Advanced Writing

Cristie Cowles Charles

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Introduction

Welcome to Advanced Writing!

Cristie Cowles Charles

Welcome to Advanced Writing!

When we decided to create a new textbook about advanced writing, we made one major goal: that it *not* be boring. (We hope you agree!) So we chose this interactive online venue with cool tech we thought you'd enjoy: embedded videos *inside* the textbook, lots of images and graphics, embedded quiz and discussion questions, and even live links so you don't have to leave the textbook to go to a web page. Plus, you can read it anywhere: on a computer, tablet, and even your phone!

We also decided to make our textbook completely free. (You're welcome.) We know how expensive college can be, so we found funding from generous people and departments to produce this textbook as an Open Educational Resource (OER). But more importantly, we tried to talk to you like people. We know a lot of textbooks can sound dry and boring and far away, but we wanted to teach you like you're sitting right there in front of us. So we've added stories and analogies that come from our lives and connect to experiences you'll relate to. Because, you know, we're people, too.

My majestic office view. #nofilter (Image by the author.)

So to help you reach your goals, we're going to give you a window into the world of good writing. Here's the actual view from my office window as I write this. Can you believe those mountains? We're going to be your guides as we climb the proverbial mountains of good writing to get the skills and knowledge you need to succeed as writers (cue song from *The Sound of Music*). We hope you'll do like our motto here at Brigham Young University:

> *Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve*

We promise that if you'll work hard to learn the skills in this book, your efforts will pay off. You'll emerge from this journey stronger and with a broader vision of how you can influence the world as a better writer, a better learner, and a better person.

Sincerely,

Cristie Cowles Charles, Editor

Check Out the Tech

Here's some of the cool tech you'll encounter in this book.

Embedded Videos

Videos are embedded into the text so you can just click on them without leaving the textbook and watch them there with no ads—yet the creators still get credit for your clicks. Here's a cool three-minute video about why these young men from inner-city Chicago choose to write. Try watching it by clicking directly on it.

Note: If you ever want to watch a video outside of the textbook itself, look at the bottom right corner and you'll see a link for *Vimeo* or *YouTube* that you can click on. Or the video's URL will also be listed directly under the video.

https://youtu.be/Fxh5Umdgxi0?si=00KlWrTigmfjQS9F

Embedded Websites

We'll always provide the actual URL address for websites, but even better, we'll often put them in an iframe, which allows you to access everything wihtout leaving the textbook. Convenient!

Try checking out this website below for the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). The good people at Purdue University have spent years compiling resources for college writers, so you can find answers to almost any writing question such as *How do headings work in APA format?* or *What are some good transition words?* Scroll down and try browsing through the sections or searching for a topic.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

Hint: I always ask my students to bookmark this *Transitions Words* page that lists good transition words by function—it comes in handy in most writing situations. This is also an example of a regular hyperlink that's not an iframe.

Chapter Questions

Throughout the book are questions that ask you to think about what you're reading or try out some writing techniques. Your teacher might assign you to do these for credit, but even if not, they can help you practice what you're learning.

Average Reading Time

At the beginning of every chapter we've included the average time it takes readers to read the whole chapter. This includes the time it takes to watch videos but doesn't include any writing activities, discussion questions, or quizzes. Students find this really helps them plan their time.

End-of-Chapter Surveys

How often do you get to tell textbook authors what you think? Now you can. And we can take it—we really want to know what you liked and didn't like or what was confusing or helpful so we can revise it. (Hey, if we talk the talk of seeking feedback, we should walk the walk, right?)

Please be sure to take the surveys at the end of each chapter so we can improve our own writing. It's for posterity!

Spoiler Alerts

Previewing a book is a good way to get a feel for it and anticipate what's coming. We've divided this textbook into three main units: Writing Tools, Academic Audiences, and General Audiences.

UNIT 1: WRITING TOOLS

In **Unit 1: Writing Tools**, you'll get help understanding how academic writing differs from other types of writing and learn the tools you need to get your message across.

In **Chapter 1 What's Advanced About Advanced Writing?**, we'll talk about how writers in your chosen field are part of a discourse community whose style, forms, and vocabulary you'll need to learn. **Chapter 2 Writing Tools** deals with the rhetorical strategies you learned in your first-year writing class and how we'll build on those strategies in this course. **Chapter 3 Writing Processes** addresses the steps involved in creating a piece of writing and how best to approach a writing assignment. **Chapter 4 Grammar & Mechanics** will review the most important grammar, spelling, and punctuation concepts that will convince your audience that you know what you're talking about. In **Chapter 5 Style**, we'll delve into the nuances of language that can take your writing from good to great. And finally, in **Chapter 6 Design**, you'll learn elements of design and how to use images, fonts, color, and other tools to best get your message across.

UNIT 2: ACADEMIC AUDIENCES

In **Unit 2: Academic Audiences**, we'll focus on what writing is like in scholarly settings and how to create some of the most useful types of documents.

In **Chapter 7 Writing for Academic Audiences**, we'll discuss how best to write formally for an academic audience and what is valued in an academic discourse community. **Chapter 8 Finding and Evaluating Sources** will help you see how research and evidence are the main currencies of academia and will teach you how to find and analyze sources using online databases and other tools. **Chapter 9 Discussing and Citing Sources** deals with the best ways to talk about your sources (summary, paraphrase, and quotation) and how to give credit to others' work (using style guides)--an essential skill that can also keep you out of trouble. In **Chapter 10 What Is a Literature Review?**, you'll learn the definition of a literature review, how it differs from a typical research paper, and how literature reviews are used in academia and beyond. **Chapter 11 How to Plan a Literature Review** will go through the first steps for writing a literature review: taking good notes, structuring, and outlining. **Chapter 12 How to Write a Literature Review** follows with the final steps for creating a literature review: drafting, writing an abstract, and revising. And finally, **Chapter 13 Proposals** will cover the best ways to formally ask for anything--especially money for research and other projects.

UNIT 3: GENERAL AUDIENCES

The final unit, **Unit 3: General Audiences**, will deal with how to write for less academic, more general audiences and will also cover different types of public writing.

To that end, **Chapter 14 Writing for General Audiences** will cover strategies for getting your message across to a general audience and explain how that differs from academic writing. **Chapter 15 Job and Graduate School Applications** will delve into some specific genres for applying for jobs (such as resumes, cover letters, and online profiles) and graduate schools (CVs and personal statements). In **Chapter 16 Public Texts**, you'll learn strategies for writing other genres such as memos, emails, social media posts, blog posts, infographics, and opinion editorials. And finally, **Chapter 17 Presentations** will take you through the steps to creating a killer presentation--whether it be a traditional oral presentation or a poster presentation.

We believe this (hopefully not boring) textbook will give you the skills you need to succeed in your future at the university, in your career, and in life.

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Feedback

We welcome any feedback you have for this book. Please email advancedwritingtextbook@gmail.com if you have a question, notice typos, come across problems, have suggestions, or simply want to make our day with a compliment.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the unsung heroes who teach university writing courses—most of whom are adjunct faculty with full family lives and outside responsibilities—who often juggle heavy grading loads, shared offices, and uncertain professional futures in order to do what we love: teach. This textbook comes from that same labor of love. It's also dedicated to our vibrant students who make our efforts worth it. Thanks to our departments who support us and our colleagues who encourage us. Most especially, this book is dedicated to our families who sacrificed significantly for us to add this worthy workload to our plates and to God who directed our paths.

–Cristie Cowles Charles, Editor

UNIT 1

WRITING TOOLS

1

What's Advanced About Advanced Writing?

Cristie Cowles Charles

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you will learn

- how you can benefit from becoming a better writer
- how knowledge is created in the scholarly community
- what constitutes a discourse community
- how writing in the your discipline is distinctive from other disciplines
- how to learn your field's particular jargon, genres, and style

1.1 You Are Here

Know where you are so you can know where you're going.
Photo by joelogon on flickr

Here you are in a class about Advanced Writing. Are you wondering what you're doing here? What's the point of this class? Is it just another hoop to jump through before graduating? Didn't you already take a writing class as a freshman? Haven't you already learned how to write papers in your other classes? Isn't that good enough?

My answer to that is, sure. It's good enough if you're okay with just being okay. If your favorite emoji is the "meh" emoji; if you want to spend your whole life jumping through hoops rather than calling the shots; if you never want to get a raise or win friends and influence people. Or if you identify with this baby (see awesome photo):

But wouldn't it be amazing if your words could actually change people's minds? (Like your boss's mind about that raise?) What about changing people's lives? What if you could not only find answers to real-life problems but also share your work with others so they make a difference in the world? Or what if you just want to express yourself better to that cute student across the room? Or what if you want to convince your city to move a walking path that juts into your property because you want to install a fence and you don't have the tools or permission to move it? (This may or may not be based on a real life example from my backyard.) All of these things and more can be yours if you learn how to up your game as a communicator. And that takes practice—thus, this class.

Is this your Writing Spirit Baby? Photo by greychr on flickr

Let me tell you a secret: you will spend most of your life communicating. Even those of you who chose your college major thinking that you wouldn't have to write a lot (math majors, anyone?) will spend most of your work life communicating—reading, speaking, and writing. Trust me; you might not believe it now, but go talk to someone who has the job you want someday, and you'll find out just how much of their work life involves communication. (Spoiler alert: it's a lot.)

Not only that, but you'll probably spend much of your personal life communicating, too. What's that, you say? You plan to spend most of your personal life sitting on your couch at home in front of a screen and never seeing any people?

Secret: Even babies know how important communication is. Photo by Andrew Barwell on flickr

Well, I have news for you: you still can't avoid communication from your couch. In fact, everything on that screen involves some form of communication—that movie was written and produced by people for people. That video game, too. Even that cat meme you're chuckling at was created by a person to make an impact. And the minute you click "share," presto! You're communicating right back. You can't help it. Because you're human (I'm assuming you're human), and that's what humans do. In fact, you might even say that communication is one of the main things that make us human.

So you might as well get good at it, right? And that's where this class comes in. If you'll dig in and work hard, you'll learn those awesome communication skills we were talking about and you'll get lots of good practice communicating so you can make a difference in this world. And then you can be a better human and help other humans be better humans, too.

Ah, Cat Memes! They're communication, too. Photo by Meme Binge on flickr

Welcome to My Parlor

Now that we've established that you're in the right place, let me tell you what your job is in this class. I know, I know, you're going to say your job is "to learn." And you're not wrong. But more specifically, we want to teach you how to join a conversation. And not just any conversation, but the particular conversation in your field. That's what makes this writing class an "advanced writing" class as opposed to your first-year writing class or high school. Your first-year writing class was all about writing skills in general, but this one focuses on your field of study and the specific vocabulary, strategies, and tools your future colleagues use. To explain this, first, let me set the mood. (Feel free to turn down the lights for this section.) Welcome to my parlor:

This is actually George Washington's Parlor. Photo by Matt Briney on Unsplash

Or if you prefer this modern parlor . . .

This parlor is preferred by hipsters. Photo by Sven Brandsma on Unsplash

A famous scholar named Kenneth Burke (okay, famous mostly just to writing teacher nerds) came up with an equally famous analogy for academic writing (also mostly writing-teacher famous, but still awesome). Note: It helps if you imagine Morgan Freeman's voice reading it. He said,

> *"Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him [or her]; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself [or herself] against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress." — Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form*

Cool party, right? (Okay also mainly cool to writing teachers.) But still, Burke makes a great point. If you've ever been to a party and wanted to join in on a conversation, you know that you had to first listen to what's going on, catch the lingo, note who's taking which sides, and then finally put in your oar—enter the conversation. This is the way knowledge is created and shared in the world—by figuring out what's come before, learning about what's going on, and then adding your two cents (to which someone else will respond, and the cycle continues). And it's by honing those skills that you'll become a master communicator in your field. So how do you "listen" to your field's conversation? By joining its discourse community.

Can You Say Shibboleth?

A discourse community means a group with shared knowledge, values, characteristics, genres, language, and/or style. You're already part of many discourse communities. For example, your "Friends" on Instagram are a collection of people who have something in common (you), who understand what a post is (the genre or the form writing usually takes), who

share a lingo (like LOL, BTW, and TMI), and who enter into conversations (by responding with words, emojis, or just cat memes).

Do you remember the first time you visited a different family—maybe the family of your significant other or your roommate or best friend? Did you notice that they talked and acted differently than the family you grew up in? Did they have little nicknames or mannerisms or ways of responding that surprised (or even amused or annoyed) you? Did they have inside jokes that you didn't understand? That's because they've developed a discourse community and you're an outsider. Here's hoping things worked out and now you've made it into their inner linguistic circle. But if not, that's okay. At least your life wasn't on the line.

Here's a great story about a discourse community with wild consequences for outsiders. It's from the Old Testament in *The Bible*. (Again, try imagining Morgan Freeman's voice—it really helps):

> *"And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;*
>
> *Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand." Judges 12:5-6*

What? Did you catch that? The Gileadites had a discourse community with a built-in test to see if someone was a member of their group. They knew that people in their community could pronounce the sound "sh" in shibboleth, but the Ephraimites couldn't—it would always come out sounding like "ssss" for them. So the Gileadites tested everyone who tried to cross the river, and using that one word caught and killed 42,000 Ephraimites! Harsh. And now, to this day, the word shibboleth means "any custom or tradition, usually a choice of phrasing or even a single word, that distinguishes one group of people from another" ("Shibboleth," *Wikipedia*). In other words, this story was so compelling that the word shibboleth has come to mean anything that marks you as an outsider of a discourse community.

So, I'm not saying that you'll be killed if you don't learn the lingo of your discourse community, but I *am* saying that understanding your audience can help you get your voice heard and taken seriously. Your goal in this class is to learn how to become an insider in your field of study so that when you do step into the river and enter the conversation, you don't get your proverbial head chopped off. Here's a quick video that illustrates what happens when someone misreads the situation and uses the language and style of one discourse community (business) in the wrong setting with the wrong audience (but still with an awesome accent).

What happens when you use the wrong language for your discourse community.

Watch on YouTube

What happens when you use the wrong language for your discourse community. https://youtu.be/nqHIgzC14v4

Don't be like these guys. Do your homework and learn what's appropriate—and not—in your field's discourse community.

How to Listen

So how can you discern the characteristics of the discourse community in your particular field? By doing a bunch of "listening" first. Here are some places you can go to start learning how people talk, write, and respond. The more read and talk to people in your field, the faster you'll catch on and the faster you'll be able to contribute.

Publications (journals, books, newspapers, websites)

Style Guides (APA Manual, Turabian, MLA, etc.)

Conferences/Societies

Websites

Email Listservs

Online forums

Conversations

Interviews

LinkedIn feeds

Facebook/Instagram/Twitter

Pinterest

Now let's get you started finding your field's discourse community.

Discourse Community Activity

Search online for 2-3 publications or websites in your particular major/field of study. They can be written for an academic audience, a general audience, or anything in between, but they have to be from your field. Now skim through the publications and list at least 3 things that stick out to you that they have in common—either in their form (genre), look (design), writing style, vocabulary, etc. List those characteristics along with the field you looked up. Voila! You've already started to recognize what distinguishes your discourse community.

Is There Life After College?

All this talk about talk reminds me why we're here in the first place—to become better communicators. So if you need a little more motivation to bring your A game, listen to this: when employers are asked about the top five attributes they want in new hires coming out of college, they almost universally mention communication skills.

> *"If you are trying to decide among a few people to fill a position, hire the best writer. . . . Clear writing is a sign of clear thinking. Great writers know how to communicate. They make things easy to understand. They can put themselves in someone else's shoes. They know what to omit. And those are qualities you want in any candidate. Writing is making a comeback all over our society...Writing is today's currency for good ideas."*
>
> *—Jason Fried, Founder of Basecamp, Author of ReWork*

Not only will this book prepare you to succeed in your remaining college classes, it will also teach you skills necessary for your career and life. So all I can say is sit down, buckle up, and hold on to your hats and glasses because you're in for a wild ride!

What if I have a question?

See this comic.

Syllabus Activity

Read your course's Syllabus and email your teacher with any questions you might still have about the course. If you have no questions, then email your teacher a cat meme and/or a compliment about something you like so far about their class. You'll make their day.

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2

Writing Tools

Jon Ostenson

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- define basic terms of rhetoric (argument, emotion, character, and style) and see examples of these in the world around you
- define the elements of the rhetorical triangle (writer, audience, message, and purpose) and recognize how those are influenced by (and influence) the context in which we write
- use various methods of invention, organization, and style to adapt written and oral forms of communication to specific rhetorical situations.

2.1 You're Not a Blank Slate

If you look over the learning outcomes for this chapter, do any of those terms and ideas sound familiar to you? Do they bring back memories of your first-year college writing class? Or maybe of high school English classes?

You're embarking on an advanced writing course, but I doubt this is your first encounter with being taught about writing. In fact, I hope you've had many encounters with writing teachers and assignments, and it's important to note that you've got a lot of experience with writing already under your belt. The purpose of this chapter is to lay a basic foundation of concepts about writing (which we'll frame in terms that are usually associated with the study of rhetoric). Much of what you read in this chapter may sound familiar to you, especially if you took a first-year writing course at BYU and studied from the textbook commonly assigned in that course.

But if this is your first writing class in college or if the mention of words like rhetoric or audience or genre make your heart race a bit and your palms sweat, don't worry! You're not coming at this as a complete novice—you've had lots of

experience with the concepts of this chapter already. For instance, deciding whether to ask someone out via text message or in person, thinking about the best way to approach that roommate who always eats your food, biting your tongue in front of the cop who just pulled you over– in all these situations you're practicing the concepts we'll discuss here because you're making decisions about how to use the available tools to best communicate.

The goal of this chapter is to give you some terms and definitions that will tap into both your previous writing instruction and your personal experience with communication in general. We'll explore some examples to help connect those ideas to real-world situations and, hopefully, to remind you of ways that you've applied these principles yourself. Then, the rest of the text will build on that foundation as we focus your attention on specific situations you'll likely encounter working in your field of study.

Recall from FYW

What do you remember learning in your first-year writing course? (Or, if you didn't have a first-year writing course, think about the last writing course you can remember.) What concepts stood out, what practices did you adopt as a result of this course?

2.2 Fundamental Writing Tools

Let me share with you one of my fundamental truths about writing: Good writing is about making good choices. What does that mean? You may have already noticed that this chapter has a different feel from the previous chapter—that "feel" is something we sometimes call voice (which we'll get to more in a little bit when we talk about style later in this section). My voice as a writer comes from the choices I make that would be different from the choices a different writer might make. You'll notice this throughout this textbook, in fact: Each person who contributes to the book has a different voice because we make different choices in our writing.

The best writers have a large tool chest available to them, and they make purposeful and effective choices about which tools to use in a given situation. Just as a good carpenter recognizes when a saw is needed versus a plane, a good writer knows when to use an anecdote versus results from an empirical study.

In this section we want to review some of the tools we use to persuade, inform, or otherwise communicate with others. In your first-year writing (FYW) class, it's likely that you studied these tools by examining how other people used them and then practiced using them yourself in your own writing. In many ways, you'll engage in similar work in this course, but within the specific context of your field of study.

Evidence and Reasoning

One of the most important choices we make as writers is related to the evidence we use to support our claims and how we connect that evidence. Many of the texts we read and write try to inform or persuade an audience and the kind of evidence we use is critical to that purpose. Strong writers rely on sound thinking, logically connected claims and reasons, and clearly articulated assumptions that support this thinking. (Some of you may have had teachers in the past use the term logos to talk about this kind of reasoning, which is a Greek word. We'll stick with the English terms in this book.)

Photo by CDC on Unsplash

The role of evidence and reasoning is absolutely fundamental to so much of our communication in the world. Take the issue of vaccinating children, which lately has become an intensely debated issue. Those in favor of vaccinations base their arguments on scientific evidence and principles; their underlying assumption is that the methods of science build solid knowledge that helps us control the world around us (i.e., prevent horrible diseases from infecting people).

Those opposed to vaccinations (often called "anti-vaxxers") use a different kind of logic, attributing causal power, for instance, to correlated events (my grandson was fine before the vaccine but then after was diagnosed with autism); they assume that these coincidences prove causality and that the doctors and big vaccine makers are in cahoots. There exists a fundamental disconnect in the way most health care professionals reason about vaccines and the way anti-vaxxers do, and that's connected to the underlying assumptions both make about what constitutes knowledge you can trust.

Discussion Question

What issues or controversies (like the debates over vaccines) do you see today that include people using reasoning and evidence in different ways?

Character

In looking at character, we're focused on the persona we build as communicators–on our credibility as a writer or speaker. (Some of you may be familiar with the Greek term ethos, which is how the Greeks referred to this idea of character.) How do we convey a sense of expertise to an audience so they trust what we're saying? How do we connect

with our audience in ways that help us achieve our purpose? Our messages will be more effective if our audience has reasons to trust us. We build this trust through demonstrating that we're knowledgeable about a topic, presenting a balanced view of the issue, and sharing personal experiences as appropriate that connect us with our audience.

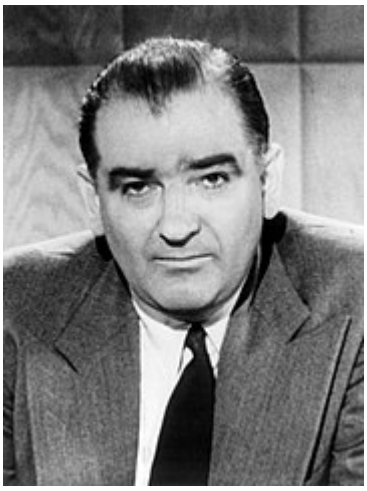
Don't make it so you have to wear a hat everywhere. Get your information from good sources. Photo by Allef Vinicius on Unsplash

This issue of character seems to be more and more important. One student I was working with searched the Internet looking for solutions to an outbreak of acne on her forehead; in an online forum, she read a suggestion to use a Mr. Clean cleaning pad on the affected skin. The result was a chemical burn on her forehead that was much worse (and more noticeable) than the pimples. Why would this student put her trust in an unknown contributor to an online forum rather than a medical expert? I'm guessing she was probably in a hurry and paid a (painful) price for ignoring credibility. While good readers should work to assess the character of an information source, as writers we can help them and ourselves out by attending to how to build our character.

Discussion Question

Where do you go online to find information that you think will be reliable? Why do you think that information is reliable or how has this source proven itself to be trustworthy?

Emotion



Joseph McCarthy (Public Domain)

Emotions are powerful tools in communicating, and as such should be used carefully. Emotional appeals to an audience through specific stories and concrete details and specific word choices can evoke the proper feelings in an audience and propel them to action. (Again, some of you may be familiar with the term pathos, which the ancient Greeks used to refer to these appeals to emotion.)

However, these appeals to emotion can also be abused to manipulate an audience into wrong or inappropriate thought or action. Joseph McCarthy, a senator from Wisconsin in the 1950s, ruined many careers in and out of politics when he accused many people of being Communist sympathizers. He played on anxieties felt by many about the spread of this ideology and the growing power of the USSR, but in the end there was little real evidence to prove either the veracity of his claims or the threat that these alleged sympathizers posed. (In fact, so disgusted was the public with his manipulative tactics that we now have the term McCarthyism to describe making accusations without real evidence.) As a speaker and writer, it's up to you to ensure that you use rhetorical tools like emotional appeals ethically and responsibly—you don't want your name becoming associated with dastardly, underhanded deeds!

Discussion Question

Emotion can be a powerful tool in situations where we're trying to convince or persuade others. How have you used emotion in the past in your interactions with others? Can you think of a moment when someone used emotional appeals to persuade you? In either case, were these appeals to emotion ethical? Why or why not?

Style

Your writing style is as unique as the way you dress. Photo by Amanda Vick on Unsplash

Finally, there's the Style of our message, or how we communicate a message–the words and sentences we use. Just as many of us choose to dress a certain way (to reflect our personality perhaps or influence the impression we have on others), we "dress" our message in a certain way through our use of language. Remember my note earlier that the different authors who contribute to this book make different choices with our language—that gives each of us our style. (Case in point: Note that I chose to use a dash in that last sentence, which is not the same choice other writers would make.)

It's important that we adhere to standard English conventions in our spelling and punctuation and sentence structure; writing that's riddled with errors reflects poorly on the writer. How many flame wars have been started on the Internet because someone used your instead of you're or there instead of their? At the same time, we want to hone the power of our sentences by using sophisticated techniques that can impact a reader. We can enhance our style by studying the best writers (both in our discipline and outside of it) and taking careful note of how these writers achieve certain effects with the sentences they craft.

While you'll read much more about style later in this text, it's worth noting here that many audiences value concise writing that's not pretentious. This is especially true when we write for general audiences, and it's actually part of what informs our character. As writers we should strive to make even complex ideas as intelligible as possible, and we should attend to word choice and sentence structure as important tools in this goal. A great example of this actually comes from government, where agencies are actually required by law to write plainly and clearly. Look at the two sentences below, taken from the government's guidelines for plain language:

Don't Say	Say

These sections describe types of information that would satisfy the application requirements of Circular A-110 as it would apply to this grant program.	These sections tell you how to meet the requirements of Circular A-110 for this grant program.

Note how much more direct the second sentence is, and note the choices that are made to bring about that clarity (such as the choice in the second example to focus on the reader's action through using the pronoun "you"). Clear, concise writing can be more appealing to audiences and can strengthen their opinion of you as a writer.

2.3 The Rhetorical Situation

Who's your audience for your journal? Photo by Jan Kahánek on Unsplash

When I was 11 and 12 years old, I was very good at keeping a journal; I wrote nearly every day. When I wrote in that journal, I'm not sure I ever expected anyone to read my daily entries, but I did hold on to the journal through the years. Today, my children like to read those entries and tease me about them (they are admittedly immature and pretty silly, but then I was a kid, so what do you expect?). I like to complain to them that if I had known that my future children would read it, I either would never have kept a journal or I would have tried to sound more mature in it.

If you keep (or have kept) a journal, perhaps you've wondered if anyone else would ever read what you wrote–maybe you've hoped that they wouldn't! It's an odd thing, keeping a journal: I started off many of my entries in that journal with the phrase "Dear Journal," and I wonder today if I really imagined some real audience on the other end of my writing. As I consider the practice of journal writing, I wonder if we ever really write without an audience in mind—even if we really think we're just writing for ourselves, are we ever really unaware that others might read it?

This little trip down memory lane suggests that no writing really occurs in a vacuum. There are always external forces acting on us and influencing the choices we make as writers. With the writing tools from the last section in mind, it's appropriate now to consider the context in which writing occurs.

Suppose you’re sitting in class and the professor starts talking about a midterm essay you have to write. Or it’s near the end of the semester, you’re running low on funds, and you need to ask Mom for a little extra to help see you through. Or you’ve graduated and your boss wants you to create an informational brochure for new employees to walk them through some common tasks on the job. In each of these cases, and so many others we encounter daily, you find yourself in what we call a "rhetorical situation" where you can put writing skills to work in communicating something meaningful. That situation has become so important to scholars of writing that we've invented several ways of thinking and talking about it. One of the most common ways configures the elements of this situation as a triangle, like the one in the image below.

The Rhetorical Triangle

Good writers will assess these elements before they commit themselves to written or spoken words. If you think back to other writing courses you've taken, you may have talked about something like this, even if you didn't use the same triangle metaphor. (If you took first-year writing here at BYU, you might remember using the acronym GRAPE to learn about these concepts.) The triangle we use in this text implies that these elements are interconnected and inform each other. We'll take each one in turn in the sections that follow and consider how they're connected through some examples.

2.4 Purpose

If you look at our triangle, you'll note that purpose sits squarely in the middle, surrounded by writer, audience, and message. Why do you think we situated it in the center like this? My idea is that placing purpose in the center suggests its central role in crafting the message; purpose is at the heart of the decisions we make as writers. Lots of students assume that we study writing in order to change people's minds, and that's certainly one of our purposes in communicating with each other. But we might also want to inform an audience, or even get them to simply feel something–although even in these cases, there's often an implied sense that we want to change our readers' views or feelings about something.

A man with a purpose: FDR delivers a speech after Pearl Harbor (Public Domain)

Your purpose is going to shape the choices you make as a writer. If you want to report on the results of a project, you might choose to organize details in a chronological pattern since that will best convey the progress made during the project. But if you're looking to convince investors to give you some money to develop a new mobile app, you'll probably want to begin by talking about a common problem you see that your app can fix.

Sometimes we begin writing without really knowing what our purpose is, beyond wanting to finish the piece of writing and/or satisfy someone's demands. That's okay, really, and you shouldn't always let an unclear purpose stop you from writing. Have you ever gotten two or three (or more!) pages into an assignment and there, in the last paragraph, you realize that you've finally discovered what you want to say? That happens to all of us, and writing is actually a powerful way for us to discover what it is we have to say about something. It's okay if your sense of what you have to say shifts as you compose, but take advantage of opportunities to revise your work and have others read it before submitting so that you make sure your finished work has a strong sense of purpose woven throughout the piece.

Discussion Question

Think about your discipline or area of specialty within your field. What are some reasons why people in your field write or communicate? What drives people in your field to communicate?

2.5 Writer

Every message has an author behind it. When you're interpreting or analyzing a message you receive from someone else, it's a no-brainer to think carefully about who the author is. The author's values and views on the world can influence the message in important ways that we want to be aware of.

But as a student in this writing class, you're often going to be the writer, and it may seem silly to spend any time thinking about yourself in relation to your message. Nevertheless, as we'll cover throughout this book, it's important to consider things like your relationship to an audience and to the topic you're writing about.

Analyzing this relationship might lead you to uncover shared values or experiences that you can tap into as part of an argument. How does your audience perceive you? Considering this question can help you make choices to build your credibility with an audience so they trust what you're communicating. Do you have implicit or unexamined biases towards the topic you're writing on? Examining these can help you approach an audience more effectively as you recognize those and acknowledge the ways they color your thinking.

2.6 Audience

Your message needs to be shaped in consideration of the audience to whom you send it. In fact, considerations of audience may be the most important forces shaping a message.

If your bank account is empty and you approach your parents for more cash, a sound knowledge of who they are and what they value will be critical to ensuring the success of your request. Do they respond better to emotionally rich requests that draw on their relationship to you or are they more compelled by logical arguments about the rising costs of college life? It's likely you know your parents well and what will and will not work when it comes to convincing them to part with some money. The better you can come to know the audience you're writing or speaking to in a given situation, the better you can craft your message to them.

Discussion Question

Thinking about your discipline or specialty within your field, what kinds of audiences do you imagine you will write to? How might you think about adjusting a message to one of these audiences?

Sometimes you're going to be writing to an audience you're unfamiliar with, and this will require you to do some imagining or some research. In the situation you're addressing with your writing, what will your audience care about the

most? What do they value that you can tap into to help change their minds? Rather than take guesses at this, many writers will try to get to know an unfamiliar audience better by speaking to them or reading things they write. Even rudimentary research can give you valuable insights into those you want to communicate with and help you select the appropriate tools and approaches in your writing.

Consider possible unintended audiences when sending out a public message. Photo by Kaboompics.com

In today's world, it's also true that we have to consider unintended audiences for our messages, especially when those messages are going out on a public platform like Twitter. In 2015, a woman employed in public relations sent what she thought was a humorous tweet to her 170 followers right before she boarded an international flight to Africa. While in flight, her tweet was picked up by a writer for a popular tech blog who retweeted it and posted about it on the blog; by the time this woman landed, she had received tens of thousands of tweets condemning her for what was widely perceived as a racist joke. In addition to the public humiliation she and her family faced, she was fired from her job.

Whether the public shaming this woman experienced was deserved or not, this is an important lesson in carefully considering audience–intended and unintended. The fact that our words can be shared and transmitted to other audiences suggests we need to be careful in our communications when we're the writer, and perhaps also just a bit more humble and open-minded as listeners.

Image by Wikipedia

And we may have to consider computers–or at least the algorithms written for them–as part of our audience. For example, let's say you've got a message that you want to promote on a platform like YouTube or Facebook and you want it to reach a wide audience. To do so, you'll have to consider how to leverage the algorithms that promote content: How can you get your company's press release to be at the head of users' Facebook newsfeeds? Can you get your video to the front page of YouTube? Figuring this out requires understanding how those platforms make decisions about what's going to be foremost in users' feeds.

2.7 Message and Genre

For our purposes here, the message is the actual writing that we produce, whatever form it takes. One element of this message we'll pay attention to is its content. We make choices about content based on our purpose and our audience–will a personal story best move my audience or would statistics do a better job? What about a combination of the two? We might also consider the words and sentence structures that will be most appropriate–can we avoid using technical jargon, for instance, or will our audience expect that?

In addition to thinking about content, we also need to pay attention to the form our message takes. As a student, you've probably become familiar with a set of forms (or genres, which is the word we'll use more): the essay, the research report, the short essay response on an exam, etc. But in the larger world, there are a multitude of genres we could use, ranging from the opinion editorial to the press release or the political campaign speech. And new technologies are consistently bringing us new genres: Facebook and Instagram posts, tweets, text messages, and so on.

Discussion Question

What kinds of genres have you written in as a student? What about outside of school?

Good writers carefully consider which genre will be the most appropriate for their purposes and their audience. Sometimes we don't get a choice in this area–your boss wants a brochure for new employees or your professor assigns you a research paper. Even if we don't have a choice, it's still critical to understand the role that genre plays in our writing.

Scholars in the field of writing studies talk about genres as arising from social situations, and that means our writing is influenced by the context in which it takes place. Think about the wedding announcements you may have seen on Instagram or in your local newspaper and how those came to be. (You can see some from the New York Times or here's some with more local flavor from the Daily Herald.) Imagine the first couple who, way back when, decided to announce their upcoming wedding in the newspaper so it would reach a larger audience. This hypothetical first couple had to make decisions about what to include and how to phrase those details.

Through time, as these unique rhetorical situations recur, a certain set of expectations about the form the message will take begins to solidify. To return to our example, after many couples follow that first, brave couple's lead, expectations (or conventions) start to emerge, leading to the recognizable genre of the engagement announcement that we see today. Certain patterns of organization might emerge as will certain phrases that help meet the needs of the context. You know you're dealing with a formalized genre when you start to see lists with help on how to write in that genre (such as this tip sheet from Brides.com for writing up your wedding announcement in the newspaper or this one from Martha Stewart about announcing your wedding on Instagram).

An example of a longer message posted as a series of tweets (credit: @BanburyRUFC)

However, features that we come to expect in a genre aren't always fixed. For instance, the tweet's origins as a text message limited content to 140 characters, which might be enough for brief status updates (the original goal of tweets) to a group of friends, but isn't really suitable for conveying more complex ideas. But as Twitter became more widely used by corporations and governments, some of them started circumventing the 140-character limit by attaching screenshots of typed press releases. Or you may have also seen some Twitter users use bracketed numbers at the end of each tweet in a series to let you know how many individual tweets make up the larger message. The needs of people using Twitter have shaped the way it's used and have forced the genre itself to adapt; most users can now use 280 characters in their tweets (which still isn't a lot).

Not all forms are appropriate for every message and every situation, and a good writer will make careful choices about which genre to use in any given situation based on what each genre allows for. I've heard friends complain about Instagram posts with lengthy captions; these complaints suggest that most people see this platform as a way of sharing images, and they open up Instagram to see things, not to read stuff. Similarly, we don't read obituaries expecting to learn about the deceased person's weaknesses or failings in life; the expectations of this genre are that we extol a person's virtues and accomplishments, even though we know that nobody's perfect and the obituary's subject certainly had flaws. An obituary that was brutally honest about its subject would really throw readers for a loop.

Kathleen Dehmlow

Kathleen Dehmlow (Schunk) was born on March 19, 1938 to Joseph and Gertrude Schunk of Wabasso.

She married Dennis Dehmlow at St. Anne's in Wabasso in 1957 and had two children Gina and Jay.

In 1962 she became pregnant by her husband's brother Lyle Dehmlow and moved to California.

She abandoned her children, Gina and Jay who were then raised by her parents in Clements, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Schunk.

She passed away on May 31, 2018 in Springfield and will now face judgement. She will not be missed by Gina and Jay, and they understand that this world is a better place without her.

source: Minnesota Public Radio

But even in these cases where writers may have subverted the expectations, they're showing an awareness of the genre and how it is typically used. One obituary that went viral recently was written by siblings whose mother had abandoned them. The beginning of this obituary followed the expected conventions, but it soon takes an unexpected turn with statements like "She will not be missed by [her children]"–ouch! You might question the appropriateness of these choices (and many have, including the editors who published it), but it's hard to deny the powerful effect of authors who understand the way a genre is supposed to work and who grab our attention by subverting it.

Discussion Question

Think about a genre you're familiar with (digital, visual, musical, or print) and consider if you've ever encountered an example of that genre that subverted or changed the expectations you have for that genre. Describe what was different about this example—just note a couple of examples—and how you reacted to it. For example, I think of the movie *Shrek* and how it subverted a lot of the traditional fairy tale tropes, especially in the end when the princess Fiona decides to remain an ogre. I loved that twist because, instead of following the expectation that she (like so many fairy tale heroes) would want to return to "normal," that choice celebrated Fiona recognizing something valuable and desirable in being an ogre.

The more you understand about genres (the form a message takes) and how they can be used, the more skilled you'll be at communicating effectively. It's important, too, to recognize that each discipline often privileges certain genres for the communication that takes place in that field. To become an expert in a field is to understand those genres and how to use them to share knowledge with other members of the field.

2.8 The Context

This idea of the context (the circle around our triangle) is kind of a catch-all for everything else that might influence our writing in a given situation. Part of this context is the social context surrounding writing that we just talked about with genre. (See how all these elements are tightly integrated?) But there are other forces to consider as well.

Something prompts the writing you do, sometimes before you even know what you want to say. For instance, after being late to class several times thanks to long lines in the campus food court, I feel like something has to change. That desire to see change might come before even knowing what change needs to take place. (The ancient Greeks would have called this desire the Exigence of the situation.)

This prompting can be external (your boss asks you to put out a press release) or it could be internal (you want to express your feelings to that special someone in a Valentine's Day card). The compulsion might be about something really grand (there's injustice in the criminal sentencing guidelines and you want to make others aware of that so we can make change) or something mundane (you're going to be late to the movies so you text a friend to have them save you a seat). But the point is, some problem or need inspires us to craft some writing that we hope will address that need.

We can create a sense of urgency in our writing that not everyone might see (and that we then need to convince them of). A politician, for example, might see an emergency worthy of drastic action in the number of homeless people in a city. That sense of emergency might not be shared by others, however, who may see these numbers as not so alarming or might see other issues as more urgent. So if that politician wants to see things happen, she will need to convince her audience that the numbers of homeless people do, in fact, represent a crisis worthy of her proposed actions. Most people may not pay attention to her collection of ideas and solutions if they don't feel there's a real problem.

Good writers don't take for granted that everyone else will see an issue or idea quite as compellingly as the writers do. Part of your job as a writer, then, may be to demonstrate the exigence of the moment that compels you to write, to persuade your audience that the time for action or change is, indeed, right now.

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Jon Ostenson

Jon Ostenson began his teaching career as an English teacher in junior high and high school classrooms. After about a decade, he moved to the university level where he now teaches courses in teacher preparation, young adult literature, and, of course, writing. Outside of work, he's entranced by retro tech and can often be found surfing YouTube for videos showcasing 8-bit technology.

3

Writing Processes

Brian Jackson

Learning Outcomes

This chapter will teach you how to

- Use a mindful writing process to plan, practice, revise, and reflect on writing tasks
- Assess a writing task, set goals, generate ideas, organize, outline, draft, peer review, evaluate, revise, reflect, and make connections
- Collaborate constructively with others to engage in writing as a social process.

3.1 Mindful Writing Processes

Writing—You May Have Noticed—Is Hard

Writing is hard.

Writing is not like riding a bike: you only have to learn to ride a bike once; learning how to write, however, is a life-long journey. #badmetaphors Photo by Michal Vrba on Unsplash

The problem is that we assume it's *easy*. We think of writing as a remedial activity. We think of it the way we think about learning to ride a bike: Once we get the hang of it, we've got it covered forever. University students routinely try to "get out of" taking first-year writing in part because they think they've peaked as writers and there's nothing more to learn.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Learning to write is an iterative process. You get better at it as you practice, practice, practice.

But there's another problem: Not only is writing iterative; it's complicated. Writing is a social activity mediated by technology and the needs of writers and readers. Technology, writers, and readers are all complicated dimensions of the rhetorical situation. As you learned in the last chapter, communication is embedded in social worlds of negotiated meaning. So, writing has to respond to this situated but uncertain world.

In a very real way we're never done learning to write.

Another way we act as if writing is easy, to our detriment, is that we spend so little time on it. When get writing assignments, we put them off, procrastinating the day of our writing till the night before. Once we get words on the page and we've checked for errors, we hesitate to rethink them or revise them. So we don't.

One last way we assume writing is easy: We don't think about it at all. Writing expert Richard Lanham once said that

> *"Americans use their language, spoken as well as written, in a chronic absence of mind."*

You could think of a number of ways this statement might be interpreted: We don't think, we don't plan, we don't strategize, we don't scrutinize, we don't reflect, we don't take language seriously. We take it for granted.

Learn to be a Mindful Writer

In this chapter, I invite you to leave these false assumptions behind, break from whatever habits you may have had in the past, and develop a mindful disposition to writing.

Mindfulness guru Thich Nhat Hanh. Photo by Marloes on Flickr

The term "mindfulness" is trendy. The word might make you think of someone sitting criss-crossed on a yoga mat with a look of vague stillness on their face. Scholars who study Buddhism, like the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh or professor of medicine Jon Kabat-Zinn, think of mindfulness as a kind of *still presence* — a way to be fully present in your body, detecting sensation and feeling in order to calm and redirect the mind. This kind of mindfulness is essential for mental health.

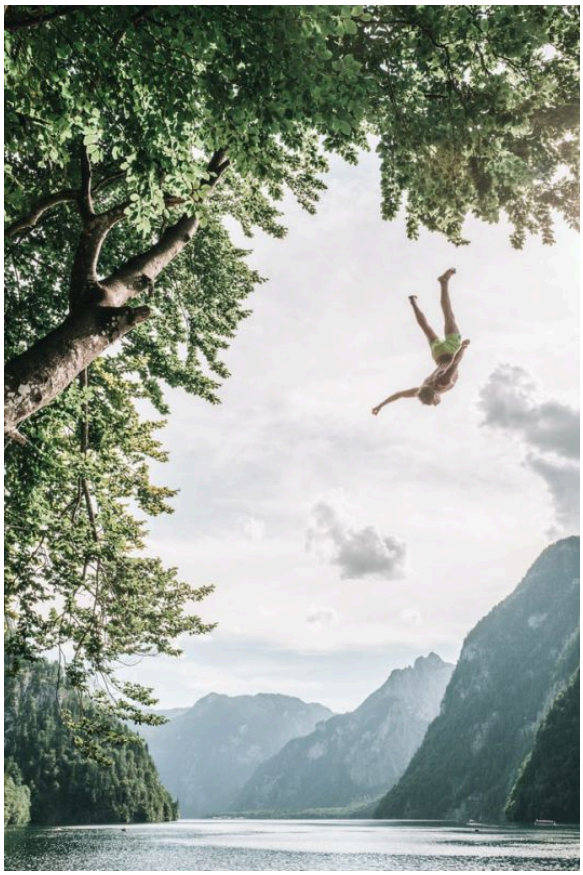
But there is another way to think of mindfulness. Mindfulness, for me, is the art of being aware of the activity you are participating in and how you might do it better. This is usually how scholars define metacognition: the process of monitoring and controlling our activity to maximize our efforts. I am suggesting here that mindfulness, as I've defined it, helps us improve our writing tasks because it directs us to monitor and control the process from beginning to end.

When you become a mindful writer, you take control of your own process in order to improve it, refine it. You become a philosopher of your own learning.

That sounds mighty grand for a General Education class you might have been hesitant to take. However, mindful writing isn't just an esoteric, abstract academic exercise. Heaven knows you don't need any more of those, especially as you approach the last year or two of your undergraduate studies. If you can make metacognition central to your process as a writer, you will find that writing, though hard, can be managed — and improved. You'll feel more confident as you start to put words on the page. When you're finished, you'll feel like you learned more about writing and yourself as a writer. You'll feel more prepared for the next writing task you take on.

3.2 The Mindful Writing Cycle

Writing is not just a product but a process. Writers go through a process when they write. They think, they make notes in their heads and on scratch paper, they put words on the page/screen, they review those words and make changes. They ask questions and go out looking for answers. If they're wise, they give their writing to someone else to review so they can see if they're accomplishing what they set out to do. And then they make more changes.



Try writing like someone crazy enough to try this drive. Photo by Julian Paul on Unsplash

Processes are also (a) idiosyncratic, and (b) socially contingent. By *idiosyncratic*, I mean that each person has a writing process that may or may not follow a logical step-by-step pattern. For example, the last time I taught first-year writing, I encouraged students in the early stages of writing to "let the madman/madwoman out" by writing quickly and sloppily, without worrying about where the writing would go or whether it would be any good. This "mad writer" method worked well for some students. For others, letting the madman out made no sense if the madman was just going to run amok with no clear aim.

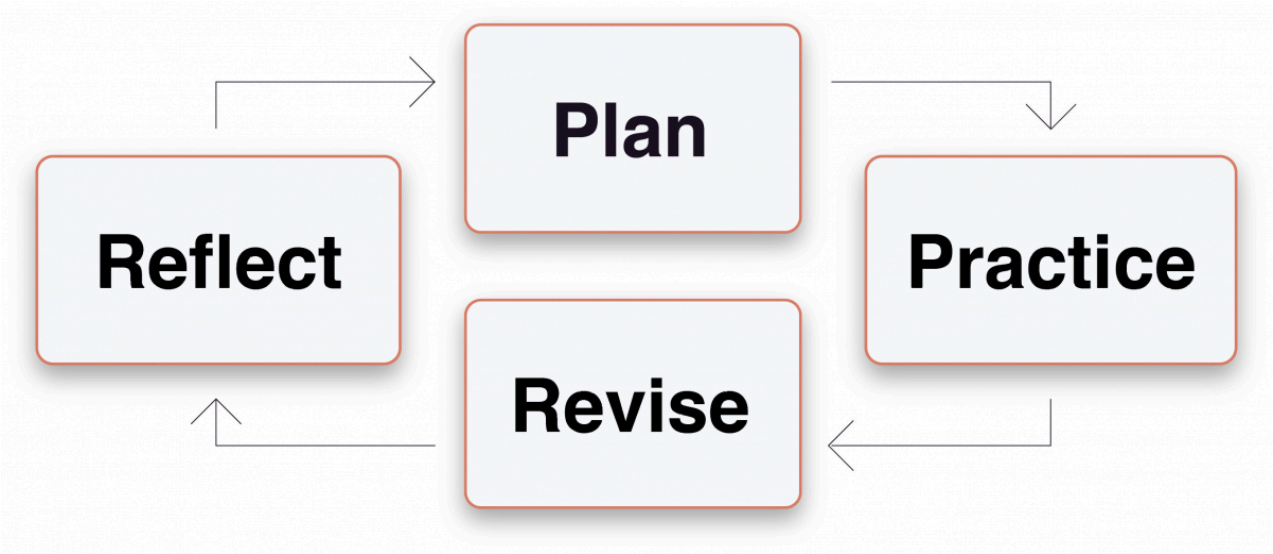
By *socially contingent*, I mean that our writing processes fit the rhetorical situation in which we find ourselves (see Chapter 2). If I'm tapping out a light-hearted text message to my sister Amanda, I'm not going to think too hard about the quality of what I'm typing. Sometimes one thoughtless draft gets the job done. But if you're planning to publish an important research document for other specialists who have high standards for research methods, data evidence, and writing quality, then you're going to use a thorough writing process, starting with research questions and ending with meticulous proofreading. The social situation in which we write influences our processes.

For the rest of this chapter, I will describe a process I'm calling the *mindful writing cycle*. This cycle isn't just something I cooked up this morning and slapped up in a chart. This cycle is based on significant research into the way people write and the way people improve as writers. (Yes, there are people out there who study the activity of writing as a subject

worthy of study in itself. They're wild at parties.) The cycle is in part based on the model of self-directed learners developed by Susan Ambrose in *How Learning Works*.

Remember from the previous section that I'm using the word *mindful* to refer to the way we monitor and control our writing process in order to improve our chances for social success through writing, no matter what writing situation we find ourselves in. If we use a mindful writing cycle, we'll learn from our writing experience.

Though I present this cycle in stages, I encourage you to use these activities in whatever way you see fit as you become the kind of writer you need to be. Your instructor may ask you—nay, *assign* you—to follow this cycle in specific ways. The goal is to help you become a more mindful writer.



Here's a quick tour of the cycle (Figure 1) before we get into specifics:

Plan: A mindful writer will take time at the beginning of a writing task to assess the task and set goals. In the planning stage, you'll consider what your audience wants from you as a writer. You'll collect and study examples of the thing you're supposed to write. You will decide when you'll write and how you'll discipline yourself write.

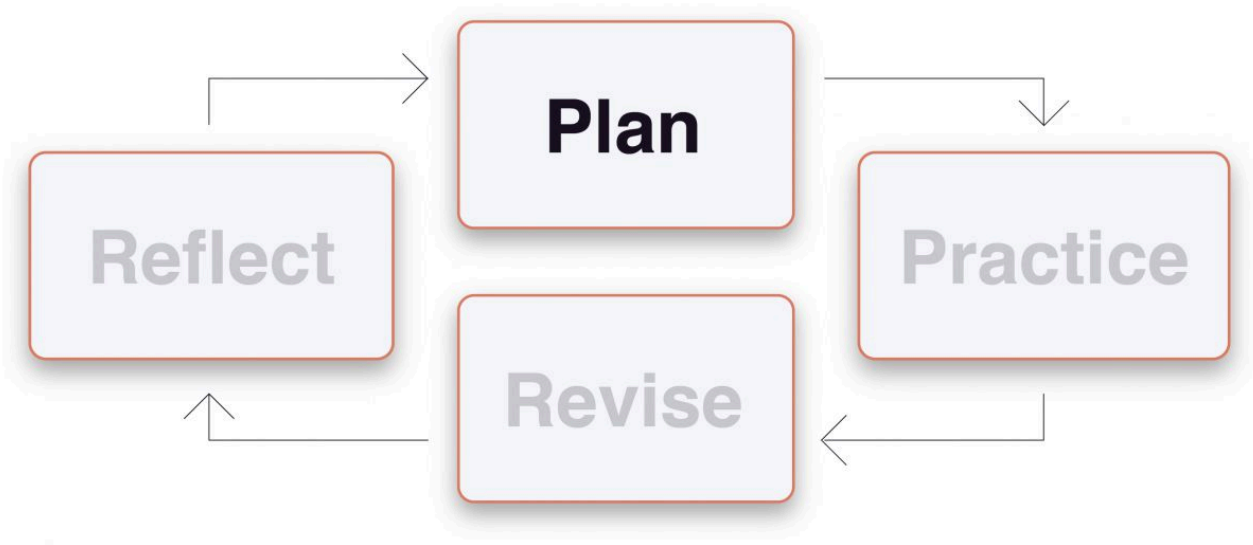
Practice: In the practice stage, you come up with ideas, write out a draft using various rhetorical strategies appropriate for your context, and ask for feedback from people whose judgment you trust. I know we often call this stage "drafting," and, sure, it's that. But the word *practice* reminds us that you are *iterating* — you are beta-testing your ideas before you have to send them out into the world.

Revise: Revision happens throughout any writing process; you can't help but make little changes as you go. In the cycle of mindful writers, you receive feedback and then you make deliberate, meaningful changes to your work at all levels (from the whole argument to the puntuation) to prepare to hand it over to a teacher, editor, or some other audience.

Reflect: To develop your metacognitive abilities as a writer, you'll need to think carefully about what you've learned from the writing process, what you'll take with you to future writing tasks, and what needs to change. Without this step, you can't take control of your writing.

OK, now that we've set up the global picture of writing processes, I'm going to go straight for the advice. In the next four sections, you'll find suggestions for each step in the cycle of mindful writers. This content can feel a bit list-y, but I've designed it that way to serve as a reference to help you build your metacognitive abiltities at each stage of the writing process. Dive in and out of this material as necessary.

3.3 Plan



Remember that in the planning stage, we (a) assess the task and (b) set goals.

Assess the Task

Any time you set out to solve a problem or complete a task, you want to step back and look at what needs to be done and make some plans.

Which one would you want for a bike shelter? It helps to research the possibilities and make a plan before starting a big project. Photo by Kon Karampelas on Unsplash

One time my wife asked me to build a shelter in our back yard for our bikes. I'd never built one. So I watched a few videos on *YouTube*, talked to some neighbors, and went around my block taking pictures of other people's shelters to catch the vision. My planning made the task easier when I finally bought lumber and started hammering it together. As a mindful writer, you should take time to plan out your project before sitting down to write.

Read the assignment carefully. If you've been given an assignment sheet, read it. Notice key terms for what you're being asked to do (like analyze or argue). If your assignment came with due dates (introduction, first draft), put those dates in your phone. If your instructor gave you a rubric or other evaluative criteria, review it.

Recall what you already know about this kind of writing (prior knowledge). Ask yourself the following questions:

- How is this assignment like those I've completed before?
- How is it different?
- Which writing experiences can I draw from for this new assignment?

Analyze the genre. This is an important term that you learned from last chapter (yay, prior knowledge!). From the perspective of rhetoric, genres are more than just forms or categories of writing (e.g., romance novels). Genres are semi-formal but adaptive text types that respond to a variety of social needs. In the social sciences, we use a variety of genres to make knowledge: genres like literature reviews, research articles, grant proposals, oral presentations, or email queries. To analyze a genre, try these three steps:

1. Gather examples, either from your teacher or from online (from professional sources) — it's good to have several quite different examples to show how genres vary, and it's even useful to have *bad* examples;
2. Analyze the rhetorical situation of the genre: Who writes this thing? Who reads it? What kind of problem does it solve? What is its purpose?; and
3. Analyze the writing strategies you see in the examples: How is this genre organized, usually? What kind of style or argument or document design or evidence do I detect across examples?

Assess your own rhetorical situation.

- Who is my audience?
- What do I know about them?
- What are their values, assumptions, or expertise as a discourse community (like economists or psychologists)?
- What do they want from me?
- How should I think about them, construct and invent them, as I write?
- What is my role as writer?
- What do I want my audience to feel, think, or do as a result of reading what I write?

Anticipate the value of the task.

- What am I going to learn from this project?
- What skills will it teach me?
- How will it help me do the stuff I want to do in the future?
- How will I make personal connections to this writing task so that I won't be bored or discouraged?

Set Goals

Decide what you want your paper to look like. Now that you've reviewed some examples, both good and bad (I hope), describe the kind of paper you want to write:

> *"In my paper, I want to do X, Y, and Z because my audience . . ."*

Such goals are called *product goals*, and they help you anticipate a successful paper.

Writing for just 15 mintues a day can make a significant dent in your paper. Photo by NeONBRAND on Unsplash

Set goals about when and where you'll write. Get out your phone, and plan some writing times. Block out time *each day* to write or even just think about your project. Even if it's for only fifteen minutes. Write every day. Write every day so that when you get stuck, you won't need to worry as much about a looming due date. Choose your writing spot carefully. Find a quiet, comfy place with few distractions.

Commit to distraction-free writing. I know we're crazy about our phones and we can't live without them. FOMO is real. So are the bad consequences of CPA — continuous partial attention. Commit fully to the writer's life and shut off your phone, close all windows not related to your work, and disable all notifications. Get into *deep focus mode*, and the writing will be easier.

Reward yourself. If you've had a good writing day, go get yourself something sweet or savory. Or go watch an episode of that show you've been bingeing.

Set goals to share your work with others. Set a goal to share your work with a class member, a writing tutor (in the Writing Center), or a trusted friend or family member. Talk, annoyingly, about your project with anyone who will listen.

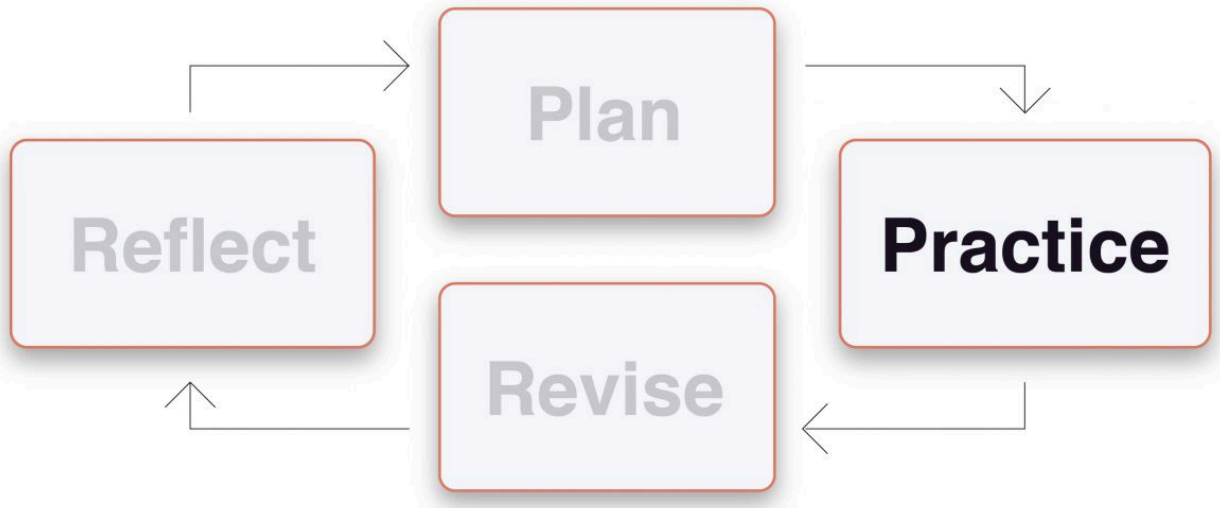
3.4 Practice

A few years ago, a friend of mine invited me to his wedding reception. In the middle of the meal, he stood up and started making a speech — standard sappy stuff. A few minutes into it and without warning, he pointed to me and said, "And now I'd like my friend Brian to come up and share a few words about our friendship!"

Is anything as awkward as an impromptu wedding speech? Photo by Inna Lesyk on Unsplash

I stood up with icy fear in my veins. My mind folded up on itself like a camp chair. He gave me the microphone and I turned and looked at everyone, sitting there picking at cheesecake, and wanted to crawl into the center of the earth. I belched out a few disconnected thoughts and sat down in disgrace.

Anyway, enough about the worst day of my life. Let's imagine, instead, that I knew ahead of time that my friend would call on me to speak. I followed the advice in the last section and studied the genre of wedding toasts (*YouTube*, of course, has good and bad ones). And then, long before the blessed day was near, and because you shouldn't procrastinate a wedding toast, I started building the content of the speech. How should I do it?



You're put in a similar position every time you are assigned to write. But unlike in my speech fiasco, you want to give yourself time to generate ideas. Once you've done your planning (assess the task, set goals), you need to generate content in a process we often call "prewriting" or "invention." That's what this section is about. I've called it the *practice* stage because in this stage you can experiement with your content using *invention strategies* and get feedback through *peer review* before completing the project. Again, I've given you a list of strategies and quesitons you can ask yourself as a writer.

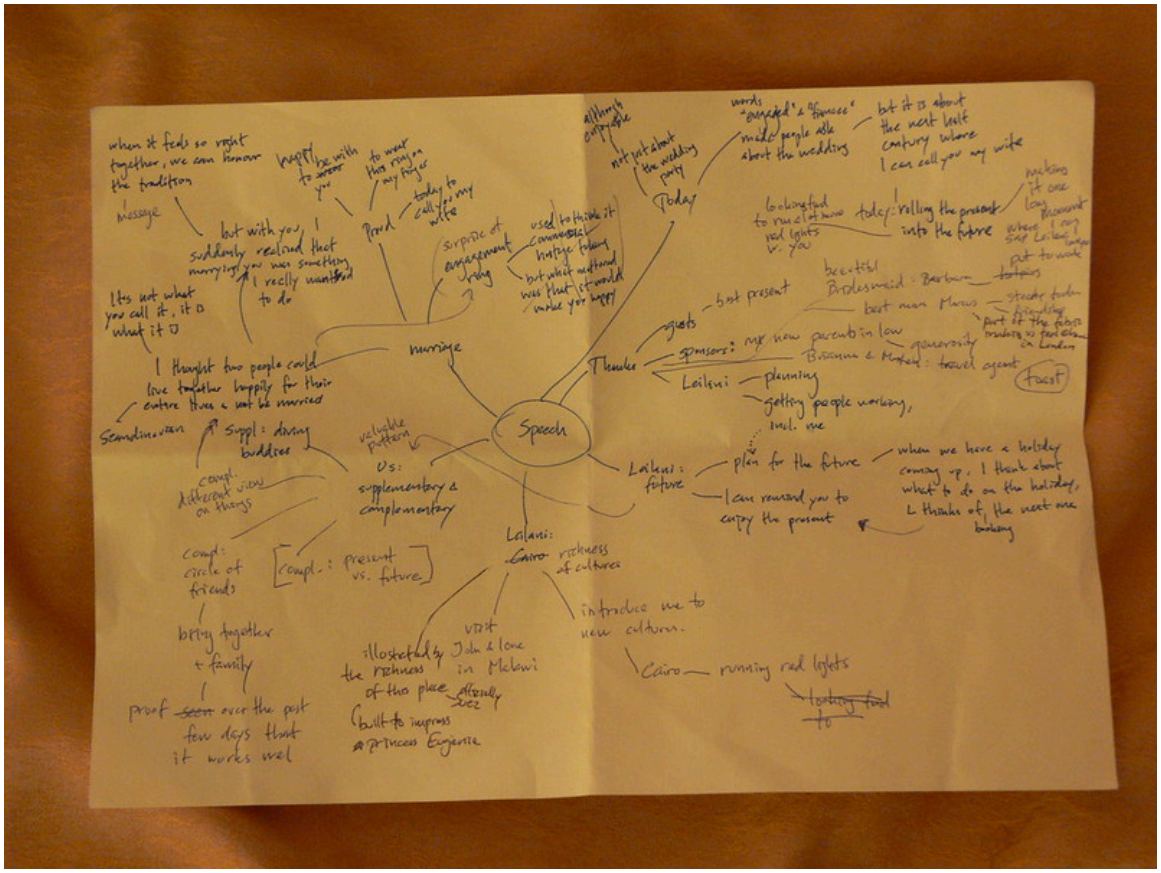
Invention Strategies

Self-exploration. If you have flexibility on the topic, ask yourself (and answer in writing),

- What interests me?
- What do I care about?
- What's been on my mind?
- What am I curious about?
- What do I want to know more about?
- What is my "what if"?
- What do I want to study in grad school?
- What do I want to pursue as a career?

Inquiry. Ask questions. If you have a vague sense of a topic, jump on *Google* and read anything you can find. Consult *Wikipedia*. Go to the library and find a book and read it (or at least "around" in it). Find key terms or authorities from an informal search. Talk to experts about your topic. Use *Google Scholar* or academic databases to review expert research in social science. Review data from published experiments, surveys, or interviews; maybe you can do your own surveys or interviews.

Form a hypothesis about your topic, like "I think X influences Y, but I'm not sure" or "I think X is the case, but I'm not sure" or "I think X would be a solution to Y, but I'm not sure." It's so important to begin a writing task with *questions* and not answers; don't do research merely to support your preconceptions. (In future chapters, you'll learn more about the research process.)



An unstructured draft of someone's wedding speech—I wish I'd had time to do this. Photo by Lars Plougman on Flickr

Unstructured drafting. Some invention activities invite you to write without thinking much about where you're going. Unstructured invention activities can help you put ideas into sentences to explore what you're thinking. Make lists, draw pictures, make clusters (by writing your topic in the middle of a page and then branching out from there with subtopics/issues). Try freewriting: Just start writing about your topic without stopping, even if you feel like your ideas are bad. Don't stop until your fingers fall off.

Structured drafting. For those of you less inclined to the free association of unstructured drafting, you can try the structured kind. Use the journalist's questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Think about your topic in categories: history, consequence, law, authority, value, location, cost, etc.

Outlining. I know this sounds high school-y, but research shows that it's effective for early drafting. Additional research suggests, though, that outlining works best if you've brainstormed ideas first. So, then, here's an order for outlining:

1. Brainstorm by writing a list of concepts or ideas or questions or key terms or topics,
2. Organize the list into concept clusters related by theme, and then
3. Make an outline of your paper by mapping out these clusters into a sequence.

Write an outline for your project, even if you're not sure you'll keep it. Anticipate how long each section will be, even if you're not sure. Write the number 1 and then write a key term or phrase about what you'll do first, and so on. Use subordination — that's when you tab over for subtopics, like this:

I. Operant conditioning
    A. History: Thorndike, Skinner
    B. Reinforcement and punishment
        1. Positive and negative reinforcement
        2. Positive and negative punishment
II. Classical conditioning . . .

Outlining is a helpful way to find what will become the subheads of your paper. If you're far enough in your inquiry process to know what you want to talk about, you can outline nearly every paragraph of your paper before you write it. I've found it useful to outline a text and then write underneath the subcategories the names of sources I've found that will fit in that subcategory.

Genre drafting. From my *YouTube* research on wedding toasts, I notice that many of them begin with a joke—sometimes a wicked-cruel but still funny joke—and then move to nostalgia about friendship, and maybe a little proase at the end. Similarly, you can draft your paper by keeping your target genre in mind as you write, which is a particularly useful exercise when you're working on a big research project.

Genres are blueprints for social behavior. If you're writing a research project that begins with an introduction laying out previous reserach, then start there. Often in social science writing, there is a "methods" section and/or a "results" section. Use these sections as guides for your drafting (but make sure the genre you're writing fots your instructor's assignment!).

Audience drafting. Related to genre drafting, audience drafting means only this: Think about your audience as you write. Remember their concerns, what they know and don't know, what they need from you to understand what you're trying to say. If your audience is non-specialist — if, for example, you're writing about social science research to the public — translate your specialist knowledge into clear, accessible language. Define your terms. Make reader-friendly moves by providing clear transitions. Help them understand why your work is important.

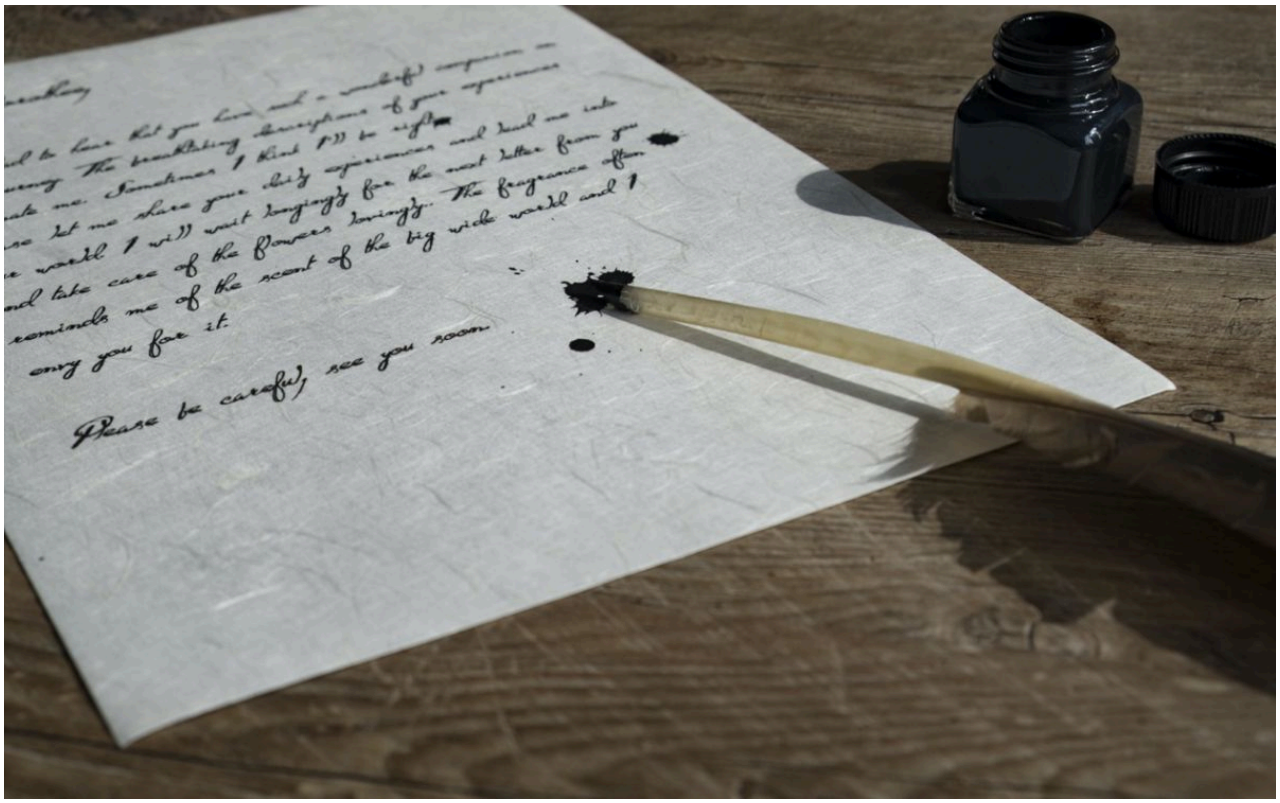
Ignore sentence-level issues. It's hard to ignore errors and clumsy sentences as we draft, but I'd urge you to write as swiftly as you can at first and ignore sentence-level issues. There's no use polishing up a draft that you plan to revise after receiving feedback. Turn off the grumpy editor who wants to tell you you don't know enough, your writing isn't working, you have to make things perfect. Everyone is entitled to a lousy first draft. (But no professional writer is content with a first draft!)

Write every day. I know I've already said it in the section on planning, but let me say it again. If you write every day, even if it's for just 15 minutes, you'll have more material, more ideas, more text to work with.

Peer Review

Back to my worthless wedding toast: If I'd had the time to draft a speech before giving it, I would have been wise to give a beta version to my wife or a trusted friend to see what they thought. I've been saved many times from being less effective in my writing by having someone else review it.

Remember that writing is a social activity, a collaborative work of imagination. Plan to get feedback. Without feedback, you cannot monitor and control your writing process, the primary activity of mindful writing.
Your peer reviewers play the role of readers for your work. Review helps us become *reader-centered writers* rather than narcissistic writer-centered ones. It gets us out of our own heads.



Try writing your peer reviewer a letter. (You don't have to use a feather and ink.) Photo by Wallpaper Flare.

Write your peer reviewer a letter. As you prepare for peer review, *write a "Dear Reader" letter*. Doesn't have to be long. At the top of your draft, write "Dear Reader," and then explain what you're trying to do and why you're trying to do it. Describe your imagined audience and their needs. Assess the draft by describing what makes it strong and where you think it's weak. Maybe give them specific tasks as readers: "I'm concerned that on p. X I lose the thread of my argument," or "I'd like you to look for places that could use more support" or "Please ignore the third section; I'm still working on getting it right" or "Please tell me where you feel most interested/bored with the paper."

Many times getting a peer review involves *giving* one in return. As a peer review*er*, you'll want to follow whatever protocol your instructor gives you. If you don't receive specific instructions for peer review, consider doing some of the following:

Be positive. Give the writer praise for the things you think he/she did well, and give him/her *specific* praise (with page numbers) describing the strengths you see in the paper.

Use shared criteria. If your instructor gave you a rubric, use its language to describe what you see in the paper. Use key terms (like argument, organization, evidence).

Be specific. Avoid vague "good job" or "it could be improved" kind of talk. Be specific about the paper's strengths and weaknesses.

Stay focused on the macro. It's easy as a reviewer to get caught up in *micro* (sentence-level) issues, like mistakes. Ignore them, assuming that the writer will proofread before publishing. Focus on the rhetorical situation: the genre, audience, and purpose. Is the purpose clear? Is the genre appropriate for the situation? What is the overall feel of the paper?

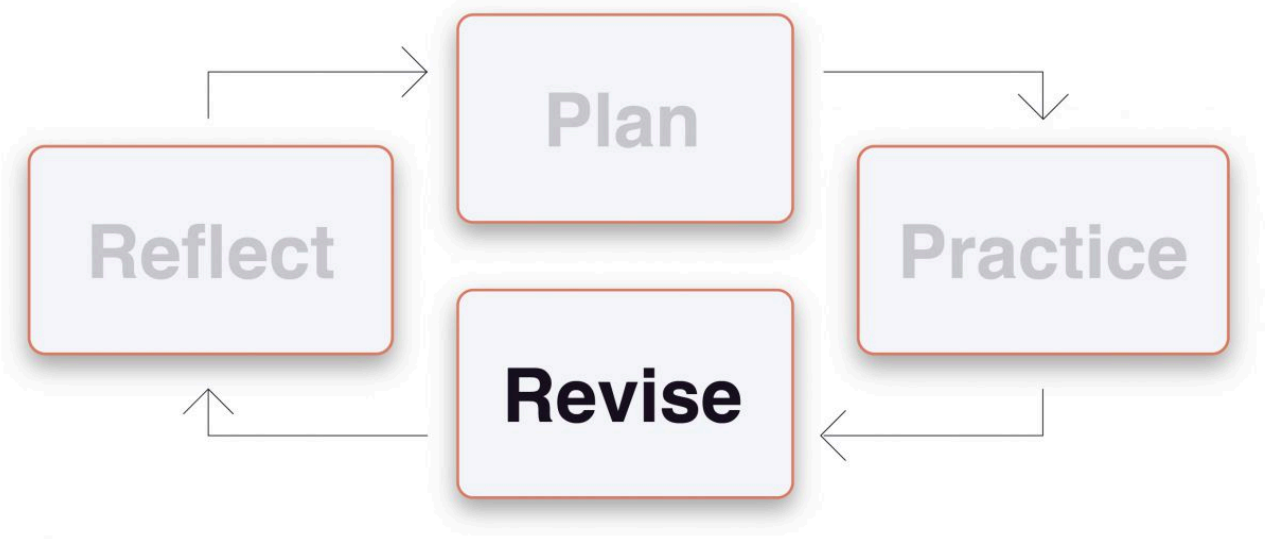
Ask questions. Sometimes the best feedback is a good question written in the margins: "Why is this here?" or "Where is the evidence of what you've just said?"

Respond as a reader. Trust your instincts. You can tell things about the paper based on your own experience reading it. Where did you disengage, get lost or confused, raise an eyebrow in skepticism? Are you convinced by the argument? Did the writer do something powerful with language? Tell them.

3.5 Revise

Now that you've drafted an essay and received feedback, you can revise — the third stage of our mindful writing cycle.

Since writing is hard, our natural inclination is to do less of it. When I sit down to write, I find myself shuffling papers around my desk or looking for something to eat or leaning back in my chair to look out the window. Sometimes I play Pac-Man or online 8-Ball. That's when I know I'm in full writing-avoidance mode.



Novice writers struggle with these avoidance feelings once they have a draft written. Research shows that novice writers revise very little of their drafts, making mostly cosmetic changes while proofreading. The more successful writers are thinking about their genre, audience, and purpose in the revision process. Moving commas around will come later. Revision is the process of *re-seeing* your work in an effort to make it as strong and effective as possible. And yes, it can be painful as heck. Surely it will be less painful if you've given yourself time to revise and if you're writing every day. (Got the message yet? Write every day! Think of yourself as a writer. It's what you do.)

There's just no way to rock a hospital gown. Be okay with feeling vulnerable. Photo by National Cancer Institute on Unsplash

Revision is a *mindset*. When you give your writing to someone else, you make yourself vulnerable, like that moment when the doctor comes in and you're wearing that little sheet that's open in the back, feeling like a weirdo and waiting for the next embarrassing thing to happen. If you decide to take on a *mindful learner* disposition as a writer, you'll tell yourself the profound but often unspoken truth that *All writers have more to learn*. Even you.

In that sense, you won't feel like your writing is an embarrassment but a moment to explore your own thinking while you're saying something important. When you receive feedback, listen attentively. Don't try to defend what you've written; everyone knows it's a draft and you're entitled to write poorly in a draft. Ask good questions and take notes. Let the peer review process instruct and refine you.

With feedback in hand, you're ready to re-see your work. The mindful writer now monitors and controls the process with "user" (i.e., audience) perspective. As you review the feedback and your draft, start devising a revision plan. Your revision plan will be composed of your own sense of the draft and the feedback you received.

Because writing processes are idiosyncratic, you'll find your own path through revision. Here are some questions you might want to ask yourself as you revise:

- How can I make this text more aligned with the required genre?
- How can I help my audience get the information they need?
- How can I make more creative, innovative decisions that will engage the audience?
- Where do I risk offending or boring my audience?
- How can I make my purpose more clear?
- Considering my audience's specialized social science knowledge, what do I need to do to support the argument I'm making?
- How could I more effectively organize this draft with subheads or topic sentences?
- How will I revise my paragraphs to make them more focused on a single idea?
- Where in the draft do I feel most excited about the writing?
- Where in the draft do I feel like I'm confusing or I'm B.S.ing?
- Where can I add more style — examples, metaphors, humor, a clever turn of phrase?
- How have I established my own credibility?

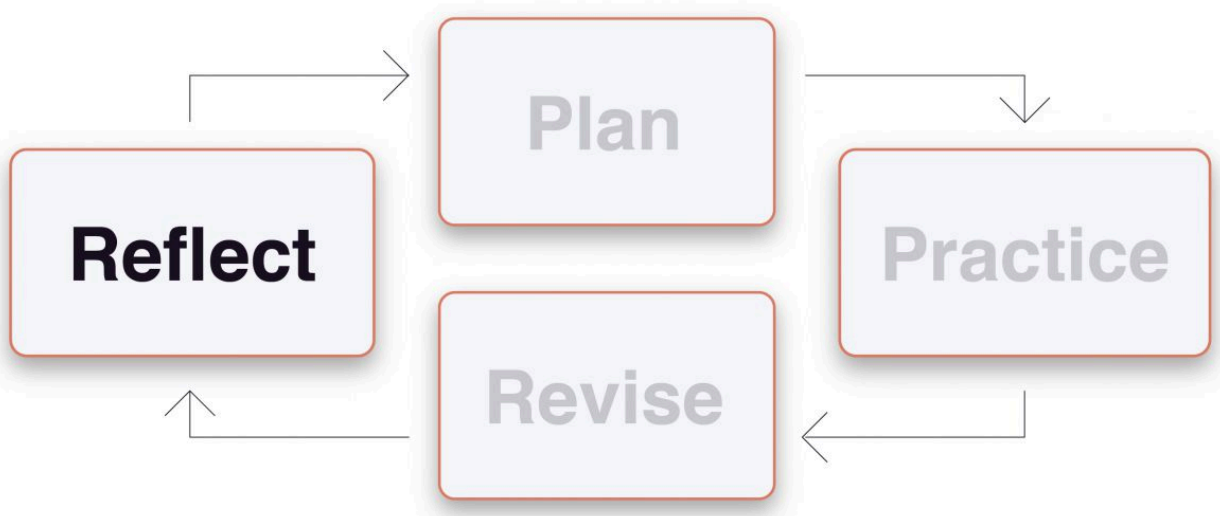
Once again, stay focused at first on getting the Big Picture in place before you start revising sentences for style or error. Learn to trust your instincts. Sometimes as we read our work carefully, *if* we read it carefully, we have these impressions, a "felt sense," of how the writing is going. Listen to what your senses are telling you. Imagine a fellow social scientist (or whoever your audience is) reading your text. Read your text out loud to get some distance between you and it, to hear it in a new way.

The Big Revision Checklist

When you have a draft in good shape, you may want to look at The Big Revision Checklist (Google document) as you proofread and polish. Just keep in mind that this list is incredibly thorough, so focus on the areas that you need the most.
You want your revisions to be purposeful. You want to be able to explain to someone how your revisions improve your text. That's the goal: deliberate, purposeful changes to a text to make it more rhetorically powerful.

3.6 Reflect

I've been trying to convince you in this chapter that writing is more than just doing a task. Mindful writing means developing new powers, dispositions, and habits — a new, more aware and deliberate writing Self, committed to improvement. When we write, we project an identity to our audiences; by reflecting, we construct a learning identity for ourselves.



Research has demonstrated that reflective writing can help people overcome post-traumatic stress disorder, tragedy, anxiety, depression, racial prejudice, academic failures, and other ailments. In a more modest way, reflective writing can help us think through what we've accomplished when we finish tasks and how we're a different, wiser person as a result of it.

After you turn in a final draft, you can build a healthy, mindful writerly identity by spending a little time reflecting on what you've learned in the process. Ideally, your instructor will require you to do some of this reflection — either in an informal writing assignment or in class discussion — so you can make this identity construction a social experience.

I know it sounds corny, but reflection can make you a better person. When you look back at something you've accomplished with something more deliberate and mindful than relief, you develop dispositions for writing success in the future.

So: How should you reflect? You can start by answering the following questions:

Looking Back, Measuring Progress

- How did completing this writing task help me achieve outcomes A, B, C for this course?
- How do I feel about my final draft?
- What did I do well? What would I revise if I had more time?
- What did I intend to do? What did I actually do?
- What did I learn about myself as a writer?
- What can I see in the drafts as evidence of my learning? Where specifically in the drafts?
- What do I *wish* I'd learned but didn't?
- What writing strategies did I use to complete this paper? How well did they work for me?
- What rhetorical strategies did I use in this writing task, and why (genre, audience, purpose)?

Looking Forward, Making Connections

- What will I need to change about my strategies in the future?
- When do I think I'll write a paper like this again?
- Which writing strategies will I use in future writing tasks?
- Which rhetorical strategies will I use in future writing tasks?
- How will completing this writing task have helped me live my everyday life?

Notice how these questions invite you to think about your completed task in a variety of ways related to the course, your assessment of the final product, your perception of your own growth, and your sense of what needs to change in the future.

Use your newfound Reflection Powers to look backward and forward at the same time. Photo by Laurenz Kleinheider on Unsplash

And now I hope you're seeing how the steps in the cycle for mindful writers are connected. There's always another writing task on the horizon. These questions prepare you to move forward by looking backward. When you start a new task, you start with the dispositions, experiences, and knowledge you already have; there's no shortcut to becoming the writer you want to become. But after each task, you can consolidate your new powers to project yourself into the next writing task, having become just a little bit better than you were before.

3.7 Collaborative Writing

We've reviewed the mindful writing process and its stages. In this last section, we're going to talk about one more important social aspect of the writing process that every advanced writing student should know: collaborative writing. In my experience, students underestimate the amount of time they will spend as professionals — no matter the profession — working on writing tasks with others. In a 2015 study on writing in the workplace, University of Wisconsin literacy expert Deborah Brandt discovered that most workplace writing is co-authored, as is most published scholarship in the sciences. Does that surprise you? Considering some of your previous experiences with collaborative writing, it might do more than surprise you—it might dismay you.

A Common Sentiment about Group Writing. Photo on Creative Commons.

Why Group Work Fails to Spark Joy

I don't want to start on a negative note here, but let's acknowledge that not everyone has a good experience working on projects with others.

Sometimes we just don't get along. A common group anguish is with the *freeloader*, the group member who shows up to maybe one meeting, disappears, won't respond to emails or texts, maybe shows up on the day of the group presentation to stumble through, and then takes credit for the final project. We all know this person. This person is on the Naughty List. Don't be that person.

Don't be the *controller,* either. That's the person who, from the beginning, and perhaps because this person is anxious the rest of you won't pull your load, takes over the whole project and starts calling the shots. There's also the *pleaser*, who just wants to do what everyone else wants to do and has no original ideas or suppresses his or her own valuable alternative ideas.

Much like what Leo Tolstoy says about families in the first line of the novel *Anna Karenina*, there are many ways unhappy groups are unhappy. Who can blame students for wanting to avoid them?

In spite of the somewhat popular but vague negative feeling about group projects, my guess is that many of you have had positive experiences working in groups. And it turns out that all the research on collaborative learning has revealed that students learn significantly from group projects. The Association of American Colleges and Universities labels collaborative work a "high-impact practice" because of what students get from it. When you have to work together, especially with folks you wouldn't normally associate with, you have to listen to others, learn from them, and test your ideas against theirs, which can be a refining process. You'll find out that — imagine! — not everyone thinks the way you do, and we're better off when we combine our ideas with the ideas of others.

What do you do if you've been assigned a group writing project? How do you ensure that the end product is something you can be proud of and that the process you take to get there is productive?

Your writing group could be this happy if you follow the advice in this chapter. Photo by Jud Mackrill on Unsplash

Getting Started

Get to know each other. If your instructor has assigned you a group and you don't know the other members well, take some time to get to know one another. Cover the standard ground about where you're from, what you're into, and what you want to do later in life.

Set up an easy communication system. Swap contact information. Group text messages work best for most people. Talk about how you're going to use a synchronous online system for collaboration. Google Docs works so much better than trying to pass Word documents back and forth because you can edit documents simultaneously and the changes are automatically saved. Review your schedules with each other so you'll know when you might be able to meet.

Discuss past group work. Share with each other an experience or two about both successful and unsuccessful collaborative projects you've been in before. Talk specifically about what made a project work, or not. Share your concerns, if you have any, about group work. Talk about what you hope to get out of this project.

A Group Contract can actually help set expectations for your project. Photo by Cytonn Photography on Unsplash

Draft a Group Contract. If your group is up for it, you might want to draft a "Group Contract" that each person agrees to, with statements like, "I will come to all our group meetings and stay on task," "I will be timely in my communication with members of my group," "If I miss a meeting or class period, I will contact all my group members and make up for what I've missed," and so on.

Assess the task and set goals. Review together the assignment you've been given. Review whatever assignment sheets, due dates, or rubrics you've received. Break down the task into parts: What needs to happen first, second, third? Decide on a timeline for when you want to have pieces of the project completed.

Assign group roles. The most productive groups I've been in have a very clear distribution of labor. Each of us knows what our assignment is. Everyone has a task. The easiest way to divide up a group writing task is to assign each segment of the genre you're writing (introduction, literature review, etc.). However, that method might lead to a fragmented text. Instead, you may want to consider assigning roles related to project management: timekeeper, notetaker, editor, communication director, reviewer, facilitator, etc.

Get to Work

Stay in touch. I know that some of you would rather start on a task and be left alone for a while, but in my experience, the stronger groups *overshare* with each other. I mean that they talk frequently, even if only for a few moments on a group text about this or that issue. It's easier to solve problems early when the entire group is open to this kind of self-correcting chatter. It would be even better if you could meet together face to face with open laptops and work together at the same time, talking and then writing and then talking and then writing.

Value everyone's input and resolve differences amicably. Photo by Mark Adrian on Unsplash

Compromise. I've had more than one experience writing in groups when another group member has cut some of my material from the final product. Though I've never felt that the cut material was absolutely essential to the project, I have felt that my work was undervalued or dismissed or misunderstood. In those instances, I've had to move forward with the new changes knowing that each member will have to compromise material for the good of the project. If you feel like part of what you've produced is essential to the project, discuss the issue with all your group members.

Resolve differences. Sometimes groups don't get along. If so, don't assume your group is dysfunctional. It's a people thing to have static in close quarters. Some of these problems will be alleviated significantly with the kind of work I recommended in the last section. Before you go to the teacher, try to work out the differences together — all of you together (i.e., try to keep from pairing off in disagreement). Listen carefully to someone else's concerns. If things get unmanageable, visit with your instructor.

Write. Just throwing in my mantra again: Write, and write as much as possible. As a group member, don't wait till right before due dates to get things done. Get your work finished so you can then turn your attention to the work of others in the group. Invite other group members to read your work and offer feedback.

All-in on finishing touches. Though you may select someone to be the final editor or proofreader, plan for each group member to review the final product before turning it in. You want every member to sign off on the final project so the responsibility is shared.

As part of your afterparty, take time to reflect on how it went. Photo by Maxime Bhm on Unsplash

The Afterparty

Reflect. Once you've turned in your project, take a moment and think about what you've learned — about writing, about yourself as a writer, about group projects, about the topic you wrote about. What went well? If you could go back to the beginning, what would you change about the way your group handled the project? What did you learn from the group project that you likely would not have learned working on your own? What will you do differently when you need to work in a group again?

Assess. With any luck, your instructor will ask each group member to fill out a peer evaluation form to describe and assess the various efforts of the other group members. If you're not sure your instructor has set up a system like this, go ask. On the better peer evaluation forms I've seen, the instructor asks you to rate both the quantity and quality of each group member. Final scores might depend on the way you evaluate your peers. It's hard sometimes to make such judgments on people you've worked closely with. But without this accountability, some people will do more work than others.

In conclusion, I hope you can have more positive experiences working on collaborative writing tasks. Team projects and collaborative writing are central to the work of many situations you'll find yourself in at college and in your career. If you can learn to work effectively with groups, you'll have great success, no matter what you do.

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And if you take only one thing away from this entire chapter, I hope I've at least convinced you to become a mindful writer who thinks not only about *what* you write but *how* you write—so that the next time you face a writing task, you're even more competent and confident than before.

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Brian Jackson

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4

Grammar & Mechanics

Julie H. Haupt & Brittany Passmore

Learning Outcomes

- In this chapter you'll learn principles of grammar, spelling, and punctuation that will help you correctly and eloquently get your message across.
- Precise grammar and mechanics will convince your readers that you belong in their discourse community and that they should listen to you.

4.1 Grammar Principles

Welcome to the grammar chapter! This information is designed to help you in several ways. First, you may have had lingering questions during your high school and college education about where to insert punctuation or how to make sentences better constructed and less awkward. We hope that this information will help you fill in any missing gaps so you can write even more effectively throughout your life.

Second, in today's world, we "meet" many people through our writing before we are formally introduced in person. This writing (via email or text, for example) may create a "first impression" and influence their expectations about our level of professionalism. Good composition and an understanding of grammar can make a positive impression and get important things done.

Finally, the world needs the information we can offer; we are more likely to be able to spread that message if we can convey it clearly. In addition, we may be able to publish it more widely or be seen as more credible if our writing is engaging, authentic, interesting, and well-edited. To accomplish good style, knowing the fundamentals is important.

As you proceed through each section, take time to read the information slowly and carefully. Make note of the examples and the ways they demonstrate the principle being discussed. Note sections for review that are new to you or where you

might need more practice.

This grammar instruction includes three major sections to share principles of

1. Structure
2. Power, and
3. Polish.

Structure represents the building block principles that help you understand the organization of sentences and teaches ways to add punctuation to keep your meaning clear to the reader. The **Power** section contains rules that can help your writing gain more convincing power by deliberately managing the placement of words and phrases. Finally, the **Polish** section discusses principles to help you apply polishing touches that will help your writing go from good to great.

Click on the links below to read the content of each section of this chapter.

SECTION 1: STRUCTURE

SECTION 2: POWER

SECTION 3: POLISH

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5

Style

Brooke Downs

Learning Outcomes

Students will master strategies to

- write in a correct, clear, and graceful prose style
- write coherent and unified texts with a distinct voice

5.1 What Is Style? Why Does It Matter?

On the first day of class, I ask my students what good writing is. Once a student called out, "Not boring!" I appreciated the bluntness because it's true: good writing is interesting—or to use a less boring word—good writing is *vivacious*.

This chapter will help you improve your writing style. What is style and why should you care about it? Style is the sum of a writer's choices in vocabulary, sentence length, sentence structure, and more. Developing strong style turns a sufficient writer into a superb one. I love teaching style because most of my students are sufficient writers when I meet them. They already know how to find information and craft an argument (substance), they can organize their thoughts (structure), but the wording itself (style) is often thick and clunky. If you think that sounds like you—no worries! Your writing *should* be thick and clunky—in the first draft, anyway. Style is revision. Just as mastering style comes later in our writing education, it comes later in a paper's progress.

Before we talk about how to apply that high-gloss finish to your masterpiece, here's a bonus reason to love style—I bet you chose your major because you're passionate about sharing it. In your classes you've studied how to solve problems like reducing athletic injuries, improving parenting skills, or teaching children the arts. Maybe you've wished these athletes, parents, or teachers could learn what you have. Unfortunately though, these people aren't likely to read

textbooks or academic journal articles because they're . . . not exactly not boring. How can you get these solutions into the hands of the people who need them? The answer is style. A scholar who can transform stacks of dense research into a creation as clear as oxygen and as gripping as a mystery novel can change the course of history. My proof? We'll meet her at the end of this chapter.

5.2 How to Use This Chapter

This note is more for your instructor than for you, but reading this chapter in one sitting or covering the material in one class period would be a mistake. First, style is a broad concept that concerns everything you are writing this semester. Second, this chapter requires the mastery of skills, not just knowledge. If you do the exercises, you will rewrite sentences, and sometimes paragraphs, so plan for extra time if necessary.

This chapter will focus on two principles of style, clarity and vivacity, with several strategies to achieve each. One way to divide the material is to teach clarity early in the semester, or during lessons about writing for an academic audience, and to teach vivacity later in the semester, or during lessons about writing for a general audience.

5.3 Clarity

Can you find the teddy bear? The golf ball? The chili pepper? (Photo by levelord)

Lately I've enjoyed hidden picture puzzles. At first I thought they would be child's play—I mean, I've known what a banana looks like for some time now. But many are challenging (at least for a word nerd with no spatial skills). As I searched, I realized the three qualities that make a hidden picture puzzle hard to crack (which is good) also make a piece of writing hard to read (which is bad). A hidden picture disrupts clarity for the amusement of the viewer, but as writers, we don't want our meaning to be hidden. We want to give our readers a clear picture.

Concision

So what ingredients create a tough hidden picture, and conversely, what strategies create clear writing? First, the puzzle requires you to find about ten objects, but the picture is a complete junk heap—it might depict fifty objects or more. All the clutter makes it difficult to spot the object you need. Clutter relates to the first component of clarity: concision. Unlike a hidden picture puzzle, we don't want unneeded or wordy material to confuse, distract, or slow down the reader.

Coherence

Second, the objects aren't where you expect them to be. If I'm looking for a shoe, I may instinctively look at the ground first because that's where my shoes usually are. Of course, the picture is not real life and tricks me by dangling the shoe from a chandelier. Can't say I've ever put my shoes there. By contrast, we want ideas to be where readers expect them. We want coherence, meaning logical order. For example, research articles often use the IMRAD format (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion). I suppose scientists could try a "MARDI" format or describe their studies in rap lyrics, but those genres wouldn't best help us understand their findings. Furthermore, publishers and readers would wonder why the writers don't seem to grasp the expectations of a research article (Are they not intelligent?) and question their credibility. So save any poetic chaos for creative writing class and keep your academic papers shipshape.

Cohesion

Third, hidden picture puzzles blend and camouflage an object, so even if you see it, you don't recognize it. For example, a blonde's ponytail can look a lot like a banana. We don't want our ideas to have the blurry haze of a hidden picture. Cohesion is all about forging links: you want to glance backward and forward, showing how your second idea connects to your first idea and how the second will connect to the third. Sometimes we're so happy to be done writing the meat of a paragraph we neglect to cap it with a transition. But it's our job, not the reader's, to put the pieces of our paper together. Make sure your writing comes "no assembly required."

To sum up, clarity consists of concision, coherence, and cohesion. To preview the other half of this chapter, vivacity vies for variety and voice. I'm sorry, but alliteration is alluring—which brings me to my final point about clarity. "Clarity trumps everything" (Harrison, 2012, p. 164). It doesn't matter how beautiful or clever (or alliterative) a sentence sounds if your audience doesn't know what it means. Our chief goal as we revise is to make the phrasing clearer. If we can also make it more interesting, so much the better. Clarity is for the brain; vivacity is for the ear—and the heart.

5.4 Concision

Concision means getting the most power from the fewest words (Harrison, 2012). It *doesn't* mean being brief at all costs or neglecting detail (Strunk, 2004). It means every word must be doing work. Here's a comparison.

Imagine an Apple engineer hands you the latest iPhone. You are intrigued because it seems to have a home button like the models of yesteryear. You press it, but nothing changes. "What does this button do?" you ask. "Oh," the engineer mumbles. "It doesn't do anything. We had some plans for it, but they didn't work out. I guess we should have removed it." You probably feel embarrassed for Apple and use your new iPhone to join the internet's mockery of its design flub. The inspiration for this example came from *The Elements of Style*, a writing guide *Time* named one of the best and most influential books. It compares writing to design this way: "A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts" (p. 23). The goal here is mindful *composition*, a word that can mean both design and writing.

So take pride in your writing—aspire to the same standards of artisanship as when you bake a cake, build a robot, or shoot free throws. Now that we've defined concision, let's address some qualms students may have about writing concisely.

Complicated ≠ Intelligent

Many students believe "the more words we use, or the more elaborate our language, the more intelligent we sound" (Fiske, 2006, p. 43). In fact, the opposite is true, as this Stanford University study found. People who understand their topic can communicate it simply. Remember—"clarity trumps everything" (Harrison, 2012, p. 164). So don't let the desire to sound professional (which is good) end up making you sound dull or murky. This became such a problem in government publications that Congress passed the Plain Writing Act in 2010. Our government even maintains a website about good style. Government employees have won the No Gobbledygook Award with fantastic revisions like this one (scroll down), which cut 191 words to 45! So concision isn't just wise; it's the law.

Don't Inhale the Wordiness Surrounding You

Once a student doubted concision could be so important when his textbooks, he pointed out, were not concise. Unfortunately that's true—many things we read are models of information more than models of writing. And we tend to imitate what we read, so beware of poor models. Always read critically, whether that's questioning information or the presentation of it.

Thoughts Count, Not Word Counts

Finally, students may inflate their wording because they're thin on material and need to fill a page count. Unconcise writing "makes a little thought go a long way" (Lanham, 1981, 21:41). Here we can see how higher-level writing skills (like research and process) can influence sentence-level skills like concision. Students who have solid substance don't need to be wordy. Students who plan well have time to revise.

Some students hope the teacher won't notice a little padding here, a little padding there. *I* notice. *Your* English teacher notices. Your non-English teachers notice, if only subconsciously. The word *concision* may not enter their minds, but if they breeze through your paper (when they must trudge through so many in their grading pile) their supreme gratitude will likely boost your grade.

Now that we've discussed the value of concision, let's look at some wordy sentence patterns and learn how to fix them.

Wordy Sentence Patterns

Near Synonyms

The first type (and the one people are most familiar with) is simple redundancy. The writer uses words that are similar or very much the same. See what I did there? I didn't need to say *similar* and *very much the same*. Try revising this sample on your own:

Many of the concepts and principles early psychology taught have not withstood later research and study.

Show Answer

Many of the concepts early psychology taught have not withstood later study.

Your revision may vary, but I hope you caught both pairs of near synonyms. Now, is there a shade of difference between *concepts* and *principles*? Yes, *concept* sounds like a pure idea while *principle* sounds more like a guideline or even a moral belief. The question is, are these terms different enough to justify asking the reader to process more words? Will the reader sense something is missing if I don't use one? Often the answer depends on context. As for *research* and *study*, they can be synonyms if I mean consuming information. Perhaps *research* is a subset of *study*: *research* implies *study* but *study* doesn't necessarily imply *research*. If my only meaning is scientific experimentation, I would keep *research* and cut *study*. When faced with near synonyms, pick the one that best fulfills your purpose.

Students often use synonyms to round the sentence out by ear. They're afraid of short sentences. Don't be. You'll have plenty of opportunities to write in a variety of sentence lengths. Some wonder if an extra word or two can truly damage a sentence much. One instance often goes unnoticed; the danger is creating unconcise *habits*. An unneeded word in each sentence will soon bloat a paper drastically.

Circumlocution

The next type is circumlocution, which means *to talk around*. This is using a phrase for which we already have a word. Often, that phrase defines the word itself. My mind once tripped over this sentence (see if you can find the circumlocution):

The researchers quickly identified the problem and what the desired result of fixing it would be.

Why does that last part sound so funny? *The desired result of fixing a problem* sounds like a *solution* to me. In fact, if we looked up *solution* in a dictionary that's roughly what it would say. Now revise this sentence:

In the event that the foundation does not renew our grant, we will not add any new staff next year.

Show Answer

If the foundation does not renew our grant, we will not hire anyone next year.

So don't dance around your meaning. Locute; don't circumlocute.

Words Implied by Other Words

In the case of words implied by other words, the writer has found the right term but tacked on unneeded specifiers. Look at this example:

Laurel, one of my fellow classmates, combined the hydrogen peroxide and potassium iodide together (Fiske, 2006, p. 107).

Can we combine the materials separately? No, by definition *combine* means together, so we can cut *together*. We can also use the singular *classmate* to imply *one of*. Is it possible to have an *un*fellow classmate? Well, that sends my sarcastic imagination spiraling in all sorts of directions, but that's probably not the writer's intention. So here's the revision:

My classmate Laurel combined the hydrogen peroxide and potassium iodide (Fiske, 2006, p. 107).

Some students even cut *My classmate*. Again, context should dictate that decision. Does the reader need to know Laurel is a classmate? That will depend on if we're writing a lab report (then probably not) or a blog post to interest parents in trying chemistry experiments with their children (then why not?). Now remove the implied words in this sentence:

My friends and I decided that a local Italian restaurant is where we would dine on one particular night.

Show Answer

My friends and dined at an Italian restaurant one night.

(*Restaurant* is by definition a *where. Particular* is covered by *one*. *Decided* and *local* aren't needed unless you want to emphasize the decision or the location. One student even pointed out that *dine* implies *night*, but you can keep *one night* if the sentence is opening a story.)

You may have noticed the original sentence wasn't long or unclear. If spoken, it wouldn't strike you as rambling. Since conversations are impromptu and writing can be revised, the standard of concision in print is much higher.

The first three strategies treated the word level. The next three eliminate weak sentence structures. Doing so will automatically make them more vivacious.

Smothered Verbs

Smothered verbs is a friendlier term for *nominalization*—meaning to turn into a noun. Most words can take several parts of speech:

The crew *completed* the building four days early. (verb)
The building was *completely* finished four days early. (adverb)
The *completed* building was four days early. (adjective)
The building was brought to *completion* four days early. (noun)

Each example stresses a different component. The first highlights the crew's action while the second emphasizes completeness (a nominalization from the adjective *complete*) with the doubled *completely finished*. As is usually the case, our verb form here is probably the best while the noun form is probably the worst. Other considerations being equal, use the verb form.

I see a lot of nominalized verbs in this sentence:

Colleges now have an understanding that yearly tuition increases are impossible because of strong parental resistance to the soaring cost of higher education (Williams, 2010, p. 40).

Smothered verbs get ridiculous quickly. For some reason, we're not allowed to *understand*—we have to *have an understanding*. *Resist* isn't good enough either, but *resistance of* is. These phrases are more pompous and pointless than professional. How about this instead—

Colleges understand they cannot increase tuition yearly because parents resist (Williams, 2010, p. 40).

You can keep *the soaring cost of higher education* if you want, but I resisted it. In this sentence, turn as many nouns as you can into verbs:

With the recent reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone, helpful changes in the ecosystem have occurred, such as a decrease in the elk population, changes in the plant life, and overall the restoration of the natural ecosystem.

Show Answer

Reintroducing gray wolves to Yellowstone restored the natural ecosystem by decreasing the elk population and improving plant life.

Whoa—that sentence became much shorter and clearer by using verbs (and more specific ones). Beware of generic verbs like *affect, change, influence,* and *impact. I affected my sister today* sounds wacko. Worse, you could use the nominalization *I had an effect on my sister today*. A normal person would get to the point by saying *I cheered up my sister today* or *I annoyed my sister today*.

The following sentence doesn't sound wacko, but it should:

Excessive media consumption affects language development.

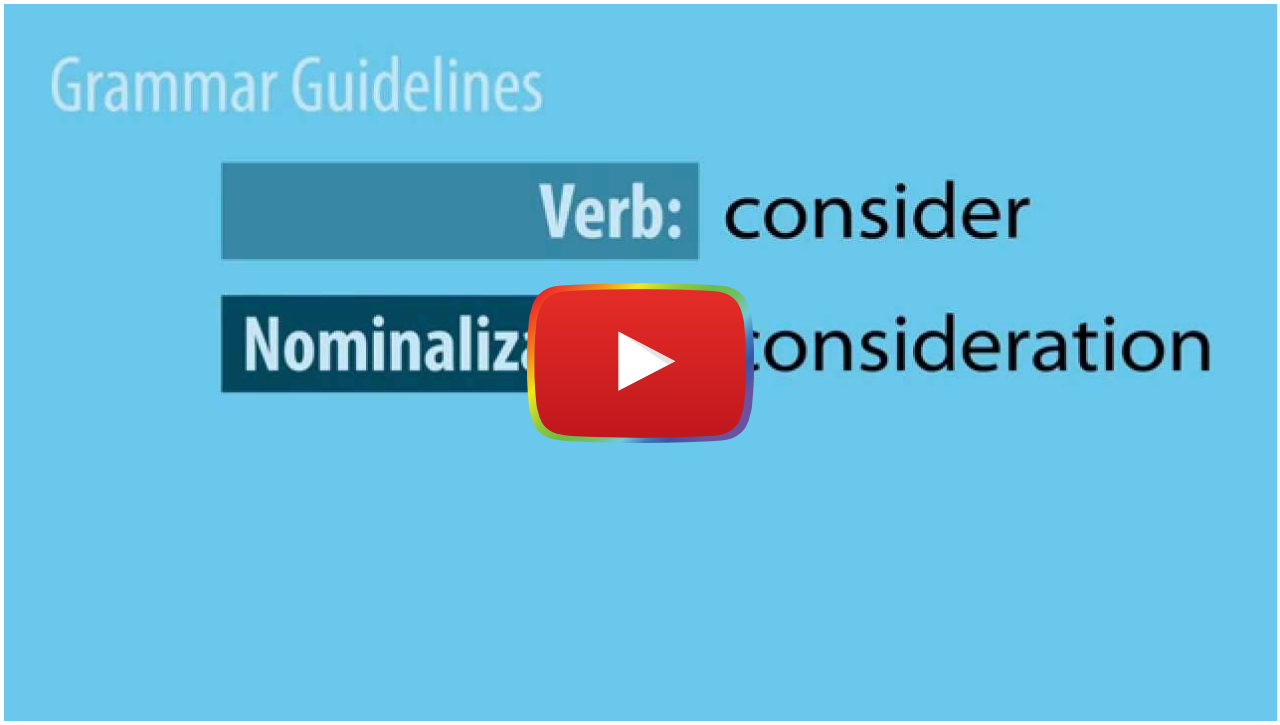
Um, affects how? Not good, I'm guessing? Understandably, studies often use *affect* because researchers don't yet know how their variables interact. You, however, know the conclusion and can use a dynamic verb. "Plus and minus" verbs work well, such as *increases/ decreases* or *helps/ hinders*. We could rephrase to—

Excessive media consumption slows language development.

Without such a verb, we'll need another sentence:

Excessive media consumption affects language development. Children do not progress as quickly.

Speed up this tentative momentum with precise verbs. Don't smother them. Now watch this video to solidify your anti-smothering skills:



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/82MHOBvovmo

Passive Voice

Passive voice sentences tend to be longer, dryer, and harder to understand. The most typical sentence structure is subject/object/verb:

Dean kicked the ball.

This is active voice. Passive voice arranges it object/verb/subject:

The ball was kicked by Dean.

That's a formula for recognizing passive voice: "To be" verb + past tense verb + "by" subject. Use active voice as much as possible. To change passive voice into active voice, set the subject where it belongs—in the driver's seat since it's driving the sentence.

Original: Since one of the best libraries in the country is owned by our university, a library science program should be started.

Revision: Since our university owns one of the best libraries in the country, it should start a library science program.

Try improving this sentence:

Many violations of this policy have been committed by these employees.

Show Answer

These employees have violated this policy many times. (Bonus points if you un-smothered violation into violated.)

Sometimes fixing passive voice is trickier because the subject of the sentence is missing; it's implied instead. To fix these, ask *Who is doing the action of the sentence? Who is using the verb?*

Original: The woman was questioned for two hours before being arrested.

Revision: Police questioned the woman for two hours before arresting her.

The first sentence would be okay if the writer wants to focus on the woman (we'll discuss this more soon). Rephrase the following sentence on your own. It explains campus meal plans but hides the true subject. Can you find it?

The money to be used must be spent by the end of the semester or the remaining amount will be forfeited.

Show Answer

If students don't spend the money by the end of the semester, they forfeit it.

To review the passive voice, sample this snarky guy. If nothing else, he'll shame you into using the active voice.

Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/tGkP-GikAZA

The passive voice is appropriate when the subject is unknown or less important than the object. Let's say I'm a 1960s journalist reporting on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. My first headline might say *Three Gunshots Fired at JFK.* It's passive, but perhaps I don't yet have the shooter's name. Even if I did, the president is arguably more important. By the same principle, *JFK Pronounced Dead* would be better than *Dr. Clark Pronounces JFK Dead.*

In years past, studies have used this form of the passive voice to describe methods: *Pairs of five-year-olds were observed*. However, many style guides now permit and even encourage authors to refer to themselves as *I* or *We*: *We observed pairs of five-year-olds* or *From the data I have concluded . . .*

So for the most part, stay active! And don't allow yourself to be weighed down by the clunky passive voice. (See what I did there?)

False Starts

A false start is the opposite of making a good first impression. The opening phrase of the sentence says nothing, creating what scholar Richard Lanham calls a slow wind-up. (He made a brilliant concision video called *Revising Prose*. Perhaps your teacher would let you view it in class). One kind of false start is the "blah blah is that" opening (also Lanham's term). Here's a sample:

It is clear that only a huge tax increase will make the program feasible.

That snarky guy calls this saying you're saying something.

Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/cqRhnwI5y4I

The technical term for saying you're saying something is *metadiscourse*. You can use metadiscourse occasionally to draw special attention to your most important points, but that means a few times per paper, not per paragraph. These sentences are easy to revise—just chop off the beginning:

Only a huge tax increase will make the program feasible.

The other type of false start usually begins with the phrases *It is*, *There is*, or *There are*. Can you identify the subject and verb of this sentence?

There was a fight between Curtis and Miles at the basketball game last Saturday.

Many students guess the subject is *Curtis and Miles* and the verb is *fight*. That's not correct, but it should be. The answer is actually *There was*. Wow—that's about the least specific, least vivacious subject-verb combo possible. Some call these openers dummy subjects and verbs since they shunt the true subject and verb later in the sentence. To revise, pull the true subject and verb up:

Curtis and Miles fought at the basketball game last Saturday.

Now reword this sentence:

There are a lot of articles for the committee to read before the budget review.

Show Answer

The committee must read many articles before the budget review.

As with the passive voice, sometimes the subject of a false start is missing. Who is doing the action in this sentence?

There has been a change in the graduation requirements for Exercise Science majors.

Well, the administration or department probably did the actual changing:

The department has changed the graduation requirements for Exercise Science majors.

If you wanted to emphasize the change itself, perhaps the original sentence is okay. If you wanted to emphasize the consequences for students, you could say this:

Exercise Science majors have new graduation requirements.

Infer a subject for this sentence and adjust it accordingly:

There can be considerable controversy about the appropriate amount of homework for middle schoolers.

Show Answer

Experts disagree about the appropriate amount of homework for middle schoolers.
Parents and teachers sometimes argue about the appropriate amount of homework for middle schoolers.
(The best subject—or compound subject—would most accurately reflect the student's research, of course.)

I'm guessing we use false starts as a formula to get drafting. Don't know how to start a sentence? *There is* is there for you. False starts are fine in a first draft, but be sure to clean them up for the final. If false starts are a habit for you, use the search function (Control + F) to locate instances of *There are*, *There was*, *There can, There would*, etc. Try this trick for finding any phrase you overuse. These constructions can also begin a phrase, so don't let them slip by in the middle of a sentence:

Even if we finish manufacturing the product this month, there is a lot of testing to complete before we can release it.

Watch this video to learn how to get rid of "There is"-type false starts:

Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/eWBohA7uiBA

You made it—you now have many tools to condense a sentence. I hope you're not overwhelmed because, ironically, concision is the largest section in this chapter. I think that's because it's the most basic principle of style, and as I mentioned earlier, some of the strategies incidentally energize sentences (we could have discussed them in the vivacity section too) as they shorten them. While concise writing does conserve the reader's time, more importantly, it conserves the reader's energy. This is crucial in a long piece (such as a research paper) or a piece aimed at a general audience (such as a social media post). The more energy your sentences have, the less energy the reader depletes in processing them.

5.5 Coherence

The next strategy for creating clarity is coherence. Broadly speaking, *coherent* means logical. In writing, it usually means logically organized. The best order to put your writing in is the one your audience expects. For most genres, that's an introduction that presents the main idea, supporting paragraphs that substantiate it, and a conclusion that reiterates it.

Most college students have mastered this macrostructure (I rarely ask students to move entire sections or paragraphs) but need practice with microstructure: ordering within a paragraph. Often students build their microstructures by ear—does it sound good? That's an accurate principle, but remember it's secondary: first clarity, then vivacity. Order your sentences by function instead. For academic papers, I use the acronym A BEAST to remember the elements my paragraph needs. After all, you want your paper to be a beast—tough to reckon with.

A BEAST

Argument
Background
Evidence
Analysis

Summary
Transition

Argument

A is for argument. Your previous teachers may have called this a topic sentence, but I prefer argument because your first sentence should do more than mention a subject—it should state what the paragraph will prove. Even in an informative (rather than persuasive) paper, you must give evidence that verifies the facts you want your readers to know.

The best argument sentences encapsulate the *entire* paragraph: remember—no slow wind-ups. Based on the argument sentence, a reader should know exactly what to expect from the paragraph. Let's look at an opening sentence that *doesn't* do that. What do you predict the next sentences will be about?

Every person on this planet is unique.

Hmm . . . I think the paragraph might be about DNA since that's what makes us unique. Maybe the paragraph will encourage readers to identify and use their strengths. I hope the paragraph isn't about self-esteem—by second grade I was tired of hearing about that. So what is this paragraph really about? In this case, the answer comes in the last sentence of the paragraph (six sentences later):

What if we implemented a literacy program that challenged children while they could still read books that interested them?

Oh, so the writer mentioned uniqueness to lead up to the idea of a more customized reading curriculum. I understand the intention now, but I want to understand from the beginning. In Western culture, we expect point-first writing: we want authors to disclose their objective upfront. So make sure your argument sentence doesn't merely warm up to your point. Nail it. If you notice you're a point-last writer, you can often find a later sentence that captures the whole paragraph better. For this example, I asked the student to make the last sentence the first and phrase it as a statement:

I propose we implement a literacy program that challenges children yet allows them to read books that interest them.

And the former first sentence isn't wasted effort—it may be usable elsewhere.

Some students are tempted to lead with background information or their best piece of evidence. This buries the argument in sentence three or four. Don't do it—we can wait just a moment for background and we'll process your information better if we understand why you're telling it.

Background

After argument comes background: this is nonargumentative (or less argumentative) material that prepares the reader for your research. Sometimes the introduction provides sufficient background and you can move straight to E: evidence.

Evidence

Your reader is now ready to hear all the specific statistics, experiments, case studies, interviews, etc. you've gathered. The key word is specific. As a reader, I want to experience your research journey. I want to become as much of an expert as you are. Describing the methods behind your most important findings will convince me more than glossing over conclusion after conclusion. But we can't let evidence do all the work—we need to add our own analysis.

Analysis

Analysis is your commentary on the evidence. You further explain how your research bolsters your argument. I find many students tend to favor one or the other—either evidence or analysis. The first group sticks closely to their articles, letting the scholars say everything. The second group prefers to skim over the studies in their own words, but this

doesn't permit the reader to experience the evidence firsthand. Balance evidence and analysis as much as you can. You can also alternate between evidence and analysis as many times as you need. That means a paragraph might actually look like this: ABEAEAEAST.

Summary

S is for summary—I wish it were P for Point, but that doesn't spell anything. I say that because it's much more important to echo your argument than rehash every bit of the paragraph. Often, the summary can state your point even more strongly and specifically than the argument sentence because your reader now knows all the details.

Transition

The final element is T for transition. Although a single word is often sufficient (note *final* from the last sentence), I prefer conceptual transitions, meaning you show how the previous paragraph and the next relate. I could write this instead: *Just as a summary sentence gives readers closure, a transition sentence primes them for the next.*

Now you know the entire A BEAST model. My goal isn't to lock you into a formula (for example, it's okay if your argument needs two sentences) but to help you remember to order sentences by function first. The following paragraph is a good first draft: the student has included all the needed elements and made the wording flow. We can improve it, however, by identifying the function of each sentence and revising accordingly.

Child-directed speech has features like simplified structure, exaggerated intonation, and slower pacing. A 2003 study found children in low-income homes are exposed to far less child-directed speech than children in higher-income homes; two recent studies corroborate these results. Child-directed speech strongly correlates with socioeconomic status and language delays. Furthermore, low vocabulary has also been tied to long-term struggles in reading and writing. To prevent such problems, parents must be trained to use child-directed speech often. In other words, the more toddlers talk with their parents, the less likely they are to have vocabulary deficits.

SHOW ANSWER

The original version orders the sentences as background, evidence, argument, transition, summary, analysis. Here is a possible revision:

Child-directed speech strongly correlates with socioeconomic status and language delays. This type of talking has features like simplified structure, exaggerated intonation, and slower pacing. A 2003 study found children in low-income homes are exposed to far less child-directed speech than children in higher-income homes; two recent studies corroborate these results. In other words, the more toddlers talk with their parents, the less likely they are to have vocabulary deficits. Thus, parents must be trained to use child-directed speech often. Furthermore, low vocabulary has also been tied to long-term struggles in reading and writing.

Guideposts

Along with smart sequencing, guidepost words, which are transitional words anywhere in the paragraph, can help the reader know where you're going. Perhaps you've gone hiking, wondered if you were still on the right trail, and a signpost reassured you that you were. We can use words like *for example*, *however*, and *consequently* to signal our intentions to the reader (Harrison, 2012). This is where brief metadiscourse is not only appropriate but very helpful. Try reading the following paragraphs. The first offers no guideposts:

Jazz bands began to split into two main categories: black and white. Black bands (bands made up entirely of African-Americans) were known as "big bands." Solos were encouraged among all of the band members, not just the leader of the band. These bands played mostly for the poorer, lower class blacks of the era. These big bands began writing their

own music. The music performed by jazz bands had been made up entirely of arrangements of the day's popular music. Music was written specifically for a band (Harrison, 2012, pp. 166-167).

This revision gives us several trail marks (set in blue):

Jazz bands began to split into two main categories: black and white. Black bands (bands made up entirely of African-Americans) were known as "big bands" and were characterized by a number of things. First, solos were encouraged among all of the band members, not just the leader of the band. Second, these bands played mostly for the poorer, lower class blacks of the era. And third, these big bands began writing their own music. Up until this time, the music performed by jazz bands had been made up entirely of arrangements of the day's popular music. It wasn't until this time that music was written specifically for a band (Harrison, 2012, p. 167).

The first paragraph feels a bit fragmented—almost more like a list of facts than a paragraph. In the second, the writer's expressions direct our attention. We mentally place the first pieces of information under *characteristics*. The next phrases tell us we're moving into historical development. Like a GPS, signal phrases save readers energy and worry by alerting them to turns in advance.

Old to New Information

Another tactic for creating coherence is starting with information the reader is likely to know then moving to less commonly known information. This gives the reader a foundation to build on. For example, I'm guessing most of you have heard of *The Wizard of Oz* story. I bet many of you have also seen the film. Very few, though, would be familiar with the literacy criticism it's prompted. Thus, my audience will feel most comfortable beginning with old information, like the characters, and then progressing to new information, like the story's possible symbolism. Rewrite the following paragraph based on that principle:

The Wizard of Oz may be a political allegory, which many fans of this beloved book and film do not know. For example, the scarecrow represented farmers, who didn't have a brain because farmers of the era weren't looking after their political interests. Industry was represented by the tinman. The Industrial Revolution was making humanity heartless, so the tinman didn't have one. Finally, the drought in the western United States was embodied by the Wicked Witch, who could only be killed by water (Taylor, 2005).

Show Answer

Sample revision: Many fans of the beloved book and film, *The Wizard of Oz*, do not know that it may be a political allegory. For example, the scarecrow has no brain since farmers of the era weren't looking after their political interests. The tinman has no heart because the Industrial Revolution was making humanity heartless. Finally, Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch of the West by throwing water on her. The Witch embodies the western United States, which was experiencing drought (Taylor, 2005).
(Some students have also previewed the paragraph by first listing out the characters. Others have described all the characters before mentioning any of the symbolism.)

As with concision, don't worry about coherence as you're drafting. Your first version need only be a brain dump. Write the way you played as a child. If I handed a group of adults an enormous box of Legos and asked them to make something, they would probably pick through the first layer of pieces, fretting about what to do first. A group of kids would turn that box upside down. They instinctively know it's easier to sort the parts when they're all on the table.

5.6 Cohesion

Some use *coherence* and *cohesion* interchangeably, but I see coherence as putting ideas in a logical order whereas cohesion is linking (or sticking—as in *adhesive*) ideas smoothly. For example, the following paragraph is completely

cohesive yet completely incoherent:

On my fridge I keep a collection of magnets. Magnet rhymes with *Dragnet*. *Dragnet*, a true crime television series, took place in Los Angeles. Los Angeles is the second most populous city in the United States.

You can see how I moved from one idea to the next, but the paragraph says nothing significant (although I highly recommend *Dragnet*).

Sentence Linking

The best paragraphs are both coherent and cohesive. The following sentences are in a good order, but I think I can make the links between sentences more graceful. The writer introduces the problem with a story then advocates for change:

Many ducks roam around my neighborhood. When they have new ducklings, I love to watch them. The mother leads the ducklings, and sometimes she walks over the storm drains. The ducklings fall right through the slats of the drain because their feet aren't big even though their mother's are. Then residents or city personnel must get into the drain, catch the ducklings, and lift them out. We should put mesh nets over the storm drains so they don't fall in.

The paragraph makes sense, but notice how it flows better when I make a phrase near the end of one sentence connect to a phrase early in the next sentence. The pairings are in matching colors:

Many ducks roam around my neighborhood. My neighbors and I enjoy watching them, especially when they have new ducklings. They are adorable as they waddle behind their mother so faithfully. But sometimes the mother walks over a storm drain and the ducklings fall right in! Their tiny feet just aren't big enough to span the drain's slats. These drains wouldn't trap the ducklings if the city spread mesh nets over them. If we don't, residents or city personnel must continue to get into the drains, catch the ducklings, and lift them out.

Now make this coherent paragraph more cohesive with sentence linking:

Salt Lake City should build a new theatre for two reasons. Broadway producers know the Salt Lake area is a good market because we have many singers and dancers. Recent shows from New York will really attract this crowd. Furthermore, many seats at Capitol Theatre don't have a decent view of the stage. In 1903, the principles of good sight lines weren't as well known, which is when the theatre opened. However, the city hesitates to rebuild Capitol Theatre because it's a historic structure.

Show Answer

Sample revision: Salt Lake City should build a new theatre for two reasons. First, Broadway producers know Salt Lake City is a good market because it has many singers and dancers. Many of these performers will swarm to buy tickets to recent shows from New York. Second, many seats at Capitol Theatre don't have a decent view of the stage. The theatre, built in 1903, doesn't use the most recent principles of good sight lines. Unfortunately, these sight lines cannot be improved unless the city is willing to rebuild this historic structure.

Side note—these sentences came true. Salt Lake City built a new theatre, the Eccles, in 2016. Capitol Theatre renovated its seating in 2019.

Subject Aligning

Another method of creating cohesion is subject aligning. This means keeping the main idea of the paragraph at the beginning of sentences as much as possible. This reworking of the duckling paragraph is also cohesive:

Many ducks roam around my neighborhood. They are fun to watch, especially when they have new ducklings. They are adorable as they waddle behind their mother so faithfully. But sometimes the ducklings follow their mother over a storm

drain and fall right in! Their tiny feet just aren't big enough to span the drain's slats. The ducklings then have to be rescued by residents or city personnel who get into the drains, catch them, and lift them out. The poor creatures could be spared if the city spread mesh nets over the drains.

For the sake of example, I aligned the subject of *every* sentence, but that isn't necessary. A little variation is refreshing and won't disrupt the cohesion. I also had to use the passive voice in the last two sentences, which could be okay if I want to focus on the ducklings.

Try subject aligning this paragraph. Use the passive voice as little as possible.

Body image is usually decreased by viewing advertisements. When presented with ideals that are difficult or impossible to achieve and maintain, people become less secure. This spurs the growth of profits as consumers buy product after product to improve appearance. Over the last few decades, research has confirmed the harm ads wield over female body image. Whether this harm is equal on males, however, is a more recent question.

Show Answer

Sample Revisions

Advertisements usually decrease body image. They present ideals that are difficult or impossible to achieve and maintain, reducing viewers' security. Advertisers and their client companies profit as consumers buy product after product to improve appearance. Over the last few decades, advertisements' harm on female body image has been confirmed by research. Whether ads harm male body image equally, however, is a more recent question.

We often let advertisements decrease our body image. When we see ideals that are difficult or impossible to achieve and maintain, we become less secure. We spur the profits of advertisers and their client companies as we buy product after product to improve appearance. Over the last few decades, the harm women feel from advertisements has been confirmed by research. Whether males experience equal harm, however, is a more recent question.

(In the second example, you could substitute something like "people" or "consumers" for "we.")

If cohesion seems nitpicky—you're right. But in another sense it's the crowning achievement of clear writing. If you take time to be cohesive, don't be surprised if people ask you how you write so well. Your audience will be pleasantly surprised when reading your work feels as frictionless as ice skating. Sadly, we're used to reading being as "frictionless" as say—wrestling an alligator. Level every obstacle for your reader. Use cohesion to lull them into a lovely rhythm.

Excellent work—you're now equipped to make your sentences clearer. If you do, they'll also become more interesting. In the next section you'll acquire even more tools to animate your writing.

5.7 Vivacity

Permit me to have a hipster moment—I liked Harry Potter before it was cool. Nobody I knew was hep to the series until the release of book four. Once at lunch a friend complained she didn't like how the storyline was unfolding. I realized I almost didn't care about the plot. I read because I loved simply being in J. K. Rowling's magical world. Reading felt like *living* there. The characters felt *alive* to me. Even today, all I want to know is, will I go to Hogwarts when I die?

That's the power of lifelike—or vivacious—writing (the Latin root *viv* means *life* as in *revive* or *survive*). Vivacious writing transforms reading from the Dementor-like torture of passing eyes over print to extract information to conversing with a

real *live* human being (as pleasant as a bite of Professor Lupin's chocolate). The first requires great patience and gives little satisfaction in return. The second feels a lot like listening to a story.

Although your teachers won't let you write a novel instead of a research paper, you can use the techniques of creative writing in any genre much more than you would expect. We will learn about two: voice and variety.

5.8 Voice

Voice refers to the writer's attitude or personality. Some use *voice* to include choices like vocabulary, sentence length, and sentence structure although I feel those belong to the broader term *style*. However, style certainly influences voice: describing the babbling of a brook as *mellifluous* would establish an elevated, elegant tone. Using a fragment like "No way!" would create a playful, conversational voice.

The appropriate voice for a text depends on its genre and audience. For example, we expect a lot of voice in a poem and very little in a health history. This semester you'll write for both academic and general audiences in assignments like a research paper and magazine spread. Both will have a similar goal, such as reducing television viewing for children under two, but the audience will determine the content you include.

In an academic paper, you might address a government agency, citing studies that prove frequent television viewing reduces the parent-child interaction necessary to build language skills. You might ask the government agency to make a brochure about child media guidelines for pediatricians to give to parents. In a magazine article, you might address parents directly with a bulleted list of activities they can enjoy with their children besides watching TV.

Regardless of the genre, two strategies, story framing and sentence-as-action, will help you enhance your voice.

Story Framing

Humans think in stories. You know that when a presenter begins telling a story, your attention perks up. I definitely recommending using stories in your pieces for a general audience. Should we use stories in an academic paper? Possibly—some research includes interviews or case studies. Even if we don't *tell* a story, we can *frame* anything as a story. The audience probably won't know you're doing this, but they will be more engaged.

Let's start by framing this semester as a story. What do we need to tell a story? I give my creative writing students the acronym COOT to remember.

- Character
- Objective
- Obstacle
- Tactic

This Semester: Your Story

A story needs a character who has an objective, encounters obstacles, and uses tactics to overcome them. So who is our hero this semester? It's you! Your objective for this class is probably to get a good grade. Your obstacles might be procrastination, wanting to spend more time with friends, or meeting family obligations. Your tactics might include setting a schedule, studying with friends, or video chatting with your little sister instead of driving the hour home. That's not a bad story—most importantly, I hope you now think of yourself as a hero—but I think we can go bigger.

As an example, we'll discuss the work of McCall Booth, the student who wrote the paper about reducing television viewing in children under two. McCall is a Human Development major. Let's go bigger—McCall wants to help people (objective). She wants to overcome the obstacle of speech disorders so children can communicate well. McCall's choosing to study this problem this semester because she wants to face the enemy—what prevents children from developing language? One answer is excessive television. Now McCall knows her nemesis. What tactics will she use to

defeat it? McCall realizes parents have the power to direct their child's behavior. She wants to write to them. But how will parents get the message? McCall may need another tactic. In her research, she learns that behavior interventions with medical professionals work best—people believe and follow the advice of their doctor. So McCall's strategy is to get pediatricians to tell parents about media guidelines for children. McCall's everyday school drudgery is now a story.

I hope you'll frame your semester this way more than the first way. You are the hero of this project. You're here to destroy your archenemy: a problem in your field. Your sidekicks are ready to help—your teacher, your review group, even the scholars whose material you cite. Your superpowers are your research, your persuasion, and your writing skills. What you write could help eradicate the problem. What you say could convince those in power to implement your recommendations. (Remember I promised to tell you about a scientist who did just that? She's still coming.)

Research as a Story: Make a Movie for Your Readers

You can frame the problem you're studying this semester the same way for your audience. When I was studying for a college entrance exam, my teacher told me, "Whenever you read, make a movie in your mind." Watch how McCall makes a movie for her reader in the introduction of an article she geared to *Parents* magazine:

Alex sighs in frustration as he enters the living room. Toys scattered on the floor, books yanked from shelves, and his kids pay no mind to the chaos they've created. He needs to help cook dinner, but first he needs a way to distract the children from their havoc-wreaking. The instant Alex turns on the television the kids gravitate toward the bright screen, and he can work in peace. But he can't stop the little voice in his head that asks when was the last time he played with his children rather than letting a screen babysit them.

Who is our hero now? Alex, or more broadly, parents. What is the objective? To help cook dinner—more generally, to accomplish tasks at home. What is the obstacle? The children are asking for attention too. What is the tactic? Television—it will absorb the children's attention instead. McCall then hints this tactic may have serious consequences. In the rest of the article she will explain these consequences and suggest better tactics.

Framing the problem as a story accomplishes two things: first, the audience is more interested. Of course, McCall could have started the article this way: "Too much television delays language development." That sounds like a sentence straight from her research paper, and we expect more pizzazz when we read a magazine. We pick up a magazine for a break, not a lecture. Second, she relates to her audience. In a magazine, her research paper sentence could sound like an accusation. Subtext: *Why are you such a bad parent? You're making your kid dumb. Never watch TV again!* Instead, her story sympathizes with parents by showing she understands the stressful choices they face.

How could McCall frame the story for an academic paper? Her audience will be other experts who care about the problem, with scholars and speech pathologists as the primary audience. Educators and social workers could be a secondary audience. Inevitably, peers in the class and the teacher will "overhear" her paper. Others who can help fix the problem, like medical professionals and government employees, might be a tertiary audience. You should use your voice in an academic paper, but it will be subdued. The trick is to be spirited enough to interest your reader and not so spirited you lose your credibility (Harrison, 2012). Perhaps it's like wearing your best suit to a job interview but throwing in a stylish necktie or necklace.

To sound professional, students often use abstract nouns as the subjects of their sentences. In McCall's case those might be *language development*, *interaction*, *speech delay*, and *screen media consumption*. Unfortunately, when it comes to making a movie in the mind, inanimate concepts aren't very lively actors. If you can make the subject of your sentence a person, do it. You won't sound less professional, and the audience will pay attention and understand you better. McCall can use subjects like *parents*, *children*, *speech pathologists*, and *pediatricians* throughout her paper. Here is a sample introduction for an academic paper:

Speech pathologists and other professionals who work with children know the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two do not use screen media. In treating clients, many of us have probably seen a parent hand an underage child a smartphone or tablet while they wait for the older child's appointment to finish. Should

we say something? Yes. We know premature and excessive media consumption can contribute to many problems, including language delay. Since parents need to hear this message early and regularly, I advise speech pathologists to partner with pediatricians, who meet with a family about nine times during a child's pre-toddler years.

This paragraph features action, not concepts, by using story framing: We have characters (speech pathologists) who have an objective (sharing media guidelines to avoid language delay). To overcome the obstacle (usually treating children already two years old) they develop a tactic (teaming with pediatricians).

Show Your Hero Succeeding

Especially in texts for a general audience, be sure to finish the story. You've painted a "before" picture that illustrates the problem. Now paint an "after" picture that shows the benefits of implementing the solution. Show your hero (the audience) succeeding. This could be McCall's conclusion of her magazine spread:

When Alex enters the living room tonight, things are much the same: toys scattered on the floor, books yanked from shelves, and his kids pay no mind to the chaos they've created. He needs to help cook dinner, but now television isn't his first strategy for engaging the children. Instead, he scoops up an armful of play food among the toys and leads his children to the kitchen. He puts a pot on the floor for his three-year-old, hands her some play food, and asks her to cook something. He sends his five-year-old son to get salt from the pantry. He knows chatting about cooking (real or pretend) with his children contributes much more to their development than watching television, and he feels good about spending time with them.

Here's a prewriting exercise to experiment with story framing on your own:

> Think about the next assignment you will write for this class. How can you use story framing to make the piece more interesting? Either jot down some plans here or try writing the introduction itself.

Story framing is Mary Poppins's spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down. After all, many of us can breeze through fifty pages of a novel in the time it takes to decode five pages of a research article. Well here's the irony: a spoonful of sugar was only in the film, not the book. See—those filmmakers know what they're doing. Make a movie for your reader.

Sentence as Action

Sometimes I've asked myself, *Can I shortcut all this revision by writing a solid sentence in the first place?* I think the answer is yes and no. No, we rarely write a sentence the best way the first way. And yes, a few tricks can help us know if we're on the right track during drafting. First, we need to shift the way we think about a sentence. When you were younger, you probably learned that a sentence is a complete thought. As a college student, you likely read many sentences that are overloaded units of information. I define a sentence as a unit of action: A subject verbed an object. Something happened—that's a story. And remember, we can frame anything as a story.

From the sentence-as-action paradigm, I've created a formula for a good sentence. I hesitate to say *formula*—writing is a fascinating blend of art and science and thus never formulaic—but I hope it can be a handy yardstick on the go. For contrast, let's look at the bad formula first. I've included pictures so you can see what a bad sentence feels like.

Bad Sentence Formula

Photo by WandererCreative

Vague subject +

Photo by Spoba

Weak verb or
Passive verb or
Unnecessary “to be” verb +

Photo by Ben Kerckx

Everything else you need to say but didn’t because you wasted your subject and verb

Here’s a bad formula sentence to muck through. Can you tell what it means? Hint: It’s the plot of a well-known movie. I’ve formatted it as a “question” below, just so you can click the answer when you’re ready.

A difference of opinion was undertaken by two opposing parties in which the surprising fact of one party’s paternity was revealed by the other party.

Show Answer

Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back
Revision: Darth Vader dueled Luke Skywalker and declared, “I am your father.”

Naturally, the opposite is the good sentence formula:

Good Sentence Formula

Concrete subject (human if possible) + forceful verb + the result (what happened when the subject verbed the object?).

Take this bad formula sentence about McCall’s topic and give it a concrete subject and a forceful verb.

A meeting should take place in which media guidelines are gone over at pediatric offices so harmful exposure does not occur.

Show Answer

Pediatricians should explain media guidelines to parents to protect children from harmful media exposure.

A thesaurus is your best friend when it comes to pinpointing the powerful verb you need. I used one myself to write that last sentence—instead of *pinpointing* I had *finding*. This is a perfect case to illustrate what a thesaurus can do: often our working memory can’t promptly retrieve all the vocabulary we know. Searching for the right synonym can trigger that “on the tip of the tongue” feeling. A thesaurus can bring the ideal word to mind much more quickly. Many word processors have a built-in thesaurus—try right-clicking the word.

A final tip—only use words you already know from the thesaurus. Choosing a scholarly-sounding word you have only a vague notion of can be tempting, but it may not fit your context or have connotations you didn’t anticipate. Now that you have the framework for a compelling sentence, let’s look at some troubleshooting.

Smoothing Sentences with Parallelism

In oral presentations, we worry about stumbling over our words. In writing we can’t literally stutter, but sentences sometimes sound awkward. The culprit is often problems with parallelism. The following sentence is not parallel:

Kara’s hobbies include reading, sewing, and dance.

Maybe your ear gagged on that last bit. Why not say *dancing* so it matches the others? Parallelism means keeping equal parts of a sentence in the same form: for example, all verbs or all nouns—not a mix.

Fix the parallelism mistake in this sentence:

Our college helps students land careers in computer programming, software development, service technicians, and IT managers.

Show Answer

Our college helps students land careers as computer programmers, software developers, service technicians, and IT managers.
(The first two items on the list are fields. The last two items on the list are positions. You wouldn’t say, “Our college helps students land careers in service technicians.”)

Parallelism also means making sure the first part of the sentence tallies with the last. Look at this sentence:

The English teacher said Alicia needed to improve her grammar and coming to class late.

The verb *improve* has two nouns phrases attached to it: *grammar* and *coming to class late*. Let's separate the parts of the sentence to check if each works on its own:

The English teacher said Alicia needed to improve her grammar.

Okay, that sounds normal. What about the second part?

The English teacher said Alicia needed to improve her coming to class late.

That sounds funny. We can fix it by using a different noun phrase that gels better with *improve*:

The English teacher said Alicia needed to improve her grammar and punctuality.

Or we could add a verb that fits with *class*:

The English teacher said Alicia needed to improve her grammar and come to class on time.

Make the following sentence parallel:

Crooning saxophones and trumpets that blare can be heard at Jack's Jazz Joint, which also sells sheet music and tuning.

Show Answer

Crooning saxophones and blaring trumpets can be heard at Jack's Jazz Joint, which also sells sheet music and tunes instruments.

Saxophones that croon and trumpets that blare can be heard at Jack's Jazz Joint, which also offers sheet music and instrument tuning.

(I hope you caught both brands of faulty parallelism.)

The best way to find clumsy sentences is to read your paper out loud. That probably sounds like nerdy overachieving. Do it anyway. If it sounds good reading aloud, it will sound good to the reader.

A vibrant voice pops the topic right off the page. Help your readers visualize your research journey by framing it as a story and packing your sentences with action.

5.9 Variety

Just as we can spice up our writing with voice, we can use the spice of life—variety. This section will specifically discuss sentence length and sentence structure.

Varying Sentence Length

Have you ever driven from Provo to St. George? This trip has the perfect conditions for highway hypnosis. With not much to see (unless you're a sagebrush expert), a constant speed limit, and very few traffic maneuvers to vary the pace, drivers can suddenly realize they've been zoned out for ten or twenty minutes—they've been driving without conscious effort.

I hope my readers are pretty conscious when I'm with them, so I vary the pace by varying sentence length. For the most part, our sentences are too long and too similar (Lanham, 1981). How can you determine a good length? Sometimes

content influences the pace: I may use some staccato sentences for my hard-hitting statistics, then stroll leisurely through a touching story. Here are other factors to consider:

Short sentences (1–10 words) keep the reader's attention and are easy to understand. However, they may sound choppy or immature if overused. Long sentences (20–30 words) have plenty of room to show connections between ideas, but they risk boring or confusing the reader. Medium sentences (10–20 words) combine the benefits of both: they're short enough to be readable but long enough to develop ideas. And we've already discussed the drawback of too many medium sentences—highway hypnosis.

Every sentence in the following paragraph is of medium length (13–16 words). Revise for more variety. Be as creative as you wish (keep the meaning but change anything else):

Good writers and good boxers are alike because they try to vary their moves. A boxer who always gave two quick jabs then one uppercut would be laughed at. The opponent would probably win the fight because the rhythm is too predictable. Writers try to create sentences of different lengths so they keep the attention of their audience.

Show Answer

Sample revision: Good writers write the way good boxers box. If a boxer always gave two quick jabs then one uppercut, his opponent would thrash him soundly because his rhythm is predictable. Similarly, writers must vary their sentence lengths unless they want to bore their readers. Sentence lengths: 8, 22, 14

One way to control length is to coordinate (combine) sentences well. First we must learn to combine them logically, then we can learn to switch up our habitual sentence patterns. (In case we have any editing minors in the house, some examples will technically subordinate rather than coordinate, but for simplicity's sake I'm putting both under the category *sentence combining*.)

Combining Sentences Logically

Often, writers don't combine sentences with much variety. *And* becomes the default coordinating word. Writers merge many short sentences with *and* for no reason except to get that medium length the ear likes. Remember—not every sentence needs to be round; use many lengths so the paper feels on average round.

Here are two strategies for coordinating sentences better. First, coordinate only when you need to. Don't combine sentences unless they have a direct relationship. Second, use a coordinator more specific than *and* if possible. The following sentence uses illogical coordination:

Every Christmas I open a new pair of pajamas, and my grandpa's birthday is the next day.

The relationship between the parts is tenuous (Which are we going to talk about—pajamas or Grandpa?) so the writing sounds juvenile—more like impromptu speech. These ideas belong in separate sentences, possibly separate paragraphs. When you write, if you determine the ideas do belong in the same sentence, then make sure you're using a suitable coordinator.

A good coordinator accurately defines the relationship between the two parts. The relationship may be contrast (*but*, *although*), cause and effect (*because*, *consequently*), or order (*after*, *third*). Notice how these sentences sound more logical with proper coordination:

Original: Cassie stayed up late to study the night before the test, and Colin gave his brain plenty of sleep.
Revision: Cassie stayed up late to study the night before the test, but Colin gave his brain plenty of sleep.

Original: She brought a toy to school, and her parents had to talk to the teacher.
Revision: Because she brought a toy to school, her parents had to talk to the teacher.

Original: To make macaroni and cheese, boil and drain the noodles and add butter, sauce, and milk.
Revision: To make macaroni and cheese, first boil the noodles. When they are tender, drain the water. Finally, add butter, sauce, and milk.

Improve this paragraph with more appropriate coordination. Be sure to separate sentence parts that don't have a direct relationship.

My family has many Christmas Eve traditions. We watch a movie and we usually disagree about it. My brother Reid likes comedies like *Elf*, and my brother Ryker prefers classics like *It's a Wonderful Life*. We also make treats. Caramel popcorn is our favorite, and we play card games. We eat the popcorn and the cards get sticky.

Show Answer

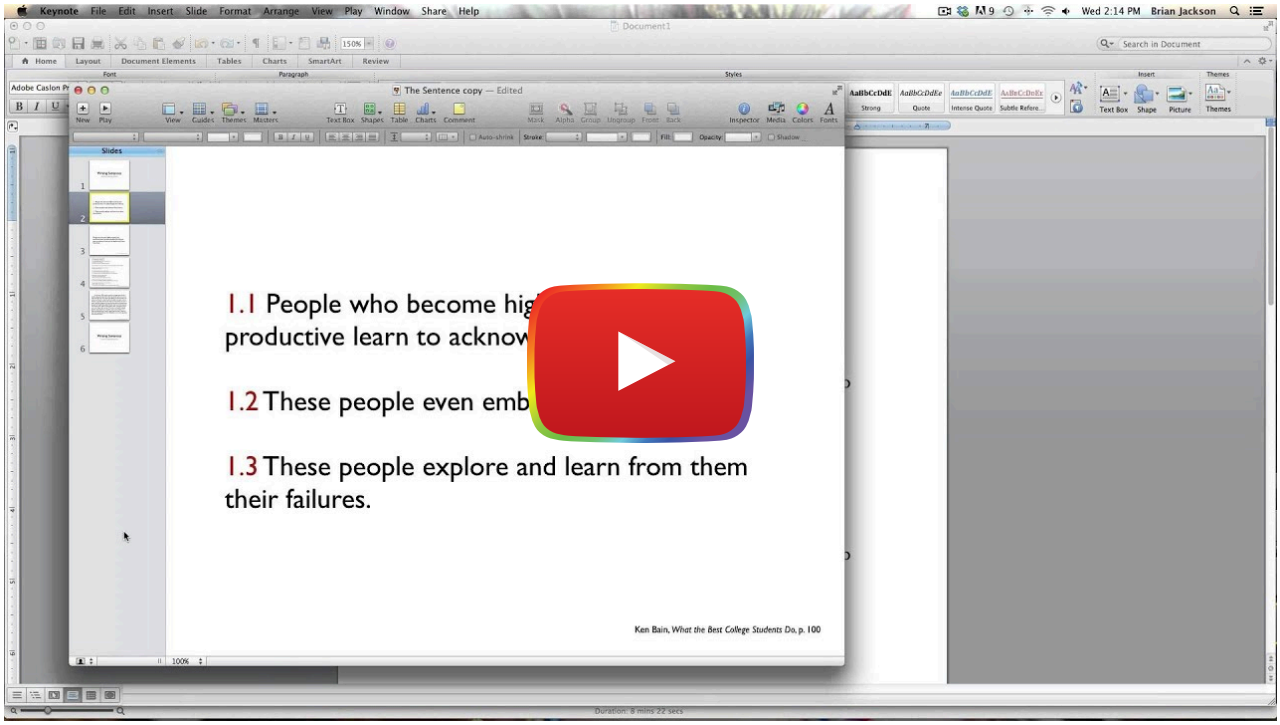
Sample revision: My family has many Christmas Eve traditions. First, we watch a movie. My brother Reid likes comedies like *Elf*, but my brother Ryker prefers classics like *It's a Wonderful Life*. Then we make treats—caramel popcorn is our favorite. After that, we play card games. Sometimes the cards get sticky because we can't stop eating the popcorn!

Now that you know how to fix faulty coordination, let's try combining sentences in more interesting ways.

Combining Sentences Creatively

We tend to default to the most common English sentence structure: subject, verb, object. And that's okay—we want plenty of those because the reader expects them and understands them easily. Writers also have their unique sentence pattern habits. For example, I love introductory phrases—and I can't resist finishing with a dashy punch (or parenthetical phrase). You should embrace your quirks too, but how do we expand our stylistic repertoire?

Research has proven that practicing combining sentences and imitating the way master writers do so reliably improves your writing style (Graham & Perin, 2007). BYU professors Brian Jackson and Jon Ostenson created Style Academy, which is packed with sentence combining and sentence imitating exercises. In the video, Professor Jackson will show you how to combine sentences. At 5:45, you can try your own paragraph. (I've included the sentences you'll need so you can copy and paste them into your own document).



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/C46WGj85ix8

1.1 This happened in the late 1990s. 1.2 I could no longer see my feet. 1.3 I made an appointment with a Paris eye doctor. 1.4 The doctor ran some tests. 1.5 The doctor sent me off to buy some glasses.

2.1 I'd like to blame my choice of frames on the fact that I couldn't see them clearly.

3.1 I'd like to say they were forced upon me. 3.2 Neither excuse is true.

4.1 I made the selection of my own free will. 4.2 I chose them because I thought they made me look smart. 4.3 I chose them because I thought they made me look international.

5.1 The frames were made of dark plastic. 5.2 The frames had rectangular lenses. 5.3 The lenses were not much larger than my eyes.

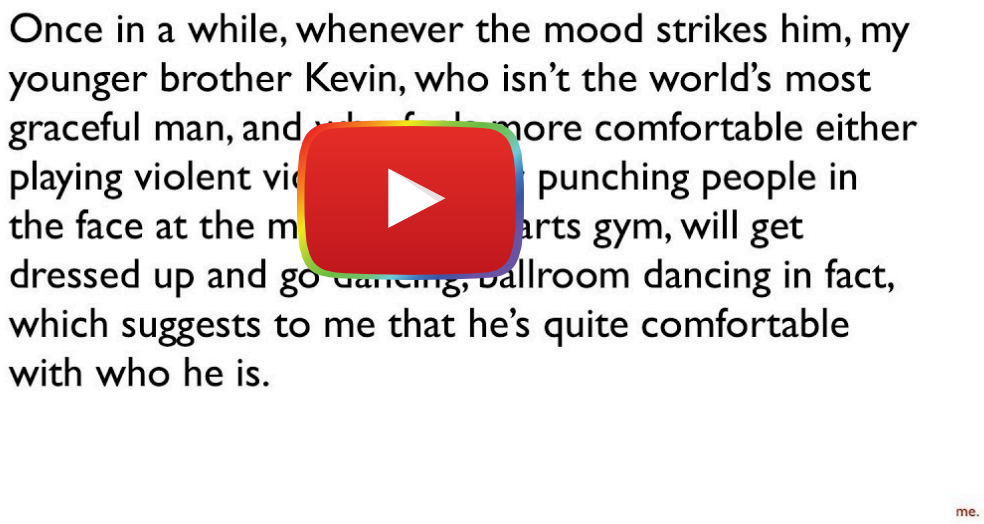
6.1 There was something vaguely familiar about them. 6.2 I could not put my finger on what was vaguely familiar about them.

7.1 I spent a great deal of time in front of the mirror. 7.2 This was after I picked them up. 7.3 I pretended to share intelligent comments regarding the state of Europe.

Show Answer

Answers will vary. Finish the video to see how David Sedaris wrote his paragraph.

You probably noticed you've been combining sentences all your life (that's what revision is). Now you can combine them more mindfully. Imitating an author's sentence structure is more challenging. Professor Jackson will provide a few examples in the video. At 6:00, you can try it yourself. (Again, I've included the models you'll need so you can copy and paste them into your own document).



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/6wGdmIZg1vM

If you need content for your sentence, consider writing about your research for this class.

Option 1: Sometimes, according to Edwin Teale, a gall gnat larva, which does not resemble the adult in the least, and which has certainly not mated, nevertheless produces within its body eggs, live eggs, which then hatch within its soft tissue.

Option 2: There is nothing better that students can take home over summer vacation than a sense that what they have learned the previous year has meant they were able, with the help of lots of other people, including that alienated girl with the green hair and that kid who counts on his fingers, and lots and lots of people beyond the walls of the school, to make something important happen, to meet a challenge.

Show Answer

Answers will vary.

Have you ever noticed how rearranging the furniture can make a room feel completely new? The same goes for sentences, but sometimes we don't rearrange them because revision, like furniture, can be heavy. With practice, the task becomes lighter—maybe more like rearranging flowers.

5.10 Mechanics

As a side note before we conclude, things like spelling, grammar, and punctuation (I'll lump them under the term *mechanics*) are also components of style. Mechanics are the lowest level concern, but that doesn't mean you should neglect them. I know they can be annoying—some rules of English make sense; many don't. But anytime we make an error, the reader's attention may be drawn away from the message and dwell on the mistake.

As a comparison, imagine you attend a Hollywood party where celebrities are wearing couture like Aramani tuxedos and Dior gowns. You're very impressed with your conversation partner's ensemble—and then you notice a zipper that's not quite, well, zipped. It's hard to ignore. Even though the outfit comes from one of the most prestigious designers on the planet, something's just a little off, a little embarrassing. Don't let that happen to your paper.

Here are two tips for proofreading. First, read the paper aloud. The brain often autocorrects typos when reading silently. You'll also be more accurate if you use a hard copy. Second, read the paper backwards—not directly backwards, but read the last sentence first, then the next-to-last sentence, etc. Reading forward, the mind concentrates on the text's overall meaning and may overlook technicalities like mechanics. As a teacher I really appreciate (and reward!) papers that contain few to no errors, especially in citation. Usually this means the student has managed time well to refine the paper so thoroughly.

5.11 Help Them Hear You

Let's get back to where we started: not boring. Does a 350-page book about pesticides sound not boring to you? Me neither, but that book, *Silent Spring*, has sold more than six million copies in the United States alone since 1962 (Palacio, 2012).

The video below tells the story of the author, or if you prefer the short version, I'll list out her story frame too:

Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/Ipbc-6IvMQI

Character: Rachel Carson, marine biologist.
Objective: Establish the responsible use of pesticides.
Obstacle: The public doesn't know how dangerous pesticides can be. Many only know the pesticide DDT saved millions of lives during Word War II by eradicating malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Apparently, pesticides are the greatest liquid since H_2O (hardly an exaggeration—see 4:56).
Tactic: Inform the public by writing a book.

Of course, many books don't succeed. What made *Silent Spring* different? First, Rachel Carson had the goods. Her book's reference list was fifty pages long (and you thought your bibliography was a pain). One pesticide manufacturer feared Carson's research so much it threatened to sue the *New Yorker* (which published *Silent Spring*serially) for libel unless the final installment of the book was cancelled. The magazine's legal counsel replied, "Everything in those articles has been checked and is true. Go ahead and sue" (Sherman, 2001, p. 53). Do you have that kind of confidence in the quality and quantity of your research? I know it's a high standard for a college paper, but it's a standard that can mobilize the public to solve a problem.

Carson's second success secret was style, of course. She could have started her book with this sentence: *Pesticides are chemicals that kill or repel unwanted organisms*. But she didn't. In fact, I bet you can guess how she did start it. Read the next paragraph to check your answer:

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields. In autumn, oak and maple and birch set up a blaze of color that flamed and flickered across a backdrop of pines. Then foxes barked in the hills and deer silently crossed the fields, half hidden in the mists of the fall mornings (1).

Yes, she started with a story—woven with gorgeous language, as I'm sure you noticed. The first chapter is even called "A Fable for Tomorrow." Carson goes on to describe how the town changes: suddenly livestock die off, crops won't grow, and even humans fall ill. She explains that while this town is fictional, each individual disaster has actually occurred in a community.

While subsequent chapters slide from this literary style to a more general style peppered with academia, the wording stays sharp. Plus, the stories—true ones—stick around (you can read one from the *New Yorker*). Carson knew case studies not only hook the reader, they evidence an argument: come for the story; stay for the social change.

The style of *Silent Spring* enchanted me so much, by the time I finished the book, Carson had me easily remembering that endrin is more toxic than dieldrin, that the recommended application of DDT is one pound per acre, and that 100 parts per million of DDD in body tissue is enough to kill birds and fish. And I was a teenage English major.

In response to *Silent Spring*, John F. Kennedy assigned the Presidential Science Advisory Committee to conduct its own studies on pesticides (Michaels, 2003). Twelve of the pesticides Carson deemed most harmful were either more carefully regulated or completely outlawed ("The Powerboat and the Planet," 1999). Many people credit her as the catalyst of the modern environmental movement.

Like Rachel Carson, you as a scholar have knowledge that would alleviate many of the world's ills. Make us hear you. Well, I guess we can't *make* people listen, but a strong style can make it easier—even fun. Even pesticides.

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6

Design

Visual Design for Writers: Turn Viewers into Readers

Brian Collier

Learning Outcomes

Students will learn

- the principles of good visual design including font choice, space, and scale/hierarchy.
- how to create and utilize tables and figures including different types of graphs

6.1 Visual Design

So you're a writer. You've got some nice words to say about something important. You've successfully accomplished step one, that is, having something to say and saying it well. Step two is how you present your writing. Is it readable? Is it easy to scan and understand? Basically, does your writing convert a viewer into a reader? Visual design is the key to turning someone into a reader. Just as there are principles in writing that establish structure and appeal such as character (ethos), emotion (pathos), and evidence and reasoning (logos), visual design is no different. There are three main principles to consider when visually designing your text: font choice, space, and scale or hierarchy.

Quote

"Only when the design fails does it call attention to itself; when it succeeds, it's invisible." -- typographer John D. Berry.

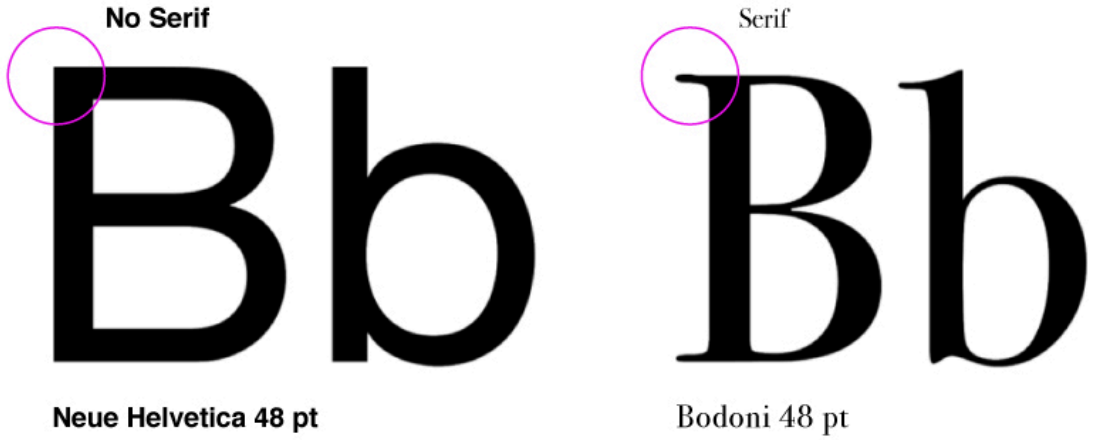
We'll discuss how these three design principles will make your visual design invisible, and in so doing, succeed at conveying the weight of your words.

6.2 PRINCIPLE 1: FONTS

The word font is often synonymous with the word typeface today. A typeface, however, is a design of type like Times New Roman or Arial, whereas font refers to the various styles of a typeface, like bold, 16pt, italicized, etc. For the purpose of this section though, we will use the word font to refer to different styling of written words.

Fonts are to written language as accents are to audible speech. Oftentimes, the accent carries more communicative power than the content being verbalized. The same goes for fonts. Fonts are conduits to convey tone before a word is ever read. And in today's world, people don't like to read too much, so font choice is pretty important. As Roger Black, founder of the Font Bureau, boldly stated, "Make it easy to read."

There are two common families of fonts that many people have heard of at some point—serif and sans serif.



Sans serif shown in Neue Helvetica 48 pt. Serif shown in Bodoni 48 pt.

Serif

Serif fonts have been used in print for centuries. The serif, or tail that extends from the main stroke, leads the eye to the next letter, helping to group letters to become words more easily. It has traditionally been used for body copy or the copy that makes up a paragraph; however, this trend has evolved with the advent of the internet. You'll notice this book doesn't use serif fonts for paragraphs (We'll discuss this more in the sans serif section). When using serif fonts, viewers immediately get a sense of historicity, professionalism, and formality. Use serif fonts to elevate your words if you want them to appear more sophisticated.

Serif font with serifs highlighted.

Sans Serif

These are fonts without tails, or serifs (the word “sans” literally means “without”). If fonts wore clothes, sans serifs would be buck naked. The first sans serif font made its appearance in the early 19th century and then caught on with popularity in headlines and poster advertisements. For this reason, sans serif fonts tend to carry a sense of modernity with them. They connote “progress and emphasize the future, which is why aerospace, technology, medicine, and biotech companies adopted sans serifs early on.” (Monotype)

Sans Serif Font

If you want to communicate a sense of modernity, sleekness, boldness or even approachability in your words, a sans serif would make a great choice.

Web Fonts

Fonts eventually were translated from print to web, which were technically sans serif due to low pixel count. As screen resolution increased with denser pixel count, more detail could be added to web fonts. This took years though, which is why sans serif fonts are so ubiquitous on the web. However, today both serif and sans serif are used extensively on the web. It’s a great time to be a Typophile! As co-founder of Fonts in Use, Stephen Cole noted, “You can’t be a good typographer if you aren’t a good reader.” I would also argue that you become a more effective writer as you become more knowledgeable about typography. There are other font types including display and script. Display fonts are often custom and carry unique personalities.

The font used for the word Jump is considered a display font. This type of font would not be good to use in a paragraph at small scales. It is meant to be displayed at larger sizes. Logo and card design: Brian Collier

Script fonts originate from handwriting, both print and cursive and can be quite useful and beautiful.

A proper use of Script Font in a logo (wordmark). Custom Script designed by Brian Collier

However, if you use poorly crafted script fonts to express a very generic phrase or idea and apply it in vinyl on the wall of your home, I will fail you. This is simply tacky and you're better than that.

This is a poor use of a script font. It is illegible, the space between words is too great and it looks tacky. Yes, I know, this is the opinion of this chapter's author. I want you to know there are better options out there. Photo source.

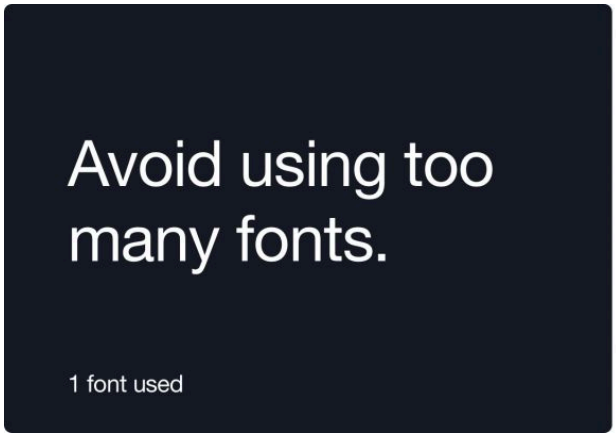
Here are some great resources for finding and becoming familiar with fonts of all kinds.

1. Typewolf: What's trending in type.
2. Google Fonts: A vast library of free fonts. It's hard to find a horrible font here.
3. Font Squirrel: Free quality fonts. Beware, not all fonts are created equal here.
4. Typographica: A blog for seeing how type is analyzed.
5. I Love Typography: Another blog for lessons on type.

General Rules for Using Fonts

Now that we've introduced where to find some good fonts, let's talk about the do's and don'ts of using them.

1. Don't use too many fonts. Our brains like simple. Our cerebral organ loves to find shortcuts to free up space to compute new ideas. Fonts help train our brains. Too many fonts force us to try to find associations with the font's use that may not be there.



2. Keep it consistent. This goes hand in hand with not using too many fonts. Of the fonts you do use, keep their usage consistent. This creates a pattern. Again, the brain functions on patterns. Good user experience involves establishing patterns.

3. Mix your styles. This follows the principle of contrast. Contrast is just one principle to help provide context. Mix a serif with a sans serif for best contrast. Mix fonts too similar to one another and it will only cause confusion. People need to be told what is important.

4. Don't be blind to the color blind. This is called accessibility. Can those who have color blindness still read what you've written? When using color, use this checker to verify there is sufficient contrast in the colors you've chosen.

5. Watch your weight. That's not a negative comment on body image. Fonts have weights too. Some are thin and some are thick. And yes, they are called weights. When you bold a font, that would be considered a heavier font. As a rule of thumb, don't deviate from 'normal' on body text, to ensure you keep text readable. Reserve heavier weights for headlines and emphasizing certain words in a paragraph (like the bolded words in this paragraph).

6. Be aware of the accent. Remember, fonts are like accents. They carry distinctive communication before a word is ever read. Take a look at some of these words in fonts that don't necessarily match personalities.

For example, "formal dinner" wouldn't usually be written in a casual, handwriting font--the font choice creates a disconnect. Or more interestingly, the tone of "Wrestling Match's" font is what most people would consider a stereotypical, girl-oriented, frilly font and might create a disconnect with some people who consider wrestling a beefy, macho, male-oriented sport. As you can see, fonts can even reveal societal biases!

When Bill Dawson was asked why we need so many typefaces, He replied, “Do we need so many books? Do we need another painting? Do we need so many songs? Do we need another movie?” The answer is yes. Type is what meaning looks like. It will add an extra layer of communication and intention to your writing. To use type well is to truly understand what you are trying to convey.

6.3 PRINCIPLE 2: SPACE

Space defines relationships. Basically, the amount of space between two elements defines the relationship between them. The closer two objects are to each other, the more likely they are related to each other. When designing your text, you must be aware of the space between letters, between words, between paragraphs, between headlines, and even the margins and gutters. Knowing how to utilize these spaces intentionally will communicate to your reader how to associate and process the information provided.

This is Dave Matthews of the Dave Matthews Band. He comments on spacing between words. Listen to his song "Space Between":

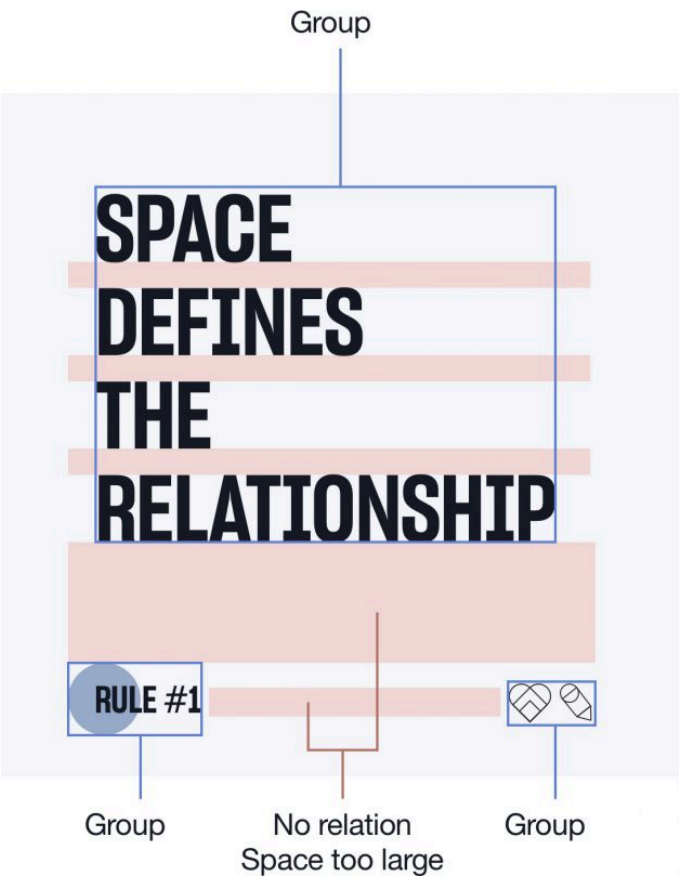
Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/Wi9HjkJ3L5Y

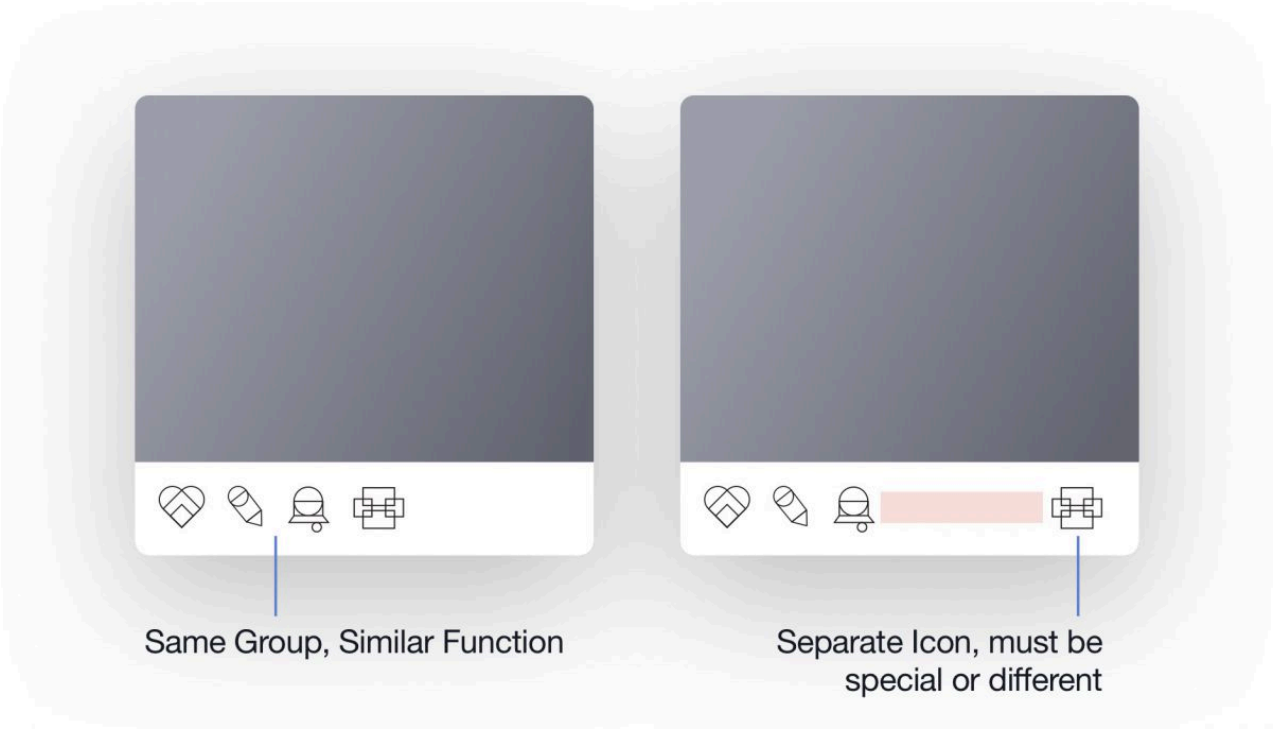
Thanks, Dave, for teaching us the design principle of proximity. :) How about now I just show you what I'm talking about. Ready? Here we go!

The small space between lines makes the whole lines look like a single group (leading)

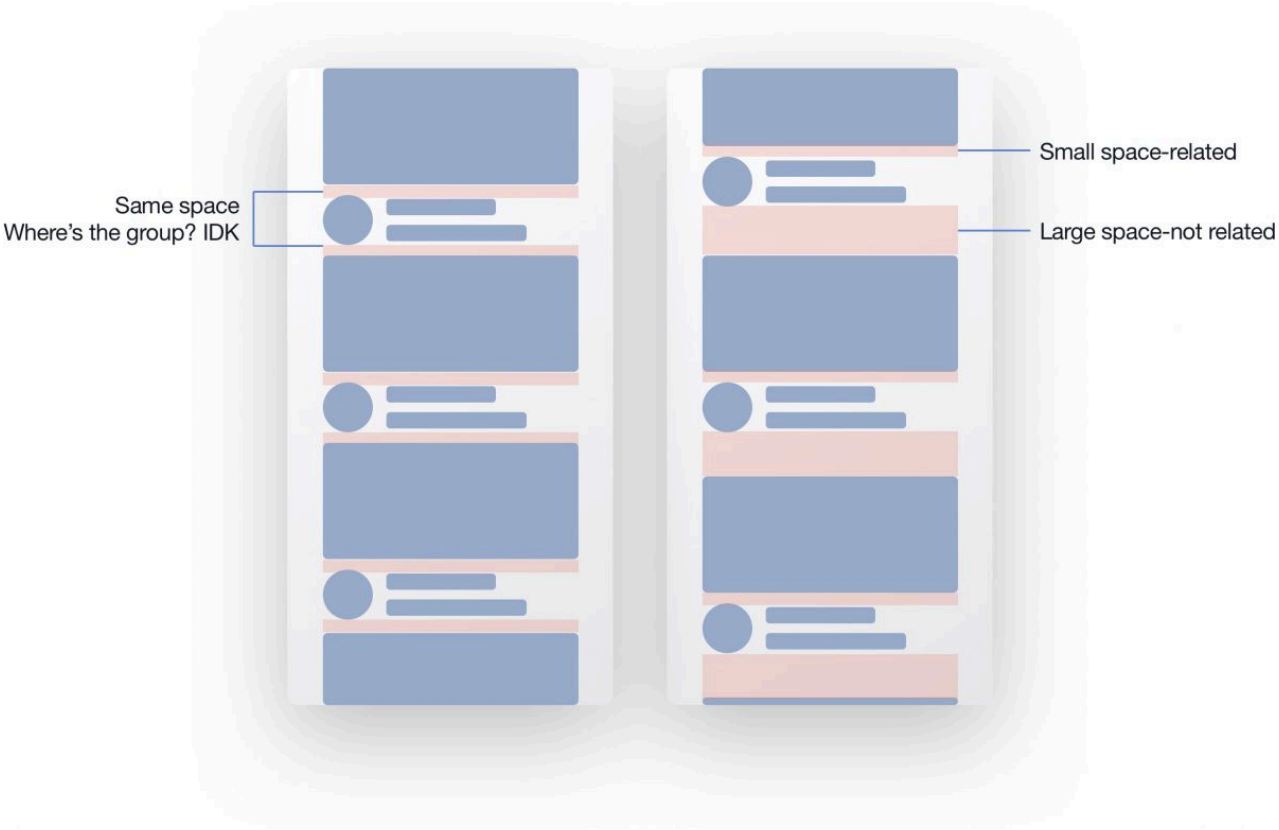
Too much space means no relation



Space can separate or connect elements. Icons on the card together make it seem like a group of actions. Icon isolated make it seem more important (Empashis) than the other actions

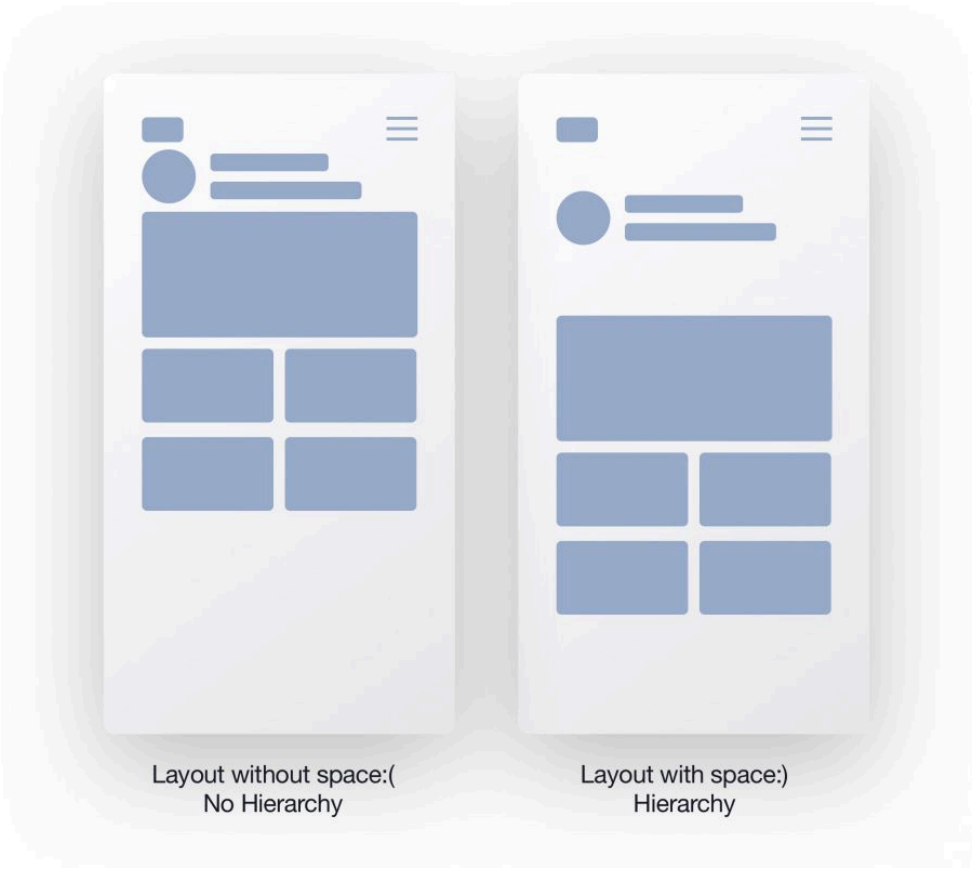


Space can add clarity instead of confusion.
Add space and it defines the relationship



Space can make things more legible. A general rule for space between lines (aka line height) is 130%-150% of the font size. For example, if I have a font size of 16 pt, I might want to set my line height to 24pt. Also, please set your body copy to 16pt. Your mobile readers will thank you.

Space can create hierarchy. Space can attract the eye to more important info.



Learn to see space first if you want to control it. Don't focus on the elements, focus on all the area around it and the relationships it creates.

Want to see the importance of space? Tryremovingit,amirite?

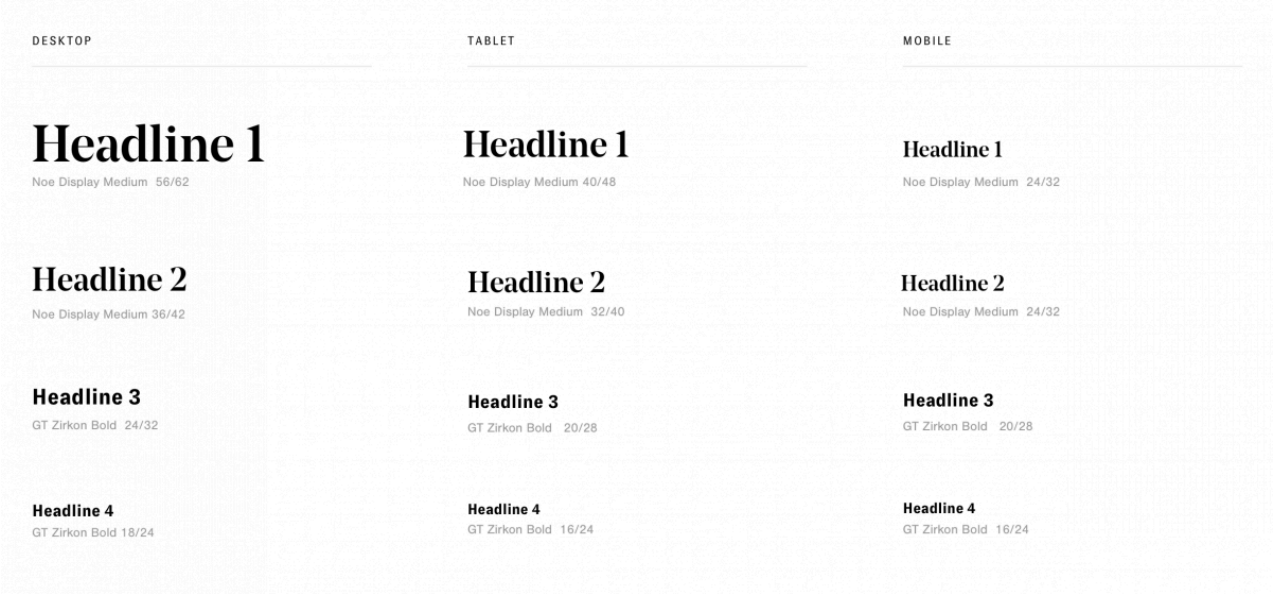
6.4 PRINCIPLE 3: SCALE

Size. Creating hierarchy is the process of using scale or size of multiple elements in a composition. In writing, you develop a hierarchy of ideas such as stories, chapters, paragraphs, and sentences. How will you visually treat these ideas to clearly communicate the separation or association of common ideas, or the ideas within a larger idea? Scale, of course. You thought I wasn't going to give you the answer? Come on, who do you think I am?

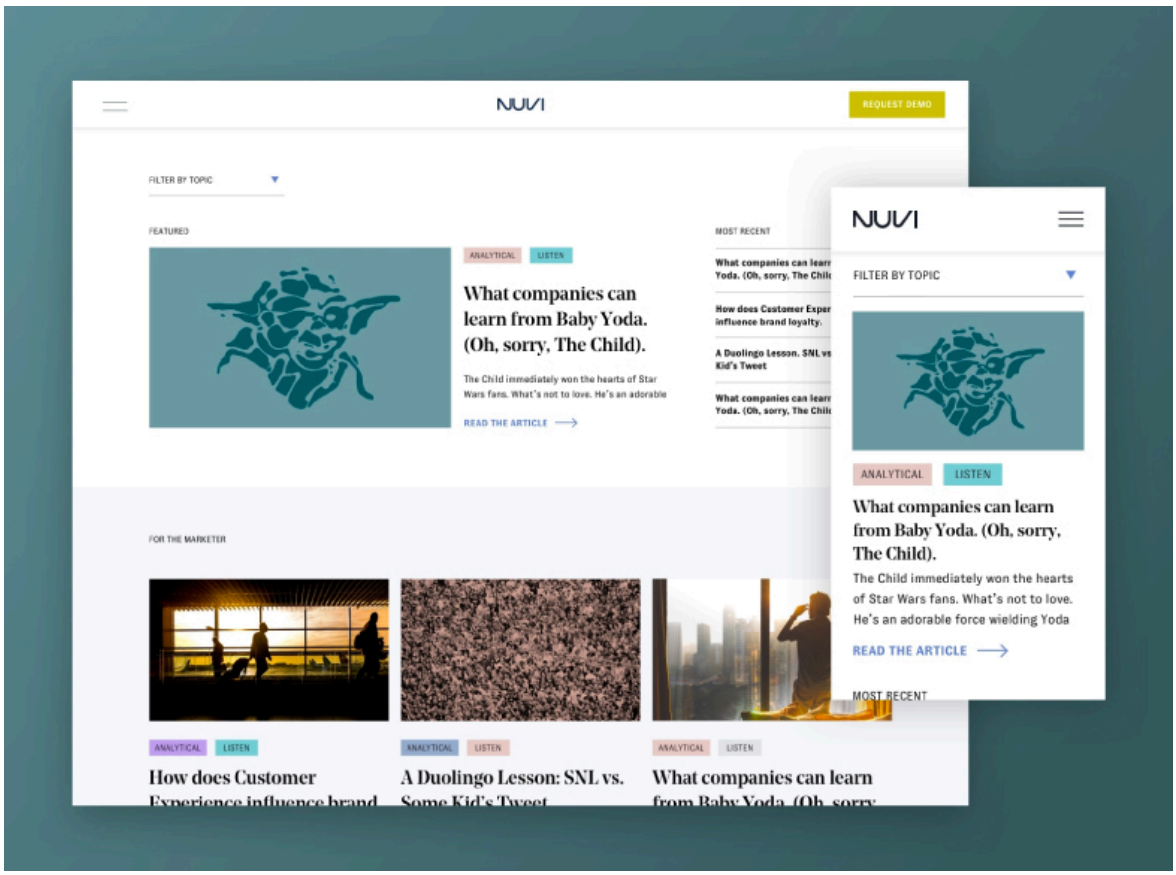
Headings as Navigational Tools

We've been trained to have shorter attention spans for reading. Therefore, depending on the what and to whom you're writing, you'll want to consider creating an easily skimmable document. You can typically do this by using headlines. Typically in website design, there is a hierarchy of headings used: H1, H2, H3, H4, H5. H stands for header.

Here's an example of the scale of each header.



Example of website typographic hierarchy of different sized headlines.



Example of multiples Headers being used in context. Layout Design and Yoda artwork by Brian Collier

What if words aren't enough? What if you need to communicate with numbers?

6.5 Communicating with Numbers

So far you've learned how to format and stylize your words. Words are just a collection of individual glyphs. A glyph is a character or symbol. Letters are glyphs. Numbers are also glyphs, as they are symbols for separate, distinct ideas. Here's an example of every glyph that has been designed in the Helvetica font.

Full Glyph Set for Helvetica Font designed by Monotype

Remember, English isn't the only language a font has to be designed for. Characters exist in other languages that don't belong to the English speakers' character set, but numbers are a bit more universal between languages. Let's dive into how to use numeric glyphs effectively.

Table and Figures

Tables and figures are common ways to showcase a numeric data set. According to APA Guidelines, tables are "numerical values or text displayed in rows and columns." A figure is "any type of illustration (chart, graph, photograph, drawing maps...) other than a table."

How to Choose

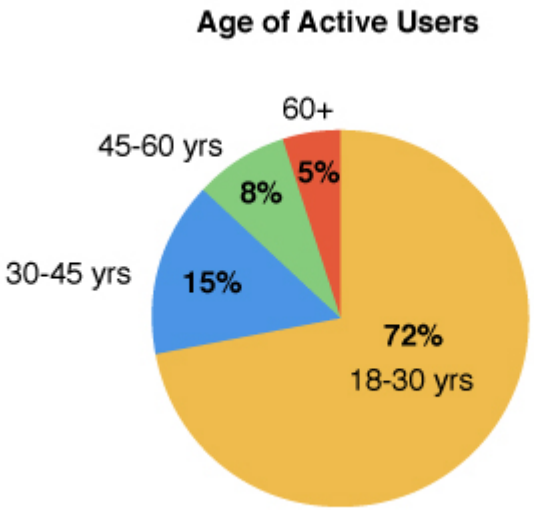
Remember, clarity above all. If it's hard to write, it's hard to read. If it's hard to display, it's hard to compare and digest. Do not use tables and figures to simply decorate your presentation. Decoration is not design because it lacks purpose or intent. The visualization of data should always punctuate the point you are trying to make with credible information.

Tables are ideal for showing raw data, or data that has not been analyzed in a way to imply a comparison or conclusion of relationships between data variables. Though it requires more analytical brainpower, readers can more liberally draw

their own conclusions from tables.

Name	Email	Age	Status
Name	Email	19	Active
Name	Email	39	Active
Name	Email	32	Inactive
Name	Email	29	Canceled
Name	Email	40	Active
Name	Email	29	Inactive
Name	Email	18	Active

Figures are ideal when visualizing data results that have been analyzed for relationships between variables. They come in the form of graphs, charts, drawings, photos, or maps. Figures tell more explicitly what the reader should deduct from the data presented.



Because figures are so varying, here are a few guidelines to follow when using them.

1. Pick the right graph

Here are a few examples of popular graph types and the pros and cons of using them.

Pie Charts

- great for categorical data.
- A circle is divided into segments, with each segment representing a category of data adding up to 100%.
- Not great if there are too many categories or the category percentages are too similar.
- Best used when you have 5 or fewer categories to showcase with greater variation in segment percentages.

Pictographs/Infographics

- Graphs for comparing data using pictures.
- Great for general audiences as they simply convey trends.
- Not great for scientific data as it's hard to convey minute differences in numbers.
- These graphs tend to generalize numbers to show larger trends.

Line Graphs

- These are some of the most popular graphs because they are easy to make and easy to understand.
- Line graphs are great when portraying change in magnitude over time.
- The X-axis usually represents time with data points plotted and connected with a line.
- The Y-axis can represent a number of data, but always when showing change in magnitude.

Bar Graphs

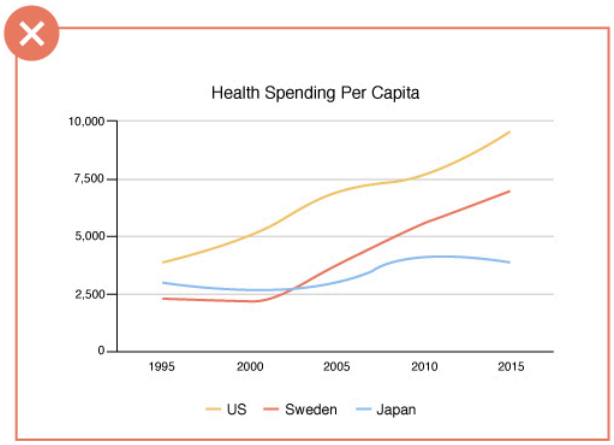
- These are similar to line graphs in that they show time-series data, but using bars instead of lines.
- Bar graphs are great for comparing data and can be displayed with vertical or horizontal bars.
- Vertical bar graphs are best used for time comparison and frequency data.
- Remember they typically don't leave room for text labels though.
- Horizontal bar graphs accommodate longer text labels.

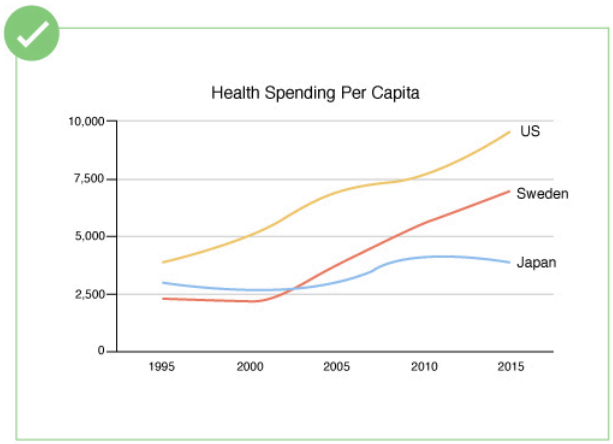
2. Don't use legends unnecessarily

Quote

"Remember kid . . . Heroes get remembered; legends never die." --The Great Bambino to Benny "The Jet" Rodriguez in the movie *The Sandlot*

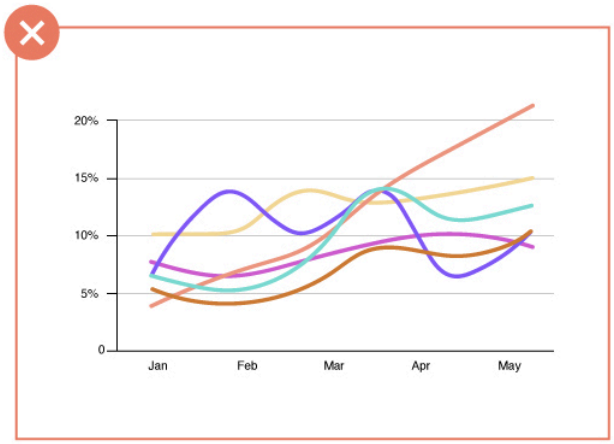
Well, Mr. Bambino, we say sometimes you need to kill the legend, especially if there is only one category. Legends require more eye jumping, more association, more mental work. If you have multiple categories, consider using a legend. Many times, you can label categories right next to the data, like in a line graph.

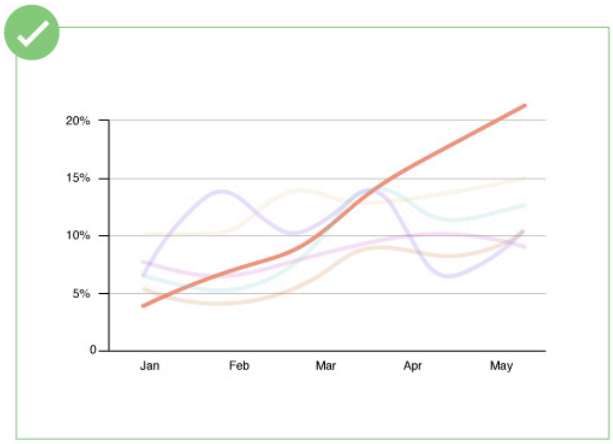




3. Highlight supporting details and suppress others.

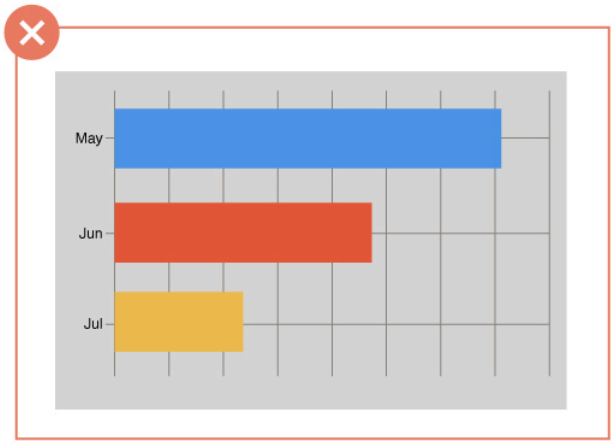
Highlights provide contrast. Mitch Hedberg, the stand-up comedian, once astutely observed, “I got highlights because I think some of my hairs are more important than others.” When working with graphs, it’s typically because you’re trying to make a point. If the data helps support it well, highlight that detail to contrast obvious differences in data comparison. Using color is a great way of highlighting data.

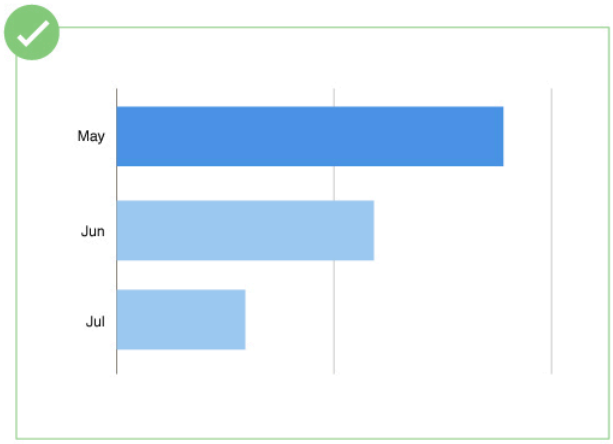




4. Don’t introduce unnecessary complexity.

Keep it simple. Don’t use more lines than necessary and don’t highlight frames, just the data.





Conclusion

It's not enough to be a great writer. You must be a great presenter if you are to increase the chances of people reading your words or understanding your ideas. Visual design is essential in accomplishing this goal. Remember, if it's hard to write, it's hard to read. If it's hard to look at, it's hard to read. Your job is to uncover the unseen and articulate it. Part of that is to learn how to choose good fonts, utilize space intentionally, and establish hierarchy of information by using scale.

Previous Citation(s)

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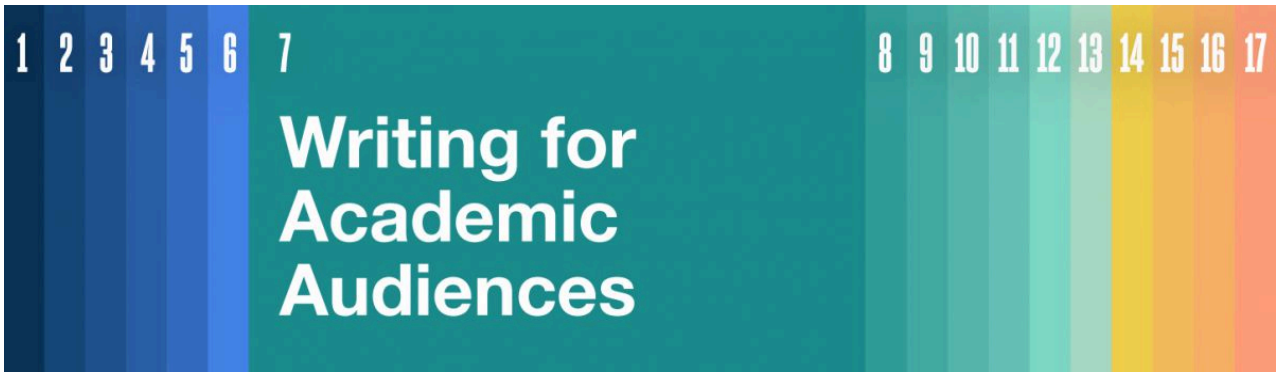
UNIT 2

ACADEMIC AUDIENCES

7

Writing for Academic Audiences

Cristie Cowles Charles & Julie H. Haupt



Learning Outcomes

In this chapter students will learn

- the difference between academic audiences and general audiences.
- how to observe and understand the discourse community of a certain field
- the characteristics of academic writing including
  - academic genres
  - style guides
  - scholarly voice

7.1 How to Write to Academic Audiences

Here comes the sad bride. Photo from Picqsels.com.

I promise, my husband and I didn't *try* to ruin his brother's wedding. In our defense, Andre and Emily [names have been changed to protect the people who are still mad] got married five days after us, and in all the hubbub with two weddings in the family, no one actually remembered to give us their formal wedding invitation. Let me add that my husband and I even decided to postpone our honeymoon and stay in the local area for a whole week just so we could attend their wedding, so we should get some points for that.

Well, we stayed in a town in the mountains that was a lot farther away from downtown Salt Lake City than we'd realized. So by the time we arrived at the wedding, everyone had been sitting there waiting for 45 minutes—and they'd just sent the oldest brother Mike down the hallway to do one last check to see if we'd finally shown up. (You've probably figured out that these were the days before cell phones.)

We ran around the corner in the nick of time, yelled out to Mike, and followed him, running our fastest down the hallways and stairs to the wedding even though I was wearing a fitted pink dress and heels and my husband was in a fancy, dark suit. We ran into the room huffing and puffing and looked around apologetically only to see all our family members—dressed completely in white. Apparently, Andre and Emily had decided it would be a beautiful idea to have *everyone* wear white to their wedding, but no one had thought to tell us—so there we were for the rest of the ceremony, looking like two ugly weeds in a field of exquisite flowers. And because we were late, we had to walk past everyone and sit in the front row, invading everyone's view including the bride and groom's. To this day, Andre and Emily think we ruined their moment on purpose out of jealousy for having our weddings so close together, but I promise it was just that we were ill-informed. You've got to believe me!

We stuck out worse than this flower. #weddingfail Photo by Rupert Britton on Unsplash

Why do I bring up this painful story, you ask? Because it illustrates the point of this chapter. Remember in Chapter 1 when we talked about discourse communities and the word "shibboleth" as an indicator that someone doesn't belong to a group? You guessed it. My husband and I obviously didn't belong in the "apparently-now-it's-okay-to-wear-white-to-a-wedding" group and wished we'd been better informed. If only we'd done our homework (read the invitation and looked at a map) and learned to say the proverbial "sh" in shibboleth before we were socially obliterated that day with mean glares and long, sad sighs in our direction.

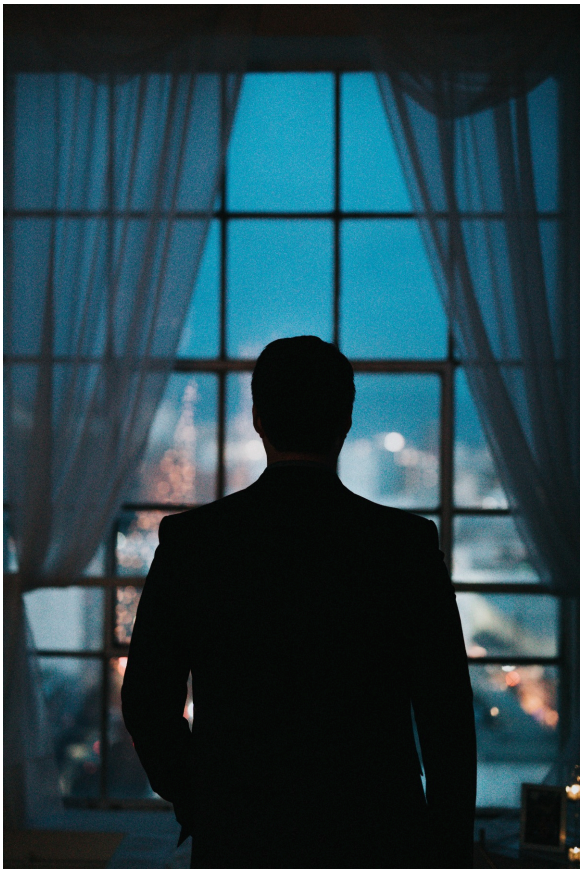
It turns out academic audiences care about style, too. If everyone else in your field uses careful, formal language and rigid organizational formats and you waltz in with casual slang and ideas that don't always make sense, you're not going to go very far. Now don't get me wrong—in academic writing, some diversion from the norm is tolerated, but you have to earn it.

Before developing this unique style, Picasso studied conventional painting techniques at the best art school in Spain. Violon (Violin) by Pablo Picasso.

Did you know the artist Pablo Picasso went to the best art school in Spain and learned how to paint very traditional paintings before developing his unique, convention-altering style? (Google "Picasso early paintings" if you don't believe me.) He first needed the skills and understanding of what the norm was in his field in order to break those conventions and create a new style in response. You, too, should spend time listening to and observing the conversations going on in your field so you can learn the lingo—the jargon—and understand the conventions people use. Not because you want to simply conform, but rather, so that you can understand your audience and know the best ways to get your message across and be heard. And if you want to change the conventions along the way, go for it. But you're more likely to have an influence if you first learn what the standards are.

It's All About Character

The trick to writing for academic audiences resides in the concept of Character. For more on character, see Chapter 2: Writing Tools. When you want to contribute to an academic discourse community, they have to believe that you know what you're talking about, that you're trustworthy, that you're logically minded, that you have good character. Some people have an advantage with things like PhD's and publications that indicate they can be trusted. But what can an inexperienced undergrad do to convince other academics to listen? I think the best answer is to act like a spy.



Learning about your field is a lot like being a spy. Photo by Nathan Dumlao on Unsplash

Good spies gather intel before going out in public. They listen to the conversation stream, observe, practice. Then once they're out in the field, they fake it 'till they make it. As they go, they learn the tricks and language that bring them to be accepted into a group. In fact, spying and writing are so similar that some of the world's best writers were spies and some of the best spies became writers (see Ernest Hemingway, John Le Carre, Ian Fleming, and W. Somerset Maugham, for example).

So start your observations. Notice the language and structure as you read research articles for a class assignment. Note the levels of formality in the scholarly articles and books you read in your field. Join LinkedIn and start following big names in your field. Listen to the way your professors talk and write. Keep a "Jargon journal" where you list words you notice are specific to your field.

Another way to learn is by doing—by writing all those beloved research papers you've been assigned in the past. It turns out all those assignments to gather reliable sources and use formal language were an effort to prepare you for academic writing. Can you believe the reason that your teachers have been assigning you research papers for years was not because they hate your guts but because they actually care about your guts? It turns out research papers are designed to help you practice the most important characteristics of academic writing. Let's talk more about those characteristics.

7.2 What Sets Academic Writing Apart?

I love this picture from 1962 of researchers collaborating at the National Cancer Institute. Photo by National Cancer Institute on Unsplash

Writing for Academic Audiences is also known as "scholarly writing" and is, therefore, meant to be read by scholars in a particular field. It usually involves research of some kind—whether it's written to record the data in an experiment (like a lab journal), or to request research funding (a grant proposal), to review what's been done in the field (a literature review), or to compose a final write-up of one's experimental results (a research article).

Another way to define academic writing is to talk about what it's *not*. It's not the kind of writing found in popular sources such as online newspapers, blogs, magazines, Instagram, or Twitter—those are all intended for a "general audience" or a "popular audience" composed of people in general, not in a specific field.

Here's a comparison of how writing for a general audience differs from academic writing:

General Audience	vs.	Academic Audience
Short paragraphs	vs.	Long paragraphs
Engaging, friendly tone	vs.	Serious, academic tone
Logical progression/light referencing	vs.	Synthesized claims, heavy referencing
Clever wording to encourage insight	vs.	Clarity to avoid misunderstanding

Focus on practical application	vs.	Focus on knowledge and scientific advancement
Passionate writing with conviction	vs.	Objective writing with solid backing
Focus on narrative and relevance to audience	vs.	Focus on data, methods, and results
Most appeals are to emotions and authority/character	vs.	Most appeals are to logic and authority/character
Hyperlinks or endnotes for references	vs.	In-text citations and reference lists that following a field's style guide

Academic vs. General Audiences

Give an example of something you've read recently that was written for an academic audience (like a research article, lab report, scholarly book, etc.). Now explain at least three ways the academic text was different than something you've recently read that was written for a general audience (online newspaper, blog, Instagram, etc.).

7.3 Shortcuts in Academic Writing

Scholars have developed shortcuts to make it easier to share information in their field. Haven't you always wanted a shortcut like this? #bookshelfdoor Photo by Stefan Steinbauer on Unsplash

As scholars have communicated over the years, people in specific fields began using shortcuts like shared vocabulary words (jargon) or uniform organization to make it easier to understand and/or access the most important information

in their field. These shortcuts have developed when a discourse community has needed a standard way of doing something.

Genre

A message in a bottle: probably not the best format for a letter of recommendation. Photo by Charlotte Noelle on Unsplash

Many of these agreed-upon shortcuts have now turned into their own Genres or expected ways of formatting a document. For example, if you ask your professor to recommend you to a graduate program, you expect them to write a formal letter of recommendation rather than, say, a text message or a message in a bottle. And, in fact, the formality and rigid organization of the letter of recommendation themselves signal to the audience that this is an official statement, that it should be taken much more seriously than a text message (or bottle message), and that the author has put significant thought and time into the document. The choice of genre alone is a sign to the audience of the document's context and purpose.

So just like you keep a "jargon journal," start paying attention to and noting the genres you see used most in your field as well. For instance, you might have noticed that the typical format for a research article follows the IMRAD Format: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. This format was developed by the scientific community to report research results because it makes it very easy to find information fast. Scholarly readers know they'll always find the review of literature in the Introduction section and a summary of the data analysis in the Results section. This also makes it easy to compare across several articles like to analyze the techniques reported in the Methods section of several articles. For more tips on reading and interpreting IMRAD articles, see Chapter 8: Finding and Evaluating Sources.

Peer-Reviewed Journals

As people began reporting on their research, they needed venues in which to show others what they learned. So groups of scholars created specialized journals where people could publish their research for others to see. Every field has many academic journals like *The Journal of Neuroscience*, *Progress in Human Geography*, or *The Annual Review of Public Health* where the main scholarly conversations are happening today—and most have very high standards. To keep their standards high, the editors of journals use the peer review process where all articles are reviewed by two or more experts who give feedback on such things as the quality of the research, the caliber of the methodology, the accuracy of the results, and even the style of the writing. This feedback then goes back to the authors who revise and resubmit their articles until they're accepted for publication. (I hope this reminds you of the revision process we talked about in Chapter 3: Writing Processes.)

Style Guides

Not that kind of Style Guide—style as in writing. Photo by Alexandra Gorn on Unsplash

These journals also brought about another shortcut for scholars: a set standard for the style of writing. When people submit articles for review to be published in an academic journal, they have to make a lot of decisions about the style of their writing. (See Chapter 5: Style for a thorough discussion of the stylistic decisions writers make.) How would you know if you should include an Oxford Comma—a comma in a list after the word "and"—or if headings should be bolded or if you need to include a title page and an abstract? Many of these decisions are arbitrary (they don't matter very much in the grand scheme of things), but not all of them are—and either way, a decision still has to be made.

Luckily, academic journals started publishing the answers to these questions in "Style Guides" so people wouldn't have to ask all the nitpicky questions. One of the most famous style guides came in 1929 from the American Psychological Association (APA). This guide has gone through many editions (the 2019 7th edition is the most recent) and has become the standard for most of the social sciences today. (For more information on style guides, see Chapter 9: Talking About Sources). The APA Manual delineates all the minute as well as the major standards they've decided on for

the social sciences including everything from a specific way to cite sources (year first, then the author's name, etc.) to whether or not to use the Oxford Comma (yes) to an entire section on how to avoid biased language. In fact, it was a big deal when the lastest edition announced a change from requiring two spaces after every period to one. (You can see how nerdy things can get over at the APA!)

And even though the APA decided on certain standards, that doesn't mean all style guides are the same. For example, the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook for journalists doesn't recommend the Oxford Comma while the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) (or the closely related Turabian style) does. Or the Modern Language Association's standards for Works Cited pages require the date to go near the end of the reference rather than the beginning like in APA. Even businesses and universities can have a style guide to keep things standardized in all their publications. For instance, here's a link to my university's style guide for how to use their logo properly. So my point isn't which style guide is better, but rather, that you should figure out which style guide is used the most in your field and follow that. It will provide many of the shortcuts to your discourse community.

And don't forget that teachers can have their own preferences when it comes to style. If you've ever written a paper and didn't know whether or not you needed a title page, then you know what I'm talking about. The best way to figure out what your teacher expects stylistically is to read the assignment instructions; they probably tell you which style to follow for citations (MLA, APA, Turabian, etc.). And if you can't find the answer, just ask.

Scholarly Voice

One final note on writing for academic audiences is to pay attention to the formality of your language. Again, much of what you need to know about writing style is covered in your style guide and in Chapter 5: Style. But I just want to emphasize one last thing that sets apart academic writing: voice.

Linguist Averil Coxhead at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand compiled The Academic Word List, a list of the 570 word families that appear most frequently in academic texts but not in general texts. Here's a list of the top 60 words from that list of academic words. Read through them and ask yourself why these words are used much more in scholarly works than in general texts.

> *Analyze, Approach, Area, Assess, Assume, Authority, Available, Benefit, Concept, Consist, Constitute, Context, Contract, Create, Data, Define, Derive, Distribute, Economy, Environment, Establish, Estimate, Evident, Export, Factor, Finance, Formula, Function, Identify, Income, Indicate, Individual, Interpret, Involve, Issue, Labor, Legal, Legislate, Major, Method, Occur, Percent, Period, Policy, Principle, Proceed, Process, Require, Research, Respond, Role, Section, Sector, Significant, Similar, Source, Specific, Structure, Theory, Vary*

Academic Word List

Choose 3 words from the Academic Word List (above) and explain why you think they specifically are used much more frequently in academic texts than in general texts.

I hope you can see that precision, clarity, and formality are favored in academic writing. Each of those words helps writers describe something very specific. You probably don't use the word "method" much in your daily life but when you're describing how you set up an experiment, it would come up frequently. I hope you're getting a feel for how much more specific and formal academic writing is than other kinds of writing.

Ready for prom, not a pool party. Photo by Nqobile Vundla on Unsplash

However, that doesn't mean that you need to lose your "voice" when you write for an academic audience; rather, you simply need to elevate your language, formalize it. Just as you wouldn't wear a tuxedo to a pool party, you wouldn't wear a swimsuit to the prom (at least, I hope you wouldn't). But no matter what you wear, you're still you.

The same goes for writing. You can still be you and write in a more formal style—it just means that you need to take advantage of higher-level skills like using vocabulary from your field, adding strong transitions between sentences and paragraphs, and incorporating reliable evidence. (For more help with this, again see Chapter 5: Style). But be careful; this sophistication can be done to a fault.

I had a friend in high school who would write with the biggest, most abstruse words she could find (like the word "abstruse") and put them in long, complicated sentences—and it paid off in the form of good grades on papers. Her high school teachers were impressed by her vocabulary and sophistication compared to her peers, but when she got to college, she was surprised to find out that it didn't impress her college teachers. That's because they could see through it—her writing was inauthentic. They could tell that she was adding complication to sound sophisticated but it actually gave the impression of trying too hard. This friend had to learn to keep her own voice and focus more on clarity and cohesion rather than complication. Similarly, to be a good academic writer, you need to focus on precise writing, not complex writing.

Can You Use "I" in Academic Writing?

Along with the tendency to be complex comes the tendency to obscure your voice through the Passive Voice ("It was done" rather than "I did it") and Third Person (using he/she rather than first person "I"). Although older professors still believe that you should not refer to yourself as "I" in formal papers, this standard has been changing. It's now accepted and sometimes encouraged in most fields to use the term "I."

7.4 A Word About This Textbook

Now before you go accusing us of talking the talk and not walking the walk, please note that we deliberately wrote this textbook in a casual, conversational style that's also decidedly not "academic." In Chapter 14: Writing for General Audiences, we'll talk in depth about why we made this choice, but we hope that by now you can tell that this textbook is not in an academic, scholarly, serious style. We would hate for you to model your academic papers after our casual style—instead, please recognize that when you're reporting on research, you have a different Rhetorical Situationthan we have in this book.

Your purpose in an academic paper is to make a formal, logical argument for your professor to show how well you've researched a topic while *our* purpose in this book is to teach college students about writing in an engaging manner that hopefully doesn't put you to sleep. So please look to texts in your field, your professors' assignment instructions, and the student examples in this book to help you gauge the right level of formality for your academic writing. But once you go on Instagram or Twitter, feel free to be as casual as you want!

Looking Ahead

In high school you did baby research. Photo by Janko Ferlic on Unsplash

The chapters in this unit about Writing for Academic Audiences revolve around analysis and research because academic writing usually revolves around—guess what? Analysis and research. In high school and in your first-year college writing course, you most likely learned how to write a basic research paper. You learned how to think of an argument, turn it into a thesis statement, find quotes that matched your thesis statement, and restate your thesis in your conclusion. Maybe you even learned how to write the infamous "five-paragraph essay." You probably also figured out how to write in a more formal tone. Those are all good skills you've honed. But they're baby skills.

Now that you're an adult, we want to take your research and analysis skills to the next level. The tragic flaw of typical research papers is that they actually don't teach you how to do good research. Instead, they teach you how to make an argument and justify your argument with quotes you find to support that argument. You don't actually have to know what's going on, what the state of the field is—you just have to find sources that match what you're trying to say. But that's not how real-world research works.

Now you should do grown-up research. Photo by National Cancer Institute on Unsplash

Mature scholars start their research by looking at what's been done, they analyze what's out there and figure out where the gaps and limitations are in current research, then they make their arguments and plans for future research *based on what they found*. FYI, this is something undergraduates are notoriously bad at.

So we're going to focus the rest of this *Unit 2: Writing for Academic Audiences* on skills that will flex the most important research and writing muscles you're missing. Chapters 8-12 will focus on finding and evaluating sources, talking about sources, learning about the genre of the literature review—a specific kind of research paper, and following the steps for creating a sophisticated literature review. Then in chapter 13, we'll show you how to propose a research project that will fill in gaps in current research.

So don't be like my husband and me and embarrass yourself in a big way; do your homework and get informed before putting yourself out there so that when you have something to say, you can confidently enter the conversation and people will not only admire your style, they'll listen to what you have to say.

Previous Citation(s)

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Cristie Cowles Charles

Brigham Young University

Cristie Cowles Charles teaches writing and literature courses at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. She enjoys sparking a love for writing in her students--or at least a love for having had written (it's always worth it in the end, right?). She thinks pumpkin pie counts as a vegetable, is married to a super hot mechanical engineering and neuroscience professor (yes, they exist), and adores her five magnificent children.

Julie H. Haupt

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8

Finding & Evaluating Sources

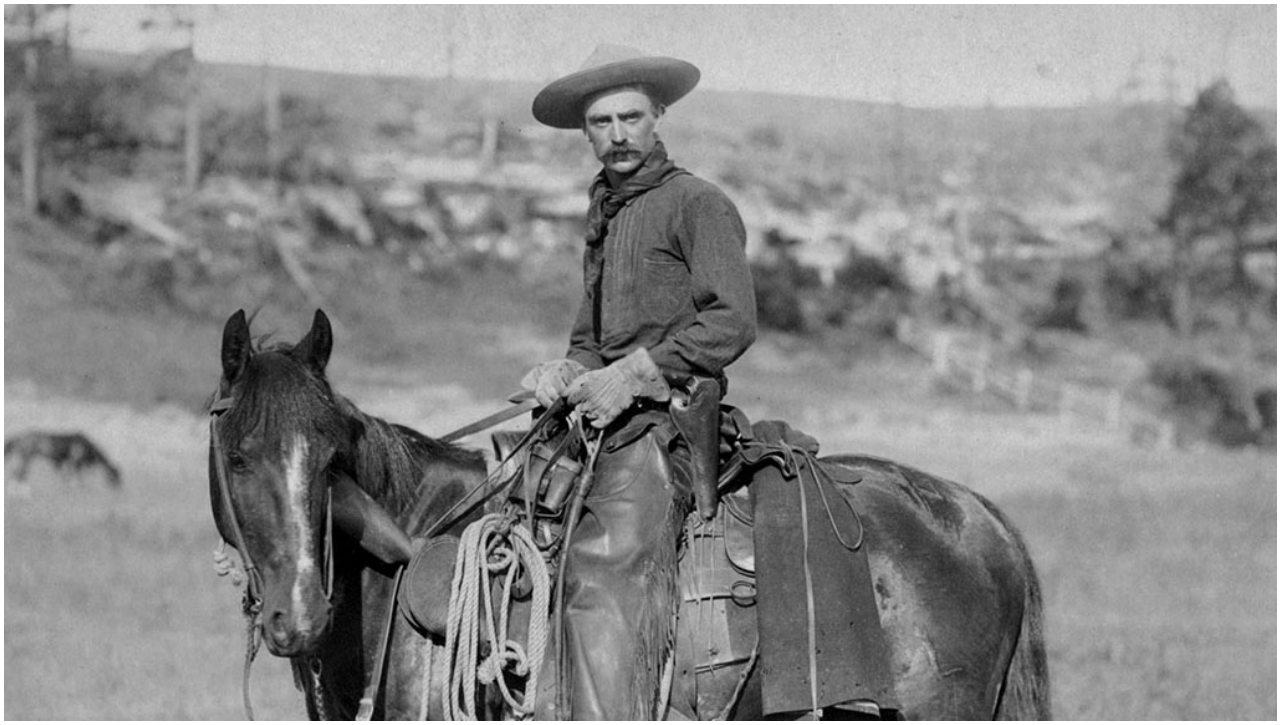
Cristie Cowles Charles & Elise Silva

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you will learn how to

- conduct background research on a topic
- select and narrow a research topic and create a research question
- utilize library and electronic resources to locate relevant information
- evaluate sources' reliability and usefulness
- take notes and create an annotated bibliography

Note: this chapter contains a Library Research Assignment as part of the practice for this section, so budget extra time to choose and narrow your topic.



Cowboys are tough, just like research. (Public Domain)

I live in the high desert mountains of the West surrounded by ranchers and cowboys. Cowboys and cowgirls are tough. Finding and evaluating sources is tough. So I'm going to teach you how to find and evaluate sources western style, like a cowboy or cowgirl. So you can be tough, too.

8.1 Why Research?

If a cowgirl wants to buy a horse, she first decides what kind she wants—there's a big difference between a hard-working quarter horse and a tall, speedy thoroughbred. Then she finds out who's selling, checks out the horse's condition, learns about its heritage, tries it out, and sees how it behaves in different situations. In other words, she does her research. We, too, spend our lives doing research—whether we realize it or not. For example, between Yelp!, Rotten Tomatoes, Consumer Reports, and Amazon reviews, it seems like we're always trying to find the best products and the best deals. When we have questions, we go to Wikipedia or ask Siri or Alexa for answers. Never in the history of the world have we had so many resources literally at our fingertips.

Quote

"Google is turning 18 years old this year. I cannot believe it was just 19 years ago that I never researched anything ever."

—Comedian Kellen Erskine, "Composed" Dry Bar Comedy on VidAngel

The trick is, how do you know you're getting the best answers to your questions? How can you tell if you're using the best sources of information or if the information you find is accurate, reliable, and up-to-date? These days you even have to ask yourself if the information you find has been planted by Russian hackers trying to influence your political opinion. The problem with a glut of resources is that it's become increasingly hard to find reliable information, which is

why doing good research is becoming a necessary life skill, not just a school skill. If you know how to conduct good research, you'll be more influential no matter which career you go into.

And so I give you **The Cowboy and Cowgirl's Guide to Finding and Evaluating Sources** with all the steps you'll need to find solid answers to your questions.

8.2 Step One: Choose Yer Horse (Select a Topic)

A Cowgirl wants to choose the best horse for the job, just like you should choose your best topic. (Public Domain)

My kids call their grandpa "Cowboy Phil" because he wears a big custom-made hat, likes to go on cattle drives, and taught my kids how to ride a horse. He also taught them that it matters what kind of horse you choose.

Quote

"You pick your horse based on the work at hand. But above all, you've got to really know your horse and make sure it knows you're the boss."

—Cowboy Phil

Now stop for a second and turn on this authentic cowboy music by Brenn Hill called "Equine" about the importance of horses in a cowboy's life. Keep this on as background music as you read on. It'll really give you the cowboy/cowgirl

spirit.

Watch on YouTube

Authentic Cowboy Musician Brenn Hill sings "Equine."

On a ranch, when the summer days get shorter and the weather turns chilly, that means it's time for the Fall Roundup. The cows pasture for the summer in the mountains eating the delicious grass and breathing the clean air. But once it gets colder, they need to be rounded up and brought back down to the ranch.

You can't round up cattle without a good horse, so the first step of a roundup is to gather all the horses together from the *remuda* (all the horses on a ranch) so everyone can collect their horses. Each cowboy or cowgirl has their *string*—or group—of five or six horses that each have different strengths and weaknesses. This string of horses has a lot of important jobs to do along the way—some are better at long distances, some are better at bursts of speed—but in the end, the horse you choose is the most important because it has to be your partner on your journey. As Cowboy Phil says, you choose your horse based on the task at hand. You consider your horses' strengths and weaknesses—their potential—and then choose the best one to take on the road.

How do you choose the best horse for your journey? Photo by Vidar Nordli-Mathisen on Unsplash

Choosing your topic for the journey of writing any kind of research paper should begin with similar consideration and care. You want to choose your research topic wisely; you don't want to invest a lot of time, energy, and resources into researching a topic for a long paper unless it has a lot of potential and is something you like enough to stick with for the long haul.

Quote

"A good horse costs just as much to feed as a bad one." —Cowboy Wisdom

In a typical advanced writing class, you'll probably be asked to spend a significant amount of time on this topic: you'll likely create an extensive literature review looking at what others have said about your topic. You'll perhaps write a proposal based on it and/or give an oral presentation or poster presentation explaining this topic to your peers.

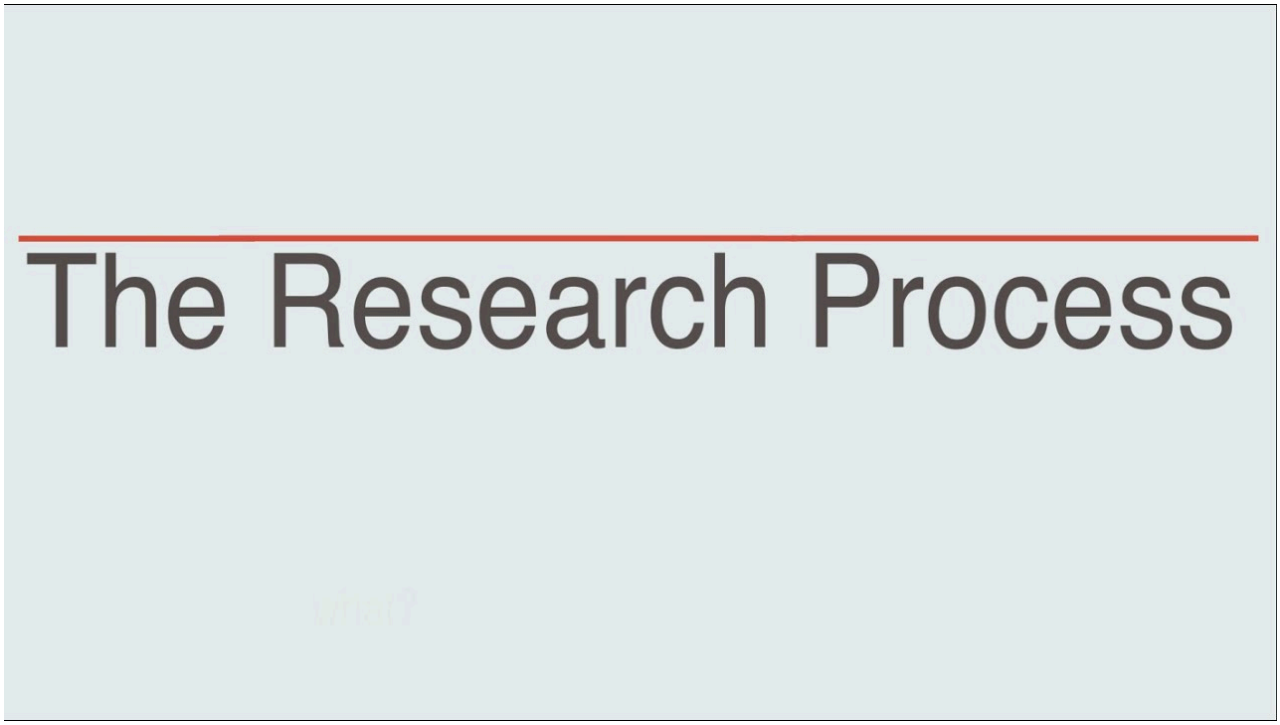
So find something you love, because it won't be worth investing in unless you really love yer horse, er, topic. So what's the best way to choose a topic? Just like on a ranch, you need to do some gathering work first. Gather your string of ideas to the corral to take a good look at the possibilities.

Background Research

First, get a birds-eye view of your topic. (Public Domain)

One of the most overlooked and underrated parts of the research process is doing background research. Students often want to just jump right in to finding sources on a topic—grabbing the first horse they see—but the problem is that no one can know how good their topic is—especially how wide or narrow it is—until they take a good look at the bigger picture.

Getting a bird's-eye view of your topic will help you understand the context of how your topic fits into your field in general and even how important it is to the bigger world. It'll also help you discover what questions are being asked, what the hot topics are in your field, and where the most promising research is going. All this will help you create a better research question and streamline your database searches down the road. Watch this quick video on starting the research process and then we'll talk about options for doing background research.



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/9vkpCvGxgqw

Brainstorming

Maybe you're like many of my students and don't even have an idea of what to research or don't really know where to start. Background research is also perfect for exploring topics and thinking about how your interests can morph into a great research question. For example, here are some questions you can ask yourself as part of the brainstorming process:

- Why did you choose your major in the first place--what topics most excited you?
- Can you think of any problems you've heard about in your field that you want to solve?
- What's something you recently heard about in a class that sparked your interest?
- What's a controversy or trend you want to know more about?
- If you think back on personal problems and questions you've had in your life, how might they relate to your discipline of study?

If you want to be more creative or free in your topic exploration, consider these next strategies:

Freewriting

An easy way to generate ideas is to do a good ol' freewrite—get out a piece of paper or open a blank document on your computer and time yourself for 5 minutes.

You can do a freewrite on anything from a post-it note to a napkin to a retro typewriter. Photo by Jen Theodore on Unsplash

Start writing about topic ideas and don't let yourself stop writing until the timer goes off. No erasing, no judgment, just keep writing. If you run out of things to say, then write, "I can't think of anything to say" until something pops into your head. The trick is to keep writing. You'll often find that ideas start to flow when you suspend judgment like this and just let whatever comes to mind flow out of your pen/keyboard. This is also a good technique to use if you get stuck in the drafting process. Studies have shown that freewriting unlocks the creativity of your brain and helps you think of connections you wouldn't normally make. In fact, some studies have shown it can actually improve your health (see, for instance, Murray, 2002), so try it!

Mindmapping

Mindmapping has also been shown to jumpstart your creative juices and help your brain make new connections. There's something about thinking visually rather than just linearly that allows you to explore relationships between topics in a fresh way. In fact, we'll revisit this idea later when we talk about generating ideas for paper organization.

Mindmapping can be done on a piece of paper (the old-school preferred way) or using mindmapping apps or software like Trello, FreeMind, or XMind (new school). In the middle, write a general idea for a topic in the middle and circle it. Then draw a line to branch off that idea and write something related to it, etc. Using different colors for different branches can help you visually organize your information. You might be skeptical of this method at first, but just try it. You might be surprised what kind of ideas pop into your head when you see them visually mapped rather than simply listed in a row.

Here's a mindmap for exploring the topic of Digital Storytelling. Photo by Robyn Jay (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Talking


I bet this couple is talking about some awesome research topic possibilities. Photo by Cristina Gottardi on Unsplash

As basic as it sounds, sometimes just talking out your ideas with another person can help you make connections and discover new possibilities. Find a buddy, go to one of your professor's office hours, or even ask someone out and talk about topics you're interested in. You can either do like the freewrite and explore ideas with little judgment or you can ask the other person to give you honest feedback. Sometimes you'll be surprised what you can come up with simply by articulating your ideas to another person and hearing feedback from them.

Wikipedia and Google

Wikipedia has more pages than all these books put together. Photo by Ajda Berzin on Unsplash.

Another good place to start exploring general topics is probably already one of your go-to sources: *Wikipedia*. In case you've been living in a cave, *Wikipedia* is a huge online encyclopedia containing pages that summarize millions of topics. A *Wikipedia* search can give you a quick sense of the history of a certain topic, who the majors players are, and what the sub-areas of research are. It can also lead you to related ideas and areas of research you hadn't though of before. *Wikipedia*'s structure can be helpful to you as well because it breaks down larger discussion into bite-sized sub-issues and links out to other related articles. Consider how this organization can help you choose and narrow a topic.

Because *Wikipedia*'s not a peer-reviewed publication, you can't use it as a main source for your paper, but most information on *Wikipedia* includes references to the original, primary sources, so you can use their references section to help you locate reliable, peer-reviewed sources that you can use in your paper.

Feel free to spell out the word "Google" in M&M's for extra inspiration. Photo by lalo Hernandez on Unsplash

Doing some general *Google* searches will also help you see what popular sources and commercial sites address your topic and if it's been in the news lately. Trade journals by professionals in your field are also a good resource. They might have a "magazine" feel to them but deal with specific issues within an area of study.

Libraries

Libraries are buildings that hold books. Try one! You might like it. Photo by Shunya Koide on Unsplash

Another option is to (wait for it . . .) physically walk into the library! Did you know people publish field-specific encyclopedias and bibliographies and even subject list books—rich resources that are often overlooked (because, you know, you have to walk into the library to see them). Do it!

These field-specific books can answer questions that a general internet search can't—questions like these:

- Which books and articles about a certain topic are the most influential?
- What's the current thinking in your field on a particular issue?
- Or what are some synonyms for specific search terms that can make database searching more fruitful (like finding out you should be searching for "emerging adult" along with "young adult")?

It's like finding a research shortcut just by taking a walk! You can usually find these in your discipline's section of the library in their reference section. Or you can ask any librarian to direct you to these and other rich background sources that are great for exploring topics in your field. Plus, you might get in a few extra steps for the day.

Note-taking

As you explore ideas about your topic, don't forget to take notes about which key words that up, how many references are listed, what sub-topics emerge, whose names you see repeatedly, and which areas of research seem especially fruitful. You'll thank yourself later in the research process when you use those notes and keywords in your database searching or if you decide you want to change your focus to a different angle or even a different topic.

> ***Quote***
>
> *"A good background researcher sketches out main arguments, sub-topics, and specific language that's popping up within a wider discussion during the background research stage. This language will become important later when the researcher opens up a database"*
>
> *—Elise Silva, BYU Writing Programs Librarian*

Stay organized. If you want to collect your notes into a giant pink heart, go for it. You do you. Photo by Adam Kring on Unsplash

Here's an example of how background research helped Justin, one of my students. At first, Justin decided he wanted to study the effects of exercise on diseases or aging. But then as he did some background research, he found that there were already tons and tons of articles on that topic. So he brainstormed other ideas, talked to his peers and professors about possibilities, and even sought the help of the Economics subject librarian.

After more exploration, Justin decided to change his focus to the influence of China on the economies of African countries. There were a lot fewer articles on that specific topic, so he knew it was a more fruitful place to put his research energy. Plus, by changing his topic early on before he spent too much time gathering sources, he saved himself a lot of time in the long run.

A Word on Changing Topics

Remember: the earlier you change your topic, the less work for you. If your horse is tired or you don't get along, that's okay. You can choose another horse from your string—that's why you brought them along. But the sooner you change the better. At a certain point, it becomes too late in the day and you have to just ride your horse to the end of the trail, tired or no. But by doing good background research now, you can find that great topic that will take you all the way into the sunset.

Do good background research now so you can ride your topic into the sunset. Photo by Helena Lopes on Unsplash

Background Research

Now it's your turn. Brainstorm some ideas and choose a general topic that interests you. (Note that for the purposes of this class, your topic should be related to your major.) Do some background research: read about it on Wikipedia, search it on Google, see if it's been in the news. Pay attention to what sub-areas emerge and who the major players are. Maybe do a freewrite or create a mind map to generate more ideas. Then write two or three possibilities for a research topic you want to explore further in this class.

8.3 Step Two: Saddle Yer Horse (Create a Research Question)

Like a saddle, a good research question is a helpful tool that can help you rein in your topic. Photo by Jonathan Cosens Photography - JCP on Unsplash

Research always starts with a question. It might not always be stated outright, but every time you look something up on your phone, you have a question—there's a gap in your knowledge that you want to fill. Once you have a general sense of a topic you're interested in, that's when you're ready to saddle your horse--formulate a more specific research question. Trust me, you want your horse (topic) to be saddled and ready before you get on the road or you'll be in for a bumpy ride.

> ***Quote***
>
> *"You have to find a better reason than 'it's an assignment' to devote weeks to your research and for your readers to spend time reading your article. You'll find that better reason when you can ask a question whose answer solves a problem that you can convince readers to care about. That question and problem are what will make readers think your research is worth their time." from The Craft of Research (Booth, Colomb, and Williams, p. 35)*

In academia and even in industry, there's a pattern to research:

1. Read what's been done on a topic
2. Figure out where the gaps of knowledge are (secondary research)
3. Fill one of those gaps with some kind of action that creates new knowledge—be it a survey, experiment, analysis, longitudinal study, product, etc. (primary research)
4. Publish the results of that action or create a prototype
5. Start the process over again

Your job right now is to do steps 1 and 2—the Secondary Research part of this process: read what's been done on a topic and figure out where the gaps of knowledge are. Then later you might even be asked to propose some primary research that could fill one of the gaps you find (although there most likely won't be time in this class to actually do the primary research, just to propose it).

Even this dog has a question. Photo by Camylla Battani on Unsplash

So in order to find a narrow enough topic to study and to be ready to go to the next step in the research process, you need to come up with a strong research question. You might be tempted to skip this step, but if you can take the time now to saddle your horse (by devising a narrow, specific research question), the next stretch of the research process journey—database searching—will be much, much easier.

Watch this quick video about research questions:

Watch on YouTube

Hypothesis

Although, we use the term "research question," it doesn't necessarily have to be in question format; your research question can be as simple as testing a hypothesis like this one:

> *"I expect that smartphone usage at a young age will increase a child's likelihood of developing anxiety."*

Will this child's smartphone usage increase his anxiety? Photo by Diego Passadori on Unsplash

Even though this isn't in question format, it's an implied question—we assume that by making this statement, you'll next try to figure out whether your hypothesis is correct. So really, your research question turns into this:

> *"Does smartphone usage at a young age increase a child's likelihood of developing anxiety?"*

A hypothesis means that you predict the answer to your research question will be "yes." You can create a more open ended approach where you adopt a posture of openness and curiosity like this:

> *"I wonder if a teacher's appearance has an effect on their students."*

The "I wonder" phrase is also an implied question because presumably the way you'll learn about this topic is to find answers to questions about teacher appearance and student learning. In other words, you don't have to stick to an exact formula when developing a research question, but you do need to have a specific area of inquiry in mind.

WATCO Question

If, on the other hand, you like to use formulas, one helpful way to create a research question is to formulate what my colleague Dr. Grant Boswell calls a "WATCO question." WATCO stands for What are the consequences of? Or to be more precise, What are the consequences of something (A) on something else (B)? This format can be very helpful because it forces you to narrow your topic—and I find students almost always need to narrow their topics more than expand them. As you will see as you begin to search databases for articles and books, the narrower or more specific your research question, the easier it'll be to find answers. Here are some examples of WATCO questions previous students have asked (they were assigned to come up with three possible questions).

Do you like formulas? Then WATCO Questions are for you. Photo by ThisisEngineering RAEng on Unsplash

WATCO (what are the consequences of) **childhood obesity** on:

1. Self confidence?
2. Adult health outcomes?
3. Society?

WATCO **narcissism** on:

1. Adolescent populations?
2. Adult populations?
3. Relationships?

WATCO **educational funding** on:

1. Student Performance?
2. Extracurricular Activities?
3. School Resources?

WATCO **meritocracy** on:

1. Social mobility?
2. Higher education?
3. Relationships?

WATCO **bilingualism** on:

1. Infants' differentiation abilities (Between the two languages)?
2. Cognizant skills as compared with their monolingual peers?
3. Infants' social skills?

WATCO **a high sugar diet** on:

1. Carcinogenesis?
2. Metastasis and tumor growth?
3. Cancer mortality?

Here are three different but related questions from one student:

1. WATCO dyslexia on the encoding processes?
2. WATCO early intervention with autism on ability to develop Theory of Mind?
3. WATCO speech/language therapy on patients who have suffered left-lateralized strokes?

As you can see these students are starting to narrow a large topic into smaller areas of focus. The more specific the WATCO questions, the easier it'll be for them to start the next step in the process.

Feedback

At this point, getting feedback can be very helpful. Seek feedback on your research question from your peers, your teacher, or other professors. It's likely that if they think something sounds interesting, it'll be interesting to other people as well. They can also give you ideas of ways you can narrow your topic or different avenues you can take.

Research Question & Feedback

Try to formulate three possible research questions based on the topic you've selected. If you want to use the WATCO format, you can choose at least one A term and three B terms or write three separate questions. Narrow your terms as much as possible. Post your own research question then comment on 3 of your peers' questions by clicking "Reply." Here's what to comment on for each question:

1. Rate your peer's questions on a scale of 1-10 based on how much you would want to read a paper about that topic.
2. Explain what interests you about that question.
3. Add suggestions for improvement.

Once you've gotten feedback on your questions, choose the topic that resonates the best with others and that you believe will be the most fruitful and interesting to you. Now you're ready to move on to the next stage: finding and narrowing sources (or in cowboy terms, getting the lay of the land).

More Resources

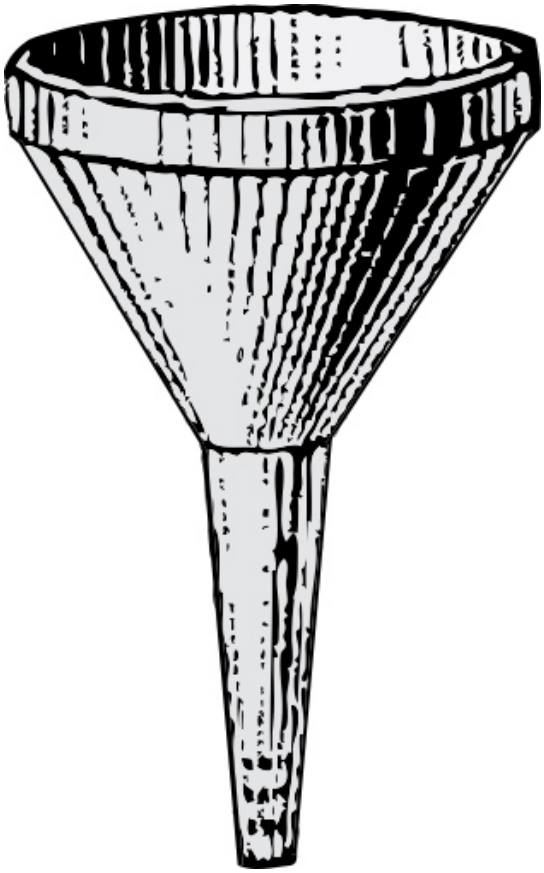
If you'd like more help doing background research or choosing a topic, watch Modules 1 and 2 in the iframe below (you can click directly in this frame like a website). https://ysearch.lib.byu.edu/

8.4 Step Three: Get the Lay of the Land (Search & Narrow)

In order to understand the state of your field on a topic, you need to step back and get the lay of the land. (Public Domain)

When people started exploring the West, they started with the big questions: How big is this country? Where are the mountains and rivers? What's the best path to the ocean? Then as people moved into certain areas, they narrowed their scope as their knowledge grew: Where's the most fertile soil in this valley? Where can I build my ranch to be out of the wind? Where are the best trails to take my cattle?

Researchers in every field also start big and get more narrow as they go. They begin by asking big questions, and as people make discoveries throughout the years, they narrow their scope to create new knowledge.



The progression of research goes from bigger questions to narrower. (Public Domain)

So the first researchers who discovered cancer asked the big questions like "What is cancer?" "How does it affect the human body?" But then as they began to answer those questions, they narrowed their scope to create new knowledge. For example, cancer researchers branched their research into looking at

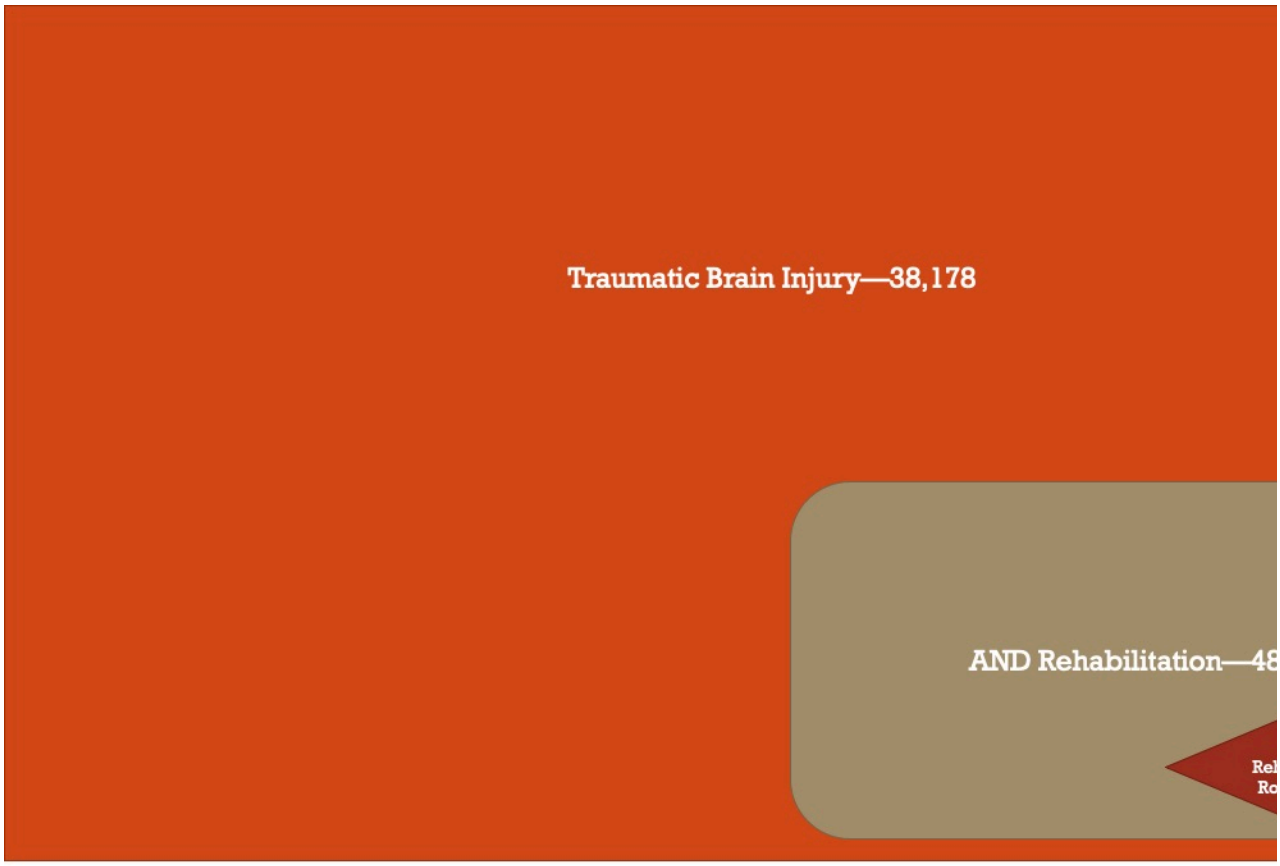
- different types of cancer (e.g., What is lung cancer? What is skin cancer?)
- or different populations (e.g., How does cancer affect people with low socioeconomic status? What about African American women?)
- or different age groups (e.g., How does cancer affect children? Does it affect people over age 80 differently?).

By adding new factors to their research questions, they narrowed their scope and continued to create new information.

Too many choices, like too big a topic, can be paralyzing. Use strategies to narrow your options. Photo by Megan Markham on Unsplash

You'll follow a similar path when looking for sources about a topic: you'll start with a topic or research question, then as you search for sources, you'll probably find that you need to narrow your scope until you find that *sweet spot*—a manageable number of sources to take a closer look at.

Here's a real life example: my husband is a professor here at BYU in Mechanical Engineering and Neuroscience. He studies Traumatic Brain Injury, but if he just types "Traumatic Brain Injury" into the Web of Science Database, he gets over 38,000 results: clearly too many to handle! Then if he adds another factor to narrow the scope--say, "Traumatic Brain Injury" AND "Rehabilitation"--he gets 4,800, still too many, but getting better. Finally, when he adds a third narrowing factor "AND Robotics," he gets 32 results--the Sweet Spot! That's a manageable herd. Later you'll be finding your own Sweet Spot, so stay tuned.

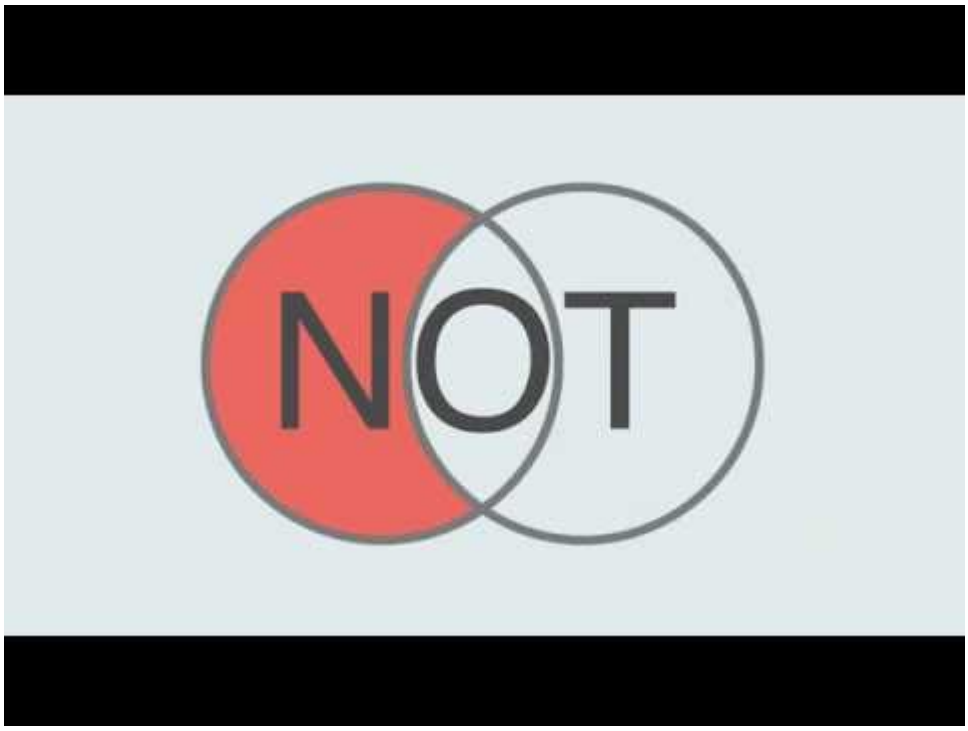


You want to narrow until you find the Sweet Spot of Research: 30-50 sources.

Finding Sources

So now it's your turn to get the lay of the land and start rounding up sources the way a cowgirl rounds up her cattle. Where do you search? If you're a college student, you're lucky! Your university library most likely gives you free online access to specialized databases, subject guides, and hundreds of other resources, and it's all free of charge! If you're not in college, you can still check out your local library and Google Scholar for many resources. Here's where to start:

Keywords



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/3Y0dceYcRH8

As you saw in the video, you'll need to use keywords to search for sources that fit your topic. Don't forget to use Boolean Operators (AND, OR, NOT) to get the best results. I hope you noted some good keywords as you did your background research—especially pay attention to the keywords listed after the Abstract of an article because these are the best terms for database searching. Remember that another good place to find synonyms for keywords is the field-specific subject encyclopedias mentioned in the last section. Sometimes if you can't find very many sources on a particular subject, it's *not* because no one's published on it but because you're using the wrong keywords.

Library Research Assignment Part 1

Complete the parts of this assignment to get started navigating the library website and searching databases for your research topic.

1. Write down your narrowed research question or topic (it should be related to your major or minor).
2. List 3-5 possible keywords that will help you research your Research Question/Topic.

Library Research Guides

Speaking of resources, I want to give extra attention to probably the best resource for preliminary research: Library Research Guides. Subject Librarians are librarians who specialize in a specific field of study and have a master's degree or PhD in that subject area plus a master's degree or PhD in library and information science. They really know their stuff. These subject librarians usually work at university libraries and gather resources about specific majors or fields and find the best databases and resources for locating sources in those specific fields. In other words, they do the heavy lifting for you, so all you have to do is follow their recommendations.

Here's how to do it: Look on your university's main Library website under "Research Guides." Here's an example below from BYU that is free for anyone to use. Click on the button "Research Guides" and read through the different subjects available. https://lib.byu.edu/

Now find your major or your field of study and click on it (you can do this right inside the iframe above). For example, if you're a Geography major, click on the *Geography* link, or if you're a Latin American Studies major, click on *Latin American and Iberian Studies*. If your major isn't listed or if your research topic is outside of your major, then find the closest subject to your topic. Once you click, you'll see tabs for finding the best types of sources like articles, books, statistics, etc. in that field. The top item in a list is the best and/or most used database in your field. There's usually even a picture and contact info for your particular Subject Librarian and a place where you can email them or set up an appointment in case you have further questions. They've thought of everything!

Let's take my student Justin as an example. Justin was a Social Science Teaching major, but even though his major falls under the category of Education, the topic he chose to research was the influence of China on African economies. Therefore, the Research Guide he clicked on was *Economics*. If you go to the Research Guide for Economics (see below), you'll find an amazing page written by the Subject Librarian with tabs listing resources for finding articles, books, statistics, and other valuable tips—resources you wouldn't have found simply typing your topic into Google or even Google Scholar.

If you click on the *Articles* tab, you'll see that in the field of Economics, there are several databases that are used the most: *EconLit* for articles more under the general economics umbrella and *Business Source Premier* and *ProQuest Business Collection* for more business-related articles. These databases keep your search inside the relevant field and weed out the irrelevant junk you'd find just searching on Google or even Google Scholar. The librarians have already done the hunting for you, so take advantage!

Library Research Assignment Part 2

1. Go to the BYU Library home page at lib.byu.edu and click on “Research Guides.” From the “Subject Guide” list, choose which subject fits your topic. List the subject and subject librarian (you might need to click on an extra tab like one that says *Get Help*).
2. List the top indexes or databases for journal articles that the Subject Guide recommends you use for this topic. (List 3-5)

Key Takeaways

You'll learn more about finding sources if your class attends a live Library Session with a Subject Librarian, but here are some of the most important takeaways:

- Always go through your university library website to search in databases (or even to use Google Scholar) because once you're logged in, you should have automatic access to thousands of databases. If you're not logged in, you could be locked out of many journals and other publications or be required to pay for them. If you ever have trouble accessing databases or RefWorks, contact your librarian or teacher for help.
- When you come across a perfect source that really fits your topic and you wish you had more like it, read the article's Introduction (aka Literature Review) section and check out their References page to see which articles they're citing. If they spend a lot of time talking about a certain article, you'll know it's important to their topic. You can easily search for those sources on your university library page or on Google Scholar. This is a great way to quickly find relevant sources.
- In a lot of databases, you can filter for “most cited articles” and “most cited authors” The ones that are cited the most are usually the most important sources to look at because they've had the most influence. Pay the most attention to those.

Also note that if you have questions, you can click on the *Get Help* tab to find the subject librarian's picture and contact information so you can request extra help.

Library Research Assignment Part 3

1. Do a thorough search of the Subject Guide. Explore several of the tabs. Look for resources you can use to get background information, bibliographies, statistics, and other research in your field. Note the resources you can use in future research projects. List three sources BESIDES indexes and databases that could help you in this project. Wise students use specialized background sources as well as articles and books during the research process.

2. What is a new resource that you learned about in this search?

Finally, lest you think that Subject Guides are only helpful for doing research in your field, I want you to take some time to explore a subject totally unrelated to your major or research topic so you can see what's out there. In your personal life, you'll probably need to research topics that you've don't know anything about, so take a few minutes and see how much you can learn.

Library Research Assignment Part 4

Spend a few minutes researching a subject guide in a field very different from your major. Turn up your curiosity, open up tabs, and browse. List two things you learned in your browsing.

Now you're ready to get started on your search for sources. If you're lucky, your class will be meeting with a Subject Librarian. Even if not, you can try contacting a subject librarian at your library. Bring your narrowed research question, your list of keywords, and the databases you plan to explore. It's helpful to try some preliminary searches with your keywords before this meeting so you know generally how many sources are available on your topic and whether you need to narrow your scope (which is most likely). If you still have too many sources appearing, you can narrow your search by adding more factors (AND) or by leaving out some results (NOT). If you use OR, then that will expand your search, but that can be helpful if there is more than one accepted term for one of your keywords.

Your goal in the end will be to find that sweet spot where you have just the right-sized herd. For a literature review where you'll probably need 15-20 sources in the end, I tell my students to gather about 30-50 sources to take a closer look at. You'll inevitably throw some out once you read them more thoroughly, so this way you can still have enough in the end. For a proposal or an infographic assignment, you might only need 5-10 sources, so gather about 20 to start with. Catch my drift? Bring any questions or problems you've had in your preliminary searches to your meeting with the Subject Librarian, and you should be ready to ride.

More Resources

If you still feel lost or would like more detailed guidance about finding sources or evaluating what you find, you can review Modules 3 and 4 here (scroll down). https://open.byu.edu/-mia

8.5 Step Four: Round 'Em Up (Gather & Annotate)

Now's the time to gather your herd and decide which sources are the best. (Public Domain)

Now that you've set your sights on the sweet spot (usually between 30-50 sources), you want to start gathering like a good cowboy. Don't just randomly grab whatever you see—you need to be selective, look at many, but only gather the best sources. The first step is to make sure you have a good rope—in other words, the right tools.

Grab Yer Rope

> *"A Cowboy's most important tool is his rope." —Michele Morris in The Cowboy Life (p. 71)*

If you don't already have a RefWorks account (or other citation software), now's the time to get one. Citation Software is an easy way to save articles and other sources you find in one electronic location. The beauty of doing this is that once you've incorporated your sources into your paper, you can quickly create a *References* list from the software. Although you'll still need to double-check the entries it generates (*always* double-check!), this will still save you a lot of time. You can also use it to organize your sources and even save .pdf versions of them in your account.

There are many options for citation software, so if you have one you already know and use, you can stick with that. Some options are EndNote, Zotero, Mendeley, EasyBib, and Citation Machine. If you're a BYU student, you have free access to RefWorks, and the library has made it very easy to save items straight to your RefWorks account, so I suggest you start there.

Here are instructions on **how to set up your own RefWorks Account**: https://open.byu.edu/-oTid

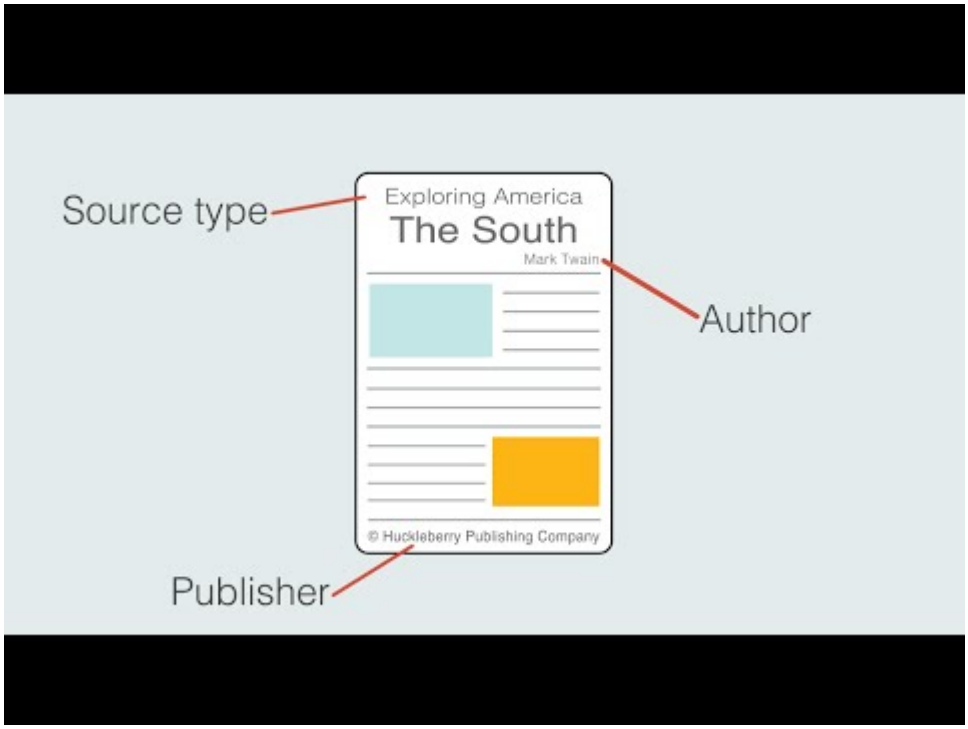
Here are instructions for **sending documents to RefWorks**: https://open.byu.edu/-hyrH

If you'd like more instruction on how to use RefWorks. here's a nifty **playlist of tutorial videos** on YouTube: https://open.byu.edu/-QJM

Should you Read It?

Now comes the process of reading and evaluating your sources and deciding whether they fit your paper or not. You don't want to waste time reading articles you obviously won't need. Here are some things to quickly consider to help you decide if you should go deeper into an article. (We'll talk more about this in the next section.)

Is it credible?



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/ioRGnTOqFMY

Is it reliable and relevant?

Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/4-I8vNdNlnI

How to Read Online

Even cowgirls read online. Photo by Sincerely Media on Unsplash

Reading research online is very different from reading print sources; however, more of us are reading online than ever before. Before you whip out those articles, make sure you understand how to mentally prepare yourself for the online reading experience. If you're reading an e-book or an academic article in PDF format, make sure to create a helpful reading environment for yourself by mitigating distractions, and spending a pre-determined length of time reading/annotating before jumping to the next task. Screens distract us, but deep reading, the kind you need to do when researching, does not work when you're distracted. Turn off your phone, and concentrate.

You can also take advantage of software that allows you to Annotate (write notes directly on) articles and take notes as you go. You can do this by hand or digitally. Hypothes.is provides pretty cool software that allows you to write notes directly on online webpages and articles and also share your annotations with peers or others.

How to Read a Journal Article

Finding sources is different than understanding them—especially because academic jargon can make these texts harder to access than than what you're used to reading. Whether you're reading an academic article or an academic book, make sure you're strategic in your approach to reading. Good researchers don't read articles cover-to-cover, so it's important to learn how to approach a source so you don't waste precious time.

Reading academic sources can be frustrating. Use smart strategies. Photo by Siora Photography on Unsplash

First, as you're searching, look only at titles and abstracts to figure out which sources are the most relevant to your topic. Sources don't need to address all aspects of your topic to be relevant, but they should address at least one aspect that relates. When you find a source you want to take a closer look at, mark it by adding it to a RefWorks list or recording it somehow. Then don't just read straight through each article you find—that will take hours and is extremely inefficient. Instead, follow this advice from an expert:

BYU Professor Dr. E. Jeffrey Hill from the School of Family Life spoke with Wes Burr (one of the most prolific authors in the family studies field) about how to efficiently read journal articles. He offered the following suggestions (used with permission):

1. "First, read the title carefully. The author(s) likely spent many hours deciding on a title. Try to get the most understanding out of it that you can.
2. Next, read the abstract. It should contain about 50% of what you need to know from the article. Have a sheet of paper ready and draw out all of the relationships mentioned in the abstract, so you get a conceptual idea of what is going on.
3. Now read the first paragraph of the introduction. Much of what they couldn't fit into the abstract will be in the first few paragraphs of the introduction.
4. Next read the Conclusion/Summary. This should be the take home message of the article and will give you an idea of the main points.
5. After reading the Conclusion/Summary, read each heading and first sentence of every section. You may read more if something seems particularly interesting. You may also look at figures and tables to see a succinct summary of results.
6. Next read the entire discussion section. This is where the author tells what the important findings were and the meaning of those findings.
7. Finally, if you have any time left, read the rest of the introduction to get a better idea of the background.

You almost never need to read the methods or results sections in their entirety unless you have a specific reason like if you're setting up an experiment using similar methodology (though it can be helpful to briefly look over any tables or figures). The idea is to be efficient and recognize which aspects of the article are relevant to your topic. Throughout the process, highlight key ideas and take notes. And always record which source a quote or idea comes from because you'll need that information later."

Remember that many of the conclusions any given author makes will be questioned by another source, so it's fine if you don't agree with what the author says—you simply need to understand the main points and how their article relates to your research and the other sources you've read.

Note-Taking

One of the most important aspects of cowboy/cowgirl life is keeping good records. It's crucial to know how many cows you have and which ones are the best.

Quote

"Record-keeping is as much a part of ranch life as roping and riding." —Michele Morris, author of The Cowboy Life (1993, p. 147)

Just like there's an art to rounding up cattle, there's an art to sorting through sources. The goal of annotating and note-taking is for you to self-regulate—or make sure you're understanding the piece while you're reading it—but it's also to create a helpful list that you can consult later as you're writing your paper. One of the best strategies to make your life easier is to take notes as you go. You can take notes electronically on apps like Trello, on paper, on index cards, or even go old school and print out articles and highlight and write directly on them. No matter the method, you need to stay organized and be sure to keep track of which sources belong to which notes.

While simple highlighting might be your preferred method of annotating, it doesn't tell you much about the content of what you're reading. Focus on summarizing and noting what will be helpful as you return to the article later in the writing process. For example, if you've recorded the article's major findings as you go, it'll be much easier to sort through all your sources later when you're trying to find a detail you remember reading but don't remember where. Or if one researcher's methods are similar to another's, make note of that so you can compare and contrast them later. If you know you'll be writing a certain kind of paper like a Research Grant Proposal or a Literature Review, then keep in mind the goals of that assignment as you go. (For example, see the section on note-taking in Chapter 11: How to Write a Literature Review).

Color-coding your notes will keep you organized and save you time later. Photo by You X Ventures on Unsplash

One of the best ways to stay organized (especially if you'll be writing a Literature Review on this topic in the future), is to use a color-coding system where you assign one color to each source you've gathered. Then as you read that source, summarize the most important points in your own words. As you write your summaries, record them individually and use that source's assigned color—either by writing it on a colored card/paper/post-it note, writing with different colors of ink, or if you're using electronic software, by tagging all your notes with the assigned color. This will also help you later as you try to compare or synthesize sources. It's true that you can just copy and paste good quotes as you go, but trust me that summaries will be the most valuable notes you take. Don't forget to record which page each summary/quote came from so you can easily cite it later.

Should you accept or reject it?

Lest you think that you need to keep every source you find, watch this tutorial to see how to decide whether to accept or reject a source:

https://open.byu.edu/-iMg

Write an Annotated Bibliography

One of the most useful forms of note-taking is writing an Annotated Bibliography. Your teacher might ask you to do this in preparation for writing a longer paper. Even if it's not required, an Annotated Bibliography can be an easy way to keep track of the most important information from sources you find.

You already know the definition of a bibliography (a list of the sources you use in a paper, also known as a References page). To “annotate” simply means to summarize, comment on, or explain more about something (especially a text). So an annotated bibliography is a bibliography that also includes a summary and/or evaluation of each source. The

annotated bibliography is so helpful that it has become a legitimate genre on its own: you can find formal annotated bibliographies on key topics published in many academic journals.

An annotated bibliography may seem like busy work, but it's actually a really important part of any research writing process. If done well, it helps you to gather, cull, and organize source material, get it cited correctly, and evaluate its quality. It also helps you make connections between sources and practice the art of summary and synthesis. This helps you begin to put all of these sources into conversation with one another before you actually start to compose.
Recent research[1] has shown that college students have major difficulty *summarizing* articles and books (as opposed to simply paraphrasing or quoting from them). (See Chapter 9 Talking About Sources.) Summary is an important skill, and writing an Annotated Bibliography will give you fantastic practice summarizing sources. The beauty of this is that you can also use those summaries later when you write your paper and want to refer to a source. It will also help you keep track of which sources addressed which topics. In fact, if you are assigned to write a Literature Review (which you probably will be in this class), you will use summary almost exclusively.

You might also analyze and evaluate the sources in your Annotated Bibliography. These evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of a source as well as any connections you make to other sources will help you see the bigger picture (the lay of the land) as you write. This will also come in handy as you write your paper because you can incorporate your analysis into your paper as well.

Keep the big picture in mind as you write your annotated bibliography. Here's a good explanation of what your end goal is: to eventually synthesize your sources.

Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/7r5bQ5ncbyQ

How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

Generally, these are the steps for writing an Annotated Bibliography:

1. Write the source alphabetized and in its full reference format (follow the appropriate documentation style such as APA, Turabian, MLA, etc.). For more help on citation formats, see Chapter 9: Talking About Sources.
2. Write a short paragraph (5-7 sentences)

    a) summarizing the source,

    b) evaluating its strengths and weaknesses, and

    c) explaining how it's relevant to your specific topic.

For more specific information on how to best summarize sources, see Chapter 9: Talking About Sources

Additional Resources

If you'd like more guidance on writing an annotated bibliography (including examples), see Purdue Online Writing Lab's Guide to Annotated Bibliographies (scroll down):

https://open.byu.edu/-tBF

[1] Several internal BYU studies as well as R.M. Howard, T. Serviss, & T. K. Rodrigue. (2010). Writing from sources, writing from sentences. *Writing & Pedagogy, 2.2,* 177-192.

8.6 Step Five: Corral 'Em (Analyze & Evaluate)

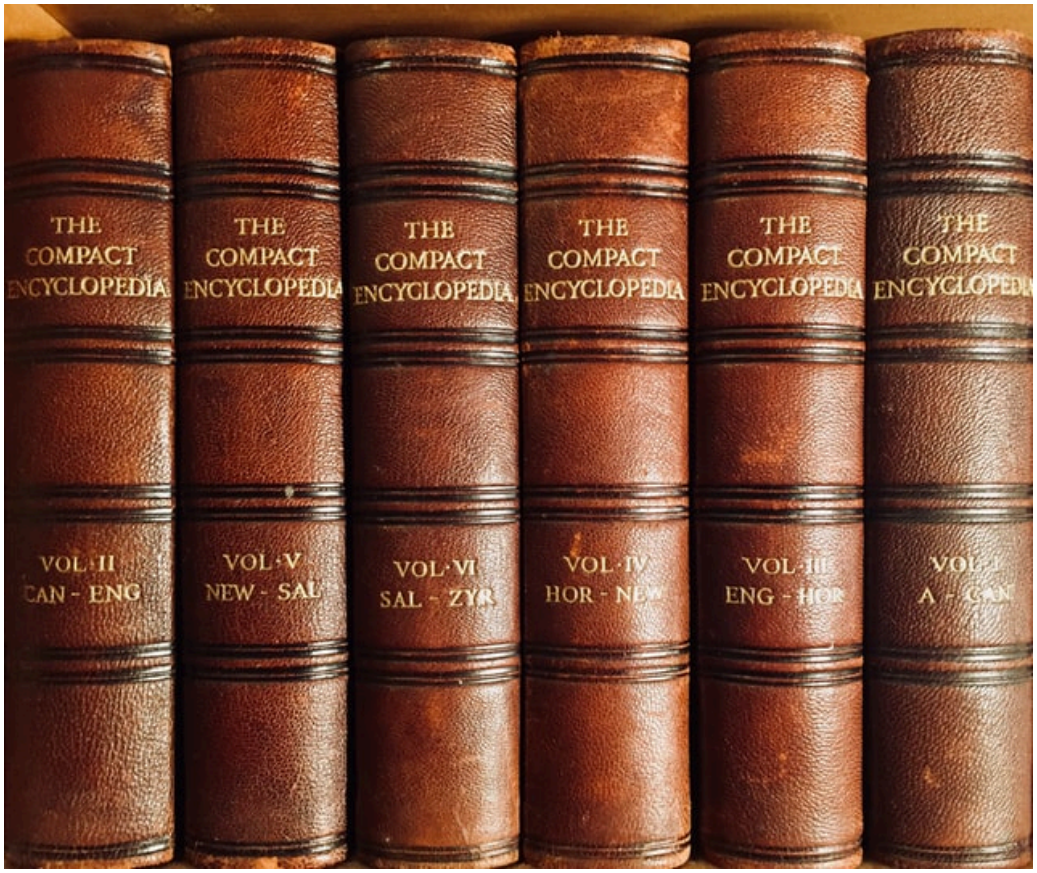
Corralling your cattle is the last step in your research roundup. (Public Domain)

Corralling cattle is an exhilarating practice that requires both quick thinking and strong skills on the part of the herder. For a cowboy or cowgirl to do their job right, the cattle must be found, rounded up, inspected carefully, earmarked, and then corralled—much like your sources.

Evaluate Sources

Why is this an issue?

Why do you even need to evaluate information? In the olden days (not that long ago, actually) there were texts that everyone agreed were authoritative. Maybe your parents own some old encyclopedias that they've displayed on a bookshelf. These were pretty much accepted as standard texts—you could look at them and trust the information that was printed.



In the past, encyclopedias were simply accepted as good sources of information. We can't say as much for everything published on the internet. Photo by James L.W on Unsplash

Then came the internet. So much information began to be produced, it was hard to know what was credible. This has created civic debates about who believes what and what information (as people, a nation, and as communities), we should or shouldn't believe. One thing that is good about the way information is produced today is that it allows for people from all walks of life, and from all over the world to have a voice and to share it online. It's a way of democratizing access to, and the sharing of, information, points of view, and narratives that have been left out of mainstream discussions in the past.

But there is a downside: there are no longer gatekeepers of information—the editors, librarians, and experts who would fact-check information before it was produced into the encyclopedias of yester-year. This means that no matter what information you are consuming, you need to become information savvy yourself, and learn good fact-checking behaviors. This is especially true when engaging with information online, which we'll get to later in this section.

How do I evaluate scholarly material?

Scholarly material is, by its very nature, refereed before it is published. This is why academics hold it up as the "gold standard" of academic communication, and many journals engage in what is known as the Peer Review Process. Like when you peer review in class, scholars engage in a similar practice, except for instead of having a classmate review their work, academics have their work reviewed by experts in their disciplines who recommend the work be published, revised, or not published at all. This rigorous exercise is put into place to ensure strong standards in academic communication. You can find peer-reviewed journal articles through most major databases, and if you are ever confused as to whether something is peer reviewed or not, make sure to look up the journal itself online, where you can usually tell in its description whether it is the result of peer review practices.

But just because something is peer reviewed doesn't mean it's the best material for your information need. Depending on your topic, you may need to find peer reviewed material that is published within a certain time frame. It is generally accepted that the more recent the publication, the better, but this really depends. The academic conversation moves rapidly in some fields, like technology and media, and you'll need to find information published in the last 3-5 years for it to feel current. Other historical topics might allow for information to be older before it becomes dated. Seminal texts—or texts that are really important to the field—might have been published quite a while ago, but they may still be relevant to your conversation and are worthwhile to consult.

Relevance is also an important factor in determining whether scholarly information is good for your information need. This requires you to have a good sense of what you are writing about and why you are writing about it—so you can gather the best information out there. Some students fall into the "good enough" category where they just collect the first 20 sources that are good enough for them to sound somewhat educated on their topics. By so doing, they undercut the joy of the research process which is finding the *best* sources for their needs. But knowing what these best sources are is tricky: not every source, you see, needs to address every aspect of your exact topic to be highly relevant. Realize that every source might not talk about your whole topic--but they might talk about sub-issues within a wider topic or even related issues.

Here is an example: say you are examining the way social media interactions affects teenage girls' behavior towards one another in person. You may find highly relevant sources that are on parts of this issue like an article on teenage social media usage, teenage social interactions, and how social media affects the brain. You might also find a few articles about sub points in your paper like cognitive development for females in teenage years. As you research, it is best to corral as many sources as you can at first, but as you cull the herd, be intentional about which ones you keep and which ones you cut loose. This will help you choose the best sources, and not just ones that are good enough.


Choose the most high-quality sources (livestock) for your herd. Photo by Pixabay from Pexels

Finally, consider other forms of scholarly communication like scholarly books. Many books published by academic presses (you can see what venue published the book in its first few pages) are peer reviewed and undergo a very rigorous editing process. To evaluate books, I'd suggest looking at who published it (a university press will carry the most clout in the scholarly communication world) and who wrote it, or contributed to it. Finally, the publication date will matter to those reviewing your bibliography.

Less scholarly sources are trade journals (like *Psychology Today*) which are meant for practitioners in a field. Though they're not peer reviewed, you may still find relevant research in these publications. Make sure to double check the information against the peer-reviewed research in your field before citing these sources, but do realize that they can provide a good starting point in timely, academic conversations.

How do I evaluate information I find online?

Here's where we get to the meat of it (sorry, cows!). The difficulty with information online is there is such a variety of it. We find a spectrum from highly reputable sources like the research done by the Pew Research Center—a non-governmental, not for profit, entity which studies issues relating to the United States—to enraged rantings on blog posts about the latest immigration scandal. The .org/.com tests no longer work to distinguish between "iffy" information types as just about anyone can get a .org nowadays. With opinion forums, open-access encyclopedias (read: Wikipedia) and cloak websites which hide behind layers of misinformation disguised as legitimate research to push political agendas, even the most educated of people feel wary when approaching information online. Many people would rather throw up their hands in disgust, and decide to make personal decisions about what to believe, rather than carefully learning how to evaluate information they find online for themselves, and become thoughtful researchers.

Don't know what to believe? Hone your source evaluation behaviors. Photo by JESHOOTS.COM on Unsplash

In the past we've relied on acronyms (like CRAAP: Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose) to help give us rules of thumb about how to evaluate information; however, the information we find online often defies such definitions and quick tests of credibility. Instead, we need to learn two important lessons when interacting with information online:

1. Define your information need. This means that you need to think very carefully about what information you are seeking and go to the *right places* to find that kind of information. If you don't fully understand what information will fill your need, chances are you'll be looking willy-nilly for information and your information may end up coming from sketchy places. For instance, you wouldn't go to the same place to find information about a health concern you had as you would to find information about a TV you were thinking of buying. The same is the case for finding information you'll use in a paper. What is your paper about? Where would experts on this issue (either scholars, or others) be publishing? Defining your information need helps you decide where to search in the first place for good information—rather than sorting through bad information later.

For example, if you are writing about the psychology of self-driving vehicles and are trying to find a book on the subject, be warned: those may not have been written yet. Articles, which have a quicker publication rate, might be where to look for such information.

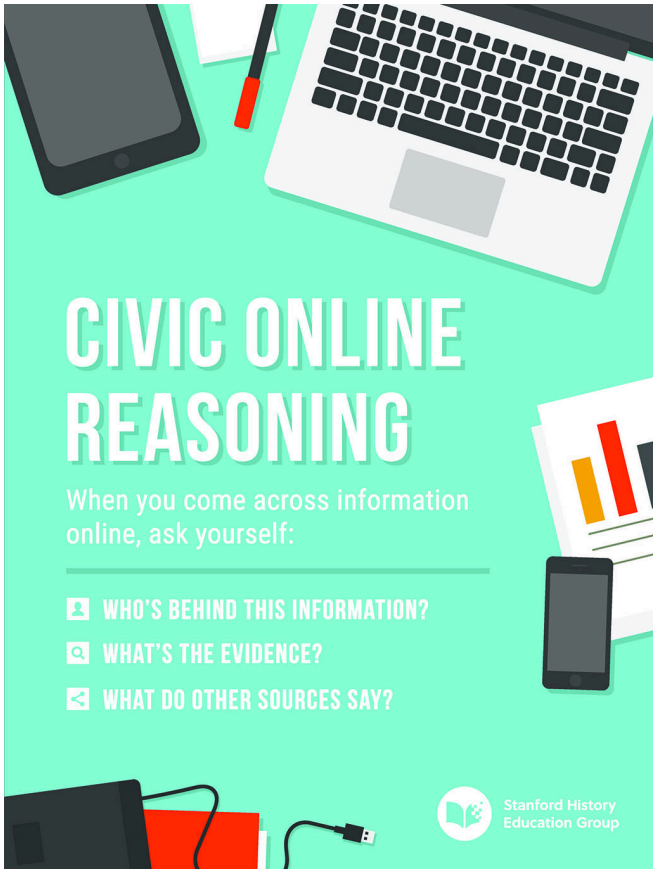
2. Act like a fact-checker. This means that you should read information online very differently than you do traditional print material. Generally folks who read a book or a print newspaper read pretty traditionally: from top to bottom/left to right. When those same people approach a web page to decide if it is credible or not, they often do the same thing: read vertically—up and down. But professional fact checkers do something very different: they read laterally. This means that instead of focusing on the content of the website or publication they are verifying—they focus on the verification. They open tabs, they double check claims—they google the folks who are behind the information and where it came from. This horizontal reading means they jump off the source to check it, rather than staying on the source and trusting what it's telling them.

Fact checkers also tend to look further down on Google results lists than students would—they realize that the first few results in a Google search can be easily manipulated, so that's why they look at results further down and look at multiple source materials about a particular issue or source before believing its claims.

Fact Checking Behaviors

Find a website or article you don't know much about on a social media feed. Practice expert fact checking behaviors to decide if the information is credible or not. Record a reflection on your experience.

Many recent studies show that students really struggle to act like fact checkers. In fact, the Stanford History Education Group recently found that when students were evaluating a politically polarizing Tweet, about half of them did not click on the link provided in the tweet to corroborate the information found therein (p. 23). This is an issue because it shows that students get caught in superficial information evaluation acts: they might notice the hyperlink is there and think that the fact that it is there alone gives the source credibility without actually clicking on it and checking it out.



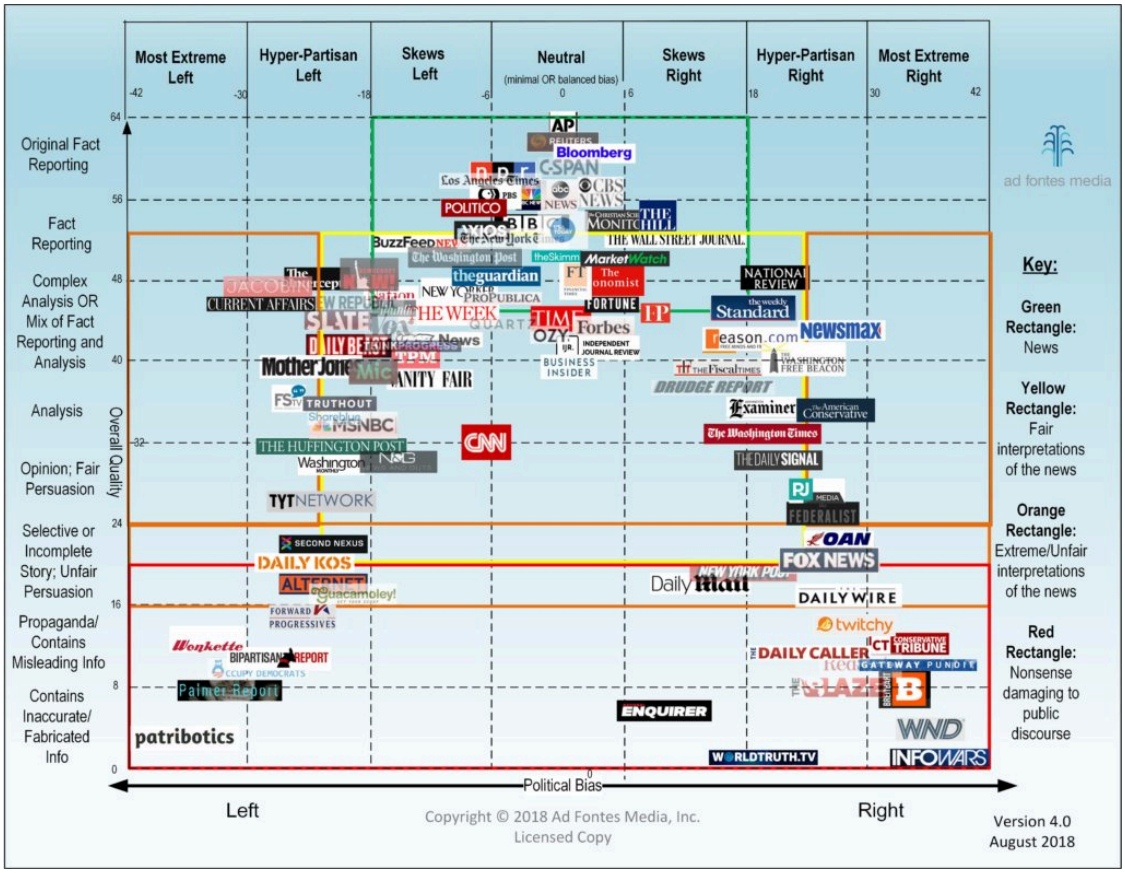
Stanford History Education Group's suggestions for engaging with information online. Learn more at: https://open.byu.edu/-CeP

Self-Evaluation: Check Yourself

Perhaps the hardest thing we need to check is ourselves and our own biases. Confirmation bias plays into source evaluation behaviors for all of us. We all have confirmation bias, which means we are drawn to and tend to support/believe sources that reinforce our preexisting thoughts. Why is this an issue while evaluating information

online? Well, it's an issue because we may struggle to seek out and fairly consider sources who support points of view that are not our own.

One way to deal with this is to proactively consume online material (especially news sources) that span the ideological spectrum. For example, check out this chart below that was created by a fact-checking organization. It shows the levels of bias of most news outlets today—and its results might surprise you.



Levels of bias and fact checking in news sources. (Used with permission.)

As you can see, many news sources lean one way or the other—but a whole lot are neutral and might be considered "mainstream." Such mainstream sources employ vigorous fact-checking and fact-based news reporting and are generally trustworthy.

No matter where your favorite news outlet falls on this chart, one of the best ways to avoid bias is to to double check information across several reports. When you get your information from only one source, you risk getting stuck in an echo chamber where what you hear only amplifies what you already believed. When you read more than one source, you are more likely to hear different points of view and get a more balanced view of a topic or situation. Similarly, it helps to realize that genre differences (like opinion vs. news feature) could change how you interact with the information you encounter. In sum, keep your fact-checking guard up when you read online—as Mad-Eye Moody says, "Constant vigilance, Harry!"

As Mad-Eye Moody says, you need "Constant Vigilance" when reading online. Photo by Artem Maltsev on Unsplash

A second way you might deal with the issue of confirmation bias is by practicing intellectual humility. That is to say, being willing to reevaluate your beliefs, assumptions, and biases in the face of compelling, reliable, evidence. Practicing intellectual humility is not distrusting yourself or your gut, but instead, is realizing that you are a budding thinker and scholar, and you have a lot to learn. Intellectual humility is approaching research as an exercise in learning, exploring, and growing. It is an exercise in curiosity.

Revisiting one major principle: How did this information come to be?

At this point you might be a little frustrated and be thinking, "Well what can I trust? I guess I can't trust anything or anyone!" Distrust of the media is a bit of a scary phenomenon since it seems to give license for individuals to believe whatever they want rather than becoming informed on salient issues. That is why I advocate an informed approach to information consumption rather than an approach which is self-defeating. If there is one idea I want you to walk away from this section with, it is this: in order to really evaluate information, you need to figure out how that information was created; in other words, figure out how it came to be.

Such a question as "How was this information created?" hits on many points: who is behind this information? Who wrote it? Who published it? What kind of a publication process did it go through? Was it vetted? Was it reviewed and edited? By answering these questions you'll be able to construct a picture of the process this information went through in order to come to you. You might even be able to surmise if someone had an agenda or motivation that seemed hidden at first. As with everything, you'll need to make some value judgments along the way. For example, some kinds of information will help you establish your credibility in a paper, whereas other kinds of source material will lend humor or pathos to an argument. As you engage with such sources consider your audience and what kind of information they would expect you to use for your writing. It all comes back to context when you make the decision to trust a source or to use it purposefully in your writing.

Conclusion

Now that you've evaluated, analyzed, and started to synthesize your sources, you're ready to learn how to cite them. In other words, now that you've rounded up and corralled your herd, you're finally ready to incorporate those sources into your writing. You're living the dream!

This could be you living the research dream. Photo by Tobias Keller on Unsplash

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9

Discussing & Citing Sources

Cristie Cowles Charles

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you'll learn how to

- differentiate between summary, paraphrase, quoting, and patchwriting
- effectively and ethically incorporate sources into your own writing
- follow an appropriate style of documentation

9.1 Key Terms

An original bombard—is this what being bombarded with information overload feels like? Photo by PHGCOM

We live in a world where we're constantly bombarded by information. We hold in our hands the ability to google any question we can think of and get thousands, if not millions, of answers. Thanks, Siri and Alexa!

It's become increasingly important to know not only how to sift through all the junk to get to the good answers but what to do with that information once you've found it. How can you share information you find in an ethical and convincing way? How can you make it so your writing is easy to fact-check so people will trust what you say? The answer: properly citing your sources. (Or in other words, telling us where you got your information.)

But it goes deeper than that. Before we start, we need to define some key types of source citation: quotation, summary, paraphrase, and patchwriting.

Definitions

Quotation	Copying the exact words of a text.
Summary	Restating the main ideas of a large or small text in your own words while significantly reducing the length.
Paraphrase	Rewriting a sentence or a short passage into your own words while keeping a similar length.
Patchwriting	Taking a text and changing some words or substituting synonyms or changing some grammar but not changing it enough to be considered your own words.

The key to properly citing sources is knowing which of these citation techniques to use (or not use) and how to do it. Some students think that all they need to do is slap a name and a year in parentheses after the quotes in their paper and then they're all good. But citing sources runs much deeper than that, and these four terms—summary, paraphrase, quotation, and patchwriting—have a lot to do with it. We'll talk more in depth about each of these techniques in the next section. But first, we need to look at what's actually going on in college papers.

9.2 How Do Students Cite Sources? Badly.

You might not know this, but you're probably bad at summarizing texts. How do I know? Because I'm guessing if you're reading this, then you're probably a college student, and college students are almost universally bad at summarizing texts. How do I know that? Research.

Rebecca Moore Howard and Sandra Jamieson are fantastic researchers famous for The Citation Project—a major study to find out how college students typically cite sources (2013). Howard and Jamieson looked at 174 student research papers from 16 different colleges. They tried to represent all types of schools and populations from ivy-league to private religious universities to public community colleges and from all areas of the country so their data could be generalized.

Howard and Jamieson's team spent months checking every single source listed in each student's references page and compared the original source to how the information was cited in the student's paper. (How would you like that job?) Their findings were surprising and revealing:

The Results

Now back to those key terms: Of the 1,911 citations of 930 sources they looked at, guess how many of those citations were direct quotations quoted word-for-word from the source?

> 46%

How many were paraphrases?

> 32%

And how many were considered patchwriting?

> 16%

Now what about summary?

> Only 6%

That means that only 6% of the time did students choose to summarize their sources in their papers (p. 123). Why should we care? What's so great about summaries, you ask? Hold that thought—I'll tell you in the next section. For now, just remember that 94% of the time students chose not to do it.

Before we move on, there's one more surprising finding from Howard and Jamieson's study that I want to point out to you. When the researchers checked the students' sources and their citations, they also looked at which part of the sources—mostly articles and book chapters—students took their citations from.

Guess which page of the sources 46% of citations came from?

> Page 1

You're not on vacation. If you only cite from the first two pages of a source, you're probably being a lazy researcher.
Photo by Sincerely Media on Unsplash

You read that right. Almost half of all citations came from the first page of the source! If you think about it, the first page usually doesn't contain much more than an abstract and maybe an introductory paragraph or two. So it's not exactly the most meaty part of a paper with the most felicitous quotes.

And 23% more of the students' citations came from guess which page?

> Page 2

Yep. That means that about 70% of citations came from the first two pages of a source—before most sources have gotten beyond the Introduction. Why is this significant? Because our job as writing teachers is to help you engage with your sources—to get to know them, to understand what their results mean, to make connections with other sources. But you can't get to know your sources in just the first two pages. This suggests that students are reading superficially, looking for the first decent quotes they can find, and not taking the time to understand what the paper's main points are or what their results mean. To be frank, this shows that students are being lazy. And this is a problem—which is where Summary comes in. Read on to find out how Summary can save the research day.

9.3 A Citation DTR: Summary Paraphrase, Quotation, and Patchwriting

Summary, I love you!

Love! Photo by Ben White on Unsplash

Summary is the most felicitous type of citation and the most sophisticated. The reason most students choose not to summarize when citing sources is that summary has the highest degree of difficulty of all the types of source citation—and for good reason: you have to actually understand your source in order to summarize it. You can quote anything you want to without ever understanding what it means, but in a summary, you not only translate the text into your own words, you also shorten its length and provide just the highlights. That means that you have to understand what the most important points are. That is definitely harder than just quoting all the time, but if you add more summary to your papers, they will also increase in sophistication and probably in grade as well.

By learning how to summarize, you can show your research prowess and make better, more insightful points when you write—and your readers (and teacher) will notice. If I were having a DTR (Define the Relationship talk) with Summary, I would say,

> *Summary, I love you!*

Not only can summary help you make better points, there is an advantage to putting things into your own words: you can control the language and match your writing style. And you can also highlight the parts of the sources that are the most relevant to your own paper, the parts you want your audience to notice. You can also talk about ideas and findings in general instead of sticking to shorter, individual points.

If you like more technical terms, here's the way Howard and Jamieson defined summary in their study:

The author

- writes from a paragraph or more (technically at least 3 sentences)
- restates and condenses the text by at least 50%
- employs “fresh language,” or in other words, only uses 20% or less of the language from the passage (Howard, et al., 2010, p. 181)

Because summary is so powerful, I tell students to make a goal to summarize 50-70% of the time in their papers. If they're writing a literature review, I say to use summary almost exclusively, often summarizing more than one article in the same sentence. One of the best ways to add summary to your papers is if you've already written a good annotated bibliography during your source-gathering phase (see Chapter 8). In any case, my advice is to try to strengthen your relationship with summary. When you summarize a shorter passage, you should cite the page number where you found the information as well as the author and year, but when you talk about the ideas in a source in general, you don't need to list a page number—just the author and year.

Paraphrase, I like you!

Paraphrase is an acceptable form of citation and has a medium degree of difficulty. It's similar to summary because you're also translating information into your own words. This comes with the same advantages of being able to control the language of your sentences and match your own writing style. By using your own language, you can also point out what's most relevant to your paper, so that's good. And by putting it in your own words, you prove that you at least understand what's being said by the author(s) in that particular passage. However, the problem is that when you paraphrase, you only work with a short passage at a time (usually only a sentence or two). I know this might sound alarming, but for this reason, paraphrasing can actually be dangerous.

Paraphrase = Like! (Public Domain)

When you work sentence-by-sentence, you run the risk of doing what I did in my sixth grade report about Penguins. I opened the encyclopedia book labeled "P" (yes, I was very old school) and read a sentence about penguins. Then I would turn to my (really old school) computer and try to write the same sentence in my own words, but I would think to myself, "The encyclopedia said it so well, I can't really think of a different way to say that."

So I would substitute a few synonyms for some of the words or rearrange the order of the sentence, but I kept most of the encyclopedia's wording and all of the ideas. Not cool. Technically, that's considered plagiarism—taking someone else's words or ideas and calling them your own—and I'm lucky I didn't get into trouble in sixth grade. But I was eleven at the time, and my teacher probably recognized that I was an emerging writer still very new to writing about research. She knew I would eventually learn how to cite my sources. The trick is that now that we're all adults, we're expected to know how to cite sources, so the stakes are much higher. When plagiarism is detected—even if it was unintentional—you can get into trouble, fail a paper, or even fail a class or get put on probation. Many well-regarded people have gotten in big

trouble for plagiarizing—even when it was unintentional. The consequences are serious, so take your citations seriously as well.

Plagiarism is like taking the words out of someone else's mouth. Photo by Christian Gertenbach on Unsplash

So if you want to avoid the dangers of unintentional plagiarism, try not to work sentence-by-sentence and stick as much as you can to summary (oh, Summary, you're so beautiful!). But there are definitely times you'll need to paraphrase, so here's Howard and Jamieson's definition of paraphrase to make things more precise:

In a paraphrase, the writer

- deals with a short passage [up to a paragraph]
- does not condense much
- employs “fresh language,” but sometimes keeps key words, (again, 20% or less) (Howard, et al., 2010, p. 181)

I tell students to paraphrase around 20-30% of the time. When should you choose to paraphrase? When you're talking about a specific idea or point that an author made that you want to refer to but that doesn't need to be quoted because the wording itself isn't important. Just be sure to cite the page number(s) where you found that information as well as the author and year. I like to tell my students that if their instinct is to quote something, look at the wording and decide if it is really special, really unique. If the specific wording doesn't matter, try paraphrasing.

Quotation, I just want to be friends.

A little quotation goes a long way. Photo by Flow Graphics on Unsplash.

Like jalapeno peppers, quotations should be used sparingly. I know, I know, you're probably thinking, "But I thought I was supposed to pepper my papers with quotes!" You've got the wrong kind of pepper. Quotes are not the salt and pepper you sprinkle all over your food—instead think, jalapeno pepper. A little goes a long way. (Photo Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/upeters/14181186453 CC BY-NC 2.0)

Quotations should stay in the Friend Zone (Public Domain)

Obviously, quotation has the lowest degree of difficulty of all the citation styles because all you have to do is take an author's words exactly. But if you just use quote after quote, it will seem like you can't speak for yourself or that you don't actually understand your sources. So put quotations in the Friend Zone and hang out with them only occasionally. Save your quotes for those times when an author says something in a unique or special way and you want to highlight their language. Or if you want to highlight an expert's authority, you can include a poignant quote. Again, with quotes, you're working sentence-by-sentence, so in order to use them, you don't have to understand the context of a quote or how it fits into the bigger picture. Try to avoid paparazzi syndrome—don't take things out of context. It can be all too tempting to find a quote that supports your point without understanding the context or including all sides. Here's Howard and Jamieson's details about quotation:

In a quotation, the writer

- copies the wording exactly
- puts quotation marks around all copied words (please!)
- Long quotes (more than 40 words) are cited differently (usually indented as a block, see your style guide)

I tell my students to use quotation only 5-10% of the time when you're citing sources; use summary and paraphrase the rest of the time. Wait until you have that "killer quote." If you're writing a literature review—especially in the social sciences—then you should almost never quote. If you do need to quote, put quotation marks around all words that belong to that author and cite author's name (use only their last name) and year. More importantly, you need to cite the page number each time you quote. In APA, for example, it should look like this: (Charles, 2019, p. 345).

I also like to challenge my students to always introduce a quote (and usually also a paraphrase) and also comment about it afterward. If it's by a famous person, say so in your paper instead of just listing their name in the citation at the end. Comment on how the quote is relevant. We'll talk more about using evidence in your paper in Chapter 10 on Literature Reviews.

One caveat is that if you're writing a paper that analyzes a literary text like a poem or novel (rare in the social sciences), you are supposed to quote often from the literary work itself as part of your analysis. But the reason you're supposed to quote in this case instead of paraphrase is that the wording is literary—which by definition means it's special and unique. So it still follows the rules of when to quote vs. paraphrase—quote when the specific wording matters. But remember that literary analyses are the only time when a lot of quoting is considered felicitous.

Patchwriting, I'm getting a restraining order!

Go away, Patchwriting! Photo by Jonathan Sharp on Unsplash

Patchwriting is so sixth grade. The penguin paper I described above was really an instance of patchwriting. Patchwriting is where a writer—whether intentionally or unintentionally—takes a text, changes some words or substitutes synonyms or changes some grammar but doesn't change it enough to be considered their own words. The degree of difficulty is extremely low because you don't have to understand the text well or even quote well to do it. You can be sloppy. But beware: the consequences can be as dire as if you plagiarize outright.

Howard's definition:

- "Copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes" (Howard, 1993, p. 233)

In fact, most schools and institutions have a plagiarism code, and you should review yours so you understand what can happen. For example, BYU's statement on Academic Honesty refers to patchwriting as "plagiarism mosaic" and lists many of the consequences that can occur to writers if they intentionally or unintentionally plagiarize. Patchwriting and other types of plagiarism disrespect the research process and negate the work of others. Ethics are very important at universities and in the workplace and are one of the keys to creating new knowledge, so you should maintain high ethical standards in your research and writing. Commit now to being precise in your use of sources and never deliberately plagiarizing. Not only will this keep you out of serious trouble, it will also earn you respect now and in the future.

If you want to see how patchwriting and a laxity about sources—even if inadvertent—can get you bad attention, read this article about Melania Trump's Republican National Convention speech that many people believe was patchwritten from Michelle Obama's previous Democratic National Convention speech. Or watch this side-by-side video and judge for yourself if you think Ms. Trump's speech was original enough or if it should be considered plagiarism/patchwriting.

Either way, she got much more attention for the plagiarism question than she did for her message. Don't let there be a question about your citations—cite responsibly, and you'll avoid problems like these.

https://youtu.be/RcbiGsDMmCM

A Word on Intentional Plagiarism

On a final note, it should go without saying, but just so I'm perfectly clear, it is never okay to take credit for someone else's words. It doesn't matter if you've been sick and have a scary deadline or if your roommate bought a paper off the internet and turned it in with no consequences or if you don't get an A in this class, you'll lose your scholarship—if you deliberately take credit for someone else's work, you're effectively stealing and could lose much more than your scholarship. Not only could fail the assignment, fail the class, or even get kicked out of school, you will most definitely lose your dignity. (Cue Whitney Houston song "The Greatest Love of All.) And now that there are many kinds of plagiarism-checking software readily available (like TurnItIn that's used at BYU), it's extremely likely that you will get caught. Resolve now to never fall into the temptation to turn in someone else's work. If you get caught doing so in the workplace, you'll most likely lose your job. And you'll also lose your credibility and respect. And don't forget that you could also get into trouble with the author you took from.

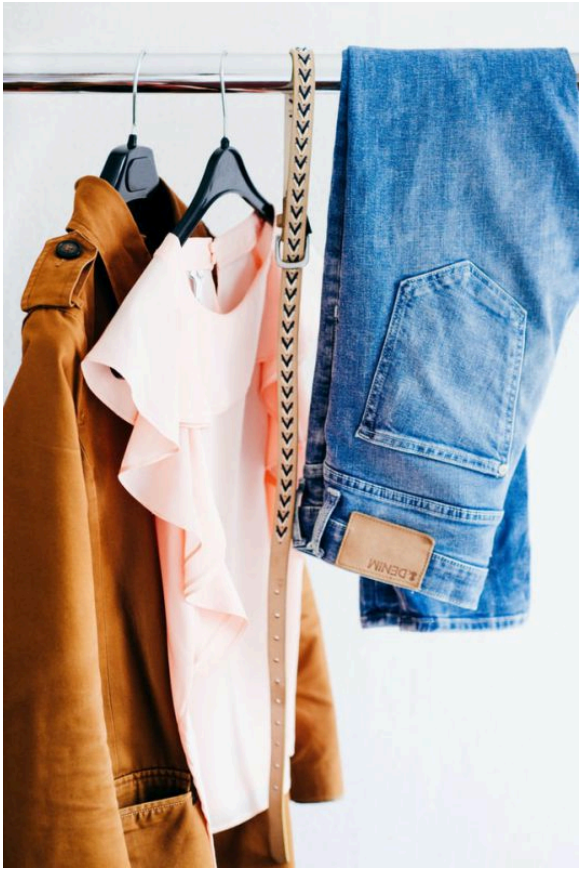
Here's what famous author Nora Roberts had to say when she discovered another author had stolen some passages of her writing:

> *"If you plagiarize, I will come for you. If you take my work, you will pay for it and I will do my best to see you don't write again."*
>
> *from Locus Magazine https://locusmag.com/2019/06/roberts-vs-plagiarism/*

Don't lose your integrity for a relationship with plagiarism. It will end badly. Have a DTR with your sources and decide that you will love summary, like paraphrase, be friends with quotations, and run far, far away from patchwriting and plagiarism. If you can do this, you'll write happily ever after.

9.4 How to Cite Sources

Now that you've committed to citing your sources properly, let's make sure you know how to do so. Generally speaking, you need to give enough publication information that the person reading your paper can easily go find your source and see where your information came from. You also need to make sure it's clear which information comes from the source as opposed to your own ideas or words. I spent one semester working as a documentation editor for BYU's Honors Program journal called *Insight*. My entire job was to go through the articles that were being published and look up every single citation, find the actual book or article, and make sure everything was cited properly. It was tedious, but it taught me how important good citation is.

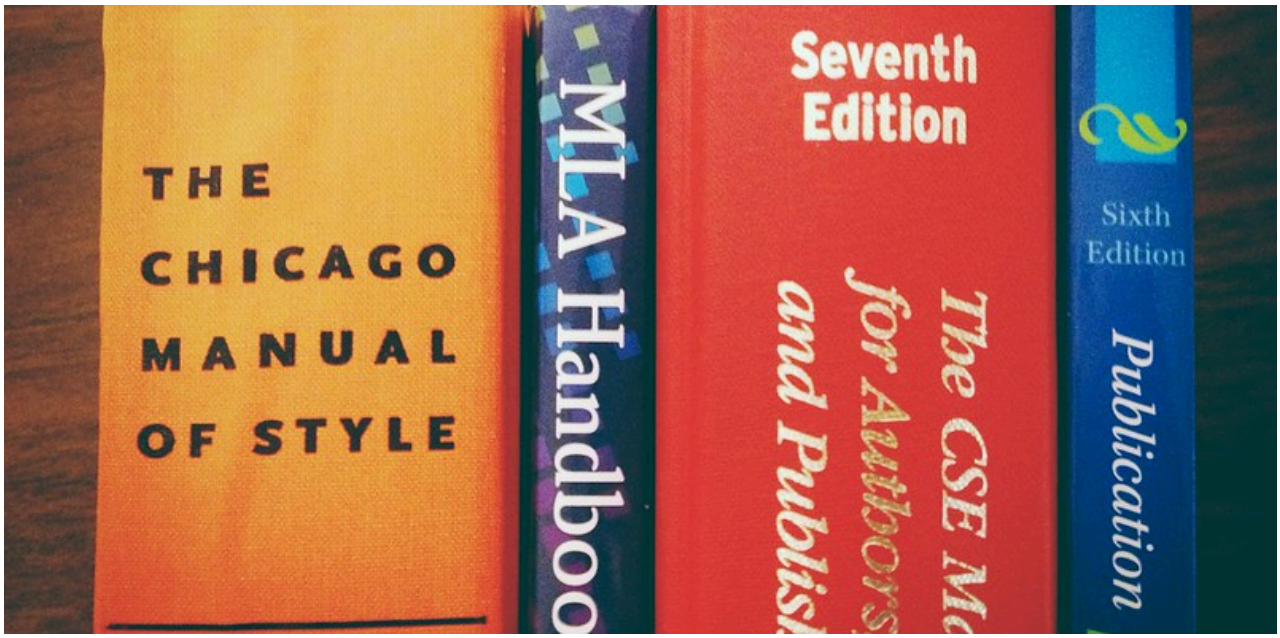


Not this kind of style guide! Photo by Alexandra Gorn at Unsplash

You probably know that when you summarize, paraphrase, or quote from someone else, you need to include information to acknowledge the author. How do you know which information to cite? How can you tell what format you put this information? You need to follow a style guide. All publishers, news outlets, academic journals, universities, and even most companies have a style guide. They do this to make sure all their publications are consistent and clear and reflect the right image. Here's a link to BYU's Style Guide.

To be honest, the rules of different style guides can be arbitrary—is it really important if you capitalize every word in a title or only the first word? No. What's important is that you follow the rules of your style guide so your writing matches your readers' expectations and so they can easily find where your sources came from. It's important to note that other countries that value collectivism over individualism might have different ideas about citation and what belongs to an individual or not, but in this class, you need to follow standard American rules.

Style Guides



These are some of the types of Style Guides used in various fields. Photo by fixedandfrailing on Flickr.

In most fields, there's a standard style guide or citation manual that people follow for the proper format for citing sources. The manual consists of the formatting rules that a governing board has decided upon to keep their publications consistent. They not only list rules for citations but often also talk about clarity, avoiding bias, and even for where to put the page number on the page.

Here are some common style guides:
APA, MLA, Chicago/Turabian, AP, IEEE, AMA, and ASA. Sometimes specific journals have their own in-house rules instead of following a bigger style guide.

If you ever have a question about how to cite something, look it up in your field's style guide. There you can find in-depth answers to questions of format, style, punctuation, etc. However, sometimes you just need the basics as a reference. Here is a link to the Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab)'s pages on style guides and citation. You can find information for all the guides listed above: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html.

I suggest you bookmark these and refer to them often as you write. Use these as a guide but only under that assumption that any detailed questions you have should be looked up in the actual manual. Please note that when you generate a references or bibliography page from citation software like RefWorks, you'll still need to go through and double check each source because the citation software often puts items in the wrong places or misses details like italics or capitalization. I've found this to be especially true with book chapters.

It's important to know the difference between in-text citations—citing sources inside the sentences of your paper—and citations in your references list at the end of your paper. Generally, in-text citations occur inside parentheses, include the author's name, the publication year, and the page number if necessary. These in-text citations are there so your readers can refer back to your references page where the full publication information should be. See the Purdue OWL pages and your field's style guide for all the information on creating references pages.

How to Summarize

Even when you're summarizing an entire study that was published, you still need to cite your source. If what you're summarizing can be found on a specific page of a publication, then include the page. Otherwise, follow your style guide's recommendations for in-text citations. You also need to make it clear where your writing and ideas stop and

your source's start. If you mention the author's name in your sentence, you don't need to repeat it in the parenthetical reference and you should add the year right after their name; however, if you don't mention the author's name, everything goes at the end in the parenthetical reference.

How to Paraphrase

Like summary, you should follow your style manual's guidelines for in-text citations. However, because a paraphrase comes from a short passage, you need to include the page number(s) as well. If your source is a webpage, you can include paragraph numbers instead.

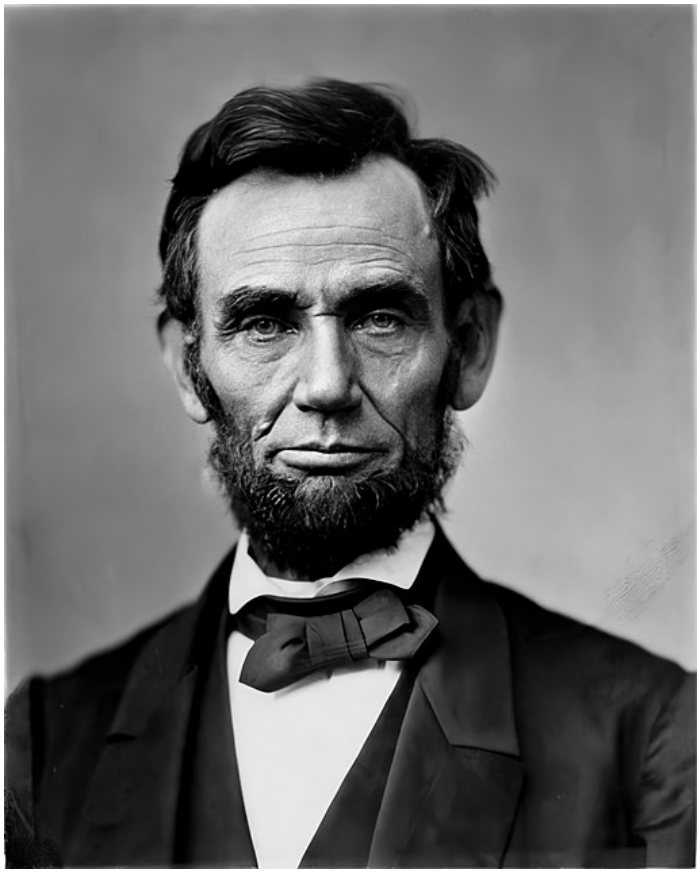
How to Quote

Quoting is much like paraphrase where you need to cite the page number with your in-text citation (or paragraph number for a webpage). Use quotation marks to make it clear which exact words come from your source versus which ones are your own and double-check that you quoted correctly.

9.5 Let's Practice

Now we're going to do an activity that Howard and Jamieson reference in their article on student citation practices (add reference): you're going to summarize, paraphrase, and quote from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Now It's Your Turn



President Abraham Lincoln. (Public Domain)

First, read the Gettysburg Address all the way through—don't worry it's short. Note the most important points and any particularly poignant phrases. If you need to look up how to cite this source inside your text, go to the Purdue OWL citation webpage or look it up in your style guide.

Four score 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 battle-field 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 can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not 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.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg_Address

Summary

Now you're going to practice summarizing. Often the way you summarize will depend upon your audience. If you're explaining something to your 5-year-old cousin, you'll use different language than if you're summarizing the address for an academic paper. Choose a specific audience and/or context for your summary before you begin.

Try Summary

Your turn. Please summarize the Gettysburg Address in 2 sentences. You may choose a specific audience/context for your summary. Include proper in-text citation.

Do you see how in a summary you must distill the most important ideas into a much shorter length? This is hard because you need to understand what the most important ideas are, but it also allows you to explain things in your own words and adjust to your audience.

Paraphrase

This time you're going to practice paraphrasing. To get practice adjusting your wording to a different situation, choose a new audience and/or context for your paraphrase. Remember that you should choose only a short passage to paraphrase, and your text should be about the same length as the original, just in your own words. Because a paraphrase should come from a short passage, any in-text citations should include the page number(s). Since the Gettysburg Address is so short, use the paragraph number like this: (para. 2).

Try Paraphrase

Now paraphrase 1-3 sentences from the Gettysburg Address. Choose a new audience/context for this paraphrase. Include proper in-text citation.

Do you see how summary and paraphrase allow you to change your wording and approach based on your audience? For example, if you were simply quoting, it would be much harder to explain something to a 5-year-old.

Quotation

Now I want you to choose a quote from the Gettysburg Address where the wording really sticks out as beautiful or poignant or illustrates a point well. This is the trick with quoting—you don't want to just quote large chunks. You need to be selective. In fact, if you'd like, you can write a sentence that is mostly in your words but adds short quotations inside your sentence. Quotes work best if you introduce them in your own words and/or give commentary about them after. In-text citations are the same as with paraphrases. Include the page number(s), or in the case of the Gettysburg Address, use the paragraph number.

Try Quotation

Choose a particularly meaningful or beautiful part of the Gettysburg Address to quote. Don't forget to introduce the quote and/or comment on it afterward. Choose a new audience/context again. Include proper in-text citations.

Conclusion: Choose Your Own Adventure

Now that you know how to cite sources, you're ready to start focusing on writing your paper. Your teacher has probably either assigned you to write a literature review or a proposal next. So next choose the chapter of whichever paper you've been assigned (Chapter 10 for Literature Reviews or Chapter 13 for Proposals), and you can continue your research journey.

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10

Defining Literature Reviews

Cristie Cowles Charles

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you'll

- learn the definition of a literature review
- understand the difference between a literature review and a traditional argumentative research paper
- learn how literature reviews are used in the scholarly research process
- understand the purpose of a literature review

10.1 What's a Literature Review?

To answer this question, I have to tell you a story, so stick with me.

According to Marty McFly, this is a Hoverboard. Photo by Frank Schwichtenberg

The straightforward answer is that a literature review is a review or synthesis of all the research published on a certain topic. But I'd rather explain it from a skateboarder's perspective:

One of my favorite movie series is the 1980s classic *Back to the Future* trilogy where the bodacious skater Marty McFly time-travels to the future and sees the coolest thing I could imagine: a hoverboard. As a kid, I was a dabbling skateboarder at the time I saw this movie and thought if I could just have one of those rad, flying hoverboards, all my troubles would disappear. It was an optimistic time.

Trouble is, hoverboards are really hard to make. We've already passed the year 2015 when the "Future" of *Back to the Future Part 2* takes place, and guess what? No hoverboards. I know what you're thinking: you've seen a skateboard-like, two-wheeled device marketed with the name "Hoverboard" that teenagers ride around parks, sidewalks, and their parents' basements. But you're wrong: that's just an electric, no-handled scooter that occasionally catches on fire and burns people's houses down. I'm not satisfied.

Is this a real hoverboard? I think not. Photo by Soar Boards

I want a *real* hoverboard. That you ride *in the air*. So how can we know when real hoverboards will be available? How can we know where the technology is now? Will we know a real hoverboard when we see one? Tony Hawk, the best skateboarder of all time (whose face was incidentally taped to my wall in the '80s) recently filmed a 2-minute video of how far real hoverboard technology has come—filmed on the very day Marty McFly supposedly went to the future: October 21, 2015:

Tony Hawk and the cutting edge of hoverboard research

Watch on YouTube

Tony Hawk and the cutting edge of hoverboard research. https://youtu.be/wCZiEtduSQg

Although this "hoverboard" was really a huge black rectangle the size of Delaware floating only an inch off the ground, and although Tony Hawk fell off a lot, he was technically in the air, so I'm taking that as a good sign. Then recently, a professional jet ski rider broke the world record for longest time "hovering" in the air with a highly dangerous jet-engine-propelled contraption called Flyboard Air. It's also definitely a step in the right direction, but there's a big problem (beside extreme danger): it's projected to cost around $250,000. Sadly, not in my price range.

The good news is, now we've found the point where hoverboard research actually is. The bad news: we have to face the sad truth that it might still be a while before we get real Marty-McFly-approved flying hoverboards that non-billionaires can ride. But at least now we know. Because knowing is half the battle.

The State of a Field on a Topic

That leads me to literature reviews. Whenever you want to know the state of a field of research like how far hoverboard technology has come, the best way to find out is probably not YouTube videos. It turns out you can do something much more reliable: conduct a literature review. In this case, "literature" doesn't mean the Victorian novels you read in English class, it means all the research published on a certain topic. So a literature review is simply a review or a *synthesis* of the research published on a topic.

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants (Public Domain)

Researchers and companies today don't just start projects out of the blue—they do their homework first by finding out what others have already done. So if you want to make a hoverboard, you don't just go to Home Depot and buy random parts—you research what already exists and talk to the experts so you don't have to reinvent the wheel (get it?).

> *"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." —Sir Isaac Newton (and the motto of Google Scholar)*

Find the gaps in research. Photo by Jeremy Bishop on Unsplash.

Before good researchers set up any surveys or experiments, or even write a proposal for funding, they figure out exactly which research questions have already been asked and answered. Same goes for anyone wanting to make a product that will sell. But more importantly, they look for the gaps in the research or marketplace where answers have yet to be found. And then they focus their own work on filling in some of those gaps. That'll be your job, too.

In other words, the goal of a literature review is to find the sweet spot where the most promising research is happening now—we call that the cutting edge. (*The Cutting Edge* is also a cheesy '90s movie about ice skating, so be sure not to get them confused.) As Marty McFly would say, finding the cutting edge is pretty gnarly because that's where the adventure begins. So grab the closest thing you have to a hoverboard, and let's go.

10.2 How is a Literature Review different from a typical Research Paper?

*Suggestion: Just for fun, as you read this next section, set the mood by playing one of these songs called "Old Friends." You'll see how it's relevant in a minute.

1. Simon & Garfunkel "Old Friends"—old-school classic
2. Ben Rector "Old Friends"—w/ high school band Euromart, in the garage of the house he grew up in
3. Willie Nelson, Roger Miller, Ray Price "Old Friends" —country Western style

You've probably been writing research papers most of your life—you know, starting from the five-paragraph essay you learned in high school to the term paper you wrote last semester that had a thesis statement and lots of quotes. So it can seem daunting to switch gears to writing a literature review, but there are some distinct advantages to making the switch (that I'll get to later). The trick is first understanding the difference between the two.

Research Papers are Thesis Driven

The difference between a typical research paper and a literature review is your purpose and strategy. Tell me if this sounds familiar: when you're assigned to write a research paper, you start with a thesis or argument that you'd like to make. Your thesis has to do with a new way to look at something or a change you'd like to see in the future. Then you search for sources that support your point. You might adjust your thesis if you come across sources that challenge your claim, but generally, the sources you've gathered become evidence for your thesis and you use them to support your point. In other words, your argumentative research paper is **driven by your thesis**.

Literature Reviews are Source Driven

In contrast, when you write a Literature Review, the sources themselves dictate what you'll say in your paper. Remember, your goal is to tell your audience the state of the field on a topic—what's been happening in the published research—so you can find the cutting edge and where the research gaps are. Therefore, you need to find and evaluate the most relevant sources surrounding a topic and then write a review *based on what you find*. You can't decide on a thesis statement or know what points you'll make before you start because you have to find out what researchers are doing before you can report on that. Simply put, your literature review is **driven by your sources**.

You'll still have an overarching point/thesis that controls your literature review paper structure, but it will be a claim about what patterns you found in the research—*not* an argument about a change you want to see in the future or a new way to look at something. And you'll decide on your thesis much later in the writing process. Here's a table that compares the writing process of a traditional research paper with that of a literature review:

	Traditional Research Paper	**Literature Review**
	Thesis-driven	Source-driven
Step 1	Conduct background research on a Research Question	Conduct background research on a Research Question
Step 2	Choose an argument/thesis	Find, evaluate, & annotate sources
Step 3	Find sources for evidence to match your argument	Look for patterns in the sources, find gaps
Step 4	Look for counterarguments and evidence to refute them	Develop a thesis based on where researchers agree & disagree in the field
Step 5	Outline the points of your argument	Write an outline based on the patterns and gaps you found
Step 6	Write paragraphs that support your thesis with evidence/quotes	Write paragraphs that support your thesis by synthesizing sources

Step 7	Revise	Revise

Literature Reviews: Catching up with Old Friends

Here's where the song comes in—another way to think about the difference between literature reviews and the traditional research papers you're used to writing (with props to Professor David Taylor from the University of Maryland). What do you do when you meet an old friend? You ask,

Literature reviews are like getting filled in by an old friend. (Public Domain)

> *"How are you?*
>
> *What have you been up to?*
>
> *Fill me in!"*

Literature Reviews are like getting filled in by an old friend. Only this time, you're explaining how a field of research has gotten to the present (like how far hoverboard technology has come). But like a conversation with an old friend, you want to review only the details most relevant to the situation. You don't usually give a moment-by-moment chronology of what you've done in your life (no one has time for that); rather, you talk in terms of categories—work, family, travel, etc. This is like the synthesis that happens in a Literature Review. As you read sources about a specific topic, you'll look for themes, for similarities and differences, for points of agreement and disagreement, for gaps in the research that haven't been filled in yet. Those themes become the categories you'll talk about in your literature review so your audience will understand the big picture about your topic.

In contrast, a traditional research paper is like what happens after you've reviewed the past with your friend—only then do you talk about the future. What are your old friend's future plans? Do they have a big trip in the works or a change in career? Are there goals in their life plans they still want to accomplish? Do you agree or disagree with them? This is like the argumentative thesis statement in a research paper about what changes you think should happen in the future or a new way to look at something. A typical research paper talks about how we should look at a problem differently or how we should fill in the gaps in research. It's forward thinking rather than talking about what's happened up until now.

And as you might have realized by now, you could even call the introduction section of a traditional research paper a "mini literature review" because in it you explain the background behind your topic before you make your argument about the future. So it's safe to say that in order to get to the future (research or change), we usually first have to go back in time (see what's come before). Marty McFly would approve.

Why Literature Reviews?

There are some huge advantages to trying out this new genre of a literature review as opposed to a traditional research paper. We learned in Chapter 9 Talking About Sources that most college students do not engage with their sources—most students merely find quotes to fit their argument and plug them into their papers without actually understanding—or perhaps even reading—their sources. Many even quote directly from the abstract, not even bothering to read past there. Even more telling is that in the Howard and Jamieson study mentioned in Chapter 9, the number of students who *summarized* their sources in their papers was only 6%. That's probably because summary is a higher-level task that requires actually understanding the sources instead of merely extracting one quote at a time. And without summary, you can't have synthesis—the cornerstone of a good literature review. It's as if students are spending a lot of time exercising their research muscles, but have completely missed their most essential summary and synthesis muscles—their core, if you will.

Summary and synthesis are like your core muscle exercises—essential skills that will make all writing and headstands easier. (Wikimedia Commons)

Because of findings like this, many instructors are now assigning literature review papers rather than traditional research papers in order to isolate those core muscles that need exercise the most—the summarizing and synthesizing muscles. Because Literature Reviews are *source-driven* and require understanding and summarizing many sources, they are the perfect assignment for strengthening the missing skills in your writing repertoire. We've found that when our students write literature reviews, they learn (sometimes for the first time) the true steps of the research process; how to read, understand, and summarize sources; and even more importantly, they can finally see the big picture and synthesize those sources to understand the state of a field.

And by strengthening your ability to evaluate and synthesize sources, you'll actually strengthen your other writing skills as well, including your traditional research paper writing skills. You'll find after you focus on the literature review that finding and evaluating *any* type of source will be much easier—just like strengthening your core muscles will help you with all types of exercise.

Literature Reviews can help you develop rock hard research abs. Image by FelixMittermeier on Pixabay

This might sound crazy, but I actually get emails every semester from former students thanking me for assigning them a literature review because it's helped them with research projects in their next classes or jobs. You, too, can get rock hard research abs by learning how to write a literature review!

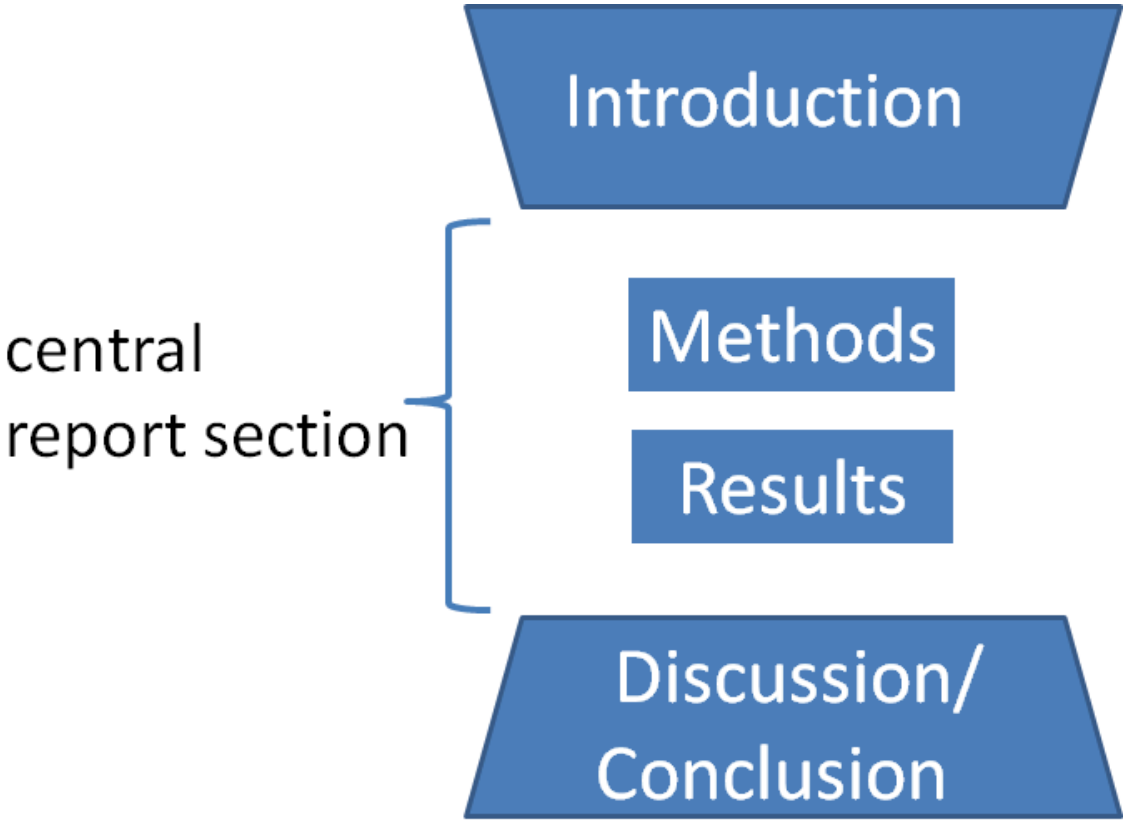
10.3 Literature Reviews in the Real World

In case you're not convinced enough to take on the task of writing a literature review, I thought I'd mention that literature reviews come up in the real world in many different venues that you'll encounter in your schooling and career. You'll see that they often follow similar patterns and purposes:

Grant Proposals

Any grant proposal submitted to request research funding begins with an extensive literature review to justify the need for the research funds. If you can prove there's a gap in knowledge, it makes it that much easier to convince your audience to give you funding to fill that gap. More on that in Chapter 12: Proposals.

IMRAD Articles



The Introduction of an IMRAD article includes a literature review. Photo by Tom Toyosaki on Wikimedia Commons

IMRAD (pronounced "im-rad") stands for Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion and is the most common genre published in the social sciences and sciences. Most of the sources you gather will likely be IMRAD-format papers or will at least begin with an introduction. The "I" in IMRAD stands for Introduction and usually consists of a review of the literature on the authors' research topic. The author(s) usually use the Introduction section to report on the published literature about their research topic and reveal the trends and gaps in current research. An added benefit to beginning an article this way is that by showing the gaps in the research, the author(s) can justify their own research and explain the significance of the topic they chose to examine. Clever!

Photo by Yogi Purnama from Pexels

It's kind of like a superhero moment when someone publishes that they have a problem (e.g., turns on the Bat Signal or yells "Help!"), and Batman or Superman or Wonder Woman swoops in and saves the day. The authors lay bare a problem or gap in current research, and then they reveal the research they did to solve that problem, fill that gap. Ta da! Research saves the day.

As you might guess, the sections following the Introduction (Methods, Results, Discussion) describe the primary research the author(s) conducted to answer their research question. First they report on their quantitative and/or qualitative ***M****ethods* (M in IMRAD) including statistical analyses. Then they publish their ***R****esults* (R in IMRAD). Finally, the author(s) embark on a ***D****iscussion* (D in IMRAD) of their results in the context of the greater field of research and make suggestions for future research. This starts the research cycle over again as someone else reads their article as part of their own review of the literature and discovers a gap in the research that can be filled by new primary research.

Published Literature Reviews

In the world of academia, literature reviews can also be published on their own. For example, if someone does an extensive investigation into an important topic, the publishers of academic journals will often publish that literature review on its own to help other researchers understand that topic better.

Market Analyses

In the business sector, when someone wants to sell a product or service, they usually conduct a market analysis first to figure out how their product/service could fill a niche in the market. Entrepreneurs know that it's worth spending time researching existing products as well as potential competitors to find potential gaps in the market. They know that in order to convince people to buy their product/service, they have fill a customer's need. Conducting a market "literature review" helps them pinpoint those gaps in the current market so their product will have the biggest impact and their business will succeed.

Popular Literature Reviews

Image by Wikimedia Commons

Lest you think nerdy academics and business gurus are the only ones who rely on literature reviews, recall the last time you went on Wikipedia. If you think about it, Wikipedia is really just a giant Literature Review on millions of topics. Although the information on Wikipedia is not formally peer-reviewed like the reviews published in academic journals, they do cite all their sources and frequently revise to keep the information current. Clearly there's a market for relevant information. If you really want your mind to explode *Inception*-style, look up "Wikipedia" on Wikipedia and you'll find a literature review about a literature review. Crazy.

All this is a long way of saying that literature reviews are a part of life. And they're a huge part of any scholarly discipline, any successful business, and even our basic human desire for knowledge. So if you're ready to learn how to tackle your own literature review, let's talk about the first steps in Chapter 11 How to Plan a Literature Review.

Previous Citation(s)

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11

Planning Literature Reviews

Cristie Cowles Charles

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you'll learn the steps to creating a literature review including

- analyzing sources
- noticing patterns
- organizing and grouping sources
- creating a map and/or outline of your literature review

Note: Because this chapter involves the steps for writing your Literature Review, the discussion questions in each section will be more involved than in other chapters, so give yourself extra time. But never fear! They will all lead to writing a better paper.

11.1 Take Notes Like a Boss

Good notes will make your life much easier! Photo by Elijah Hail on Unsplash

Remember back in Chapter 3: Writing Process where we introduced you to the steps of the writing process? And do you remember that the first step is to Plan? I hope so. Because for a big paper like a Literature Review, the more you prepare and plan, the better your paper will turn out. Trust me; you don't want to jump into this one the night before it's due. Or even the week before it's due. The key to a good Literature Review is finding the patterns and connections between sources and *synthesizing* those sources rather than just talking about them individually. Therefore, before you begin writing or even planning what to write, you need be sure you've done your homework and have good notes to work with. For the purposes of this section, I'm going to assume that you've already done the steps in Chapter 8: Finding and Evaluating Sources: you've created a research question, gathered many relevant and reliable sources, annotated your sources, taken good notes, and hopefully even written an Annotated Bibliography.

Recall from Chapter 1 that any publication is written as part of an ongoing conversation. So it helps to view all the sources you've found as contributions to the larger conversation in your field. Your job is to figure out the most important threads of that conversation. For this reason, a good Literature Reviewer synthesizes the sources—compares them and shows them in a larger context—rather than just talking about them individually. Like Marty McFly, your readers need the big picture.

> *"A literature review can be just a simple summary of the sources, but it usually has an organizational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis. A summary is a recap of the important information of the source, but a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information. It might give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations. Or it might trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates. And depending on the situation, the literature review may evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant."*

—*The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

I know in Chapter 10 we talked mostly about looking at what's been done before. But the truth is, even though the past is your focus in a literature review, like in the movie *Back to the Future*, you'll also want to keep in mind the present and future.

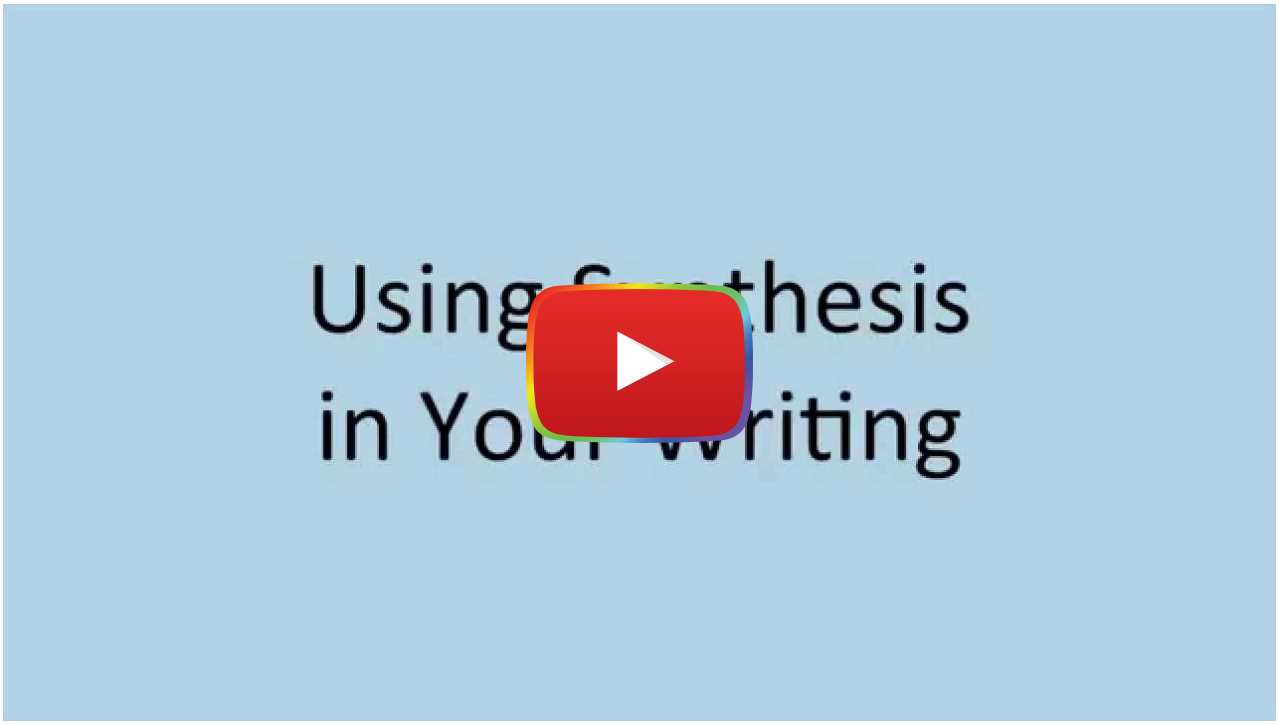
Map out the past, present, and future of research. Feel free to use a time-traveling Delorean. Photo by Jason Leung on Unsplash

Imagine you're getting into your time-traveling Delorean so you can figure out

- the **past**—how far research has come
- the **present**—where researchers are currently focusing their research, and
- the **future**—where gaps in knowledge appear that can be filled by tomorrow's researchers.

What is Synthesis?

Throughout the rest of this section you'll be going through a tutorial created by superstar research librarian Emily Swensen Darowski and illustrious associate professors Nikole D. Patson and Elizabeth Helder Babcock to take you through the process of synthesizing sources. Have your notes from your sources ready and follow the instructions after each video.



Watch on YouTube

By Emily Swensen Darowski, Nikole D. Patson, and Elizabeth Helder Babcock. (CC-BY-NC-SA)
https://youtu.be/E1WuhPXQ5wA

Step 1: Color-Code Your Notes

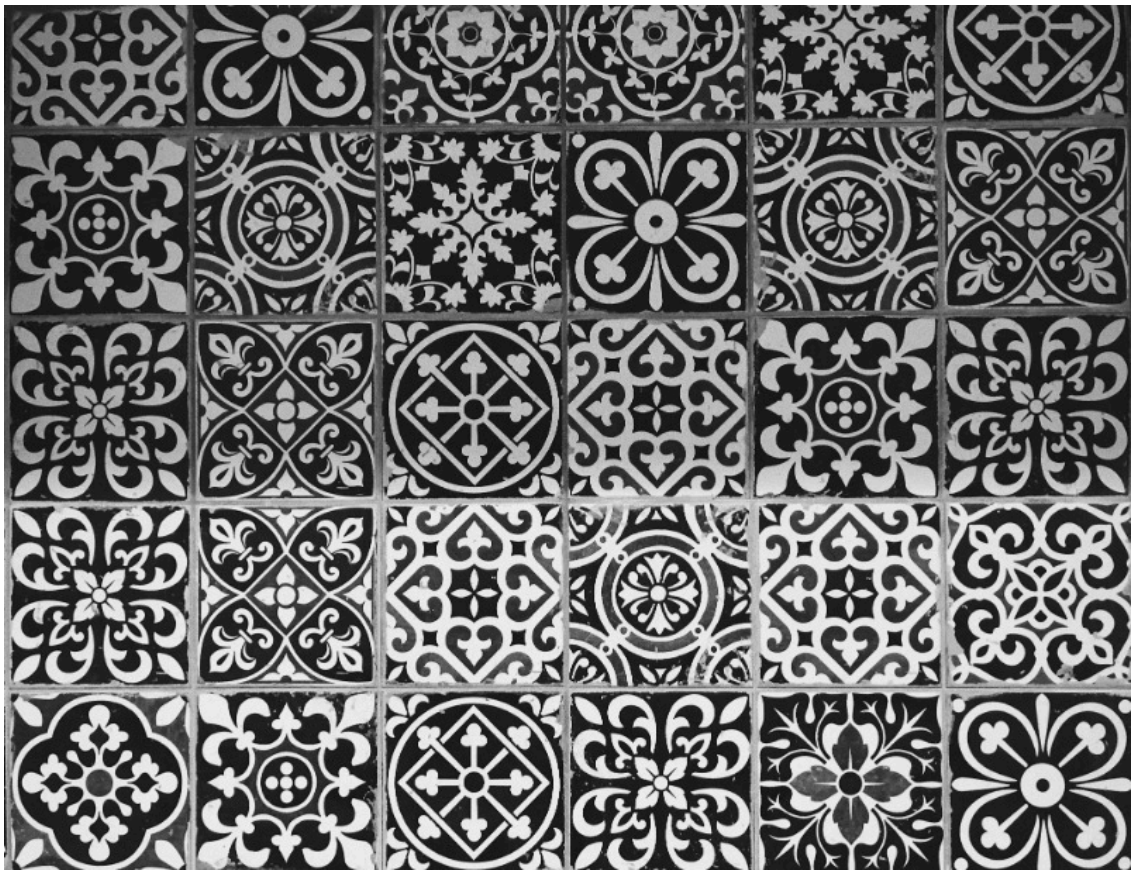
Color-Code Your Notes. Photo by Sara Torda on Unsplash

This is where your notes will come in handy. If you've already color-coded your summaries from your sources, then you're one step ahead. If not, don't worry. Just watch this video and follow the steps. Remember, you can use paper cards or electronic note-taking software like Trello.

Watch on YouTube

By Emily Swensen Darowski, Nikole D. Patson, and Elizabeth Helder Babcock. (CC-BY-NC-SA)
https://youtu.be/Zcp0bov2svo

Step 2: Look for Patterns



Can you see patterns? Photo by James McDonald on Unsplash

Now you're going to take your note-taking to the next level as opposed to just writing general summaries like you did for an Annotated Bibliography. This time as you read through your notes and sources, you'll be looking for patterns and themes that emerge.

If you're writing a stand-alone literature review, then you don't need to look for all the items listed in the video. (A stand-alone literature review means the kind that's published on its own and is not the introduction to a bigger empirical research project report or IMRAD format paper. Most students will be writing a stand-alone literature review). In that case, you just need to look for things that help you see what's happening in the field, what researchers are doing. So you can ignore the items in the video such as "Methodology that you might 'borrow' for your proposed materials or procedures" because you won't be conducting any experiments or primary research in this class. Your teacher might eventually ask you to propose research in a grant proposal, but that's the most you'll have time for. So for now, just focus on the items relevant to a literature review as you organize your notes.

Watch on YouTube

By Emily Swensen Darowski, Nikole D. Patson, and Elizabeth Helder Babcock. (CC-BY-NC-SA)
https://youtu.be/7bDVx3iicbE

I tell my students to ask four questions as they look through their sources and notes:

1. What do researchers agree and disagree about?
2. How are researchers narrowing or changing their focus to create new information?
3. What are each study's limitations and strengths?
4. What's the next step in research—what should be studied in the future? (The research gap)

Revisit your sources from your Annotated Bibliography. Look through them again looking for these patterns:

- Similarities/Differences
- Relationships
- Areas of inquiry
- Areas of controversy
- Gaps

Another way to think of these groups is to think ***heat***: Where are the hottest areas of research? What are the most heated debates? Which studies are the hottest—most cited? Which are only lukewarm because they have major limitations/weaknesses? Where does the research go cold (where are there gaps that need to be filled)?

Step 3: Organize and Group

Group your notes into themes or umbrellas. Photo by Alex Blajan on Unsplash

Now you can group your notes into themes or umbrellas based on the four questions you've been asking yourself. Or if you notice similarities or connections between sources, feel free to make an umbrella based on that. This process doesn't have to be perfect, so don't get caught up in making things match perfectly. The point is that you're starting to organize your notes based on your own agenda.

Watch on YouTube

By Emily Swensen Darowski, Nikole D. Patson, and Elizabeth Helder Babcock. (CC-BY-NC-SA)
https://youtu.be/TJNoymVkqlI

Here's what you can consider about each of the four questions from above:

1. What do researchers agree and disagree about?

Many students are tempted to simply report on what's been established and agreed upon in their field, but the problem with this is that if everyone in your field agrees about something, then it becomes common knowledge and no longer counts as a gap in knowledge. So if you only report on what is commonly agreed upon, you're actually writing a descriptive report rather than a synthesized literature review. Students in fields like Public Health where reports are common need to pay extra attention to avoiding this tendency. Reports are great when explaining something like the difference between symptoms of the common cold versus the coronavirus—you want to focus on the most agreed-upon information in that case. But a literature review has a different purpose: to unearth the gaps and disagreements where the most fruitful areas for future research are.

If most researchers seem to agree, all is not lost; that information can become background information for your literature review. So take note of common knowledge in your field, but focus your search on areas of disagreement.

2. How are researchers narrowing or changing their focus to create new information?

Remember as well that researchers are constantly trying to create new information. They do this in two ways:

1. by narrowing or shifting their focus or
2. by taking something that's been done before and doing it in a new way as a type of re-vision.

It's your job to point out how researchers in the field are currently creating new information and where you think the field is going next (aka the gaps in research). If you notice, for instance, that researchers have started to look at specific geographic areas but they haven't yet looked at different age groups, then this could be an area for further research. It's

valuable to show a trajectory of how variables are being narrowed because that helps us know where things are bound to go in the future as well.

3. What are each study's limitations and strengths?

When I have a student who's struggling with synthesis, I often tell them to go through each source and simply write out the strengths and weaknesses. It's a great way to start because it gets their analysis juices flowing. Perhaps a limitation is in methodology—is the study reporting on a small number of participants? That usually allows for richer data (a strength) but at the cost of being able to generalize to a bigger population (a weakness). Is the study only quantitative in nature? That allows for easily measurable results about larger populations (a strength), but perhaps they are missing the richer data interviews or qualitative surveys could produce (a weakness). Does someone's interpretation of results seem to miss what another research group published? Ta da! You've found a gap that can be filled with future research.

One more way to take note of limitations and strengths is to pay attention to which sources are cited the most and have had the most influence in your field. You can generally assume that the more a source is cited, the "stronger" the research.

4. What's the next step—what should be studied in the future? (The research gap)

All of this is leading to the ultimate goal of a literature review, which is to show where researchers should go next. As you analyze your sources and find places where further research would add knowledge to your field, take note. You can organize these "gaps" into themes or umbrellas as well and include them in your literature review. In terms of hoverboards, the point of a literature review is to figure out what's been done—and more importantly, what *hasn't*—so you can pinpoint where the best place is to take the next step and remain on that cutting edge.

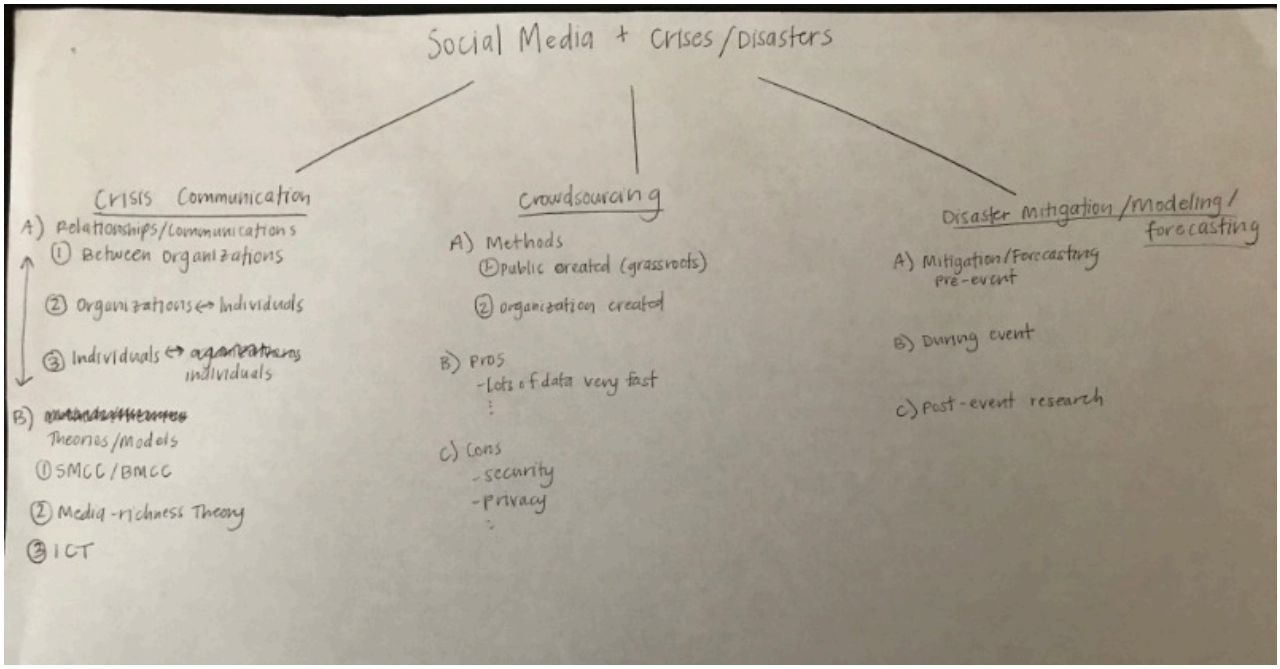
Make a Map

Make a map of your sources. Photo by oxana v on Unsplash

As you compare sources and group your notes, you'll be able to figure out the main paths that the conversation is taking. This is why Literature Reviews are generally organized around themes rather than simply a list of information about each source separately. In fact, most Literature Reviews are organized in one of these four structures:

1. Similar concepts or themes
2. Similar methods
3. Chronological development
4. Controversies

My students often find it helpful to literally make a map of their sources to show where themes are emerging. This is similar to the creative mindmapping we talked about in the brainstorming section earlier. As with brainstorming, it often helps to physically draw the connections because it encourages your creativity and your ability to see relationships. Here's an example of my awesome geography student Carly's paper on the uses of social media during crises and disasters. Making a map of her topic and what she found in her sources allowed her to visually see where the areas of inquiry are in her field. This map could easily be used to create themes for her notes or even to structure her outline for her literature review.



A student's mindmap for her paper showing areas of inquiry around the topic of social media use during disasters. (Used with permission)

Step 4: Assess Groupings

It's time to look through the way you've grouped your notes and see where your sources are landing. Make sure you have multiple sources under each theme/umbrella so you'll be able to synthesize once you get to the drafting stage. If you don't have enough sources under a theme/umbrella, this is a good time to either look for more sources or decide that this particular theme is not important enough to include. Once you feel like you have enough sources under each group, you can probably see how your paper's outline will emerge from this organization. (We'll talk all about outlines in the next section.)

Watch on YouTube

By Emily Swensen Darowski, Nikole D. Patson, and Elizabeth Helder Babcock. (CC-BY-NC-SA)
https://youtu.be/E0AsfD4ih2I

Step 5: Write a Paragraph

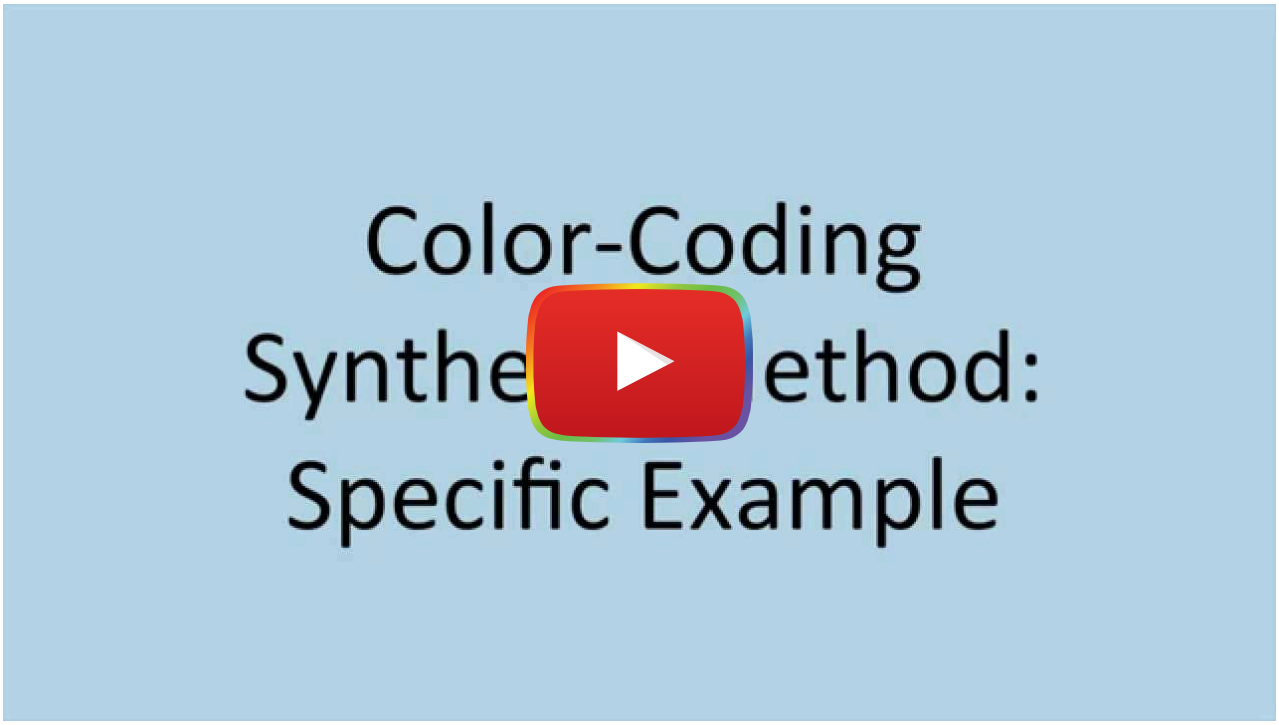
Now you can try writing a paragraph that synthesizes the sources under one of your groups of notes. If you can include synthesized paragraphs like this throughout your paper, your literature review will be much more sophisticated than a simple annotated bibliography or descriptive report—you will show that you understand the areas of inquiry in your field and how researchers are approaching your topic.

Watch on YouTube

y Emily Swensen Darowski, Nikole D. Patson, and Elizabeth Helder Babcock. (CC-BY-NC-SA)
https://youtu.be/1E_ZlVsrBNQ

Step 6: Check Out an Example

As a final step, watch this video to review the steps and check out an example.



Watch on YouTube

By Emily Swensen Darowski, Nikole D. Patson, and Elizabeth Helder Babcock. (CC-BY-NC-SA)
https://youtu.be/zjzm99oNf5E

Now that you've started organizing your notes into themes, patterns, and idea umbrellas, you're ready to structure your paper. So we'll take a break from working with notes and move on to the structure of a literature review.

11.2 Structure Your Paper

A Literature Review follows a general structure. As you start organizing your ideas and formulating what you want to say, think about how and where your ideas will fall into this basic structure:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Introduction (with Thesis Statement)
- Body Paragraphs (with Headings)
- Discussion/Conclusion
- References

In addition, your teacher might ask you to include other elements like a Table of Contents, List of Tables and Figures, or an Appendix.

I'm going to cover each of the main elements of Literature Review structure, but instead of talking about them in the order they go in your paper, I'm going to talk about them *in the order you should tackle them*. Trust me, it'll make your life easier.

Thesis Statement

Now that you've grouped your notes and seen patterns emerge, you're ready to create the crux of your literature review: the thesis statement. But don't be fooled into thinking that you're writing a typical research paper with an argumentative thesis statement where you take a position on an issue. In contrast, your position in a literature review is simply what

you believe to be *the state of the field on an issue*. Some people call it an expository thesis statement because it *exposes* or announces your topic rather than taking a position or arguing your opinion. So any claim you make will be determined by the sources that you've been organizing and grouping and the trends or patterns you found. One way to think of a literature review thesis statement is in two parts:

> *Thesis = Main Areas of Inquiry + Future Research Directions*

Areas of Inquiry

In other words, you will describe what you think the main areas of inquiry are concerning your topic. This is the new knowledge you're personally bringing to the table and that justifies writing a literature review—now that you've read and analyzed your sources, you can tell us your findings. And your findings consist of the fact that researchers in your field are congregating in certain arenas—also known as areas of inquiry. Your job is to point out where those areas are.

Go back to your notes from the Synthesis activities in the last section and also do some mind mapping until you have decided on 3-4 main areas of inquiry you want to talk about in your paper. If you're organizing your Literature Review chronologically or by methodology instead of by theme/area of inquiry, then you can divide your ideas in to 3-5 sections based on those perspectives. Either way, you can even write out the headings you would use for each section.

Future Research Directions

And because there are still limitations or gaps in knowledge, you're also in a position to explain where you think future research should go. These are your main findings or "results" in a Literature Review. So your thesis statement—or main point—is a combination of your main sections and your findings. You'll eventually put this statement at the end of your Introduction.

Length

Another difference between a typical research paper and a literature review is that in the former, a thesis statement is short—one or two sentences—and makes a claim; in contrast, a literature review thesis statement can be as long as a paragraph. In fact, the thesis statement can serve two purposes: it can explain your main point and it can indicate the organization of your paper. (Be sure to list everything in the same order you'll talk about them in your paper.)

For example, my student Justin's thesis statement is actually a paragraph long and sets up the organization of his paper. (This came at the end of his Introduction.)

> *In this paper, I will give an overview regarding the history of Africa's relationships with their traditional investors and then compare that to China's relationship with Africa now. I will then cover the three main ways that China is involved with Africa which are FDI, trade, and aid and discuss what researchers have found both China and Africa have to offer in all of these interactions. Then I will synthesize how current researchers agree and disagree regarding both the positive and negative effects of China's interaction on Africa from a macroeconomic and microeconomic level. I will then end this review by offering what researchers say is the future of Africa based on their relationship with China.*

As you can see, this is very different than a typical thesis statement. It's long and doesn't take a stand on an issue. But it still serves the purpose of delineating the main points of his paper—areas of inquiry and research gaps—and setting a direction for where he'll go.

Write a Thesis Statement

Now it's your turn to try creating a preliminary thesis statement to go at the end of your Introduction. List the 3-5 main Areas of Inquiry that you've found based on your topic. Then list the main gaps you've found in the research and where you think further research should go. Now write these things out into a few sentences that could go at the end of your Introduction. You might have to revise this later, but it will be a good start.

Outlining

Outlines are like topiaries. Photo by Dean Moriarty from Pixabay.

Once you have a basic thesis statement—or even as you're trying to create one—you can start organizing your ideas into an outline. Your notes should already be grouped under umbrellas, so it shouldn't be too hard now to make a general outline of the rest of your paper. There are two types of outlining you can choose for setting up your paper: the formal outline (aka the structured outline) or the organic outline (aka the unstructured outline). Dr. Matt Baker (2019), a BYU Linguistics professor, has studied the way students create outlines and likes to compare the two types of outlining to making a topiary—you know, those shaped trees or bushes that often look like animals (they're especially prevalent at Disney resorts).

Organization-Only Outlines are like the topiary wire frames that a bush will grow into.Photo by Mike Atkinson on Flickr.

Baker calls the formal/structured type of outline an Organization-Only Outline and says this is similar to the formal way gardeners create topiary bushes. The formal way is to create a metal wire frame first and then grow the bush into the frame until it's shaped beautifully. This is like the types of formal outlines you're probably most familiar with that use Roman numerals:

I. Introduction
II. Main Point #1
    A. Sub-topic A
        i. Sub-sub-topic i
        ii. Sub-sub-topic ii
    B. Sub-topic B
III. Main Point #2
    A. Sub-topic A
    B. Sub-topic B, etc.

If you already have a good sense of where you're going with your literature review, then this can be a great way to start filling in the details. You can make your major umbrellas/areas of inquiry the first level of Roman numerals (I, II, III, etc.), and start adding subsections underneath. Your notes should help you a lot with this.

Organic Content-Exploration Outlines take shape as you develop your ideas and even start writing. (Public Domain)

The second type of outlining is more organic. Baker calls this type a Content-Exploration Outline. This involves many of the idea-generating activities we've done like brainstorming, mind mapping, and grouping as well as just plain writing

sentences and paragraphs. This is like the type of topiary where a gardener sees a full-grown bush and starts trimming it from the outside-in to create a shape. You can group ideas and work on one area and then another as your paper takes shape. You can write the sentences and paragraphs that feel the most fruitful and then work on another preferred section next.

You can even write a whole rough draft and then create an outline in reverse to see the bigger picture of how you organized your ideas and revise from there. Many students don't recognize these activities as types of outlining, but they are because they help organize your ideas, which is the whole point of a formal outline as well.

> *"Over the course of my 17-year writing career, I began to give up on outlining — that is, before I write. I've come to prefer a more organic approach to creation, first laying out my raw material on the page, then searching for possible patterns that might emerge."*
>
> *—Writer Aaron Hamburger (2013) in NY Times article "Outlining in Reverse"*

Of course, you can also have a combination of both types of outlines, which is what most students do. As you may have noticed, the activities we've done earlier in this chapter have had the purpose of helping you to organize your ideas into the shape of a paper. You might be tempted to skip this stage of the writing process, but research shows that if you take the time to organize your ideas, your writing will be

- more efficient (Kellogg, 1988),
- higher quality (de Smet, Broekkamp, Brand-Gruwel, & Kirschner, 2011; Kellogg, 1987),
- and more satisfying in the end (Torrance, Thomas, & Robinson, 2000).

Those are pretty good benefits!

Here is an example of a Literature Review outline for one of my student's papers. Pay attention to the *content* but more importantly, notice the *structure* of her paper.

> Home-Based Therapy for Children with Autism

I. Introduction
    A. Autism Spectrum Disorder
        i. Definition
        ii. Occurance
    B. Autistic children
        i. Current research/study methods
        ii. Current treatments
            a. In-home or in-school?
II. How the environment affects autistic children
    A. Sensory enrichment therapy
        i. Definition
        ii. Useful for autistic children?
    B. How the studies were administered
        i. Positive/negative results
        ii. Limitations
        iii. Parent-involvement in therapy
III. Home-Based Therapy
    A. PLAY Project Home Consultation program
        i. Purpose
        ii. Results
    B. Quantitative measurement
        i. Caregivers biased?
    C. Qualitative measurement
        i. Specific autism symptoms tests used
        ii. Results of home-based therapies
IV. Effect of home-based therapy on family
    A. Positive
        i. Easier to do things in familiar environments
    B. Negative
        i. Strain on parental relationships
        ii. Strain on sibling relationships
V. Future Research
    A. Long-term goals
        i. Have a long-term follow-up to current home-based therapies
        ii. Positive/negative results of following-up long-term (use specific study)
    B. More test subjects
        i. Family-centered approach only done on 1 family
        ii. Not enough subjects = can't be statistically significant
VI. Conclusion
    A. Children with autism
        i. Effect of the environment
        ii. Effect of the home
    B. Home-Based therapy
        i. Effect on family
        ii. How effective it is for the child
    C. Maybe quickly reiterate the future research needed?

**I honestly could use any suggestions on how to organize this better. I've spent hours trying to organize my sources/info better but could use any thoughts y'all have on how to make it better!

My favorite part about this outline is the comment at the end that this student invites any suggestions for improvement. That shows exactly the right attitude when writing—be open to feedback. The beauty of creating some type of outline now is that you can get feedback on your ideas and organization *before* you go through the work of writing out all your beautiful sentences and paragraphs.

Create an Outline

Now start creating a rough outline of your paper. You can do this by making a detailed formal outline with Roman numerals or you can do the more organic approach and start writing out ideas, sentences, and paragraphs. But if you choose the second option, you also need to show that you're starting to organize those ideas into a structure. You can read Chapter 12 if you want more details about the specific parts of a literature review. Ask for feedback on your outline before you do more writing work.

Now that you have a sense of the structure for your own Literature Review, you're ready to start drafting your paper. Luckily, Chapter 12 is all about drafting.

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12

Writing Literature Reviews

Cristie Cowles Charles

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you'll learn the steps to creating a literature review including

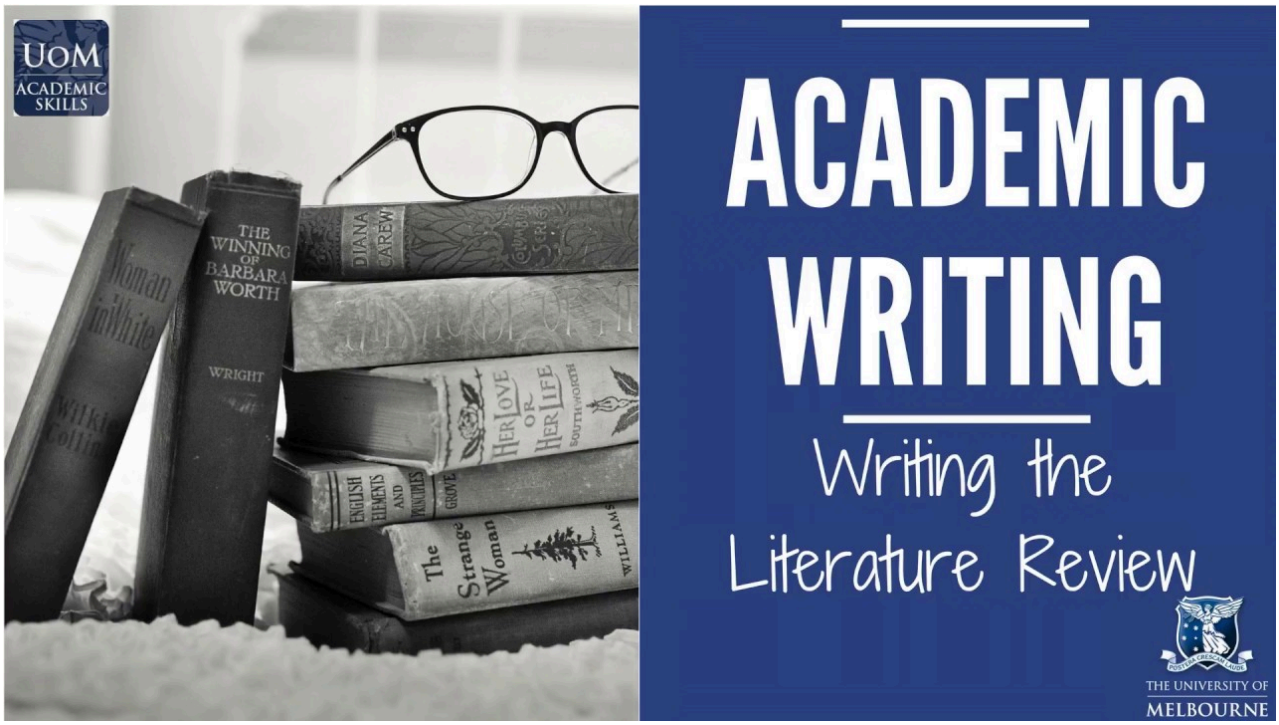
- writing an introduction, body paragraphs, a discussion/conclusion, abstract, and other elements
- drafting and getting feedback
- revising your literature review

Note: Because this chapter involves the steps for writing your Literature Review, the discussion questions in each section will be more involved than in other chapters, so give yourself extra time. But never fear! They will all lead to writing a better paper.

12.1 Draft and Synthesize

At this point, I want you to watch this 10-minute video because it both reviews what we've talked about thus far and provides great ways to get started on the actual writing of your paper. Here are some highlights to pay attention to:

- questions to ask as you take or review your notes that will guide your writing
- suggestions for how to organize your notes. (Or actually, I should spell it "organise" with an "s" since the video comes from Australia.)
- ways to add interpretation to what you say about your sources
- language to use to comment on the studies you're summarizing and synthesizing
- examples of literature review synthesis



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/70n2-gAp7J0

Video Review

What three strategies or elements from the video do you plan to incorporate into your own Literature Review?

Start Drafting

Now it's time to start drafting your paper. Follow the structure from your outline and start filling in the missing parts. Get out your notes and remind yourself of the sources you plan to talk about. You don't have to write your paper from beginning to end in order—you can go to the parts that feel the easiest and start there. Here are some places you can start:

Bullet-Point Draft

Writing your Bullet Points should be as fast as this Bullet Train. Photo by Fikri Rasyid on Unsplash

I often have my students start with a Bullet-Point draft that takes the ideas they've been outlining and fills them in with more details but only in bullet-point form. The beauty of bullet points is that they keep you from getting caught up in the language and style and allow you to focus simply on your main points. You can smooth out the sentences and transitions later, but for now, just get your ideas on the page.

Write the Introduction

Another way to get started is to just write the Introduction. You already have a thesis statement that can go at the end, so now you can start introducing your topic and its importance, setting up your Literature Review. See below for more specific help with Introductions.

Write a Body Paragraph

Or a third place to start is to jump into writing a body paragraph that synthesizes your sources—the way you did in that synthesis activity earlier. Take your notes and choose one set to talk about in paragraph form.

Don't think too hard about getting things perfect when you're drafting—that's what revision is for. Just focus on getting started and filling in some of the missing pieces. If you get stuck, do some brainstorming activities to get your creative juices flowing. Once you have something written, I suggest seeking feedback to make sure you're going in the right direction. In fact, I recommend getting as much feedback as possible along the way.

Start Writing

Now it's your turn to choose somewhere to start writing—choose either a bullet-point draft, the introduction, a body paragraph or something else. Then write the equivalent of at least one paragraph.

How to Write Each Section

Now that you've jump-started the writing process, we'll go through each of the parts of your paper more in depth to help you fill out a complete draft.

Introduction

Once you know what your main points will be, you're ready to introduce your ideas. As in any paper, you can't just jump right into your thesis statement and points; you need to set the stage first. Here are the elements of a good introduction to a literature review:

A good introduction

- introduces the topic and indicates its importance (impact on individuals)
- gives a context for the research question
- defines key terms, concepts, and/or theories
- explains what search methods were used and how many and what types of sources were reviewed (this is sometimes optional)
- suggests the organization of the rest of the paper

Remember in some style guides, you don't need to title your Introduction "Introduction"—you simply center the title of your paper at the top of your page (with no bolding or other formatting) and then jump right into your first paragraph.

Tip: You don't always know where you're going when you start a paper, so just get a good draft of an introduction down. Then when you finish writing a first draft of your paper, read your conclusion and consider using some of it in your introduction instead. I often tell my students that conclusions make good introductions because you finally know exactly where you went in your paper. Either way, you'll want to revisit your introduction once your paper's done so you can adjust it to better match where your paper went.

Introduction

Get a start on your introduction by writing an opening sentence that introduces your topic and/or indicates its importance. Post that here. Then you can use that to jump start the rest of your introduction.

Body

The body of your paper is where you can develop your points and use your newfound synthesis skills. Remember the synthesis activity with the videos you did in the last chapter? As you create a draft, you can start composing paragraphs using your awesome notes just like you practiced with those videos. Try to incorporate several sources into each paragraph to be sure that you're synthesizing and not just summarizing or listing without making connections. Your color-coded notes can help you be sure that each paragraph contains multiple sources.

In the body of your paper, you should

- synthesize previous studies to inform the reader of the state of research
- “identify relations, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature” (APA Manual, p. 8)
- group your points into major headings and subheadings (You choose the arrangement based on what you’ve found: similar concepts or theories, similar methods, chronological development, controversies, etc.)
- support all points with evidence drawn from sources or with sound reasoning and in which all borrowed information is documented.
- summarize sources most of the time, paraphrase sometimes, and use quotations very sparingly—only when specific wording is poignant or can’t be said in any other way.

One way to talk about your sources is known as the CEC Method: Claim-Evidence-Commentary.

Claim + Evidence + Commentary

Just like any paragraph, you should start with a Topic sentence that acts as a mini-Thesis statement or a general Claim about your topic. Then you need to give **evidence** to support that claim. In a literature review, your evidence comes in the form of studies that have been done—all those brilliant notes you've been taking. This is where you can synthesize your sources and show that they are related under the umbrella of a topic. However, just listing or summarizing sources does not make the connection between them and your topic sentence clear. This is where **commentary** comes in. Your job is also to comment on and interpret the significance of your "evidence" so your audience can understand the connections between them. In the next section we'll talk more about how to do this, especially how to incorporate metacommentary into your paragraphs. In synthesis, your language is the key.

Add Metacommentary

Metacommentary is the key to synthesis. metacommentary (aka metadiscourse) is a type of commentary that guides your reader and helps them interpret the sources and evidence you're presenting. Think of it as really powerful transitions. First, let's remind ourselves what transitions are. Transition words act like signposts—they guide your reader through your points. They can also glue your ideas together so they feel more cohesive. Beware that transitions can definitely be overdone, but I'd say most students in general could use more transitions in their papers rather than fewer.

Add signposts to your writing to guide your reader. Photo by Dallas on Flickr.

Here's an awesome list of transition words (also linked in the frame below) that are grouped by category from the famous Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab—scroll down to see the list). You can also download a great handout by the University of Maryland here.

I always suggest that my students keep a categorized transition list like this handy as they write so that when you know you want to connect ideas in a certain way (e.g. to show contrast), you can easily find a good list of options (e.g. in contrast, conversely, etc.). Not only will transitions help your ideas feel more connected, they will also smooth out your writing style like butter.

https://open.byu.edu/-xpEK
https://open.byu.edu/-wzm
You might think you can just stop at transition words, but metacommentary is much more than just sprinkling some "therefore's" and "however's" throughout your paper—metacommentary actually takes your synthesis to the next level. Remember the Claim-Evidence-Commentary pattern I've mentioned? The commentary part of that sandwich is where you should focus right now. What do you comment on? You can either highlight why a source is important or connect it with other sources. This is your chance to point out the answers to the four questions you looked for in your note-taking:

1. What do researchers agree and disagree about?
2. How are researchers narrowing or changing their focus to create new information?
3. What are each study's limitations and strengths?
4. What's the next step in research—what should be studied in the future? (The research gap)

You can think of metacommentary as a sandwich with your name on it. If my student's name were Alisa, here's what an "Alisa sandwich" would look like:

ALISA—SOURCE—ALISA

- First, Alisa starts with a claim about what's happening in the field or about a particular subsection or focus of the field. This could serve as a topic sentence for a paragraph, for example.
- Second, she sets up the source with guiding language like transitions and references to her past points or sources.
- Third, she talks about the source itself and summarizes pertinent information.
- Lastly, Alisa comments on the source and/or connects it to her main point or to next source.

This metacommentary is a lot like the interpretation mentioned in the video at the beginning of this chapter. This type of "sandwich" can occur several times in a paragraph as you synthesize your sources. Here's a sample paragraph from Chris, a Public Health student, (check this) who wrote a paper called "The Causes of a Behavioral Pandemic: Screen-time Addiction and Consequent Depression Among Adolescents." I've bolded the metacommentary Chris had added to guide his readers and to connect his points together.

> ***Even though there have been far fewer studies on adolescents than adults****, adolescent studies have consistently shown that those who are more physically active experience less depressive and associated symptoms, as well as a greater overall state of well-being (Kremer 2014).* ***These studies have also shown that*** *low levels of vigorous exercise in youth can independently cause depressive symptoms. One longitudinal study revealed that over 30% of children who participate in high levels of screen-time use experience moderate to high levels of depressive symptoms (Kremer 2014).* ***Additionally, another study*** *of children in the United States demonstrated that those who participated on a sports team were less likely to exceed recommended screen-time limits established by the US Department of Health.* ***This study also demonstrated that*** *as the number of total physical activity sessions increased among youth, both during free time and at organized events, children were less likely to exceed recommended screen-time limits (Carlson 2010). In this study, children who were more physically active consistently showed lower rates of depression and other emotional disorders.* ***Therefore, evidence across multiple studies suggests that participating in screen-time activity may not be the direct cause of depressive symptoms, but rather the sedentary lifestyle and lack physical activity it causes among youth. With this recent***

evidence, experts are beginning to search for ways to replace screen-time participation of adolescents with physical activities.

Note how the last few sentences of this paragraph consist entirely of metacommentary—points that connect to the bigger picture of Chris's literature review. Also notice how Chris uses transition words and phrases to glue his points together so it doesn't come out of the blue when he brings up a new study. Chris also talks about more than one study in this paragraph, demonstrating his ability to synthesize and not just summarize. Without the metacommentary, it would be much harder to see the connections between the studies and how they fit into the bigger picture. Finally, Chris indicates the implications of these studies and points to what researchers are doing next. This has a dual purpose of reminding readers why this topic is important as well as indicating where he will go in his next paragraph (about physical activities). Metacommentary is powerful!

Metacommentary takes practice, but you can do it! And it will not only make your points stronger, it will make it easier for your audience to read and understand—which should always be your goal.

If You Get Stuck

Literature reviews can be hard. If you get stuck, I have a little trick I tell my students. For your first draft, try starting every sentence with "Researchers . . ." I know this seems formulaic, but if you can keep your focus on what particular researchers did or what they agree or disagree on, you'll avoid the most common pitfalls of literature reviews: sounding like a typical argumentative research paper. If your focus is always on what researchers are doing or what they've found, then at the very least you'll stay in the realm of the literature review genre. Later you can go back through and change up your sentence structure, but I've found that this is an easy way for students to get through a first draft.

A Quick Word on Verb Tense

Students often ask about verb tense in relation to literature reviews—do you say that someone "conducted a study" in past tense? But then what if you're saying that "researchers agree" about something? That's in present tense. I use this rule of thumb: if you're talking about something specific that was completed in the past, use the past tense. If you're talking about a current attitude or something currently accepted in a field, then use present tense. For example, if you say that you conducted a review of the literature, then that's over and done with, so you should use the past tense. Or if you want to talk about a particular study that was done, then use the past tense, too. But if you want to say that researchers in general currently agree about something, then you can use the present tense.

Things get a little trickier when you talk about what's happened by researchers in the field in general rather than talking about a specific study. For example, if many people have studied hoverboard technology, then you should talk about it in that same tense—they "have studied." That's called the present perfect tense (the verb "to have" + past participle). You don't need to remember the name—just the fact that you can use this tense when you want to say that researchers in the field "have done" something in general or that a review of a topic "has been done." So here's a table based on the work of Feak and Swales (2009) to sum this up:

Tense	Reference	Example
Past Tense	A Single Study or Event	McFly (1989) investigated the usefulness of hoverboards in a chase.
Present Tense	Generally Accepted Knowledge of the Field	One of the most promising areas of hoverboard technology is the use of electromagnets (Allain, 2015).
Present Perfect Tense	An Area of Inquiry	The usefulness of skateboards in a chase has been widely researched (McFly, 1985; McFly, 1989; McFly, 1990).

Verb Tenses to Use in Literature Reviews

Discussion/Conclusion

Your last section will either be called discussion or conclusion (or will possibly not have a heading depending on your teacher's preferences or the style guide you're following). In an effective Discussion (aka Conclusion) section you should

- do more than sum up what you have said (though you should do that as well)
- explain where there are gaps and limitations in the previous research done
- indicate recommendations for future research based on those gaps

At the end of this section,

- restate your position (thesis statement)
- show the implications of your findings

References

You must also include a list of your References (also known as a Bibliography or Works Cited page depending on the documentation style) showing all the sources you referred to in your paper. Your references page must be in alphabetical order and formatted according to your chosen style guide (see Chapter 9: Talking About Sources).

Other Elements

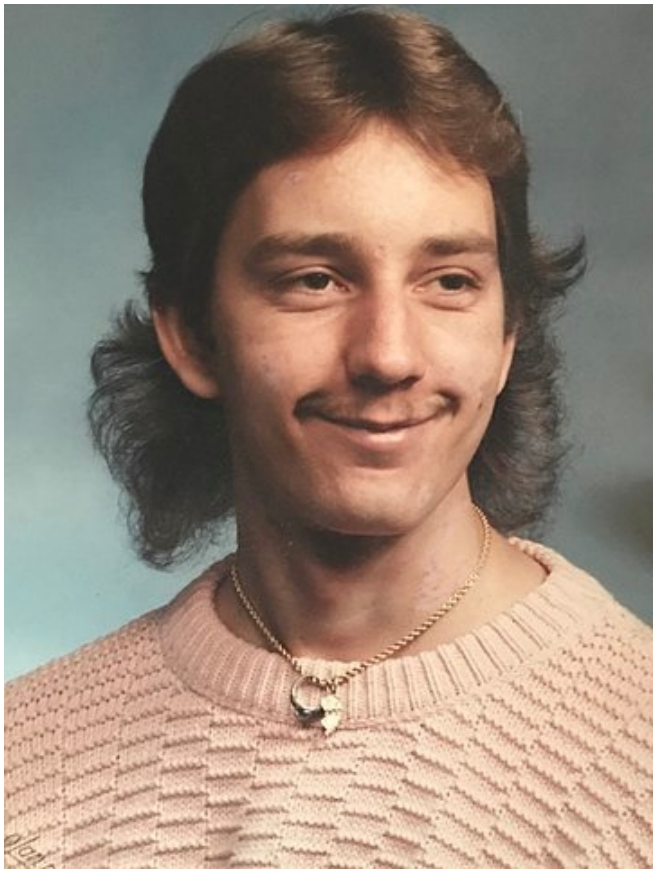
Your teacher might require you to include these other elements in your Literature Review paper. Be sure to follow the format from your style guide.

Title Page

I've waited until now to talk about titles because it's wise to wait until you have a good draft before you choose a title. Why? Because you often don't know exactly where your paper will go until you've written it out. Your title is your readers' first entry into your paper, so you want it to be interesting and also reflect what's inside. Your title should also include as much information as possible while remaining appropriately short and sweet. For example, the APA Manual recommends not using extraneous words but sticking to the main point of your paper. My student Justin's title follows this model:

Implications of Chinese Involvement on Africa's Economy

He basically summarizes his main point in one succinct statement—the ultimate summary. APA would be proud.


The Mullet. Business in the front, party in the back. Image on Wikimedia

However, depending on your sub-field in the Social Sciences, many scholars like to do what I call a "reverse mullet." As you might know, the rad '80s mullet haircut that's short on top and long in the back has been described as

The Mullet:

Business in the front, party in the back.

A mullet starts with the serious and ends with the fun. But academic titles often do the reverse: they have an interesting introductory phrase, then a colon, and then the standard, more serious title. That's why I call them the Reverse Mullet:

Reverse Mullet: Party in the front, business in the back. Photo by Weidmaier

The Reverse Mullet:

Party in the front, Business in back

A reverse mullet title gets the reader's attention before adding the serious explanation. For example, one of my students named Katelyn wrote her Literature Review on how much high school students' perception of their teachers was influenced by their teachers' apparel. Her title included a Reverse Mullet structure:

Keeping it Class-y: How Formality of Teacher Apparel Affects

Student Perceptions of the Teacher in the Classroom

Because her field is education (Social Science Teaching), this second type of title structure is appropriate and adds interest. You can talk to your writing teacher or the professors in your major to find out which type of title would be most appropriate for you to use in your field. If you want to just play it safe, stick with a plain title, but know you might be missing a chance to draw your readers in.

What else should go on your title page besides your title?

- Your Name (centered)
- Your Teacher's Name (centered on the next line)
- A Page Number (in the top right corner that's continued throughout the paper)
- Optional: the Name of the School or Department
- Optional: the Name/Number of Your Course (e.g., English 300)
- Optional: the Date

Your title and these additions should go in the middle of the page. Of course, your teacher is the best person to ask about formatting requirements and will usually give you clear instructions. If you have questions, ask.

Abstract

You should save writing your abstract for last because it's a summary of your completed paper. You can try writing a preliminary abstract now as a type of outline, but you run the risk of finding out that once you're done with your paper, you actually went in some different directions. My advice is to hold off and wait to write the abstract until the end. You can create a page after the title page where your abstract will go, but to emphasize that you should write this last, we'll wait to cover the details of writing an an abstract until the next section.

Appendix

If you have tables or figures (or formulas or other data) that are too big to be added inside the text of your paper, you can put them at the end. If you only have one Appendix, you can call it just that. But if you have more than one, call them Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. and refer to them as such in the text of your paper.

Tables and Figures

One more element that could be helpful to your paper is to include tables and/or figures. You're probably familiar with Tables (you know, the boxes with lots of horizontal and vertical cells). A Figure is any type of image, graph, or chart besides a table. You can use tables or figures from your sources as long as you cite them properly. You can also create your own table or figure either from existing data or to explain a concept. See Chapter 6: Design for the details of how to create, use, or format tables and figures. Just remember to check your style guide; for example, in APA Format, you need to title and number your tables and figures separately.

I hope you feel like you have a better sense of the structure for your own Literature Review. In the next chapter, we'll talk about how to start drafting your paper.

12.2 Write an Abstract

We're not talking about this kind of abstract! (Public Domain)

Not that kind of abstract! As great as abstract art is, what you need now is the abstract of your paper. (Note: some teacher's won't require an abstract, so you can skip this section in that case.) Why do you think I've saved the abstract for last even though it's the first thing your audience will read (after your title)? You guessed it: it's because the abstract is a summary of everything you've talked about in your paper, so if you haven't written your paper yet, it's pretty hard to summarize it.

A lot of students think that the abstract is a *preview* of your paper that simply invites the reader to learn more. But that's not the purpose of the abstract, that's the purpose of the *Introduction*. If your paper were a movie, your abstract would *not* be the movie trailer. A movie trailer is an invitation to see more without giving away too much; that's the point of your *Introduction*. Instead, your abstract would be the movie *plot synopsis*. It would have a big SPOILER ALERT sign in front of it because in it you want to give away all the punchlines from your paper. In fact, the more you include your most important points or findings, the better. Because readers might only ever read your abstract, you want the most important information there. Then just like you did in your own database searching, they will decide based on the abstract whether they should open your paper and read more details. Your job is to make sure they have the best information to do that.

An abstract has a few main parts that mirror the parts of your paper but in miniature. First, in 1-2 sentences, you should introduce the topic, its importance, and the problem or question you tried to answer. Then you should succinctly explain your methods (database searching) and the scope of your project. The last and largest part should consist of your main findings such as the main areas of inquiry where researchers are congregating. You should include the major strengths and limitations (gaps) you found in your review. Finally, you should explain any implications of your study and suggest where future research should go. See? A miniature paper. It should be so miniature, that an abstract should usually not exceed 250 words. At the end, you can also list a few Keywords to make it easy to search for your paper on databases.

To solidify your understanding of how to write an abstract, watch this 3-minute video from the University of Melbourne that takes you through a good example. Try not to get distracted by their awesome Australian accents.

Watch on YouTube

Now if you would like more details, you can refer to this explanation.

12.3 The Real Last Step: Revise (and Revise and Revise)

Revision means re-vision. Photo by pine watt on Unsplash

The best writers revise (and revise and revise). Think back to Chapter 3: Writing Processes and the section on Revision. You need to think like your audience, which means you have to get out of your own head and think mindfully. One way to do this is to *revise with purpose* or in other words, with specific goals in mind.

You can't revise without a decent draft, so don't blow off the first draft deadline. The better your first draft, the better your paper will be in the end because you'll have enough time to really look at your paper. Actually re-look at your paper, or in other words, re-vise. Get it? Re-vision?

So how can you get out of your own head? Two ways: people and levels. The first way to get a fresh perspective is audience-oriented revision: peer review, teacher conferences, writing center appointments, and other outside feedback from real, live people.

Get Feedback!

Seek feedback! Photo by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

When you find out how other people react to your paper, it will give you invaluable perspective into what's working and what's not. This is feedback and is extremely valuable. Your teacher should help you do these kinds of peer reviews and revisions in class.

One of the most valuable ways to improve your paper is to get feedback. Feedback can come from anyone—peers, teachers, relatives, Writing Center tutors, roommates—just be sure to choose someone you trust who also knows about good writing and won't hesitate to tell you where you can improve. I don't know your grandma, but if she's the type of grandma who will tell you your paper is great no matter what's in it because you're just so nice, then run away! Okay, don't really run away from your grandma—she's probably very loving and supportive. Give her a hug instead. However, don't give your paper to your grandma to critique in that case. *My* grandma is actually a fantastic writer and wouldn't be afraid to tell me where I can improve. *Do* give your paper to someone like *my* grandma.

> *Here's a tip: Most universities have a Writing Center where you can take your paper to a Writing Tutor for help and feedback for free. Do it! It's free! And they can even meet with you online.*

We're lucky at BYU that we have our very own Research and Writing Center. They can help you with any stage of the writing process from selecting a topic to citing sources to synthesis. If you're not on our campus, look up your school's writing center.

As an undergrad, my husband didn't start out with the best writing skills, so he used to take his papers to the BYU Writing Center over and over and over. I think they made the rule that you can only go once a day because of him. And guess what? It helped! His grades went up! That was his secret to success that I'm passing on to you. Your teacher doesn't have time to personally meet with each student over and over and over, but the Writing Tutors are literally paid to do just that. Well, maybe keep your visits to only one per day, but you get what I mean. Take advantage! Make an appointment right now! Did I mention that it's free?

If you need more motivation to just do it, watch this "motivational" video by Shia Le Boeuf.

Revise by Levels

The second way to improve your paper is to go through a layered revision process focusing on global and then local issues. As you re-see your paper, take my advice and tackle Global Revision before you focus on Local Revision. What do I mean by that? Let me tell you a quick story.

A Revision Story Involving Cats

When my family and I were moving to our town, we looked at a lot of houses online. We fell in love with a beautiful old house that had been totally renovated but was selling at a shockingly low price. When we finally visited the house with our realtor, we discovered why it had been on the market for so long: it smelled like cat pee. Like really, really smelled. It turns out the house had been occupied by what many people would call a "crazy cat lady"—an older woman who lived with at least 50 cats. Then tragically, a fire completely destroyed the house (I'm pretty sure the woman and her cats survived).

To protect the innocent, this is not the infamous cat house but is close to what it looked like. Photo by Jessica Furtney on Unsplash

The home owner used $400,000 of insurance money to beautifully restore the house. They rebuilt the intricate wooden staircase, restored the stately crown molding, installed lush carpet, and added upgrades to a gorgeous kitchen. The only problem was that they did their restoration in the wrong order—they took care of the *local issues* of paint color and carpet thickness while ignoring the more *global issue* of the smell. Eventually, they had to rip up all their work in the basement in order to treat the floor with a special enzyme that combated cat urine. If they'd just treated the cat smell first, then they could have saved themselves thousands of dollars, hours of work, and could have sold their house for a much higher price.

The Moral of the Story


Always get rid of the cat pee (global issues) first! Photo by Andrew Umansky on Unsplash

What does all this have to do with revision? You've got it—treat the *global issues* first! Get rid of the cat pee! Don't worry about *local issues* like flowery language or sentences that connect perfectly to each other if you're just going to have to completely renovate that section later. Work on the *global issues* like ideas, logical order, and evidence first and wait until those are intact before focusing on the details. Put another way, whole-paper and paragraph-level revisions should come before sentence-level and word-level changes.

As a final gift, fantastic BYU Family Science professor Julie Haupt offers the following path for doing four purposeful revisions—two global revisions and two local revisions. If you really want to improve your literature review, follow these steps.

GLOBAL REVISION—The Forest

First, look at the forest, not the trees. Photo by Frederico Bottos on Unsplash

Level 1: Structural Review (Global)

Purpose: The structural review examines the document as a whole to see if all requirements are met and the document's organization is sound.

Meet Assignment Requirements. Ask yourself if your paper meets all the requirements of the assignment? Look at your structure and make sure you have all necessary sections such as the following:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Introduction (with Thesis Statement and/or Organizing Statement)
- Body with Headings
- Conclusion/Discussion
- References

Include a Thesis and an Organizing Statement. Does the current version of the thesis statement match the tone, scope, and organization of the body text? Does an organizing statement after the thesis introduce the major topics and the order they will appear in the body (e.g., "In this review, I will first discuss . . . then . . . and finally . . .)

Use Headings. Is the body text subdivided in a logical way with evidence-based information located in appropriate sections? Are the major sections roughly symmetrical (in terms of length)? Are the headings brief, yet descriptive? If

subheadings are used, does the major section contain at least two? Are all levels of headings separated by text?

Level 2 (Global): Paragraph/Logic Review

Purpose: The Paragraph/Logic Review is designed to review each paragraph for cohesion and compliance to the CEC (Claim-Evidence-Commentary) format.

Sequence Paragraphs Effectively. When reading only the first sentence of each paragraph, does the logical pattern of the paper emerge? Do the claims made in these topic sentences coordinate well with the thesis of the paper?

Check Topic Sentences and Cohesion. Does the topic sentence or claim provide an effective overview of the information that is located in the paragraph? Is the claim supported by several points of synthesized evidence, rather than a single study? Does each paragraph seem well directed and cohesive? Do the sentences build one upon another within the paragraph in a logical way?

Evaluate Paragraph Length. Are any paragraphs too long (longer than approximately ½ page)? Are any paragraphs too short (approximately three sentences or less)? Do paragraphs transition well from one to the next and use transitional words to connect ideas?

LOCAL REVISION—The Tree

In Local Revision, you'll pay more attention to the details of the "tree." Photo by Petr Kratochvil on Pixabay

Level 3 (Local): Formatting Review

Purpose: The Formatting Review is designed to make sure all style and formatting conventions are explicitly followed to help the paper reflect a high level of professionalism.

Check Document Formatting. Do the title page, abstract, body text, and reference page appear in the correct page formatting as required? (Check your discipline's style guide for details.)

Examine the Reference List Closely. Are all references in the reference list ordered alphabetically? Is the reference list spaced with no extra gaps between paragraphs? Are all references (e.g., journal articles, internet resources, or books) listed in the correct format? Is every reference on the reference list cited at least once in the body and does each in-text citation have a corresponding reference in the reference list?

Make a Final Check of the In-Text Citations. Is all information properly cited with an in-text citation when needed? Do all in-text citations include the year next to the author(s)? When more than one citation is listed within parentheses are they separated by semi-colons? Do they need to be ordered alphabetically by first author's last name?

Use "et al." Correctly. Check your field's style guide for multiple authors. If a study has multiple authors, do you include the correct number of authors' names in the in-text citation? Do you include the correct number of authors in the references page?

Level 4 (Local): Finishing Review

Purpose: The Finishing Review is an opportunity to look closely at sentence construction, language, hedging, and grammar/punctuation.

Review Phrasing with a Read-Aloud Session. Read your paper aloud. Since having to read a sentence twice to get its meaning or "tripping over" phrasing can be an indication of awkward construction, are all sentences easily read aloud? Are any sentences so long that they have become difficult to comprehend, but could be split without changing the meaning?

Use Non-Biased, Non-Absolute Language. Do all references to people comply with the "people first" designation and avoid inappropriate uses of terms for various groups? Are the findings and summary statements in the review properly "hedged"?

Check Punctuation and Grammar. Are all commas, semicolons, colons, hyphens, and other punctuation used correctly throughout the document (including the reference page)? Are common grammar mistakes, such as parallelism, subject-verb agreement, misuse of pronouns, and other grammatical issues corrected?

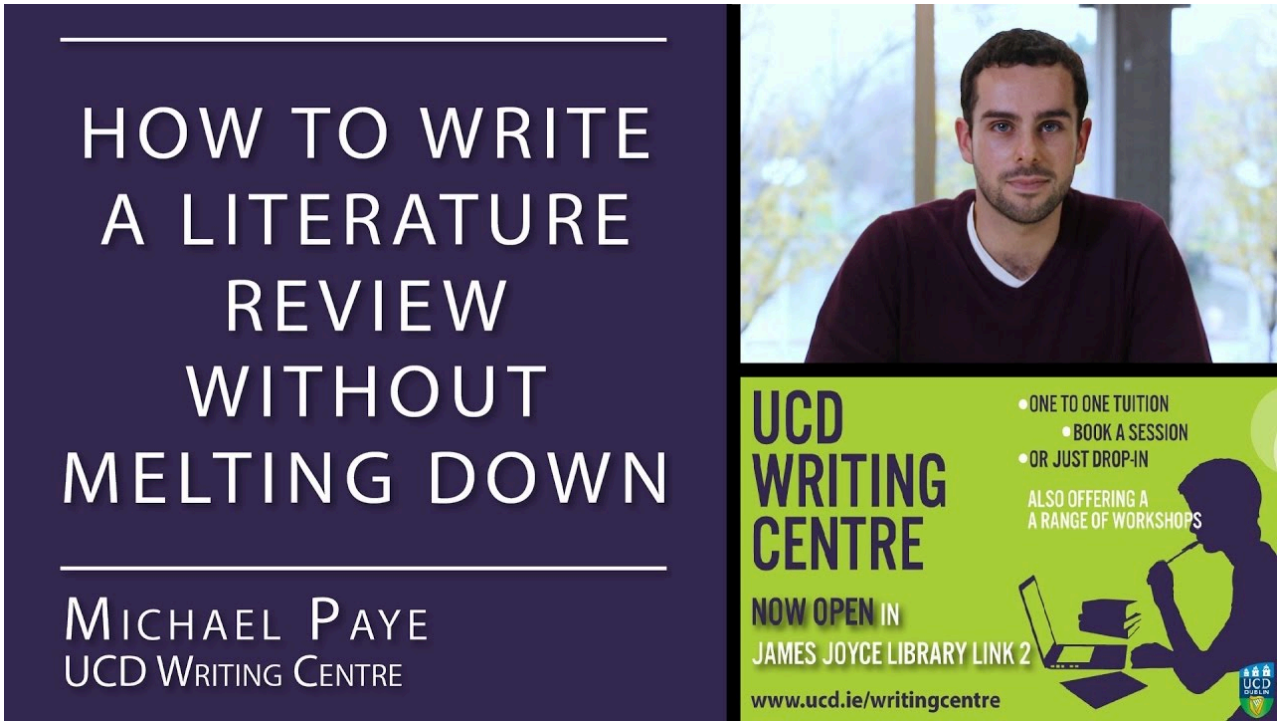
Conclusion

I know Literature Reviews can be daunting, but I hope that after reading this chapter you feel better prepared to tackle this bodacious writing assignment. As you practice writing, you'll find that it'll get easier and easier until it's as intuitive as riding a hoverboard.

Writing a Literature Review can be as easy as riding a hoverboard.

*Bonus Video

If you're still confused or would like more guidance on writing a literature review, here is an optional 25-minute video that thoroughly goes through the entire process of writing a literature review. As an extra bonus, it's made by Michael Paye from the University of Dublin who has an awesome Irish accent. Enjoy!



Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/ouY2FH0BKkQ

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Cristie Cowles Charles

Brigham Young University

Cristie Cowles Charles teaches writing and literature courses at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. She enjoys sparking a love for writing in her students--or at least a love for having had written (it's always worth it in the end, right?). She thinks pumpkin pie counts as a vegetable, is married to a super hot mechanical engineering and neuroscience professor (yes, they exist), and adores her five magnificent children.

13

Crafting Proposals

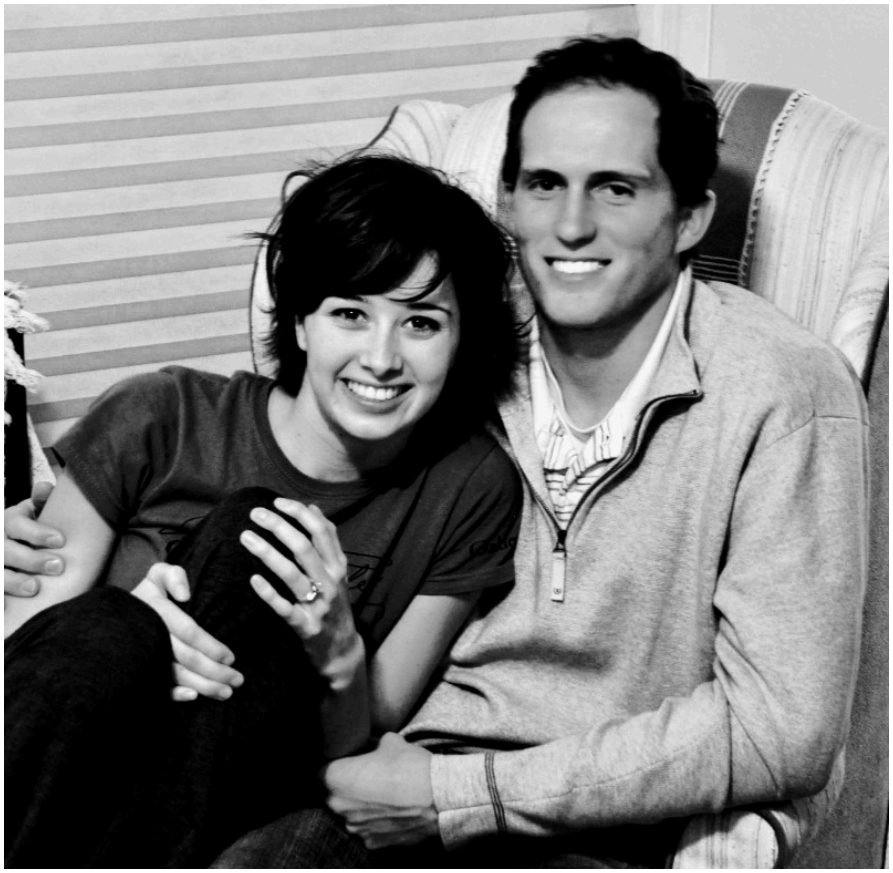
Laura Dutson

Learning Outcomes

- Identify the proposal as a distinct genre of writing in academia
- Recognize the potential benefits of the genre in current field of study, in future career, and in life
- Understand the need for genre analysis in determining specific organizational principles for each proposal
- Learn the driving questions and principles that must be addressed in all proposals and prospectuses
- Feel empowered to persuasively and professionally leverage the proposal genre to achieve goals

13.1 Introduction to Proposals

Before I dated my husband, when I imagined true love, I envisioned sappy notes tucked under my windshield wiper and sweet nothings jotted on sticky notes stuck to my bathroom mirror. But as I started falling for Jason, my desire for written flirtation was left unanswered—my windshield wipers and mirrors were perpetually empty. As a words gal (I teach writing for a living; you can guess my primary love language), I craved words on a page as a final persuasion that I should fully dive into a relationship with a guy who had me smitten in just about every other way.



The two of us about an hour after I accepted my now-husband's written marriage proposal. (Courtesy of the author.)

Luckily for me, and our two girls who wouldn't be here without us, Jason knew his audience. And so on the night he proposed, while we sat cozy on the bench seat in a truck parked on the side of the road, he gave me the first and only love letter that I've ever received from him. The letter genuinely detailed his feelings and what he hoped for our future. He loosely outlined a problem—racing-heart, weak-knees, dizzy-head love—and a solution—his hope that I would agree to a life-and-beyond partnership and commitment. I said yes. I'm oversimplifying the decision just a bit, but essentially, the love letter sealed the deal.

When we face life's sticky issues, whether they be, ahem, marriage relationship decisions, or more broadly—civic problems, community projects, research ideas, social concerns, or heck, even a lengthy school essay, it's often difficult to tackle a complex project alone. As we start to visualize solutions to problems, we often discover we need buy-in from someone else (or a group of someones) to make stuff happen.

A proposal is one way to get buy-in from the people you need to make things happen. We write proposals to persuade an audience to support a suggested action plan. You'll find proposals that ask for dollars to finance a project, skills and resources to boost a venture, or simply permission to proceed. A proposal asks a specific audience to address a specific problem by supporting your efforts on a specific course of action. Specificity is key.

Local school districts submit proposals to receive federal government funding for Head Start, a research-backed program for early childhood education

The uses of a proposal document are as diverse as the problems they address. To flood you with examples—charity organizations submit grant proposals to various donors asking for funding to initiate a new projects or sustain efforts; contractors submit bids (proposals) to complete work on construction projects; city councils file proposals asking for funding to improve city infrastructure; entrepreneurs request investment money for business start-ups; teachers write grant proposals asking for additional classroom equipment; venues pitch their location for an event; employees suggest ideas for solving company problems to higher-ups; academics submit proposals seeking permission to present at professional conferences; researchers seek funding to conduct research; graduate students ask for go-ahead from faculty to proceed with a large project.

At times, proposals are submitted as part of a competitive process—only the best proposals are given the nod. Other times, proposals are a stepping stone to ensure preparation and readiness before the wish is granted. Proposals can be solicited as part of an official process or program to award funding or support. Or they are sometimes submitted to an audience unsolicited, delivered on the guts and prayers of the writer.

Proposals in Your Life

Consider a time when you've requested something specific from someone— a proposal of sorts. How did you ask for the support?

13.2 Proposals in Academia

As a student and researcher, proposal documents will help you rally support from the right people as you move from a question or gap in the literature into experimentation, from uncovered research into papers or presentations, and from established conclusions into real-life applications. Use proposals to bring the right people and resources to your inquiry. There are many types of proposals, and the categories blend and blur, but here are a two broad types of proposals you might encounter in academia: research grants and prospectuses.

Research Grants

Discovering and documenting ideas has a cost, and often that cost can be measured in dollars and cents. In an academic environment, thinkers (students, faculty, researchers, etc.) often request funding to complete a research project through grants. The money can be used to subsidize time, travel, materials, experts, and other resources needed. Research grants are offered by universities, by invested organizations, and government agencies. For example, see grants.gov for lists of federal funding grants.

Undergraduate Research Grants

Budding student researchers can submit proposals to apply for research grants specifically available for undergraduate research within colleges and departments and/or through university libraries. Many of these opportunities require collaboration with a faculty member, which deepens the possibilities and enriches the experience.

Have a good idea for a project? Find a faculty member who is willing to back you up, write a solid proposal using this chapter, and you have a decent chance of getting funds to make it happen.

A recent BYU student research project looked at shyness and its effects on romantic relationship expectations and satisfaction. The funding for the project was achieved through submission of a proposal.

Talk to faculty, college advisers, and librarians to discover these undergraduate opportunities for project funding. Be on the lookout for posters and emails within your college department advertising deadlines and requirements. Even university libraries often offer research funding for using their materials to complete a project.

You can find Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library undergraduate research grant information here. And to access specific examples of undergraduate-faculty collaborative research projects completed with grant funding at Brigham Young University, visit the Journal of Undergraduate Research, which publishes the final write-ups of funded projects in each department.

Prospectuses

A proposal to write a substantive research paper or book is often called a prospectus. Academic researchers write this type of proposal when dealing with written research projects or books.

A prospectus is a proposal that pitches a research project, often written to seek approval from a faculty mentor.

At its heart, a prospectus is about getting on the same page with faculty who will support your project. It's the same with proposals as a whole—getting on the same page with those who have the power to support your project.

In graduate programs and upper-level undergraduate courses, you might find students working on prospectus documents that detail their ideas and plans to complete a large research project, a master's thesis, or doctoral dissertation. These prospectuses pitch a topic and plan for the larger writing/research project.

A prospectus document is usually submitted to a faculty member or committee who has the power to approve project plans and give the student go-ahead and support. A prospectus is used to ensure student preparation, determine student focus on a significant issue worth researching, and establish student/faculty agreement on a feasible plan before a student is released to dive headlong into databases and drafting.

As subsets of proposals, we'll talk about both research grants and prospectuses under the broader title, proposals, in the rest of the chapter.

13.3 Creating a Proposal

Each opportunity to write a proposal will be distinct. Some calls for proposals will have specific templates; some won't. They will differ in expectations regarding page count, section headings, and detail level. We can't tackle—nor do I know—all the nuances and requirements of each and every proposal.

But this I do know: as a proposal writer, you're expected to uphold specific expectations and comply with any diverse specifications that might be required by your audience, the people with the power to bestow a blessing of resources, funding, or permission. Your ability to meet and exceed an audience's unique expectations will determine how willingly they say yes.

So don't write a proposal before doing homework: read all provided instructions, use the provided template if given one, talk to those with experience on the specific proposal, and scrutinize successful proposal examples in each unique circumstance to determine your audience's expectations.

Proposals are written in the mode of problem and solution. Your job is to demonstrate that there is a problem for which you have a unique solution. And then your job is to present the solution—propose and pitch the solution and course of action—to the specific problem.

So, identify a specific problem or question in your area of interest. Then design a plan, study, or project to address it. And finally describe the plan and method in detail in a proposal for the big-wigs.

Understanding Proposal Requirements

Which of the following options are good ways to find out and meet the specific requirements of a proposal opportunity?

- [ ] Review examples of past successful proposals for the specific opportunity.
- [ ] Talk with decision-makers who will review the proposals to discover their expectations for the document.
- [ ] Find and mimic any provided templates for the specific proposal opportunity.
- [ ] Ask those who have submitted proposals in the past for advice.
- [ ] Read and re-read the posted "call for proposals" information to understand decision-maker priorities.
- [ ] All of the above.

13.4 Proposal Sections

As I've said, proposal formats vary widely. But more than likely, most proposal specifications will ask you to create a document with sections to address the main core questions. Let's consider some of the common sections you might encounter and how they address questions that you need to answer. Obviously, order and specific headings will vary in each proposal depending on the listed requirements.

Title

Most proposals ask you for a title. Create a vibrant, engaging title with specific, clear articulation of your problem and/or solution to make your audience want to learn more. Think of your title as the hook to get your audience to continue. Two-part titles with a colon allow more space for specificity. Be sure to follow capitalization rules for titles in the desired writing style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.).

Introduction/Purpose

What is the proposed action or solution? What does the writer want to do?

The authors of a research proposal at BYU wanted to look at the role of genes in how individuals cope with stress. This was the aim of their exploration as presented in their proposal.

Here you include a brief overview of the purpose of the proposal. You establish the proposed action or solution in general terms—your goal at the outset. Sometimes, this section doesn't have an obviously marked header, but is rather the first paragraph(s) to launch the document.

When writing a proposal for a possible research paper (a prospectus, as we discussed earlier), you likely won't know the full nuance of your thesis or conclusions exactly. But you should have questions about your topic that have narrowed your scope of exploration. Announce an aim, goal, and/or scope as a starting point.

Set-up your stylistic voice and tone right away. While you should write appropriately for the circumstance and audience, avoid dull or diluted writing. Be clear, vibrant, and direct. In a competitive proposal process, reviewers may only read the title and introduction before deciding whether to give more consideration to the proposal. Be interesting; don't let them stop reading.

Problem/Question

Why is it proposed? What is the problem, question, need, or goal to address? And how is it important to both the writer and the decision-makers?

This section establishes the need and importance for the proposal—a why for the proposal.
In this section, explain how you recognized a question begging for an answer, a problem itching for a solution. If personal reasons are driving your question or problem, in some proposal circumstances it is appropriate to detail these motives in this first section. Read through sample proposals in similar circumstances to see if personal motives are appropriate to include in yours.
You will also want to use this section to demonstrate your understanding of the conversation surrounding the question, problem, need or goal; show that you've reviewed the literature/research/conversation surrounding your topic. You can do this by incorporating ideas and context from other researchers or thinkers on the issue. As you do, suggest how your project is distinct from others, but how it fits in the context of a larger conversation. If you've written a review of literature around a certain question or topic prior to drafting a proposal (which you can read more about in the Literature Review chapters of this book), you would incorporate an overview of your literature review conclusions in this section.

Be aware that proposals might ask you to include more than just the overview of your literature review conclusions in your proposal. Some proposals require a separate, more lengthy literature review discussion as part of your submission to demonstrate a more thorough understanding of context. If so, it is likely to be included earlier or later in the proposal document as a separate section and thus would be less likely to be included here in this section. As always, follow the specific guidelines for each unique proposal opportunity to decide how to include literature review content. Include a reference page in the appropriate citation style as necessary.

By seeking to understand the relationship between punk music and activism specifically in Belfast, Ireland, one proposal writer sought to illuminate how music generates and motivates activism generally.

And as a final, most important, step in this section, persuade the audience that the question, problem, need, or goal is (or should be) important to them. As with all good writing, a writer is most effective when writing toward the values and concerns of their audience. This is especially important when the audience holds power to determine your (or your project's) fate. In providing your audience with a statement or narrative of the problem, present convincing evidence that

the problem matters now and the time to address the problem is now. Make a solid case that the problem is ripe, ready to be addressed—and you are the one for the job.

Objectives/Solutions/Outcomes

How will the proposed action/solution effectively solve the problem, answer the question, meet the need, or achieve the goal that the audience now agrees is important?

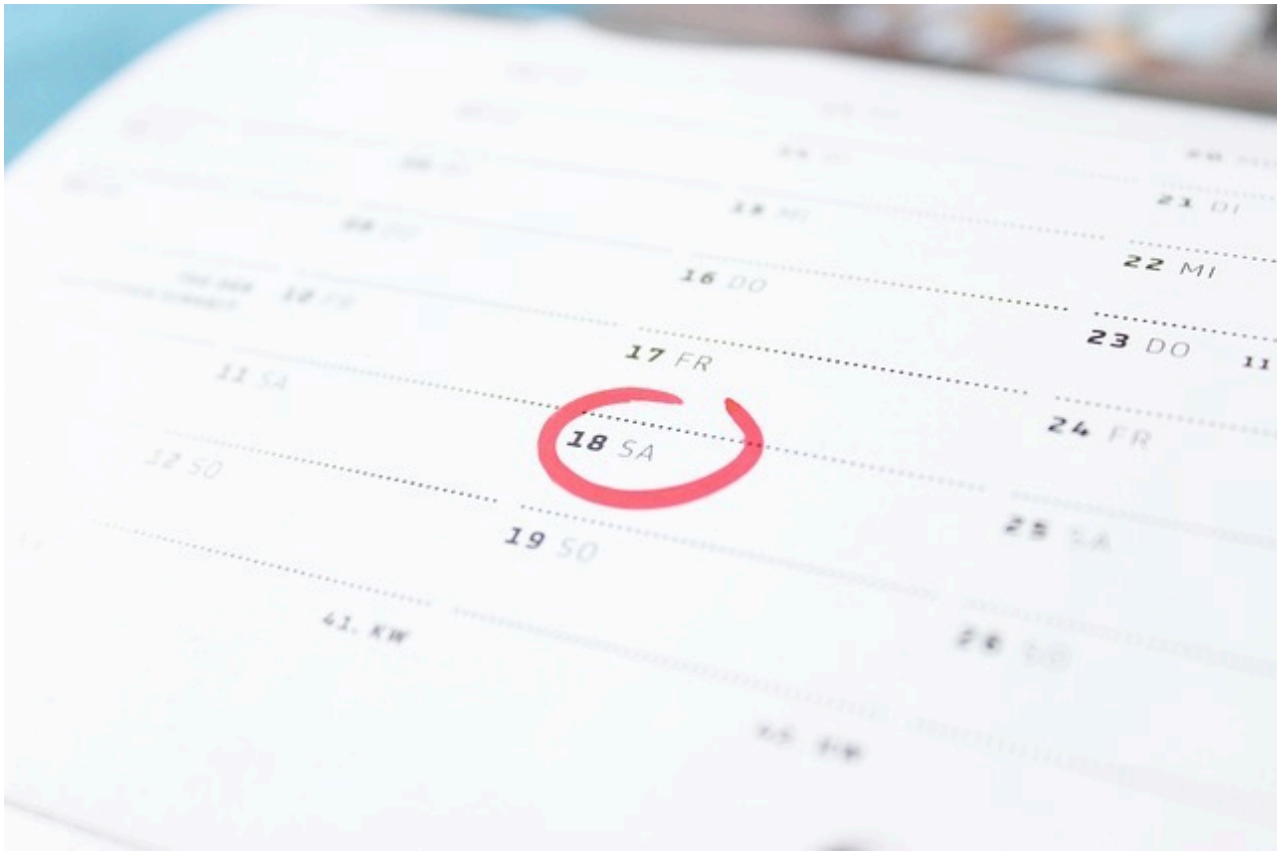
In this section, identify what you plan to produce, specifically any tangible outcomes you anticipate. Outline the specifics of your end product, contribution, or solution, which might be a publication, presentation, performance, invention, new metric achievement, lecture, physical object, or a paper. For starters, as an undergraduate proposing a research paper, you might anticipate presenting your project at an undergraduate research conference—many universities have them in each department.

If you are writing a proposal for a paper (a prospectus), you will likely outline the thesis, organization, and contents of your eventual project. Some writers incorporate a traditional outline here—roman numerals and all. For a longer project, you might break-down a book chapter-by-chapter with summaries. Or this section simply might be a single paragraph with sentences addressing each sub-topic of your project. Show your audience that the output of your efforts will make an impact in resolving the specified need.

Method/Schedule

Is the writer capable of planning, managing, and completing the proposed action?

We've come to the broadest section—and the most varied in style and requirement across the proposal spectrum. This section asks you to breakdown a plan to generate your end product, using concrete information such as method, timelines, data, steps, cost, equipment or facilities needed, wages or personnel required, feasibility, consequences or expected results. Graphs, charts, bulleted schedules or timeline goals, and budgets are not unusual here. Show how, where, and when the work will be completed.



Committing to a timeline will demonstrate your ability to complete the proposed project.

For a proposal that pitches a large project or paper, you will likely outline a timeline estimating your agenda for completing the phases of research and drafting. As you draft your timeline, consider prior commitments you've made in other areas of your life and plan accordingly. Write a month-by-month, week-by-week, or day-by-day schedule with how you plan to complete your project, depending on the scope. The timeline must be a realistic vision of your ability to complete the work in the time. You might consider giving deadlines for the following intermediate steps: beginning research, assembling a preliminary bibliography, taking notes, writing a first draft, gathering feedback, and writing a final draft.

Including a task timeline is especially helpful if your research is complicated with interviews, surveys, data collection, and other primary research methods. In research and statistics classes within your field you will learn various methods for creating quantitative and qualitative data. Outline your specific, statistically-sound plan for generating data within this section. Get down to the nitty-gritty of how you're going to get the job done.

Qualifications

Does the writer have qualified personnel involved?

You don't need to be Einstein; you don't need to be brilliant (well, more than you already are). As a student in your field, you are qualified to address a problem, question, need, or goal in your field. Briefly list your education and directly relevant previous experience. It might be just a sentence or two. This section may or may not be necessary when drafting a proposal for a fairly straightforward project.

If you are engaging in complex statistical research or another project that demands technical skills or specific abilities, you might need to persuade your audience that you are qualified by noting any specific background, training, or expertise you have (or will get) that will help you do your work well.

You will also want to briefly introduce other people who might be involved in your action plan. If you are writing a proposal for a collaborative project, address your colleagues' qualifications and abilities briefly as well. Some undergraduate research grants require the participation of a full-time faculty mentor. You will outline their position, college, department, and research interests here.

Resources

Does the writer have the necessary resources, background context, and/or knowledge to begin? Is the cost (if any) of the proposed action reasonable considering potential benefits?

A solid plan and qualified personnel are not the only two ingredients for a successful project. Projects might also demand materials, instruments, travel, equipment, and compensation.

Often, it comes down to money. When discussing resources in a proposal, prepare a proposed resource and cost budget down to the dollars. Budget fairly to show a close estimate of costs you will face and/or resources you will need. Demonstrate good planning by identifying accurately what's needed, where the resources are available, and what it will cost. Your audience will be looking to see if the costs seem reasonable considering the anticipated results of the project. Often, this section might include a spreadsheet or list showing how resources will be allocated and applied.

Literature Review/Bibliography

Because you likely won't need more than articles, journals, and books to begin a major research paper, the literature that you annotate, summarize, and incorporate is the primary resource to consider in your proposal for that paper. Thus, you might be asked to include additional literature review (a survey of relevant sources—the "literature") or a bibliography of sources, which may or may not be annotated with the sources' argument and your anticipated use. Your review of the literature will also support the Problem/Question section, as detailed above. Literature reviews are discussed at length in a prior chapter.

Outlining your supporting documents in the proposal, wherever your literature review content is included, will demonstrate you have access to the solid, relevant sources, the resources you need to begin. Any sources that you cite in your earlier sections should be included in this review of the literature or annotated bibliography. As with any time you cite sources in a formal document, use a consistent and appropriate citation style which fits the audience's expectations (APA, MLA, Chicago, Turabian, etc.).

Conclusion

While some proposals won't ask you for a conclusion, when they do, use your conclusion to summarize your main points and create a final appeal to your audience. Reiterate the established need and your proposed solution. Ask clearly for the desired course of action: dollars to finance a project, skills and resources to boost a venture, or simply permission to proceed. Emotionally emphasize the vision. Make it personal for your audience at your close.

Understanding Proposal Structure

True or False: Proposals rigidly follow the sections listed above. You should always plan to include each and every section, in the order listed above.

- [ ] True—exactness matters with proposals and you should always seek to follow the above sections exactly.
- [ ] False—each unique proposal circumstance will demand different sections and topics to address in varying orders, which may or may not include some of the sections above.

13.5 Final Considerations

As you finish your proposal, here are some final things to consider.

- Be consistent and clear as you design your headings and structure. Make sure your design fits with the expected look for the specific situation and audience. Look at examples to see what looks best to you.
- Revise and edit carefully to establish your credibility. Your audience wants to trust your abilities and they will see them reflected first in your attention to detail in the proposal. Submit a proposal with clean grammar and close adherence to the specifications provided.
- Before you submit a proposal, seek feedback. If you can, ask for reviews from people who have evaluated similar proposals or prospectuses as decision-makers. Or, at the least, ask for feedback from peers who may have been successful before. Ask them to read it quickly, even skim it. Does it make sense? More than likely, your audience will be reading a pile of proposals rapidly. You want the clarity and vibrancy of yours to stand out right away.
- Without alternate instructions, the default is to submit by official email as a PDF—always as a PDF to avoid formatting hiccups.
- Don't miss deadlines for submission. They often come just once a year.

For me, a written paper proposal given with a glittery ring in a small wooden box marked the end (the start!) of a pretty magical love story. Yes, yes, and again yes, I said to my now-husband in response to the most important proposal I've gotten to date. My husband and I teamed up to tackle life's roller coaster, and thus far, it's been thrilling. Yes, I'm stretching a bit putting my engagement story into the mix. But I'm convinced that like a one-knee, shaky-hands, big-kiss proposal, written proposals have the power to link the right people and resources to a project, even a marriage in this case.

Likewise, if we think about the proposals we write as vibrant documents written about actual problems or questions to real people who can make decisions (not to face-less bureaucratic organizations), we'll be more likely to make profitable connections with an audience who has the extra boost of power to make things happen. With the right resources sent to the best projects, we see questions answered, problems solved, needs met, and goals achieved. I have to admit, it feels a little bit like magic.

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UNIT 3

GENERAL AUDIENCES

14

Writing for General Audiences

Cristie Cowles Charles, Nicole Clawson, Julie H. Haupt, & Jill Larsen

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the difference between writing for a general audience versus an academic audience
- Recognize the benefits of analyzing your audience
- Define and evaluate your purpose, context, and message
- Learn strategies for designing and presenting a message so that it is successfully understood by a general audience

14.1 What the Heck Are General Audiences?

This might come as a surprise to you, but when you graduate, you won't always be working with people in your field. Don't get me wrong—you'll still be expected to communicate in the specialized language of your discipline to people *inside* your discipline, but people *outside* your field will also need to understand your work—people like your manager, your customers or clients, and maybe even your significant other. You'll need to learn how to translate complicated topics for these general audiences, also known as public audiences, in order to get your message across.

In fact, just because most of you are young, people will automatically assume that you're tech savvy and an expert at posting on social media. And this will most likely lead to you being tasked with writing posts and blogs for your company, program, or department—even if you've never done it before. But don't panic. Instead, get good at it!

And despite what people assume about youngsters, even if you're skilled at following celebrities on Twitter or posting cat memes on Instagram, that doesn't mean that you know how to represent your company online or report on research published by your favorite professor. So we want to arm you with strategies to tackle the tricky task of writing for people

not in your field because there are actually tried-and-true strategies you can use to make the biggest impact. And understanding these strategies could make or break your job search, your career, or possibly even your love life.

I'm serious about the love life thing. If you need more convincing, watch what happened when Jimmy Fallon *failed* to understand the rhetorical situation when he met Nicole Kidman a few years ago. (Watch at least through minute 3:00.)

Watch on YouTube

https://youtu.be/qtsNbxgPngA

Remember the good ol' rhetorical triangle? Well, Jimmy made some classic mistakes when he analyzed the rhetorical situation before meeting Nicole Kidman. He clearly didn't understand his audience (a sophisticated, talented woman who was interested in him), he clearly misinterpreted the purpose and context (movie meeting vs date), and he clearly blew the message (wearing sweats and playing video games). No amount of brie cheese could salvage that meeting, and even years later he had to ask, "Did I date Nicole Kidman?"

What your staunchest, most serious professor might look like at a dinner party. Photo by ThePlaz on Wikimedia Commons

Don't be like Jimmy—recognize when you're on a date! You've learned tools for analyzing your situation; use them! It pays to learn the best tools for translating your message to a general audience. It turns out even your staunchest, most boring, serious professor—you know the one who has a monotonous voice and always puts you to sleep—has to be able to explain their job to their next-door neighbor or at a dinner party or to their significant other (unless their significant other is also an expert in the same field, which means they probably have really boring, serious children. But I digress.).

If, on the other hand, the love of your life is in a different field from you like, say, the field of mechanical engineering and neuroscience while you teach English literature and writing classes (just to pick a random example), then you need to learn how to translate the work you do to a more general audience in order to keep your relationship strong and show that you care. And that takes a new set of strategies that help bridge the gap between you and your general audience such as adding stories, using an engaging voice, and even including humor. See, I told you this chapter would be good for your love life!

In addition, if you want your work in your field to make a big difference and get attention, you need to know how to highlight it so that people will listen. That's why these days so many people post articles on *LinkedIn* and *Medium.com* and even *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*—to highlight what they do for the greater public to understand, which in turn increases their reputation and personal brand. You, too, can get the attention you deserve! But you have to learn how to appeal to a general audience. And that's where we're going to start: audience.

14.2 Audience in the Real World

The most important thing we can teach you about writing for general audiences is to analyze your audience. Companies spend millions of dollars a year analyzing their audiences to convince people to buy their products. They've learned that understanding their audience's preferences, motivations, and values is a key to good sales. This is often called market

research. For example, here's a one-minute ad from IBM for an artificial intelligence-powered marketing platform whose sole purpose is to try to help companies understand their audience better:

Watch this video to see how you become a company's target audience.

It makes you re-think how you spend your time (and clicks) online, doesn't it? Or at least how many times you post on social media about eating waffles. The bottom line from IBM and this section on audience is that audience matters—if you can really understand who you're presenting to, you can make your message appealing to them and in turn effect the change you'd like them to make.

So when you think about your audience, spend some time trying to imagine them. Consider demographics. Age. Gender. Socioeconomic status. What other companies would your target audience follow? Consider where your audience gets their social media content. Do they spend their time on Facebook? Or do they prefer Instagram or Twitter? Do they use the Google App or the News App on their iPhone? Consider "problems." What problem are you providing a solution for? You should empathize with their dilemmas and provide an answer to their issues. Let's practice.

Audience Analysis

Nike Audience Analysis

For this assignment, let's look at Nike. Go to nike.com and see if you can answer the following Audience Analysis Questions. Note that you might not be able to answer all of them. Thinking through all of this information, write a short paragraph 3-4 sentence analysis of Nike's audience.

1. What is the approximate size of Nike's audience? Are they addressing a small population or a sizable group?
2. Who, specifically, are they targeting? (Think demographics)
3. What is the demographic makeup of Nike's audience (age, gender, education level, ethnicity), and how might they use that information to develop and shape their content?
4. What personal and professional traits does Nike have in common with the members of their audience?
5. Are there any cultural considerations that may influence how their audience responds to their content?
6. Does their audience expect to be entertained as well as informed?
7. Does Nike target certain members of their audience, and if so, which members?
8. How does Nike earn their audience's trust? How do they demonstrate their knowledge or expertise?
9. What preconceptions or biases might be held by some members of their aucience?
10. What expectations will their audience have regarding Nike's social media content?
11. What expectations does their audience have regarding the format of their social media content?
12. What key questions does Nike's audience expect them to answer?
13. What key objections are audience members likely to raise?
14. To connect to the needs and interests of their audience, what particular appeals does Nike include in their social media content?

Now that you understand Nike's audience, you are much better prepared to know how to appeal to them, what tone to use with them, and how to present information so they will pay attention. You can and should analyze your audience in similar ways before you communicate to them—which leads me to this textbook.

Under the Hood

Photo by Hosea Georgeson on Unsplash

I'll let you in on a secret. When we decided to write this textbook, we had a dilemma: should we model academic writing by using a formal, serious, and scholarly tone? Or should we as authors use a less formal, conversational voice that would appeal more to a general audience?

To answer this, the first thing we authors did was analyze you—our audience. We talked about what type of textbook would appeal to you, what kind of content we should include, what kind of strategies we should use in our approach, and what kind of language to choose. We looked at previous textbooks, talked to our students, consulted other instructors, and even read a book explaining recent research scholars have done specifically about your generation. How does it make you feel to know your textbook authors are thinking about you so much? We hope that rather than feeling creeped out, you feel flattered and happy that we care. Because we do. But either way, our audience analysis of you was very enlightening.

We came to the conclusion that even though lots of other textbook writers choose to model a stiff, academic tone, you probably wouldn't like that. Instead, we thought you'd appreciate if we wrote to you in our own voices as if we were having a conversation, as if you were sitting right there. So we threw caution (and typical textbook conventions) to the wind and chose to treat you more like a general audience rather than an academic one in this book.

And even though some of our colleagues worried that you'd mistake our conversational tone as the way *you* should write your *academic* papers, we've found that you're smarter than that—that you can do your own audience analysis and recognize that we're writing like this because our purpose (to teach college students about writing) is different than yours in an academic paper (to make a logical argument for your professor to show how well you've researched a topic).

When writing this textbook, we tried to imagine what college students like you would want. Photo by Naassom Azevedo on Unsplash

When writing this textbook, we tried to imagine what college students like you would want. Photo by Naassom Azevedo on Unsplash

In that vein, we determined that in this textbook, you'd want us to keep the paragraphs short, include personal stories, add images and videos, incorporate lots of white space and headings, and perhaps most importantly of all, make the textbook open source and free of cost. We did all this for you! Because we care. So far, we've had very positive feedback about our choice of conversational voice and interactive elements (not to mention the fact that it's free). But if you think of ways we can improve, please feel free to tell us in the end-of-chapter surveys. The beauty of an online textbook is that we're continually revising it, so bring on the feedback!

Like our audience analysis of you, your analysis of your own audience will help you develop effective strategies to get your message across. And asking for feedback will help you figure out if you're hitting the mark. Now that you know your audience, let's talk about what else to consider when writing for general audiences.

14.3 Purpose, Context, and Message

As Jimmy Fallon taught us, when we communicate, it helps to think through the rhetorical situation first. When you're writing to general audiences, once you have a sense of your audience and their values, you also need to think about the context you're writing in and delineate your purpose—*why* are you communicating? Generally, most public communication falls into three categories:

1. **Informative**—like reporting on the latest research coming out of computational linguistics
2. **Persuasive**—like convincing your city to install a stoplight at a dangerous intersection
3. **A mix of the two**—like explaining how germs are spread during flu season in order to persuade your audience to get a flu shot.

Ask yourself, What exactly do I want my audience to think after reading/hearing my message?

Informational Writing

If your goal is to inform, your focus will be on clarity. Keep the language simple and think through how much background information you need to give your audience. You can quote from experts—general audiences love appeals to character—as long as you keep the jargon to a minimum and explain where your information is coming from.

You'll probably want to draw your reader/listener in with some kind of hook or interesting fact that introduces the topic and catches their attention. Then as you proceed, make sure there's a logical progression through your points. One way to test this is to have people read it and give you feedback—find people who fit the demographics of your audience if possible.

Choose clear diagrams, tables, figures, and/or images to illustrate your point. Image in Public Domain

You also want to use strong visuals—especially if you want to portray data. Informational writing relies on facts, data, and statistics, but these need to be portrayed in easy, understandable ways, and visuals really help with that. Choose clear diagrams, tables, figures, and/or images to illustrate your point. Document design can also help—things such as bullets, headings and subheadings, bolded key terms or definitions, call-out boxes, color, and even white space.

Even in informational writing, you can appeal to the emotions of your audience. For instance, consider including some type of story, example, or case study that connects with your audience because it will help them see the relevance of

your point. You can even consider whether adding some humor would be appropriate. When you conclude, try to tie in your conclusion to your introduction and leave your audience with something memorable. Ask yourself, "What do I want my audience to remember?" End with that.

Persuasive Writing

As opposed to informational writing, if your goal is to persuade or get your audience to do or think something, then you're making an argument. There's a whole field of study called rhetoric that goes back to ancient times where people examine the best ways to persuade or influence others. When writing an argument, your objective is to propose a solution to a current problem, to have your audience see your opinion, point, or research claim as valid, true, and valuable. In other words, your purpose is to persuade, convince, motivate, or move readers toward a certain point of view or action. In fact, a lot of persuasive writing ends with a "call to action" where you overtly ask your audience to—you guessed it—take some kind of action.

In academic circles, persuasion is best done through published articles or presentations that focus on methods, data, results; but when it comes to general audiences, the focus changes first, to catching people's attention and then to convincing them with a mix of appeals to logic, character, and emotion.

A Word on Narrative

One particularly poignant tool to use in general audience writing is narrative—especially personal stories. As mentioned in Chapter 5: Style, we as humans are hard-wired to remember stories. Narratives that are personal, detailed, and interesting can be a point of convincing evidence that has the power to mold and change your readers' thinking much more than statistics or data alone can.

Watch this 3-minute video about the power of storytelling from one of the greatest group of storytellers in modern times: Pixar.

Watch on YouTube

The Power of Storytelling https://youtu.be/1rMnzNZkIX0

Harness the power of storytelling by adding global storytelling (having an arc to your writing with a beginning, middle, and end, etc.) and local storytelling elements (like including an incident that happened to you). Review Chapter 5: Style

for more ideas.

Context and Genre

One last consideration to keep in mind is the context in which you're communicating and whether there's an established genre or form your writing needs to fit into. To review the concepts of genre and context, see Chapter 2: Writing Tools. Whether it be an online blog post, a resume, a poster presentation or a tweet, you need to understand the conventions people usually use when communicating. In fact, sometimes knowing the genre is all the information you need to understand the message.

For example, in the town where I live, there's an odd tradition that when high schoolers ask someone to a school dance, they usually do so in a creative way. Like, really creative. Like, Instagram-worthy. So one day, my family found this message on our doorstep.

My son understood this date invitation because he knew the genre and context. Photo by the author, used with Abby's permission.

Even though the words of Abby's message themselves weren't intelligible, we immediately understood the message because we understood the *genre* (unusual items left on doorsteps are usually dance invitations) and the context (we've seen the movie *The Guardians of the Galaxy*, so we caught the reference to the plant creature who speaks using only one phrase: "I am Groot."). In fact, by referencing a popular movie and challenging the typical genre of dance invitations, Abby made a better—and funnier—invitation than if she'd simply said her message straight out. This is why understanding genre and context can really help you get your own message across—even in your love life.

The rest of this unit of the textbook (General Audiences) will be devoted to specific genres of general audience writing, so for help with particular types of communication like resumes, blog posts, or presentations, go to those chapters. In the meantime, let's finish our discussion with the best strategies for connecting with general audiences.

14.4 Strategies for General Writing

Where academic audiences are made up of people who generally study the same things as you, general audiences are just that—general. You can assume that your readers/listeners have generic knowledge about many different subjects, but they don't know any particulars about your field, so you'll have to fill in those gaps. But be careful not to use jargon from your field because they'll get lost in the language and ignore your message. The best way to figure out what strategies work best for general audiences is to see this kind of translation writing in action.

Academic vs General Audiences: Reporting on Research

We're going to use our analytical skills again to figure out what characteristics are best used in general writing. Here's an example of how writers have translated academic research into the public sphere. First, read the abstract of this academic article called "There's No Place Like Home: The Associations Between Residential Attributes and Family Functioning" (click on the link or scroll down below). Then skim through the article. You don't have to read everything—just understand what it's about and notice how the authors use academic language to portray their message.

Next, read this newspaper article that introduces this research to a general audience (click on the link or scroll down below). Note the tools the author uses to appeal to this broader, less academic audience.

Make the Connection

List 2-3 strategies that the author of the newspaper article used to translate the academic research article to a more general/public audience? Which strategies do you think are the most helpful and that you can use when you write for a general audience?

I hope you noticed things like the use of good visuals to draw the reader in, the conversational tone, the easy explanations of the research, the lack of jargon, and the use of direct quotes from the article's author himself. This made it feel like the wrtier was telling the story of how the research came to be rather than just reporting on data. These are all strategies that can come in handy when you're translating something academic into something for the public.

Here's a table that sums up the contrasting strategies generally used in Academic versus General Writing.

Academic Audience Writing	**General Audience Writing**
Long paragraphs	Short paragraphs
Serious academic tone	Engaging, friendly tone
Synthesized claims/heavy referencing	Logical progression/light referencing
Clarity to avoid misunderstanding	Clever wording to encourage insight
Focus on knowledge and scientific advancement	Focus on practical application
Objective writing with solid backing	Passionate writing with conviction
Focus on data, methods, and results	Focus on narrative and relevance to audience
Most appeals are to logic and authority/character	Most appeals are to emotions and authority/character
APA in-text citations and reference lists	Hyperlinks or endnotes for references

As you can see, when you change audiences, you need to change your strategies. Some of these differences might not be as pronounced in some genre outlets; for example, some blogs operate more like academic outlets, are serious in

tone, and require heavy, scholarly referencing. However, this table generally represents good rules to follow.

Top Seven Hints for Writing for General Audiences

Here are some last tips that will help your writing shine.

- **Anchor each new point, taking the reader on a journey.** Use the first part of the sentence and subject skillfully to keep your audience engaged (sometimes flip the order of the sentence to achieve this level of engagement); be aware of the same principle as you transition from paragraph to paragraph. Use one-sentence zingers and varied sentence and paragraph length to maintain high interest from point to point.
- **Ax anything unessential.** Look at writing through the metaphor of finding a pot of gold in the woods. It can be found within 400 feet, but in the searching for it, you walk a mile. Which does your audience want—the 400 feet or the mile? When you have to cut things out, you are often cutting out the mile. These parts are hard to cut because they were personal to you and to the journey of finding the pot of gold, but the audience is not part of that journey. They generally want your message in the 400 feet.
- **Attribute sources with very short, but impressive elements.** When citing a source and choosing what to include (e.g., author's name, credentials, affiliation with an institution, professional background, name of recent article or book, etc.), try to include no more than two attributions and use those that are most impressive for the audience of your piece. Add quotes in places that are consistent with the original text to not misuse another author's intent.
- **Angle your insights to help readers gain a new perspective.** Know the point you are driving towards, even if the reader does not see it from the beginning. Consider starting with some of the most interesting parts of the idea or a story or place them closer to the first of the article (once interested, the reader can better deal later with the less interesting parts of the topic if they are already "hooked" on the article). Refine the ending to make sure readers finish with an unstated invitation to continue to think about your point. Don't "overstay your welcome" by doing too much of a summary.
- **Allow authentic use of narrative to be real and to touch readers.** Paint a picture by using great adjectives; don't be afraid to add emotional words to human experience to bring it to life. At times, this means that you slow down the pacing in order to give rich detail. If you begin or end with examples or stories, make sure that the tone stays consistent throughout, so the story is woven into the piece, rather than used as a stand-alone piece. Carefully consider the use of "you" and "your" since this speaks directly to the reader. When you choose to speak "second person" be sure you are speaking generally enough to include all of your audience, that you don't inadvertently offend them by putting on a label or suggesting a belief or behavior they have that might not be very complimentary (to avoid making sweeping or inaccurate judgements). With a call to action, also be aware of how this might be taken by your audience.
- **Analyze or interpret data or statistics to guide readers.** When describing research, simplify (it may help to think of a friend or neighbor); state findings in present tense and explain the conducting of a study in the past tense. Be careful about "dumbing down the research" so much that it confuses terms or overgeneralizes findings (e.g., consider whether the original researchers would be happy with your clarity and accuracy in describing their work). For your most important points that hinge on research or when introducing charts or graphs, take time to guide readers through complicated findings with helpful analysis, rather than assuming they will get the point if you only just mention the presence of findings in this area.
- **Apply good APA protocols & hyperlinks to build transparency and trust.** Use a good variety of resources that would be considered credible by your audience. Where you can, hyperlink to the original, using a key word or two to hyperlink the resource. In those cases and in other cases where the source is not internet based (e.g., a book), provide an endnote. (See this video, for example, with a brief information about how to insert endnotes in Word.) Key points need good references to build credibility, but in public scholarship pieces, synthesis is not generally needed, nor is it necessary to be obtrusive about a heavy focus on naming or explaining sources in general—just be transparent and wise in the selection of sources (e.g., if all your sources are blogs that no one has heard of, the piece may not feel very authoritative).

Representing a Company or Group

In some cases you will be writing under your own name; other times you'll be writing for a company or group. You always want to consider what your writing tells the reader about yourself and if you're building and protecting your reputation. But once you're writing on behalf of a company or group you have the added responsibility of representing them as well. If you can consciously keep your purpose, audience, genre, and context in mind every time you send out an email or text or post or reply on Slack, you will become much more adept at using the rhetorical situation for your and their benefit. Try to use the mindful writing techniques from Chapter 3 and imagine you're reading your piece from your audience's perspective. Or even better, test your piece on actual readers and get feedback. Either way, you'll want to make sure you follow any Style Guides or standards that your company has.

Read an Example

Finally, one of the best ways to learn how to write for a general audience is to read pieces written for general audiences. Shocking, I know. As a last exercise, choose of these examples of articles by undergraduate students in BYU's School of Family Life written and published for a general audience. Notice the strategies they use to make their article more appealing for a general audience, even when they're reporting on academic research that's been done on their topic.

Option #1: Love: The Greatest Motivation to Change

Option #2: Longevity Secrets of Utah Centarians

General Audience Examples

Which article did you read? What strategies did the author(s) employ to appeal to a general audience? How can you incorporate these strategies into your own writing?

With practice, you'll learn how to easily transition between writing for an academic audience versus a general audience.The last three chapters of this textbook will take you through the most important genres for general audiences: professional portfolios, public texts, and presentations.

Chapter 15: Job and Graduate School Applications

- Resume
- Cover Letter
- Interview
- Graduate School Application Letter
- CV (Curriculum Vitae)

Chapter 16: Public Texts

- Memos and Email
- Social Media
- Online Writing
- Infographics and Data Visualization
- Opinion Editorials

Chapter 17: Presentations

- Oral Presentations
- Poster Presentations

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15

Applying for Jobs & Graduate Schools

Nicole Clawson

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you will learn

- how to write a killer resume, cover letter, and personal statement
- how rhetoric will help you land the job or a spot in graduate school

Read this chapter to make the answer to this sign "You." Photo by Free To Use Sounds on Unsplash

So you want to get a job? Or go to grad school? Or maybe get into a professional school? This chapter will give you the tools you need to create a killer application. Remember that the rhetorical situation surrounds everything—it even surrounds the pursuit of your dreams. So before you even start writing your application materials, you must assess the situation. In this chapter, you'll look at the genre of various application materials and consider how your character will be presented to your audience. You will make sure your purpose is clear and the message is compelling. But, primarily, you'll be focusing on audience. After all, how can you expect to land a job if you don't understand the group or company? How can you show an admissions committee why you're a good fit for their department *and* they're a good fit for you if you don't even know what research they conduct? How can you convince your boss to give you perks if you don't know what your boss values?

15.1 Professional Audience Analysis

Before you begin writing any application document you need to know to whom you are writing. Hopefully at this point you have narrowed your list of potential employers or schools. If you haven't yet—jot down a pro and con list. Compare and contrast each company/school's requirements and preferences. Dig in to their websites. See if their values align with yours and if you like the work they're doing. Once you have decided on a winner, you should perform an in-depth analysis of the company/department. The following discussion questions are rather . . . thorough . . . so get comfortable and get answering.

Audience Analysis

1. Look at the company, program or employer's website to see how the organization describes itself.
2. Create a list of key terms from the ad and the website.
3. Briefly answer the Audience Analysis Questions. Note that you might not be able to answer all of them based on the audience.
4. Using all of this information, write a brief analysis of your audience.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1. What is the approximate size of your audience? Are you addressing just one or two people or a sizable group?
2. Who, specifically, are you writing to? A hiring manager or department? A specific person?
3. What information do you have regarding the demographic makeup of your audience (age, gender, education level, ethnicity), and how might you use that information to develop and shape your writing?
4. What personal and professional traits do you have in common with the members of your audience?
5. What common values do you share with your audience?
6. Are there any cultural considerations that may influence how your audience responds to your writing?
7. Will your audience expect to be entertained as well as informed?
8. Will you be targeting certain members of your audience, and if so, which members? (Think name-dropping, more on that later)
9. How will you have to earn your audience's trust? How will you demonstrate your knowledge or expertise?
10. What preconceptions or biases might be held by some members of your audience?
11. What expectations will your audience have regarding your application materials?
12. What expectations will your audience have regarding the format of your application materials?
13. What key questions will your audience expect you to answer?
14. What key objections are audience members likely to raise?
15. What particular appeals should you include in your application materials to connect to the needs and interests of your audience?

After you have completed the activity you should have a pretty good picture of your audience. You will also want to spend a bit of time closely reading the position posting and/or description. See if you find similar keywords, or words that have a similar connotation, in your audience analysis and in the position posting. Make note of any you find, as they will come in handy when you are crafting your professional portfolio. Now, let's look at the resume.

15.2 Rules of the Resume

Resumes are essential whether on paper or online. Image via Amtec Photos

Even with LinkedIn, Facebook, and online application systems, the resume is still king. It is your chance to quickly show all of the really great accomplishments you've made and how well equipped you are for the job at hand. The trick is that you only have one page. Oh . . . and about ten seconds to seal the deal.

Conventions of the Genre

One Page

The first rule of the resume is that it must be only one page long. No more, no less. (There are some exceptions in certain fields that allow two pages, but these are very rare.) If you go over, you've broken the rules of the genre. If you go under, you tell your audience that you don't have much experience. This one page is golden space—use it wisely.

Golden Triangle

Speaking of "golden space," the "Golden Triangle" is the space which occupies the top left-hand corner of the resume and branches out to form a triangle from there. This space is where your reader is most likely to look first. That means we should put all of the most valuable information within that space. If you choose to break this rule (like putting your name on the right side of the paper), do so carefully and with thought. Your audience should be able to get the information they need quickly. Remember, a prospective employer only gives about 7-10 seconds per resume before deciding if it lives to the next stage in the application process.

Your Golden Triangle

What information will you place in the golden triangle?

White Space

If you have a bit of extra white space on your resume (usually due to a lack of relevant work experience) you should focus on your school experience. List the accomplishments you have achieved during your time at university: Teacher Assistantships, Projects, Lab Work, Courses Completed, Scholarships, Club Memberships, etc.

Narrative

Your job is to create a story for your audience. Make sure you are answering who you are and why you are a great fit for this position within both the resume and cover letter or statement of intent. Every paragraph in your cover letter and every bullet point in your resume should be there for a reason. Take a look at your past and current experience and match it up to what the company is looking for.

What to Include and in What Order

Remember that your goal is to tell a story about why you are a great candidate for this particular job or internship. And . . . we only have one page in bullet-point format to share that story. That means that we should only include the most relevant and current information for that specific job. Generally speaking, that excludes your high school days. Based off of your audience analysis, give the information that matters most to your audience. Are they more concerned about your educational experience? Or your work experience? Put the one they care about most at the top. Make sure your bullets are in reverse chronological order. Your audience is interested in the really cool stuff that you are doing now, not what you did when you were 14.

Religous Volunteer Experiences

Many students ask if they should include their religious volunteer or mission experience and the very clear answer is "it depends." Like everything else in your resume, your experience must be there to tell a story and link directly to the current job for which you are applying. BYU Career Services has an excellent handout which helps job and grad school candidates work church service into “transferable skills.”

Interests

Some companies pay close attention to the interest section. You are not required to include this section, or a section like it, but it is a great way to fill in some of the golden space if you may not have extensive work experience. Spend a bit of time researching those you’ll work with. If you find out they like the outdoors and you are a kayaking enthusiast—write that down. It will show that you are a good fit not only in the office, but socially as well. However, make sure that you are genuine in your responses. Don’t write that Shakespeare is your favorite author (because you think it makes you sound smart) when all you remember is watching Leonardo DiCaprio play Romeo during movie day in your sophomore English

class. You may find yourself in a very uncomfortable position when your interviewer asks which of the Bard's sonnets is your favorite.

Bullet points help readers speed through your resume. Photo by Dean Page on Pixabay

Photo by Dean Page on Pixabay

15.3 Bulleted Sections

Once you have nailed down which experiences you want to highlight, based on your audience analysis, you need to look at how you will organize that information into bulleted sections. Within every section, each bullet point is a phrase—not a complete sentence. And each phrase begins with a verb. If you find that you are using the same verb in many of your bullets, you may want to google "Action Verbs" or head to BYU's Career Services website to see their Action Verbs handout.

Look at each of your bullet points. Do they begin with a verb-first phrase? After you have revised your verb-first phrases you need to look closely at the information you are providing your readers. You should move from task-oriented phrases to phrases which provide *quantifiable data*, indicate the *motivation* behind the task, and show the *impact on others*.

Move from

- Tested operating systems

to

- Tested 5 operating systems daily

and ending up with something like this

- Tested 5 operating systems daily to minimize errors for customers

Bullet Points

Now you do it. Revise each of your bullet points to include quantifiable data, motivation, and impact.

Best=Longer?

Right now you might be thinking “how can I create the ‘best’ bullet points and stay within the one-page limit?” The best way to do so is to head back to your audience analysis. Make sure that each section has a purpose and links to your narrative. Adapt the sections to highlight the information your audience wants to know. Get comfortable with the delete button and get rid of irrelevant bullet points (we really don’t need to know the stuff you did in high school). Only include and highlight the most current and impressive and relevant bullet points.

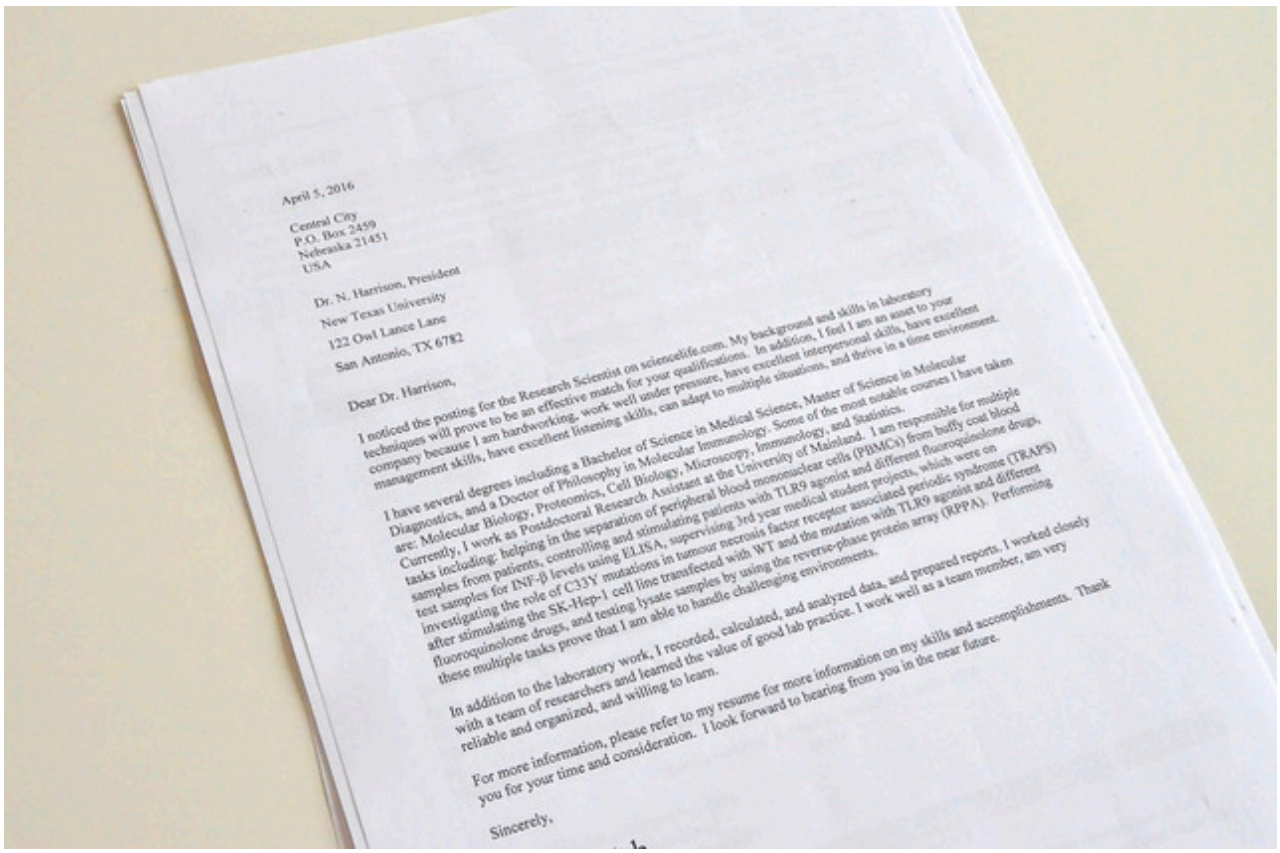
15.4 The Master

It is good practice to keep a “master” resume as you progress through your career. A master resume contains all of the awesome things you have done. Each time you complete a new task or project in your current job, you will head over to this master resume and either add more bullet points under your current job or create a new bulleted section. Your master resume will be multiple pages long. If you are faithful to this process, you will have an up-to-date working document that is always ready to use for a job application process.

How to Use It

After you have completed the audience analysis for your prospective job, you will head to your master resume. Copy and paste (or adapt) only the information that is pertinent for this new job into your new resume. Basically, you are plagiarizing yourself. Which is the only cool way to plagiarize.

15.5 Cover Letters



April 5, 2016

Central City
P.O. Box 2459
Nebraska 21451
USA

Dr. N. Harrison, President
New Texas University
122 Owl Lance Lane
San Antonio, TX 6782

Dear Dr. Harrison,

I noticed the posting for the Research Scientist on sciencelife.com. My background and skills in laboratory techniques will prove to be an effective match for your qualifications. In addition, I feel I am an asset to your company because I am hardworking, work well under pressure, have excellent interpersonal skills, have excellent management skills, have excellent listening skills, can adapt to multiple situations, and thrive in a time environment.

I have several degrees including a Bachelor of Science in Medical Science, Master of Science in Molecular Diagnostics, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Molecular Immunology. Some of the most notable courses I have taken are: Molecular Biology, Proteomics, Cell Biology, Microscopy, Immunology, and Statistics.

Currently, I work as Postdoctoral Research Assistant at the University of Mainland. I am responsible for multiple tasks including: helping in the separation of peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) from buffy coat blood samples from patients, controlling and stimulating patients with TLR9 agonist and different fluoroquinolone drugs, test samples for INF-β levels using ELISA, supervising 3rd year medical student projects, which were on investigating the role of C33Y mutations in tumour necrosis factor receptor associated periodic syndrome (TRAPS) after stimulating the SK-Hep-1 cell line transfected with WT and the mutation with TLR9 agonist and different fluoroquinolone drugs, and testing lysate samples by using the reverse-phase protein array (RPPA). Performing these multiple tasks prove that I am able to handle challenging environments.

In addition to the laboratory work, I recorded, calculated, and analyzed data, and prepared reports. I worked closely with a team of researchers and learned the value of good lab practice. I work well as a team member, am very reliable and organized, and willing to learn.

For more information, please refer to my resume for more information on my skills and accomplishments. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Cover letters allow you to highlight your best points. Photo by Resume Writing Lab

The cover letter is a weird thing. The very name implies that it comes first in the application process. However, it sometimes only comes into play after your resume has made the cut. And many jobs don't ask for a cover letter anymore or ask for an email instead. That being said, your cover letter is the place where you can emphasize or highlight certain aspects of your resume or explain some of the holes your resume might have. It should introduce, justify, and explain your resume. And, if you are one of the lucky ones who do not have to submit a cover letter, still write one. Use it as a place to practice your PAR story for your interview--PAR stands for problem, action, result. Try to frame your experience in cover letters and interviews by showing a problem you encountered, an action you took, and the results of that action.

Conventions of the Genre

The cover letter looks and smells like a traditional formal letter. It must have a heading, opening salutation, body paragraphs, and a closing salutation. It should be one page long with lots of white space.

- **Heading**: Your heading should match the heading found on your resume. Make sure to include your address, telephone number, and email address. You can include your LinkedIn information. We also need the date and the address of person to whom you are writing.
- **Opening Salutation**: Please avoid using "To Whom It May Concern." It is outdated and shows that you didn't care enough to seek out the person your letter is going to. Use Google and see if you can figure out your point of contact. If that fails, give the company a call. "Hi! My name is Bob Lob and I'm applying for the student intern position in the pediatric research department. I'd like to personalize my cover letter. Could you tell me who's responsible for potential interns?" Not only does it provide you with the information you need, but it could also get your name circulating. If all of the above fails, you can broaden your field a bit and address the role or the department (e.g., "Dear Hiring Manager," or "Dear Applications Department")
- **First paragraph**: How did you find out about the job? What connects you to the company? "Name drop" in this paragraph. Do you have any mentors that work there? Did a current employee suggest the job to you? What position are you applying for?

First Paragraph Activity

Answer the above questions in paragraph form.

- **Second and third paragraphs**: Why are you interested in their company? How will you add value to the company? What is unique about you? Highlight the awesome items that are in your resume. Mention education and experience. You can mention why the company is good for you, but focus mostly on how you are good for the company. Show them how much you want to work for them. If you need to explain why you may have sub-par grades or experience, this is the place to do so. Make sure that you own your flaws, but use them to show your character. If something made your grades fall a bit short, show what you learned from the experience.

Second and Third Paragraph Activity

Answer the above questions in paragraph form. Make sure you are keeping your audience in mind. Also, it wouldn't hurt to use the PAR method (problem, action, result).

15.6 The Interview

Thanks to all your hard work on your resume and cover letter your foot is in the metaphorical door, but your rhetorical work is far from done. Now we need to prepare for the interview.

Prepare

Interviewers like to ask behavioral questions to figure out how you react to challenges. Be prepared to convince them of your skills by using the keywords you found during your audience analysis to prepare personal stories that show problems you faced, actions you took, and changes you effected. Not only will this exercise help with your interview, but it will help with crafting your cover letter or statement of intent. Each of the stories we share should be brief, engaging, and job related. Make a table of PAR stories (problem, action, result) like the one below, with column heading for key words, problem, action, and result.

KEY WORDS	PROBLEM	ACTION	
Leadership	My team had been working on a project for weeks, but we weren't having success. No one was stepping up to take responsibility for our deliverables. The due date was fast approaching.	I created a schedule that would ensure completion by the due date, then talked to each person on the team to get their commitment. I put in double shifts to help a new team member get up to speed.	The tea and we comple profess work ar model.
Analytical	Our client delivered a 40-page document of required changes that made my team feel overwhelmed and discouraged.	I stayed late and created a spreadsheet showing which person could best make the changes requested and how we could accomplish them quickly.	My bos next mo assignm charge

Type caption for image (optional)

Just like you'll be adding experiences to your Master Resume, make sure to add to your PAR table throughout your career when you conquer a tough challenge. You'll be instantly ready to prep for your next interview, cover letter, or statement of intent. Look over this sample PAR table. Read some of the example stories to get ideas.

Practice

After you've done your research, grab a smart person and practice, practice, practice. Hand them a copy of your resume and something to eat. Get them to ask you behavioral questions so that you can **practice answering smoothly and confidently**with PAR stories.

You may feel uncomfortable asking someone to practice an interview with you, but practicing your PAR stories at least three times will give you a level of confidence that sets you apart from your competition. **Ask for candid feedback.** Be open and appreciative. Video record yourself to see if your mannerisms, posture, and voice all support the image you are trying to portray.

Interview Formats

Interviews are conducted in various formats (in-person, video call, recorded video, phone), depending on an organization's resources, the job level, an location.

In-person Interview

Face-to-face interviews are still the gold standard. Lots of information (most of it non-verbal) flows back and forth in this sort of interview. When you're offered a seat, take out a pen and paper to take notes. Taking notes helps you look alert and capable. it also helps you remember points you'd like to bring up.

Your interviewer will probably start with an "ice-breaker" question. Be prepared for the classic **"Tell me about yourself."** Give a brief personal pitch that you've practiced so many times you don't even need to think about it. Connect your background and strengths to your target job.

Once you get talking, remember to breathe. Your interviewer wants you to succeed. Help them or her discover that you're the perfect candidate; that will make their job much easier.

Video Call or Remote Interviews

Video call interviews are becoming much more common. They're an inexpensive way for companies to quickly assess the capabilities, suitability, and fit of candidates. In addition to the tips above, follow these steps to improve your video interview performance.

Set up

- Become familiar with the technology so you won't be flustered if it fails. Try out at least two services so you can switch if necessary.
- Compose a backdrop. Make sure your interviewer sees you in a clean, simple environment.
- Orient the light toward your face or to your side, (not above or behind you.) Strong overhead light can make you look spooky. Natural light is the most flattering, so try to sit facing a window.
- Make sure the camera is at eye level or slightly above. Place your laptop on a stack of books so that your interviewer isn't looking up your nose.
- Double check the interview time and time zone.

On the day

- Choose a solid-colored shirt and make sure it's pressed. Wrinkles show up more on camera. If you need to wear a white shirt, wear a suit jacket over it. If you want a few pointers on how to dress, read this article by Monster.
- Maintain a fairly constant distance from the webcam.
- Don't drum your fingers or use the keyboard to type notes during your call. Sensitive microphones will magnify every sound.
- Look at the camera, not the screen. Don't try to stare at it constantly, but do look directly into it when you want to emphasize a point or convey sincerity.
- Smile! Exude energy, confidence, and optimism.

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are a little nerve-wracking because of limited feedback from your interviewer. You can't see a reassuring nod or smile to tell if you are on the right track. In addition to securing a quiet spot and double-checking your interview time, these two simple tricks will make a big difference in helping you come across as calm, confident, and upbeat.

1. Remain standing and walk around
2. Smile (even if no one's in the room)

Even if people can't see you, you will sound better if you're smiling, moving, and well-dressed than if you're slouched on the couch in your pajamas. Also, moving helps you shed stress.

Interview Day

You've done your preparation and the big day is finally here. Don't worry. You'll rock this. Having confidence will improve your performance, so do what you can to feel invincible. Read through your PAR stories to remind yourself how awesome you are, press your shirt (details make a differences), and leave an extra half hour for traffic.

15.7 The Aesthetics of the Application

Some jobs will only ask for your resume; others will ask for a cover letter or a written statement in addition to your resume. If your potential place of employment asks for multiple documents, you must make sure they present a unified front. Basically, both the content and visual elements should tell the same story.

Just like you dress the part for an event, you need to dress up your application materials. If you are trying to impress a date, you probably aren't going to wear your grandpa's Hawaiian shirt with your sister's pleather pants. Just a guess. Most likely, and probably without even thinking, you'll be cultivating an image of yourself. Maybe you want to exude "Hey, I like the outdoors and I smell like pine trees," so you wear brown boots and a plaid shirt. Maybe you want your vibe to be "I'm a cultured person who enjoys the finer things in life," so you wear dark jeans, a crisp white oxford, and a blazer. If the date is to a concert, you know you'll wear jeans and a t-shirt . . . unless it is a philharmonic concert. Then, to borrow words from Justin Timberlake, "I be on my suit and tie." You are considering the genre (what type of date is it), the audience (your date), and your character (how you want the world, or your date, to perceive you).

This is what you need to do with your application materials. You want those documents to say that you are smart, with-it, bright, mature, and detail oriented. And all parts should look like they belong together (remember the Hawaiian shirt and pleather pants?). The easiest way to do this is through colors and fonts. Make sure that you have the same font on your cover letter as you do on your resume. Yes, chances are that they won't look at those two documents at the same time, but what if they do? You don't want them to wonder why your resume has a Hawaiian vibe while your cover letter looks like it's from a bad Britney Spears' music video. That's bad news.

Comparison

Open your two documents (resume and cover letter) side by side on your screen. Do they jive? do they look like they go together? If now, fix them. Make them cohesive. Just like you dress the part, you need to dress up your application materials.

As a reminder, always keep your audience in mind. What are they expecting your application materials to look like? **Check out the standards in your field.** Generally speaking, the same rules apply for all fields; however, they might look slightly different. For example, imagine what application materials would look like for someone going into graphic design. Now think about someone going out for a CPA job. BYU Career Services has collated sample student resumes from many different fields. Use them as a resource. You can also use other legit online sources to find appropriate examples.

15.8 Graduate School Applications

This could be you if you get into graduate school. A killer application will help you get there. Photo by Frits de Jong from Pixabay

So you are one of those who want to slave through a few more years in academia? Before you start dreaming about the hallowed halls of academia, you need to get your application materials in order. In addition to submitting your resume or CV and transcript, you'll most likely be asked to provide a personal statement about why you want to attend the school's particular grad program. You also need to be thinking about who you'll ask to write your letters of recommendation.

Curriculum Vitae

As opposed to a traditional one-page resume, a curriculum vitae, or CV, is an academic document that showcases your entire academic and professional career and can be multiple pages long. You should include professional contact information and relevant details of your educational training, coursework, professional training, special accomplishments, and skills while focusing on those most relevant to academia—teaching, researching, publishing, and presenting. If you're applying to medical school or a professional school, you should emphasize your specific medical, dental, law, PT, etc. experience and training as well.

Format

Your format can include large headings and a generous amount of white space. Create relevant sections with headings that keep this information clear and accessible, and highlight the most important items (from the school's perspective). Your CV should generally be single spaced, 10-12 pt font.

Style

Your style should be fairly formal. Although you do not need to use complete sentences, your style should be clear, concise, and precise. Keep your formatting and wording consistent and parallel.

Examples

Check out this site for examples of CVs including tips for writing them.

Personal Statement

Although sometimes daunting to write, a personal statement (aka statement of intent or letter of intent) gives you the space to tell your specific audience why you should be admitted. You get to tell what talent, skills, and perspective you bring to the incoming class in an interesting and engaging way. Sometime you'll receive a bit of a prompt, other programs will just ask you to write a "Personal Statement" or "Statement of Intent" or "Letter of Intent."

Personal Statement Questions

Respond to the following: (Yes, there are a lot of questions, but these will help you create a really fantastic and specific statement)

- What is your purpose in graduate study?
- What is the area of study in which you wish to specialize? (Use the language of the field)
- What is your intended future use of your grad study?
- What is your unique preparation and fitness for study in the field?
- Do you have any problems or inconsistencies in your records/scores?
- Do you have any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere in your application?
- What did you learn from the problems or inconsistencies or special conditions?
- How have those experiences made you into the person you are today?
- These should be made into positive statements about your abilities and future.
- Why do you want to attend their university? Be specific.

Conventions of the Genre

- Be conservative with your design and writing style
- If no page requirement is listed—stick to 2 pages max, singled-spaced.
- 12 point in a conservative font like Garamond, Calibri, or Times New Roman

Your essay must emotionally engage the reader and directly link to the narrative you created with your resume or CV. It should show a unique point of view and reinforce all of the rest of your application materials. It should unfold the story of what have you done in your life up to this point that uniquely positions you to be a top candidate for this particular program.

Format

- No opening or closing salutation
- Your essay should begin
- ATTN: Graduate Selection Committee (unless you are posting your work in a text box)

The beginning of your essay should have a hook. You can grab the reader's attention with a spellbinding anecdote, counter-intuitive statement, or shocking one-liner.
The essay should be written in the first person as it creates an intimacy between the writer and the reader. We want our work to be emotionally appealing.

1. Begin with personal details outlining the "WHY": the why of your academic and career plans
- Tell how you first became interested in the subject you plan to study
- Provide anecdotes from childhood, early academic life, travel, service, or other experience

2. Present some recent experience and accomplishments in the field
- Course work you've excelled in
- Awards you've received
- Aspects of the field that inspire you
- Clubs you've participated in
- Conferences you've presented at
- Papers you've published

3. Goals for the Future

You should explain why attending THEIR university matters to the achievement of your goals. Notice the difference between the following
- "I want to attend X University because I want to study women's health"
- "As you can see, from the time I was 16, I've dedicated myself to researching the impact of the environment on women's health in third world countries. My time spent studying under Dr. MacKenzie has taught me the value of working alongside someone who not only excels in academia but also gets their boots dirty, so to speak. X University's reputation for providing onsite training and fieldwork, in addition to preparing its students to hold their own in the academic setting is unparalleled. I would be honored to be among those students. I would also love the opportunity to study with Professor Ludlow, given her groundbreaking research on microplastics and women's health in India. Her article found in..."

4. Conclusion
- Summarize what you've already written
- Perhaps touch back on the hook from your intro
- Express interest in *their* program
- Thank them for their consideration

A quick note about educational or work foibles from Vana C. Koutsomitis (it's corny, but true):

> *"Maya Angelou famously said, 'We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.' This is true of your professional evolution. You might feel like you are not where you want to be—or not where you thought you'd be by now—but your journey will evolve. There is nothing wrong with revealing the bumps along the way, as long as you can articulate where you want to go. The most important exercise . . . is defining your values, goals, and mission and working consistently in that direction."*

Mentors

Many students cruise through university without taking advantage of all that the university has to offer. No, I'm not talking about renting out the cinema room on the fourth floor. I'm talking about the potential to find a mentor in one or two of your professors. Take advantage of this opportunity. Seek out a professor with whom you have a connection. And, frankly, if you are in a class of 350 students, it's going to be hard to make a connection during class time. Office hours provide a great opportunity to get to know your professors, and they'll be happy to answer any questions you have.

So, just like in an interview, come prepared! Ask them how they got to be where they are. Ask them about their experiences in grad school. Ask them how they knew they were on the right career path. Ask them about their specific field. Ask. Ask. Ask. Listen and take notes. Be engaged and courteous. Tell them what your current plans are and ask for advice. Ask if they know of anyone in the field that might be willing to talk with you or let you shadow them. Then, a day or so later, shoot them an email thanking them for their time. Be specific on why their interview was helpful to you. You also can do this type of interview in the workplace with people who have the job you want someday. It can be a great way to make connections and find out what it takes to reach your goals.

This is only one way of finding and creating a mentor. Sometime it happens organically. Sometimes you have to go out and make it happen. Mentors can encourage and guide us. They can connect us with others that can further our career and enrich our lives. Go the extra mile and make these connections.

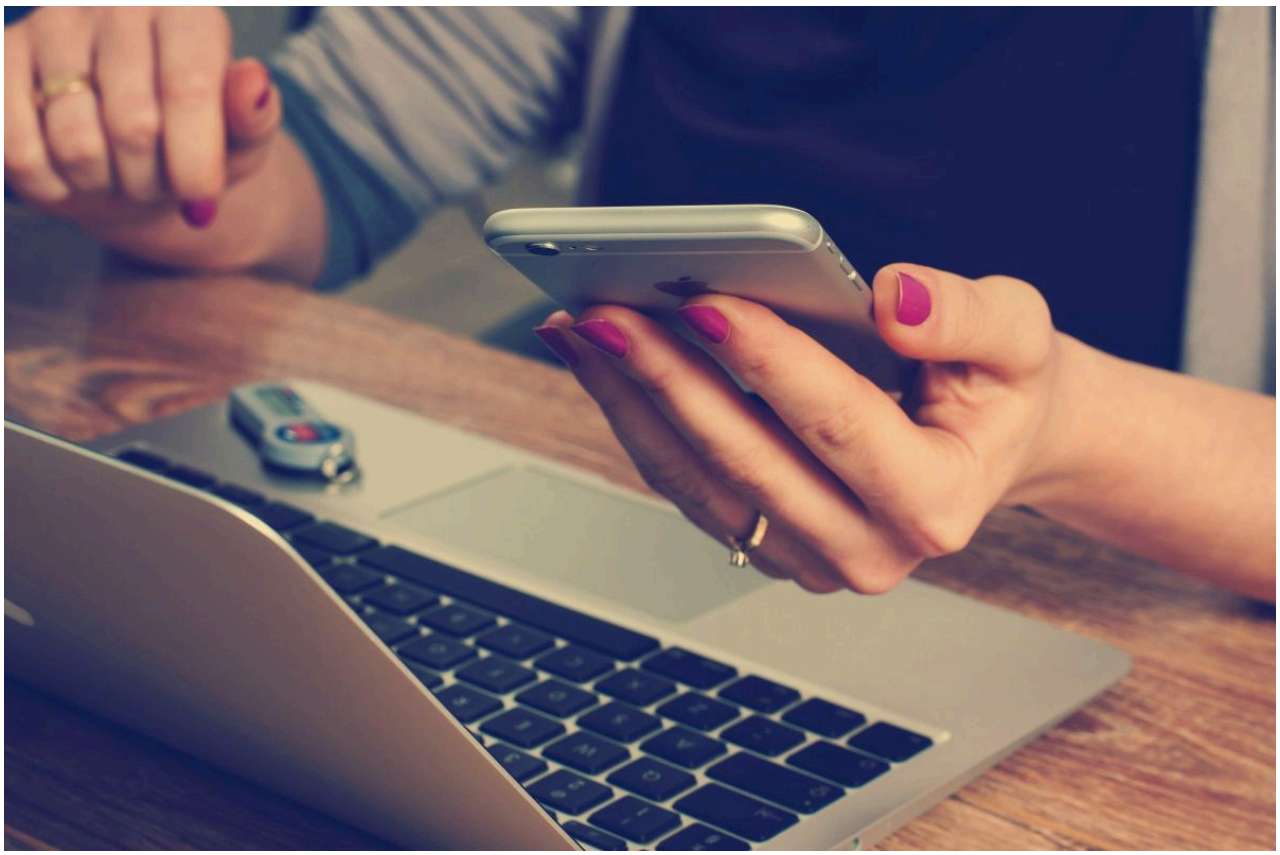
Letters of Recommendation

Most grad programs will ask for multiple letters of recommendation. That means that you have the opportunity to show difference aspects of your personality and work ethic. Your boss, your mentor, and your professors have all had different experiences and interactions with you. Give careful thought to which qualities you want highlighted in your letters, and consider which of your contacts will best be able to showcase those qualities. Your professor and your boss will have different experiences with you and will be able to highlight various qualities you possess. Don't procrastinate this decision; you want to give your recommenders several weeks' notice.

When you approach your letter-writers, make sure to ask if they can write a strong recommendation—you want to know now if they have any hesitation and why. If everything still seems golden, go ahead and provide them with your due dates, application materials (resume or CV, personal statement), and a list of your attributes, accomplishments, and experiences. You can even tell them what the other letter writers will talk about. Don't hesitate to remind them of the looming deadline if they haven't submitted their letter yet.

Be sure to drop by with a small token of appreciation (chocolate, office plant, etc.) and thank them for their work. They are taking time out of their busy schedule to provide a free service for you.

15.9 Personal Branding



You need a presence online so potential employers can find you. Photo by FirmBee on Pixabay

Online Presence

Just like you were concerned about your narrative in your application materials, you need to worry about what story is found in your online presence. It's important to make sure that what you've been putting out to the world is what you want your potential employers to see. It is also important to ensure that what you are putting out there is authentic and uniform across all platforms. Not only do you want the narrative in your resume and cover letter to match, you want to it match across Facebook and Instagram and Twitter. Revisit the narrative you created in the Interview section and create a 2-3 sentence-long description of yourself. You can use this for your "elevator pitch" when you meet someone, in interviews, or your tagline on social media.

Personal Branding with Social Media

Build your brand online and network with professionals in your field using social media that reflects your career or professional goals. The tips below, from the National Association of Colleges and Employers, provide you with tangible steps to building your brand online.

Facebook

- Use a professional-looking picture; you can use the same picture on all of your social media pages
- Add the following to the "about" section: internship, job and other educational experience, a short bio, and links to other professional social media
- Follow organizations you're interested in to discover intern and full-time job opportunities, company announcements and potential organizational contacts

LinkedIn

- Use a professional profile photo
- Customize your headline with keywords and phrases related to your desired industry or profession
- Submit requests to connect with professionals you've worked with or met through networking channels and personalize your request by offering some information on why you would like to connect
- Don't just connect and leave it at that; build relationships with your network to cultivate stronger professional ties

Twitter

- Use a professional profile photo and your cover photo can indicate your interests
- Choose a Twitter handle that will be recognizable as you
- Tell your story in your bio, include university, class year, major, and keywords describing your career interests
- Add a link to your LinkedIn profile, your personal website, blog, and/or online portfolio

Image by Washington & Lee University

Note how the first bullet point asks for a professional photo. It's because it's important. But it doesn't mean that you have to break the bank. Ask your roommate or a friend to take a picture of you in natural light. Wear professional clothes; pick a neutral background. Then upload that picture to each site. Just don't use a selfie or crop a vacation pic.

Your Personal Brand

Your Personal Brand Review what Washington & Lee University has said about personal branding (above). Go through your Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter and make necessary changes. Write a quick paragraph detailing some of the changes you made.

LinkedIn

Look over your LinkedIn profile and make sure that it reflects best practices in your target industry. Different industries—and even different functions within industries—have different standards and expectations. Modify your headline and summary to point toward the job you want. Make sure your profile is “search optimized” by including key skills and phrases in your descriptions of accomplishments at former positions. If you have done a thorough job of the audience analysis earlier in this chapter, you’ll be set to hit the ground running. If you are new to LinkedIn, do a little genre research. Find people who have the job you want and let their LinkedIn profiles inspire you content, formatting, etc. If possible, connect with these people and seek their advice. Join groups in your industry and begin engaging with the members. You could even interview one of these people to find out more.

ResearchGate

Check out this Science article about the role the social networks ResearchGate or Academia.net can play in your online presence. It gives great information about how to connect to others in academia and filter out information and research you don't want.

15.10 Commencement

Don't forget to enjoy the moment. Photo by Baim Hanif on Unsplash

Thinking about life after college can be one of two things: absolutely thrilling or absolutely mind numbing. There are so many choices and options. If you've known you were going to be a dentist since the time you were three, good for you. Go after your tooth (ful)filling dreams. If you are still trying to decide what to do with your life (and you graduate this semester), good for you. Keep waiting tables until you decide. Life is long and it often twists and turns in unexpected and beautiful ways. Although this chapter isn't about helping you decide what path to take but how to put your best foot forward once you begin down that road, it's helpful to take a minute to think of where you've been, where you'd like to be, and enjoy where you are in this moment.

Once you're ready to take the first step toward life after undergrad, know that you have the tools to create really stellar application materials. Start small, start early, and start with the basics. **Make sure you know your audience** well. Get ready to write and revise and revise and revise and . . . you got it--revise! You'll want to get everything as near to perfection as you can. Make plans to ask trusted people (mentors, professors, people in the field, etc.) to make sure that you are presenting your **character** the way you want and that your **message** is persuasive. Get comfortable with helpful criticism. Begin looking at your online presence through the eyes of a potential employer or grad school mentor. Ask yourself if you need to revisit some of the content you've posted online. If the answer is "yes," then take the time now to spruce up your image.

Take your time with your application materials and put the effort in. You've got what it takes to do what you love!

With a good application, you, too, can end up doing what you love! Photo by Riz Mooney on Unsplash

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16

Creating Public Texts

Nicole Clawson & Jill Larsen

Learning Outcomes

This chapter will teach you

- how to recognize and write in the different genres of public texts such as
  - emails
  - memos
  - social media posts
  - infographics
  - blogs and other online writing
  - opinion editorials

16.1 Learn the Genres

This chapter will focus on public texts--the different genres you might be asked to write in your future career. We will cover everything from how to write inter-office communication to persuasive online writing. Genre is the key. Make sure you understand the constraints of the genre before you put fingers to keyboard.

Photo by rawpixel at Pixabay

16.2 Email

Email is one of the most popular forms of communication in the business and academic worlds. But despite how common email is, it's deceptively hard to write a really good email. You want your messages to be clear, correct, concise, and to-the-point. You want to get the the meat of your message quickly but at the same time keep a light, professional tone. Focus on these Do's and Don'ts:

The Do's of Email

- Be polite and considerate.
- Always be a bit more formal if you are writing to your superior or someone in a position of authority. It's smart to err on the side of being too formal.
- Begin with an appropriate salutation. Find out how your professor/boss/peer would like to be addressed. Or if you don't know, notice how they sign their emails or refer to themselves. If they live in academia-land, stick with Professor or Dr. If they live in the real world, use Mr. for men and Ms. for women. (Mrs. and Miss are out-dated terms that unnecessarily emphasize women's marital status--don't use them unless someone specifically requests it.)
- Use the subject line. It should clearly and concisely state what the email is about. Don't use a vague subject line or start a sentence in the subject line and finish it in the body. In a professional setting, don't make bad puns or jokes.
- Be careful when using the Reply All option. Read the article. 'Nuf said about that. But only say "'Nuf said" if you're writing to your best bud and not your boss.
- Sign your emails with a friendly closing salutation like "Sincerely," or "Best regards." And think twice before using email signatures.

The Don'ts of Email

- Don’t email your professor/boss if you can find the answer to your question elsewhere (e.g., it’s in the syllabus, the textbook, online, or ask a classmate or coworker).
- Don’t ask, “Did I miss anything important when I didn’t come to the meeting/class yesterday?”
- Don’t use emoticons or emojis and don’t overuse exclamation points.
- Don’t be overly informal (e.g., avoid slang or spellings like "thx"). Capitalize sentences and the word "I" like normal (this is not a text message) but don't use ALL CAPS (that's the email equivalent of yelling).
- Don't send GIFs in professional settings.
- Avoid being snarky, rude, or curt. It might be funny and sarcastic, but your audience may not read it that way. It's much harder to convey feeling through email, so don't assume your reader will understand if you're joking.
- Don’t try to deal with a problem in an email that would be better served by a phone call or an office visit.

With all of these things, Think: what does this question or situation imply about me?

Now, I can hear some of you saying “My boss uses emojis!” That’s cool. Your boss can use emojis, and you can, too, as long as you let your boss make the first move to informality. The same thing goes with salutations. Always use the proper format and formal names, but let them drop the salutations before you do. Let your boss/professor sign their first name before you address them as such. Let your boss use slang or emojis before you do.

Remember, you’d rather be slightly overdressed to a party than under dressed. Same thing goes for workplace writing. It's better that your writing be slightly over-formal than sloppy and ill-mannered.

What's Wrong With This Email #1?

Hey, I lost my syllabus because someone stole my notebook so I’m not sure what’s do tomorrow. Can you tell me what we need to do for class? Thxs!!! Hildegard <3

Sent at 11:59pm

16.3 Memo

A memo is a weird thing. It lives in the space between an old-school letter and an email. The great thing about a memo is that it forces us to get to the meat of our message quickly. And, being that it is slightly more formal than an email, it immediately tells our audience that this information is important.
So when do we send a memo?

- If it is part of the company protocol.
- When the message is too long to be contained in an email.
- If the document is going to be printed out and placed, say, on a bulletin board.
- When we need to convey detailed and complex information to those outside of our workplace.

Conventions of the Genre

Memos look a lot like email--if the email were written out in a Word document. Follow this format to create a memo (you can also use a template from Word or Google to begin with):
“Memorandum” or "Memo" as the title (flush left)
To: (readers' names and job titles) From: (your name and job title) Date: (complete and current date) Subject: (what the memo is about, highlighted in some way)

- Block format (flush left, with no indentation for new paragraphs)
- No salutation
- No signature

Make sure that you get to the main point of your memo quickly. That means that the first sentence is your purpose statement. The content should be short and to-the-point and provide the context or background information briefly. The last sentence should be a clear action request.

Memo Examples

Google "Memo Examples" and peruse the examples that come up to get an idea of what memos look like and the kind of language and style they typically use. Now think of 3 possible instances when you might be asked to write a memo in your future career.

16.4 Multimodal Writing

Now we're going to talk about different types of writing that use more than words. We call this multi-modal. You will discover how image, video, color, and other design choices can forward the argument you are making with your words. In fact, the various modes should be an argument by themselves. When you create a multi-modal argument, you will bring all modes together into one cohesive, unified, effective ensemble.

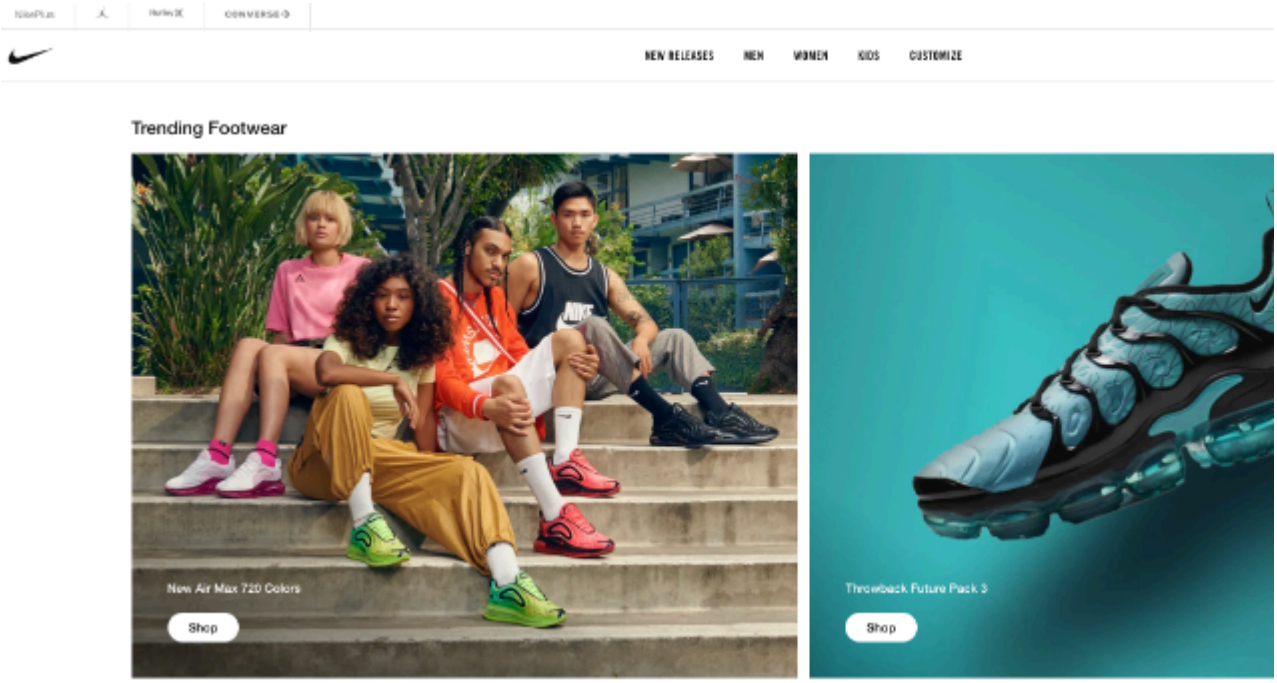
16.5 Social Media

You're probably very familiar with how to navigate and use social media to promote your own image and purposes, but how can you do this on behalf of a company or group? Just because you were born during a certain time frame (Hello iGen'ers!) you *might* be asked to write the social media content for the company you work for. Let's do what we've been taught to do when we are tasked with something new and analyze the genre.

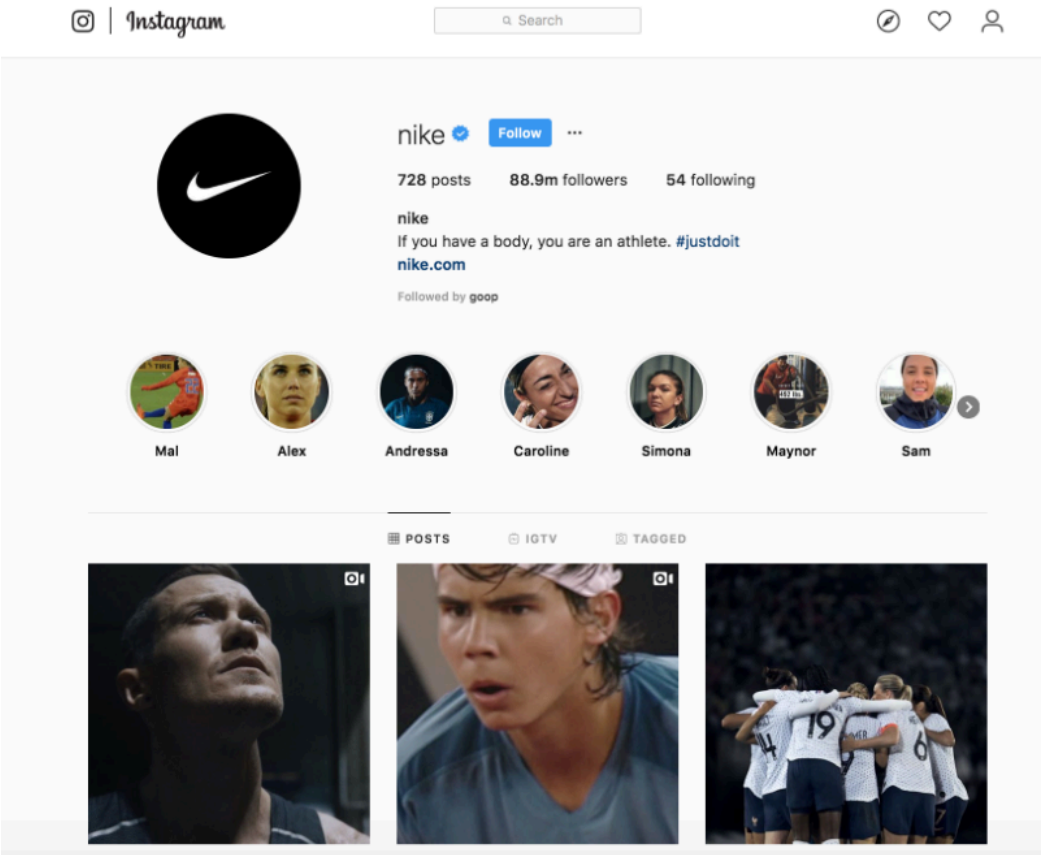
GENRE ANALYSIS

Let's use a single company to analyze the social media genres you might be writing. Let's "just do it" and use Nike. Spend a bit of time scrolling through Nike's website, Instagram, and Twitter feed.

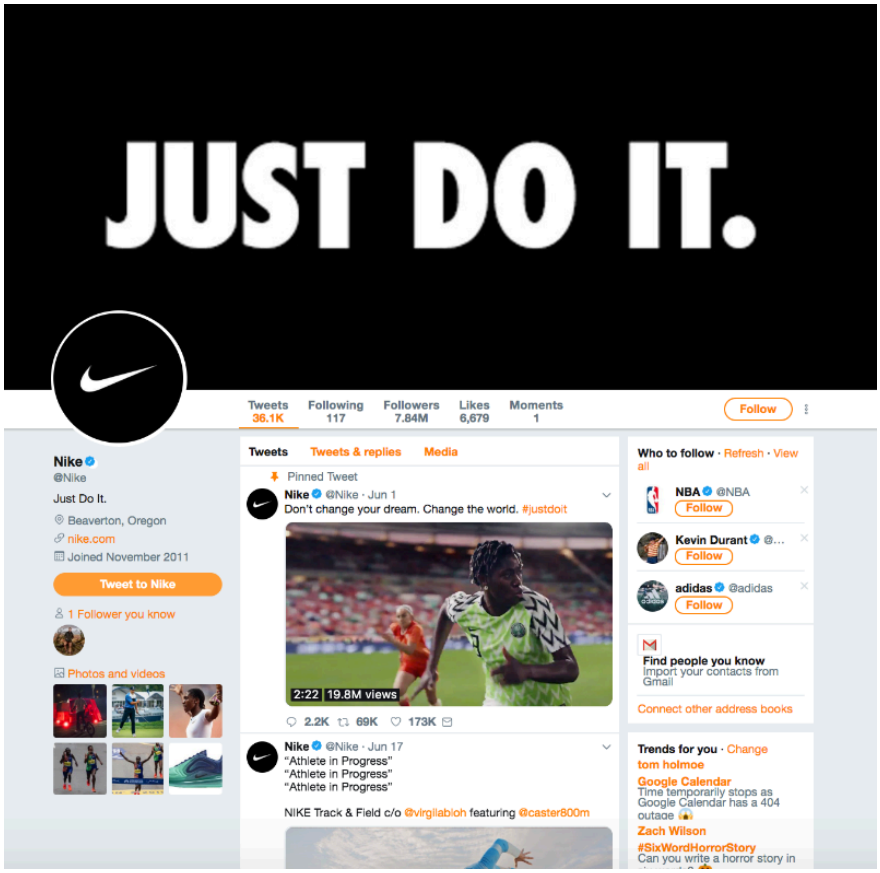
Website



[Instagram]



[Twitter]



Genre Analysis 1

What are the differences between the three genres? It might help to create a table to organize your findings. Look at both the visual aspects as well as the writing.

Genre Analysis 2

What are the similarities between the three genres? And how does Nike keep their branding similar across the three genres?

Images

Sprout Social found that 58% of consumers prefer "visual-first content, with graphics, images and produced video taking the lead." Or, as my students say, the **images hook** and then the **words inform**. Look at the images found on the various platforms. Notice that the images are cohesive and visually appealing. It might seem superficial, but many of our readers will make snap judgement just by looking. Our goal is to present a professional product and we need to do that through both the visual and compositional element. If you need a refresher on visual rhetoric, see Chapter 6 Design.

Hashtags

Be strategic with your use of hashtags. (They act almost like the keywords found in your literature review.) You want to attract potential customers or users by using appropriate hashtags that describe your product or company or enhance the narrative you are trying to tell. Avoid cultural appropriation. And avoid hashtag overkill.

Takeaways

- Look at other successful companies that are similar to yours. What does their social media content look like? What lessons can you learn from their feed?
- Review your company's mission statement, values, narrative, and purpose.
- Ask yourself who, specifically, is your audience? The wrong answer is "the entire world."
- Consider your audience's expectations. What are they expecting to see or to learn from your posts or tweets?
- Adhere to genre conventions:
  - Blog—concise paragraphs with carefully cultivated images.
  - Tweet—280 characters to get your message across. Choose wisely.
  - Instagram and Facebook post—short and sweet messages with cohesive visual elements.
- Brainstorm ways in which you can quickly and efficiently highlight the purpose of the post or tweet

16.6 Online Writing

Writnig online can be harder than it looks. Photo by Scott Graham on Unsplash

It is highly likely that you will be asked to write a blog post or online article for the future company you work for. Even if you go into academia, most departments expect their professors to have an online presence. Often, these online writing is persuasive and informative. They ask the reader to reconsider previously held ideas or to take action. Like all of the other genres we've discussed in this textbook, an understanding of audience is extremely important.

One of the worst things you can do when writing online is to write in a manner inconsistent with your target medium. Just as you adopt a different tone in letters asking Mom for money than you would in a letter to your bank asking for a loan, you also must know the conventions of the place where your writing will be read.Your tone must be balanced and consistent and your voice unique—humorous or cynical, angry or sorrowful, objective or contemplative--but definitely the voice of the writer. If you're writing for your job, remember that you are not writing as a private individual, but as an employee. You are an extension of the company and must write as such.

As you'e writing, follow these steps. First, state the issue at hand. Good pieces evolve from current issues concerning and intriguing the intended readers. Next, state a position on the question or issue. The best and most effective pieces then go on to state the opposite position's best argument, which is then knocked down by the writer's better argument. Back your position with evidence, data and stories. Last, provide a call to action or restate the issue you want your audience to reconsider. Remember the tips for writing for General Audiences in Chapter 14.

Open strong

Start with an attention-grabbing opening line that cuts to the heart of your key message and encourages people to read further. Online articles are meant to be read quickly. If an article is not interesting, readers generally will not bother finishing it. Therefore, it is crucial that you begin with a good lead, an opening sentence or story that "hooks" readers immediately and makes them want to read on. A good lead tantalizes, informs, and sets the tone for the piece. It can even be creative.

For instance, an editorial on gambling in the Wall Street Journal began with a paraphrase of Dr. Seuss: "I do like gambling, Sam-I-Am, I really like it, and I can. For I can do it in a plane, on a boat, at the track, and in the rain. I can do it in a casino, with the lottery, or with Keno." This type of beginning immediately evokes an emotion reminiscent of books from childhood but with a grown-up theme. This leads to curiosity and reading on. Readers make decisions on whether or not to read an article by how they respond to the headline and the first sentence. In other words, the first line is the display-window for all the goodies you have inside; waste no time in getting to your point.

Use active and conversational voice

Emphasize active verbs. Don't overuse adjectives and adverbs, which only weaken writing. Write to the level of your audience.

Keep paragraphs short but variable

In general, paragraphs should be no more than 3-5 sentences. Keep sentences short. If a sentence is overly long, your audience will get lost (and bored).

If you want to deliver a really punchy point, remember—single sentence paragraphs rock!

The reason is "gray space," the way a long block of text tends to turn gray upon glancing. The most important consideration about shorter paragraphs is that they're easier for readers to read. Long unbroken blocks of text are daunting to most readers. Frequent paragraphs promise a sort of "rest stop" to readers. One advantage to this is that you don't need to keep your paragraphs wholly unified and long as in academic writing.

Find the story

We all love dazzling our friends with great data and facts, but to really make an impact with your piece wrap your data in a story. Refer to real world events or personal experiences that you and your audience have likely encountered. Don’t try just to teach your readers, touch them emotionally.

Include Images

Images are often the first things that hook the reader. Make sure that your images promote your message and are there for a purpose. Make sure that the images you use create a cohesive aesthetic for the article, post, or overall blog. Just like your words tell a story about the content and the writer, so do your images. A word of caution—provide proper

attribution for each image you include. If you don't know if an image is copyrighted, don't use it. Instead go to Creative Commons or my personal favorite: Unsplash where you can find thousands of beautiful, copyright-free images.

You can also do an Advanced Search in google imge search to find copyright-free images. Under "Settings," click "Advanced Search" and then at the bottom look for "Usage Rights." Click on the drop-down menu and choose "Free to Use or Share." Now all the images that come up in your search will be free to use.

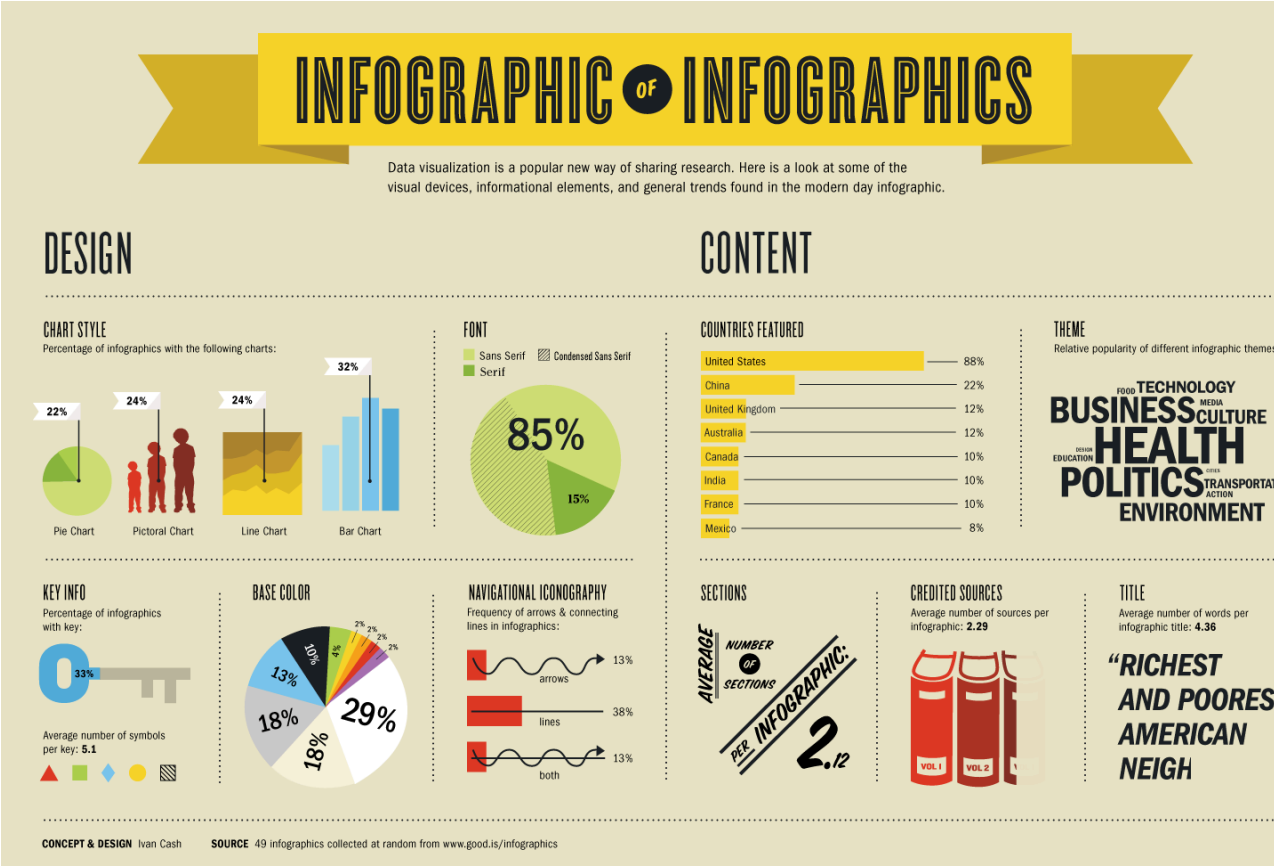
Give Credit

Beware that even if an image is free to use or share, you still need to say where you got it. Look through this textbook and notice that all the images are copyright-free or have a Creative Commons copyright. Note also that we always say where the images some from--that's called Attribution and is often required, so just get used to doing it. Be a responsible online writer! Give credit!

16.7 Infographics

An information graphic is a document that uniquely displays information and data in a compelling way. The use of graphics, images, and symbols allows readers to download information much more quickly than text alone. You have probably seen them used for advertising or public service ads. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the sponsoring institution of BYU) even has a collection of infographics in their Newsroom which communicate complex or controversial topics in an easy to read format.

Check out this infographic of infographics to get a look at the genre.



Creating infographics

As rhetorical masters you are ready to go beyond writing documents; now you can design them. Now you get to use the rhetorical principles we have discussed throughout this textbook in an even more engaging way. There are many different modes of rhetoric—remember, everything is rhetoric—but each mode has its own rhetorical strengths and weaknesses.

Your audience will be anyone who is interested in the information you are presenting in your infographic. You need to create a document that will engage and inform them quickly, and inspire them to seek out further knowledge. Because of its easy access and shareability, your infographic will pull in a much larger secondary audience. So, be sure to create a document that less-informed audience members will understand and appreciate.

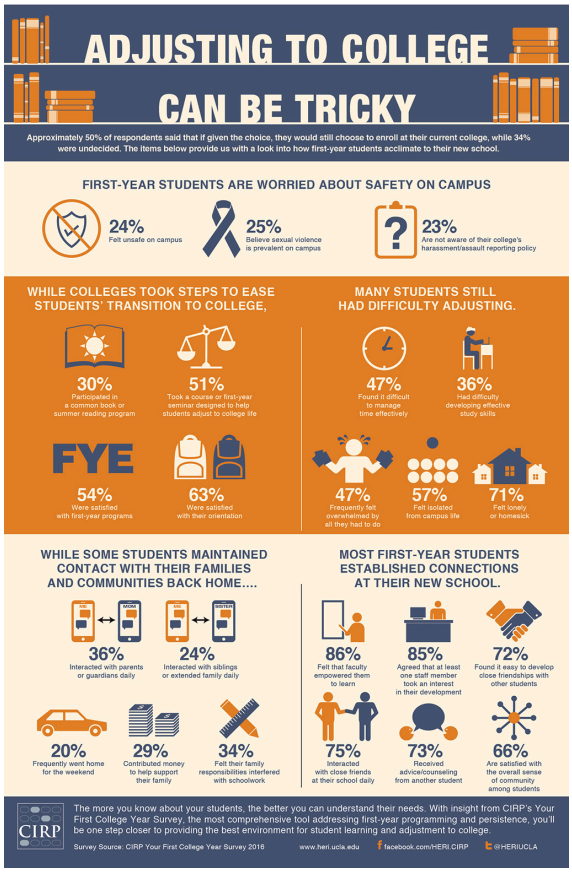
In addition to Photoshop, InDesign, and Powerpoint, there are many online infographic generators to choose from. Check out the following generators and find one the suits your needs:

- Canva
- piktochart
- Venngage
- Visme

Formatting an infographic

Formatting is entirely up to you. A good rule of thumb is to use around 250 words of text in your document and a combination of images and charts/graphs. Simplified images are usually better than actual photos. Just remember: your visual rhetoric should make your argument as effectively as your written rhetoric does.

Beware of including information that comes from only one source, since this can unfairly drive the facts towards a particular conclusion. In the social sciences, this is called single-source bias. Look at your infographic the same way that you would a research paper or a university essay. The more sources you have, and the more building blocks you have to tell an interesting story, and the more credible that story is.



16.8 Opinion Editorials

Don't be like this. Use a convincing argument instead! Photo by Steve Johnson on Unsplash

A good opinion editorial (aka op ed) offers a perspective on a current item of interest to the readers of a specific publication. Hence, an understanding of **audience** is extremely important. Moreover, opinion pieces are the product of an individual, not a committee. That means that the author must insure his or her **voice** shines through and that the **tone** is appropriate for the topic of the piece.

Also, while it may seem obvious, it bears repeating: the best opinion pieces are lively, informative, and good pieces of writing.

Opinion editorials and other newspaper and magazine articles have **very short paragraphs**. In general, no more than two or three sentences make up a typical paragraph. Like other online writing, don't feel you need to keep your paragraphs unified and long. In opinion writing it is perfectly legitimate to begin new paragraphs often, even if it means continuing a thought begun in an earlier paragraph.

Another consideration about op ed writing is that you must **grab the reader's attention quickly**. Articles are meant to be read quickly, and rarely are they ever read again. And if an article is not interesting, readers generally will not bother finishing it.

A final consideration for op-ed pieces is that it must be **short and concise**. Although lengths of op-ed pieces in real newspapers vary–those in the New York Times may be longer than those in smaller papers, for example–you should waste no time in getting to your point.

What aspect of your research topic would make a good opinion piece?

Choose something you discovered from your research and that you have a strong opinion about. What could be a good argument you could make about that topic?

16.9 A Few Final Words

By now, you should know the importance of getting to know your **genre**. If you know what the genre constraints are before you begin writing *and* you are keeping your **audience** expectations in mind, you will save yourself a huge headache and avoid heavy usage of the delete button. Also, make sure that you are considering your own **character**--whether you are writing as yourself or as a spokesperson for your company--and how your voice and tone could be perceived by your audience. Using **images** are powerful, but make sure they are consistent with the message and **narrative** you are attempting to deliver.

You've been doing all of these steps for a long time. Since you began asking mom or dad for a few bucks for the weekend or your boss for some time off. Since convincing a certain someone to date you. Since you started creating your perfect Instagram or TikTok persona. See . . . you are a natural. Now, go out and change the world!

References

The 2018 Sprout Social Index: realign and redefine. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/index/

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17

Presenting

Cristie Cowles Charles & Jill Larsen

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter you'll learn all about Oral Communication in the form of Oral Presentations and Poster Presentations. You'll demonstrate your ability with presentation media and with public speaking skills, including

- focusing a topic,
- adapting it to the understanding of a particular audience,
- organizing main points coherently and supporting them with adequate detail, and
- delivering a message effectively using appropriate audio and visual aids.

17.1 Zen and the Art of Oral Presentation

As important as it is to write clearly in today's professional world, speaking clearly is equally essential—in meetings, on the phone, in formal presentations, in conversations with supervisors and subordinates, at conferences, in elevators, and even when asking for a raise. It turns out there's an art to speaking clearly just as there's an art to writing clearly, and many of the same tools you use in writing can help you create exceptional presentations.

Often when I introduce the concept of oral presentations, my students tell me this fills them with dread. One of the reasons for this dread is past bad presentation experiences. For every amazing oral presentation in this world, there are oodles of terrible ones. You've probably sat through one yourself—the kind that's either endlessly boring or excruciatingly embarrassing or just misses its audience completely. So it's my job to teach you the life-and-death skill of creating an awesome oral presentation so no one ever has to suffer from what's commonly known as "Death by PowerPoint." I, too, have suffered from a bad presentation experience.

Bad Presentations

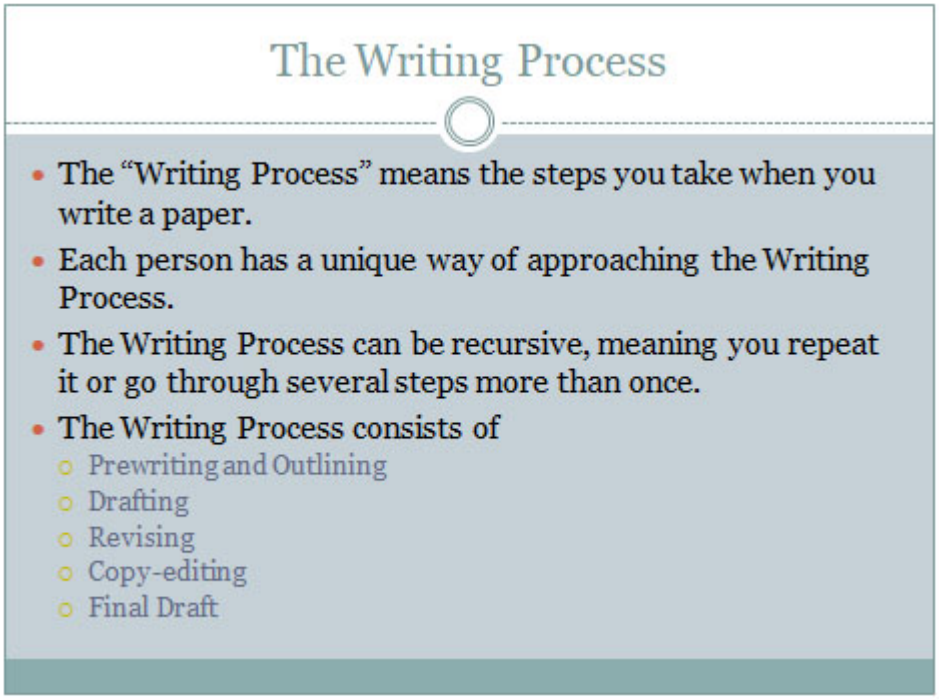
When I was eight years old, my family moved from the urban, diverse, fairly dangerous South Side of Chicago . . .

. . . to suburban, much-less-diverse, very-non-dangerous Provo, Utah.

As you can imagine, I had some culture shock. For example, I was used to a very small group of children in my church congregation in Chicago where I felt confident and at home. That all changed when I walked into my new children's church room bursting with dozens of kids all staring at me—the New Girl. Soon I was asked to give a two-minute talk in front of this group. What would have seemed like a simple task in Chicago now loomed like the scariest monster in Provo. How could I possibly give a talk with all those eyes staring at me—the New Girl?

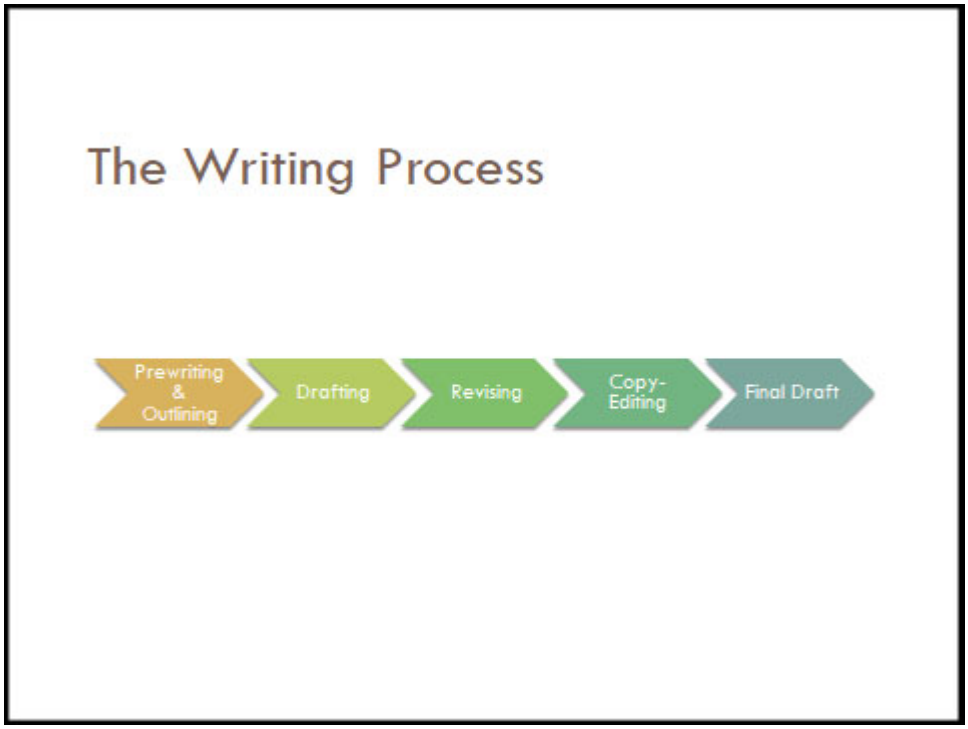
My mom devised a solution: she found a big picture from a scripture story and taped my talk to the back of it so I could hold the picture up in front of my face while I spoke. So that's what I did: I stood at the mic, held on to that picture in front of my face like a battle shield, and read my talk word-for-word off the back. This, clearly, was a low point in my presentation history.

Luckily, it got better. As I grew older, I got more and more comfortable speaking in front of an audience and even gave a few successful presentations in high school and college. I learned how to take my notes and morph them into bullet points on a PowerPoint slide (like the one below), sometimes with a picture or two added for interest. And I eventually got by just fine.



My Old, Text-Based, Me-Oriented Format

But it wasn't until I began teaching at BYU that I found my *presentation zen*. Literally. A colleague of mine (Brian Jackson, the author of Chapter 3), gave me a book called *Presentation Zen Design* by Garr Reynolds that changed my whole outlook on presentations. I had imagined my presentations in class as a way to portray my points one-by-one on a screen (me-oriented), but Reynolds made me think from my audience's point of view and decide what would appeal most to them (audience-oriented). The result was slides like this new, zen one.



My New, Zen Audience-Oriented Slide Format

Presentation Zen

Reynolds who lives in Japan, offers the Buddhist Zen ideas of simplicity, restraint, and naturalness as a model for re-thinking the genre of presentations. In other words, like a beautiful and peaceful Japanese Zen Garden, slides should be cleared of clutter and instead point solely to the essence of the message.


A zen garden—and a good presenter—focuses on restraint, simplicity, and naturalness. Photo by Paul Mannix on Flickr.

> *Zen Presentations utilize "restraint in preparation, simplicity in design, and naturalness in delivery." —Garr Reynolds (p. 22)*

Reynolds insists that presentations encourage the audience to focus on the person presenting--not on the slides. For example, he encourages his readers to get rid of "Death by PowerPoint" (badly designed, bullet-point-based slides that a

presenter reads word-for-word) and instead focus on a clear message and slide simplicity--in other words, zen design.

But enough reading! I believe the best thing you can do to learn about all this is to experience other people's excellent ones, so I think we should start by hearing from Garr Reynolds himself from a TEDx Talk he gave in Kyoto, Japan. Don't worry; it's (mostly) in English. I want you to pay attention to both what he says as well as how he presents it since he is, of course, also a master presenter. It's 15 minutes long, but trust me, you want all the information in it, so please watch the whole thing.

Watch on YouTube

Garr Reynolds's TEDx Talk "Why Storytelling Matters" https://youtu.be/YbV3b-l1sZs

Garr Reynolds's TEDx Talk

Describe the top 2-3 presentation principles you learned from Garr Reynolds's TED Talk. What strategies do you plan to incorporate into your own oral presentation?

Did you notice how relaxed Reynolds seemed in his presentation? Did you notice the simplicity of his slides—or the fact that the camera focused on him personally most of the time and not on his visuals? What about the clarity of his message? Could you write down his main point in one sentence? What about the flow? Did it feel organized? Did the count from 1 to 10 help you know where he was and where he was going? Did you like his additions of humor? Did you learn something? I hope your answer to all these questions is yes.

Simple but captivating images give your audience breathing room. Image by Hong Zhang from Pixabay

In the rest of this chapter, we're going to explore the elements that go into two types of presentations: the traditional oral presentation and the poster presentation. There might even be some stories and a video or two. So take a deep, cleansing breath, put on some soothing music, and get ready to find your *presentation zen*.

17.2 The Oral Rhetorical Situation

By aki.sato (aki sato) - https://www.flickr.com/photos/neco299/5320569712/, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12819363

Just like when facing any writing task, the first step to creating a strong oral presentation is to analyze the rhetorical situation. Garr Reynolds used the example of the art of Kamishibai Japanese storytelling to explain the three-part harmony of an oral presentation:

1. A master storyteller uses
2. Visual elements (they used hand-drawn slides) to tell a story to
3. An engaged audience.

Sounds like the rhetorical triangle, right? Remember, a *Speaker* (aka *Writer*) gives a *Message* to an *Audience* (see chapter 2). We'll talk about all these elements, but when it comes to oral presentations, I suggest you think about the audience first.

Audience

Probably the most important thing to consider in creating an oral presentation is your audience. You might have the best message in the world, but if you don't understand your audience, they'll miss or at least *dismiss* your message. Nancy Duarte, owner of a successful presentation design company, gave a famous TED Talk about what makes the best presentations. She asserted that you as the presenter might *think* that you're Luke Skywalker—that you're the *hero* of your talk, but you're not. The *audience* is the hero. You are Yoda—the guide. Or should I say, "Luke you are not. Yoda you are."

Who's your audience?

As your audience's guide, you need to understand them, and the best way to do this is to put yourself in their shoes. Most presentation experts agree that the concept of empathy is paramount (Duarte, Reynolds, Stinson); if you can really understand your audience, you'll be much more successful at portraying your message. For example, it's most likely that in this class you'll be presenting in front of your fellow classmates. Part of your grade may even come from your peers.

What an Audience Wants

Think about when you've watched someone else's presentation. What elements did you appreciate about it? Beautiful images? Good data? Humor? A compelling story? Confident delivery? Did anything not go well? How can you apply all this to your own presentation? In other words, what do you think your audience wants from you?

As you prepare, ask yourself these questions about your your audience:

- **What do they already know?** This determines how much background info you must provide.
- **Where do they stand on the issues related to your topic?** Do you think they'll be sympathetic about your topic coming into your presentation? Try to put yourself in their shoes: anticipate their objections or concerns, answer their questions, play to their passions. If you don't know where they stand, you can ask a sample of them as you prepare your presentation. In the business world, this is called market research and involves surveys and focus groups.
- **What kind of language style or formality will they best respond to?** You'll use a different level of formality and vocabulary when addressing your professor versus talking to your four-year-old cousin. Similarly, if you aim too formal or too high in your vocabulary, your audience either won't understand or will see you as a snob (or both). If you aim too casual, they'll dismiss you as uninformed or will think you're insulting their intelligence. Strike a balance.
- **What entertains them; what do they find interesting?** This can help you figure out something that will grab their attention. Most college students respond well to visuals and videos as well as compelling stories. But you can also get their attention by stepping away from the technology and doing something offline like a demonstration, description, or discussion. Just make sure that whatever you choose is short, sweet, and relevant to your presentation–no random SpongeBob dances! (Unless that's relevant, then go for it.)
- **Which appeals will they best respond to?** Think about the three different rhetorical appeals mentioned in Chapter 2: Writing Tools and how you might use them to further your argument:
  - Evidence and Reasoning—stay organized; use data and evidence to back up your points; set up a clear, logical progression from point to point.
  - Character—show through citations that you've done your homework, tastefully name-drop, use language that will convince them you're knowledgeable without being full of yourself, dress like a professional.
  - Emotion—tell stories, show pictures or videos that demonstrate the impact on people, show vulnerability, pull at their heartstrings.

Zen Connection

Garr Reynolds did a fantastic job of connecting to his audience in the video you watched. He showed that he was aware of his Japanese audience at the TEDx Conference in Kyoto by using examples from Japanese history (like Kamishibai storytelling), by talking about how he's lived in Japan for many years, and by sometimes throwing in Japanese words or phrases. This emphasized that he was aware that he could seem like an outsider to them but he also understood a lot about their culture and what would appeal to them. As you prepare your own oral presentation, think of similar details or shared experiences or even inside jokes that would appeal to your classmates. What do you have in common?

To really solidify the takeaways about knowing your audience, watch this three-minute video from a presentation design company Stinson who has researched what audiences are (and are not) looking for in presentations.

Watch on Vimeo

10 Things your Audience Hates About your Presentation https://vimeo.com/179236019

Purpose

(U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Gabrielle Joyner/Released)

Now that you've considered your audience, another essential question to ask yourself is **What's the purpose of your presentation?** In other words, what's your main message? Can you boil it down to just one sentence?

Generally, oral presentations fall into one of three categories of purpose:

1. To inform
2. To persuade
3. To both inform and persuade.

So a community health worker might give a presentation to inform new mothers about how to care for their baby's needs while a political candidate might give a speech to persuade you to vote for him or her. Generally in this class, you'll be designing a presentation that's meant to both inform and persuade. In other words, you'll most likely be informing your audience about the topic you've studied all semester, but in the end you'll also want to persuade them to do something related to that topic. This "something" is often referred to as a "Call to Action."

Call to Action

Nancy Duarte (the presentations expert mentioned earlier) says that every presentation should end with a Call to Action. She studied thousands of presentations and discovered that the best ones move in a similar pattern:

1. First, they talk about a problem (the status quo),
2. Then they introduce a solution (the new bliss) and
3. Shift back and forth throughout the presentation between the "status quo" and the "new bliss."
4. Finally, they end with a call to action.

To see Duarte's full TED talk, click here. Minutes 5:00-9:00 are especially good.

Imagine your audience asks you the question at the end of your presentation “So what? What do you want me to do about it?” What is your answer?

Purpose and Call to Action

Take a minute and think of your own Presentation topic and write some ideas of what your main message could be. (You should try to distill it down to one sentence.) What kind of problem and solution can you present? Now write a potential Call to Action you can make at the end of your presentation. What do you want to convince your audience to do?

Genre

One last aspect of the rhetorical situation that's valuable to consider is this question: **What are the conventions of the genre?**

Just like other types of writing (research papers, proposals, resumes, etc.), presentations tend to follow a specific format. These conventions have been developed over time as people have had success using certain formats and then other people adopt those same formats in their own presentations.

For example, in the last decade, a whole new type of oral presentation has become wildly popular: the TED talk. You've already watched one earlier in this chapter. Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to spreading of ideas to change the world (cite website). And in order to spread ideas, the TED organization chose one specific method they thought would be the most powerful. You guessed it: the oral presentation.

The TED organization believes in "the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world" (TED Website). TED chose one specific method to change the world: oral presentation.

And, in fact, it's worked. The best TED presentations have been watched by millions of viewers, have spread iconic messages across the world, and have made the best speakers famous and/or skyrocketed their careers. That's a lot of power in 18 minutes!

If you've watched many TED talks, you've probably noticed that most of them have a similar structure beyond the obvious beginning, middle, and end. You probably expect a TED presenter to

1. Start with an attention-getting opener,
2. Give background information that includes why the topic matters,
3. Explain a problem (including evidence),
4. Suggest a solution (including evidence),
5. Perhaps go back and forth between these, and finally,
6. Call the audience to some kind of action.

Within the talk, you probably expect to see visuals and/or videos, hear stories—especially personal stories that reveal some vulnerability and relatability, laugh at additions of humor, feel a surge of emotions related to the problem, and—if the presenter does their job right—desire to act as part of the solution. And you expect all this to fit into the strict 18-minute time limit.

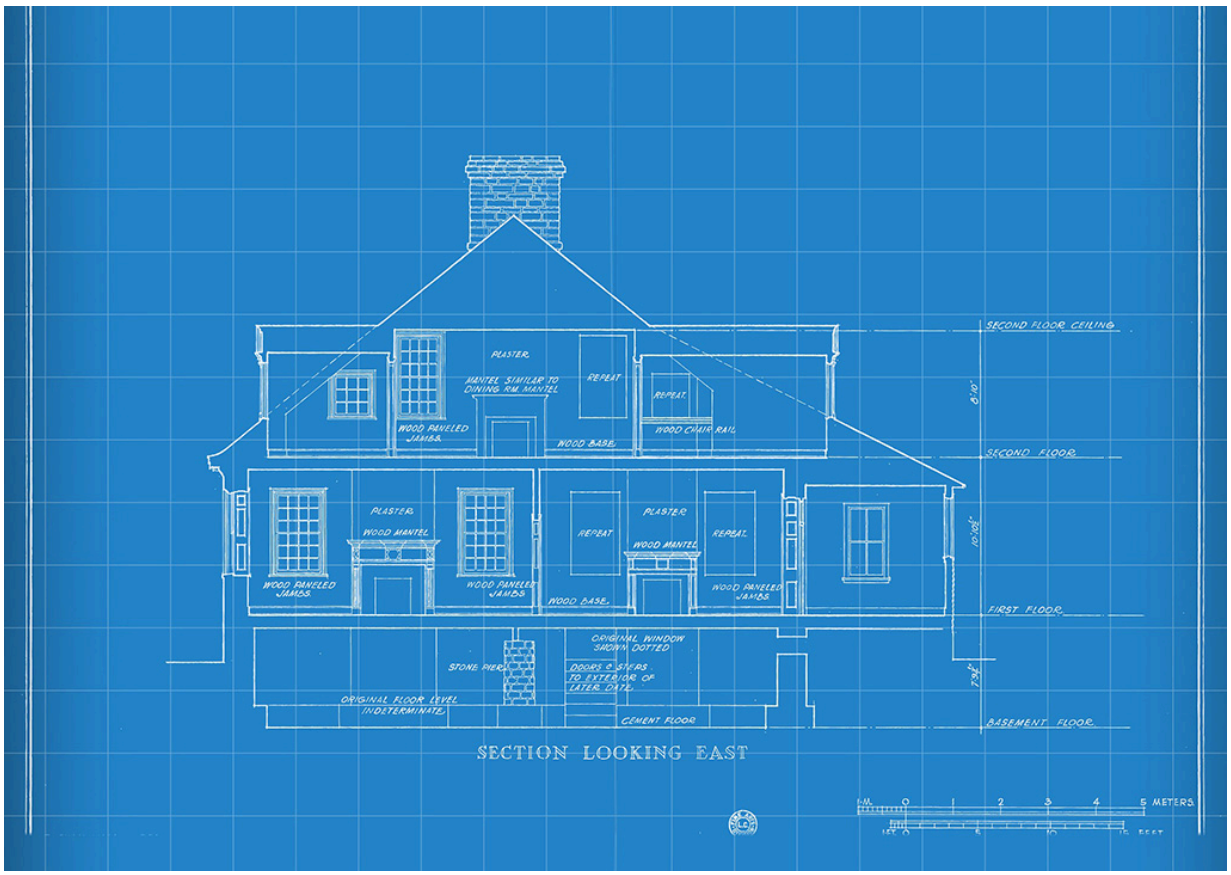
The reason most presenters have gravitated toward these conventions is because they work. The most influential presentations follow this structure. See, for example, Steve Jobs' 2007 iphone launch . . .

Steve Jobs right before getting the most applause probably ever given by an audience of Techies. Photo by Miquel C. on Flickr

. . . and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech". Not surprisingly, these elements are also good strategies for you to use in your own oral presentations. That's where we're going in the next section.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech is known as one of the greatest speeches of all time. Photo in Public Domain

17.3 Presentation Structure



Now it's time to plan your structure. Following the conventions of great oral presentations is a great place to start:

1. Beginning
   - Start with an attention-getting opener
   - Give background information that includes why the topic matters

2. Middle
   - Explain a problem (including evidence)
   - Suggest a solution (including evidence)
   - Perhaps go back and forth between these

3. End
   - Call the audience to some kind of action

1. Beginning

Surprise! It's become part of the genre of oral presentations to begin with an attention-getter. The reason for this is that people generally decide within the first 30 seconds whether they think a presentation will be good or not and whether they'll listen in or tune out. First impressions matter, so take advantage of the moment. This doesn't mean you need to do a wild interpretive dance or a stand-up comedy routine or throw out piles of money for people to take notice. You simply need to **do something interesting that's relevant to your topic**. This could be as simple as telling a story or presenting a surprising statistic, showing a poignant picture, or asking a rhetorical question.

Nancy Duarte began her famous TED Talk with the **bold statement**, "I believe you have the power to change the world." In contrast, Garr Reynolds talked about his job as a presentations consultant (introducing an **appeal to character**) and added a promise that he would share the 10 most important things he's learned for improving presentations.

Do something surprising. I remember one of my students started her presentation speaking to us in Japanese for about 15 seconds. This immediately caught our attention because we wondered why she would do something so out of the ordinary. She went on to talk about second language learners and the best strategies for teaching children to learn a second language. By speaking in Japanese, she helped her audience feel how uncomfortable it is not to understand the language being spoken, which made her audience sympathetic to her cause.


"Motherese" is good for babies and presentations on speech pathology. Photo by Torbein Ronning on Flickr

Do a demonstration. Another student brought a small blanket, wrapped it up and held it like a baby. She began talking "baby talk" to the blanket for a few moments. She then introduced the concept of "motherese" (the exaggerated "baby talk" mothers often use with their children). This student explained that although baby talk was discouraged in the past as immature and coddling, motherese was actually beneficial to children's language development because it turns out mothers naturally exaggerate the sounds the babies first attempt to make. It was fascinating, and I still remember it. I also proudly use baby talk whenever I hold a baby.

Sometimes you can surprise your audience by waiting until after the beginning to really catch their attention. I had a Math Education student who started in a typical fashion describing what she had researched about a certain way to teach the concept of dividing fractions. Then she stopped her presentation, grabbed a marker, and proceeded to **teach us a concept**—in this case a math concept—the way she would in a classroom by writing it out on the whiteboard. She did such a good job teaching the concept that it was like a lightbulb went off in everyone's brains—suddenly we understood how to divide fractions! By *showing* rather than *telling*, this student proved her point that the new teaching method was effective.

The point is that if you think outside the box and find a way to add interest to your topic, your audience will be more interested in your presentation and will keep listening. Think of how you can **involve your audience** in your presentation.

Tell a Story

One universal way to add interest to a presentation is to add some kind of story. (You can also refer to the section in Chapter 5 Style that talks about Story.) According to Harvard psychologist Jerome Bruner, a person is 22 times more likely to remember a fact when it's told as part of a story (Harrison, 2015). 22 times! Here's a two-minute video of Nancy Duarte talking about the power of story:

Watch on Vimeo

Nancy Duarte on the Power of Story https://vimeo.com/20652285

You can add storytelling elements to your presentation in two ways: globally and locally.

Global Story

If you can take your presentation's message and treat it like a story with a beginning, middle, and end, then you're halfway there. Your presentation itself can feel like a story or a journey you take us on if you start with a theme, develop it with strong points and good examples, and end with excitement and closure. Think of the solution you offer like a "happily ever after."

Local Story

A story about two sisters became very personal for one presenter. Photo by Ben White on Unsplash

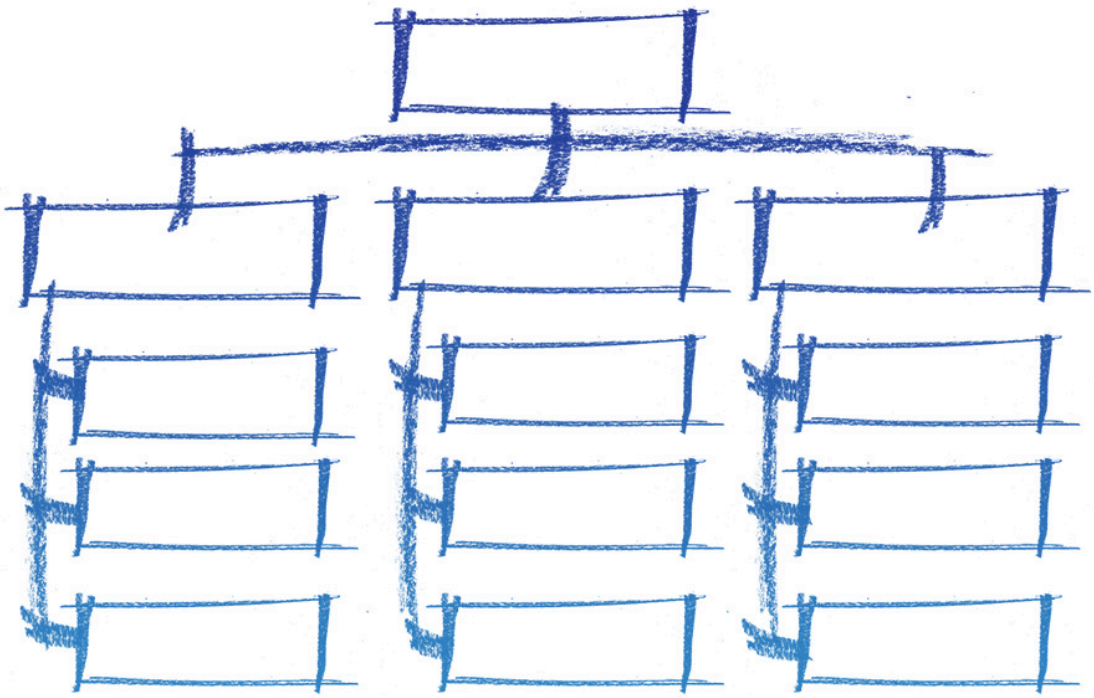
You can also add specific stories about people into your presentation to demonstrate a concept or **show an example of someone affected by the problem** you're talking about. I remember a student talking about a migrant worker named Charles he met while serving as a volunteer in Spain. Charles's picture personal story of leaving his wife and daughter in his home country in order to work in Spain and send them money stuck with me and added an emotional, human element to a presentation on the economics of migration.

One of the most powerful types of story is a **personal story** because it shows vulnerability and helps your audience identify with you. Most TED Talks include some kind of personal story for this reason. I still remember when one of my students showed a picture of a family and talked about how the older sister's chronic health problems affected the family. She specifically mentioned the consequences the older sister's illness had on the younger, healthy sister--things like feeling neglected, lonely, and scared. She then revealed that the younger sister was herself and went on to talk about her research about the effects of children with chronic illnesses on their healthy siblings. As you can imagine, these presentations that include a story (whether at the beginning or somewhere else) become more memorable and powerful because of them.

Give Background

If your attention-getter is relevant to your topic, it will naturally serve as background on your topic; however, it's also important to explain why your topic is important. You can do this the way you often do in the Introduction of research papers—by providing statistics, giving context, and showing implications surrounding this topic.

Indicate Your Organization



Because your presentation is oral, it will be harder for your audience to understand the logical flow of your paper, so do them a favor and indicate in your introduction where you plan to go in your presentation. Explain your purpose so your audience knows exactly what your point is and then refer back to it in every section. If you use directional words like first, second, next, finally, etc., you can cue your listeners to your organization and help them understand the progression of your points. Similarly, good transitions between sections and sentences will also help your audience follow your organization. You can also add headings to your slides that indicate where you are in your presentation.

Although you'll spend much effort planning your Beginning, it should only take up about 10-20% of your presentation time, so for a 10-minute presentation, that's no more than 1-2 minutes.

2. Middle

If you've done your job at the beginning, your audience should be interested in your topic, understand your purpose, and be ready to hear your main points. In a short presentation (15 minutes or less), you only have time to make about **2-4 main points** before it's time to conclude—it generally takes up to two minutes to make a point. Even in a longer presentation (up to an hour), you still want to focus on only about five main points total, spending a little more time on each than you would in a short presentation. So use your time well. It helps to create an outline of this section to keep yourself organized.

Each point you make should refer back to your overall purpose as you go. Focus on the problem that you're trying to solve and the solutions you're offering your audience. Generally, you want to order your points like this:

- second strongest point first
- the rest of your points in the middle
- strongest point last

This is because your audience will remember your last point best and your first point second best. This section is where you want to cite lots of sources to provide evidence for your points and increase your *credibility*. You can also appeal to your audience's *emotions* as you go and include attention-grabbing elements and stories here as well, although your strongest appeal will be *logical*: whether your examples and evidence are convincing. Again, transitions and directional words (first, second, etc.) will help you guide your audience on your logical journey. The middle section should take up 60-80% of your presentation.

Middle Points

Think about your purpose and the middle of your own presentation. List 2-4 main points you could make about your topic to inform and persuade your audience. List them in order of second best, your other point(s), then your best point last.

3. End

At the end of your presentation, as in a typical paper's conclusion, you should briefly summarize your main points—remind your audience of the journey you took them on. If you started with a story or attention-getter, bring it full circle by mentioning it again in the context of the solutions you've offered. Remind your audience of your purpose, then bring it home with your Call to Action. Answer the question your audience will inevitably be asking: So what? What does this have to do with me? The answer is your invitation to take action to help solve the problem you've introduced. Here are some examples of Calls to Action from my students' class presentations:

- Donate $1 to a fund to stop World Hunger
- Add the phone number for the suicide prevention hotline to their phones and if they suspect a friend is contemplating suicide, commit to asking them about it directly
- Attend an event during maternal health week at our university
- Call their legislator about an immigration issue
- Be more sympathetic when listening to someone who stutters

As in the beginning, the end should also take up between 10-20% of your presentation. Often you'll take questions at the end of a presentation, so be sure to plan for that in your timing.

Timing

The only way to have impeccable timing is to practice. Photo in Public Domain

A word on timing. If your presentation has a time limit, DO NOT GO OVER THE TIME LIMIT! Your audience will immediately stop paying attention when your time is up, and if you're presenting for a class, you'll probably lose points on your grade.
Practice giving the presentation, and have a *backup plan* for how to wrap up if things take longer than anticipated. There are various reasons you could run out of time—technical difficulties, the previous presenter going long, a schedule change, etc. Pinpoint places where you could cut or condense your points. I tell my students that when they hit the one-minute-left mark, they should start their conclusion whether or not they've made it through all their other points. Timing is more important than getting through everything—and mentioning any of your middle points is much less important than ending with a strong conclusion!

References

Harrison, Kate. (January 20, 2015) https://www.forbes.com/sites/kateharrison/2015/01/20/a-good-presentation-is-about-data-and-story/#1a09f5912b83)

Also (Aaker). https://open.byu.edu/-AQEZ

Duarte, N. “The secret structure of great talks.”

17.4 Presentation Tools

Lastly, we need to talk about the tools you can use to enhance your presentation and improve your delivery so your presentation is received as favorably as possible.

Resources

Slides

Slide software like PowerPoint provides an easy way to add visuals to your presentation, but beware that the focus should still always be on you--the presenter. Remember presentation zen and don't get caught up in adding lots of bullet points or images to your slides. You can use this popular software to create your slides:

- Microsoft Powerpoint
- Keynote
- Google Slides
- Prezi

But the most important thing to remember is that **you don't need anything fancy**—on the contrary, because the focus should be on you not your slides, any slide software should allow you to create simple, clutter-free, message-oriented slides.

Keep presentation zen in mind and don't add something just because you can: don't use fancy swipes or animations, and if you really need to refer to notes, put them in the "Notes" section of the presentation (seen only by the presenter) or use good old-fashioned index cards. See Chapter 6 Design for more instruction on designing beautiful slides. You can also watch David JP Phillips's TED Talk on "How to Avoid Death by PowerPoint" where he makes the following excellent points based on what our brains can handle:

- Have only one message per slide
- Use contrast and size to highlight the most important information
- Don't put full sentences on slides (unless you're showing a quote)
- Never include more than 6 items on a slide

How Will You Improve?

Name one presentation tool—concerning visuals or delivery—that you've used poorly in the past that you want to improve in this presentation. Explain how you'll do better this time around.

Images

How do you choose an image? Photo by Héctor J. Rivas on Unsplash

Visuals should be visual. Relevant images are a powerful way to transmit meaning in a presentation; however, you must be careful that your **images enhance what you're saying** and don't detract. One way to do this is if you're using a photo, have it take up the whole space of the slide, touching the edges. You can add text to your slide, but keep it very simple.

Again, think about copyright. When you're presenting solely for educational use in a classroom, most images and videos will fall under the fair use act and are allowed. However, as soon as you present publicly outside the classroom—even online—you need to be sure you're following copyright guidelines.

A great way to look for images is go to my favorite website for beuatiful, copyright-free images (where most of the images from this book come from): Unsplash.com. Or you can do a Google Search, click on "Settings," then "Advanced Search," then scroll down to "usage rights" and choose "free to use or share." This will bring up images that are generally free to use as long as you attribute who the author is in your text (like a citation). Note: even if you use a copyright-free image, you usually need to **attribute the creator** in the caption with a link to the online location of the image. For more information on copyright, go to https://copyright.byu.edu/.

Videos

Videos can be very compelling, but make sure they're **relevant** and that you **only show the essential parts**. No video should be longer than 20% of the presentation, so in an 8-10 minute presentation, it should be no longer than 2-3 minutes. If possible, embed videos into your document instead of just having a link that you click on. That said, watch out for copyright violation. Linking to a document is not a problem, but if you have to download someone else's video in order to embed it, that can be a copyright violation.

If you use links instead, be sure to go in before your presentation and open each video once so no ads pop up at the beginning during your presentation—super annoying! Even if you embed your video, sometimes it doesn't work when you click on it, so I recommend opening the original videos in a different window to have as a backup. Videos are the #1 technology problem in presentations, so have a contingency plan. Incidentally, whenever you introduce a clip—it helps to **tell your audience something to look for** so they watch with a purpose.

Technical Difficulties

I had a French teacher in college who had an anti-talent with technology. Unfortunately, he taught a class on French History where almost every day he had to show art on a slide projector and play music on a CD player (yes, those were the olden days). Inevitably he could never even get a simple CD player to work and would call out, "Est-ce qu'il y a un technicien dans la classe?" Is there a technician in the class? We lost a lot of time in that class due to technical difficulties (and secretly made fun of him outside of class). Don't be like my French teacher--be prepared!

Is there a technician in the class?

When you only have 8-10 minutes to make a point, you can't afford time-consuming technical glitches. So **make a backup plan**! Come early to set up! Test out your presentation and links before you actually get up to present. Email your

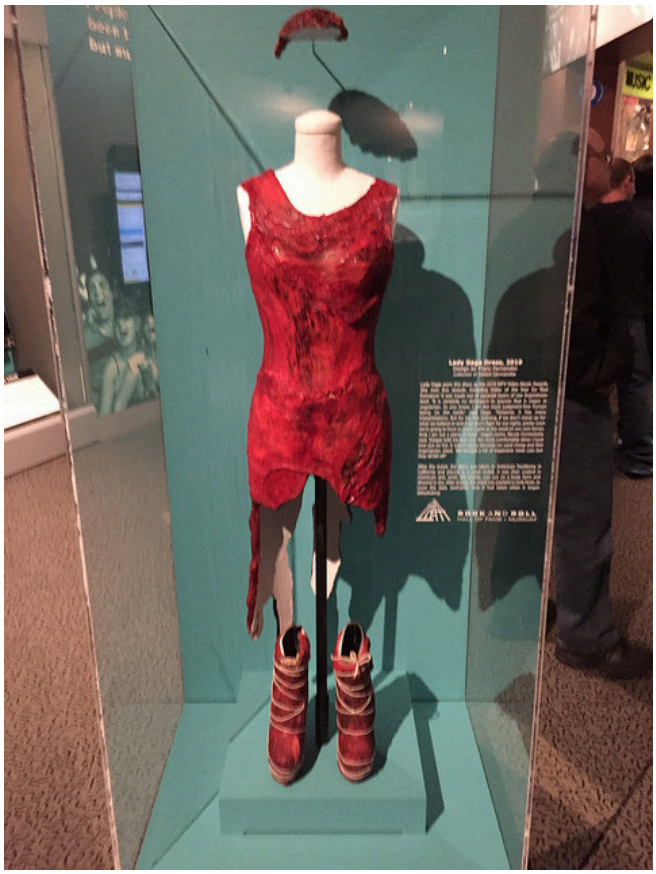
presentation to yourself so you can always access it from another computer if your computer dies. Even better, make a copy on a desktop or thumb drive that you can plug into someone else's computer if the internet suddenly stops working.

You can't plan for all technical difficulties--I had a student who wanted to make a point by throwing a glass plate on the ground (it was safely in a ziplock bag). Unfortunately, the bag split open and actually shattered all over the carpeted classroom floor. After a call to the janitor and a lot of distraction, we got it cleaned up, but not without scaring a lot of people and losing valuable presentation time. Here are some tips with dealing with technical difficulties:

- Have a backup plan (or two)
- Try not to get flustered
- If something doesn't work twice in a row, calmly move on
- If you do miss a video, etc., explain what the point of that part of your presentation would have been

Delivery

Dress



Is this a good look for your presentation? Image by Brian Sawyer on Flickr

You’re not Lady Gaga. Don’t wear a dress made out of meat. Dress professionally. I tell my students to think about their audience and dress one notch more formally than them. A safe bet is to dress as if you're going to a job interview—that will lend credibility to your presentation. You can't foresee all issues, but you can usually control what you wear. Usually.

As an undergraduate, I once presented a paper at a conference, and several of my colleagues and friends came to watch in the audience. I walked up to the podium, gave my presentation, and walked back to my seat. I thought it went great! Until we walked out of the room and I felt a draft.

I was wearing a long fitted skirt that had a seam up the back, and unbeknownst to me, the seam had split open almost all the way up the back, showing my underwear! It turns out my presentation was much more revealing than I'd meant it to be. It was like living that nightmare where you show up to school in your underwear! And no one told me about it until after the conference session!

Avoid wardrobe malfunctions like mine by choosing professional clothes and practice giving your presentation in them so you can find out at home rather than in front of a crowd that your outfit has a weak seam.

Is this a good look for your presentation?

Practice

I can't emphasize enough the importance of practicing your presentation before your give it. It's almost impossible to get the timing right on the first try, but after practicing it several times with a timer, you'll have a sense of how long each section takes. Find your most honest friend to give you feedback—especially on your delivery.

A lot of people have ticks or habits or gestures that they don't know they do in front of people. For example, I took an acting class and got the feedback that apparently, whenever I'm trying to seem serious or angry, I plant my feet and sway back and forth. When I received my first set of student evaluations as a teacher, one of them said I touch my hair a lot. I had no idea. Nor did I realize it would bug someone throughout the semester. I just wish they'd told me earlier! By practicing your presentation, you can work out all those ticks before you present instead of finding them out in the comments afterward.

Be Confident

Present confidently like this. https://flic.kr/p/egvm3w [Public Domain]

Finally, present confidently! And if you don't feel confident, act confident! Research shows that audiences can't differentiate between someone who *is* confident and someone who's just *pretending* to be. Look your audience in the eye and speak slowly and clearly. Most novices speak too quietly and way too fast. If you're using a microphone, you need to speak even slower than you think to be understood. I once spoke at a graduation ceremony and the main note I received during the practice was that I needed to speak half as fast into the microphone! This felt very unnatural, but when I saw the recording afterward, I realized they were right.

If you're nervous about presenting, see Amy Cuddy's TED Talk about how you can increase your confidence in front of people simply by focusing on your posture.

Conclusion

I hope that now you know that an oral presentation doesn't have to fill you with dread like mine did when I was eight. You just have to find your presentation zen. Simplify, focus on the most important things, stay organized, appeal to logic, character, and emotion, use your resources wisely, practice, and be confident, and you will be on the path to creating inspiring presentations.

Now you're on the path to your presentation zen. Photo in the Public Domain

17.5 Poster Presentations

Often, academic and professional conferences include poster sessions, which is a different kind of oral presentation. For most of us the term "poster" conjures images of our second grade science fair where we bought a piece of poster board (okay, Mom or Dad bought us a piece of poster board) and then we cut and pasted relevant pictures to help the other kids in our class understand the science principle we had researched. It seems counter-intuitive to use such an old school technology in today's tech heavy world. *But*, many of our second grade skills still work beautifully in an academic conference setting.

What is an academic poster session?

https://byrdnick.com/archives/11346/classroom-poster-sessions

Most academic conferences include workshops, panels, and posters. The poster session of the conference is generally held in a large hall with aisles and aisles of posters reporting current research geared toward conference attendees. Poster sessions are loud and chaotic. Dozens of presenters and audiences asking and answering questions and generally engaged in lively research discussions.

Why present a poster instead of a presentation?

You could present your research in a presentation format—and many times you will; but, a poster session allows a much more personal interactive engagement with your audience. According to Colin Purrington, photographer and blogger, "Research shows that people who are standing are more engaged listeners than people sitting in chairs." Audiences can also view your poster when you aren't present.

What is a conference poster?

An academic poster is generally a large paper mounted on the wall with a short engaging title, a prompt to your research question, a little about your research findings, and a short list of published research from experts in the field all presented in a visual graphical format, bright colors, and limited text. Your academic poster should invite an interested audience to come over and learn more.

What are the academic poster requirements?

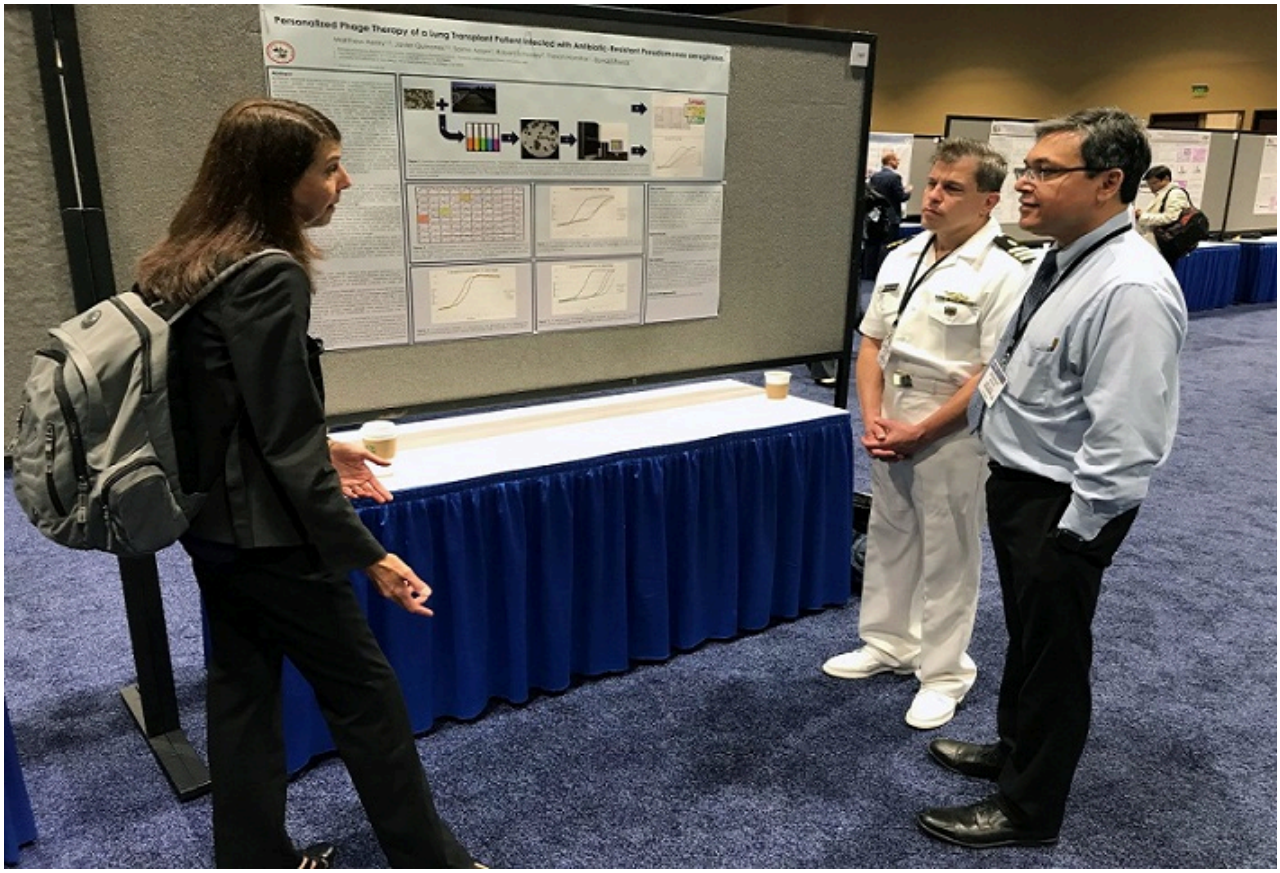
Most academic posters are approximately 3'x4', professionally printed, and organized into columns (usually 3 or 4) and sections or boxes to help readers quickly access research information. Posters usually have a banner heading containing the poster title, the presenters/researchers name or names and the sponsoring body or institution/school. Blogger Colin Purrington shares some templates to make this process easier.

Design Choices

What template or software did you use to create your poster? Why?

How do I avoid making common poster mistakes?

1. Avoid wordiness. Try to limit text to 1000 words or less.
2. Maintain adequate white space or negative space. Avoid making your poster look crowded.
3. Use a sans-serif font for titles and headings and use a serif font for text (see Chapter 6 Design).
4. Use list format when appropriate—avoid large blocks of text.
5. Use italics or bold, rather than underline, for emphasis. Underline is generally reserved for hyperlinks.
6. Use consistent single spacing.
7. Avoid hyphenating words.
8. Use consistent contrast. Avoid dark or bright or busy backgrounds behind black text.
9. Avoid crazy color schemes. make your color palette pleasing and appropriate for your research topic.
10. Label graphic elements figure 1, figure 2, and so forth. Give your graphics titles and captions. Provide the source for any graphics and visuals you don't create yourself.
11. Use graphics and pictures. Visual elements draw and inform viewers more than text alone.
12. Make sure viewers can see and read text and visuals comfortably from 3-6 feet away.
13. Format references in the correct format for your field and position the references section at the bottom or bottom right on your poster.
14. Have a colleague proof your poster.
15. Don't plagiarize.



https://health.mil/News/Articles/2019/02/11/Call-for-abstracts-open-for-2019-Military-Health-System-Research-Symposium?type=Technical+Documents (licensed for reuse)

How do I present a poster?

1. At most academic poster sessions you stand next to your poster and guide the reader through it; but, it should be designed so that a viewer can understand your research if you aren't there.
2. Give viewers a SHORT 3-4 minute well-rehearsed overview of your poster and your research and then invite questions. The value of a poster session is that it is interactive.
3. Dress Professionally. Avoid chewing gum and keep your hands out of your pockets.
4. Maintain comfortable eye contact.
5. Thank viewers for visiting.

Steven M. Block of Princeton University warns, "Remember that when it comes to posters, style, format, color, readability, attractiveness, and showmanship all count. Take the time to get things right."

Poster Design Revolution

One last note is that there's a grass-roots revolution going on in academic poster design led by Mike Morrison who was a frustrated PhD student who spent a year researching better poster design ideas to try to improve the cluttered, text-heavy conference posters that made conference sessions overwhelming and exhausting. He provides clean, easy-to-look-at templates for his "better design[ed]" posters and explains and why's and how's in this 20-minute video. You don't have to watch it, but it's backed by good psychological research and represents a current trend that could make your poster much more likely to be noticed and read.

17.6 The Concluding Conclusion

Communicating to others is one of our most human traits, and now you know how to best present your ideas to other humans. If you remember to analyze your audience, keep yourself organized, use smart design, and act professionally, your presentation will be listened to and make a difference.

We've reached the end of our journey together in this chapter and this book. We hope you've enjoyed your time learning how to improve your writing and communication skills. Now it's your turn to do the second part of our school's motto and the goal of this book:

Previous Citation(s)

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Glossary

Find something...

Abstract

Found at the beginning of academic articles and books, gives a brief summary of the most important points and findings contained inside. May include a list of keywords to aid database searching.

Academic Audiences

Audiences whose focus is on scholarly research, logical arguments, convincing evidence, and a formal style

Annotate

Write notes on, summarize, and/or evaluate a source such as an article or book.

Annotated Bibliography

A document that lists the bibliographic information for each source on a topic and also includes a summary and/or analysis of each source.

Appendix

Extra pages at the end of a paper for anything that is too big or complicated to be contained inside the paper such as Tables, Figures, and Data.

Argumentative Thesis Statement

A sentence that sums up the crux of a typical research paper where the author makes an argument such as proposing a new way to look at something or a change they'd like to see in the future.

Assumptions

An assumption is a value or belief that connects the claim and the reasons given to support that claim. Sometimes these are unspoken and subtle, other times we need to be explicit about them and perhaps even persuade our audience to accept the assumptions that underlie our argument.

Audience

The audience is the group of people to whom you intend to address your message. The better you know them and their values, the more effectively you can make choices in your writing to persuade or inform them.

Body

The body of the paper consists of all the inner paragraphs between the Introduction and Conclusion. The body is usually divided into sections and is where all your points will go (including evidence and commentary).

Character

The character of a speaker or writer describes how that author is perceived by an audience.

Claim

A claim is an assertion you make, something you propose to be true. We use reasons (or evidence) to support our claims and convince or persuade others to change their views or feelings to match what we assert in our claim.

Commentary

Commentary means a writer's comments in a paper (as opposed to the claims, evidence, etc.). It usually involves analysis or interpretation and can also include opinion or explanation depending on the type of paper.

Common Knowledge

Knowledge that's generally agreed upon. This usually refers to things an average, educated audience would know like that water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit. This also refers to knowledge agreed upon by members of a certain group or field. For example, Agency Theory is a theory acknowledged in the field of economics. Things considered Common Knowledge do not have to be cited but you have to remember who your audience is. Agency Theory would not have to be cited for an audience of economists who know the term but would have to be cited for a general audience.

Conclusion

The Conclusion section of a paper comes at the end and usually sums up your main points, restates your position (thesis statement), and indicates the implications of your findings. Depending on the type of paper, you may also give recommendations for future research. Also known as the Discussion section.

Content-Exploration Outline

This type of outline involves idea-generating activities like brainstorming, mind mapping, grouping, and writing sentences and paragraphs. The point is to look for patterns and find the structure in your ideas but in a less formal manner. You can even write a rough draft and then create a more formal outline in reverse that can then be revised. Also known as an organic outline or an unstructured outline.

Context

Context is a catch-all term we use to describe all the factors that influence our writing, including the moment that inspires our writing, the timing with which we deliver our writing, and other external factors related to our writing.

Discourse Community

A group with shared knowledge, values, characteristics, genres, languages, and/or style.

Discussion

The Discussion section of a paper comes at the end and usually sums up your main points, restates your position (thesis statement), and indicates the implications of your findings. Depending on the type of paper, you may also give recommendations for future research. Also known as the Conclusion.

Empathy

Understanding, being aware of, or even feeling the feelings or experiences of others.

Evidence

This is a broad term that we might use to suggest all kinds of support for a claim, from scientific evidence to personal experience to appeals to emotions and shared values. Also known as reasons or logos.

Exigence

The exigence is what prompts us to see change come about, and it inspires our decision to take up pen and paper (or set our fingers to the keyboard) and write.

Expository Thesis Statement

A statement that sums up the crux of a literature review (as opposed to an argumentative research paper) where the author exposes or announces their topic rather than taking a position or making an argument. It usually consists of two parts: main areas of inquiry about a topic and future research directions.

Figure

Any type of image, graph, or chart besides a table.

Gaps

In terms of research, gaps are the questions that haven't been answered or the areas where further research is needed. In business, gaps are the niches in the marketplace that haven't yet been filled.

General Audiences

People who are not members of your field and who have general knowledge about topics but not specific knowledge, also known as public audiences.

Genre

A genre is a kind or type or form or writing. It emerges from repeated situations in which we communicate in specific ways. We also talk about how a genre has certain conventions: An audience expects a specific genre to do things in specific ways (e.g., a letter will have a greeting and a farewell).

Global Revision

Global Revision in a paper is like looking at the foundation and framework of a house: the big ideas, the structure, the logical order you put things, the headings and bigger transitions such as from section to section, etc. Global Revision should generally come before Local Revision.

GRAPE

GRAPE is an acronym used in BYU's first-year writing classes to help you remember the main elements of the rhetorical situation. The G stands for genre (the form or type of writing we choose to use in the situation); the R for rhetor (the speaker or writer); the A for audience (to whom the speaker and writer is addressing their message); the P for purpose (what the rhetor or writer intends to accomplish with the message); and the E for exigence (the reason why this message needs to be given by this speaker to this audience at this moment).

Hedge

Hedging means adding conditional statements or qualifying a statement in order to allow for more possibilities. For example, the statement "All forests have pine trees" means no exceptions are allowed. But if you say "Most forests have pine trees," it's okay if there are exceptions.

IMRAD Format

The standard form for a research article consisting of Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion.

Introduction

An introduction is the first part of a paper where you introduce your topic, give background information, and usually delineate your thesis and suggest the organization of the rest of your paper.

Jargon

Specialized language that is used by a specific group of people but is not understood by the general public.

Literature Review

A literature review is a review or synthesis of all the research published on a certain topic. It shows the "state of the field." A literature review can be part of the introduction of a bigger paper or can be a longer stand-alone document.

Local Revision

Local Revision in a paper is like looking at the finish work on a house: the style, formatting, sentence-to-sentence transitions, grammar, language, etc. Local Revision should generally come after Global Revision.

Message

The message is, quite simply, what you have to say to other people through your writing or speaking. It's connected to our discussions about argument: The message often contains a claim support by reasons (and underpinned by important assumptions).

Metacognition

the practice of monitoring and controlling your own process in order to improve; thinking about thinking

Metacommentary

Metacommentary is the words and phrases you use to comment on something you've written. Metacommentary helps with interpretation, clarification, and elaboration. Transition words can act as metacommentary as can phrases such as "In other words . . ." and even whole paragraphs.

Mindful Writing Cycle

A sequence of steps (plan, practice, revise, reflect) used when completing a writing task that improve performance and metacognitive abilities

Mindfulness

The state of being deliberate in how you approach writing tasks, using metacognition and a mindful writing cycle

Organization-Only Outline

A typical outline that organizes a paper into sections and subsections, often using Roman numerals and letters to indicate levels. Also known as a formal outline or a structured outline.

Passive Voice

The process whereby an article, book, or other piece of writing is formally evaluated by qualified scholars in the same field as the author. These reviewers evaluate the quality of the research and determine whether or not to recommend the work for publication. Peer review can also be done less formally with less formal writing as between classmates.

Plan

Assessing the writing task and setting goals

Practice

Using strategies to generate content, draft, and receive feedback from peers and instructors

Presentation

An address given verbally to a public audience, often with visual aids. Also known as an oral presentation.

Primary Research

Research you conduct yourself such as surveys, experiments, or observations (as opposed to secondary research involving the analysis of existing sources).

Public Audiences

People who are not members of your field and who have general knowledge about topics but not specific knowledge, also known as general audiences.

Purpose

Purpose is the driving reason why we're writing. It's what we hope to accomplish by writing to this audience.

Reasons

This is a broad term that we might use to suggest all kinds of support for a claim, from scientific evidence to personal experience to appeals to emotions and shared values. Also known as evidence or logos.

References

The References section is where you provide all the information necessary about your sources such as authors' names, year, title, publisher, etc. These are usually in alphabetical order and should follow the format of your chosen style guide.

Reflect

Looking back on a completed writing task to see what you've learned and what needs to change.

Revise

Making mindful changes to a draft after receiving feedback

Rhetoric

At its most basic level, rhetoric is the study of how we communicate effectively with people. It encompasses a study of the tools we might use as well as the way the context of our communication may impact the way we use those tools.

Rhetorical Situation

We use the term rhetorical situation to describe the context in which you engage an audience through writing or speaking. It can refer specifically to characteristics of the audience and your relationship to them as well as your purpose in communicating with them. We analyze a rhetorical situation in order to guide our decision-making as we compose a written or spoken message.

Rhetorical Triangle

An image that describes a rhetorical situation where the three connected points of the triangle are the Writer, the Speak, and the Message. These surround a purpose and exist inside the context or the situation.

Running Head

A shortened version of a paper's title that runs across the top of the pages of a manuscript. According to the new APA Manual (2019), this is no longer needed in student papers.

Secondary Research

Research involving the analysis of existing sources (as opposed to primary research that you conduct yourself). Most undergraduate research papers are based on secondary research.

Shibboleth

A word, phrase, custom, or other indicator that someone is part of a particular group. It can also refer to jargon in a discipline. From Judges 12:5-6.

Style

Style in writing is the manner in which we communicate. It involves how we structure sentences, which words we choose, and other sentence-level choices that support the content of our message.

Table

A box with horizontal and vertical cells used to organize data.

Thesis Statement

The main point of a paper summed up as a brief statement. In a typical Research Paper, it's usually an argumentative thesis statement while in a Literature Review, it's usually an expository thesis statement

Third Person

Writing from the perspective of he/she/it/they rather than first person (I/we) or second person (you).

Transitions

Transitions are words or phrases that help link ideas together. Transitions can be one word, one sentence, or a whole paragraph.

Writer

The writer is you--the person composing the message. But don't be complacent and think you don't need to think critically about who you are as a writer. We should consider our own emotions, our biases and preferences, and our relationship with the audience when we consider our role as writers.