First-Year English Composition

FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH COMPOSITION

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PART I

PART I: FUNDAMENTALS OF COLLEGE COMPOSITION

1.

WHY FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION?

What Is First-Year College Writing?

Almost every college student in the United States is required to take one or two semesters of college writing. At OSU-OKC, everyone takes English Composition I, and depending on the degree program, many take English Composition II. This approach is pretty common at most colleges, and the usual idea is that students take these classes in their first year of college, and thus, these classes are referred to as "first-year writing" (FYW) or "first-year composition" (FYC).

These classes are usually managed by the college's English department, but they are pretty different from the English classes you might be used to. The focus in these classes is almost exclusively writing, and any reading material is typically non-fiction, not literature or poetry. The classes generally operate on the assumption that students entering college already have a basic knowledge of how to write grammatically correct sentences, so they incorporate very little grammar (no worksheets!). Instead, the emphasis is almost entirely on how to read and write at the level expected of you in college. For some students, being dropped into a class that's so different can be pretty disorienting, and knowing that you'll have to do a lot of writing can be intimidating. After you read this chapter, you should have a better idea of why we ask this of you and what you can expect to get out of it.

Why Is College Writing Mandatory?

Competing Views on College Writing

The “why” of a college writing class is not as clear-cut as you might think. The tradition began at Harvard in the mid-19th century, when professors complained that students weren’t being adequately trained to write for college. The school instituted a mandatory first-year writing course with the aim of providing young professionals “with the tools to avoid embarrassing themselves in print,” and the trend caught on and spread to many state schools (Berlin 35). However, many other Ivy League English departments argued that English at the college level should focus on literature; they believed students should be analyzing the great works of Western literature and creating their own literary advances. At the same time, mainly in the Midwest and away from the elite schools, a progressive view emerged, arguing that writing and rhetoric must be studied, not merely as a professional skill, but as a tool for civic participation. At this time, there were three competing camps: the non-Harvard Ivy Leaguers, who felt that the only writing English departments should teach was literary writing; the Midwestern progressives, who wanted to teach writing and rhetoric for civic participation; and the Harvard camp, who wanted first-year composition to just focus on making sure students could write competently as an academic and professional skill. Eventually, the non-Harvard Ivy Leaguers lost, and the study of literature became relegated to its own field, but the other two camps still exist and argue to this day.

Indeed, the passage of time has added to the debate, as the study of composition matured into a discipline of its own, with scholars researching questions like “How do people actually learn to write?”. In the 1970s, scholars in the field began to resent the framing as FYC as subordinate to other disciplines, existing only to teach writing for them. They argued that first-year composition classes should have a role more similar to the required introductory psychology or sociology classes you may take. For these scholars, the first-year writing classes should introduce students to the discipline now commonly referred to as “composition/

rhetoric," or "comp/rhet" for short, providing them with basic knowledge of the discipline and recruiting new majors to the area. They argued that treating the composition curriculum as existing mainly to serve other classes was both unfair and unrealistic (Crowley). In the last couple of decades, more and more universities have begun offering comp/rhet degrees, yet, particularly at colleges where these degrees are not offered, the expectation that first-year composition primarily serves to help students write effectively in their other classes persists.

So, why do you – a student at OSU-OKC in the year 2025 – have to take at least one first-year writing course? Is it to master enough writing skill to avoid embarrassing yourself, as James Berlin described Harvard's goal? Is it so you can write passing essays in other classes? Is it to learn enough about writing and rhetoric that you can use them as tools for civic participation? Is it to introduce you to the basic principles of comp/rhet so you can be informed and maybe one day pursue further study? Well, I would argue that it's a little bit of all of these. We don't believe we have to choose just one. Our writing courses are designed on the premise that we can teach you some basic principles about comp/rhet, and you will be able to use those principles in your other classes *and* see how those principles relate to effective civic engagement in a democracy. Throughout this text, as we introduce new concepts, we will return to 1) how to use an idea or skill in other college classes/your future career and 2) how the idea or skill relates to civic engagement. The following sections will elaborate a bit more on these two aims.

Developing Skills for Other Classes

Using knowledge you learned in class in a different context, like in another class or on the job, is called "knowledge transfer." One of the biggest complaints we hear in the English Department goes along these lines: "Why can't these students do X? Didn't you teach them this?"

Often, the answer is yes, we taught it, but research shows that college students struggle when it comes to knowledge transfer about writing.

One problem is that students know from experience that every teacher they have is different. It's therefore easy to believe that each instructor is idiosyncratic, with unique expectations and grading standards, and to some extent, this is true. (I once had a professor who, for whatever reason, hated the word "while," so every time I wrote for this professor, I had to remember not to use it. That was certainly not something I'd ever been taught before!) However, trying to learn "how to write" from scratch for each new course or instructor is taking this belief too far. Throughout this text, we'll focus on general principles that should apply at least 90% of the time, and we'll discuss when and why you might encounter exceptions.

Beyond individual professors grading their own way, another problem students encounter with transferring knowledge from their writing classes is simply that we can only practice a handful of types of essays in our first-year composition classes, while there are dozens, maybe hundreds, of other types you could potentially be assigned. We could never practice all of these! Thus, it's important to focus on the general strategies and approaches, and think about how to apply them in new contexts.

Our broader core goal is familiarize you with the academic discourse community. A *discourse community* is any group or subculture that has its own norms and expectations for communication. A discourse community can be huge, like an entire culture. (Americans, for example, are noted even among English-speaking cultures for being fairly direct and unapologetic in their communication.) A discourse community can also be extremely small, like a core friend group that has developed its own slang and inside jokes. If you take a few minutes to think about all of the groups you belong to, you'll realize that you're already a member of dozens of specific discourse communities of various sizes, some of which probably even have conflicting norms. You move between these groups naturally, probably rarely even consciously considering how your communication is different in these different settings.

The academic discourse community is yet another one of these groups, and when you start college, you need to learn the ropes. To that end, first-year composition

focuses mainly on the kinds of writing you will need to do for college – what we'll refer to from now on as "academic writing." Academic writing is different from other kinds of writing you may be more familiar with.

- First, academic writing is always making some kind of *argument*; it always has a point. However, even though it's argumentative, academic writing relies on empirical evidence, adopts a respectful tone and attitude toward those who disagree, and is careful to be precise and thoughtful about the claims it makes. Thus, these arguments are pretty different from the kinds you're probably used to encountering in popular and political discourse.
- Second, academic writing typically assumes an audience that is fairly educated on the topic. The topics of argument thus tend to be fairly specific and nuanced, and writers don't spend time defining basic terms or explaining fundamental concepts that experts in the field will already know.
- Finally, academic writing tends to have a fairly serious and formal style. In fact, to be honest, often academic writing is pretty boring, but the *best* academic writing has a clear authorial voice and engages its readers.

These are all generalizations about academic writing, and it's likely that you could find exceptions to each one. However, if you have a writing assignment for a college class, you are pretty safe in assuming that those features are expected. Thus, throughout this text, we will emphasize these principles as we introduce new concepts and genres.

Writing and Rhetoric Outside of College

The great thing about studying and practicing academic writing in first-year composition is that, while directly helping you be successful in school, it also helps you develop valuable soft skills and engage more effectively in your community by:

- Teaching the importance of evidence-based arguments

- Cultivating precision and clarity
- Promoting critical thinking
- Emphasizing audience awareness
- Expanding rhetorical skills

These are skills that employers often say college graduates are lacking. In fact, a 2020 study found that employers considered soft skills more important than technical skills in their hiring decisions, and they ranked communication, teamwork, ability to learn, and analytical thinking as some of the most important soft skills (Succi and Canovi).

You might already be noticing that these skills are also essential to effective civic engagement. Democracy, after all, is about people working together to make the best decisions for their own government. In fact, developing these skills is a major rationale for the existence of public education in the first place.

Even if you have no interest in civic engagement, these skills are also key to a fulfilled, successful life:

- Problem-solving: Whether you're figuring out how to balance your budget, resolving a dispute with a roommate, or addressing a community issue like inadequate public transportation, problem-solving skills are crucial.
- Effective communication: From writing emails to professors, giving presentations at work, or simply expressing your needs in personal relationships, clear communication is vital in all aspects of life.
- Teamwork: Collaborating with classmates on group projects, working with colleagues in your future career, or organizing a neighborhood clean-up all require the ability to work effectively with others.
- Conflict resolution: Disagreements are inevitable in life. Whether it's mediating between friends, negotiating with a landlord, or finding common ground in a heated political debate, the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully is invaluable.
- Critical thinking: This skill helps you make informed decisions about

everything from which news sources to trust, to evaluating product claims before making a purchase, to analyzing complex social issues affecting your community.
- Decision-making: Life is full of choices, big and small. From deciding on a career path to choosing how to spend your free time, strong decision-making skills can lead to better outcomes and greater satisfaction in life.

We could say that we want to focus on the soft skills employers want and leave it at that. However, you are a whole person, not just an employee, and these soft skills are more than boxes to check for a future boss. By developing these skills, you're not just preparing for future college classes or even for participation in democracy – you're equipping yourself with tools that will serve you well in your personal relationships, academic pursuits, professional life, and everyday challenges.

Conclusion

As we have seen, there are competing rationales behind requiring college writing courses like this one. At their core, these classes aim to prepare you for the writing demands you will face across the curriculum and in your future career. However, they also serve the broader purpose of developing essential skills for effective civic engagement and participation in a democratic society. The critical thinking, communication, and rhetorical abilities you will cultivate have wide-ranging applications. Whether you are crafting a persuasive report for a business client, articulating your perspective on a community issue, or analyzing complex topics for scholarly study, you will draw upon the tools first-year composition provides.

Although first-year composition is focused primarily on helping you develop as an academic writer, becoming a skilled writer is about far more than putting words on a page. It's about sharing knowledge and exploring ideas with precision and nuance. These are abilities that will serve you not just in the academic world, but as a professional, a community member, and an engaged citizen. As you

progress through this course, keep an open mind to how the concepts apply both within academia and beyond the classroom walls. The skills you develop through first-year composition will aid you in any context where communicating well truly matters.

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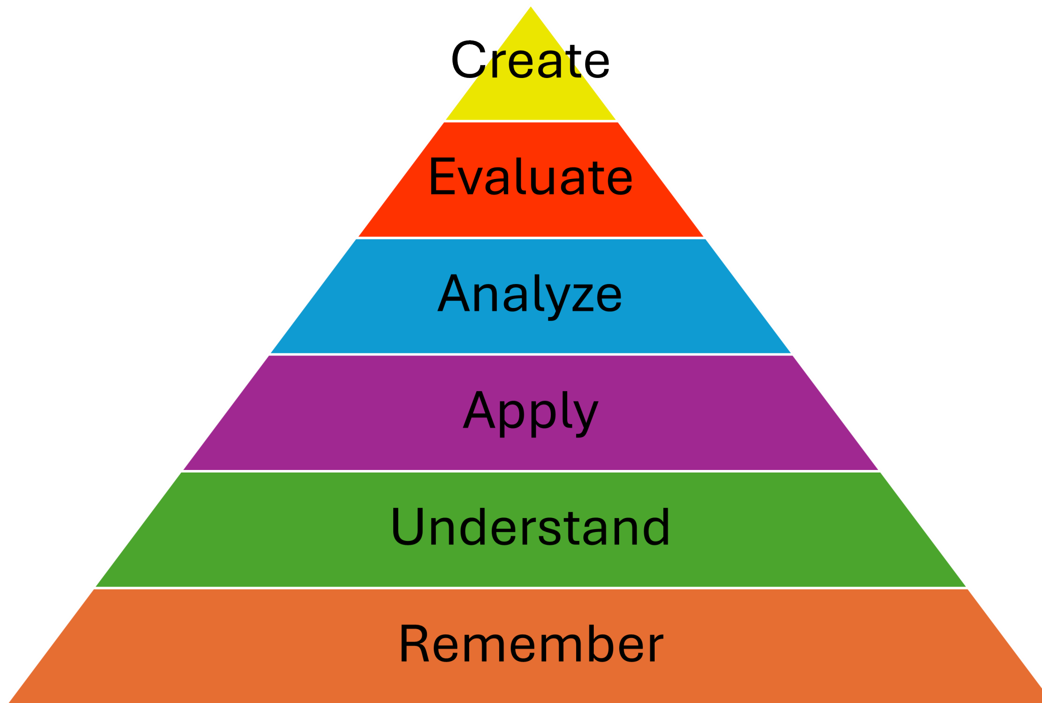
2.

READING WELL

Reading with Critical Engagement

You can expect to do a lot of reading for your college classes. You may expect that a professor will assign a reading because they want you to simply remember the content of what you've read, and that may sometimes be the case, especially when you're reading from a textbook. However, at the college level, reading is generally not a passive activity where you are simply expected to retain the information. Instead, often you will need to go beyond remembering or understanding information from a reading. You may need to apply what you've learned, make an argument about what you've read, or synthesize information from multiple reading assignments to create your own written work. To accomplish those tasks, you need to read with a more critical mindset about the text. Instead of passively taking in information, you should be engaging with the text by responding, asking questions, and making connections.

To accomplish those critical reading tasks, it can be helpful to understand Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive skills. Educational theorist Benjamin Bloom developed a taxonomy of cognitive tasks based on how challenging or complex each task is; successfully completing tasks at the top of hierarchy depends on one's ability to complete tasks at the bottom of the hierarchy. Bloom's taxonomy looks like this:



When we think about reading for college, these might look like the following tasks:

- **Remember** – Be able to recall key arguments and details from texts.
- **Understand** – Be able to explain the meaning of a text in your own words.
- **Apply** – Be able to use the ideas from a text in a new context.
- **Analyze** – Be able to explain connections and relationships between texts.
- **Evaluate** – Be able to make an argument about a text.
- **Create** – Be able to propose changes to a text.

At the college level, you'll often be asked to analyze, evaluate, and create; thus, you'll want to read with these goals in mind. The great thing about aiming high on Bloom's taxonomy is that the lower levels are then automatically covered. If you know a reading well enough to make a strong argument about it, you certainly remember it will enough to pass a multiple choice test as well. So how do you read in a way that makes this possible?

1. Identify the original context of the piece. Where and when was it originally

published? Who was the originally intended audience? If the original publication was a newspaper or magazine you don't know much about, *Wikipedia* can be a great resource for a general description of what kinds of topics the publication typically covers and what their readership is like.

2. Use pre-reading strategies like skimming the headings. This practice will give you a sense of the main ideas and how the text is organized, before you dig into the details.
3. Annotate what you read! Don't just highlight main ideas; make marginal notes. Have you ever been reading and suddenly realized you weren't actually paying attention to the words, even though your eyes were passing over them? Marginal notes force you to engage with the text's content. Common marginal types of marginal notes include things like:

    - Jotting down the main topic or point of a section in your own words
    - Noting questions about what is meant
    - Commenting on the writing style
    - Identifying your own thoughts or feelings in response to what you're reading

3. Write about what you read! After you complete a reading, write a brief summary or even a response. This practice will cement the text in your memory, as well as give you an opportunity to organize and articulate your opinions about it.
4. Talk about what you read! Having conversations is an important learning tool because it allows you to engage in *dialectic*. Dialectic involves discussing your responses with others, particularly people who will challenge or contradict your views. Through dialectic, you are able to refine your ideas.

Summary Writing

A summary is simply a brief, objective description of a text's main ideas. The key aspect of a summary is that it's much shorter than the original text, focusing only on main ideas and omitting supporting details.

Learning how to write good summaries will serve you in many ways in your college career. Summaries of others' works often serve as background or supporting information in your own writing, but they can also be useful tools to help you organize research when you have to evaluate and synthesize information from different sources. A good summary:

- Identifies the author, title, and original publication context of the work being summarized
- Is written in your own words, with few or no quotations from the work being summarized
- Clearly articulates the main point (and not just the topic) of the work being summarized
- Thoroughly and accurately reflects the supporting reasons and evidence provided in the work being summarized
- Does not convey (even subtly) your opinion of or response to the work being summarized
- Uses frequent attributive tags (phrases like "according to Author" or "Author argues") to remind the reader that someone else's work is being summarized

Summaries are always shorter than the work being summarized, but they can otherwise vary greatly in length, depending on your purpose. When I was in graduate school, I had a professor who required us to write a one-sentence summary of each book we read (yes, we read multiple books for one class!). That exercise turned out to be really useful because I was forced to figure out the main point of an entire book and put that point into my own words. However, those summaries weren't detailed enough to use for something like an annotated

bibliography. Most summaries you write for academic work will be somewhere between several sentences to a full page.

A good strategy for getting started on your summary is to use the opening sentence to identify the author's full name, the text's title, the original publication title (the name of the magazine or website where an article was published), and the text's main idea. You can also incorporate other contextual details that you think are relevant; for example, readers might benefit from knowing the year a source was published, the genre of a source, or the background of the author. Here are some examples of strong opening sentences:

- In the 1932 article "In Praise of Idleness" from *The Atlantic*, philosopher Bertrand Russell argues that Western society puts too much emphasis on work and productivity, and that we would be better off if we valued leisure more.
- In "True Crime Distorts the Truth about Crime" from the magazine *Reason*, Kat Rosenfield asserts that true crime media often exploits victims in the name of creating a tidy narrative that appeals to audiences.
- In the *Transcultural Psychiatry* article "Technology and Addiction: What Drugs Can Teach Us about Digital Media," researchers Ido Hartogsohn and Amir Vudka critique the common discourse that describes digital media as addictive, arguing that this view, though accurate in some senses, also limits our ability to develop healthier approaches to our engagement with digital media.
- In the book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman describes numerous studies that show how humans use mental shortcuts that can lead to misunderstandings and bad decisions, and illuminates how we can become more aware of these shortcuts to slow down our thinking when we need to.

Note how each of the above sentences uses the author(s) as the subject of the sentence. This is good practice, as it's how you'll be expected to refer to sources

throughout your academic writing, but it's also an easy way to streamline the sentence. When you have to cram in so much contextual information, it's easy for the opening sentence to become clunky or even ungrammatical.

In some contexts, a single-sentence summary may be sufficient. However, in most cases, you'll be expected to expand the summary a bit more by including brief descriptions of the key supporting arguments or main ideas. The most important factor to keep in mind as you flesh out the summary to the expected length is proportion.

Sometimes, people get overly focused on just one particular idea from the text – whether it's the idea they liked or disliked the most, or simply the part they understood the best. As a result, they end up only including that single idea in their summary, neglecting to cover the text's other major points. Instead, if you're asked to write a 3-4 sentence summary, you should think about how to divide up the text's primary ideas somewhat proportionately across the remaining 2-3 sentences after your opening sentence.

The goal is to provide a balanced, representative summary that captures the essence of the text, not just the parts that stood out the most to you personally. Maintaining this sense of proportion is key to crafting an effective, comprehensive summary that meets the expectations of your audience. To illustrate, here is an expanded version of the first example; you can read the full original article here to compare: https://harpers.org/archive/1932/10/in-praise-of-idleness/

> In the 1932 article "In Praise of Idleness" from *The Atlantic*, philosopher Bertrand Russell argues that Western society puts too much emphasis on work and productivity, and that we would be better off if we valued leisure more. First, Russell notes that advances in technology have greatly increased productivity, which should have allowed everyone to work less; instead, though, companies will lay off employees while requiring those who remain to work the same hours as they did before. He argues that the same productivity could be achieved by halving the number of hours

that people must work while doubling the number of employees, in which case everyone would be happier, as everyone would have both income and free time. He also critiques the notion that work is inherently valuable or meaningful, pointing out that this argument is most commonly made by the idle rich to make the poor feel better about their lot. Finally, Russell argues that with more leisure time and less exhaustion from work, people will be more free to pursue education, develop hobbies, and enjoy their communities.

A Note about Attributive Tags

Attributive tags, sometimes also called "signal phrases," are how you indicate in your writing that you are referring to someone else's words or ideas. The most typical type of attributive tag in academic writing comes at the beginning of a sentence and consists of an author's last name and a verb, as in:

- Russell argues
- Kahneman explains
- Rosenfield criticizes

The Names

A standard practice is to identify an author's full name the first time you introduce them/their source in your essay. After that, use only the last name. In academic writing, we never refer to people by first name only, and we typically also do not include titles like Dr., Mr., or Ms.

When you have a source with two authors, you will use both names. As in the example opening sentence above, you'll use both full names the first time, and then both last names the rest of the time, as in:

- Hartogsohn and Vudka explain
- Hartogsohn and Vudka describe

Notice that the order of the names is always the same!

Finally, if you have a source with more than two authors, you will use the first author's name, and then the abbreviate et al. (which stands for "and others"). Again, you'll use the full name plus et al. the first time, and then just the last name plus et al. the rest of the time:

- First reference: In the *Journal of Management* article "Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing," Jean M. Twenge et al. describe their study finding that younger generations care more about leisure time and expect more compensation than older generations.
- After the first reference:
    - Twenge et al. discuss
    - Twenge et al. suggest

When the context makes it clear that you are referring to a source you have previously named, you can use pronouns or other replacements to avoid repeating the names over and over:

- Russell argues . . . . He notes that . . . .
- Rosenfield criticizes . . . . She claims that . . . .
- Hartogsohn and Vudka explain . . . . They describe . . . .
- Twenge et al. discuss . . . . The researchers suggest that . . . .

The Verbs

When you're writing about books, articles, or other texts in academic work, you'll notice we mostly use present tense, even when we're describing old texts. The idea is that the content of written work exists in an eternal present – the words on the page remain unchanged regardless of when they were written. It can get a little trickier when you're summarizing, for example, a study that was conducted. In cases like that, you might use past tense when referring to the actions the researchers took, but still use present tense when summarizing the ideas in the

text. Notice in this example that the middle sentences, which describe the study itself, is in past tense, while the rest of the summary uses present tense.

> In the *Journal of Management* article "Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing," Jean M. Twenge et al. describe their study finding that Millennials care more about leisure time than previous generations. The researchers analyzed data that was collected from high school seniors in 1976 (Boomers), 1991 (GenX), and 2006 (Millennials), comparing the value each cohort placed on leisure time, intrinsic rewards (interesting or fun work), extrinsic rewards (money and prestige), altruistic rewards (helping others), and social rewards (connectedness) when it came to their career goals. They found that desire for leisure time increased across the three generations, desire for intrinsic, altruistic, and social rewards decreased across the generations, and desire for extrinsic rewards spiked with GenX and then dropped slightly with Millennials, though it remains much higher than it was with Boomers. Twenge et al. argue that employers could most effectively attract younger employees by offering more vacation time and more flexible schedules. They also note that their data supports the stereotype that Millennials are entitled and overconfident, expecting more status and compensation than is realistic.

Also, try to avoid saying things like "the author says" or "talks about" – they're a bit too vague, plus some picky professors might point out that written works don't actually "say" or "talk" about anything! Instead, you can use more specific verbs like:

- argues
- demonstrates
- illustrates
- analyzes
- explains
- presents

- contends
- examines

These verbs do a better job of indicating what authors are doing, and they sound more academic. Just make sure you pick one that makes sense in your context.

Response Writing

Responses build on summaries by adding your own opinions about the text. A response essay is a common early college writing assignment because response essays demonstrate that students know how to read with a critical eye. However, they can be challenging for students who have only ever been asked to regurgitate information and not expected (or even allowed!) to share their own views. When they are done well, though, responses are a great way for students to demonstrate that they can not only read well enough to summarize a text, but they can move to those higher levels in Bloom's taxonomy by analyzing how the text works and evaluating its effectiveness.

Response essays typically do some combination of the following:

- Critique the ideas or arguments made in the text by analyzing and evaluating the text's logic and evidence
- Critique the way the text is written by analyzing and evaluating the text's broader rhetorical effectiveness
- Critique the significance of the text, to yourself and/or to others

Your instructor may ask you to focus on just one of those, but most commonly, all three aspects of the response are fair game. The following sections explain what each of these response types focuses on and provide lists of questions to help you develop ideas.

Critiquing a Text's Ideas

One type of response focuses solely on the text's content (what it says). You might use this list of questions to generate critiques of a text's ideas:

- What is the central claim or argument being made by the author? Can you summarize the main point in a single sentence? How clear, focused, and specific is the claim being made?
- What evidence (e.g. facts, data, examples, expert opinions) does the author use to support their argument? Is the evidence credible, relevant, and sufficient to support the claims made?
- How well does the author's logic and reasoning hold up under scrutiny? Are there any flaws, inconsistencies, or gaps in their argumentation?
- Where does the text acknowledge or address counterarguments or alternative viewpoints? How effectively does the author respond to potential objections to their position?
- What assumptions does the author rely on? Are these assumptions justified and warranted?
- Based on your analysis, what is your overall assessment of the text? Do you find the author's argument convincing and well-supported, or do you have significant reservations or criticisms?

Critiquing a Text's Rhetorical Effectiveness

A text's logic and evidence are just one aspect of its rhetorical effectiveness. You could broaden your critique by examining other aspects of how the text is written. For more on rhetorical theory, see the chapter titled "Classical Rhetorical Theory." For a start, though, you might use this list of questions to generate critiques of a text's rhetoric:

- Who is the intended audience for this text, and how does the author seem to be addressing or appealing to them?
- How effectively does the author anticipate and respond to potential

counterarguments or objections from the audience?

- How effectively has the author adapted the language, tone, and level of technicality for the intended audience?
- What is the genre of the text? How well does the text follow the conventions of the genre? If it deviates from them, how do those choices impact the text's effectiveness?
- What qualifications, expertise, or authority does the author have on this topic? How effectively does the author convey these in the text?
- How does the author establish their credibility and trustworthiness?
- What are the potential biases or conflicts of interest that could undermine the author's credibility? Do you see evidence of these in the text?
- What strategies does the author use to get the audience to feel invested in the topic? How effective are these strategies?
- How effectively does the author connect their ideas to their intended audience's values?
- What emotions does the author try to evoke in the reader? Are the emotional appeals appropriate and justified given the context and subject matter?
- How effectively does the author use language, tone, imagery, and other rhetorical devices to elicit emotional responses?
- What is the overall tone of the text (e.g. formal, informal, conversational, academic, passionate)? How effective is this tone for the subject matter and the intended audience?
- How effectively does the author use word choice and sentence structure to develop the text's style and voice?
- How is the text structured and organized (e.g. chronological, compare-contrast, problem-solution)? Does the organization and flow of ideas help or hinder the effectiveness of the author's arguments? Are there clear transitions and logical connections between the different sections and points made in the text?
- What specific rhetorical devices (e.g. metaphors, analogies, repetition, rhetorical questions) does the author use, and how do they impact the effectiveness of the text? Are these devices used judiciously and in service of

the author's overall argumentative goals?
- Overall, how successful is the text in achieving its intended purpose for its intended audience? What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the text's rhetorical appeals and stylistic choices? What recommendations would you make to the author to improve the overall effectiveness of the text?

Critiquing a Text's Significance

Another angle you could take is to analyze and critique the overall impact or significance of the text. This can be personal, focused just on what the text means to you, or could take a larger view and address how the text fits in its broader social context. You might use this list of questions to generate critiques of a text's significance:

- How does the text resonate with your own experiences, beliefs, or worldview? In what ways does it connect to or challenge your personal perspective?
- What emotions, memories, or associations does the text evoke for you on a personal level? How do these personal responses shape your interpretation and evaluation of the text?
- In what ways does the text illuminate or expand your understanding of yourself, your relationships, or your place in the world? How might it inspire personal growth, reflection, or transformation?
- Are there particular ideas or passages in the text that you find especially compelling, relatable, or meaningful on a personal level? What is it about these elements that resonates with you?
- How does your own social, cultural, or demographic background influence how you engage with and make sense of the text on a personal level? In what ways might your personal identity and experiences shape your critique?
- How relevant and significant is the argument in the broader context? Does it address an important issue, and does it offer new or meaningful insights?
- What broader social, cultural, political, or historical issues, themes, or

debates does the text engage with or illuminate? How does it contribute to your understanding of these larger social contexts?

- In what ways does the text reflect, challenge, or reshape common social narratives, assumptions, or power dynamics? How might it impact societal attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors?
- Who are the key stakeholders, communities, or social groups that the text centers? Whose perspectives and experiences are not represented?
- How might the text's themes, messages, or representations impact different groups in different ways?
- What are the broader societal implications or real-world consequences – positive or negative – that could stem from the ideas, arguments, or perspectives presented in the text?

Conclusion

Reading and writing at the college level requires moving beyond simply absorbing information to critically engaging with texts. By applying strategies like annotating, summarizing, and responding, you can develop the higher-order cognitive skills of analysis, evaluation, and creation from Bloom's taxonomy. Mastering these skills allows you to thoughtfully assess the strengths, weaknesses, and potential impacts of different texts. Ultimately, the ability to read critically and respond substantively demonstrates an essential intellectual skillset. It shows you can think deeply, reason rigorously, and communicate insightfully about complex ideas. Honing this expertise will serve you well not just in college, but in navigating our increasingly information-saturated world with discernment and insight.

Related Writing Projects

- Response Essay

- Rhetorical Analysis Essay – One Text
- Rhetorical Analysis Essay – Compare and Contrast Two Texts

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3.

CLASSICAL RHETORICAL THEORY

The word "rhetoric" is often used pejoratively to mean "empty words" or "manipulative argumentation," but as someone who studies rhetoric, I find this usage a little insulting and far too narrow. I like Kenneth Burke's definition of rhetoric as "a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols." Burke's definition is a little harder to understand, so let's break it down:

- "A symbolic means" = using symbols, which would include words but also all kinds of other symbols
- "Of inducing cooperation" = getting someone to do what you want, whether that's to believe something, react a certain way, or change their behavior
- "Beings that by nature respond to symbols" = humans (and possibly other animals, though we're going to focus on human-to-human interactions for this textbook!)

In other words, according to Burke, rhetoric is the use of words and/or other symbols to get other people to do what you want. That would certainly include manipulative argumentation, but it would also include telling a joke that makes someone laugh, asking someone to pass the salt at the dinner table, and even giving the weather forecast (assuming the forecaster wants the audience to believe it). It would also include non-verbal symbolic communication, like wearing a suit to show a job interviewer that you're professional or responding to a text with the appropriate emoji to convey your emotional reaction. Rhetoric is, therefore,

an enormous field of study! Those of us who study rhetoric also have a tendency to think of everything that has any symbolic meaning as a "text" that can be read and every communication as a kind of "argument," because it's always with the purpose of changing something in the audience.

Even though rhetoric as a field has grown to encompass all kinds of symbolic communication, the study of rhetoric has its origins in ancient Greece. The earliest known theorists of rhetoric were teachers called "Sophists" who instructed students in the art of persuasive public speaking. Prominent Sophists like Gorgias and Protagoras emphasized the power of language to shape public opinion and sway audiences. These skills were particularly important in a democratic culture where decisions were often made on the basis of arguments presented by politicians. Following the Sophists, many Greek philosophers developed their own rhetorical theories. Aristotle, in fact, was the philosopher who established what is now called "the Rhetorical Triangle," which you'll see more about below.

The rhetorical theories that originated in ancient Greece have been studied, refined, and expanded upon ever since, and they continue to be relevant today. We can use these ideas to evaluate the work of others and to help us develop our own work.

The Rhetorical Triangle

The rhetorical triangle is a way of analyzing a text's power by looking at three interrelated concepts: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

Logos

Logos refers to the logic of a text. It includes everything from how clear and consistent the message is to the strength of the evidence. A text that makes arguments based on logic and evidence is said to use *logical appeals*. Here are some questions you could use to analyze the *logos* in a text:

- Is the argument clearly stated and easy to follow?
- Are there any logical fallacies or contradictions in the reasoning?
- Is the evidence provided relevant, credible, and sufficient to support the claims?
- Are counterarguments fairly considered and addressed?
- Does the conclusion logically follow from the premises stated?
- Are there gaps, assumptions, or oversimplifications in the logic?

Logical fallacies are errors in reasoning that can undermine an argument's validity. Some common fallacies include:

- Ad hominem: Attacking the person making the argument rather than addressing the argument itself.
    - "You can't trust Dr. Smith's research on climate change because he drives a gas-guzzling SUV."
    - "Why should we listen to Professor Lee's economic theory? She's never even run a business."
    - "The defendant's testimony isn't credible because he has a criminal record."
- Straw man: Misrepresenting an opponent's argument to make it easier to attack.
    - Person A: "I think we need stricter gun control laws." Person B: "You just want to take away everyone's guns and leave us defenseless!"
    - Person A: "Schools should offer vegetarian options in cafeterias." Person B: "So you're saying we should force all kids to become vegans?"
    - Person A: "We should increase funding for public transportation." Person B: "Oh, so you want to ban all cars and make everyone ride the bus?"
- False dichotomy: Presenting only two options when there are actually more.
    - "Either we cut social programs, or we'll go bankrupt as a nation."
    - "America: love it or leave it."

- Slippery slope: Arguing that a small step will inevitably lead to a chain of related events.
    - "If we ban assault weapons, soon they'll take away all our guns, and then we'll be defenseless against a tyrannical government."
    - "If we allow students to use calculators in math class, they'll never learn how to do basic arithmetic."
    - "If we increase the minimum wage, companies will have to raise prices so much that no one will be able to afford anything."
- Circular reasoning: Using the conclusion as a premise to support itself.
    - "The Bible is true because it says so in the Bible."
    - "Freedom of speech is important because we should be able to speak freely."

A logical argument should be structured with clear premises that lead to a supported conclusion. It should use valid reasoning, avoid fallacies, and be based on credible evidence. Good arguments also anticipate and address potential counterarguments.

In conclusion, logos is crucial for building a strong, persuasive argument. By using clear reasoning, solid evidence, and avoiding logical fallacies, writers can create compelling cases that appeal to their audience's intellect and critical thinking skills. However, logos alone is often not enough to fully persuade an audience, which is why it's important to consider ethos and pathos as well.

Ethos

Ethos refers to the character of the writer, in particular, how that writer's character comes across through the text. In most cases, we are more likely to believe a writer who seems to be trustworthy, credible, sensible, and knowledgeable. A text that makes arguments based on the writer's character is said to make *ethical appeals*. (That terminology often confuses students, because we think of the word "ethical" as referring to morality.)

Here are some questions you could use to analyze *ethos* in a text:

- What credentials, expertise, or firsthand experience does the writer demonstrate regarding the topic?
- Does the writer come across as fair, unbiased, and level-headed?
- Is the tone reasonable, respectful, and mature?
- Does the writer establish common ground and good will with the audience?
- Are there instances where the writer's credibility or objectivity is undermined?
- Does the writer fully disclose biases, vested interests, or limitations in their perspective?

Closely related to ethos is the concept of angle of vision, perspective, or point of view. Different people have different perspectives on a topic, which significantly influences how they think and write about it. For example, a teacher and a student might have very different views on the effectiveness of a particular teaching method. Even a single person can have multiple perspectives based on their various roles in life. A parent who is also a teacher might approach an educational issue differently depending on which role they prioritize.

It's important to recognize that everyone has some form of bias or perspective. The term "bias" often carries a negative connotation, but it can be oversimplifying to assume there's such a thing as a purely objective point of view. Instead of striving for complete objectivity, which is arguably impossible, writers should aim for transparency about their perspective and potential biases. This honesty can actually enhance their ethos by demonstrating self-awareness and fairness.

In conclusion, *ethos* is about establishing credibility and trust with the audience. By demonstrating expertise, fairness, and transparency about one's perspective, a writer can build a strong ethical appeal. This not only makes the audience more

likely to listen but also creates a foundation of respect and understanding, even if the reader ultimately disagrees with the argument.

Pathos

Pathos refers to how effectively the text appeals to the audience's values and emotions. A good argument needs to make the audience care about the issue, and perhaps even make the audience feel some sympathy for the writer. A text that makes arguments based on emotions is said to make *pathetic appeals* (or *emotional appeals*, now that the word "pathetic" has shifted in meaning). Here are some questions you could use to analyze *pathos* in a text:

- Does the writing tap into shared values, hopes, fears, or identities of the audience?
- Are personal anecdotes, examples or hypotheticals used to stir emotions?
- Is wording used deliberately to evoke specific emotional responses (such as outrage, sympathy, or inspiration)?
- Is the audience's self-interest or aspirations effectively engaged?
- Does the emotional angle risk being perceived as manipulation or oversimplification?

The importance of appealing to audience needs, values, and motivations cannot be overstated in effective communication. By understanding and addressing what matters to your audience, you can create a connection that goes beyond mere logical persuasion. This doesn't mean simply telling people what they want to hear, but rather framing your argument in a way that resonates with their existing beliefs and concerns.

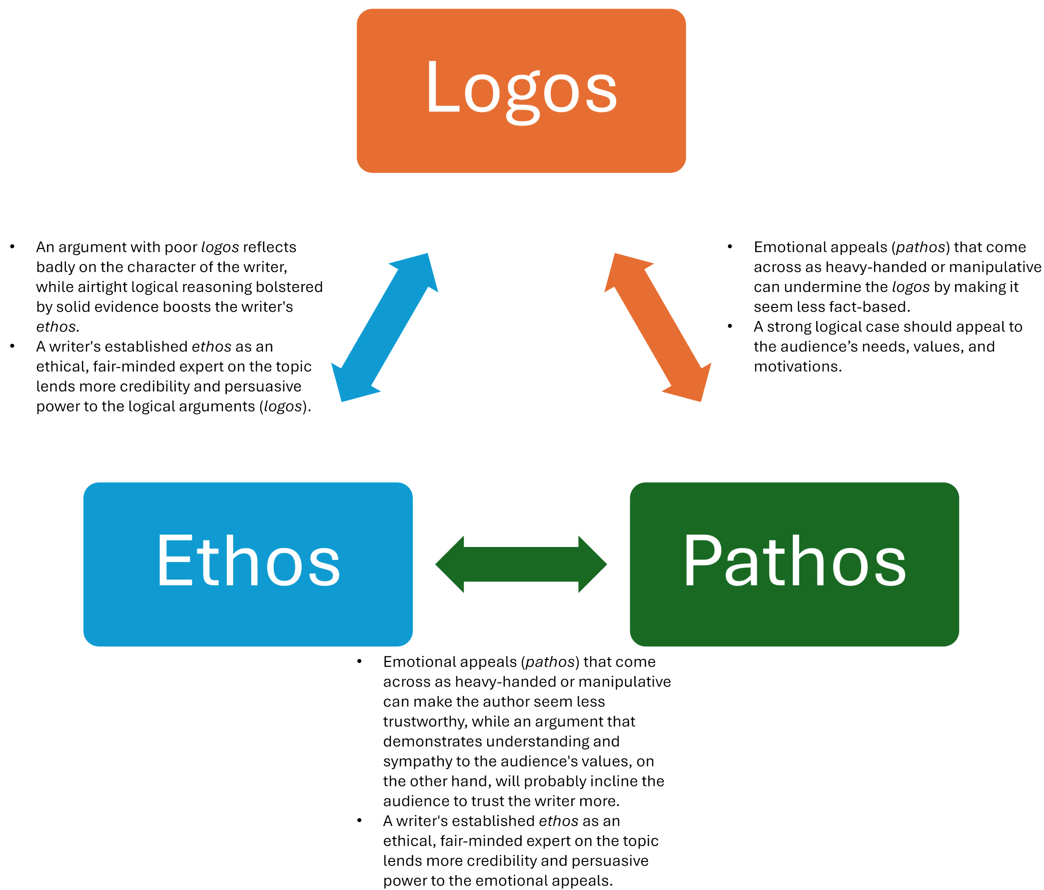
It's crucial to note that pathos isn't just about evoking obvious or extreme emotions. While many people might immediately think of appeals to pathos as using pictures of sad puppies or stirring up anger, any emotion can be part of a pathetic appeal. This includes positive emotions like hope, pride, or excitement. For example, a speech about environmental conservation might appeal to fear

by discussing the dangers of climate change, but it could also appeal to hope and inspiration by highlighting successful conservation efforts and the beauty of nature.

Ultimately, *pathos* is about connecting with your audience on an emotional level. By appealing to shared values, using vivid language and examples, and evoking appropriate emotions, writers can make their arguments more compelling and memorable. However, it's important to use pathos responsibly and in balance with logos and ethos. Overreliance on emotional appeals without logical backing or credibility can be perceived as manipulation, potentially undermining the overall argument.

The Interconnected Triangle

Clearly, these three rhetorical factors also influence each other in a variety of ways. For example, an argument with poor *logos* (unclear, contradictory, fallacious, or lacking in evidence) reflects badly on the character of the writer, thus indirectly harming the writer's *ethos*. Audiences will question the writer's expertise, trustworthiness, and intellectual honesty if the reasoning is sloppy or unsupported. Conversely, valid logical reasoning bolstered by solid evidence boosts the writer's *ethos* as someone knowledgeable who argues in good faith. Emotional appeals (*pathos*) that come across as heavy-handed, manipulative, or playing too much on fears/insecurities rather than positive values can undermine the *logos* by making the argument feel less fact-based, and if audiences feel like the author is trying to manipulate them, they may start to question the author's *ethos*. An argument that demonstrates understanding and sympathy to the audience's values, on the other hand, will probably incline the audience to trust the writer more. A writer who comes across as biased and unreasonable (bad *ethos*) is going to encourage the audience to be more skeptical of their *logos,* while on the flip side, a writer's established *ethos* as an ethical, fair-minded expert on the topic lends more credibility and persuasive power to both the logical arguments (*logos*) and emotional appeals (*pathos*) employed.



Conclusion

The key elements of classical rhetorical theory provide a valuable framework for both analyzing and crafting persuasive arguments. As you analyze the rhetorical strengths and weaknesses of arguments across texts, you will develop a more nuanced ability to assess *logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*, and *kairos*. Applying these skills will empower you to engage with complex issues as critical thinkers and ethical communicators – discerning "what persuades" beyond just surface appeals. By becoming more consciously aware of these features, you will also better be able to employ them thoughtfully and purposefully in your own work.

Related Writing Projects

- Rhetorical Analysis Essay – One Text
- Rhetorical Analysis Essay – Compare and Contrast Two Texts

4.

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

When we zoom out from a text itself, we can look a text in its context, which consists of four main elements: purpose, audience, genre, and medium. Together, these elements are often referred to as the *rhetorical situation*.

In this chapter, we will explore each of these concepts in depth, focusing on how a better understanding of them can help us develop a better understanding of a text. By the end, you'll see how these elements work together to create impactful communication. Although we'll be focused on analyzing these aspects in texts that others have written, you will also start to see how you can be more conscious and intentional about these elements when writing your own texts.

I. Purpose

Rhetorical purpose refers to the specific goal or objective that a communicator aims to achieve through their message. It is the driving force behind any piece of communication, shaping its content, structure, and delivery.

Purpose and Exigence

To fully understand purpose, we must first explore a closely related concept: exigence. The exigence is the specific problem or circumstance that has motivated the author to create the text in the first place. In other words, it's the "why" behind the communication.

The rhetorical exigence can be quite urgent and immediate. For example, imagine a storm system with a high chance of generating tornados is approaching,

creating a need for meteorologists and public officials to alert people in the path of the storm. The approaching storm system is the exigence, and their purpose is to change their audience's behaviors in particular ways: stay inside, remain alert for sirens, and be prepared to take shelter. Other examples of urgent exigence might be breaking news events, immediate health threats, or security breaches – any situation where action is needed immediately.

The rhetorical exigence can be time-sensitive, but not urgent. An election campaign is a good example of a time-sensitive exigence; the end point is the election, which may be weeks or months ahead. Other examples might be product launches or seasonal events. In all of these examples, the problem or circumstance has a defined end point or expiration date when the issue becomes settled or is no longer relevant, but immediate action is not necessary.

The rhetorical exigence can also be more general and relate to ongoing issues or concerns, such as social and political issues, environmental concerns, and public health initiatives. An anti-smoking campaign, for example, has no clear end point. This kind of exigence only ends when the problem is completely solved, which may never happen.

A good understanding of the exigence can also help authors make effective choices about *kairos*, which refers to the timing of their argument. (Yes, it's another Greek term like *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, but the concept actually predates Aristotle and the rhetorical triangle!) *Kairos* is all about seizing the most opportune moment to take action. With urgent exigence, the author may have little choice in the matter, but less urgent exigences can allow for rhetors to make more conscious decisions about when to deploy their messages.

Another part of *kairos* is tailoring the message to emphasize its current relevance for audiences. One of my favorite examples of *kairos* actually came from a student, who noted how Reese's changes their ads throughout the year. In October, their ads feature the pumpkin-shaped peanut butter cups, in December it's Christmas trees, in February it's hearts, and in April it's eggs. Instead of just

using exactly the same promotion year-round, they change the product itself and their advertising to stay relevant to the season.

Issue	**Exigence**	***Kairos* – timing**	***Kairos* – relevance**
Climate change	The ongoing threat of climate change and its impacts	Giving a speech about climate action immediately following a major natural disaster	Connecting the disaster to climate change
Product launch	The need to increase profits and market share	Launching a new smartphone just before the holiday shopping season	Promoting the product as a great gift idea
Political campaign	Constituent concerns about economic inequality	Proposing a new tax plan right after a major corporation announces record profits while laying off workers	Arguing that this new tax plan will prioritize workers over corporations
Social issues	Ongoing concerns about police brutality and corruption	Organizing a large-scale protest following a high-profile case of police misconduct	Creating signs and slogans that reference the incident
Corporate crisis	A major product defect that poses safety risks	Issuing a public apology and recall notice before the problem becomes widely reported in the media	Emphasizing in the communication that consumer safety is a high priority and that the corporation is always vigilant
Academic research	A gap in knowledge about a specific disease	Publishing groundbreaking research just before a major conference	Showing how the new research will solve a pressing problem caused by the gap

In each of these examples, the exigence creates the need for communication or action, while *kairos* represents the optimal moment to address that need for maximum impact, as well as strategies that emphasize how the argument is

currently relevant. Not all situations allow for rhetors to choose the timing of their argument, but at the very least, they can use *kairos* to establish their argument's relevance and significance.

How Exigence Shapes Content and Delivery

- Urgent exigence necessitates brief and direct messages, often through multiple channels, while less urgent exigence allows for more detailed and nuanced communication.
- Urgent exigence tends to adopt a more serious tone, while less urgent exigence can be more varied.
- Urgent and time-sensitive exigence requires clear calls for the audience to take specific actions within a given timeframe, while ongoing exigence might focus more on general behavioral change or aim to shape beliefs more than behaviors.
- Urgent exigence limits options for dialogue on issues, while ongoing exigence allows for audience response/participation.
- If author and audience disagree on the urgency of the exigence, the author may try to modify the audience's feelings/beliefs about how urgent the situation is.

Analyzing Texts with a Focus on Exigence

1. What specific problem or situation prompted the creation of this text?
2. How urgent or time-sensitive is the exigence? Is it an immediate crisis, an ongoing issue, or something in between?
3. Are there multiple exigences at play? If so, how do they interact or compete with each other?
4. How does the author's perception of the exigence differ from the audience's perception?
5. How does the author attempt to convince the audience of the importance or urgency of the exigence?
6. How has the exigence evolved over time? Is it a new issue or a longstanding concern?
7. What cultural, social, or historical factors contribute to this exigence?
8. How does the exigence shape the tone, style, and format of the text?
9. What would resolve or address this exigence? How does this relate to the author's purpose?
10. How might different stakeholders perceive the exigence differently?
11. How does the medium of communication relate to the nature of the exigence?
12. Why did the author choose this particular moment to address the exigence?
13. What recent events or circumstances make this moment particularly opportune for this message?
14. Are there any time-sensitive elements in the text that might lose relevance if delivered at a different moment?
15. How does the author leverage current events or the zeitgeist to enhance the message's relevance?
16. In what ways does the text's timing affect how the audience might receive or interpret the message?
17. How might the effectiveness of this text change if it were presented at a different time?
18. Are there any missed opportunities in terms of timing that could have made the text more impactful?

Purpose as Rhetorical Aim

While exigence helps us understand the motivation behind a text, we can also think about purpose in terms of broader rhetorical aims. These aims can be classified into just a few typical categories:

- To inform or educate: the author's main goal is for the audience to learn something new

- To persuade or motivate: the author's main goal is for the audience to adopt a new position or pursue a particular of action
- To entertain: the author's main goal is to engage and amuse the audience

Any given text is likely to have just one of these as the primary or most obvious aim; however, these aims can and often do overlap.

Informative texts, for example, aim to change the audience's beliefs about the topic, so they need some elements of persuasion. Furthermore, what counts as "informative" can, to some extent, be in the eye of the beholder. An author may be simply trying to inform the audience about an issue, but on controversial topics (think climate change or vaccines), some audiences would interpret that same text as intending to persuade rather than simply inform. Informative texts are also more effective if they are interesting and fun for the audience to read, so they may incorporate elements of entertainment.

Similarly, persuasive texts benefit from being entertaining; they must get and keep the audience's attention. They also frequently rely on facts and data that might be new to the audience, so they can be informative.

Finally, texts with the primary purpose of entertainment still often convey information (everything I know about the Napoleonic Wars, I learned from Naomi Novik's novels!), and they both intentionally and unintentionally convey lessons. For example, In shaping how we view and move within the world, the texts we consume for entertainment do, in some sense, persuade us.

Because persuasion is implied in every kind of text, comp/rhet scholars often say, "Everything is an argument." Any time we communicate, we are trying to have some kind of effect, so in the most general sense, every text is persuasive.

How Rhetorical Aim Shapes Content and Delivery

Despite how tangled up the different rhetorical aims can be, the author typically

has one aim that dominates the others, and that aim will shape the text's content and delivery, often as described in the table below:

	Informative	Persuasive	Entertaining
Tone & Style	Objective, clear, and straightforward	Varies from objective to passionate, depending on audience and context	Casual, humorous, or dramatic
Structure & Organization	Logical progression, often moving from basic/background information to more complex ideas	Often logically organized, but may incorporate narrative elements	Narrative or non-linear
Evidence & Examples	Relies mainly on facts, statistics, and expert opinions	Incorporates a mix of facts, statistics, and expert opinions with relatable anecdotes	Mainly consists of narrative, anecdotes, and/or jokes
Emotional Appeals	Few or none	Ranges from few to many, depending on audience and context	Frequent

By examining these elements, we can infer the main aim of a text even when it's not explicitly stated. We can also evaluate how well the various components of the text support its intended rhetorical aim(s). Finally, when creating our own messages, we can deliberately choose elements that best serve our primary rhetorical aim.

Analyzing Texts with a Focus on Rhetorical Aim

1. What is the primary rhetorical aim, and how can you tell?
2. What are any secondary rhetorical aims, and how can you tell?
3. How do the choices made in the use of evidence and examples reflect the rhetorical aim(s)?
4. How does the text's structure or organization reflect the rhetorical aim(s)?
5. How do the author's choices in tone & style reflect the rhetorical aim(s)?
6. How do the emotional appeals reflect the rhetorical aim(s)?
7. Overall, how effective are all of these choices in accomplishing the rhetorical aim(s)?

By understanding both the specific exigence and the broader rhetorical aim, we can gain a more comprehensive view of a text's purpose and how texts can be shaped to better accomplish their purposes. This understanding is crucial for both analyzing existing texts and planning our own writing.

II. Audience

Now that we've explored purpose, let's turn our attention to another crucial element of rhetoric: the audience. In rhetoric, the audience refers to the intended recipients of a message. Understanding and adapting to the audience is crucial for effective communication. We can think about both the primary audience, who would be the originally intended recipients, and any secondary audiences, who would be others who might encounter the message in other contexts. Currently, secondary audiences can be quite large and varied, as content is so easily shared online. Often, as a student, you are a secondary audience for the texts you're asked to analyze. As a secondary audience, analyzing texts effectively requires you to identify and understand the primary audience; after all, the author may have made certain assumptions that don't apply to you, but that would have made sense for the primary audience.

Composition scholars Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford describe two different ways of thinking about the primary audience. One is the "audience addressed"; that is,

the real people who would have encountered the text in its original publication. To identify this audience, you might need to engage in a little background research. Where and when was the piece originally published? Based on that information, what kind of people would have encountered it?

Ede and Lunsford's second kind of audience is the "audience invoked." This audience is who seemed to be in the author's head while they were writing. You learn about this audience by looking at the text itself and asking questions like:

- What assumptions does the text make about the audience's background knowledge, beliefs, or values?
- What role does the author seem to imagine the audience taking?
- What kind of relationship does the author seem to imagine having with the audience?
- What responses does the author imagine coming from the audience?

Audience Analysis

Key factors to consider in audience analysis include:

- Demographics (age, gender, education, culture)
    - Example: A financial advice article targeted at young adults will address different concerns than one for those nearing retirement
- Psychographics (attitudes, values, beliefs)
    - Example: An advertisement might focus on a product's environmental friendliness for an eco-conscious audience, while emphasizing the product's price, convenience, or utility for other audiences
- Prior knowledge and experience on the topic
    - Example: The language used for an audience of experts can be quite technical, but would need to simplified for beginner audiences
- Relationship to the author
    - Example: A CEO speaking to employees would use a different tone

compared to when they address shareholders

Note that these factors could differ between the audience addressed and the audience invoked. If the author invokes an audience that is too far removed from the real audience, the text is likely to fall flat or be unsuccessful. For example, an author writing a young adult novel might address actual teenagers but invoke a slightly more mature, idealized, or outdated idea of teenagers. If this invoked audience is too far removed from reality (e.g., using outdated slang or unrealistic situations), the book may fail to connect with its intended readers.

Adapting to Audience

Ways to adapt a message to the audience include:

- Adjusting language and terminology: The level of technicality will vary depending on the audience's knowledge and familiarity with the topic. Similarly, the level of formality and tone will vary depending on the audience's relationship to the author.
- Selecting appropriate examples and analogies: Examples and analogies that are relatable to the audience will be more memorable, so these should be based on the audience's experiences, cultural references, and interests.
- Addressing potential concerns or counterarguments: Anticipating where an audience is likely to have questions or concerns and proactively addressing these shows understanding of the audience's perspective.
- Choosing suitable emotional appeals: Different audiences have different values and motivations, so emotional appeals should be tailored to what matters to the audience.

Analyzing Texts with a Focus on Audience

1. Who is the intended primary audience?
2. How has the author tailored the text's language and terminology for the intended audience?
3. How does the selection of example and analogies reflect the intended audience's knowledge and interests?
4. Where has the author predicted the intended audience's concerns and objections and addressed those?
5. How do the emotional appeals reflect the intended audience's particular values and motivations?
6. Overall, how well does the text actually meet the audience's needs and expectations?
7. What, if any, differences exist between the audience addressed and the audience invoked? How might the differences influence the effectiveness of the text?
8. What secondary audiences are also likely to encounter this text? Would the text be equally effective for them? Why or why not?

III. Genre

Having examined purpose and audience, we now move on to our third key concept: genre. In rhetoric, genre refers to categories or types of communication that share similar characteristics in form, style, or content. Understanding genre is crucial for both creating and interpreting messages effectively.

Genre can be broken down into seemingly infinite categories, but this chapter will focus on some categories that you will encounter a lot in college, and that you are probably not familiar with. Most of these genres are the ones you will draw from when you find sources for your own research papers. Those genres include:

Newspaper Articles

- News briefs: Short, concise reports of current events
- Investigative reports: In-depth articles uncovering hidden information or wrongdoing
- Op-eds: Opinion pieces written by guest contributors

- Editorials: Opinion pieces representing the newspaper's official stance
- Feature stories: Longer, more detailed articles exploring a topic in-depth
- Columns: Regular pieces by specific writers, often opinion-based

Magazine Articles

- Feature articles: In-depth, long-form pieces on a particular topic
- Personal essays: Reflective, first-person narratives
- Popular science and technology pieces: Accessible articles on scientific or technological topics
- How-to guides: Instructional articles providing step-by-step guidance
- Fashion and lifestyle pieces: Articles on trends, style, and daily living
- Cultural commentary: Analysis of current social and cultural phenomena
- Creative nonfiction essays: Literary pieces blending factual content with creative writing techniques
- Memoirs: Personal narratives focusing on specific life experiences

Academic Journal (Scholarly) Articles

- Empirical research reports: Articles presenting original research findings
- Interpretative/analytical essays: Pieces offering analysis of texts or ideas
- Literature reviews: Comprehensive summaries of existing research on a topic
- Theoretical articles: Pieces proposing, discussing, or critiquing theoretical frameworks
- Policy arguments: Articles advocating for specific policy changes based on research

Of course, these are just a handful of examples, focused on traditional print media (although many of these sources are made available online, as well).

If we were to add websites, online video, podcasts, and social media to our list, we

can expand it even more. However, you're less likely to be secondary audiences for those kinds of texts, so you're probably much more familiar with them as genres.

Identifying a Text's Genre

As a secondary audience for many of the texts you read in college, figuring out what genre you have in front of you can be a little tricky. Although there's no foolproof method, the following clues should help you narrow it down:

- Where was the piece originally published? (If it was in a scholarly journal, it's probably a scholarly article. If it was in a magazine, it's some type of magazine article.) You may need to do a little sleuthing if you're not familiar with the publication; *Wikipedia* can be a good resource to find out what a given publication is and what kinds of pieces it typically includes.
- Compare the text's content to what is described in the list above.
- Look for a label. Sometimes articles will be labeled as "Opinion," "Analysis," "Feature," or "Research Article."
- Ask a librarian!

Genre Conventions and Expectations

Each genre has its own set of conventions and expectations, including:

- Structure and organization
    - Overall structure: Academic writing tends to use a "closed-form" structure, with a clearly stated thesis and focused body paragraphs, while other types of writing might be more narrative or free-flowing.
    - Introduction and conclusion: A news article typically begins with a concise lead paragraph summarizing key points, while an academic paper might start with a broad context before narrowing to a specific thesis statement. In many persuasive genres, the conclusion is a place to reiterate the main idea and end with a call to action, while genres

  geared toward entertainment may focus on ending with something witty or memorable.
  - Paragraphs and transitions: Magazine and newspaper articles tend to use short paragraphs with very specific information, while academic writing tends to have longer, more nuanced paragraphs with prominent transitional sentences and phrases.
- Style and tone
  - Level of formality: Academic writing and legal documents typically use a highly formal style, while magazine articles often employ a casual, conversational style.
  - Personal voice: Memoirs and personal essays heavily utilize the author's unique voice, while scientific papers and news reports aim for a more objective, neutral style.
  - Level of technicality: Technical manuals and scientific papers use specialized jargon and complex terminology, while general interest articles and popular science writing aim to simplify technical concepts for a broader audience.
  - Emotional language: Magazine articles and newspaper opinion pieces often use emotive language to engage the audience, while academic writing and news reporting typically strive for a more neutral, factual tone.
  - Figurative language: Literary works often employ metaphors, similes, and other figurative devices, while technical writing and legal documents aim for literal, precise language.
- Length and format
  - Length: News briefs tend to be very short, while feature articles may be longer. Magazine articles vary in length, but generally don't run more than a few pages, while journal articles are typically at least 10-12 pages long, and sometimes much longer!
  - Use of headings and subheadings: Business reports and technical documents often use multiple levels of headings to organize information, while newspaper articles rarely use explicit headings.
  - Page layout: Academic papers often follow strict formatting

guidelines (e.g., APA, MLA), while magazines have more flexibility in layout and design.
    - Integration of visuals or multimedia elements: Academic articles often include charts, graphs, and tables, while magazine articles may tend to have illustrations or photographs. Web articles often incorporate hyperlinks, videos, and interactive elements.
- Use of evidence and support
    - Types of evidence: In academic articles, papers rely on empirical data and primary sources, while newspaper and magazine articles frequently incorporate interviews and eyewitness accounts.
    - Amount of evidence: Academic writing typically requires extensive evidence to support claims, while opinion pieces might rely more on logical argumentation and less on external evidence.
    - Integration of evidence: Literary analysis interweaves textual evidence with interpretation, while legal writing often includes extensive quotations from statutes and case law.
    - Citation practices: Academic writing uses formal citation styles (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago), while journalism often incorporates attributions within the text without formal citations.

Analyzing Texts with a Focus on Genre

1. What is the text's genre, and how can you tell?
2. What are the typical conventions of the text's genre?
3. To what extent does the text adhere to or subvert the genre's conventions for structure and organization?
4. To what extent does the text adhere to or subvert the genre's conventions for style and tone?
5. To what extent does the text adhere to or subvert the genre's conventions for length and format?
6. To what extent does the text adhere to or subvert the genre's conventions for use of evidence and support?
7. Why might the author have made these choices?
8. How effective are the author's choices regarding genre conventions?

IV. Medium

The final piece of our rhetorical puzzle is the medium. The medium is the channel through which a message is delivered. It can significantly impact how a message is conveyed and received, and is closely intertwined with our other concepts of purpose, audience, and genre.

Types of Media

Common types of media include:

- Written (print, digital text)
- Oral (speeches, podcasts)
- Visual (images, videos, infographics)
- Digital (websites, social media, interactive content)

How Medium Affects Message Delivery and Reception

The choice of medium influences:

- Message length and depth: Different media have varying constraints and expectations for how long a text can be, which in turn affects the depth of content. Shorter formats like tweets or Instagram captions require distilling complex ideas into bite-sized pieces, while longer formats like books or long-form articles allow for more nuanced discussions.
- Audience reach: Different media have varying potentials for reaching audiences, both in terms of size and demographics. Some media are better suited for reaching broad, general audiences, while others excel at targeting specific demographics or interest groups.
- Interactivity and feedback: Different media offer varying levels of interactivity between the sender and receiver of a message, as well as

different mechanisms for feedback. More interactive media can allow for clarification, discussion, and the co-creation of meaning, while less interactive media rely more heavily on the initial message being clear and comprehensive.
- Permanence vs. ephemerality: Different media have varying degrees of permanence, which affects how long a message remains accessible and relevant. Ephemeral media might encourage more casual or immediate communication, while permanent media often involve more careful consideration of long-term impact.
- Multimodal possibilities: Different media offer various combinations of text, images, audio, and video, allowing for diverse ways of conveying information. The multimodal capabilities of a medium can enhance communication by engaging multiple senses or presenting information in complementary formats, which can improve understanding, retention, and engagement with the content.

Analyzing Texts with a Focus on Medium

1. What is the text's medium? (If multimodal, what media are combined?)
2. How does the medium shape the text's content and delivery?
3. How does the medium influence the message's impact on the audience?
4. How effective is the medium for accomplishing the author's purpose?

V. Interplay of Concepts

As we've explored each of these concepts individually, you may have noticed that they are deeply interconnected. In this final section, we'll examine how purpose, audience, genre, and medium influence each other.

1. Purpose drives genre and medium selection
2. Audience considerations affect all other elements
3. Genre conventions shape purpose and medium choices

4. Medium capabilities influence genre and audience reach

Case Study: Analysis of a TED Talk

Let's examine a popular TED Talk to see how these concepts interact in a real-world example. We'll analyze "The Power of Vulnerability" by Brené Brown, a talk that has garnered millions of views online. You can watch it yourself using the link in the citation at the end of this chapter.

Purpose

The exigence for this talk is the ongoing question of how to live a more fulfilling life, specifically addressing the role of vulnerability in human connection and happiness. The primary rhetorical aim of this talk is to persuade. Brown aims to motivate the audience to embrace vulnerability in their own lives. A secondary aim is to inform, as Brown educates the audience on her own research to support her argument.

Audience

The primary audience is the live attendees at the TEDx event, typically well-educated professionals interested in personal growth and new ideas. The secondary audience is the much larger online viewership of diverse backgrounds, ages, and cultures who are interested in self-improvement and psychological insights.

Genre

This communication falls under the genre of a conference presentation or lecture, specifically a TED Talk, which has its own set of conventions. These include a focus on "ideas worth spreading," a time limit (usually around 18 minutes), the use of personal stories and humor, and often the inclusion of visual aids.

Medium

The talk was delivered orally to a live audience and recorded on video for online distribution. This dual medium allows for both immediate interaction with the live audience and widespread dissemination to a global online audience.

Analysis of Interplay

Purpose and Audience

- Brown's choice of language and examples reflects her understanding of her audience's educational level and interest in personal development.
- She uses humor and personal anecdotes to connect with the audience emotionally, making her message more relatable and persuasive.
- The complexity of her research is balanced with accessible explanations, catering to both the live audience of professionals and the diverse online audience.

Purpose and Genre

- The TED Talk format, with its emphasis on "ideas worth spreading," aligns perfectly with Brown's purposes of persuading and informing.
- The genre's expectation of a clear, central idea is met with Brown's focus on vulnerability.
- The time constraint of the TED Talk genre forces Brown to distill her years of research into key, impactful points, enhancing the persuasive power of her message.

Audience and Genre

- The TED Talk genre assumes an audience interested in innovative ideas, allowing Brown to present complex research findings in an accessible way.
- The genre's typical length (around 18 minutes) requires Brown to distill her years of research into key points that will resonate with the audience.

- The expectation of a diverse, global audience (due to online distribution) influences Brown to use universally relatable examples and avoid culturally specific references.

Medium and Purpose

- The oral delivery allows Brown to use tone, pacing, and body language to enhance her message and connect with the audience.
- The video recording enables her to reach a much wider audience, amplifying her purpose of spreading her ideas about vulnerability.
- The dual medium (live talk and online video) allows Brown to achieve both immediate impact and long-term influence.

Medium and Audience

- The live presentation creates an intimate atmosphere, allowing Brown to gauge and respond to audience reactions in real-time.
- The online video format allows the secondary audience to pause, re-watch, and share the talk, expanding its reach and impact.
- The accessibility of the online medium enables Brown's message to reach a global audience, potentially influencing people from diverse backgrounds.

Genre and Medium

- The TED Talk genre is optimized for both live presentation and video sharing, with an emphasis on visually engaging slides and dynamic speaking.
- The medium of online video distribution has shaped the TED Talk genre, encouraging speakers to craft globally relevant messages.
- The genre's emphasis on personal stories and emotional connection is well-suited to both the immediacy of live delivery and the intimacy of individual online viewing.

This analysis demonstrates how purpose, audience, genre, and medium work together to create an effective piece of communication. Brown's talk succeeds because these elements are well-aligned: her purpose suits the TED Talk genre, the genre meets the audience's expectations, the medium supports her message, and all elements work together to engage and inspire the audience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, mastering the interplay of purpose, audience, genre, and medium is key to becoming a skilled communicator and critical thinker. By considering these elements in both your analysis of texts, you'll be better equipped to develop nuanced critiques of what works (and doesn't work) about a given text. Further, being consciously aware of these rhetorical elements can help you make more effective choices with the texts you create.

Related Writing Projects

- Rhetorical Analysis Essay – One Text
- Rhetorical Analysis Essay – Compare and Contrast Two Texts

Works Cited

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5.

SYNTHESIZING SOURCES

What is Synthesis?

Synthesis is about creating something new out of existing elements. The traditional "research paper" is a synthesis. When you synthesize ideas from various sources, you're adding your unique voice and perspective to a scholarly conversation. Just as participants in a discussion build on and respond to each other's points, academic writing involves engaging with and responding to what others have already said.

Whenever you are asked to research a topic and then write a paper about it, you will need to engage in synthesis. You will first read multiple texts on the topic and evaluate those texts to determine first, which ones are relevant and credible, and second, which ideas from the high-quality sources are useful or significant. Then, you will use those ideas to inform your own perspective on the topic. Finally, you will write an essay in which you explain and defend your perspective, referring to those sources and your evaluation of them as support. Note how this is different from a "report" that just draws from various sources and summarizes the information found in them; instead, it's a type of argument because you are trying to support your own perspective.

This process is different from what many students actually *do* when confronted with an assignment to write a research paper or a research-supported argument. True synthesis is hard! To avoid it, many students will instead decide in advance what their perspective on the topic is, then skim through texts to find quotes and evidence to support that perspective. The end product may look similar to an essay in which synthesis actually happened. Although we can't necessarily stop

you from engaging in this kind of "pseudo-synthesis," keep in mind that (1) your instructor will probably be able to tell because your argument is likely to be shallow and ill-informed, and (2) you're depriving yourself of an opportunity to practice skills that you won't be able to fake as you progress in your academic career.

Your Synthesis Question

Like all academic writing projects, underlying a synthesis is a question; in this case, the synthesis question is one that invites various perspectives and allows you, as the writer, to critically evaluate these perspectives as you develop your own.

A good synthesis question won't have an obvious or straightforward answer. Instead, it should invite multiple possible answers, each of which could be potentially supported with evidence and logic, but none of which is certain with the information available to us now. Thus, a question like, "Is smoking cigarettes harmful to your health?" wouldn't be a strong synthesis question because the answer has already been pretty successfully shown to be "Yes." However, a question like "Should cigarettes be banned?" would work as a synthesis question because, although people can support their positions with evidence and logic, the "correct" answer is still wide open for debate.

Example Synthesis Questions

Synthesis questions underlie the major topics of interest in all kinds of disciplines. As noted in Ch. 1, academic writing assumes an audience that is educated about a topic, so people usually don't bother writing about topics where the answers have already been settled. Instead, they focus on questions where debate still exists. These questions often require the integration of multiple perspectives, theories, or data sources to develop a comprehensive argument. They challenge the synthesis writer to think critically, analyze complex information, and draw connections between different ideas or fields of study. Synthesis questions are not merely about recalling facts, but about evaluating,

interpreting, and combining information to create new insights or solutions. They reflect the dynamic nature of academic inquiry, where knowledge is constantly evolving and being refined through debate and research. The following examples from various disciplines illustrate the depth and complexity of synthesis questions across different fields of study:

- **History:** What were the primary causes of the American Civil War?
- **Philosophy:** Do human beings have free will, and what does this mean about our moral obligations?
- **Psychology:** How much do genetic versus environmental factors influence human behavior and mental health, and how should we act on this information?
- **Literature:** How is the concept of the American Dream portrayed across various 20th century American novels and plays?
- **Political Science:** What should be done to improve voter participation in the United States?
- **Sociology:** What factors contribute to the racial wealth gap in the United States, and how should this gap be addressed?
- **Interdisciplinary:** What is the most effective way for governments to increase climate change awareness and motivate action by citizens?

Developing Your Own Synthesis Question

If your instructor asks you to choose your own synthesis question, don't just pick the first idea that comes to mind (or that pops up when you Google "synthesis questions"). Instead, use the following strategies:

1. **Start with a broad topic of interest:** Choose a subject area that genuinely intrigues you and where you sense there might be ongoing debates or unresolved issues.
2. **Research current discussions:** Dive into recent academic literature, articles, or discussions in your chosen field to identify areas of controversy or uncertainty.

3. **Look for intersections:** Consider how different aspects of your topic might interact, or how insights from other disciplines could apply to your area of interest.
4. **Identify multiple perspectives:** Ensure your question addresses a topic where various viewpoints or explanations exist. This is crucial for synthesis.
5. **Ensure complexity:** Your question should not have a simple, straightforward answer. It should require analysis and integration of multiple sources or ideas.
6. **Make it specific and focused:** While the topic should be complex, the question itself should be clearly defined.
7. **Consider relevance and impact:** Think about how answering this question could contribute to the field or have real-world applications.
8. **Ensure it's answerable:** While the question should be complex, make sure it's possible to address it with available resources and within your timeframe.
9. **Engage in dialectic:** Discuss your question idea(s) with your classmates and your instructor.
10. **Be willing to revise:** It's normal to revise and refine your question as you delve deeper into your research.

Finding Sources

If your instructor has provided the question, your instructor may also provide sources for you to use. If you are responsible for finding your own sources, you may want to refer to the chapters on Finding Your Own Secondary and Tertiary Sources and Evaluating Sources. For best results, try to find sources that represent multiple perspectives on the issue. Your instructor may tell you a specific number of sources to use, but if not, a good rule of thumb is approximately one source for every 300-400 words the essay is expected to be. However, it's possible to write a lengthy synthesis with as few as two sources! Some students are tempted to believe that more sources are always better, but a few high-quality sources

used well are more meaningful than a dozen sources that only receive shallow treatment.

How to Write a Synthesis

Before you even begin to write your synthesis, it can be a useful exercise to jot down your ideas about the synthesis question prior to reading any sources. As we read, our ideas change in ways we aren't always even consciously aware of, and having a written record of what you used to think can make it easier to bring your own ideas back into the conversation when you reach that step of the process.

Read, Annotate, and Summarize Your Sources

The first formal step in writing a synthesis essay is to carefully read and annotate your texts. It's important that you truly understand their ideas so you can represent them fairly in your essay; use the strategies from the chapter on Reading Well to guide you in this process.

Analyze Your Sources

Then, you need to analyze the texts rhetorically – looking at their perspectives, areas of agreement and disagreement, and evaluating the credibility of each source. Particularly when the sources contradict each other, you will need to determine which to believe, and why. Most of your analysis probably won't actually end up written into a synthesis essay, although you may include a few bits and pieces. Mainly, though, you're analyzing so that you can make sense of how your sources fit together with each other, why they don't always agree with each other, and what useful ideas each source has to offer. Here are a few questions to consider as you analyze your sources:

- What different perspectives, purposes, and intended audiences are represented in your sources?
    - How do these differences affect what is included in or excluded from

each source?
    - How do these differences explain why the sources are different in style, tone, use of evidence, etc.?
    - What potential biases or agendas might the authors have, and how could that influence their perspectives?
- Where do the sources agree and disagree?
    - Do they agree on details but differ on broader conclusions or explanations? Or perhaps vice versa?
    - Do they present similar values but differ on the facts? Or perhaps vice versa?
    - Are there areas where sources partially agree or disagree, offering nuanced or qualified perspectives?
    - Are there any underlying assumptions that differ among the sources?
- What would the authors of each source say to the others?
- How would you rate or rank the sources in terms of credibility, and why?

Reflect on Your Sources

The next step is to interrogate your own ideas and understanding based on what you've learned from the texts. If you took the time to jot down some notes about your initial thoughts, now is the time to return to those to remind yourself where you stood before. A few questions to think about:

- What new insights or perspectives have you gained from reading the texts?
- Where do you disagree with or doubt the texts, and why?
- How have your initial thoughts or ideas changed or been reinforced after engaging with these sources?
- What questions do you still have after engaging with the sources?
- How well do the sources collectively answer the synthesis question? Are there perspectives that seem to be missing or underrepresented?

Draft a Thesis Statement

Your analysis and reflection should have prepared you to take a new position in answering your original synthesis question. That new position will become your thesis statement. Now that you've carefully read and analyzed the sources, think about what you've learned from them, but also where you have your own ideas that supplement or conflict with the sources. Draft an answer to the synthesis question with those ideas in mind. It will probably be a fairly long and complex statement!

A good synthesis statement should present your own perspective on the question. This perspective should be

- **arguable**. You should expect that a fair number of reasonable people will disagree with your thesis. If that's not true, meeting the following criteria will help you get there.
- **informed.** Base your thesis statement on what you've learned from the texts, even if you disagree with some elements. You can even incorporate that disagreement into your thesis statement!
- **nuanced**. To develop nuance, it can be helpful to introduce *tension* into your thesis statement, showing how your ideas contradict or complicate other perspectives, rather than stating an just a broad claim.
- **specific**. Try to forecast the details you'll want to cover in your body paragraphs.

Weak Synthesis Thesis Statement	Stronger Version
Many causes contributed to the Civil War.	While the moral issue of slavery was certainly a major factor leading to the Civil War, economic conflicts were equally instrumental in pushing the nation toward armed conflict.
Many people argue that free will does not exist.	Although some philosophers present a compelling case that our choices are shaped by causes beyond our control, free will can exist even in a deterministic universe.
Nature and nurture both factor into human behavior.	While genetic predispositions can play a role in psychological traits and mental health, environmental factors are equally or more important causal determinants of human behavior.
The portrayal of the American Dream in 20th century literature is complicated.	The American Dream is a complex and often contradictory concept across 20th century literature, embodying hopes for upward mobility and self-determination, while also revealing the harsh realities of systemic inequality, disillusionment, and the struggle to find individual identity.
Several reforms could improve voter participation.	Although measures like automatic voter registration could modestly increase access, more fundamental reforms to campaign finance, district mapping, and voter ID requirements are also necessary to fully protect voting rights.
There are many possible explanations for the racial wealth gap.	While the history of slavery has played a role, the enduring racial wealth gap in the United States results mainly from the compounding impacts of discriminatory housing and banking policies, unequal educational opportunities, and labor market biases.
Motivating action on climate change is challenging.	To motivate work on climate change, messaging must move beyond individual responsibility to incorporate policy incentives that will influence corporate and government decisions.

Develop Your Body Paragraphs

Once you have your thesis statement, you can use the conventional closed-form essay structure as a framework for your essay. Many synthesis essays will use either the Classical Argument Structure or the Modified Classical Argument Structure, but any organizational pattern could work; refer to the chapter on Argument Structures for more information.

In the body of your essay, you will develop main points that explain your new answer to the question, drawing on how the texts contributed to your understanding as well as your own new ideas and critiques. To demonstrate synthesis, it's important to do the following:

- Incorporate specifics from the sources
- As much as possible, use more than one source in each body paragraph
- Respond to things you disagreed with in the sources
- Show how the sources respond or relate to each other

These qualities help to show that you are truly engaging with the sources and putting them in conversation with each other, rather than doing the kind of "pseudo-synthesis" described at the beginning of the chapter.

Example Synthesis Paragraph

This example synthesis paragraph goes with next-to-last example thesis statement provided above. The motivating synthesis question for that thesis statement was "What factors contribute to the racial wealth gap in the United States, and how should this gap be addressed?"

> One important factor in the wealth gap is the continued impact of slavery, which prevented Black families from accumulating wealth for generations; even the poorest White immigrants have had an enormous head start since their families were not legally prevented from owning assets. Darity supports this notion, noting that slavery has "prevent[ed] the

> intergenerational transmission of wealth that occurs at much higher rates among other ethnic/racial groups in the USA" (146). It is true that slavery has had long-term effects that are often ignored, and that the intergenerational transmission of wealth (or lack thereof) certainly contributes to the wealth gap. However, as Shapiro notes, the gap has remained fairly stable since the 1970s (7); something beyond the lasting impact of slavery therefore must be contributing to its persistence, or we might expect that the gap would continue to narrow as slavery recedes more into the past. Furthermore, focusing solely on the historical causes can distract us from the very real current types of discrimination which are in our power to address. In fact, Darity suggests reparations as a potential solution, but this solution is incomplete because reparations can only go so far in a society that is still marked by active racial discrimination.

Notice how the example paragraph connects information and ideas from two different sources. The quote from Darity is straightforward support for the topic sentence, but the information from Shapiro is more complicated. Here, instead of using Shapiro as support for the topic sentence, the writer has made an inference from Shapiro's information to show why they believe that slavery is not the sole or even primary cause of the racial wealth gap. Finally, the writer addresses an element of Darity's argument with which they disagree, and explain why.

At a minimum, you should aim to incorporate material from at least two of your sources in every body paragraph of your synthesis essay. Furthermore, to show that you're not just cherry-picking quotes that support what you already believed, consider ways you can incorporate inferences based on the texts and/or critique of the texts into at least some of your body paragraphs.

Common Struggles and Pitfalls

- Oversimplifying complexities:
    - When attempting to combine perspectives from multiple sources, it's easy for students to oversimplify nuanced ideas or flatten out

important complexities and tensions. Be careful not to try to force sources into 100% agreement with each other. The whole point of synthesis is that there isn't one objectively "right" answer.

- Cherry-picking evidence:
    - Rather than fully engaging with sources, some students may latch onto partial quotes or evidence that confirms their pre-existing view while ignoring complicating information. Taking material out of context, particularly when doing so betrays the author's original intent, is both dishonest and intellectually lazy. Some sources may be very difficult to understand, but the solution is to get help with understanding them, not to ignore the parts you don't get.
- Lacking critical evaluation:
    - Students sometimes treat all sources as equally credible and authoritative, rather than assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each source. If you reject information or an argument from one source, you need to be able to articulate why – and that reason needs to be better than "it didn't confirm what I already believed."
- Failing to create an original perspective:
    - The whole point of synthesis is to craft a new and insightful position, but students may get bogged down in summarizing what sources say instead of forging their own argument or conceptualization.
- Organizational challenges:
    - Synthesizing divergent sources coherently is difficult. It can be helpful to look back at your synthesis question and jot down the main points you want to make in answering that question, without thinking too much about what the sources say. Then, you can go back to the sources and see how each one relates to your points. Of course, this method only works if you have already thoughtfully engaged with the sources!

Write Your Introduction and Conclusion

The introduction and conclusion for a synthesis essay can follow the standard

closed-form strategies described in the chapter on Introductions & Conclusions, with modifications as needed based on your selected Argument Structure.

Related Writing Projects

- Synthesis Essay

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6.

THE WRITING PROCESS

In addition to helping us read rhetorically, classical theory has given us some useful concepts for the writing process. Many of these concepts have been supported and refined by modern composition research, as well as research from related fields, like education and cognitive psychology.

The writing process described below, though roughly in order from beginning to end, is not linear. The idea that we first have an idea, then write down that idea, and finally, rewrite to make sure we've expressed the idea clearly and correctly, is a dramatic oversimplification of how our brains engage with writing. We often imagine that the words are in our heads, and all we have to do is write those words down. If that were the case, writing would be a lot easier than it actually is!

Writing is a cognitive process, and the act of writing down our ideas can help us refine those ideas. Actually putting something into words requires us to think about it differently. You may have experienced this if you've ever had a great idea for a story and then couldn't figure out how to actually put it down on the page. The chasm between the idea itself and the words to express that idea is wider than we think!

Writing is also a social process; imagining an audience for our writing and/or receiving feedback from a real audience also helps us refine our ideas. Experienced, successful writers are always listening to their imagined audience, reconsidering their work as they try to placate the hecklers and appease the critics.

What this means is that the reality of the writing process is not at all linear. We have an idea, start to write it down, change that idea, write down the new idea, and that process can go on and on. Successful writers embrace that messiness by

not letting themselves become too attached to their original ideas or words, while also not expecting their final product to be perfect.

Invention

Invention is step one of the writing process; it's the process of coming up with and fleshing out an idea.

Finding a Topic

We first need to clarify that word, "topic." The word comes to us from Greek, like so much of classical rhetorical theory. The Greek word *topoi (*singular, *topos*) is the same as the root word for the English word "topic," which we might use interchangeably with the word "subject" when we're talking about an essay. You might say, for example, your essay's topic is "the education system of the United States." In common usage, that makes perfect sense; however, when we use the word "topic" in a rhetorical context, the meaning is much more specific.

A *topos* is a specifically defined place, and the underlying rhetorical principle is about staking out the precise areas of agreement and disagreement on a given issue. To describe the topic of an argument, you must identify the actual question or disagreement being addressed. "The education system of the United States" thus is not really a topic, because there are many different ideas that could be argued on that subject. Perhaps the actual topic is "whether access to public education should be enshrined as a constitutional right at the federal level" or "whether public high schools are adequately preparing students for college" or "whether the common system of using property taxes for education is ethical." In other words, your *topic* is a much more precise description of the subject matter of your argument. From here through the rest of the book, the word "topic" has this more specific meaning.

Why Topics Are Important

When engaged in an argument or debate, it's common for both parties to make assumptions about what the other person already understands or believes

regarding the issue at hand. However, these assumptions are often incorrect, leading to a situation where you end up talking past each other, addressing different aspects of the issue entirely. It feels futile and frustrating because you're not actually engaging with the core disagreement or divergence in perspectives. If you think back to a frustrating argument you've had, you might realize that this was indeed at least part of the problem.

The ancient Roman rhetorician Quintilian used a helpful metaphor to describe the importance of properly identifying the true topic of debate. He likened topics to the specific places experienced hunters know they can reliably find their quarry. Just as a hunter doesn't waste time scouring the entire forest, a skilled rhetor pinpoints the precise point of disagreement that needs to be addressed and focuses their attention there.

Identifying this true topic involves peeling back layers and digging deeper into the initial broad issue. You have to analyze where exactly you and your audience's viewpoints splinter and diverge. What is the root cause of the disagreement? What specific claim or stance do you want to argue for or against?

Once you locate that critical point of divergence, it becomes much clearer what type of argument you are trying to make – whether it's a factual claim, a value judgment, or a policy recommendation. Knowing the precise argument type then illuminates what kinds of evidence and support will be most effective and relevant for that claim. (You can refer to the later chapters in this textbook for details on each of the main types of argument.)

Rather than blindly talking past each other, pinpointing the true topic allows you to engage directly with the heart of the disagreement in a precise and productive way. Your evidence and reasoning can be targeted appropriately, increasing your chance of actually changing minds or reaching mutual understanding.

Choosing a Valid and Useable Topic

It can also be useful to think of topics as questions. Good questions for academic argument have answers that are **arguable** and **tenable.**

Arguable means that reasonable people can and do disagree about how to answer these questions. Although technically, you can always find someone who will disagree with anything, we use the qualifier "reasonable" to mean "able to be reasoned with." That is, arguable issues have people with various perspectives, but most people are willing and able to change their minds about them, if provided with sufficient reason to do so. If you choose a topic that isn't arguable, you're just wasting your own time, either because you're preaching to the choir (the audience already agrees with you), or you're arguing with people who will never change their minds, no matter what you say.

Tenable means that the various answers *can* be supported with reasoning and evidence. Some questions are more matters of taste than of logic or reason, and those don't really work as topics for arguments. For example, nobody is going to convince me that I like shrimp, no matter how much evidence they give me that I should.

Another consideration, especially when you have a lot of choice over your own topics, is what an appropriate **scope** for your topic is. Many early college students start out by picking topics and questions that are far too broad to adequately address in an essay. A topic that is too broad will force you to skim the surface; your argument will be shallow, vague, and likely fail to actually hit on the main areas of disagreement. On the other hand, a more targeted, specific topic allows you to dive deeper and write a more nuanced, complex analysis or argument.

When the Topic Has Been Selected for You

Often, your instructor will have narrowed the field of topics for you, or even assigned a specific topic. In that case, you will still need to consider just how much room you have to play with that topic and make sure you're taking a stance on the topic that is arguable, tenable, and an appropriate scope. If the topic the instructor has provided is broad, you may still have some opportunity to narrow it down. No matter what, though, you will still need to figure out what it is you want to say about the topic, so invention will be part of your process.

Tools for Invention

Regardless of how you come to your topic, both you and your reader will have a better time if you actually care about and are interested in the topic. If the topic has been assigned to you, it can be a bit more difficult to drum up that enthusiasm, but finding a way to connect with the subject matter will make the writing process less daunting and likely result in a stronger final product.

The following exercises and tools can be ways to find topics, to figure out how to care about a topic, and to discover what you want to say about a topic.

- Brainstorming – Make a free-flowing list of anything that comes to mind related to the general topic area. Don't censor yourself. Let random thoughts, personal experiences, strong opinions emerge. Often an engaging angle reveals itself in the process.
- Freewriting – Set a timer and write continuously for 5-10 minutes, avoiding stopping or self-editing. Let your stream of consciousness explore the topic. You may stumble onto an interesting thread to pull.
- Dialectic – Take two contrasting positions and argue both sides out on paper, going back and forth. This exercises critical thinking and may reveal where your true stance lies.
- Conversation – Talk to friends, family, community members with unique perspectives on your topic area. Their real-world views may spark an angle you hadn't considered.
- Searching Online – I generally recommend against doing the first thing most students do, which is search online for topic ideas. Most of what you find there is (1) overdone, (2) too broad, and/or (3) just plain boring. I have found that AI chatbots can be helpful, but the first ideas they offer usually aren't great. However, if you respond to the initial suggestions by telling the AI what works and doesn't work about them, you might get to something useful eventually, though it may take several tries. You will still need to be very clear about the requirements of the assignment, as well; you can't rely on the AI to understand those, and students have been steered in

the wrong direction more than once!

The key is using these strategies to actively develop a topic you find interesting and important, rather than passively accepting the first bland idea that comes to mind. Remember, before you start drafting, to make sure you have an actual *topos* and a point you want to make as your central idea. That main point may evolve once you start writing, but it will give you some direction when you begin drafting.

Drafting

The next step – where you actually start writing down your ideas – can be intimidating. This stage is where many students get stuck or feel like they have "writer's block." Here are few tips that should help:

- Just start writing! Much like freewriting for invention, if you disconnect from any expectations and let your thoughts go, you'll have some raw material that you might be able to reshape into a structured essay. Sometimes having something on the page is enough to make everything feel less overwhelming.
- Make an outline. Some people and some contexts benefit more from outlining than others, but if you're stuck, it can't hurt to try it! That outline might be as simple as jotting down your main point and a few supporting ideas, or you can do a fully detailed, formal outline with a thesis statement, topic sentences, and supporting ideas, or something in between.
- Skip the introduction (for now). The introduction is both one of the more difficult sections to write and one of the last sections you'll actually be ready to write. Just because something comes first in the essay doesn't mean you have to write it first! Feel free to jump ahead and write a body paragraph first.
- Don't pressure yourself to word everything perfectly the first time around. When I have watched students write in class, I have sometimes seen someone spend 30 minutes or more just writing and rewriting the same

sentence. If you're stumped for the right words or not sure how to complete a thought, just write something down as a placeholder and make a note to come back to it later. (I usually highlight the section in the essay to make it more noticeable; otherwise, I might forget to change it later!)
- Don't be afraid to change your mind. Remember, writing is a cognitive and social process, and you'll likely find that your initial ideas shift as you're writing. That's a good thing; embrace it!
- Don't force yourself to use the same tools and procedures every time. We grow and change, and our writing contexts and assignments change as well. If something that used to work for you isn't working this time, try something else.
- Set small, achievable goals. Those goals might be based on how much writing you produce or how long you spend writing; do what works better for you. In either case, aim for something you're confident you can actually do, even if that's as small as writing just one sentence or working on the essay for just 15 minutes before you take a break. As you gain confidence, you can increase your targets. And reward yourself when you meet your goals! (I ate one peanut butter M&M for every sentence in this section.)
- Create accountability. Find a partner or small writing group and set up a schedule to work at the same time alongside each other. Doing this is how I survived writing my dissertation! I would meet with two friends on Zoom, we'd briefly share what we were working on that day and how much we hoped to get done, and then we'd all go on mute and work separately for our allotted time. At the end, we'd share how it went, commiserate or celebrate as needed, and then be done.

One thing you might notice about many of these tips is that they are not compatible with procrastination. Good writing needs time. Even if you're capable of producing a decent essay at speed, your product will be better if you spend more time on it.

Fleshing Out a Too-Short Essay

A common hiccup in the drafting process is when you know a few main points you want to cover, but aren't sure how to develop those points into complete paragraphs. You may notice that your paragraphs are very short or that you feel like you're just repeating yourself. This is a sign that you haven't yet dug deep enough into your topic, so your ideas aren't yet fully developed. If you find that you are constantly struggling to reach a minimum word count, even a pretty short one, prepare to push yourself harder. You write more by having more to say, and you have more to say by thinking more and thinking more critically. Here are a few questions that might help you flesh out any given paragraph or idea:

- How do I know that what I am saying is true or correct?
- Is there evidence that contradicts my point of view? How do I justify my position in light of that evidence?
- How could someone disagree with me about the point I'm trying to make? How would I respond to them?
- Where is there gray area on this issue, and how does that gray area fit within my perspective?
- How does the point I'm making here fit within the larger scheme of my essay?
- How does my point relate to the larger context of the course's subject matter?
- Why are my ideas interesting and significant? What do they show my readers that they may not have otherwise considered?

Those questions are just a start; not all of them will necessarily always apply, and you may also think of others that work well for you. Unfortunately, there's no shortcut or secret trick to developing your ideas. You just have to do the hard work of it, and know that it does get easier with practice!

Revision

I find it helpful to draw a distinction between true revision and the processes

of editing and proofreading, which are described in separate sections below. Revision is about the actual content of your work, including the stance you take, the support you provide for it, and how you organize those elements. Thus, revision is really inextricable from all parts of the writing process, from when you start developing an initial idea until you submit the final version for a grade. However, it's generally wise to plan a dedicated revision phase after completing an initial full draft. At this stage, you can take a holistic look at how effectively your ideas are coming across and make any needed improvements or course corrections.

Tools for Revision

- Peer review – Ask a friend or classmate to provide feedback focused specifically on content and clarity as a reader. Avoid pure grammar/style corrections at this point. Have them summarize your main point, assess your evidence, point out confusing areas, and identify anything important you may have missed.
- Reverse outlining – Work backwards from what you've written and outline the main ideas as they're presented. This exercise can help you identify organizational missteps (like two closely related ideas that appear far apart from each other in the essay) or crucial gaps in your logic.
- Taking a break – If you've been working consistently on the draft for a while, you probably need to step away completely for 24 hours or more. Getting away from it for a bit, especially if you get a night's sleep in the interim, will help you approach your work with fresh eyes.
- Reading out loud – Hearing your draft read aloud can make clarity issues more apparent than reading it silently on the page. Ask a friend to read it to you, or record yourself, and listen critically.

Realistically, you'll have to find a place to stop revising. As your deadline approaches, you'll need to allow time to edit and proofread your work, and at that point, you probably don't want to be completely reworking a main idea.

However, prioritizing an in-depth revision process first is key to developing a strong, coherent, and well-supported piece of writing.

Editing

The term "editing" is often used as a catch-all for making any kinds of changes to a written draft, but as with revision, I find it useful to rely on its more specific meaning: Editing is about style. When you edit your work, you are more or less satisfied with the overall content and organizational structure of the essay as a whole and its individual paragraphs, and you are ready to focus on sentence-level stylistic issues. These include:

- Adjusting the style to suit an academic context
- Improving the overall flow and readability
- Adding elements like schemes and tropes to emphasize or illustrate points, as well as to make the text more interesting and engaging for readers

Refer to the chapter on Academic Style for much more about style, including some specific tips that will help you edit your own writing.

Presentation: Proofreading and Formatting

Proofreading

Proofreading should really be held back until the last possible moment because changes you make in revision or editing can create new proofreading needs. Proofreading is about correcting grammatical and mechanical errors. (Sometimes "errors" is really too strong of a word. These "rules" are often far more flexible than you've been taught, and it's common to deviate from them in specific ways, especially in popular writing. However, the general expectation for academic writing is that you will follow the conventional rules of grammar and mechanics like spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.)

The good news: We increasingly have tools that can help you with this step of the

process. The bad news: These tools aren't perfect, and you should be prepared to double-check the advice they provide.

Grammar and mechanics are often intimidating and overwhelming to students, and you may have bad memories of boring worksheets or digital drills that didn't effectively teach you anything. If that's how you feel, you are not alone. What we now know about how people learn these rules is that (1) you can absorb them from reading and (2) they're easier to learn in a real writing context rather than from worksheet exercises. That means if you want to improve, you should read more, especially the kinds of texts you want to imitate, and you should practice correcting your own work, ideally with the guidance of your instructor or a writing tutor.

Formatting

Technically, you can do most of your formatting at just about any stage of the writing process, or whenever it's most convenient for you. Even if you take a stab at formatting everything according to convention in an earlier draft, however, you'll probably want to do one last check before you submit your final draft. Refer to the chapter on Academic Conventions for more on formatting.

7. ACADEMIC CONVENTIONS OF STRUCTURE, STYLE, AND FORMAT

One reason we ask students to take composition classes is to introduce them to academic conventions. In this context, "conventions" just means "normal ways of doing things." Knowing and practicing these conventions will help you be successful in writing across many of your classes.

I find it useful to make a distinction between "conventions" and "rules." There are actually very few hard rules about academic writing, with the exception of avoiding plagiarism. Otherwise, you can find exceptions to every rule you've likely been taught about what is "allowed" in your academic writing. As you progress in your academic career, you'll start to develop a feel for the norms within your chosen discipline, and those may vary somewhat from what this chapter describes. However, the aim of this chapter is to equip you with a basic understanding of the most common expectations. Think of them as your "safe bet" guidelines; even when other approaches may be allowed, adhering to these conventions is often the path of least risk. Of course, if another professor explicitly asks you to do something different for their assignments, do that instead!

Later chapters will get into some of these conventions in much more detail; this chapter is intended to serve as a basic overview that you can use any time you have to write a paper for any class. If you follow the basic conventions outlined here, you can expect to more or less meet your instructor's expectations.

Expectation #1: Explicitness

Most of the conventions for academic writing can be traced back to a demand for explicitness. In this context, “explicit” just means that everything is spelled out and explained really clearly. A few key elements of explicitness might be helpful to keep in mind:

- State your main idea up front, and then provide the evidence and rationale for it.
- Be clear and direct in your wording.
- Explain your logic and thought processes, particularly when you are presenting evidence to support a point.

Examples of Non-Explicit and Explicit Writing

> Non-Explicit: There are many factors to consider when examining the causes of the French Revolution; the economic situation of the time played a role, as did social tensions and political instability.

> Explicit: The French Revolution was primarily caused by a combination of economic crisis, social inequality, and political mismanagement; these three factors interacted to create the conditions for revolution.

Notice how the second example starts by clearly listing the three causes that will be addressed. The concept that these three causes interacted is also clearly stated in the second example, while it is only implied in the first example.

> Non-Explicit: The data seems to suggest that there might be a potential correlation between the variables under examination.

> Explicit: The data shows a strong positive correlation between increased exercise and improved cardiovascular health.

Notice that the second example specifies the strength and type of correlation, as well as the exact variables being considered.

> Non-Explicit: Shakespeare's use of imagery in *Macbeth* is significant. The play contains many references to blood, which is important to the overall themes.
>
> Explicit: Shakespeare's frequent use of blood imagery in *Macbeth* reinforces the play's themes of guilt and moral corruption. For instance, when Macbeth sees a dagger covered in blood before killing Duncan, it foreshadows the bloodshed to come and symbolizes the guilt that will haunt him. This imagery recurs throughout the play, becoming more intense as Macbeth's crimes multiply, thus visually representing his deepening moral degradation.

Notice that the second example provides specific details from the play as support, and it fully explains how the references to blood relate to the play's themes.

Expectation #2: Closed-Form Structure

Most academic writing follows a standard organizational pattern that consists of introduction, body, and conclusion. These sections consist of at least one paragraph each, though the body of the essay almost always should have multiple paragraphs. Depending on the specific genre, the body of the essay may also be further subdivided into sections.

Keep in mind that the length of each section (introduction, body, conclusion) will vary depending on the overall length of the work. There is no set rule for how long any given section or how long a paragraph must be; however, in academic writing, paragraphs are often longer than they are in popular writing. If you notice your writing has many short paragraphs, that can be a sign that you need to either consolidate ideas or that you are under-explaining your ideas!

Paragraphs, by the way, are both visual and conceptual divisions. In a typed essay, a new paragraph is traditionally indicated by the text starting on a new indented line. That visual indicator is a cue to the reader that the topic is also shifting. Academic readers rely on that visual cue and will be confused if it's missing, but they will also be confused if the visual cue is there but doesn't line up with a shift in topic. No matter how formal the assignment, it's a great idea to follow paragraph conventions, even if your professor hasn't explicitly asked for them. They're so expected in academic writing that many people wouldn't even think to ask; they just assume you know to do it.

Here is an outline showing the most conventional closed-form structure:

> **Introduction** – introduces the question or issue that the essay will address; provides relevant background information; closes with thesis statement. May be a single paragraph for a short essay, but often consists of multiple paragraphs for longer works.
> **Body** – develops, in multiple paragraphs, support for and explanation of the thesis statement
> **Conclusion** – discusses the broader significance or application of the thesis statement. May be a single paragraph for a short essay, but often consists of multiple paragraphs for longer works.

Note: You can find more about how to write introductions and conclusions in the chapter on Introductions & Conclusions, and more about how to write body paragraphs in the chapter on Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences, and Body Paragraphs.

Thesis Statements & Topic Sentences

The thesis statement is possibly the most important element of closed-form writing. This statement sums up the main idea of your essay; it's your answer to the question you presented in the introduction of the essay. You can even think of the thesis as the "elevator pitch" for your essay. For shorter essays, the thesis statement is typically a single sentence, and although longer works occasionally

have multiple-sentences or even full paragraphs, it is good practice for you to aim for a single sentence. You can find more on thesis statements here: Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences, and Body Paragraphs.

Just like the thesis statement sums up the main idea of your essay, each paragraph will have a topic sentence that sums up the point of the paragraph. The topic sentence is almost always the first sentence of the paragraph, and they're handy because readers can easily get a sense of the paper's ideas just by reading the first sentence of each paragraph. You can find out more about topic sentences in the chapter on Thesis Statements, Topic Sentences, and Body Paragraphs.

Expectation #3: Academic Writing Style

Academic writing also has conventions for style. It's important to be aware that these conventions can vary quite a bit across different disciplines and genres, just as structure does. However, there are some basic expectations that it's useful to know. You can find much more detailed recommendations about writing style in the Academic Style chapter, including examples demonstrating each of the characteristics listed below.

- **Conciseness** – You might think of academic writing as "wordy," but actually, academic writing tends to be more direct and more concise. Good academic writing is very carefully edited to avoid wasted words.
- **Complexity** – Although academic writing is edited to be concise, it also tends to use more complex sentence structures and transitions. These stylistic choices relate back to the idea of academic writing being explicit; that is, how ideas relate to each other must be expressed clearly and thoroughly. In academic writing, we're careful not to assume that readers will know what we mean.
- **Precision** – Academic writing avoids generalities; it aims to be as precise as possible, especially when referring to dates, times, and measurements.

- **Point of View** – Academic writing typically uses third person, with first person used in limited circumstances. Second person ("you") is never considered appropriate for academic writing outside of technical writing (and quoted material).
- **Formality** – Academic writing avoids wording that might be considered "slangy" or "casual," aiming instead for more sophisticated language.

I feel compelled here to add a note that much published academic writing is not actually very good, at least when we're considering the quality of the writing style. Most academics haven't been taught any more about writing than they received in their own first-year composition classes, if even that, and they are almost as likely to fall prey to the same myths about academic writing that many students do, leading them to some bad habits.

Myths That Lead to Bad Habits of Style:

- You sound smarter if you use more words or write longer sentences.
- You sound smarter if you use bigger words.
- You sound smarter if you make grandiose statements.
- Some things are *never* allowed in academic writing. (What these are can vary, but commonly, these include first person, contractions, passive voice, starting a sentence with a conjunction, ending a sentence with a preposition, and/or splitting an infinitive.)

The persistence of these habits is part of why AI-generated and AI-edited writing is often so immediately identifiable and so atrocious to read; it's been fed a lot of *bad* writing as training for what "academic writing" sounds like. Instead of perpetuating these tendencies, I advise following George Orwell's "Rules of Writing":

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.

3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent. [Note from me: As long as they actually mean precisely the same thing!]
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Following Orwell's rules is unlikely to get you into any trouble, even with a professor who does believe the myths, and it will make your writing better overall. Nonetheless, because these myths are fairly common, don't be surprised if you someday have a professor who actively encourages some of them!

Expectation #4: Manuscript Formatting

In almost every circumstance, you will be expected to type your papers for college classes. Although some formatting guidelines (such as preferred fonts or placement of page numbers) will vary across different disciplines or classes, you can anticipate that your essays should:

- Be typed in a conventional, easily readable typeface
- Be double-spaced
- Use indentions to indicate where new paragraphs begin
- Include a title that is specific to the paper's content (not just "Essay 1" or "Final Draft")

You can find detailed formatting guidelines in whatever style guide your instructor recommends (MLA or APA), or online. Those guidelines will dictate all kinds of details, such as:

- The size of your margins
- The acceptable typefaces and sizes you may use

- How to format your title and heading information
- How to format your page numbers
- How to correctly incorporate and label images, charts, graphs, and tables

Following these conventions is a way of telling your readers that you know the ropes and should be taken seriously in this academic context, so it's important to learn what they are.

Work Cited

Orwell, George. "Politics and the English Language." *Essays*, Penguin, 1946.

8.

ARGUMENT STRUCTURES

Using Frameworks for Arguments

In this chapter, you will learn about several common frameworks for organizing a written argument. All of these frameworks are compatible with a closed-form essay structure, which includes an explicit thesis statement, paragraphs organized with topic sentences, and an introduction and conclusion.

The frameworks incorporate two main elements:

> Affirmative Arguments: Direct support for your central claim or thesis.
> Rebuttal Arguments: Responses to potential opposing views or counterarguments.

While these are well-established frameworks, remember that you can deviate from them or combine elements as needed. While having a guiding framework is valuable, especially early in your writing development, the most persuasive arguments often move fluidly between different frameworks based on the specific rhetorical context. The frameworks simply provide a proven structure to ensure your argument is coherent, complete, and strategically organized.

Another important note to remember is that these frameworks can expand or contract to suit any length of argument. Early in your academic career, you'll mostly write short essays that have 1-2 paragraphs of introduction, 3-5 body paragraphs, and another 1-2 paragraphs of conclusion, but it's possible to expand these frameworks for different lengths of essay – or to even longer works, like books!

Traditional Classical Argument

The traditional classical structure of an argument is based on how the ancient Greeks and Romans structured their arguments, which they would have presented orally. It's a pretty basic structure, and you'll often see it used for short arguments, like those presented in editorials.

Introduction

- Follows closed-form introduction structure
- Closes with a thesis statement that presents the claim

Affirmative Section

- Made up of multiple paragraphs; the "main" section of the essay
- Each paragraph opens with an explicit topic sentence that states a reason to support the claim
- Each paragraph supports the reason with grounds, warrant, and backing as needed

Rebuttal Section

- One or more paragraphs, but typically shorter than the previous section
- Identifies and responds to opposing views/conditions of rebuttal

Conclusion

- Follows closed-form conclusion structure
- Most traditionally, includes a call to action

Modified Classical Argument

The modified version changes where the responses to opposing views appear. Rather than saving all of the rebuttal arguments for the end, you address those opposing views as they are relevant to each line of argument. You may *also* have a paragraph prior to the conclusion where you address opposing views that do not directly relate to a specific line of argument. This version is useful because it allows you a bit more room to respond to opposing views, and you don't have to hope your audience ignores their doubts and questions until the end of the essay – you can address them immediately.

Introduction

- Follows closed-form introduction structure
- Closes with a thesis statement that presents the claim

Affirmative/Rebuttal Section

- Made up of multiple paragraphs; the "main" section of the essay
- Each paragraph opens with an explicit topic sentence that states a reason to support the claim
- Each paragraph supports the reason with grounds, warrant, and backing as needed
- Each paragraph identifies and responds to the conditions of rebuttal related to the reason and/or warrant for that paragraph

Optional Rebuttal Section

- If present, one or more paragraphs, but typically shorter than the previous section
- Identifies and responds to opposing views that were not tied to the previous lines of argument, and therefore not addressed in the main body

Conclusion

- Follows closed-form conclusion structure

Classical Refutation

You would most likely use this structure when your claim is directly focused on arguing that some other view is incorrect (known as making a negative argument), but you are not particularly interested in supporting any affirmative views. For example, you might argue that raising the minimum wage will *not* increase prices and focus exclusively on refuting the various arguments people have made claiming that raising the minimum wage will increase prices.

Introduction

- Follows closed-form introduction structure
- Closes with a thesis statement that presents the claim (which will be an assertion that a particular view is incorrect)

Rebuttal Section

- Made up of multiple paragraphs; the "main" section of the essay
- Each paragraph opens with an explicit topic sentence that rebuts a particular supporting reason for the opposing view
- Each paragraph provides refutations of grounds, warrants, and/or backing for opposing view

Conclusion

- Follows closed-form conclusion structure

Surprising Reversal

The surprising reversal makes sense when you know the audience doesn't believe your claim, but that's only because they are misinformed in some way. The general assumption is that the audience, though incorrect, is not strongly attached to their incorrect view.

Introduction

- Follows closed-form introduction structure to establish topic, significance, and context
- Does NOT include the thesis statement

Popular View Section

- Usually brief
- Explains the common but misinformed view on the issue

Thesis

- May appear at end of previous section or beginning of next section, or as its own paragraph (depending on what makes the most sense in context)
- Establishes the claim that will be supported in the remainder of the essay; the claim may be affirmative or negative

Affirmative/Rebuttal Section

- Made up of multiple paragraphs; the "main" section of the essay
- Presents affirmative and/or rebuttal arguments as needed to support the claim

Conclusion

- Follows closed-form conclusion structure

Dialogic

When your audience is likely to be more skeptical of your claim, a dialogic argument may be a better option. In this kind of argument, you first explore the strengths of various perspectives on the topic without taking a clear position of your own. Only later in the essay do you reveal your claim and then offer support for it. Organizing your argument in this way allows you to demonstrate to the audience that you are carefully considering and respectful of other positions on the issue.

Introduction

- Follows closed-form introduction structure to establish topic, significance, and context
- Does NOT include the thesis statement

Background Section

- Often a lengthy section, around half (or more) of the total length of the essay
- Explores multiple perspectives on the topic, establishing the value of each

Thesis

- May appear at end of previous section or beginning of next section, or as its own paragraph (depending on what makes the

most sense in context)
- Establishes the claim that will be supported in the remainder of the essay

Affirmative/Rebuttal Section

- Presents affirmative and/or rebuttal arguments as needed to support the claim

Conclusion

- Follows closed-form conclusion structure

Rogerian

Rogerian argument, named after the psychologist Carl Rogers, who developed "active listening," is the model for the most resistant audience, and it's the most unusual framework. In fact, many people object to calling it a type of "argument" at all because of how it emphasizes finding common ground and making compromises. When you write a Rogerian argument, not only do you hope the audience shifts a bit, but you as the writer must also be willing to shift your own view.

Introduction

- Follows closed-form introduction structure to establish topic, significance, and context
- Does NOT include the thesis statement

Audience View Section

- Summarizes the audience's view accurately and sympathetically

Common Ground Section

- Establishes areas of agreement and shared values between writer and audience

Writer's Views Section

- Presents points that complicate or challenge the audience's view
- Focuses on how these points prevent the writer from completely accepting the audience's view

Conclusion

- Presents thesis/claim, which typically is a synthesis or compromise between the audience view and the writer's view

9.

THESIS STATEMENTS, TOPIC SENTENCES, AND BODY PARAGRAPHS

Thesis Statements

The thesis statement is the heart of any essay; it's a concise statement (usually just one sentence) that summarizes the main point the author is making. If you think of an academic essay as presenting your perspective on a complex question, the thesis is your answer to that question, boiled down into a single statement. The rest of the essay will provide support for your answer and/or explain your answer in more detail, but a reader should be able to guess from your thesis more or less what to expect from the rest of the essay.

Arriving at a thesis statement can take various paths, but there are two common ones.

Path #1: You instinctively know what point you want to make.

> In this situation, you may have a strong opinion or immediate response that you know you want to support in your essay. You will probably start with a broad, simple thesis statement that articulates that view. As you identify supporting points and possible counterarguments, you will almost certainly go back and refine that initial statement to be more specific.

Path #2: You aren't sure what your main point is going to be.

> In this situation, you may have a lot of opinions and thoughts you could

share, but no single main idea is obvious. Alternatively, you have no clue at all what you might say in your essay. This situation is especially common when you are being asked to analyze something. Rather than starting with a thesis statement, you'll work your way to a thesis statement by first figuring out what separate points you want to make and then articulating a single sentence that encapsulates or summarizes those points. In comparison to Path #1, you might not need to make as many changes to your thesis as you work, but you still may find that you change your mind as you draft!

Tension and Risk-Taking

A good thesis statement has some element of tension or riskiness to it. Remember, the issues we build academic essays around must be arguable. That doesn't mean your thesis has to be a "hot take" on an issue, stating an outrageous or unsupportable opinion. Instead, you must strike a balance between being specific enough to be arguable while still being grounded in solid evidence and reasoning. The key is to advance a thoughtful interpretation or idea that readers may not have considered before. The potential for disagreement is what makes academic discourse meaningful. Be careful not to zoom so far out with your thesis statement that you end up with something like, "This issue has both pros and cons." Even if you do discuss both pros and cons in your essay, you need to take a clear and specific stance. (What if you really can't decide whether the pros or cons are more significant? Your thesis might be something like, "The pros and cons balance each other, making this issue impossible to decide.")

Topic Sentences

If you derived your thesis statement by starting with the points you want to make in your essay, you already have a good idea of what your topic sentences will be. Topic sentences function like mini-thesis statements; each topic sentence sums up the point that you're making in that particular body paragraph. The thesis

statement, in turn, sums up and forecasts those topic sentences. A strong topic sentence tells the reader exactly what to expect from the paragraph, and has a clear relationship to the thesis statement. The reader should be able to tell that the topic sentence is developing a particular point that supports or explains the larger idea presented in the thesis statement.

Body Paragraphs

After the topic sentence, the body paragraph needs to contain both concrete evidence that supports the topic sentence, as well as your own explanation and justification of that evidence. Although there's no set rule, a useful rule of thumb is that the paragraph should lean more on your explanation than on the evidence; a good ratio is about 2/3 your own explanations to 1/3 concrete evidence. Avoid opening or closing paragraphs with evidence. Instead, develop the habit of opening your body paragraphs with topic sentences and closing them with your own ideas that explain the evidence you have provided and make it clear how your point connects back to your thesis statement. One of the main reasons that students struggle to meet minimum word count requirements is that they don't explain themselves fully, instead assuming that the evidence speaks for itself. In academic work, however, it's important to always spell out exactly what you mean and why.

Example Thesis & Topic Sentences #1

The example thesis and topic sentences below are from a response essay written about the article "The Epidemic of Facelessness" by Stephen Marche. Note how the thesis incorporates two main ideas: emotional effectiveness and lack of logical persuasion. The topic sentences then detail those ideas more specifically.

Thesis: Marche's article is emotionally effective, but not logically persuasive.

Topic Sentences:

- The specific examples Marche uses to illustrate trolling help readers feel emotionally invested in the issue.
- Marche's word choices emphasize the seriousness of the problem.
- Marche makes unjustified logical leaps from what little research he cites.
- Marche fails to explore other possible causes for trolling.

Example Thesis & Topic Sentences #2

The example thesis and topic sentences below are from a synthesis essay responding to this assignment prompt: "How much do genetic versus environmental factors influence human behavior and mental health? Synthesize research findings from twin studies, adoption studies, and gene-environment interaction models." Note how the order of ideas in the thesis statement is mirrored by the sequence of topic sentences.

Thesis: While both genetic and environmental factors significantly influence human behavior and mental health, aside from a few highly heritable conditions, most characteristics result from a complex interplay between genes and environment.

Topic Sentences:

- Twin and adoption studies have provided strong evidence for the strong heritability of a few conditions like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and autism spectrum disorder.
- Twin and adoption studies have also demonstrated that both genes and environment play a significant role in personality, as well as conditions like ADHD and depression.
- Gene-environment interaction models further show that a great many traits and conditions, including PTSD, phobias, substance use disorders, language, and obesity are strongly influenced by both genetics and

environment.

Example Thesis & Topic Sentences #3

The example thesis and topic sentences below are from an evaluation argument essay.

Thesis: Despite its controversial nature, genetic engineering in agriculture is a good solution to global food security challenges.

Topic Sentences:

- Genetic engineering techniques can significantly enhance crop yields and nutritional content, addressing food scarcity in developing regions.
- The ability to create pest-resistant crops through genetic modification reduces the need for harmful pesticides, benefiting both farmers and the environment.
- The adoption of genetically modified crops can lead to increased farmer income in developing countries, contributing to economic stability and food security.
- Genetically modified crops can withstand extreme weather conditions, making them more resilient in the face of climate change.

10.

INTRODUCTIONS & CONCLUSIONS

When to Write

I highly recommend that you wait to write your introduction and conclusion until you are fairly close to done with the body of the essay. Many students feel like they should start with the introduction because it comes first in the essay, but it's often easier to write once you have a clearer idea of what, exactly, you are introducing! Also, the introduction and conclusion work best when they resonate with each other, and that's easier to accomplish when you write them together.

Introductions

Introductions are your opportunity to invest your audience in your essay. In academic work, people are typically reading because 1) they already care about the topic and/or 2) they need the information contained in the text for some reason. That means there's less pressure to "grab" the audience right away, but you still want them to feel positive and excited about reading your work. The main way you accomplish that is by establishing the importance of your topic, tapping into *kairos* and *pathos* (see Classical Rhetorical Theory for more details). A good introduction gives the audience of a sense of the "so what?" regarding your topic; after reading the introduction, they should know why this topic is interesting or controversial, and why they should care about it.

The standard format for introductions to academic essays is pretty formulaic:

- Introduce the issue of the argument
- Establish the relevance/significance/timeliness of the issue (*kairos* and *pathos*)
- Provide any necessary background or context your readers may need
- Close with your thesis statement

In most short essays, your introduction will probably be a single paragraph, and those first two bullet points may even be covered in a single sentence, but keep in mind that each piece of a closed-form structure can be scaled up or down to suit the overall length of the text. When you read published works, especially scholarly ones, you'll find that introductions are more often multiple paragraphs, although the basic sequence of the above bullet points is typically the same.

You should also be aware that, although the most common form of introduction closes with the thesis, some essay structures (uncreatively called "delayed thesis" essays) don't provide the thesis until later – sometimes not even until the very end of the essay. However, unless you are certain your instructor will allow that or you've been explicitly assigned to do it that way, you should probably plan to include your thesis statement at the end of your introduction.

No Hook?

You may have been taught in the past to include a catchy hook at the beginning of your essay, and that is technically an option. However, hooks of that style are actually pretty uncommon in academic writing, and they can be risky. It's better to have no hook at all than one that will register to your readers as juvenile or trite. Avoid these overdone strategies:

- The "have you ever" rhetorical question
- The dictionary definition
- The random quote that only vaguely relates to the topic (or worse, has been misattributed to someone who never said it!)

Conclusions

Conclusions are, in my opinion, the most challenging pieces to write. You need to somehow bring the essay to a close without being redundant but also without adding new material, and that's a difficult task. The key ideas for a conclusion are **closure** and **meaning**. The reader needs to feel they have reached the end, so a conclusion shouldn't introduce new details, but you also want to avoid just repeating things you've already said. Instead, a good conclusion leaves the audience with an answer to "so what now?" They have read your essay and presumably see your point; where do things go from here?

Unlike with introductions, there is no clear pattern or model for closed-form conclusions. However, there are a few strategies that you can usually mix-and-match, depending on what makes sense for your essay.

- Briefly reiterate the main point of the essay. (Do not repeat the thesis exactly, and don't dwell on the supporting ideas, especially for a short essay. It starts to feel redundant.)
- Connect the point you made to its larger significance. How does seeing things your way help the audience have a better, more accurate understanding of the topic?
- Discuss next steps:
    - What could or should the audience do with what they have learned from you?
    - What parts of the topic could use more research or discussion, and why?

A good way to help the essay feel "complete" after the conclusion is to refer back to what you wrote in the introduction to establish the topic and its significance. See if you can echo those same ideas in your conclusion.

Examples

Read the example introduction/conclusion pairs below and see if you can identify how they follow the patterns described above. Can you find elements that could be made stronger?

Example #1

Introduction

In the era of streaming entertainment, the traditional movie theater business model faces an existential crisis. As media conglomerates like Netflix and Disney build their own streaming platforms, a growing number of new films are premiering at home rather than having a theatrical release. This shift raises questions about the future viability of cinemas and moviegoing as a cultural experience. While streaming offers unparalleled convenience and affordability for consumers, the theatrical experience remains invaluable for films as an art form and communal event meriting preservation in the digital age.

Conclusion

Though the movie theater business faces intense pressures from the streaming revolution, the theatrical experience is simply too culturally vital to be abandoned entirely. Viewing a quality film in the singular setting of a theater, surrounded by fellow audience members, allows the magic of the cinematic art form to be fully realized and appreciated in a way streaming can never replicate. To uphold this tradition, theater companies must innovate with upgraded sight and sound, diversified programming, and enhanced hospitality that provides moviegoers an experience transcending just watching content on a small screen. While streaming will certainly remain dominant for convenience, the art of film demands a premium viewing platform – the theater – be kept alive and evolved for modern audiences to enjoy movies as they were meant to be seen.

Example #2

Introduction

Incentivizing student performance has become a controversial strategy in the ongoing quest to improve educational outcomes. While monetary rewards like cash payments for good grades or test scores seem intuitively motivating, research has cast doubt on the effectiveness of this approach, especially for adolescents. A recent study highlighted in Matthew Springer's article "What Gets Students Motivated to Work Harder? Not Money" from *The Conversation* found that offering middle school students $100 for attending tutoring sessions had negligible impact. In contrast, students who received a simple, low-cost certificate of recognition from the superintendent saw dramatic increases in tutoring attendance. Springer explains that the counterintuitive finding challenges traditional economic assumptions and underscores the complex psychological and social factors influencing student behaviors. Although the study offers some interesting food for thought, Springer oversimplifies the findings and is too quick to dismiss the use of monetary incentives.

Conclusion

While Springer makes a fair point that non-monetary incentives like recognition awards should not be overlooked, he goes too far in using this single study to argue against financial rewards altogether. Rather than taking an either/or approach, schools and policymakers should view monetary and non-monetary incentives as complementary tools. Combining public recognition and social esteem factors like certificates with financial rewards could potentially amplify the motivational effects. Furthermore, incentive programs should be tailored not just to the developmental level but the specific circumstances, cultures, and needs of different student populations. Ultimately, more extensive research looking at how various incentive structures influence behaviors across age groups and demographic factors is still needed.

11.

ACADEMIC STYLE

One of the most challenging aspects of academic writing is developing a style that feels natural and comfortable for you, but that also meets typical expectations for academic work. This task is not made any easier by the fact that students typically come into college with some strong misconceptions about what academic style is – misconceptions that have been bolstered by reductive teaching practices (like "never use first person") and bad advice from tools like Grammarly.

In reality, academic style isn't clear-cut at all, and what exactly counts as academic writing style varies a lot depending on whom you ask. It depends on how old somebody is, what discipline they were trained in, and sometimes just their personal preferences. This chapter aims to give you a general sense of what is most common and should serve you well in many contexts. As you practice more and more, you will start to settle into a style that feels natural to you, and at the same time, develop the tools to flex that style in different directions to suit various contexts.

Density

The first and main feature of academic writing is that it's very dense; it conveys a lot of meaning concisely. Students tend to think that academic writing is wordy because it uses a lot of big words and long sentences, and that's not wrong. However, what makes academic writing dense is that it conveys the same amount of meaning using fewer words than you typically would to convey the same meaning in less formal writing or in speech. Therefore, on the average, academic writing is actually *more* concise than other forms of writing. What makes it feel so wordy is that it uses more complex sentences, often because the subject matter

is complicated, and that it takes time to explain details that might go unstated in other contexts.

- **Wordy:** Even though it rained a lot last night, I made the decision to go ahead and take my dog for a walk in the park at my usual time.
- **Not Wordy:** Although it rained heavily last night, I walked my dog in the park at the usual time.

A good rule of thumb is to aim to reduce your word count by about 20 to 25 percent when you're editing your writing. That's painful for those of you who struggle just to reach the minimum word count, but that's really a big part of what makes academic writing feel academic.

Precision

Similarly, academic writing necessitates precision, avoiding vagueness or overgeneralization. Some common errors students make in this regard is using phrases like "since the beginning of time" (overgeneralization) and "for many years" (vague).

Another common problem with precision that might be harder to notice initially is using the word "this" as the subject of a clause. If the word "this" is immediately followed by a verb, a noun should be inserted after "this" to clarify the referent. For example:

> **Imprecise:** This happens because of various factors.
> **Precise:** This **phenomenon** happens because of various social and economic factors.
>
> **Imprecise:** This means that further research is needed.
> **Precise:** This **finding** means that further research is needed.

By incorporating specific nouns after the pronoun "this," the writing becomes

more precise, and the intended referent is evident to the reader, elevating the style and making it sound more academic.

Formal Diction

You probably already know that academic writing is formal, but you might not always recognize how to make your writing seem more formal. Many students think the trick is to use a thesaurus to replace "boring" words with "fancier" words, but that often backfires. Making your diction more formal is usually easier than that!

- I see a lot of students using the words "well" and "so" used as transition words. Those are things we do in conversation all the time, but they shouldn't make it into your edited academic writing.
- Don't use contractions (most of the time). Attitudes about whether contractions are acceptable really vary depending on what discipline you're in, and it will depend frankly on who your professor is and how they feel about contractions. Even though I personally think they're fine, I expect students to practice not using them for my classes, just to get used to it.
- Rhetorical questions can also be fine, but they should never be used sarcastically or in an accusatory way. Use rhetorical questions sparingly and only to introduce a new topic or to transition into a new idea.
- Replacing two-word verb phrases with single-word alternatives is a surprisingly simple way to elevate your style. We have a lot of two-word verb phrases in English. A lot of them end with the prepositions up, down, in, out, on, or off, such as "brings up" "puts down" "gives off" etc. Change those to single word alternatives. "Brings up" can become "raises"; "puts down" can become "places"; "gives off" can become "emits."

Informal: Well, exercise is pretty important for people's health. It can help people lose weight, get stronger muscles, reduce stress, and improve mood. Plus, regular exercise lowers risks for diseases like heart problems and diabetes. Exercising regularly ends up making people healthier overall.

What kind of person wouldn't want that?

More Formal: Exercise is important for people's health. It can help people lose weight, build stronger muscles, reduce stress, and improve mood. Plus, regular exercise lowers risks for heart problems and diabetes. Exercising regularly makes people healthier overall, and most people would be happy to see those benefits.

Point of View

Academic writing strives for objectivity, which generally entails maintaining distance between the writer and readers through the use of third-person pronouns (he, she, it, they, them, their). The first-person singular (I) may be permissible in certain disciplines when discussing personal experiences directly relevant to the content. For example, "I conducted fieldwork in rural Tanzania" would be acceptable. However, first-person singular is typically avoided when expressing opinions, as statements are assumed to represent the writer's perspective unless otherwise indicated. In other words, just state your view directly and people will understand that it's your view! Occasionally, phrases like "I think" or "I believe" may be used to explicitly signal disagreement with a previously mentioned viewpoint: "While Smith argues X, I believe Y is more accurate."

The use of first-person plural (we, us) depends on the discipline and whether the intended audience is included in that collective pronoun. Its use is appropriate only if the writer and readers share the experiences being discussed.

The second-person pronoun (you) and imperative statements addressing the reader (e.g., "Imagine this," "Consider the following") should generally be avoided in academic writing. Such directives can come across as informal, instructional, or even accusatory. Removing second person from your writing is one of the quickest, easiest ways to make it sound more academic.

Second Person: If **you** want to learn a new language, **you** should immerse yourself in it as much as possible.

Third Person: If **people** want to learn a new language, **they** should immerse yourself in it as much as possible.

Explicitness

Academic writing demands explicitness, clearly articulating the connections and logical progression between ideas. You should clearly and thoroughly explain how one concept leads to the next through the effective use of transitions and various types of conjunctions. Conjunctions serve to link clauses, sentences, and concepts, guiding the reader through the logical flow of the writer's analysis and indicate which elements are more or less important. Complex sentence structures involving subordinating conjunctions and relative clauses are frequent in academic writing.

Not Explicit: The Civil War was a significant event. Abraham Lincoln became the president, the South seceded from the nation, and the North fought the South.

Explicit: The Civil War, one of the most significant events in American history, arose from longstanding tensions between the northern and southern states. When Abraham Lincoln, who was fundamentally opposed to the expansion of slavery, was elected as the 16th president, seven southern slave states seceded from the Union, triggering the outbreak of the war.

Hedging

A common feature of academic writing is the use of hedging language to qualify claims and demonstrate the degree of certainty or limitation. Writers employ techniques such as modal verbs (e.g., may, could, can), verbs that suggest possibility (seems, suggests, tends), and the avoidance of universal statements. For instance, rather than asserting "Academic writing requires hedging," you might state, "Academic writing tends to use hedging strategies to indicate the strength of claims."

Excessive hedging can undermine the persuasiveness of arguments because it makes you sound wishy-washy or unwilling to commit to a point, so you want to be careful about how much you do it.

> **Too Much Hedging:** The findings from this study may possibly suggest that there could potentially be some kind of correlation between regular physical activity and cardiovascular health.
> **Not Enough Hedging:** The findings from this study prove that increased exercise leads to better cardiovascular health in all individuals.
> **Appropriate Hedging:** The findings from this study suggest a positive correlation between regular physical activity and improved cardiovascular function in the study's participant sample.

Responsibility

Lastly, academic writing takes responsibility. Academic writing provides evidence for claims and cites its sources in an accepted style. Be careful of making claims like "Studies have shown" unless you are prepared to cite some specific studies to support that assertion. You should also be careful that you don't take for granted that commonly held beliefs are true, and write as though they are without verifying that they have indeed been researched and confirmed.

Creating Readability and Flow

Following the guidelines in this chapter's first section will help to make your style more "academic," but they don't do much to make a piece pleasant or fun to read. Once you have edited your work to ensure that it follows academic conventions, you can take it to the next level by incorporating elements that will help your reader stay engaged. Many of the features described below overlap and can easily be combined.

Concrete Language

Concrete language appeals to the senses. When we read something concrete, we can picture it, or imagine how it sounds, feels, smells, or tastes. The opposite of concrete language is abstract language. These are concepts or ideas that aren't tangible. Although academic writing often requires the use of some abstract language, it's easy to get lost or just be bored by long strings of abstractions. Adding specifics and concrete details where possible makes the writing easier to follow and more engaging.

> **Abstract:** The geopolitical tensions escalated into an intractable international crisis.
> **More Concrete:** Disagreements between multiple countries over territory worsened, leading to armed conflicts that threatened many nations.

Narrative

Humans love stories. Adding occasional narratives where appropriate, such as to illustrate a point, helps keeps readers engaged. Narratives might come from real stories (your own or those gathered from research), or they can even be hypothetical scenarios or analogies. As a bonus, in addition to adding life to your writing, narratives can serve as evidence to support your claims.

> **No Narrative:** Perseverance is essential for success in higher education because earning a college degree requires overcoming many challenges and obstacles over several years. Without the determination to persist despite hardships, the rigor and endurance required for higher learning can cause students to become overwhelmed and give up prematurely.
> **Narrative Added:** Perseverance is essential for success in higher education because earning a college degree requires overcoming many challenges and obstacles over several years. Without the determination to persist despite hardships, the rigor and endurance required for higher learning can cause students to become overwhelmed and give up prematurely. For example,

Jennifer was a college student who struggled through her freshman year, failing several classes despite studying hard. The heavy course load, pressure to succeed, and self-doubts made her want to drop out. However, Jennifer persevered, adjusting her study habits and learning how to manage her time better. By persisting through that difficult first year, she built academic stamina and a stronger drive to continue. Four years later, Jennifer proudly walked across the stage at graduation.

Sentence Variety

Sentence variety refers to variation in the lengths and types of sentences you use. Readers will become bored when too many sentences are similar, and they might also find too many long, complex sentences in a row difficult to follow.

Poor Sentence Variety: The Civil War was very important. The war started in 1861. The North and South were divided over the issue of slavery. Abraham Lincoln was the president. There were many battles. The war ended in 1865. The North was victorious.

Improved Sentence Variety: The Civil War, which started in 1861, was very important. At that time, the North and South were divided over the issue of slavery, and Abraham Lincoln was the president. After many famous battles, the war ended in 1865 with the North victorious.

Schemes and Tropes

Schemes are specific strategies for ordering words or phrases to create effects such as humor or emphasis. **Tropes** are types of figurative language or wordplay. There are dozens of specific types of schemes and tropes, and most of them have odd Greek or Latin names. Here are a few of the most common types used in academic writing, along with examples:

Schemes

- Parallelism – the use of similar structural patterns in words/phrases, as in "Good writing requires **originality of ideas**, **clarity of expression**, and **presence of voice**." Notice how each phrase in the list is in the form of *noun* + "of" + *noun*. This use of parallelism makes the sentence more pleasing than something like, "Good writing requires originality, clarity, and presence of voice," where the last item feels a bit out of place because it doesn't fit the previous pattern.
- Auxesis/Climax – a type of parallelism where the parallel items show ascending importance or significance, as in "That mistake wasn't **a minor error**, but **a catastrophic blunder**." In this example, the two parallel phrases both are in the form of "a" + *adjective* + *noun*, but the second item is much more significant than the first, helping to emphasize just important it is.
- Antithesis – a type of parallelism where the same grammatical structure is used for contrasting ideas, as in "She was both **brilliantly witty** and **painfully shy**." These two parallel *adverb* + *adjective* phrases express contrasting ideas, which helps to create tension and interest.
- Anaphora – repeating the same word or phrase at the beginnings of phrases or clauses, as in "**They fought for** freedom, **they fought for** their rights, and **they fought for** a better future." Anaphora helps create a rhythm to the sentence and provide structure to a list of items.
- Epistrophe – repeating the same word or phrase at the ends of phrases or clauses, as in "I told the **truth**, the whole **truth**, and nothing but the **truth**." Repeating the word "truth" emphasizes its importance and makes the statement more memorable.

Tropes

- Metaphor – a comparison by way of referring to something as something else, even though they are not literally the same, as in "The light of reason must illuminate the path forward." (Reason is not a literal light and there is

not a literal path to illuminate.) Metaphor is a useful way to create vivid, concrete imagery when the concepts themselves are abstract.

- Simile – a comparison using "like" or "as," as in "The orbits of the planets are like the cogs of an intricate clockwork." Simile is often useful to help readers understand or visualize ideas.
- Litotes – an understatement by negating the contrary, as in "He is not unintelligent." (We understand that the person in question is perhaps not extremely intelligent, but also not stupid.)
- Zeugma – using two different meanings of the same word/phrase in the same sentence, as in "I lost my keys and my temper." Zeugma can create a feeling of surprise or amusement.

Using AI-Assisted Editors

You may be tempted to use Grammarly or other AI-powered editing tools to "improve" your style. However, you should be very cautious about that. While these tools can be helpful if you're struggling to find the best way to word something, if you use them too much, they tend to create a style that is inflated, vague, repetitive, and/or filled with corporate buzzwords that don't really belong in academic writing.

I took the following passage from a real, high-quality academic text:

> The role of public research universities—particularly state flagships—in educating our population is critical to understand because of the pivotal place they hold in the ecology of American higher education. These schools bridge the elite and mass sectors of higher education (Armstrong and Hamilton 4).

Then, I asked AI to rewrite the passage so it sounded "more academic." The following is what it produced:

> The ontological significance of public research universities—particularly state flagship institutions—within the contemporary higher education ecosystem demands rigorous scholarly scrutiny. These institutions occupy a critical interstitial position, mediating between elite and mass higher education paradigms.

Some people may find the second example impressive because it uses "big words," but it's not *good writing*. It's full of meaningless fluff that obscures rather than clarifies. Yes, some academic writing is hard to understand, but it should not be intentionally so; if the vocabulary is difficult, it should only be because the subject matter requires it to be. You are almost always better off using simpler, more direct language.

Works Cited

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Laura T. Hamilton. *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

12.

THE TOULMIN MODEL OF ARGUMENTATION

Toulmin: An Overview

The Toulmin model, which was developed in the 1950s by philosopher Stephen Toulmin, is a tool that allows you to identify the necessary parts of an argument. It helps you plan your argument by ensuring you have all the required components. It also enables you to analyze other people's arguments and pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses.

Claim

The main part of an argument is the claim, which is the central assertion being made. A claim must be disputable and cannot be a fact or something the audience already accepts.

There are three types of claim:

- Claims of fact – assertions about what is, what was, or what will be
- Claims of value – assertions about what is good or bad, right or wrong
- Claims of policy – assertions about what should or should not be done

The claim is the core of the thesis statement. You can also think of the thesis statement as the exact wording you've chosen to express the claim, whereas the claim is the actual idea being conveyed. Each of the claim types listed above has its own chapter with much more information and examples.

The Hierarchy of Claim Types

The order in which these types of claims are presented – fact, then value, then policy – is not arbitrary. We can't make arguments of value without relying on facts, and we can't make arguments of policy without relying on arguments of value (which rely on facts). In other words, we first have to agree about what reality is before we can even argue about whether it's good or bad. Then we have to agree about what is good or bad before we can effectively propose changes to make things better. Understanding this nested structure of argument types can be incredibly helpful when we think about some of the most intractable arguments in our society, over topics like gun control or abortion. Often, people jump straight to arguments of policy or value, when the problem is that they don't even agree on the same basic facts, like whether the 2nd Amendment covers automatic weapons or whether a fetus is a person. We are sometimes very bad at identifying the real *topos* of our arguments!

On less controversial topics, the hierarchy is often less important because the underlying facts and values may already be widely accepted by the audience. You'll notice these when you read further in this chapter and learn about warrants.

Reasons

Reasons are assertions made in support of claims. An argument will have one claim, but it will usually have multiple reasons. Reasons may or may not be accepted facts, but usually they're not; usually they themselves are arguable assertions. You can find the reasons that support your claim by just filling in the blank after "because" following your claim.

Enthymemes & Warrants

When you connect each reason to the claim with a word like "because," it creates a logical structure called an enthymeme. The enthymeme is an *incomplete* logical structure because it always assumes that a third, often unstated, assertion is true.

Let's examine some examples:

- Enthymeme: Cats are good pets because cats are low maintenance.
    - Assumption: It's good for a pet to be low maintenance.
- Enthymeme: Cats are good pets because cats are clean.
    - Assumption: It's good for a pet to be clean.

This assumption, in Toulmin terminology, is called a **warrant**. Often, it's easier to understand the significance of warrants when you see enthymemes that *don't* make logical sense. For example:

- Enthymeme: Cats are good pets because cats destroy your furniture.
    - Warrant: It's good for a pet to destroy your furniture.

Read as two independent sentences, the claim "Cats are good pets" and the reason "Cats destroy your furniture" are fine. I can believe both are true, and there's nothing weird about that, really. However, as soon as I connect them with that word "because," something happens. I'm creating a relationship between these two statements, and the believability of that relationship depends on something else being true. Suddenly, I have gone from being a person who likes cats *despite* the fact that they destroy furniture to being a person who likes cats *because* they destroy furniture, and that's a little bit odd.

In real life arguments, we often don't give a second thought to these assumptions because, like in the first two examples, they're not particularly controversial. However, it's really valuable to be able to identify what they are. Alongside the reasons, they are the pillars on which the argument rests, and even when they're not extremely controversial, some critical thinking about them can help us accomplish two tasks: (1) providing more thorough evidence for our argument and (2) responding more effectively to opposing views.

Warrants, like claims, can be classified into different types, and they're based on the type of assumption being made.

- Substantive warrants – assumptions about how to interpret evidence
- Authoritative warrants – assumptions about who is trustworthy or credible
- Motivational warrants – assumptions about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable, right or wrong

You can find much more on warrants in the chapters on writing arguments of fact and arguments of evaluation.

Grounds & Backing

Grounds are the evidence or explanation that support the reasons; the grounds show your audience why they should believe or agree with your stated reason. Similarly, warrants often need support, and this support is called backing. The backing shows your audience why they should believe or agree with your warrant.

What Is Evidence?

For both grounds and backing, there are many types of evidence that you can use. When you're developing an argument, you may find it helpful to brainstorm possibilities from as many different categories of evidence as you can; this exercise often leads to the discovery of evidence that you might not otherwise have considered.

Types of evidence include:

- Personal experience
- Observation/anecdote
- Primary research data
- Secondary research data
- Hypothetical examples
- Logical reasoning

Conditions of Rebuttal & Responses to Conditions of

Rebuttal

The next aspect to consider in the Toulmin model are the conditions of rebuttal. Toulmin emphasizes first identifying all of the potential objections to the reason and grounds, as well as all of the potential objections to the warrant and backing. While you could brainstorm other objections beyond the conditions of rebuttal that challenge the argument more holistically, Toulmin's framework focuses primarily on why an audience might disagree with the reason itself, distrust the grounds supporting the reason, disagree with the warrant itself, or distrust the backing for the warrant. In other words, the conditions of rebuttal are targeted to specific lines of argument, not necessarily to the overall claim.

To illustrate, consider the earlier argument that "Cats are good pets because cats are low maintenance." Potential rebuttals include someone arguing that cats are not actually low-maintenance (rebutting the reason) and someone arguing that it's not important for a pet to be low maintenance (rebutting the warrant). "Cats are not good pets" is NOT a condition of rebuttal because it's challenging the claim itself rather than the reason or warrant.

After you have examined your lines of argument and identified all of the potential objections, you must then respond to those objections, particularly if they have any validity at all. Sometimes students forget to do this part! It's great to acknowledge where there are valid objections to your argument, but you shouldn't just abandon your argument after doing so. If you still believe you're right (and hopefully you do), you need to explain why you think these objections are either incorrect or not significant enough to make you change your mind.

There are two main strategies for responding: concession and refutation. With **concession**, the writer grants a reasonable point made by the opposition, e.g. "It is true not all cats are utterly low-maintenance," but then reaffirms their overall claim, e.g. "However, compared to most typical pets, they require substantially less care." Alternatively, with **refutation**, the writer respectfully presents an opposing view, e.g. "Some argue cats are not low-maintenance because...," but then demonstrates why this view is mistaken with counterevidence.

You do not need to refute every objection; judicious concessions can actually strengthen an argument by enhancing your ethos and displaying fairness in considering other perspectives. As long as concessions are followed by reaffirmation of the central claim, the overall argument remains sound.

In identifying the conditions of rebuttal, you may notice that warrants are often values widely shared by the audience but prioritized differently. Consider the enthymeme, "The government should ban plastic bags because plastic bags are bad for the environment." The warrant, "The government should enact policies to protect the environment" may not itself be problematic for the audience. However, some may prioritize other concerns above environmental protection; for example, they may agree both with the reason (plastic bags are bad for the environment) and the warrant (the government should enact policies to protect the environment), but they might argue that banning plastic bags would be an inefficient policy, and that the inefficiencies outweigh the potential benefits. In this case, you would need to anticipate what these competing values might be, understand their basis, and make a case for why the value underlying your own argument should be prioritized.

Qualifiers

The last Toulmin element is the term qualifier, and these bring us all the way back around to our claim. Qualifiers are words or phrases that limit the scope of your claim. Often, you'll come to these as you have brainstormed your conditions of rebuttal. You'll realize there are some areas where you need to allow for exceptions. You might adjust your claim by adding limiting words like "often," "generally," "usually," etc. I might change my "Cats are good pets" claim to something like "Cats are generally good pets." This way I'm not saying *all* cats are *always* good pets. Perhaps I change it to something like, "Cats are good pets for most people," to acknowledge that some people might have specific needs that cats don't meet. You have to be careful with qualifiers because you can qualify your claims so much that you're no longer making an argument. If you find that your claim is essentially just saying that something *may* be true, you might

not even have an arguable claim anymore. You'll want to consider carefully what exceptions are absolutely necessary for you to allow.

Line of Argument

Each reason with all of its attendant parts – the warrant, the grounds, the backing, the conditions of rebuttal, the responses to the conditions of rebuttal – is a line of argument. A claim is typically supported with multiple lines of argument, and it's important that all of your lines of argument are well-developed.

13.

ARGUMENTS OF FACT

What Are Arguments of Fact?

Writing arguments about facts is an important part of academic persuasive writing. This may seem contradictory at first – how can you argue about facts? The key is that **facts** and **claims of fact** are slightly different.

When making an argument of fact, you are arguing for a particular assertion about reality that is not already widely believed or accepted.

Claims of fact are statements about what was, what is, or what will be – concerning the past, present or future. However, they are distinct from **facts** because facts are generally accepted. They may be accepted because we already have a lot of evidence to support them, and/or because they are easily empirically verifiable – that is, we can directly observe them to be true. In contrast, **claims of fact** are neither generally accepted nor easily empirically verifiable. However, even if they can't be 100% proven true, you can support these claims with empirical evidence and logical reasoning. (Of course, what constitutes a generally accepted fact may depend somewhat on your audience. For academic writing, the broad academic audience is the benchmark, not fringe groups that reject empirical evidence.)

Some examples help illustrate the distinction between **facts** and **claims of fact**:

> Generally Accepted Fact: The 2008 financial crisis led to a major recession in many countries.
> Claim of Fact: Deregulation of the financial industry and lack of oversight

on mortgage lending practices were primary causes of the 2008 financial crisis.

Generally Accepted Fact: Vitamins are essential nutrients required in small amounts for human health.
Claim of Fact: High doses of supplemental vitamin C help prevent colds and flu.

Empirically Verifiable Fact: Students' reading scores have decreased in the last few years.
Claim of Fact: The disruptions to education during the pandemic caused students' reading scores to decrease.

In each case, the "factual claim" is an assertion about reality that is still open to debate, yet you can find some reputable evidence and make logical arguments to support it.

Common Types of Arguments of Fact

Arguments of Definition

A significant number of legal and policy debates revolve around questions of fact. Tax laws represent a major area where we frequently encounter such issues. For instance, the question of whether Scientology should be classified as a business or a religion has profound implications for its tax-exempt status. Ostensibly an inquiry about objective reality, it defies straightforward empirical resolution. We must carefully examine the evidence through the lens of our legal definitions of "business" and "religion," assessing which characterization best aligns with observable facts about Scientology.

Consider how important and influential arguments about definitions can be:

- **Immigration law** – Defining key concepts like "refugee," "asylum seeker," and "temporary protected status," has major implications for who qualifies for various immigration benefits and protections.
- **Intellectual property** – Patent, trademark, and copyright laws hinge on precise definitions of terms like "fair use."
- **Environmental regulations** – Determining what qualifies as "waters of the United States," "wetlands," and "endangered species" under environmental statutes impacts jurisdiction and requirements.
- **Healthcare policy** – Definitions around "medically necessary," "experimental treatment," and "disability" affect insurance coverage decisions.
- **Employment law** – Interpretations of "employee" vs "independent contractor" as well as concepts like "hostile work environment" have major workplace ramifications.
- **Free speech jurisprudence** – Definitions of "incitement," "true threat," or "obscenity" mark the boundaries of First Amendment protections.
- **Antitrust/competition policy** – Concepts like "monopoly power," "consumer harm," and "relevant market" require careful delineation.
- **Ethics policies** – Defining "conflict of interest," "whistleblower," and "research misconduct" governs ethical oversight.

Many arguments in these fields revolve around who or what, exactly, is included or excluded from particular definitions.

Scientific Arguments

Many scientific inquiries grapple with questions rooted in empirical fact. For instance, the debate over whether IQ tests accurately measure intelligence has persisted for decades. While the widely accepted consensus at present is that IQ tests do not provide a comprehensive measure of the multifaceted concept of intelligence, there remains some ongoing dispute and nuance around this issue.

A more popular example arises when contemplating the likelihood of discovering

extraterrestrial life. This is a factual scientific question, yet one that admits a range of potential answers based on differing assumptions and perspectives. One view could be that given the vast expanse of the universe, we are extremely likely to eventually encounter other life forms. An opposing stance might deem it highly improbable that we will ever make such a monumental discovery, asserting that life may be extremely rare or even unique to Earth.

Here are some other common areas of argument in both natural and social sciences:

- **Efficacy of Medical Treatments** – For any given medical condition or treatment, scientific debates often weigh evidence from clinical trials, observational studies, and mechanistic research to determine how effective the treatment truly is and whether potential side effects outweigh benefits.
- **Diet & Nutrition** – Scientists argue over the role different nutrients, such as fats, carbs, proteins, and vitamins, play in healthy diets based on interpreting contradictory studies and determining relevance of data from animal models versus human trials.
- **Nature vs. Nurture** – Many fields, like psychology and genetics, have long-running arguments about the relative importance of innate biological factors versus environmental influences in shaping human traits, behavior, and mental development.
- **Origins of the Universe** – Cosmologists argue over different theories, like the Big Bang, steady state, or multiverse, to explain the origins and evolution of the observable universe based on available evidence.
- **Environmental Impacts of Technologies** – Scientists argue over potential ecological risks and life cycle analyses of new technologies, like nanotech, geoengineering, fracking, or GMOs, based on modeling their environmental effects.
- **Sources of Social Inequality** – Researchers argue over the relative importance of factors like economic systems, discrimination, culture, family structure, etc. in perpetuating wealth gaps and social inequalities.
- **Criminal Justice Reform** – Social scientists debate the effectiveness of

different policies, like stricter sentencing, rehabilitation programs, and addressing root causes, in reducing crime rates based on empirical data.

These are only a few examples, but they illustrate how even straightforward scientific questions often elude simple, unequivocal answers. The process of investigating such issues requires carefully weighing accumulated evidence while entertaining multiple hypotheses. The richness of the scientific endeavor lies in an openness to continually refine our understanding as new data emerges.

Arguments of Interpretation

Literary analysis and questions of interpretation also frequently constitute arguments grounded in factual evidence. When analyzing a work's meaning or evaluating differing interpretations, one is fundamentally making claims about observable reality within the text itself.

While determining whether a TV show is "good" or "bad" inherently involves subjective value judgments, examining the show's underlying themes, messages, and potential impacts is an exercise in factual argumentation. Asserting that a show perpetuates certain societal biases or promotes particular ideological viewpoints requires citing specific examples, dialogue, plot points, and character arcs as empirical proof. Similarly, claims about the overarching lessons or significance a literary work conveys must be substantiated through careful textual analysis and marshaling of evidence from the source material.

Thus, the process of deconstructing and interpreting the meanings of creative works enters the factual realm of logically evaluating evidence to make defensible claims. The fields of literary criticism, anthropology, philosophy and others are replete with reasoned arguments over subjective experiences and abstract concepts, grounded in observable data. This underscores that factual arguments are not the purview of only the STEM disciplines, but exist in areas of academic discourse across the liberal arts, as well.

Here are some examples:

- **Interpreting symbolism** – Critics in arts and literature create arguments about the symbolic meanings of key objects, characters, or events.
- **Identifying themes** – Critics in arts and literature also argue about the themes (lessons) that a particular work may be intended to convey.
- **Analyzing or applying meaning** – Philosophers and critics argue about what exactly is meant by a particular text and/or how those ideas can be used. Many of these questions involve applying a particular theoretical framework or lens to a text.

Applying Toulmin to Arguments of Fact

Identifying Reasons and Grounds

In an argument of fact, the reasons and grounds overlap and blur together. (This phenomenon actually lines up with how Toulmin originally presented his framework, and unsurprisingly, he was initially focused on arguments of fact.)

Fortunately, with arguments of fact, it's not that important to be able to make that distinction, so if you find that you struggle a bit to distinguish between reasons and grounds, don't worry about it. However, you may note when you're writing out your enthymemes for factual arguments that instead of using the word "because" to connect a claim and reason, you might find that it makes more sense grammatically to say, "and we know this because." I find that doing it that way often makes the rest of the Toulmin framework a bit easier to apply.

In arguments of fact, your reasons and grounds will primarily consist of empirical evidence and possibly testimony. When you use empirical evidence, your warrants will be **substantive warrants**. These are assumptions about what empirical evidence means. When you use testimony, your warrants will be **authoritative warrants.** These are assumptions about who can or should be trusted.

Empirical Evidence: Reasons, Grounds, Substantive Warrants, and Backing

Empirical evidence comes from our senses – observations, studies, and experiments, whether conducted by ourselves or others. This kind of evidence is probably the kind that is most familiar to you.

Let's look at an example. Imagine that I am a prosecutor, and I am trying to convict a woman named Martha of hitting a man named George with a golf club. One of my pieces of evidence is Martha's fingerprints on the golf club. As I'm planning my argument to present to the jury, I could outline it like so:

> **Claim:** Martha hit George with the golf club.
> **Reason:** I know this because Martha's fingerprints were found on the golf club.
> **Grounds (How do I know the reason is true?):** The specific evidence that Martha's prints were indeed on the golf club, such as forensic reports or photographs.
> **Warrant:** Someone's fingerprints on the golf club is a sign that they used it to hit George.
> **Backing (How do I know the warrant is true?):** My explanation of why fingerprints on the weapon are indicative of guilt. This backing could review what we know about how fingerprints are transferred, how they can smudge over time, and so on to justify this connection between evidence and conclusion

However, I must also consider potential rebuttals. I need to be prepared for what Martha's defense attorney might say.

> **Rebuttal of Reason/Grounds:** Were there any potential errors in the fingerprint analysis? In other words, is it possible that Martha's fingerprints are *not* actually on the golf club?
> **Rebuttal of Warrant/Backing:** Are there other reasons Martha's fingerprints might be on the golf club besides her using it to hit George? In

other words, could her fingerprints be on the golf club with a completely innocent explanation?

As the prosecutor, I need to consider how likely it is that the defense attorney will raise either or both of these objections, and be prepared for how I will respond to them.

Testimony: Reasons, Grounds, Authoritative Warrants, and Backing

The other main type of evidence that we have in arguments of fact is testimony, that is, someone else's word or expert opinion.

Let's imagine that I'm still the prosecutor, and I'm still trying to convict Martha, and now I have a witness named Roger.

Claim: Martha hit George with the golf club.
Reason: I know this because Roger says she did it.
Grounds (How do I know the reason is true?): The specific evidence that Roger says Martha did it. (Hopefully, we get Roger on the stand and hear it out of his own mouth. Second best might be a recording of Roger saying it. The farther we get from hearing it directly from Roger, the weaker these grounds become, and in fact, legally we probably wouldn't be allowed to use it at all!)
Warrant: If Roger says it, it's true.
Backing (How do I know the warrant is true?): My explanation of why we should believe Roger, including why he's trustworthy, how he was in a good position to see what happened, etc.

Again, I must also consider potential rebuttals. I need to be prepared for what Martha's defense attorney might say.

Rebuttal of Reason/Grounds: Is there any doubt that Roger actually pointed the finger at Martha? (If we got him on the stand, probably not. However, if we have recorded evidence or secondhand evidence, it may be

possible that Roger has been misunderstood or taken out of context, and he didn't actually say that Martha did it.)

Rebuttal of Warrant/Backing: Could Roger be mistaken or lying?

As the prosecutor, I need to consider how likely it is that the defense attorney will raise either or both of these objections and be prepared for how I will respond to them.

Preponderance of Evidence

When making an argument of fact, your goal is to present a preponderance of evidence that tips the scales in favor of your claim. Usually, a single piece of evidence alone is not sufficient. You want to accumulate and marshal multiple pieces of evidence that *collectively* support your factual assertion.

At the same time, you should directly refute any evidence that seems to contradict your claim. There are a few ways to approach this:

- Show that the contradictory evidence is inaccurate or misrepresented. For example, clarifying that a quote was taken out of context or an observation was flawed.
- Demonstrate that the evidence, even if factual, does not actually undermine your claim when properly interpreted. You can argue that the source is untrustworthy or mistaken about the implications.
- Provide explanations or alternative interpretations that resolve the seeming contradiction between the evidence and your claim.

The goal is to bolster evidence supporting your side, while systematically refuting or reinterpreting evidence opposed to your claim. By addressing contradictions head-on, you leave your audience with a preponderance of evidence weighted toward accepting your factual assertion as more likely to be valid.

Substantive Warrants

In making arguments with empirical evidence, you inevitably rely on one or more substantive warrants. Being aware of the type used allows you to scrutinize and support the underlying assumption more rigorously.

Substantive warrants, which underlie the use of empirical evidence, are more complex than other types of warrants. There are five main kinds of substantive warrants related to empirical claims:

Sign Warrants
These assume that one observation signifies or is a sign of something else. For example, claiming "Martha is guilty because her fingerprints were on the weapon" uses a sign warrant that her prints signal guilt. When we say something is a "red flag," we're employing a sign warrant. These are potentially the most common type of warrant underlying empirical evidence because if you use statistics to support a claim, you are likely relying on a sign warrant. For example, consider the enthymeme "Streaming services have grown at an astounding rate and we know this because Spotify increased from 100 million paid subscribers to 236 million in just the past five years." This enthymeme assumes that an increase from 100 million to 236 million is a sign of an astounding growth rate.

Generalization Warrants
These involve generalizing from a specific example or set of examples to a broader group. If you claim "Marijuana is an effective pain relief medicine" based on studies showing it reduced pain, you are generalizing from those study samples to a universal claim.

Comparison Warrants
These assume what is true in one case will hold true for a similar, analogous case. For instance, "The U.S. can improve its economy by eliminating the penny, as other countries have done" compares national economies.

Analogy Warrants

While also comparing things, analogies are different from comparisons because analogies find similarities between two superficially dissimilar things. Saying "The universe has an intelligent designer, like a watch" posits an analogy between the complexity of each.

Cause-Effect Warrants

These are the oddball warrants of the substantive warrants. You will have a cause-effect warrant when your enthymeme uses the word "because" to indicate a CAUSE rather than a supporting reason, as in "The U.S. has high rates of poverty because it lacks a strong social safety net." In that enthymeme, I am not saying that the lack of a strong social safety net is evidence showing that the U.S. has high rates of poverty; I am saying that the lack of a strong social safety net is a *cause* of the high rates of poverty. The assumption here is that lack of a strong social safety net can cause high rates of poverty, and I will need to provide backing for that. (In fact, causal arguments often depend at least as much on backing as they do on grounds.)

Related Writing Projects

- Argument of Fact – Scholarly Sources
- Empirical Research Report

14.

ARGUMENTS OF VALUE

What Is Evaluation?

Evaluation arguments are a category of arguments concerned with assessing and judging the quality, value, nature, or worth of something. At their core, these arguments make claims about whether a given person, thing, concept, action, or phenomenon is good or bad, desirable or undesirable, ethical or unethical, valuable or worthless, and so on.

Evaluations require establishing clear criteria and standards by which the subject of evaluation will be scrutinized and appraised. The arguer puts forward a evaluative claim or conclusion, supported by reasoning showing how well the subject meets or violates the stated criteria and why those criteria are important measures of quality or worth.

There are two main types of evaluation arguments: ethical and categorical.

Ethical Evaluations

Ethical evaluations argue about what is morally right or wrong. They rely on fundamental assumptions about the foundations of moral reasoning.

Note that sometimes ethical evaluation claims masquerade as policy claims. On its surface, the claim "People shouldn't lie" is a claim of policy because it's asserting that something shouldn't be done. However, it's very abstract and also

quite easy to rephrase as "Lying is wrong" without changing the meaning. It can be useful to experiment with different ways of stating the same claim to be sure you're classifying your claim correctly. In particular, remember that policy claims are concrete and practical, while ethical evaluation claims are likely to be more philosophical or abstract.

Deontological vs. Consequentialist Ethics

Deontological ethics focuses on judging the morality of an action based on its adherence to moral rules or duties. It holds that some acts are intrinsically right or wrong, regardless of their consequences. Deontological principles are moral absolutes like "Don't lie," "Don't steal," and "Keep your promises." From this view, morality flows from rationally understanding and obeying these inviolable rules. With claims based on deontological ethics, you have to provide grounds showing that subject does/does not violate the ethical principle and provide backing for the principle itself. For example:

> Claim: Downloading pirated software is unethical.
> Reason: Because it is stealing.
> Grounds: [Evidence/explanation explaining why downloading pirated software should be considered stealing]
> Warrant: People should not steal.
> Backing: [Evidence/explanation showing why people should not steal]

Consequentialist ethics, instead, evaluates the morality of actions solely by their consequences and outcomes. The moral rightness is determined by the results and real-world effects, not based on predefined rules. A common consequentialist principle is utilitarianism – judging acts as moral based on whether they maximize overall human (or sentient) wellbeing and minimize suffering.

> Claim: Factory-farmed meat is unethical.
> Reason: Because it causes harm to the environment.
> Grounds: [Evidence/explanation showing that factory-farmed meat causes harm to the environment]

Warrant: We should not cause harm to the environment.
Backing: [Evidence/explanation showing why we should not cause harm to the environment]

The warrants here reflect different ethical principles – a deontological rule against stealing, and a consequentialist focus on minimizing harm. However, you'll probably notice that even consequentialist ethics ultimately rely on certain underlying principles about what constitutes harm.

Writing Ethical Evaluations

When constructing an argument involving ethical evaluation, you must carefully unpack and justify the moral principles and philosophical assumptions underlying your position. You also need to recognize potential objections critics may raise based on alternate ethical perspectives. For instance, a consequentialist may object to a deontological argument by questioning whether following the rule really leads to the best real-world outcome. Respectfully engage with these differing viewpoints and explain why your ethical approach is more coherent, justifiable, or better addresses the nuances of the specific situation.

If you are making a consequentialist argument, you will also need to provide evidence for your causal claims; see the chapter on Arguments of Fact for more information about that.

Categorical Evaluations

In a categorical evaluation, you assess whether something is a good or bad example of its category. You are likely already familiar with this kind of argument! Whenever you read product reviews before you buy something, you're engaging with categorical evaluations. You also run into these when you read reviews of books, TV shows, movies, or video games.

The basic claim structure is: "X is a good/bad Y."

Examples:

> The Honda Civic is a good compact car.
> Amazon is a bad corporate citizen.

The X term (the Honda Civic, Amazon) is the **subject** of evaluation. The "good" or "bad" is the value term. And the Y term (compact car, corporate citizen) is the category. Categories can be quite broad (e.g. "institution," "product") or more specific (e.g. "compact sedan," "tech company"). The same thing can be evaluated across multiple relevant categories. You'll need to give careful thought to which category is most appropriate for your purposes. Although you don't have to explicitly compare the subject of your evaluation to others in the same category, that is implicitly what you are doing, so your category needs to be broad enough to contain more than just the one thing you are evaluating, but narrow enough that one could reasonably make comparisons across items in the same category.

Distinguishing Categorical Evaluations from Causal Claims

It's important to distinguish evaluative claims from causal claims about effects or consequences. For example, "social media is bad for you" is not a categorical evaluation because "for you" is not a coherent category to evaluate. An evaluative claim needs to have a clear subject category, such as "Scrolling social media is a poor way to spend leisure time." With this example, "way to spend leisure time" is a category. We know it's a category because we can easily identify other things that fit into it (reading, watching TV, sleeping, exercising, socializing, etc.). All of that aside, however, if your category is that abstract, it can be difficult to create a strong argument, especially if you're trying to shoehorn a causal argument into a categorical evaluation structure. You're often better off making a claim where the category is a bit more concrete and understandable.

The Criteria-Match Pattern

Categorical evaluations follow a criteria-match pattern:

- **Criteria:** Establish criteria for what constitutes a "good" example of the category. (Note that it's helpful to avoid thinking about your specific subject of evaluation when you do this! You'll want to create criteria that encompass all the possibilities for the category.)
- **Match:** Evaluate how well the subject matches those criteria

For example, criteria for a "good compact car" might include affordability, fuel efficiency, and safety ratings. You would then assess how well a particular model like the Civic meets those standards.

The criteria effectively function as the argument's warrants, so developing detailed, relevant criteria and being prepared to back those criteria is crucial.

When drafting:

- First, determine your ideal criteria for the category before considering the specific subject you are evaluating. List 4-7 criteria to complete the sentence "A good Y is/has . . ." (Yes, you will do criteria for a "good Y," even if your claim is ultimately going to be that your subject is a "bad Y.")
- Separately analyze how the subject matches each of these criteria.
- Prioritize and lead with the criteria that best support your overall claim. (If your claim is "X is a good Y," you will focus on the criteria that X matches well. If your claim is "X is a bad Y," you will focus on the criteria that X does not match well.)
- Set aside any criteria that don't match your claim to address separately in a rebuttal section (see the chapter on Argument Structures).

Criteria-Match and Toulmin

The criteria-match pattern aligns well with the Toulmin model of argument:

Claim: X is a good/bad [category]
Criteria = Warrants
Match analysis = Reasons

By establishing criteria first, you've essentially already mapped out the warrants underlying the reasons that will support your evaluative claim. Consider the previous example of "Amazon is a bad corporate citizen."

Some criteria for what make a good corporate citizen might be:

- A good corporate citizen effectively compensates for its impact on the environment.
- A good corporate citizen does not focus only increasing profits.
- A good corporate citizen engages in ethical business practices.
- A good corporate citizen treats employees fairly.

The match analysis for this might read:

- Amazon does not effectively compensate for its impact on the environment.
- Amazon focuses only on what improves profits.
- Amazon engages in unethical business practices.
- Amazon does not treat employees fairly.

If we approach this from a different direction by writing our claim and reasons as enthymemes, we can see how the criteria listed above are the same as the warrants generated by the enthymemes:

- Amazon is a bad corporate citizen because it doesn't effectively compensate for its impact on the environment.
    - A good corporate citizen effectively compensates for its impact on the environment.
- Amazon is a bad corporate citizen because it focuses only what improves profits.

    - A good corporate citizen does not focus only shareholders and increasing profits.
- Amazon is a bad corporate citizen because it engages in unethical business practices.
    - A good corporate citizen engages in ethical business practices.
- Amazon is a bad corporate citizen because it does not treat employees fairly.
    - A good corporate citizen treats employees fairly.

The advantage of starting with the criteria instead of the match is that you may identify criteria that aren't consistent with your argument. Very few things are entirely good or entirely bad, so acknowledging the good qualities in something bad, or vice versa, is important for a fully developed evaluation.

For example, what if one of my criteria is "A good corporate citizen contributes to important causes"? Amazon does do that, so that criterion contradicts my overall evaluation of them as a bad corporate citizen. I need to address that in my argument, but if I only brainstormed reasons Amazon is bad, I wouldn't have thought of it, and my argument would be weaker.

Related Writing Projects

- Categorical Evaluation Argument – Classical Structure

15.

ARGUMENTS OF POLICY

What Are Arguments of Policy?

Policy claims are assertions about what should (or should not) be done, in a very concrete sense. (Claims about what should or should not done purely in an ethical sense, as in "People shouldn't lie," are more properly classified as ethical evaluations.)

Policy arguments are also often called **problem-solution arguments** or **proposal arguments**. These alternative terms can be useful to help your remember that your argument must clearly lay out the problem that exists, and that the solution you suggest must be an actual proposal, not just a vague suggestion.

Writing Arguments of Policy

Arguments of policy truly combine everything you've learned about argumentation.

The first part of making a policy argument is convincing your readers that a problem exists and motivating them to want to solve that problem. People are naturally wary of change and prefer the status quo, so you'll want to make sure your argument fully establishes not just that the problem is real, but creates a sense of urgency to address the problem. Common strategies include:

The first part of making a policy argument is convincing your readers that a problem exists. You will marshal arguments of fact and value as needed to do this. Common strategies include:

1. Arguing that a particular situation has negative effects:
    - Present factual evidence and data that demonstrate the harmful consequences or impacts of the current situation.
    - Use causal reasoning to establish a clear link between the situation and the negative outcomes.
    - Highlight the ethical implications of these negative effects, such as violations of human rights, environmental degradation, or economic inequalities.
2. Arguing that a particular situation is unethical or immoral:
    - Appeal to widely accepted moral principles, values, or ethical frameworks to demonstrate that the current situation is inherently wrong or unjust.
    - Provide examples or case studies that illustrate how the situation violates these moral or ethical standards.
    - Utilize emotional appeals and vivid language to evoke a sense of moral outrage or indignation among the audience.
3. Presenting compelling narratives or personal stories:
    - Use anecdotes, testimonials, or real-life examples to humanize the problem and create an emotional connection with the audience.
    - Highlight the personal struggles, hardships, or injustices faced by individuals or communities affected by the problem.
4. Citing authoritative sources and expert opinions:

  - Reference studies, reports, or statements from credible organizations, think tanks, or subject matter experts to lend weight and credibility to the argument.
  - Use statistics, survey data, or research findings to quantify the magnitude or severity of the problem.

5. Comparing the current situation to historical examples or analogies:

  - Draw parallels between the present problem and past situations that were widely recognized as problematic or unjust.
  - Use historical examples to demonstrate the potential consequences of inaction or the benefits of addressing similar issues.

The next part is detailing your actual proposal. The more specific you can be, the better. Who should do what? When, where, and how should they do it? Be very careful not to use passive voice in your claim. "Automatic weapons should be banned" doesn't tell the reader who would be banning them or any details about what that ban would look like.

The final part of making a policy argument is explaining why your proposed solution is good; again, you will need to marshal arguments of fact and/or value. Most typically, this part of the argument will rely on causal arguments to establish the effects of your proposed action and/or comparison arguments showing how similar proposals have worked. You will need to address common criteria for evaluating a proposal:

- Efficacy – Will your proposal actually solve the problem? This involves demonstrating a clear causal link between the proposed action and the desired outcome.
- Feasibility – Is your proposal practical and realistic? This takes into account factors such as available resources, logistics, legal constraints, and potential obstacles to implementation.
- Cost – Is your proposal worth what it will cost? What are the financial,

time, and resource costs associated with the proposed solution? Additionally, potential unintended negative consequences should be considered and weighed against the expected benefits.

Not only do you need to address these criteria for your own proposal, but you also need to consider alternative proposals and how they compare to yours on each criterion.

Policy arguments can be affirmative, advocating for a specific action or policy to be implemented, or negative, arguing against a particular proposal or course of action. While negative policy arguments are less common, they should still be based on a clear understanding of the proposed policy or action being opposed and provide specific reasons and evidence for the opposition.

Related Writing Assignments

- Proposal Essay

16.

WRITING AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH REPORT

Empirical Research

Empirical research uses information gathered from **primary sources** to answer a research question. You may recall from reading about scholarly articles that empirical research reports are a major subgenre of scholarly article. Empirical research reports are also, essentially, a very specialized type of argument of fact.

Different disciplines engage in empirical research in slightly different ways; this chapter presents empirical research as it is typically addressed in the natural and social sciences. Scholars in fields like literature, art, philosophy, and history also conduct empirical research (primarily analyzing texts or other artifacts), but they often don't quite follow the standard structure that I describe in this chapter. However, you technically can use this structure for any type of empirical research; it just wouldn't be the conventional way it's done in the humanities.

Empirical Research Questions

Empirical research starts with a question that you want to answer and that can be answered empirically. (Refer back to the chapter on Arguments of Fact for more about empirical evidence.) You will probably start first with a broad topic or question and gradually narrow that question down as you consider the following issues:

- What are you able to find relevant, scholarly secondary sources about?
- What can you realistically accomplish with the time and other resources you have?
- What kind(s) of primary source data are you interested in collecting?

The remaining sections of the chapter walk you through the process of identifying and refining your research question, collecting your data, and writing up your final report. You'll probably go more or less in order, but keep in mind that it's very normal – and often necessary – to jump back and forth between steps.

Selecting a Research Question

A good first step to picking a good research question (called an RQ for short) is to just start by listing topics that are interesting to you. Be open-minded in this phase. Include things that you think are cool or interesting, that you're curious about, or that you may be already know a lot about. Once you have this list, pick the 3-4 ideas that you're most interested in pursuing. Don't worry yet about whether they'll actually work; odds are they'll need some refinement, no matter what. It is possible that none of your top 3-4 ideas will end up working out, in which case you can always come back to your larger list, but that's pretty uncommon.

As noted above, you will need to use scholarly sources to provide background and context for your research, so a good next step is a library search to see what's out there on these 3-4 topics. Your topics are probably broad, and you can use this search to help you narrow them down, too.

As you review the sources available on your topic, you should focus on recent scholarly articles, and more specifically on empirical research reports. Pay attention to the research questions they address and the methods they use, as you could potentially use these as models for your own work. You should also be looking for themes, or recurring ideas that pop up in multiple articles. These

themes should help you understand what areas of the topic are currently being explored by scholars.

As you work, jot down potential research questions that come to mind. You may find that a topic that started out as a favorite isn't really offering you any great ideas for empirical research, and that's fine. Hopefully, though, you end up with a list of at least few research questions that seem interesting to you.

Deciding on a Research Method

Your next step is to consider whether and how you can use primary research to answer these research questions. Your research method is how you plan to collect data from primary sources to answer your research question. What constitutes a primary source largely depends on what you are doing with the source. Primary source material is anything that provides *firsthand* evidence to answer a research question. It is distinct from the kinds of sources you are probably used to using, which are typically secondary sources that provide someone else's – usually an expert's – information, arguments, or analysis.

You collect primary source data directly, typically by **interviewing or surveying people**, by **designing and running experiments**, by **carefully observing settings or events**, or by **finding and examining artifacts or texts**.

The following examples illustrate the relationships among research questions, primary sources, and secondary sources. Note how, in every case, the primary source provides direct information to answer the research question, while the secondary sources may provide either other people's attempts to answer the same question or background information about the topic(s) involved.

- Research Question: How did Depression-era newspaper articles describe the economy?
  - Primary Sources: Depression-era newspaper articles
  - Secondary Sources: Books and articles about the economy, the

    Depression, and/or newspapers

- Research Question: How do college students feel about the college bookstore?
    - Primary Sources: College student ratings of their experiences with the bookstore (collected via survey) and/or college student comments about the bookstore (collected via interview or from online reviews)
    - Secondary Sources: Books and articles about college students, college bookstores, and/or customer satisfaction
- Research Question: How much faster are people at solving crossword puzzles when they are well-rested compared to when they are tired?
    - Primary Source: Data collected by observing and timing both well-rested and tired people solving crossword puzzles (experimental data)
    - Secondary Sources: Books and articles about rest and cognitive function and/or about crossword puzzles
- Research Question: How much time does the average shopper spend in the dollar section at Target?
    - Primary Source: Data collected from observing and timing people in the dollar section at Target
    - Secondary Sources: Books and articles about consumer behavior, story layout/design, and so on
- Research Question: What is the underlying message of the book *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen?
    - Primary Source: *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen
    - Secondary Sources: Books and articles about *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen, themes in Georgian novels, and literary analysis

Note that though it is technically possible for nonfiction articles or books about a topic to serve as primary source material, those scenarios are quite unusual. If you find yourself thinking, “I’m collecting data by reading articles about my topic,” that’s probably not primary research!

A clear idea of your method should incorporate answers to these questions:

- Who or what will you be collecting data from?
- Where, when, and how will you collect that data?

Troubleshooting Your Research Question and Method

There are few common pitfalls students run into at this point in planning their projects. Once you have a research question and method in mind, take a moment to evaluate your idea on the three key criteria described below: alignment, feasibility, and ethics.

Alignment

Students sometimes struggle to make a good "match" (also known as alignment) between their proposed research question and their planned primary source material. For example, you may wonder how having a family member with dementia affects people's family relationships, and then propose interviewing people who have family members with dementia. However, interviewing people doesn't tell you directly what the effects are; it only tells you what people *say* the effects are. People aren't always honest, unbiased, or accurate, even when describing their own lives. A more appropriate research question for this type of primary source data might be something like, "How do people who have family members with dementia describe the effects on their family relationships?" The difference is subtle, but important; the revised question is one that can actually be answered with information collected by interviewing these people.

Another common error is assuming that any data collected from interviews will always be considered primary source data. However, interviews can be secondary sources. If you interview someone about a topic simply because you want their expertise on it, you are using that person as a secondary source; it's not really any different from if you cited an article they wrote about the topic. Consider, for example, a scenario where your research question is, "What are the most common hurdles new nurses experience on the job?" You can certainly ask your nursing

faculty about this, but the question as written suggests that the most direct information would come from new nurses themselves. You would want to either revise the research question (to something like, "What do nursing faculty believe are the most common hurdles new nurses experience on the job?") *or* plan to just interview new nurses instead. (You could still interview experienced nurses, too, but you would either focus the interview on having them describe just their early experiences on the job or use their information as secondary source material.)

To evaluate the alignment of your planned research question and method, consider whether your planned primary source material truly represents the **most direct** way to find an accurate answer your research question. If it doesn't, either the research question or the method needs to be revised.

Feasibility

You also need to consider the constraints on your time and other resources. Many students have really ambitious project ideas that would be too big for professional researchers to take on, let alone for a project that will last only a few weeks. Be realistic about the time you have to invest in the project and carefully consider your access to any special tools or skills you might need to conduct the research as you're envisioning it.

Ethics

Because you're students and not conducting this research as professionals who intend to publish, you don't have to go through all of the training and paperwork that professional researchers do. Anyone who conducts research professionally is required to take ethics training and keep their certifications up to date, and they have to submit their research proposals to an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) for research involving animals, or to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research involving humans. The IACUC or IRB verifies that their planned research is safe and ethical and provides oversight to make sure the researcher doesn't violate any rules in the process of conducting research.

However, just because you're not required to jump through all of those hoops, you should still adhere to the ethical principles of conducting research. In fact, because you do not have the training that professional researchers do, you should be even more careful in some ways. Never do anything invasive or that might cause any distress to your research subjects (human or animal). Sometimes professional researchers have to do these things, but they are carefully trained in minimizing the harm, and they have to justify the need for such research. Your research will not meet that standard.

If you are collecting data involving people in any way, make sure your research plan adheres to the principles of:

- Informed Consent – Be sure to let people know what you are doing and why, and make sure they know they can opt out or change their minds, even if they previously said they would participate. If you plan to collect data from minors, you have a little bit of leeway if those minors are your classmates, but check with your instructor first to be sure; ethical guidelines for research involving minors are very strict.
- Privacy – Respect people's privacy. Ask permission to use their real names, to record audio or video, and be careful not to provide identifiable information when you report your results. Only conduct observations in public places.

If you are collecting data involving animals, make sure your research plan adheres to the principles of:

- Humane Care – Animals must be provided appropriate care and conditions.
- Noninvasive Procedures – Any procedures should be noninvasive and not cause the animal distress.

A good rule of thumb for animal research is whether you are doing something that might ordinarily be done in the course of normal animal care. For example,

I have had students who ran experiments on their own pets testing different methods of training. Trying out ways to train your pets is a perfectly normal thing to do, so I didn't have any ethical concerns about that project.

Conducting Background Research

Your next step is to start combing through scholarly sources on the topic so you can provide a brief literature review. (Note that literature reviews can also be written as stand-alone essays.) The literature review synthesizes other scholarly work on the topic to accomplish two main tasks:

- To explain the background/history of the topic
- To describe the current state of research on the topic
- When incorporated into your own empirical research report, to provide the justification for your specific research:
  - By showing that the research question is currently relevant/significant
  - By showing that previous studies on the specific question need replication, haven't been consistent, or do not exist
  - By providing theoretical frameworks or perspectives that guide your study

The literature review should critically analyze and summarize the key findings, theories, and methodologies from prior research related to your topic and question. It demonstrates your comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge base. The review should highlight gaps, inconsistencies, or areas that need further investigation, making a strong case for why your proposed study is important and fills a void. The literature review essentially lays the groundwork by situating your study within the broader scholarly conversation.

As you work on this background research, you may find that you need or want to revise your research question and/or method. That's expected and perfectly acceptable. Just make sure your new RQ and method are still aligned, feasible, and ethical.

Collecting Your Data

Be sure to allow plenty of time for this step; it often takes longer than you expect! In fact, you'll probably have to start collecting your data before you really feel ready to start collecting your data. If it's possible to do a trial run of your survey or interview questions or of your experimental design before you officially begin collecting data, I highly recommend doing so. It will give you a chance to iron out any little problems before they cause bigger issues later.

Writing the Report

Empirical research reports typically follow a structure that is often abbreviated as IMRD: Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion. In practice, the Conclusion is often consolidated with the Discussion, but I find it useful to think of it as a separate section. The contents of each of these sections are described below, but keep in mind that there are certainly variations on this format.

- **Introduction**
    - Opening paragraph establishes research area and its significance.
    - Multiple paragraphs of literature review follow.
    - The final paragraph of the introduction section identifies the research question of interest and connects it to the preceding literature review.
- **Methods**
    - Describes, in detail, the who, what, when, where, and how of data collection.
- **Results**
    - Presents the data that were collected.
- **Discussion**
    - Discusses how the data does/does not answer the research question.
    - Connects the study's findings back to the literature that was covered in the literature review.

- **Conclusion**
    - Suggests how study's findings could be applied.
    - Describes limitations of the study.
    - Identifies avenues for future research.

Documenting Your Sources

You will, of course, document your secondary sources in the usual manner. How you document your primary source material varies a bit depending on whether you are following MLA or APA guidelines, and what kind of primary research you conducted. The two tables below describe how to cite your primary research according to MLA (Table 1) and APA (Table 2).

Table 1

MLA Guidelines for Documentation of Primary Source Data

<table>
<tr><th>Type of Source</th><th>In-Text Citations</th><th>Works Cited</th></tr>
<tr><td>Documents or Media (TV shows, movies, songs, etc.)</td><td>Follow standard rules</td><td>Follow standard rules</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interviews</td><td>Follow standard rules. If using a pseudonym for the interviewee, be sure to indicate this in the text.</td><td>Cite interviewee (real name or pseudonym) and interview details as follows.

Lastname, Firstname. Type of interview. Date.

Example:
Doe, Jane. Phone interview. 4 Aug. 2022.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Survey Data</td><td colspan="2">Per MLA Style Center:

In a report on data collected from a survey you designed and distributed, clarify the data source in the body of the report instead of creating a works-cited-list entry for the survey. Be sure to explain in detail the methodology you used—that is, how you distributed the survey and collected and sorted responses. It’s also good practice to make the survey instrument available to readers, either by including it as an appendix to your report or by providing a link to it in an endnote. Some researchers even make their data sets available to readers, often in an Excel file.

You may want to anonymize your data in the report on your findings. There are two options for anonymizing survey responses: you can use generic language to report a finding (e.g., “one respondent commented …”), or you can use pseudonyms for respondents. If you decide to use pseudonyms, place a note at the first instance that indicates that the names of survey respondents have been changed to preserve their anonymity.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Experimental or Observational Data</td><td colspan="2">MLA does not provide guidance about citing one’s own experiments/observations, but presumably the statement above regarding raw data from surveys can be applied to this data as well.</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2

APA Guidelines for Documentation of Primary Source Data

<table>
<tr><th>Type of Source</th><th>In-Text Citations</th><th>References</th></tr>
<tr><td>Documents or Media (TV shows, movies, songs, etc.)</td><td>Follow standard rules</td><td>Follow standard rules</td></tr>
<tr><td>Interviews</td><td colspan="2">Per the APA Handbook (7th edition):

When quoting research participants, use the same formatting as for other quotations. . . . Because quotations from research participants are part of your original research, do not include them in the reference list or treat them as personal communications; state in the text that the quotations are from participants.

When quoting research participants, abide by the ethical agreements regarding confidentiality and/or anonymity between you and your participants. Take extra care to obtain and respect participants' consent to have their information included in your report. You may need to assign participants a pseudonym [or] obscure identifying information. (p. 278)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Survey Data</td><td colspan="2">Per Purdue OWL:

Since a survey you conducted yourself is not published elsewhere by someone else, you do not cite it in the same way you cite other materials. Instead, in your paper you describe your survey and make it clear that the data you're referring to is from the survey, usually by saying so in introductory sentences. In your paper, you should include a short overview of your survey method: whom the survey was administered to, how it was administered, how many responses you got, and what kind of questions you asked. You should include a copy of the survey instrument (the full set of questions asked) as an appendix to your paper. You do not need to include your survey in your reference list.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Experimental or Observational Data</td><td colspan="2">Because these would also be unpublished information used for your original research, they will not be cited. The APA Handbook (7th edition) does recommend including details that may "help readers understand, evaluate, or replicate the study" in an appendix if they "are relatively brief and easily presented in a print format" (p. 41).</td></tr>
</table>

Related Writing Projects

- Literature Review
- Empirical Research Report

17. FINDING YOUR OWN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY SOURCES

Secondary and Tertiary Sources

Most of the research you conduct for college assignments is secondary research. This means you are primarily seeking out sources about a topic, particularly those written by experts on the subject matter. The goal is to consult the existing body of knowledge and synthesize what others have discovered and analyzed through their research.

Except in a few specific circumstances, very few college assignments require the use of primary research, where you generate original data yourself through methods like experiments, surveys, interviews, or observations. Even when some primary sources are incorporated, such as historical documents, works of literature, or datasets, they are almost always analyzed and interpreted through the lens of secondary sources written by subject matter experts. You can read more about the distinction between primary and secondary sources, as well as how to locate, evaluate, and incorporate different source types, in the chapter on "Writing an Empirical Research Report." That chapter provides in-depth guidance on conducting original primary research for academic papers. For most college research assignments, however, the emphasis will be on critically reviewing the secondary sources – consulting the work of experts who have already studied your topic in depth. Your task is to synthesize what they have

found and contribute your own analysis and insights, rather than generating entirely new primary data yourself.

Secondary sources critically examine primary materials, put them into context, identify their significance, and situate them within broader theories and fields of study. Examples of secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, literature reviews, critiques, commentaries, and analytical reports. These sources digest primary information and provide value-added analysis, evaluation, and interpretation.

Reference works, like dictionaries and encyclopedias, are considered tertiary sources because they synthesize and summarize information from other sources to provide basic background information. You may use reference works, particularly as you're developing a sense of your topic and refining your ideas, but they rarely play a major supporting role in an academic essay. When they are cited, it's almost always to provide basic background information when introducing the topic.

Searching Your College Library Catalog

With so many materials available with a simple Google search, using your college library catalog might seem unnecessary, but it should *always* be your first stop for locating sources. The library has many benefits that aren't available to you when you search on your own, including:

- Access to subscription-only materials, including the full text of books and articles that you can access online
- Ability to request materials from other libraries at no charge
- Collections of sources that have already been vetted
- Focus on nonfiction and academic sources that are specific to student needs and interests
- Built-in tools to save, organize, and even cite your sources
- Actual humans who are there to help you do research

Not only is using the library a great way to save time and money, when your professors see that you are citing books and articles that clearly came from a college library rather than from a basic Internet search, they see that you understand the expectations of conducting academic research. Conversely, when your professors see that you have cited nothing but a few websites, they might question your academic maturity.

College libraries are designed to serve students, and they also have staff members who are experts in finding sources and who are there specifically to help you. Your college fees pay for those privileges, so use them!

How to Search a Library Catalog

Library catalogs work a little bit differently than internet search engines. They are not designed to parse full phrases or sentences as effectively, and rely more on precise "keyword" searches. You may need to experiment with different keyword combinations before finding the right terms to retrieve the most relevant results for your research topic.

You'll probably want to use the advanced search options in the library catalog, unless your topic is still quite broad. The advanced search allows you to enter multiple search terms simultaneously and combine them using Boolean operators like AND, OR, and NOT to refine and narrow your search in various logical ways. Using "AND" allows you to search two or more keywords at once, narrowing down the search, while "NOT" allows you to exclude irrelevant materials that might be cluttering your research results. You would use "OR" to search variations or synonyms of the same term, which can be particularly useful when you're not yet sure which term is most commonly used.

Be sure to take your time exploring and experimenting with the various search filters and limiters offered by the library catalog system. These can help further focus your results by criteria like publication date, language, material type, and more.

When you do find particularly relevant sources in the catalog that line up well with your research interests, take note of the "subject headings" or "subject terms" that the library has assigned to those sources. These standardized terms can provide an effective path for uncovering additional sources on the same concept. Using these subject terms as keywords in your subsequent searches, especially if your initial searches aren't retrieving many useful results, can greatly improve your search strategy. The catalog subject headings essentially represent a controlled vocabulary of terms that the library uses to categorize and group related materials together. Leveraging this vocabulary can tap into the full depth of resources the library has on your topic area.

It would be impossible to fully explain every tool available to you; the best way to learn is through experimentation, so don't be afraid to get in there and test it out.

What You'll Find in the Library Catalog

The library catalog contains not only information about all of the physical items that are held in the library, but also information and links to the vast majority of the library's digital items, meaning that in many cases, you can find and read your sources without ever leaving home.

Physical Items

- Books
- Print journals and magazines
- Newspapers
- DVDs and CDs
- Other multimedia materials

Online Databases

- Electronic journals and ebooks
- Newspapers and magazines in digital format

- Streaming videos and audio
- Primary source materials (historical documents, datasets, etc.)
- Subject-specific research databases (e.g. legal, medical, scientific)

The online databases provide access to a vast array of scholarly resources, both owned by the library and subscribed to from third-party providers. Many allow full-text searching and downloading of journal articles, ebooks, reports and more. The library typically organizes databases by broad disciplinary categories as well as specific subject areas to aid in discovery. With excellent search tools, the online databases exponentially expand the materials available beyond just the library's physical collections.

A Pete's Portal search will search all of these materials at once, and if you log in, you'll also be able to save the results of your searches, so you can easily come back to them later.

Important Limiters and Labels

The library catalog and the individual databases will allow you to limit your search results to "peer-reviewed" sources. Most of the time, you'll want to do this because academic work is expected to lean heavily on scholarly journal articles. Only scholarly journals and articles published in them will have that "peer-reviewed" label. However, you should be aware that not everything published in a scholarly journal is necessarily a peer-reviewed article; scholarly journals occasionally also include editorials, book reviews, or letters to the editor. Fortunately, these usually include a label in the title to let you know that they're one of these other types of articles.

The library catalog will also indicate whether sources are books, ebooks, magazine articles, newspaper articles, or other types of sources. This labeling can be really useful when you are evaluating your sources and when you are figuring out how to cite them!

18.

EVALUATING SOURCES

Principles of Source Evaluation

No matter what kind of source you are using, you can apply several basic principles to evaluate the source and determine whether and how you should use it. One common mnemonic device for these principles is CRAAP:

- Currency – Is the information up-to-date? For your topic, how recent does your information need to be?
- Relevance – Is the information truly applicable to your topic? Is it at an appropriate level (not too elementary or too technical) for what you need?
- Authority – What are the author's credentials on the topic?
- Accuracy – Is the information supported by evidence? Has the information been reviewed or fact-checked? Is the information consistent with what you find in other sources?
- Purpose – What is the intention behind the source? What political, ideological, cultural, or personal biases are likely to have influenced the information being provided?

Although these basic principles can apply to any type of source, it can be very helpful to also understand the main types of sources you're likely to encounter. First, knowing the type of source can serve as clues to your source evaluation. Scholarly sources, for example, are going to be considered more credible than non-scholarly sources. Second, knowing the type of source can give you some direction about specific red flags to look for when you're evaluating that kind of source. For instance, when you know you have an article from a public affairs

magazine, you'll know to be extra conscious of political biases. Finally, different types of sources follow different documentation rules, and you'll need to be familiar with the basic format for each of the most common types of sources. You can find out more about that in the chapter on Integrating Material from Sources.

A note about bias: The word "bias" has a negative connotation that I believe is a bit unfair. Many novice researchers believe that the goal is to find "unbiased" sources, but most experienced researchers will argue that such a thing is impossible. We all have beliefs, values, experiences, purposes, and limitations that make it impossible for us to provide a complete and unbiased perspective on a given topic, especially when we are examining complex issues. Even questions in the natural sciences, which may seem straightforward to answer objectively, typically depend on assumptions that may be widely accepted, but always remain open to revision as new evidence is discovered. Thus, instead of classifying sources as biased or not, I think it is more useful to consider what kinds of biases influence the source, how they influence the source, and how honest and clear the source is about those biases. Of course, this entire perspective is itself a demonstration of bias. My belief that bias is inevitable is certainly not shared by everyone! I'm just pretty skeptical of anyone who claims to have the one true perspective on any topic, and I think I'm right to be.

Understanding How Sources Vary by "Type"

The following section focuses solely on non-fiction sources, as you would not be using fiction for secondary research. It also focuses on the two most common categories within which you will be finding sources: books and periodicals. Of course, there are many other types of sources out there, but books and periodicals remain the most typical in academic work. Because library databases contain the full text of many books and periodical articles, you can often conduct your research entirely online without ever actually citing a website as a source.

Whether a source is considered **scholarly** or not is probably the most important distinction to note. Scholarly sources are the preferred sources for academic work, and you will often be required to use only scholarly sources or for a certain number or percentage of your sources to be scholarly. Both books and articles can be scholarly, but (annoyingly) how you determine whether a book is scholarly is different form how you determine whether an article is scholarly.

Scholarly sources are preferred, but there are credible non-scholarly sources out there, too. Be careful not to assume the terms "scholarly" and "credible" are equivalent; it's better to think of scholarly sources as a very specific subset of the much larger pool of credible sources.

The remainder of this chapter explores the differences between books and periodical articles, how to determine whether each is considered scholarly, and how to evaluate the credibility of non-scholarly sources.

Books

With so many resources available online, defining exactly what counts as a "book" is more complicated than it seems like it ought to be. A basic definition is something like, "a work of substantial length that is not updated more often than once per year." Though books may be republished in new editions, for most books, there is no set schedule for how often or when that will happen; it just depends on when updates to the text are needed. The only exceptions to that are reference books, some of which are updated annually. Another distinction is that each new issue of a periodical will contain all new content, whereas books retain most of their content from edition to edition, with just the relevant sections updated or re-organized as needed.

One great aspect of doing research through a library catalog and in subscription databases is that they will often label the type of source for you! If the catalog

describes the work as a "Book" or "eBook," you can feel pretty confident that's what it is.

Books by Publication Category

Although the library will let you know that you indeed are looking at a book, you will still need to be able to identify the exact type of book you have. Different types of books have different degrees of credibility, and some types of books will have limitations on how you will be to use them.

When we divide nonfiction books into categories, we look at four variables:

- What type of publisher published the book?
    - If the book was published a university or other academic press, we'll consider it "scholarly." Note that you might have to do a little online sleuthing to find out details about the publisher!
- What is the intended purpose of the book?
- Who is the intended audience of the book?
- What are the credentials of the author?

Based on the publisher type, we will divide our non-fiction books into two broad categories: **scholarly** or **non-fiction trade.** We will then further divide the books based on their purpose, intended audience, and author credentials.

Scholarly books include three sub-categories: reference books, textbooks, and "other" scholarly books. In all three categories, the **defining feature that makes it a scholarly book is that it is published by a university or other academic press**. If the book is *not* published by a university or other academic press, it will automatically go into the "non-fiction trade" category.

The other features of scholarly books break down as follows:

- **Reference Books**
    - Purpose: Used for readers to look up specific pieces of factual

information; not intended to be read straight through
    - Audience: May be general audience, as with a basic desk dictionary or general encyclopedia, or may be specific, as with a specialized work like *Black's Law Dictionary* or the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*
    - Author: Expert
    - How to identify: Purely informational; often organized alphabetically by topic or in some other way that indicates that readers aren't reading it straight through; title may contain words like dictionary, encyclopedia, atlas, or almanac
- **Textbooks**
    - Purpose: Used to teach students on a particular topic
    - Audience: Students
    - Author: Expert
    - How to identify: Often contains exercises and assignments; often addresses students directly ("you")
- **Other**
    - Purpose: Presents an academic argument, theory, or research
    - Audience: Other experts
    - Author: Expert
    - How to identify: In-depth and highly technical; documents sources extensively; does not demonstrate characteristics of reference books or textbooks

All three of these categories are perfectly fine for you to use in academic work, but they aren't all equally good, particularly when it comes to reference books or textbooks. If you are using reference books, you should try to use the more specialized kinds rather than those targeted at a general audience. If you use a textbook, the higher the level of student it's for, the better; definitely avoid using textbooks for students below college level.

Non-Fiction Trade Books

Everything else will fall under the category of "non-fiction trade" (AKA "mass market") books. Technically, publishers distinguish between those two terms, but they are similar enough for us to use interchangeably here. All of these books are intended to be sold for profit, hence the terms "trade" and "market." The audience for non-fiction trade books tends to be fairly broad, especially as compared to scholarly books. Although most non-fiction trade books aren't ideal to use, if you find one that is written by an expert, is targeted at an audience of educated adults, and doesn't have something sketchy about its apparent purpose, it is probably acceptable to use for academic work, though still not as good as finding a scholarly source instead. If you feel like the book is trying to sell the audience something (whether that's a product or an idea), make the author famous, or otherwise manipulate people in some way, definitely don't use it!

Edited Collections: An Important Aside

One kind of book you may run into is what is called an "edited collection." Edited collections contain multiple works written by various authors, all collected into one volume. Sometimes these works have been reprinted from other publications; if that's the case, you'll want to evaluate based on the *original* publication information, not based on the edited collection. (You will also need to cite these a bit differently from other types of books!)

Periodicals

Periodicals include magazines, newspapers, and scholarly journals. We call them periodicals because they are published periodically; new versions come out on a regular schedule, whether that's daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or something else. Each new version is called an "issue," and it typically contains all new content, distinct from previous issues. All of the issues from a given year are

a "volume." Thus, a periodical with quarterly issues will have four issues in a volume, while a periodical with weekly issues will have 52 issues in a volume.

Another feature that's common across periodicals is that they collect content by different authors. Periodicals contain **articles**, which are different pieces written by different people, and then these pieces are reviewed by the editors of the periodical, arranged in some way, and then published. When you cite something from a periodical, you're nearly always going to cite a specific article from a specific issue of a specific periodical. You'll want to keep that in mind so you use the correct terminology and don't do something like refer to the scholarly article you're citing as a "journal." Some journals have been publishing dozens of articles annually for well over a hundred years, so it's important to understand that each article represents just one small slice of what a periodical has published!

When you're identifying the specific type of periodical you have, it's easier if you're using the library catalog. Many catalogs and databases distinguish between newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals in their listings. Some databases also have a specific label just for trade magazines, although sometimes they call them "trade journals" or "trade publications" instead.

Academic Journals

Academic journals, also called scholarly journals, are where scholars and researchers publish their work. These are where you find **scholarly articles.** Scholarly articles have been peer reviewed, which means they have been checked by a panel of experts on the subject and received their approval prior to publication. Most of the articles in an academic journal will have been peer reviewed.

Library catalogs and databases generally make it easy to tell when you have an article from an academic journal by including a label such as "peer-reviewed" or "academic journal" on the listing. However, although most of the contents of academic journals are peer-reviewed, many of these periodicals also publish editorials, books reviews, and letters to the editor, and the library catalog might

label these articles as peer-reviewed incorrectly because of the journal they're published in. In fact, these are not peer reviewed and should generally not be used for academic work. Luckily, these are typically clearly labeled with a descriptive word prior to the title, as in "Editorial: 2013 in Review" or "Book Review: The Rise of Corporate Feminism." When you see a label like that, that's your cue that that particular article is an exception and will not count as a scholarly source.

Understanding and Reading Scholarly Articles

Most people do not read scholarly articles in their entirety, at least not to begin with. Following are some tips and tricks to help you skim scholarly articles efficiently, so you know which you want to keep and which you want to toss out. Most scholarly articles open with an abstract. The abstract is a summary of the text, and by itself, may provide you enough information to categorize your article (or even to decide you don't need or want it). Always start by reading the abstract!

We can further categorize scholarly articles into four common types: empirical research reports, interpretive analyses, literature reviews, and theoretical articles. These divisions can be blurry, but knowing what category your article most closely resembles will help you know how to efficiently approach it.

- **Empirical Research Reports** – these articles are most common in the natural and social sciences. They report the results of the authors' own study. They are pretty consistently divided into Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion sections. As a reader, you can save yourself a lot of time by reading *only* the Introduction and the Discussion sections. Start by reading the last paragraph of each, and then backtrack if you need more context. The Methods and Results are almost always unnecessary for anyone who is not aiming to replicate the research themselves.
- **Interpretive Analyses** – these articles are most common in law and the humanities. They argue for a particular interpretation of a text. Although they do not have a standard pattern of organization like empirical research reports do, you can generally apply a similar process. Read the

introduction, skim the article to get a sense of how the sections are divided up (if they are at all), and then read the end. Figure out from there if you need to backtrack and read more.

- **Literature Reviews** – these articles are common across all disciplines, but most common in the natural and social sciences. They summarize, synthesize, and evaluate the research that has been done on a given topic, usually with a goal of identifying areas where more research is still needed. (You may also see that empirical research reports often contain a literature review section, which works to show how the study the authors conducted meets a need.) These can be a fantastic source of information to provide an overview of the current state of academic research on a particular topic.
- **Theoretical Articles** – these articles are common across all disciplines. They discuss and often make an argument about a theory or theories. They may be arguing that an accepted theory is not accurate, that a new theory is valuable, and/or proposing a new theory or synthesis of theories. You'll probably want to skip these articles entirely, as they are mainly useful only for someone who is very advanced in a particular field.

You are likely to find some articles that don't fit neatly into any of the above categories, and that's fine, too. Remember that the principles of closed-form writing hold true. The introduction should let you know what to expect from the text, and from there, you can read even just the first sentence of each paragraph to construct a basic outline of its ideas.

Everything Else: Commercial (For-Profit) Periodicals

For periodicals, everything that isn't from an academic journal will fit into one of the commercial periodical categories, as described below. Some of these types of sources are better than others, but regardless, for academic work, you should use articles from commercial periodicals sparingly.

Newspapers, News Magazines, and Public Affairs Magazines

Newspapers primarily contain relatively short articles about current events. They're usually divided into sections, so you might find World News, U.S. news, local news, politics, business, et cetera, and they also contain opinion sections with editorials and columns. These might include things like advice columns, horoscopes, and movie reviews. Because the articles are often not in-depth, newspaper articles are not commonly used in academic work except potentially for background information.

News magazines and public affairs magazines are fairly similar to each other and can be difficult to distinguish between. News magazine articles are a bit longer than newspaper articles, but typically are not extremely long, and they usually come out a little less often than a newspaper does. Examples of news magazines would be *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Week*, *Christian Science Monitor, National Journal*, *U.S. News and World Report*.

Public affairs magazines typically have much longer and more highly researched articles. They're still typically about current social and political issues, often analyzing these topics with a particular political slant, and they also usually contain other features like book reviews, movie reviews, humor columns. Some of them also include fiction. Examples of these would include *The New Yorker*, *National Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *Commonweal*, and *Congressional Quarterly*. Because these works are often very in-depth, they are more commonly cited in academic work than newspaper or news magazine articles.

When you're evaluating your news and public affairs sources, keep in mind that national and international publications generally have strong fact checking. They do not want to risk being sued, so their fact checking departments are primarily focused on correcting errors that might lead to lawsuits. It's not as high a level of editorial review as you would find with a scholarly source, but it is still better than something that has no review at all.

You should also be aware of your source's reputation and political bias. The website mediabiasfactcheck.com is pretty good to determine a source's reputation and its typical bias. Keep in mind that sources can be biased without being untruthful, and a source having a clear bias doesn't mean you can't use it; it just means you have to be cautious about how you use it. If you find a source that you like, but you find that it's strongly leaning left or right, try to find a source on the other side of the spectrum on the same topic. That's going to improve your ethos by showing your lack of bias in your research, and it will probably expand your understanding of the issue as well. The table below provides an overview of some popular public affairs sources with their typical political leaning; keep in mind, though, that the political biases of publications change over time, vary across different authors, and are somewhat open to interpretation.

Left/ Liberal	**Center/Moderate**	**Right/ Conservative**
Harper's	*Atlantic Monthly*	*American Spectator*
Mother Jones	*Commentary*	*Fortune*
The Nation	*Commonweal*	*National Review*
The New Yorker	*The Economist*	*Reader's Digest*
Salon	*Foreign Affairs*	*Reason*
Sojourners	*New Republic*	*Weekly Standard*

Trade Magazines

Trade magazines, also known as trade journals or trade publications, are written for people working in a particular profession or trade. These can be good resources, but it's unlikely in most cases that you'll run into these on your topics that you're researching. Examples of these would include magazines like

Advertising Age, *Chemical and Engineering News*, *Architectural Digest*. In some ways, they may seem similar to academic journals because they are so focused on a particular specialty, but the contents are not peer reviewed.

Niche Magazines

Usually niche magazines are written for general audiences with a particular interest, so these are the magazines you see on the stands at the store, *Vogue*, *Car and Driver*, *People*, et cetera. You should not use articles from niche magazines in academic work.

19.

INTEGRATING MATERIAL FROM SOURCES

Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing

As you write, you'll want to provide specifics from your sources. You may, for example, want to refer to findings from a study that support your claim, refer to an expert who agrees with you, or even quote someone whose ideas you plan to critique. To do this well, you must integrate source material into your own work.

You have three main options when you're thinking about how to integrate material from your sources. You can summarize the material, you can paraphrase the material, or you can quote the material.

For all three, no matter what, you still have to document your sources. One area where students sometimes are confused is they believe if they're summarizing or paraphrasing, they don't need to document the source. They feel like they should only document if they're using the source's exact words. That is not in the case. And that is dangerous because that can lead you into academic misconduct or accidental plagiarism.

Even though you always have to document your sources when you use them, you'll need to make thoughtful choices about when it's best to quote, paraphrase, or summarize.

When to Quote

When you quote, you use the author's exact words in your essay. Perhaps because

it's so easy to just copy and paste, most student writers quote too often and use quotes that are too long; you really want to quote sparingly. A rule of thumb I was taught is to aim for no more than 10% of your essay to consist of quoted material. Are there exceptions to that rule? Absolutely. But keeping that in the back of your mind should help you remember that quotes need to earn their place in your essay.

You should only quote material in these specific circumstances:

- If you need the voice of the author to add credibility to the testimony
- If the language or the word choices are particularly striking or important
- If you're planning to actually discuss or analyze the language that they used

When you do quote, be sure to quote only the relevant portions. You can integrate quoted phrases or clauses into your own sentences to improve the flow and avoid having to quote extraneous words or phrases from the original. You can also use an ellipsis (the three dots in a row) to omit words or phrases from the sentence, as long as doing so doesn't change the meaning.

When to Paraphrase

Most of the time, you should be paraphrasing. When you paraphrase, you identify a specific passage from the source, and you relate it in your own words. A good paraphrase is different from the original in both word choice and in sentence structure; don't fall into the trap of using a thesaurus just to replace a few key words.

You should paraphrase:

- If you want to use some information from the source, but the exact wording is not particularly important.
- If the language of the original source is too complicated, and you need to clarify it so that your audience will understand.
- If you want to incorporate a source's specific argument without disrupting

the flow of your own language.

These three occasions represent the vast majority of circumstances in which you will integrate material from a source, so naturally, paraphrasing will be the most commonly used of your three options.

When to Summarize

Sometimes the entire main idea of the source is relevant to your discussion, and you can't point to a single specific passage in the source that you're referring to. Instead, you need to present a short version of the source's entire main argument or point.

You would also summarize when you need to introduce a text before getting into a more detailed analysis of it, like when writing a Response Essay, a Rhetorical Analysis, or some kind of interpretive argument (see the chapter on Writing Arguments of Fact).

The chapter on Reading Well provides additional information about writing summaries.

Source Integration

In addition to choosing appropriately whether to quote, paraphrase, or summarize, you'll need to **integrate** your source material effectively.

When integrating sources, follow the sandwich rule. Your own material should be on either side of anything from a source. The source material is the filling; your voice, interpretation, and commentary are the bread.

Specifically, do not open a paragraph with source material. First, introduce the topic or point in a way that transitions from the previous content. Then, use an **attributive tag** (also known as a **signal phrase**) to present the summary,

paraphrase, or quote. Afterward, explain how the source material relates to your paragraph's point and/or overall thesis using at least one or two sentences.

Attributive tags/signal phrases are ways to introduce source material, so it doesn't just appear out of nowhere. Most commonly, the consist of the author's last name plus a verb, like "Hawkins argues," but another common version is the phrase "According to." In academic writing, these almost always appear *before* the source material, unlike journalistic and fiction writing, which sometimes place them after a quote.

Note: You should **always** use an attributive tag when **quoting a source**. For paraphrases or summaries, a parenthetical citation alone may suffice, but quotes appearing without introduction are likely to confuse readers.

Attributive tags serve multiple purposes. First and foremost, they prepare the reader for what they are about to encounter; remember, academic writing doesn't like surprises! Additionally, they can smooth the transition between your language and the source material, especially for quotes, where the author's style of writing may be very different from your own. Finally, they offer you a chance to frame the source material to support your rhetorical purpose. You can include details about the author or publication as a way of illustrating (or diminishing) the source's credibility, or use the attributive tag to indicate the source's relationship to your argument or to other sources. You can see examples of all of these at the end of this chapter.

Source Documentation

Finally, you'll want to be sure that you're documenting your source material correctly. Proper documentation is a tool to help you avoid plagiarism. A lot of plagiarism is accidental because students don't understand how to document sources appropriately. Accidental plagiarism is called **academic misconduct**, and you can still get in trouble for it, even though you didn't mean to do it!

To avoid plagiarism, you'll need to ensure that these items are addressed:

1. Make it clear to readers when you've obtained ideas or words from someone else.
2. Distinguish your words from those written by others (using quotation marks or block formatting for long quotes).
3. Allow readers to identify whose ideas or words you're using.
4. Provide enough information for readers to easily locate the original source.

As long as you meet those four requirements, you'll be safe from accidental plagiarism. However, you'll still want to refer to an appropriate style guide to understand exactly *how* to meet those requirements in accordance with academic conventions.

The two most commonly used academic style guides are probably *The MLA Handbook* and *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. You may recognize these by the shorthand teachers often use to refer to them: MLA and APA. If you've ever had a teacher say something like, "Use MLA," that means "Follow the rules in *The MLA Handbook*."

MLA stands for Modern Language Association, and, as you've probably guessed from the title of the book, APA stands for American Psychological Association. Both of these groups are "professional organizations" with members who work in those fields, and they publish style guides on writing, formatting essays, and documenting sources. The idea is for everyone in a particular field to use the same formatting style for consistency. MLA is commonly used in the humanities like English, languages, art, and philosophy. APA is commonly used in the social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and political science. Depending on your intended field, you may ultimately use a different style guide in the classes related to your major, but most classes on this campus allow you to follow MLA, APA, or both. However, APA is the most popular system here, and if you're going into a health-related field, it's the one you'll be expected to use.

These style guides are updated occasionally, typically around every 5-7 years, so it's also important to be sure you're using the most current edition of the style guide. The following section provides an overview of the basics, but you'll want

to ensure you know how to access more detailed guidance. You can usually buy used copies of the actual handbooks pretty cheaply online, but if that doesn't work for you, most libraries (including our college library) will have copies on hand, either in the Reference section or on reserve at the circulation desk. You can also find good help online, although you need to make sure the resources are accurate and up-to-date.

Whatever system you use, it's important to be consistent with it; don't mix and match rules from different systems in the same paper!

Documentation Basics

Both MLA and APA require two parts:

1. A list of complete citations for all sources used. This list appears on the final page(s) of the essay. It's called the Works Cited in MLA, and it's called the References in APA. (Both MLA and APA have you list your sources in alphabetical order by author's last name, use a hanging indent, and double-space.)
2. In-text citations wherever sources are referenced. In-text citations can be in the form of attributive tags/signal phrases (APA calls these "narrative citations"), parenthetical citations, or combinations of both.

You will find many online resources to help you create the complete citations for your Works Cited or References page, including tools built in to the OSU-OKC library catalog and databases. Although these tools are not 100% reliable, they are generally pretty accurate, especially if you are citing a common type of a source like a scholarly journal article or a book. That said, it's always up to you to double-check that these citations are correct before you use them; what you put in your own work is always your responsibility. Both the MLA and APA handbooks offer explicit guidance and lots of examples, and you can find plenty of information online as well. The examples later in the chapter illustrate three of

the most common types of citations: a scholarly journal article, an article from a website, and a book.

The in-text citations are a little trickier, and we don't yet have any reliable way for computers to create them for you. (Microsoft Word has a built-in system for creating citations, but it's pretty inaccurate!) Here are the basics:

- MLA in-text citations require:
    - Author's last name (if no author, use title of source)
    - Page number of passage being quoted *or* paraphrased (if no page numbers, omit)
- APA in-text citations require:
    - Author's last name (if no author, use title of source)
    - Year of publication (if no year is available, use n.d.)
    - Page number of passage being quoted (if no page number, use paragraph number and/or section title)

As long as you include the basic information as described above, you should be safe from accidental plagiarism. However, in-text citations do have certain expectations for how to present this information in your essay, and following those conventions is an important way to show you should be taken seriously. It's also helpful for readers when citation information is consistently formatted across various sources; there's no guessing about what the author meant or why they did something a particular way. The sections below provide examples illustrating how to format this information in the most common variations you're likely to encounter. However, everyone runs into something unusual eventually; that's when you should refer to the relevant handbook, if possible, or check reliable online resources like *Purdue OWL*.

One Final Note: *Et Al.*

Technically, this isn't really a documentation basic, but you will see the abbreviation *et al.* ALL THE TIME in citations. It is short for the Latin phrase *et alii,* which means "and others." Both MLA and APA use it frequently when

there are multiple authors, although their exact rules vary. It can be helpful to mentally substitute the English version "and others" whenever you use it to help you remember that 1) it's plural and 2) it's a necessary part of acknowledging that the first author listed didn't do all the work.

When you use it, remember:

- et is a whole word, so there's no period after it
- al. is an abbreviation, so there is a period after it
- you don't need any punctuation before it
- punctuate after it like you normally would, even if it looks weird

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Putting It All Together

As examples, the following sections use these **entirely fabricated sources and quotes**:

> "Margolin's latest poetry collection is a true tour de force; the combined use of vivid imagery and evocative language stirs the senses and transports readers into a world of startling beauty. Seldom do words on a page conjure such sublime experience." -Found in paragraph 1 of an undated online review by critic Sophia Hawkins

> "For centuries, the Earth's ecosystems maintained an intricate equilibrium. The delicate balance of nature has been disrupted, potentially with catastrophic consequences for all life on Earth. If current trends continue unabated, scientists warn, we are on a path towards mass extinction events." -Found on p. 128 of a 2016 scholarly article by Drs. Jane Dorey, Daniel Beaumont, and Isabella Prentice

> "With the benefit of hindsight, all the warning signs were there. The localized conflicts following the drought created a perfect storm of

> circumstances, each more volatile than the last. Tensions mounted with every provocation until the powder keg inevitably ignited." -Found on p. 12 of a 2018 book by Henry Winslow and Charlotte Bellamy

I used AI to fabricate the topics and publication details of these texts, as well as the quotes and paraphrases, though I did edit them in various ways. (I'm trying not to be too concerned that one of these imaginary texts is about World War III!)

MLA Full Citations

Below are the full MLA 9th edition citations for the above (again, completely fake) sources. Take a moment to skim through them. What information can you identify about these sources from the citations?

> Dorey, Jane, et al. "Correlation Between Anthropogenic Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Rising Global Temperatures: A Statistical Analysis." *Journal of Climate Science*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2016, pp. 127-156. *ProQuest*, http://doi.org/10.5555/12345678.
>
> Hawkins, Sophia. "Poetry to Stir the Soul: A Review of Vivid Imagery by Julia Margolin." *LitReviews.com*, 22 Sept. 2021, www.litreviews.com/margolin-vivid-imagery.
>
> Winslow, Henry, and Charlotte Bellamy. *The Calamity Years: How Famine Sparked the Third World War*. Penguin Books, 2018.

A few features to note:

- When a source has more than two authors, a full MLA citation lists the first author, followed by the abbreviation et al.
- Titles are presented in "title case" – proper nouns, the first word, last word, and "main" words in the title are all capitalized.
- Titles of short works, like articles, are in quotation marks.

- Titles of long works, like books, and works that contain other works, like websites or journals, are in italics.

MLA In-Text Citations

Quotes

When discussing the impact of climate change, climate researchers Jane Dorey et al. note that "the delicate balance of nature has been disrupted, potentially with catastrophic consequences for all life on Earth" (128).

In her review, Sophia Hawkins argues that Margolin's use of "vivid imagery and evocative language . . . transports readers into a world of startling beauty."

Winslow and Bellamy describe the events leading up to the war as "a perfect storm of circumstances, each more volatile than the last" (12).

Paraphrases

When examining the effects of climate change, the researchers Jane Dorey et al. assert that human activities have thrown the natural world out of equilibrium, possibly leading to disastrous ramifications across all ecosystems (128).

Human activities have thrown the natural world out of equilibrium, possibly leading to disastrous ramifications across all ecosystems (Dorey et al. 128).

In her critique, reviewer Sophia Hawkins contends that Margolin effectively uses description and emotionally charged words.

Margolin has been recognized for effectively using description and emotionally charged words (Hawkins).

The historians Henry Winslow and Charlotte Bellamy characterize the series of events preceding the war as an escalating cascade of incidents (12).

The series of events preceding the war as an escalating cascade of incidents (Winslow and Bellamy 12).

Summaries

In her review of Julia Margolin's latest poetry collection, critic Sophia Hawkins praises the poet's masterful use of descriptive language to transport readers into lushly rendered sensory worlds. Hawkins also highlights how Margolin connects these sensory and embodied encounters to more abstract experiences like grief and disappointment, stirring the emotions and imaginations of readers in profound ways. Overall, Hawkins deems the collection a stunning achievement that cements Margolin's reputation as one of the foremost poets of her generation.

Jane Dorey et al.'s research paper presents a rigorous statistical analysis examining the correlation between human-caused greenhouse gas emissions and increases in global temperatures. Analyzing decades of data, their study finds greater than 99% confidence that rising emissions have directly contributed to the steady climb in average temperatures worldwide. The authors assert that these findings provide irrefutable evidence of the deleterious impact of human activity on the planet's delicate ecology and climate systems. They conclude by underscoring the urgency of enacting policies to rapidly reduce emissions to mitigate potential catastrophic consequences.

In their historical account *The Calamity Years*, Henry Winslow and Charlotte Bellamy chronicle how a series of environmental disasters and ensuing famines in the early 21st century ultimately sparked an escalating chain of conflicts that erupted into World War III. They depict how severe

droughts, unprecedented wildfires, and crop failures triggered mass starvation, societal unrest, and a collapse of global food supply chains. According to Winslow and Bellamy, as nations grew desperate, tensions flared and volatile incidents set off retaliatory acts of violence between major powers, unraveling longstanding treaties and peace accords and finally igniting the most devastating global conflict in human history.

A few features to note:

- With MLA, it's typical to use the author's full name the first time you include them in an attributive tag, and only after that to use their last name. It's also acceptable to just use the last name the whole time. Never include a first name in a parenthetical citation, though!
- When two authors are listed, they are both included in every attributive tag or parenthetical citation, and their names are given in the same order every time.
- The abbreviation et al. is considered part of the author credit for sources with 3+ authors, so it's always included in attributive tags and parenthetical citations. Note that it means "and others," so it changes the verb you should use in an attributive tag. It can help to remember that "Name et al." = "they."
- Page numbers are not labeled (for example, with a p.). With MLA, if you have a number, it's a page number unless otherwise noted, so a label is unnecessary.
- Pay close attention to where and how punctuation is and isn't used in and around the parenthetical citations. Those details are part of the "rules"!

APA Full Citations

Below are the full APA 7th edition citations for the above (again, completely

fake) sources. Take a moment to skim through them. What information can you identify about these sources from the citations?

> Dorey, J., Beaumont, D., & Prentice, I. (2016). Correlation between anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and rising global temperatures: A statistical analysis." *Journal of Climate* Science, *42*(3), 127-156. http://doi.org/10.5555/12345678
>
> Hawkins, S. (2021, Sept. 22). *Poetry to stir the soul: A review of* Vivid Imagery *by Julia Margolin*. LitReviews.com, https://www.litreviews.com/margolin-vivid-imagery.
>
> Winslow, H., & Bellamy, C. (2018). *The calamity years: How famine sparked the Third World War*. Penguin Books.

A few features to note:

- When a source has multiple authors, a full APA citation lists them all (up to 20 of them, anyway – if you have more than 20, that's something for you to look up yourself!).
- Titles are presented in "sentence case" – only proper nouns and the first word of title and subtitle are capitalized.
- Quotation marks are not used around titles of any kind.
- Except when citing a website, short works are plain (no italics or special formatting) and long works/containers are in italics.

APA In-Text Citations

Quotes

> When discussing the impact of climate change, climate researchers Dorey et al. (2016) note that "the delicate balance of nature has been disrupted, potentially with catastrophic consequences for all life on Earth" (p. 128).

In her review, Hawkins (n.d.) argues that Margolin's use of "vivid imagery and evocative language . . . transports readers into a world of startling beauty" (para. 1).

Winslow and Bellamy (2018) describe the events leading up to the war as "a perfect storm of circumstances, each more volatile than the last" (p. 12).

Paraphrases

When examining the effects of climate change, the researchers Dorey et al. (2016) assert that human activities have thrown the natural world out of equilibrium, possibly leading to disastrous ramifications across all ecosystems.

Human activities have thrown the natural world out of equilibrium, possibly leading to disastrous ramifications across all ecosystems (Dorey et al., 2016).

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The series of events preceding the war as an escalating cascade of incidents (Winslow & Bellamy, 2018).

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In their historical account *The Calamity Years*, Henry Winslow and Charlotte Bellamy (2018) chronicle how a series of environmental disasters and ensuing famines in the early 21st century ultimately sparked an escalating chain of conflicts that erupted into World War III. They depict how severe droughts, unprecedented wildfires, and crop failures triggered mass starvation, societal unrest, and a collapse of global food supply chains. According to Winslow and Bellamy, as nations grew desperate, tensions flared and volatile incidents set off retaliatory acts of violence between major powers, unraveling longstanding treaties and peace accords and finally igniting the most devastating global conflict in human history.

A few features to note:

- Most of the time, APA does not include source's first names, unless for some reason it would be awkward not to use them.
- The year of publication is given alongside the author's name. When the author's name is in an attributive tag, the year is in parentheses right after it. When the author's name is in a parenthetical citation, there's a comma

after it and the year is given inside the same parentheses.

- If there are more than two authors, you use the first author followed by et al. wherever the author's name should appear.
- Page numbers are labeled with a p., and paragraph numbers with a para.
- Pay close attention to where and how punctuation is and isn't used in and around the parenthetical citations. Those details are part of the "rules"!

PART II

PART II: WRITING PROJECTS

20.

RESPONSE ESSAY

Write a closed-form essay of about 1000-1200 words responding to a text. The text may be provided by your instructor or may be one you find yourself.

Introduction

You'll likely want to follow the conventional closed-form introduction structure for this essay:

- Open by establishing the issue that the text addresses, and why that issue is important
- Provide background that the reader needs to understand your response – this will consist of a brief summary of the text to which you are responding.
- Close with your thesis statement

Thesis Statement and Topic Sentences

The topic sentences (main points) in a response essay should focus on identifying your reactions to and opinions of the text. The thesis statement should sum up and forecast these specific reactions/opinions.

Be careful not to spend time in the body of the essay just summarizing the text; you'll have already done that in your introduction. Instead, focus on answering questions like:

- Where did you agree or disagree with the text, and why?
- What did you like or dislike about the text, and why?
- What do you think was done well or done poorly in the text, and why?

Refer back to the chapter on Reading Well for a more detailed list of questions to consider.

Conclusion

Consider the following options for writing your conclusion paragraph:

- Reiterate your thesis statement (briefly, using different words)
- Summarize how the text did or did not change your views on the issue
- Hypothesize about what might have led you to respond differently to the text (for example, if it were easier to read, or if they had better evidence)

Work Cited

Don't forget to provide a full citation for the text you're responding to! When you just have one source, you'll call this your "Work Cited."

21.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY - ONE TEXT

You will provide a rhetorical analysis of a single text by responding to its arguments, evidence, and effectiveness. The text may be an article, essay, speech or other work provided by your instructor, or your instructor may ask you to choose a text yourself.

Your rhetorical analysis should focus on examining how effectively the text persuades its intended audience through the rhetorical appeals of logos (logic/reasoning), ethos (writer's credibility), and pathos (emotional appeals).

The purpose is to demonstrate your ability to carefully analyze rhetorical strategies used in the text and provide an evaluation of their effectiveness or ineffectiveness through reasoned critique. The key is providing an insightful examination of the text's rhetorical strategies rather than just summarizing its content. Your analysis should demonstrate thorough comprehension and a reasoned critique.

Introduction

Open your essay by introducing the text you are analyzing and establishing the issue or argument it addresses. Provide brief background information to orient the reader. End your introduction with a clear thesis statement that previews your overall evaluation of the text's rhetorical effectiveness.

Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph should focus on a different rhetorical strategy, appeal, or area of critique regarding the text. Possibilities include:

- Evaluating the logic, reasoning, and use of evidence (logos)
- Assessing the credibility and authority of the writer/speaker (ethos)
- Analyzing emotional appeals and persuasive techniques (pathos)
- Examining the text's assumptions, underlying values, or ideologies
- Identifying effective or ineffective use of style, tone, examples, etc.
- Strengths, weaknesses, or limitations in the scope of the argument

Develop each point with specific examples and quotes from the text to illustrate and support your analysis.

Conclusion

Synthesize your main points by reiterating your overall evaluation from the thesis. You may also reflect on how well the text achieved its purposes for its intended audience, what could have made it more persuasive, or how it challenged or reinforced your own perspectives.

Work Cited

Don't forget to provide a full citation for the text you're analyzing! When you just have one source, you'll call this your "Work Cited."

22.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY - COMPARE AND CONTRAST TWO TEXTS

Write an essay of approximately 1000-1200 words in which you rhetorically analyze and then compare/contrast two texts. The texts may be provided by your instructor, or your instructor may ask you to choose one or both texts yourself. For an effective compare/contrast, the two texts should have at least one thing in common.

Your rhetorical analysis should focus on examining how and why the texts are rhetorically similar or different, and how those similarities or differences impact their effectiveness. The key is providing an insightful examination of the texts' rhetorical contexts and strategies rather than just summarizing their content.

Introduction

Open your essay by introducing the texts you are analyzing and establishing the issue or argument it addresses. Provide brief background information to orient the reader. End your introduction with a clear thesis statement that previews your overall conclusion about the texts' rhetorical similarities and differences.

Body Paragraphs

Your body paragraphs should thoroughly analyze the rhetorical strategies

employed in each text and how they contribute to the authors' respective arguments or purposes. Some areas to focus on include:

- Purpose and audience – Consider the intended goals and audiences for each text, and how the rhetorical strategies are crafted accordingly.
- Tone and style – Examine the tenor of each work and the effects created by the writers' diction, syntax, and use of rhetorical devices like metaphor, imagery, etc.
- Appeals to ethos, logos, and pathos – Discuss how the authors establish their credibility and appeal to logic and emotion through rhetorical techniques.
- Use of evidence – Analyze the types of support and evidence used by the writers, and their effectiveness in argumentation.
- Document design & visuals – Analyze how the text uses or does not use elements of document design and visuals effectively.

Devote balanced analysis to **each text** in the body, comparing and contrasting the rhetorical approaches in a systematic way. Integrate specific examples from both texts to ground your analysis in the textual evidence.

Conclusion

Synthesize your main points by reiterating your overall main point from the thesis. You may also reflect on how well each text achieved its purposes for its intended audience, what could have made them more persuasive or appropriate for their intended audiences, or how analyzing two texts this way can provide new insights (on their given topic or on rhetoric).

Works Cited

Don't forget to provide a full citation for both texts!

23.

SYNTHESIS ESSAY

Write a synthesis essay of approximately 1000-1200 words in which you construct an original argument or perspective on a topic by analyzing and combining information from 2-4 sources. Your sources may be provided by your instructor, or you may need to locate appropriate sources yourself.

The key is using the sources skillfully to develop, support, and enhance your own point of view on the topic rather than just summarizing the sources individually. Your essay should draw key insights from across the sources to substantiate your argument.

Introduction

Open with an introductory section that captures the reader's interest, provides relevant background on the topic, and establishes a clear thesis statement for your position or argument.

Body Paragraphs

The body of your essay should logically progress your main argument using details, evidence, and insights drawn from synthesizing the sources. Some tips:

- Group sources by commonalities to set up and support key points in your argument. In other words, organize your body paragraphs by the points you want to make and integrate sources as they relate to those points.
- Use sources to substantiate your key claims with such evidence as

examples, data, or expert views.

- Describe how the sources provide insights that further or qualify your position.
- Discuss connections and contradictions among your sources, and describe how your argument relates.
- Respond to source material with which you disagree, and explain your disagreement.

Skillfully integrate information and quotations from the sources as supporting evidence for your point of view. Sources should not be simply summarized in isolation.

Conclusion

Wrap up by reiterating how the synthesized information from your sources shapes and reinforces your overall argument or perspective on the topic. You may point out limitations or implications for further thought.

Works Cited

Include a Works Cited page listing all sources used.

24.

CATEGORICAL EVALUATION ARGUMENT - CLASSICAL STRUCTURE

Write a categorical evaluation essay of approximately 1000-1200 words in which you evaluate how well a subject meets the criteria for a given category. Make sure your claim is really a categorical evaluation! Refer to the chapter on Arguments of Value for more details.

Derive grounds and/or backing for your argument from 1-3 sources. You can also present grounds and backing from personal experience, observations, and logical reasoning.

Use either the Traditional Classical Argument or Modified Classical Argument structure to organize your essay; refer to the chapter on Argument Structures for more details.

Don't forget to include a Works Cited or References page that provides a full citation for each source you used!

25.

ARGUMENT OF FACT - SCHOLARLY SOURCES

Write an approximately 1000-1200 word argument of fact essay in which you challenge a commonly held belief. You may argue that something widely believed to be true is not actually true and/or that something else is true instead. Alternatively, you may argue that the commonly held belief is partially true, but more complicated or nuanced than people realize. Any of those approaches can work – just be sure you are indeed writing an argument of fact, and not some other kind of argument! Refer to the chapter on Arguments of Fact for more information.

Derive grounds and/or backing for your argument from 1-3 sources, including at least 2 scholarly sources. You can also present grounds and backing from personal experience, observations, and logical reasoning.

Use the Classical Refutation, Surprising Reversal, Dialogic, or Rogerian Structure to organize your essay, depending on what is most appropriate for your purpose and audience; refer to the chapter on Argument Structures for more details.

Don't forget to include a Works Cited or References page that provides a full citation for each source you used!

26.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Write a literature review of approximately 1000-1200 words that provides an overview and synthesis of the major writings on a particular topic. Locate and analyze 8-10 relevant scholarly sources to include in your literature review. Be aware that this is a very short literature review, using relatively fewer sources than normal for a literature review; you'll want to choose a pretty narrowly focused topic!

The key is comprehensively summarizing and evaluating the current state of knowledge on the topic based on the published literature. Your review should explain prevalent themes, findings, debates, theories, methodologies, and gaps or inconsistencies across the sources.

Introduction

Open with an introductory section that provides background on the topic, defines key terms, and describes the objectives and scope of the literature review. Your thesis statement for a literature review should forecast the themes/issues that the body paragraphs cover.

Body

The body should be organized by major themes, debates, methodologies, or other logical categorizations that emerge from analyzing the sources. Structure it something like:

Theme/Issue 1

- Summarize and analyze the key points made by various sources on this theme
- Compare and contrast differing perspectives or findings
- Evaluate strengths and weaknesses
- Note any gaps or limitations

Theme/Issue 2

- Summarize and synthesize the sources relevant to this theme
- Discuss agreements, disagreements, inconsistencies across sources
- Highlight important theories, methodological approaches, etc.

(Continue with other themes, debates, perspectives to organize your review)

Accurately summarize and objectively represent each source, but analyze patterns, tendencies, and relationships across the literature as a whole. Use transitions to convey connections and move between sources.

Conclusion

Summarize the overall state of knowledge as revealed by the literature review. Discuss major findings, prevalent views, ongoing debates, and areas that need further research. Evaluate strengths, shortcomings, and knowledge gaps of the current literature.

References or Works Cited

Provide a comprehensive list of all scholarly sources referenced, properly formatted.

27.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH REPORT

Write an empirical research report of approximately 1500-1750 words. Your empirical research report will include the following sections:

- Introduction with brief literature review and research question (approximately 700-800 words)
- Methods (approximately 150-250 words)
- Results (approximately 150-250 words)
- Discussion (approximately 200-350 words)
- Conclusion (approximately 150-250 words)
- Works Cited/References
- Appendices, as needed

Source Requirements

You will need to cite at least SIX scholarly sources as secondary sources.

You will most likely cite all of your secondary sources in the *Literature Review* section of the essay. You will then conduct your own empirical study, and refer back to that same literature in your *Discussion*, when you analyze and interpret the results of your study.

It is possible that one or more of your secondary sources will be used as a model or resource for your own study, in which you will cite those sources in the *Methods* section.

You must have at least one primary source, which is the data you collect.

Depending on the type of data you collect and whether you are using MLA or APA, your primary source material may or may not appear on the Works Cited/References page. Refer to the MLA or APA Handbook for guidance.

Other Requirements

- Include at least one visual representation (chart, graph, photo, diagram, illustration, etc.) in your report. Label the visual(s) you use according to MLA or APA guidelines, as relevant.
- If applicable, include a copy of your interview or survey questions in an appendix. Label your appendix according to MLA or APA guidelines, as relevant.

28.

PROPOSAL ESSAY

Write a proposal essay of 1500-1750 words, using at least SIX scholarly sources.