in various behaviors. Some individuals may become paralyzed at the prospect of making a decision. Other individuals may bend their wills to others’ in order to keep the peace. Yet another symptom is the retreat from society as a whole—to become isolated.

The influence of genetics on human behavior has been shown through studies of twins who were separated at birth. Not only do these sets of individuals share many physical characteristics, but they also tend to have the same sort of interests and biases and utilize similar mental processes. Nocturne in Black and Gold (The Falling Rocket) by James Abbott McNeil Whistler is very emblematic of the impressionist movement: its dark colors, contrast, and lack of definite form reflect the attitudes of the day.

Show Answer

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- Modification of Bone Wars (errors added). Provided by: Wikipedia. Located at:
Active and Passive Voice

Voice is a nebulous term in writing. It can refer to the general “feel” of the writing, or it can be used in a more technical sense. In this section, we will focus on the latter sense as we discuss active and passive voice.

You’ve probably heard of the passive voice—perhaps in a comment from an English teacher or in the grammar checker of a word processor. In both of these instances, you were (likely) guided away from the passive voice. Why is this the case? Why is the passive voice so hated? After all, it’s been used twice on this page already (three times now). When the passive voice is used to frequently, it can make your writing seem flat and drab. However, there are some instances where the passive voice is a better choice than the active.

So just what is the difference between these two voices? In the simplest terms, an active voice sentence is written in the form of “A does B.” (For example, “Carmen sings the song.”) A passive voice sentence is written in the form of “B is done by A.” (For example, “The song is sung by Carmen.”) Both constructions are grammatically sound and correct.

Let’s look at a couple more examples of the passive voice:

- I’ve been hit! (or, I have been hit!)
- Jasper was thrown from the car when it was struck from behind.

You may have noticed something unique about the previous two sentences: the subject of the sentence is not the person (or thing) performing the action. The passive voice “hides” who does the action. Despite these sentences being completely grammatically sound, we don’t know who hit “me” or what struck the car.

The passive is created using the verb to be (e.g., the song is sung; it was struck from behind). Remember that to be conjugates irregularly. Its forms include am, are, is, was, were, and will be, which we learned about earlier in the course.

Remember, to be also has more complex forms like had been, is being, and was being.

- Mirella is being pulled away from everything she loves.
- Pietro had been pushed; I knew it.
- Unfortunately, my car was being towed away by the time I got to it.

Because to be has other uses than just creating the passive voice, we need to be careful when we identify passive sentences. It’s easy to mistake a sentence like “She was falling.” or “He is short.” for a passive sentence. However, in “She was falling,” was simply indicates that the sentence takes place in the past. In “He is short,” is is a linking verb. If there is no “real” action taking place, is is simply acting as a linking verb.

There are two key features that will help you identify a passive sentence:

- Something is happening (the sentence has a verb that is not a linking verb).
- The subject of the sentence is not doing that thing.

Usage

As you read at the two sentences below, think about the how the different voice may affect the meaning or implications of the sentence:

- **Passive voice:** The rate of evaporation is controlled by the size of an opening.
• **Active voice:** The size of an opening controls the rate of evaporation.

The passive choice slightly emphasizes “the rate of evaporation,” while the active choice emphasizes “the size of an opening.” Simple. So why all the fuss? Because passive constructions can produce grammatically tangled sentences such as this:

Groundwater flow is influenced by zones of fracture concentration, as can be recognized by the two model simulations (see Figures 1 and 2), by which one can see . . .

The sentence is becoming a burden for the reader, and probably for the writer too. As often happens, the passive voice here has smothered potential verbs and kicked off a runaway train of prepositions. But the reader’s task gets much easier in the revised version below:

Two model simulations (Figures 1 and 2) illustrate how zones of fracture concentration influence groundwater flow. These simulations show . . .

To revise the above, all I did was look for the two buried things (simulations and zones) in the original version that could actually *do* something, and I made the sentence clearly about these two nouns by placing them in front of active verbs. This is the general principle to follow as you compose in the active voice: Place concrete nouns that can perform work in front of active verbs.

### Practice

Are the following sentences in the active or passive voice?

Jayden drank more sodas than anyone else at the party.
The samples were prepared in a clean room before being sent out for further examination.
Karen was dancing with Joshua when she suddenly realized she needed to leave.
Carlos was a very serious scientist with unique interests.
When I returned to my room, my luggage had been stolen.

Show Answer
Sentence Style

Why Sentence Style Matters

Imagine a world where all music was in a single monotone, all paintings were the same shade of green, and all dancing consisted of one slow dance step. Writing with only one kind of sentence style would fit nicely into that world. In truth, music, art, and dance gain much beauty and interest from wide variation. You, as a writer, also have the option to vary your sentence style strategically. This chapter will help you vary sentence lengths and styles and choose when to write in active and passive voice. You will also learn how to use subordination, coordination, and parallelism to achieve emphasis and balance, how to control for sexist and offensive language, and how to manage the mood of the verbs in your writing.

16.1 Using Varied Sentence Lengths and Styles

Learning Objectives

Understand the value of varied sentence lengths within a body of text.
Use a variety of sentence beginnings and endings.
Recognize different sentence styles.

Text written with only one type of sentence is boring for readers. To make your texts more interesting, you should use sentences of varying lengths, with different openings and endings, and with a variety of structures.

Featuring Short Sentences

Short sentences, when not overused, can be used to emphasize an idea and catch a reader’s attention. Notice how the ideas expressed through the following short sentences grab your attention more than the same ideas do when embedded in longer sentences.

**Ideas separated into shorter sentences**: My mother wants me to spend next weekend with her and my two aunts. They all talk nonstop. I am sure I would be nothing more than a fly on the wall while they talk about all the family members. I am simply not going!

**Ideas embedded in longer sentences**: My mother wants me to spend next weekend with her and my two aunts who all talk nonstop. I am sure I would be nothing more than a fly on the wall while they talk about all the family members, so I am simply not going!

But you need to be careful to choose your short sentences strategically so that they carry emphasis without making your writing appear unsophisticated. A third option might be to use one longer sentence and break up the
other one into two shorter sentences.

Combining Short Sentences

Since an abundance of short sentences will give a simplistic appearance to your writing, you don’t want to use an excessive number of them close together. You can combine short sentences as a means of explaining an idea or a connection between two ideas. When you combine two complete sentences, you have to choose to either subordinate one of the ideas to the other or coordinate the two ideas by giving them equal weight. Your choice should always reflect the intended emphasis and causality of the two initial sentences.

Example

Two short sentences: My television is broken. It is Karen’s fault.

Sentence combination that maintains intended emphasis and causality: Because of Karen, my television is broken.

Incorporating Sentences of Varying Lengths

Text of varying lengths is easier to read than text where the sentences are all about the same length. A whole page of extremely long sentences is overwhelming. Try reading a high-level academic paper on a scientific topic. The sentences are often long and involved, which results in difficult reading. A whole page of very short sentences, on the other hand, is choppy and seems unsophisticated.

Consider the following text that begins the first chapter of Mark Twain’s A Tramp Abroad. Twain begins with a long sentence (thirty-three words), follows with a medium-length sentence (seventeen words), and closes with two short sentences (six and five words, respectively). This mix of sentence lengths creates text that flows smoothly and is easy to read.

One day it occurred to me that it had been many years since the world had been afforded the spectacle of a man adventurous enough to undertake a journey through Europe on foot. After much thought, I decided that I was a person fitted to furnish to mankind this spectacle. So I determined to do it. This was in March, 1878.

Now read a different version of the same paragraph. Notice how the short sentences sound choppy and juvenile.

I was thinking one day. I thought of something the world hadn’t seen lately. My thought was of an adventurous man. The man was on a walking trip through Europe. I thought some more. Then I decided that I should take such a trip. I should give the world something to watch. So I determined to do it. This was in March 1878.

Here’s another version of the same paragraph written in one long and rather overwhelming sentence.

One day it occurred to me that it had been many years since the world had been afforded the spectacle of a man adventurous enough to undertake a journey through Europe on foot, so after much thought, I decided that I was a person fitted to furnish to mankind this spectacle, and it was in March 1878 that I decided I was determined to do it.

Diversifying Your Sentence Openers and Endings

Like making all your sentences the same length, starting all your sentences in the same format—say, with “the” or “there”—could result in seriously boring text. Even if you vary your openings slightly but still follow the basic subject–verb–object format every time, you’re missing an opportunity to make your sentences more interesting. Study how the following techniques for varying the sentence openers add interest.
Example 1

All sentences begin with one or two words:

**Original:** The girl was terribly upset when her purse was stolen. There wasn’t anything that could get the image out of her mind. The thief was running when he grabbed her purse. The girl didn’t see him coming and was caught off guard. The girl fell down and never got a good look at him.

**Revision:** [Reverse the sentence.] Having her purse stolen upset the girl terribly. [Start with the key issue.] Her mind held onto the image and would not let it go. [Add an adverb.] Unfortunately, she didn’t see him coming and was so caught off guard that she fell down and never got a good look at him.

Example 2

Sentences begin with a variety of words but all follow the subject-verb-object format:

**Original:** The young woman got up off the ground. Then she ran to her dorm room in a state of shock. She got in the elevator without looking at anyone. She started crying as soon as she walked into her room. Her roommate held her hand and tried to get her to calm down. Some friends from down the hall showed up.

**Revision:** The young woman got up off the ground. [Rearrange to create an introductory phrase.] In a state of shock, she ran to her dorm room. [Insert an adjective at the beginning.] Frightened, she got in the elevator without looking at anyone. [Choose an unusual subject for the sentence.] Tears came as soon as she walked into her room. [Rearrange to create an introductory phrase.] In an effort to calm her down, her roommate held her hand. [Add some new content at the beginning of the sentence.] As timing would have it, some friends from down the hall showed up.

By placing a key word or phrase at the end of a sentence, you can also hold readers’ attention as they wait for the full meaning to unfold. This approach of building to a climax places added emphasis on an idea.

Example 1

The old battle-ax looked like she was about to start yelling at everybody, so I held my breath right up until the moment she broke into a wide grin.

Example 2

The whole family gathered around the computer waiting for my sister to say the words we’d been waiting to hear for fifteen months—that she was coming home.

Including Sentences with Differing Structures

Just as you need to use a variety of sentence openers to keep text interesting, you should vary your sentence structure. The types of clauses you use are key factors in varying your sentence structure. Look at the following table for an overview.

**Table 16.1 Varying Sentence Types Based on Clauses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Type</th>
<th>Number and Type of Clauses</th>
<th>Example [Independent Clauses Underlined, Dependent Clauses in Bold]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple sentence</td>
<td>One independent clause</td>
<td>Ted threw the bat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound sentence</td>
<td>Two independent clauses</td>
<td>Ted threw the bat, and it hit the umpire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Key Takeaways

- Using a variety of sentence lengths helps make text interesting.
- Varying your sentence beginnings helps keep texts from being too monotonous.
- Using a mix of sentence structures makes text more inviting and engaging.
- You can use short sentences to create emphasis.
- You can add emphasis by placing key words and terms at the ends of sentences and as the last word in a series.
- You can also add emphasis to a sentence with paired ideas by strategically aligning words with the ideas.

### Exercises

Write a series of three sentences that include two longer sentences and a shorter sentence used for emphasis. Vary the placement of the shorter sentence in the sequence and consider the effect on the sentence.

Combine the following two sentences into one sentence where the relationship between the two ideas is emphasized:

In size, Idaho is the fourteenth-largest state in the United States.

In population, Idaho ranks thirty-ninth in the United States.

Write a sentence with a series where the last item in the series is the most impressive or startling.

Compare “hourly workers” and “salary workers” in a sentence using either like words or paired words to emphasize the two ideas.

Write a paragraph about a childhood memory. Include about one-third short sentences (seven or fewer words), one-third medium sentences (between twelve and twenty-four words), and one-third long sentences (more than twenty-five words). Include at least ten sentences. After each sentence, include the number of words in parentheses.

Write a paragraph about something you have done during the last couple of weeks. Do not use more than two sentences with the same format or opening phrasing. Include at least eight sentences.

Write a paragraph about your family. From Table 16.1 “Varying Sentence Types Based on Clauses”, use each of the four sentence types at least once. After the paragraph, include a chart showing each of the sentence types and your matching usage.

### 16.2 Writing in Active Voice and Uses of Passive Voice

#### Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between active and passive voice.
- Write in active voice.
Know when and how to use passive voice.

Sydney J. Harris, a Chicago journalist, said, “We have not passed that subtle line between childhood and adulthood until we move from the passive voice to the active voice—that is, until we have stopped saying, ‘It got lost,’ and say, ‘I lost it.’” Besides being a rite of passage in human development, routinely using active voice also marks growth in your writing ability.

As a college writer, you need to know when and how to use both active and passive voice. Although active voice is the standard preferred writing style, passive voice is acceptable, and even preferred, in certain situations. However, as a general rule, passive voice tends to be awkward, vague, and wordy.

Recognizing Active and Passive Voice

Lack of awareness or understanding of passive voice may cause you to use it regularly. Once you fully grasp how it differs from active voice, passive voice will begin to stand out. You will then recognize it when you use it as well as when others use it.

To use active voice, you should make the noun that performs the action the subject of the sentence and pair it directly with an action verb.

Read these two sentences:

Matt Damon left Harvard in the late 1980s to start his acting career.

Matt Damon’s acting career was started in the late 1980s when he left Harvard.

In the first sentence, “left” is an action verb that is paired with the subject, “Matt Damon.” If you ask yourself “Who or what left?” the answer is “Matt Damon.” Neither of the other two nouns in the sentence—“Harvard” and “career”—left anything.

Now look at the second sentence. The action verb is “started.” If you ask yourself “Who or what started something?” the answer is again “Matt Damon.” But in this sentence, “career” has been placed in the subject position, not “Matt Damon.” When the doer of the action is not in the subject position, the sentence is in passive voice. In passive voice constructions, the doer of the action usually follows the word “by” as the indirect object of a prepositional phrase, and the action verb is typically partnered with a version of the verb “to be.”

Look at the following two passive voice sentences. For each sentence, note the noun in the subject position, the form of the verb “to be,” the action verb, and the doer of the action.

Example 1

The original screenplay for Good Will Hunting was written by Matt Damon for an English class when he was a student at Harvard University.

Example 2

As an actor, Matt Damon is loved by millions of fans worldwide.

Put the following four sentences to the test in order to determine the voice of each: Is the doer in the subject position paired with an action verb (active voice) or placed as an indirect object of a prepositional phrase after a version of the verb “to be” (passive voice) and a verb in past perfect tense?

Matt Damon and Ben Affleck grew up together and are still colleagues and friends today. (active)

An Oscar was given to Matt Damon and Ben Affleck for the Good Will Hunting script. (passive)

Jason Bourne was played several times by Matt Damon. (passive)

Besides acting in the Bourne movies, Matt also played the title character in Good Will Hunting, Saving Private Ryan, and The Talented Mr. Ripley. (active)
Using Action Verbs to Make Sentences More Interesting

Two sentences can generally say the same thing but leave an entirely different impression based on the verb choices. For example, which of the following sentences gives you the most vivid mental picture?

A bald eagle was overhead and now is low in the sky near me.

OR

A bald eagle soared overhead and then dove low, seemingly coming right at me.

As a rule, try to express yourself with action verbs instead of forms of the verb “to be.” Sometimes it is fine to use forms of the verb “to be,” such as “is” or “are,” but it is easy to overuse them (as in this sentence—twice). Overuse of such verbs results in dull writing.

Read each of the following sentences and note the use of the verb “to be.” In your head, think of a way to reword the sentence to make it more interesting by using an action verb. Then look at how each revision uses one or more action verbs.

Examples

Original: A photo was snapped, the tiger was upset, and Elizabeth was on the ground.

Revision: Elizabeth innocently snapped the photo and the lion let out a roar that sent Elizabeth scrambling backward until she fell down.

Original: A giraffe’s neck is long and thin, but it is as much as five hundred pounds in weight.

Revision: A giraffe’s neck wanders far above its body and often weighs as much as five hundred pounds.

Original: An elephant is able to drink eighty gallons of water and is likely to eat one thousand pounds of vegetation in a day.

Revision: In one day, an elephant slurps down eighty gallons of water and grinds away one thousand pounds of vegetation.

You might have developed a tendency to use another rather dull and unimaginative form of passive voice, by starting sentences with “there is,” “there are,” “there were,” “it is,” or “it was.” Read each of the following examples of this kind of passive voice construction. In your head, think of a way to reword the sentence to make it more interesting by using an action verb. Then look at how each sentence can be revised using an action verb.

Examples

Original: There are thousands of butterflies in the Butterfly House.

Revision: Thousands of butterflies flitter around in the Butterfly House.

Original: There were four giraffes eating leaves from the trees.

Revision: Four giraffes ripped mouthfuls of leaves from the trees.

Using Action Verbs Alone to Avoid Passive
Voice

Even though the passive voice might include an action verb, the strength of the action verb is lessened by the structure of the sentence. Also, the passive voice tends to create unnecessary wordiness. Read the following sentences and think of a way to reword each using an action verb in active voice. Then study the suggested revision in each case.

Examples

Original: The zebras were fed by the zoo workers. (eight words)
Revision: The zoo workers fed the zebras. (six words)

Original: Water was spewed in the air by the elephant. (nine words)
Revision: The elephant spewed water in the air. (seven words)

Original: The home of the hippopotamus was cleaned up and made tidy by Hank the Hippo Man. (sixteen words)
Revision: Hank the Hippo Man cleaned up and tidied the hippopotamus’s home. (eleven words)

Writing in the Active Voice

Once you completely understand the difference between active and passive voice, writing in active voice becomes easy. All you have to do is to make sure you always clearly say who or what did what. And if you notice you are using forms of the verb “to be” with your action verb, look closely at the reason. If you are writing in progressive tense (“Carrie is walking to my house”) or perfect progressive tense (“Melissa will have been married for four years by then”), you will need to use such helping verbs, even in active voice. (See Chapter 15 “Sentence Building”, Section 15.2 “Choosing Appropriate Verb Tenses” for more information on progressive and perfect progressive tenses.)

Using Passive Voice

Sometimes passive voice actually is the best option. The point is to only use passive voice when you consciously decide to do so. Consider the following acceptable uses of passive voice.

- When you don’t know who or what is responsible for the action:
  Example: Our front door lock was picked.
  Rationale: If you don’t know who picked the lock on your front door, you can’t say who did it. You could say a thief broke in, but that is an assumption. You could, theoretically, find out that the lock was picked by a family member who had forgotten to take a key.

- When you want to hide the person or thing responsible for the action, such as in a story:
  Example: The basement was filled with a mysterious scraping sound.
  Rationale: If you are writing a story, you might logically introduce a phenomenon without revealing the person or thing that caused it.

- When the person or thing that performed the action is not important:
  Example: The park was flooded all week.
  Rationale: Although you would obviously know that the rainwater flooded the park, it is not important to say
so.

- When you do not want to place credit, responsibility, or blame:
  
  Example: A mistake was made in the investigation that resulted in the wrong person being on trial.

  Rationale: Even if you think you know who is responsible for a problem, you might not want to expose the person.

- When you want to maintain the impression of objectivity:
  
  Example: It was noted that only first graders chose to eat the fruit.

  Rationale: Research reports in certain academic disciplines attempt to remove the researcher from the results, to avoid saying, for example, “I noted that only first graders....”

- When you want to avoid using a gendered construction and pluralizing is not an option (see Section 16.3 “Using Subordination and Coordination” for more on nonsexist language):
  
  Example: If the password is forgotten by the user, a security question will be asked.

  Rationale: This construction avoids the need for “his or her” (as in “the user forgets his or her password”).

Key Takeaways

- In active voice, the subject of the sentence completes the action. In passive voice, the action is performed by someone or something other than the subject of the sentence.
- As a rule, you should write using the active voice in order to make sentences more interesting.
- One way to avoid dull sentences is to avoid starting sentences with wording such as “there are,” “there was,” and “it is.”
- Using action verbs without the verb “to be” creates stronger, active voice sentences.
- Some specific situations call for the use of the passive voice.

Exercises

Pay attention to material you read over one week. From the things you read, collect at least ten examples of sentences written in passive voice. Take the sentences you collected and rewrite them in the active voice. Choose one of the examples of acceptable uses of passive voice cited in this section and write a sample paragraph demonstrating that usage.

Rewrite each of these sentences using an action verb in active voice:
  
  There were five guys sharing a pizza on the back patio.
  Jane is at her parents’ house for the weekend.
  The movie was enjoyed by all of us.
  It was a long night when the three of us decided to build a set of bunk beds.
  The bus ride from here to Chicago is long and bumpy.

16.3 Using Subordination and Coordination

Learning Objectives

Learn how to use subordination to include main ideas and minor ideas in the same sentence.
Learn how to use coordination to include two or more ideas of equal weight in a single sentence.
Within a single sentence, learn to keep subordinated ideas to a minimum.
Subordination and coordination are used to clarify the relative level of importance or the relationship between and among words, phrases, or clauses within sentences. You can use subordination to arrange sentence parts of unequal importance and coordination to convey the idea that sentence parts are of equal importance.

Subordination

Subordination allows you to convey differences in importance between details within a sentence. You can use the technique within a single sentence or to combine two or more smaller sentences. You should always present the most important idea in an independent clause and use dependent clauses and phrases to present the less important ideas. Start each dependent clause with a subordinating conjunction (e.g., after, because, by the time, even though, if, just in case, now that, once, only if, since, though, unless, until, when, whether, while) or a relative pronoun (e.g., that, what, whatever, which, whichever, who, whoever, whom, whomever, whose). These starters signal the reader that the idea is subordinate. Here’s a sentence that uses a relative pronoun to convey subordination:

- I will come to your house or meet you at the gym, whichever works best for you.

The core idea is that I will either come to your house or meet you at the gym. The fact that you’ll choose whichever option works best for you is subordinate, set apart with the relative pronoun “whichever.”

In the next example, two smaller sentences are combined using the subordinating conjunction “because”:

- Smaller sentence 1: The number of students who live at home and take online college classes has risen in the past ten years.
- Smaller sentence 2: The rise has been due to increased marketing of university online programs.
- Larger sentence using subordination (version 1): The number of students living at home and taking online college classes has risen in the past ten years because of increased marketing of university online programs.
- Larger sentence using subordination (version 2): Because of increased marketing of university online programs, the number of students living at home and taking online courses has risen in the past ten years.

Coordination

Some sentences have two or more equal ideas. You can use coordination to show a common level of importance among parts of a sentence, such as subjects, verbs, and objects.

Examples

Subject example: Both green beans and asparagus are great with grilled fish.

Verb example: We neither talked nor laughed during the whole two hours.

Object example: Machine embroidery combines the beauty of high-quality stitching and the expediency of modern technology.

The underlined ideas within each sentence carry equal weight within their individual sentences. As examples of coordination, they can be connected with coordinating conjunctions (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet) or correlative conjunctions (both…and, either…or, just as…so, neither…nor, not…but, not only…but also, whether…or).

Controlling Emphasis

You likely use subordination and coordination automatically. For example, if you say that something happened (e.g., Dale broke his leg while sledding) because of something else (e.g., he broke his leg when he slided into a tree), you can use separate sentences, or you can use subordination within one sentence.
Ideas presented in two sentences: Dale broke his leg while sledding this weekend. His leg broke when the sled hit a tree.

Ideas presented in one sentence using subordination: This weekend, Dale broke his leg when his sled hit a tree. [Dale broke his leg is the main idea. The fact that it happened when the sled hit a tree is the subordinated idea.]

A natural way to use coordination is, for example, to discuss two things you plan to do on vacation. You can present the two ideas in separate sentences or in one sentence using coordination to signal equal emphases.

Ideas presented in two sentences: I’m planning to see the Statue of Liberty while I’m in New York. I’m also going to go to a Broadway play.

Ideas presented in one sentence using coordination: While I’m in New York, I am planning to see the Statue of Liberty and go to a Broadway play.

Subordination Pitfalls

You will want to avoid two common subordination mistakes: placing main ideas in subordinate clauses or phrases and placing too many subordinate ideas in one sentence.

Here’s an example of a sentence that subordinates the main idea:

- LoDo, a charming neighborhood featuring great art galleries, restaurants, cafés, and shops, is located in the Lower Downtown District of Denver.

The problem here is that main idea is embedded in a subordinate clause. Instead of focusing on the distinctive features of the LoDo neighborhood, the sentence makes it appear as if the main idea is the neighborhood’s location in Denver. Here’s a revision:

- LoDo, located in the Lower Downtown District of Denver, is a charming neighborhood featuring great art galleries, restaurants, cafés, and shops.

A sentence with too many subordinated ideas is confusing and difficult to read.

Here’s an example:

- Television executives, who make the decisions about which shows to pull and which to extend, need to consider more than their individual opinions so that they do not pull another Star Trek mess-up where they don’t recognize a great show when they see it, while balancing the need to maintain a schedule that appeals to a broad audience, considering that new types of shows don’t yet have a broad following.

And here’s a possible revision:

- Television executives need to consider more than their individual opinions when they decide which shows to pull and which to extend. Many years ago, some of these very executives decided that Star Trek should be canceled, clearly demonstrating they do not always know which shows will become great. Television executives should also balance the need to maintain a schedule that appeals to a broad audience with an appreciation for new types of shows that don’t yet have a broad following.

Key Takeaways

- Subordination refers to ideas in a sentence that are of less importance than the main idea. Subordinated ideas are typically connected to the rest of the sentence with a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun.
- Coordination refers to two or more ideas of equal weight in a single sentence. Coordinated ideas are usually joined to each other with coordinating conjunctions or correlative conjunctions.
- You can create emphasis using subordination and coordination within longer sentences.
- Problems with subordination include placing main ideas in subordinated clauses and phrases and including too many subordinated ideas in one sentence.
Exercises

Write a sentence about the thrill of deep-sea diving and include the subordinate idea that the scenery is often amazing.
Write a sentence including intercollegiate sports and intramural sports as coordinating ideas of equal weight.
Write a sentence using “new car” as an emphasized main idea and “red interior” as a less emphasized subordinated idea.
Write a sentence using “blogs” and “Facebook” as coordinated ideas with equal emphases.
Using ideas of your own, write a sentence that demonstrates the use of subordinating ideas.
Using ideas of your own, write a sentence that demonstrates the use of coordinating ideas.

16.4 Using Parallelism

Learning Objectives

Recognize lack of parallelism.
Present paired ideas in parallel format.
Present items in a series in parallel format.

Parallelism is the presentation of ideas of equal weight in the same grammatical fashion. It’s one of those features of writing that’s a matter of grammar, style, rhetoric, and content. Used well, it can enhance your readers’ (and even your own) understanding and appreciation of a topic. The most famous line from John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address provides another example (a specific kind of reversal of phrasing known as antimetabole): “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” You’ll encounter parallelism not only in politics but in advertising, religion, and poetry as well:

- “Strong enough for a man, but made for a woman.”
- “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”
- “Some say the world will end in fire, / Some say in ice.”

Here are a couple of examples of sentences in need of parallelism.

Example 1

While it was raining, I had to run into the grocery store, the dry cleaners, and stop at the bookstore.

This sentence is not parallel because it includes three equally weighted ideas but presents two of them with action verbs and one without. By simply adding words such as “duck into” to the middle item, the sentence becomes parallel: While it was raining, I had to run into the grocery store, duck into the dry cleaners, and stop at the bookstore.

You could also correct this sentence by removing “stop at” from the third idea: While it was raining, I had to run into the grocery store, the dry cleaners, and the book store.

Example 2

The test was long and requiring skills we hadn’t learned.

This sentence is not parallel because it presents two like-weighted ideas using two different grammatical formats. Here is a parallel version:

The test was long and required skills we hadn’t learned.

Parallelism is most often an issue with paired ideas and items in a series as shown in the preceding two examples.
A key idea to keep in mind is that you need to use common wording with both items, such as common articles (e.g., the, a, an) and common prepositions (e.g., by, for, of, on, to). The next two subsections provide more in-depth discussion of these two concepts.

Making Paired Items Parallel

In a sentence, paired items or ideas are often connected with either a comparative expression (e.g., easier than, as much as, bigger than), a coordinated conjunction (e.g., and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet), or a correlative conjunction (e.g., both…and, either…or, just as…so, neither…nor, not…but, not only…but also, whether…or). Read the following error examples. Think of a way to correct each sentence. Then look below the error to see possible corrections. Note that you can usually correct each error in more than one way.

Example 1

Comparative Expression

Our neighbor’s house is bigger than the size of our house.

Possible Corrections:

Our neighbor’s house is bigger than our house.

OR

The size of our neighbor’s house is bigger than the size of our house.

Example 2

Coordinated Conjunction

Louie, my crazy shih tzu loves running after Frisbees and plays with leaves.

Possible Corrections:

Louie, my crazy shih tzu, loves running after Frisbees and playing with leaves.

OR

Louie, my crazy shih tzu, loves to run after Frisbees and to play with leaves.

Example 3

Correlative Conjunction

Not only was he rude, but also ate all the shrimp balls.

Possible Corrections:

Not only was he rude, but also he ate all the shrimp balls.

OR

Not only was he rude, but he also ate all the shrimp balls.
Making Items in a Series Parallel

Items in a series include ideas embedded in a sentence as well as those in numbered or bulleted lists. One way to check for parallelism is to say the sentence stem that precedes the first item and then, one at a time, add each subsequent series item to the stem. Assuming the stem works with the first item, subsequent items that do not work with the stem are not parallel with the first item.

Example

After I get off work, I’m driving to the gym, doing five miles, and weights.

Stem prior to the first item: After I get off work, I’m...

Stem works with the first item: After I get off work, I’m driving to the gym.

Stem works with the second item: After I get off work, I’m doing five miles.

Stem does not work with the third item: After I get off work, weights.

A version of the sentence that is parallel: After I get off work, I’m driving to the gym, running five miles, and lifting weights.

Now stem does work with the third item: After I get off work, I’m lifting weights.

Read the two error examples and imagine how you could correct each one. Then check below the error for possible corrections.

Error Example 1

Embedded Series

On Saturday, my roommates and I are playing in a game of pick-up basketball, collecting coats for charity, work on our homework for three hours, and go to a party in the Village.

Possible Corrections:

On Saturday, my roommates and I are going to play in a game of pick-up basketball, collect coats for charity, spend three hours on homework, and go to a party in the Village.

OR

On Saturday, my roommates and I are playing in a game of pick-up basketball, collecting coats for charity, spending three hours on homework, and going to a party in the Village.

Error Example 2

Listed Series

The people I have met since starting college include the following:

- Sarah Winston
- Joe Fuller, a guy from the Chicago area
- Adam Merce and Donna Taylor
- Ian Messing from England
- and CaLinda Harris, whom I met in math class

Possible Corrections:

The people I have met since starting college include the following:
Utilizing Parallel Structure

If you take the most impressive or startling item in a series and place it last, you can draw attention to it as well as to the whole series. Look at the difference in the following two sentences.

Most impressive item last: In the accident, he received cuts on his face, a mild concussion, a cracked rib, and a ruptured spleen.

Most impressive item buried within the series: In the accident, he received cuts on his face, a ruptured spleen, a cracked rib, and a mild concussion.

Using like or paired words along with ideas you are comparing can help you emphasize the comparison.

Example with like words: It’s unusual to feel intense attraction and intense repulsion for the same person.

Example with paired words: You always seem to run to guitar lessons and crawl to piano lessons.

Key Takeaways

- Parallelism refers to common grammatical treatment of like-weighted items within a series.
- Parallelism is also a rhetorical and stylistic technique for arranging ideas in a pleasing and effective way.
- Paired ideas within a sentence should be parallel.
- Ideas within a series should be parallel whether embedded in a sentence or listed vertically.
- In almost all situations, more than one possible method exists for making a sentence or list parallel.

Exercises

Indicate whether relevant parts of each sentence are parallel. Then rewrite the problem sentences to make them parallel.

Even though I don’t get paid as much, working in the psychology office is more meaningful than working at the fast food restaurant.

According to Lester, both going to a movie and midnight bowling are still being considered.

Abby, the attorney, and the child advocate named Becca held a meeting before the whole group arrived.

I have already packed casual pants, my favorite casual tops, dress pants, dress tops, some socks, plenty of underwear, and three pairs of shoes.

Some must-see sites in Texas include the following:

- the Alamo in San Antonio
- the Riverwalk, which is also in San Antonio
- Big Bend
- Schlitterbaum Water Park that kids love so much
- King Ranch
- South Padre Island

Write a sentence telling what you did this past weekend. Include an embedded series or a list in your sentence and make sure the items are parallel.

Write a sentence comparing two college classes. Make sure the comparison items are parallel.

With your writing group or on your own, find at least three examples of parallelism in advertising, politics, or religious texts. Be prepared to discuss why and how parallelism is used in these kinds of discourse.

16.5 Avoiding Sexist and Offensive Language

Learning Objectives

- Recognize language that is considered sexist.
- Avoid sexist language in your writing.
- Recognize and avoid language that is offensive to any specific group of people.

The rights of women have changed dramatically over the past few decades. Slowly, written English has started to reflect those changes. No longer is it considered appropriate to refer to a “female engineer” or a “male nurse.” It is also unacceptable to refer generically to a doctor as “him,” a teacher as “her,” or a politician as “him.” Such usage is considered to be sexist language. You can use acceptable nonsexist language by using passive voice (see the example in Section 16.2.5 “Using Passive Voice”), using plural formats (see the examples in Section 16.5.1 “Using Plural Format”), eliminating pronouns, switching to direct address, and choosing nonsexist terms whenever possible. An option of last resort is to use “his or her,” “his/her,” “her or his,” or “her/his” or even to alternate “his” and “her” throughout a text, though this path is stylistically awkward and usually unnecessary given the other options available to you.

Using Plural Format

By using plural nouns instead of singular nouns, you can switch from sex-specific singular pronouns to gender-neutral pronouns.

Examples

**Example of sexist language using singular pronoun:** A family member who misses a holiday dinner will find *he* has missed more than the food.

**Example of nonsexist language using plural pronoun:** Family members who miss holiday dinners will find *they* have missed more than the food.

Revising to Eliminate Pronouns

Since English includes many singular gender-specific pronouns, another way to eliminate sexist language is to eliminate the use of pronouns.

Examples

**Example of sexist language using singular pronoun:** A family member who misses a holiday dinner will find *he* has missed more than the food.
Example of nonsexist language due to elimination of pronoun: A family member who misses a holiday dinner misses more than the food.

Using Direct Address

Sometimes you can simply switch from third-person singular to second-person singular or plural and in the process make your tone more engaging.

Examples

Example of sexist language using third-person pronoun: A student who forgets to bring his book to class will be assessed a ten-point penalty for his daily work.

Example of nonsexist language using second-person pronoun: If you forget to bring your book to class, you will be assessed a ten-point penalty for your daily work.

Choosing Nonsexist Terms

One of the best methods of solving the sexist language problem is to choose nonsexist terms. With a little practice, you can learn to naturally use the currently preferred nonsexist language rather than terms that are no longer acceptable. Study the following table for some examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formerly Acceptable</th>
<th>Currently Acceptable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>businessman, businesswoman</td>
<td>businessperson, business executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chairman, chairwoman</td>
<td>chairperson, chair, head, leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congressman, congresswoman</td>
<td>congressperson, legislator, member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>firefighter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mail carrier, mail delivery person, letter carrier, postal worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homankind, humans, people, Homo sapiens, humanity, the human race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>police officer, officer of the law, trooper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sales associate, salesperson, seller, vendor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoiding Other Offensive Language

Whether language is offensive depends entirely on the audience. If the audience or part of the audience views the wording as offensive, then the wording is offensive. To avoid inadvertent offensive text, adhere to the following general guidelines.

- Use currently accepted terminology when referencing groups of people. If you are writing about a group of people and you are unsure of the proper terminology, research the most recent usage patterns before you write.
- Be sensitive when referencing people with disabilities by using a “people first” approach. For example, say “a person who uses a wheelchair” instead of “a wheelchair-bound person.”
- Do not use profanity or vulgar words of any kind. When in doubt, don’t use the term, or if you must use it as part of a quotation, make clear that you’re quoting it.
• Avoid stereotyping (ascribing positive or negative attributes to people based on groups to which they belong).

Key Takeaways

• Some language that was formerly considered acceptable is now considered sexist.
• You can avoid sexist language by using passive voice or plural constructions, by eliminating pronouns, or by switching to direct address.
• Whenever possible, you should choose from among nonsexist terms that are increasingly available.
• Be sensitive when you write. Avoid any language that might offend others.

Exercises

Rewrite each of the following sentences three times to eliminate the sexist language using the techniques discussed in this section

When the customer uses abusive language, he can be thrown out of the restaurant.
A student who habitually arrives late for class is endangering his chances for success.
There’s nothing more important to elementary education than a teacher who is committed to her students.

Over the course of a week, record any instances of stereotypes or any shorthand characterizations of groups of people. Share your list with other members of your group or the class as a whole.

16.6 Managing Mood

Learning Objectives

Understand imperative, indicative, and subjunctive verb moods.
Revise passages with inconsistent verb moods.
Write passages using uniform verb mood.

The mood of a verb can be imperative, indicative, or subjunctive. Although those three words might make mood sound somewhat complicated, in reality you are likely quite familiar with the different moods. Study this table for clarification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Moods</th>
<th>Explanations</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>The subject is understood to be the reader and is not given in the sentence. Imperative sentences include the following: • Commands • Requests • Advice</td>
<td>• Control your partying when you are in college. • Please keep your future in mind as you make choices. • Limit partying to the weekends so you will be more likely to find success as a college student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb Moods</td>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicative</td>
<td>Indicative sentences include the following:</td>
<td>• During my first year in college, I was <strong>more focused</strong> on having fun with my friends than on studying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(or</td>
<td>• Statements</td>
<td>• About one-third of eighteen-year-old college freshmen <strong>drop out</strong> within their first year of college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>declarative)</td>
<td>• Facts</td>
<td>• Although some colleges try to control your behavior with rules, you <strong>need</strong> to figure out for yourself how to successfully balance your class work and your personal life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opinions</td>
<td>• Do you think it <strong>helps</strong> to have midnight curfews for students who live in dormitories?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjunctive</td>
<td>Present-tense verbs remain in the base form rather than changing to match the</td>
<td>• [present tense] It is important that I <strong>be</strong> [NOT <strong>am</strong>] focused on doing homework before partying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>number or person of the subject. Past-tense verbs are the same as simple past</td>
<td>• [present tense] I suggest a student <strong>work</strong> [NOT student works] on assignments every Friday afternoon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tense. Exception: The verb “to be” uses “were” in all situations.</td>
<td>• [past tense] If I <strong>were</strong> [NOT was] him, I’d have stayed at the library with my laptop for a few hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subjunctive sentences include the following:</td>
<td>• [past tense] If I <strong>hadn’t seen</strong> it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have believed it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wishes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recommendations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Doubts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contrary-to statements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Problems with mood occur when the mood shifts within a sentence, as shown in the following table. In the table, the revisions were all made to match the mood that the sentence initially used. You could also choose to make different revisions that are equally acceptable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Moods</th>
<th>Problem Shifts</th>
<th>Revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Started with imperative and switched to subjunctive</td>
<td>Control your schedule, and I’d choose the number of hours I need for homework before talking to anyone about weekend plans.</td>
<td>Control your schedule and choose the number of hours you need for homework before talking to anyone about weekend plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started with indicative and switched to imperative</td>
<td>People don’t think for themselves and stop being so wishy-washy.</td>
<td>Think for yourself and stop being so wishy-washy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started with subjunctive and switched to imperative</td>
<td>It matters that you be in charge of your success and you should stop blaming others.</td>
<td>It matters that you be in charge of your success and stop blaming others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key Takeaways**

- Verb moods include imperative, indicative, and subjunctive.
- Inconsistent verb moods can make text confusing.
- Avoid using multiple verb moods within a single passage.

**Exercises**
The following passage has inconsistent verb moods. Identify the existing verb moods as imperative, indicative, and/or imperative. Then revise the passage so that it has consistent verb moods.

Don’t go to the party on Friday night. If I were you, I’d spend Friday in the library and go to the big party on Saturday. Physics majors need to stay focused.
Write three sentences using each of these verb moods in one of the sentences: imperative, indicative, subjunctive.
Write a passage with at least three sentences. Use a consistent verb mood throughout the passage.

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Revising Weak Passive-Voice Sentences

As we’ve mentioned, the passive voice can be a shifty operator—it can cover up its source, that is, who’s doing the acting, as this example shows:

- **Passive**: The papers will be graded according to the criteria stated in the syllabus.
  - Graded by whom though?
- **Active**: The teacher will grade the papers according to the criteria stated in the syllabus.

It’s this ability to cover the actor or agent of the sentence that makes the passive voice a favorite of people in authority—policemen, city officials, and, yes, teachers. At any rate, you can see how the passive voice can cause wordiness, indirectness, and comprehension problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your figures have been reanalyzed in order to determine the coefficient of error. The results will be announced when the situation is judged appropriate.</td>
<td>Who analyzes, and who will announce?</td>
<td>We have reanalyzed your figures in order to determine the range of error. We will announce the results when the time is right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With the price of housing at such inflated levels, those loans cannot be paid off in any shorter period of time.</td>
<td>Who can’t pay the loans off?</td>
<td>With the price of housing at such inflated levels, homeowners cannot pay off those loans in any shorter period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the arm of the hand-held stapler is pushed down, the blade from the magazine is raised by the top-leaf spring, and the magazine and base.</td>
<td>Who pushes it down, and who or what raises it?</td>
<td>After you push down on the arm of the hand-held stapler, the top-leaf spring raises the blade from the magazine, and the magazine and base move apart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>However, market share is being lost by 5.25-inch diskettes as is shown in the graph in Figure 2.</td>
<td>Who or what is losing market share, who or what shows it?</td>
<td>However, 5.25-inch diskettes are losing market share as the graph in Figure 2 shows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For many years, federal regulations concerning the use of wire-tapping have been ignored. Only recently have tighter restrictions been imposed on the circumstances that warrant it.</td>
<td>Who has ignored the regulations, and who is now imposing them?</td>
<td>For many years, government officials have ignored federal regulations concerning the use of wire-tapping. Only recently has the federal government imposed tighter restrictions on the circumstances that warrant it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Practice**

Convert these passive voice sentences into the active voice. Why is the active voice a better choice for each of these sentences?

The process, which was essential for the experiment’s success, was completed by Enzo.
The cake that I worked on all day long is being eaten by Justin.
After the pattern has been applied to the fabric, work on the embroidery can be started.

Don’t get the idea that the passive voice is always wrong and should never be used. It is a good writing technique when we don’t want to be bothered with an obvious or too-often-repeated subject and when we need to rearrange words in a sentence for emphasis. The next page will focus more on how and why to use the passive voice.

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- Power-Revision Techniques: Sentence-Level Revision. **Authored by**: David McMurrey. **Located at**: [https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/hirev2.html#passive](https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/hirev2.html#passive). **License**: [CC BY: Attribution]
Using the Passive Voice

There are several different situations where the passive voice is more useful than the active voice.

- When you don’t know who did the action: *The paper had been moved.*
  - The active voice would be something like this: “Someone had moved the paper.” While this sentence is technically fine, the passive voice sentence has a more subtle element of mystery, which can be especially helpful in creating a mood in fiction.

- When you want to hide who did the action: *The window had been broken.*
  - The sentence is either hiding who broke the window or they do not know. Again, the sentence can be reformed to say “Someone had broken the window,” but using the word *someone* clearly indicates that someone (though we may not know who) is at fault here. Using the passive puts the focus on the window rather than on the person who broke it, as he or she is completely left out of the sentence.

- When you want to emphasize the person or thing the action was done to: *Caroline was hurt when Kent broke up with her.*
  - We automatically focus on the subject of the sentence. If the sentence were to say “Kent hurt Caroline when he broke up with her,” then our focus would be drawn to Kent rather than Caroline.

- A subject that can’t actually do anything: *Caroline was hurt when she fell into the trees.*
  - While the trees hurt Caroline, they didn’t actually do anything. Thus, it makes more sense to have Caroline as the subject rather than saying “The trees hurt Caroline when she fell into them.”

**Note:** It’s often against convention in scholarly writing to use *I*. While this may seem like a forced rule, it also stems from the fact that scholars want to emphasize the science or research as opposed to the author of the paper. This often results in the passive voice being the best choice. This is not the case in other formal settings, such as in resumes and in cover letters.

**Practice**

Consider the following instances. In each case, determine why the writers might want to use active or passive voice. Write an example sentence based on their circumstances.

Antonella made an error in her calculations that ruined an experiment. This error ended up costing both time and materials. She has to write a report to her boss. What might she say about the experiment?

Isabel is writing a supernatural thriller. Her main character, Liam, notices that his keys aren’t where he left them. How might Isabel word this realization?

Thiago is writing a cover letter to apply for a new job. He is listing out tasks that he does at his current job. How would he want to word these items?

**Using the Passive**

Now that we know there are some instances where passive voice is the best choice, how do we use the passive voice to its fullest? The answer lies in writing direct sentences—in passive voice—that have simple subjects and verbs. Compare the two sentences below:

- Photomicrographs were taken to facilitate easy comparison of the samples.
- Easy comparison of the samples was facilitated by the taking of photomicrographs.
Both sentences are written in the passive voice, but for most ears the first sentence is more direct and understandable, and therefore preferable. Depending on the context, it does a clearer job of telling us what was done and why it was done. Especially if this sentence appears in the “Experimental” section of a report (and thus readers already know that the authors of the report took the photomicrographs), the first sentence neatly represents what the authors actually did—took photomicrographs—and why they did it—to facilitate easy comparison.

### Practice

Read the following sentences. Are they using the passive effectively? If there are any errors, rewrite the sentences accordingly.

- The machine needs to be reset at 10:23, 11:12, and 11:56 every night.
- The final steps, which need to be finished before the sun sets over the mountains, are going to be completed by Kajuana.
- The difficult task of measuring minute fluctuations in weight was made easier by the use of a new digital scale.

Show Answer

As we mentioned in Participles, the passive voice can also be used following relative pronouns like that and which.

- I moved into the house that was built for me.
- Adrián’s dog loves the treats that are given to him.
- Brihanna has an album that was signed by the Beastie Boys.

In each of these sentences, it is grammatically sound to omit (or elide) the pronoun and to be. Elision is used with a lot of different constructions in English; we use it shorten sentences when things are understood. However, we can only use elision in certain situations, so be careful when removing words! You may find these elided sentences more natural:

- I moved into the house built for me.
- Adrián’s dog loves the treats given to him.
- Brihanna has an album signed by the Beastie Boys
Practice Activities: Active and Passive Voice

Passive to Active

Convert these passive voice sentences into the active voice:

- Alana’s toes were crushed by the garage door.
- The passive voice has likely been heard of by you.
- Rebeca’s favorite spot in the lecture hall had been taken by the time she got to class.
- When the passive voice is overused, you often end up with flat writing.

Active or Passive

Read the following sentences. Are they using the passive effectively? Or should they be rewritten as active sentences?

- Maren was hit by several branches as she slid down the hill.
- A lot of discussion about whether technology is hurting or helping our ability to communicate has been inspired by this increase in technology.
- Listeners are encouraged by the lyrics to cast aside their fear and be themselves.

Show Answer
Part 6: Style and the Writing Process
Any piece of writing is shaped by external factors before the first word is ever set down on the page. These factors are referred to as the rhetorical situation, or rhetorical context, and are often presented in the form of a pyramid.

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

Purpose

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

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

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

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

Useful Questions

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

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

Audience

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

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

What to Think About

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Author**

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

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

**Questions for Consideration**

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

(Rules adapted from David McMurrey’s online text, *Power Tools for Technical Communication*)

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Active Writing vs. Passive Writing

One of the frustrations about learning writing (and teaching it) is the confusion resulting from different lessons at different levels. At different levels, we are taught different—often conflicting—lessons. For example, were you taught to start the essay with a quote? Were you taught to place your thesis first? These are lessons from early on that don’t work as well in formal academic writing at the college level. Many model texts come from journalism, where the quotes begin many paragraphs. This is a problem in college-level writing, though. Let’s use our texts and question asking abilities to stamp out some of the lessons learned earlier on that may no longer apply. To do this, we’ll have to be careful.

Let’s take the example mentioned earlier about starting with a quote. How does starting with a quote affect the audience? One likely effect is entertainment; readers may be interested enough to read onward. That’s not an issue with nearly all academic writing, since you know your audience is not reading for entertainment. At lower levels, teachers are happy enough that students are quoting at all, so they applaud attention-getting moves. Many statewide assessments have one essay set up so that students respond to a quote about literature.

- It’s clear that many of our prior models (and pop culture) tell us that it’s fine to make a habit out of starting or ending with quotes.
- To say that such quoting is okay to perform because it’s so popular, though, is a logical fallacy. It’s an incorrect appeal to values known as the ad popularum fallacy. We probably know it best from our moms when they said something like “If your friends jumped off the bridge, would you, too ______?"

Identifying the Problem
Starting with quotes makes the essay writer less active, since the quote is apparently doing all the work. However, as I have taught, writers need to become more active, always interpreting quotes. If paragraphs end or begin with quotes, what is the writer able to do with the quote? (Not much, unfortunately.) Think of the effects your quotes will have on readers.

What happens to the paragraph’s topic sentence when there’s a quote at the start? Writers rarely add in topic sentences if they quote first. Also, there’s the problem of why the paragraph ends up in the paper in the first place. Paragraphs filled with quotes mean the writer allowed the sources to take over the paper. This imbalance affects development, organization, and clarity.

I’m concerned that many of us aren’t getting the proper balance into our paragraphs. Sources are taking over, and transitions are lacking. The result may be a paper with many good paragraphs that are independent of one another and which were inspired directly by source material. As I evaluate what each writer does, these elements become major problems.

Fixing the Problem
Most of us were taught to put the thesis first in papers, right? That’s ineffective at the college level. It’s tough to unlearn past lessons and to adapt our writing to new
situations. Hopefully, we can apply our critical thinking skills to the writing we do. It makes sense that writers should take these steps to craft papers with topic sentences logically linked to an arguable thesis. Quote placement plays a major role in how we will be judged by the audience.

It’s Not Just Spelling. . .
To check our paragraphs, we should:

- Verify that there’s a topic sentence for the paragraph
- Check to see that the topic sentence is linked logically to the thesis. (Ideally, your thesis should include its reasoning.)
- Pay attention to how the paragraph ends. Is there a transition? Is the thesis or topic sentence linked to the material near the paragraph’s end?
- View the number of quotes as an indication of how active the writer has been.
- Add in missing interpretation and setup before/after quotes.
- Throw in signal phrases so that quotes aren’t popping up without speakers or credibility
- Break up long areas of source use
- Check to see that the topic sentence comes from you, not just from the source.

Good readers are adept at scanning for these elements. If too many problems persist, your essay loses credibility and power. Each of these elements is easy to fix. The question is: Did you edit carefully enough that problem areas received attention?

Last idea: I just set up an either/or between active and passive writing. There happen to be some limits to that sort of yes/no, this/that binary choice, right?

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Welcome to The Writing Process!

In this step-by-step support area, you will find everything you need to know about writing a paper.

Have you ever received a writing assignment, thought “This won’t take long” and then stayed up all night writing the night before your assignment was due because it ended up taking a lot longer than you thought it would? If you have, you’re not alone. Many beginning writers struggle to plan well when it comes to a writing assignment, and this results in writing that is just not as good as it could be. When you wait until the last minute and fail to engage in a good writing process, you’re not doing your best work—even if you did “get all A’s in high school” as a procrastinator.

Research on writing tells us that the best thing writers can do to improve their writing is improve their writing process! With that in mind, this area of the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab is going to take you through the steps of a thorough writing process—one that involves many stages that will help you become a better writer.

You will learn about the recursive nature of the writing process, and you’ll be taken through each step of writing a paper with instruction, activities, and videos. With support for prewriting activities, you’ll learn how to generate and organize your ideas, and with support for paragraph building, you’ll learn how to turn those ideas into well-organized paragraphs. You’ll also learn about how rhetoric can help make your writing stronger, and you can even get some advice from fellow students about what to expect in college writing courses. If you’re writing a paper and need help with any of the steps along the way, The Writing Process area can help.
Thesis Hints

Function of the Thesis
As a writer, everything you do sends a message to readers. Your thesis should be the best sentence in your paper. Everything else should be related to the thesis. If it isn’t, then it doesn’t belong there. Here’s an interesting definition: “The thesis is a provable opinion about which others may disagree.” A well-worded thesis sets out what you will prove and offers a glimpse at your logic. It may show the other side, too, if that’s what your task calls for.

What most Writers Fail to Do
Most people write essays where the body paragraphs don’t match up with what they say they’ll do in the paper. They have not reworded the working thesis that got them through the prewriting and drafting stages. Refine the thesis as you get a clearer idea of what you’ll be able to prove. Make sure that the thesis reflects what the paper actually does.

Another weak point occurs when writers string together several questions in their introduction—and then hit readers with their thesis. They haven’t answered the questions fully, and they are probably copying the questioning tactic from something they saw on television or read in a newspaper. Academic writing is a more formal situation, so “dress up” your style and the amount of previewing you will do. If you structure the introduction properly, the thesis will appear later in the introduction after it has been set up.

Preview what you will do in the paper. It’s always necessary. However, it can be as easy as listing your major paragraph topics. I’ll expect you to improve the introduction beyond these basic expectations. Preview at the start, though—and review with care at the end. If you don’t, we won’t care or remember.

Definition of Thesis
Again, a thesis is a provable opinion about which reasonable people disagree.
You’re familiar with writing these. It is helpful to remember a few things about good thesis statements:

A thesis is an opinion, not a fact. It’s not useful to write a five-page paper with the thesis: “I really, strongly, vehemently believe that the Civil War was most likely fought between 1861 and 1865.” Prove something about which people disagree.

Using my famous “Goldilocks principle,” decide whether your thesis is appropriate to the scale of the assignment. Is it too large, too specific, or “just right” for your task? The answer depends on your audience, purpose, and assignment information, so read it!

Tone
Keep the tone confident. It’s a thesis statement, not a thesis question. You are the person answering questions, not just asking them (so don’t overuse rhetorical, unanswered questions). Avoid using “I” as well. For example, if I say, “Alice, close the door,” my statement assumes “I want you to close the door, Alice.” I didn’t need to say “I” to communicate here, right? The same usually goes with academic writing. Avoid “I” or “you.” (There’s nothing like me getting a paper with the writer carelessly mentioning “When you are pregnant. . .”)

Where it Goes
**Placement**? Put the thesis near/at the end of the paragraph. Lead up to it with careful setup.

Finally, expect that you’ll rework the thesis as you go along. You might create a working thesis out of a question, turning it into an answer as you prewrite. Sharpen it as you proceed!

**Editing Checklist**
To help your editing and drafting, here are some questions you can ask/answer about the thesis:

- Is the thesis limited enough for a short paper? How so?
- Have you included enough strong points to prove your thesis?
- What is the pattern your essay follows? List argument’s sides and rhetorical modes (i.e., definition, narration, compare and contrast, etc.).
- Do you do enough to prove a number of points that support your thesis? (Remember that proving a point to doubting readers takes more time than you might expect.)
- Where could you include additional information to make the argument more persuasive?
- Did you refute at least one major opposing argument? Which one?
- Describe two of the tones you adopted at different places in the essay, and tell why they are appropriate.
- List your restated thesis that you put in the conclusion paragraph. (If you didn’t put one in, then write one here, copy it in your notes, and put it into the paper.)
How to Write a Thesis Statement

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

Start with a question — then make the answer your thesis

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

- **Question:** “What are the benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade classroom?”
  - **Thesis:** “Computers allow fourth graders an early advantage in technological and scientific education.”
- **Question:** “Why is the Mississippi River so important in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*?”
  - **Thesis:** “The river comes to symbolize both division and progress, as it separates our characters and country while still providing the best chance for Huck and Jim to get to know one another.”
- **Question:** “Why do people seem to get angry at vegans, feminists, and other ‘morally righteous’ subgroups?”
  - **Thesis:** “Through careful sociological study, we’ve found that people naturally assume that “morally righteous” people look down on them as “inferior,” causing anger and conflict where there generally is none.”
Tailor your thesis to the type of paper you’re writing

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

- **Analytical:** Breaks down something to better examine and understand it.
  - Ex. “This dynamic between different generations sparks much of the play’s tension, as age becomes a motive for the violence and unrest that rocks King Lear.”
- **Expository:** Teaches or illuminates a point.
  - Ex. “The explosion of 1800’s philosophies like Positivism, Marxism, and Darwinism undermined and refuted Christianity to instead focus on the real, tangible world.”
- **Argumentative:** Makes a claim, or backs up an opinion, to change other peoples’ minds.
  - Ex. “Without the steady hand and specific decisions of Barack Obama, America would never have recovered from the hole it entered in the early 2000’s.”

Ensure your thesis is provable

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

Good Theses Examples:

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

Bad Theses Examples:

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

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

Example thesis statements with good statement language include:

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

Know where to place a thesis statement

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

Limit a thesis statement to one or two sentences in length

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

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

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

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

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

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

Version A:

Now we turn to the epidemiological evidence.

Version B:

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

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

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

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

Cohesion and Coherence

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

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

Cohesion

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

**Version A:**

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

**Version B:**

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

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

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

Coherence

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

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

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

The Wind-Up

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion: Paragraphs as Punctuation

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

Etiology is the cause of a disease—what’s actually happening in cells and tissues—while epidemiology is the incidence of a disease in a population. 

The quote uses a version of an ASA-style in-text citation for Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” American Journal of Sociology 78 (1973): 1360-80. 
Guiffre. Communities and Networks, 98. 

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Introductions and Conclusions

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

Introductions

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

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

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

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

https://youtu.be/Rkefst9D6n0

Conclusions

Conclusions usually

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

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

https://youtu.be/2L7aeO9fBzE
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- Writing a Killer Conclusion. Authored by: Shmoop. Located at: https://youtu.be/2L7aeO9fBzE. License: All Rights Reserved. License Terms: Standard YouTube License
Tips for Drafting

Since writer’s block and the internal editor can undercut our best efforts, use the following tips to get started in drafting. Of course, you have preferred prewriting techniques that lead up to this point. The OWL Excelsior Writing Lab cover those prewriting approaches.

Get a physical location where you can work without too many distractions. Some writers listen to music. Some cannot write if listening to music with any words. It all depends on what works for you. Be aware of this.

Like any skill, writing takes some warm-up. The first twenty minutes of one’s writing may produce mostly junk with a few usable sentences or ideas. Save your files rather than overwriting everything so that you can mine the prewriting for later ideas. Often, I have located ideas for future projects in these scrap files. While starting the writing, ignore your internal editor who is telling you where semicolons should appear! Just write. After several minutes, it is likely that you will stop “writing like one talks,” which is what I am doing here!

To avoid writer’s block, make yourself believe you have written a lot. Use 14 point font here to fill the page more easily. (This is a trick I have used successfully in completing 50,000-word novels each November in the National Novel Writing Month contest.

Cite as you write so that you never have to go back and, forensically, figure out “What was.” Figuring out what you took after the fact is not how we should approach writing.

Use a prewriting technique like clustering, freewriting, asking reporters’ questions, or listing.

Read the work aloud. By going back to your work or reading it aloud, you can get a sense of the voice. You’ll see and hear what’s missing or which ideas feature too much coverage (overdwelling). I often use one color of highlighting to indicate where something isn’t well worded and another color for areas where I could add more interpretation or detail. Again, use a system that works for you. Writers don’t want to stop themselves repeatedly while drafting, but a quick right-click and highlight can be useful during editing. Similarly, know the keyboard shortcuts so that the writing process isn’t interrupted.

Even when drafting, work at the beginnings and endings of paragraphs. Consider adding transitions between ideas and paragraphs. To see an example of drafting in action, look through the following three slides on drafting from OWL Excelsior, clicking “Next” at the bottom of each page to proceed.

The thesis is a provable opinion, so it should be something others could disagree with. It may only occur to you late in the writing process, but one had best have a good idea of the audience and purpose stated on the assignment sheet before even starting.

If you find that you draft several paragraphs that don’t seem to fit the thesis, what’s easier to fix: the thesis or several paragraphs?

Make sure your major paragraph topics (your major reasons for support) are included in the wording of the thesis. Work out the thesis later on. For now, concentrate on fresh writing, communicating things in new ways.

If the assignment sheet requires three full pages for the final copy, draft slightly more than this so that you have flexibility when editing. However, if sources are called for, it is often best to draft one’s ideas first and then fit in the cited material later on.

There is no set way to draft. Again, do what works for you. Some writers must have a thesis before writing anything else. For others, the claim is nearly the last thing they create, since they prefer to put together reasoning and see where it leads. Try different prewriting approaches and be aware of what sort of writer you tend to be.

This last idea is important: Writing, you are a writer. Using others’ ideas as support, you are more important
than either the ideas or the other writers, however famous they may be. Take oneself seriously as a thinker, then.

Strong topic sentences are a key. Include topic sentences and use these to check that everything else in the paragraph fits the promise of the topic sentence. However, do not get so fixated on the wording of topic sentences that you fail to say anything different from what you though you were supposed to. Then you become like the horse with the blinders above... only going where you are led because other sensory input is being denied. Drafts... horses... very punny. This is a key point. Often, the best major ideas appear on their own within a paragraph and become different paragraph reasons.

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Outlining

Learning Objectives

Recognize that an outline allows you to visually see the relationships between ideas for a writing project. Understand that you can create an outline by hand but that using a computer provides useful conveniences. Understand the lettering and numbering system and the indenting system used in outlining.

Your instructor may make decisions about the form your essay will take, dictating whether you are supposed to write in a particular genre. But if you’re given some choice or flexibility about form, just as in the case of voice, audience, and message, you need to make the most of that responsibility. Regardless of who dictates form, you or your instructor, know what form your writing should take and make sure it suits the voice, audience, and message. Some common forms of writing include the following:

- Argument
- Book review
- Case study
- Comparative analysis
- Critique
- Informative essay or report
- Lab report
- Opinion essay
- Personal narrative
- Persuasive essay
- Proposal
- Research report

An outline is another way to visually see the relationships between ideas you are gathering. You can create an outline by hand or on a computer. If you create one by hand, leave a blank space so you can fit additional ideas in within different areas. Using a computer for your outline is preferable since you can easily add ideas and move ideas around.

Start with your core idea as the beginning point of the outline. Then use roman numerals to add the subtopics followed by indented capital letters for the details. If you add finer details, you can use further-indented numbers for the next level and even-further-indent ed lowercase letters for a level after that. When using a computer, the preset tabs are most likely fine for the indenting.

The outline below relates to the map from the last section. It is simply another way to accomplish the same process of idea gathering. Notice that the writer here has made a sentence outline by writing out each element in a complete sentence. This strategy will help this writer move more easily from outline to essay draft.

The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally as Part of the Identity of Sturgis and the Surrounding Area

As with the mapping process, once you have included all the ideas you have, take a break and return to your outline later. If, in the meantime, a thought comes to you, take a minute to add it. When you are satisfied with your outline, use it to guide your writing process. However, keep in mind that your outline is only a tool you are using, and you will vary from it when you have other ideas along the way.

(The indents may not show up properly here, but be sure you’re indenting over for every level in the outline.)
I Bike Week has been going on for more than seventy years.
   It is an automatic assumption by locals that Bike Week will be held each year.
   Most locals have never known life without Bike Week.

II Bike Week is a key element of area finances.
   Millions of dollars flow into the area economy.
   Sturgis and the surrounding cities have invested heavily in the function.
   Although the actual Bike Week is a central focus, bikers come here for months on either side of the week to
   ride the famous routes.

III The area has grown and developed around Bike Week.
   Every small town has a Harley-Davidson store.
   Merchants continually create new products to sell to bikers.
   The locals are very accepting and supportive of the bikers.

IV People around the world recognize Sturgis for Bike Week.
   People attend Bike Week from all fifty states and many other countries.
   Although Sturgis has only a few thousand people, the town is known around the world.

Key Takeaways

- Outlining uses roman numerals, numbers, letters, and indenting to visually show how ideas are related.
- You can create an outline by hand, but using a computer gives you much greater flexibility to add ideas and
  move ideas around.
- State the thesis at the start of outlines. It’s useful for readers to see the one sentence all this structure
  supports!
- Weird rule: If you have an A, you must also have a B. This follows throughout the outline and lets writers
  develop the support sufficiently.
- Within an outline, the numbering/lettering order is as follows: I.

   A.
   1.
   2.
   a.
   b.

   B.
   1.
   2.
   a.
   b.

Exercises

Using a topic of interest to you, create an idea outline for a short paper.

Using a word processing program, present the following information in a short outline using at least two
roman numerals and at least two capital letters. You will have to reorder the ideas so they make sense.
- Topic: Technology should be a part of current-day education from kindergarten through all levels of
college.
Ideas:

People need a natural comfort with technology before entering the workplace.

Students think in a technological way, so it’s wrong to pull them backward at school.

Students live in a technology age, so they should be educated in a technology age.

Students expect technology at school.

Students must experience using technology rather than just being told about it.

Even sixteen-year-olds are expected to be comfortable with computers on their very first jobs.

Most students use some types of technology at home.

Jobs ranging from waitresses to mechanics to nurses to lawyers require computer use.
“The Placemat” is educator Larry Weinstein’s transitions document, available through this link. (Click the only image on the page once you’re in Weinstein’s site to get to the actual placemat.)

It’s a document that, due to its placemat-like size, is difficult to reproduce here. If you save it and then open it with one of your computer’s paint or photo programs, you can rotate this and resave it.

Why do all this? Well, it’s an amazing guide to the different moves writers make through transition work. It has lists of transitions that work with rhetorical modes as well.

“Share and enjoy!” (Trademark of the Sirrux Cybernetics Corporation. . . just a little Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy humor.)

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Taking Notes, Quoting, Summarizing, and Paraphrasing

Ways of Bringing Information into Your Paper

Writers can bring information from a source in several different ways:

You can **quote** it exactly the way it appears in the original book, article, video, etc. You need to make sure to place quotes around these words and provide documentation (i.e., parenthetical citation and bibliographic information).

You can **summarize** ideas and words from the source, using your own words and style of writing. A summary gives the main ideas or points, in the order they are presented in the original source. A summary is always shorter that the original and follows the order of the original. Its purpose is to present a digest of the most important information contained in the original. Since summary is written in your own words, you don’t need quotation marks but you do need to provide documentation (i.e., parenthetical citation and bibliographic information).

When you **paraphrase**, restate the information in your own words and writing style for the purpose of clarifying the ideas contained in the original. A paraphrase may be shorter than the original, but usually not by much, and it can be arranged differently. Since paraphrase is written in your own words, you don’t need quotation marks, but you do need to provide documentation (i.e., parenthetical citation and bibliographic information).

You **do not need to document common knowledge**, which represents general information found in many sources and remembered by many people:

Easily observable information: First Amendment of the Constitution is about freedom of speech; certain types of trees lose leaves in the fall

Commonly reported facts: Napoleon’s army was defeated in the War of 1812; the US involvement in WWII started with the attack of Japan on Pearl Harbor

Common sayings: Thou shall not kill; think before you speak

**Recording Information**

Take careful notes. You can do this on cards or on sheets of paper. **Always** (whether summarized, paraphrased or quoted) indicate at the top what the note is about (i.e., the content of the note), and at the bottom of the note indicate the source of information (author, title and page number if given). Regardless whether you quote, summarize or paraphrase, you must document the source!

**Use quotations sparingly.** If you use too many quotes, you’ll be bringing many writing styles into your essay and your paper will be very choppy. Use quotes only if they come from a historical document, the wording is unique, interesting, important, insightful or powerful and when a piece of information is controversial. Otherwise, paraphrase or summarize in your own words. If you decide that you want the information exactly as the author has stated it, be sure to copy every word and punctuation mark exactly as it appears in the source (even if it’s misspelled or incorrect) and put quotation marks around the text.
Use summary when you need only the main points.

Use paraphrase carefully. Typically, less than a third of a body paragraph generally comes from the sources. Of that source use, we most often summarize or paraphrase. Quoting is rare. That means that you have read the material, thought about it for a few moments and written down in your own language what the material said rather than just copying/pasting in some source words.

Avoiding Problems

When taking notes, make sure you do the following to avoid future problems:

- Avoid writing “raw” notes: notes that contain only your data, information you collected. Instead, write notes that contain your analysis and interpretation of that data. When you write such notes, you are reflecting on the data, and this will make your paper easier to write later because you’ll already have your interpretations contained in the notes. If you wait to interpret the notes later when you start writing your essay, you’ll be doing it out of the context without the benefit of the entire source.
- Always note your source (author, title and page number) on every note.
- When you have completed reading a passage you want to use in your paper, close the source and write your note after thinking a bit in your own words.
- Remember that changing the words does not change your obligation to document the source. Paraphrases and summaries require documentation.
- Place quotation marks immediately around everything taken word for word from the source.

Tips for Integrating Quotes

Here are some tips for quoting:

- Use double quotation marks " ."
- End the quote before the parentheses, not after.
- For quotes within quotes, use single quotation marks.
- For quotes fewer than four full typed lines, work the quotation into the body of your paper.
- For longer quotations, set off the quotation from the rest of your text by indenting twice (1”) from the left margin and dropping the quotation marks as the block style indicates a quote. The signal phrase for long quotes usually ends with a colon.
- For partial quotations, use ellipsis [ . . .], which consists of three (eliding within the sentence) or four (eliding between sentences) periods with the space before and after each and square brackets around them.
- To add words to a quotation to clarify or correct something, use square brackets.

Tips for Paraphrasing and Summarizing

When you paraphrase or summarize, you use your own words to restate the ideas (paraphrase) or condense the ideas (summarize). Follow the steps below when doing either of the activities:

Skim the material to get the main idea.
Read the material again carefully and slowly, noting the wording.
Without looking at the material, write down only the main idea
Review the material once more to check whether you got the idea right.
Write your summary or paraphrase in your own words.
Check for accuracy to make sure you haven’t changed the intent of the expression.
How not to Write the Introduction and Conclusion

Overview
The opening and closing of anything one writes become increasingly important with busy readers. The way a writers introduces the subject to readers could determine how they will approach the ideas or even if they will continue reading. The introduction of a research paper is especially important because research papers tend to be long and complex.

The Introduction
Your introduction should accomplish key goals:

- Grab attention. Open with a quote, fact, statistic, or short narrative.
- Convince readers that your paper is worth reading. Demonstrate the importance of your subject with details.
- Explain the basic context of your subject
- Narrow the topic to a specific thesis that clearly states your position

You may use the introduction to explain or justify research methods or address readers’ objections.

The Conclusion
A conclusion should accomplish specific tasks:

- Bring the paper to an interesting, logical end
- End with a final fact, quote, or comment to provoke readers to accept your ideas and think about the topic on their own
- Reinforce the main points of the essay without unnecessary repetition
- Restate your thesis in a strategic spot where it will have the most effect on readers
- Speculate about future action

Trite, Cliched Beginnings and Endings Send Messages
Remember, readers’ memories are not very powerful. Remind them of the specific things they should take away from the reading of your essay. Just avoid saying “In conclusion, I will review _____ and _____,” because this patterned ending sounds false. In fact, avoid every writing “In conclusion” to start a paragraph which is, obviously, the last!

Often, I mine the words for my introduction from the conclusion. By that point, I know more about what I have accomplished in those body paragraphs. I can copy and paste (and reword) my conclusion, which appears sharper than the original
introduction. This process might work for you, and it’s easy with the copy and
paste commands. Then, go back and rewrite a conclusion, making sure it’s not just
parroting the wording of the introduction. Call this the Robin Hood Principle:
Stealing from the rich to give to the poor.
Read aloud both your introduction and conclusion. Hear how they sound, and make
sure they are of similar quality and length without seeming identical. Lastly, avoid
“According to Dictionary.com, _____ is” or any “Society verbs ___________”
constructions. (“Society views the media as bad.”) Provable? Arguable?)
Early assignments in most writing courses feature passive writing. By this, I mean writers are quoting rather than interpreting much.

There are only three reasons we’d ever quote: We cannot state the words better, they are the strongly-held opinion of an expert, or they are a statement differing from widely-held belief in that field of study.

Instead of quoting and moving on as if something has happened, paraphrase. It is the default source use, not quoting. Paraphrasing well is a skill, as one must reword and reorder. Unfortunately, most students only think to reword. That can lead to mosaic plagiarism.

As with any source use, treat quotes as excuses for argument. Surround them with signal phrases before and interpretation after. Readers are more interested in your use of the material than in the material itself.

Beginning or ending paragraphs on quotes, then, can be problematic because it’s so passive.

Whether we quote, paraphrase, or summarize, it is important to set up the cited material with a signal phrase and to interpret it after the in-text citation. Treat your ideas as professors do: Your points are more important than the source ideas. If we placed you on a see saw opposite the source, which would weigh more (and thus be able to hold the other up in the air before dropping them)?

This is a strange point, but hopefully memorable: Your ideas matter most, with the support backing what you bring to the writing situation.

Being this active as a writer may be the opposite of what you were taught in eighth grade; in college, the expectations are different.

- Quote Sparingly. **Author**ed by: Joshua Dickinson. **Provided by**: Jefferson Community College. **Located at**: http://www.sunyjefferson.edu. **Project**: Writers' Handbook. **License**: [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0)
Checklist: Using Quotations Effectively

Before you include a quotation in your essay, ask yourself:
- Which point of mine does the quotation support?
- Why should the passage be quoted rather than paraphrased or summarized?
- What do my readers need to know about the quotation’s author?

As you integrate quotations into your draft, ask yourself:
- Have I sufficiently introduced the quotation with a phrase or sentence?
- Will my readers know whom I am quoting and why?
- Does the quotation fit smoothly into my own sentence?

As you revise your work, ask yourself:
- Have I strung together too many quotations?
- Have I used long quotations sparingly?
- Have I used quotation marks properly and documented each quote?

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The One-Sentence Paraphrase Rule

Break up long areas of source use. Interpret them. The citation counts only for the sentence it’s in, not for the sentence before that, or the sentence before that, etc.

Telling Yours from Theirs

Use sources as a form of backup for what you write. They support the writer’s claims, creating the sense that the writer owns her paper.

Now, too many students think that they are supposed to write a bunch of papers that list quotes. Sometimes, they even paraphrase entire paragraphs. This results in failing arguments and failing grades, because they have done so little work. It’s easy to find a bunch of quotes. It’s easy to paraphrase those quotes. This is where the one-sentence rule for paraphrase comes about.

As a reader, I need to be able to distinguish between “what’s yours” in the essay and “what’s theirs.” Ideally, the distinction between sources and you should be easy. In practice, though, it is not.

The Rule

At the college level, instructors will only consider your citation to be “good” for the sentence in which it occurs. That is, when I read a paragraph and it has a citation at the end, that citation only counts for the sentence it is in.

Consequences Big Blocks of Uninterpreted Paraphrases

What I often see are blocks of source information that aren’t quoted, but which are cited. The writer basically attempted to reword an entire block of text from the source. The writer thought they’d be okay with just plopping a parenthetical citation near/at the paragraph’s end.

If this happens, you need to know how I will read things.

I will read it as follows:

The Paraphrase Counts only for the Sentence it is in.

The paraphrase counts only for the sentence it is in. Therefore, anything in the several sentences before you cited is not covered by that ending parenthetical citation. Let me show you an example from a student essay. You’ll see how easy it is to throw in some details, and how tempting it is to leave them all alone. This comes from a student paper about Alzheimer’s disease:

Experiments have been done on mice to determine which of two Beta secretases in the brain could be mainly responsible for the development of destructive plaques. An enzyme has been recently discovered called BACE 1. This enzyme snips a protein in the brain that forms a beta amyloid fragment. These fragments come together to form the plaque. Researchers are looking for a way to develop a drug that will inactivate BACE 1 and prevent the buildup of beta amyloid in the brain. Beta amyloid forms plaques that interfere with communication among neurons. There could possibly be another enzyme that they are calling BACE 2 as of now. The abnormal
accumulation of chromosome 21 in cells could also be a main cause of Alzheimer’s (Travis 1).

Aside from the fact that these are unquoted quotes, what’s the problem with stringing together eight sentences like this? Do you see what I’m talking about with the one-sentence rule? For the example above, the parenthetical citation (Travis 1) at paragraph’s end would count only for the sentence it’s in. That is why we put the period only after the parentheses. The period encloses that citation within its sentence.

The paragraph above shows serious plagiarism problems.

**The Solution: Break Up Long Areas of Source Use**

...and Interpret

Paraphrasing problems like the one above can be easy to fix. You break up the long areas of source use and interpret their meaning. The breaking up will force you to include only the source information that’s most valuable. The interpretation will get you to stick in more of your own ideas. Interpreting enough will tend to make it so you can’t just string together source information without writing anything about it.

Do you recall how much of a percentage of an average body paragraph should come from the source?

Answers vary, of course, depending on your purpose and the sophistication of your topic. However, if you consistently let the sources take over more than 1/3 of your body paragraphs, you will not be a successful arguer, thinker, or writer.

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- The One-Sentence Paraphrase Rule. **Authored by:** Joshua Dickinson. **Provided by:** Jefferson Community College. **Located at:** http://www.sunyjefferson.edu. **Project:** College Writing Handbook. **License:** CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike
How Instructors View Paraphrases

Should writers paraphrase more than they quote? When should a writer use paraphrase? When should quotes be used?

Believe me, students can get frustrated and nervous at the prospect of paraphrasing. The reason, I think, is that one needs to know what a source means before being able to paraphrase. As handbook editor Jane Aaron writes in an early edition of *The LB Brief Handbook* “[...] an unsuccessful paraphrase—one that plagiarizes—copies the author’s words or sentence structures or both *without quotation marks*” (423). You will need to get good at paraphrasing to do well in college-level writing.

Cite as you write. Remember, when in doubt about whether or not to cite, just cite. Cover yourself against accusations of plagiarism.

**Reword and Reorder**

To count as a valid paraphrase, you need to reword *and* reorder the original. Then, of course, you cite the source. You cannot just switch around a few words and hope that you’ve done enough.

It’s not okay to slightly reword the original, or simply to replace the verb with a synonym. This is a form of plagiarism. While still keeping to the source’s meaning, you must attempt to entirely reword and reorder the original. If part of the original cannot or should not be reworded, put that phrasing in quotes.

Please ask questions if you are unsure about what constitutes a proper paraphrase. Like most citing issues, judge on a case-by-case basis.

Don’t forget to interpret your cited information. Even though it’s in your words, you still need to interpret.

**Remember These Questions?**

Should writers paraphrase more than they quote?
When should a writer use paraphrase?
When should quotes be used?

Quotes should be used when the writer couldn’t say it better, or when the source “said it” in such a distinctive manner that it’s almost impossible to paraphrase without losing much of the meaning. Advertising and famous speeches convey meaning better if they are cited. Imagine paraphrasing “Coke, the real thing” or “We have nothing to fear but fear itself!”

However, in academic writing situations you are expected to paraphrase a lot. Quotes should be used sparingly. Take the time to understand what you’re quoting. Reorder and reword it, cite it, then interpret.

Do you see how all those activities (reordering, etc.) will tend to give you lots to say about a paraphrase? If you think of the area after your citation as the place where proving happens, then the work of interpretation becomes much easier. That is, if you
go to the trouble of understanding, reorder *and* rewording a given quote, then throwing in a few sentences of interpretation is a relatively easy task. You already translated the quote into your own words by paraphrasing; now, show what the quote means and how it helps one’s thesis.

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Moves for Providing Commentary

Your commentary can take many forms. Which form you employ depends on the evidence and the points you are trying to make. The commentary may be as follows:

- Explaining or clarifying a point
- Inferring from facts
- Drawing own conclusions
- Extrapolating from parallel contexts
- Showing implications
- Showing effects of a problem/issue
- Showing causes of a problem/issue
- Reiterating pertinent information or points
- Linking information to larger issue and/or main thesis
- Comparing unfamiliar issue to a familiar one to increase understanding
- Contrasting/juxtaposing issues to sharpen argument by making distinctions clearer
- Others

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How Might I Avoid Letting Source Use Take Over?

Q: How can I Avoid Letting the Paper get Taken over by Sources?

A: This is a common issue. We think we know what we are classifying or writing about, but once we begin drafting and using others’ ideas, the focus seems to get lost.

Q: In the typical body paragraph, how much should I write?

A: Over 75% should be from you. Realize that summaries and paraphrases, though in your words, aren’t yours. They’re from the sources. So, we have this tough standard of having to write a lot of commentary. Without using “you” or “I,” you should be able to handle this at the ENG 101 level. Read on!

- Integrating supporting sources without offering them chances to take over the paper is a huge issue. We’ll confront it for the rest of our writing lives. I can offer you some suggestions. They are in no particular order. Please read this carefully, though, as it might help you avoid either plagiarism or an extremely low grade. I’ll follow up on this with other postings, too.
- Freewrite what you think about the topic as soon as you decide on it. When you outline the paper’s reasons, be sure to write out what you think. (I like to hand write what I think and then type it. Typing allows me to add things and to think about them. At this point, at least I have something of my own, though I know it’ll change significantly.)
- Force yourself to write out topic sentences that are directly related to the thesis.
- Let your thesis change after you’re in the midpoint of the essay. It’s smart not to try and fit the paper to one sentence; it’s easier by far to fit one sentence to the paper you write than vice versa! Refine your working thesis repeatedly. It’s a messy process and it should be!
- Support needs to remain in support. Condition yourself to write two or more sentences of commentary for every piece of source information. You know you must cite summaries, paraphrases, and quotes, right? To do less would be to plagiarize. But, once we do this so carefully, we end up with paragraphs taken over by sources. Unless you provide commentary on these summaries, paraphrases, or quotes, you are not writing actively. You can create integrated paragraphs by handling the material, saying things about it.

Q: What might I do after the citation?

A: Question the source information, extend it, offer examples examples, respond by adopting any of various tones toward it, relate it to the topic sentence, relate to thesis, or relate it to what happens next. A power move is to show another example and then compare/contrast, discuss the examples (analysis, synthesis, evaluation skills). If you take a tone toward the material, you might be “accepting,” “skeptical,” “in agreement with” it. These are attitude words. It’s okay to have attitude as long as you don’t sound as if you are speaking or writing a newspaper editorial! In fact, avoid sounding like you’re chatting (which is something I am doing here.)

- Treat the citations as excuses for you to argue something. That “something” is up to you, but realize that readers expect your commentary to matter more than the cited information. Play the game, but realize that in college, these rules are radically different from what one could get away with in high school. (You are doing well with responses to the photos and essays, so do that some sort of logical, detailed thinking after citations.)
- If good things must occur after citations, they also must happen before the citations. Review the handbook and my information about signal phrases. Your job is to establish the context of what’s being said and why it matters. You handle this with exact verbs like “contends,” “refutes,” “suggests,” “defends,” rather than blah verbs like “is” or “says.” We call this setup a signal phrase. The signal phrase introduces a source. Use signal phrases to signal a shift from your words to theirs. This is part of a well-integrated paragraph.
• **Save author for signal phrase** if you have no page to cite. For website and database sources, no page number goes into parentheses, so you’d better save the author for the signal phrase.
• Offer enough examples and logical discussion to take over those paragraphs that are in danger of being run by sources.
• Don’t start or end paragraphs with source material. I say this because sources take over if they begin or end. (That’s not an absolute rule, but you recognize its practicality.
• Readers are easily distracted. After a citation, it is okay to restate the paraphrase’s meaning.
• Writers hurt their chances at success with topic sentences that don’t get followed, paragraph endings that are vague, and a lack of transitions. You know that people notice the beginnings and endings the most, so be sure these are excellent. Transition smoothly from idea to idea, both within sentences and between paragraphs. (Many writers think well but cannot start sentences at all well. Be sure you don’t fit that category.)
• Read your work aloud with an “ear toward” hearing the transitions from you to the source and back. If there are big chunks of source use, you must break up those and provide sufficient commentary. That’s where that general “25% or more yours” rule fits in, since you can break up paragraphs and offer sufficient commentary to regain control.

Remember that good readers want to be able to appreciate what you bring to the discussion.

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• How Might I Avoid Letting Source Use Take Over?. **Authored by:** Joshua Dickinson. **Provided by:** Jefferson Community College. **Located at:** [http://www.sunyjefferson.edu](http://www.sunyjefferson.edu). **Project:** Writers’ Handbook. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
The Importance of Spelling

Word-processing programs usually have a spell-checker, but you should still carefully check for correct changes in your words. This is because automatic spell-checkers may not always understand the context of a word.

Misspelling a word might seem like a minor mistake, but it can reflect very poorly on a writer. It suggests one of two things: either the writer does not care enough about his work to proofread it, or he does not know his topic well enough to properly spell words related to it. Either way, spelling errors will make a reader less likely to trust a writer’s authority.

The best way to ensure that a paper has no spelling errors is to look for them during the proofreading stage of the writing process. Being familiar with the most common errors will help you find (and fix) them during the writing and proofreading stage.

Common Spelling Errors

Phonetic Errors

Phonetics is a field that studies the sounds of a language. However, English phonetics can be tricky: In English, the pronunciation of a word does not always relate to the way it is spelled. This can make spelling a challenge. Here are some common phonetic irregularities:

- A word can sound like it could be spelled multiple ways. For example: “concede” and “conceed” are the same phonetically, but only “concede” is the proper spelling.
- A word has silent letters that the writer may forget to include. You cannot hear the “a” in “realize,” but you need it to spell the word correctly.
- A word has double letters that the writer may forget to include. “Accommodate,” for example, is frequently misspelled as “acommodate” or “acommodate.”
- The writer may use double letters when they are not needed. The word “amend” has only one “m,” but it is commonly misspelled with two.

Sometimes, words just aren’t spelled the way they sound. “Right,” for example, does not resemble its phonetic spelling whatsoever. Try to become familiar with words that have unusual or non-phonetic spellings so you can be on the lookout for them in your writing. But again, the best way to avoid these misspellings is to consult a dictionary whenever you’re unsure of the correct spelling.
Homophones

“Bread” and “bred” sound the same, but they are spelled differently, and they mean completely different things. Two words with different meanings but the same pronunciation are homophones. If you don’t know which homophone is the right one to use, look both up in the dictionary to see which meaning (and spelling) you want. Common homophones include:

- right, rite, wright, and write
- read (most tenses of the verb) and reed
- read (past, past participle) and red
- rose (flower) and rose (past tense of rise)
- carat, caret, and carrot
- to, two, and too
- there, their, and they’re
- its and it’s

Typographical Errors

Some spelling errors are caused by the writer accidentally typing the wrong thing. Common typos include:

- Omitting letters from a word (typing “brthday” instead of “birthday,” for example)
- Adding extra letters (typing “birthdayy”)
- Transposing two letters in a word (typing “brithday”)
- Spacing words improperly (such as “mybirthday” instead of “my birthday”)

Being aware of these common mistakes when writing will help you avoid spelling errors.

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Lower Order Concerns for Proofreading

Previously we examined higher order concerns (HOCs) as part of the revision stage of the writing process. Once we move to the proofreading stage, it’s time to consider the lower order concerns (LOCs). The difference is simple: HOCs are global issues, or issues that affect how a reader understands the entire paper; LOCs are issues that don’t necessarily interrupt understanding of the writing by themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOCs</th>
<th>LOCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis statement</td>
<td>Punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Citation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of ideas</td>
<td>Sentence structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may find yourself thinking, “Well, it depends,” or, “But what if...?” You’re absolutely right to think so. These lists are just guidelines; every writer will have a different hierarchy of concerns. Always try to think in terms of, “Does this affect my understanding of the writing?”

Are HOCs More Important than LOCs?

No, not necessarily. HOCs tend to interrupt a reader’s understanding of the writing, and that’s why they need to be addressed first. However, if a LOC becomes a major obstacle, then it naturally becomes a higher priority.

Think of an example of how a Lower Order Concern could become a Higher Order Concern.

Here are some other issues you might face. These may be more difficult to categorize, and they may largely depend on the writing. If you think, “It depends,” make notes about the circumstances under which these issues could be a HOC or a LOC.

- Evaluating sources
- citation method
- style
- paragraph structure
- active vs. passive voice
- format

How to Address LOCs
Analyze your use of source material. Check any paraphrases and quotations against the original texts. Quotations should replicate the original author’s words, while paraphrases should maintain the original author’s meaning but have altered language and sentence structures. For each source, confirm that you have adhered to the preferred style guide for the target journal or other venue.

Consider individual sentences in terms of grammar, mechanics, and punctuation. Many LOCs can be revised by isolating and examining different elements of the text. Read the text sentence by sentence, considering the grammar and sentence structure. Remember, a sentence may be grammatically correct and still confuse readers. If you notice a pattern—say, a tendency to misplace modifiers or add unnecessary commas—read the paper looking only for that error. Read the document backwards, word by word, looking for spelling errors. Throughout the writing process and especially at this stage of revision, keep a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a writing handbook nearby.

Strategies such as reading aloud and seeking feedback are useful at all points in the revision process. Reading aloud will give you distance from the text and prevent you from skimming over what is actually written on the page. This strategy will help you to identify both HOCs, such as missing concepts, and LOCs, such as typos. Additionally, seeking feedback will allow you to test your ideas and writing on real readers. Seek feedback from readers both inside and outside of your target audience in order to gain different perspectives.

Proofreading Advice

The following video features two student tutors from the Writing and Reading Center at Fresno City College. In addition to great guidance about proofreading strategies, they also offer insights about what to expect when working with Writing Center tutors.

https://youtu.be/STa5W4gm2qY?t=17s

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Revising With Style In Mind

A writer’s style is what sets his or her writing apart. Style is the way writing is dressed up (or down) to fit the specific context, purpose, or audience. Word choice, sentence fluency, and the writer’s voice — all contribute to the style of a piece of writing. How a writer chooses words and structures sentences to achieve a certain effect is also an element of style. When Thomas Paine wrote “These are the times that try men’s souls,” he arranged his words to convey a sense of urgency and desperation. Had he written “These are bad times,” it’s likely he wouldn’t have made such an impact!

Style is usually considered to be the province of literary writers. Novelists such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner and poets such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman are well known for their distinctive literary styles. But journalists, scientists, historians, and mathematicians also have distinctive styles, and they need to know how to vary their styles to fit different audiences. For example, the first-person narrative style of a popular magazine like *National Geographic* is quite different from the objective, third-person expository style of a research journal like *Scientific American*, even though both are written for informational purposes.

Not just right and wrong

Style is not a matter of right and wrong but of what is appropriate for a particular setting and audience. Consider the following two passages, which were written by the same author on the same topic with the same main idea, yet have very different styles:

“Experiments show that Heliconius butterflies are less likely to ovipost on host plants that possess eggs or egg-like structures. These egg mimics are an unambiguous example of a plant trait evolved in response to a host-restricted group of insect herbivores.”

“Heliconius butterflies lay their eggs on Passiflora vines. In defense the vines seem to have evolved fake eggs that make it look to the butterflies as if eggs have already been laid on them.” (Example from Myers, G. (1992). Writing biology: Texts in the social construction of scientific knowledge. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. p. 150.)

What changed was the audience. The first passage was written for a professional journal read by other biologists, so the style is authoritative and impersonal, using technical terminology suited to a professional audience. The second passage, written for a popular science magazine, uses a more dramatic style, setting up a conflict between the butterflies and the vines, and using familiar words to help readers from non-scientific backgrounds visualize the scientific concept being described. Each style is appropriate for the particular audience.
Elements of style

Many elements of writing contribute to an author’s style, but three of the most important are word choice, sentence fluency, and voice.

Word Choice

Good writers are concise and precise, weeding out unnecessary words and choosing the exact word to convey meaning. Precise words—active verbs, concrete nouns, specific adjectives—help the reader visualize the sentence. Good writers use adjectives sparingly and adverbs rarely, letting their nouns and verbs do the work.

Word Choice

Good writers also choose words that contribute to the flow of a sentence. Polysyllabic words, alliteration, and consonance can be used to create sentences that roll off the tongue. Onomatopoeia and short, staccato words can be used to break up the rhythm of a sentence.

Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency is the flow and rhythm of phrases and sentences. Good writers use a variety of sentences with different lengths and rhythms to achieve different effects. They use parallel structures within sentences and paragraphs to reflect parallel ideas, but also know how to avoid monotony by varying their sentence structures.

Sentence Fluency

Good writers also arrange their ideas within a sentence for greatest effect. They avoid loose sentences, deleting extraneous words and rearranging their ideas for effect. Many students initially write with a looser oral style, adding words on to the end of a sentence in the order they come to mind. This rambling style is often described as a “word dump” where everything in a student’s mind is dumped onto the paper in no particular order. There is nothing wrong with a word dump as a starting point: the advantage of writing over speaking is that writers can return to their words, rethink them, and revise them for effect. Tighter, more readable style results when writers choose their words carefully, delete redundancies, make vague words more specific, and use subordinate clauses and phrases to rearrange their ideas for the greatest effect.

Voice

Because voice is difficult to measure reliably, it is often left out of scoring formulas for writing tests. Yet voice is an essential element of style that reveals the writer’s personality. A writer’s voice can be impersonal or chatty, authoritative or reflective, objective or passionate, serious or funny.

Strategies to Revise for Style

Read an essay draft out loud, preferably to another person. Better yet, have another person read your draft to you. Note how that person interprets your words. Does it come across as you had meant it originally? If not, revise.
Adopt a persona that’s related to your topic. Write from the perspective of this person you create: what language would a young woman who’d just spent two years in the peace corps use, for instance, if the essay were about the value of volunteer work? How would the words on the page of a project about gun control look coming from the perspective of a very conservative gun owner?

Combine (some) short sentences, or break apart (some) long sentences. Sentence length variety is an asset to your readers, as noted above. If you find a stretch of your essay that uses many sentences of approximately the same length close together, focus on combining or breaking apart there.

Punch up the word choice. Not every word in an essay can be a “special” word, nor should they be. But if your writing in an area feels a little flat, the injection of a livelier word can have strong rhetorical and emotional impact on your reader. Think of these words as jewels in the right setting. Often swapping out “to be” verbs (is, was, were, etc.) with more action-packed verbs has immediate, positive impact. Adjectives are also good candidates for updating—look for “things” and “stuff,” or “very” and “many,” to replace with more precise terminology.

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- Image of Style. Authored by: Dr Case. Located at: https://flic.kr/p/b3Qrdt. License: CC BY-NC: Attribution-NonCommercial
Peer Editing is Inherently Self-Interested

Ironically, peer editing someone’s work actually benefits ourselves as much or more than the other writer. That’s because we’ll inevitably notice aspects of our paper that we need to tweak and improve upon. Seeing others’ work helps with our own.

It’s also useful to remind ourselves not to be too nasty with comments to others (or ourselves). That’s where we can confuse criticism with judgment. Students are usually harsher with evaluating or grading peer work than any professor! Be positive and specific. Avoid being like those elementary kids who, when called upon for Show and Tell, end up stating “Here’s my essay. I like it a lot. It’s really good.” Really and other junk works can be avoided both in our peer editing and essay writing.

Again, the key is to be positive. Ask questions and be specific.

Jot the things in your own paper which this peer editing reminds you to fix. They are there if you are open to noting them. In fact, this is all about noting: Mark, remember is another synonym for notice.

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Higher Order Concerns for Editing

Introduction

Regardless of writers’ levels of experience or areas of expertise, many struggle with revision, a component of the writing process that encompasses everything from transformative changes in content and argumentation to minor corrections in grammar and punctuation. Perhaps because revision involves so many forms of modification, it is the focus of most scientific writing guides and handbooks. Revision can be daunting; how does one progress from initial drafts (called “rough drafts” for good reason) to a polished piece of scholarly writing?

Developing a process for revision can help writers produce thoughtful, polished texts and grow their written communication skills. Consider, then, a systematic approach to revision, including strategies to employ at every step of the process.

A System for Approaching Revision

Generally, revision should be approached in a top-down manner by addressing higher-order concerns (HOCs) before moving on to lower-order concerns (LOCs). In writing studies, the term “higher order” is used to denote major or global issues such as thesis, argumentation, and organization, whereas “lower order” is used to denote minor or local issues such as grammar and mechanics. The more analytical work of revising HOCs often has ramifications for the entire piece. Perhaps in refining the argument, a writer will realize that the discussion section does not fully consider the study’s implications. Or, a writer will try a new organizational scheme and find that a paragraph no longer fits and should be cut. Such revisions may have far-reaching implications for the text.

Dedicating time to tweaking wording or correcting grammatical errors is unproductive if the sentence will be changed or deleted. Focusing on HOCs before LOCs allows writers to revise more effectively and efficiently.
Revision Strategies

Bearing in mind the general system of revising from HOCs to LOCs, you can employ several revision strategies.

- **Begin by evaluating how your argument addresses your rhetorical situation**—that is, the specific context surrounding your writing, including the audience, exigence, and constraints.[2]
  - For example, you may write an article describing a new treatment. If the target journal’s audience comes from a variety of disciplines, you may need to include substantial background explanation, consider the implications for practitioners and scholars in multiple fields, and define technical terms. By contrast, if you are addressing a highly specialized audience, you may be able to dispense with many of the background explanations and definitions because of your shared knowledge base. You may consider the implications only for specialists, as they are your primary audience. Because this sort of revision affects the entire text, beginning by analyzing your rhetorical situation is effective.

- **Analyze your thesis or main argument for clarity.**
- **Evaluate the global organization of your text by writing a reverse outline.** Unlike traditional outlines, which are written before drafting, reverse outlines reflect the content of written drafts.
  - In a separate document or in your text’s margins, record the main idea of each paragraph. Then, consider whether the order of your ideas is logical. This method also will help you identify ideas that are out of place or digressive. You may also evaluate organization by printing the text and cutting it up so that each paragraph appears on a separate piece of paper. You may then easily reorder the paragraphs to test different organizational schemes.

Completing a Post-Draft Outline

The reverse outline mentioned above is also known as a **post-draft outline**. Guidance for how to complete one for an entire essay draft, as well as for an individual problematic paragraph, are found in this presentation.

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- Post-Draft Outline. **Authored by**: Alexis McMillan-Clifton. **Provided by**: Tacoma Community College. **Located at**: http://prezi.com/ilic1tcomvne/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share. **License**: [CC BY: Attribution]
The OWL Excelsior site contains a wonderful walk-through of the writing process, with several pages devoted to the different stages of revision. It is best viewed by accessing the links and then following the Next buttons at the bottom of each page.

Peer Review

Whether you’re in an online class or a face-to-face class, peer review is an important part of the revision process and is often a required component in a writing class. In the following video, you’ll see students engage in a particular type of peer review called CARES.

It culminates in the Peer Editing page, which includes both a video and a downloadable peer editing form.

Check our these resources!
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- Peer Editing. **Authored by:** OWL Excelsior Writing Lab. **Provided by:** Excelsior College. **Located at:** http://owl.excelsior.edu/writing-process/revising-and-editing/revising-and-editing-peer-review/. **Project:** Writers' Handbook. **License:** CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike
Part 7: Diction
Everyone’s a Wordsmith

If you are going to write for either personal or professional reasons, you should carefully choose your words. Make sure your words say what you mean by controlling wordiness, using appropriate language, choosing precise wording, and using a dictionary or thesaurus effectively.

17.1 Controlling Wordiness and Writing Concisely

Learning Objectives

- Recognize and eliminate repetitive ideas.
- Recognize and remove unneeded repeated words.
- Recognize unneeded words and revise sentences to be more concise.

It is easy to let your sentences become cluttered with words that do not add value to what you are trying to say. You can manage cluttered sentences by eliminating repetitive ideas, removing repeated words, and rewording to eliminate unneeded words.

Eliminating Repetitive Ideas

Unless you are providing definitions on purpose, stating one idea in two ways within a single sentence is redundant and not necessary. Read each example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove repetitive phrasing that adds wordiness. Then study the suggested revision below each example.

Examples

**Original:** Use a very heavy skillet made of cast iron to bake an extra juicy meatloaf.

**Revision:** Use a cast iron skillet to bake a very juicy meatloaf.

**Original:** Joe thought to himself, “I think I’ll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.”

**Revision:** Joe thought, “I think I’ll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.”
Removing Repeated Words

As a general rule, you should try not to repeat a word within a sentence. Sometimes you simply need to choose a different word. But often you can actually remove repeated words. Read this example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove a repeated word that adds wordiness. Then check out the revision below the sentence.

Example

Original: The student who won the cooking contest is a very talented and ambitious student.

Revision: The student who won the cooking contest is very talented and ambitious.

Rewording to Eliminate Unneeded Words

If a sentence has words that are not necessary to carry the meaning, those words are unneeded and can be removed to reduce wordiness. Read each example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove phrasing that adds wordiness. Then check out the suggested revisions to each sentence.

Examples

Original: Andy has the ability to make the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

Revision: Andy makes the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

Original: For his part in the cooking class group project, Malik was responsible for making the mustard reduction sauce.

Revision: Malik made the mustard reduction sauce for his cooking class group project.

Key Takeaways

- State ideas only once within a single sentence, as opposed to repeating a key idea in an attempt to clarify.
- Avoid unnecessarily repeating words within a sentence.
- Write concisely by eliminating unneeded words.

Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences by eliminating unneeded words.

- I was late because of the fact that I could not leave the house until such time as my mother was ready to go.
- I used a pair of hot pads to remove the hot dishes from the oven.
- The bus arrived at 7:40 a.m., I got on the bus at 7:41 a.m., and I was getting off the bus by 7:49 a.m.
- The surface of the clean glass sparkled.

17.2 Using Appropriate Language
Learning Objectives

Be aware that some words are commonly confused with each other.
Recognize and use appropriate words, taking care to avoid jargon or slang.
Write in a straightforward manner and with the appropriate level of formality.

As a writer, you do not want inappropriate word choice to get in the way of your message. For this reason, you need to strive to use language that is accurate and appropriate for the writing situation. Learn for yourself which words you tend to confuse with each other. Omit jargon (technical words and phrases common to a specific profession or discipline) and slang (invented words and phrases specific to a certain group of people), unless your audience and purpose call for such language. Avoid using outdated words and phrases, such as “dial the number.” Be straightforward in your writing rather than using euphemisms (a gentler, but sometimes inaccurate, way of saying something). Be clear about the level of formality needed for each different piece of writing and adhere to that level.

Focusing on Easily Confused Words

Words in homophone sets are often mistaken for each other. (See Chapter 19 “Mechanics”, Section 19.1.3 “Homophones” for more about homophones.) Table 17.1 “Commonly Confused Words” presents some examples of commonly confused words other than homophones. You will notice that some of the words in the table have similar sounds that lead to their confusion. Other words in the table are confused due to similar meanings. Keep your personal list handy as you discover pairings of words that give you trouble.

Table 17.1 Commonly Confused Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>affect</th>
<th>effect</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all ready</td>
<td>already</td>
<td>lay</td>
<td>lie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allusion</td>
<td>illusion</td>
<td>leave</td>
<td>let</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>among</td>
<td>between</td>
<td>ordinance</td>
<td>ordnance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td>our</td>
<td>precede</td>
<td>proceed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>award</td>
<td>reward</td>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>quite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breath</td>
<td>breathe</td>
<td>quote</td>
<td>quotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>may</td>
<td>sit</td>
<td>set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conscience</td>
<td>conscious</td>
<td>statue</td>
<td>statute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desert</td>
<td>dessert</td>
<td>that</td>
<td>which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emigrate</td>
<td>immigrate</td>
<td>through</td>
<td>thorough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>especially</td>
<td>specially</td>
<td>who</td>
<td>whom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explicit</td>
<td>implicit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writing without Jargon or Slang

Jargon and slang both have their places. Using jargon is fine as long as you can safely assume your readers also know the jargon. For example, if you are a lawyer, and you are writing to others in the legal profession, using legal jargon is perfectly fine. On the other hand, if you are writing for people outside the legal profession, using legal jargon would most likely be confusing, and you should avoid it. Of course, lawyers must use legal jargon in papers they prepare for customers. However, those papers are designed to navigate within the legal system.

You are, of course, free to use slang within your personal life, but unless you happen to be writing a sociolinguistic study of slang itself, it really has no place in academic writing. Even if you are writing somewhat casual responses in an online discussion for a class, you should avoid using slang or other forms of abbreviated communication common to IM (instant messaging) and texting.

Choosing to Be Straightforward

Some writers choose to control meaning with flowery or pretentious language, euphemisms, and double-talk. All these choices obscure direct communication and therefore have no place in academic writing. Study the following three examples that clarify each of these misdirection techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Misdirection Involved</th>
<th>Straightforward Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flowery or pretentious</td>
<td>Your delightful invitation arrived completely out of the blue, and I would absolutely love to attend such a significant and important event, but we already have a commitment.</td>
<td>The speaker seems to be trying very hard to relay serious regrets for having to refuse an invitation. But the overkill makes it sound insincere.</td>
<td>We are really sorry, but we have a prior commitment. I hope you have a great event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphemisms</td>
<td>My father is follicly challenged.</td>
<td>The speaker wants to talk about his or her father’s lack of hair without having to use the word “bald.”</td>
<td>My father is bald.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double-talk</td>
<td>I was unavoidably detained from arriving to the evening meeting on time because I became preoccupied with one of my colleagues after the close of the work day.</td>
<td>The speaker was busy with a colleague after work and is trying to explain being tardy for an evening meeting.</td>
<td>I’m sorry to be late to the meeting. Work ran later than usual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presenting an Appropriate Level of Formality

Look at the following three sentences. They all three carry roughly the same meaning. Which one is the best way to write the sentence?

- The doctor said, “A full eight hours of work is going to be too much for this patient to handle for at least the next two weeks.”
- The doctor said I couldn’t work full days for the next two weeks.
- my md said 8 hrs of wrk R 2M2H for the next 2 wks.

If you said, “It depends,” you are right! Each version is appropriate in certain situations. Every writing situation requires you to make a judgment regarding the level of formality you want to use. Base your decision on a
combination of the subject matter, the audience, and your purpose for writing. For example, if you are sending a
text message to a friend about going bowling, the formality shown in example three is fine. If, on the other hand,
you are sending a text message to that same friend about the death of a mutual friend, you would logically move
up the formality of your tone at least to the level of example two.

Key Takeaways

- Some words are confused because they sound alike, look alike, or both. Others are confused based on
  similar meanings.
- Confine use of jargon to situations where your audience recognizes it.
- Use slang and unofficial words only in your informal, personal writing.
- Write in a straightforward way without using euphemisms or flowery language to disguise what you are
  saying.
- Make sure you examine the subject matter, audience, and purpose to determine whether a piece of writing
  should be informal, somewhat casual, or formal.

Exercises

Choose five of the commonly confused words from Table 17.1 “Commonly Confused Words” that are
sometimes problems for you. Write a definition for each word and use each word in a sentence.
Start a computer file of words that are a problem for you. For each word, write a definition and a sentence.
Add to the file whenever you come across another word that is confusing for you. Use the file for a quick
reference when you are writing.
List five examples of jargon from a field of your choice. Then list two situations in which you could use the
jargon and two situations in which you should not use the jargon.
Work with a small group. Make a list of at least fifty slang words or phrases. For each word or phrase,
indicate where, as a college student, you could properly use the slang. Share your final project with the
class.
Work with a partner. Write five sentences that include euphemisms or flowery language. Then trade papers
and rewrite your partner’s sentences using straightforward language.
Make a list of five situations where you should use very formal writing and five situations where more
casual or even very informal writing would be acceptable.

17.3 Choosing Precise Wording

Learning Objectives

- Understand connotations of words and choose words with connotations that work best for your purposes.
- Incorporate specific and concrete words as well as figurative language into your writing.
- Recognize and avoid clichés and improperly used words.

By using precise wording, you can most accurately relay your thoughts. Some strategies that can help you put
your thoughts into words include focusing on denotations and connotations, balancing specific and concrete words
with occasionally figurative language, and being on guard against clichés and misused words.

Focusing on Both Denotations and
Connotations

Consider that the words “laid-back” and “lackadaisical” both mean “unhurried and slow-moving.” If someone said
you were a “laid-back” student, you would likely be just fine with that comment, but if someone said you were a
“lackadaisical” student, you might not like the connotation. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs all have both
denotations and connotations. The denotation is the definition of a word. The connotation is the emotional sense of a word. For example, look at these three words:

- excited
- agitated
- flustered

The three words all mean to be stirred emotionally. In fact, you might see one of the words as a definition of another one of them. And you would definitely see the three words in a common list in a thesaurus. So the denotations for the three words are about the same. But the connotations are quite different. The word “excited” often has a positive, fun underlying meaning; “agitated” carries a sense of being upset; and “flustered” suggests a person is somewhat out of control. When you are choosing a word to use, you should first think of a word based on its denotation. Then you should consider if the connotation fits your intent. For more on using a dictionary or thesaurus to enhance and add precision to your word choices, see Section 17.4 “Using the Dictionary and Thesaurus Effectively”.

Choosing Specific and Concrete Words

You will always give clearer information if you write with specific words rather than general words. Look at the following example and think about how you could reword it using specific terms. Then check out the following revision to see one possible option.

Examples

Original: The animals got out and ruined the garden produce.

Revision: The horses got out and ruined the tomatoes and cucumbers.

Another way to make your writing clearer and more interesting is to use concrete words rather than abstract words. Abstract words do not have physical properties. But concrete words evoke senses of taste, smell, hearing, sight, and touch. For example, you could say, “My shoe feels odd.” This statement does not give a sense of why your shoe feels odd since odd is an abstract word that doesn’t suggest any physical characteristics. Or you could say, “My shoe feels wet.” This statement gives you a sense of how your shoe feels to the touch. It also gives a sense of how your shoe might look as well as how it might smell. Look at the following example and think about how you could reword it using concrete words. Then check out the following revision to see one possible option.

Examples

Original: The horses got out and ruined the tomatoes and cucumbers.

Revision: The horses stampeded out and squished and squirted the tomatoes and cucumbers.

Study this table for some additional examples of words that provide clarity to writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Words</th>
<th>Specific Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td>Tess and Abby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animals</td>
<td>dogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food</td>
<td>cheeseburger and a salad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract Words</th>
<th>Concrete Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>noise</td>
<td>clanging and squealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success</td>
<td>a job I like and enough money to live comfortably</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enhancing Writing with Figurative Language

Figurative language is a general term that includes writing tools such as alliteration, analogies, hyperbole, idioms, metaphors, onomatopoeia, personification, and similes. By using figurative language, you can make your writing both more interesting and easier to understand.

Figurative Language

**Alliteration:** Repetition of single letters or sets of letters.

**Effect:** Gives a poetic, flowing sound to words.

**Example:** Dana danced down the drive daintily.

**Analogy:** The comparison of familiar and unfamiliar ideas or items by showing a feature they have in common.

**Effect:** Makes an unfamiliar idea or item easier to understand.

**Example:** Writing a book is like raising a toddler. It takes all your time and attention, but you’ll enjoy every minute of it!

**Hyperbole:** A greatly exaggerated point.

**Effect:** Emphasizes the point.

**Example:** I must have written a thousand pages this weekend.

**Idiom:** A group of words that carries a meaning other than the actual meanings of the words.

**Effect:** A colorful way to send a message.

**Example:** I think this assignment will be a piece of cake.

**Metaphor:** An overall comparison of two ideas or items by stating that one is the other.

**Effect:** Adds the connotations of one compared idea to the other compared idea.

**Example:** This shirt is a rag.

**Onomatopoeia:** A single word that sounds like the idea it is describing.

**Effect:** A colorful way to describe an idea while adding a sense of sound.

**Example:** The jazz band was known for its wailing horns and clattering drums.

**Personification:** Attributing human characteristics to nonhuman things.

**Effect:** Adds depth such as humor, drama, or interest.

**Example:** The spatula told me that the grill was just a little too hot today.

**Simile:** Using the word “like” or “as” to indicate that one item or idea resembles another.

**Effect:** A colorful way to explain an item or idea.

**Example:** Hanging out with you is like eating watermelon on a summer day.
Using Clichés Sparingly

Clichés are phrases that were once original and interesting creations but that became so often used that they have ceased to be interesting and are now viewed as overworked. If you have a tendency to use a cliché or see one while you are proofreading, replace it with plain language instead.

Example

I’m loose as a goose today.

Replace cliché: I’m very relaxed today.

Table 17.2 A Few Common Clichés

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>as fresh as a daisy</th>
<th>as slow as molasses</th>
<th>as white as snow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beat around the bush</td>
<td>being led down the primrose path</td>
<td>big as life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottomless pit</td>
<td>busy as a bee</td>
<td>can’t see the forest for the trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chip off the old block</td>
<td>dead of winter</td>
<td>dirt cheap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don’t upset the apple cart</td>
<td>down to earth</td>
<td>flat as a pancake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for everything there is a season</td>
<td>from feast to famine</td>
<td>go with the flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gone to pot</td>
<td>green with envy</td>
<td>growing like a weed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heaven on earth</td>
<td>here’s mud in your eye</td>
<td>in a nutshell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the doghouse</td>
<td>just a drop in the bucket</td>
<td>knock on wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>light as a feather</td>
<td>like a duck out of water</td>
<td>made in the shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muddy the water</td>
<td>naked as a jaybird</td>
<td>nutty as a fruitcake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old as dirt</td>
<td>our neck of the woods</td>
<td>plain as the nose on your face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raking in the dough</td>
<td>sick as a dog</td>
<td>stick in the mud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stubborn as a mule</td>
<td>sweet as apple pie</td>
<td>thorn in my side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two peas in a pod</td>
<td>under the weather</td>
<td>walks on water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water under the bridge</td>
<td>when pigs fly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guarding against Misusing Words

If you are uncertain about the meaning of a word, look the word up before you use it. Also, if your spellchecker identifies a misspelled word, don’t automatically accept the suggested replacement word. Make an informed decision about each word you use.

Look at the Figure 17.1.
Equipment and memories can be photographic, but to look good in pictures is to be photogenic. To catch an error of this nature, you clearly have to realize the word in question is a problem. The truth is, your best chance at knowing how a wide range of words should be used is to read widely and frequently and to pay attention to words as you read.

Key Takeaways

- Words have both denotations and connotations, and you need to focus on both of these meanings when you choose your words.
- Specific words, such as “fork” or “spoon” instead of “silverware,” and concrete words, such as a “piercing siren” instead of a “loud sound,” create more interesting writing.
- Figurative language, including alliteration, analogies, hyperbole, idioms metaphors, onomatopoeia, personification, and similes, helps make text more interesting and meaningful.
- Both clichés and improperly used words detract from your writing. Reword clichés using straightforward language. Eliminate improperly used words by researching words about which you are not sure.

Exercises

Fill in the blank in this sentence with a word that carries a connotation suggesting Kelly was still full of energy after her twenty laps:

Kelly ____ out of the pool at the end of her twenty laps.

Identify the general word used in this sentence and replace it with a specific word:

I put my clothes somewhere and can’t find them.

Identify the abstract word used in this sentence and replace it with a concrete word:

I smelled something strong when I opened the refrigerator door.

Identify the cliché used in the following sentence and rewrite the sentence using straightforward language:

We should be up and running by ten o’clock tomorrow morning.

Identify the misused word in the following sentence and replace it with a correct word:

I’d rather walk then have to wait an hour for the bus.

Write a sentence using one of the types of figurative language presented in Section 17.3.3 “Enhancing Writing with Figurative Language”.

Over the course of a week, record any instances of clichés or trite, overused expressions you hear in conversations with friends, coworkers, or family; in music, magazines, or newspapers; on television, film, or the Internet; or in your own language. Share your list with members of your group or the class as a whole.
17.4 Using the Dictionary and Thesaurus Effectively

Learning Objectives

- Understand the information available in a dictionary entry.
- Understand the benefits and potential pitfalls of a thesaurus.
- Use dictionaries and thesauruses as writing tools.

Dictionaries and thesauruses provide writing assistance for writers of all levels of experience and ability. Think of them as tools that will help you to do your very best writing. A dictionary can help you determine the precise denotations of words, while a thesaurus, used responsibly, can help you to capture subtle differences in the connotations of words.

Using Dictionaries

Technology is changing the face of dictionaries. A short twenty or thirty years ago, a good graduation gift for a college-bound student was a hardcover dictionary. Today very few college students even own one because online dictionaries are so readily available. Using an online dictionary, you can look up a word in the time it takes to type it, as opposed to taking the time to flip pages and scan through a page of words in a print dictionary. On the other hand, a hard-copy dictionary is still a great backup if you’re unable to get online, and it can lead to some surprising discoveries of other words on the same page, just as browsing through a shelf of library books can put you in contact with books you might not have otherwise encountered.

The important issue is that you use a dictionary of some kind and that you understand what it can provide for you. Whether you use a print or online dictionary, the entries offer a wealth of information. Figure 17.2 includes some of the most common dictionary entry components. Following the list is a color-coded entry for “elementary” (from Dictionary.com, based on the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*) showing where various parts of the entry can be found:

Figure 17.2
• **Spelling**: The correct arrangements of letters for the word.
• **Pronunciation**: Phonetic pronunciation.
• Syllabication: Division of the word into syllables.
• **Part of speech**: Explanation of how a word is used within a sentence.
• Plural formation: Spelling for the plural form of a word (e.g., “babies” for the word entry “baby”).
• **Word origin**: History of the word.
• **Meaning(s)**: At least one, but usually more than one, explanation of the sense of a word.
• Examples in context: The word used in a phrase or sentence.
• **Synonyms and antonyms**: Words with similar and opposite meanings. In the case of the “elementary” entry, only synonyms (similar meanings) are given.
• **Common usage situations**: Specific circumstances where a word is used or misused.
• **Other forms**: Examples of related versions of the word.
• Alternate spellings: Some words have more than one acceptable spelling (e.g., “grey” and “gray”). The word “elementary” has no alternate spelling.
el-e-men-ta-ry  [el-uh-men-tuh-ree, -tree]

—adjective

1. pertaining to or dealing with elements, rudiments, or first principles: an elementary grammar.
2. of or pertaining to an elementary school: elementary teachers.
3. of the nature of an ultimate constituent; simple or uncompounded.
4. pertaining to the four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, or to the great forces of nature; elemental.
5. Chemistry. of or noting one or more elements.

Origin:
1400–50; late ME elementare (< MF elementaire) < L elementarius.

See element, -ary

—Related forms
el-e-men-tar-i-ly  [el-uh-men-ter-uh-lee], adverb
el-e-men-ta-ri-ness, noun
non-el-e-men-ta-ry, adjective
post-el-e-men-ta-ry, adjective
pre-el-e-men-ta-ry, adjective
qua-si-el-e-men-ta-ry, adjective
su-per-el-e-men-ta-ry, adjective
trans-el-e-men-ta-ry, adjective
un-el-e-men-ta-ry, adjective

—Can be confused: 1. eleemosynary, elementary (see synonym note at this entry);
2. elemental, elementary.

—Synonyms
1. Elementary, primary, rudimentary refer to what is basic and fundamental. Elementary refers to the introductory, simple, easy facts or parts of a subject that must necessarily be learned first in order to understand succeeding ones: elementary arithmetic. Primary may mean much the same as elementary; however, it usually emphasizes the idea of what comes first even more than that of simplicity: primary steps. Rudimentary applies to what is undeveloped or imperfect: a rudimentary form of government.
Using a Thesaurus Effectively

Like dictionaries, thesauruses are available in both print and online media. And as with dictionaries, the convenience of modern technology dictates that online thesauruses are the preferred choice of most college students these days. One warning about thesauruses: they can be overused or used out of context. You might be tempted to use a “fancier” synonym or antonym for a word when a simple and direct approach might be best.

Whether you use an online or hard-copy thesaurus, you will encounter the following features.

Figure 17.4

- **Identified word**: The word you enter will typically be shown at the top of the page.
- **Number of thesaurus entries**: In online thesauruses, all entries related to your identified word will be included. Sometimes, as in the case of the fifty entries that go with the sample “walk” entry, you will have to click to subsequent pages to see all the entries.
- **One whole entry**: A thesaurus page has running entries (one after the other). Each entry follows the same format, so you can easily see where one entry ends and another begins.
- **The identified word as the main word in an entry**.
- **The part of speech** of the word as the word is used in the different entries. As is the case with “walk,” words often can be used as more than one part of speech. “Walk” has both noun and verb entries.
- **The definition of the identified word as used in each entry**.
- **Synonyms** for each of the main words.
- **Antonyms** for the main word. Due to the nature of the word “walk,” only one of the first seven entries shows an antonym.
- **The identified word as a synonym for a related main word**.

Figure 17.5 shows four color-coded entries for the word “walk” (out of fifty) at Thesaurus.com (based on Roget’s Thesaurus).
Figure 17.5
**Main Entry:** walk

**Part of Speech:** noun

**Definition:** brief travel on foot

**Synonyms:** airing, carriage, circuit, constitutional, gait, hike, jaunt, march, pace, parade, perambulation, peregrination, promenade, ramble, saunter, schlepp, step, stretch, stride, stroll, tour, traipse, tramp, tread, turn

**Main Entry:** walk

**Part of Speech:** noun

**Definition:** pathway

**Synonyms:** aisle, alley, avenue, boardwalk, boulevard, bricks, bypath, byway, catwalk, cloister, course, court, crossing, esplanade, footpath, gangway, lane, mall, passage, path, pavement, pier, platform, promenade, road, sidewalk, street, track, trail

**Main Entry:** walk

**Part of Speech:** noun

**Definition:** discipline

**Synonyms:** area, arena, bailiwick, calling, career, course, domain, dominion, field, line, metier, profession, province, sphere, terrain, territory, trade, vocation

**Main Entry:** walk

**Part of Speech:** verb

**Definition:** move along on foot

**Synonyms:** advance, amble, ambulate, canter, escort, exercise, file, foot, go, go on foot, hike, hit the road, hoof it, knock about, lead, leg*, locomote, lumber, march, meander, pace, pad, parade, patrol, perambulate, plod, prance, promenade, race, roam, rove, run, saunter, scuff, shamble, shuffle, slog, stalk, step, stride, stroll, strut, stump, take a walk, toddle, tour, traipse, tramp, travel on foot, traverse, tread, trek, troop, trudge, wander, wend one's way

**Antonyms:** run

* = informal/non-formal usage
Key Takeaways

- Dictionary entries include much information in addition to the correct spelling of the words.
- Thesauruses provide synonyms and antonyms for different parts of speech and different meanings of an identified word and for words related to the identified word.
- Dictionaries and thesauruses (when used judiciously) are helpful tools for all writers.

Exercises

Use a dictionary to answer these questions:
- What is the origin of the word “margin”?
- How many different definitions does your dictionary have for the word “best”?
- What, if any, related forms of the word “subject” are provided in your dictionary?
- What parts of speech are listed in your dictionary for “close”?
- What, if any, common usage situations are given in your dictionary for the word “scale”?

Use a thesaurus to write five versions of the following sentence that mean roughly the same thing. Change at least two words in each version:

Hannah considered accepting a job with Bellefor Inc. but decided against it.

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Controlling Wordiness and Writing Concisely

Learning Objectives

- Recognize and eliminate repetitive ideas.
- Recognize and remove unneeded repeated words.
- Recognize unneeded words and revise sentences to be more concise.

It is easy to let your sentences become cluttered with words that do not add value to what you are trying to say. You can manage cluttered sentences by eliminating repetitive ideas, removing repeated words, and rewording to eliminate unneeded words.

Eliminating Repetitive Ideas

Unless you are providing definitions on purpose, stating one idea in two ways within a single sentence is redundant and not necessary. Read each example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove repetitive phrasing that adds wordiness. Then study the suggested revision below each example.

Examples

**Original:** Use a very heavy skillet made of cast iron to bake an extra juicy meatloaf.

**Revision:** Use a cast iron skillet to bake a very juicy meatloaf.

**Original:** Joe thought to himself, “I think I’ll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.”

**Revision:** Joe thought, “I think I’ll make caramelized grilled salmon tonight.”

Removing Repeated Words

As a general rule, you should try not to repeat a word within a sentence. Sometimes you simply need to choose a different word. But often you can actually remove repeated words. Read this example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove a repeated word that adds wordiness. Then check out the revision below the sentence.

Example

**Original:** The student who won the cooking contest is a very talented and ambitious student.

**Revision:** The student who won the cooking contest is very talented and ambitious.
Rewording to Eliminate Unneeded Words

If a sentence has words that are not necessary to carry the meaning, those words are unneeded and can be
removed to reduce wordiness. Read each example and think about how you could revise the sentence to remove
phrasing that adds wordiness. Then check out the suggested revisions to each sentence.

Examples

**Original:** Andy has the ability to make the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

**Revision:** Andy makes the most fabulous twice-baked potatoes.

**Original:** For his part in the cooking class group project, Malik was responsible for making the mustard
reduction sauce.

**Revision:** Malik made the mustard reduction sauce for his cooking class group project.

Key Takeaways

- State ideas only once within a single sentence, as opposed to repeating a key idea in an attempt to clarify.
- Avoid unnecessarily repeating words within a sentence.
- Write concisely by eliminating unneeded words.

Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences by eliminating unneeded words.

- I was late because of the fact that I could not leave the house until such time as my mother was ready
to go.
- I used a pair of hot pads to remove the hot dishes from the oven.
- The bus arrived at 7:40 a.m., I got on the bus at 7:41 a.m., and I was getting off the bus by 7:49 a.m.
- The surface of the clean glass sparkled.

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**Project:** Writers' Handbook. **License:** CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike
Signal Phrases: Now I Know That You Know Why so-and-so is Valuable

If readers (and graders) of your work cannot tell what’s from you and what’s from a given source, this is a problem. It’s a diction problem, but it could also be a plagiarism issue. For instance, if a student failed to quote someone else’s words, even though they cited this creates a plagiarism situation because the lack of “ ” tells readers that the wording is the student’s. More common is the passive writing that results when paragraphs or sentences start with quotes which lack any setup. We call that setup—which shows source credibility and signals the start of source use—a signal phrase.

Varied signal phrases display that the writer knows why the source is valid. They are an important part of the game of academic writing.

When you use others’ ideas, you have a variety of options for integrating these sources into your text. The main requirement is that you make it clear within your in-text reference that the information is not yours and that you clearly indicate where you got the idea. The following box shows some alternate phrases for signaling that the ideas you are using belong to another writer. Using a variety of wording makes writing more interesting. Note: Past tense is used in these examples. You may elect to use present tense (“writes”) or past perfect tense (“has written”), but keep your tense use consistent.

Phrases That Signal an Idea Belongs to Another Writer (Shown in APA style)

- According to Starr (2010)...
- Acknowledging that...
- Starr (2010) stated...
- As Starr (2010) noted...
- In 2010, Starr reported...
- In the words of Starr (2010)...
- It is obvious, according to Starr (2010), that...
- Starr (2010) argued that...
- Starr (2010) disagreed when she said...
- Starr (2010) emphasized the importance of...
- Starr (2010) suggested...
- Starr observed in 2010 that...
- Technology specialist, Linda Starr, claimed that...(2010).
- ...indicated Starr (2010).
- ...wrote Starr (2010)

Table 22.3 Integrating Sources (Summarized or Paraphrased Ideas) shows some actual examples of integrating sources within the guidelines of the three most common documentation formats. You should weave the cited details in with your ideas.

Table 22.3 Integrating Sources (Summarized or Paraphrased Ideas)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>APA</th>
<th>MLA</th>
<th>CMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Author’s name:</strong> Either within a signal phrase or in parentheses before the period at the end of the sentence.</td>
<td><strong>Author’s name:</strong> Either within a signal phrase or in parentheses before the period at the end of the sentence.</td>
<td><strong>Author’s name:</strong> Either within parentheses at the end of the sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year:</strong></td>
<td>Either within parentheses after the name that is used in a signal phrase or after the name and a comma within the parentheses before the period at the end of the sentence (name, year).</td>
<td><strong>Page number:</strong> Either alone before the period at the end of the sentence or after the name within the parentheses before the period at the end of the sentence (name #).</td>
<td><strong>Year:</strong> Either within parentheses after the name that is used in a signal phrase or at the end of the sentence (name, year, #).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example #1</td>
<td>Many school staffs discuss integrating technology without making significant progress in that direction. Starr (2010) indicated that teachers’ lack of personal understanding of technology could cause roadblocks to integrating technology into classrooms.</td>
<td>Many school staffs discuss integrating technology without making significant progress in that direction. Starr indicated that teachers’ lack of personal understanding of technology can cause roadblocks to integrating technology into classrooms (1).</td>
<td>Many school staffs discuss integrating technology without making significant progress in that direction. Starr (2010) indicated that teachers’ lack of personal understanding of technology could cause roadblocks to integrating technology into classrooms (1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example #2</td>
<td>Many school staffs discuss integrating technology without making significant progress in that direction. Teachers’ lack of personal understanding of technology can cause roadblocks to integrating technology into classrooms (Starr, 2010).</td>
<td>Many school staffs discuss integrating technology without making significant progress in that direction. Teachers’ lack of personal understanding of technology can cause roadblocks to integrating technology into classrooms (Starr 1).</td>
<td>Many school staffs discuss integrating technology without making significant progress in that direction. Teachers’ lack of personal understanding of technology can cause roadblocks to integrating technology into classrooms (Starr 2010, 1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22.4 Two Authors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>APA</th>
<th>MLA</th>
<th>CMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example #1</strong></td>
<td>Merriman and Nicoletti (2008) suggest that US K–12 education must take on a structure that is globally acceptable.</td>
<td>Merriman and Nicoletti suggest that US K–12 education must take on a structure that is globally acceptable (9).</td>
<td>Merriman and Nicoletti (2008) suggest that US K–12 education must take on a structure that is globally acceptable (9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example #2</strong></td>
<td>US K–12 education must take on a structure that is globally acceptable (Merriman &amp; Nicoletti, 2008).</td>
<td>US K–12 education must take on a structure that is globally acceptable (Merriman and Nicoletti 9).</td>
<td>US K–12 education must take on a structure that is globally acceptable (Merriman &amp; Nicoletti 2008, 9).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 22.5 Multiple Authors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>APA</th>
<th>MLA</th>
<th>CMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three to five Authors:</strong> List all three authors at first reference (name, name, and name) and the first name plus “et al.” for subsequent references (name et al.).</td>
<td><strong>Three authors:</strong> Treat in same manner as two authors: (name, name, and name).</td>
<td><strong>Three authors:</strong> Treat in same manner as two authors: (name, name, and name).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Six or more authors:</strong> For all references, list the first name plus “et al.” (name et al.).</td>
<td><strong>Four or more authors:</strong> You can choose to list all authors or to use the first author name plus “et al.” (name et al.).</td>
<td><strong>Four or more authors:</strong> You can choose to list all authors or to use the first author name plus “et al.” (name et al.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example #1</td>
<td>Borsheim, Merritt, and Reed (2008) suggest that teachers do not have to give up traditional curricula in order to integrate technology.</td>
<td>Borsheim, Merritt, and Reed (2008) suggest that teachers do not have to give up traditional curricula in order to integrate technology (87).</td>
<td>Borsheim, Merritt, and Reed (2008) suggest that teachers do not have to give up traditional curricula in order to integrate technology (87).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example #2</td>
<td>In fact, it has been argued that technology has become part of education without a great deal of effort from teachers (Borsheim et al., 2008).</td>
<td>Some have argued that technology has become part of education without a great deal of effort from teachers (Borsheim et al. 87).</td>
<td>In fact, some have argued that technology has been incorporated into education without a great deal of effort from teachers (Borsheim et al. 2008, 87).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 22.6 Personal Communication

| Example #1 | Stanforth (personal communication, July 17, 2010) indicated she had been using a computer board in her classroom for three years and could not imagine giving it up. | Stanforth indicated she had been using a computer board in her classroom for three years and could not imagine giving it up. | Sue Stanforth (telephone interview by the author, July 17, 2010) indicated she had been using a computer board in her classroom for three years and could not imagine giving it up. |
| Example #2 | Many teachers are angry that they are being pushed to include technology because they like the way their classrooms work without it (Kennedy, personal e-mail, June 25, 2009). | Many teachers are angry that they are being pushed to include technology because they like the way their classrooms work without it (Kennedy). | Many teachers are angry that they are being pushed to include technology because they like the way their classrooms work without it (Greg Kennedy, e-mail to author, June 25, 2009). |

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Figurative Language

“It’s like butter.” (simile, or comparison using like or as). Similes are kind of weak in contrast with their tougher bigger brothers, the metaphors. They ask only that readers see something as similar, whereas metaphors ask that we identify two unlike things. “Her heart is burned bulk butter.” (Alliteration, or repetition of vowel sound, as well as a metaphor, or identification of two unlike things)

“All the world is butter to a dairy farmer.” (hyperbole, or exaggeration for effect)

“Butter, not pork, is to some the other white meat.” (If this makes any sense, it could be understatement, or... well, it’s kind of self-explanatory!)

“Packagers soon began coloring white margarine yellow to boost its lagging early sales.” (symbolism, or the use of an object to stand for an idea. It’s arguable whether you view yellow as an object, but you get the idea of a thing standing for an idea.--- “Isn’t that what margarine is all about, keeping up appearances?” (rhetorical question, not meant to be answered by audience)

“Nice shoes, Mr. Dickinson; are those actually from the 1970s or the 1980s?” (verbal irony, or the opposition between a word’s intended meaning and its usual meaning)

“Just as he was talking about how his friends’ cars have so many flats, his car had a flat tire!” (situational irony, or an event that is surprising and defies expectations)

“I knew Caesar was going to die, so it was strange to hear him praising his trustworthy friends when they were plotting his death.” (Dramatic irony, or the audience’s greater knowledge than one or more characters have)

“Et tu, butter?” (allusion, or reference to another literary or cultural work. In this case, Caesar’s famous last words “Et tu Brute?”, or “You, too, Brutus,” are being reused. By twisting the original, this is also parody, or a comedic copying of an original)

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Why is it Important to Avoid Cliches?

The general rule George Orwell tells us in his essay “Politics and the English Language” is “Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.” Bizarrely enough, the first website hit for this essay comes from a Russian site. . . how ironic! (Not coincidental. . . I really mean ironic here!)

All of the dicta Orwell gives us follow:

- Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Love that last one, huh? The back story there is that, to the ancient Greeks, outlanders (one of their ideas) seemed. . . well. . . outlandish, partly because of their languages’ sounds. They sounded like “bar bar bar,” sort of like talking adults sound in George Shultz’s The Peanuts! This is called a metarule, a rule about rules.

Cliches are grooves our thoughts enter. They are comforting because they are so automatic. Call them shortcuts to thought. They are stifling because they are so typical.
Part 8: Research
Why Is Research Important?

The Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus

A few years ago a little-known animal species suddenly made headlines. The charming but elusive Tree Octopus became the focal point of internet scrutiny.

If you’ve never heard of the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus, take a few minutes to learn more about it on this website, devoted to saving the endangered species.

You can also watch this brief video for more about the creatures:

https://youtu.be/SU-yq_IJhtU
Source Reliability

If you’re starting to get the feeling that something’s not quite right here, you’re on the right track. The Tree Octopus website is a hoax, although a beautifully done one. There is no such creature, unfortunately.

Many of us feel that “digital natives”—people who have grown up using the internet—are naturally web-savvy. However, a 2011 U.S. Department of Education study that used the Tree Octopus website as a focal point revealed that students who encountered this website completely fell for it. According to an NBC news story by Scott Beaulieu, “In fact, not only did the students believe that the tree octopus was real, they actually refused to believe researchers when they told them the creature was fake.”[1]

While this is a relatively harmless example of a joke website, it helps to demonstrate that anyone can say anything they want on the internet. A good-looking website can be very convincing, regardless of what it says. The more you research, the more you’ll see that sometimes the least-professional-looking websites offer the most credible information, and the most-professional-looking websites can be full of biased, misleading, or outright wrong information.

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to resource reliability. Each new source has to be evaluated on its own merit, and this module will offer you a set of tools to help you do just that.

In this module, you’ll learn about tips and techniques to enable you to find, analyze, integrate, and document sources in your research.


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- Image of tree octopus. **Authored by**: Kirt Baab. **Located at**: https://flic.kr/p/cQAeTN. **License**: CC BY-NC-ND: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives

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- Save the Tree Octopus. **Authored by**: Save The Tree Octopus!. **Located at**: https://youtu.be/SU-yq_IJhtU. **License**: All Rights Reserved. **License Terms**: Standard YouTube License
Jefferson Community College’s Information Literacy Tutorial offers current citation models, research tips, and a refresher on one’s skills as a researcher. Feel free to use any or all of the current units:

- Unit 1 “Access”
- Unit 2 “Inquiry”
- Unit 3 “Search”
- Unit 4 “Evaluate”
- Unit 5 “Attribute”

Much of what we are learning is review, so look at the ways you are refining your search and writing processes.

Public domain content

- Information Literacy Tutorial. **Authored by:** Joshua Dickinson. **Provided by:** Jefferson Community College. **Located at:** http://www.sunyjefferson.edu. **Project:** College Writing Handbook. **License:** CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike
The first step towards writing a research paper is pretty obvious: find sources. Not everything that you find will be good, and those that are good are not always easily found. Having an idea of what you’re looking for—what will most help you develop your essay and enforce your thesis—will help guide your process.

Example of a Research Process

A good research process should go through these steps:

- Decide on the topic.
- Narrow the topic in order to narrow search parameters.
- Create a question that your research will address.
- Generate sub-questions from your main question.
- Determine what kind of sources are best for your argument.
- Create a bibliography as you gather and reference sources.

Each of these is described in greater detail below.
Books, books, books …Do not start research haphazardly—come up with a plan first.

Preliminary Research Strategies

A research plan should begin after you can clearly identify the focus of your argument. First, inform yourself about the basics of your topic (Wikipedia and general online searches are great starting points). Be sure you’ve read all the assigned texts and carefully read the prompt as you gather preliminary information. This stage is sometimes called pre-research.

A broad online search will yield thousands of sources, which no one could be expected to read through. To make it easier on yourself, the next step is to narrow your focus. Think about what kind of position or stance you can take on the topic. What about it strikes you as most interesting? Refer back to the prewriting stage of the writing process, which will come in handy here.

Preliminary Search Tips

It is okay to start with Wikipedia as a reference, but do not use it as an official source. Look at the links and references at the bottom of the page for more ideas. Use “Ctrl+F” to find certain words within a webpage in order to jump to the sections of the article that interest you.

Use Google Advanced Search to be more specific in your search. You can also use tricks to be more specific within the main Google Search Engine:

- Use quotation marks to narrow your search from just tanks in WWII to “Tanks in WWII” or “Tanks” in “WWII”.
- Find specific types of websites by adding “site:.gov” or “site:.edu” or “site:.org”. You can also search for specific file types like “filetype:.pdf”.
- Click on “Search Tools” under the search bar in Google and select “Any time” to see a list of options for time periods to help limit your search. You can find information just in the past month or year, or even for a custom range.

Use features already available through Google Search like Search Tools and Advanced Search to narrow and refine your results.
As you narrow your focus, create a list of questions that you’ll need to answer in order to write a good essay on the topic. The research process will help you answer these questions.

Another part of your research plan should include the type of sources you want to gather. Keep track of these sources in a bibliography and jot down notes about the book, article, or document and how it will be useful to your essay. This will save you a lot of time later in the essay process—you’ll thank yourself!

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10 Google Quick Tips

We all know how to Google...but we may not be getting as much out of it as we’d like. The following video walks through ten easy tips for getting you closer to what you’re looking for.

Getting More Out of Google

For a visual representation of additional online search tips, click the image below.

Click on this Infographic to open it and learn tricks for getting more out of Google.

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- Video: Level Up Your Google Game. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** CC BY: Attribution
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- How To Google Like A Pro! Top 10 Google Search Tips & Tricks. **Authored by:** Epic Tutorials for iPhone, iPad, and iOS. **Located at:** https://youtu.be/R0DQfwc72PM. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License
Argument Pointers: Some Basics. . .

Overview
Argument Pointers—What am I leaving out?

Let’s anticipate (derived from the Latin *anticipare*, “to take before”) what you’ll be doing.

How can I argue without the “I” being important?
Use sources to show what you mean; let your writing voice be heard best as you interpret the meaning of the cited material for the reader. Be sure you reason in your paper. Readers will know if the argument logically “holds” or not, yet you must prove and provide setup for your argument. Remind the reader where they have been, and show them how your points relate to the argument. This is difficult.

In an argument, when do I know “enough is enough”?
Strike a balance between sketchy, inadequate development and uncontrolled detail. Tell it quickly—do not be wordy.
Often, you need to restate the point within a quote before getting on to proving something about it. Think of the quotes as excuses to argue your thesis. Don’t leave them “hanging.”
You will get better at recognizing areas needing more proof if you read your work aloud. Read it through repeatedly.

When arguing, what is “fair play”?
- Show both sides with an even tone, and reason through the ways one side is superior to the other. Readers reject one-sided arguers.
- Attempt to be as objective as possible.
- Think out a strategy for appealing to those readers in your audience who are neutral.
- Strategize how you will deal with those opposing your point of view.
- Do not rely on one source for too much.
- Recognize bias in your sources.

“Police yourself.”
When in doubt about whether to cite, cite! You’ll cover yourself against unintentional plagiarism.
Break up any long areas of paraphrase. I’ll consider the citation good for the sentence holding it, not for the last three-or six-sentence before the ( ).
Any plagiarism is a failed paper (and then some. . .).
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“Popular” vs. “Scholarly” Sources

Research-based writing assignments in college will often require that you use scholarly sources in the essay. Different from the types of articles found in newspapers or general-interest magazines, scholarly sources have a few distinguishing characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Popular Source</th>
<th>Scholarly Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intended Audience</td>
<td>Broad: readers are not expected to know much about the topic already</td>
<td>Narrow: readers are expected to be familiar with the topic before-hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Journalist: may have a broad area of specialization (war correspondent, media critic)</td>
<td>Subject Matter Expert: often has a degree in the subject and/or extensive experience on the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Includes quotes from interviews. No bibliography.</td>
<td>Includes summaries, paraphrases, and quotations from previous writing done on the subject. Footnotes and citations. Ends with bibliography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication Standards</td>
<td>Article is reviewed by editor and proofreader</td>
<td>Article has gone through a peer-review process, where experts on the field have given input before publication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where to Find Scholarly Sources
The first step in finding scholarly resources is to look in the right place. Sites like Google, Yahoo, and Wikipedia may be good for popular sources, but if you want something you can cite in a scholarly paper, you need to find it from a scholarly database.

Two common scholarly databases are **Academic Search Premier** and **ProQuest**, though many others are also available that focus on specific topics. Your school library pays to subscribe to these databases, to make them available for you to use as a student.

You have another incredible resource at your fingertips: your college’s librarians! For help locating resources, you will find that librarians are extremely knowledgeable and may help you uncover sources you would never have found on your own—maybe your school has a microfilm collection, an extensive genealogy database, or access to another library’s catalog. You will not know unless you utilize the valuable skills available to you, so be sure to find out how to get in touch with a research librarian for support!

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- Finding sources image. **Authored by**: Kim Louie for Lumen Learning. **License**: CC BY: Attribution

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- Choosing Search Terms for Sources. **Provided by**: Boundless. **Located at**:
An increasingly popular article database is Google Scholar. It looks like a regular Google search, and it aims to include the vast majority of scholarly resources available. While it has some limitations (like not including a list of which journals they include), it’s a very useful tool if you want to cast a wide net.

Here are three tips for using Google Scholar effectively:

**Add your topic field (economics, psychology, French, etc.) as one of your keywords.** If you just put in “crime,” for example, Google Scholar will return all sorts of stuff from sociology, psychology, geography, and history. If your paper is on crime in French literature, your best sources may be buried under thousands of papers from other disciplines. A set of search terms like “crime French literature modern” will get you to relevant sources much faster.

**Don’t ever pay for an article.** When you click on links to articles in Google Scholar, you may end up on a publisher’s site that tells you that you can download the article for $20 or $30. Don’t do it! You probably have access to virtually all the published academic literature through your library resources. Write down the key information (authors’ names, title, journal title, volume, issue number, year, page numbers) and go find the article through your library website. If you don’t have immediate full-text access, you may be able to get it through inter-library loan.

**Use the “cited by” feature.** If you get one great hit on Google Scholar, you can quickly see a list of other papers that cited it. For example, the search terms “crime economics” yielded this hit for a 1988 paper that appeared in a journal called *Kyklos*:

**The economics of crime deterrence: a survey of theory and evidence**
S Cameron - Kyklos, 1988 - Wiley Online Library
Since BECKER [19681 economists have generate, a large literature on crime. Deterrence effects have figured prominently; few papers [eg HOCH, 19741 omit consideration of these. There are two reasons why a survey of the economics of deterrence is timely. Firstly, there ...
Cited by 392  Related articles  All 5 versions  Cite  Save

Google Scholar search results.

Using Google Scholar

Watch this video to get a better idea of how to utilize Google Scholar for finding articles. While this video shows specifics for setting up an account with Eastern Michigan University, the same principles apply to other colleges and universities. Ask your librarian if you have more questions.
https://youtu.be/oqnjhjISHFk

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- Secondary Sources in Their Natural Habitats. **Authored by:** Amy Guptill. **Provided by:** The College at Brockport, SUNY. **Located at:** http://pressbooks.opensuny.org/writing-in-college-from-competence-to-excellence/chapter/4/. **License:** [CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)
Using Google Scholar. **Authored by:** EMU Library. **Located at:** https://youtu.be/oqnhjISHFk. **License:** All Rights Reserved. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License
As we learned earlier, the strongest articles to support your academic writing projects will come from scholarly sources. Finding exactly what you need becomes specialized at this point, and requires a new set of searching strategies beyond even Google Scholar.

For this kind of research, you’ll want to utilize library databases, as this video explains. https://youtu.be/phUqd8nO5Q

Many journals are sponsored by academic associations. Most of your professors belong to some big, general one (such as the Modern Language Association, the American Psychological Association, or the American Physical Society) and one or more smaller ones organized around particular areas of interest and expertise (such as the Association for the Study of Food and Society and the International Association for Statistical Computing).

Finding articles in databases

Your campus library invests a lot of time and care into making sure you have access to the sources you need for your writing projects. Many libraries have online research guides that point you to the best databases for the specific discipline and, perhaps, the specific course. Librarians are eager to help you succeed with your research—it’s their job and they love it!—so don’t be shy about asking.

The following video demonstrates how to search within a library database. While the examples are specific to Northern Virginia Community College, the same general search tips apply to nearly all academic databases. On your school’s library homepage, you should be able to find a general search button and an alphabetized list of databases. Get familiar with your own school’s library homepage to identify the general search features, find databases, and practice searching for specific articles.

https://youtu.be/phUqd8nO5Q

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- Library Search. **Authored by:** iLearningServices. **Located at:** https://youtu.be/phUqd8nlO5Q. **License:** Other. **License Terms:** Standard YouTube License
How to Search in a Library Database

Scholarly databases like the ones your library subscribes to work differently than search engines like Google and Yahoo because they offer sophisticated tools and techniques for searching that can improve your results.

Databases may look different but they can all be used in similar ways. Most databases can be searched using **keywords** or **fields**. In a keyword search, you want to search for the main concepts or synonyms of your keywords. A field is a specific part of a record in a database. Common fields that can be searched are author, title, subject, or abstract. If you already know the author of a specific article, entering their “Last Name, First Name” in the author field will pull more relevant records than a keyword search. This will ensure all results are articles written by the author and not articles about that author or with that author’s name. For example, a keyword search for “Albert Einstein” will search anywhere in the record for Albert Einstein and reveal 12,719 results. Instead, a field search for Author: “Einstein, Albert” will show 54 results, all written by Albert Einstein.

**Learn More**

This short video demonstrates how to perform a title search within the popular EBSCO database, *Academic Search Complete*.

**Practice: Keyword Search**

1. Identify the keywords in the following research question: “How does repeated pesticide use in agriculture impact soil and groundwater pollution?”
   
   Show Answer

2. When you search, it’s helpful to think of synonyms for your keywords to examine various results. What synonyms can you think of for the keywords identified in the question above?
   
   Show Answer

Sometimes you already have a citation (maybe you found it on Google Scholar or saw it linked through another source), but want to find the article. Everything you need to locate your article is already found in the citation.
Many databases, including the library catalog, offer tools to help you narrow or expand your search. Take advantage of these. The most common tools are Boolean searching and truncation.

## Boolean Searching

Boolean searching allows you to use AND, OR, and NOT to combine your search terms. Here are some examples:

**“Endangered Species” AND “Global Warming”** When you combine search terms with AND, you’ll get results in which BOTH terms are present. Using AND limits the number of results because all search terms must appear in your results.

![Venn diagram showing the overlap of two circles labeled “Endangered Species” and “Global Warming”]

*“Endangered Species” AND “Global Warming” will narrow your search results to where the two concepts overlap.*

**“Arizona Prisons” OR “Rhode Island Prisons”** When you use OR, you’ll get results with EITHER search term. Using OR increases the number of results because either search term can appear in your results.

![Venn diagram showing two separate circles labeled “Arizona Prisons” and “Rhode Island Prisons”]

*“Arizona Prisons” OR “Rhode Island Prisons” will increase your search results.*

**“Miami Dolphins” NOT “Football”** When you use NOT, you’ll get results that exclude a search term. Using NOT limits the number of results.
"Miami Dolphins" NOT "Football" removes the white circle (football) from the green search results (Miami Dolphins).

**Truncation**

Truncation allows you to search different forms of the same word at the same time. Use the root of a word and add an asterisk (*) as a substitute for the word’s ending. It can save time and increase your search to include related words. For example, a search for “Psycho*” would pull results on psychology, psychological, psychologist, psychosis, and psychoanalyst.

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- Bowman Library Research Skills Tutorial, Boolean search images. **Provided by:** Menlo College. **Located at:** http://www.menlo.edu/library/research/tutorial/#module3. **License:** CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike
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Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources

When searching for information on a topic, it is important to understand the value of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.

**Primary sources** allow researchers to get as close as possible to original ideas, events, and empirical research as possible. Such sources may include creative works, first hand or contemporary accounts of events, and the publication of the results of empirical observations or research.

**Secondary sources** analyze, review, or summarize information in primary resources or other secondary resources. Even sources presenting facts or descriptions about events are secondary unless they are based on direct participation or observation. Moreover, secondary sources often rely on other secondary sources and standard disciplinary methods to reach results, and they provide the principle sources of analysis about primary sources.

**Tertiary sources** provide overviews of topics by synthesizing information gathered from other resources. Tertiary resources often provide data in a convenient form or provide information with context by which to interpret it.

The distinctions between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources can be ambiguous. An individual document may be a primary source in one context and a secondary source in another. Encyclopedias are typically considered tertiary sources, but a study of how encyclopedias have changed on the Internet would use them as primary sources. Time is a defining element.

While these definitions are clear, the lines begin to blur in the different discipline areas.

In the Humanities & Social Sciences

In the humanities and social sciences, primary sources are the direct evidence or first-hand accounts of events without secondary analysis or interpretation. A primary source is a work that was created or written contemporary with the period or subject being studied. Secondary sources analyze or interpret historical events or creative works.

**Primary sources**
- Diaries
- Interviews
- Letters
- Original works of art
- Photographs
- Speeches
- Works of literature

A **primary source** is an *original* document containing firsthand information about a topic. Different fields of study may use different types of primary sources.

**Secondary sources**
- Biographies
- Dissertations
A secondary source contains commentary on or discussion about a primary source. The most important feature of secondary sources is that they offer an interpretation of information gathered from primary sources.

**Tertiary sources**

- Dictionaries
- Encyclopedias
- Handbooks

A tertiary source presents summaries or condensed versions of materials, usually with references back to the primary and/or secondary sources. They can be a good place to look up facts or get a general overview of a subject, but they rarely contain original material.

**Examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Critical review of the painting</td>
<td>Encyclopedia article on the artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Civil War diary</td>
<td>Book on a Civil War Battle</td>
<td>List of battle sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Novel or poem</td>
<td>Essay about themes in the work</td>
<td>Biography of the author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political science</td>
<td>Geneva Convention</td>
<td>Article about prisoners of war</td>
<td>Chronology of treaties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### In the Sciences

In the sciences, primary sources are documents that provide full description of the original research. For example, a primary source would be a journal article where scientists describe their research on the genetics of tobacco plants. A secondary source would be an article commenting or analyzing the scientists’ research on tobacco.

**Primary sources**

- Conference proceedings
- Interviews
- Journals
- Lab notebooks
- Patents
- Preprints
- Technical reports
- Theses and dissertations

These are where the results of original research are usually first published in the sciences. This makes them the best source of information on cutting edge topics. However the new ideas presented may not be fully refined or validated yet.

**Secondary sources**

- Monographs
- Reviews
- Textbooks
- Treatises

These tend to summarize the existing state of knowledge in a field at the time of publication. Secondary sources are good to find comparisons of different ideas and theories and to see how they may have changed over time.

**Tertiary sources**
These types of sources present condensed material, generally with references back to the primary and/or secondary literature. They can be a good place to look up data or to get an overview of a subject, but they rarely contain original material.

### Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Conference paper on tobacco genetics</td>
<td>Review article on the current state of tobacco research</td>
<td>Encyclopedia article on tobacco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Chemical patent</td>
<td>Book on chemical reactions</td>
<td>Table of related reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Einstein’s diary</td>
<td>Biography on Einstein</td>
<td>Dictionary of relativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Evaluating Sources

You will need to evaluate each source you consider using by asking two questions:

- Is this source trustworthy?
- Is this source suitable?

Not every suitable source is trustworthy, and not every trustworthy source is suitable.

Determining Suitability

Your task as a researcher is to determine the appropriateness of the information your source contains, for your particular research project. It is a simple question, really: will this source help me answer the research questions that I am posing in my project? Will it help me learn as much as I can about my topic? Will it help me write an interesting, convincing essay for my readers?

Determining Trustworthiness

Click through the slideshow to read about techniques for analyzing sources and differentiating between popular and scholarly sources.

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Tools for Evaluating Sources

Need a good way to evaluate a source? Take a look at its "craap"!

The C.R.A.A.P. method is a way to determine the validity and relevance of a source. C.R.A.A.P. stands for

- **C**: Currency. When was the information published?
- **R**: Relevance. How relevant to your goals is the information?
- **A**: Authority. How well does the author of the information know the information?
- **A**: Accuracy. How reliable is the information?
- **P**: Purpose. Why does this information exist in this way?

If the source you’re looking at is fairly current, relevant, and accurate, it’s probably a good source to use. Depending on the aim of your paper, you’ll be looking for an authority and purpose that are unbiased and informative.

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  **Located at**: https://youtu.be/_M1-aMCJHFg. **License**: All Rights Reserved. **License Terms**: Standard YouTube License
Why Mark Up Your Texts?

Marking up your book properly is a survival skill in college literature classes. Most instructors expect you to develop your own system for noting “significant stuff” when reading. Marking up your book will allow you to locate information while testing.

Even if you are renting a text or reading it on a Kindle or other device, there are annotation tools. In fact, some of the electronic tools can allow you collection your annotations.

How to Mark Up Your Book

There is no set way to mark up a text, but active readers tend to do several of the following things:

- Underline important passages. As an alternative, you could put vertical lines in the margin next to important areas.
- Put ?, ! or questions of your own in the margins next to confusing or surprising passages. This way, you won’t have to stop your reading for too long in order to look up words, phrases, etc.
- Draw lines and arrows between connected ideas. Try and find your own level of connections so that these become more meaningful.
- List concepts, themes, or the names of other authors in the margins. These indicate connections.
- List the page number or beginning of a quote similar to the one you’re annotating. Connect one quote with another. Quotes can be linked based on similarity, difference, emphasis, subtlety, etc. It’s up to you.
- Doubt the author. Be skeptical this in the margins! Insults work, too. . .
- Use literary terms like irony, ambiguity, symbolism, tone to indicate where the author is making these “moves.”
- Create your own shorthand for marking the book. This could be as simple as using the triangle (delta), the mathematical symbol for change. I have a bunch of these. It works.

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Using Sources in Your Paper

Within the pages of your research essay, it is important to properly reference and cite your sources to avoid plagiarism and to give credit for original ideas.

There are three main ways to put a source to use in your essay: you can quote it, you can summarize it, and you can paraphrase it.

Quoting

Direct quotations are words and phrases that are taken directly from another source, and then used word-for-word in your paper. If you incorporate a direct quotation from another author’s text, you must put that quotation or phrase in quotation marks to indicate that it is not your language.

When writing direct quotations, you can use the source author’s name in the same sentence as the quotation to introduce the quoted text and to indicate the source in which you found the text. You should then include the page number or other relevant information in parentheses at the end of the phrase (the exact format will depend on the formatting style of your essay).

Summarizing

Summarizing involves condensing the main idea of a source into a much shorter overview. A summary outlines a source’s most important points and general position. When summarizing a source, it is still necessary to use a citation to give credit to the original author. You must reference the author or source in the appropriate citation method at the end of the summary.

Paraphrasing

When paraphrasing, you may put any part of a source (such as a phrase, sentence, paragraph, or chapter) into your own words. You may find that the original source uses language that is more clear, concise, or specific than your own language, in which case you should use a direct quotation, putting quotation marks around those unique words or phrases you don’t change.

It is common to use a mixture of paraphrased text and quoted words or phrases, as long as the direct quotations are inside of quotation marks.
Providing Context for Your Sources

Whether you use a direct quotation, a summary, or a paraphrase, it is important to distinguish the original source from your ideas, and to explain how the cited source fits into your argument. While the use of quotation marks or parenthetical citations tells your reader that these are not your own words or ideas, you should follow the quote with a description, in your own terms, of what the quote says and why it is relevant to the purpose of your paper. You should not let quoted or paraphrased text stand alone in your paper, but rather, should integrate the sources into your argument by providing context and explanations about how each source supports your argument.\[1\]

Sources that are not properly integrated into your paper are like "bricks without mortar: you have the essential substance, but there's nothing to hold it together, rendering the whole thing formless" (Smith).


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Citing FAQs

Citing Websites can be a Pain
Often, there is no author given for a website. Not having someone standing behind a source as author may be a clue about the site’s validity.

What if Some of Information in the Model Works Cited Entry isn’t in my Source?
Again, lack of too much information tells you something about the reliability of the site. However, life must go on. If you lack an author, go to the next best thing. What’s that? The title would go next.

If you lack a clear title, sometimes you have to infer what it would be from the website. Titles can be tricky.

On a Practical Note. . .
Remember, all you’re doing in the works cited is pointing someone in the right direction within a set format. Can they find the source you’re citing? Easily? As long as they can easily find the source, you’re doing a big part of your job as a citer of information. Don’t neglect the format, though. Every misspelling, every dot out of place, every spacing error tells the reader something about you. You’ll want those “somethings” to be positive rather than negative, right?

Indent the second and third lines of a given works cited entry. Writers usually do this last. Also, you should apply italics last, as fewer errors result when you type in the regular font style.

Double-space works cited entries, leaving no extra spaces between entries or between the centered Works Cited title of the page and the first entry.

Alphabetize the entries, ignoring words like “The” or “An” in titles as you organize entries.

Should I use underlined text or italicized text in works cited entries?
The current MLA 8 rules call for italics, not underlining. Underlined items nowadays look like hyperlinks (buttons) and so should be avoided.

Citing’s Three Basic “Sentences”
Think of the works cited entry as a collection of three rough sentences. First, there’s the author’s information. Second, we have the title information. The third “sentence” includes publication data. All types of sources follow this basic organization. Knowing this rule allows you to answer many citing questions on your own, using the reference to check your work. Certainly, this should free you up from having to ask others, since the information is readily available.

Be your own best answerer of questions in any course you take!

Citing is a practical thing. If you’re ever in doubt, simply cite. If you think you haven’t paraphrased correctly, go back and check the original, putting quotes around the words you used. The citations in the text point us to the works cited page, which points us out towards the sources. Finally, every citing decision is made on a case-by-case basis, with these practical rules in mind.

Let’s get these things right, since they say so much about the writer’s credibility.
There’s a lot at stake. Keep on asking questions if you can’t locate the answers.

Thanks for reading!

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Using Multiple Sources

Sources are a great help for understanding a topic more deeply. But what about when sources don’t quite agree with one another, or challenge what you have experienced yourself?

This is where your skill of synthesis comes into play, as a writer. Synthesizing includes comparison and contrast, but also allows you to combine multiple perspectives on a topic to reach a deeper understanding.

This video explains the process of synthesis in action.

https://youtu.be/7dEGoJdb6O0

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- Synthesizing Information. Authored by: GCFLearnFree.org. Located at: https://youtu.be/7dEGoJdb6O0. License: All Rights Reserved. License Terms: Standard YouTube License
I recommend that you complete the *Plagiarism Tutorial from the University of Mississippi and the post test on the website. It offers useful practice so we may avoid any plagiarism issues.

Plagiarism tutorial? Hmmm. . . it sounds almost like it would be teaching us to plagiarize successfully! Not so.

The posttest may be submitted to your instructor as proof that you understand the key concepts here.

*For those of you using a print copy, this can be accessed at: http://lib.usm.edu/plagiarism_tutorial.html
Avert the Goblin Threat in this Interactive Plagiarism Game!

Lycoming College has a fun game, Goblin Threat, which teaches the concepts of academic honesty, plagiarism, and proper source use. (The game requires FlashPlayer.)
Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty or academic misconduct is any type of cheating that occurs in relation to a formal academic exercise. It can include

- **Plagiarism**: The adoption or reproduction of original creations of another author (person, collective, organization, community or other type of author, including anonymous authors) without due acknowledgment.
- **Fabrication**: The falsification of data, information, or citations in any formal academic exercise.
- **Deception**: Providing false information to an instructor concerning a formal academic exercise—e.g., giving a false excuse for missing a deadline or falsely claiming to have submitted work.
- **Cheating**: Any attempt to obtain assistance in a formal academic exercise (like an examination) without due acknowledgment.
- **Bribery** or paid services: Giving assignment answers or test answers for money.
- **Sabotage**: Acting to prevent others from completing their work. This includes cutting pages out of library books or willfully disrupting the experiments of others.
- **Professorial misconduct**: Professorial acts that are academically fraudulent equate to academic fraud and/or grade fraud.
- **Impersonation**: assuming a student’s identity with intent to provide an advantage for the student.

Watch this video to deepen your understanding about the importance of practicing academic honesty.

https://youtu.be/JylxFnk7btU

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- What is Academic Honesty?. **Authored by**: NEIU Ronald Williams Library. **Located at**: [https://youtu.be/JylxFnk7btU](https://youtu.be/JylxFnk7btU). **License**: [CC BY: Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
Research Worksheet: Types of Evidence

Given the topic sentence below, identify relevant and diverse evidence from sample source. Look for various types of evidence in your source. Identify evidence that supports the topic sentence. Identify the type of evidence you are lacking and indicate where you plan to locate the lacking evidence.

**Sample Topic Sentence**

In addition to grave health risks, the spread of avian influenza is accompanied by corrosive economic impacts that manifest themselves on all levels of global society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing Evidence</th>
<th>Lacking Evidence</th>
<th>Source for Lacking Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>__ Facts</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Statistics</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Expert Explanations</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Anecdotes</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Experimental Studies</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__ Examples</td>
<td>__</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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- Types of Evidence. **Authored by:** Joshua Dickinson, Joanna Chrzanowski. **Provided by:** Jefferson Community College. **Located at:** [http://www.sunyjefferson.edu](http://www.sunyjefferson.edu). **Project:** College Writing Handbook. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)
Defining Plagiarism

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

Examples of plagiarism include:

- Turning in someone else’s paper as your own
- Using the exact words of a source without quotation marks and/or a citation
- Taking an image, chart, or statistic from a source without telling where it originated
- Copying and pasting material from the internet without quotation marks and/or a citation
- Including another person’s idea without crediting the author

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

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

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

Both intentional and unintentional plagiarism are wrong, against the rules, and can result in harsh punishments. Ignoring or not knowing the rules of how to not plagiarize and properly cite evidence might be an explanation, but it is not an excuse.
A GENERAL GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING WRITTEN PLAGIARISM

Are my own words being used?

YES

Is it my idea?

YES

Yay! You’re not plagiarizing!

NO

Are you using quotation marks or placing it in a block quote?

YES

You’re paraphrasing

NO

Yay! You’re not plagiarizing!

NO

You’re plagiarizing!

Go quote it!

Now what?

ADD A CITATION AND BIBLIOGRAPHY!


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What is plagiarism? An informative chart. **Provided by:** EasyBib  **Located at:** http://www.easybib.com/guides/students/research-guide/what-is-plagiarism/. **License:** CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike
Avoiding Plagiarism

How to Avoid Plagiarizing

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

https://youtu.be/t5dRz6ZEkJ8

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

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

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

Tip #3: Document Everything

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

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

Tip #4: Don’t Include Too Much Material Taken from Other Sources
Writing assignments are about your ideas, your interpretations, and your ability to synthesize information. You should use relevant sources to support your ideas using evidence such as quotes, paraphrases, and summaries, as well as statistics and other data. But don’t lose sight of the fact that your argument is central! Including too much material from other sources can result in a paper that feels like it has been pasted together from a variety of authors, rather than a cohesive essay. Such papers also run a much higher risk of setting off plagiarism warnings in SafeAssign or other plagiarism-detecting software. Try to find a balance: use enough evidence from credible sources to prove your points but don’t let the ideas of others take the place of your own thoughts.

**Tip #5: When in Doubt, Give a Citation**

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

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

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

**Step 1:** Provide context for the source. If you haven’t used it yet in the essay, tell us the source’s title and author (if known), and any other information that’s relevant, like the purpose of the organization that published it, for instance.

**Step 2:** Provide the quote itself. Be sure to format correctly and use quotation marks around exact language.

**Step 3:** Provide a summary and/or analysis of what the quote says, and how it relates to the subject matter of your essay and your thesis.

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The Annotated Bibliography Exercise

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

As you develop a working thesis for your research project and begin to collect different pieces of evidence, you will soon find yourself needing some sort of system for keeping track of everything. The system discussed in this chapter is an annotated bibliography, which is a list of sources on a particular topic that includes a brief summary of what each source is about. This writing exercise is a bit different from the others in this part of The Process of Research Writing in that isn't an “essay” per se; rather it is an ongoing writing project that you will be “building” as you discover new pieces of evidence for your research project.

Here is an example of an entry from an annotated bibliography in MLA style:

This article is about an educational program used by the U.S. Navy to educate people in the Navy and their families about some of the things that are potentially dangerous to children about the Internet. Parsons says that the educational program has been effective.

Annotated bibliography entries have two parts. The top of the entry is the citation. It is the part that starts “Parsons, Matt” and that lists information like the name of the writer, where the evidence appeared, the date of publication, and other publishing information.

The second part of the entry is the summary of the evidence being cited. A good annotated bibliography summary provides enough information in a sentence or two to help you and others understand what the research is about in a neutral and non-opinionated way.

The first two sentences of this annotation are an example of this sort of very brief, “just the facts” sort of summary. In the brief summaries of entries in an annotated bibliography, stay away from making evaluations about the source—“I didn’t like this article very much” or “I thought this article was great.” The most important goal of your brief summary is to help you, colleagues, and other potential readers get an idea about the subject of the particular piece of evidence.

Summaries can be challenging to write, especially when you are trying to write them about longer and more complicated sources of research. Keep these guidelines in mind as you write your own summaries.

- Keep your summary short. Good summaries for annotated bibliographies are not “complete” summaries; rather, they provide the highlights of the evidence in as brief and concise a manner as possible, no more than a sentence or two.
- Don’t quote from what you are summarizing. Summaries will be more useful to you and your colleagues if you write them in your own words. Instead of quoting directly what you think is the point of the piece of evidence, try to paraphrase it. (For more information on paraphrasing your evidence, see Chapter 3, “Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism”).
Inevitably, students in research writing classes always ask how many sources they need to include in their research projects. In one sense, “how many sources do I need?” is a utilitarian question, one usually attached to a student’s exploration of what it will take to get a particular grade. Considered more abstractly, this question is also an effort to explore the scope of a research project. Like a certain page or word count requirement, the question “how many sources do I need?” is an effort to get a handle on the scope of the research project assignment. In that sense, asking about the number of sources is probably a good idea, a little like asking how many sources do I need?

Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?

An annotated bibliography is an excellent way to keep track of the research you gather for your project. Make no mistake about it— it is extremely important that you keep track of all of your evidence for your research project, and that you keep track of it from the beginning of the process of research writing.

There’s nothing more frustrating than incorporating into your research project, only to realize you have forgotten where you found the article or book chapter in the first place. This is extremely frustrating, and it’s easily avoided by doing something like writing an annotated bibliography.

You could use other methods for keeping track of your research. For example, you could use note cards and write down the source information as a proper citation, then write down the information about the source that is important. If the material you know you want to use from a certain source is short enough, you might even write a direct quote, which is where you write down word for word what the source says exactly as it is written. At other times, you can write a paraphrase, which is where you write down what the source means using your own words.

While note cards and other methods have their advantages, annotated bibliographies are an extremely useful tool for keeping track of your research. An annotated bibliography:

• Centralizes your research into one document that you can keep track of both as a print-out of a word-processed file and as a file you save electronically.

• Allows you to “copy and paste” citation information into the works cited part of your research project.

Annotated bibliography also gives you the space to start writing and thinking a bit about how some of your research might fit into your project. Consider these two sample entries from an annotated bibliography from a research project on pharmaceutical advertising:


Siegel, who is a doctor himself, writes about how drug advertising has undermined the communication between doctors and patients. He says that drug ads have driven up the costs of prescription drugs, particularly big selling drugs like those for cholesterol.


http://www.emich.edu/halle.

This article is about a study that said that African-American doctors saw advertising of prescription drugs as a way of educating their patients. The ads are useful because they talk about diseases that affect African-Americans. Even from the limited amount of information available in these entries, it’s clear that a relationship between these articles exists. Both are similar articles about how the doctor/patient relationship is affected by drug advertising. But both are also different. The first article is from the newspaper The Nation, which is in many ways similar to an academic journal and which is also known for its liberal views. The second article is from a trade journal (also similar to academic journals in many ways) that obviously is an advocate for the pharmaceutical industry.

In other words, in the process of compiling an annotated bibliography, you are doing more than keeping track of your research. You are starting to make some comparisons and beginning to see some relationships between your evidence, a process that will become increasingly important as you gather more research and work your way through the different exercises that lead to the research project.

But remember: However you decide to keep track of your research as you progress through your project—annotated bibliography, note cards, or another method—the important thing is that you need to keep track of your research as you progress through your project!

How many sources do I need?

Don’t “cut and paste” from database abstracts. Many of the periodical indexes that are available as part of your library’s computer system include abstracts of articles. Do no “cut” this abstract material and then “paste” it into your own annotated bibliography. For one thing, this is plagiarism. Second, “cutting and pasting” from the abstract defeats one of the purposes of writing summaries and creating an annotated bibliography in the first place, which is to help you understand and explain your research.

Different writers will inevitably write slightly different summaries of the same evidence. Some differences between different writers’ summaries of the same piece of evidence result from different interpretations of what it important in the research; there’s nothing wrong with that.

However, two summaries from different writers should both provide a similar summary. In other words, its not acceptable when the difference of interpretation is the result of a lack of understanding of the evidence.

Why Write Annotated Bibliographies?
much something weighs before you attempt to pick it up. But ultimately, there is no right or wrong answer to this question. Longer research projects tend to have evidence from more different sources than shorter projects, but there is no cut-and-dry formula where “X” number of pages will equal “X” number of sources.

However, an annotated bibliography should contain significantly more entries than you intend or expect to include in your research project. For example, if you think you will need or if your instructor requires you to have research from about seven different sources, you should probably have about 15 different entries on your annotated bibliography.

The reasons you need to find twice as many sources as you are likely to use is that you want to find and use the best research you can reasonably find, not the first pieces of research you can find. Usually, researchers have to look at a lot more information than they would ever include in a research writing project to begin making judgements about their research. And by far the worst thing you can do in your research is to stop right after you have found the number of sources required by the instructor for your project.

Using Computers to Write Annotated Bibliographies

Personal computers, word-processing software, and the Internet can make putting together an annotated bibliography more useful and a lot easier. If you use word-processing software to create your annotated bibliography, you can dramatically simplify the process of creating a “works cited” or “references” page, which is a list of the sources you quote in your research project. All you will have to do is “copy and paste” the citation from the annotated bibliography into your research project—that is, using the functions of your computer and word processing software, “copy” the full citation that you have completed on your annotated bibliography page and “paste” it into the works cited page of your research project.

This same sort of “copy and paste” function also comes in handy when doing research on the web. For example, you can usually copy and paste the citation information from your library’s online database for pieces of evidence you are interested in reading. In most cases, you should be able to “copy and paste” information you find in your library’s online database into a word processing file. Many library databases—both for books and for periodicals—also have a feature that will allow you to email yourself results from a search.

Keep two things in mind about using computers for your annotated bibliographies:

• You will have to reformat whatever information you get from the Internet or your library’s databases in order to meet MLA or APA style.

• Don’t use the copy and paste feature to plagiarize! Simply copying things like abstracts defeats one of the important purposes for writing an annotated bibliography in the first place, and it’s cheating.

Assignment: Writing an Annotated Bibliography

As you conduct your research for your research writing project, compile an annotated bibliography with 15-20 entries. Each entry in your annotated bibliography should contain a citation, a brief summary of the cited material. You will be completing the project in phases and a complete and revised version of it will be due when you have completed your research.

You should think of your annotated bibliography as having roughly twice as many sources as the number of sources you will need to include for the research project, but your instructor might have a different requirement regarding the number of sources required.

Also, you should work on this assignment in parts. Going to the library and trying to complete this assignment in one sitting could turn this into a dreadful writing experience. However, if you complete it in stages, you will have a much better understanding of how your resources relate to each other.

You will probably need to discuss with your instructor the style of citation you need to follow for your research project and your annotated bibliography. Following a citation style isn’t difficult to do, but you will want to be consistent and aware of the “rules” from the beginning. In other words, if you start off using MLA style, don’t switch to APA style halfway through your annotated bibliography or your research project.

Last, but not least, you will need to discuss with your instructor the sorts of materials you need to include in your research and your annotated bibliography. You may be required to include a balance of research from scholarly and non-scholarly sources, and from “traditional” print resources (books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and so forth) and the Internet.

Questions to ask while writing and researching

• Would you classify the material as a primary or a secondary source? Does the research seem to be difficult to categorize this way? (For more information on primary and secondary sources, see Chapter 1, “Thinking Critically About Research” and the section “Primary versus Secondary Research”).

• Is the research from a scholarly or a non-scholarly publication? Does the research seem difficult to categorize this way?

• Is the research from the Internet—a web page, a newsgroup, an email message, etc.? Remember: while Internet
research is not necessarily “bad” research, you do need to be more careful in evaluating the credibility of Internet-based sources. (For more information on evaluating Internet research, see Chapter 1, “Thinking Critically About Research,” and the sections “The Internet: The Researcher’s Challenge” and “Evaluating the Quality and Credibility of Your Research.”

- Do you know who wrote the material you are including in your annotated bibliography? What qualifications does your source say the writer has?
- Why do you think the writer wrote it? Do they have a self-interest or a political viewpoint that might make them overly biased?
- Besides the differences between scholarly, non-scholarly, and Internet sources, what else do you know about where your research was published? Is it an academic book? An article in a respected journal? An article in a news magazine or newspaper?
- When was it published? Given your research topic, how important do you think the date of publication is?
- Are you keeping your summaries brief and to the point, focusing on the point your research source is trying to make?
- If it’s part of the assignment, are you including a sentence or two about how you see this piece of research fitting into your overall research project?

Revision and Review

Because of its ongoing nature, revising an annotated bibliography is a bit different than the typical revision process. Take opportunities as you compile your annotated bibliography to show your work in progress to your classmates, your instructor, and other readers you trust. If you are working collaboratively on your research projects, you will certainly want to share your annotated bibliography with classmates who are working on a similar topic. Working together like this can be a very useful way to get more ideas about where your research is going.

It is best to approach the annotated bibliography in smaller steps—five or six entries at a time. If that’s how you’re approaching this project, then you will always be in a process of revision and review with your classmates and your instructor. You and your readers (your instructor and your classmates) should think about these questions as you revise, review, and add entries:

- Are the summaries you are including brief and to the point? Do your readers understand what the cited articles are about?
- Are you following a particular style guide consistently?
- If you are including a sentence or two about each of your resources, how do these sentences fit with your working thesis? Are they clarifying parts of your working thesis that were previously unclear? Are they suggesting changes to the approach you took when you began the research process?
- Based on the research you have so far, what other types of research do you think you need to find?

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Part 9: MLA Citations
MLA Style and What to Include When Citing

The Indian River State College’s site has a useful overview of MLA style and its current format rules.

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Why Is MLA Documentation Important?

MLA stands for Modern Language Association. This is a professional organization for scholars of language and literature.

But why does this group of people have so much influence on the appearance of papers you write in college?

The MLA, like many other academic organizations, publishes a scholarly journal and has done so for decades. In years before computers were common, the editors of this journal required typed submissions for publication to follow a common formatting template.

Professors who were following this format to write their own work recognized the value of having some standard of uniform appearance. They started asking their students to follow the same format when they typed essays for class projects.

Fast forward to now, and we have a thick set of guidelines for how the first page of an essay should look, what margins and font are appropriate, and what a Works Cited entry for a blog post should look like.

The ultimate goal for MLA formatting and citation standards is so that everyone has a common template to draw from. While they may feel like unbreakable rules, it’s helpful to remember that they were created to serve a common need, with your interests in mind.
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The Jefferson Community College “Citing Sources: MLA” LibGuide is a useful resource on MLA 8.

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MLA style is one of the most common citation and formatting styles you will encounter in your academic career. Any piece of academic writing can use MLA style, from a one-page paper to a full-length book. It is widely used by in many high school and introductory college English classes, as well as scholarly books and professional journals. If you are writing a paper for a literature or media studies class, it is likely your professor will ask you to write in MLA style.

The importance of using citations is explained in the following video:

https://youtu.be/IMhMuVvXCVw

The Purpose of MLA Style

The MLA style guide aims to accomplish several goals:

- to ensure consistent use of the English language in academic writing;
- to ensure consistent formatting and presentation of information, for the sake of clarity and ease of navigation; and
- to ensure proper attribution of ideas to their original sources, for the sake of intellectual integrity.

Citation Resources

There are many fantastic resources out there that can make the formatting and citation process easier. Some common style guides are found at:

- **The Purdue Online Writing Lab**: this is a popular resource that concisely explains how to properly format and cite in various academic styles.
- **EasyBib**: in addition to having a style guide, this website allows you to paste in information from your research and will create and save citations for you.

Reference management websites and applications can also assist you in tracking and recording your research. Most of these websites will even create the works cited page for you! Some of the most popular citation tools are:

- Zotero
- RefME
- BibMe

The New Edition

The newest edition of the MLA Handbook, the 8th Edition, was released in April 2016. This text will focus on the newest changes, but you should be aware that some institutions or instructors may still utilize the previous 7th
edition of the handbook. While the overall principles of creating a works cited page and using in-text citations remains the same, there are a few key changes and updates that make the citation process easier for our modern uses. For example, the guidelines now state that you should always include a URL of an internet source, you can use alternative author names, such as Twitter handles, and you no longer need to include the publisher (in some instances), and you don’t need to include the city where a source was published. These new changes are less nit-picky and allow for a more streamlined citation process that will work with the wide variety of source locations (i.e., YouTube videos, songs, clips from TV episodes, websites, periodicals, books, academic journals, poems, interviews, etc.).

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MLA In-Text Citations

Because the use of in-text citations will be so integral to your writing processes, being able to instantly craft correct citations and identify incorrect citations will save you time during writing and will help you avoid having unnecessary points taken off for citation errors.

Here is the standard correct in-text citation style according to MLA guidelines:

“Quotation” (Author’s Last Name Page Number).

Take a moment to carefully consider the placement of the parts and punctuation of this in-text citation. Note that there is no punctuation indicating the end of a sentence inside of the quotation marks—closing punctuation should instead follow the parentheses. There is also no punctuation between the author’s last name and the page number inside of the parentheses. The misplacement of these simple punctuation marks is one of the most common errors students make when crafting in-text citations.

Include the right information in the in-text citation. Every time you reference material in your paper, you must tell the reader the name of the author whose information you are citing. You must include a page number that tells the reader where, in the source, they can find this information. The most basic structure for an in-text citation looks like this: (Smith 123).

So, let’s say we have the following quote, which comes from page 100 of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South*:

“Margaret had never spoken of Helstone since she left it.” [1]

The following examples show incorrect MLA formatting:

| “Margaret had never spoken of Helstone since she left it.” (Gaskell 100) | Incorrect because the period falls within the quotation marks |
“Margaret had never spoken of Helstone since she left it” (Gaskell, 100).

Incorrect because of the comma separating the author’s last name and the page number

“Margaret had never spoken of Helstone since she left it” (Elizabeth Gaskell 100).

Incorrect because the author’s full name is used instead of just her last name

“Margaret had never spoken of Helstone since she left it” (North and South 100).

Incorrect because the title of the work appears, rather than the author’s last name; the title should only be used if no author name is provided

The following example shows **correct** MLA formatting:

“Margaret had never spoken of Helstone since she left it” (Gaskell 100).

However, there are exceptions to the above citation guideline. Consider the following format of an in-text citation, which is also formed correctly.

Elizabeth Gaskell’s narrator makes it clear that “Margaret had never spoken of Helstone since she left it” (100).

Do you notice the difference between this citation format and the format of the first example? Unlike the first example, this citation does not list the author’s last name inside the parentheses. This is because the last name is included in quotation’s introduction, which makes the identity of the author clear to the reader. Including the author’s last name again inside of the parenthesis would be thus redundant and is not required for MLA citation.

The same rule about inclusion of the author’s last name applies for paraphrased information, as well, as shown in the following example:

Elizabeth Gaskell’s narrator makes it clear that her protagonist does not speak of her home once she is in Milton (100).

In this paraphrase, the author’s last name precedes the paraphrased material, but as in the case of quotation integration, if the author’s last name is not described in the paraphrase then it is required inside of the parentheses before the page number.
When and How to Create MLA In-Text Citations

Is this your own, original idea or information?  
YES: No citation needed

NO:

Does your source have an author?  
YES: Did you mention the author’s name in the text already? (ex. According to Dr. Wilson...)

NO: No need to mention the author again.

Did you mention the author’s name in the text already? (ex. According to Dr. Wilson...)

YES: No need to mention the author again.

NO: Write the author’s last name in parentheses at the end of your sentence. Ex: (Wilson).

Include the title of the source, or the first word of the title, in parentheses at the end of the sentence (unless you already mentioned the title in the text). Ex.: (“Beyond”).

Does your source have page numbers?  

NO: If it’s a media source, cite the relevant time range in parentheses (ex. “CSI” 00:01 : 15-50)

YES: Did you mention the author or title already within your text?

YES: Add the page number(s) in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Ex: According to Dr. Wilson, wildlife should remain in the wild (37).

NO: Put the page number(s) after the author’s name or title in the parentheses at the end of the sentence. Ex.: Wildlife should remain in the wild (Wilson 37).

Your citation is complete!

Repeat this process for each quote, paraphrase, and summary you include from other sources. Remember that in-text citations typically include the author’s name and page number. Ex.: (Warner 54).

Being more compliant with MLA in-text citation guidelines will become easier if you review these examples and the citation rules on which they rely.
In-text citations are often parenthetical, meaning you add information to the end of a sentence in parentheses. But if you include that necessary information in the language of the sentence itself, you should not include the parenthetical citation. This example shows you proper uses of in-text citations.


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MLA Block Quotations

When to Use a Block Quotation

A typical quotation is enclosed in double quotation marks and is part of a sentence within a paragraph of your paper. However, if you want to quote more than four lines of prose (or three lines of verse) from a source, you should format the excerpt as a block quotation, rather than as a regular quotation within the text of a paragraph. Most of the standard rules for quotations still apply, with the following exceptions: a block quotation will begin on its own line, it will not be enclosed in quotation marks, and its in-text citation will come after the ending punctuation, not before it.

For example, if you wanted to quote the entire first paragraph of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, you would begin that quotation on its own line and format it as follows:

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, ‘and what is the use of a book,’ thought Alice, ‘without pictures or conversations?’ (Carroll 98)

The full reference for this source would then be included in your Works Cited section at the end of your paper.

Formatting Block Quotations

The entire block quotation should be indented one inch from the left margin. The first line of the excerpt should not be further indented, unless you are quoting multiple paragraphs—in which case the first line of each quoted paragraph should be further indented 0.25 inches. As should the rest of your paper, a block quotation in MLA style should be double-spaced.

Block Quotations

Watch this video from Imagine Easy Solutions for more information on formatting block quotations.

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MLA Document Formatting

Overall Structure of an MLA Paper

Your MLA paper should include the following basic elements:

- Body
- Works Cited

Sample Paper

Visit the Modern Language Association website to see an example of a student paper following MLA guidelines.

General MLA Formatting Rules

- **Font**: Your paper should be written in 12-point text. Whichever font you choose, MLA requires that regular and italicized text be easily distinguishable from each other. Times and Times New Roman are often recommended.
- **Line Spacing**: All text in your paper should be double-spaced.
- **Margins**: All page margins (top, bottom, left, and right) should be 1 inch. All text should be left-justified.
- **Indentation**: The first line of every paragraph should be indented 0.5 inches.
- **Page Numbers**: Create a right-justified header 0.5 inches from the top edge of every page. This header should include your last name, followed by a space and the page number. Your pages should be numbered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3…) and should start with the number 1 on your title page. Most word-processing programs have the ability to automatically add the correct page number to each page so you don’t have to do this by hand.
- **Use of Italics**: In MLA style, you should italicize (rather than underline) the titles of books, plays, or other standalone works. You should also italicize (rather than underline) words or phrases you want to lend particular emphasis—though you should do this rarely.
- **Sentence Spacing**: Include just one single space after a period before the next sentence: “Mary went to the store. She bought some milk. Then she went home.”
- **The first page**: Like the rest of your paper, everything on your first page, even the headers, should be double-spaced. The following information should be left-justified in regular font at the top of the first page (in the main part of the page, not the header):
  - on the first line, your first and last name
  - on the second line, your instructor’s name
  - on the third line, the name of the class
  - on the fourth line, the date
- **The title**: After the header, the next double-spaced line should include the title of your paper. This should be centered and in title case, and it should not be bolded, underlined, or italicized (unless it includes the name of a book, in which case just the book title should be italicized).
- **The Oxford Comma**: The Oxford comma (also called the serial comma) is the comma that comes after the second-to-last item in a series or list. For example: The UK includes the countries of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In the previous sentence, the comma immediately after “Wales” is the Oxford comma. In general writing conventions, whether the Oxford comma should be used is actually a point of fervent debate among passionate grammarians. However, it’s a requirement in MLA style, so double-check all your lists and series to make sure you include it!
MLA Formatting

Watch this video to review all of the basic formatting recommendations:
https://youtu.be/4edLWc-elyQ?t=58s

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In MLA style, all the sources you cite throughout the text of your paper are listed together in full in the Works Cited section, which comes after the main text of your paper.

Formatting the Works Cited Section

In MLA style, all the sources you cite throughout the text of your paper are listed together in full in the Works Cited section, which comes after the main text of your paper.

- **Page numbers:** Just as the rest of your paper, the top of the page should retain the right-justified header with your last name and the page number.
- **Title:** On the first line, the title of the page—“Works Cited”—should appear centered, and not italicized or bolded.
- **Spacing:** Like the rest of your paper, this page should be double-spaced and have 1-inch margins (don’t skip an extra line between citations).
- **Alphabetical order:** Starting on the next line after the page title, your references should be listed in alphabetical order by author. Multiple sources by the same author should be listed chronologically by year within the same group.
- **Hanging indents:** Each reference should be formatted with what is called a hanging indent. This means the first line of each reference should be flush with the left margin (i.e., not indented), but the rest of that reference should be indented 0.5 inches further. Any word-processing program will let you format this automatically so you don’t have to do it by hand. (In Microsoft Word, for example, you simply highlight your citations, click on the small arrow right next to the word “Paragraph” on the home tab, and in the popup box choose “hanging indent” under the “Special” section. Click OK, and you’re done.)
Works Cited


A correctly formatted Works Cited page, according to the MLA handbook.

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Creating MLA Works Cited Entries

Because of the wide variety of source formats, MLA 8 now requires that researchers follow a simple set of guidelines to create appropriate citations (instead of looking up one of the fifty-nine types of sources inside the previous handbook and following the instructions). Although there are still distinct rules you need to follow to create a citation, the rules are less rigid and allow for you to look for the main components of a citation and construct it yourself. This means you will need to think about the source and its information, select the appropriate components, and organize it in a logical and useful manner.

Regardless of the source type, you are now asked to locate the same “core elements” from your sources and place them in a standard order in order to create citations. These core elements are explained in detail below. **Note that you do not need to memorize every step of this process**, but should take this opportunity to understand how citations are created. You can always return to this page, to the MLA handbook, the [MLA Style Center](http://www.easybib.com/guides/citation-guides/mla-8/), or to other online resources to help you create the citations you need for your paper. Click through the following slides to learn more about each component and to see examples of MLA citations.

You can also [download the presentation here](https://youtu.be/lSekgYAdQcU?t=2m7s).

Watch this video to see examples of how to identify the core elements needed in a citation:

https://youtu.be/lSekgYAdQcU?t=2m7s

**Practice**

Practice your mastery of MLA documentation by correctly ordering the following citations from the [Santa Fe College library](https://youtu.be/lSekgYAdQcU?t=2m7s):

- Book – Desktop Version | Touchscreen Version
- Chapter in an Edited Book – Desktop Version | Touchscreen Version
- Article from a Print Journal – Desktop Version | Touchscreen Version
- Journal Article from a Library Database – Desktop Version | Touchscreen Version
- Web Page – Desktop Version | Touchscreen Version
- Video – Desktop Version | Touchscreen Version

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Part 10: APA Citations
Why Is APA Documentation Important?

American Psychological Association (APA) Style is a method of formatting and referencing works in research papers and manuscripts. This style is most commonly practiced by academics within the social sciences, including the fields of nursing, psychology, and political science, and economics. APA style provides writers with a consistent formula for acknowledging the works of others using parenthetical in-text citations and a page listing all references. Additionally, APA style makes use of specific guidelines concerning the structure, content, and order of each page of a research paper or manuscript. Adhering to the uniform standards of APA style will enhance your paper’s organization and allow readers to review your work with greater clarity.

The APA articles and templates on this website were developed in accordance with the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Consult the *Publication Manual* (6th ed.) for more details about formatting and organizing your document.

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Careful adherence to these conventions is likely to make a good initial impression on the reader, while carelessness may have the opposite effect. When the major sections of a paper are carefully arranged in the appropriate order, the reader may be more inclined to show an interest in the paper’s ideas.

How should the major sections of an APA-style paper be arranged?

- **Title Page**: acts as the first major section of the document
  - Presents a running head and begins the document’s pagination
  - Includes the paper’s full title centered in the upper half of the page
  - Contains the name(s) of the writer(s) and their institutional affiliation

- **Abstract**: acts as the second major section of the document
  - Presents a single-paragraph summary of the paper’s contents
  - Contains approximately 150 to 250 words
  - Includes select keywords for easy access by researchers

- **Main Body**: acts as the third major section of the document
  - Presents a report of the writer(s)’ research and findings
  - Includes four sections (typically): the introduction, method, results, and discussion
  - Provides the reader with pertinent information about the paper’s topic

- **References page**: acts as the fourth major section of the document
  - Presents a compilation of the sources cited in the paper
  - Provides a comprehensive list of works that appear as in-text citations in the paper
  - Details the full source information for each entry

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APA Title Page Formatting

Placement

As the first major section of the document, the title page appears at the top of the first page.

Components

The title page is comprised of a few key elements:

- Running head (or shortened title) and label
- Page number
- Full title of the paper
- Author byline: first name(s), middle initial(s), and last name(s)
- Affiliated Institution(s) or Organization(s)
- Author note (optional)

Follow your instructor’s directives regarding additional lines on the title page. Some professors require further information, including the date of submission, course number or title, or name of the professor.

General Format

Like the rest of the paper, the title page should be double-spaced and typed in Times New Roman, 12 pt. The margins are set at 1” on all sides.

How should the running head be formatted on the title page?

The running head and label is flush with the upper left-hand corner of the title page, while the page number is flush with the upper right-hand corner of the page. The label “Running head” should only appear on the title page; on all other pages, simply include the shortened title of the paper. All letters of the running head should be capitalized and should not exceed 50 characters, including punctuation, letters, and spaces.

Example of a correctly formatted running head on the title page:

Running head: EFFECTS OF NUTRITION ON MEMORY

Note: The title page is distinct in that the shortened title of this page is preceded by the label “Running head” followed by a colon; no other page of the document features this label.

How should the full title of the paper be formatted?

The full title of the paper is centered in the upper half of the page, and the first letter of each major word is capitalized. The paper’s title should be a maximum of 12 words and fill one or two lines; avoid using abbreviations and unnecessary words. Do not format the title with bold, italics, underlining, or quotation marks.
How should the author byline be formatted?

The author byline is comprised of the author(s)’ first name(s), middle initial(s), and last name(s); this line follows after the full title of the research paper. Note that two authors are separated by the word and, but more than two authors’ names are separated by commas.

What should the institutional affiliation include?

Following the author byline is the institutional affiliation of the author(s) involved with the research paper. Include the name of the college or university you attend, or the name of the organization(s) that provided support for your research.

Any additional lines of information requested by your professor may be situated after the institutional affiliation. If your instructor requires you to include an author’s note, position it in the lower half of the title page.

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  http://writingcommons.org/open-text/writing-processes/format/apa-format/1139-formatting-the-title-page-apa. **License:** **CC BY-NC-ND:** Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
APA Abstract Page

Placement

The abstract acts as the second major section of the document and typically begins on the second page of the paper. It follows directly after the title page and precedes the main body of the paper.

The abstract is a succinct, single-paragraph summary of your paper’s purpose, main points, method, findings, and conclusions, and is often recommended to be written after the rest of your paper has been completed.

General Format

How should the abstract page be formatted?

The abstract’s length should be a minimum of 150 words and a maximum of 250 words; it should be confined within a single paragraph. Unlike in other paragraphs in the paper, the first line of the abstract should not be indented five spaces from the left margin.

Like the rest of the paper, the pages of the abstract should be double-spaced and typed in Times New Roman, 12 pt. The margins are set at 1” on all sides. While the running head is flush with the upper left-hand corner of every page, the page number is flush with the upper right-hand corner of every page. Note that all letters of the running head should be capitalized and should not exceed 50 characters, including punctuation, letters, and spaces.

The title of the abstract is centered at the top of the page; there is no extra space between the title and the paragraph. Avoid formatting the title with bold, italics, underlining, or quotation marks, or mislabeling the abstract with the title of the research paper.

When writing the abstract, note that the APA recommends using two spaces after sentences that end in a period; however, sentences that end in other punctuation marks may be followed by a single space. Additionally, the APA recommends using the active voice and past tense in the abstract, but the present tense may be used to describe conclusions and implications. Acronyms or abbreviated words should be defined in the abstract.

How should the list of keywords be formatted?

According to your professor’s directives, you may be required to include a short list of keywords to enable researchers and databases to locate your paper more effectively. The list of keywords should follow after the abstract paragraph, and the word Keywords should be italicized, indented five spaces from the left margin, and followed by a colon. There is no period at the end of the list of keywords.

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APA First Main Body Page Formatting

Beginning at the top of a new page, the main body of the research paper follows the abstract and precedes the References page. Comprised of the introduction, method, results, and discussion subsections, the main body acts as the third major section of the document and typically begins on the third page of the paper.

General Format

Like the rest of the paper, the pages of the main body should be double-spaced and typed in Times New Roman, 12 pt. The margins are set at 1” on all sides. While the running head is flush with the upper left-hand corner of every page, the page number is flush with the upper right-hand corner of every page. Note that all letters of the running head should be capitalized and should not exceed 50 characters, including punctuation, letters, and spaces.

https://youtu.be/dYRZh-lIIBo

The full title of the paper is centered directly above the introduction with no extra space between the title and the first paragraph. Avoid formatting the title with bold, italics, underlining, or quotation marks. The first letter of each major word in the title should be capitalized. Unlike other sections of the main body, the introduction does not require a heading or label.

When writing each paragraph, note that the APA recommends using two spaces after sentences that end in a period; however, sentences that end in other punctuation marks may be followed by a single space.

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APA Headings and Subheadings

How should section and subsection headings be formatted in APA style?

A research paper written in APA style should be organized into sections and subsections using the five levels of APA headings. APA recommends using subheadings only when the paper has at least two subsections within a larger section. Notice how sections contain at least two smaller subsections in the example below:

Method

Design

Participants

Demographic.

Characteristics.

Limitations

https://youtu.be/l1gLkPSEBmc

Starting with the first level of heading, the subsections of the paper should progressively use the next level(s) of heading without skipping any levels. Major sections of the paper’s main body, including the Method, Results, and Discussion sections, should always be formatted with the first level of heading. However, keep in mind that the Introduction section, which is preceded by the full title of the paper, should be presented in plain type. Any subsections that fall under the major sections are formatted with the next level of heading.

Note that all paragraphs of the main body, including those that fall under subsections of a larger section, still maintain the pattern of indentation, use Times New Roman font, 12 pt., and are double-spaced. There are no extra lines or spaces between paragraphs and headings.

How are the five levels of APA-style headings formatted?

Format each of the five levels of APA-style headings as demonstrated in the example below. Note that while the example features headings titled “First Level,” “Second Level,” and so on, each heading in your paper should be named according to the section it describes.

**First Level**

The first level of heading is bolded and centered, and the first letter of each word in the heading is capitalized. The paragraph text should be typed on the following line and indented five spaces from the left.
Second Level

The second level of heading is bolded and situated flush left, and the first letter of each word in the heading is capitalized. The paragraph text should be typed on the following line and indented five spaces from the left.

Third level

The third level of heading is bolded, indented five spaces from the left, and followed by a period. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word in the heading and of proper nouns. The first paragraph following this heading should be typed on the same line as the heading.

Fourth level

The fourth level of heading is bolded, italicized, indented five spaces from the left, and followed by a period. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word in the heading and of proper nouns. The first paragraph following this heading should be typed on the same line as the heading.

Fifth level

The fifth level of heading is italicized, indented five spaces from the left, and followed by a period. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word in the heading and of proper nouns. The first paragraph following this heading should be typed on the same line as the heading.

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APA In-Text Citations

An essential component of a research paper, in-text citations are a way of acknowledging the ideas of the author(s) of a particular work.

Each source that appears as an in-text citation should have a corresponding detailed entry in the References list at the end of the paper. Including the required elements in every citation allows other researchers to easily track the references used in a paper and locate those resources themselves.

There are three pieces of information that should be included in a citation after quoting another writer’s work: the author’s last name, the year of publication, and the page number(s) of the quoted material, all of which are separated by commas. The page number should follow a lower-case letter ‘p’ and a period.

- Basic structure: (Author, Year of Publication, p. 142)
  - Example: (Kutner, 2003, p. 451) [1]

If the quoted material was taken from more than one page, use two lower-case letter ‘p’s.

- Basic structure: (Author, Year of Publication, pp. 194-196)
  - Example: (Kutner, 2003, pp. 451-452) [1]

How should multiple authors of a single source be cited?

There are a few guidelines to follow when citing multiple authors for a single source. Separate the names of the source’s authors by using commas. Depending on the location and instance of the citation, an ampersand(&), the word and, or the term et al. may also need to be used.

When should an ampersand be used?

Ampersands (&) should only be used in parenthetical in-text citations. An ampersand separates the last and second to last author of a cited work.

- Example: Research has demonstrated that “synesthesia appears quite stable over time, and synesthetes are typically surprised to discover that other people do not share their experiences” (Niccolai, Jennes, Stoerig, & Van Leeuwen, 2012, p. 81). [1]

When should the word and be used?

The word and should only be used in a sentence or paragraph; do not use it in a parenthetical in-text citation. The last and second to last author of a cited work are separated by the word and.

- Example: Niccolai, Jennes, Stoerig, and Van Leeuwen (2012) observed that “synesthesia appears quite stable over time, and synesthetes are typically surprised to discover that other people do not share their experiences” (p. 81). [1]
When should the term et al. be used?

When citing a single work with many authors, you may need to substitute some of the authors’ names with the term et al. The term et al. should not be italicized in your paper, and a period should be placed after the word al as it is an abbreviated term. Follow these guidelines regarding the usage of et al.:

**Use et al.:**

- The first time and every time you cite a source with at least six authors.
  - **Example:** The in-text citation of *Zoonoses: Infectious diseases transmissible from animals to humans*, a book authored by Krauss, Weber, Appel, Enders, Isenberg, Schiefer, Slenczka, von Graevenitz, and Zahner, would appear as follows: [2]
    - (Krauss et al., 2003, p. 91)
    - As Krauss et al. (2003) observed, ...

- Every following time (after the first instance) that you cite a source with at least three authors.
  - **Example:** Citing the article “Modality and variability of synesthetic experience” by Niccolai, Jennes, Stoerig, & Van Leeuwen would appear as follows: [1]
    - The first instance: (Niccolai, Jennes, Stoerig, & Van Leeuwen, 2012, p. 81)
    - Every following instance: (Niccolai et al., 2012)

**Avoid using et al.:**

- The first time you cite a source with up to five authors.
  - Instead, list all of the authors at their first mentioning.

- To cite a work that only has two authors.
  - Instead, always list the two authors’ names in every citation (separated by either an ampersand or the word and, depending on the location)

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APA Block Quotations

When should a block quotation be used?

A block quotation is an extract consisting of more than 40 words from another author’s work. Block quotations should be used in moderation, typically when using another writer’s words is a more effective way of illustrating an idea. Avoid using block quotations excessively as this practice gives the reader the impression that you are inexperienced in the subject or are simply filling pages to meet a word count requirement.

How should a block quotation be formatted?

While a short quotation is enclosed in quotation marks and integrated into the surrounding paragraph, a block quotation is an independent paragraph that is indented five spaces from the left margin. This type of quotation should be double-spaced like the rest of the paper, but it should not be enclosed in quotation marks. In a block quotation, the parenthetical in-text citation should follow directly after the end punctuation of the final sentence. Note the placement order of the quotation marks, parentheses, and period.

Let’s look at two examples:

One researcher outlines the viewpoints of both parties:
   Freedom of research is undoubtedly a cherished ideal in our society. In that respect research has an interest in being free, independent and unrestricted. Such interests weigh against regulations. On the other hand, research should also be valid, verifiable, and unbiased, to attain the overarching goal of gaining obtaining [sic] generalisable knowledge. (Simonsen, 2012, p. 46)

Note that although the block quotation is formatted as a separate block of text, it is preceded by an introductory phrase or sentence(s) followed by a colon. If the author’s name and the year of publication appear in the introductory sentence, the parenthetical in-text citation at the end of the paragraph should simply include the page number(s) of the original text, as shown in this example:

Simonsen (2012) outlines the two opposing viewpoints:
   Freedom of research is undoubtedly a cherished ideal in our society. In that respect research has an interest in being free, independent and unrestricted. Such interests weigh against regulations. On the other hand, research should also be valid, verifiable, and unbiased, to attain the overarching goal of gaining obtaining [sic] generalisable knowledge. (p. 46)

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APA References Page Formatting

Placement

The References page is located at the end of the main body of the paper and begins at the top of a new page. Appendices, footnotes, and additional materials should follow after the References page.

General Format

Like the rest of the paper, the References page should be double-spaced and typed in Times New Roman, 12 pt. The running head should appear flush with the upper left-hand corner of the page, and the page number should appear at the upper right-hand corner of the page.

The title of the References page is capitalized and centered at the top of the page without any formatting, including bold, italics, underlining, or quotation marks. Avoid mislabeling the References page as “Works Cited,” “Sources,” or “Bibliography.”

Entries

Each entry should be formatted as a hanging indentation: the first line of each citation should be flush with the left margin while each subsequent line of the citation is indented five spaces from the left margin. Alphabetize the entries in the References page based on the authors’ last names (or the first word of a work’s title, if a work does not name any authors). Though it will vary from source to source, the general structure of a print book citation is as follows:

Author Last Name, Initials. (Year of publication). Title of the work. Publication city: Publishing Company.

Electronic sources generally require more information than print sources, such as a uniform resource locator (URL), a digital object identifier (DOI), or the date the source material was accessed.

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Creating APA References Entries

https://youtu.be/as3f9dzmWDQ

Following is a list of sample citations for commonly used sources. Consult the current edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.) for a complete list of guidelines for formatting entries on the references page.

Print Examples

Single-Authored Book


Book with Multiple Authors

Two or more authors


Seven or more authors


Book by an Association or Organization


Article or Chapter in an Edited Collection


Collected Content in an Edited Book

Single editor

Multiple editors

Article in Print Periodical
With DOI

Without DOI

Electronic Examples

Book in Electronic Form

Article in Online Periodical
With DOI

Without DOI

Article from a Webpage
By Multiple Authors

By an Organization/Group

Unknown Author, Unknown Date
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OER books are usually blends of different texts, so I cannot speak to the original Lumen authors’ backgrounds.

Here is a little bit of background about myself, though (written in that third person that is always a warning sign for individuals, as *Seinfeld* episodes show us).

Josh Dickinson is an Associate Professor of English at Jefferson Community College in Watertown, NY. He teaches English and Education courses with a focus upon American Literature, Native American Literature, and non-Western Literature. Josh attended SUNY Jefferson, SUNY Potsdam, Syracuse University, and Colgate University.

Josh also supervises Jefferson’s EDGE (concurrent enrollment) English offerings at over a dozen local high school and BOCES sites.

He enjoys participating in the National Novel Writing Month contest, having completed seven novels so far each November. Josh has officiated high school soccer matches for 25 years and supports pro teams Tottenham Hotspur, FC Barcelona, and Borussia Dortmund.

At the Canadian Museum of History, Ottawa: Go Habs, Go!