Writing in the Social Sciences

Cristie Cowles Charles
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Introduction
Welcome to Writing in the Social Sciences!

When we decided to create a new textbook about Writing in the Social Sciences, we made one major goal: that it NOT be boring. (You're welcome. 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, even live links so you don't have to leave the textbook to go to a web page. Plus, you can read it on a computer, tablet, and even your phone!

But more importantly, we tried to talk to you like people. (We're assuming you're 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 tried to make connections to culture and experiences that you'll
relate to. Because, you know, we're people, too. And isn't that why you're going into the
Social Sciences? Because you dig people? So much so that you want to study them?

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? Well, we're going to be your guides as we climb the proverbial mountains 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 will work hard in this course, your efforts will pay off as you emerge
from this journey stronger and with a broader vision of how you can influence the world as a
better writer, a better social scientist, 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. Check it out so that you know
what to do when you encounter these things later.

**Embedded Videos**

Videos are embedded into the text so you can just click on them inside the textbook and
watch them there with no ads. Don't worry, these are simply fancy links, so the creators of
the videos still get to count your click for their statistics. Here's a cool three-minute video
about why these young men from inner-city Chicago choose to write. Try watching it by
clicking on it.
Embedded Websites

When we want you to go to a particular website, we'll always provide a regular link to it (and include the actual address: lib.byu.edu), but even better, we'll often put it in an iframe, which is a fancy embedded link. This is just like going to the actual website--you can access everything the same way you would normally--but you don't have to leave the textbook to do it. So convenient! Here's an iframe that connects to our BYU Library web page. Try scrolling on it and then look up your favorite book.

Spoiler Alerts

Previewing a book is a good way to get a feel for it and anticipate what's coming. In the old days, we would literally pick up our textbooks from the campus bookstore and physically leaf through the pages, but that's not possible online. So here are some spoiler alerts so you'll know what's coming in the rest of this book. 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 writing in the Social Sciences differs from other types of writing and learn the tools you need to get your message across.

In Chapter 1 Writing in the Social Sciences, we'll talk about how writing specifically in
the social sciences represents a discourse community whose style, forms, and vocabulary you'll need to learn to be taken seriously. **Chapter 2 Writing Tools** deals with the rhetorical strategies you learned in your first-year writing class and how we will 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 about visual design and how to use images, fonts, color, and other visual elements to best get your message across.

**UNIT 2: ACADEMIC AUDIENCES**

We've divided the rest of this book into two sections based on the two most common audiences social scientists write for: Academic Audiences and General Audiences. In **Unit 2: Academic Audiences**, we'll focus on what writing is like in university settings and how to create some of the most useful types of documents.

In **Chapter 7 Writing for Academic Audiences**, we'll talk about 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 currency of academia and that you need certain skills to find as well as analyze sources. **Chapter 9 Talking About Sources** deals with the best ways to talk about your sources (summary, paraphrase, and quotation) and give credit to others' work (APA Format)--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 the social sciences. **Chapter 11 How to Write a Literature Review** will go through the steps for writing a literature review which will also hone your research and analysis skills. And finally, **Chapter 11 Proposals** will cover the genre of the proposal and the best ways to ask for anything--especially money.

**UNIT 3: GENERAL AUDIENCES**

The final unit, **Unit 3: General Audiences**, will deal with how to write for people not in your field because it turns out that more and more social scientists are spending time writing blog posts, social media posts, opinion editorials, infographics, and even tweets for general audiences. You'll learn how your writing style should shift when your audience changes from an academic audience to a more general, public audience. We'll also cover different types of public writing.

To that end, **Chapter 12 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 13 Professional Portfolio** will delve into some specific genres for applying for jobs--namely, resumes and cover letters--and graduate schools. In **Chapter 14 Public Texts**, you'll learn about other typical genres for general audiences such as strategies for writing effective memos, emails, social media posts, blog posts, infographics, and opinion editorials. And finally, **Chapter 15 Presentations** will take you through the steps to creating a killer presentation--whether a traditional oral presentation or a poster presentation.

The end of the textbook will have two Appendices: one for **Student Examples** and one for an **Instructor's Guide**.

We hope this textbook will give you the skills you need to succeed in your future at the university and in your career.

**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. (Hey, if we talk the talk of seeking feedback, we should walk the walk, right?)

So please be sure to take the surveys at the end of each chapter so we can improve our own writing. It's for posterity! Here's what the surveys look like. We especially like comments about what you liked or didn't. Try right now to click on the questions and give us feedback about this chapter--it should only take a couple minutes.
Author Biographies
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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 sacrifice worth it. Thanks also 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
Writing in the Social Sciences

Cristie Cowles Charles

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you will learn

- why this class is important
- how you can benefit from becoming a better writer
- which disciplines are part of the social sciences
- how knowledge is created in the social sciences
- what constitutes a discourse community
- how writing in the social sciences is distinctive from other disciplines.

1.1 You Are Here
Here you are in a class about Writing in the Social Sciences. 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-FaZg]. 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.
Secret: even babies know how important communication is.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/abardwell/1218015037 (CC BY-SA 2.0)

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 (geography, 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 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?
Well, I have news for you: you still can't avoid communication. 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 do your best in this class, you'll learn those awesome communication skills we were talking about and you'll get lots of good practice communicating so you can . And then you can be a better human and help other humans be better humans, too. And isn't that what you came here to college study anyway? Humans? Are you sick of the word "human" yet? You'd better not be if you're going into social science because that's what they're all about.

I'm Majoring in Humans

To be more specific, this book is geared toward anyone majoring or minoring in the social sciences. What are the social sciences, you ask? They're just that: sciences (aka fields of study) that deal with social-ness (aka people and how they act or interact). Therefore, if your
major has to do with people or if you're a person, you're welcome in this class. Here are some of the typical examples of social sciences.

- Anthropology
- Archaeology
- Communication Studies
- Economics
- Education
- Family Science
- Geography
- History
- Law
- Linguistics
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Sociology

But don't think we stop there. Many other fields involve the study of people and therefore fit into the social sciences while also overlapping with other fields such as the hard sciences or business:

- Advertising
- Communication Disorders
- Exercise Science
- Health Studies
- Marketing
- Nutrition Science
- Public Administration
- Public Health

One easy test to see if you're part of the social sciences is if your field uses the APA Manual [https://edtechbooks.org/-jMo] (aka the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association) as its chosen Style Guide. (If you don't know what I'm talking about, no worries. We'll talk more about that later in Chapter 8). Not every single social science uses it, but the majority do.

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 freshman writing class. Your freshman class was all about writing skills in general, but this one focuses on your discipline and the specific vocabulary, strategies, and tools social scientists 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](https://edtechbooks.org/-HTW) on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/)

Or if you prefer this modern parlor...
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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-xQB]
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 of social science--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][https://edtechbooks.org/-GGE] 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 the family of your significant other or your roommate or best friend? Did you notice that they talk and act 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! 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,"
Writing in the Social Sciences

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.

And what you don't want is to be considered an outsider in your field of study--your goal in this class is to learn how to become an insider 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 you use one discourse community's (business) language and style in the wrong setting with the wrong audience.

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.

**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 social scientists 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.
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 here along with the field you looked up. Voila! You've already started to recognize what distinguishes your discourse community.

Is There Life After College?

When employers are asked about the top five attributes they wanted 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-rtiL]

Not only will this book prepare you to succeed in your remaining college classes, it will also
What if I have a question?

**Syllabus Activity**

Read your course's Syllabus and post any questions you might still have about the course here. If you have no questions, post "no questions" so your teacher knows you were here.

**Suggested Citation**

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, 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 not 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-Cgk]). 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 at BYU 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 the social sciences.

2.2 Fundamental Writing Tools

Let me share with you one of my fundamental truths about writing: Good writing is about making good choices. 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 FYW class, it's likely that you studied these tools by examining how other people used them and you 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 the social sciences.

Evidence and Reasoning

One of the most important choices we make as writers in this discipline 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 in the social sciences 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.
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. 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.

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
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. But they can also be abused and an audience manipulated 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 did the public become by 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**

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 the impression we want to strike with others), we "dress" our message in a certain way through our use of language.

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 in our discipline and others and taking careful note of how they 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](https://edtechbooks.org/-aTyI):

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 using the pronoun "you" as the subject rather than "These sections" or stripping out some unnecessary adjectives). Clear, concise writing can be more
appealing to audiences and strengthen their opinion of you as a writer.

2.3 The Rhetorical Situation

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 the midterm essay she's assigning. 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 a 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, one of the most common being as a triangle, like the one in the image below.
Good writers will assess these elements before they commit themselves to written or spoken words. If you’ll think back to your FYW course, you should have talked about something like this, even if you didn’t use the same triangle metaphor. (If you took FYW 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.
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 the social sciences. 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 the social sciences, 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.
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 rhetor, and perhaps also just a bit more humble and open-minded as listeners.
And we may have to consider computers–or at least the algorithms written for them–as part of our audience. If 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, you'll have to consider how to get the algorithms that determine what people see on those platforms to push your message to the largest number of eyeballs possible. 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 choices.

Scholars in the field of writing studies talk about the form these messages take (their 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 in your local newspaper and how those came to be. (You can see some from the New York Times [https://edtechbooks.org/-EKm] or here's some with more local flavor from the Daily Herald [https://edtechbooks.org/-XPc].) Imagine the first couple who, way back when, decided to announce their wedding in the newspaper so it would reach a larger audience. They had to make decisions about what to include and how to phrase those details, and those first decisions may have set up a pattern for others to follow how imitated them.

Through time, as these 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, we would see a set of 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-BUi] for writing up your wedding announcement in the newspaper).
An example of a longer message posted as a series of tweets (credit: @BanburyRUFC [https://edtechbooks.org/-EGP])

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 not really suitable for conveying more complex ideas. But as Twitter became more widely used by corporations and governments to share information widely, some of them started subverting 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 extoll 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.

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.
Writing in the Social Sciences

**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 it celebrated Fiona recognizing something valuable and desirable in being an ogre--a creature we would often consider less than appealing.)

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, and it's worth considering how that prompt influences what and how you write. 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.

Want more discussion about analyzing the rhetorical triangle? This video from the University of Maryland, Baltimore Writing Center is a great way to spend six minutes!

Watch on YouTube https://edtechbooks.org/-mXMQ
Suggested Citation

Learning Outcomes

- Employ informed and flexible processes for writing and speaking, including: creating and/or finding ideas about which to write; collecting evidence and data; planning and drafting; revising; editing; and designing or presenting a message so that it is successfully understood by a specified audience.
- Use a mindful writing process to plan, practice, revise, and reflect on writing tasks.
- 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.

Of course it is; what a stupid way to start this chapter.
The problem is that we pretend 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. And then you die, having failed to master it fully.

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 complicated. Unpredictable. Unfathomable. As you learned in the last chapter, communication is embedded in social worlds of negotiated meaning. As I’m writing this, I’m trying to figure out what you need as a writing student. Even after 17 years teaching and studying writing, I’m not sure I’ll succeed. I have to imagine who you are—invoke you, invent you—and what you need, across a stretch of time and space (and, alas, culture—I’m getting old).

Writing is an unnatural act.

So, in a very real way we’re never done learning to write.

Another way we pretend writing is easy, to our detriment, is that we spend so little time on it. High school and standardized tests condition us to a “starting gun” approach to writing. We get the assignment, and we start chugging. No planning, thinking, or revising necessary. When we get writing assignments, we put them off, procrastinating the day of our writing till the night before and then fueling our furious typing with caffeine. Once we get words on the page and we’ve checked for errors, we’re loathe to rethink them, reform them. So we don’t. We know this isn’t the best way to write, but when we get good grades (if we do), we have no incentive to change.

One last way we pretend 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.

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 here, helps us improve our writing tasks because it directs us to monitor and control the process from beginning to end.

Mindfulness is an act of metacognition, or the process by which we think about our own thinking. 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 highfalutin for a GE 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. You know this. 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 smart, they give their writing to someone else to review so they can see if they’re accomplishing what they set out to do. They make more changes.

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, like one student named Dallin, 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 social science research for other social scientists 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 3.2 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 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 comma) 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. Below you’ll find suggestions for each step in the cycle of mindful writers.

### 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. 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 (define, apply, analyze, contrast, assess, argue, explain, support, describe, synthesize, etc.). 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. Check your overall understanding of what is being asked and ask questions. Ask for a rubric from your instructor. A rubric will describe the traits your instructor wants to see in good work.

Recall what you already know about this kind of writing (prior knowledge). You’re a writer. You’ve been writing for a long time, both in and out of school. You’ve had experiences. You’ve completed assignments. Think about answers to the following questions: How is this assignment like those I’ve completed before, and how is it different? Which writing experiences can I draw from for this new assignment? If your instructor has assigned you a project that requires you to synthesize the writing of other people with your own, remember that you’ve written with sources in the past. That said, new writing experiences often throw curveballs; be prepared to transform what you already know in this new setting.

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 science, 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; (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.

*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.* Writing is a social activity for social purposes. The writing process can, and should, be social as well. 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
I hope you noticed how the planning stage invites you to think globally about your project: the Big Rhetorical Picture. It also goads you into what’s called self-regulating strategies, or self-discipline, if you prefer. In the practice stage, you set down this mental map you’ve charted for yourself in planning, and you write. How? I’m not sure I can tell you; your unique social situation will influence the process you use to get to a draft, and so will your topic and the level of knowledge you have about that topic. If you’ve been assigned to write a psychology paper on “operant conditioning” and you know zilch about it, then you need to start reading stuff before you start writing stuff. There are several tried-and-true ways into writing—a process we rhetoric nerds call “invention.”

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. Do the unthinkable: Go to the library and find a book and read 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 a little of that on your own. 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
writing in the social sciences

chapters, you'll learn more about the research process.

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. You can also use what Greek rhetoricians called topoi (the plural form of topos), which are categories of thought that guide invention activities. Let me give you some examples. consequence is a topos: What are the consequences of X on Y? Here's an example: What are the consequences of stress or abuse on brain development in childhood? definition: What is X and how has it been defined by various people? value: Is X good or bad, right or wrong, valuable or not valuable? antecedent: When did X start, and what are the past important events for X? division: How could X be divided into different categories and sub-categories?

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. Keep 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 research, then start there. That's what your audience will expect to see. Just start writing the paper from top to bottom. If you're like me, you'll find that your introduction (with thesis) is the part of the paper you revise the most, as you discover in the body what you really want to say. Follow the structure of the genre you're writing. For example, 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 fits 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. Remember that it’s hard for any of us to predict precisely how this or that audience will respond to our work. Using your best understanding of the discourse community you belong to (e.g., psychologists, historians, the public, etc.), just imagine the kind of audience you want to read and respond to your work.

**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. If you write every day, you won’t feel particularly frustrated when you have to rewrite, reorganize, or delete stuff later on. 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. When you start writing the next day, your brain will have been working, subconsciously, on your writing problem, and you’ll pick right up where you left off. You could set a goal to write for a certain amount of time a day; my friend Joey sets word count goals for himself: 1000 words a day, or something like that. That's a bit too ambitious for academic writing, but you get the point. All these invention strategies will be much stronger if you have kept your intellect active each day by committing your ideas into writing.

**Peer Review**

You’ve used inquiry methods for invention, you’ve written a draft, and now you’re ready to hand it over to someone to see what they think. Remember that writing is a social activity, a collaborative work of imagination. You’re an artist, but you’re not alone. 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.

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.”

As a peer reviewer, 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
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.)

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 do I risk offending or boring my audience?
- Where do I feel most excited about the writing?
- 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 the draft in good shape, you may want to look at the below revision checklist as you proofread and polish. Just keep in mind that this list is incredibly thorough. You likely will not have time to attend to all of these principles.

**Review**

- I have used an effective writing process that includes goal-setting.
- I have been willing to cut, rewrite, and rework my writing so I can re-see.
- I have saved editing and proofreading till the end (as much as I can).
- I have read my text out loud.
- I have revised the sentences that don’t sound good to my ear.
- I have proofread it—closely, in hard copy if necessary.
- I have asked peers, the Writing Center, and my instructor for feedback.
- I have incorporated their feedback through multiple drafts.
- I have consulted a handbook or reliable online source to understand conventions.
- I have done my best—or, the best I could do within the time constraints.
Rhetorical Situation

- I have written in the genre appropriate for the rhetorical situation.
- I have studied a variety of examples of the genre.
- I considered my social science audience carefully—their needs, their values, their time.
- My purpose is clear.
- I have used the conventions my instructor expects.
- I establish my credibility by showing I understand the topic (i.e., I’ve done my research).
- I establish my goodwill with my audience.
- I treat rhetorical adversaries fairly.
- I present alternative opinions with fidelity.
- I have shown balance by anticipating and respecting alternative viewpoints.
- I considered the assumptions I’m making.
- I have provided sufficient credible evidence to support my point.
- I make emotional appeals fitting for the situation.
- I have tried to give readers a good reading experience.

Flow

- In my introduction, I capture my readers’ attention.
- My introduction is relevant, specific, and compelling.
- When appropriate, I forecast the organization of the rest of the paper.
- I transition between paragraphs using signals/transitional words.
- My paragraphs develop single ideas.
- My paragraphs roll out in a sequence that makes sense.
- I use cohesive strategies (like transitional phrases) to connect sentences together.
- My conclusion does not merely reiterate the introduction.
- My conclusion ties together the writing and gives readers something to think about.
- I have checked for topics/ideas that don’t apply to my main thesis and taken them out.
- I have checked my paper for balance. I don’t spend too much time on trivial information.
- My tone is consistent.

Style

- I used an editing/proofreading process only after I wrote a rough draft.
- My sentence types vary—I use different kinds of phrases or clauses, sometimes of varying lengths.
- My sentence lengths vary.
- I’ve considered carefully my word choice.
- I’ve cut back all the dead wood, the wordiness.
- I use concrete words.
- I define and use correctly key terms from social science.
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- I use powerful words for imagery or compelling connotations.
- I avoid sexist or demeaning language.
- I avoid cliches.
- I use “to be” verbs sparingly and purposefully.
- I write in active voice most of the time, with clear subjects and verbs.
- My sentence fragments are intentional.
- I’ve read my paper out loud and revised for rhythm, flow, voice, mood.
- I use metaphors to argue, delight.
- I use rhetorical schemes (like balance or repetition).
- I use commas purposefully (as in, I understand where to put them).
- I use other punctuation appropriately, and for variety and emphasis.

Formatting

- I have given my writing a catchy and descriptive title that will draw in readers.
- I have proofread my paper! Get off my case now!
- My paper is in the documentation style (like APA or Turabian) the genre demands.
- My sources are cited appropriately (for the documentation style).
- If I cite sources, I have a reference page in the proper format.
- I summarize sources in my own language.
- I use block quotes sparingly, if at all, and I contextualize them.
- My sources are cited ethically (to distinguish my writing from the writing of others).
- I have consciously selected a font and format to maximize my rhetorical effect.

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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.

I hope you don’t mind that I’m getting a little philosophical here at the end. Writing is one aspect of how we build our identities. So much of our behavior is a result of the stories we tell ourselves. If you see yourself as a good person, willing to help out when others are in a jam, and if that “good person” idea is part of what psychologists call your “core narrative,” then you’ll be more willing to help. When I was in sixth grade, I started doing poorly in math. Because I had a false belief that math should be easy for smart kids, I told myself that I wasn’t a “math person.” Unfortunately, not-a-math-person became a core narrative for me for the rest of my grade school education.

We can build healthier core narratives by writing reflectively from time to time. Research—including significant research in the social sciences—has demonstrated that reflective writing can help us 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, more wise 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 have 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. It sounds hyperbolic when I say it, 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.

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

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 (a) anonymous, meaning that no author's name appeared on the document, (b) clerical, meaning that the writing was related to the
mundane, often insanely boring, bureaucratic methods of doing business, and (c) co-authored.

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?

**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.

*Philosophize about 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. 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," "I will listen carefully to the insights and feedback of other members," "If I do not respond to emails and group texts, I understand that my group may complete the project without me and report my work to the instructor," "If I miss a meeting or class period, I will contact all my group members and make up for what I've missed," "I will not get defensive at the feedback of others," or "I will do my best work and expect other group members to do the same."

*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. Set goals as a group for when you want to be done with A, B, and C. Reserve time to complete parts of the project and review drafts together. It might make sense to actually write out a "to do" list with these assignments ("Luke will do X, Asia will do Y . . . ").
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 (but not necessarily the wisest) way to divide up a group writing task is to assign each segment of the genre you're writing (introduction, literature review, etc.). You may want to consider assigning roles related to project management: timekeeper, notetaker, editor, communication director, reviewer, facilitator. Each group member brings a unique set of skills to the task; find out what those skills are. Talk about how you'll make decisions as a group. For example, should every decision be unanimous? How will you compromise if there is disagreement?

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.

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. Repeat back what you're hearing to make sure you understand. If a group member is not responding to emails or texts, refer back (if you can!) to the Group Contract referring to consequences of ghosting or the like. 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.

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.

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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.

Suggested Citation

4

Grammar & Mechanics

by Julie Haupt

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. As you complete this advanced writing requirement in your university experience, 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, we are writing about an important subject matter: people. 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. Then,
when you review these principles in preparation for the grammar exam, study strategically by spending more time on those areas that are less familiar and by utilizing the additional resources provided in the answer key section to make sure you have a firm grasp on all these principles.

This grammar instruction includes three major sections to share principles of

1. structure
2. power, and
3. clarity.

**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 **clarity** section discusses principles to help you apply polishing touches that will help your writing go from good to great.

### 4.2 Principles of Structure

Understanding grammar might sometimes seem like an impossible task. How do you remember when you need a comma and when you don’t? Why do you have to say “whom” instead of “who” sometimes? When do you use a semicolon? Why so many rules and so many exceptions?

If you feel at a loss when these questions come up, you’re not alone! Many people do not feel very confident in their knowledge of grammar and usage rules, and so most tend to guess or write simply enough to avoid these confusing grammar questions when writing. But you don’t always have to feel this way. By the end of this grammar course, you should be able to gain the skills and knowledge that you need to identify many of your own mistakes and make conscious choices in the editing process to improve your writing.
To start this journey of improving your grammar and writing, we first need to understand the very basics of writing: the building blocks of sentences. Just like professional basketball players drill basic skills like dribbling the ball and shooting free throws, we will start with a discussion of the fundamentals, or the basic parts of sentence structure.

In the next few sections, we’ll review the two main parts of every complete sentence, what makes sentences incomplete, and how you can recognize these important sentence elements. When you understand these simple concepts, you’ll be able to apply them to almost any grammar rule with ease, including using punctuation skillfully.
Two Ingredients Make a Sentence

The ingredients of a good sentence are a noun and a verb. Photo by Calum Lewis [https://edtechbooks.org/-UuE] on Unsplash

All complete sentences have two basic ingredients: a main noun and a main verb. As you will recall, a noun is any person, place, thing, or idea. A noun can be as simple as the word “I.” You’ve probably learned that a verb is any action word or a state of being (so some of these verbs might not always involve a lot of movement). Your verb can be as simple as the word “walk.” Together, this noun and verb create a complete sentence: “I walk.” Essentially, the noun tells us who or what the actor of the sentence is, and the verb tells us what the actor is doing, or the action.

However, most sentences aren’t made up of one simple noun and one simple verb. Sentences usually contain noun phrases and verb phrases. These phrases include other words that might not look like a noun or verb, but these extra words often help specify or describe the actor and the action or state. Noun phrases, for instance, can be very long and complicated.

Noun phrase: The little old lady who lives in the fluorescent pink house on the corner of 13th Street. . .
Notice that we have not yet gotten to the point of saying what the old lady is actually doing, so we haven’t managed to add a “main verb” yet. While this phrase does have a verb, “lives,” don’t let this word deceive you! This verb is still within the entire noun phrase and doesn’t actually tell us what the little old lady is doing in the sentence. The word “lives” here is just describing something about the lady. To know what the real action is in the sentence, we need a verb phrase.

**Verb phrase:** . . . went to the store on Center Street to buy a delicious chocolate cake for her favorite grandson’s birthday party.

Notice how this verb phrase was just as complicated as the noun phrase, but it still started with a verb (“went”) that everything else related to it in some way. Together, the noun phrase and verb phrase make a complete sentence.

**Complete sentence:** The little old lady who lives in the fluorescent pink house on the corner of 13th Street went to the store on Center Street to buy a delicious chocolate cake for her favorite grandson’s birthday party.

Let’s look at a few more sentences and practice recognizing which part of the sentence is the noun phrase and which part is the verb phrase. Try to figure it out on your own from the example sentence, and then look at the noun phrases and verb phrases listed below to see how you did.

**Example:** The green martian flew to earth in his rocketship.

**Noun phrase:** The green martian

**Verb phrase:** flew to earth in his rocketship

**Example:** The boy in the flannel shirt wanted to go on a hike with his friends.

**Noun phrase:** The boy in the flannel shirt

**Verb phrase:** wanted to go on a hike with his friends

**Example:** Family vacations can strengthen family relationships and leave lasting memories.

**Noun phrase:** Family vacations

**Verb phrase:** can strengthen family relationships and leave lasting memories

Notice that in these examples, the noun phrase came first in these sentences, and everything after the noun phrase was included in the verb phrase. While not every sentence is quite this simple, this basic pattern of having a main noun followed by a main verb is essential to making a complete sentence.
Completing Sentences

If a sentence is missing either the noun phrase or the verb phrase, it is an incomplete sentence. Unfortunately, however, some writers don’t realize they are breaking the rules and leave a sentence fragment in a place where it only serves to reduce credibility: “Because it was snowing.” Here, we sense that something is missing. If you’d seen any of those example noun phrases or verb phrases on their own, you probably would have had that same sense and questioned the author’s meaning. Some writers in public scholarship do use these incomplete words or sentence fragments, such as “Really?!” as its own sentence. The principle here is that it is best to know the rules before you break the rules for a stylistic purpose.

When sentences begin with words like after, when, or because, they introduce the need for more information to complete the thought. These helping words (also called “subordinate conjunctions”) signal to readers that the incomplete thought is related to another thought in some way. For instance, adding because tells us that the incomplete sentence is a reason for something else. Here’s an example of this transformation:

**Complete sentence:** We won the game.

**Incomplete sentence:** After we won the game . . .

The first example is a complete sentence since “We” is the noun phrase, and “won the game” is the verb phrase. But as soon as we added the word “after” to the sentence, we wondered, “What happened after we won the game?” Now that sentence is incomplete and depends on another complete sentence to finish the thought. Where the complete sentence could stand independently (called an “independent clause”), the second or incomplete sentence depends on additional meaning (called a “dependent clause”).

When you realize that you have a dependent clause, just add another complete sentence or independent clause (like “we celebrated by getting ice cream”) to finish your idea. Now the entire thought makes sense and feels finished:

**Complete sentence:** After we won the game, we celebrated by getting ice cream.

With few exceptions, you should always write in complete sentences, especially in academic, research-based writing. As mentioned, a fragment can occasionally be used skillfully to add emphasis or nuance to your writing, but for the most part, focus on writing complete sentences to aid in communicating your ideas clearly.

**Technical Terms to Learn**

This basic information has given you examples of the building blocks we use in discussions of grammar. For additional review, you can also watch this short video about sentence structure to be sure you understand the differences between phrases and clauses.
As a reference, here are the terms we will use throughout the rest of the grammar instruction:

**Subject**: A noun or noun phrase that operates as the subject of the sentence’s verb.

**Predicate**: A verb or verb phrase that relates to the subject of the sentence.

**Phrase**: An incomplete sentence that is either missing the subject (or noun phrase) or missing the predicate (verb phrase).

**Clause**: A group of words that has both a subject and a verb and which can either be independent or dependent:

- **Independent Clause (IC)**: A complete sentence that can stand on its own because it is made of a subject (noun phrase) and predicate (verb phrase), such as “I walk.”

- **Dependent Clause (DC)**: An incomplete sentence that has a helping word (subordinate conjunction) that requests additional information. It relies on another complete sentence (independent clause) for more details or action, such as “After we won the game.”

- **Coordinate Conjunction**: A linking word that puts two IC’s together. There are only a few, so they are easy to memorize with the acronym FANBOYS, which stands for the conjunctions *for, and, nor, but, or, yet,* and *so.*
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Subordinate Conjunction: A word such as after, when, or because that turns phrasing from a complete sentence and creates a DC, which is now subordinating because it relies on other information within the sentence to make it complete. Here’s an expanded (though not exhaustive) list of common subordinate conjunctions you may encounter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>Until</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Although</td>
<td>Provided that</td>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As</td>
<td>Rather than</td>
<td>Whenever</td>
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<tr>
<td>Because</td>
<td>Since</td>
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<td>Before</td>
<td>So that</td>
<td>Whereas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Even if</td>
<td>Than</td>
<td>Wherever</td>
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<tr>
<td>Even though</td>
<td>That</td>
<td>Whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If</td>
<td>Though</td>
<td>While</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In order to</td>
<td>Unless</td>
<td>Why</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although these grammatical terms might seem a little tricky to keep straight, try using them interchangeably with the more familiar terminology we’ve used so far. For instance, try saying both “noun phrase” and “subject” whenever one of these two terms comes up in this textbook. As you grow more comfortable with these terms, you’ll be able to recognize grammar principles and mistakes more easily. As you go along, please take time to watch the short review videos and to do the practice exercises. In this way, you’ll have a better chance of mastering these rules.

Rule #1: Separate and Set Off Main Clauses Correctly

This principle shows how you can use your knowledge of the basic building blocks of sentences to punctuate them correctly. This rule contains three sections—with these errors in your papers always marked in green.

1A. Choosing punctuation to fit your sentence.

Some people avoid using complicated sentences altogether because they don’t think they can keep all of the punctuation rules straight. However, if you’ve already mastered the building blocks of sentences, these punctuation rules are now much easier to apply.

First, let’s do a quick review of ICs and DCs with this short video, which will also give you an introduction to comma rules.
In this section, we’re going to look at combining different kinds of clauses in a variety of ways. Using sentences with different structures will help your writing to feel less choppy and help you present your ideas in a more interesting way. We’ll look at how to punctuate first when combining two ICs and then when putting ICs together with DCs. We’ll tackle these both with and without linking words.

The linking words we’re using are called **FANBOYS conjunctions**. Like the subordinate conjunctions that we reviewed earlier, these linking words (or “**coordinate conjunctions**”) help show us the relationships between our different phrases and clauses. The acronym FANBOYS stands for the conjunctions *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*. These are some of the most commonly used linking words in our writing, so be sure to memorize these words! This video can help you review their use.
Joining ICs with FANBOYS Conjunctions

When two or more ICs are joined by one of the FANBOYS conjunctions, you need a comma before the linking word.

**No:** My family lives in a blue house and my neighbors live in a white house.

See how each portion of the sentence (aside from the “and” conjunction) is an IC? Each of these clauses are independent and could stand on their own in separate sentences. However, when linking them here with a FANBOYS conjunction, “and,” we need to insert a comma.

**Yes:** My family lives in a blue house, and my neighbors live in a white house.

Here’s another example of a FANBOYS linking word joining two complete sentences:

**No:** Sue’s parents told Sue to be home by midnight but she was fifteen minutes late.

**Yes:** Sue’s parents told Sue to be home by midnight, but she was fifteen minutes late.

See how each part of the sentence is complete? And since we split them with one of our FANBOYS conjunctions, “but,” we needed to add a comma right before the linking word.
This comma rule is simple but is often broken. Just keep in mind that when linking two complete thoughts with a FANBOYS conjunction, you must use a comma to separate them.

**Joining ICs with a Semicolon or Colon**

Sometimes to make a more striking statement, an author may choose to keep two ICs in the same sentence but join them with a semicolon.

**No:** I invited her to my party, she didn’t come.

**Yes:** I invited her to my party; she didn’t come.

Though we could have added a FANBOYS conjunction (“I invited her to my party, **but** she didn’t come”), the use of the semicolon makes the second phrase ring with a little more irritation. Semicolons are best used between two independent clauses that are closely related and equal in weight. Semicolons work like a soft period, allowing the reader to roll through the sentence break rather than coming to a full stop.

**Yes:** My family lives in a blue house; my neighbors live in a white house.

**Yes:** Sue’s parents told Sue to be home by midnight; she was fifteen minutes late.

However, if you mistakenly put a comma in the place of the semicolon here, you’ll have created a **comma splice**. Commas are a weak pause and are too small to keep apart two complete sentences on their own. If you *do* want to use a comma, you’ll have to choose to add a FANBOYS conjunction.

Another option in working with two ICs (especially if your sentences have become long and complicated) is to separate them into their own sentences. Periods will create the strongest pause you can make because periods represent a full stop.

**Yes:** Sue’s parents told her they were worried about her long drive in the dark down the winding country road; they made it clear that they preferred she take the road trip during daytime hours.

**Better:** Sue’s parents told her they were worried about her long drive in the dark down the winding country road. They made it clear that they preferred she take the road trip during daytime hours.

Finally, you can also use a colon to combine two ICs. However, it’s best to use a colon when one sentence seems to introduce, point to, or emphasize the other. While the colon represents a similar pause in length as the semicolon, the colon signals to readers that something really important is coming up.

**Yes:** Sue was nervous about going home: She was fifteen minutes late.
In this sentence, the second IC, “she was fifteen minutes late,” explains why Sue is so nervous in the first IC.

The most important thing to remember when using colons is that you can only use them after an IC. This means that you’ll rarely use colons after verbs or prepositions because these words don’t usually end our sentences.

No: Please take care of the dog, including: walking him every day.

Yes: Please take care of the dog: Walk him every day.

Although “please take care of the dog” is a complete sentence, the word “including” is a phrase. Since that phrase is an incomplete sentence, we can’t follow it with a colon. By taking out “including,” we can place the colon after an IC. Also notice that when you use a colon, you capitalize the next word if the sentence that follows is also a complete sentence.

**Combining ICs and Phrases**

Let’s look at an example of combining an IC (“I went to the fair”) with a phrase (“didn’t win any prizes”) and linking it with one of our FANBOYS conjunctions.

Yes: I went to the fair but didn’t win any prizes.

“I went to the fair” is our independent clause and “but” is our FANBOYS conjunction. Since “didn’t win any prizes” is a phrase (because it is missing a subject), we don’t need to worry about adding a comma before the linking word because we aren’t joining two ICs. The FANBOYS conjunction is just fine on its own, simple as that! You might be tempted to add a comma here just for flair, but notice that this usage doesn’t follow punctuation rules, so the comma should not be added. Here’s another example:

Yes: Sue got lost on the way home and was 15 minutes late as a result.

Notice that “Sue” is the subject of our first clause, but the second clause “was fifteen minutes late as a result” doesn’t have a subject; it’s just a verb phrase. Sue operates as the subject of both verb phrases (“got lost on the way home” and “was fifteen minutes late as a result”). We can easily keep track of one subject with two verb phrases, so no comma is required.

Let’s say that you wanted to add emphasis and chose not to use a FANBOYS conjunction to link an IC and a phrase—like in that sentence about the fair. Here’s another option: Use a dash.

No: I went to the fair didn’t win any prizes.

Again, adding a comma to put this IC + phrase combination together would lead to a sort of comma splice—so, don’t do that! Because the portion of the sentence after the dash is just a
noun phrase, not a complete sentence, an **em dash** is a great way to separate that fragment from the rest of the sentence without any other linking words.

**Yes:** I went to the fair—didn’t win any prizes.

**Yes:** My father completed his doctorate while working a full-time job—a difficult task.

This dash is not a hyphen. Notice how the em dash is formatted. This is a long dash (the same width as the capital letter M) and is significantly longer than a hyphen. Be sure to place no spaces on either side of the em dash. If you’re typing in Word, you can accomplish this without inserting a special character by simply typing the word before the dash, two hyphens, the next word, and then a space or punctuation mark. Word will then automatically format the two hyphens into an em dash for you.

**Example:** “word--word” becomes “word—word” as soon as you hit the spacebar after typing the second word.

**Practice: Choosing Punctuation to Fit Your Sentence**

Now it’s your turn! Check the following sentences for correct punctuation. You might first try to label the clauses and phrases to make the task easier. Try fixing the incorrect sentences in a variety of ways to get comfortable with using different types of punctuation correctly.

1. My family took me to Disneyland for my ninth birthday, that day was one of the best days of my life.
2. If you give me any excuses for: missing a class or not completing your homework, I will accept only an emergency related to your health or your family.
3. Technology can be a great benefit since it allows us to communicate all around the world but it can also be a great distraction for communicating with the people right in front of you.
4. There was a news report about the parade; and I think they got a good shot of me at one point.
5. I always felt that families were important, I feel even stronger about that now that my father has passed away.
6. One of the best ways to get to know someone is to spend time with them, and ask meaningful questions.
7. My father and I like to go to football games together, cheering for our team together really strengthens our relationship.
8. After a while: I was able to calm my sister down, and we had a meaningful conversation to make our feelings understood.
9. I’ve always wanted to travel to Asia someday and I just heard about a study abroad that might give me that opportunity.
10. I enjoyed going out to see the movie, however, I stayed up too late and didn’t do very well on my test the next morning.
Now, try this practice test question. All practice test questions are formatted exactly the way you’ll see on your actual grammar test. As you progress throughout the textbook, you’ll notice that although each practice test question tests a principle you’ve just learned, it will also test a past principle that you’ve learned earlier on in the text. This first question, however, will only test principles from this section. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no changes.”

1. Kenneth has a Family Resiliency course exam next week; I recommend he review his notes, and study with other students in his class.
   1. no changes
   2. week, I | notes and
   3. week; I | notes and
   4. week, I | notes, and

See answer key on page 87.

1B. Introducing your ideas.

We begin many of our sentences with introductions of some sort, and these often need a comma after them to set them off from the subject. In this section, we’ll go over how to recognize introductory phrases that use DCs, phrases, or other transitional words.

Introducing Sentences with a DC

Remember that using words that are subordinate conjunctions can turn an independent clause into a dependent clause. These conjunctive words help to show relationships between different thoughts and signal that there is more information to come after that phrase. You’ll remember some from the Technical Terms list (because, when, and until), but you can use the acronym AAAWWUBBIS (after, although, as, while, when, until, because, if, since) to remember more. If it helps, you can shorten the acronym to AWUBIS and remind yourself that many of the letters can stand for multiple conjunctions.

Whenever you see one of these kinds of words at the beginning of a sentence, it should warn you that you are encountering an introductory phrase, which you will need to separate from the main subject with a comma. Here’s an example:

No: While I was visiting my aunt I tried her homemade apple pie.

Yes: While I was visiting my aunt, I tried her homemade apple pie.

You probably noticed that “while” was the word that signaled to you that the subject of an IC was still coming, but how do we know where the phrase ended and where we should put the comma? This is where being able to identify noun phrases comes in handy. You just need to find the subject of the IC that follows. In this case, it was the word “I” in the phrase “I tried her homemade apple pie.” Thus, the comma had to come right before the subject to
separate the two clauses from each other.

Let’s look at another example:

**No:** If enough people sign the petition the school may have to change its policy.

**Yes:** If enough people sign the petition, the school may have to change its policy.

Here we can see how the comma separates the introductory DC (“If enough people sign the petition”) from the IC (“the school may have to change its policy.”)

**Introducing Sentences with Prepositional Phrases**

We often give our readers additional details as we write with helpful phrases that begin with words like *in, to,* and *on.* They tend to give a little more detail about an object, like something “on the chair” or someone “with her friend.” We call these *prepositional phrases* because the helping words they begin with are called *prepositions.*

When prepositional phrases begin a sentence, you should make sure to put a comma after them so your readers can keep them separate from the following subject of your sentence. Although you may not always feel that you need a comma in these situations and not every style guide requires it, use it routinely to emphasize the noun phrases in your sentences.

Let’s look at this example:

**No:** In the garden I lost my trowel.

**Yes:** In the garden, I lost my trowel.

**Yes:** I lost my trowel in the garden.

Since we know *in* is a preposition, we recognize that “in the garden” is a prepositional phrase, not the subject of the sentence, so we separate this introductory element from the subject. We place a comma after the introductory phrase to separate it from the upcoming noun phrase, “I.”

Notice how there is no comma in the last example because the prepositional phrase does not introduce the subject.

Here’s one more example:

**No:** During the school year my roommates are usually too busy to exercise with me regularly.

**Yes:** During the school year, my roommates are usually too busy to exercise with me regularly.
Notice how “during the school year” isn’t our subject. The true actor of the sentence is “my roommates,” which is why we separated this main unit from the introductory phrase with a comma.

**Introducing Sentences with Transition Words**

Another way that we help our readers get the details they need is by using *transition words* to connect ideas or show shifts in our writing. We may use words like *however*, *indeed*, *rather*, and *therefore*. These words are also known as *adverbs*, and they always need a comma after them when they introduce a sentence.

**No:** Unfortunately we need to make a quick trip to the store before we go to the party.

**Yes:** Unfortunately, we need to make a quick trip to the store before we go to the party.

Because these adverbs signal a transition in thought or attitude, the pause of the comma after them helps the reader pause just enough to prepare for that anticipated change. Note that transition words can also be adverbs that end in -ly.

**No:** Currently the number of children without the required childhood vaccinations is decreasing.

**Yes:** Currently, the number of children without the required childhood vaccinations is decreasing.

Notice again how putting a comma after this one-word introduction helps separate the phrase from the subject of the sentence. This slight pause helps the reader process the sentence more easily.

**Practice: Introducing Your Ideas**

Now it’s your turn! Determine whether these sentences have introductory phrases that need punctuation and insert the comma appropriately.

1. When you want to make a good impression he suggests you speak politely but genuinely.
2. Since I’ve been studying family sciences, my whole perspective on life has changed.
3. Therefore, parents should take advantage of opportunities to connect with their children.
4. In the middle of the school year I’m always grateful for a break to reset and relax.
5. Before Steve took the test he made sure to turn off his cell phone.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. *With some embarrassment* Angela realized that she and Jane hadn’t finalized their
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joint presentation notes by the due date; like they had promised to do.

1. no changes
2. With some embarrassment, | date
3. With some embarrassment | date
4. With some embarrassment, | date;

See answer key on page 89.

1C. Using detours in your sentences.

An important way that we can give our readers extra details in our writing is by making small detours. We insert various phrases and clauses to add more meaning and context—information sometimes adding to the thought midstream. At times, these detours can be distracting or awkwardly placed (which we explore in rule 5E), but they can also be used effectively if you know how to punctuate them.

In this section, we’ll go over the required punctuation of three types of detours: specific detours, general detours, and dependent clauses used as detours.

Specific Detours

Some descriptive phrases are very specific and especially help us to convey the meaning of our sentences. These phrases add more meaning by helping us clearly distinguish something (like a noun phrase) apart from everything else. These specific detours are also called restrictive clauses.

For instance, let’s say you’re writing about two types of bread. Perhaps you’re arguing that wheat bread is healthier than white bread. One way that you could communicate which kind of bread you’re specifically talking about is by using restrictive clauses. These clauses will not only describe the previous noun, bread, but will also identify which kind of bread we mean. Here, the restrictive clauses are marked in red:

**Example:** Bread that is made from wheat flour is healthier than bread that is made from white flour.

One way to easily figure out if a clause is restrictive is by reading the sentence as if the clause weren’t there. If the sentence doesn’t make as much sense or becomes unclear without the clause, you know that the clause is essential to the sentence and therefore restrictive. So, if we took out those descriptions from our bread example, we would have this sentence:

**No:** Bread is healthier than bread.

The sentence doesn’t really make sense now, does it? We need those clauses to tell us what kind of bread is healthier so that we understand the sentence.
Another trick you can try to help you identify these specific restrictive clauses is reading the sentence as if the descriptive phrase were in parentheses. If putting parentheses makes the phrase sound out of place, then you know that the information is probably essential and specific to that noun phrase.

**No:** Bread (that is made from wheat flour) is healthier than bread (that is made from white flour).

When we put the descriptions of the bread aside in parentheses like this, we make it sound like *all* bread comes from wheat flour at first. Then we turn around and say that *all* bread is made from white flour. We know that this is silly, of course, because there are many types of breads from a variety of flours. We’re not trying to talk about bread in general but specific kinds of bread, so we know that we must use a restrictive clause to describe the bread.

Now that you know how to recognize a restrictive clause, let’s talk about how to format and punctuate it. These kind of clauses should begin with the word *that* rather than *which*. Because they are necessary to the sentence’s meaning, they do not require any punctuation to set them off from the rest of the sentence. You can remember not to put punctuation around these descriptions based on the trick you used earlier. If you couldn't logically place parentheses around that phrase, you shouldn't put any other punctuation, either.

Here’s another example of a specific, or restrictive, clause:

**Yes:** Video games that include excessive violence can be harmful to an adolescent’s development.

Here, “that include excessive violence” is a description that identifies the kind of “video games” the author intends to discuss and sets those video games apart from other video games—specific and vital to the main point. We can double check that this clause is necessary by reading the sentence without the clause or by putting it in parentheses.

**No:** Video games can be harmful to an adolescent’s development.

**No:** Video games (that include excessive violence) can be harmful to an adolescent’s development.

While taking out the clause may sound okay at first, understanding the context and author’s intent helps us know that not *all* video games may hurt teenagers; the author hopes to specifically highlight the danger of violent video games. Using the parentheses trick may make this distinction a little clearer. When we put the description in an aside like that, it sounds like a simple matter of fact. We make it sound like *all* video games include excessive violence. And although many video games do, we know that plenty of them are actually violence free. We definitely have a restrictive clause here.

Remember, because the specific clause gives more meaning to the sentence and helps the
author identify what kind of video games can be harmful, we use *that* and no punctuation around the phrase.

How essential or specific does the information need to be to count as a restrictive clause? The answer sometimes depends on the writer making a judgment call as in the next example:

**No:** The restaurant, which is right down the street, serves tacos for a dollar each on Tuesday.

**Yes:** The restaurant that is right down the street serves tacos for a dollar each on Tuesday.

In this case, the author felt that the reader might need the information about which restaurant is being discussed since Taco Tuesdays are popular in the area. However, let’s say that the taco restaurant is the only one in town. In that case, the phrase is not needed to differentiate the taco restaurant, only to offer some incidental, but non-crucial information. In your own writing, you’ll need to pay close attention to whether your descriptive detours are helping you to specify necessary information or not. As you continue to watch for these detours and decide how specific you’re trying to be, you’ll become more confident with some of these subtler detours.

**General Detours**

Other detours that we use to describe objects in our sentences are more general than specific. These descriptions are general because they add more information than readers technically need. You could actually put these phrases in parentheses as if they were an aside, and the whole sentence would still make sense. These phrases are called **nonrestrictive clauses.** They should begin with *which* and should have commas around them (right where you would have put parentheses).

**Example:** My family, which has seven kids, loves to go to Lake Powell during the summer.

You can see from this example that the phrase “which has seven kids” still describes “my family,” but it is general information that could easily be set off with parentheses or even left out if we wanted. We don’t need the information about how many kids are in the family because the possessive “my” already identifies the family as the one specifically belonging to the author. Thus, we began the clause with *which* and surrounded it with commas. Here is another example:

**No:** He picked up his book from the library that is a great place to find reliable resources.

**Yes:** He picked up his book from the library, which is a great place to find reliable resources.

As you can see, the reader doesn’t need the extra information that libraries have great resources. When we treat this description as a specific, restrictive clause, it actually
identifies a specific library (perhaps the only library) that has reliable resources, but even without much context, we know that most libraries have these resources. Instead, it makes much more sense that this description is just an extra idea that the author added as if to say, “By the way, this is something that libraries are generally known for.” Because we have a general detour, we set it off with commas and start it with the word *which*.

Note that you can use other forms of punctuation to set off these detours—especially if you want to make a more emphatic statement. In that case, you can set off these detours with em dashes. Dashes will always emphasize the detour more than commas because dashes create a stronger pause than commas do. Additionally, you can also use parentheses if you want to de-emphasize the descriptive detour.

Whatever punctuation you decide to use, make sure to pair like punctuation marks together. You wouldn’t put one parenthesis at the beginning of the detour and finish the detour with a comma on the other side. Otherwise, your reader would be left looking for the final parenthesis! Similarly, pair commas with commas and dashes with dashes. Don’t mix and match these punctuation marks around your detours.

**No:** Bees—which are a type of stinging insect, help pollinate the earth.

**Yes:** Bees—which are a type of stinging insect—help pollinate the earth.

**Yes:** Bees, which are a type of stinging insect, help pollinate the earth.

Finally, there is one exception to using the word *that* or *which* to begin restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. Whenever your clause describes people, you’ll want to use the word *who* instead.

**No:** I contacted a person yesterday that could help me solve my computer networking problem.

**Yes:** I contacted a person yesterday who could help me solve my computer networking problem.

*Who* can operate in the same way as *that* or *which*, so you’ll need to be careful about using your punctuation to show whether your detour is restrictive or nonrestrictive. Here, “who” does not need to be set off by commas since it specifically identifies people by giving helpful, essential information.

*Who* also relates more to individual people, so no need to switch to *who* when referring to a team or group.

**No:** The team who won the hula hoop contest received a standing ovation from the crowd.

**Yes:** The team that won the hula hoop contest received a standing ovation from the crowd.
Yes: The person who won the hula hoop contest received a standing ovation from the crowd.

Dependent Clauses as Detours

We’ve talked a little about how DCs work as introductory phrases, but what about when they come in the middle of a sentence or at the end, somewhere after the independent clause?

Although introductory DCs need a comma after them, which we learned in rule 1B, the situation is different when these phrases come after the main part of your sentence. In other words, if you flip the DC behind the IC, you don’t need a comma or any other punctuation before the DC (unless the DC is nonrestrictive, or general information added to the sentence).

No: Dad went to the store, while Mom went to pick up the kids from soccer practice.

Yes: Dad went to the store while Mom went to pick up the kids from soccer practice.

Since “while” turns the IC about Mom into a DC, we didn’t put a comma before that clause.

Here’s another example:

No: Alfred got a job as a butler, because he excels at being polite.

Yes: Alfred got a job as a butler because he excels at being polite.

Here, we can see that “because” is our helping word and signals to the reader that more information, a reason, is coming. The information that followed the subordinate conjunction was essential to the sentence, so we didn’t need a comma before “because.”

Here’s an example of a general, nonrestrictive DC that would need a comma:

Yes: She plans to go to the beach, whether it rains or not.

In this sentence, the author’s intent and context can help make it clear that the weather is beside the point. Readers don’t need to know this general information to understand her plans even though the DC detour helps to emphasize them.

Practice: Using Detours in Your Sentences

Now it’s your turn! At this point, it would be a great idea to watch this that vs which video as a quick reminder of what you’ve learned.
Then, practice placing punctuation around various detours in the sentences below.
Remember that all nonrestrictive (or general) clauses need commas or dashes, but anything restrictive (or specifically identifying) does not need punctuation. Remember to also watch out for people and use who appropriately.

1. The team went out for milkshakes, after the game.
2. The park that is just down the street from my house has a tennis court beside the playground.
3. I stayed up all night because I had to study extra hard for my final exam today.
4. I am allergic to lactose, which is in most dairy products.
5. The neighborhood kids say the house, that is on the corner, might be haunted.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. My new townhouse, which was built in 2007, is really well constructed: I have taken great care of it.
   1. no changes
   2. townhouse which was built in 2007 | constructed:
   3. townhouse, which was built in 2007, | constructed
   4. townhouse which was built in 2007 | constructed

See answer key on page 90.
1D. Constructing lists with punctuation.

Here’s a few more rules about using punctuation to help you, especially when you handle lists:

**Using the Serial Comma and Semicolons in Lists**

Whenever you list three or more things in your writing, you’ll be expected to use the **serial comma** in the social sciences. The serial comma, also known as the Oxford comma, is the final comma that comes before the last item in your list. While some disciplines or particular style guides for organizations aren’t proponents of the serial comma, it is a convention that the social sciences adhere to for purposes of clarity.

Let’s go ahead and look at an example.

No: I enjoy reading, biking and cooking.

Did you notice that there wasn’t a comma after biking? That’s exactly where a serial comma should go.

Yes: I enjoy reading, biking, and cooking.

This rule is a pretty simple concept to keep in mind with short list items, but be careful when you start listing longer, more complicated items. You still need to use the serial comma before that last item.

No: Committee members are responsible for advertising about upcoming events, planning activities and panels for conferences and recruiting volunteers to help run all activities.

Yes: Committee members are responsible for advertising about upcoming events, planning activities and panels for conferences, and recruiting volunteers to help run all activities.

Semicolons can also be used effectively in lists, but only under certain conditions. When you use a semicolon in a list, it acts as a “super,” more powerful comma to separate items that also need normal commas within them. Using semicolons in this way keeps your list clear and organized. Here’s an example of when you might need semicolons to clarify a list:

No: My favorite foods are strawberries, a fruit, carrots, a vegetable, and ice cream, a dessert.

See how this list gets so confusing? Phrases like “a fruit” are meant to describe the previous term, “strawberries,” but these phrases seem like other items in the list. To add clarity, we’ll add semicolons after these descriptive phrases to show exactly where the next list item begins.

Yes: My favorite foods are strawberries, a fruit; carrots, a vegetable; and ice cream, a
dessert.

See how each of these list items are now separated by semicolons? Even though there are commas within each item, we can clearly see when the next food is listed. Also notice that you still use the semicolon right before the last full item, just like you do with a normal serial comma.

One more thing to remember with semicolons in lists is that even if only one of your list items needs an interior comma, you must still use semicolons to separate your list items. Here’s an example:

**No:** I need to run errands at the grocery store, the library, which is near the grocery store, and the bank.

**Yes:** I need to run errands at the grocery store; the library, which is near the grocery store; and the bank.

**Using Colons or Dashes to Introduce Lists**

You can use colons to introduce lists too. However, remember that the same rules we discussed with colons before still apply here. Since you can only use colons after an IC, you’ll rarely use one after a verb or preposition. If a list is introduced with a DC, no colon is required. If you want to use a colon, introduce your list with an IC.

Here’s an example:

**No:** The job requirements are: organization, diligence, and honesty.

A colon is not needed here since the sentence reads fine without a break and you have not inserted an IC to introduce it. “The job requirements are” is a fragment. To fix this sentence, we can either take out the colon or rephrase the first part of the sentence to be a complete sentence.

**Yes:** The job requirements are organization, diligence, and honesty.

**Yes:** The job requires the following qualities: organization, diligence, and honesty.

Notice that when using a colon to introduce a list, you don’t need to capitalize the first word in the list.

Occasionally, you may want to start your sentence with a list. If that is the case, you can transition from that list to the rest of your sentence with an em dash. Make sure that the part of your sentence following the dash is an independent clause, however.

Let’s look at this example.
No: Commas, semicolons, colons, dashes—can all be incorporated into lists.

Notice how the phrase after the dash is a fragment? There’s no subject! To fix this mistake, we can either take out the dash and insert a conjunction into our list, or we can change the second part of the sentence into an independent clause by adding in a subject.

Yes: Commas, semicolons, colons, and dashes can all be incorporated into lists.

Yes: Commas, semicolons, colons, dashes—these punctuation marks can all be incorporated into lists.

You can also incorporate the list into the middle of your sentence. This type of list functions like the detours we saw in rule 1C.

Yes: Various punctuation marks—commas, semicolons, colons, dashes—can all be incorporated into lists.

Practice: Use Commas, Semicolons, Colons, and Dashes in Lists

Now it’s your turn! Look at these sentences and see which ones use serial colons, semicolons, colons, or dashes to correctly organize and introduce the list items. What would you do to fix these mistakes?

1. Sometimes, all you need is faith, trust and pixie dust.
2. My reasons for going to this school are: the teachers are excellent, the campus is beautiful, and the opportunities there are unique.
4. Our company is looking for employees with a good work ethic, an ability to analyze situations quickly and a strong initiative.
5. Lions, tigers, bears—are very dangerous and lead us to say, “Oh, my!”
6. In the Lord of the Rings, there are well known and well-loved characters such as Frodo, the brave hobbit, Sam, his loyal friend, Gandalf, the wise wizard, and Aragorn, the mysterious ranger.
7. My best friend is loyal, hilarious, but shy, and always honest.
8. Technology—phones, tablets, computers—is practically everywhere and accessible to almost anyone nowadays.
9. There are four general styles of parenting: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved.
10. Rain, rain, and more rain—all it ever seemed to do in this place was rain.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Effective parent-child communication includes: trust, generosity, and patience.
   1. no changes
Rule #2: Follow Agreement and Reference Rules

Part of structuring sentences well is remembering how to use verbs with nouns and pronouns to make sure they agree in number. Also, pronouns can be tricky and confusing, especially if they don’t agree with the noun they were referencing. These rules of agreement and reference in English are important to building a grammatically correct structure, with errors marked in red to match this rule.

2A. Match the number of your subjects and verbs.

As you have been able to see, subjects (or noun phrases) and predicates (or verb phrases) are the basic building blocks of every sentence. Understanding these elements is foundational to your understanding of all grammar principles, which you’ll see throughout this section.

One principle that we follow pretty naturally in our writing is the way we match our subjects and verbs by number. If you’ve grown up as a native English speaker, this is a grammar rule that you rarely have to consciously think about. You reflexively say things like “I am” rather than “I are” or “we are” rather than “we is.” To do so, we make our subjects and verbs “agree” by making them both singular or both plural. We call this rule subject-verb agreement.

Subject-verb agreement can be difficult to understand in some cases. For instance, sometimes two singular pronouns may match with different verbs, like “I have” and “she has.” If you’ve ever had to conjugate verbs when you learned another language, you may realize that keeping all these forms straight can get confusing. However, you can still use some simple tricks to help you use verb forms correctly. Here, we’ll go through two situations where you’ll need to pay special attention to whether your subjects and verbs match in number or not.

Detours Between the Main Noun and the Verb

Sometimes, we try to match our verbs with the wrong noun when we write as a result of having detours in our sentences. That’s why you need to be very good at identifying the true subject of your sentence. One situation where you might accidentally focus on the wrong noun is when you have a detour like a short prepositional phrase between the main noun and the verb. Here’s an example:

No: The vase of roses look lovely there on the table.

At first, this sentence sounds all right. After all, the segment “roses look lovely” sounds
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correct. However, are the roses the main noun of the sentence? No, it’s really the vase that is the subject, and the roses are simply attached to it with the preposition of. If you took out that little detour, the sentence that results, “The vase look lovely,” would sound awkward and incorrect.

To fix this mistake, all you have to do is ignore the detour made by the prepositional phrase and focus on the true actor of our sentence: the vase.

Yes: The vase of roses looks lovely there on the table.

Now that sentence looks lovely and is grammatically correct, too. Let’s try another one.

No: Amanda, along with her family, are going to see a play tonight.

Although we know from the detour “along with her family” that Amanda isn’t going to see the play alone, Amanda is still the only person in the main noun phrase. Try ignoring the detour. Does “Amanda are going to see a play tonight” sound right? Because the subject is singular, we also need to keep the verb singular.

Yes: Amanda, along with her family, is going to see a play tonight.

Indefinite Pronouns

You might recognize that we use pronouns in place of noun phrases all the time to avoid repetition. Instead of saying something like “the boy in the flannel shirt” repeatedly in a sentence, we can simply say “he” after we have mentioned him. Pronouns are especially useful because they can replace entire noun phrases, not just the main noun itself. But what happens when the pronoun is not so clear? Is everyone, no one, each, and some a reference to multiple people, or are these words considered singular?

The answer is that by definition, they are singular indefinite pronouns and will take a singular verb. Here are the most common singular indefinite pronouns: anyone, everyone, someone, somebody, nobody, each, and one. While most of these indefinite pronouns are singular, two others, all and both, are plural indefinite pronouns and will take a plural verb.

No: Each complete the necessary tasks.

This sentence may sound natural enough at first, but we’ve actually matched “each,” a singular pronoun, with “complete,” a plural verb. All we need to do to fix this mistake is to make the verb singular by adding an “s” to the end.

Yes: Each completes the necessary tasks.

Make sure to keep focused on the main subject and its verb as you look out for subject-verb agreement mistakes, because it’s easy to get distracted by other words or phrases as in the
following examples:

**No:** Somebody from the group of students volunteer at the animal shelter every Thursday.

**Yes:** Somebody from the group of students volunteers at the animal shelter every Thursday.

As you can see, “somebody” is one of our singular pronouns, even though that “somebody” comes from a larger group. Thus, we need to say that “somebody . . . volunteers” rather than “volunteer.”

**Practice: Match the Number of Your Subjects and Verbs**

Now it’s your turn! Determine which sentences below match subjects and verbs according to number. If they don’t agree, adjust the sentence.

1. Many people, like my sister Mary, has to take the bus to school.
2. A box of assorted chocolates were left on the table with a note for Juliet.
3. Each of the students has read the assigned chapter from the textbook in preparation for class.
4. One of the rules in my family are to always say “I love you” before you leave the house.
5. The dog from up the street barks all night long.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Writing down thoughts, including writing letters and journaling, are important practices for enhancing personal development, progression, and growth.
   1. no changes
   2. is an important practice | development, progression and growth
   3. are important practices | development, progression and growth
   4. is an important practice | development, progression, and growth

See answer key on page 91.

**2B. Match the case in your pronouns.**

We use **pronouns** like he, she, and it in place of nouns all the time in our writing. However, these pronouns have a lot of different forms; just the pronoun he can also become him, his, and himself. How do we know when to use which one? By understanding which **case** a pronoun should be.

The case of a noun or pronoun shows what role that word is playing in the sentence. The optional roles are subject, object, or possessive. For example, you refer to yourself with a different form depending on whether you are the subject of the sentence, the object of the
action, or the possessor of something. Here’s an example of each using the base pronoun “I”:

**Subject:** I am going to the store.

**Object:** He gave *me* a present. **OR** He gave a present to *me*.

**Possessive:** Would you like to pet *my* dog?

### Deciding on Case with Multiple Pronouns

When you are using more than one pronoun to talk about a group of people, like “he and I,” you may not be sure which pronoun forms to use. He and I? Him and me? He and me? Him and I? There are so many potential combinations! Though it may seem tricky at first, remember that you only need to know which role the pronoun is playing in the sentence (subject or object) to get it right. Although each sentence will be unique, a couple of tricks will help you use the right pronouns every time.

First, if you’re using a first-person pronoun (like “I”), make sure you always put the other pronoun or name first. Think of it as a polite gesture to let the other person go before you. However, if you’re not using a first-person pronoun, don’t worry about who goes first; just decide the order by whichever sounds best.

**No:** I and my grandmother made cookies on Saturday afternoon.

**Yes:** My grandmother and I made cookies on Saturday afternoon.

Next, isolate your pronouns one at a time to determine which form you need for each one. While you’ll always need both of your pronouns in the same case (all subject, all object, or all possessive), it can be difficult to keep these forms straight. This trick allows you to rely on your ear without any risk of accidentally misguiding yourself.

**Example:** He and *(me/I)* went for a walk through the scenic old town.

To be sure you are right, try saying your sentence with one pronoun at a time. Whichever form your ear tells you sounds right, use it!

**Yes:** He went for a walk through the scenic old town.

**Yes:** I went for a walk through the scenic old town.

**Yes:** He and I went for a walk through the scenic old town.

Let’s try another one.

**Example:** My parents spoke to my siblings and *(I/me)* about how important it is to choose
good friends.

Okay, let’s run our test to see whether we should use “I” or “me.”

Does “My parents spoke to I” or “My parents spoke to me” sound better? Definitely the second option. Here’s the final sentence:

Yes: My parents spoke to my siblings and me about how important it is to choose good friends.

Choosing Between Who and Whom

Knowing when to use who or whom follows the same rules for case that you have just learned. To help you decide, you need to know whether the word is being used as a subject or object. Who is in the subject case, and whom is in the object case. Because he is in the subject case, we can use it to replace who. Similarly, because him is in the object case, we can replace whom with him. Switching these pronouns is easy to remember because both whom and him end with the letter m. This trick also works for whoever in the same way as who and for whomever in the same way as whom, so we’ll use these words interchangeably in this section.

To figure out whether to use who or whom, just answer the question in your sentence with he or him. Then, use the corresponding who pronoun. Let’s try an example.

Example: (Who/whom) is taking you to the dance?

Let’s answer with he and him and see which sounds most natural. “He is taking you to the dance,” or “Him is taking you to the dance.” He definitely sounds better, which means that we should use who.

Yes: Who is taking you to the dance?

Here’s another sentence. See if you can figure it out!

Example: I will send the invites to (whoever/whomever) I want.

Answer the question with both he and him. “I will send the invites to he” or “I will send the invites to him”? Since him sounds best, this answer should lead you to choose whomever.

Yes: I will send the invites to whomever I want.

Now, occasionally you’ll run into a sentence where both he and him seem to work just fine. This will happen when the who/whom pronoun is functioning as both the object of the first part of the sentence and the subject of the second part of the sentence. Instead of wondering which one really sounds best, just remember that the subject form always trumps when you have both options. This means you should always use who (represented by he) or
whoever in these situations.

**No:** The speech will be given by whomever is most qualified.

**Yes:** The speech will be given by whoever is most qualified.

Although “The speech will be given by him” sounds right, “he is most qualified” sounds just as good. Because the subject, *he*, always trumps the object in these situations, we default to using *whoever*.

**Practice: Match the Case in Your Pronouns**

Now it’s your turn! Review this short video on when to use *who* or *whom* before you try this exercise.

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**Grammar Rule** *Which sounds better: he or him?*

I will give the fish to **he** will provide it a good home.

**Whoever** he

**Whomever** him

---

Watch on YouTube [https://edtechbooks.org/-Rxqu](https://edtechbooks.org/-Rxqu)

Look at these examples and practice using these two tricks as you look for which pronouns marked in red are in the correct case.

1. Me and Jacob had only been dating for three months when he surprised me with a proposal—a proposal I wasn’t sure I was ready to say “yes” to yet.
2. I and she have a teacher who is really good at explaining complicated principles.
3. Everyone says that I should go to law school, but between you and I, I would rather study to be a family counselor.
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4. After months of searching, my supervisor was desperate to find a job candidate whom would qualify for the open position.
5. As much as I didn’t like it, Delilah and her were my only options for carpooling to work.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. When I discovered whom had written this volume I was even more impressed by its credibility.
   1. no changes
   2. whom | volume, I
   3. who | volume, I
   4. who | volume I

See answer key on page 92.

2C. Match pronouns to their references.

Just like your subjects always need to agree with their verbs, your subjects also need to agree with the related pronouns that refer back to them. Additionally, you’ll need to make sure that your pronoun references aren’t ambiguous.

Matching Pronouns to Their References in Number

You want to be sure that a noun that is plural is followed by a pronoun that is also plural. Remember that pronouns are words that can stand in for any noun or noun phrase: words like he, she, it, I, you, we, and they. In the following sentence, notice which pronoun accurately refers back to the main subject (e.g. the students):

No: The students left the books on the desks when it went out to recess.

Yes: The students left the books on the desks when they went out to recess.

In the first sentence, “the students” was a plural subject. The following pronoun, “it,” referred to the original subject, but “it” is singular. In the second sentence, we simply changed “it” to a plural pronoun, “they.”

Here’s another example:

No: An individual should help their neighbors in need.

See how the subject “an individual” is singular, but the later pronoun “their” is plural? There are a couple of ways to fix this mistake.

Yes: An individual should help his or her neighbors in need.
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Now both the subject and the pronouns are singular. Since using the “his or her” is sometimes a wordy or awkward construction, another solution is to make the subject plural (if possible) to match the plural “their.”

**Yes:** Individuals should help their neighbors in need.

Now both terms are plural and agree with each other.

This rule applies to both clear, definable subjects as well as indefinite pronouns (e.g. words like everyone, anyone, and each). As we discussed in a prior section, most of these words are singular by nature, so they will need singular pronouns to match with them.

**No:** By now, everyone should know how to tie their shoes.

The subject, “everyone,” is a singular indefinite pronouns, but “their” is plural. Here are two ways to correct this problem and achieve agreement:

**Yes:** By now, everyone should know how to tie his or her shoes.

**Yes:** By now, all should know how to tie their shoes.

Here’s another example with an indefinite pronoun:

**No:** Each of the boys wanted to spend their money at the candy store.

**Yes:** Each of the boys wanted to spend his money at the candy store.

Although we know there are multiple boys, the word “each” tells us that we have to think of them individually. Thus, we used the word “his” instead of “their” because “his” is singular. However, there are a couple of other solutions we could employ here. We could also manipulate the sentence so that we don’t need a second pronoun. You may find that these strategies change the meaning of your sentence too much, but they may also add to your flexibility as a writer.

**Yes:** Each of the boys wanted to spend the money at the candy store.

**Yes:** Each of the boys wanted to spend money at the candy store.

As you’ve already seen in the few examples we’ve gone over, there are multiple ways to fix these pronoun agreement problems. When one term is singular and the other is plural, here are some of your options:

1. Make both terms singular.
2. Make both terms plural.
3. Replace possessive pronouns with an article like the or a.
4. Remove one of the pronouns.
5. Rewrite the sentence to avoid awkward phrasing.

Since not all of your sentences will be the same, one solution probably won’t work every time for you. Having a variety of rephrasing options allows you to make sure that you have the tone and nuance you want in your sentences.

For instance, if you decide to match a singular term like “a teacher” with a singular pronoun, you’ll need to use “him or her” to avoid using sexist language (which we cover more in rule 4A). However, saying “him or her” could get old if you need to keep using a pronoun multiple times. In this case, you might decide to alternate using “him” and “her” (as long as you avoid confusing your reader), or you might decide to use plural terms from the start. Practice using all of these options as you correct this type of error in the follow examples so you can have flexibility and control in your writing.

**Practice: Match Pronouns to Their References in Number**

Now it’s your turn! Identify which sentence examples below have pronoun agreement errors and practice using different methods to fix the mistakes.

1. Anyone can lose their head and say something they don't mean when they get angry.
2. My cousins like us to get together at their house every Saturday for games and treats.
3. If one person can’t finish the project by themselves, they should ask for help.
4. Individuals should take his or her time each day to take care of his or her body’s needs through healthy eating and appropriate exercise.
5. Each member of the family can find a way to show greater love and appreciation for their family members.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. A great professor sees their students as individuals whom are full of potential.
   1. no changes
   2. A great professor | who
   3. Great professors | who
   4. Great professors | whom

See answer key on page 92.

**Avoiding Ambiguous References**

Writing in the social sciences values clarity very highly. Because of this, you will be expected to use pronouns that refer to other terms clearly, leaving no room for questionable interpretations. Pronouns are confusing or ambiguous to the reader when they don’t tell the reader exactly which earlier word or phrase they are talking about. Here’s an example:

No: Cynthia told Tiffany that she should study for the exam.
This sentence can be interpreted in two ways. Either Cynthia thinks that she herself should study, or she thinks that her friend Tiffany should study. But which one are we talking about? The reader doesn’t know, so it’s the author’s job to make the misunderstanding clear.

**Yes:** Cynthia told Tiffany that Cynthia should study for the exam.

**Yes:** Cynthia told Tiffany that Tiffany should study for the exam.

**Yes:** Frustrated by her roommates frequent complaints about bad test scores, Cynthia told Tiffany to study for the upcoming exam.

Using either name to replace the pronoun can be an acceptable solution depending on the author’s intent. The last sentence builds more context and takes out the confusing pronoun “she.”

Pronouns like *it* and *this* can be especially problematic since we use them often as we write without thinking much about what they refer to. When a writer isn’t clear, the reader could be confused or need to make some assumptions and possibly choose the wrong meaning. If these pronouns directly follows whatever term they’re talking about, however, they can be used without ambiguity. Otherwise, *it* and *this* should either be followed or replaced by a clarifying noun phrase.

**No:** When the bat hit the baseball, it made a loud *crack*.

In this example, the “it” is ambiguous because it could refer to either “bat” or “baseball.” To clarify, we simply replace the pronoun with the correct noun.

**Yes:** When the bat hit the baseball, the bat made a loud *crack*.

If you don’t want to be too repetitive in your writing, you can also clarify ambiguous pronouns like *it* and *this* by adding a noun that sums up the previous noun or noun phrase. This strategy is especially useful when you’re talking about an idea, a principle, or an experience. Here’s an example of an ambiguous pronoun that could use another noun to sum up an idea:

**No:** The Founding Fathers believed in equal rights among all land owners, and this has since grown to include all men and women.

See how “this” is a little ambiguous? It could be referring to any one of several nouns: the Founding Fathers, equal rights, land owners, or the belief of the Founding Fathers. To adjust, we’ll simply insert a word that summarizes the correct idea.

**Yes:** The Founding Fathers believed in equal rights among all land owners, and this ideology has since grown to include all men and women.
Notice how adding one simple word to summarize, “ideology,” clarified the meaning of the pronoun and the sentence.

**Practice: Avoiding Ambiguous References**

Now it’s your turn! Review this video about pronoun reference.

[Watch on YouTube](https://edtechbooks.org/-SGk)

Then look at the following sentences and see which ones have ambiguous pronouns.

1. While family vacations often create happy memories, this requires adequate planning beforehand.
2. Lillian told Margaret that she should have been more careful not to procrastinate her final project.
3. John and I worked hard last year to meet our goals in our schooling, work, and extracurricular activities.
4. If you find it at the store, make sure to bring a pumpkin home.
5. When the plate hit the table, it broke.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”
1. Researchers must share this information sheet with study participants, before they sign the consent form.
   1. no changes
   2. participants before | the participants
   3. participants, before | the participants
   4. participants before | they

See answer key on page 94.

Congratulations! You have completed the first section of the grammar course and reviewed the rules that help us understand how to structure sentences well with agreement, case, and punctuation. These rules are standard (except the controversial serial comma) and can be used throughout your future to create professional writing of many kinds. We next turn to principles of power that will help you to keep your readers engaged.

4.3 Principles of Power

While having grammatically correct sentences is a fine goal for your writing, you will want to use your knowledge of grammar not just to say things clearly but also to share your ideas with power and grace. To do so includes understanding your audience and showing them proper respect, writing without overstating scientific conclusions, using logic in the ordering of the ideas in your sentences, and preferring the active voice. We call these important principles of power rhetorical choices. Make your rhetorical choices wisely by considering the following rules, many of which are associated with using APA style—the convention for social science writing. We use the royal purple and royal blue to mark errors in this area to remind you to use your power wisely.

Rule #3: Increase Your Credibility with Respectful and Logical Language

Writing is becoming increasingly globalized, and your audience is likely to include people of many different backgrounds and perspectives. To avoid offending or alienating readers who may have an important stake in your research or arguments, be sensitive to a variety of issues that may distance or offend your reader if handled inappropriately.

3A. Eliminate bias or stereotyping.

Avoiding biases or stereotypes in your writing may seem like a no-brainer, but you might be surprised by how often assumptions and biases can creep into a paper. We’ll take a look specifically at avoiding biases regarding gender, race, and disability, but be aware that other biases, such as age or sexual orientation may also require careful treatment to show sensitivity.

Avoiding Gender Biases
Gender is a sensitive issue in the world today, and there are a few ways to make sure that your writing acknowledges the various opinions and ideas surrounding gender.

First of all, make sure that you use inclusive language when you use **pronouns**. Historically, we used to use *he* as an inclusive pronoun when talking about any individual. In recent years, however, modern conventions, including APA guidelines, have encouraged writers to include “she” when appropriate, and it almost always is.

**No:** An individual should take care of his family.

**Yes:** An individual should take care of his or her family.

Depending on the type of document you’re writing, especially if it’s long enough, you may choose to follow the acceptable format of alternating the use of “he” and “she” so as not to use “he or she” every time you need a pronoun. Whatever way you decide to handle the issue, make sure to include both genders or keep subjects neutral unless you truly need to specify one gender or the other. Here is an example of when the subject should remain neutral:

**No:** Corporate officers and their wives have been invited to the summer company picnic.

**No:** Corporate officers and their spouses have been invited to the summer company picnic.

**Yes:** Corporate officers and their partners have been invited to the summer company picnic.

Another aspect of using inclusive language with gender is to use **neutral job titles**.

Sometimes we don’t think about how a job title can specifically call out one gender or another, but even these subtle terms can come across as sexist to a reader who notices the bias.

**No:** The policemen in our city work diligently to keep the streets safe.

**Yes:** The police officers in our city work diligently to keep the streets safe.

Since we probably can’t assume that every police officer is indeed male in the city, we can’t say “policemen” without excluding the female police officers. Here’s another example:

**No:** My family tends to tip waitresses twenty percent.

**Yes:** My family tends to tip servers twenty percent.

While a lot of servers may be female and therefore waitresses, there are still plenty of male waiters. The easy solution here is to use the gender neutral term *servers*.

Finally, make sure to use **parallel** terms whenever referring to both genders. This principle means that you should use terms that are essentially equivalent, such as “male and female”
rather than “male and woman.” Here’s an example in a sentence:

No: Welcome to all the men and girls who are attending this conference.

Yes: Welcome to all the men and women who are attending this conference.

Yes: Welcome to all the boys and girls who are attending this conference.

These methods of using inclusive, nonsexist language should come pretty naturally and easily once you’re aware of them. As long as you remain aware, you’ll be able to avoid offending members of your audience who could be especially sensitive to issues of gender.

**Avoiding Biases in Race and Ethnicity**

Next, race and ethnicity also require careful handling in our use of language. In general, make sure to use the ethnic terms that a certain ethnicity or race prefers. So when you do need to bring up these sensitive issues, make sure to research which terms are preferred by these individual groups. For instance, most people with dark skin find the term *Negro* or *Black* offensive. Some groups prefer the term *African American*, but others aren’t from Africa and would want another term to describe their ethnicity. Here’s an example of using appropriate terminology when mentioning race is necessary:

No: The study included 48 Hispanics and 42 Orientals.

Yes: The study included 48 Hispanics and 42 Asians.

Yes: The study included 48 Hispanic Americans and 42 Asian Americans.

People from Asia prefer the term “Asian” to “Oriental,” so we’ve replaced that term in the yes example. “Hispanics” is generally accepted, although certain groups might prefer that you specify which country they originate from. Another option here, since we’re likely dealing with a study from the US, is to specify these terms further with “Hispanic Americans” and “Asian Americans.”

Each edition of the APA manual makes a point to list the current preferred designation for particular races and ethnic groups. The APA official website, www.apastyle.org, is a good place to turn for checking current preferences of various groups in the Guidelines for Unbiased Language. You can also search elsewhere on the internet or find members of these groups in your community to confirm the most appropriate terminology. Additionally, if you are reading scholarly information that mentions race, you can follow the protocol of recently published work in APA peer-reviewed scholarly journals, which are required to use designations correctly and sensitively.

As a general rule, don’t bring up the topic of race unless it’s truly relevant and vital to your argument. These same principles of showing respect for diversity apply to many other things that can be sensitive in our society, such as religion and politics. Often, these ideas aren’t
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important to mention. If you find them relevant to your argument and your audience, keep in mind any opposing viewpoints. Address these perspectives respectfully—not just to avoid alienating those audience members, but to gain others’ respect by treating people with differing backgrounds and perspectives fairly.

Putting People First

Because there are so many ways to easily (and accidentally) label people unfairly in our society, APA style encourages writers to “put people first” when describing individuals from different groups and backgrounds. For instance, people with disabilities usually don’t like to be referred to as “disabled people.” By calling them “people with disabilities,” you focus on the people as their primary designation rather than their disabled conditions, which don’t necessarily define them. Here’s another example of using the “people first” guideline:

No: I work in a school with retarded children.

Better: I work in a school with special needs children.

Best: I work in a school with children who have special needs.

The word retarded itself is very controversial and seen as highly offensive when talking about special needs, but even saying “special needs children” implies that the children are defined by those qualities. When we put the word children first, we focus more on the individuals and less on the handicap.

While this rule works generally, some communities decide that they prefer the shorter form, which doesn’t follow the “people first” designation. When you write about particular populations, be aware of how expert authors in the field currently designate those groups and what those groups prefer to be called. For example, autistic individuals don’t mind being called “autistic individuals” or “autistics”; that’s just the accepted term that they themselves use. Again, if unique characteristics like disabilities or handicaps aren’t truly relevant to your writing and audience, no need to bring them up!

Practice: Eliminate Bias or Stereotyping

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying which sentences have stereotypes or biases. How would you adjust these sentences? What resources would you seek out to verify preferred terms and names?

1. A teacher should provide his class with ample resources to complete their assignments and properly learn the required material.
2. Living with a roommate who is blind has completely changed my perspective on a number of things in my life.
3. The firemen have been working tirelessly to quench the numerous wildfires scattered along the west coast of the United States.
4. While serving as a missionary for my church, I was able to meet some Indians on various reservations.
5. The boys and girls in my fifth-grade class usually liked to play soccer together during recess.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Most every teacher wishes for her students to behave well in class—an optimistic hope.
   1. no changes
   2. her | class; an
   3. his or her | class; an
   4. his or her | class—an

See answer key on page 94.

3B. Avoid absolute language.

Writing in the social sciences, or any science, for that matter, is like contributing to a conversation at a party. At a party, you walk up to a group, listen to the chatter, and then start offering your own opinions and experiences when ideas come to you and as you feel accepted and competent to speak in that setting. But the conversation doesn’t usually stop with whatever you had to say. If it did, it would probably feel a little awkward.

Now, imagine someone at a party insisting that everyone likes watermelon—but you happen to be someone who doesn’t like watermelon. (Maybe you can’t even stand the smell of watermelon!) So you clear your throat and inform those at the party that not everyone likes watermelon, and you’re living proof. That person who made that comment will probably feel a little silly about what he or she said and certainly couldn’t keep on insisting on this claim very believably or kindly.

Writing in a specific field is much the same as a conversation at a party—it’s just a much slower conversation. The point is, people don’t just stop writing about and contributing to the field after you’ve finished an article. They keep right on writing, researching, and discovering, and you probably will, too.

This is one of the biggest reasons why we stress using appropriate language whenever you make even the smallest claim as you write. To do this, you need to avoid overstating anything in your argument. Imagine how you might feel in five years after making a clear claim on an issue that overstated the findings when information showing your error comes to light and your article is still in print under your name.

If scientists were to claim something that could apply universally to everyone, their papers and research could be disproven and discredited as soon as someone else found one exception to their argument. While you may not be planning on making any major
breakthroughs in research, you still want your writing to contribute to your field’s conversation—and you don’t want to make the mistake of saying something you might regret later.

To avoid overstating your claims, refrain from using absolute language, which are words that are either completely inclusive or completely exclusive. These are words like always, never, everyone, and no one. You can also make your claims sound absolute when you use verbs that imply absoluteness like will and do.

Let’s look at some examples.

No: Never let a Friday night go by without going on a date with your spouse if you want a healthy marital relationship.

Yes: Spending time with your spouse can lead to a healthier marital relationship.

No: Letting your children eat dessert every night will make them unhealthy and lead them to feel entitled to sugary treats.

Yes: Letting your children eat dessert every night may lead them to be unhealthy or feel entitled to sugary treats.

Do you see how the first sentence in each pair sounds so absolute, as though the result is completely unavoidable? But surely you can’t speak for the future of every marital relationship or child, no matter how strongly you believe in your researched stance. The second sentence in each pair fixes this rigid stance by instead focusing on a possible, and even likely, outcome without implying that every marriage or child will face these consequences. This writing strategy is called hedging.

There are certain words that can help you hedge like this and leave a little room for exceptions. These hedging words include words like might, may, could, some, suggest, are related to, and more likely.

Let’s do one more example.

No: Research proves that people will help you if you ask nicely.

Yes: Research suggests that people may be more likely to help you if you ask nicely.

We used a number of different hedging words in this example. Depending on the context of your writing, you may need to include more or fewer of these kinds of words. You can still make clear statements and be convincing without overstating information or the current state of research in the field. Make sure to choose your words carefully so that you don’t sound too timid while you try to avoid using absolute language.

Practice: Avoid Absolute Language
Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying which sentences have absolute language. See what hedging words you might add to make some of these statements less absolute.

1. Inflation will never stop unless we prevent our country from sliding further into debt.
2. Studies show that continually dating a spouse after marriage is guaranteed to prevent any strain or hardship in a couple’s relationship.
3. College-aged students with helicopter parents are more likely to use medication for depression and anxiety.
4. The best way to cope with difficulties like loss and stress is to talk to a professional counselor.
5. While many individuals think of peer pressure as a negative influence, there are times when peer pressure can lead to a positive experience.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. The overuse of media undoubtedly has the biggest effect on many children’s: psychological, mental, and physical health indicators.
   1. no changes
   2. may have a large | children’s
   3. undoubtedly has the biggest | children’s
   4. may have a large | children’s:

See answer key on page 95.

3C. Arrange words in your sentences logically.

Have you ever had a friend say something that didn’t quite make sense, but since you knew the person and situation well, you figured out what your friend meant to say anyway? Now, that’s not such a big deal when you’re just talking casually. But when you’re writing a formal research paper, you definitely don’t want someone misunderstanding you or doubting your logic.

That’s why we’re going to look at the different ways you might misplace a phrase or word to imply something you don’t really mean. We can’t assume an audience will know us or the situation; thus, as writers, we have the responsibility to write in ways that minimize the chance of misinterpretation. Part of doing this skillfully means putting phrases, adjectives, and adverbs close to the words or phrases they are modifying or describing.

Keeping Introductory Phrases Logical

Let’s start off with a humorous look at this first example.

No: Flying through the air, the dog expertly caught the frisbee in his teeth.
Though someone might argue that we knew or at least assumed that it was the frisbee and not the dog that was flying through the air, this sentence construction technically indicates that dog is flying. We can clarify the meaning of the sentence with a little rephrasing.

This type of mistake is called a **dangling modifier**. The opening phrase sets up the context and then doesn’t anchor the right noun to it. An easy way to fix the problem is to add the noun into the opening phrase so the context is clear. In this version, we clarified the actions of both the frisbee and the dog, showing that it was indeed the frisbee that flew through the air.

**Yes:** As the frisbee flew through the air, the dog expertly caught it in his teeth.

Here’s another example:

**No:** Running down the street, my cell phone fell out of my pocket.

**Yes:** While I was running down the street, my cell phone fell out of my pocket.

Think about what the first dangling modifier sentence implies. Can your cell phone really run down a street? Of course not. Although we can guess that it was you rather than your cell phone that was running down the street, you should make sure you state it this way.

A second way to fix a dangling modifier is to leave the phrase at the beginning without a subject, but place the main subject immediately after the comma, which anchors it by proximity.

**Yes:** Running down the street, I noticed my cell phone fall out of my pocket.

**Properly Placing Descriptive Words and Phrases**

Let’s investigate another type of modifier mistake.

**No:** The parents served hamburgers to the children on paper plates.

**Yes:** The parents served hamburgers on paper plates to the children.

The misstatement may or may not be easy to spot. Technically, the first sentence indicates that the *children* are on paper plates because “on paper plates” comes right after “the children.” Again, proximity matters to meaning. By putting the phrase “on paper plates” right after “hamburgers,” we know that the writer means that the hamburgers are being served on paper plates.

This **misplaced modifier** mistake happens when a descriptive phrase is placed in the wrong part of the sentence. To fix this problem, just move that phrase to a more logical place. It can take a good editing eye to find some of these errors; our brains work hard to make sense of things and may “autocorrect” the meaning. Checking your work carefully will
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help you place modifiers next to the words or ideas they really are intended to describe.

Let’s look at another example.

No: She found three birds in the park huddled under some fallen leaves.

Although a smart reader could figure out what the author means by this sentence, it sounds like the park is huddled under some fallen leaves, not the birds. A simple switch solidifies the intended meaning of the sentence.

Yes: She found three birds huddled under some fallen leaves in the park.

Be careful as you rearrange these descriptive modifiers. Sometimes, you might accidentally create another misplaced modifier by moving it to the wrong place. Always reread your sentence to make sure your revisions work logically.

No: I used to ride to Salt Lake City to participate in an internship on the UTA train every week.

No: I used to ride to Salt Lake City to participate on the UTA train in an internship every week.

Yes: I used to ride to Salt Lake City on the UTA train to participate in an internship every week.

Although we have looked at phrases, the same principle applies to a single-word descriptor. Note in this example how just a single word can distort the meaning of a sentence.

No: I only see peacocks on the hill at twilight.

Yes: I see peacocks on the hill only at twilight.

That first sentence probably sounds completely normal and straightforward when you say it out loud. But take a look at what comes right before and right after the word “only.” By saying “I only see,” I’m implying that literally the only thing I ever do is see peacocks on that hill at twilight. I never eat, sleep, breathe, or anything else—nope, all I do is see those peacocks. On the hill. At twilight.

As ridiculous as that interpretation may seem, it’s a result of placing “only” right before the verb “see.” However, if I think about what I actually mean—that twilight is the only time of day when I happen to see peacocks on that hill—then it makes sense that “only” should be right before “at twilight,” as it is in the second example.

This type of mistake can apply to any adverb such as “only.” Just like misplaced modifiers, misplaced adverbs are in the wrong part of the sentence. To fix these sentences, consider which part of the sentence the word applies to most and then place the adverb right before
that part of the sentence.

**Practice: Arrange Words in Your Sentences Logically**

Now it’s your turn! Review this video on [dangling modifiers](https://edtechbooks.org/-ycZ).

[Grammar Guideline](image)

To succeed as a pop star, you’ll need your manager to promote you.

[Watch on YouTube](https://edtechbooks.org/-FIy)

And watch this video on [misplaced adverbs](https://edtechbooks.org/-LYt).
Watch these before trying these exercises to see more examples and observe how they are fixed. In these sentences, find and fix the dangling modifiers, misplaced modifiers, or misplaced adverbs.

1. Many parents employ a rule that children may only ask for a second serving of food after they have finished every bite of their first serving.
2. The adults served slices of cake on paper plates to the children at the birthday party.
3. Celia will present her report about endangered sea turtles in the conference room.
4. Gnashing its teeth, the hunter slayed the big bad wolf without a moment’s hesitation to save Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother.
5. The delivery boy presented the beautiful bouquet of roses to the astonished woman in a slender glass vase.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **Unfamiliar with campus**, the construction disoriented the guest speaker and she arrived ten minutes late.
   1. no changes
   2. Because the guest speaker was unfamiliar with campus | speaker, and
   3. Because the guest speaker was unfamiliar with campus | speaker and
   4. Unfamiliar with campus | speaker, and
Rule #4: Use Strong Subjects and Verbs to Make Your Writing Lively and Concise

In addition to treating your audience royally by eliminating bias, avoiding absolute language, and arranging words logically for their benefit, you can also use the principle of power by selecting words to make your topic shine. In this section, we will discuss choosing strong subjects, employing vibrant verbs, and preferring the active voice to make a strong and convincing point as you write.

4A. Find and use strong subjects.

Have you ever read a sentence or paragraph that you had to read twice? Maybe you just got distracted or were tired, but maybe the author didn’t do much to attract your attention at the first of the sentence or paragraph. Although not a strict grammar rule, a principle of power that you should master is the use of strong subjects to engage and hold your audience. You’ll find it helpful to understand the basics of subjects and verbs as you master these next few stylistic principles. For instance, making your subjects strong will keep your writing more concise and engaging for readers.

To begin, think of the subjects of your sentences as the “actors.” You don’t want these actors to be lazy; you want them to be center stage and to act their part. Sometimes without realizing, however, we hide our subjects behind lazy words—especially when we begin a sentence with words like it and there.

What’s so bad about these words as sentence starters? Well, the answer is that pronouns like it and there simply aren’t very specific. They’ll often lead to ambiguity or unnecessary wordiness. Take a look at these examples below:

No: There are many ways to regulate your children’s media intake.

Yes: Parents can regulate their children’s media intake in three ways.

Notice how in the first example, there wasn’t really representing anyone or anything. It was a lazy actor with no real role to play. By finding the true actor (in this case, “parents”) and placing it center stage as the subject, we created a stronger and more specific subject and related it to a clear action.

Here’s another example. See if you can figure out why the first sentence’s subject is weak and why the second sentence’s subject is stronger.

No: It is important for you to listen to your spouse.

Yes: You should listen to your spouse carefully when you counsel together on sensitive issues.
Again, “it” wasn’t the real actor of the sentence. “It” didn’t do anything! Instead, we recognized that the author was speaking to the audience and giving them a call to action. The pronoun “you” addressed the readers directly and served well as a strong subject. Notice that in both of these examples, the second sentence “fix” didn’t just start differently and with more authority— the statement had more to say. Delivering information more efficiently is generally a side benefit of using a stronger subject.

Now, using “it” or “there” as a subject isn’t always bad. These can be useful pronouns when they have a clear reference and may help your writing to be more concise if their meaning is clear. However, if you find yourself falling into a pattern of using these words frequently, try livening up your writing by identifying the true actor of your sentence and putting the actor center stage.

**Practice: Find and Use Strong Subjects**

Now it’s your turn! Review the principle of finding strong subjects in [this video](https://edtechbooks.org/-nCF) and then look at these examples to practice identifying which sentences have weak subjects. Rewrite them to be stronger.

1. It seemed as if the team of researchers had purposely skewed the data.
2. There are so many variables that contribute to this study, so it makes it difficult to conclude what the results truly mean.
3. We can contribute to our families by taking time to communicate lovingly each day.
4. It is important to understand how attachment styles affect relationships.
5. I moved into a new apartment during my sophomore year of college.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **It is generally acknowledged that children, who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home, tend to have a better relationship with each parent.**
   1. No changes
   2. Children, who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home,
   3. It is generally acknowledged that children who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home
   4. Children who grow up in a home with both parents and experience low conflict in the home

See answer key on page 97.

**4B. Use vibrant verbs.**

In addition to improving your subjects, you can also improve your use of verbs by avoiding
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the overuse of *be* verbs, reducing nominalizations, and keeping your verbs close to your subjects. Let’s talk about these problems and how you might substitute more vibrant and concrete verbs and place them more effectively in your sentences.

**Avoiding the Overuse of Be Verbs**

One trap that can slow the pace of writing or weaken sentences can be the overuse of the handy *be* verbs. Though these words have a place in your writing, overusing them can stifle your writing and leave it flat or unclear. *Be* verbs include any form of the word *be*, like *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *been*, and *being*.

Think about it: When you say that your subject “is” something, all you’re really telling your audience is that the subject exists. It simply is. That’s a pretty obvious and unnecessary statement most of the time. Using *be* verbs isn’t a crime, but replacing *be* verbs with stronger, more specific verbs will add depth and variety to your writing.

You’ll solve half of your *be* verb problems by fixing any weak subjects that you have, which we have just discussed. Spotting other *be* verbs that you can replace with a more vibrant choice may be harder, but with a little practice, you’ll start noticing these *be* verbs all over the place!

Let’s take a look at an example.

**No:** Budgeting is an important way to be financially responsible.

Now, you’ve probably already noticed that this sentence doesn’t have a weak *there*or *it* subject. However, we’ve still tied our subject to a weak *be* verb, “is,” that only states a simple, obvious fact. Not only that, but another *be* verb, “be,” comes later on in the sentence.

We can fix this sentence to make it a little more lively in a few different ways depending on what we want to emphasize. Look at the more descriptive use of the verbs (highlighted in red) in these sentences:

**Yes:** You can become more financially responsible by budgeting.

**Yes:** Budgeting allows couples and families to remain financially responsible.

**Yes:** When families budget consistently, they learn to take responsibility for their finances.

Each of these solutions has a slightly different emphasis, but they all convey the same general message without using any *be* verbs. Notice as well how all of these sentences encourage a deeper thought than the original sentence. Rather than just stating an obvious fact, these three other sentences make a connection between a specific action and a desirable outcome.
Here’s another example with some potential solutions:

**No:** Exercising is the best antidepressant, so many health professionals say.

**Yes:** Many health professionals advocate for exercise as an effective antidepressant.

**Yes:** Many health professionals agree that exercise can alleviate some depressive symptoms more effectively than some antidepressant medication.

Again, these potential solutions emphasize different parts of the original ideas, but that’s the beauty of using strong, vibrant verbs; your meaning can instantly become clearer and gain more depth. You’ll find that you start saying a lot more with fewer words as you pair strong subjects with strong verbs. To see some ideas of more vibrant verbs that can better articulate your ideas, check out this [list](https://edtechbooks.org/-wnP) of “action verbs” provided by BYU’s career services.

**Practice: Avoid the Overuse of Be Verbs**

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying which sentences have weak verbs and rewrite them to be stronger.

1. Indoor plumbing is a commodity that many of us take for granted and is still spreading to third-world countries in places like Africa and Asia.
   1. no changes
   2. that looks
   3. which looks
   4. which is

2. People often find talking to strangers awkward and intimidating.
3. Cleaning is a boring task for most children.
4. Pushups are my least favorite form of exercise.
5. The vase fell onto the floor with a loud crash, sending shards of glass in all directions.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. I think that the north end of the park, that has a waterfall, is prettier than the south end.
   1. no changes
   2. that looks
   3. which looks
   4. which is

See answer key on page 97.

**Avoiding Weakening Your Meaning by Turning Verbs into Nouns**

Now that you understand how to choose strong subjects and verbs for your sentences, you probably feel a lot more confident about your writing already. But be careful; you might get carried away with choosing fancy-sounding subjects and verbs and fall into the trap of turning your verbs into nouns. Most of these verbs-turned-nouns have a -tion ending, such
as when consider becomes consideration. This transformation is also called a nominalization. You’ll also occasionally see verbs turned into nouns with -ing, -age, -ment or -ance endings, but these nominalizations aren’t as common as the -tion ending.

Now, nominalizations aren’t always bad or even grammatically wrong. However, if too many of those action words are turned into long non-acting words, you have lost some of the power your writing could have had. You don’t need to eradicate all -tion words from your writing. However, we often use these words as crutches to try to sound more sophisticated in our language when in reality, their use tends to clutter up our sentences. Here’s a brief video [https://edtechbooks.org/-uGWx] to make this concept more clear.

So how do we fix this problem? Just remember all the practice you’ve had in identifying subjects and verbs. Find the true action verb that has been turned into a noun and the true actor (or subject), and then place these words in their correct roles near the beginning of the sentence. You’ll have to look especially carefully for your subjects and verbs when dealing with nominalizations, but you’ll soon get the hang of it.

Let’s try an example together.

No: The student officer gave the first-year student directions to the new student’s first class.

This sentence might seem pretty clear at first glance, but look at it closely. See any nominalizations with a -tion ending? You should notice that the noun directions has been transformed from the verb direct. So how do we change that noun back into a verb?

First, think about who is supposed to be doing the directing in this sentence. Is it the first-year student? Is it the student officer? Someone else? If you identified the student officer as the true actor of the sentence, you’re right! Now, let’s rewrite this sentence so that all the action is clear.

Yes: The student officer directed the first-year student to the new student’s first class.

Notice that in rewriting this sentence, we took out the verb gave. This was a weaker verb than directed, and now our sentence is more clear, concise, and lively.

Let’s try another one.

No: Our appreciation for your service is very great.

Yes: We deeply appreciate your service to us.

See how this nominalization led the speaker to use a weak be verb? By making “we” the true actor or subject and by using “appreciate” as the true action or verb rather than using its nominalized noun form, “appreciation,” we were able to naturally take out that be verb and create a clearer, stronger sentence.
Reducing nominalizations can help us focus on more vibrant verbs. Making those changes can be done in a variety of ways depending on your desired meaning. Since you will be able to use these principles to adjust your writing style to capture more power, these rules are worthy of your attention and focus as you produce and edit writing.

**Practice: Avoid Nominalizations**

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice identifying nominalizations by finding the true actor, finding the true action, and rewriting the sentence to make it stronger.

1. Teenagers tend to influence each other more than their parents do.
2. Advocating for equal rights is an ongoing process that needs continuing attention and understanding on all sides.
3. The direction of these meetings is not something we need to mention in great detail.
4. The experience of most newlyweds and fighting over finances is common.
5. The encouragement of parents is a way to help children grow.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **Caroline and him gave a presentation** about the balance between self-reliance and interdependence in healthy couple relationships.
   1. no changes
   2. He and Caroline | gave a presentation
   3. Caroline and him | presented
   4. He and Caroline | presented

See answer key on page 98.

**Keeping Subjects and Verbs Close**

By now, I hope you see how effectively you can write with more power just by paying a little closer attention to your use of subjects and verbs. However, these strong subjects and verbs might not do very much for you if you don’t place them where they can work together. Subjects and verbs communicate clearest when they sit close together in a sentence, and leaving **interruptions** between them can add confusion and introduce clumsy wording.

When possible, avoid letting long phrases interrupt the flow of your sentence by placing them between your main subject and your main verb. These interruptions between your subject and verb usually appear after helping words like *if, because,* and *while.* You might remember that these helping words are also known as **subordinate conjunctions.** Here’s an example of this kind of an unnecessary interruption in the vicinity of the verb and its subject:
No: Some families, because they gather each night for family dinner, grow closer together.

In essence, these interrupting phrases make your readers mentally hold their breath until they finally get to the verb, “grow.” Simply moving this detour before or after the subject-verb pairing can help your readers get to the point of your sentence faster as in this revised sentence:

Yes: Some families grow closer together because they gather each night for family dinner.

When you rearrange your sentences like this, take extra care that you haven’t accidentally created a misplaced modifier. You may also need to reword a sentence somewhat if you’re having trouble moving the interrupter elsewhere in the sentence.

This principle of power again seeks to help you strengthen your writing, but is not a hard and fast rule. In fact, on occasion, you might find that an interruption between your subject and verb is the best way to write your sentence to add some important emphasis. Even then, keep these interruptions as short as possible so your readers can process your sentence easily.

Yes: Kind actions, when motivated by charity, bless others lives.

In this example, the interrupting phrase was short and helps to emphasize a key element of the meaning of the sentence. As you might imagine, the principle of keeping subjects and verbs close is particularly important when sentences get long and sometimes complicated. Let’s look at a final example.

No: Competition, although it can be very motivating and invigorating for many individuals, can also bring contention among even the closest of friends.

Here, we see an interruption that can easily be moved elsewhere in the sentence and will help the reader to process the sentence faster.

Yes: Although competition can be very motivating and invigorating for many individuals, it can also bring contention among even the closest of friends.

Yes: Competition can bring contention among even the closest of friends, although it can also be very motivating and invigorating for many individuals.

You can review the principle of keeping subjects and verbs close with this short video [https://edtechbooks.org/-irQ].

Practice: Keep Subjects and Verbs Close

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and practice rearranging subjects and verbs for better vicinity.
1. Staying organized, which is not always an easy task considering the demanding nature of the principle, is not my cousin’s best attribute.

2. Adolescents, since they are young and often inexperienced due to their developing brains, do not always make the best decisions.

3. The fact that my roommate came to the aftershow party, despite her many protests that she is introverted and does not like to spend a lot of time around people, especially when those people are strangers, was a miracle.

4. While being on time takes careful planning ahead, it can prove your diligence and reliability to a potential employer.

5. The persistent degrading presentation of women in the media, unless we somehow stop it and begin enforcing positive messages in today’s media, will keep women of all ages from understanding who they really are.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. The author, because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, submitted a new draft of the article that discusses social cognition in emerging adults.

   1. no changes
   2. Because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, the author | article, which
   3. The author, because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, | article, which
   4. Because he had made so many citation mistakes in his previous drafts, the author | article that

See answer key on page 98.

4C. Favor the active voice.

Another way to keep a powerful voice in your writing is to favor the active voice. Perhaps you remember past English teachers reminding you to avoid using the passive voice, or maybe your grammar checker on Word is set at the highest level and you are getting the little green squiggly lines under your passive voice sentences, but have forgotten how to adjust passive voice to active voice. If that’s the case, here’s a quick review of the principle, a few tips on how to spot it, and some simple methods for switching from passive voice to active voice.

**Differences between Active Voice and Passive Voice**

Active voice is stating your sentence in a very straightforward way with an actor followed by its verb—it’s the same principle we’ve been repeating over and over again: using a subject and a verb skillfully and deliberately to convey the meaning of your sentence.

**Active voice:** The cat chased the mouse.
Here, “the cat” is the subject and “chased” is the verb, making “the mouse” the object. When we take the object of the sentence (“the mouse”) and put it into the subject spot, notice what happens—we switch to passive voice.

**Passive voice:** The mouse was chased by the cat.

Now, this sentence has the exact same meaning as the sentence written in active voice, but it does have a different emphasis (maybe eliciting more sympathy for the mouse), and it also uses more words. In addition to simply switching the placement of the sentence’s subject and object, we’ve also had to expand the verb to add a *be* verb (from “chased” to “was chased”). Also, we’ve had to add a helping word “by” to reintroduce the subject.

In fact, we have so de-emphasized the subject that we could leave “by the cat” off entirely and the sentence would still make sense (e.g., “The mouse was chased.”). If this structure seems a little backwards, that’s because it is! Can you just feel the power draining out of the sentence?

As a review, the passive voice switches the position of the subject and the object in a sentence. To make that switch, the verb adds a helping *be* verb and the object adds the word *by* in front of it. Sometimes the entire *by*-phrase of the object will even disappear entirely from the sentence.

So, here’s a handy summary of the three signs you can use to help you find a sentence written in passive voice:

- The subject and object have switched positions.
- The verb includes a helping *be* verb.
- The object has the word *by* in front of it, or you could add the test phrase “by zombies” to the end of the sentence (if the subject of the sentence is not even named at all).

Perhaps you can see why APA standards assert that writers should prefer the active voice over the passive voice except in rare exceptions. Passive writing takes the attention away from the true subject of the sentence. It also tends to be wordier (thanks to those added *be* verbs and the *by* phrasing) and can sometimes be less clear. In general, your writing will improve in clarity and concision if you avoid using the passive voice.

**Changing Passive Voice into Active Voice**

Now that you know how to find the passive voice in your writing, let’s work through a couple of examples to learn how to change the sentences from passive to active voice.

The first step is to identify the subject and object of your sentence and determine which one is the *true* subject or actor. Here’s a hint: the true subject in a passive voice sentence usually follows the word *by* or needs to be added since it has been eliminated.
Once you’ve realized who or what the true subject is, simply move that subject into the spotlight at the beginning of your sentence, adjust your verbs to be more direct, and move the true object back into its place later on in the sentence.

Let’s do this example together.

**No:** The tree was chopped down by my grandfather last year.

Can you tell that this sentence is in the passive voice? The verb gives us a clue that the sentence is about chopping, but we are sure that the noun in the subject place is not doing any of the chopping since it’s a tree.

We also note that the person doing the chopping, the grandfather, is tucked nicely behind a by phrase. There’s also that extra be verb in the verb phrase “was chopped.” Since the subject and object have clearly been switched, let’s put the grandfather back into the subject spot and give him credit for his hard work!

**Yes:** My grandfather chopped down the tree last year.

Great! Now the subject is in the subject position, the object is in the object position, and we don’t have any extra be verbs or prepositions cluttering up the sentence. The sentence has gone from ten words to seven words, which gives the reader fewer words to read to get the same meaning. Review this video [https://edtechbooks.org/-TwE](https://edtechbooks.org/-TwE) for more help in understanding how to switch between active and passive voice.

Now, despite the number of how many times you may have been cautioned not to use the passive voice, this construction can be useful in some instances. For example, let’s take the example of someone at your workplace making a mistake that lost the company thousands of dollars. It could be reported in the corporate newsletter in active voice or passive voice.

Compare these two statements:

**Active Voice:** Jordan lost the company thousands of dollars through a careless mistake.

**Passive Voice:** The company lost thousands of dollars through a careless mistake.

Though corporate leadership may want to encourage employees not to be careless, they may not want to make an example of Jordan. In this case, the use of the passive voice was helpful here in reporting the incident but hiding the actor. In other cases, we use passive voice not so much to hide the actor, but because we simply have no need to mention the actor since it draws emphasis away from the real message. This often happens in methodology sections of scholarly journals.

**Passive Voice:** Participants were asked to turn off their cell phones during the test.

**Active Voice:** The three graduate students of Dr. Jones who conducted the first portion of the study asked the participants to turn off their cell phones during the test.
You’ll probably agree that we didn’t mind knowing who gave the participants the instructions about their cell phones, so passive voice was helpful here.

This video [https://edtechbooks.org/-WSAS] helps illustrate other examples where you might choose to use the passive voice, but you should often feel more confident about using active voice instead. When you do choose to write passively, you should be very deliberate and make sure that you feel appropriately justified in using the passive voice.

**Practice: Favor the Active Voice**

Now it’s your turn! Look at the sentences below and figure out which sentences are written in passive voice. If any sentences do use passive voice, practice rewriting them in active voice. If any of the sentences are missing a true subject because there is no by phrase to help, you can invent one that would make sense.

1. The zucchini bread was baked to perfection.
2. All of the students studied diligently for their grammar test.
3. My mother told my brother to be home by midnight, but he stayed out past his curfew.
4. In preparation for the event, decisions were carefully made by the committee members.
5. Not everyone can hope to win the contest, but valiant effort can certainly be given by anyone.
6. The lesson was prepared by the teacher a week in advance.
7. The servers wiped off the tables regularly to ensure a clean environment for the customers.
8. On average, seven hours of television are watched daily by people in the United States.
9. My best friend and I took an amazing trip to Asia over the summer.
10. I told my boss not to worry because everything would be taken care of by the clean-up crew.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. **We designed the study** to determine the quality of the relationship between adopted children and their parents, which may struggle at times.
   - no changes
   - The study was designed | which may struggle at times
   - We designed the study | which always struggles
   - The study was designed | which always struggles

See answer key on page 99.

Congratulations! You have now completed the second section of the grammar course and applied various rules to make your writing more powerful, including using inclusive
language and choosing strong subjects and verbs. Remember that while these rules are fairly standard in just about any writing genre, they are also stylistic guidelines that you don’t have to follow in every instance. We encourage you to pay attention to these principles carefully in your writing so you can gain a better understanding of when it is appropriate to break these rules and what you prefer in your personal style. As you continue to develop this taste for power in your writing, let’s move on to polishing our prose by paying attention to some small, sentence-level details.

4.4 Principles of Polish

In the final polishing of a written piece, authors typically engage in some fine-tuning to make their piece especially effective. Paying close attention to these small details is a way to show professionalism and respect for your reader. Carefully editing for these last little details will help readers stay focused on your message rather than becoming distracted by minor errors. Hopefully, the streamlining and wordsmithing you do will help you reach greater clarity, which is the focus of this section. These errors will be marked in manuscripts with pink and orange.

Rule #5: Pay Attention to the Small Details

Taking the time to pay attention to the small details of parallelism, hyphens, and apostrophes might seem minor, but all the final touch-ups you make in your writing can help it flow, be clear, and make a difference for your readers.

5A. Use parallelism to increase flow.

Sentences can get unruly and convoluted fast, especially when you have complicated ideas to put on the page. When you can’t quite put your finger on why your sentence seems messy or doesn’t seem to be working, check for consistency in each part of your sentence. Maybe this is what is making it sound awkward.

When the different parts of your sentence all flow in a consistent way, its meaning will naturally be clearer to your readers. This consistency in writing is called parallel structure. The basic idea of parallel structure is assuring that every part of a list or a set of comparative ideas starts in the same grammatical way. For example, notice how awkward this sentence sounds:

No: I like to read, dance, and listening to music.

Perhaps you recognized that the third item in this list did not seem consistent with the way the other two listed elements are stated. The basic way to correct non-parallel structure is to make sure the first word of each item in the list or other phrases is the same part of speech so that all first words of the list are similar (e.g., all prepositions, all verbs, all nouns, and so on).
As you look at these corrected examples, you will see that the author had the choice to state all first words as present tense verbs (like *read* and *dance*) or as *-ing* verbs (to match *listening*) to bring consistency to the list. In these two examples, you will see that the list is now consistent and the awkward construction is remedied:

**Yes:** I like to read, dance, and listen to music.

**Yes:** I like reading, dancing, and listening to music.

Though it’s a small change, these sentences are now clear and work beautifully. As you make these types of changes, you might think of parallelism like the branches of a tree. Each point where two or more branches split off should grammatically start from the same place, just like each item in your list should start with the same type of word.

Let’s look at another example.

**No:** Young children enjoy chocolate, lollipops, and eat ice cream.

**Yes:** Young children enjoy eating chocolate, lollipops, and ice cream.

**Yes:** Young children enjoy eating chocolate, licking lollipops, and slurping their ice cream.

In the first *yes* answer, the branch began at *eating* with the three nouns listed from there (all items that could be eaten). In the second *yes* answer, the branch began after *enjoy* with the three *-ing* verbs starting each part of the three-part list (all actions that could be enjoyed). The beauty is that each list is now consistent in form.

Parallel structure isn’t just used in lists, though. When pairing phrases with the use of the following words (called correlative conjunctions), the clauses or phrases we use on either side should also be parallel. Here are five very common examples that you should watch out for:

- Not only . . . but also . . .
- Neither . . . nor . . .
- Either . . . or . . .
- Between . . . and . . .
- Both . . . and . . .

Just like each item in a parallel list, the *first* word portion of your sentence that follows each of these words should branch off by using the same type of grammatical word, such as all nouns, all verbs, or whatever part of speech you are using.

Let’s look at one of those sentence types and see how to keep each part consistent. The correlative conjunctions are marked in green and the first word that must be parallel in red so you can see the structuring of the sentence better:
No: Parents strive both to support their children in their activities and guiding them in their aspirations.

Yes: Parents strive both to support their children in their activities and to guide them in their aspirations.

“Both” and “and” are the branch-off points in this sentence. In the no example, “both” is followed by a preposition, “to,” and “and” is followed by a verb, “guiding.” Not parallel! We had to tweak the second part of the sentence a bit in the yes example to get the two branches to match with prepositions, but that’s okay. Although in this case the preposition happened to be the same word, the prepositions can be different words; they just both need to be prepositions to be parallel. Another way to fix this sentence is to place the word “to” (which is common to both phrases) in front of the parallel connective and to use verbs as first words.

Yes: Parents strive to both support their children in their activities and guide them in their aspirations.

Occasionally, you may come across a sentence that you need to rewrite almost entirely so that the structure is parallel. The work required to keep your sentence structure consistent, however, will make your writing crisper and cleaner.

Here’s one more example:

No: I could neither concentrate on my homework nor my chores.

Can you see how the words right after “neither” and “nor” don’t match up? “Concentrate” is a verb, but “my chores” is a noun phrase. Placed in this linked structure, they are not parallel. The first yes example below uses parallel verbs and the second yes example uses parallel noun phrases. Both are great options for fixing the parallel structure.

Yes: I could neither concentrate on my homework nor focus on my chores.

Yes: I could concentrate on neither my homework nor my chores.

Before you try the practice exercise, watch these two short videos on keeping lists [https://edtechbooks.org/-EFHN] and other phrases [https://edtechbooks.org/-pqf] parallel for more examples.

Practice: Use Parallelism to Increase Flow

Now it’s your turn! Look at these examples and rewrite them to be parallel. Note that you can make your work easier by circling or highlighting the correlative conjunctions or the first word in a list to help you see the problem better.

1. The city of Paris, France is well known for its sights, I love the food there, and romance.
2. Parents need to know how to discipline, compassionate, and teach important life skills to their children.
3. Either we will go to the party together or coming home right after I run some errands.
4. As the coordinator of this international event, I am responsible for negotiating prices for the venue and catering, the speakers have necessary comforts and resources, and managing the social media outreach to advertise.
5. The couple was frustrated and overwhelmed between taking care of their newborn and starting a business at the same time.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. The list of interview questions we ask all of the candidates are focused on their education, experience with children in a formal setting, and reason they want to work here.
   1. no changes
   2. are | and
   3. is | and their
   4. is | and their

See answer key on page 100.

5B. Insert hyphens appropriately.

The more nouns and adjectives you pack into a sentence, the more potential you have for rich and interesting writing, but the greater the risk for a muddled sentence. While it can be helpful to rearrange these words with prepositions so your readers can better process your meaning, you have another useful tool at your disposal: hyphens!

Hyphens can link words together to show relationships between them that are helpful as you describe different noun phrases. In order to use hyphens effectively, however, you’ll need to keep a few important rules in mind.

The first is that you use hyphens between two or more words when those words are acting like one word. To show that these words work together to modify, or describe a noun, you may need to use a hyphen. However, the hyphen is only necessary if these words come before the noun. If the description comes after the noun, there’s no need to use hyphens.

No hyphens: I have an adorable, energetic little brother.

Hyphens: I have a 10-year-old little brother who is absolutely adorable.

In the first sentence, we have chosen three very descriptive, independent words to describe this brother (adorable, energetic, and little). We could have left any of those three words out and the sentence would have still made sense.
By contrast, the three descriptive words set right before the noun, brother (10, year, and old) are acting as one word and would not work independently or separately to communicate the brother’s age. Since these words act as one and are set before the noun, they are packaged as one unit by using hyphens. When those same words appear after the noun, they are no longer hyphenated.

**No hyphens:** My brother is ten years old and is absolutely adorable.

See the pattern? Here’s another example:

**No:** I live in a middle class neighborhood.
**Yes:** I live in a middle-class neighborhood.

**No:** I live in a neighborhood from the middle-class.
**Yes:** I live in a neighborhood from the middle class.

To review, multiple-word descriptions that come before the noun need hyphens; these same descriptions placed after the noun do not. This rule does have occasional exceptions, although not many. One notable exception that you may come across often is the compound term *high school* when used to describe a noun. This phrase rarely ever takes on hyphens, even when you use it as an adjective.

**No:** Back in the day, I used to be the high-school mascot.

**Yes:** Back in the day, I used to be the high school mascot.

Let’s look at a shortlist of hyphenated adjectives with a corresponding noun. Note that if you tried to use these words as unhyphenated, separate words to describe the noun, they wouldn’t make much sense—they only make sense as a unified, single descriptor:

- short-term loan
- up-to-date information
- community-based education
- green-eyed monkey
- well-known expert
- one-way street
- five-point star
- chocolate-covered almonds

What about *newly-married couple*? If this hyphen looks strange to you, then good. In English, we make an exception to the hyphen principle we’ve just described when an *-ly* adverb is the first word in the set (even though they are describing a single characteristic). The *-ly* ending makes their intention clear enough.

**No:** The bridge ran across a quickly-flowing stream.
Yes: The bridge ran across a quickly flowing stream.

So whenever you’re debating whether you need a hyphen or not and you see an adverb with an -ly ending, you can feel confident knowing that you don’t need a hyphen.

Try another example.

No: The happily-singing bird went about building its nest.

Although “happily” and “singing” are working together to describe “bird,” “happily” is an -ly adverb modifying the adjective that comes next, not an equal partnering word. Thus, the phrase doesn’t need a hyphen.

Yes: The happily singing bird went about building its nest.

Finally, let’s talk about one other frequent use of hyphens. Many words that we use (especially in more technical writing) include some sort of prefix like un, re, or self. Often, we have a difficult time judging whether or not these prefixes should be attached to the word completely or attached by a hyphen. While there are too many prefixes to go over in detail, we’ll give you an overall guideline with one notable exception. Generally, you’ll find that most prefixes do not require a hyphen, such as the prefix over.

No: Half of the employees feel that they are over-worked.

Yes: Half of the employees feel that they are overworked.

However, the one prefix that is almost always hyphenated is self, no matter whether it is placed before a noun or not.

No: Some teenagers struggle with their selfesteem.

No: Some teenagers struggle with their self esteem.

Yes: Some teenagers struggle with their self-esteem.

In a few cases, a prefix not normally requiring a hyphen may need one in order to clarify the word, such as re-establish. As another example, imagine your embarrassment if you asked your boss to “re-sign” a document that had been modified, but left a sticky note on it without your handy hyphen that said “Please resign.” Lesson learned: Hyphens matter!

In doubt on a certain word? Whenever you come across a phrase or compound word that stumps you, refer to a reliable dictionary as you write. For example, you can simply go to m-w.com, the official website for Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, and search the term for any word where you suspect a hyphen might be needed. As you continue to look up words, you’ll become more confident and remember more exceptions.
Practice: Insert Hyphens Appropriately

Now it’s your turn! Take a look at these example sentences and determine which terms need hyphens and which ones don’t.

1. Overly attentive parents can run the risk of spoiling their children.
2. Many young women struggle with self esteem because of the way women are portrayed in the media.
3. One of my favorite classes I’ve taken so far is my class on human development.
4. I have a three year old niece whom I get to babysit every other weekend.
5. After holding the faculty and staff meeting, the administration set expectations and prepared for the upcoming parent-teacher conferences.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. His supervisor is asking him to only select highly qualified members for the research team.
   1. no changes
   2. select only | highly qualified
   3. only select | highly-qualified
   4. select only | highly-qualified

See answer key on page 101.

5C. Use apostrophes appropriately.

Ever wondered about apostrophes? They are also a little mark but can make a difference in showing possession correctly. Most words show possession by adding ’sto the end, but not always. When do you add an apostrophe, and does it come before the letter s or after? Here are a few tips to keep in mind with all possessives, including pronouns.

Using Apostrophes in Possessive Pronouns

*His, her, my,* and *your* are all possessive pronouns that we use regularly—and they never use apostrophes. Period. This rule is simple, but possessive pronouns can be easily confused with similar contractions, which *do* use apostrophes. Different pronouns like it’s/its, you’re/your, who’s/whose, and they’re/their (not to mention there) might seem difficult to keep straight at first, but there’s a simple trick to figuring out which one you need.

Since the pronouns with an apostrophe are a contraction, or a combination of two words, just expand them to include both words again and see if they work in the sentence. For example, *its* is possessive, as in “its head,” but “it’s” is a contraction, as in “it is going to be a great day.” When you want to use a word like *its/it’s* in a sentence and expanding the contraction to two words doesn’t make sense, then *its* should be possessive and you don’t
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need an apostrophe.

Example: The dog shakes it’s/its tail when it recognizes that it’s/its going to rain.

Expanded: The dog shakes it is tail when it recognizes that it is going to rain.

As we can see in the expanded version of this sentence, only the second instance of the expanded “it is” makes sense, so that’s the only one that needs an apostrophe.

Yes: The dog shakes its tail when it recognizes that it’s going to rain.

Let’s try one more example.

Example: How do you know if your/you’re going to be successful in life?

Expanded: How do you know if you are going to be successful in life?

The expanded version sounds good, so we know that we can use the apostrophe as a contraction.

Yes: How do you know if you’re going to be successful in life?

Try this trick any time you see a pronoun that you think might use an apostrophe. If you can split it logically into two words, keep the apostrophe. If not, throw it out.

Adding Apostrophes to Plural Words Ending in s

Normally, making a word possessive is simple: just add an apostrophe and an s. However, when the word is already possessive with an s on the end, you shouldn’t try to add an extra ‘s, so just add the apostrophe after the s. A simple rule to help keep this idea straight is to first make the word plural (add the s) and then make it possessive (add the apostrophe).

One boy: The boy’s sandcastle washed away with the waves.

Two or more boys: The boys’ sandcastle washed away with the waves.

One woman: The woman’s style was impeccable.

Two or more women: The women’s style was impeccable.

In this last example, the change to plural did not require adding an ‘s, but as our first step, we still made it plural (woman to women). Then, since the plural form didn’t involve adding an ‘s, we could simply add an ‘s to make it possessive. Since the word is already plural, you don’t need to add the s before the apostrophe. Here’s one more example to illustrate the principle:

No: I went to visit my children’s school one day.
Yes: I went to visit my children’s school one day.

Adding Apostrophes to Names that End with s

Names that end with s are tricky to make possessive, but we’ll follow very similar rules here to the ones we’ve already discussed. First, you have to determine whether the name you’re talking about represents an individual or a group. If the name refers to multiple people, make sure you’ve made it plural first by adding s or es.

Let’s take the last name “Williams,” which already ends in s, as an example. To make singular names like this possessive, add the normal apostrophe-s ending.

Singular possessive: I weeded Mr. Williams’s garden. [One Williams]

To make these names plural, add es: “the Williamses.” Once name is plural, simply add an apostrophe to make it possessive. No other s needed!

Plural possessive: Let’s go over to the Williamses’ house. [Many Williamses]

You may have seen other variations of these apostrophe rules before, which is understandable. Different universities or groups have their own style guides and rules. However, these guidelines follow the most recent edition of the APA style manual and are the expected convention in your field of writing.

Practice: Use Apostrophes Appropriately

Now it’s your turn! Determine which of the following examples have correct possessives formed.

1. My mother is a woman whose never intimidated by anyone.
2. Childrens’ innocence can be endearing and can also lead to humorous misunderstandings.
3. Meeting with a therapist can really help you understand you’re mental illness.
4. Every day, my older brother and I go over to the Jones’ place to see whether Mr. and Mrs. Jones need any help with chores around the house.
5. My friends car needed a jump, so I met her on 4th Street to provide her with jumper cables.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. There are six faculty members who said their going to the seminar.
   1. no changes
   2. Six faculty members | they’re
   3. There are six faculty members | they’re
   4. Six faculty members | their
Rule #6: Capitalization & Quotation

Our earliest lessons in capitalization taught us how to capitalize at the beginning of sentences and to capitalize proper nouns. We also learned to put quotation marks around the words given verbatim. These rules still work, though since then, you may have run into some special cases that require a little more sophistication. Hopefully, as we provide a few examples of how these principles work, you’ll find some answers to a few nagging questions. Also, here we discuss capitalization rules that work in text. As you know, APA citation rules have their own specific capitalization protocols, which will not be treated here (but can be found in your course resources).

6A. Understand when to capitalize.

Another way that you can increase your credibility and show your respect for individuals and groups is by capitalizing various terms correctly. Like hyphens, capitalization has a myriad of different rules to keep track of, but for now, we’ll just focus on some overarching guidelines and a few notable situations that you should be aware of.

For the most part, whenever you’re facing a name or term that may or may not need to be capitalized, it will fall into one of two categories. That term will either refer to something general or something very specific. General terms rarely need to be capitalized, but specific terms usually should be. If you can identify whether a term is general or specific, you should be able to determine whether you need to capitalize it or not.

Take a look at these examples.

General: Last Friday, my siblings and I went to the bowling alley.

Specific: Last Friday, my siblings and I went to Super Funtime Bowling Alley.

In the first example, the speaker mentioned a bowling alley, but didn’t give us enough specifics to justify capitalizing the term. In the second, the speaker actually named a bowling alley called “Super Funtime Bowling Alley.” Since the speaker referred to the official, specific name, we had to capitalize the term. (Incidentally, if the official name of the business is “Super Funtime” and the bowling alley part is not part of the business’s name, then the correct capitalization would be “Super Funtime bowling alley” since the “Super Funtime” is specific to the business, but a bowling alley is a general term.)

This same pattern of capitalizing specific terms rather than general terms is fairly consistent and reliable for most situations, and we’ll keep looking back to that idea as we look at different capitalization situations, such as the next few examples about educational degrees, seasons, and directions.

Educational degrees may seem like a specific term, but they’re actually not supposed to be capitalized (unless they contain a proper noun such as English).
No: I got my degree in Family Life at BYU.

Yes: I got my degree in family life at BYU.

Yes: I received my Bachelor of Science degree from the Brigham Young University’s School of Family Life.

The same works for class or semester designations.

No: I will be taking an Advanced Writing class in the Fall.

Yes: I will be taking an advanced writing class in the fall.

No: My sister will be taking psychology 101 in winter semester 20XX.

Yes: My sister will be taking Psychology 101 in Winter Semester 20XX.

Similarly, although the seasons may seem like a specific name, they’re actually a general term and shouldn’t be capitalized. You would only capitalize a seasonal term if that term were actually used as a name or in some sort of title.

No: One of my favorite seasons is Winter because that’s when we have Christmas!

Yes: One of my favorite seasons is winter because that’s when we have Christmas!

Here, winter is simply the season. But look below where a season can be used in a title.

Yes: I decided to take a class during Summer Term so I won’t have to take so many courses during the fall.

Notice how in this last example, the phrase “Summer Term” is capitalized but “the fall” is not. The first phrase is a title referring to a specific timeframe at BYU, but the latter is simply the general time of year.

Just like the seasons, directions of the compass are not specific enough to require capitalization.

No: The wind blew in from the East.

Yes: The wind blew in from the east.

However, when you use directions to name specific regions of the world, such as the South or the East in the United States, those terms function as a name or title and should be capitalized.

No: I am from the south.
**Yes:** I am from the South.

Finally, let’s deal with capitalization in personal titles. Titles such as “president” and “mayor” may seem specific at first blush, but they really only refer to a general office. Once you attach one of these titles to a specific name, then the title becomes specific enough to merit capitalization because they now designate a specific individual’s office or position.

**No:** Kevin J. Worthen, President of BYU, gave an excellent talk at the devotional on Tuesday.

**Yes:** Kevin J. Worthen, president of BYU, gave an excellent talk at the devotional on Tuesday.

You may be wondering if you really can’t capitalize “president” in this situation. Actually, the term “president of BYU” is generic enough, especially because there have been multiple BYU presidents and will continue to be more. The two main exceptions to this traditionally are the President of the United States and the Queen of England.

Let’s now see what happens once we attach this title to Kevin Worthen’s name.

**No:** I heard that president Worthen will speak at the BYU devotional today.

**Yes:** I heard that President Worthen will speak at the BYU devotional today.

Essentially, attaching the title to the beginning of a name makes the position specific rather than general.

What about other titles, such as the title of a book, an article, or your own paper? Typically, after you’ve capitalized the first word, you need to remember to capitalize only four types of words in titles, no matter how long or short they are: nouns (including pronouns), verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Let’s review how to identify these types of words.

**Nouns** are any person, place, thing, or idea. **Verbs** are action words, including helping verbs like be, have, or do. **Adjectives** describe nouns, and **adverbs** can modify or describe other words, like verbs. Most adverbs (and some adjectives) end in -ly, and adverbs are also known for describing the manner, time, or place of something.

Pretty simple, right? As long as you can identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, you’ll know exactly what to capitalize. Any other helping words in titles don’t need to be capitalized, no matter how long or short. Here’s an example:

**No:** Laura Padilla-Walker and her associates wrote a book called *A better way to teach kids about sex*.

**Yes:** Laura Padilla-Walker wrote a book called *A Better Way to Teach Kids about Sex*.

In the **yes** answer, “A” is the first word, so that one is automatically capitalized. “Better” is
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an adjective that describes “way,” a noun, so those both get capitalized. “To” isn’t a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb, but “teach” is a verb and “kids” is a noun. “About” is a preposition, so no need to capitalize that, but “sex” is a noun. Great! We capitalized all of the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Let’s look at one more example with all words capitalized. Which words should not be capitalized?

No: My paper is called “Growing Your Business Plan: How To Find Flexibility While Structuring A Career.”

Yes: My paper is called “Growing Your Business Plan: How to Find Flexibility while Structuring a Career.”

Practice: Understand When to Capitalize

Now it’s your turn! See if you can identify which terms are specific enough to need capitalization and which ones are too general and should remain lowercase.

1. My birthday is in the Summer, so it was never really recognized at school.
2. I live just South of campus, and I love passing the duck pond every day on my way to class.
3. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints often feel pressured to be perfect, and this mindset can be detrimental to their spiritual and emotional well-being.
4. One of the reasons that How To Train Your Dragon is my favorite movie is because it teaches such great themes about friendship and family.
5. Go straight through the stop sign, and my house is just east of the elementary school.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. You have been invited to present both your scientific findings and you should share your personal experience from the study you did with Professor James Nelson on Wednesday.
   1. no changes
   2. your personal experience | professor
   3. you should share your personal experience | professor
   4. your personal experience | Professor

See answer key on page 102.

6B. Know how to abbreviate terms and format numbers.

Occasionally, the terms you’ll be using in your writing will require abbreviations. In order to look polished and professional as you use these shortened terms, you’ll need to remember how to format and introduce your abbreviations and numbers correctly in APA format.
Formatting Abbreviations

APA style is fairly straightforward on abbreviations. For the most part, simply don’t use periods when writing your abbreviations.

**No:** My brother claims he saw a real U.F.O.

**Yes:** My brother claims he saw a real UFO.

So when in doubt, leave the periods out. There are a few exceptions to this rule, of course. Most initials in names take periods after them, like “C.S. Lewis,” as does the abbreviation for the United States, “U.S.” Generally, however, abbreviations should simply consist of capital letters without any periods in between.

**No:** I loved President Dallin H. Oaks’ talk from the last General Conference. (Notice the period missing after his middle initial.)

**Yes:** I loved President Dallin H. Oaks’ talk from the last General Conference.

Introducing Abbreviations

Our society uses many common abbreviations that most people are familiar with, such as the IRS. However, there are plenty of abbreviations that are more specialized to the social sciences and can prove confusing to readers if you don’t expand them at the first usage.

To incorporate abbreviations into your writing effectively, it’s always a safe practice to spell out the term the first time you use it followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. Then, you can feel free to use that abbreviated term on its own for the remainder of your paper.

**No:** I studied at BYU (Brigham Young University). BYU is located in a beautiful setting near the Wasatch Mountains in Provo, Utah.

**Yes:** I studied at Brigham Young University (BYU). BYU is located in a beautiful setting near the Wasatch Mountains in Provo, Utah.

**No:** Parents may engage in PDT (parental differential treatment), favoring some siblings over others. Parent differential treatment is associated with negative mental health outcomes for the less favored sibling.

**Yes:** Parents may engage in parental differential treatment (PDT), favoring some siblings over others. PDT is associated with negative mental health outcomes for the less favored sibling.

If the abbreviation you’re using is so common that it has become a dictionary-approved word such as “IQ,” you don’t need to worry about this introduction method. If you’re unsure whether you need to introduce a word or not, don’t hesitate to look up an abbreviation at m-
w.com to make sure it’s accepted as an actual word.

**Practice: Know How to Abbreviate Terms**

Now it’s your turn! See which of these sentences have correctly formatted and introduced abbreviations.

1. I received my degree in S.F.L. at B.Y.U.
2. JRR Tolkien is one of my favorite authors.
3. The high school offers a variety of classes on Family and Consumer Science (FACS).
4. Teenagers face many different types of pressure and stress, and these factors can in turn influence their GPA.
5. My employer asked me to report the incident to the LIC (Library Incident Council).

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. The American Womens Business Association (A.W.B.A.) offers personal and professional tips to its members.
   1. no changes
   2. Womens | (AWBA)
   3. Womens’ | (AWBA)
   4. Womens’ | (A.W.B.A.)

See answer key on page 103.

**Formatting Numbers**

In APA style, rules for writing out numbers are fairly simple. First of all, numbers one to nine should be spelled out with letters. Numbers 10 and above should be formatted with numerals.

No: I went on a trip to St. George for 3 days with my best friend last summer.

Yes: I went on a trip to St. George for three days with my best friend last summer.

No: Although forty-two may or may not be the answer to everything, I did find one answer that day.

Yes: Although 42 may or may not be the answer to everything, I did find one answer that day.

However, you should keep a few exceptions to these rules in mind as you write.

Whenever a number begins a sentence, title, or heading, it should be spelled out—no matter how big the number is. You should spell out simple fractions such as “one half.” Also, be
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aware of certain phrases that might be acceptable in a spelled out form like “the Twelve Apostles.”

No: 76 trombones led the big parade, I heard.

Yes: Seventy-six trombones led the big parade, I heard.

You may sometimes mention numbers that represent scores, points on a scale, chapters, etc. These references should be formatted consistently as numerals.

No: Have you read Chapter Four from the textbook yet?

Yes: Have you read Chapter 4 from the textbook yet?

This instruction is simply a brief overview of how to handle numbers in APA writing. Read this quick guide [https://edtechbooks.org/-hqU] to learn more about what kinds of exceptions you might see in your field and what you’ll be expected to follow in your own writing.

Practice: Formatting Numbers

Now it’s your turn! Read these sentences carefully and determine which numbers have been formatted correctly according to APA style.

1. My father was raised in a family of twelve children.
2. One limitation of this study stems from the lack of environment control.
3. 3 is my favorite number, and I also like multiples of 3 such as 27.
4. I tried pronouncing the word 10 times before giving up.
5. Most children are excited to get baptized when they turn 8.

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Our creative writing team has three goals, stay positive, be creative, and be responsible.
   1. no changes
   2. 3 | goals:
   3. 3 | goals,
   4. three | goals:

See answer key on page 103.

6C. Employ quotation marks consistently.

Different writing genres use quotes differently (e.g., literature reviews in the social sciences rarely use them, but public scholarship may regularly use them). Quotations can strengthen
and support your points, so you’ll need to know how to punctuate them correctly. In this section, we’ll talk about two ways that you can quote people, and we will also give you some other general mechanics to be aware of when dealing with quotations.

**Little Punctuation Goes Inside; Big Punctuation Goes Outside**

First, let’s talk about how punctuation should be formatted with quotation marks in general. Whether you’re quoting an entire sentence or a single word, should your punctuation go inside or outside the quotation marks? There are two rules that you should always follow: (a) little punctuation goes inside, and (b) big punctuation goes outside.

All small punctuation marks, essentially the period and the comma, always go inside quotation marks, even when the original quote did not include that punctuation mark. (When you need to use APA rules for standardizing citations, that’s a different matter, but otherwise, always keep periods and commas inside quotation marks.)

No: He said he was “joking”, but I didn’t believe him.

Yes: He said he was “joking,” but I didn’t believe him.

No: Make sure your little punctuation stays on the “inside”.

Yes: Make sure your little punctuation stays on the “inside.”

No: On a small piece of paper, he clearly wrote, “I am not going”, though I returned it and replied, “You really should”.

Yes: On a small piece of paper, he clearly wrote, “I am not going,” though I returned it and replied, “You really should.”

In contrast, bigger punctuation marks, like semicolons, colons, question marks, and exclamation points, tend to stay outside of quotation marks unless they were actually included in the original quotation.

No: Does America truly believe that “all men are created equal?”

Yes: Does America truly believe that “all men are created equal”?

Since we know that this phrase from the Declaration of Independence didn’t have a question mark in the original source, we keep the question mark from our sentence on the outside of the quotation marks.

Here’s one more example:

No: In my talk, I plan to discuss the meaning of the lyrics in “Choose the Right;” this hymn is known by most members of the Church.
Yes: In my talk, I plan to discuss the meaning of the lyrics in “Choose the Right”; this hymn is known by most members of the Church.

Since there is no semicolon in the title of the hymn “Choose the Right,” we kept the semicolon outside of the quotation marks.

Practice: Little Punctuation Goes Inside; Big Punctuation Goes Outside

Now it’s your turn! See which sentence examples keep small punctuation inside and big punctuation outside of quotation marks.

2. People may think you are “weird”; those people just don’t appreciate individuality.
3. Teenagers may describe experiences of “FOMO,” or “fear of missing out”.
4. I can’t wait for my own “happily ever after”!
5. What did the teacher mean by saying “you earn your grades?”

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. In preparation for tomorrow’s class discussion please read the handout entitled “Principles of Civil Discourse on Sensitive Topics.”
   - no changes
   - discussion, Topics”.
   - discussion, Topics.”
   - discussion Topics”.

See answer key on page 104.

Using Correct Punctuation with Dialogue Tags and Blended Quotations

The first way you can quote someone is to use a dialogue tag. This is one of the most common ways to quote other people, especially when you want to quote an entire sentence. The dialogue tags we tend to use in these situations are phrases like “he said” or “she said.”

This kind of quotation via dialogue is the exact same kind of format you would find in the dialogue of a novel—we’re just using the same principles in a more academic setting. You can find countless examples in just about any novel that you read, but in general, remember that you should enter and exit dialogue with commas. Here’s some different examples of various cases to illustrate the different places where you might use quotations in your sentences and how dialogue tags should work around those quotations:

Yes: “This is a friendly reminder to use commas instead of periods when you quote something in your paper with a dialogue tag,” she said.
Yes: He explained, “You also need to use a comma before your quote if you’ve used a dialogue tag to introduce your sentence. And don’t forget to capitalize the first word of the quote.”

Yes: “However,” she added, “it’s also appropriate to use commas if there is a dialogue tag in the middle of the sentence you’re quoting.”

Look closely at how each of these sentences are punctuated. If you use a dialogue tag, no matter where your quotation comes in the sentence, either introduce or leave the quote with commas (or both) and make sure that the first word of the quote is capitalized. Any continuation of a quote after an interrupting dialogue tag, like in the third example, doesn’t need to be capitalized.

You can also choose to use a colon to introduce a quotation, but remember the one rule we always keep for colons: They must follow an IC! This means that common tags like “he said” or “she said” don’t work.

No: He explained: “This is not how you introduce a quotation with a colon.”

Yes: He explained the new grammar principle: “This is how you introduce a quotation with a colon.”

The second way you can incorporate quotations into your papers is by blending them into your sentences. We especially use this style of quoting when we only want to use part of a statement from another author, such as using a phrase or partial sentence. You can still use dialogue tags with this method, but they will look a little different. Instead of just saying “he said” or “she said,” you’ll often use a phrase more like “he said that” or “she said that.” Here’s an example:

Yes: The scientist claimed that “bunnies are going to be the cause of a worldwide carrot shortage.”

Notice how no comma follows “that” and that “bunnies” isn’t capitalized even though it’s the first word in the quotation. This is because we’re doing everything we can to blend this quote into the sentence as if the quotation marks weren’t there. And if the quotation marks weren’t there, we would never put a comma after “that” or randomly capitalize a word in the middle of a sentence. In this way, we’ve successfully blended the quotation into our sentence, only including quotations around the actual words stated by the person we are quoting but still keeping the meaning of the sentence flowing beautifully.

Let’s see another example.

No: Peter Pan insists that, “A happy thought” is necessary to fly.

See how the comma gives the reader an awkward pause in the sentence? And there’s no need to capitalize “a” since it’s in the middle of the sentence.
Yes: Peter Pan insists that “a happy thought” is necessary to fly.

Whenever you have a quote that you’re trying to incorporate in this way, you can try writing the sentence as if it were truly all one sentence and then slip in the quotation marks wherever they belong. Just make sure you use the exact wording of the original source to be completely accurate. If you try this trick, you’ll probably end up with the right punctuation.

Practice: Use Correct Punctuation with Dialogue Tags and Blended Quotations

Now it’s your turn! Take a look at these examples of quoted material and see if the punctuation works with the dialogue tags correctly or not or if the quotations blend in correctly. If not, add or remove the necessary punctuation and capitalization. (These and following examples are going to ignore APA citations for now.)

1. Elder Christofferson wisely said “To persevere firm and steadfast in the faith of Christ requires that the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrate one’s heart and soul.”
2. Elder Anderson said that only believing parts of The Family: A Proclamation to the World can “Cloud our eternal view, putting too much importance on our experience here and now.”
3. Elder Rasband explained that by using the Atonement to, “press forward with faith, we are fortified against the adversary.”
4. “Our mortal life is designed by a loving God to be a test and source of growth for each of us” President Eyring instructed.
5. President Oaks gave this statement: “Under the great plan of our loving Creator, the mission of His restored Church is to help the children of God achieve the supernal blessing of exaltation in the celestial kingdom, which can be attained only through an eternal marriage between a man and a woman.”
6. Elder Soares taught that, “When we earnestly, heartily, firmly, and sincerely seek to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach it to one another, these teachings may transform hearts.”
7. President Ballard has told us that “loving God and loving our neighbors is the doctrinal foundation of ministering.”
8. President Nelson taught “The new home-centered, Church-supported integrated curriculum has the potential to unleash the power of families, as each family follows through conscientiously and carefully to transform their home into a sanctuary of faith.”
9. Elder Holland explained that “our modified Sunday service is to emphasize the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as the sacred, acknowledged focal point of our weekly worship experience.”
10. “Lessons taught through the traditions we establish in our homes,” said Elder Steven R. Bangerter, “though small and simple, are increasingly important in today’s world.”

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”
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1. Devin said “Give the Family Life Education Seminar notes to whomeveryou want.”
   1. no changes
   2. said, “Give | whomever
   3. said “Give | whoever
   4. said, “Give | whoever

See answer key on page 104.

Using Brackets and Ellipses Appropriately in Quotations

Sometimes when you’re blending in a quotation with your sentence, you’ll need to adjust the wording for everything to make sense grammatically. While you should never alter a quote on a whim, using brackets as a tool to adjust your quotations is appropriate. You might also decide that you don’t need the entire quote. The following information helps you know how to adjust those quotations accurately so they fit well within your text.

Essentially, whatever you change in a quotation, you must put those changes within square brackets. This practice is especially important for your credibility as an author. For example, if your readers were to look up a quote you used and found that you’d changed the wording without acknowledging your changes in brackets, they might doubt how accurate you’ve been in your research or wonder what other changes you might have made to other quotes. Earn your readers’ trust by being transparent with your changes.

Here’s an example of how to use brackets to alter a quote correctly:

Original Quote: Elder Gong said, “Jesus Christ calls us in His voice and His name. He seeks and gathers us. He teaches us how to minister in love.”

Now let’s try to blend this quote into a sentence.

No: Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will “teaches us how to minister in love.”

No: Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will “teach us how to minister in love.”

Yes: Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will “[teach] us how to minister in love.”

Yes: Elder Gong reminds us that the Savior will show “us how to minister in love.”

See how leaving the original verb from the quote, “teaches,” wasn’t grammatically correct for our new sentence? However, we couldn’t just change it like we did in the second sentence. Adding brackets around the word we changed in the third example shows our readers that we are consciously weaving another’s words into our own and making reliable changes that don’t skew the meaning. Another option is to place quotes around only the actual words, as in the fourth example, while being true to the original idea.

Let’s do another example.
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**Original Quote:** Elder Uchtdorf said, “Wherever you are on this earth, there are plenty of opportunities to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Now we’ll add brackets. Notice how every change is marked clearly by the brackets in the correct example.

**No:** As Elder Uchtdorf has taught, we know that “wherever we are on this earth, we have plenty of opportunities to share” the gospel.

**Yes:** As Elder Uchtdorf has taught, we know that “wherever [we] are on this earth, [we have] plenty of opportunities to share” the gospel.

Another way that we sometimes alter quotes is by leaving out portions of quoted material that is not central to our meaning, especially when a quote is too long for our purposes. We show these omissions in the middle of a quote through **ellipses**, which are the three periods you see in a row. (There is no need to place ellipses before or after the quote, since we assume that the material you are quoting from likely has text before and after it.)

Just like you must be careful with using your brackets accurately, you must do the same with how you utilize ellipses to keep the trust of your readers. When you use ellipses in the middle of a sentence, you should begin with a space, use a space between each period, and end with a space. Incidentally, scriptural passages can be followed by the reference in parenthesis, as shown, and do not need to be hyperlinked or included in a reference list when you use them in public scholarship pieces.

**No:** “I give. . .men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

**No:** “I give...men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

**No:** “I give ... men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

**Yes:** “I give . . . men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).

Sometimes, you will need to use ellipses to cut out more than just a few words. If the portion you’ve cut out includes a new sentence, you need to show that by using **four periods**. And this time, you don’t need to start off with a space—just end with one.

**No:** “And if men come unto me . . . I will make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

Although this ellipses has been formatted normally, it’s missing the fourth period to show that this omission covers a sentence break.

**Yes:** “And if men come unto me. . . . I will make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).
Practice: Use Brackets and Ellipses Appropriately in Quotations

Now it’s your turn! Look up these quotes in the following scripture references and see if they’ve been altered correctly with brackets for #1-5 and for ellipses in #6-10.

**Brackets:**

1. As disciples of Christ, we understand that “a man cannot serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24).
2. The scriptures teach that we must “choose . . . this day whom we will serve” (Joshua 24:15).
3. Although failing can be frustrating, we know that Heavenly Father “[gives] unto men weakness that they may be humble” (Ether 12:27).
4. In today’s world, we understand that we must make positive choices every day, for “by small and simple things great things are brought to pass” (Alma 37:6).
5. The Savior has reassured us many times that He “will not leave us comfortless,” but He “will come to us” (John 14:18) if we have faith and “doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36).

**Ellipses:**

1. Nephi taught us the power of obedience when he said “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that . . . he shall prepare a way” (1 Nephi 3:7).
2. We are promised that if our “bowels also be full of charity towards all men . . . then shall [our] confidence wax strong in the presence of God” (D&C 121:45).
3. It is important to treat our bodies with respect and care because our “body is the temple of the Holy Ghost...and [we] are not [our] own” (1 Corinthians 6:19).
4. Most missionaries have memorized Joseph Smith’s account of the First Vision: “I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me, I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Joseph Smith History 1:16-17).
5. I have always found comfort in this verse about the Savior’s Atonement: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ... and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Now, try this practice test question. Examine the underlined words or phrases and select the best substitution or mark “no change(s).”

1. Mr. Jones’ would always tell us to “trust our gut, . . . and everything would turn out all right.”
   1. no changes
   2. Mr. Jones | gut, . . . and
3. Mr. Jones’ | gut,...and
4. Mr. Jones | gut,...and

Well done! You have finished this grammar course and refined your understanding and ability to apply principles of structure, power, and clarity to your writing. As you incorporate these principles into your writing, you’ll see the dividends as you become well respected for your professional communication. Most importantly, you’ll be able to share important information with readers about the family in ways that will be accurate, convincing, and memorable.

**Answer Key**

To see the Answer Key for all Exercises in this chapter, go to [this Google document](https://edtechbooks.org/-aLLP).
Style

Brooke Downs

Learning Outcomes

Students will master strategies to make their writing clearer and more vivacious.

This chapter contributes to the following course learning outcomes:

- **Style**: Write in a correct, clear, and graceful prose style.
- **Structure**: Write coherent and unified texts, including effective introductions, clear thesis statements, supporting details, transitions, and strong conclusions.
- **Process**: Employ informed and flexible processes for writing and speaking, including: creating and/or finding ideas about which to write; collecting evidence and data; planning and drafting; revising; editing; and designing or presenting a message so that it is successfully understood by a specified audience.
- **Rhetorical Situation**: Use various methods of invention, organization, and style to adapt written and oral forms of communication to specific rhetorical situations.
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’re majoring in the social sciences because you want to help people. In your classes you’ve studied how to solve problems like preventing teen suicide, improving parenting skills, and reducing athletic injuries. Maybe you’ve wished these teens, parents, or athletes 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 scientist who can transform stacks of dense research into a concoction 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. The exercises ask you to rewrite sentences, and sometimes paragraphs, so budget your time accordingly. But unfortunately this e-textbook isn't designed for long answers, so you may find it easier to copy the exercise into a word processor, type your answer, then copy and paste your answer back into the book.

This chapter will focus on two principles of style, clarity and vivacity, and 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

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 played, 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. This 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 picture puts objects where you don't 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 social science 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 has not one button but two. “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 pan 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 term composition can be a synonym for 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-GSvg] 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 [https://plainlanguage.gov/] about good style. Government employees have won the No Gobbledygook Award with fantastic revisions like this one [https://edtechbooks.org/-iLcL] (scroll down to see it). 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 unconcise. 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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 in 2020.

Show Answer [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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. Take a 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 unfellow 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 the Cannon Center is where we would dine on one particular night.

Show Answer [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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. It sounds pompous and pointless, not 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.

Whoa—that sentence became much shorter and clearer by using verbs (and more specific ones). Beware of generic verbs like change and affect. 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, 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.

**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/verbsubject:

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

To review the passive voice, sample this snarky guy. If nothing else, he’ll shame you into using the active voice.
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, APA Style permits authors and teams to refer to themselves [https://edtechbooks.org/-xYK] as *I* or *We*: *We observed pairs of five-year-olds* or *From the data I have concluded . . .*

So for the most part, if you don’t want an ass-ive voice, don’t use the pass-ive voice.

**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 style video called *Revising Prose* [https://edtechbooks.org/-EFa]. 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.

---

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.

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.

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.

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 your literature review) or a piece aimed at a general audience (such as your magazine article). 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 take a 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 summarizing 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 already has 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 but to help you remember to order sentences by function first. For this exercise, identify the function of each sentence then reorder it accordingly. The computer has scrambled them randomly, but a first draft might look more like this:

Right now, BYU has two terms during the spring and summer months instead of one semester. I had a spring term course and I noticed that many students were absent, would nod off, or leave class early. It’s just too much all at once. Since students have to learn a semester of material in half the time, the classes are longer. The spring term and summer term should be combined into one summer semester. According to one study, the most productive people work for fifty minutes then take a break. A summer semester would optimize learning with manageable class periods of fifty to seventy-five minutes. People also don’t retain what they learn as well, as I will discuss later. Classes can last three hours! Students can’t focus for that long.

People also don’t retain what they learn as well as I will discuss next.

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 italics):

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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:

Original: 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 red and blue:

Revision: 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 spreadmesh 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 already-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.

Side note—these sentences came true. Salt Lake City built a new theatre, the Eccles, in 2016. Capitol Theatre will renovate 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.

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 your literature review, 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 the literature review 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 social problem. Your sidekicks are ready to help—your teacher, your review group, even the scholars whose material you cite.
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 social 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 smart phone 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**
Vague subject +
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.

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.

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.

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 Jake’s Jazz Joint, which also sells sheet music and tuning.

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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.

Now that you know how to fix faulty coordination, let's try combining sentences in more
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 [http://styleacademy.byu.edu/], which is packed with sentence combining and sentence imitating exercises. Let’s sample one of each. Below are two videos and two exercises. In the videos, Professor Jackson will do one example with you then give you one to do on your own. Be sure to pause the video when indicated so you can write your paragraph, which will be the answer to the accompanying question.

Watch on YouTube https://edtechbooks.org/-ZVov

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-oXH]

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 though, 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 autorects 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


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://edtechbooks.org/-Vhay
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 World War II by eradicating malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Apparently, pesticides are the greatest liquid since H₂O (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 at the *New Yorker* [https://edtechbooks.org/-weai]). Carson knew case studies not only hook the reader, they evidence an argument: come for the story; stay for the social change.

*Silent Spring*’s style 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 social scientist 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.

**5.12 References**


**Suggested Citation**

Learning Outcomes

- Employ informed and flexible processes for writing and speaking, including: creating and/or finding ideas about which to write; collecting evidence and data; planning and drafting; revising; editing; and designing or presenting a message so that it is successfully understood by a specified audience.
- Use various methods of invention, organization, and style to adapt written and oral forms of communication to specific rhetorical situations.
- Write in a correct, clear, and graceful prose style.
- Effectively evaluate and comment on the writing of others to facilitate revision.

6.1 Visual Rhetoric and Document Design

We live in a visual world where every person with access to a computer has all the necessary tools to produce a quality product, our audience's expect quality work and we must meet their expectations. John McWade, author of Before and After Page Design adds, "Design has always been important, but the computer has put it center stage. It's no longer enough to have a good product; it must be a good looking product" (Before and After Page Design). He continues, "The computer has made designers of all of us." So, how can you
embrace your new designer role?

The Joshua Tree Principle

Designer Robin Williams tells this story, "Many years ago I received a tree identification book for Christmas. I was at my parent's home, and after all the gifts had been opened I decided to go out and identify the trees in the neighborhood. Before I went out, I read through part of the book. The first tree in the book was the Joshua tree because it only took two clues to identify it. Now the Joshua tree is a really weird-looking tree and I looked at the picture and said to myself, 'Oh, we don't have that kind of tree in Northern California. That is a weird-looking tree. I would know if I saw that tree, and I've never seen one before.' So I took my book and went outside. My parents live in a cul-de-sac of six homes. Four of those homes had Joshua trees in the front yard. I had lived in that house for thirteen years, and I had never seen a Joshua tree. I took a walk around the block, and there must have been a sale at the nursery when everyone was landscaping their new homes—at least 80 percent of the homes had Joshua trees in the front yards. And I had never seen one before! Once I was conscious of the tree, once I could name it, I saw it everywhere. Which is exactly my point. Once you can name something you are conscious of it. You have power over it. You own it. You're in control."

I couldn't agree more! Once we have vocabulary to identify something we can see and use that principle. Rebecca Hagen and Kim Golombisky, authors of *White Space is Not Your Enemy: A Beginners Guide to Communicating Visually Through Graphic, Web, and Multimedia Design* write, "Visual Culture is a language, and like any language, visual culture has rules that make communication possible" (WSINYE 2). As Social Science writers, we will create documents for a wide array of audiences; documents that will need to meet diverse needs, values, and audience expectations. Document Design (vocabulary) we must understand and own are

- serif font
Williams created an acronym (PARC) to teach us basic design principles.

**PARC** design principles

**Proximity (Grouping)**

Items relating to each other should be grouped close together. When several items are in close proximity to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. This helps organize information, reduces clutter, and gives the reader a clear structure.

Alignment

Nothing should be placed on the page arbitrarily. Every element should have some visual connection with another element on the page. This creates a clean, sophisticated, fresh look.
Repetition (Consistency)

Repeat visual elements of the design throughout the piece. You can repeat colors, shapes, textures, spatial relationships, line thicknesses, fonts, sizes, graphic concepts, etc. This develops the organization and strengthens the unity.

Contrast

The idea behind contrast is to avoid elements on a page that are merely similar. If the elements (type, color, size, line thickness, shape, space, etc.) are not the same, then make them very different. Contrast is often the most important visual attraction on a page—it’s what makes the reader look at a page in the first place.
William's jokingly claims that designers who don't effectively use these PARC design principles get CRAP (PARC spelled backwards). John McWade adds, "Designed correctly, the paper does not appear to be designed at all; what the reader perceives is power and presence. Poor design is like smog. You can see air only when it's dirty. When it's clean it's invisible and you see the fantastic mountains, unaware of the air at all" (Before and After Page Design).

Writers must develop document design skills as 21st Century rhetorical communicators.

Presentation Guru, Garr Reynolds expands on these concepts. [https://edtechbooks.org/-qxG]

Additional Page Design tips

- Use the right paper and ink.
- Use consistent page numbers, headers, and footers.
- Use ample and appropriate margins (Leave a one-inch margin around the page).
- Use ragged rather than justified right margins.
- Use list format for easy reading.
- Keep reasonable line length.
- Keep consistent line spacing.
- Use adequate white space to balance the density of print and make the page inviting. (In document design, negative space is often referred to as white space).
- Use white space consistently to show organization and hierarchy of ideas.
- Set off headings with white space.

As we study and learn about the basic principles of design our skills will improve.
Discussion Question

What design skills do you already possess?

Suggested Citation

Unit 2: Academic Audiences
Note: This chapter will be completed during Winter semester 2020.

**Suggested Citation**

Finding & Evaluating Sources

A Cowboy and Cowgirl's Guide

Cristie Cowles Charles & Elise Silva

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you will learn how to

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

Note: this chapter contains a Library Research Homework Assignment as part of the practice for this section, so budget extra time so you can successfully take the time needed to choose and narrow your topic.
I live in the high desert mountains of the West, and my step-dad is a cowboy. Cowboys and Cowgirls are tough. Finding and evaluating sources is tough. So I'm going to teach you how to find sources western style, like a Cowboy or Cowgirl. So you can be tough, too.

8.1 Why Research?

If a cowboy like my stepdad wants to buy a horse, he first finds out who's selling, he checks out the horse's condition, learns about its heritage, tries it out, and sees how it behaves in different situations. In other words, he does his research. We, too, spend our lives doing research--whether we realize it or not. For example, between Yelp! [https://www.yelp.com/], Rotten Tomatoes [https://edtechbooks.org/-yRr], Consumer Reports [https://edtechbooks.org/-YtQ], and Amazon reviews [https://www.amazon.com/], it seems like we're always trying to find the best products and the best deals. When we have questions, we go to Wikipedia [https://www.wikipedia.org/] or ask Siri or Alexa for answers. Never in the history of the world have we had so many resources literally at our fingertips.

"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" on VidAngel [https://www.vidangel.com/] website [https://www.vidangel.com/]]

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. It's especially true in the Social Sciences that if you know how to conduct good research, you will be more influential no matter which field 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)

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. "You pick your horse based on the work at hand. You don't want to take a rodeo horse on a long drive. But above all, you've gotta really love your horse."

Similarly, 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 you really love it. This semester you'll be spending 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,
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 find good sources?

**Background Research**

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, but the problem is that no one can know how wide or narrow their topic 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 it fits into the bigger world. It will 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.

**Brainstorming**

But 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 problems you've heard about in your field that you want to solve?
- Can you remember something you recently heard in a class that sparked your interest?
- Consider a controversy or question you want to know more about but you don't know the answer to.
Think back on personal problems and questions you've had in your life and how they might relate to your discipline of study.

If you want to be more creative or free in your topic exploration, consider making a mind map or doing a free write.

**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. 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 studies--see Delys], so you might as well 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 (new school). On paper, 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.
Talking

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 on a date and talk about topics you’re interested in. This can be like the freewrite where you just 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.

Wikipedia and Google

Another good place to start exploring general topics is Wikipedia, which, as you probably know, is a summary of what’s generally known about a topic. A Wikipedia search can give you a quick sense of the history of a 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 thought 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.

Doing some general Google searches will also help you see what popular sources and commercial sites appear about 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. Another option is to physically walk into the library and look through the Social Science Encyclopedias—a rich resource that’s often overlooked. In the BYU library, these are located on the northeast side of the first floor in the reference section labeled "Social Sciences Help Desk." There are student employees there who can direct you to rich background sources that are great for exploring new topics.

**Notetaking**

"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

As you explore ideas about your topic, don't forget to take notes about key words that come up, what sub-topics emerge, whose names you see repeatedly, and which areas of research seem especially fruitful. You will 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.

Student Example: One of my students 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 decided to change his focus to the influence of China on the economies of African countries.

**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 or at least fall under the Social Sciences umbrella.) 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.
Research Question

Research always starts with a question. It might not always be stated outright, but every time you look something up on your phone, it's because there's a gap in your knowledge that you want to fill in. Once you have a general sense of a topic you're interested in, that's when you're ready to formulate a more specific research question.

“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 by 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 in this class 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 won't be time in this class to actually do the primary research, just to propose it).

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 trust me that if you can take the time now to devise a narrow, specific research question, the next step in the research process--database searching--will be much, much easier.

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, "I expect that smartphone usage at a young age increases a child's likelihood of being exposed to pornography." Even though this isn't in question format, it's an implied question--we assume that by making this statement, you will next try to figure out whether your hypothesis is correct. So really, a your research question becomes "Does smartphone usage at a young age increase a child's likelihood of being exposed to pornography?" With a hypothesis, you just also have a prediction that the answer will be "yes." You can also create a more open
ended approach where you adopt a posture of openness and curiosity: "I wonder how dismissive attachment styles play out in parenting scenarios." 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 attachment styles and parenting. In other words, you don't have to stick to an exact formula when you start researching a topic, 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 will be to find answers. Here are some examples of WATCO questions previous students have asked (they had to come up with three possible questions.

**WATCO 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)?
Writing in the Social Sciences

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 will be for them to start the next step in the process.

Feedback

At this point, feedback can be very helpful. Just like you wouldn't buy a horse without getting it checked out first, it's a good idea to get feedback on your research question from your peers or your teacher. It's likely that if they think something sounds interesting, it'll be interesting to other people as well.

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 that you might remember from your first-year Writing 150 class (you can click directly in this frame like a website):

8.3 Step Two: Get the Lay of the Land (Find Sources & Narrow Scope)

A cowboy or cowgirl doesn't just jump and go on a cattle drive with no preparation. They get the lay of the land first and plan where the best areas will be to take their cattle. Not only that, but they choose the best, most hardy cattle to take with them. Once you've done enough background research to understand your topic in general and have created a narrow research question, the next step is to get the lay of the land--to figure out the state of the field on this topic. And then you can start gathering your herd/sources that you can take with you on your research journey. You know you'll need a certain number of steer (sources), but where are the best places to look? What is the landscape like? Where will obstacles be? At this point, there's no way to know if you'll have to narrow or expand your scope until you start searching for sources (although, quick tip: most students almost always have to significantly narrow their research question).

So now starts the search for a strong herd and a good path to take them on. You're looking for strong cattle of a similar breed and a route where there's enough food and water without too much treacherous terrain. In terms of research, your research question starts you in a direction, and as you look for sources about a topic, you choose the articles and books with the most potential. Do you have time to look through thousands of sources? No way. You've got to be selective. At the same time, if you only look for the minimum number of sources, some might not turn out to be as hardy as they appeared and might not make the journey. If that's the case, and you'll probably come up short. So try to find the sweet spot where you have enough sources to examine without too many to handle. For example, I usually say the sweet spot for a literature review is to gather about 30-50 sources that you can then sort
through. That way you're guaranteed to have 20 good quality sources in the end.

**How to Narrow**

Areas of inquiry always get narrower the more we learn. When people started exploring the West, they started with the big questions: how big is this country? Where are the mountains and rivers? Then as people moved into the area, they narrowed their scope as their knowledge grew: Where's the most fertile soil in this valley? Where are the best trails to take my cattle?

Researchers in every field also start by asking big questions at the beginning, and as people make discoveries throughout the years, they narrow their scope to create new knowledge. 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, they 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 people with low socioeconomic status?) or different age groups (e.g., How does cancer affect children?). By adding new factors to their research questions, they narrowed their scope and continued to create new information. You'll follow a similar path when looking for sources about a topic: you'll start with a general topic, 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 you just type "Traumatic Brain Injury" into the Web of Science Database, you get 51,378 results: clearly too many to handle! But if you add another factor to narrow the scope--say, "Traumatic Brain Injury" AND "Rehabilitation," then you get 5,499--still too many, but getting better. Now, if you add a third narrowing factor "AND Robotics," you get 46 results--the Sweet Spot! That's a manageable herd. Later you'll be finding your own Sweet Spot, so stay tuned.

**Finding Sources**

So now it's your turn to get the lay of the land. How do you find your herd? How do you search for sources? If you're a BYU student, you're lucky! The Harold B. Lee Library gives you free access to specialized databases, subject guides, and hundreds of other resources, and it's all free of charge! If you're not at BYU, you should still be able to do most of the tutorials listed below without an account, so never fear! Also, check out your local library and Google Scholar for resources. Here's where to start:

**Library Tutorials**

In your class, you'll most likely be assigned to complete the online Library Tutorials and Library Research Assignment for Advanced Writing before attending a live library
session with a subject librarian. Please start by watching all six short tutorial videos below about the research process. (You may need to login in to the Library webpage in order access them. Scroll down inside the frame until you see the videos.):

The next part of the Library Research Assignment will be done in parts as you move through this chapter.

**Keywords**

As you saw in the tutorial 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. 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 keyword.

**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 your narrowed research question or topic here (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. BYU’s 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 of library and information science. They 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 the main Library website under "Research Guides":

Click on Research Guides, and you'll find lists of the many different majors and fields of study the librarians have already found for you (scroll down to see the lists):

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 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 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!

For example, 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 above), you'll find an amazing page written by the Subject Librarian Brian Champion with tabs listing of 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 Article Databases tab, you'll see that in the field of Economics, there are two main databases that are used the most: Business Source Premier for more business-related articles and EconLit for articles more under the general economics umbrella. 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 Assignment
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 here (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)

A Word on Database Searches

You’ll learn more about finding sources when your class attends your 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'll 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, email your teacher or librarian 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 most attention to those.

Also note that if you have questions, you can click on the Get Help tab and subject librarian Brian Champion’s picture and contact information comes up 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 ten 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 for your class meeting with the Subject Librarian. 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 (about 30-50 sources). Bring any questions or problems you've had in your preliminary searches to your session 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 from your first-year writing class (Writing 150) here:

8.4 Step Three: Round 'Em Up (Gather & Annotate Sources)

Now that you've set your sights on the sweet spot between 30-50 sources, you want to start gathering like a good roper. Don't just randomly grab whatever you see--you need to be selective, look at many, but only gather the best ones. First, 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. Add links As 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 from the BYU Library on how to set up your own RefWorks Account.

Here are instructions for sending documents to RefWorks:

If you'd like more instruction on how to use RefWorks, here is a 20-minute playlist on YouTube: [https://edtechbooks.org/-QJM](https://edtechbooks.org/-QJM)

**How to Read Online**

Now comes the process of reading and evaluating your sources and deciding whether they fit your paper or not. 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 are 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 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 are distracted. Turn off your phone, and concentrate.

**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 popular information. Whether you are 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. 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):
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1. First, commit that you will spend no more that 60 minutes reading the article.
2. Begin by taking 2 minutes to 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.
3. Next, spend 10 minutes reading 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Next read the entire discussion section. This is where the author tells what the important findings were and the meaning of those findings.
8. 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 that 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

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 noting what will be helpful as you
return to the article later in the writing process. For example, if you've noted the article's major findings as you go, it will 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 author'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 9: Literature Reviews [https://edtechbooks.org/-tmG]).

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, 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.

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://edtechbooks.org/-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). 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 published in many academic journals.

An annotated bibliography may seem like busy work, but it actually is a really important part of any research writing process. The annotated bibliography teaches you how to gather and cull source material. It also helps you practice the art of synthesis. Creating an annotated bibliography, if done well, helps you gather main source material, get it cited correctly, and helps you summarize shortly what the point of the research is. This helps you begin to put all of these sources into conversation with one another before you actually start
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 8 Citing 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 papers because you can incorporate your analysis into your paper as well.

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 8: Citing 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 8: Citing 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):

Corralling cattle is an exhilarating practice that requires both quick thinking and strong skills on the part of the herder. For a cowgirl to do her job right, the cattle must be found, rounded up, inspected carefully, 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.
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. If you are writing on a topic related to technology or media, for example, the academic conversation moves really rapidly in these areas, and you will 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 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 all of your sources 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.
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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-znwl]) 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 [https://www.pewresearch.org/]--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.

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.

3. **Act like a fact-checker.** This means that you 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-bBN](https://edtechbooks.org/-bBN) 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.
CIVIC ONLINE REASONING

When you come across information online, ask yourself:

- WHO’S BEHIND THIS INFORMATION?
- WHAT’S THE EVIDENCE?
- WHAT DO OTHER SOURCES SAY?

Stanford History Education Group's suggestions for engaging with information online. Learn
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.

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 wear your
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favorite news outlet falls on this chart, one of the best ways to avoid bias is 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!"

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 distrust of 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 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: "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 will 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 will 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 start figuring out how to cite your sources once you've found them. In other words, now that you've corralled the herd, it's time to do some branding.
Cristie Cowles Charles

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.
Talking About 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? By PHGCOM [https://edtechbooks.org/-Fzo]. CC BY-SA 3.0

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 from.)

But it goes deeper than that. Before we start, we need to define some key types of source citation.
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Terms

- Quotation
- Paraphrase
- Summary
- 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.

9.2 How Do Students Cite Sources? Badly.

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.

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.

Well, it all started when a fantastic researcher named Rebecca Moore Howard visited our college campus and presented on The Citation Project [https://edtechbooks.org/-QTX]--a major study she and Sandra Jamieson were conducting. In order to find out how college students typically cite sources, 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 (2018) 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?
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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 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!

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 7). 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.
When you work sentence-by-sentence, you run the risk of doing what I did in my 6th 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 6th grade. But I was 11 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.
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 goes a long way!

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://edtechbooks.org/-UaY CC BY-NC 2.0)
Quotations should stay in the Friend Zone https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1431775

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 (indented as a block, see APA Manual)
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, 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 9 on Literature Reviews [https://edtechbooks.org/-Foc].

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 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!**
Patchwriting is so 6th 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-QHh] 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.
Writing in the Social Sciences

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-QBf] 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 can 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.

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 your roommate bought a paper off the internet and turned it on with no consequences or if you'll lose your scholarship if you don't an A in a class--if you deliberately take credit for someone else's work, you're effectively stealing and could lose much more than your scholarship. You will lose your dignity. (Cue Whitney Houston song "The Greatest Love of All [https://youtu.be/IYzVDI7E72w].) 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://edtechbooks.org/-sun

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 Stuff

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.

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 [https://brand.byu.edu/].

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.

APA Format

In the social sciences, most writers follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th Edition (2019), often called the APA Manual for short. The 6th edition was used for nine years, but in 2019, a new 7th edition just came out. 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 also for clarity, avoiding bias, and even for where to put the page number on the page.

If you ever have a question about how to cite something, look it up in the APA Manual. 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 APA Formatting [https://edtechbooks.org/-sfB] 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. 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 APA Formatting [https://edtechbooks.org/-sfB] pages and the APA Manual 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 the APA guidelines for in-text citations. You also need to make it clear where your writing and ideas stop and your source's start. I 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 the APA 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**

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
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://edtechbooks.org/-ANX

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 much 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 9 for Literature Reviews or Chapter 10 for Proposals), and you can continue your research journey.

End-of-Chapter Survey

Please rate your general experience reading this chapter. (Choose one.)

a. Not Awesome
b. Somewhat Not Awesome
c. Neutral
d. Somewhat Awesome
e. Awesome

Did this chapter support your learning?

a. Did Not Support Learning
b. Somewhat Did Not Support Learning
c. Neutral
d. Somewhat Supported Learning
e. Supported Learning

What did you like best about this chapter?
How can we improve this chapter?

Suggested Citation

10

What is a Literature Review?

Cristie Cowles Charles

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you'll

- learn how to define Literature Reviews
- understand the difference between a literature review and a traditional argumentative research paper
- learn how literature reviews are used in the Social Sciences
- 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.
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 movies is the 1989 classic Back to the Future Part 2 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-handed scooter that occasionally catches on fire and burns people's houses down. I'm not satisfied.
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
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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-omHo] 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.
Researchers today don't just start projects out of the blue--they do their homework first by finding out what others have already researched. So if you want to make a hoverboard, you don't just go to Home Depot and buy random parts--you research what others have done and check out the conversation 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)
Before good researchers set up any surveys or experiments, or even write a proposal for funding, they'll 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 where answers have yet to be found. And then they focus their own research 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 rad because that's where the adventure begins. The rest of this chapter will focus on the best tools and strategies to use when writing a literature review, so grab the closest thing you have to a hoverboard, and let's go.
10.2 How is a Literature Review different than a typical Research Paper?

*Suggestion: Just for fun, as you read this next section, set the mood by playing one of these old songs called "Old Friends." You'll see how it's relevant in a minute.

1. Simon & Garfunkel "Old Friends" [https://youtu.be/BPTOY8FrvNw] -- old-school classic

2. Ben Rector "Old Friends" [https://youtu.be/4SU8qxrhs1g] -- w/ high school band Euromart, in the garage of the house he grew up in

3. Willie Nelson, Roger Miller, Ray Price "Old Friends" [https://youtu.be/nCM8sI1RRD1] -- 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 changes 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Research Paper</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis-driven</td>
<td>Source-driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 Conduct background research on a Research Question</td>
<td>Conduct background research on a Research Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2 Choose an argument/thesis</td>
<td>Find, evaluate, &amp; annotate sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3 Find sources for evidence to match your argument</td>
<td>Look for patterns in the sources, find gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4 Look for counterarguments and evidence to refute them</td>
<td>Develop a thesis based on where researchers agree &amp; disagree in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5 Outline the points of your argument</td>
<td>Write an outline based on the patterns and gaps you found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6 Write paragraphs that support your thesis with evidence/quotes</td>
<td>Write paragraphs that support your thesis by synthesizing sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7 Revise</td>
<td>Revise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Literature Reviews: Catching up with Old Friends**

Here's 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](https://youtu.be/2IUZWX4OGI)). What do you do when you meet an old friend? You ask,

"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 yet. Those themes become the categories you'll talk about in your literature review so your audience will know exactly how far researchers have come.

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 plans? What do they want to do with their life? Do you agree or disagree with them? This is like the argumentative thesis statement in a research paper about what changes should happen in the future or how we should look at a problem differently.
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 literature review as opposed to a traditional research paper. We learned in Chapter 8 Citing 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 8, 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 muscles--their core, if you will.
Summary and synthesis are like your core muscle exercises—essential skills that will make all writing easier.

Because of findings like this, many instructors are now assigning literature review papers rather than traditional research papers in order to isolate those core research muscles that need exercise 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 describe 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.
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 Social Sciences

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 Social Sciences 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 10: Proposals [https://edtechbooks.org/-kCwa].
IMRAD Articles

IMRAD 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. 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!
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. They lay bare a problem or gap in current research, and then the author(s) "swoop in" to introduce 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 Methods (M in IMRAD) including statistical analyses. Then they publish their Results (R in IMRAD). Finally, the author(s) embark on a Discussion (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 Science and Social Science, 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.
Writing in the Social Sciences

Popular Literature Reviews

Lest you think nerdy academics are the only ones who rely on literature reviews, recall the last time you went on Wikipedia [https://www.wikipedia.org/]. If you think about it, Wikipedia is really just a giant Literature Review on thousands 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, look up "Wikipedia" on Wikipedia [https://edtechbooks.org/-pJlc] 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 field, especially the Social Sciences. So, if you're ready to work your core research muscles, let's talk about the first steps.
End-of-Chapter Survey

Please rate your general experience reading this chapter. (Choose one.)

a. Not Awesome  
b. Somewhat Not Awesome  
c. Neutral  
d. Somewhat Awesome  
e. Awesome

Did this chapter support your learning?

a. Did Not Support Learning  
b. Somewhat Did Not Support Learning  
c. Neutral  
d. Somewhat Supported Learning  
e. Supported Learning

What did you like best about this chapter?  
How can we improve this chapter?

Suggested Citation

How to Write a Literature Review

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 or outline of your literature review
- drafting your literature review
- 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.
Step One: Take Notes Like a Boss

Good notes will make your life much easier! (Public Domain) 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. 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 7: Finding and Evaluating Sources : you've created a research question, gathered many relevant and reliable sources, annotated your sources, taken good notes, and hopefully have even written an Annotated Bibliography.
The next step is to go Back to the Future and map out the past, present, and future:

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.

Recall from Chapter 1: Writing in the Social Sciences that any publication is written as part of an ongoing conversation. So it helps to see all the sources you've found as contributions to the larger conversation. 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
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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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-Nrk]

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 https://edtechbooks.org/-LOZe

Step 1: Color-Code Your Notes
Color-Code Your Notes Public Domain 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, all is not lost. Just watch this video and follow the steps. Remember, you can use paper cards or electronic note-taking software like [Trello](https://trello.com).
Step 2: Look for Patterns
As opposed to just writing general summaries like you did for an Annotated Bibliography, you're going to take your note-taking to the next level. Now as you read through your notes and sources, you'll be looking for patterns and themes that emerge. If you're not writing your literature review as part of a bigger empirical research project (those are the kind that end up as the Introduction to an article in IMRAD format), then you don't need to look for all the items listed in the video--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.
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 BlÄťjan 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.
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 is no longer counts as a gap in knowledge. So if you only report on what is commonly agreed upon, you're writing a research report rather than a literature review. Students in fields like Public Health where reports are common need to pay extra attention to avoiding this tendency. When you find information that most researchers agree on, that information becomes background information for your literature review. While it can be good to point out what's been established in a literature review, the point is to find the gaps in research where questions haven't been answered. So look for areas of controversy—those are especially valuable in a literature review because it means we don't have definitive answers and, therefore, there are gaps.

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 revision.
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 example, that researchers have started to look at specific geographic areas and if there are differences in those populations but they haven't 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.

**What are each study's limitations and strengths?**

When I have a student who's struggling with how to compare sources, I often tell them to go through each source simply write out what the strengths and limitations are of that source. It's a great way to start because it gets your 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.

**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. We need to analyze the literature that’s out there in order to find things that have been overlooked--and then we or someone else in the field can fill in that missing knowledge. In terms of hoverboards, once we know what's been tried before and where the field is, we can know what the next step is and remain on that cutting edge.

**Make a Map**
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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-pGO] earlier. As with brainstorming, it often helps to physically draw the connections because it encourages your creativity and your ability to make connections. Here's an example of geography student Carly Ringer'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.

Step 4: Assess Groupings

You can also look through the way you've grouped your notes and see where your sources are landing. Make sure you have multiple sources under each umbrella so you will be able to synthesize once you get to the drafting stage.
Step 5: Write

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 research report—you will show that you understand the areas of inquiry in your field and how researchers are approaching your topic.
Step 6: Check Out an Example

Now check out this example of how these steps to synthesis can work.
Now that you've started organizing your notes into themes, patterns, and idea umbrellas, you're ready to start thinking about the structure of your paper. So we'll take a break from working with notes and think through the structure of a literature review.

**Step Two: 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 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 are 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 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 that researchers in your field are congregating in certain arenas--or in other words, areas of inquiry. Your job is to point out where those areas are. Go back to your notes from the Synthesis activity 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 3-4 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 are also in a position to explain where you think future research should go. So your thesis statement--or main point--is a summary of these things. You'll put this statement at the end of your Introduction.

In the body of your paper you'll go into detail about each of your points and will show evidence of these areas of inquiry by synthesizing your sources. Then at the end of your literature review, you'll spend time discussing future areas for research. But for now, start by creating a thesis statement.

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 points 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, indicating that there are gaps in the research that will be addressed, and setting a direction for where he'll go.

Write a Thesis Statement

Now it's your turn to try creating a thesis statement to go at the end of your Introduction. List the 3-4 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.

Outlining
Once you have a basic 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 that can be seen as helpful for setting up your paper: the formal outline and the organic outline. Or the structured and unstructured. Dr. Matt Baker (2019), a BYU Linguistics professor, has studied the way students outline 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.
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.
   A.
      i.
      ii.
   B.
II.
   A.
   B.
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 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.

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. 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 organize them as you go.

“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.”


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.

Here is an example of a Literature Review outline for one of my student's papers:

**Home-Based Therapy for Children with Autism**

I. Introduction
   A. Autism Spectrum Disorder
1. Definition
2. Occurrence
B. Autistic children
1. Current research/study methods
2. Current treatments
   a. In-home or in-school?
II. How the environment affects autistic children
A. Sensory enrichment therapy
   1. Definition
   2. Useful for autistic children?
B. How the studies were administered
   1. Positive/negative results
   2. Limitations
   3. Parent-involvement in therapy
III. Home-Based Therapy
A. PLAY Project Home Consultation program
   1. Purpose
   2. Results
B. Quantitative measurement
   1. Caregivers biased?
C. Qualitative measurement
   1. Specific autism symptoms tests used
   2. Results of home-based therapies
IV. Effect of home-based therapy on family
A. Positive
   1. Easier to do things in familiar environments
B. Negative
   1. Strain on parental relationships
   2. Strain on sibling relationships
V. Future Research
A. Long-term goals
   1. Have a long-term follow-up to current home-based therapies
   2. Positive/negative results of following-up long-term (use specific study)
B. More test subjects
   1. Family-centered approach only done on 1 family
   2. Not enough subjects = can’t be statistically significant
VI. Conclusion
A. Children with autism
   1. Effect of the environment
   2. Effect of the home
B. Home-Based therapy
   1. Effect on family
   2. 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 to approach a project--open to feedback.

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**Create an Outline**

Now try 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 start organize those ideas into a structure.

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**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

- suggests the organization of the rest of the paper

Now check out this great explanation How to Write an Introduction to a Literature Review
Introduction

What is at least one idea from the FHSS Handout "How to Write an Introduction" that you plan to incorporate into your own Introduction?

Body

The body of your paper is where you can develop your points and use your newfound synthesis skills. This is where all the paragraphs will go that you've set up with your note-taking and grouping.

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. 10)

- 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.

- In referring to sources, you should mostly summarize, sometimes paraphrase, 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.
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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 to also comment 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.

Discussion/Conclusion

The section will either be called Discussion or Conclusion (or possibly not have a heading) depending on your teacher’s preferences. 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 in other documentation styles) showing all the sources you referred to in your paper. Your references page must be in alphabetical order and formatted according to APA Format (for more details, see Chapter 8: Citing 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 the *APA Manual* (2019).

**Title Page**

Your title is your readers' first entry into your paper. Your title should include as much information as possible while remaining appropriately short and sweet. 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.

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 [By Weidmaier](https://edtechbooks.org/-AzUs), CC-BY NC

The Reverse Mullet: Party in the front, Business in back

A reverse mullet 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)
- Optional: the Name of Your Class (e.g., English 315)

Your title and these additions should go in the top half of the page. Your teacher can tell you any other information they require like a page number. If you're using APA Format, then you'll need a page number in the upper right corner as well as a Running Head with a shortened version of your title that can "run" at the top of all your pages. See Chapter 8: Citing Sources [https://edtechbooks.org/-iny] for more information about how to do that.

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 we'll cover writing Abstracts in Section 9.10 Write an Abstract [https://edtechbooks.org/-dCx].

Appendix

If you have tables or figures that are too big to be added into 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.
Tables and Figures

One more element that could be helpful to your paper is to include tables and/or figures. Tables should be familiar to you. Figures are 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 5: Design [https://edtechbooks.org/-wTBh] for the details of how to create, use, or format tables and figures. Just remember to check APA Format; for example, in APA, 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 section we'll talk about how to start drafting your paper.

Step Three: 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 you can 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 you can use to comment on the studies you're summarizing and synthesizing

- examples of literature review synthesis
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 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 transitions and allow you to focus simple 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. Feel free to read the Introductions from student example papers (to be added later) to help you get started.

**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.

Get Feedback!

Seek feedback! Photo by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

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! We're lucky at BYU that we even have our very own Social Science-specific Writing Center: the FHSS Writing Lab [https://edtechbooks.org/-EbN]. They know Literature Reviews well and can help you with any stage of the writing process from selecting a topic to citing sources to synthesis. If you have more general writing questions (or if you need an appointment after 5pm), you can
also go to the main BYU Research & Writing Center [http://writingcenter.byu.edu/].

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--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?

**Synthesize**

Now, back to writing. Remember the synthesis activity with the videos [https://edtechbooks.org/-tmG] you did earlier in this 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 you're synthesizing. As you write your paragraphs, you might wonder how to connect your ideas and do that Claim-Evidence-Commentary thing I talked about before. The answer is to the "commentary" part of that is in your language.

**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. Here's a great two-minute video to remind yourself.
As University of Maryland's Clancy Clawson says in the video, 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.

Here’s an awesome list of transition words (below) that are grouped by category from the famous Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab—scroll down to see the list). 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.

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 interpret why a source is important, highlight its significance, or connect it with other sources. This is your chance to point out the answers to the four questions I had you look 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.
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- 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 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 used transition words and phrases to glue his points together so it didn't come out of the blue when he brought up a new study. Also notice how Chris talked about more than one
study in this paragraph, demonstrating his ability to synthesize and not just summarize. But without the metacommentary, it would be much harder to see the connections between the studies and how they fit into the bigger picture.

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. 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 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 agree about something, then you can use the present tense.

Things get a little trickier when you talk about what's been done in general by researchers in the field. 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conducted a study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
<td>Researchers agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present perfect</td>
<td></td>
<td>To have + past participle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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A Single Study or Event

McFly (1989) investigated the usefulness of hoverboards in a chase.

Generally Accepted Knowledge of the Field

One of the most promising areas of hoverboard technology is the use of electromagnets (Allain, 2015).

An Area of Inquiry

The usefulness of skateboards in a chase has been widely researched (McFly, 1985; McFly, 1989; McFly, 1990).

Step Four: Write an Abstract


Not that kind of abstract! As great as abstract art is, what you need now is the abstract of your paper. 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 it in you will 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, so you want the most important information there. Then just like you did in your 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 so 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 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 the APA Manual says an abstract should 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.
Now if you would like more details, you can read this explanation.

The Real Last Step: Revise (and Revise and Revise)
The best writers revise (and revise and revise). Think back to Chapter 3: Writing Processes [https://edtechbooks.org/-KIv] 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? The first answers are peer review, teacher conferences, writing center appointments, and other outside feedback. 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 audience-oriented revision and is extremely valuable. Your teacher will help you do these kinds of revision in class.

The second answer is to take care of Global Issues before you focus on Local Issues. 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, 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 would 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 first! Photo by Andrew Umansky on Unsplash

What does all this have to do with revision? You 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 and only then should you focus on the details. Put another way, whole-paper and paragraph-level revisions should come before sentence-level and word-level changes.

Fantastic BYU Family Science professor Julie Haupt offers the following suggestions for doing four purposeful revisions--two global and two local.

**GLOBAL REVISION--The Forest**
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., “This review 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? Find more about transitions here.

LOCAL REVISION--The Tree

Level 3 (Local): APA Formatting Review

Purpose: The APA Formatting Review is designed to make sure all APA 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? (Use APA Manual if you have questions.)

Examine the Reference List Closely. Are all references in the reference list ordered alphabetically? Is the reference list double spaced entirely (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 and ordered alphabetically by first author’s last name? If included in parentheses, do studies with multiple authors use ampersands, rather than the word and before listing the last author?

Use “et al.” Correctly. If a study has three to five authors, does the first in-text citation for the research list all the authors, along with the year of publication? Do these same studies at subsequent mentions include only the first author’s last name + et al. + publication year? Do any in-text citations of six or more authors include only the first author’s last name last name + et al. + publication year?

**Level 4 (Local): Finishing Review**

Purpose: The Finishing Review is an opportunity to look closely at sentence construction, language hedging/genuine regard, and grammar/punctuation.

Review Phrasing with a Read-Aloud Session. 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, use 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.
*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!
HOW TO WRITE A LITERATURE REVIEW WITHOUT MELTING DOWN

Suggested Citation

Learning Outcomes

- Identify the proposal as a distinct genre of writing in Social Science disciplines, and elsewhere.
- Recognize the potential benefits of the genre in current field of study and in future careers and lives.
- 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 prospectus.
- Feel empowered to persuasively and professionally leverage the proposal genre to achieve goals in the Social Sciences and in their life.

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.

My husband and me, about an hour after I accepted his 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 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?

### Proposals in the Social Sciences

As a social scientist, 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. Social science is social. Use proposals to bring the social, the right people and resources, to your science. There are many types of proposals, and the categories blend and blur, but here are two broad types of proposals you might encounter in the social sciences: 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 the social sciences, 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 [http://www.grants.gov/] for lists of federal funding grants.

#### Undergraduate Research Grants

Budding student social scientists 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
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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-mxT]. 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 [http://jur.byu.edu/], 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. Social scientists write this type of proposal when dealing with written research projects or books.
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.
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 on page length expectations, required sections, and level of detail demanded. 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?

a. Review examples of past successful proposals for the specific opportunity.
b. Talk with decision-makers who will review the proposals to discover their expectations for the document.
c. Find and mimic any provided templates for the specific proposal opportunity.
d. Ask those who have submitted proposals in the past for advice.
e. Read and re-read the posted "call for proposals" information to understand decision-maker priorities.
f. All of the above.
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.

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.

Explain how you recognized a question begging for an answer-- a problem itching for a solution. Consider personal reasons that might be driving your proposal. Read through sample proposals in similar circumstances to see if articulating your personal motives is appropriate. In some proposals it certainly is; in some, it’s certainly not.

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. Incorporate ideas and context from other researchers or thinkers on the issue. Suggest how your project is distinct from others, but how it fits in the context. If you’ve written a review of literature around a certain question or topic (which you can read more about in the Literature Review chapter of this book [link to that chapter]), incorporate the conclusions from your literature review here.

Some proposals might ask you to include a lengthy literature review as part of your submission to demonstrate a very thorough understanding of context. This might be included earlier or later in the proposal document. As with each of these sections, follow the specific guidelines for each unique proposal opportunity. Include a reference page in the appropriate citation style as necessary.
Through seeking to understand the relationship between punk music and activism in Belfast, Ireland, one proposal writer sought to illuminate how music generates and motivates activism, which is relevant beyond Ireland.

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 they now agree 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 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, preliminary bibliography, note-taking, first draft of paper, gather feedback, and write 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-grittys 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 seems 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. [Link to prior chapter on Lit Reviews]

Outlining your supporting documents in the proposal, wherever it 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.

a. True—exactness matters with proposals and you should always seek to follow the above sections exactly.

b. 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.

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 according to 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 by 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.

Likewise, if we think about the proposals we write as vibrant documents written to real
people who make decisions (not to face-less bureaucratic organizations), we’ll be more likely to make profitable connections with audiences who have 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.

### End-of-Chapter Survey

Please rate your general experience reading this chapter. (Choose one.)

- a. Not Awesome
- b. Somewhat Not Awesome
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat Awesome
- e. Awesome

Did this chapter support your learning?

- a. Did Not Support Learning
- b. Somewhat Did Not Support Learning
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat Supported Learning
- e. Supported Learning

What did you like best about this chapter?
How can we improve this chapter?

### Suggested Citation

Unit 3: General Audiences
Learning Outcomes

- Understand the difference between writing for a general audience versus an academic audience.
- Recognize the benefits of learning how to write for a general audience.
- Design or present a message so that it is successfully understood by a general audience.
- Use various methods of invention, organization, and style to adapt written and oral forms of communication to specific rhetorical situations.

What the Heck Are General Audiences?

This might come as a surprise, but when you graduate, you'll not only be expected to write in the specialized language of your field, but you'll also be expected to write for audiences outside of your field, in other words General Audience [https://edtechbooks.org/-pwry] or public audiences. 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!

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.

If you need more convincing that improving your communication skills could improve your life—especially your love life,—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://edtechbooks.org/-TbA)

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
Writing in the Social Sciences

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. 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 can talk to each other but no one else can understand them—and 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 like metaphors, stories, and even 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.

**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? Do they get their information from 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 issue. Let's practice.

**Audience Analysis**
Nike Audience Analysis

For this assignment, let's look at Nike. Go to nike.com [https://www.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 here.

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 audience?
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. Now let's talk about the characteristics most general audiences share.
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 audience writing 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" [https://edtechbooks.org/-VepY] (click on the link or scroll down below).

Now read this newspaper article [https://edtechbooks.org/-ZAM] that introduces this research to a general audience (scroll down). 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 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 author himself. This made it feel like they were 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 these two types of writing: Academic Audience Writing vs General Audiences Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Audience Writing</th>
<th>vs</th>
<th>General Audience Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long paragraphs</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>Short paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious academic tone</td>
<td>vs</td>
<td>Engaging, friendly tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 is generally a good rule to follow. Which brings me to this textbook.

**Under the Hood**

Photo by [Hosea Georgeson](https://edtechbooks.org/-aKhE) on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/)
When we decided to write this textbook, we had a dilemma: should we model academic writing by using a formal, serious, and academic tone? Or should we use a less formal, conversational tone that would appeal more to a general audience?

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, and what kind of strategies we should use in our approach. We looked at previous textbooks, talked to our students, talked to other instructors, and even read a book explaining research people have done about your generation: *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us* [https://edtechbooks.org/-vqjz]. How does it make you feel to know that people are studying you and talking about you? I hope it makes you feel good. Our audience analysis 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're having a conversation, as if you're sitting right there. That meant that we chose to keep the paragraphs short, include personal stories, add images and videos, incorporate lots of headings, and perhaps most importantly of all, make the textbook free of cost. We did all this for you! We hope you'll let us know in the surveys at the end of the chapters if we hit our mark. If we didn't, please tell us how we can improve! The beauty of an online textbook like this is that we are continually revising and improving 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.

### 13.3 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-Pwam]--why are you communicating? Generally, most public communication falls into three categories:

1. informative
2. persuasive
3. a mix of the two

Either you're trying to

1. explain something--like reporting on the latest research coming out of computational linguistics
2. or you're trying to argue for something--like getting your city to install a stoplight at a dangerous intersection
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3. or you're mixing 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 this?

**Informational Writing**

If your goal is to inform, your focus will be on clarity. Keep the language simple, think through how much background information you need to give your audience, and 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.

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.

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. Click here to watch. 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. Instagram and Pinterest have really encouraged this practice. So one day, we found this message on our doorstep.
Even though the words of Abby's message themselves weren't clear, we immediately understood the message because we understood the genre (when items are left on doorsteps, it's most likely a dance invitation) 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. This is why understanding genre and context can really help you get your own message across.

The rest of this Unit is 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.

**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 we're writing on behalf of a company or group we have the added responsibility of representing them as well. If we can consciously keep these things (purpose, audience, genre, and context) in mind...
every time we send out an email or text or post or reply on Slack, we will become much more adept at using the rhetorical situation for our benefit. Try to use the mindful writing techniques [https://edtechbooks.org/-yfr] 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.

**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 with brief information about how to insert endnotes [https://edtechbooks.org/-ETR] 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).

**Choose an Example**

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.

**Undergraduate 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?
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With practice, you'll learn how to easily transition between writing for an academic audience versus a general audience. See the last three chapters of this textbook for examples of how to write in particular genres:

Chapter 14: Professional Portfolio
- Resume
- Cover Letter
- Interview
- Graduate School Application Letter
- CV (Curriculum Vitae)

Chapter 15: Public Texts
- Memos and Email
- Social Media
- Online Writing
- Infographics and Data Visualization
- Opinion Editorials

Chapter 16: Presentations
- Oral Presentations
- Poster Presentations

Suggested Citation

Learning Outcomes

- In this chapter, you will learn how to write a killer resume, cover letter, and statement of intent. We will focus on how rhetoric will help us land the job or a spot in graduate school.

Professional Audience Analysis

The rhetorical situation surrounds everything--it even surrounds your pursuit to get a job or spot in grad school. Your job is to assess the situation before you even start writing your application materials. For this chapter, we will look at the genre of various application materials and how our character will be presented to our audience. We will make sure our purpose is clear and the message is compelling. But, primarily, we’ll be focusing on audience. [Insert rhetorical triangle graphic] After all, how can you expect to land a job if you don’t know the group or company or department? How can we convince our boss to give us perks if we don't know what the boss values?

Before we begin writing any application document we need to know to whom we are
writing. Hopefully at this point you have narrowed your list of potential employers or grad schools. If you haven’t yet–jot down a pro and con list. Compare and contrast their requirements and preferences. Dig in to their website. See if their values align with yours. See if you like the work they are doing. Once you have decided on a winner, you should perform an in-depth analysis of the company. 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. To connect to the needs and interests of your audience, what particular appeals should you include in your application materials?

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 that as it will come in handy later. We need to make sure that we are using the rhetorical skills we gained in our FYW course to persuade our audience that we are the one they should hire or accept into their program. Now, let’s look at the resume.

**Rules of the Resume**

Even with LinkedIn, Facebook, and on-line 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 10 seconds to seal the deal.

**Conventions of the Genre**

**One Page**

The first rule of the resume is that it must be only 1 page long. No more, no less. 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. [Insert graphic of golden triangle]. 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. Thus, your reader should be able to quickly “raid” your resume to find those golden nuggets. 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 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 chronological order. Your audience is interested in the really cool stuff that you are doing now, not what you did when you were 14.

**LDS Mission**

Many students ask if they should include their mission experience and the very clear answer is "it depends." Like everything else in your resume, your mission 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](https://edtechbooks.org/-BbBu) 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 not only a good fit 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 are your favorite.
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. [https://edtechbooks.org/-Top]

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, the motivation behind the task, and shows 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. copy and paste one revised section here.

Best=Longer?!?!?

Right now you might be thinking “how can I create the ‘best’ bullet points and stay within the 1 page limit?” The best way to do so is to head back to your Audience Analysis. Make sure that each section is there for a purpose, links to your narrative, and helps to tell your story. 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.

- Adapt to audience
- Cut out irrelevant bullet points
- Highlight most relevant bullet points
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 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.

The Interview

[Insert "Most Common Non-verbal Interview Mistakes" pg 16 OR have graphic designer make one in our colors]

Prepare

PAR stands for PROBLEM, ACTION, RESULT. Interviewers like to ask behavioral questions to figure out how you react to challenges. Be prepared to convince them of your skills by using keywords from the job description to prepare personal stories that show problems you faced, the actions you took, and what the results were. Not only will this exercise help with your interview, but it will help with the crafting of 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 like the one below, with column heading for key words, problem, action, and result. [Insert PAR table—pretty one made by graphic designer? Like they have in MCom text with our color scheme (page 8)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY WORDS</th>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>The team rallied behind my schedule, and we kept in close contact to complete the project on time. The professor was very pleased with our work and asked to use our project as a model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Our client delivered a 40-page document of required changes that made our team feel overwhelmed and discouraged.</td>
<td>I stayed late and created a spreadsheet showing which person could best make the changes requested and how we could accomplish them quickly.</td>
<td>My boss was surprised and pleased the next morning. He agreed with all my assignment suggestions and put me in charge of the team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-ULmw]. 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 her discover that you're the perfect candidate; that will make her 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 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. 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 pointed on how to dress, read this article [https://edtechbooks.org/-bZTd] 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.

Cover Letters
The cover letter is a weird thing. The very name implies that it comes first in the application process. However, it only comes into play after your resume has made the cut. And, let’s be honest, many jobs don’t even ask for a cover letter anymore. 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.

**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 1 page long.

- **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”)

- 1st 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?

1st Paragraph Activity

Answer the above questions in paragraph form

- 2nd and 3rd 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. Don’t focus on why the company is good for you but 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 attempt to use them for your advantage. Use this space to show your character--what did you learn from the experience that made your grades fall a bit short?

2nd and 3rd 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, as explained earlier.

- Last paragraph: Ask for an interview or say how you are looking forward to connecting with them soon. Thank them for their time. Be kind and considerate.
- Closing and signature: If the company you are applying to is super old school and they want your application materials in hard copy, don’t forget to sign it.

Read through these two cover letters [https://edtechbooks.org/-HZI]. Notice the difference between the first and second. After doing so, do two things.
Cover Letter Comparison

First, look at their thesis statement. They focus on 3 things (code quickly, collaborate with anyone, and work like a Trojan) that inform the rest of their letter (the three body paragraphs). And then they wrap it up very nicely at the end (I’m an engineer who can blaze through problems, create an effective team, and work really hard). See if you have a thesis statement the guides the reader through your cover letter. Revise your letter so that it has a strong thesis statement, paragraphs that link to the thesis, and a nice concluding statement.

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 your 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 man 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. Copy and paste the before and after here.

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 legit online sources to find appropriate examples.

Image by Frits de Jong from Pixabay

Graduate School Applications

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 their 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, accessible, and highlight the most important items (from the school’s perspective). Your CV should generally be single spaced, 10-12 pt font.
Writing in the Social Sciences

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.

Statement of Intent

Although sometimes daunting to write, a personal statement gives you the space to tell your specific audience why you should be admitted. It also gives you the chance to stand out from the rest of the applicants. 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.”

Statement of Intent 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
- If no page requirement—stick to 2 pages max, singed-spaced.
- 12 point in a conservative font like Verdana, Courier, or Times New Roman

Your essay must emotionally engage the reader and directly link to your narrative. 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.
Writing in the Social Sciences

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 rhetor and the reader. We wait our work to be emotionally appealing.

1. Begin with personal details outlining the “WHY”: the why of your academic and career plans
   - 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
   - Coursework most exciting to you
   - Awards you’ve received
   - Aspects of the field that inspire you
   - Membership in clubs
   - Conferences you’ve presented at
   - Papers published

3. Goals for the Future
   - Everything you’ve written so far is prep work for this section
   - You should explain why attending THEIR university matters to the achievement of your goals
   - “I want to attend X University because I want to study women’s health”
   - VS
   - “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 3rd 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
Writing in the Social Sciences

- Once again, express interest in THEIR program
- Thank them for their consideration

A quick note about educational or work foibles from Vana C. Koutsomitis [https://vanakoutsomitis.com/](https://vanakoutsomitis.com/) (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 4th floor. I’m talking about your professors. Take advantage of them. 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. Send your professor an email and ask to visit with them during office hours. Like we already discussed with the professional interview, come prepared with questions. 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.

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

Before you start asking for people to write you a letter of recommendation, you need to give serious thought to whom you should ask (a mentor is a great person to ask!). Generally speaking, the grad program will ask for multiple letters of recommendation. That means that you have to opportunity to show difference aspects of your personality and work ethic. Your professor and your boss will have different experiences with you and will be able to highlight various qualities you possess. When you settle on someone to ask them if they can write a strong recommendation—you want to know now if they have any hesitation and why. Give them several weeks notice. Provide the due dates and all of your application materials (resume or CV and personal statement). Send them a list of your
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attributes/accomplishments/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. Bring a small token of appreciation (chocolate, office plant, etc.). They are taking time out of their busy schedule to provide a free service for you.

**Personal Branding**

**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 is 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 our resume and cover letter to match, you want to it match across Facebook and Instagram and Twitter. Revisit the narrative you created in chapter 6 and create a 2 to 3 sentence-long description of yourself. You can use this for your "elevator pitch" in interviews or your tagline on social media.

**Your Personal Brand**

Review what Washington & Lee University has said about personal branding. Go through your Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter and make necessary changes. (See below if you need a refresher) Write a quick paragraph detailing some of the changes you made.
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 via Washington & Lee University [https://edtechbooks.org/-fsk]

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. 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.

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 through job of the Audience Analysis found in Chapter 6, 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 use one of these people to interview for the Interview Memo activity.

ResearchGate

Check out this Science article [https://edtechbooks.org/-Uik] about the role ResearchGate can play in your online presence. It is a bit old (2014), but it gives great information about
how to connect to others in academia and filter out information and research you don't want.

“I was updating my CV and LinkedIn page and looking for a way to increase the visibility of my research and citations of my publications,” says Amanda O’Donnell [https://edtechbooks.org/-vnn], a molecular biologist at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. "It was really easy to join and create my online profile. ResearchGate found all my publications and identified my co-authors and peers so I could follow them."

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https://edtechbooks.org/-ypp

https://edtechbooks.org/-QDb

https://edtechbooks.org/-eGQ

Suggested Citation

### Learning Outcomes

- Employ informed and flexible processes for writing and speaking, including: creating and/or finding ideas about which to write; collecting evidence and data; planning and drafting; revising; editing; and designing or presenting a message so that it is successfully understood by a specified audience.
- Write coherent and unified texts, including effective introductions, clear thesis statements, supporting details, transitions, and strong conclusions.
- Use various methods of invention, organization, and style to adapt written and oral forms of communication to specific rhetorical situations.
- Write in a correct, clear, and graceful prose style.
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.

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 was written out in a Word doc. Follow these things to create a memo (you can also use a template from Word or Google to begin with):

“Memorandum” as the title (flushed 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 (flushed 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.

The following discussion is a long assignment. An assignment that will help you create goals in 315 to help you acquire the skills for your dream job.

**Interview Memo**

You will interview a professional working in the field (hopefully the job) that you want to work in. Your goal is two-fold: (1) to learn about the types and amounts of communication the job requires, and (2) to network with a potential mentor. You should ask questions about collaboration, communication requirements, communication skills, etc. After the interview, you will write up a memo where in you will give a summary and comment on what you will do in English 315 to prepare for such work. In particular, write about how the assignments in this class will or will not apply to your profession.

**Email**

An email is a bit more informal than a memo, but we still need to adhere to its conventions.
Be clear, correct, concise, and to-the-point. Just like the memo, we should get to the meat of the email quickly. But an email allows for a bit of “shooting the breeze.”

Be polite and considerate and always be a bit more formal if you are writing to your superior. 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. If they live in academia-land, stick with Professor or Dr. If they live in the real world, use Mr. for men and always call a woman Ms. Even after you learn her marital status, you should find out if she prefers Ms. or Mrs. Never call a woman Miss.

Don’t do the following things:

- 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 you can ask a classmate or coworker)
- Don’t use emoticons or emojis and don’t overuse exclamation points
- Don’t try to deal with a problem in an email that would be better served by an office visit
- Don’t be overly informal (e.g., avoid slang or spellings like thnx)
- Don’t ask, “Did I miss anything important when I didn’t come to the meeting or class yesterday?”

With all of these things, Think: what does this question or situation imply to your superior?

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, but let them drop the salutations before you do. Let your boss 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. We’d rather 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? Thnx!!! â˜º Hildegard <3 Sent at 11:59pm
What's wrong with this email #2?

Hey Teacher. To be honest I hate these kinds of assignments. They are hard for my conscience because I don’t know exactly how much I’ve done but I try to assess it as honestly as I can. I’ll give myself a 1.5 out of 2 because I did all of the responses you had us do, and I wrote 15 minutes a day about 3-4 times a week. Have an awesome Sunday, here’s a scripture I like that I wanted to share. Hey George! I hope you’re having a fantastic sunny Sunday! I wanted to share a scripture that I love and that took on a lot of meaning on my mission. Proverbs 3:13-14 13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. 14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.” Have a great sabbath.

A few additional notes on email

- Be careful when using the Reply All option [https://edtechbooks.org/-Wqo]. ‘Nuf said about that.
- 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.
- And watch being snaky, rude, or curt. It might be funny and sarcastic, but your audience may not read it that way.
- And think twice before using email signatures [https://edtechbooks.org/-TCIL].

Social Media

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. Now, you might be 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? 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 [https://www.nike.com/]
Writing in the Social Sciences

Instagram [https://edtechbooks.org/-fhQI]
Genre Analysis 1

What are the differences between the three genres? 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-UUm] 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 5.2 [https://edtechbooks.org/-wTBh].

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.
- 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
Online Writing

It is highly likely that you will be asked to write a blog post or online article for the future company you work for. Often, these pieces are 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 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 asking for a loan, you also must know the conventions of the place where your writing will be read. The writer’s tone must be balanced and consistent, and his or her voice unique--humorous or cynical, angry or sorrowful, objective or contemplative, but definitely the voice of the writer. If you are 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 are writing, follow these steps. First, state the issue at hand. Good pieces evolve from current issues concerning and intrigue 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.

**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 quick. 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](https://edtechbooks.org/-mHP) 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." It “must” evoke an emotion or an element of curiosity. Readers make decisions on whether or not to read an article by how they respond to the headline and the first sentence. The first line is the display-window for all the goodies you have inside. Remember, you should waste no time in getting to your point.

**Use active and conversational voice**--Emphasize active verbs. Forget 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 three 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! In general, no more than two or three sentences make up a typical paragraph. 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 are 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. Don't feel you need to keep your paragraphs wholly unified and long.

**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.

Infographics and Data Visualization

In this section, we will be looking at and creating different types of argument using more than words. We call this a multi-modal argument. You will discover how image, video, color, font 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.

Creating Infographics
Type caption for image (optional)

What is an infographic?: 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 even has a collection of infographics in their Newsroom [https://edtechbooks.org/-qvuh] which communicate complex or controversial topics in an easy to read format.

Infographic Assignment

You will create an infographic document about your semester topic. Use images, graphs, tables, charts and hyperlinks. Post an early draft here.
ADJUSTING TO COLLEGE CAN BE TRICKY

Approximately 50% of respondents said that if given the choice, they would still choose to enroll at their current college, while 34% were undecided. The items below provide us with a look into how first-year students acclimate to their new school.

FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS ARE WORRIED ABOUT SAFETY ON CAMPUS

- 24% Felt unsafe on campus
- 25% Believe sexual violence is prevalent on campus
- 23% Are not aware of their college’s harassment/assault reporting policy

WHILE COLLEGES TOOK STEPS TO EASE STUDENTS’ TRANSITION TO COLLEGE,

- 30% Participated in a common book or summer reading program
- 51% Took a course or first-year seminar designed to help students adjust to college life
- 47% Found it difficult to manage their time effectively
- 36% Had difficulty developing effective study skills

MANY STUDENTS STILL HAD DIFFICULTY ADJUSTING.

- 54% Were satisfied with first-year programs
- 63% Were satisfied with their orientation
- 47% Frequently felt overwhelmed by all they had to do
- 57% Felt isolated from campus life
- 71% Felt lonely or homesick

WHILE SOME STUDENTS MAINTAINED CONTACT WITH THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES BACK HOME....

- 36% Interacted with parents or guardians daily
- 24% Interacted with siblings or extended family daily
- 20% Frequently went home for the weekend
- 29% Contributed money to help support their family
- 34% Felt their family responsibilities interfered with schoolwork

MOST FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS ESTABLISHED CONNECTIONS AT THEIR NEW SCHOOL.

- 86% Felt that faculty empowered them to learn
- 85% Agreed that at least one staff member took an interest in their development
- 72% Found it easy to develop close friendships with other students
- 75% Interacted with close friends at their school daily
- 73% Received advice/counseling from another student
- 66% Are satisfied with the overall sense of community among students

The more you know about your students, the better you can understand their needs. With insight from CIRP’s Your First College Year Survey, the most comprehensive tool addressing first-year programming and persistence, you’ll be one step closer to providing the best environment for student learning and adjustment to college.

Survey Source: CIRP Your First College Year Survey 2016  www.heri.ucla.edu  facebook.com/HERICIRP  @HERI_UCLA

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Why do we create infographics?: As rhetorical masters you are ready to go beyond writing documents; now you can design them. You will be using the rhetorical principles we have discussed throughout this textbook, and now you get to use them 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.

Who are infographics written for?: 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.

What does an infographic look like?: Formatting is entirely up to you. A good rule of thumb is to use around 250 words of text in your document and at least two different modes, if not more. 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.

How do I create an infographic?: 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-FMT]
- Piktochart [http://piktochart.com/]
- Venngage [https://venngage.com/]
- Visme [https://edtechbooks.org/-RKqS]

Opinion Editorials
A good opinion piece offers a perspective on a current item of interest to the readers of a specific publication. Hence, an understanding of audience is extremely important.

The writer’s tone is balanced and consistent, and his or her voice unique—humorous or cynical, angry or sorrowful, objective or contemplative, but definitely the voice of the writer. Opinion pieces are the product of an individual, not a committee.

Also, while it may seem obvious, it bears repeating: the best opinion pieces are lively, informative, and good pieces of writing.

One of the worst things you can do when writing 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 asking for a loan, you also must know the conventions of the place where your writing will be read.

In this case, you are “publishing” in a magazine, so you should be aware that magazine articles have very short paragraphs. In general, no more than two or three sentences make up a typical paragraph.

The reason is “gray space,” the way a long block of text tends to turn gray upon glancing. Also, because newspapers are printed in columns, paragraphs seem longer than they would
in a book because the lines are shorter.

The most important consideration about shorter paragraphs is that they are 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.

Don’t feel you need to keep your paragraphs wholly 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. If you’ve been paying attention at all, you’ll notice that I have been doing just that throughout this article.

Another consideration about Magazine writing is that you must grab the reader’s attention quickly. Magazine 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.

For that reason, 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.”

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 [https://www.nytimes.com/] 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 and record it here:

References

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.

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 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 oral 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 of presentation 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?

Writing a talk was not the problem—it was the audience of 8- to 11-year-olds who filled me with dread. My mom devised a solution: she found a big picture from a scripture story and suggested I tape 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 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 not the best oral presentation moment (for myself nor my audience), but at least I survived.

My Old, Text-Based, Me-Oriented Format
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 on the left), sometimes with a picture or two added for interest. And I eventually got by just fine.
My New, Zen Audience-Oriented Slide 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 seen presentations as a way to simply 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. Reynolds who lives in Japan, offers the Buddhist Zen ideas of simplicity, restraint, and naturalness as a model for re-thinking the genre of oral presentation: he advocates "restraint in preparation, simplicity in design, and naturalness in delivery" (Reynolds, p. 22).

**Presentation Zen**

Zen Presentations utilize "restraint in preparation, simplicity in design, and naturalness in delivery." --Garr Reynolds
A zen garden--and a good presenter--focuses on restraint, simplicity, and naturalness.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/paulmannix/286817119 CC BY 2.0
Reynolds insisted that the presenter should put the audience first. He said the main focus of
a presentation should be on the presenter--not the slides. For example, he encouraged his
readers to get rid of "Death by PowerPoint": 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. Like a beautiful and peaceful Japanese Zen Garden, slides should be cleared of
clutter and instead point solely to the essence of the message.

But enough reading! I believe the best thing you can do to learn about oral presentations is
to experience other people's excellent presentations, 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.
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.

In the rest of this chapter, we're going to explore the elements that go into good traditional oral presentations as well as look specifically at one other common types of presentation: 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.

**The Oral Rhetorical Situation**
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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-pnUC] 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. 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, so we’ll spend the most time on this part of the rhetorical situation. 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.

**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 mostly 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 oral 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?

As you prepare, ask yourself these questions about your your audience:

- **What do they already know?** This determines how much background info you must
Writing in the Social Sciences

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 few 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, discussion, or even dance.

- **Which appeals will they best respond to?** Think about the three different rhetorical appeals mentioned in [Chapter 2: Writing Tools](https://edtechbooks.org/-ezSj) 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**

If you think about Garr Reynolds's presentation that you watched from the TEDx Conference in Kyoto, Japan, he clearly thought about his audience and chose examples from Japanese history (like Kamishibai storytelling), he talked about how he's lived in Japan for many years, and he sometimes threw in Japanese words or phrases. This emphasized that he was aware that his audience was mostly Japanese, that he could seem like an outsider to them but he also understood a lot about their culture and also understood 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.

10 Things your Audience Hates About your Presentation https://vimeo.com/179236019

**Purpose**

Now that you've considered your audience, another essential question to ask yourself is **What's the purpose of your oral presentation?** In other words, what's your main message? Can you boil it down to just one sentence?

What's your point?

Generally, oral presentations fall into one of three categories of purpose:

1. To inform
2. To persuade
3. A mix of the two

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](https://edtechbooks.org/-JXW). Minutes 5:00-9:00 are especially good.

Sometimes a Call to Action is obvious like in a sales pitch--it's clear they want you to buy their product. But sometimes it can be a little more hidden. When you give your presentation, you want it to be clear what action you want your audience to take. 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 like research papers, proposals and resumes, oral presentations in general tend to follow similar structural patterns. 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" (cite). 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--including Steve Jobs' 2007 iphone launch [https://youtu.be/x7qPAY9JqE4] . . .
and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech" [https://youtu.be/ARvrvJv4th4]—follow this structure. 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.

Presentation Structure
Now it's time to plan your structure. You've already decided on your Purpose and have chosen a Call to Action. What's next? A logical structure is a key to a successful presentation, so 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 [Evans citation]. 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.
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.

Your attention-getter doesn't have to be at the beginning either. 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 Writing Style [add link] 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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-eprs](https://edtechbooks.org/-eprs)). 22 times! Here's a two-minute video of Nancy Duarte talking about the power of story:

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**

You can also add specific stories about people into your presentation to demonstrate a concept or show an example. 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 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 on healthy siblings of children with chronic illnesses. 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. [Add image]
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. 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 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.

Watch this two-minute video on Presentation Structure from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands where they really like seafood:

Fish-Shaped Presentation Structure https://youtu.be/EkLBGQjmvJo

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
- 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**
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

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Presentation Tools
Finally, 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 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 software to create your slides; here's a list of the most common software for creating presentations:

- Microsoft Powerpoint
- Keynote
- Google Slides
- Prezi

But the most important thing to remember is that you do not 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 5 on Writing Design [https://edtechbooks.org/-tQt] for more instruction on designing beautiful slides. You can also watch David JP Phillips's TED Talk on "How to Avoid Death by PowerPoint [https://youtu.be/Iwpi1Lm6dFo]" 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


Visuals should be visual. 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 to 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). For more information on copyright, go to https://copyright.byu.edu/.

Videos

Videos can be very compelling. In an 8-10 minute presentation, no video should be 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 give 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 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!
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 in 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**
You’re not Lady Gaga. Don’t wear a meat dress. 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.

**Practice**

I can't emphasize enough the importance of practicing your presentation before you 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, 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.
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 [https://youtu.be/Ks-_Mh1QhMc] 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.


Poster Presentations
Writing in the Social Sciences

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 (ok, Mom 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.
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 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.
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 [https://edtechbooks.org/-BiAz] 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 san-serif font for titles and headings and use a serif font for text.
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.
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."
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.

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