

College Composition

College Composition

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Contents

Part I. Faculty Resources

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Discussion Rubric | 3 |
| 2. Just-in-time Review Links | 4 |
| 3. I Need Help | 5 |

Part II. Module 1: Introduction to Literacy Narratives

- | | |
|--|----|
| 4. Self as Writer | 9 |
| 5. Discussion: What is a Literacy Narrative? | 13 |
| 6. Discussion: Strategies Writers Use in a Literacy Narrative | 16 |
| 7. Discussion: How to Summarize (Basic Rules) | 22 |
| 8. Discussion: Synthesizing Literacy Narratives | 23 |
| 9. Assignment: Summarize a Sophisticated Essay about Literacy Narratives | 24 |

Part III. Module 2: Writing Your Own Literacy Narrative

- | | |
|---|----|
| 10. Audience Awareness | 29 |
| 11. Writing For Your Audience | 31 |
| 12. Analyzing Your Audience | 32 |
| 13. Finding Your Voice | 33 |
| 14. Different Voices | 35 |

15. <u>Academic Voice</u>	38
16. <u>Tips On Academic Voice</u>	41
17. <u>Finding Your Voice Review</u>	44
18. <u>Modes Of Persuasion</u>	45
19. <u>Ethos</u>	47
20. <u>Pathos</u>	50
21. <u>Logos</u>	52
22. <u>Modes of Persuasion Activity</u>	54
23. <u>Putting it all together: Modes of Persuasion</u>	55
24. <u>Using Evidence</u>	56
25. <u>Using Experience</u>	58
26. <u>Using Primary Sources</u>	60
27. <u>Using Secondary Sources</u>	62
28. <u>Examining Sample Integration</u>	64
29. <u>Using Evidence Activity</u>	65
30. <u>Source Integration</u>	66
31. <u>Synthesizing Sources</u>	68
32. <u>Source Integration</u>	69
33. <u>Paraphrasing</u>	70
34. <u>Paraphrasing Structure</u>	73
35. <u>Paraphrasing Activity</u>	76
36. <u>Quoting</u>	77
37. <u>Quoting II</u>	82
38. <u>Using Sources Blending Source Material with Your Own Work</u>	98
39. <u>Using Sources Creatively</u>	100
40. <u>Integration Practice</u>	102
41. <u>When to Quote & When to Paraphrase</u>	103
42. <u>Paragraphing</u>	107
43. <u>Revising & Editing Process</u>	108

44. Revision Checklist	110
45. Editing Checklist	112
46. See It In Practice: Revising and Editing	113
47. Literacy Narrative Assignment	114

Part IV. Module 3: Rhetorical Analysis

48. Understanding the Rhetorical Situation	119
49. Argument Analysis	120
50. Thinking About Content	122
51. Thinking Rhetorically	124
52. Looking at a Sample Analysis	126
53. Practicing Analysis	127
54. Brainstorming	133
55. Rhetorical Analysis Assignment	134

Part V. Module 4: Research and Argumentation

56. Research	139
57. Group Work	141
58. Group Work online	142
59. Collaborative Writing	143
60. Finding Topics	144
61. Finding Arguments	146
62. Topic Development	147
63. Narrowing & Developing	148
64. Narrowing Process	150
65. Research Questions	151
66. Developing Keywords for Your Research	152
67. Library Worksheet: Tips for Evaluating Information	153

68. <u>Evaluating Sources</u>	154
69. <u>Source Suitability</u>	156
70. <u>Authorship & Authority</u>	158
71. <u>Evaluating Sources: Documentation</u>	159
72. <u>Timely Sources</u>	161
73. <u>Evaluating Online Sources</u>	163
74. <u>Evaluation Checklist</u>	165
75. <u>Databases v. Google</u>	167
76. <u>Wikipedia</u>	168
77. <u>Thesis Development</u>	169
78. <u>See It In Practice: Thesis Development</u>	170
79. <u>Thesis Statement Activity</u>	171
80. <u>Using Sources Effectively</u>	172
81. <u>Organizing Your Argument</u>	173
82. <u>Argument & Audience</u>	176
83. <u>Revising & Editing A Research Paper</u>	178
84. <u>Note-Taking</u>	180
85. <u>Labeling Notes</u>	182
86. <u>Documenting Notes</u>	184
87. <u>See It In Practice: Note Taking</u>	186
88. <u>Oral Presentation Assignment</u>	187
89. <u>Research Project Assignment</u>	190

PART I

FACULTY RESOURCES

I. Discussion Rubric

Discussion/Class Workshop Rubric, English

Criteria	Expert	Proficient	Novice
Insightful contributions	Contributions to discussion demonstrate full and insightful understanding of material	Contributions to discussion demonstrate basic understanding of material	Contributions to discussion suggest student has not read or thought much about the material
Regularity of contributions	Contributions to discussion are frequent	Student sometimes offers contributions to discussion	Student seldom (if ever) offers contributions
Application of Material	Student demonstrates ability to apply material to current workshop	Student demonstrates some ability to apply material to current workshop	Student demonstrates little to no ability to apply material to current workshop

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2. Just-in-time Review Links

Grammar: [Excelsior College OWL Grammar Essentials](#)

Writing: [Excelsior College OWL The Writing Process](#)

Plagiarism: [Excelsior College OWL Avoiding Plagiarism](#)

3. I Need Help



Need more information about this course? Have questions about faculty resources? Can't find what you're looking for? Experiencing technical difficulties?

We're here to help! Contact oeer@achievingthedream.org.

PART II

MODULE I:

INTRODUCTION TO
LITERACY NARRATIVES

4. Self as Writer

Reader-Writer Notebook/Journal: Responding to Essays/Creative Nonfiction ([PDF](#))

Suggested length of each journal entry: 1-1 1/2 typed pages, double-spaced.

The purpose of the notebook/journal is to help you to “read as a writer,” paying careful attention to the ways in which authors craft their pieces to address an intended audience(s). Each class you usually will submit one short journal entry on an assigned reading. Some journal assignments will be given out in class. However, in other journal entries, you can choose how to focus on one or more aspects of the writer’s craft. These entries will help prepare you for class discussions as well as your own writing. Sometimes I will ask one or two students to distribute copies of a journal assignment(s) to the class to stimulate discussion.

Here are some general questions to consider in reading essays for class. In writing (unassigned) journal entries, you will probably only focus on a few of these questions. However, thinking about all of them will help you prepare for class. Later in the term, I will distribute a response guideline sheet for the short stories that we read.

- What is/are the potential meanings of the title? How does the writer introduce the essay?
- What is the general tone of the piece – persuasive, angry, informative/neutral, ironic, humorous? What kind of language(s) does the writer use – direct and simple, colloquial,

abstract/"high academic", personal/confessional, humorous?
Does the tone shift over the course of the essay? What's the effect(s) on you as a reader? What is your impression of the writer/narrator?

- How vividly does the writer draw upon memories of personal experience or the experiences of others? In what ways does the writer employ the tools of fiction (setting, character, dialogue)? How does the writer use imagery, symbol and metaphor?
- What sections, paragraphs, words or sentences seem especially significant? Why? How does the writer use repetition – of words, phrases, sentences or passages – in the piece?
- What's the central point of the piece?
- How does the writer end the essay? What do the introduction and conclusion as "bookends" of the piece suggest about how to read the essay?
- How do you see this essay as connecting with other readings (for the course or outside), experiences you've had, and issues that you've thought about?
- What have you learned **as a writer** from this piece? Are there any narrative techniques that you are working with (or would like to work with) in your own writing?

Writer's Letter Assignment ([PDF](#))

Suggested length: 1-1 1/2 typed pages, double-spaced.

Throughout the semester, I will ask you to keep a constant finger of the pulse of your own work

with each writing assignment. As I read your work, I will do so developmentally, considering your progress from the previous assignment and your goals for the next one. We open the term, then with a reflection on your own experiences with writing: what has worked for you so far as a writer, what aspects of your writing are satisfying to you versus those which are less so, what you hope to accomplish in this course and so on. Please take a half-hour to an hour to create a portrait of yourself as a writer. These questions are intended as a guide. Don't answer these questions in a list-like fashion! Create an engaging and readable narrative.

Some Questions to Consider:

- How often do you write (a) for courses/assignments (b) for pleasure (c) for other purposes (e.g. job, student publication)? How often do you wish you wrote?
- What do you like to read? Are there any specific authors who have inspired you as a writer?
- Does the experience of writing vary for you with different types of writing e.g., technical, expository, diary, fiction)? If “yes”, say more.
- How would you characterize yourself as a writer (this characterization may differ with specific kinds of writing such as technical and scientific writing, poetry, science fiction, etc.)? How do you think others see you as a writer?
- What “writing rituals” (e.g. place to write, music, etc.) do you

have?

- What influences have been most helpful for you as a writer (e.g. friends/family, classes, religious, political)?
- What has your experience in writing or English classes been like?
- What are your goals for yourself as a writer this term?

5. Discussion: What is a Literacy Narrative?

What is a Literacy Narrative?

A literacy narrative is simply a collection of items that describe how you learned to read, write, and compose. This collection might include a story about learning to read cereal boxes and a story about learning to write plays. Some people will want to record their memories about the bedtime stories their parents read to them, the comics they looked at in the newspaper, or their first library card. Others will want to tell a story about writing a memorable letter, learning how to write on a computer or taking a photograph; reading the Bible, publishing a 'zine', or sending an e-mail message.

Your literacy narrative can have many smaller parts, but they will all be identified with your name. For instance, you might want to provide a story about learning to read as a child, a digitized image of one of your old report cards, a story about writing a letter as a teenager, a photograph of you as a young child; a song you learned when you were in school).

Sample Narratives and Clips

*Many of these are broken links so you will have to search archive.org for archived copies of the pages

Anonymous "Memory Work" <<http://hdl.handle.net/>

[2374.DALN/53](http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/53)>

Anonymous "I am A Creative Being"
<<http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/728>>

Anonymous "The Lost Art of Note Passing"
<<http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/287>>

Kelly Smith "What is 'Good' Writing?" <<http://daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/1696>>

Emily Schikora "Literacy as Transformation"
<<http://daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/2835>>

John McBrayer "Adventures in Reading"
<<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/862>>

Megan Ahern "Where is the Love"
<<http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/950>>

Laura Rotheram "Almost Pretty" <<http://daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/2920>>

John LaMotte "From Ludacris to Shakespeare"
<<http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/649>>

Lindsay Hearts "Lindsay Hearts' Literacy Narrative"
<<http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/1527>>

Al Smith "Short Bus" <<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/1455>>

Melanie Yergeau "Dropping out of High School"
<<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/240>>

Scott DeWitt "Staying in the Lines" <<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/488>>

Karin Hooks "An Old Chalk Board" <<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/243>>

Valerie Lee "Literacy Narrative" <<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/610>>

Darius Streets "My Introduction to Love"
<<http://daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/887>>

Lauren Elder "The Literacy of Recipes"
<<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/881>>

Glen Armstrong "Music Narrative" <<http://hdl.handle.net/2374.DALN/576>>

Terrance Tate “My Life” <<http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/1147>>

Tonya Adams “Mommy Daughter Library Stories”
<<http://www.daln.osu.edu/handle/2374.DALN/1186>>

6. Discussion: Strategies Writers Use in a Literacy Narrative

Harry Potter and the Deep South: My Literacy Awakening by Elisabeth Hieber

When considering my literacy development, the most memorable moment is not obvious. It did not involve the process that I went through to learn to read. It did not have anything to do with the first words I put on paper. Additionally, even though my access to the written word was never restricted or limited, as it was for famous writers Malcolm X and Sherman Alexie, and I had every opportunity to read and write, my major literacy awakening did not occur until after I had a reasonably advanced mastery of the English language.

Reading and writing have always been an important part of my life. I have grown up with them like two old friends. In fact, my earliest memory involves staring at a complicated book about lizards – the kind with more words than pictures. I was “reading” it on the couch of our very first home in Georgia, while my parents argued in the other room. I wanted them to stop fighting, so I kept pretending that I was reading aloud each and every word to distract them with my prodigious intellect, when in fact, I could only recognize basic articles like “the” and “a.” I could not have been older than three at the time. However, as striking as this memory is, it is not the most important event in my literacy development.

My most memorable experience came when I was much older, directly after the summer between third and fourth grade. As a family of Ohio expatriates, we were living in Oakwood, a small town in Hall County, Georgia. At the time, I was absolutely obsessed with all things Harry Potter. My parents gave me the first three books about the adventurous teen wizard, and I read them lying

on the sun-bleached boards of our neighbor's dock on Lake Lanier, listening to the water lapping up on the red clay banks. I would imagine that any day I was going to get my own letter via owl to go to Hogwarts.

However, my imagination was not enough to sustain me. I needed the story to continue. When school started again at Oakwood Elementary, I realized that a fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, was released the preceding July. On the first trip to the school library of the year, I was desperate to obtain that book. It was nowhere to be found. When I asked the head school librarian where it was, she refused to acknowledge my question. Confused, I found the assistant librarian, Ms. Sloan, and also asked her. She said they did not have it and suggested I try Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* instead. I took the book and left the library in a state of thorough confusion and frustration.

The weeks went on, and I still could not locate the book anywhere. I asked my mother to drive me to various libraries around the county, and as my main and most constant literary sponsor, she was happy to do so. But I could not find the book anywhere in all of Hall County. I would begrudgingly select a consolation prize at each and every library, and read the books with a fraction of the enthusiasm. Some of the most memorable were Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* and Jack London's *White Fang* – if there was anything I loved almost as much as Harry Potter during this time period, it was stories about animals.

Little did I know that my fruitless searching was finally going to result in victory. In class one day, a boy delivered a note to me that requested my presence in the library and was signed by the assistant librarian. I walked down the stifling hallway, wondering with a certain amount of trepidation what the assistant librarian could possibly want from me. Was *Gone with the Wind* overdue?

I entered the library, and Ms. Sloan ushered me into the room directly behind the circulation desk.

"I have something to show you," she whispered. Her hushed tones combined with the overt obscurity of the location of our meeting

reminded me of my fourth-grade conceptualization of a speakeasy. She walked me to a bookcase running along the back wall of the room, and pulled out a thick book placed discreetly near the bottom.

“I have it – *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.” She smiled at me as my jaw dropped. “You can read it, but you can’t check it out from the library – this is my personal copy. You can read it only in this room, during your recess.”

I was overjoyed. But I wasn’t elated enough to disregard the secrecy shrouding the arrangement.

“Why doesn’t the library have a copy to check out?” I asked, as confused as ever. Ms. Sloan looked at me, and I remember her face to this day: a combination of concern, regret, and strained severity.

“The school doesn’t have any Harry Potter books, because the school district banned them. Do you know what that means? Banned books?”

“Banned books? Why would anyone ban books? I thought reading was a good thing.” Though sincere, I will not deny I was a bit of a brownnoser at the age of ten.

Ms. Sloan then patiently informed me what banned books were, in terms of my limited experience within the education system. When the content of a book is deemed too inappropriate, or too controversial, the school district sees fit to ban them, meaning free access to them is barred in public schools and libraries. The concept made sense to me, but I simply could not understand what was so inappropriate or controversial about a teen wizard. Despite all of my confusion, I accepted it, and proceeded to read the book, sequestered in the hot backroom of the library, until I finished it a week later.

Here is where a little context about the climate of the area where I grew up might be appropriate and enlightening. Hall County is a small region in northern Georgia where politically conservative, predominantly Southern Baptist, and Confederate pride and bitterness over “The War of Northern Aggression” still rang true. Hall County did not tolerate Yankees, Democrats, or the evil witchcraft practiced by Harry Potter and his friends. So in an effort

to staunch the flow of iniquity and corruption of the youth, the school district banned the book, and said nothing about random book burnings at the local Baptist church.

No other event influenced my literacy development as much as this one. From this point on, I put a certain value in further developing a purposeful relationship with reading, writing, and literature. For as long as I can remember, literacy has always been a part of my life. I simply viewed it as a fact of existence, as something natural, passive, and organic. Realizing that reading and writing could be restricted caused me to face the reality that literacy was participatory. I had to choose to develop my skills, choose to seek out literature, forge my own path through literacy, and find my own truths to be self-evident.

Though not as momentous, my decision to advance my literacy development was similar to the one that Sherman Alexie had to make to be successful on the Spokane Indian Reservation in order to thrive beyond expectation into his adult life. In “The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me,” he states, “As Indian children, we were expected to fail in the non-Indian world...I refused to fail. I was smart. I was arrogant. I was lucky. I read books late into the night, until I could barely keep my eyes open” (364-5). Alexie had to overcome internal and external societal pressure to succeed; in this way, his literacy became both resilient and purposeful. It was not just an activity; it became a tool. Like Alexie, I realized two mutually supportive facts in that hot backroom of a library in Georgia. Literacy did not come naturally, and literacy can be restricted. That day solidified my resolve to develop it, in order to recognize and subvert any attempts to limit my access to it. My literacy was my only tool to preserve that literacy.

Additionally, the inaccessibility of *Harry Potter* impressed upon me that reading and writing were powerful tools, not just activities that I had to do in school, or practices I enjoyed as a hobby. They could communicate ideas and ways of thinking that were pervasive and influential, that authority figures feared enough to restrict and ban. Conversely, literacy can be manipulated by authority figures

to project an agenda. Malcolm X discusses the legacy of white Europeans slanting history to objectify, exploit, and eliminate the role of blacks in “Learning to Read.” He states: “You can hardly show me a black adult in America – or a white one, for that matter – who knows from the history books anything like the truth about the black man’s role” (356). Malcolm X’s literacy development started with learning to read, but expanded further with his realization of just how much written history has been manipulated to serve an ulterior motive. “I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened up to me,” he states. “I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive” (360). In a way, I came to a similar conclusion. Being able to read and write are *helpful* skills, but being able to understand their power and their ability to change the course of history provides a level of cognition that is *illuminating*.

After my chance insight into the insurmountable significance of literacy, I was left with an all-encompassing desire for more. It felt like an aching, perceivable hunger. I read everything with a distinct sense of desperation, from Stephen Crane’s *Red Badge of Courage* to Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, because I had a fleeting feeling that all of it could be taken away from me at any time, and that advancing my literacy was the only way I could keep it in my possession. As I grew older and my reading level progressed, my appetite never abated. I developed a focused, progressive passion for learning that has infused my collegiate studies. To this day, I often find myself wandering the massive university library, independent of a specific academic need, in the hopes of discovering meaningful literature and lessons from another time. I realize that, in order to affect the course of history in my own meaningful way, I must be, to quote Malcolm X, as “mentally alive” as possible.

To this day, I am overwhelmingly grateful for Ms. Sloan. In retrospect, I realize just how much she risked and sacrificed in order to provide me with literature that I valued. She jeopardized her job,

her reputation as a librarian, and her integrity as an educator for the sake of advancing my imagination. What she gave me that day was far more precious than any Harry Potter book. I placed a new value on my literacy development, a value with a certain purpose, and an inherent association with valor and strength. Literacy changes the course of history; recognizing that power, and learning to respect it, changed the course of my life.

Works Cited

Alexie, Sherman. "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me." *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011. 363-65. Print

X, Malcolm. "Learning to Read." *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011. 354-60. Print.

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Elizabeth Heiber wrote this essay for an intermediate composition class at the University of Cincinnati. The essay won the prestigious Dunn Award for Writing Excellence at the 15th Annual UC Student Writing Awards Ceremony.

7. Discussion: How to Summarize (Basic Rules)



An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

[https://library.achievingthedream.org/
monroecccollegecomp/?p=24](https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroecccollegecomp/?p=24)

Two options for viewable/printable reference guides below:

[Download color guide here.](#)

[Download B&W guide here.](#)

8. Discussion: Synthesizing Literacy Narratives

Critical Anthological Imagination: Looking Historically at Prisoners Writing About Themselves as Adult Learners in the United States (1966-2006)

Dominique T. Chlup Texas A&M University, USA

9. Assignment: Summarize a Sophisticated Essay about Literacy Narratives

Summary Assignment Guidelines

For this assignment, you will be doing the following:

1. Read and annotate the assigned essay
2. Write a 250-350 word summary using the notes you took on the essay.

Remember these guidelines as you draft and revise:

- Your first or second sentence must identify the author's name, essay title in quotation marks, and the author's thesis (paraphrased).
- Use transitions. Transitions create fluidity, walking your reader through the ideas the same way you'd provide directions to your house (for example: First you go through the stoplight, then you turn onto Stony Point, after which you'll pass a church on your right." The difference here is that you're walking your reader through the path of the author's argument. Transitions also help your reader to understand the organizational pattern of the essay you're summarizing.
- Always remind your reader that these are the AUTHOR's ideas, not your ideas. You do this by inserting reminders every other sentence or so. For example, use signal phrases such as: He said, or He also argues, etc
- Vary your word choice. If you keep writing "He says" or "She states," try a different introductory verb, like "He argues" or "He asserts."

- Make sure ALL the sentences are in your own words. No quoting the author unless it is absolutely necessary (for example, maybe the author uses an unusual phrase or has created a new term for something that you can't put in your own words).
- Identify only the main ideas. Stay away from supporting evidence and minor details. Your purpose is to CONDENSE the article down to what is basically an outline of its major ideas.
- Proofread before you submit your summary.

PART III

MODULE 2: WRITING YOUR
OWN LITERACY
NARRATIVE

10. Audience Awareness

Audience Awareness



Who are you writing for? You want to ask yourself that question every time you begin a writing project. And you want to keep your audience in mind as you go through the writing process because it will help you make decisions while you write. Such decisions should include what voice you use, what words you choose, and the kind of syntax you use. Thinking of who your audience is and what their expectations are will also help you decide what kind of introduction and conclusion to write.

Your instructor, of course, is your audience, but you must be careful not to assume that he or she knows more than you on the subject of your paper. While your instructor may be well-informed on the topic, your purpose is to demonstrate your knowledge and fully explain what you're writing about, so the reader can see that you have a good grasp on the topic yourself. Think of your instructor as intelligent but not fully informed about your topic. Think of your instructor as representing people from a particular field (historians, chemists, psychologists).

Another approach is to think of your audience as the people who

make up the class for which you are writing the assignment. This is a diverse group, so it can be tough to imagine the needs of so many people. However, if you try to think about your writing the way others from a diverse group might think about your writing, it can help make your writing stronger.

II. Writing For Your Audience

Writing for Your Audience

Sometimes, it's difficult to decide how much to explain or how much detail to go into in a paper when considering your audience. Remember that you need to explain the major concepts in your paper and provide clear, accurate information. Your reader should be able to make the necessary connections from one thought or sentence to the next. When you don't, the reader can become confused or frustrated. Make sure you connect the dots and explain how information you present is relevant and how it connects with other ideas you have put forth in your paper.

As you write your essay, try to imagine what information your audience will need on your topic. You should also think about how your writing will sound to your audience, but that will be discussed more in the next section on Voice.

When it's time to revise, read your drafts as a reader would, looking for what is not well explained, clearly written, or linked to other ideas. It might be useful to read your paper to someone who has no background in the topic you're writing about to see if your listener can follow your argument. As always, your job as the writer is to communicate your thinking in a clear, thoughtful, and complete way.

12. Analyzing Your Audience

Analyzing Your Audience

Because keeping your audience in mind as you engage in the writing process is important, it may be helpful to have a list of questions in mind as you think about your audience. The interactive worksheet below can be saved and printed if you want to keep it near your computer as you write.



An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

[https://library.achievingthedream.org/
monroeccccollegecomp/?p=30](https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=30)

13. Finding Your Voice

Finding Your Voice



In writing, just as in life, you're selective when choosing words and the tone of voice you use in various situations. When writing a thank-you to Great-Aunt Millie for the socks she sent you for your birthday, you probably use a polite, respectful voice. When you are having a fight with your partner or are gossiping with a friend, both your vocabulary and tone will be quite different. Likewise, you'll use a more formal voice in a research paper compared to a personal essay, an email, or a journal entry.

Deciding what kind of voice to use in writing depends entirely on who will be reading what you write and what your purpose is in writing. Are you writing about the first time you ever drove a car? Explaining your theory about why yoga is such a popular exercise regimen and spiritual practice? Putting forth your informed opinion of why hybrid cars are problematic for the environment despite their increased gas mileage?

What creates voice is simply the words you choose and the way

you use them. What kind of voice you use in a paper depends on the assignment and the audience, as well as the effect you want to create. By making conscious choices about the words you use to communicate to your reader, you establish a voice.

14. Different Voices

Different Voices

Note the two different voices here talking about the same subject. Which boss would you rather work for?



Boss

1:

It has come to my attention that computers are not being turned off at the end of the workday. This is a possible security breach, as well as a waste of electricity, and failure to shut down electronic equipment will not be tolerated. Please ensure that your computers are off before you leave each night or there will be consequences for individuals who do not comply.

Boss 2:

Hello, everyone! I know that here at Plants, Inc., we're all committed to a green work environment. So I'm asking for your help with respect to computers. We've seen a number of computers inadvertently left on in the evenings. I want to ask for your cooperation in turning off your computer before you leave, which helps conserve electricity. Thanks for your help!

Notice the different tones in the two passages. Tone is part of the voice and reveals the attitude of the writer, which can range from friendly to angry to cold to intimate.

If you're writing a personal essay, about an experience in your life, then the voice you use will reveal how you feel about the experience. You'll most likely write using the personal pronouns **I** or **we**. You'll let your personality emerge in the language you choose.

If you want to convey a humorous or outrageous event, then your words and your tone will reflect that. You might exaggerate, use informal, even silly sounding words or use acerbic, or understated language. Your sentences might be short and convey energy. If, on the other hand you are writing about a loss, your words will be more serious, your tone somber and your sentences might be longer, more thoughtful and reflective. As the writer, you get to decide how you want to describe your experience.

Notice the different voices and sentence structure in the excerpts from these two popular memoirs.

Memoir 1:

We didn't call it the kitchen in our house. We called it the Burns Unit.

"It's a bit burned," my mother would say apologetically at every meal, presenting you with a piece of meat that looked like something—a much-loved pet perhaps—salvaged from a tragic house fire. "But I think I scraped off most of the burned part," she would add, overlooking that this included every bit of it that had once been flesh.

~from The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid by Bill Bryson

Memoir 2:

Later I realized that I must have repeated the details of what happened to everyone who came to the house in those first weeks, all those friends and relatives who brought food and made drinks and laid out plates on the dining room table for however many people were around at lunch or dinner time, all those who picked up the plates and froze the leftovers and ran the dishwasher and filled our (I could not yet think my) otherwise empty house even after I had gone into the bedroom (our bedroom, the one in which there still lay on a sofa a faded terrycloth XL robe bought in the 1970s at Richard Carroll in Beverly Hills) and shut the door.

~from A Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion

If your assignment is to write a more academic paper, then you will want to consider using the academic voice, which will be discussed on the next page.

15. Academic Voice

Academic Voice



Assuming that your audience is a teacher of some sort, your main purpose is to demonstrate your ability to articulate knowledge and experience. When writing a research paper and other academic writing (what is called academic discourse) you'll want to use what is called **the academic voice**, which is meant to sound objective, authoritative,

and reasonable. While a research paper will be based on your opinion on a topic, it will be an opinion based on evidence (from your research) and one that has been argued in a rational manner in your paper

You use the academic voice because your opinion is based on thinking; in your paper you're revealing your thought process to your reader. Because you'll be appealing to reason, you want to use the voice of one intellectual talking to another intellectual.

If the subject matter for your academic writing isn't personal, as in the case of a formal research paper, you would take on a more detached, objective tone. While you may indeed feel strongly about what you're writing about, you should maintain a professional tone, rather than a friendly or intimate one.

However, it's important to note that even the most formal academic voice does not need to include convoluted sentence structure or abstract, stilted language, as some believe. As with all writing, you should strive to write with clarity and an active voice that avoids jargon. All readers appreciate a vigorous, lively voice.

Instead of:

The utilization of teams as a way of optimizing our capacity to meet and prioritize our goals will impact the productivity of the company.

Write:

Teams will execute the goals and enhance the company's output.

Of course, the decision about whether you use a specialized vocabulary depends entirely on who your audience is and the purpose of the paper.

REMEMBER

Some academic writing will require a more personal tone, such as when you are writing a formal narrative essay or perhaps an **ethnography** (study of a culture) essay. In general, the academic voice is a formal one, but there will be variations based on the situation.

16. Tips On Academic Voice

Tips on Academic Voice

When using the academic voice you won't usually use first personal pronouns.

Instead of:

I think anyone who becomes a parent should have to take a parenting class.

Write:

Parenting classes should be mandatory for any biological or adoptive parents.

NOTE:

There are exceptions for certain types of writing assignments.

Avoid using second person pronouns.

Instead of:

When you read “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” you will realize that King was writing to people besides the ministers who criticized him.

Write:

Upon reading “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” readers will note that King was addressing a wider audience than the clergy who condemned his actions.

Avoid contractions in more formal writing.

Instead of:

It shouldn't be difficult to record what we feel, but many of us just can't get our feelings down on paper.

Write:

It should not be difficult to record feelings, but many people are unable to do so.

Avoid informal language.

Instead of:

It's obvious that she's a feminist because she makes a big deal about women who were into the suffrage movement.

Write:

Because of her focus on the suffragists, one can assume she is a feminist.

Abbreviations for common terms should not be used in academic writing

Instead of:

Smith was declared the official winner at the P.O. last Mon. on Jan. 6th.

Write:

Smith was declared the official winner at the post office last Monday, on January 6.

17. Finding Your Voice

Review

See It in Practice

In the following video, we'll check in on our student as she reflects on the tone of voice she'll use in her essay. You'll notice her struggles as she considers how she'll keep a formal tone for an essay that requires some examples of informal language.



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18. Modes Of Persuasion

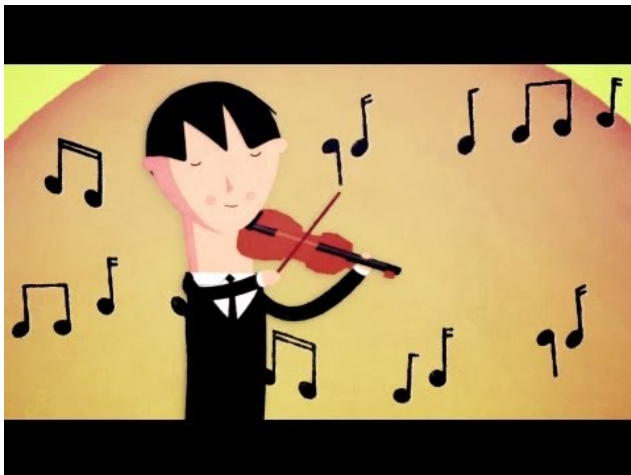
Modes of Persuasion

As described in the [Rhetorical Styles](#), the modes of persuasion you are about to learn about on the following pages go back thousands of years to [Aristotle](#), a Greek rhetorician. In his teachings, we learn about three basic modes of persuasion—or ways to persuade people. These modes appeal to human nature and continue to be used today in writing of all kinds, politics, and advertisements.

These modes are particularly important to argumentative writing because you'll be constantly looking for the right angle to take in order to be persuasive with your audience. These modes work together to create a well-rounded, well-developed argument that your audience will find credible.

By thinking about the basic ways in which human beings can be persuaded and practicing your skills, you can learn to build strong arguments and develop flexible argumentative strategies. Developing flexibility as a writer is very important and a critical part of making good arguments. Every argument should be *different* because every audience is *different* and every situation is *different*. As you write, you'll want to make decisions about how you appeal to your particular audience using the modes of persuasion.

The video below provides you with an excellent example of how these modes work together, and the pages that follow will explain each mode in detail, focusing on strategies you can use as a student writer to develop each one. If you need the transcript, just click on the CC button at the bottom right of the video.

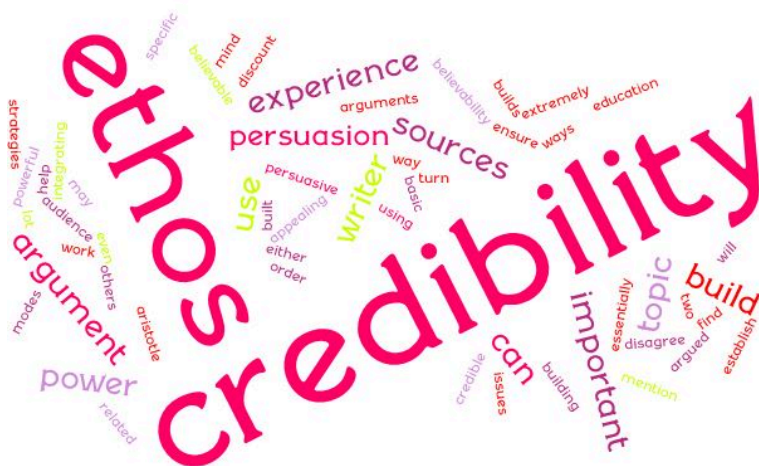


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19. Ethos

Ethos



Appealing to **ethos** is all about using credibility, either your own as a writer or of your sources, in order to be persuasive. Essentially, ethos is about believability. Will your audience find you believable? What can you do to ensure that they do?

You can establish ethos—or credibility—in two basic ways: you can use or build your own credibility on a topic, or you can use credible sources, which, in turn, builds your credibility as a writer.

Credibility is extremely important in building an argument, so, even if you don't have a lot of built-in credibility or experience with a topic, it's important for you to work on your credibility by integrating the credibility of others into your argument.

Aristotle argued that ethos was the most powerful of the modes of persuasion, and while you may disagree, you can't discount its power. After all, think about the way advertisers use ethos to get us to purchase products. Taylor Swift sells us perfume, and Peyton

Manning sells us pizza. But, it's really their fame and name they are selling.

With the power of ethos in mind, here are some strategies you can use to help build your ethos in your arguments.

- **If you have specific experience or education** related to your issues, **mention it** in some way.

NOTE:

Not all professors will be in favor of this, as it will depend upon the level of formality of the assignment, but, in general, this is an effective strategy.

-
- **If you don't** have specific experience or education related to your issue, make sure you **find sources from authors who do**. When you integrate that source information, it's best if you can address the credibility of your sources. When you have credible sources, you want to let your audience know about them. You can learn more about integrating your source information to effectively address credibility in this [Signal Phrases](#) activity in [Research](#).
 - **Use a tone of voice** that is appropriate to your writing situation and will make you sound reasonable and credible as a writer. Controversial issues can often bring out some extreme emotions in us when we write, but we have to be careful to avoid sounding extreme in our writing, especially in academic

arguments. You may not convince everyone to agree with you, but you at least need your audience to listen to what you have to say.

- **Provide good balance** when it comes to pathos and logos, which will be explored in the following pages.
- **Avoid flaws in logic**—or [logical fallacies](#)—which are explored later in this area of the Excelsior OWL.

20. Pathos

Pathos



Appealing to **pathos** is about appealing to your audience's emotions. Because people can be easily moved by their emotions, pathos is a powerful mode of persuasion. When you think about appealing to pathos, you should consider all of the potential emotions people experience. While we often see or hear arguments that appeal to sympathy or anger, appealing to pathos is not limited to these specific emotions. You can also use emotions such as humor, joy or even frustration, to note a few, in order to convince your audience.

It's important, however, to be careful when appealing to pathos, as arguments with an overly-strong focus on emotion are not considered as credible in an academic setting. This means you could, and should, use pathos, but you have to do so carefully. An overly-emotional argument can cause you to lose your credibility as a writer.

You have probably seen many arguments based on an appeal

to pathos. In fact, a large number of the commercials you see on television or the internet actually focus primarily on pathos. For example, many car commercials tap into our desire to feel special or important. They suggest that, if you drive a nice car, you will automatically be respected.

With the power of pathos in mind, here are some strategies you can use to carefully build pathos in your arguments.

- **Think about the emotions most related to your topic** in order to use those emotions effectively. For example, if you're calling for change in animal abuse laws, you would want to appeal to your audience's sense of sympathy, possibly by providing examples of animal cruelty. If your argument is focused on environmental issues related to water conservation, you might provide examples of how water shortages affect metropolitan areas in order to appeal to your audience's fear of a similar occurrence.
- In an effort to appeal to pathos, **use examples** to illustrate your position. Just be sure the examples you share are credible and can be verified.
- In academic arguments, be sure to **balance appeals to pathos with appeals to [logos](#)** (which will be explored on the next page) in order to maintain your ethos or credibility as a writer.
- When presenting evidenced based on emotion, **maintain an even tone of voice**. If you sound too emotional, you might lose your audience's respect.

2I. Logos

Logos



Logos is about appealing to your audience's logical side. You have to think about what makes sense to your audience and use that as you build your argument. As writers, we appeal to logos by presenting a line of reasoning in our arguments that is logical and clear. We use evidence, such as statistics and factual information, when we appeal to logos.

In order to develop strong appeals to logos, we have to avoid faulty logic. Faulty logic can be anything from assuming one event caused another to making blanket statements based on little evidence. Logical fallacies should always be avoided. We will explore [logical fallacies](#) in another section.

Appeals to logos are an important part of academic writing, but you will see them in commercials as well. Although they more commonly use pathos and ethos, advertisers will sometimes use logos to sell products. For example, commercials based on saving consumers money, such as car commercials that focus on miles-per-gallon, are appealing to the consumers' sense of logos.

As you work to build logos in your arguments, here are some strategies to keep in mind.

- **Both experience and source material can provide you with evidence to appeal to logos.** While outside sources will provide you with excellent evidence in an argumentative essay, in some situations, you can share personal experiences and observations. Just make sure they are appropriate to the situation and you present them in a clear and logical manner.
- **Remember to think about your [audience](#)** as you appeal to logos. Just because something makes sense in your mind, doesn't mean it will make the same kind of sense to your audience. You need to try to see things from your audience's perspective. Having others read your writing, especially those who might disagree with your position, is helpful.
- **Be sure to maintain clear lines of reasoning throughout your argument.** One error in logic can negatively impact your entire position. When you present faulty logic, you lose credibility.
- When presenting an argument based on logos, **it is important to avoid emotional overtones and maintain an even tone of voice.** Remember, it's not just a matter of the type of evidence you are presenting; how you present this evidence is important as well.

22. Modes of Persuasion Activity



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23. Putting it all together: Modes of Persuasion

Analyze This

As you have learned, balancing ethos, pathos, and logos as you build your argument is an important part of being persuasive. Now that you have learned about all three modes of persuasion, it should be helpful to see some analysis for these appeals in action.

In this **Analyze This** video, watch as one student shares an analysis of ethos, pathos, and logos in an article he read for class.

To read the full article the student analyzes, click [here](#).

Then, click to watch the student video below.

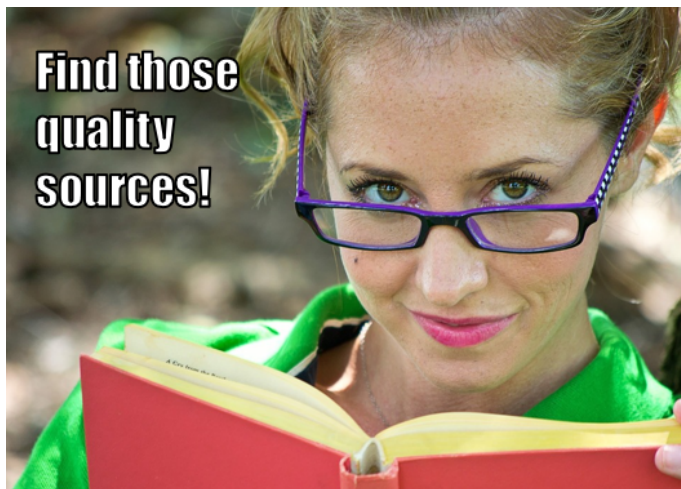


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24. Using Evidence

Using Evidence



When writing an argumentative essay, you'll definitely want to locate quality sources to support your claims, and you have a lot of options for sources. You can look for support for your argument in journal articles, magazine articles, documentaries, and more. You may even be allowed to use [personal experience](#) and observations, but this isn't always the case. No matter what, you'll want logical, clear, and reasonable evidence that helps you support your claims and convince your audience.

It's important to review the [logical fallacies](#) before you develop evidence for your claims. If you're using personal experience, you have to be careful that you don't make claims that are too broad based on limited experiences.

The following pages provide you with information on the types of sources you may be able to include, how to decide if your sources

are credible, and how to make good decisions about using your sources.

25. Using Experience

Experience



Chances are, if you have chosen an issue to write about for your argumentative essay, you have chosen a topic that means something to you. With this in mind, you may have had personal experience related to the issue that you would like to share with your audience.

This isn't always going to be allowed in an argumentative essay, as some professors will want you to focus more on outside sources. However, many times, you'll be allowed to present personal experience. Just be sure to check with your professor.

If you do have personal experiences to share, you have to make sure you use those experiences carefully. After all, you want your evidence to build your [ethos](#), not take away from it. If you have witnessed examples that are relevant, you can share those as long

as you make sure you don't make claims that are too big based on those experiences.

Here's an example of an ineffective use of personal experience as evidence:

A student is writing an argumentative paper on welfare reform, arguing that there are too many abuses of the system. The student gives an example of a cousin who abuses the system and makes a claim that this is evidence that abuse of the system is widespread.

Here's an example of how the student might use personal experience as evidence more effectively:

A student is writing an argumentative paper on welfare reform and has statistical evidence to support claims that the system is not working well. Instead of using the personal experience about a cousin who abuses the system as key evidence, the student shares data and then presents the personal experience as an example that some people may witness.

26. Using Primary Sources

Primary Sources



When you use source material outside of your own experience, you're using either primary or secondary sources. **Primary sources** are sources that were created or written during the time period in which they reference and can include things like diaries, letters, films, interviews, and even results from research studies. **Secondary sources** are sources that analyze primary sources in some way and include things like magazine and journal articles that analyze study results, literature, interviews, etc.

Sometimes, you'll be conducting original research as you work to develop your argument, and your professor may encourage you to do things like conduct interviews or locate original documents. Personal interviews can be excellent sources that can help you build your [ethos](#), [pathos](#), and [logos](#) in your essay.

When conducting an interview for your research, it's important to

be prepared in order to make the most of your time with the person you are interviewing.

TIPS:

The following tips will help you get the most out of your interview:

- Prepare questions you want to ask in advance.
- Be prepared with some follow up questions, just in case the questions you have prepared don't get the interviewee talking as you had hoped.
- Have a recording device handy. It's a good idea to record your interview if your interviewee is okay with it.
- If you can't record the interview, come prepared to take good notes.
- Record the date of your interview, as you will need this for documentation.
- Obtain contact information for your interviewee in case you have follow-up questions later.
- Be polite and appreciative to your interviewee, as you will want the experience to be a positive one all the way around.

27. Using Secondary Sources

Secondary Sources

When you're searching for secondary source material to support your claims, you want to keep some basic ideas in mind:

- Your source material should be **relevant** to your content.
- Your source material should be **credible**, as you want your sources to help you build your ethos.
- Your source material should be **current** enough to feel relevant to your audience.

Before you make your final decisions about the sources you'll use in your argumentative essay, it's important to review the following pages and take advantage of the helpful source credibility checklist below.

Click on the image below for an interactive PDF version of the checklist. In some browsers, you may need to download or save this file to be able to utilize all of its functionality. You may also download, save, and submit to your professor as a part of your process.

The Excelsior College Online Writing Lab
Using Evidence Checklist



Name:
Source Title:
Source Type:

Credibility:

- Yes | No
☐ ☐ Is information about the author's qualifications, such as education or profession, available on the source or through additional research?
☐ ☐ Does the source provide a reference list or bibliography showing where the information contained within the source came from?
☐ ☐ Can you find information about whether or not the publisher is reputable?

Relevance and Content:

- Yes | No
☐ ☐ Is the subject matter of the source related to your topic?
☐ ☐ Are you able to distinguish between fact and opinion in the source?

Date:

- Yes | No
☐ ☐ Can you tell when this source was published or revised?
☐ ☐ Based on the date, will the facts and opinions in this source provide you with current information?

Intended Audience:

- Yes | No
☐ ☐ Does this source work well for your audience? For example, if you are writing for a formal, academic audience, is the source a scholarly publication from a journal or a reputable book? If you are writing for the general public, is the source more popular in nature?

Purpose

- Yes | No
☐ ☐ Is the information in this source biased or limited to one point of view?
☐ ☐ Overall, is this source suitable as a resource for your research purposes?

If you answered "No" to one or more of these questions, you should take a closer look at your source. Getting one "No" does not mean you should not use your source, but it does mean you should really think about the overall quality of your source.

*Modified adapted from University of Massachusetts "Evaluating Sources Checklist"

[Reset Form](#)

[Print Form](#)

[Save As](#)

28. Examining Sample Integration

See It in Practice

In this video cast, you'll see our student writer examine her rough draft and discuss how she integrated her source material into her paper.



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29. Using Evidence Activity

Using Evidence Activity



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30. Source Integration

Source Integration

Just as with any type of essay, when you write an argumentative essay, you want to integrate your sources effectively. This means you want to think about the different ways you integrate your sources (paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting) and how you can make sure your audience knows your source information is credible and relevant.

These key lessons on source integration in [Research](#) are relevant here.

[Summarizing](#)

[Paraphrasing](#)

[Quoting](#)

[Signal Phrases](#)

However, this helpful checklist on source integration can help you remember some of the key best practices when it comes to getting the most out of your source material in your argumentative essay. Just click on the PDF below for the interactive checklist. In some browsers, you may need to download or save this file to be able to utilize all of its functionality. You may also download, save, and submit to your professor as a part of your process.



Source Integration Checklist

Name: _____

Integrating Sources

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have provided set-up or introductory information the first time I use each source.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have made it clear that each source is credible and can be trusted.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have made sure the source material is clearly relevant to my topic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have provided some kind of commentary or analysis after each quote I used.

Finding Balance

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have not used too many quotes, making sure that quotes account for no more than five to ten percent of my writing.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have avoided long quotes unless they are necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have worked to paraphrase information (put source material in my own words) whenever possible in order to avoid too many quotes.

Documentation

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I have cited all borrowed information, even information I put in my own words, with in-text documentation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> My source information at the end (Works Cited, References, etc.) matches my in-text documentation.

Getting one “no” does not mean you have done a poor job overall integrating your source material, but you may want to consider revising your essay to address that issue.



3I. Synthesizing Sources

Download a [blank Synthesis Chart](#) here.

32. Source Integration

See It in Practice

In this video cast, you'll see our student writer examine her rough draft and discuss how she integrated her source material into her paper.



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33. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing

When you want to use specific materials from an argument to support a point you are making in your paper but want to avoid too many quotes, you should paraphrase.

What is a paraphrase?

Paraphrases are generally as long, and sometimes longer, than the original text. In a paraphrase, you use your own words to explain the specific points another writer has made. If the original text refers to an idea or term discussed earlier in the text, your paraphrase may also need to explain or define that idea. You may also need to interpret specific terms made by the writer in the original text.

Be careful not to add information or commentary that isn't part of the original passage in the midst of your paraphrase. You don't want to add to or take away from the meaning of the passage you are paraphrasing. Save your comments and analysis until after you have finished your paraphrased and cited it appropriately.

What does paraphrasing look like?

Paraphrases should begin by making it clear that the information to come is from your source. If you are using APA format, a year citation should follow your mention of the author.

For example, using the Thoreau passage as an example, you might begin a paraphrase like this:

Even though Thoreau (1854) praised the virtues of the intellectual life, he did not consider....

Paraphrases may sometimes include brief quotations, but most of the paraphrase should be in your own words.

What might a paraphrase of this passage from Thoreau look like?

Passage “Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market.”

Paraphrase

In his text, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Henry David Thoreau (1854) points to the incongruity of free men becoming enslaved and limited by constant labor and worry. Using the metaphor of a fruit to represent the pleasures of a thoughtful life, Thoreau suggests that men have become so traumatized by constant labor that their hands—as representative of their minds—have become

unable to pick the fruits available to a less burdened life even when that fruit becomes available to them (p. 110).

Note that the passage above is almost exactly the same length as the original. It's also important to note that the paraphrased passage has a different structure and significant changes in wording. The main ideas are the same, but the student has paraphrased effectively by putting the information into their own words.

What are the benefits of paraphrasing?

The paraphrase accomplishes three goals:

1. Like the summary, it contextualizes the information (who said it, when, and where).
2. It restates all the supporting points used by Thoreau to develop the idea that man is hurt by focusing too much on labor.
3. The writer uses their own words for most of the paraphrase, allowing the writer to maintain a strong voice while sharing important information from the source.

Paraphrasing is likely the most common way you will integrate your source information. Quoting should be minimal in most research papers. Paraphrasing allows you to integrate sources without losing your voice as a writer to those sources. Paraphrasing can be tricky, however. You really have to make changes to the wording. Changing a few words here and there doesn't count as a paraphrase, and, if you don't quote those words, can get you into trouble with **plagiarism**.

The next page will allow you to see more examples of effective paraphrasing before you practice with the [Paraphrasing Activity](#).

34. Paraphrasing Structure

Paraphrasing Structure

As noted on the previous page, when you paraphrase, you have to do more than change the words from the original passage. You have to also change the sentence structure. Sometimes, students will struggle with paraphrasing because they have an urge to simply use the same basic sentence or sentences and replace the original words with synonyms. This is not a method that works for effective paraphrasing.

Let's see what that looks like. Here's an original quote from an article about a new video game based on Thoreau's famous work, *Walden*.

Original Quote

"The digital Walden Pond will showcase a first-person point-of-view where you can wander through the lush New England foliage, stop to examine a bush and pick some fruit, cast a fishing rod, return to a spartan cabin modeled after Thoreau's and just roam around the woods, grappling with life's unknowable questions."

Incorrect Paraphrasing According to Hayden (2012),

the Walden Pond game will offer a first-person view in which the play can meander within the New England trees and wilderness, pause to study foliage or grab some food, go fishing, return home to a small cabin based on Thoreau's cabin, and just venture around in the woods, pondering important questions of life (para. 3).

Explanation

Here, you can see that the “paraphrase” follows the exact same structure as the original passage. Even though the wording has been changed, this would be considered a form of plagiarism by some because the sentence structure has been copied, taking this beyond just sharing the ideas of the passage. Let's take a look at a better paraphrase of the passage.

Correct Paraphrasing According to Hayden (2012), the upcoming video game Walden Pond is a first-person game that simulates the life and experiences of Thoreau when he lived at Walden Pond. Based upon Thoreau's famous work, *Walden*, the game allows players to experience life in the New England woods, providing opportunities for players to fish, gather food, live in a cabin, and contemplate life, all within a digital world (para. 3).

Explanation

In this paraphrase, the student has captured the main idea of the passage but changed the sentence structure and the wording.

The student has added some context, which is often helpful in a paraphrase, by providing some background for the game.

You will now have the chance to practice your ability to recognize an effective paraphrase in the [Paraphrasing Activity](#) on the following page.

35. Paraphrasing Activity

Paraphrasing Activity



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36. Quoting

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the uses of quotes.
- Correctly use quotes in sentences.

Quotation marks (“ ”) set off a group of words from the rest of the text. Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotations of another person’s words or to indicate a title. Quotation marks always appear in pairs.

Direct Quotations

A direct quotation is an exact account of what someone said or wrote. To include a direct quotation in your writing, enclose the words in quotation marks. An indirect quotation is a restatement of what someone said or wrote. An indirect quotation does not use the person’s exact words. You do not need to use quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Direct quotation: Carly said, “I’m not ever going back there again.”

Indirect quotation: Carly said that she would never go back there.

Writing at Work

Most word processing software is designed to catch errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. While this can be a useful tool, it is better to be well acquainted with the rules of punctuation than to leave the thinking to the computer. Properly punctuated writing will convey your meaning clearly. Consider the subtle shifts in meaning in the following sentences:

- The client said he thought our manuscript was garbage.
- The client said, “He thought our manuscript was garbage.”

The first sentence reads as an indirect quote in which the client does not like the manuscript. But did he actually use the word “garbage”? (This would be alarming!) Or has the speaker paraphrased (and exaggerated) the client’s words?

The second sentence reads as a direct quote from the client. But who is “he” in this sentence? Is it a third party?

Word processing software would not catch this because the sentences are not grammatically incorrect. However, the meanings of the sentences are not the same. Understanding punctuation will help you write what you mean, and in this case, could save a lot of confusion around the office!

Punctuating Direct Quotations

Quotation marks show readers another person’s exact words. Often, you will want to identify who is speaking. You can do this at the beginning, middle, or end of the quote. Notice the use of commas and capitalized words.

Beginning: Madison said, “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Middle: “Let’s stop at the farmers market,” Madison said, “to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

End: “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner,” Madison said.

Speaker not identified: “Let’s stop at the farmers market to buy some fresh vegetables for dinner.”

Always capitalize the first letter of a quote even if it is not the beginning of the sentence. When using identifying words in the middle of the quote, the beginning of the second part of the quote does not need to be capitalized.

Use commas between identifying words and quotes. Quotation marks must be placed *after* commas and periods. Place quotation marks after question marks and exclamation points only if the question or exclamation is part of the quoted text.

Question is part of quoted text: The new employee asked, “When is lunch?”

Question is not part of quoted text: Did you hear her say you were “the next Picasso”?

Exclamation is part of quoted text: My supervisor beamed, “Thanks for all of your hard work!”

Exclamation is not part of quoted text: He said I “single-handedly saved the company thousands of dollars”!

Quotations within Quotations

Use single quotation marks (‘ ’) to show a quotation within in a quotation.

Theresa said, “I wanted to take my dog to the festival, but the man at the gate said, ‘No dogs allowed.’”

“When you say, ‘I can’t help it,’ what exactly does that mean?”

“The instructions say, “Tighten the screws one at a time.””

Titles

Use quotation marks around titles of short works of writing, such as essays, songs, poems, short stories, and chapters in books. Usually, titles of longer works, such as books, magazines, albums, newspapers, and novels, are italicized.

“Annabelle Lee” is one of my favorite romantic poems.

The New York Times has been in publication since 1851.

Writing at Work

In many businesses, the difference between exact wording and a paraphrase is extremely important. For legal purposes, or for the purposes of doing a job correctly, it can be important to know exactly what the client, customer, or supervisor said. Sometimes, important details can be lost when instructions are paraphrased. Use quotes to indicate exact words where needed, and let your coworkers know the source of the quotation (client, customer, peer, etc.).

Key Takeaways

- Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotes and titles of short works.
- Use single quotation marks to enclose a quote

within a quote.

- Do not use any quotation marks for indirect quotations.

Exercises

1. Copy the following sentences onto your own sheet of paper, and correct them by adding quotation marks where necessary. If the sentence does not need any quotation marks, write OK.

- Yasmin said, I don't feel like cooking. Let's go out to eat.
- Where should we go? said Russell.
- Yasmin said it didn't matter to her.
- I know, said Russell, let's go to the Two Roads Juice Bar.
- Perfect! said Yasmin.
- Did you know that the name of the Juice Bar is a reference to a poem? asked Russell.
- I didn't! exclaimed Yasmin. Which poem?
- The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost Russell explained.
- Oh! said Yasmin, Is that the one that starts with the line, Two roads diverged in a yellow wood?
- That's the one said Russell.

37. Quoting II

What this handout is about

Used effectively, quotations can provide important pieces of evidence and lend fresh voices and perspectives to your narrative. Used ineffectively, however, quotations clutter your text and interrupt the flow of your argument. This handout will help you decide when and how to quote like a pro.

When should I quote?



Use

quotations at strategically selected moments. You have probably been told by teachers to provide as much evidence as possible in support of your thesis. But packing your paper with quotations will not necessarily strengthen your argument. The majority of your paper should still be your original ideas in your own words (after all, it's your paper). And quotations are only one type of evidence: well-balanced papers may also make use of paraphrases, data, and

statistics. The types of evidence you use will depend in part on the conventions of the discipline or audience for which you are writing. For example, papers analyzing literature may rely heavily on direct quotations of the text, while papers in the social sciences may have more paraphrasing, data, and statistics than quotations.

1. Discussing specific arguments or ideas.

Sometimes, in order to have a clear, accurate discussion of the ideas of others, you need to quote those ideas word for word. Suppose you want to challenge the following statement made by John Doe, a well-known historian:

“At the beginning of World War Two, almost all Americans assumed the war would end quickly.”

If it is especially important that you formulate a counterargument to this claim, then you might wish to quote the part of the statement that you find questionable and establish a dialogue between yourself and John Doe:

Historian John Doe has argued that in 1941 “almost all Americans assumed the war would end quickly” (Doe 223). Yet during the first six months of U.S. involvement, the wives and mothers of soldiers often noted in their diaries their fear that the war would drag on for years.

2. Giving added emphasis to a particularly authoritative source on your topic.

There will be times when you want to highlight the words of a particularly important and authoritative source on your topic. For example, suppose you were writing an essay about the differences between the lives of male and female slaves in the U.S. South. One

of your most provocative sources is a narrative written by a former slave, Harriet Jacobs. It would then be appropriate to quote some of Jacobs's words:

Harriet Jacobs, a former slave from North Carolina, published an autobiographical slave narrative in 1861. She exposed the hardships of both male and female slaves but ultimately concluded that “slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women.”

In this particular example, Jacobs is providing a crucial first-hand perspective on slavery. Thus, her words deserve more exposure than a paraphrase could provide. Jacobs is quoted in Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

3. Analyzing how others use language.

This scenario is probably most common in literature and linguistics courses, but you might also find yourself writing about the use of language in history and social science classes. If the use of language is your primary topic, then you will obviously need to quote users of that language.

Examples of topics that might require the frequent use of quotations include:

Southern colloquial expressions in William Faulkner's Light in August

Ms. and the creation of a language of female empowerment

A comparison of three British poets and their use of rhyme

4. Spicing up your prose.



In order to lend variety to your prose, you may wish to quote a source with particularly vivid language. All quotations, however, must closely relate to your topic and arguments. Do not insert a quotation solely for its literary merits.

One example of a quotation that adds flair:

Calvin Coolidge's tendency to fall asleep became legendary. As H. L. Mencken commented in the *American Mercury* in 1933, "Nero fiddled, but Coolidge only snored."

How do I set up and follow up a quotation?

Once you've carefully selected the quotations that you want to use, your next job is to weave those quotations into your text. The words that precede and follow a quotation are just as important as the quotation itself. You can think of each quote as the filling in a sandwich: it may be tasty on its own, but it's messy to eat without some bread on either side of it. Your words can serve as the "bread" that helps readers digest each quote easily. Below are four guidelines for setting up and following up quotations.

In illustrating these four steps, we'll use as our example, Franklin Roosevelt's famous quotation, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

1. Provide a context for each quotation.

Do not rely on quotations to tell your story for you. It is your responsibility to provide your reader with a context for the quotation. The context should set the basic scene for when, possibly where, and under what circumstances the quotation was spoken or written. So, in providing a context for our above example, you might write:

When Franklin Roosevelt gave his inaugural speech on March 4, 1933, he addressed a nation weakened and demoralized by economic depression.

2. Attribute each quotation to its source.

Tell your reader who is speaking. Here is a good test: try reading your text aloud. Could your reader determine without looking at your paper where your quotations begin? If not, you need to attribute the quote more noticeably.

Avoid getting into the “he/she said” attribution rut! There are many other ways to attribute quotes besides this construction. Here are a few alternative verbs, usually followed by “that”:

add	remark	exclaim
announce	reply	state
comment	respond	estimate
write	point out	predict
argue	suggest	propose
declare	criticize	proclaim
note	complain	opine
observe	think	note

Different reporting verbs are preferred by different disciplines, so pay special attention to these in your disciplinary reading. If you're unfamiliar with the meanings of any of these words or others you find in your reading, consult a dictionary before using them.

3. Explain the significance of the quotation.

Once you've inserted your quotation, along with its context and attribution, don't stop! Your reader still needs your assessment of why the quotation holds significance for your paper. Using our Roosevelt example, if you were writing a paper on the first one-hundred days of FDR's administration, you might follow the quotation by linking it to that topic:

With that message of hope and confidence, the new president set the stage for his next one-hundred days in office and helped restore the faith of the American people in their government.

4. Provide a citation for the quotation.

All quotations, just like all paraphrases, require a formal citation. For more details about particular citation formats, see the [UNC Library's citation tutorial](#). In general, you should remember one rule of thumb: Place the parenthetical reference or footnote/endnote number after—not within—the closed quotation mark.

Roosevelt declared, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" (Roosevelt, Public Papers 11).

Roosevelt declared, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."¹

How much should I quote?

As few words as possible. Remember, your paper should primarily contain your own words, so quote only the most pithy and memorable parts of sources. Here are three guidelines for selecting quoted material judiciously.

1. Excerpt fragments.

Sometimes, you should quote short fragments, rather than whole sentences. Suppose you interviewed Jane Doe about her reaction to John F. Kennedy's assassination. She commented:

"I couldn't believe it. It was just unreal and so sad. It was just unbelievable. I had never experienced such denial. I don't know why I felt so strongly. Perhaps it was because JFK was more to me than a president. He represented the hopes of young people everywhere."

You could quote all of Jane's comments, but her first three sentences are fairly redundant. You might instead want to quote Jane when she arrives at the ultimate reason for her strong emotions:

Jane Doe grappled with grief and disbelief. She had viewed JFK, not just as a national figurehead, but as someone who "represented the hopes of young people everywhere."

2. Excerpt those fragments carefully!

Quoting the words of others carries a big responsibility. Misquoting misrepresents the ideas of others. Here's a classic example of a misquote:

John Adams has often been quoted as having said: “This would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it.”

John Adams did, in fact, write the above words. But if you see those words in context, the meaning changes entirely. Here’s the rest of the quotation:

Twenty times, in the course of my late reading, have I been on the point of breaking out, ‘this would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!!!!’ But in this exclamation, I should have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. Without religion, this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in public company—I mean hell.

As you can see from this example, context matters!

This example is from Paul F. Boller, Jr. and John George, *They Never Said It: A Book of Fake Quotes, Misquotes, and Misleading Attributions* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

3. Use block quotations sparingly.

There may be times when you need to quote long passages. However, you should use block quotations only when you fear that omitting any words will destroy the integrity of the passage. If that passage exceeds four lines (some sources say five), then set it off as a block quotation.

Here are a few general tips for setting off your block quotation—to be sure you are handling block quotes correctly in papers for different academic disciplines, check the index of the citation style guide you are using:

1. Set up a block quotation with your own words followed by a colon.
2. Indent. You normally indent 4-5 spaces for the start of a paragraph. When setting up a block quotation, indent the

entire paragraph once from the left-hand margin.

3. Single space or double space within the block quotation, depending on the style guidelines of your discipline (MLA, CSE, APA, Chicago, etc.).
4. Do not use quotation marks at the beginning or end of the block quote—the indentation is what indicates that it's a quote.
5. Place parenthetical citation according to your style guide (usually after the period following the last sentence of the quote).
6. Follow up a block quotation with your own words.

So, using the above example from John Adams, here's how you might include a block quotation:

After reading several doctrinally rigid tracts, John Adams recalled the zealous ranting of his former teacher, Joseph Cleverly, and minister, Lemuel Bryant. He expressed his ambivalence toward religion in an 1817 letter to Thomas Jefferson:

Twenty times, in the course of my late reading, have I been on the point of breaking out, 'this would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!!!!' But in this exclamation, I should have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. Without religion, this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in public company—I mean hell.

Adams clearly appreciated religion, even if he often questioned its promotion.

How do I combine quotation marks with other punctuation marks?

It can be confusing when you start combining quotation marks with other punctuation marks. You should consult a style manual for

complicated situations, but the following two rules apply to most cases:

1) Keep periods and commas within quotation marks.

So, for example:

According to Professor Jones, Lincoln “feared the spread of slavery,” but many of his aides advised him to “watch and wait.”

In the above example, both the comma and period were enclosed in the quotation marks. The main exception to this rule involves the use of internal citations, which always precede the last period of the sentence. For example:

According to Professor Jones, Lincoln “feared the spread of slavery,” but many of his aides advised him to “watch and wait” (Jones 143).

Note, however, that the period remains inside the quotation marks when your citation style involved superscript footnotes or endnotes. For example:

According to Professor Jones, Lincoln “feared the spread of slavery,” but many of his aides advised him to “watch and wait.”²

2) Place all other punctuation marks (colons, semicolons, exclamation marks, question marks) outside the quotation marks, except when they were part of the original quotation.

Take a look at the following examples:

The student wrote that the U. S. Civil War “finally ended around 1900”!

The coach yelled, “Run!”

In the first example, the author placed the exclamation point outside the quotation mark because she added it herself to emphasize the absurdity of the student’s comment. The student’s original comment had not included an exclamation mark. In the second example, the exclamation mark remains within the quotation mark because it is indicating the excited tone in which the coach yelled the command. Thus, the exclamation mark is considered to be part of the original quotation.

How do I indicate quotations within quotations?

If you are quoting a passage that contains a quotation, then you use single quotation marks for the internal quotation. Quite rarely, you quote a passage that has a quotation within a quotation. In that rare instance, you would use double quotation marks for the second internal quotation.

Here’s an example of a quotation within a quotation:

In “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” Hans Christian Andersen wrote, “But the Emperor has nothing on at all!” cried a little child.”

Remember to consult your style guide to determine how to properly cite a quote within a quote.

When do I use those three dots (. . .)?

Whenever you want to leave out material from within a quotation, you need to use an ellipsis, which is a series of three periods, each of

which should be preceded and followed by a space. So, an ellipsis in this sentence would look like . . . this. There are a few rules to follow when using ellipses:

1. Be sure that you don't fundamentally change the meaning of the quotation by omitting material.

Take a look at the following example: "The Writing Center is located on the UNC campus and serves the entire UNC community."

"The Writing Center . . . serves the entire UNC community."

The reader's understanding of the Writing Center's mission to serve the UNC community is not affected by omitting the information about its location.

2. Do not use ellipses at the beginning or ending of quotations, unless it's important for the reader to know that the quotation was truncated.

For example, using the above example, you would NOT need an ellipsis in either of these situations:

"The Writing Center is located on the UNC campus . . ."

"The Writing Center " . . . serves the entire UNC community."

3. Use punctuation marks in combination with ellipses when removing material from the end of sentences or clauses.

For example, if you take material from the end of a sentence, keep the period in as usual.

“The boys ran to school, forgetting their lunches and books. Even though they were out of breath, they made it on time.”

“The boys ran to school. . . . Even though they were out of breath, they made it on time.”

Likewise, if you excerpt material at the end of clause that ends in a comma, retain the comma.

“The red car came to a screeching halt that was heard by nearby pedestrians, but no one was hurt.”

“The red car came to a screeching halt . . . , but no one was hurt.”



Is it ever okay to insert my own words or change words in a quotation?

Sometimes it is necessary for clarity and flow to alter a word or

words within a quotation. You should make such changes rarely. In order to alert your reader to the changes you've made, you should always bracket the altered words. Here are a few examples of situations when you might need brackets.

1. Changing verb tense or pronouns in order to be consistent with the rest of the sentence.

Suppose you were quoting a woman who, when asked about her experiences immigrating to the United States, commented “nobody understood me.” You might write:

Esther Hansen felt that when she came to the United States “nobody understood [her].”

In the above example, you've changed “me” to “her” in order to keep the entire passage in third person. However, you could avoid the need for this change by simply rephrasing:

“Nobody understood me,” recalled Danish immigrant Esther Hansen.

2. Including supplemental information that your reader needs in order to understand the quotation.

For example, if you were quoting someone's nickname, you might want to let your reader know the full name of that person in brackets.

“The principal of the school told Billy [William Smith] that his contract would be terminated.”

Similarly, if a quotation referenced an event with which the reader might be unfamiliar, you could identify that event in brackets.

“We completely revised our political strategies after the strike [of 1934].”

3. Indicating the use of nonstandard grammar or spelling.

In rare situations, you may quote from a text that has nonstandard grammar, spelling, or word choice. In such cases, you may want to insert [sic], which means “thus” or “so” in Latin. Using [sic] alerts your reader to the fact that this nonstandard language is not the result of a typo on your part. Always italicize “sic” and enclose it in brackets. There is no need to put a period at the end. Here’s an example of when you might use [sic]:

Twelve-year-old Betsy Smith wrote in her diary, “Father is afraid that he will be guilty of beach [sic] of contract.”

Here [sic] indicates that the original author wrote “beach of contract,” not breach of contract, which is the accepted terminology.

4. Do not overuse brackets!

For example, it is not necessary to bracket capitalization changes that you make at the beginning of sentences. For example, suppose you were going to use part of this quotation:

“We never looked back, but the memory of our army days remained with us the rest of our lives.”

If you wanted to begin a sentence with an excerpt from the

middle of this quotation, there would be no need to bracket your capitalization changes.

“The memory of our army days remained with us the rest of our lives,” commented Joe Brown, a World War II veteran.

Not

“[T]he memory of our army days remained with us the rest of our lives,” commented Joe Brown, a World War II veteran.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing the original version of this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout’s topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the [UNC Library’s citation tutorial](#).

Barzun, Jacques and Henry F. Graff. *The Modern Researcher*. 6th Edition. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2004.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*, 2nd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th Edition. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

38. Using Sources Blending Source Material with Your Own Work

When working with sources, many students worry they are simply regurgitating ideas that others formulated. That is why it is important for you to develop your own assertions, organize your findings so that your own ideas are still the thrust of the paper, and take care not to rely too much on any one source, or your paper's content might be controlled too heavily by that source.

In practical terms, some ways to develop and back up your assertions include:

Blend sources with your assertions. Organize your sources before and as you write so that they blend, even within paragraphs. Your paper—both globally and at the paragraph level—should reveal relationships among your sources, and should also reveal the relationships between your own ideas and those of your sources.

Write an original introduction and conclusion. As much as is practical, make the paper's introduction and conclusion your own ideas or your own synthesis of the ideas inherent in your research. Use sources minimally in your introduction and conclusion.

Open and close paragraphs with originality. In general, use the openings and closing of your paragraphs to reveal your work—"enclose" your sources among your assertions. At a minimum, create your own topic sentences and wrap-up sentences for paragraphs.

Use transparent rhetorical strategies. When appropriate, outwardly practice such rhetorical strategies as analysis, synthesis, comparison, contrast, summary, description, definition, hierarchical structure, evaluation, hypothesis, generalization,

classification, and even narration. Prove to your reader that you are thinking as you write.

Also, you must clarify where your own ideas end and the cited information begins. Part of your job is to help your reader draw the line between these two things, often by the way you create context for the cited information. A phrase such as “A 1979 study revealed that . . .” is an obvious announcement of citation to come. Another recommended technique is the insertion of the author’s name into the text to announce the beginning of your cited information. You may worry that you are not allowed to give the actual names of sources you have studied in the paper’s text, but just the opposite is true. In fact, the more respectable a source you cite, the more impressed your reader is likely to be with your material while reading. If you note that the source is the NASA Science website or an article by Stephen Jay Gould or a recent edition of *The Wall Street Journal* right in your text, you offer your readers immediate context without their having to guess or flip to the references page to look up the source.

What follows is an excerpt from a political science paper that clearly and admirably draws the line between writer and cited information:

The above political upheaval illuminates the reasons behind the growing Iranian hatred of foreign interference; as a result of this hatred, three enduring geopolitical patterns have evolved in Iran, as noted by John Limbert. First . . .

Note how the writer begins by redefining her previous paragraph’s topic (political upheaval), then connects this to Iran’s hatred of foreign interference, then suggests a causal relationship and ties her ideas into John Limbert’s analysis—thereby announcing that a synthesis of Limbert’s work is coming. This writer’s work also becomes more credible and meaningful because, right in the text, she announces the name of a person who is a recognized authority in the field. Even in this short excerpt, it is obvious that this writer is using proper citation and backing up her own assertions with confidence and style.

39. Using Sources Creatively



Using Sources Creatively

Heather Logan

([printable version here](#))

When writing papers that require the use of outside source material, it is often tempting to cite only direct quotations from your sources. If, however, this is the only method of citation you choose, your paper will become nothing more than a series of quotations linked together by a few connecting words. Your paper will seem to be a collection of others' thoughts and will contain little thinking on your part.

To avoid falling into this trap, follow a few simple pointers:

- **Avoid using long quotations merely as space-fillers.** While this is an attractive option when faced with a ten-page paper, the overuse of long quotations gives the reader the impression you cannot think for yourself.
- **Don't use only direct quotations.** Try using paraphrases in addition to your direct quotations. To the reader, the effective use of paraphrases indicates that you took the time to think about the meaning behind the quote's words. (For further assistance see our materials on "[Using Paraphrases](#).")
- When introducing direct quotations, try to **use a variety of verbs in your signal phrases**. Don't always rely on stock verbs such as "states" or "says." Think for a little while about the purpose of your quotation and then choose a context-appropriate verb.

Also, when using direct quotations try qualifying them in a novel or

interesting manner. Depending on the system of documentation you're using, the signal phrases don't always have to introduce the quotation.

For example, instead of saying:

"None of them knew the color of the sky" is the opening line of Stephen Crane's short story, "The Open Boat" (339). This implies the idea that "all sense of certainty" in the lives of these men is gone (Wolford 18).

Try saying:

"None of them knew the color of the sky," the opening line of Stephen Crane's, "The Open Boat," implies that "all sense of certainty" in the lives of these men is gone (Crane 339; Wolford 18).

The combination of these two sentences into one is something different. It shows thought on the writer's part in how to combine direct quotations in an interesting manner.

40. Integration Practice

Signal Phrases Activity



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4I. When to Quote & When to Paraphrase

“When to Quote and When to Paraphrase” was written by Brianna Jerman

Academic writing requires authors to connect information from outside sources to their own ideas in order to establish credibility and produce an effective argument.

Sometimes, the rules surrounding source integration and plagiarism may seem confusing, so many new writers err on the side of caution by using the simplest form of integration: direct quotation. However, using direct quotes is not always the best way to use a source. Paraphrasing or summarizing a text is sometimes a more effective means of supporting a writer’s argument than directly quoting. Taking into consideration the purpose of their own writing and the purpose of utilizing the outside source, authors should seek to vary the ways in which they work sources into their own writing.

Paraphrasing and quoting are two of the three ways an author can integrate sources. The two methods are closely related, and therefore, can sometimes be confused with one another. Quoting borrows the exact wording used in a source and is indicated by placing quotes around the borrowed material. Paraphrasing, on the other hand, borrows an idea found in a shorter passage but communicates this idea using different words and word order. While it is acceptable to loosely follow a similar structure, paraphrasing requires more than simply changing a few of the original words to synonyms. Both paraphrasing and directly quoting have their merit, but they should be used at different times for different purposes. An author chooses to use one of these strategies depending on why the source is being used and what information the source provides.

When to Paraphrase

Paraphrasing provides an author the opportunity to tailor the passage for the purpose of his or her own essay, which cannot always be done when using a direct quote. Paraphrasing should be used to

- Further explain or simplify a passage that may be difficult to understand. It could be that the topic, such as the process of extracting stem cells, is particularly difficult to follow, or that the author has used language that further complicates the topic. In such situations, paraphrasing allows an author to clarify or simplify a passage so the audience can better understand the idea.
- Establish the credibility of the author. In connection to the above point, paraphrasing a complicated passage can help the author establish trust with his or her audience. If an author directly quotes a difficult passage without analysis or further explanation, it may appear that he or she does not understand the idea. Paraphrasing not only clarifies the idea in the passage but also illustrates that the writer, since he or she can articulate this difficult message to the reader, is knowledgeable about the topic and should be trusted.
- Maintain the flow of the writing. Each author has a unique voice, and using direct quotes can interrupt this voice. Too many quotes can make an essay sound choppy and difficult to follow. Paraphrasing can help communicate an important idea in a passage or source without interrupting the flow of the essay.
- Eliminate less relevant information. Since paraphrasing is written using the author's own words, he or she can be more selective in what information from a passage should be included or omitted. While an author should not manipulate a passage unnecessarily, paraphrasing allows an author to leave

out unrelated details that would have been part of a direct quote.

- Communicate relevant statistics and numerical data. A lot of times, sources offer statistical information about a topic that an author may find necessary to developing his or her own argument. For example, statistics about the percentage of mothers who work more than one job may be useful to explaining how the economy has affected children rearing practices. Directly quoting statistics such as this should be avoided.

When to Quote

Direct quotes should be used sparingly, but when they are used, they can be a powerful rhetorical tool. As a rule, avoid using long quotes when possible, especially those longer than three lines. When quotes are employed, they should be used to

- Provide indisputable evidence of an incredible claim. Directly quoting a source can show the audience exactly what the source says so there is not suspicion of misinterpretation on the author's part.
- Communicate an idea that is stated in a particularly striking or unique way. A passage should be quoted if the source explains an idea in the best way possible or in a way that cannot be reworded. Additionally, quoting should be used when the original passage is particularly moving or striking.
- Serve as a passage for analysis. If an author is going to analyze the quote or passage, the exact words should be included in the essay either before or following the author's analysis.
- Provide direct evidence for or proof of an author's own claim. An author can use a direct quote as evidence for a claim he or she makes. The direct quote should follow the author's claim

and a colon, which indicates that the following passage is evidence of the statement that precedes it.

- Support or clarify information you've already reported from a source. Similar to the above principle, an author can use a direct quote as further evidence or to emphasize a claim found in the source. This strategy should be used when an idea from a source is particularly important to an author's own work.
- Provide a definition of a new or unfamiliar term or phrase. When using a term that is used or coined by the source's author or that is unfamiliar to most people, use direct quotes to show the exact meaning of the phrase or word according to the original source.

42. Paragraphing

Paragraphing: MEAL Plan

When it's time to draft your essay and bring your content together for your audience, you will be working to build strong paragraphs. Your paragraphs in a research paper will focus on presenting the information you found in your source material and commenting on or analyzing that information. *It's not enough to simply present the information in your body paragraphs and move on. You want to give that information a purpose and connect it to your main idea or thesis statement.*

Your body paragraphs in a research paper will include [summarizing](#), [paraphrasing](#), and [quoting](#) your source material, but you may be wondering if there is an effective way to organize this information.

Duke University coined a term called the “MEAL Plan” that provides an effective structure for paragraphs in an academic research paper. Select the pluses to learn what each letter stands for.



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<https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroecccollegecomp/?p=60>

43. Revising & Editing Process

Revising & Editing Process



Revision and editing are both important parts of the writing process, yet many students skip revision and don't spend enough time editing. It's important to remember that these steps are separate and that each step takes time. The following pages will help you develop strong revision and editing strategies for your writing process.

Revision

The revision process is an essential aspect of writing and one that you should build in time for before submitting your written work.

Revision means to “re-see” the piece of writing.

It isn't just proofreading your paper or correcting grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors. Revision is stepping back and looking at your paper as a whole and seeing if you are effectively saying what you intend to say. It is giving your paper a thorough

look to see how you can make it stronger. Your goal should always be to write clearly, concisely, and in an engaging way.

One way to go about re-seeing your writing is to do it in three stages. Many people skip the first stage, but looking at the big picture is crucial in making sure you have a well-developed essay that expresses your ideas.

44. Revision Checklist

Revision Checklist

Revision Checklist

- ✓ Have I conveyed the significance of my ideas to my readers? Is my purpose clear?
- ✓ Does my essay meet the requirements of my assignment?
- ✓ Is my focus too broad? Have I narrowed my topic well?
- ✓ Is my organization plan effective?
- ✓ Is there a way to make the concept I am discussing clearer and more focused?
- ✓ Is the voice or style I am using appropriate for my audience?
- ✓ Have I clearly defined any terms used?
- ✓ Have I considered any possible objections to my position, if I take a position in this research essay?
- ✓ Do I provide clear transitions between my ideas? Are there any gaps between my points?
- ✓ Are there any points that need further explanation or detail?
- ✓ Are there any points that need to be cut because they are not related to my focus?
- ✓ Are my sources credible? Have I addressed this credibility in my writing?
- ✓ Have I integrated my source material smoothly and effectively by providing signal phrases and/or context for the information?
- ✓ Have I put source material in my own words as much as possible and used quotes only when necessary?
- ✓ Have I properly acknowledged all of my source material, including paraphrases and summaries?

When you revise, you'll want to work to “see” your writing as your audience might see it. It's important to allow some time between drafting and revision to really help you “re-see” your work with fresh eyes.

Click on the image below for an interactive PDF version of the checklist above to help you focus on some key issues as you edit. In some browsers, you may need to download or save this file to be able to utilize all of its functionality.

Excelsior College Online Writing Lab

Revision Checklist



When you revise, you will want to work to “see” your writer as your audience might see it. It is important to allow some time between drafting and revising to really help you “re-see” your work with fresh eyes.

Here is a checklist to help you focus on some key issues as you revise.

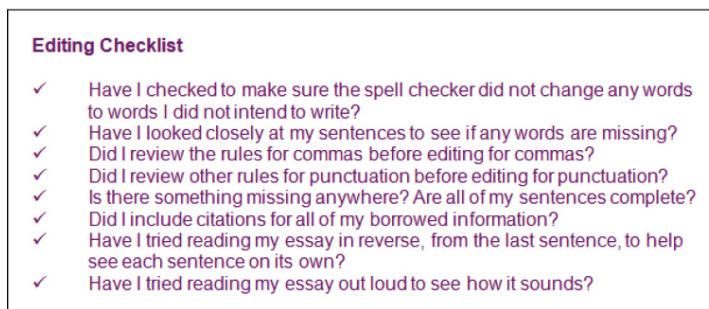
Name:

- ☐ Have I conveyed the significance of my ideas to my readers? Is my purpose clear?
- ☐ Does my essay meet the requirements of my assignment?
- ☐ Is my focus too broad? Have I narrowed my topic well?
- ☐ Is my organization plan effective?
- ☐ Is there a way to make the concept I am discussing clearer and more focused?
- ☐ Is the voice or style I am using appropriate for my audience?
- ☐ Have I clearly defined any terms used?
- ☐ Have I considered any possible objections to my position, if I take a position in this research essay?
- ☐ Do I provide clear transitions between my ideas? Are there any gaps between my points?
- ☐ Are there any points that need further explanation or detail?
- ☐ Are there any points that need to be cut because they are not related to my focus?
- ☐ Are my sources credible? Have I addressed this credibility in my writing?
- ☐ Have I integrated my source material smoothly and effectively by providing signal phrases and/or context for the information?
- ☐ Have I put source material in my own words as much as possible and used quotes only when necessary?
- ☐ Have I properly acknowledged all of my source material, including paraphrases and summaries?

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45. Editing Checklist

Editing Checklist



Remember, your spell checker and grammar checker on your word processing program are valuable tools, but they miss a lot! Pay close attention as you run both your spell checker and grammar checker, questioning them as you go.

Once you have finished running these programs, it's time for you to get to work as an editor. Click on the image below for an interactive PDF version of the checklist above to help you focus on some key issues as you edit. In some browsers, you may need to download or save this file to be able to utilize all of its functionality.

[A picture of the checklist with a link to the interactive pdf.](#)

46. See It In Practice: Revising and Editing

See It in Practice

Here, you'll see two video casts. In the first video, our student writer shows how she engaged in some content revision of her paper. In the second video, you'll see how our student writer edited her paper, questioning the spell checker and grammar checker during the process.



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[https://library.achievingthedream.org/
monroeccccollegecomp/?p=64](https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=64)



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monroeccccollegecomp/?p=64](https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=64)

47. Literacy Narrative Assignment

Download the [rubric for this assignment here](#).

Literacy Narrative Assignment

Prompt: Write a 700-900 word, thesis-driven essay in which you discuss some moment of your literacy acquisition that you can relate to at least two of the essays we've read.

Essay Requirements:

- Double-spaced
- 12 pt font Courier New
- Standard Essay format (title, introduction, thesis, at least three body paragraphs, conclusion)
- Quotations in MLA format from at least two of the essays we've read

Introduction: Provide background information that you think will help your reader to understand the context for the story you're going to tell. Close with a thesis that clarifies what your paper is going to be about; make sure it's clear why what you're going to write about is important. Make sure this thesis relies on one of the themes we've discussed (use your synthesis chart)

Section 1: THIS MAY BE MORE THAN ONE PARAGRAPH. Discuss a shared theme in two or more of the essays we've read (this includes those from the DALN, too. You can even quote from your classmates if you found what they posted about in discussion connects to what

you've read); help your reader to understand how other writers have acquired literacy. When you provide examples, quote and/or paraphrase from the essay(s) using MLA format.

Section 2: THIS MAY BE MORE THAN ONE PARAGRAPH. Discuss a key moment in your life related to that same literacy theme from section 1.

Conclusion: Make clear why what you've discussed is important for your reader.

PART IV

MODULE 3: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

48. Understanding the Rhetorical Situation

[Murder! \(Rhetorically Speaking\) by Janet Boyd](#)

This essay is a chapter in Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 2, a peer-reviewed open textbook series for the writing classroom.

49. Argument Analysis

Argument Analysis



Sometimes, the best way to learn how to write a good argument is to start by analyzing other arguments. When you do this, you get to see what works, what doesn't, what strategies another author uses, what structures seem to work well and why, and more.

Therefore, even though this section on argument analysis is one of the last lessons in this area, your professor may have you start here before you draft a single word of your own essay.

In the pages that follow, you will learn about analyzing arguments for both content and rhetorical strategies. The content analysis may come a little easier for you, but the rhetorical analysis is extremely important. To become a good writer, we must develop the language of writing and learn how to use that language to talk about the “moves” other writers make.

When we understand the decisions other writers make and why, it helps us make more informed decisions as writers. We can move from being the “accidental” writer, where we might do well but are not sure why, to being a “purposeful” writer, where we have an awareness of the impact our writing has on our audience at all levels.

50. Thinking About Content

Thinking About Content



Content analysis of an argument is really just what it seems—looking closely at the content in an argument. When you're analyzing an argument for content, you're looking at things like claims, evidence to support those claims, and if that evidence makes sense.

The [Toulmin](#) method described earlier in this learning area is a great tool for analyzing the content of an argument. In fact, it was developed as a tool for analyzing the content of an argument. Using the different concepts we learn in the Toulmin model, we are able to examine an argument by thinking about what claim is being made, what evidence is being used to support that claim, the warrants behind that evidence, and more.

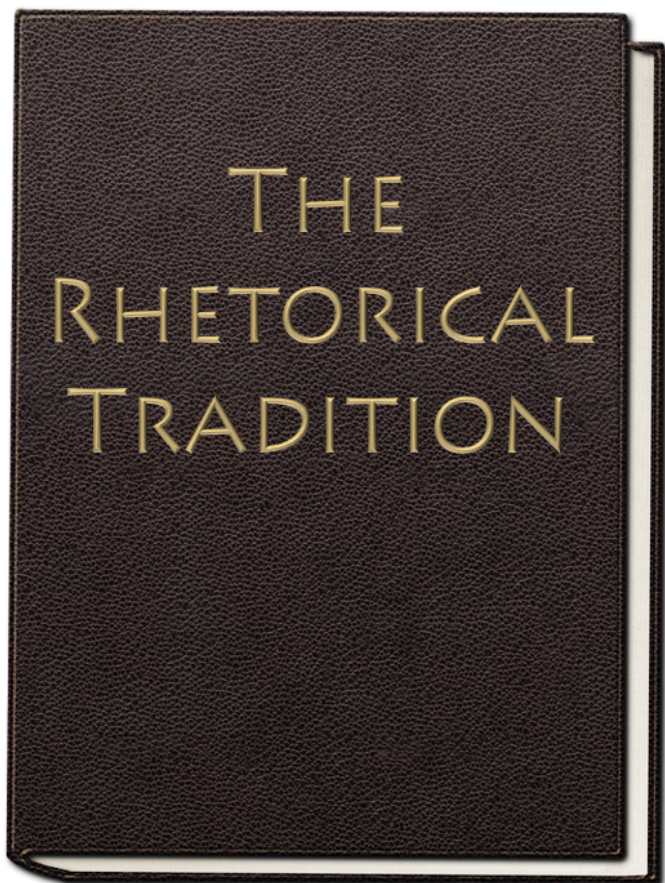
When you analyze an argument, there is a good chance your

professor will have you review and use the Toulmin information provided in the Excelsior OWL.

However, the lessons you have learned about [logical fallacies](#) will also help you analyze the content of an argument. You'll want to look closely at the logic being presented in the claims and evidence. Does the logic hold up, or do you see logical fallacies? Obviously, if you see fallacies, you should really question the argument.

51. Thinking Rhetorically

Thinking Rhetorically



As a part of thinking rhetorically about an argument, your professor may ask you to write a formal or informal rhetorical analysis essay. Rhetorical analysis is about “digging in” and exploring the strategies

and writing style of a particular piece. Rhetorical analysis can be tricky because, chances are, you haven't done a lot of rhetorical analysis in the past.

To add to this trickiness, you can write a rhetorical analysis of any piece of information, not just an essay. You may be asked to write a rhetorical analysis of an ad, an image, or a commercial.

The key is to start now! Rhetorical analysis is going to help you think about strategies other authors have made and how or why these strategies work or don't work. In turn, your goal is to be more aware of these things in your own writing.

When you analyze a work rhetorically, you are going to explore the following concepts in a piece:

[Audience](#)

[Purpose](#)

[Style or Voice](#)

[Ethos](#)

[Pathos](#)

[Logos](#)

You will be thinking about the decisions an author has made along these lines and thinking about whether these decisions are effective or ineffective.

The following page provides a sample rhetorical analysis with some notes to help you better understand your goals when writing a formal rhetorical analysis.

52. Looking at a Sample Analysis

Sample Rhetorical Analysis

Seeing rhetorical analysis in action is one of the best ways to understand it. Read the following sample rhetorical analysis of an article. If you like, you can read the original article the student analyzes by clicking [here](#).

Then, click the image below to see the sample paper in a PDF format. In the sample, scroll over the dialog boxes to learn about the strategies and techniques the author used in this rhetorical analysis essay. In some browsers, you may need to download or save this file to be able to utilize all of its functionality.

[Rhetorical Analysis Sample Essay](#)
[Thumbnail](#)

53. Practicing Analysis

“The Zombie as Barometer of Capitalist Anxiety” by D.T. Robb

The modern incarnation of the zombie, as seen strewn across pop culture horror novels and films in ever-increasing numbers, is easily recognized and radically different from its historical roots; any member of our modern Western culture can spot the gray, often rotting flesh, the black eyes, the dishevelled appearance, the shuffling gait, the wretched moaning, and, of course, the bloody mouths flecked with fresh flesh and detritus. However, the zombie goes beyond cheap thrills; zombies, as well as other variations of horror monsters, represent a fear that pervades society as a whole, a collective nervousness of destruction at the hands of a seemingly invulnerable foe.



According to Peter Dendle, in his essay, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety,” the zombie has “...tapped into a deep-seated anxiety about society, government, individual protection, and our increasing disconnectedness from subsistence skills.”¹ Dendle states that the prevalence of the zombie in pop culture correlates to society’s fear that any sudden jolt of the status quo, undead or otherwise, would

result in mass chaos, that people would be unable to protect themselves or to survive on their own.

Yet one may take the thought of this collective anxiety a step further to discern one of the underlying causes and major contributions to the general nervousness of the public and the widespread appearances of zombies in films and literature: capitalism.

Past to Present

According to Dendle, “the zombie, a soul-less hulk mindlessly working at the bidding of another, thus records a residual communal memory of slavery: of living a life without dignity or meaning, of going through the motions.”¹ Here we see the zombie’s origins, as corpses reanimated by bourgeois landowners or factory foremen through some rites of magick for the sake of performing menial labour without demanding fair wages, hours, and treatment, never tiring or making mistakes.

This is one of the earliest iterations of the zombie, and the origin of the capitalist metaphor. The proto-capitalist economy of nineteenth century America was dependent on slave labour, and pro-slavery politicians of the time argued that the economy of the South would have collapsed entirely should slavery be outlawed. Here it is evident how a fear and disdain of capitalism would have been imprinted on the minds of the enslaved Africans and Haitians, from whose culture the zombie originated. They were slaves because slavery was profitable, vital to economy and thus not morally bankrupt to the slave owners, and an implicit resistance to this system would have been planted.

From here the zombie transformed from a worker drone to a bloodthirsty monster, personality vanished, flesh rotting off of bone, an insatiable hunger for long pig, and most importantly a horde—one capable of the annihilation of human society. Zombies went from a cheap work force to a full-blown apocalypse, and they

had never been more popular as capitalism conquered the world. The capitalist metaphor came to a head with George Romero's 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead*, in which the main characters attempt to escape the zombie apocalypse by finding sanctuary in a shopping mall. When the survivors find temporary safety, they return to their consumer roots and ransack the mall for products, and, after observing his comrades and the encroaching zombies, one character remarks, "They're us."²

Later, much more subtle hints at the metaphor of consumer capitalism occur in the *Resident Evil* cycle and many other films and books, where the zombie outbreak is, directly or otherwise, the result of illicit business practices of faceless corporations. This possibly stems from a mistrust of large conglomerates whose GDPs began to exceed entire nations'; Wal-Mart currently has more purchasing power than Saudi Arabia does.

In Max Brooks' *World War Z*, a critique of capitalism is offered in the form of Phalanx, a vaccine manufactured to prevent "rabies" and sold as a solution to the developing zombie crisis; Phalanx was pushed through the FDA by the government (and the corporations that control it) despite a lack of testing and evidence regarding the zombie virus, for the sake of keeping the populace calm while earning unprecedented profits at the expense of the victimized masses. According to Breckenridge Scott, the character responsible for Phalanx:

"It protected them from their fears. That's all I was selling. Hell, because of Phalanx, the biomed sector started to recover, which, in turn, jump-started the stock market, which then gave the impression of a recovery, which then restored consumer confidence to stimulate an actual recovery!"³

This passage shows how the bourgeois businessman Scott justified selling his snake oil to the masses, in that the mass production of Phalanx and its widespread sales led to an economic recovery, and the reader is presented with the conflicting viewpoints between economic recovery and the deaths of millions of misled humans. The reader is presented with the question of whether the economy

should take precedent over the well-being of the people, and while the choice is obvious, it shows the reader that corporations will sacrifice lives for their bottom lines.

And so, as zombies enter the world of prime-time television dramas, so too does our anxiety grow.

Anxiety Disorder

The zombie as we know it today, by its very nature, is a mindless creature which was once a human being, a sentient individual with a name and free will, but has been warped to become a ravenous consumer without thought or emotion. It meanders through city streets, around small towns, and along highways with no thought or desire but to consume anything and everything it can—namely,



human flesh.

If one listens to the cries of anti-capitalist dissenters, an eerie similarity between zombies and members of capitalist economies appears, at least in terms of behavior; the masses go out from their homes and flock to shopping centers and department stores, willingly giving away the fruits of their labour in exchange for luxury items, and often really don't know why.

A defining feature of the zombie is the loss of the individual's sentience once transformed into the undead, just as a loss of

sentence occurs in the individual within a consumer capitalist culture, at the hands of mass marketing and advertising. On the subject of the loss of free will, author Chuck Palahniuk wittily writes: “Experts in ancient Greek culture say that people back then didn’t see their thoughts as belonging to them. When ancient Greeks had a thought, it occurred to them as a god or goddess giving an order... Now people hear a commercial for sour cream potato chips and rush out to buy, but now they call this free will. At least the ancient Greeks were being honest.”⁴

Here Palahniuk’s anti-capitalist sentiments can be translated to the parallel between zombies and consumers, as both experiences a loss of sentence, and of the individual. The zombie is a monster of majority, unlike its vampiric and lupine counterparts, as those in our society who are given to the consumer instinct are a majority and the few individuals who criticize capitalism from within it are persecuted and defamed in the way that zombies will swarm and attack an uninfected human. In addition, the zombie is a mechanism of annihilation; while vampires are a small minority living in the underground of a human world, feeding to survive, the zombie horde exists only for the purpose of consuming or converting all humans until the species is extinct and the paradigm shifts to a world inhabited only by zombies.

This is similar to the cries of the left wing, who accuse the right—the upholders of *laissez-faire* capitalism and unwavering nationalism—of demanding conformity of all to their belief systems and ways of living (if you don’t like America, well you can just get out).

However, Dendle postulates that while zombie apocalypse films and novels capitalize on the anxiety of the masses, the underlying purpose of zombie culture is not to display the end of the world but to illustrate how the world may be profoundly changed for the better by means of the old world’s destruction. Dendle states: “Post-apocalyptic zombie worlds are fantasies of liberation: the intrepid pioneers of a new world trek through the shattered remnants of

the old, trudging through the shells of buildings and the husks of people.”¹

In *World War Z*, the sundering of the zeitgeist in the United States shatters the pre-existing capitalistic and highly individualized philosophy of the masses and opens up the populace, through their vulnerability, to survival only through communal life and cooperation. However, even Brooks’ profound statements regarding cooperation are contradicted within his novel, in the example of socialist Cuba becoming a booming post-war capitalist force. One can infer from the critiques of both capitalism and communism that Brooks supports neither in his writing, adding another layer to the zombie-capitalist.

I believe that the impact of Brooks’ novel regarding our economic anxiety can be summarized by this statement of a Japanese character late in the novel: “His generation wanted to rule the world, and mine was content to let the world, and by the world I mean [the United States], rule us. There has to be a better way, a middle path where we take responsibility...”² This is a powerful line, as it transforms the novel from a simple metaphor for capitalism to a statement that the world must take a path between capitalism and communism in order to survive and prosper, and that this path is now available as the world has an opportunity to rebuild. This is the ultimate function of the zombie, beyond cheap thrills of a horror film and beyond a criticism of the right-wing and consumer capitalism; the zombie functions to clean the slate and enable the world to rebuild anew.

1. Dendle, Peter. “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety.” 45-55. Print.

2. Brooks, Max. *World War Z*. Print.

3. Ramero, George A. *Dawn of the Dead*. Film.

4. Palahniuk, Chuck. *Lullaby*. Print.

54. Brainstorming

[Download the Rhetorical Analysis Worksheet here.](#)

55. Rhetorical Analysis Assignment

[Download the Rubric](#) for this assignment here.

Rhetorical Analysis of Your Own Writing

LENGTH: 700-900 Words

FORMAT:

- Traditional essay (intro, at least three body paragraphs, conclusion)
- Double-spaced
- Quotations and paraphrases from your literacy narrative in MLA format

For this assignment you will conduct a rhetorical analysis of your literacy narrative (or, if you prefer, some persuasive text you've written in the past).

Objectives: To identify your rhetorical strengths and weaknesses; to analyze your own writing style and tone; to practice using quotations and paraphrase; to develop a thesis-driven essay

Directions:

1. Review my comments and the grading rubric on your graded literacy narrative; OR, find a text argument, a twitter argument, a Facebook argument, an email or letter you've written, a persuasive paper you've composed, etc. It needs to be attempting to persuade someone to do or think something.
2. Just as we've practiced with the professional essays we've read,

you'll look for rhetorical strategies and/or logical fallacies in YOUR OWN written argument. Some of the strategies you'll examine will be things like: how did you establish your tone? What words did you use, and how did they impact the tone? How did you organize your evidences? What kinds of evidences did you use? How did you present those evidences, etc? Use the Basic Questions for Rhetorical Analysis worksheet to guide your prewriting.

3. Draft an essay in which you explain what strategies you made in your written argument, what mistakes you made, and what the impact of your strengths and/or weaknesses were on the success of your argument. You will show your reader what you mean by quoting from different parts of your argument as examples and then discussing those examples.
4. Imagine your audience as someone who hasn't yet taken this class. Your rhetorical analysis will guide that student through how to better analyze rhetorical contexts by using your literacy narrative (or other writing) as an example.
5. Your rhetorical analysis should demonstrate to me that you understand how rhetorical strategies function (and that you can articulate that knowledge in an organized, coherent, and interesting essay).

ORGANIZATION TIPS:

- Your introduction should establish the context for your argument and summarize any necessary knowledge your reader needs to know before you get into the analysis. This might be explanation of the rhetorical context (what the assignment was, who you were writing to/for, when you wrote it, how long it took you, the grade you received on it if was a formal essay, etc).
- Your introduction should contain an EXPLICIT THESIS that makes clear in a succinct statement (1-3 sentences) what you

have learned, overall, about your rhetorical skills by analyzing them. It should “forecast” what your body paragraphs are going to talk about.

- Each of your body paragraphs should address a distinct aspect of your rhetorical skills.
 - Option 1: three body paragraphs explaining how effectively you used pathos and logos and established ethos and what you might have done to be more effective.
 - Option 2: three different rhetorical strategies you used (one per paragraph) that you can now identify in your literacy narrative (or other writing) and whether you used them effectively (why/why not).
 - Option 3: three body paragraphs organized into things you did effectively and things you should have improved on (ex: two effective choices you made as an arguer; one ineffective choice you made as an arguer)
- Your conclusion should look forward and answer some form of the following questions: how did analyzing your own writing change your perspective of your own writing and/or of the debate itself? How can that information be used in the future?

PART V

MODULE 4: RESEARCH AND ARGUMENTATION

56. Research

Research

Welcome to the Research area!



57. Group Work

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)

58. Group Work online

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)

59. Collaborative Writing

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)

60. Finding Topics

Finding Topics



Sometimes, your professors will assign argument topics for you to write about. For example, if you're discussing an issue in your Criminal Justice class, you may find that your professor assigns all students a topic related to that issue. However, many times, you'll have options for your argument assignments.

Most students are initially pleased to find they can choose any issue they want to write about, but this can be more difficult than it seems. What issue will you choose? How will you narrow your topic? What will your audience think about your issue? What will your audience already know about your issue?

There is a lot to consider, and, sometimes, students feel overwhelmed by the process of trying to find a good argument. Thankfully, there are some strategies to help you, and exploring

good writing process habits discussed in other areas of the Excelsior OWL can help.

- First, as always, consider your assignment requirements and try to think rhetorically about your audience, your potential ideas for topics, and what your professor is asking of you. The [Thinking about Your Assignment](#) page from [The Writing Process](#) area of the Excelsior OWL will help.
- Once, you understand the parameters of your assignment, it's time to think about your goals within those parameters. For example, do you have to write about an issue related to your major? If so, what issues stand out in your field? Or, do you have to write about an issue in your local community? If so, do you know of any issues? If not, how can you find out? At this stage, you may need to do a little preliminary research to help you find out more about current issues.
- If you feel really stuck, take advantage of some excellent topic resources on the web. You can may find resources like [200 Prompts for Argumentative Writing](#) or [Topic Suggestions for Argumentative Research Papers](#) helpful.
- If you're still uncertain about your topic, even after you have gathered some general information about it, some prewriting activities can help. You might try taking two or three potential issues and engaging in one or two of the [prewriting activities](#) in the [The Writing Process](#) area.

These strategies can help you choose an issue to write about that will interest you, engage your audience, and meet your assignment requirements.

Of course, once you have found your topic, you still have to find your argument. What angle will you take? What kind of argument would work best? On the next page, you'll see a few examples of students taking a topic or issue and finding a strong, engaging argument for your paper.

6I. Finding Arguments

Finding Arguments

Finding your way into an issue is no easy task. Once you have developed your topic idea, you have to decide how you're going to approach your issue with your given audience at the time you are writing. You have to think critically about making good decisions as a writer, balancing your own needs with the needs of your audience. Essentially, writing an effective argument is about seeing outside of your own experiences and imagining how others might view your issue. This is definitely a form of critical thinking and gives you good practice at becoming the kind of writer who can be successful in any given writing situation.

But before you begin planning your Pulitzer acceptance speech, it might be helpful to see an example or two of how an effective writer might find an argument from a broad topic or issue.

Click on the video below to see how two students each worked with a topic idea. In the video, you'll see how each student started with a broad topic, considered audience knowledge, and worked to narrow a topic into a specific argumentative angle.



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<https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=81>

62. Topic Development

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)

63. Narrowing & Developing

Narrowing & Developing

Narrowing Your Topic / Asking the Right Questions



It may seem easy to choose a topic for a research paper, but it can actually be difficult sometimes. In fact, determining a good, solid research question can be one of the hardest parts of writing a strong research paper.

Here are some guidelines to help you.

If you are able to choose your topic, find a topic that interests you. If your topic is assigned, try thinking about an aspect of that topic you find most interesting. You'll be spending a great deal of time working on this paper. Make sure that it's about something that you really are interested in learning to understand very well.

Keep in mind that your final topic and research question won't simply come to you by thinking about it. You need to get out there and start digging—through books, through encyclopedias, and

through internet sites. Pick a general topic that attracts you, and then roll up your sleeves and start reading. The narrowed topic and research question will only come to you as you wrestle with the material related to that topic.

Now, here's one of the keys to doing a research paper for a college course. Don't try to write the history of everything about your topic. Instead, find one small intriguing aspect of your topic and focus on that. A good research paper is not a big, general history or overview of everything that covers a great deal of information in a very superficial manner. It's narrowed and focused and goes deep into a limited area of a topic.

By the time you are finished researching and writing, you have become something of an expert on that very narrow topic. Let's take an example and walk you through the process.

64. Narrowing Process

Narrowing Process

The example we'll use to demonstrate a narrowing process will be World War II. Suppose you want to write your research paper on World War II.

The material written on World War II has filled whole libraries, so you obviously won't be able to complete a research paper on all of WWII in just eight or ten weeks.

Click on the tabs found at <https://owl.excelsior.edu/research/narrowing-and-developing/narrowing-and-developing-narrowing-process/> to see how you might narrow a topic like World War II.

65. Research Questions

Research Questions

Now that you have seen how to narrow a topic, it's time to see how you can take your topic and develop a good research question.

Click through the tabs found at <https://owl.excelsior.edu/research/narrowing-and-developing/narrowing-and-developing-research-questions/> to see how you could take the specific topic we chose from the previous activity and develop a good research question. Then, you'll see tips on how you can develop your own research question.

66. Developing Keywords for Your Research



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<https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=86>

67. Library Worksheet: Tips for Evaluating Information

[Download the Library Worksheet here.](#)



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<https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroecccollegecomp/?p=87>

68. Evaluating Sources

Evaluating Sources



As you gather sources for your research, you'll need to know how to assess the validity and reliability of the materials you find.

Keep in mind that the sources you find have all been put out there by groups, organizations, corporations, or individuals who have some motivation for getting this information to you. To be a good researcher, you need to learn how to assess the materials you find and determine their reliability—before deciding if you want to use them and, if so, how you want to use them.

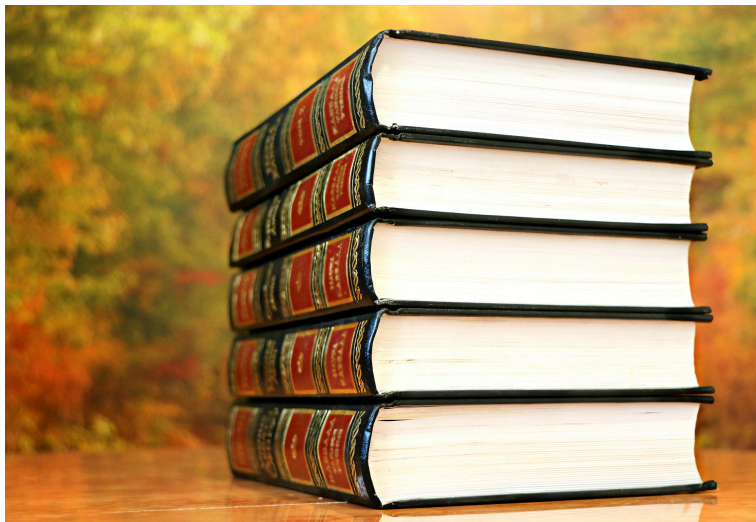
Whether you are examining material in books, journals, magazines, newspapers, or websites, you want to consider several issues before deciding if and how to use the material you have found.

- [Suitability](#)

- [Authorship and Authority](#)
- [Documentation](#)
- [Timeliness](#)

69. Source Suitability

Source Suitability



Does the source fit your needs and purpose?

Before you start amassing large amounts of research materials, think about the types of materials you will need to meet the specific requirements of your project.

Overview Materials

Encyclopedias, general interest magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek* online), or online general news sites (CNN, MSNBC) are good places to begin your research to get an overview of your topic and the big questions associated with your particular project. But once you get to the paper itself, you may not want to use these for your main sources.

Focused Lay Materials

For a college-level research paper, you need to look for books,

journal articles, and websites that are put out by organizations that do in-depth work for the general public on issues related to your topic. For example, an article on the melting of the polar icecaps in *Time* magazine offers you an overview of the issue. But such articles are generally written by non-scientists for a non-scientific audience that wants a general—not an in-depth—understanding of the issue. Although you'll want to start with overview materials to give yourself the broad-stroke understanding of your topic, you'll soon need to move to journals and websites in the field. For example, instead of looking at online stories on the icecaps from CNN, you should look at the materials at the website for the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) or reports found at the website for the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC). You also should look at some of the recent reports on the polar icecaps in *Scientific American* or *The Ecologist*.

Specialists' Materials

If you already have a strong background in your topic area, you could venture into specialists' books, journals, and websites. For example, only someone with a strong background in the field would be able to read and understand the papers published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* or the *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences*. Sources such as these are suitable for more advanced research paper assignments in upper-level courses, but you may encounter source requirements like these in freshman writing courses.

70. Authorship & Authority

Authorship & Authority

When you consider the quality of your sources, you should also consider the authorship and authority of your sources. Who wrote the material? Is that person or organization credible? The following interaction will provide you with more details on authorship and authority to help you make good decisions about your sources.

Go to <https://owl.excelsior.edu/research/evaluating-sources/evaluating-sources-authorship-and-authority/> for the interactive activity.

7I. Evaluating Sources: Documentation

Evaluating Sources: Documentation



Where does the book / article / website get its information?

Look for a bibliography and / or footnotes. In a piece of writing that is making a case using data, historical or scientific references, or appeals to outside sources of any kind, those sources should be thoroughly documented. The writer should give you enough information to go and find those sources yourself and double-check that the materials are used accurately and fairly by the author.

Popular news magazines, such as *Time* or *Newsweek* online, will generally not have formal bibliographies or footnotes with their articles. The writers of these articles will usually identify their sources within their texts, referring to studies, officials, or other texts. These types of articles, though not considered academic, may be acceptable for some undergraduate college-level research

papers. Check with your instructor to make sure that these types of materials are allowed as sources in your paper.

Examine the sources used by the author. Is the author depending heavily on just one or two sources for his or her entire argument? That's a red flag for you. Is the author relying heavily on anonymous sources? There's another red flag. Are the sources outdated? Another red flag.

If references to outside materials are missing or scant, you should treat this piece of writing with skepticism. Consider finding an alternative source with better documentation.

72. Timely Sources

Timely Sources



Is the material up-to-date?

The best research draws on the most current work in the field. That said, depending on the discipline, some work has a longer shelf life than others. For example, important articles in literature, art, and music often tend to be considered current for years, or even decades, after publication. Articles in the physical sciences, however, are usually considered outdated within a year or two (or even sooner) after publication.

In choosing your materials, you need to think about the argument you're making and the field (discipline) within which you're making it.

For example, if you're arguing that climate change is indeed anthropogenic (human-caused), do you want to use articles published more than four or five years ago? No. Because the science

has evolved very rapidly on that question, you need to depend most heavily on research published within the last year or two.

However, suppose you're arguing that blues music evolved from the field songs of American slaves. In this case, you should not only look at recent writing on the topic (within the last five years), but also look at historical assessments of the relationship between blues and slavery from previous decades.

Timeliness and Websites

Scrutinize websites, in particular, for dates of posting or for the last time the site was updated. Some sites have been left up for months or years without the site's owner returning to update or monitor the site. If sites appear to have no regular oversight, you should look for alternative materials for your paper.

73. Evaluating Online Sources

Evaluating Online Sources



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[https://library.achievingthedream.org/
monroeccccollegecomp/?p=93](https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=93)

You may have seen the commercial above making a point about how you have to be careful of what you find on the internet. This is true in life and in your efforts to find quality sources for academic papers.

The internet is particularly challenging because anyone can really

post anything they want on the internet. At the same time, there are some really quality sources out there, such as online journals.

The important thing is to use skepticism, use the guidelines you have read about in this section of Research, and be sure to ask your professor if general web sources are even allowed. Sometimes, in an effort to have students steer clear of inaccurate information, professors will forbid general web sources for a paper, but this is not always the case. If you are allowed to go to the web to locate sources, just remember to check for [suitability](#), [credibility](#), and [timeliness](#) using the guidelines presented in this section of the Excelsior OWL.

Using the [Evaluation Checklist](#) will also give you some good guidelines to remember, no matter where you found your source.

74. Evaluation Checklist

Evaluation Checklist

The following checklist should prove helpful as you evaluate your sources. In some browsers, you may need to download or save this file to be able to utilize all of its functionality.

Source Evaluation Checklist



Name: _____

Source Title: _____ Source Type: _____

(Print Book, Online Book, Ebook, Print Journal Article, Online Journal Article, Print Magazine Article, Online Magazine Article, Article from Database, Print Newspaper Article, Online Newspaper Article, Web Page, Television, Film or Music, Photograph, Thesis or Dissertation, Abstract, Book Review, Software, Blog Entry/Comment, Online Course/Discussion Board, Personal Letter or Email, Government Publication, Interview)

Credibility

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Relevance and Content

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Intended Audience

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Date

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Purpose

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered "no" to one or more of these questions, you should take a closer look at your source. Getting one "no" does not mean you should not use your source, but it does mean you should really think about the overall quality of your service.

*Checklist adapted from University of Massachusetts "Evaluating Sources Checklist"



75. Databases v. Google

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)



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[https://library.achievingthedream.org/
monroeccccollegecomp/?p=95](https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=95)

76. Wikipedia

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)

77. Thesis Development

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)

78. See It In Practice: Thesis Development

See It in Practice

In the video cast below, you'll see our student writer consider her research and use her findings from researching her research question in order to develop a working thesis. A working thesis is a tentative thesis you establish early on in your research writing process to give you focus as you complete your process. You may find you need to revise your working thesis later during **drafting** or **revision**, but establishing a good working thesis can help make the research writing process much easier.



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<https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=98>

79. Thesis Statement Activity

Thesis Statement Activity



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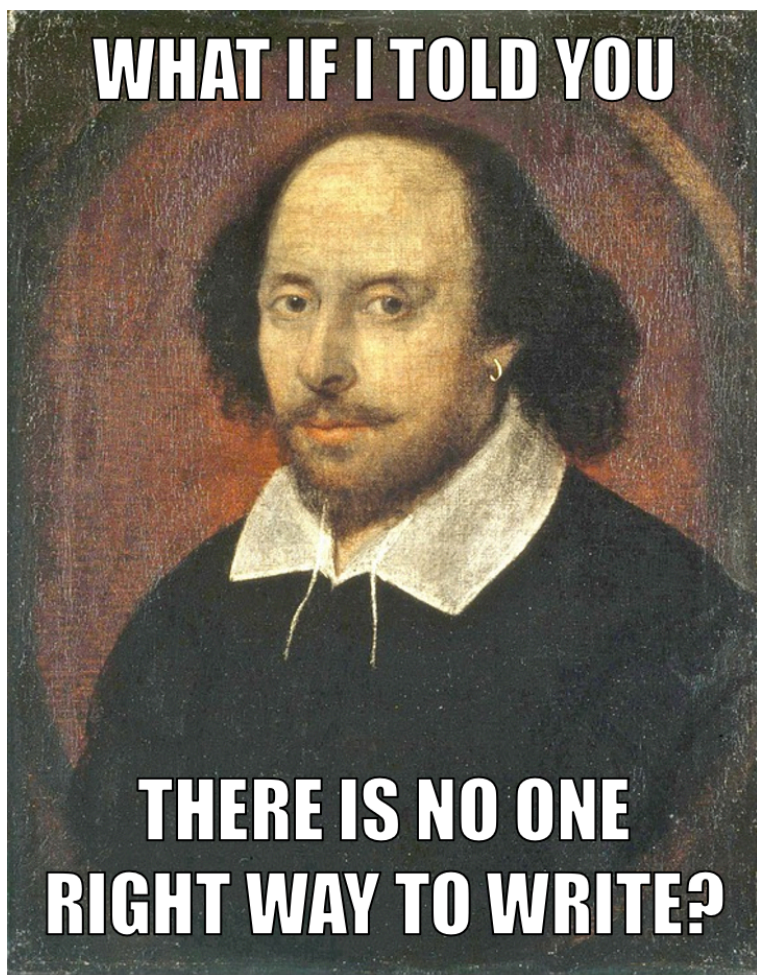
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80. Using Sources Effectively

[Download a pdf of the chapter here.](#)

8I. Organizing Your Argument

Organizing Your Argument



Once you have established a working thesis, it's time to think about how you'll organize your argument. While it's important to note that you should continue in your quest for resources and support throughout this process, even as you locate source material, you can begin to think about how you plan to bring your ideas and your sources together into a clear, organized manner.

As is the case with all types of writing, there is no one right way to organize or structure an argument. However, there are some basic structures and formats that can help you get an idea of how you want to organize your work and, at the very least, provide you with a baseline structure for your argument.

In the pages that follow, you'll explore different types and structures of arguments and will consider the pros and cons of each one. The important thing to remember is that you want to choose an argument structure that works well for your situation, meeting the needs of your audience as well as your goals as a writer. It's also good to remember that even the structures you see here are not "set in stone," and there is room for flexibility within these structures.

82. Argument & Audience

Argument & Audience



In [The Writing Process](#) area of the Excelsior OWL, you can learn about the importance of audience awareness to your writing in general. But, when it comes to making a convincing argument, audience awareness is going to be more important than ever before.

In argument, perhaps more than any other genre, you have to be completely aware of and writing for your target audience. After all, the reason you're writing at all is to convince your audience of something.

This section of the Excelsior OWL will explore the different ways in which you can be convincing to an audience. After all, different audiences require different approaches. The most important thing for you to begin to understand now is that argumentative writing is all about your audience, which means you'll need to spend some time getting to know your audience.

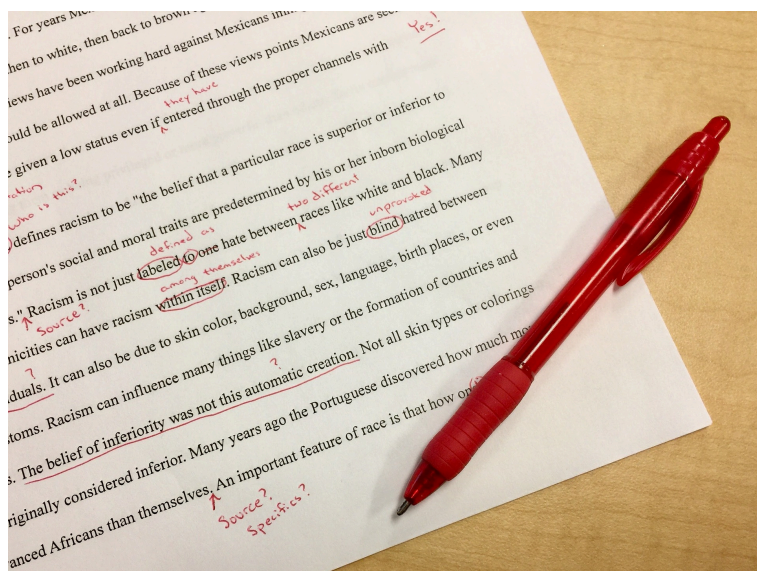
This doesn't mean you have to hang out with the people for whom you are writing. That may not be possible. It does mean you need to do some thinking and possibly some researching about who your audience is, what that audience knows about your topic or issue, and what biases or opinions that audience may already have. A good place to start is the web. Search for your topic or issue and then your audience. What can you find out?

Let's look at an example. Let's say you have decided to write about reducing the costs of textbooks at your college. You first have to decide who you need to convince. Since most of your fellow college students would agree with you on an issue like this, if you're going to make a difference, you would need to target a different audience—perhaps college administrators. A good first step would be to head to the web to see what college administrators think about this issue. Then, as a second step, if you could interview a college administrator on your campus, you would have even more information.

The Prezi on the next page will show you how you might go about trying to understand that audience and the things you would need to keep in mind as you write.

83. Revising & Editing A Research Paper

Revising & Editing a Research Paper



Revising isn't the first step in the process of writing a research paper, but it is perhaps the most important. Many students skip the revision process, mistaking editing for revision. While editing is also very important, revision is an integral part of any good writing process. During revision, you should try to see your work from different perspectives and different angles. When you revise, it's particularly important to keep your target audience in mind. You may need to make changes to content and organization. You may have to go back to the research stage of your process to find more information. You may need to cut out information that doesn't relate

to your thesis or focus. Revision is about making big changes to your writing to improve flow, development, and focus.

It's best to allow some time between drafting and revision. If you can take a break from your writing and come back to it a few days or even a week later, you're more likely to be able to see where you need to revise.

You shouldn't begin editing until you feel confident in your revisions. Once you feel your content is where you need it to be, it's time to begin a thorough editing process. Editing is about making changes to your sentences and surface features in your research paper. When you edit, you should check for things like grammatical errors, punctuation errors, spelling, and issues related to documentation.

Too often, students think that they can edit well with one pass or count on a grammar checker to "fix" everything, but to be a good editor, you should read over your essay many times yourself, each time focusing on a different issue. Grammar checkers are helpful tools, but they miss a lot, as you'll see in the [See It in Practice](#) video.

A good editing practice also involves spending extra time on the issues you may have had trouble with in the past. For example, if you know you have trouble with commas, you might review the guidelines on the [comma](#) in the [Grammar Essentials](#) area of the Excelsior OWL. Then, with those guidelines fresh in your mind, edit your essay, just paying attention to your use of commas. You might then make another pass, just looking to make sure your in-text citations are correct.

Another helpful strategy is to read your essay in reverse, starting with your last sentence and going from there. This takes away the flow as you read your essay, will slow you down, and can give you an opportunity to see each sentence on its own.

84. Note-Taking

Note-Taking



Taking notes well is a highly underrated skill. If you take notes well, your [writing process](#) will flow much more smoothly than if you take notes with an erratic and incomplete system. In addition, a good note-taking system makes it much less likely that you'll have to backtrack to find missing information or clarify unclear information on your cards.

You want to avoid the following scenario:

After several weeks of painstaking research, you're finally ready to start drafting parts of your paper. You pull out your reams of electronic or handwritten notes or notecards and start arranging the materials you're most likely to use first. You start drafting a section; suddenly, you remember running across a really perfect set of data that clearly supports the point you're arguing. Excited, you draft the paragraph making the point, find the card with the

data you need, and write the following: “An experiment that clearly documents this trend was conducted at...” You look all over the card or paper and discover that you forgot to write down the specifics of whose experiment this was. You also forgot to write down in which journal and article the experiment was reported.

Now you have some choices to make:

1. Retrace your research steps and try to find the article again.
2. Replace the perfect data with information from another experiment you read about that doesn't support your point quite as well and leaves you with a weaker argument.
3. Abandon that part of your argument altogether.

Obviously, choices two and three are highly imperfect, but choice number one may take you several hours. What do you do?

The following pages in this section on note-taking will provide you will some guidelines to help you avoid this kind of situation altogether.

85. Labeling Notes

Labeling Notes

Label Your Notes: [Summary](#), [Paraphrase](#), or [Quotation](#)



When you are taking notes, you might jot down the general parameters of an experiment you read about, you might summarize an author's argument, or you might copy a section of text. Three, four, or five weeks later, when you sit down to write, you probably won't remember which card contained the [quote](#), which contained the [paraphrase](#), and which contained the [summary](#) in your own words.

Whether you are reporting someone else's experimental process, idea, or comment, you must always clearly distinguish when your use of that other person's material is a **summary of a main idea** (someone else's key idea, but in your own words), a **paraphrase** (someone else's supporting materials rewritten in your own words), or a **quotation** (someone else's exact words).

You can help protect yourself from errors by creating a system that labels the material. One easy system is to mark quotations with a clear **Q**, paraphrases with a **P**, and summaries with an **S**. With guidelines such as these, or with another clear system that you devise, you won't find yourself unintentionally using someone else's words by confusing a quote with your own summary. Using another author's words without proper quotation marks is considered plagiarism, even if you have a footnote or a citation!

86. Documenting Notes

Documenting Notes



In addition to labeling your notes, you need to keep track of the sources of your notes.

You could write the full source on the back of each card or at the bottom of each chunk of text as you make a note, but that will get tiresome quickly.

Information Notecards and Master Notecards

Instead of rewriting the same publication information multiple times on your information notecards, try writing the full publication information of each source on one master notecard (or in one list). Then, in your notes or on the information notecards themselves, you only need to write the author and page number (for example, “Smith, p. 68”), and label it as a summary, paraphrase, or quote. The full publication information is already in your master set of references, so you don’t need to write all that down again.

When you are writing the draft of your paper, you may need to

clarify an idea or find more information. Simply look at the correct notecard, and find the author and page number. Then, look at your master list or in your set of master notecards to find the full citation for the text. You now know exactly which book, article, or website you need to look at again. In addition, when the time comes to write out your References page in full for your final paper, you can just turn to your master list, and all your sources are right there.

87. See It In Practice: Note Taking

See It in Practice

In the video cast below, you'll see how our writer keeps track of her sources and labels information from one of her sources for her research paper.



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monroeccccollegecomp/?p=107](https://library.achievingthedream.org/monroeccccollegecomp/?p=107)

88. Oral Presentation Assignment

Oral Presentations Assignment and Rubric

Each group will present their website project to the rest of the class during the last three weeks of the course.

Presentations will be 15-20 minutes each and each member of the group must present for at least five minutes total.

You may each choose individual pages from your website to discuss or you may all discuss each page. Below is the criteria used to assess your oral presentation skills:

Criteria	Expert	Proficient	Novice
Eye Contact	Student maintains consistent eye contact with audience	Student mostly maintains eye contact with audience	Student mostly fails to maintain eye contact with audience
Posture	Student's posture demonstrates confidence and engagement	Student's posture somewhat demonstrates confidence and engagement	Student's posture may distract from the presentation and suggests lack of confidence and/or engagement
Clarity	Entire presentation is clear; language used is appropriate for audience	Presentation is mostly clear; language is mostly appropriate for audience	Presentation is largely unclear; language is mostly inappropriate for audience
Fluency	Volume, rate, and inflection demonstrate engagement and confidence	Presenter may speak too quickly or slowly at times; speaker may speak too softly or loudly at times	Presenter is often difficult to hear or speaks too quickly or slowly for effective delivery
Organization of Content	Main idea is identified quickly; clear transitions are used between topics; organization is strategic and effective	Main idea is identified; some transitions are used between topics; organization is effective	Main idea may be unclear or difficult to discern from subtopics; order of subtopics is ineffective
Authority	Speaker demonstrates thorough knowledge of topic	Speaker demonstrates knowledge of topic but may depend too much on notecards at times	Speaker does not demonstrate authoritative knowledge on the topic; speaker may read from the slides/web pages

Use of Multimedia	Multimedia images are directly relevant to the overall content, and provide support for the presentation	Multimedia is related to the topic, mostly enhances the presentation, mostly provides support	Multimedia seems unrelated to the topic and/or does not enhance the presentation
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89. Research Project Assignment

[Download the rubric for this assignment here.](#)

For the final six weeks of class, we will work on group projects. The project will be to create a website, the purpose of which is to identify a problem particular groups of students coming to MCC might experience and to offer solutions and/or resources for those students to be successful. Your website will also need to demonstrate that you've considered how that solution might best be implemented and respond to potential challenges to its implementation.

You will work in groups of three students and submit ONE website which you will compose on Google Sites. There will be many steps to this project. (potential groups: single parents, veterans, students who work full-time, students with disabilities, second-language learners, immigrant populations, Honors students, Transitional Studies students, returning adult students, etc.)

Step 1: Choose a Topic and Group. Interview at least three members of that group (not including yourself) to find out concerns them about academic success. Choose one pressing concern that group has. Write a proposal.

Step 2: Accumulate Research about the Problem and Solutions; choose a solution to focus on

Step 3: Create a Website with the following pages within it:

- Welcome Page that introduces the problem (300-500 words) and includes video interviews with three members of the affected group talking about the problem (2-3 minute videos)
- Background Page that discusses the history and/or breadth of the problem (500-750 words)
- "Argument" Page that offers a solution and discusses how to

implement; opposing viewpoints and concerns will need to be addressed (1500 words)

- An Expert Profile Page— summary of an interview with an expert at MCC or in the local community who has first-hand knowledge of the issue (250-350 words)
- An Annotated Bibliography of at least 6 authoritative sources (entries should be 250 words each; all should be referenced in your website)
- A Resources Page of links to at least five additional websites and a brief 1-3 sentence description of each that your audience might reference
- An About Page with your pictures and text about members of the group

Additionally, each page on your website will need to have at least one multimodal text (some sort of visual)

Step 6: Present Final Project to your classmates