Essay (4)

مقرر: مقال (4)

الفرقة: الرابعة تعليم عام

أستاذ المقرر: أ.م.د.أمل عبادي

القسم: اللغة الانجليزية

كلية: التربية

العام الجامعي: 2024/2023م

بيـــانـــات أساسية

الكلية: التربية

الفرقة: الرابعة تعليم عام

التخصص: لغة انجليزية

عدد الصفحات:

القسم التابع له المقرر : قسم اللغة الانجليزية / كلية الآداب.

Table of Contents

Writing Research Papers:

A research paper differs from other papers that deal with literary topics in two ways. First, its purpose is not simply to convey your interpretation of the work but also to present ideas and data from others. (This material is called a *secondary source.*) Second, because it will be presented as academic discourse, the style will be more formal than that of some other work you have done.

Many of the conventions that you follow will depend on your instructor. Although some general guidelines almost always apply, be sure that you understand and use those provided for your particular assignment. The guidelines may vary somewhat from the suggestions that follow. You will enjoy the project more if you choose a topic that interests you. Because you will be spending many hours working with it, you will not want to suffer through dealing with a subject you find boring or irrelevant.

With all the work you put into a research paper, it should be more than a scrapbook of other people's ideas. It should reflect your own thinking. If you begin to feel that you have nothing to contribute to the rich critical dialogue that has preceded your study, you can use several strategies to find your own opinions. First, remember that you can argue with other critics. If you disagree with the conclusions drawn by one of your secondary sources, you have the basis for critical argument. Another way to find your own point of view is to look at a work from a perspective that has not been traditionally used. For example, feminist critics are providing some surprising new readings of well known texts by looking at them through women's eyes. Finally, you can interact with the work on a personal level by asking yourself early on how you respond to it and why. Some brainstorming on this topic may lead you to ideas that you can then investigate and test by examining the ideas of other critics.

■ **Your paper will probably run between five and fifteen pages. Regardless of its length, in its final form it should have an introduction, a well-developed discussion section, a conclusion, and a list of sources cited. Not only should the introduction announce the topic to be discussed, but it should also provide an attractive, inviting beginning. The discussion section—the heart of your explanation or argument—should follow a clear plan of development, using examples from the work itself and references to secondary sources to strengthen your case. The conclusion need not be long if you have been clear in the preceding sections. It should simply provide a satisfying sense of completion to the paper.**

Today most readers who use biographical and historical information to complement other methods of analysis turn to more than a simple recitation of the facts of an author's life or of the publication of the text. They search out the social and intellectual concerns of both the writer and his or her society. They look for other works of the same

period with which they can draw comparisons regarding themes, style, and genre. Sometimes they make comparisons between a specific work and others by the same author. Whether you are using a historical-biographical approach as your sole perspective or using it to complement another means of analysis, you will find the following questions to be helpful aids to thinking and organizing your ideas.

- **Where does this work fit into the chronology of the author's published works?**
- **Are the events of the plot based on the author's own experiences?**
- **How old was the author when the text was written?**
- **Is the setting (time and place) one in which the author lived? If not, how did he or she become knowledgeable about it? Through travel? Reading?Research?**
- **Are any of the characters based on people the author knew?**

■ Is one of the characters based on the author him- or herself?

■ How do the issues addressed (or conflicts depicted) reflect controversies, questions, and problems of the author's day?

■ How does this work exemplify the definition of the intellectual or literary period in which it was produced—for example, classicism or romanticism?

■ What are the author's attitudes, either implied or explicit, about the central concerns of the text? Why does he or she have them?

■ Does the language include words with archaic meanings? If so, what did they mean when the author used them?

■ What writers and texts can be said to have influenced the writing of the work under consideration?[i]

When analyzing a work of art, literary critics ask basic questions concerning the philosophical, psychological, functional, and descriptive nature of a text. Since the time of

the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, the answers to these questions have been seriously debated. By asking questions of Twain's or any other text, and by contemplating answers, we too can become participants in this debate.

As a result, the hard part for many people is getting started, as where to begin isn't always obvious. To gain some control over the process, you can use several fairly simple techniques to help make your initial approach. They take little time but can pay big dividends later. The techniques suggested as starting points here involve connecting reading and writing so that you can discover what you have to say. They include making marginal notations, keeping a reading log, and using prewriting strategies.

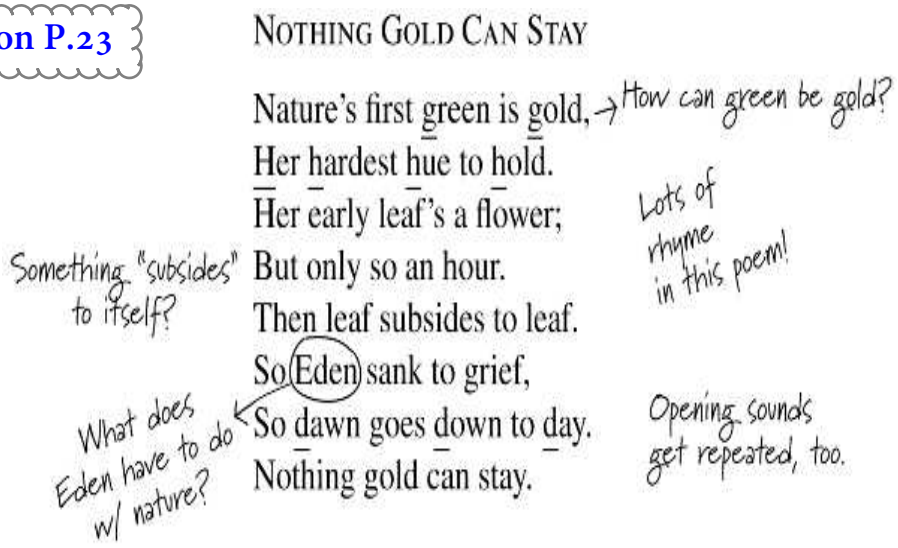
Adding Marginal Notations

One reason that reading and writing seem to be two parts of a whole is that they sometimes take place at the same time. During the first reading of a work, for example, you may find yourself underlining sentences, putting

question marks or checks in the margins, highlighting passages, or circling words that you don't understand.

You may not think of such cryptic markings as writing at all, but they are, in fact, representations of what you think and feel as you go through a text. And because nobody completely takes in a work the first time through, these markings can serve as starting points for the next reading. They will help you find those passages and ideas that you wanted to think about some more or perhaps didn't understand at all. You will be glad when you return to a work to find that you left some footprints to follow. Look at how a first-time reader responded to Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

More examples on P.23



The advantage of marginal notations is that they don't interrupt your reading very much. They are, however, usually too terse and superficial to serve as the basis of a full-scale analysis. Several other techniques that will connect your reading with your writing in more substantive ways include keeping a reading log and using prewriting strategies.

If you do make marginal and textual notes while you read, you will have the rough beginnings of a reading log. A log amplifies the process and thus requires a separate notebook for your comments. You may even want to skip the marginal markings and use the notebook from the beginning. Several kinds of information, depending in part on how familiar you are with a work, will be appropriate for your reading log. When you read something for the first time, you are likely to make notes about relatively basic information.

If you are reading a narrative, for example, you may want to answer such questions as the following:

- **Where is the action happening?**
- **What are the relationships of the characters?**
- **Which character(s) do I find to be the most interesting?**
- **Which one(s) do I care for most?**
- **Which one(s) do I dislike the most?**

You might even want to pause in the middle of your reading to speculate about the following:

- **What do I want to happen?**
- **What am I afraid will happen? What do I think will happen?**
- **What have I read that prompted the answers to these questions?**

If you are reading a poem, you may want to record answers to questions like these:

- **Who is the speaker of the poem? (Remember, the speaker is not necessarily the poet.)**
- **What do I know about him or her?**

■ **What is his or her occasion for saying it?**

■ **Where does the poem take place?**

■ **Who is listening?**

■ **Which lines seem to be the most important?**

■ **Which words resonate powerfully with me?**

■ **Do they give me insight into the poem as a whole?**

Another way of beginning to think about a work is to jot down questions, memories it has called up, arguments with the ideas, or speculations about how the author came to write it. These considerations will help you connect with what you have read, not simply focus your attention on the text itself. They will make it more meaningful to you as an individual.

References:

- **Jane Straus. *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*. San Francisco: Wiley, Year: 2008. Print.**

- **Oliver Strunk. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Pearson Education Company. 2000.**
- **Susan Thurman. T*he Only Grammar Book you'll Ever Need: A One-Stop Source for Every Writing Assignment*. Avon: Adams Media, 2003.**
- **Adrian Wallwork. *English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing*. Springer, 2011.**

The following part is excerpted from:Johnson-Sheehan. *Writing Today*, 3rd ed., Boston: Pearson, 2016.

Starting Your Research Process

A reliable research process, as shown in Figure 24.1, is "recursive," which means the researcher collects evidence and then repeatedly tests it against a *working thesis*. This cyclical process ends when the working thesis fits the evidence you collected.

24.1 develop your own dependable "research process" that will help you inquire into topics that interest you.

Step One: Define Your Research Question

Your research question identifies specifically what you want to discover about your topic. Name your topic and then write down a question your research will try to answer:

Topic: The anti-vaccine movement in the United States.

Research Question: Why are some people, including celebrities, choosing not to vaccinate their kids against common illnesses like measles, mumps, and whooping cough?

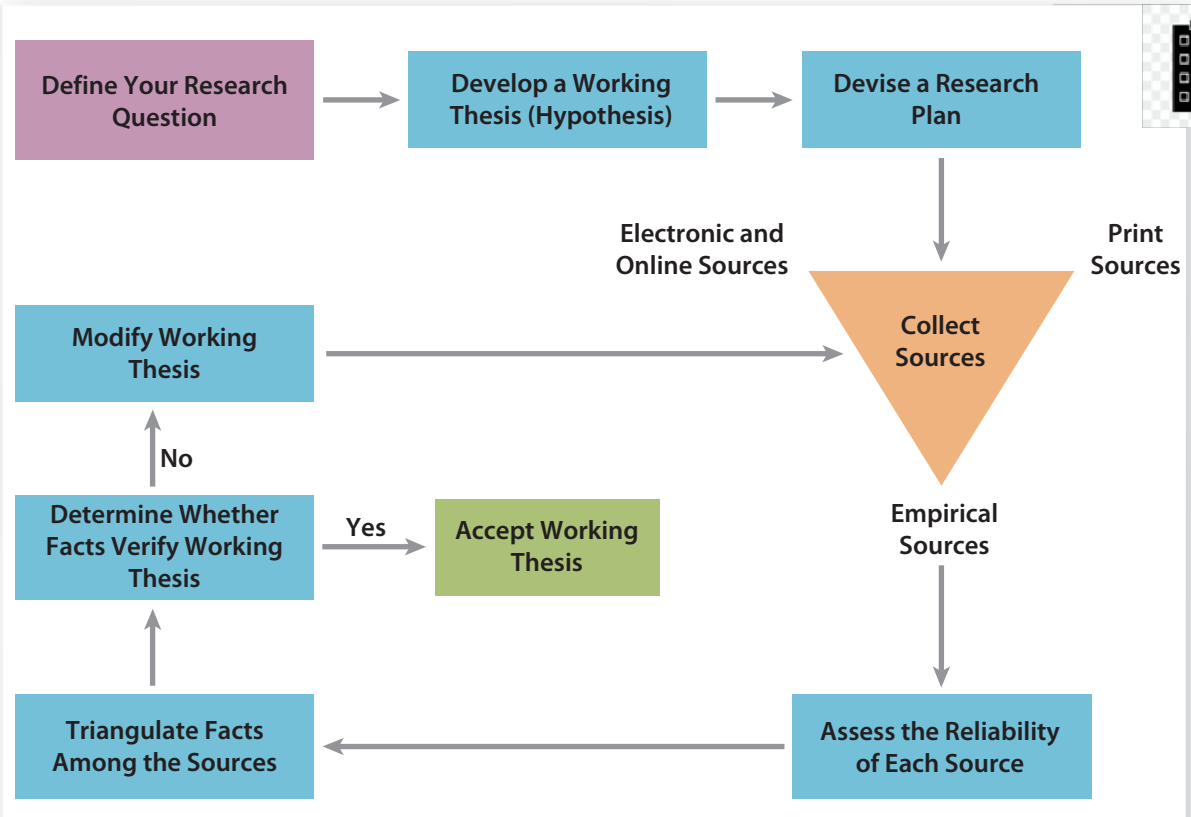


FIGURE 24.1 Following a Research Process

A reliable research process will save you time and energy. Each source you collect will lead you to other sources. Keep looping until you collect the evidence you need to draft your paper.

Topic: The oddity of wearing shorts and flip-flops in wintertime.

Research Question: Why do some college students wear shorts and flip-flops in the middle of the winter?

Once you have drafted a research question, you should spend some time sharpening it to a topic that you can answer in a college-length paper. The research questions mentioned above, for example, are too broad for a typical college paper. Here are sharper versions of those questions:

Is the anti-vaccine movement a real national threat, or is it primarily a problem for people who live in places like California with dense populations and many unvaccinated people?

Why do some students at Falls County Community College always wear shorts and flip-flops, even in the middle of the winter?

Step Two: Develop a Working Thesis

After defining your research question, you should then develop a *working thesis*, which is also called a "hypothesis" in some fields. Your working thesis is your best guess at this moment about the answer to your research question.

Try to boil your thesis statement down to one sentence. For example, here are some working theses based on the research questions above:

Even here in northern Michigan, vaccinations are still critical for all children because illnesses spread quickly over the winter since we spend more time indoors in confined spaces.

Some Falls County Community College students wear shorts and flip-flops in the winter because they prefer light, comfortable clothing, and they can keep warm by staying inside and walking from building to building across campus, but others do it just because it's fashionable and cool.

As you do your research, it is likely your working thesis will change. Eventually, it will become the main claim for your project. If possible, boil your working thesis down to one sentence. If you require two or three sentences to state your working thesis, your topic may be too complex or broad.

Step Three: Devise a Research Plan

Before you begin collecting evidence to test your working thesis, take some time to sketch out your *research plan.* Your plan should describe the kinds of evidence, including sources, you will need to answer your research question. Your plan should also describe how you are going to collect this evidence along with your deadlines for finding sources. A typical research plan has these elements:

- Research question
- Working thesis

- Description of available sources about the topic, including print and electronic sources
- Schedule for conducting and completing the research
- Bibliography

Creating a research plan will save you time by helping you identify the evidence you need and streamline your research.

Doing Start-Up Research

Now that you have figured out your research question, working thesis, and research plan, you're ready to start tracking down evidence and collecting sources. Some researchers find it helpful to begin by doing an hour of "start-up" research. This kind of research will help you to gain an overall view of the topic, figure out its various sides, and identify the kinds of sources available.

In Chapter 25, "Finding Sources and Collecting Evidence," we will talk about doing formal research, which is much more targeted and structured than start-up research. For now, though, let's look at some good ways to do start-up research:

Search the Internet. Put your research question or its keywords into *Google, Yahoo!, Bing,* or *Ask.com*. See what pops up. Jot down notes about the kinds of evidence you find. Identify some of the major issues and people involved with your topic and take note of any key sources of evidence that you might want to look up later. Bookmark any Web sites that seem especially useful.

Look Through Online Encyclopedias. Major online encyclopedias include *Wikipedia, MSN Encarta,* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Again, note the major issues and people involved with your topic. Identify key terms and any controversies about your topic.

One note: Professors probably won't let you cite online encyclopedias like *Wikipedia* or *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as authoritative sources, because the entries are often written anonymously or by non-experts. Nevertheless, online encyclopedias are useful for gaining a quick overview of your topic and finding sources that are authoritative.

Search Your Library's Catalog. Use the online catalog to search for materials available in your campus library. Write down the names of any authors and titles that look like they might be helpful. In some cases, your library's catalog can e-mail your selections to you.

Start-up research should take you an hour or less. Your goal is to gain an overall sense of your topic, not form your final opinion. Keep your options open and don't become too occupied by one source or perspective.

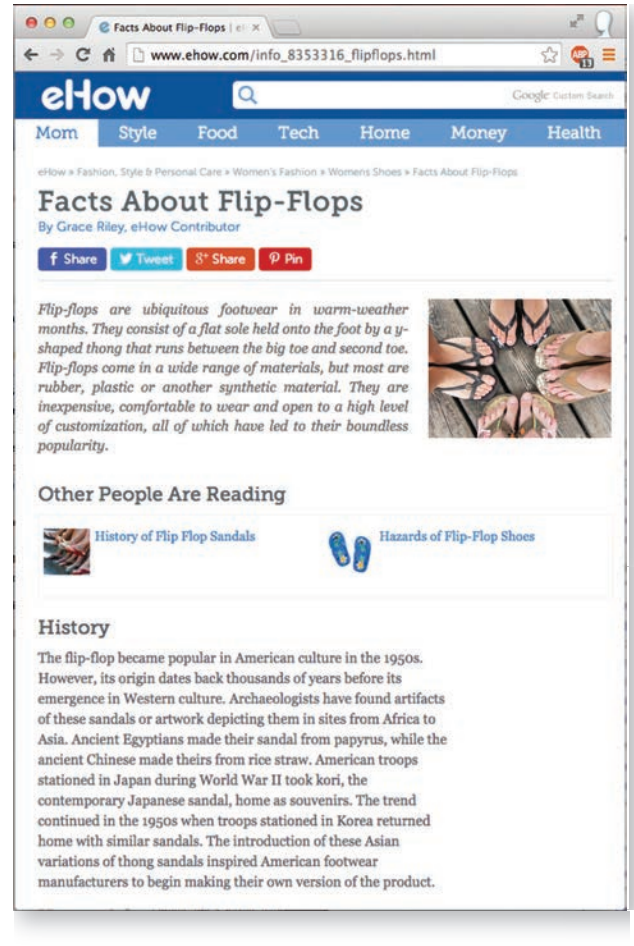
Assessing a Source's Reliability

24.2 assess whether sources are reliable and trustworthy.

All information is not created equal. Some people who claim to be "authorities" can be wrongheaded or even dishonest. In some situations, people who have agendas or biases stretch the truth or selectively use facts to support their positions. To assess the reliability of your sources, consider these questions:

FIGURE 24.2
Using Online Sources for Start-Up Research

Even though popular Web sites like eHow are not always authoritative, they are helpful for start-up research because they can help you understand trends, identify different sides of the issue, and locate sources.



Is the Source Credible?

To determine whether a source's author and publisher are trustworthy, you should use an Internet search engine to check out their backgrounds and expertise. If you cannot find further information about the author or publisher—or if you find questionable credentials or reputations—you should look for other sources that are more credible.

Is the Source Up to Date?

Depending on your topic, sources can quickly become obsolete. In some fields, like cancer research, a source that is only a few years old might already be out of date. In other fields, like geology or history, data that is decades old might still be relevant today. So pay attention to how rapidly the field is changing. Consult your professor or a research librarian about whether a source should be considered up to date.

How Biased Are the Author and the Publisher?

All sources have some bias because authors and publishers have their own ideas and opinions. When you are assessing the bias of a source, consider how much the author or publisher *wants* the evidence to be true. If it seems like the author or publisher would only accept one kind of answer from the outset (e.g., "climate change is a liberal conspiracy"), the evidence should be considered too biased to be reliable. On the other hand, if the author and publisher were open to a range of possible conclusions, you can feel more confident about using the source.

Can You Verify the Evidence in the Source?

You should be able to confirm your source's evidence by consulting other, independent sources. If just one source offers a specific piece of evidence, you should treat it as unverified and use it cautiously, if at all. If multiple sources offer the same or similar kinds of evidence, then you can rely on those sources with much more confidence.

How Biased Are You?

As a researcher, you need to keep your own biases in mind as you assess your sources. Try viewing your sources from alternative perspectives, even perspectives you disagree with. Knowing your own biases and seeing the issue from other perspectives will help you gain a richer understanding of your topic.

Evaluating Your Sources: A Checklist

- ☐ Is the source reliable and credible?
- ☐ Is the source up to date?
- ☐ How biased are the author and the publisher?
- ☐ Can you independently verify the evidence in the source?
- ☐ How biased are you?

Managing Your Research Process

24.3 devise a "research plan" for your project that allows you to stay on schedule and keep track of sources and evidence.

When you finish your start-up research, you should have enough information to finalize a schedule for completing your research. At this point, you should also start a bibliographic file to help keep track of your sources.

Finalizing a Research Schedule

You might find "backward planning" helpful when finalizing your research schedule. Backward planning means working backward from the deadline to today, filling in all the tasks that need to be accomplished. Here's how to do it:

1. On your screen or a piece of paper, list all the tasks you need to complete.
2. On your calendar, mark a final deadline for finishing your research. Then, fill in your deadlines for drafting, designing, and revising your project.

3. Work backwards from your research deadline, filling in the tasks you need to accomplish and identifying the days on which each task needs to be completed.

Online calendars like those from *Google, Mozilla,* or *Yahoo!* are great tools for creating research schedules. A low-tech paper calendar still works well, too.

Starting Your Bibliography File

Check the last chapter in your textbook, P.

One of the first tasks on your research schedule should be to set up a file on your computer that holds a working bibliography of the sources you find. Each time you find a useful source, add it to your bibliography file.

As you collect each source, record all the information for a full bibliographic citation (you will learn how to cite sources in Chapters 27, "Using MLA Style," and 28, "Using APA Style").

Following and Modifying Your Research Plan

You should expect to modify your research plan as you move forward with the project. In some cases, you will find yourself diverted from your research plan by interesting facts, ideas, and events that you didn't know about when you started. That's fine. Let the facts guide your research, even if they take you in unexpected directions.

Also, check in regularly with your research question and working thesis to make sure you are not drifting too far away from your original idea for the project. In some cases, you might need to adjust your research question and working thesis to fit some of the sources or new issues you have discovered.

When Things Don't Go as Expected

Research is a process of inquiry—of exploring, testing, and discovering. You are going to encounter ideas and issues that will require you to modify your approach, research question, or working thesis. Expect the unexpected, make the changes, and then move forward.

Roadblocks to Research. You may not be able to get access to all the sources you had planned on using. For example, you might find that the expert you wanted to interview is unavailable, or that the book you needed is checked out or missing from the library, or that you simply cannot find the data or evidence you expected to find. Don't give up. Instead, modify your approach and move around the roadblock.

Evidence and Ideas That Change Your Working Thesis. You might find something unexpected that completely changes how you view your topic. For instance, the evidence you collect might not support your working thesis after all. Or, you might find that a different, more focused working thesis is more interesting to you or relevant for your audience. Rather than getting distracted or disappointed, consider this an opportunity to discover something new. Modify your research question or working thesis and move forward.

These temporary roadblocks can be frustrating, but following unexpected paths can also make research fun. They can lead you to new breakthroughs and exciting innovations.

Let's get started. Use these guidelines to begin your research process.

UNDERSTAND Why Writers Do Research

Keep in mind that the purpose of research is to inform and support your ideas. Research is not just a regurgitation of others' ideas.

DEFINE Your Research Question

Name your topic and state your research question as specifically as possible. Improve the efficiency of your research by sharpening that research question as much as possible.

DEVELOP a Working Thesis

In a single sentence, write down your working thesis. This is your best guess, or "hypothesis," for what you think will be your main claim.

DO Some "Start-Up" Research

Take half an hour to an hour to scan the kinds of sources available and get an overall sense of the various views on your research question.

ASSESS the Reliability of Your Sources

Determine whether the sources you have collected are credible, up to date, and reasonably unbiased. Also, verify the evidence behind each source.

DEVISE Your Research Plan

Avoid the temptation to just dive in. Take a little time to make a written plan that describes your research question, working thesis, start-up research results, schedule, and an early bibliography.

CREATE a Schedule

Use "backward planning" to break your research into manageable chunks. After listing all the tasks you will need to complete, work backward from your deadline, filling in the tasks and the days they need to be completed.

KEEP a Bibliography File

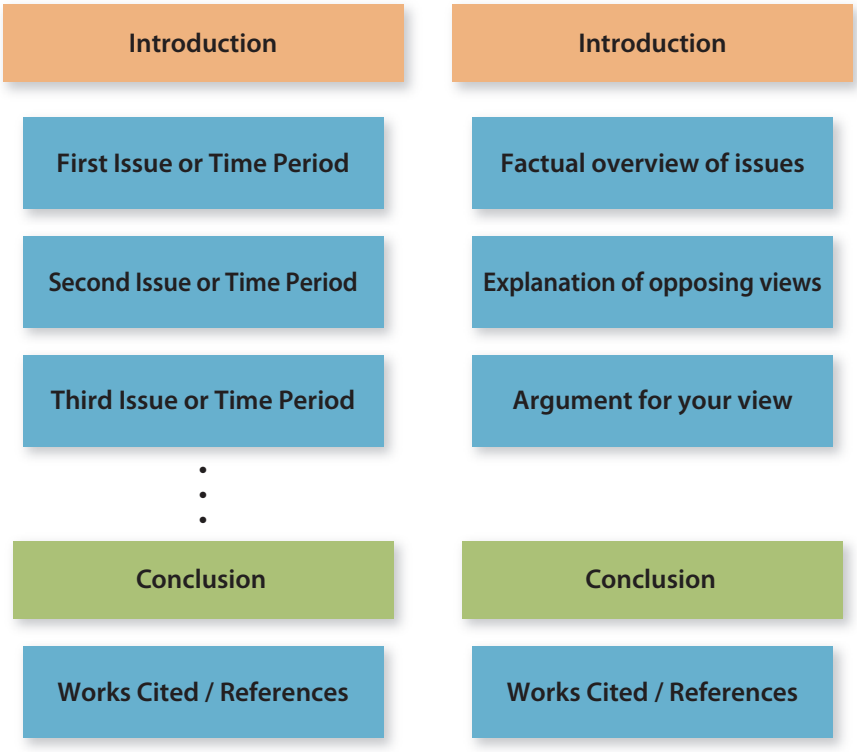
Keep a computer file of your working bibliography and maintain it. Your readers will need this bibliographic information to see where your sources can be found.

EXPECT the Unexpected

As you find new evidence, you will want to modify your research approach, research question, and working thesis. This is all part of the research process.

Research Papers

Research papers can be organized a variety of ways. These models show two basic patterns that you can adjust to fit your topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context.



Effective research papers use sources to explain an issue or argue for a position. They tend to have the following major features:

- **An introduction** that identifies the research paper's topic and purpose, while clearly stating a thesis or main point that you will support or prove; the introduction should offer background information and explain why the topic is important.
- **Body paragraphs** that use an issue-by-issue or chronological pattern to present the results of your research; the body is divided into sections with headings.
- **A conclusion** that restates the thesis or main point of the research paper and summarizes your major points.
- **A References or Works Cited** section that includes a list of references or works cited in a standardized citation style (usually MLA or APA style).

Ch.2

The Writing Process

The following part is quoted from: Bullock& Goggin. *The Norton Field Guide to Writing with Readings and Handbook*, 2019.

Generating Ideas and Text

All good writing revolves around ideas. Whether you're writing a job-application letter, a sonnet, or an essay, you'll always spend time and effort generating ideas. Some writers can come up with a topic, put their thoughts in order, and flesh out their arguments in their heads; but most of us need to write out our ideas, play with them, tease them out, and examine them from some distance and from multiple perspectives. This chapter offers activities that can help you do just that. *Freewriting*, *looping*, *listing*, and *clustering* can help you explore what you know about a subject; *cubing* and *questioning* nudge you to consider a subject in new ways; and *outlining*, *letter writing*, *journal keeping*, and *discovery drafting* offer ways to generate a text.

Freewriting

An informal method of exploring a subject by writing about it, freewriting ("writing freely") can help you generate ideas and come up with materials for your draft. Here's how to do it:

1. Write as quickly as you can without stopping for 5 to 10 minutes (or until you fill a screen or page).
2. If you have a subject to explore, write it at the top and then start writing about it, but if you stray, don't worry—just keep writing. If you don't have a subject yet, just start writing and don't stop until the time is up. If you can't think of anything to say, write that ("I can't think of anything to say") again and again until you do—and you will!
3. Once the time is up, read over what you've written, and underline or highlight passages that interest you.

4. Write some more, starting with one of those underlined or highlighted passages as your new topic. Repeat the process until you've come up with a usable topic.

Looping

Looping is a more focused version of freewriting; it can help you explore what you know about a subject. You stop, reflect on what you've written, and then write again, developing your understanding in the process. It's good for clarifying your knowledge and understanding of a subject and finding a focus. Here's what you do:

1. Write for 5 to 10 minutes on whatever you know about your subject. This is your first loop.
2. Read over what you wrote, and then write a single sentence summarizing the most important or interesting idea. You might try completing one of these sentences: "I guess what I was trying to say was . . . " or "What surprises me most in reading what I wrote is . . ." This will be the start of another loop.
3. Write again for 5 to 10 minutes, using your summary sentence as your beginning and your focus. Again, read what you've written, and then write a sentence capturing the most important idea—in a third loop.

Keep going until you have enough understanding of your topic to be able to decide on a tentative focus—something you can write about.

Listing

Some writers find it useful to keep lists of ideas that occur to them while they are thinking about a topic. Follow these steps:

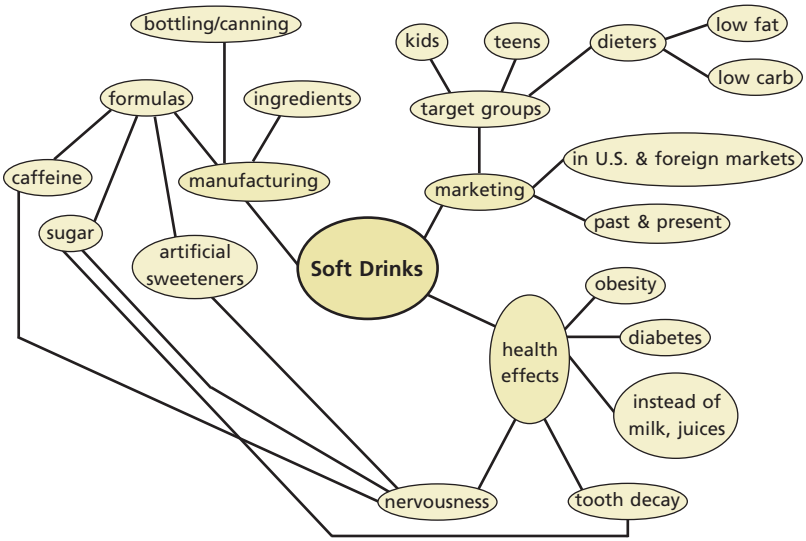
1. Write a list of potential ideas about a topic. Don't try to limit your list—include anything that interests you.

2. Look for relationships among the items on your list: what patterns do you see? If other ideas occur to you, add them to the list.
3. Arrange the items in an order that makes sense for your purpose and can serve as the beginning of an outline for your writing.

Clustering or Mapping Ideas

Clustering (also called idea mapping) is a way of generating and connecting ideas visually. It's useful for seeing how various ideas relate to one another and for developing subtopics. The technique is simple:

1. Write your topic in the middle of a sheet of paper and circle it.
2. Write ideas relating to that topic around it, circle them, and connect them to the central circle.



3. Write down examples, facts, or other details relating to each idea, and join them to the appropriate circles.
4. Keep going until you can't think of anything else relating to your topic.

You should end up with various ideas about your topic, and the clusters will allow you to see how they relate to one another. In the example cluster on the topic of "soft drinks" on the previous page, note how some ideas link not only to the main topic or related topics but also to other ideas.

Cubing

A cube has six sides. You can examine a topic as you might a cube, looking at it in these six ways:

443–51

- **DESCRIBE** it. What's its color? shape? age? size? What's it made of?

424–31

- **COMPARE** it to something else. What is it similar to or different from?
- Associate it with other things. What does it remind you of? What connections does it have to other things? How would you

418–23

CLASSIFY it?

98–130

- **ANALYZE** it. How is it made? Where did it come from? Where is it going? How are its parts related?
- Apply it. What is it used for? What can be done with it?

157–84

- **ARGUE** for or against it. Choose a position relating to your subject, and defend it.

Questioning

It's always useful to ask **QUESTIONS**. One way is to start with *What? Who? When? Where? How?* and *Why?* A particular method of exploring a topic is to ask questions as if the topic were a play. This method is especially useful for exploring literature, history, the arts, and the social sciences. Start with these questions:

- ***What?*** What happens? How is it similar to or different from other actions?
- ***Who?*** Who are the actors? Who are the participants, and who are the spectators? How do the actors affect the action, and how are they affected by it?
- ***When?*** When does the action take place? How often does it happen? What happens before, after, or at the same time? Would it be different at another time? Does the time have historical significance?
- ***Where?*** What is the setting? What is the situation, and what makes it significant?
- ***How?*** How does the action occur? What are the steps in the process? What techniques are required? What equipment is needed?
- ***Why?*** Why did this happen? What are the actors' motives? What end does the action serve?

Using Genre Features

Genres typically include particular kinds of information and organize it in particular ways. One way to generate ideas and text, then, is to identify the key features of the genre in which you're writing and use them to guide you as you write. Of course, you may alter the genre's features or combine two or more genres in order to achieve your purpose, but the overall shape and content of the genre can give you a way to develop and organize your ideas and research.

Outlining

You may create an *informal outline* by simply listing your ideas and numbering them in the order in which you want to write about them. You might prefer to make a *working outline*, to show the hierarchy of relationships among your ideas. While still informal, a working outline

distinguishes your main ideas and your support, often through simple indentation:

First main idea
  Supporting evidence or detail
  Supporting evidence or detail

Second main idea
  Supporting evidence or detail
  Supporting evidence or detail

A *formal outline* shows the hierarchy of your ideas through a system of indenting, numbering, and lettering. Remember that when you divide a point into more specific subpoints, you should have at least two of them—you can't divide something into only one part. Also, try to keep items at each level parallel in structure. Formal outlines work this way:

Thesis statement

I. First reason
  A. Supporting evidence
    1. Detail of evidence
    2. Detail of evidence
  B. Supporting evidence
II. Another reason

Here is a formal outline of the first part of the research report by Dylan Borchers on pages 588–96, "Against the Odds: Harry S. Truman and the Election of 1948," that shows how he organized it:

I. Introduction: Outcome of 1948 election
II. Bad predictions by pollsters
  A. Pollsters stopped polling.
  B. Dewey supporters became overconfident.
  C. Truman supporters were either energized or stayed home.
III. Dewey's campaign overly cautious
  A. He was overconfident.
  B. His message was vague—he avoided taking stands.

Drafting

At some point, you need to write out a draft. By the time you begin drafting, you've probably written quite a bit—in the form of notes, lists, outlines, and other kinds of informal writing. This chapter offers some hints on how to write a draft—and reminds you that as you draft, you may well need to get more information, rethink some aspect of your work, or follow new ideas that occur to you as you write.

Establishing a Schedule with Deadlines

Don't wait until the last minute to write. Computers crash, printers jam. Life intervenes in unpredictable ways. You increase your chances of success immensely by setting and meeting **DEADLINES**: Research done by ____; rough draft done by ____; revisions done by ____; final draft edited, proofread, and submitted by ____. How much time you need varies with each writing task—but trying to compress everything into twenty-four or forty-eight hours before the deadline is asking for trouble.

Getting Comfortable

When are you at your best? When do you have your best ideas? For major writing projects, consider establishing a schedule that lets you write when you stand the best chance of doing good work. Schedule breaks for exercise and snacks. Find a good place to write, a place where you've got a good surface on which to spread out your materials, good lighting, a comfortable chair, and the right tools (computer, pen, paper) for the job. Often, however, we must make do: you may have to do your drafting in a busy computer lab or classroom. The trick is to make yourself as comfortable as you can manage. Sort out what you *need* from what you *prefer*.

Starting to Write

All of the above advice notwithstanding, don't worry so much about the trappings of your writing situation that you don't get around to writing. Write. Start by **FREEWRITING**, start with a first sentence, start with awful writing that you know you'll discard later—but write. That's what gets you warmed up and going.

Write quickly in spurts. Write quickly with the goal of writing a complete draft, or a complete section of a longer draft, in one sitting. If you need to stop in the middle, make some notes about where you were headed when you stopped so that you can easily pick up your train of thought when you begin again.

Break down your writing task into small segments. Big projects can be intimidating. But you can always write one section or, if need be, one paragraph or even a single sentence—and then another and another. It's a little like dieting. If I think I need to lose twenty pounds, I get discouraged and head for the doughnuts; but if I decide that I'll lose one pound and I lose it, well, I'll lose another—*that* I can do.

Expect surprises. Writing is a form of thinking; the words you write lead you down certain roads and away from others. You may end up somewhere you didn't anticipate. Sometimes that can be a good thing—but sometimes you can write yourself into a dead end or out onto a tangent. Just know that this is natural, part of every writer's experience, and it's okay to double back or follow a new path that opens up before you.

Expect to write more than one draft. A first sentence, first page, or first draft represents your attempt to organize into words your thoughts, ideas, feelings, research findings, and more. It's likely that some of that first try will not achieve your goals. That's okay—having writing on screen or on paper that you can change, add to, and cut means you're part of the way there. As you revise, you can fill in gaps and improve your writing and thinking.

Dealing with Writer's Block

You may sit down to write but find that you can't—nothing occurs to you; your mind is blank. Don't panic; here are some ways to get started writing again:

- Think of the assignment as a problem to be solved. Try to capture that problem in a single sentence: "How do I explain the context for my topic?" "What is the best way to organize my argument?" "What am I trying to do in the conclusion?"
- Start early and break the writing task into small segments drafted over several days. Waiting until the night before an assignment is due can create panic—and writer's block.
- Stop trying: take a walk, take a shower, do something else. Come back in a half hour, refreshed.
- Open a new document on your computer or get a fresh piece of paper and **FREEWRITE**, or try **LOOPING** or **LISTING**. What are you trying to say? Just let whatever comes come—you may write yourself out of your box.

331–33

- If you usually write on your computer, turn it off, get out paper and pencil, and write by hand.
- Try a graphic approach: try **CLUSTERING**, or draw a chart of what you want to say; draw a picture; doodle.

333–34

- Do some **RESEARCH** on your topic to see what others have said about it.

477

- Talk to someone about what you are trying to do. If there's a writing center at your school, talk to a tutor: **GET RESPONSE**. If there's no one to talk to, talk to yourself. It's the act of talking—using your mouth instead of your hands—that can free you up.

348–50

IF YOU NEED MORE HELP

See Chapter 29 on GENERATING IDEAS AND TEXT if you find you need more material. And once you have a draft, see Chapter 31 on ASSESSING YOUR OWN WRITING and Chapter 32 GETTING RESPONSE AND REVISING for help evaluating your draft.

331–39
343–47
348–55

Assessing Your Own Writing

In school and out, our work is continually assessed by others. Teachers determine whether our writing is strong or weak; supervisors decide whether we merit raises or promotions; even friends and relatives size up in various ways the things we do. As writers, we need to assess our own work—to step back and see it with a critical eye. By developing standards of our own and being conscious of the standards others use, we can assess—and shape—our writing, making sure it does what we want it to do. This chapter will help you assess your own written work.

What we write for others must stand on its own because we usually aren't present when it is read—we rarely get to explain to readers why we did what we did and what it means. So we need to make our writing as clear as we can before we submit, post, display, or publish it. It's a good idea to assess your writing in two stages, first considering how well it meets the needs of your particular rhetorical situation, then studying the text itself to check its focus, argument, organization, and clarity. Sometimes some simple questions can get you started:

What works?
What still needs work?
Where do I need to say more (or less)?

Considering the Rhetorical Situation

PURPOSE

What is your purpose for writing? If you have multiple purposes, list them, and then note which ones are the most important. How well does your draft achieve your purpose(s)? If you're writing for an assignment, what are

the requirements of the assignment, and does your draft meet those requirements?

AUDIENCE To whom are you writing? What do those readers need and expect, as far as you can tell? Does your draft answer their needs? Do you define any terms and explain any concepts they won't know?

61–65

GENRE What is the genre, and what are the key features of that genre? Does your draft include each of those features? If not, is there a good reason?

66–68

STANCE Is your attitude toward your topic and your audience clear? Does your language project the personality and tone that you want?

69–71

MEDIA / DESIGN What medium (print? spoken? electronic?) or combination of media is your text intended for, and how well does your writing suit it? How well does the design of the text suit your purpose and audience? Does it meet any requirements of the genre or of the assignment, if you're writing for one?

Examining the Text Itself

Look carefully at your text to see how well it says what you want it to say. Start with its focus, and then examine its reasons and evidence, organization, and clarity, in that order. If your writing lacks focus, the revising you'll do to sharpen the focus is likely to change everything else; if it needs more reasons and evidence, the organization may well change.

Consider your focus. Your writing should have a clear point, and every part of the writing should support that point. Here are some questions that can help you see if your draft is adequately focused:

- What is your **THESIS**? Even if it is not stated directly, you should be able to summarize it for yourself in a single sentence.

- Is your thesis narrow or broad enough to suit the needs and expectations of your audience?
- How does the **BEGINNING** focus attention on your thesis or main point? 373–80
- Does each paragraph support or develop that point? Do any paragraphs or sentences stray from your focus?
- Does the **ENDING** leave readers thinking about your main point? Is there another way of concluding the essay that would sharpen your focus? 380–85

Consider the support you provide for your argument. Your writing needs to give readers enough information to understand your points, follow your argument, and see the logic of your thinking. How much information is enough will vary according to your audience. If they already know a lot about your subject or are likely to agree with your point of view, you may need to give less detail. If, however, they are unfamiliar with your topic or are skeptical about your views, you will probably need to provide much more.

- What **REASONS** and **EVIDENCE** do you give to support your thesis? Where might more information be helpful? If you're writing online, could you provide links to it? 400–401
- What key terms and concepts do you **DEFINE**? Are there any other terms your readers might need to have explained? Could you do so by providing links? 432–42
- Where might you include more **DESCRIPTION** or other detail? 443–51
- Do you make any **COMPARISONS**? Especially if your readers will not be familiar with your topic, it can help to compare it with something more familiar. 424–31
- If you include **NARRATIVE**, how is it relevant to your point? 462–70
- See Part 6 for other useful **STRATEGIES**. 371

Consider the organization. As a writer, you need to lead readers through your text, carefully structuring your material so that they will be able to follow your argument.

- Analyze the structure by **OUTLINING** it. An informal outline will do since you mainly need to see the parts, not the details.
- Is your text complete? Does your genre require an **ABSTRACT**, a **WORKS-CITED LIST**, or any other elements?
- What **TRANSITIONS** help readers move from idea to idea and paragraph to paragraph? Do you need more?

650–52

- If there are no **HEADINGS**, would adding them help orient readers?

Check for clarity. Nothing else matters if readers can't understand what you write. Following are some questions that can help you see whether your meaning is clear and your text is easy to read:

386–87

- Does your **TITLE** announce the subject of your text and give some sense of what you have to say? If not, would a more direct title strengthen your argument?

387–89

- Do you state your **THESIS** directly? If not, will readers easily understand what your main point is? Try stating your thesis outright, and see if it makes your argument easier to follow.

373–80
380–85

- Does your **BEGINNING** tell readers what they need to understand your text, and does your **ENDING** help them make sense of what they've just read?

391

- How does each paragraph relate to the ones before and after? Are those relationships clear—or do you need to add **TRANSITIONS**?
- Do you vary your sentences? If all the sentences are roughly the same length or follow the same subject-verb-object pattern, your text probably lacks any clear emphasis and might even be difficult to read.

653–63

- Are **VISUALS** clearly labeled, positioned near the text they relate to, and referred to clearly in the text?

526–38

- If you introduce materials from other sources, have you clearly distinguished **QUOTED**, **PARAPHRASED**, or **SUMMARIZED** ideas from your own?

432–42

- Do you **DEFINE** all the words that your readers may not know?

- Does your punctuation make your writing more clear or less? Incorrect punctuation can make writing difficult to follow or, worse, change the meaning from what you intended. As a best-selling punctuation manual reminds us, there's a considerable difference between "eats, shoots, and leaves" and "eats shoots and leaves."

Thinking about Your Process

Your growth as a writer depends on how well you understand what you do when you write so that you can build on good habits. After you finish a writing project, consider the following questions to help you see the process that led to its creation—and find ways to improve the process next time:

- How would you tell the story of your thinking? Try writing these sentences: "When I first began with my topic, I thought _____. But as I did some thinking, writing, and research about the topic, my ideas changed and I thought _____."
- At some point in your writing, did you have to choose between two or more alternatives? What were they, and how did you choose?
- What was the most difficult problem you faced while writing? How did you go about trying to solve it?
- Whose advice did you seek while researching, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing? What advice did you take, and what did you ignore? Why?

Assessing a Body of Your Work

If you are required to submit a portfolio of your writing as part of a class, you will likely need to write a letter or essay that introduces the portfolio's contents and describes the processes that you used to create them and that **ASSESSES THE WRITING IN YOUR PORTFOLIO**. See Chapter 34 for detailed advice and a good example of a portfolio self-assessment.

361–70

Getting Response and Revising

If we want to learn to play a song on the guitar, we play it over and over again until we get it right. If we play basketball or baseball, we likely spend hours shooting foul shots or practicing a swing. Writing works the same way. Making meaning clear can be tricky, and you should plan on revising and, if need be, rewriting in order to get it right. When we speak with someone face-to-face or on the phone or text a friend, we can get immediate response and restate or adjust our message if we've been misunderstood. In most other situations when we write, that immediate response is missing, so we need to seek out responses from readers to help us revise. This chapter includes a list of guidelines for those readers to consider, along with various strategies for subsequent revising and rewriting.

Giving and Getting Peer Response

When you meet with other students in pairs or small groups to respond to one another's work, in class or online, you have the opportunity to get feedback on your work from several readers who can help you plan revisions. At the same time, you learn from reading others' work how they approached the writing task—you're not writing in a vacuum. Some students wonder why class time is being taken up by peer response, assuming that their instructor's opinion is the only one that counts, but seeing the work of others and learning how others see your work can help you improve the clarity and depth of your writing. The key to responding effectively is to be as specific in your response as possible and avoid being either too harsh or too complimentary. These guidelines can help:

- Read your peer review partner's draft first from beginning to end as an interested reader, trying to understand the information and ideas.

Don't look for problems. In fact, a good rule of thumb is this: read your partner's drafts in the same spirit that you want yours to be read.

- Before starting a second reading, ask your partner what questions they have about the draft or if you should focus on a particular aspect or part of the draft.
- As you read the draft again, take notes on a separate sheet of paper. Your notes might include positive comments ("I like the way you. . . . "), negative comments ("This sentence seems out of place"; "Is _____ the best word to use?"), and questions ("I'm not sure what you mean by _____"; "Would this paragraph work better on p. 2?").
- When you can, do more than identify issues. Offer suggestions or possible alternatives.
- When it's your draft's turn to be discussed, listen carefully to your partner's responses, take notes, and ask for clarification if necessary. Do not take issue with your partner's responses or argue over them; even if you're sure that what you wrote is perfectly clear, it's worth taking a second look if your partner has trouble understanding it.

Getting Effective Response

Ask your readers to consider some of the specific elements in the list below, but don't restrict them to those elements. Caution: if a reader says nothing about any of these elements, don't be too quick to assume that you needn't think about them yourself.

- What did you think when you first saw the **TITLE**? Is it interesting? informative? appropriate? Will it attract other readers' attention? 386–87
- Does the **BEGINNING** grab your attention? If so, how does it do so? Does it give enough information about the topic? offer necessary background information? How else might the piece begin? 373–80
- Is there a clear **THESIS**? What is it? 387–89

380–85

- Is there sufficient **SUPPORT** for the thesis? Is there anywhere you'd like to have more detail? Is the supporting material sufficiently **DOCUMENTED**?
- Does the text have a clear pattern of **ORGANIZATION**? Does each part relate to the thesis? Does each part follow from the one preceding it? Was the text easy to follow? How might the organization be improved?
- Is the **ENDING** satisfying? What did it leave you thinking? How else might the piece end?

66–68

- Can you tell the writer's **STANCE** or attitude toward the subject and audience? What words convey that attitude? Is it consistent throughout?

57–60

- How well does the text meet the needs and expectations of its **AUDIENCE**? Where might readers need more information, guidance, or clarification? How well does it achieve its **PURPOSE**? Does every part of the text help achieve the purpose? Could anything be cut? Should anything be added? Does the text meet the requirements of its **GENRE**? Should anything be added, deleted, or changed to meet those requirements?

55–56

- Do terms need **DEFINING**? Would examples, additional detail, explanations, **DIALOGUE**, or some other strategies help you understand the draft?

61–65

- Are **CHARTS**, **GRAPHS**, or **TABLES** clear and readable? If there are no **VISUALS**, should there be?

432–42
452–56

- Are sentences complete and grammatical? Are **TRANSITIONS** helpful or needed? Is the punctuation correct?

656
653–63

- Can any words or phrases be sharpened? Are verbs mostly active? Is **LANGUAGE THAT REFERS TO OTHERS** appropriate? Are all words spelled correctly?

391

HB-66–68

Revising

Once you have studied your draft with a critical eye and, if possible, gotten responses from other readers, it's time to revise. Major changes may be necessary, and you may need to generate new material or do some rewriting. But assume that your draft is good raw material that you can revise

to achieve your purposes. Revision should take place on several levels, from global (whole-text issues) to particular (the details). Work on your draft in that order, starting with the elements that are global in nature and gradually moving to smaller, more particular aspects. This allows you to use your time most efficiently and take care of bigger issues first. In fact, as you deal with the larger aspects of your writing, many of the smaller ones will be taken care of along the way.

Give yourself time to revise. When you have a due date, set deadlines for yourself that will give you time—preferably several days but as much as your schedule permits—to work on the text before it has to be delivered. Also, get some distance. Often when you're immersed in a project, you can't see the big picture because you're so busy creating it. If you can, get away from your writing for a while and think about something else. When you return to it, you're more likely to see it freshly. If there's not time to put a draft away for several days or more, even letting it sit overnight or for a few hours can help.

As you revise, assume that nothing is sacred. Bring a critical eye to all parts of a draft, not only to those parts pointed out by your reviewers. Content, organization, sentence patterns, individual words—all are subject to improvement. Be aware that a change in one part of the text may require changes in other parts.

At the same time, don't waste energy struggling with writing that simply doesn't work; you can always discard it. Look for the parts of your draft that do work—the parts that match your purpose and say what you want to say. Focus your efforts on those bright spots, expanding and developing them.

Revise to sharpen your FOCUS. Examine your THESIS to make sure it matches your PURPOSE as you now understand it. Read each paragraph to ensure that it contributes to your main point; you may find it helpful to OUTLINE your draft to help you see all the parts. One way to do this is to highlight one sentence in each paragraph that expresses the paragraph's main idea. Then copy and paste the highlighted sentences into a new document. Does one state the thesis of the entire essay? Do the rest relate to the thesis? Are they in the best order? If not, you need to either

344–45
387–89
55–56
335–37

modify the parts of the draft that don't advance your thesis or revise your thesis to reflect your draft's focus and to rearrange your points so they advance your discussion more effectively.

373–85

Read your **BEGINNING AND ENDING** carefully; make sure that the first paragraphs introduce your topic and provide any needed contextual information and that the final paragraphs provide a satisfying conclusion.

Revise to strengthen the argument. If readers find some of your claims unconvincing, you need to provide more information or more **SUPPORT**. You may need to define terms you've assumed they will understand, offer additional examples, or provide more detail by describing, explaining processes, adding dialogue, or using some other **STRATEGIES**. Make sure you show as well as tell—and don't forget that you might need to do so literally, with visuals like photos, graphs, or charts. You might try freewriting, clustering, or other ways of **GENERATING IDEAS AND TEXT**. If you need to provide additional evidence, you might need to do additional **RESEARCH**.

345
371
331–39
477

Revise to improve the ORGANIZATION. If you've outlined your draft, number each paragraph, and make sure each one follows from the one before. If anything seems out of place, move it, or if necessary, cut it completely. Check to see if you've included appropriate **TRANSITIONS** or **HEADINGS** to help readers move through the text, and add them as needed. Check to make sure your text meets readers' expectations of the **GENRE** you're writing in.

345–46
391
650–52
61–65

Revise for CLARITY. Be sure readers will be able to understand what you're saying. Look closely at your **TITLE** to be sure it gives a sense of what the text is about and at your **THESIS**: will readers recognize your main point? If you don't state a thesis directly, consider whether you should. Provide any necessary background information and **DEFINE** any key terms. Make sure you've integrated any **QUOTATIONS**, **PARAPHRASES**, or **SUMMARIES** into your text smoothly. Are all paragraphs focused around one main point? Do the sentences in each paragraph contribute to that point? Finally, con-

346–47
386–87
387–89
432–42
526–38

sider whether there are any data that would be more clearly presented in a CHART, TABLE, or GRAPH.

656

One way to test whether your text is clear is to switch audiences: write what you're trying to express as if you were talking to an eight-year-old. Your final draft probably won't be written that way, but the act of explaining your ideas to a young audience or readers who know nothing about your topic can help you discover any points that may be unclear.

Revise VISUALS. Make sure images are as close as possible to the discussion to which they relate and that the information in the visual is explained in your text. Each image should be numbered and have a title or caption that identifies it and explains its significance. Each part of a CHART, GRAPH, or TABLE should be clearly labeled to show what it represents. If you didn't create the image yourself, make sure to cite its source, and if you're posting your work online, obtain permission from the copyright owner.

653–63

656

Read and reread—and reread. Take some advice from writing theorist Donald Murray:

> Nonwriters confront a writing problem and look away from the text to rules and principles and textbooks and handbooks and models. Writers look at the text, knowing that the text itself will reveal what needs to be done and what should not yet be done or may never be done. The writer reads and rereads and rereads, standing far back and reading quickly from a distance, moving in close and reading slowly line by line, reading again and again, knowing that the answers to all writing problems lie within the evolving text.
>
> —Donald Murray, *A Writer Teaches Writing*

Rewriting

Some writers find it useful to try rewriting a draft in various ways or from various perspectives just to explore possibilities. Try it! If you find that your original plan works best for your purpose, fine. But you may find that

another way will work better. Especially if you're not completely satisfied with your draft, consider the following ways of rewriting. Experiment with your rhetorical situation:

- Rewrite your draft from different points of view, through the eyes of different people perhaps or through the eyes of an animal or even from the perspective of an object. See how the text changes (in the information it presents, its perspective, its voice).
- Rewrite for a different **AUDIENCE**. How might an email detailing a recent car accident be written to a friend, an insurance agent, a parent?
- Rewrite in a different **TONE**. If the first draft was temperate and judicious, be extreme; if it was polite, be more direct. If the first draft was in standard English, rewrite it more informally.
- Rewrite the draft in a different **GENRE** or **MEDIUM**. Rewrite an essay as a letter, story, poem, speech, comic strip, *PowerPoint* presentation. Which genre and medium work best to reach your intended audience and achieve your purpose?

57–60 66–68 61–65 70

Ways of rewriting a narrative

- Rewrite one scene completely in **DIALOGUE**.
- Start at the end of the story and work back to the beginning, or start in the middle and fill in the beginning as you work toward the end.

452–56

Ways of rewriting a textual analysis

- **COMPARE** the text you're analyzing with another text (which may be in a completely different genre—film, TV, song lyrics, computer games, poetry, fiction, whatever).
- Write a parody of the text you're analyzing. Be as silly and as funny as you can while maintaining the structure of the original text. Alternatively, write a parody of your analysis, using evidence from the text to support an outrageous analysis.

424–31

Ways of rewriting a report

- Rewrite for a different **AUDIENCE**. For example, explain a concept to your grandparents; describe the subject of a profile to a visitor from another planet. 57–60
- Be silly. Rewrite the draft as if for *The Daily Show* or the *Onion*, or rewrite it as if it were written by Bart Simpson.

Ways of rewriting an argument

- Rewrite taking another **POSITION**. Argue as forcefully for that position as you did for your actual one, acknowledging and refuting your original position. Alternatively, write a rebuttal to your first draft from the perspective of someone with different beliefs. 157–84
- Rewrite your draft as a **STORY**—make it real in the lives of specific individuals. (For example, if you were writing about abortion rights, you could write a story about a young pregnant woman trying to decide what she believes and what to do.) Or rewrite the argument as a fable or parable. 462–70
- Rewrite the draft as a letter responding to a hostile reader, trying at least to make them understand what you have to say.
- Rewrite the draft as an angry letter to someone or as a table-thumping dinner-with-the-relatives discussion. Write from the most extreme position possible.
- Write an **ANALYSIS** dof the topic of your argument in which you identify, as carefully and as neutrally as you can, the various positions people hold on the issue. 118–19

Once you've rewritten a draft in any of these ways, see whether there's anything you can use. Read each draft, considering how it might help you achieve your purpose, reach your audience, and convey your stance. Revise your actual draft to incorporate anything you think will make your text more effective, whether it's other genres or a different perspective.

Editing and Proofreading

Your ability to produce clear, error-free writing shows something about your ability as a writer and also leads readers to make assumptions about your intellect, your work habits, even your character. Readers of job-application letters and résumés, for example, may reject applications if they contain a single error, for no other reason than it's an easy way to narrow the field of potential candidates. In addition, they may well assume that applicants who present themselves sloppily in an application will do sloppy work on the job. This is all to say that you should edit and proofread your work carefully.

Editing

Editing is the stage where you work on the details of your paragraphs, sentences, words, and punctuation to make your writing as clear, precise, correct—and effective—as possible. Your goal is not to achieve "perfection" (whatever that may be) so much as to make your writing as effective as possible for your particular purpose and audience. Consult a good writing handbook for detailed advice, but use the following guidelines to help you check your drafts systematically for some common errors with paragraphs, sentences, and words:

Editing paragraphs

- Does each paragraph focus on one point? Does it have a **TOPIC SENTENCE** that announces that point, and if so, where is it located? If it's not the first sentence, should it be? If there's no clear topic sentence, should there be one?

- Does every sentence relate to the main point of the paragraph? If any sentences do not, should they be deleted, moved, or revised?
- Is there enough detail to develop the paragraph's main point? How is the point developed—with narrative? definition? some other **STRATEGY**?
- Where have you placed the most important information—at the beginning? the end? in the middle? The most emphatic spot is at the end, so in general that's where to put information you want readers to remember. The second most emphatic spot is at the beginning.
- Are any paragraphs especially long or short? Consider breaking long paragraphs if there's a logical place to do so—maybe an extended example should be in its own paragraph, for instance. If you have paragraphs of only a sentence or two, see if you can add to them or combine them with another paragraph, unless you're using a brief paragraph to provide emphasis.
- Check the way your paragraphs fit together. Does each one follow smoothly from the one before? Do you need to add any **TRANSITIONS**?
- Do the **BEGINNING** paragraphs catch readers' attention? In what other ways might you begin your text?
- Do the final paragraphs provide a satisfactory **ENDING**? How else might you conclude your text?

371

Editing sentences

- Is each sentence **COMPLETE**? Does it have someone or something (the subject) performing some sort of action or expressing a state of being (the verb)? Does each sentence begin with a capital letter and **END** with a period, question mark, or exclamation point?
- Check your use of the **PASSIVE VOICE**. Although there are some rhetorical situations in which the passive voice ("The prince was killed by a rival") is more appropriate than the active voice ("A rival killed the prince") because you want to emphasize an action rather than who performed it, you'll do well to edit it out unless you have a good reason for using it.

- Check for **PARALLELISM**. Items in a list or series should be parallel in form—all nouns (lions, tigers, bears), all verbs (hopped, skipped, jumped), all clauses (he came, he saw, he conquered), and so on.
- Do many of your sentences begin with **IT** or **THERE**? Too often these words make your writing wordy and vague or even conceal needed information. Why write "There are reasons we voted for him" when you can say "We had reasons to vote for him"?
- Are your sentences varied? If they all start with the subject or are the same length, your writing might be dull and maybe even hard to read. Try varying your sentence openings by adding **TRANSITIONS**, introductory phrases or clauses. Vary sentence lengths by adding detail to some or combining some sentences.
- Make sure you've used **COMMAS** correctly. Is there a comma after each introductory element? ("After the lead singer quit, the group nearly disbanded. However, they then produced a string of hits.") Do commas set off nonrestrictive elements—parts that aren't needed to understand the sentence? ("The books I read in middle school, like the Harry Potter series, became longer and more challenging.") Are compound sentences connected with a comma? ("I'll eat broccoli steamed, but I prefer it roasted.")

Editing words

- Are you sure of the meaning of every word? Use a dictionary; be sure to look up words whose meanings you're not sure about. And remember your audience—do you use any terms they'll need to have defined?

HB-45

- Is any of your language too **GENERAL** or vague? Why write that you competed in a race, for example, if you could say you ran the 4 × 200 relay?

66–68

- What about the **TONE**? If your stance is serious (or humorous or critical or something else), make sure that your words all convey that attitude.

HB-31–32

- Do any pronouns have vague or unclear **ANTECEDENTS**? If you use "he" or "they" or "it" or "these," will readers know whom or what the words refer to?

HB-44

- Have you used any **CLICHÉS**—expressions that are used so frequently that they are no longer fresh? "Live and let live," avoiding something

"like the plague," and similar expressions are so predictable that your writing will almost always be better off without them.

- Be careful with **LANGUAGE THAT REFERS TO OTHERS**. Make sure that your words do not stereotype any individual or group. Mention age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and so on only if they are relevant to your subject. When referring to an ethnic group, make every effort to use the terms members of the group prefer.
- Edit out language that might be considered sexist. Have you used words like *manpower* or *policemen* to refer to people who may be female? If so, substitute less gendered words such as *personnel* or *police officers*. Do your words reflect any gender stereotypes—for example, that all engineers are male, or all nurses female? If you mention someone's gender, is it even necessary? If not, eliminate the unneeded words.
- How many of your verbs are forms of **BE** and **DO**? If you rely too much on these words, try replacing them with more specific verbs. Why write "She did a proposal for" when you could say "She proposed"? HB-44–45
- Do you ever confuse **ITS** and **IT'S**? Use *it's* when you mean *it is* or *it has*. Use *its* when you mean *belonging to it*. HB-53

Proofreading

Proofreading is the final stage of the writing process, the point where you clean up your work to present it to your readers. Proofreading is like checking your appearance in a mirror before going into a job interview: being neat and well groomed looms large in creating a good first impression, and the same principle applies to writing. Misspelled words, missing pages, mixed-up fonts, and other lapses send a negative message about your work—and about you. Most readers excuse an occasional error, but by and large readers are an intolerant bunch: too many errors will lead them to declare your writing—and maybe your thinking—flawed. There goes your credibility. So proofread your final draft with care to ensure that your message is taken as seriously as you want it to be.

Up to this point, you've been told *not* to read individual words on the page and instead to read for meaning. Proofreading demands the opposite: you must slow down your reading so that you can see every word, every punctuation mark.

- Use your computer's grammar checker and spelling checker, but only as a first step, and know that they're not very reliable. Computer programs don't read writing; instead, they rely on formulas and banks of words, so what they flag (or don't flag) as mistakes may or may not be accurate. If you were to write, "My brother was diagnosed with a leaning disorder," *leaning* would not be flagged as misspelled because it is a word (and might even be a disorder), even though it's the wrong word in that sentence.
- To keep your eyes from jumping ahead, place a ruler or piece of paper under each line as you read. Use your finger or a pencil as a pointer.
- Some writers find it helpful to read the text one sentence at a time, beginning with the last sentence and working backward.
- Read your text out loud to yourself—or better, to others, who may *hear* problems you can't see. Alternatively, have someone else read your text aloud to you while you follow along on the screen or page.
- Ask someone else to read your text. The more important the writing is, the more important this step is.
- If you find a mistake after you've printed out your text and are unable to print out a corrected version, make the change as neatly as possible in pencil or pen.

Guiding Your Reader

Traffic lights, street signs, and lines on the road help drivers find their way. Readers need similar guidance—to know, for example, whether they're reading a report or an argument, an evaluation or a proposal. They also need to know what to expect: What will the report be about? What perspective will it offer? What will this paragraph cover? What about the next one? How do the two paragraphs relate to each other?

When you write, then, you need to provide cues to help your readers navigate your text and understand the points you're trying to make. This chapter offers advice on guiding your reader and, specifically, on using *titles*, *thesis statements*, *topic sentences*, and *transitions*.

Titles

A title serves various purposes, naming a text and providing clues to the content. It also helps readers decide whether they want to read further, so it's worth your while to come up with a title that attracts interest. Some titles include subtitles. You generally have considerable freedom in choosing a title, but always you'll want to consider the **RHETORICAL SITUATION** to be sure your title serves your purpose and appeals to the audience you want to reach.

Some titles simply announce the subject of the text:

"Black Men and Public Space"
The Pencil
"Why Colleges Shower Their Students with A's"
"Does Texting Affect Writing?"

Some titles provoke readers or otherwise entice them to read:

"Kill 'Em! Crush 'Em! Eat 'Em Raw!"
"Thank God for the Atom Bomb"
"What Are Homosexuals For?"

Sometimes writers add a subtitle to explain or illuminate the title:

Aria: Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood
"It's in Our Genes: The Biological Basis of Human Mating Behavior"
"From Realism to Virtual Reality: Images of America's Wars"

Sometimes when you're starting to write, you'll think of a title that helps you generate ideas and write. More often, though, a title is one of the last things you'll write, when you know what you've written and can craft a suitable name for your text.

Thesis Statements

A thesis identifies the topic of your text along with the claim you are making about it. A good thesis also helps readers understand an essay by forecasting its overall shape. In fact, some instructors call thesis statements *forecasting statements*. Working to create a sharp thesis can help you focus both your thinking and your writing. Here are three steps for moving from a topic to a thesis statement:

1. State your topic as a question. You may have an idea for a topic, such as "gasoline prices," "analysis of 'real women' ad campaigns," or "famine." Those may be good topics, but they're not thesis statements, primarily because none of them actually makes a statement. A good way to begin moving from topic to thesis statement is to turn your topic into a question:

What causes fluctuations in gasoline prices?

Are ads picturing "real women" who aren't models effective?

What can be done to prevent famine in East Africa?

2. Turn your question into a position. A thesis statement is an assertion—it takes a stand or makes a claim. Whether you're writing a report or an argument, you are saying, "This is the way I see . . . ," "My research shows . . . ," or "This is what I believe about . . ." Your thesis statement announces your position on the question you are raising about your topic, so a relatively easy way of establishing a thesis is to answer your own question:

> Gasoline prices fluctuate for several reasons.
>
> Ads picturing "real women" instead of models are effective because women can easily identify with them.
>
> The most recent famine in Somalia could have been avoided if certain measures had been taken.

3. Narrow your thesis. A good thesis is specific, guiding you as you write and showing your audience exactly what your essay will cover, often in the same order you will cover it. The preceding thesis statements need to be qualified and focused—they need to be made more specific. For example:

> Gasoline prices fluctuate because of production procedures, consumer demand, international politics, and oil companies' policies.
>
> Dove's "Campaign for Self-Esteem" and Cover Girl's ads featuring Queen Latifah work because consumers can identify with the women's bodies and admire the women's confidence in displaying them.
>
> The 2017 famine in Somalia could have been avoided if farmers had received training in more effective methods and had planted drought-resistant crops and if other nations had provided more aid more quickly.

334–35

A good way to narrow a thesis is to ask **QUESTIONS** about it: *Why* do gasoline prices fluctuate? *How* could the Somalia famine have been avoided? The answers will help you craft a narrow, focused thesis.

4. Qualify your thesis. Sometimes you want to make a strong argument and to state your thesis bluntly. Often, however, you need to acknowledge that your assertions may be challenged or may not be unconditionally true. In those cases, consider limiting the scope of your thesis by adding to it such terms as *may*, *probably*, *apparently*, *very likely*, *sometimes*, and *often*.

> Gasoline prices *very likely* fluctuate because of production procedures, consumer demand, international politics, and oil companies' policies.
>
> Dove's and Cover Girl's ad campaigns featuring "real women" *may* work because consumers can identify with the women's bodies and admire the women's confidence in displaying them.
>
> The 2017 famine in Somalia could *probably* have been avoided if farmers had received training in more effective methods and had planted drought-resistant crops and if other nations had provided more aid more quickly.

Thesis statements are typically positioned at or near the end of a text's introduction, to let readers know at the outset what is being claimed and what the text will be aiming to prove. While a thesis often forecasts your organization, it doesn't necessarily do so; the organization may be more complex than the thesis itself. For example, Notre Dame University student Sarah Dzubay's essay, "An Outbreak of the Irrational," contains this thesis statement:

> The movement to opt out of vaccinations is irrational and dangerous because individuals advocating for their right to exercise their personal freedom are looking in the wrong places for justification and ignoring the threat they present to society as a whole.

The essay that follows includes discussions of herd immunity; a socioeconomic profile of parents who choose not to vaccinate their children; outlines of the rationales those parents use to justify their choice, which include fear of autism, fear of causing other health problems, and political and ethical values; and a conclusion that parents who refuse to vaccinate their children are unreasonable and selfish. The paper delivers what the thesis promises but includes important information not mentioned in the thesis itself.

Topic Sentences

Just as a thesis statement announces the topic and position of an essay, a topic sentence states the subject and focus of a paragraph. Good paragraphs focus on a single point, which is summarized in a topic sentence. Usually, but not always, the topic sentence begins the paragraph:

> *Graduating from high school or college is an exciting, occasionally even traumatic event.* Your identity changes as you move from being a high school teenager to a university student or a worker; your connection to home loosens as you attend school elsewhere, move to a place of your own, or simply exercise your right to stay out later. You suddenly find yourself doing different things, thinking different thoughts, fretting about different matters. As recent high school graduate T. J. Devoe puts it, "I wasn't really scared, but having this vast range of opportunity made me uneasy. I didn't know *what* was gonna happen." Jenny Petrow, in describing her first year out of college, observes, "It's a tough year. It was for all my friends."
>
> —Sydney Lewis, *Help Wanted: Tales from the First Job Front*

Sometimes the topic sentence may come at the end of the paragraph or even at the end of the preceding paragraph, depending on the way the paragraphs relate to one another. Other times a topic sentence will summarize or restate a point made in the previous paragraph, helping readers understand what they've just read as they move on to the next point. See how the linguist Deborah Tannen does this in the first paragraphs of an article on differences in men's and women's conversational styles:

> I was addressing a small gathering in a suburban Virginia living room—a women's group that had invited men to join them. Throughout the evening, one man had been particularly talkative, frequently offering ideas and anecdotes, while his wife sat silently beside him on the couch. Toward the end of the evening, I commented that women frequently complain that their husbands don't talk to them. This man quickly concurred. He gestured toward his wife and said, "She's the talker in our family." The room burst into laughter; the man looked puzzled and hurt. "It's true," he explained. "When I come home from work I have nothing to say. If she didn't keep the conversation going, we'd spend the whole evening in silence."
>
> *This episode crystallizes the irony that although American men tend to talk more than women in public situations, they often talk less at home.* And this pattern is wreaking havoc with marriage.
>
> —Deborah Tannen, "Sex, Lies, and Conversation: Why Is It So Hard for Men and Women to Talk to Each Other?"

Transitions

Transitions help readers move from thought to thought—from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph. You are likely to use a number of transitions as you draft; when you're **EDITING**, you should make a point of checking transitions. Here are some common ones:

356–59

- ***To signal causes and effects:*** accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, hence, so, then, therefore, thus
- ***To signal comparisons:*** also, in the same way, like, likewise, similarly
- ***To signal changes in direction or expections:*** although, but, even though, however, in contrast, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, on the one hand . . . on the other hand, still, yet
- ***To signal examples:*** for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, such as
- ***To signal sequences or similarities:*** again; also; and; and then; besides; finally; furthermore; last; moreover; next; too; first, second, third, etc.
- ***To signal time relations:*** after, as soon as, at first, at the same time, before, eventually, finally, immediately, later, meanwhile, next, simultaneously, so far, soon, then, thereafter
- ***To signal a summary or conclusion:*** as a result, as we have seen, finally, in a word, in any event, in brief, in conclusion, in other words, in short, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, therefore, thus, to summarize

IF YOU NEED MORE HELP

See also Chapter 58 on USING VISUALS, INCORPORATING SOUND for ways of creating visual signals for your readers.

653–63

Analyzing Causes and Effects

Analyzing causes helps us think about why something happened, whereas thinking about effects helps us consider what might happen. When we hear a noise in the night, we want to know what caused it. Children poke sticks into holes to see what will happen. Researchers try to understand the causes of diseases. Writers often have occasion to consider causes or effects as part of a larger topic or sometimes as a main focus: in a **PROPOSAL**, we might consider the effects of reducing tuition or the causes of recent tuition increases; in a **MEMOIR**, we might explore why the person we had a date with failed to show up.

246–55
224–32

Usually we can only speculate about *probable* causes or *likely* effects. In writing about causes and effects, then, we are generally **ARGUING** for those we consider plausible, not proven. This chapter will help you analyze causes and effects in writing—and to do so in a way that suits your rhetorical situation.

397–417

Determining Plausible Causes and Effects

What causes ozone depletion? Sleeplessness? Obesity? And what are their effects? Those are of course large, complex topics, but whenever you have reason to ask why something happened or what could happen, there will likely be several possible causes and just as many predictable effects. There may be obvious causes, though often they will be less important than others that are harder to recognize. (Eating too much may be an obvious cause of being overweight, but *why* people eat too much has several less obvious causes: portion size, advertising, lifestyle, and psychological disorders are only a few possibilities.) Similarly, short-term effects are often less important than long-term ones. (A stomachache may be an

effect of eating too much candy, but the chemical imbalance that can result from consuming too much sugar is a much more serious effect.)

LISTING, **CLUSTERING**, and **OUTLINING** are useful processes for analyzing causes. And at times you might need to do some **RESEARCH** to identify possible causes or effects and to find evidence to support your analysis. When you've identified potential causes and effects, you need to analyze them. Which causes and effects are primary? Which seem to be secondary? Which are most relevant to your **PURPOSE** and are likely to convince your **AUDIENCE**? You will probably have to choose from several possible causes and effects for your analysis because you won't want or need to include all of them.

332–34
477
55–56
57–60

Arguing for Causes or Effects

Once you've identified several possible causes or predictable effects, you need to **ARGUE** that some are more plausible than others. You must provide convincing support for your argument because you usually cannot *prove* that *x* causes *y* or that *y* will be caused by *z*; you can only show, with good reasons and appropriate evidence, that *x* is *likely* to cause *y* or that *y* will *likely* follow from *z*. See, for example, how an essay on the psychological basis for risk taking speculates about two potential causes for the popularity of extreme sports:

397–417

> Studies now indicate that the inclination to take high risks may be hardwired into the brain, intimately linked to arousal and pleasure mechanisms, and may offer such a thrill that it functions like an addiction. The tendency probably affects one in five people, mostly young males, and declines with age. It may ensure our survival, even spur our evolution as individuals and as a species. Risk taking probably bestowed a crucial evolutionary advantage, inciting the fighting and foraging of the hunter-gatherer. . . .
>
> As psychologist Salvadore Maddi, PhD, of the University of California at Davis warns, "High-risk takers may have a hard time deriving meaning and purpose from everyday life." Indeed, this peculiar form of dissatisfaction could help explain the explosion of high-risk sports in America and other postindustrial Western nations. In unstable cultures, such as those at war or suffering poverty, people rarely seek

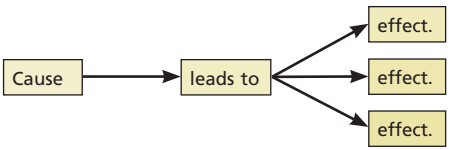
> out additional thrills. But in a rich and safety-obsessed country like America, land of guardrails, seat belts, and personal-injury lawsuits, everyday life may have become too safe, predictable, and boring for those programmed for risk taking. —Paul Roberts, "Risk"

Roberts suggests that genetics is one likely cause of extreme sports and that an American obsession with safety is perhaps a cause of their growing popularity. Notice, however, that he presents these as likely or possible, not certain, by choosing his words carefully: "studies now *indicate*"; "the inclination to take high risks *may* be hardwired"; "[r]isk taking *probably* bestowed a crucial evolutionary advantage"; "this . . . dissatisfaction *could help* explain." Like Roberts, you will almost always need to qualify what you say about causes and effects—to say that something *could explain* (rather than saying it "explains") or that it *suggests* (rather than "shows"). Causes and effects can seldom be proved definitively, so you need to acknowledge that your argument is not the last word on the subject.

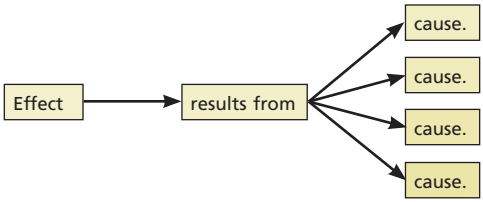
Ways of Organizing an Analysis of Causes and Effects

Your analysis of causes and effects may be part of a proposal or some other genre of writing, or you may write a text whose central purpose is to analyze causes or speculate about effects. While there are many ways to organize an analysis of causes and effects, three common ways are to state a cause and then discuss its effects, to state an effect and then discuss its causes, and to identify a chain of causes and effects.

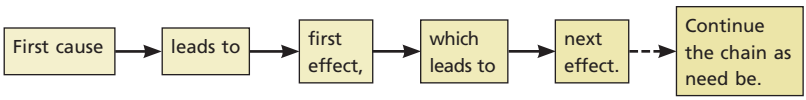
Identify a cause and then discuss its effects. If you were writing about climate change, you might first show that many scientists fear it will have several effects, including more violent storms, the extinction of various kinds of plants, and elevated sea levels.



Identify an effect and then trace its causes. If you were writing about school violence, for example, you might argue that it is a result of sloppy dress, informal teacher-student relationships, low academic standards, and disregard for rules.



Identify a chain of causes and effects. You may sometimes discuss a chain of causes and effects. If you were writing about the right to privacy, for example, you might consider the case of Megan's law. A convicted child molester raped and murdered a girl named Megan; the crime caused New Jersey legislators to pass the so-called Megan's law (an effect), which requires that convicted sex offenders be publicly identified. As more states enacted versions of Megan's law, concern for the rights of those who are identified developed—the effect became a cause of further effects.



Considering the Rhetorical Situation

As a writer or speaker, you need to think about the message that you want to articulate, the audience you want to reach, and the larger context you are writing in.

PURPOSE

Your main purpose may be to analyze the causes and effects of something. But sometimes you'll have another goal that calls for such analysis — a business report, for

55–56

example, might need to explain what caused a decline in sales.

57–60

AUDIENCE Who is your intended audience, and how will analyzing causes help you reach them? Do you need to tell them why some event happened or what effects resulted?

61–65

GENRE Does your genre require you to analyze causes? Proposals, for example, often need to consider the effects of a proposed solution.

66–68

STANCE What is your stance, and could analyzing causes or effects show that stance? Could it help demonstrate your seriousness or show that your conclusions are reasonable?

69–71

MEDIA / DESIGN You can rely on words to analyze causes, but sometimes a drawing will help readers *see* how causes lead to effects.

IF YOU NEED MORE HELP

321

See also the PROCESSES chapters for help generating ideas, drafting, and so on if you need to write an entire text whose purpose is to analyze causes or speculate about effects.

Arguing

Basketball fans argue about who's better, LeBron James or Steph Curry. Political candidates argue that they have the most experience or best judgment. A toilet paper ad argues that "you deserve a little luxury in your life, and so does your bottom." As you likely realize, we are surrounded by arguments, and much of the work you do as a college student requires you to read and write arguments. When you write a **LITERARY ANALYSIS**, for instance, you argue for a particular interpretation. In a **PROPOSAL**, you argue for a particular solution to a problem. Even a **PROFILE** argues that a subject should be seen in a certain way. This chapter offers advice on some of the key elements of making an argument, from developing an arguable thesis and identifying good reasons and evidence that supports those reasons to building common ground and dealing with viewpoints other than your own.

▲ 211–23
246–55
233–45

Reasons for Arguing

We argue for many reasons, and they often overlap: to convince others that our position on a subject is reasonable, to influence the way they think about a subject, to persuade them to change their point of view or to take some sort of action. In fact, many composition scholars and teachers believe that all writing makes an argument.

As a student, you'll be called on to make arguments continually: when you participate in class discussions, when you take an essay exam, when you post a comment to an online discussion or a blog. In all these instances, you are adding your opinions to some larger conversation, arguing for what you believe—and why.

Arguing Logically: Claims, Reasons, and Evidence

398–408

The basic building blocks of argument are **CLAIMS**, **REASONS**, and **EVIDENCE** that supports those reasons. Using these building blocks, we can construct a strong logical argument, also known as *logos*.

Claims. Good arguments are based on arguable claims—statements that reasonable people may disagree about. Certain kinds of statements cannot be argued:

- ***Verifiable statements of fact.*** Most of the time, there's no point in arguing about facts like "the earth is round" or "George H. W. Bush was America's forty-first president." Such statements contain no controversy, no potential opposition—and so no interest for an audience. However, you might argue about the basis of a fact. For example, until recently it was a fact that our solar system had nine planets, but when further discoveries led to a change in the definition of *planet*, Pluto no longer qualified.
- ***Issues of faith or belief.*** By definition, matters of faith cannot be proven or refuted. If you believe in reincarnation or don't believe there is an afterlife, there's no way I can convince you otherwise. However, in a philosophy or religion course you may be asked to argue, for example, whether or not the universe must have a cause.
- ***Matters of simple opinion or personal taste.*** If you think cargo pants are ugly, no amount of arguing will convince you to think otherwise. If you've downloaded every Taylor Swift album and think she's the greatest singer ever, you won't convince your Nirvana-loving parents to like her, too. If matters of taste are based on identifiable criteria, though, they may be argued in an **EVALUATION**, where "Tom Cruise is a terrible actor" is more than just your opinion—it's an assertion you can support with evidence.

202–10

You may begin with an opinion: "I think wearing a helmet makes riding a bike more dangerous, not less." As it stands, that statement can't be considered a claim—it needs to be made more reasonable and informed. To do that, you might reframe it as a question—"Do bike riders who wear helmets get injured more often than those who don't?"—that may be answered as you do research and start to write. Your opinion or question should lead

you to an arguable claim, however, one that could be challenged by another thoughtful person. In this case, for example, your research might lead you to a focused, qualified claim: *Contrary to common sense, wearing a helmet while riding a bicycle increases the chances of injury, at least to adult riders.*

Qualifying a claim. According to an old saying, there are two sides to every story. Much of the time, though, arguments don't sort themselves neatly into two sides, pro and con. No matter what your topic, your argument will rarely be a simple matter of being for or against; in most cases, you'll want to qualify your claim—that it is true in certain circumstances, with certain conditions, with these limitations, and so on. Qualifying your claim shows that you're reasonable and also makes your topic more manageable by limiting it. The following questions can help you qualify your claim.

- ***Can it be true in some circumstances or at some times but not others?*** For example, freedom of speech should generally be unrestricted, but individuals can sue for slander or libel.
- ***Can it be true only with certain conditions?*** For instance, cell phones and computer monitors should be recycled, but only by licensed, domestic recyclers.
- ***Can it be true for some groups or individuals but not others?*** For example, nearly everyone should follow a low-carb diet, but some people, such as diabetics, should avoid it.

SOME WORDS FOR QUALIFYING A CLAIM

sometimes	nearly	it seems/seemingly
rarely	usually	some
in some cases	more or less	perhaps
often	for the most part	possibly
routinely	in many cases	in most cases

Drafting a thesis statement. Once your claim is focused and appropriately qualified, it can form the core of your essay's **THESIS STATEMENT**, which announces your position and forecasts the path your argument will follow. For example, here is the opening paragraph of an essay by the

387–89

executive director of the National Congress of American Indians arguing that the remains of Native Americans should be treated with the same respect given to others. The author outlines the context of her argument and then presents her thesis (here, in italics):

> What if museums, universities and government agencies could put your dead relatives on display or keep them in boxes to be cut up and otherwise studied? What if you believed that the spirits of the dead could not rest until their human remains were placed in a sacred area? The ordinary American would say there ought to be a law—and there is, for ordinary Americans. *The problem for American Indians is that there are too many laws of the kind that make us the archeological property of the United States and too few of the kind that protect us from such insults.* —Susan Shown Harjo, "Last Rites for Indian Dead: Treating Remains Like Artifacts Is Intolerable"

Reasons. Your claim must be supported by reasons that your audience will accept. A reason can usually be linked to a claim with the word *because*:

CLAIM	+	*BECAUSE*	+	REASON
College students should strive to graduate		*because*		they will earn far more over their lifetimes than those who do not.

Keep in mind that you likely have a further reason, a rule or principle that underlies the reason you link directly to your claim. In this argument, the underlying reason is that isolation from other people is bad. If your audience doesn't accept that principle, you may have to back it up with further reasons or evidence.

To come up with good reasons, start by stating your position and then answering the question *why*?

> **CLAIM:** College students should strive to graduate. *Why?*
>
> **REASON:** (Because) They will earn far more over their lifetimes than those who do not. *Why?*
>
> **UNDERLYING REASON:** The economy values college graduates and pays them more.

As you can see, this exercise can continue indefinitely as the underlying reasons grow more and more general and abstract. You can do the same with other positions:

CLAIM: Smoking should be banned. *Why?*

REASON: (Because) It is harmful to smokers and also to nonsmokers.

UNDERLYING REASON: People should be protected from harmful substances.

Evidence. Evidence to support your reasons can come from various sources. In fact, you may need to use several kinds of evidence to persuade your audience that your claim is true. Some of the most common types of evidence include facts, statistics, examples, authorities, anecdotes, scenarios, case studies, textual evidence, and visuals.

Facts are ideas that are proven to be true. Facts can include observations or scholarly research (your own or someone else's), but they need to be accepted as true. If your audience accepts the facts you present, they can be powerful means of persuasion. For example, an essay on junk email offers these facts to demonstrate the seasonal nature of spam:

> The flow of spam is often seasonal. It slows in the spring, and then, in the month that technology specialists call "black September"—when hundreds of thousands of students return to college, many armed with new computers and access to fast Internet connections—the levels rise sharply.
>
> —Michael Specter, "Damn Spam"

Specter offers this fact with only a general reference to its origin ("technology specialists"), but given what most people know—or think they know—about college students, it rings true. A citation from a study published by a "technology specialist" would offer even greater credibility.

Statistics are numerical data, usually produced through research, surveys, or polls. Statistics should be relevant to your argument, as current as possible, accurate, and from a reliable source. An argument advocating that Americans should eat less meat presents these data to support the writer's contention that we eat far too much of it:

> Americans are downing close to 200 pounds of meat, poultry, and fish per capita per year (dairy and eggs are separate, and hardly insignificant), an increase of 50 pounds per person from 50 years ago. We each consume something like 110 grams of protein a day, about twice the federal government's recommended allowance; of that, about 75 grams come from animal protein. (The recommended level is itself considered by many dietary experts to be higher than it needs to be.) It's likely that most of us would do just fine on around 30 grams of protein a day, virtually all of it from plant sources.
>
> —Mark Bittman, "Rethinking the Meat-Guzzler"

Bittman's statistics demonstrate the extent to which Americans have increased their meat consumption over the last half century, the proportion of our diets that comes from meat, and, by comparison, how much protein our bodies require—and summarize the heart of his argument in stark numeric terms.

Examples are specific instances that illustrate general statements. In a book on life after dark in Europe, a historian offers several examples to demonstrate his point that three hundred years ago, night—without artificial lighting—was treacherous:

> Even sure-footed natives on a dark night could misjudge the lay of the land, stumbling into a ditch or off a precipice. In Aberdeenshire, a fifteen-year-old girl died in 1739 after straying from her customary path through a churchyard and tumbling into a newly dug grave. The Yorkshireman Arthur Jessop, returning from a neighbor's home on a cold December evening, fell into a stone pit after losing his bearings.
>
> —A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past*

Ekirch illustrates his point and makes it come alive for readers by citing two specific individuals' fates.

Authorities are experts on your subject. To be useful, authorities must be reputable, trustworthy, and qualified to address the subject. You should **EVALUATE** any authorities you consult carefully to be sure they have the credentials necessary for readers to take them seriously. When you cite

511–18

experts, you should clearly identify them and the origins of their authority in a **SIGNAL PHRASE**, as does the author of an argument that deforested land can be reclaimed:

535–38

> Reed Funk, professor of plant biology at Rutgers University, believes that the vast areas of deforested land can be used to grow millions of genetically improved trees for food, mostly nuts, and for fuel. Funk sees nuts used to supplement meat as a source of high-quality protein in developing-country diets.
>
> —Lester R. Brown, *Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a Planet under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble*

Brown cites Funk, an expert on plant biology, to support his argument that humans need to rethink the global economy in order to create a sustainable world. Without the information on Funk's credentials, though, readers would have no reason to take his proposal seriously.

Anecdotes are brief **NARRATIVES** that your audience will find believable and that contribute directly to your argument. Anecdotes may come from your personal experience or the experiences of others. In an essay arguing that it's understandable when athletes give in to the temptation to use performance-enhancing drugs, sports blogger William Moller uses an anecdote to show that the need to perform can outweigh the potential negative consequences of using drugs:

462–70

> I spent my high school years at a boarding school hidden among the apple orchards of Massachusetts. Known for a spartan philosophy regarding the adolescent need for sleep, the school worked us to the bone, regularly slamming us with six hours of homework. I pulled a lot more all-nighters (of the scholastic sort) in my years there than I ever did in college. When we weren't in class, the library, study hall, or formal sit-down meals, we were likely found on a sports field. We also had school on Saturday, beginning at 8 a.m. just like every other non-Sunday morning.
>
> Adding kindling to the fire, the students were not your laid-back types; everyone wanted that spot at the top of the class, and social life was rife with competition. The type A's that fill the investment banking,

legal, and political worlds—those are the kids I spent my high school years with.

And so it was that midway through my sophomore year, I found myself on my third all-nighter in a row, attempting to memorize historically significant pieces of art out of E. H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art*. I had finished a calculus exam the day before, and the day before that had been devoted to world history. And on that one cold night in February, I had had enough. I had hit that point where you've had so little sleep over such a long time that you start seeing spots, as if you'd been staring at a bright light for too long. The grade I would compete for the next day suddenly slipped in importance, and I began daydreaming about how easy the real world would be compared to the hell I was going through.

But there was hope. A friend who I was taking occasional study breaks with read the story in the bags beneath my eyes, in the slump of my shoulders, the nervous drumming of my fingers on the chair as we sipped flat, warm Coke in the common room. My personal *deus ex machina*,* he handed me a small white pill.

I was very innocent. I matured way after most of my peers, and was probably best known for being the kid who took all the soprano solos away from the girls in the choir as a first-year student. I don't think I had ever been buzzed, much less drunk. I'd certainly never smoked a cigarette. And knowing full well that what I was doing could be nothing better than against the rules (and less importantly, illegal) I did what I felt I needed to do, to accomplish what was demanded of me. And it worked. I woke up and regained focus like nothing I'd ever experienced. Unfortunately, it also came with serious side effects: I was a hypersensitized, stuffed-up, sweaty, wide-eyed mess, but I studied until the birds started chirping. And I aced my test.

Later I found out the pill was Ritalin, and it was classified as a class 3 drug.† I did it again, too—only a handful of times, as the side effects were so awful. But every time it was still illegal, still against

---

**Deus ex machina:* In ancient Greek and Roman drama, a god introduced into the plot to resolve complications.

†*Class 3 drug:* Drug that is illegal to possess without a prescription.

> the rules. And as emphasized above, I was much more worried about the scholastic consequences if I were discovered abusing a prescription drug than the fact that I was breaking the law. Though I was using it in a far different manner than the baseball players who would later get caught with it in their systems, it was still very clearly a "performance-enhancing drug."
>
> Just like every other person on this planet, I was giving in to the incentive scheme that was presented to me. The negative of doing poorly on the test was far greater than the negative of getting caught, discounted by the anesthetic of low probability.
>
> —William Moller, "We, the Public, Place the Best Athletes on Pedestals"

Moller uses this anecdote to demonstrate the truth of his argument, that given the choice between "breaking the rules and breaking my grades" or "getting an edge" in professional sports, just about everyone will choose to break the rules.

Scenarios are hypothetical situations. Like anecdotes, "what if" scenarios can help you describe the possible effects of particular actions or offer new ways of looking at a particular state of affairs. For example, a mathematician presents this lighthearted scenario about Santa Claus in a tongue-in-cheek argument that Christmas is (almost) pure magic:

> Let's assume that Santa only visits those who are children in the eyes of the law, that is, those under the age of 18. There are roughly 2 billion such individuals in the world. However, Santa started his annual activities long before diversity and equal opportunity became issues, and as a result he doesn't handle Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist children. That reduces his workload significantly to a mere 15% of the total, namely 378 million. However, the crucial figure is not the number of children but the number of homes Santa has to visit. According to the most recent census data, the average size of a family in the world is 3.5 children per household. Thus, Santa has to visit 108,000,000 individual homes. (Of course, as everyone knows, Santa only visits good children, but we can surely assume that, on

> an average, at least one child of the 3.5 in each home meets that criterion.)
>
> —Keith Devlin, "The Mathematics of Christmas"

Devlin uses this scenario, as part of his mathematical analysis of Santa's yearly task, to help demonstrate that Christmas is indeed magical—because if you do the math, it's clear that Santa's task is physically impossible.

Case studies and observations feature detailed reporting about a subject. Case studies are in-depth, systematic examinations of an occasion, a person, or a group. For example, in arguing that class differences exist in the United States, sociologist Gregory Mantsios presents studies of three "typical" Americans to show "enormous class differences" in their lifestyles.

Observations offer detailed descriptions of a subject. Here's an observation of the emergence of a desert stream that flows only at night:

> At about 5:30 water came out of the ground. It did not spew up, but slowly escaped into the surrounding sand and small rocks. The wet circle grew until water became visible. Then it bubbled out like a small fountain and the creek began.
>
> —Craig Childs, *The Secret Knowledge of Water*

Childs presents this and other observations in a book that argues (among other things) that even in harsh, arid deserts, water exists, and knowing where to find it can mean the difference between life and death.

526–38

Textual evidence includes **QUOTATIONS**, **PARAPHRASES**, and **SUMMARIES**. Usually, the relevance of textual evidence must be stated directly, as excerpts from a text may carry several potential meanings. For example, here is an excerpt from a student essay analyzing the function of the raft in *Huckleberry Finn* as "a platform on which the resolution of conflicts is made possible":

> [T]he scenes where Jim and Huck are in consensus on the raft contain the moments in which they are most relaxed. For instance, in chapter twelve of the novel, Huck, after escaping capture from Jackson's Island, calls the rafting life "solemn" and articulates their experience

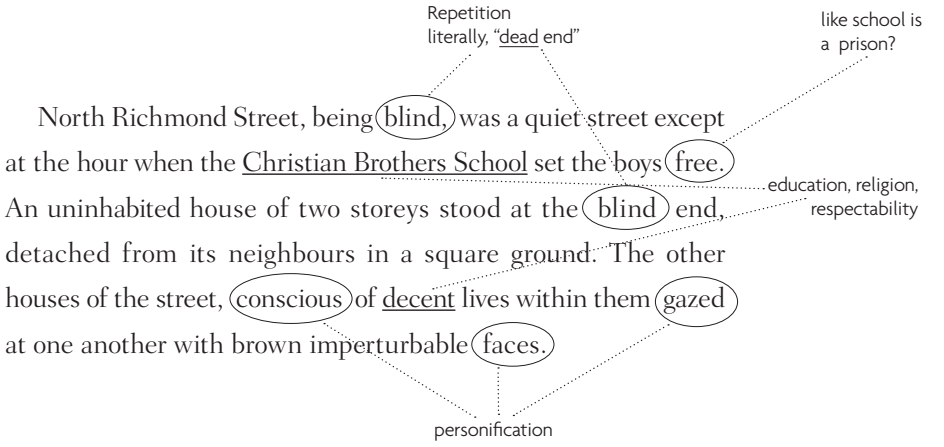
SAMPLE WRITING: ANNOTATION AND CLOSE READING

Close reading, with an eye toward setting or any other element, demands careful attention to detail. That process often begins with annotation—underlining significant details in a text and making notes in the margins, which you can then draw on to formulate arguments.

Below, you will find an annotation of the first paragraph of James Joyce's ARABY, followed by a paragraph of analysis written in response to the following prompt:

> The first paragraph of Joyce's story focuses entirely on setting. What tone is established here? How do specific details of setting and the diction used to describe them create tone?

As you read and compare the annotation and the analysis, notice how the analytical paragraph both elaborates on certain aspects of the annotation and ignores others (especially the references to religion) in order to stay focused exclusively on the claim about tone with which it opens (its topic sentence).



The first paragraph of James Joyce's story "Araby" is solemn and emotionless or even depressing in tone. The street is called "blind" twice, meaning that it is literally a dead-end street, a kind of prison from which there is no exit. It also seems a pretty lifeless, stifled and stifling place—"quiet" all but one "hour" of the day, when the boys are "set . . . free," implying that they are imprisoned the rest of the time, too. The only individual house described here is "uninhabited,"

without any life inside; "detached from its neighbours," disconnected and alone; and itself trapped "in a square ground." Though the other houses do have "lives within them," those are only "decent"—not joyful or even sad, just "decent" or respectable. All the houses are personified: the uninhabited one has "neighbours" (which at first suggests people rather than houses), and these have "faces," are "conscious," and "gaz[e] at one another." But the terms of the personification only make these houses seem more, not less, lifeless: their "imperturbable faces" lack emotion or movement, and they are "brown," the bland color of mud or dirt rather than of the things that live and grow in it. This street is a dead end in more ways than one, as living on it must feel a little like being dead or at least deadened.

Inventing Your Research Paper's Content

14.1 invent the content of your research paper with a wide range of sources.

It's no secret that your professor wants you to use sources that back up your claims and statements. She or he does *not* want to you to simply write your opinion and then sprinkle in a few citations to make it look like you did research. Professors will know the difference between a research paper that is grounded in solid research and one that merely mentions a few sources.

Inquiring: Defining Your Topic, Angle, Purpose

Your first task is to figure out what kind of research paper you are being asked to write. There are two major types of research papers:

Expository Research Paper—expository means to "exhibit" or "explain." Expository research papers explain an issue, event, or trend, without making an overt argument for one side.

Argumentative Research Paper—argumentation involves choosing one side of the issue and using your research to support your side while challenging opposing views.

If it's not clear whether you are *explaining* something (exposition) or *arguing* a point (argumentation), you should ask your professor to clarify the assignment.

Then, define your topic and figure out your angle. Your professor probably assigned you a specific topic or a range of topics on which to do research. For example, let's say you are studying the causes of the American Revolutionary War in a sophomore-level history course. Let's imagine your professor has asked you to write a ten-page research paper in which you explain how and why the war began.

Topic: The Main Causes of the American Revolutionary War

Possible Angles: Financial pressures on British colonies; overtaxation or perceived overtaxation; governance without representation; political miscalculations by King George III; French interference in British colonies; British military abuses of colonists

Obviously, a topic like the American Revolutionary War is too large to be handled in a ten-page research paper. So, you need to choose an angle that will help you narrow the topic. Choosing an angle will also help you write your purpose statement. Here is a possible purpose statement:

My purpose is to demonstrate that the American Revolutionary War was the result of several key political miscalculations by King George III and the British government.

Researching: Finding Out What Others Know

Chapter 24 goes over the research process in depth, so here is a brief review that is targeted toward the needs of research papers.

Library Research. Use your library's electronic catalog, usually available through its Web site, to search for books on your topic. Similarly, if you find an academic journal article about your topic through a journal database, look at its Works Cited or References list to see if there are other articles and books that might be useful to you.

Internet Research. Be careful about the online sources you collect, especially for research papers. Wikipedia and similar Web sites can be helpful for gaining an overall understanding of your topic, but Wikipedia is not an authoritative and citable source. After all, just about anyone can write or alter an entry on Wikipedia. So, when collecting sources from the Internet, you should thoroughly check the background of the organization that offers the information.

Empirical Research. On campus and in your community, you can find experts on your topic. You should set up interviews with these experts or send them questions via e-mail. Depending on your topic, you might also want to do some field observations that will help you confirm or challenge the information you found in print sources and electronic sources.

Organizing and Drafting Your Research Paper

14.2 develop an organization that fits the content of your research paper.

When you begin the drafting phase, your first task is to figure out which issues you want to cover and how you want to organize your research paper.

The Introduction

Your research paper needs an engaging introduction that will clearly identify your topic, purpose, and main point (thesis). A solid introduction will typically make most or all of the following five opening moves.

Identify Your Topic. Indicate to your readers what your research paper is about and perhaps what it is not about. For example,

> History textbooks tend to explain the Revolutionary War from an American-centric perspective. The Patriots were noble heroes and the British were ham-fisted villains. The real story, especially when told from the British and Canadian perspective, is much more complex.

State Your Purpose. In one sentence, tell your readers what you are trying to demonstrate or prove. You can be straightforward with this statement.

> In this research paper, I will argue that King George III was not the inept monarch described in many history books, but his economic miscalculations and his strict code of values added fuel to a growing independence movement in the American colonies.

State Your Main Point or Thesis Statement. In a research paper, your main point or thesis should be clearly stated somewhere in the introduction.

> **Weak:** King George III's mistakes were partially responsible for the American Revolutionary War.
>
> **Stronger:** The United States would have eventually gained its independence through peaceful means, but King George III's ill-conceived economic sanctions sparked a violent revolt among the American colonists, igniting an expensive and humiliating war for the British Empire.

Offer Background Information on the Topic. Give the readers just enough historical information or factual evidence to familiarize themselves with the topic.

Stress the Importance of the Topic to the Readers. Briefly mention why this topic is significant, especially to the readers. You might also consider using a grabber or a lead to catch the readers' attention at the beginning of your research paper. In Chapter 20, you can learn more about using grabbers or leads to spark the readers' interest in your topic.

These five introductory moves can be made in almost any order. Many research papers, for example, start out with some background information to catch the readers' attention. Others begin by identifying the topic and stressing its importance. If you make these five moves, you will probably have a good start to your research paper.

The Body

The body of your research paper can be organized in a variety of ways. Here are a few common ways to organize your draft:

> **Issues** Divide your information into two to five major issues that you want to discuss in your research paper. Specifically, pay attention to issues on which people tend to disagree. List the major points that people often discuss when they consider this topic.
>
> **Chronological** Divide your information into two to five historical time periods (e.g., 1980s, 1990s, 2000s; or before the event, start of the event, during the event, end of the event, aftermath of the event). Then, arrange your information by sorting out what happened in each of those time periods.
>
> **Argumentation** Divide your information into three categories: Review of the facts; discussion of how others, especially people with opposing views, interpret the facts; discussion of how you and people who agree with you interpret the facts.

Carving the Body into Sections. Each section in your research paper can follow a variety of patterns. The following organizational strategies can be helpful for arranging the material in each section:

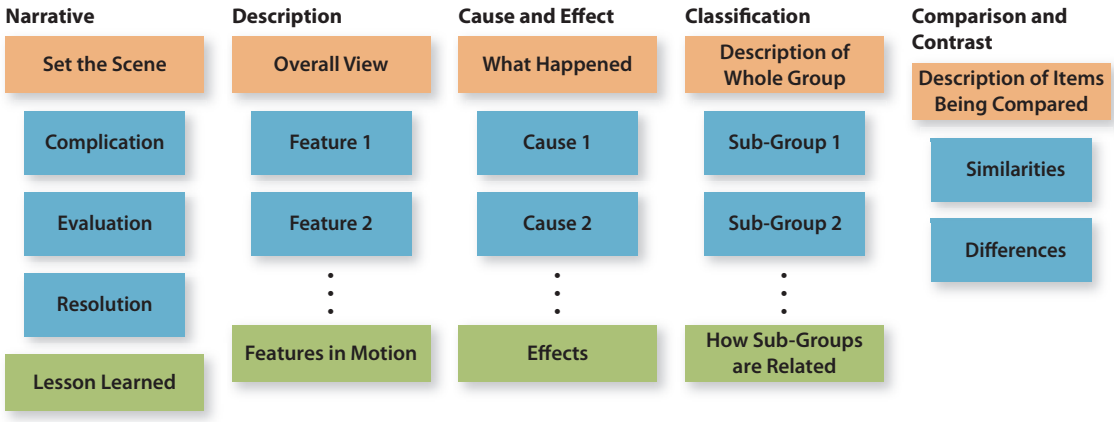


FIGURE 14.1 Organizing Sections in a Research Paper

Each section in your research paper should have its own organization. These diagrams show a few possibilities.

Narrative—Use true stories and anecdotes to illustrate your points in a chronological way.

Description—Divide something into its major parts and describe them separately.

Cause and Effect—Explain the causes of a problem and the effects.

Classification—Divide something into major and minor categories.

Comparison and Contrast—Identify similarities and differences between two things.

Figure 14.1 shows some models for how sections might be organized.

Using and Citing Your Sources. While drafting the body of your research paper, you need to carefully quote and thoroughly cite your sources.

In-Text Parenthetical Citations—Each time you take an idea or quote from a text, you need to use an in-text citation to signal where it came from. Chapters 27 and 28 on using MLA and APA styles will show you how to use in-text citations.

Quotations—Using quotes from experts is encouraged in research papers. Brief quotations can appear within a sentence and are marked off by quotation marks. Longer quotations (more than three lines of text) should be put into block quotes that are indented.

Paraphrasing and Summarizing—You can also paraphrase or summarize your sources. When paraphrasing, you should follow the structure of the source, putting the ideas or information in your own words. When

summarizing, you should re-organize the information from most important to least important, using your own words.

The Conclusion

The conclusion of your research paper should be similar in many ways to your introduction. When concluding, you should restate your main point (thesis) and stress the importance of your subject one final time. You should also briefly discuss the future of your topic.

Your research paper's conclusion should make up to five moves:

- Make an obvious transition from the body to the conclusion.
- State your main point, or thesis statement.
- Stress again the importance of the topic to the readers.
- Call your readers to action (in an argumentative research paper).
- Briefly discuss the future of this topic.

The transition to your conclusion should be obvious to the readers. A heading like "Conclusion: A New Nation Is Born" will signal that you are concluding. Otherwise, you can start your conclusion with a transitional phrase like "In conclusion," "In summary," or "In closing" to signal that you are making your final points.

Your main point or thesis statement should be similar to the sentence you used in your introduction, but not exactly the same. State your main point in different words, perhaps with a little more emphasis.

Finally, you should end your research paper by discussing the future of the topic. If you're arguing for a specific point, call the readers to action (e.g., "Now is the time to do something about this problem"). You can also discuss what you think will happen in the near future. If you're writing an expository research paper, you can briefly discuss what happened next with this topic (e.g., "The American Revolution sparked a wave of revolutions throughout the world").

Your conclusion should be brief, perhaps one or two paragraphs. Once you signal that you are concluding, your readers will expect you to wrap up in a short amount of time.

Works Cited or References

The final page(s) of your research paper will be your list of Works Cited (MLA) or References (APA). You should turn to Chapter 27, "Using MLA Style," or Chapter 28, "Using APA Style," to determine how to format your list of sources.

Choosing an Appropriate Style

14.3 determine whether a plain or persuasive style is best to achieve your purpose.

Expository research papers tend to be written in the plain style, while argumentative research papers use both plain and persuasive styles. The plain style is especially helpful for explaining the facts about your topic and discussing what happened. The persuasive style should be used when you are trying to influence the readers to accept your point of view.

Use Doers as the Subjects of Your Sentences. When drafting a research paper, writers tend to use passive voice (e.g., "In a 2011 study, brain-enhancing drugs were given by scientists to 200 college students"). When revising, change this kind of sentence into active voice by moving the doers into the subject of your sentence (e.g., "In a 2011 study, scientists gave brain-enhancing drugs to 200 college students"). Active voice will make your research paper sound more authoritative.

Avoid Weak Sentence Constructions. Where possible, avoid starting sentences with "It is . . . ," "There are . . . ," and "This is . . . ." You can strengthen these sentences by using real subjects and active verbs, such as "Students know . . . ," "Researchers discovered . . . ," and "This experiment demonstrated. . . ."

Keep Sentences Breathing Length. Research papers are often plagued with long, overly complex sentences that are difficult to read. As you revise, look for sentences that are longer than breathing length. Then, cut them down or divide them into two sentences.

Use Similes and Analogies to Explain Difficult Concepts. If you are trying to explain something complicated to your readers, try using a simile or analogy. For example, you might use a simile like "After the skirmish at Concord, the American Revolution spread like a wildfire throughout the colonies." You could also use analogies, such as "Using brain-enhancing drugs to study for an exam is like putting rocket fuel in your car. The benefits are noticeable but also short-lived and dangerous."

Designing Your Research Paper

14.4 add design elements and visuals to enhance your argument.

More than likely, your professor will give you specific guidelines about how the research paper should be formatted. In some cases, your professor may ask you to follow MLA or APA style, which are the formats spelled out in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. These handbooks, which should be available at your library or on the Internet, offer clear guidelines about how to format research papers.

You should also look carefully at the assignment sheet to determine exactly what kind of design or format your professor requires. Part of your grade, after all, may be based on whether you followed the assignment's formatting directions. If your professor does not spell out a specific format or design, you should ask for some guidance.

If you are given flexibility to choose your own design, here are some design features you might consider:

Include a Cover Page. A cover page, like the one shown in Figure 14.2, can add a professional touch to your research paper. Your cover page should include the title of your paper, your name, your professor's name, and the date the research paper was submitted. An appropriate image on the cover can also set a specific tone for the paper.

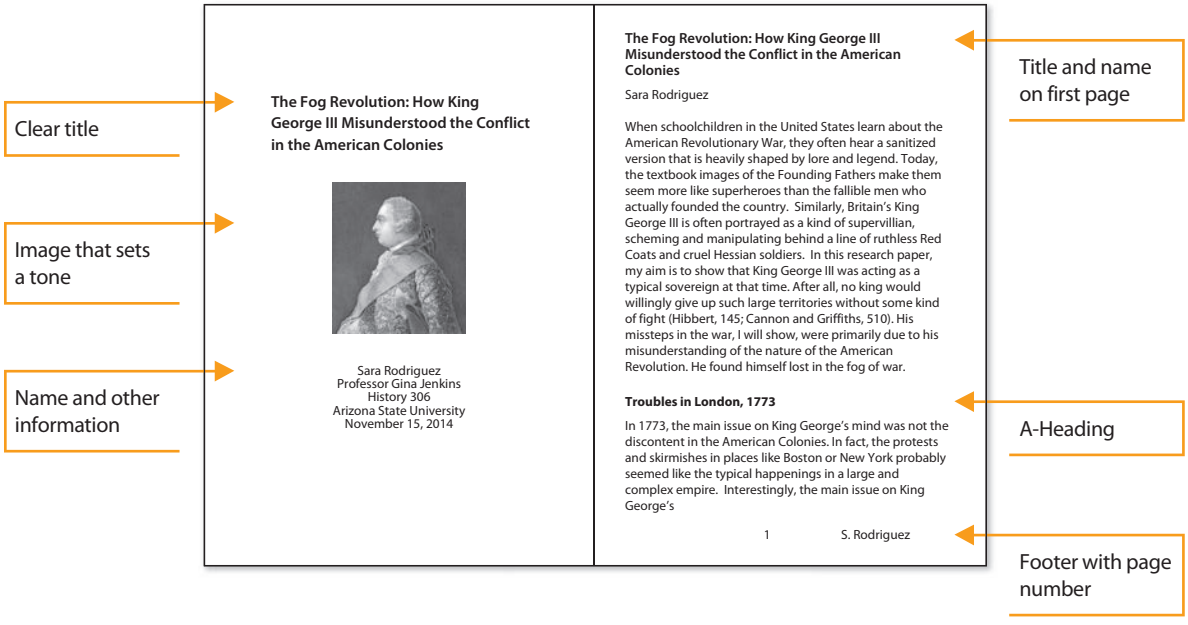


FIGURE 14.2 Designing a Research Paper

Even a traditional design for a research paper, like the one shown here, can be attractive.

Use Meaningful Headings. The headings in your research paper should be descriptive and accurate but not boring. For example, instead of "Start of Revolutionary War," you might use "The Shot Heard Around the World." Your headings should offer the readers an overall view of your paper, while giving them good reasons to read each section.

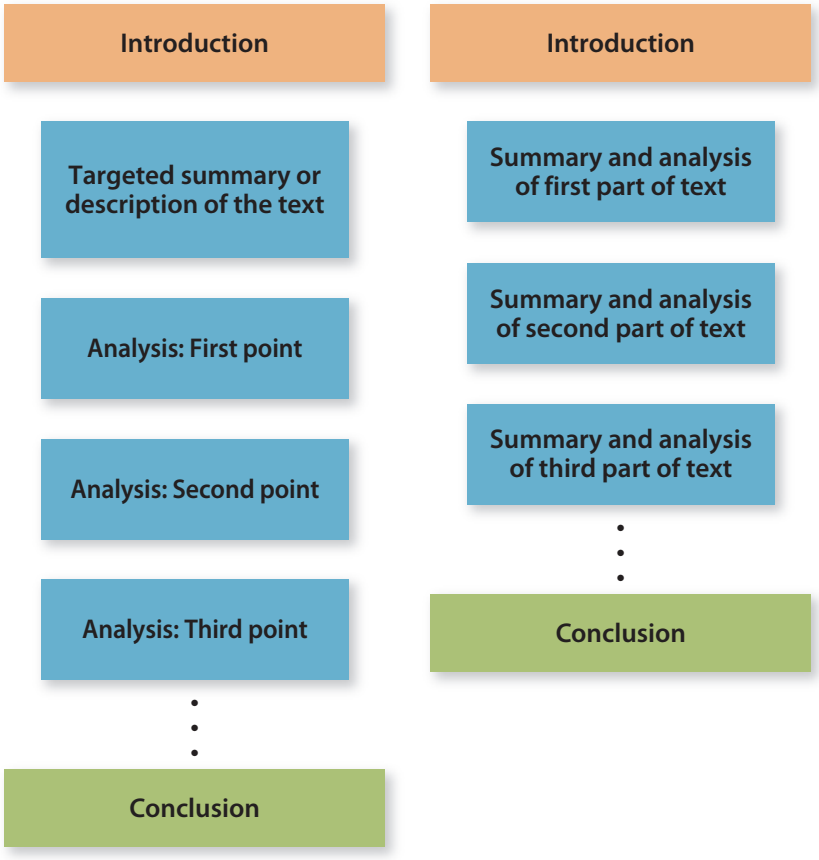
Add in Graphs, Charts, and Images. Look for ways to use graphs and charts to reinforce your major points. Photographs and other images can also enhance the readers' understanding and add some visual appeal.

Use Page Numbers and Perhaps a Header or Footer. All multi-page documents should have page numbers, but this guideline is especially true with research papers. Due to their length, research papers need page numbers to make them easier to discuss. You might also consider adding in a footer or header that includes your name.

Pay Attention to Paragraph Length. In a research paper, you don't want your paragraphs to be too short or too long. Short, choppy paragraphs (only two or three lines) signal to your readers that your topic sentences probably lack sufficient support. Long paragraphs (over one page) can signal a tendency toward rambling or a lack of focus. In some cases, short or long paragraphs are appropriate, but you should make sure they are necessary.

Literary Analyses

These diagrams show two possible basic organizations for a literary analysis, but other arrangements will work, too. You should adjust these organizational patterns to fit your topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context.



Literary analyses have these features:

- **An introduction** that identifies the literary work you are analyzing and its background. It should also state your interpretive question about the text and a main point (thesis statement) that answers the question.
- **Targeted summaries or descriptions of the text** that focus *only* on the events or features that play a key role in your interpretation.
- **Quoted material** taken directly from the text that moves your interpretation forward and illustrates your points.
- **Support for your interpretation** that shows how your interpretation makes sense and offers fresh insights into the interpretive question.
- **A conclusion** that discusses the significance of the interpretation.

Another sample of student's work is on P.

ONE STUDENT'S WORK
Literary Analyses

Visit **MyWritingLab** to explore an interactive version of this essay.

Chalina Peña
Professor John Kutz
English 250
November 20, 2014

Making "The Story of an Hour" Make Sense

Surely, only a sick, ungrateful, and selfish person would ever find "monstrous joy" upon hearing about a loved one's death. In Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," however, protagonist Louise Mallard is transformed, in the space of sixty minutes and few hundred words of narration, from a person who publicly experiences a "storm of grief" (128) to a person who alone in a room feels a "feverish triumph . . . like a goddess of Victory" (129). The *shortness* of Chopin's short story makes this transformation all the more surprising (and perhaps for some readers unrealistic), but it also invites us to read the work again and again, and then again. Some readers may find a simple, satisfying message to take away, but others will scour the story for answers that would explain why the transformation occurs. Is Louise is a monster or a reasonable and sane person, perhaps even a person like ourselves? Each time through the story, readers will recognize new details and clues, and perhaps will form new insights. However, with no completely satisfying answer emerging, many readers will ask, *why would Chopin choose to offer readers a narrative that clearly has a climax but no real resolution to the question about the main character?* Now, 120 years after its publication, the story still has the power to disturb us into considering the ways we judge and understand others and how we judge and understand ourselves.

If seen as a mere sequence of events, Chopin's story is pretty simple. A family friend and her sister Josephine understand Louise's frailty. Therefore, they try to break the news of her husband's death with care and tenderness. She reacts initially "not with a paralyzed inability to accept" things but with a "storm of grief" and an anguished "sudden, wild abandonment." Louise then retires upstairs alone and ponders the news, first sobbing "as a child who has cried itself asleep," then experiencing an "exalted perception" of newfound freedom to "live for herself" and "drinking in the very elixir of life" (129). Having composed herself,

Begins with an intriguing feature of the work.

Introduces the work and author with a very brief plot summary.

States the interpretive question and places thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph.

continued

she returns downstairs and with the others only to experience another shock: Her husband has not died; he walks unaware through the front door. Then, she falls dead herself! For the characters in the story, the story is poignant but uncomplicated: "she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills" (129).

Provides a summary of the key events.

Readers, however, having witnessed the transformation process and knowing there's more to this story, try to find a reasonable interpretation. They know a "joy that kills" does not really explain what has occurred. But how do we explain what has occurred? We examine the story again to find an explanation that makes sense. This is something each of us human beings does when encountering a mystery: We try to figure out, for instance, why would a good and kind friend be unkind to you? Why did an international atrocity occur? Or, why does a character in a short story realize that her husband's death is a good thing? In fact, as brain scientist David Eagleman explains, we humans are hardwired to feel uncomfortable until we find explanations that makes sense.

Extends and deepens the interpretative question.

> Minds seek patterns. . . . [Human beings] are driven to "patternicity"—the attempt to find structure in meaningless data. Evolution favors pattern seeking, because it allows the possibility of reducing mysteries to fast and efficient programs in neural circuitry. . . . [We are skilled] at spinning a single narrative from a collection of random threads. . . even in the face of thoroughly inconsistent data. (139–140)

Includes concepts she has learned in her psychology course, quoting and citing the source.

Of course, Chopin knew nothing about the discoveries made by modern scientists, but she did understand human nature and how we are driven to search for meaning. I think she understood that even our own actions and motivations don't always make sense to us.

In our class discussions, many of my classmates hazarded interpretations that would make sense, but for some of us none of them was adequate. One classmate solved the mystery with "Chopin is just a lousy writer. She can't write a story that makes sense." Others concluded that Louise is an "ungrateful person . . . a *horrible* person. I hated her!" Still others suggested her transformation made perfect sense in the context of 1894: "In those days, women had no freedom and had to do whatever their husbands demanded. Of course women back then would want freedom from their husbands." "In *those* days," "back *then*"? More than a hundred years may have passed since this story was published, but human beings are still pretty much the same. We still strive to make sense of mysteries.

Describes other possible interpretations and why they seem inadequate to her.

In fact, Louise herself struggles to understand what has happened to her. Her transformation comes from out of the blue. Even the narrator can't say what the "something" is that captures her:

> There was something come to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air. . . . She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will. (128–29)

Integrates quoted text and uses literary present tense.

Once captured by "this thing," Louise tries to understand what has happened to her. In her mind, she debates whether the "monstrous joy that held her" is justified, first acknowledging that her husband's face had "never looked [upon her] save with love upon her." In the end, though, she "abandons herself" to this mysterious feeling, not knowing and, it seems, not caring whether "this thing" comes from goodness and justice or ingratitude and selfishness. Louise, like the reader, has to figure that out.

A close reading of the story leaves us with no easy answers, and perhaps that is what Chopin wanted readers to ponder and remember from this vividly told and haunting story. As we try to make sense of others' motivations—whether close friends or figures in the news across the world—we are driven, as Eagleman explains, toward "spinning a single narrative" that will make sense. The same is true when we strive to understand our own private motivations and actions. Like Louise, I think, we are all "possessed," at least occasionally, by "somethings" that come from nowhere. We should search for answers, but Chopin's story reminds us that the things that motivate us are sometimes just mysterious.

Concludes by restating the thesis and then addressing broader issues that arise from her interpretation.

Works Cited

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." *Writing Today*. 3rd ed., by Richard Johnson-Sheehan and Charles Paine, Pearson, 2016, pp. 128-129.

Eagleman, David M. *Incognito: The Secret Life of the Brain*. Pantheon, 2011.

Includes a Works Cited that identifies the sources she has consulted.

Inventing Your Literary Analysis's Content

8.1 invent the content of your literary analysis with critical reading strategies.

The first challenge in writing a literary analysis is coming up with an interesting *interpretive question* about the work. As you read and research the text, look for evidence that might lead to insights that go beyond the obvious.

Authors want their literary works to affect readers in a specific way. They rarely present straightforward simple lessons, but they do want to influence the way readers

view the world. So as you are exploring the text from different angles, try to figure out what message or theme the author is trying to convey.

Read, Reread, Explore

If the literary work is a short story or novel, read it at least twice. If it is a poem, read it again and again, silently and aloud, to get a sense of how the language works and how the poem makes you feel. As you read the text, mark or underline anything that intrigues or puzzles you. Write observations and questions in the margins.

Inquiring: What's Interesting Here?

As you are reading and exploring the text, try to come up with a few interesting questions that focus on the work's genre, plot, characters, or use of language. The goal is to develop your interpretive question, which will serve as your angle into the text.

Explore the Genre. In your literature classes, your professors will use the term *genre* somewhat differently than it is used in this book. Literary works fall into four major genres: fiction, poetry, drama, and literary nonfiction.

Literary Genre	Subgenres
Fiction	short stories, novellas, novels, detective novels, science fiction, romance, mysteries, horror, fantasy, historical fiction
Poetry	limericks, sonnets, ballads, epic poems, haikus, ballads, villanelle, odes, sestinas, open verse
Drama	plays, closet dramas, comedies, tragedies, romances, musicals, operas
Literary nonfiction (or nonfiction prose)	memoirs, profiles (of people, places, events), biographies, histories, essays, nature writing, sports writing, religion, politics

While examining the text, ask yourself why the author chose this genre or subgenre of literature and not another one. Why a poem rather than a story? Why a short story rather than a novel?

Also, look for places where the author follows the genre or strays from it. How does the genre constrain what the author can do? How does she or he bend the genre to fit the story that he or she wants to tell? How does the author use this genre in a unique or interesting way?

Explore the Complication or Conflict. In almost every literary work, a key complication or conflict is at the center of the story. What are the complications or conflicts that arise from the narrative? How do the characters react to the complications? And how are these complications and conflicts resolved? Keep in mind that conflicts often arise from characters' values and beliefs and from the setting in which the characters reside. What conflicts do you sense in the story as you read? Are there conflicts between characters, between characters and their surroundings, between characters' aspirations, or between competing values and beliefs?

Explore the Plot. Plot refers not just to the sequence of events but also to how the events arise from the main conflict in the story. How do the events in the story unfold? Why do the events arise as they do? Which events are surprising or puzzling? Where does the plot seem to stray from a straight path? When studying the plot, pay special attention to the *climax,* which is the critical moment in the story. What happens at that key moment, and why is this moment so crucial? How is the conflict resolved, for better or worse?

Explore the Characters. The characters are the people who inhabit the story or poem. Who are they? What kinds of people are they? Why do they act as they do? What are their values, beliefs, and desires? How do they interact with each other, or with their environment and setting? You might explore the psychology or motives of the characters, trying to figure out the meaning behind their decisions and actions.

Explore the Setting. What is the time and place of the story? What is the broader setting—culture, social sphere, historic period? Also, what is the narrow setting—the details about the particular time and place? How does the setting constrain the characters by influencing their beliefs, values, and actions? How does the setting become a symbol that colors the way readers interpret the work? Is the setting realistic, fantastical, ironic, or magical?

Explore the Language and Tone. How does the author's tone or choice of words color your attitude toward the characters, setting, or theme? What feeling or mood does the work's tone evoke, and how does that tone evolve as the story or poem moves forward?

Explore the Use of Tropes. Also, pay attention to the author's use of metaphors, similes, and analogies. How does the author use these devices to deepen the meaning of the text or bring new ideas to light? What images are used to describe the characters, events, objects, or setting? Do those images become metaphors or symbols that color the way readers understand the work, or the way the characters see their world?

Researching: What Background Do You Need?

While most literary analyses focus primarily on the literary text itself, you can also research the historical background of a work and its author. The Internet and print

sources are good places to find relevant facts, information, and perspectives that will broaden your understanding.

Research the Author. Learning about the author can often lead to interpretive insights. The author's life experiences may help you understand his or her intentions. You might study the events that were happening in the author's time because the work itself might directly or indirectly respond to them.

Research the Historical Setting. You could also do research about the text's historical setting. If the story takes place in a real setting, you can read about the historical, cultural, social, and political forces that were in play at that time and in that place.

Research the Science. Human and physical sciences can often give you insights into human behavior, social interactions, or natural phenomena. Sometimes additional research into psychology, sociology, biology, and other sciences can give you interesting insights into characters and events.

Organizing and Drafting Your Literary Analysis

8.2 organize your literary analysis to highlight your interpretations of the text.

So far, you have read the literary work carefully, taken notes, done some research, and perhaps written one or more responses. Now, how should you dive in and begin drafting? Here are some ideas for getting your ideas down on the page.

The Introduction: Establish Your Interpretive Question

Introductions in literary analyses usually contain a few common features:

Include Background Information That Leads to Your Interpretive Question. Draw your reader into your analysis by starting with an intriguing feature of the work. You can use a quote from the work or author, state a historical fact that highlights something important, or draw attention to a unique aspect of the work or author.

State Your Interpretive Question Prominently and Clearly. Make sure your reader understands the question that your analysis will investigate. If necessary, make it obvious by saying something like, "This analysis will explore why . . . ." That way, your readers will clearly understand your purpose.

Place Your Thesis Statement at or Near the End of the Introduction. Provide a clear thesis that answers your interpretive question. Since a literary analysis is academic in nature, your readers will expect you to state your main point or thesis statement somewhere near the end of the introduction. Here are examples of a weak thesis statement and a stronger one:

> **Weak:** Jane Austen's ***Emma*** is a classic early nineteenth-century novel that has stood the test of time.

Stronger: Jane Austen's ***Emma*** is especially meaningful now, because Emma herself is a complex female character whose passion for matchmaking resonates with today's socially networked women.

The Body: Summarize, Interpret, Support

In the body paragraphs, you should take your reader through your analysis point by point, showing them why your interpretation makes sense and leads to interesting new insights.

Summarize and Describe Key Aspects of the Work. You can assume that your readers will be familiar with the literary work, so you don't need to provide a complete summary or fully explain who the characters are. But you should describe the aspects of the work that are crucial to your analysis and that need to be brought to your readers' attention. You may wish to focus on a particular scene, or on certain features, such as a character, interactions between characters, setting, language, symbols, plot features, and so forth. Discuss *only* those aspects of the work that lay the foundation for your analysis.

Build Your Case, Step by Step. Keep in mind that the goal of a literary analysis is not to prove that your interpretation is correct but to show that it is plausible and leads to interesting insights into the text and related matters. Take your readers through your analysis point by point. Back up each key point with reasoning and evidence, and make connections to your interpretive question and thesis statement.

Cite and Quote the Text to Back Up and Illustrate Your Points. The evidence for your interpretation should come mostly from the text itself. Show your readers what the text says by quoting and citing it, or by describing and citing key scenes and events.

Include Outside Support, Where Appropriate. Other scholars have probably offered their own critical remarks on the text. You can use their analyses to support your own interpretations, or you can work against them by arguing for a different or new perspective. Make sure you cite these sources properly. Do not use their ideas and phrasings without giving them credit or quoting them. (Your professor, who is an expert in these literary works, will know what others have said about them.)

The Conclusion: Restate Your Thesis

Your conclusion should bring your readers' attention back to the thesis that you expressed in the introduction. Your conclusion should also point the reader in new directions. Up to this point in the literary analysis, your readers will expect you to closely follow the text. In the conclusion, though, they will allow more leeway. In a sense, you've earned the right to speculate and consider other ideas.

So, if you want, take on the larger issues that were dealt with in this literary work. What conclusions or questions does your analysis suggest? What challenges does the author believe we face? What is the author really trying to say about people, events, and the world we live in?

Choosing an Appropriate Style

8.3 use an appropriate voice and quotations to add authority to your analysis.

Literary analyses invite readers into a conversation about a literary work. Therefore, the style should be straightforward but also inviting and encouraging.

Use the "Literary Present" Tense

Describe the text, what happens, and what characters do as though the action is taking place at the present moment. Here are two examples that show how the literary present should be used:

> Louise Mallard is at first grief stricken by the news of her husband's death, but her grief fades and turns into a sense of elation.
>
> Many of Langston Hughes's poems recount the struggles of African Americans but are often tinged with definite optimism and hope.

When discussing the author historically, however, use the past tense.

> Of course, Chopin knew nothing about the discoveries made by modern scientists, but she did understand human nature and how we are driven to search for meaning.
>
> Langston Hughes was well known in his time as a Harlem Renaissance poet. He often touched on themes of equality and expressed a guarded optimism about equality of treatment for all races.

Integrate Quoted Text

Weave words and ideas from the literary text in with your words and ideas, and avoid quotations that are not directly related to your ideas. For example, you can include a quotation at the end of your own sentence:

> Louise reacts initially with an immense grief that conforms to what might be socially expected from any person who has just learned the death of a loved one: "She wept at once, with sudden wild abandonment, in her sister's arms" (652).

You could also take the same sentence from the story and weave a "tissue" of quotations into your words:

> Although Richards is "careful" and "tender" as when he "break[s] to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death," Louise weeps "with sudden, wild abandonment," a reaction that conforms to society's expectations (69).

Make sure any sentences that include quotations remain grammatically correct. When you omit words from your quotation, use ellipses. Also, whenever you take a quote from the text, explain how the quotation supports the point you are trying to make. Don't leave your readers hanging with a quotation and no commentary. Tell them what the quote means.

Move Beyond Personal Response

Literary analyses are always partly personal, but your personal response is not enough. While your professor may encourage you to delve into your personal reactions in your response papers, your literary analysis should move beyond that personal response to a discussion of the literary work itself. In other words, describe what the text does, not just how you personally react to it.

Keep in mind that literary analyses are interpretive and speculative, not absolute and final. When you want your readers to understand that you are interpreting, use words and phrases such as "seems," "perhaps," "it could be," "may," "it seems clear that," and "probably."

> Louise seems to realize that her newly realized "exalted perception" would appear to others as "monstrous joy." That is why, perhaps, she chooses to remain behind closed doors until she can compose herself before opening "the door to her sister's importunities" to once again face her friends and family (653).

Designing Your Literary Analysis

8.4 create an appropriate design by following formatting requirements and adding visuals.

Typically, literary analyses use a simple and traditional design, following the MLA format for manuscripts: double-spaced, easy-to-read font, one-inch margins, MLA documentation style (see Chapter 27). Always consult with your professor about which format to use.

Headings and graphics are becoming more common in literary analyses. Before you use headings or graphics, ask your professor if they are allowed for your class. Headings will help you organize your analysis and make transitions between larger sections. In some cases, you may want to add graphics, especially if the literary work you are analyzing uses illustrations or if you have a graphic that would illustrate or help explain a key element in your analysis.

Design features like headers and page numbers are usually welcome, because they help professors and your classmates keep the pages in order. Also, if you are asked to discuss your work in class, page numbers will help the class easily find what is being discussed.

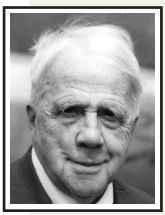
Literary Analyses

Literary analyses are essays that examine literary texts closely to understand their messages, interpret their meanings, appreciate their techniques, or understand their historical or social contexts. Such texts traditionally include novels, short stories, poems, and plays but may also include films, TV shows, videogames, music, and comics. You might read *Macbeth* and notice that Shakespeare's play contains a pattern of images of blood. You could explore the distinctive point of view in Ambrose Bierce's story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." Or you could point out the differences between Stephen King's *The Shining* and Stanley Kubrick's screenplay based on that novel. In all these cases, you use specific analytical techniques to go below the surface of the work to deepen your understanding of how it works and what it means.

You may be assigned to analyze works of literature in courses in *English, film, drama,* and many other subjects. Here is a poem by the twentieth-century American poet Robert Frost, followed by a student's analysis of it written for a literature course at the University of South Dakota and chosen as a winner of the 2017 Norton Writer's Prize.

ROBERT FROST

The Road Not Taken



Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

MATTHEW MILLER

Frost's Broken Roads

"The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost is arguably one of the most popular poems ever written. Read at graduations, eulogies, even in movies and car commercials, it is often interpreted as an ode to individualism. Frost's image of the road "less traveled" has become synonymous with daring life choices that make "all the difference" in living a fulfilling life (lines 19–20). Some may latch on to this as the poem's deeper meaning. However, this convenient conclusion ignores several conflicting, yet beautiful, details that lead the poem down a path of broken metaphor and temporal inconsistency. To truly recognize what Frost is building in this poem, a few nagging inconsistencies must be considered.

In the first line of the poem, the traveler is depicted hiking in a "yellow wood" wherein he finds a fork in his path (1). This setting is the foundation of a common metaphor, but transposing familiar notions of a figurative fork in the road onto Frost's poem requires acceptance of the traveler's metaphoric natural world and its "temporal scheme," or some form of unified movement through time, as the critic Cleanth Brooks describes it in his classic book on poetic structure, *The Well Wrought Urn* (203). If the path that is covered "[i]n leaves no step had trodden black" (12) makes "all the difference" (20) in a life, common sense indicates the decision to choose that path has to occur early enough during a lifetime to properly affect its outcome. The speaker/traveler affirms this, telling the reader that he "shall be telling" them the story of his decision "with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence" (16–17). In other words, the traveler must be fairly young, otherwise he wouldn't have "ages and ages" (17) left to tell his story. It may not be apparent at a surface level, but this complicates our understanding of the poem's implicit story.

It is common knowledge that morning, the beginning of the day, is often paralleled figuratively with the beginning of other things (e.g. "the dawn of civilization"). In this sense, the setting helps to solidify the poem's established temporal sense; the earliness of the day—"morning" (16)—parallels the early point in life when the traveler makes his life-altering decision. However, the description of the scene, the "yellow wood" (1) where the ground "lay / In leaves" (11–12), indicates that late autumn has set in around the forest. Parallels between seasonal progression and the human life cycle saturate literature and art with such metaphors as the "springtime of youth" and the "hoary winter of old age" (Kammen 23). With that in mind, the end of autumn represents the bitter end of productive years and the first step into the cold and death of winter. So, embedded in the poem is a temporal inconsistency; the traveler is young, with "ages and ages" (17) yet to live, but the autumn setting implies his world is quickly coming to an end.

Another question that complicates a traditional understanding of the poem is that of identity. The narrator claims he is "sorry" he "could not travel both" paths "and be one traveler" (2–3). For him to stray off his path would equal becoming a different person; he "could not travel both / *And be one traveler*" (2–3, emphasis added). However, one person

can easily be two different travelers in a lifetime (i.e. one person can take both a cruise vacation and a backpacking trip: two very different traveling styles). The traveler/speaker even admits this is possible by saying he *could* keep "the first for another day" (13). His excuse for not traveling both paths was not that it was impossible but rather that "knowing how way leads on to way, / I doubted if I should ever come back" (14–15). Although he believes one of the paths has "the better claim, / Because it was grassy and wanted wear" (7–8), in practically the same breath he casts doubt on the claim that it is "less traveled" (19), admitting other travelers have worn down the two trails "really about the same" (10). The speaker in this poem is not Emerson's self-reliant transcendentalist, who can "speak what [he] think[s] to-day in words as hard as cannon balls, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing [he] said to-day" (214).

Frost's syntax and punctuation add even more nuance. The poem consists of one sentence that takes up the first two stanzas and part of the third, in which our traveler deliberates and, eventually, makes his decision; and the three sentences of the third and fourth stanzas, in which our traveler lives with his choice. As the poem progresses to the point where our traveler makes his decision, we see punctuation that is irregular when compared with the rest of the poem: an exclamation point when the traveler finally makes a decision (possibly showing excess emotion); an em dash (—) followed by a repeated word when re-telling his story that functions almost like a stutter, possibly showing regret/lack of confidence in his choice. With this in mind, it seems as though our traveler had a tough time making his decision, and afterward, there is no obvious approval or happiness with it, only that it "made all the difference" (20), which could be positive or negative. 5

Placing the poem in its historical context further complicates these questions. According to an article written for the Poetry Foundation by the poet Katherine Robinson, "The Road Not Taken" was actually written "as a joke for a friend, the poet Edward Thomas."

Indeed, when Frost and Thomas went walking together, Thomas would often choose one fork in the road because he was convinced it would lead them to something, perhaps a patch of rare wild flowers or a particular bird's nest. . . . In a letter, Frost goaded Thomas, saying, "No matter which road you take, *you'll always sigh*, and wish you'd taken another" (Robinson, emphasis added).

Introducing the poet's biography might be considered by many a sin against the work, especially for those espousing Cleanth Brooks' celebration of poetic unity and universal meaning. However, knowing this information fills in several gaps about the poem; instead of confusing inconsistencies and paradoxical meanings, the poem can now be viewed—at least partly—as teasing from a friend. It is easy to imagine an indecisive Thomas, standing and staring down the fork in the path, afraid of what he'll miss if he picks the wrong trail, and then on the way home "telling" Frost, "with a sigh" (16), about all he swore he missed on *the road he didn't take* (16). This being said, Frost published this work knowing full well of its depth and epistemological possibilities, saying in a letter, "My poems . . . are all set to trip the reader head foremost into the boundless" (qtd. in Robinson).

Frost's timeless poem is an elegant narrative, filled with serene imagery and laced with layers of mystery. Readers of this canonical work can easily find themselves slipping into the easy, traditional reading of an ode to individualism. Upon closer inspection, there is only one thing clear about "The Road Not Taken," which is said best in words Frost loved to tell his readers regarding his classic poem: "[Y]ou have to be careful of that one; it's a tricky poem—very tricky" (qtd. in Robinson).

Works Cited

Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. Harcourt, 1975.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Robert S. Levine et al., 9th ed., vol. B, W. W. Norton, 2017, pp. 236–53.

Frost, Robert. "The Road Not Taken." *Poetry Foundation,* https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken. Accessed 8 Nov. 2016.

Kammen, Michael G. *A Time to Every Purpose: The Four Seasons in American Culture*. U of North Carolina P, 2004.

Robinson, Katherine. "Robert Frost: 'The Road Not Taken.'" *Poetry Foundation, 27 May 2016,* https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/89511/robert-frost-the-road-not-taken. Accessed 8 Nov. 2016.

For two more literary analyses, see CHAPTER 66.

Miller focuses his analysis on "tricky" aspects of Frost's poem. In addition, he uses aspects of Frost's biography and letters to resolve some of the seeming contradictions and tensions in the poem.

Key Features / Literary Analyses

An arguable thesis. A literary analysis is a form of argument; you are arguing that your analysis of a literary work is valid. Your thesis, then, should be arguable, as Miller's is: "To truly recognize what Frost is building in this poem, a few nagging inconsistencies must be considered." A mere summary—"Frost writes about someone trying to decide which road to take"—would not be arguable and therefore is not a good thesis.

Careful attention to the language of the text. The key to analyzing a text is looking carefully at the language, which is the foundation of its meaning. Specific words, images, metaphors—these are where analysis begins. You may also bring in contextual information, such as cultural, historical, or biographical facts, or you may refer to similar texts. But the words, phrases, and sentences that make up the text you are analyzing are your primary source when dealing with texts. That's what literature teachers mean by "close reading": reading with the assumption that every word of a text is meaningful.

Attention to patterns or themes. Literary analyses are usually built on evidence of meaningful patterns or themes within a text or among several texts. These patterns and themes reveal meaning. In Frost's poem, images of diverging roads and yellow leaves create patterns of meaning, while the regular rhyme scheme (*wood/stood/could*, *both/undergrowth*) creates patterns of sound and structure that may contribute to the overall meaning.

A clear interpretation. A literary analysis demonstrates the plausibility of its thesis by using evidence from the text and, sometimes, relevant

contextual evidence to explain how the language and patterns found there support a particular interpretation. When you write a literary analysis, you show readers one way the text may be read and understood; that is your interpretation.

MLA style. Literary analyses usually follow MLA style. Miller's essay includes a works-cited list and refers to line numbers using MLA style.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO WRITING LITERARY ANALYSES

Considering the Rhetorical Situation

PURPOSE What do you need to do? Show that you have examined the text carefully? Offer your own interpretation? Demonstrate a particular analytical technique? Or some combination? If you're responding to an assignment, does it specify what you need to do? 55–56

AUDIENCE What do you need to do to convince your readers that your interpretation is plausible and based on sound analysis? Can you assume that readers are already familiar with the text you are analyzing, or do you need to tell them about it? 57–60

STANCE How can you see your subject through interested, curious eyes—and then step back in order to see what your observations might *mean*? 66–68

MEDIA/DESIGN Will your analysis focus on an essentially verbal text or one that has significant visual content, such as a graphic novel? Will you need to show visual elements in your analysis? Will it be delivered in a print, spoken, or electronic medium? Are you required to follow MLA or some other style? 69–71

Generating Ideas and Text

Look at your assignment. Does it specify a particular kind of analysis? Does it ask you to consider a particular theme? To use any specific critical approaches? Look for any terms that tell you what to do, words like *analyze*, *compare*, *interpret*, and so on.

Study the text with a critical eye. When we read a literary work, we often come away with a reaction to it: we like it, we hate it, it made us cry or laugh, it perplexed us. That may be a good starting point for a literary analysis, but to write about literature you need to go beyond initial reactions, to think about **HOW THE TEXT WORKS**: What does it *say*, and what does it *do*? What elements make up this text? How do those elements work together or fail to work together? Does this text lead you to think or feel a certain way? How does it fit into a particular context (of history, culture, technology, genre, and so on)?

21–23

Choose a method for analyzing the text. There are various ways to analyze your subject. Three common focuses are on the text itself, on your own experience reading it, and on other cultural, historical, or literary contexts.

- ***The text itself***. Trace the development and expression of themes, characters, and language through the work. How do they help to create the overall meaning, tone, or effect for which you're arguing? To do this, you might look at the text as a whole, something you can understand from all angles at once. You could also pick out parts from the beginning, middle, and end as needed to make your case, **DEFINING** key terms, **DESCRIBING** characters and settings, and **NARRATING** key scenes. Miller's essay about "The Road Not Taken" offers a text-based analysis that looks at Frost's treatment of time in the poem. You might also examine the same theme in several different works.

432–42
443–51
462–70

- ***Your own response as a reader***. Explore the way the text affects you or develops meanings as you read through it from beginning to end. By doing such a close reading, you're slowing down the process to notice

how one element of the text leads you to expect something, confirming earlier suspicions or surprises. You build your analysis on your experience of reading the text—as if you were pretending to drive somewhere for the first time, though in reality you know the way intimately. By closely examining the language of the text as you experience it, you explore how it leads you to a set of responses, both intellectual and emotional. If you were responding in this way to the Frost poem, you might discuss how the narrator keeps trying to assert that one road is preferable to another but admits that both are the same, so that his willful assertion that one is "less traveled by" and that his choice "made all the difference" is no difference at all.

- ***Context.*** Analyze the text as part of some **LARGER CONTEXT**—as part of a certain time or place in history or as an expression of a certain culture (how does this text relate to the time and place of its creation?), as one of many other texts like it, a representative of a genre (how is this text like or unlike others of its kind? how does it use, play with, or flout the conventions of the genre?). A context-based approach to the Frost poem might look at Frost's friendship with another poet, Edward Thomas, for whom Frost wrote the poem, and its influence on Thomas's decision to enlist in the army at the start of World War I.

427

Read the work more than once. Reading literature, watching films, or listening to speeches is like driving to a new destination: the first time you go, you need to concentrate on getting there; on subsequent trips, you can see other aspects—the scenery, the curve of the road, other possible routes—that you couldn't pay attention to earlier. When you experience a piece of literature for the first time, you usually focus on the story, the plot, the overall meaning. By experiencing it repeatedly, you can see how its effects are achieved, what the pieces are and how they fit together, where different patterns emerge, how the author crafted the work.

To analyze a literary work, then, plan to read it more than once, with the assumption that every part of the text is there for a reason. Focus on details, even on a single detail that shows up more than once: Why is it there? What can it mean? How does it affect our experience of reading or

studying the text? Also, look for anomalies, details that *don't* fit the patterns: Why are they part of the text? What can they mean? How do they affect the experience of the text? See the **READING IN ACADEMIC CONTEXTS** chapter for several different methods for reading a text.

10–32

387–89

Compose a strong thesis. The **THESIS** of a literary analysis should be specific, limited, and open to potential disagreement. In addition, it should be analytical, not evaluative: avoid thesis statements that make overall judgments, such as a reviewer might do: "Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* is a failed experiment in narrative" or "No one has equaled the achievement of *The Lego Movie*." Rather, offer a way of seeing the text: "The choice presented in Robert Frost's 'The Road Not Taken' ultimately makes no difference"; "The plot of *The Lego Movie* reflects contemporary American media culture."

Read the text carefully. When you analyze a text, you need to find specific, brief passages that support your interpretation. Then you should interpret those passages in terms of their language, their context, or your reaction to them as a reader. To find such passages, you must read the text closely, questioning it as you go, asking, for example:

- What language provides evidence to support your thesis?
- What does each word (phrase, passage) mean exactly?
- Why does the writer choose *this* language, *these* words? What are the implications or connotations of the language? If the language is dense or difficult, why might the writer have written it that way?
- What images or metaphors are used? What is their effect on the meaning?
- What patterns of language, imagery, or plot do you see? If something is repeated, what significance does the repetition have?
- How does each word, phrase, or passage relate to what precedes and follows it?
- How does the experience of reading the text affect its meaning?

- What words, phrases, or passages connect to a larger **CONTEXT**? What language demonstrates that this work reflects or is affected by that context? 10–32
- How do these various elements of language, image, and pattern support your interpretation?

Your analysis should focus on analyzing and interpreting your subject, not simply summarizing or paraphrasing it. Many literary analyses also use the strategy of **COMPARING** two or more works. 424–31

Find evidence to support your interpretation. The parts of the text you examine in your close reading become the evidence you use to support your interpretation. Some think that we're all entitled to our own opinions about literature. And indeed we are. But when writing a literary analysis, we're entitled only to our own *well-supported* and *well-argued* opinions. When you analyze a text, you must treat it like any other **ARGUMENT**: you need to discuss how the text creates an effect or expresses a theme, and then you have to show **EVIDENCE** from the text—significant plot or structural elements; important characters; patterns of language, imagery, or action—to back up your argument. 397–417 401–8

Pay attention to matters of style. Literary analyses have certain conventions for using pronouns and verbs.

- In informal papers, it's okay to use the first person: "I believe Frost's narrator has little basis for claiming that one road is 'less traveled.'" In more formal essays, make assertions directly; claim authority to make statements about the text: "Frost's narrator has no basis for claiming that one road is 'less traveled.'"
- Discuss textual features in the **PRESENT TENSE** even if quotations from the text are in another tense: "When Nick finds Gatsby's body floating in the pool, he says very little about it: 'the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool.'" Describe the historical context of the setting in the **PAST TENSE**: "In the 1920s, such estates as Gatsby's were rare." HB-12–14 HB-12–14

MLA 548–96
528–31
535–38

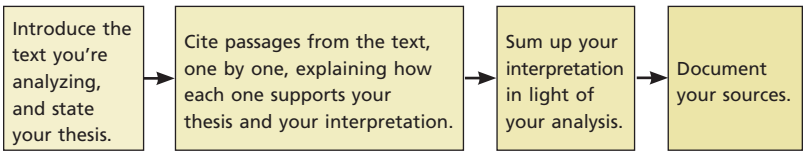
Cite and document sources appropriately. Use **MLA** citation and documentation style unless told otherwise. Format **QUOTATIONS** properly, and use **SIGNAL PHRASES** to introduce quoted material.

650–52
391

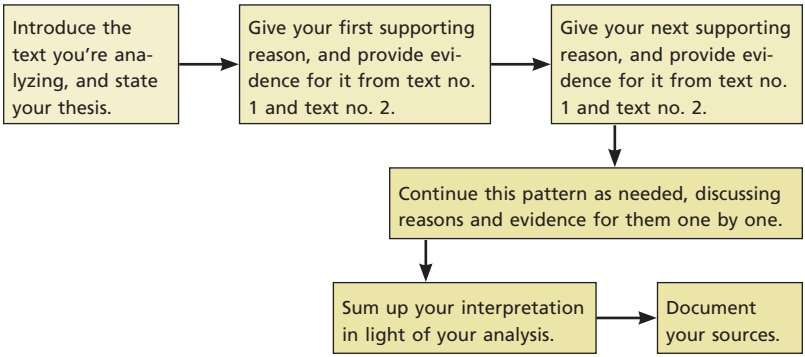
Think about format and design. Brief essays do not require **HEADINGS**; text divisions are usually marked by **TRANSITIONS** between paragraphs. In longer papers, though, headings can be helpful.

Organizing a Literary Analysis

[Of a single text]



[Comparing two texts]



REFERENCES

The contents of this textbook have been reproduced from other original sources for educational purposes only. The topics covered in this course have been selected carefully so that they address the varying needs of ESL students. The major sources for this textbook are the following:

- **Stephen Bailey. *Academic Writing: A Practical Guide for students*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.**
- **Johnson-Sheehan. *Writing Today,* 3rd ed., Boston: Pearson, 2016.**
- **Bullock& Goggin. *The Norton Field Guide to Writing with Readings and Handbook*, 2019.**

For further reading, students are recommended to check the following:

- **Oliver Strunk. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Pearson Education Company. 2000.**
- **Susan Thurman. T*he Only Grammar Book you'll Ever Need: A One-Stop Source for Every Writing Assignment.* Avon: Adams Media, 2003.**
- **Betty Schrampfer Azar. *Understanding and Using English Grammar*. New York: Longman, 1999.**
- **Jane Straus. *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*. San Francisco: Wiley, Year: 2008. Print.**
- **Adrian Wallwork. *English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing*. Springer, 2011.**