

Successful Writing (ENC0025)

SUCCESSFUL WRITING (ENC0025)

FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT
JACKSONVILLE

Florida State College at Jacksonville
Jacksonville



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to FSCJ's ENC0025 version of the Successful Writing textbook. This text has been specifically designed for this course and is adapted from previous Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA) work by the University of Minnesota Libraries. Their version was an adaptation of a previous work.

PART I

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO WRITING

1.1 Reading and Writing in College

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the expectations for reading and writing assignments in college courses.
2. Understand and apply general strategies to complete college-level reading assignments efficiently and effectively.
3. Recognize specific types of writing assignments frequently included in college courses.
4. Understand and apply general strategies for managing college-level writing assignments.
5. Determine specific reading and writing strategies that work best for you individually.

1.1 READING AND WRITING IN COLLEGE

Introduction to Reading and Writing in College

As you begin this chapter, you may wonder why you need an introduction. After all, you have been writing and reading since elementary school. You completed numerous assessments of your reading and writing skills in high school and as part of your application process for college. You may write on the job, too. Why is a college writing course even necessary?

When you are eager to get started on the coursework in your major that will prepare you for your career, getting excited about an introductory college writing course can be difficult. However, regardless of your field of study, honing your writing, reading, and critical-thinking skills gives you a more solid academic foundation.

In college, academic expectations change from what you may have experienced in high school. The quantity of work you are expected to do is increased. When instructors expect you to read pages upon pages or study hours and hours for one particular course, managing your workload can be challenging.

This chapter includes strategies for studying efficiently and managing your time.

The quality of the work you do also changes. Understanding course material and summarizing it on an exam is not enough. You will also be expected to engage seriously with new ideas by reflecting on, analyzing, critiquing, making connections, drawing conclusions, or finding new ways of thinking about a subject. Educationally, you are moving into deeper waters. A good introductory writing course will help you swim.

Table 1.1, “High School versus College Assignments,” summarizes major differences between high school and college assignments.

Table 1.1 High School versus College Assignments

High School	College
Reading assignments are moderately long. Teachers may set aside some class time for reading and reviewing the material in depth.	Some reading assignments may be very long. You will be expected to come to class with a basic understanding of the material.
Teachers often provide study guides and other aids to help you prepare for exams.	Reviewing for exams is primarily your responsibility.
Your grade is determined by your performance on a wide variety of assessments, including minor and major assignments. Not all assessments are writing-based.	Your grade may depend on just a few major assessments. Most assessments are writing-based.
Writing assignments include personal writing and creative writing, in addition to expository writing.	Outside of creative writing courses, most writing assignments are expository.
The structure and format of writing assignments are generally stable over a four-year period.	Depending on the course, you may be asked to master new forms of writing and follow standards within a particular professional field.
Teachers often go out of their way to identify and try to help students who are performing poorly on exams, missing classes, not turning in assignments, or just struggling with the course. Often teachers will give students many “second chances.”	Although teachers want their students to succeed, they may not always realize when students are struggling. They also expect you to be proactive and take steps to help yourself. “Second chances” are less common.

This chapter covers the types of reading and writing assignments you will encounter as a college student. You will

also learn a variety of strategies for mastering these new challenges—and becoming a more confident student and writer.

Reading Strategies

Your college courses will sharpen both your reading and your writing skills. Most of your writing assignments—from brief response papers to in-depth research projects—will depend on your understanding of course reading assignments or related readings you do on your own. And it is difficult, if not impossible, to write effectively about a text you have not understood. Even when you do understand the reading, it can be hard to write about it if you do not feel personally engaged with the ideas discussed.

This section discusses strategies to get the most out of your college reading assignments. These strategies fall into three broad categories:

1. Planning strategies. To help you manage your reading assignments.
2. Comprehension strategies. To help you understand the material.
3. Active reading strategies. To take your understanding to a higher and deeper level.



Planning Your Reading

Have you ever stayed up all night cramming just before an exam? Or found yourself skimming a detailed memo from your boss five minutes before a crucial meeting? The first step in handling college reading successfully is planning. This involves managing your time and setting a clear purpose for your reading.

Managing Your Reading Time



Focus on setting aside enough time for reading and breaking your assignments into manageable chunks. If you are assigned a seventy-page chapter to read for next week's class, try not to wait until the night before to get started. Give yourself at least a few days, and tackle one section at a time.

Your method for breaking up the assignment depends on the reading type. If the text is very dense and packed with unfamiliar terms and concepts, you may need to read no more than five or ten pages in one sitting to understand and process the information truly. You can handle longer sections with more user-friendly texts—twenty to forty pages, for instance. And if you have a highly engaging reading assignment, such as a novel you cannot put down, you may be able to read lengthy passages in one sitting.

As the semester progresses, you will better understand how much time you need to allow for the reading assignments in

different subjects. It also makes sense to preview each assignment in advance to assess its difficulty level and determine how much reading time to set aside.

Tip

College instructors often set aside reserve readings for a particular course. These consist of articles, book chapters, or other texts that are not part of the primary course textbook. Copies of reserve readings are available through the university library; in print; or, more often, online. When you are assigned a reserve reading, download it ahead of time (and let your instructor know if you have trouble accessing it). Skim through it to get a rough idea of how much time you will need to read the assignment.

Setting a Purpose

The other key component of planning is setting a purpose. Knowing what you want to get out of a reading assignment helps you determine how to approach it and how much time to spend on it. It also helps you stay focused during those occasional moments when it is late, you are tired, and relaxing in front of the television sounds far more appealing than curling up with a stack of journal articles.

Sometimes your purpose is simple. You might need to understand the reading material well enough to discuss it intelligently in class the next day. However, your purpose will often go beyond that. For instance, you might also read to compare two texts, formulate a personal response to a text, or gather ideas for future research. Here are some questions to ask to help determine your purpose:

- **How did my instructor frame the assignment?**

Often your instructors will tell you what they expect you to get out of the reading:

- *“Read Chapter 2 and come to class prepared to discuss current teaching practices in elementary math.”*
- *“Read these two articles and compare Smith’s and Jones’s perspectives on the 2010 health care reform bill.”*
- *“Read Chapter 5 and think about applying these guidelines to running your own business.”*

- **How deeply do I need to understand the reading?**

If you are majoring in computer science and are assigned to read Chapter 1, “Introduction to Computer Science,” it is safe to assume the chapter presents fundamental concepts you will be expected to master. However, you may be expected to form a general understanding for some reading assignments but not necessarily master the content. Again, pay attention to how your instructor presents the assignment.

- **How does this assignment relate to other course readings or concepts discussed in class?**

Your instructor may make some of these connections explicitly, but if not, try to draw connections on your own. (Needless to say, it helps to take detailed notes in class and when you read.)

- **How might I use this text again in the future?**

If you are assigned to read about a topic that has always interested you, your reading assignment might help you develop ideas for a future research paper. Some reading assignments provide valuable tips or summaries worth bookmarking for future reference. Think about what you can take from the reading that will stay with you.

Improving Your Comprehension

You have blocked out time for your reading assignments and set a purpose for reading. Now comes the challenge: ensuring you understand all the information you are expected to

process. Some of your reading assignments will be fairly straightforward. Others, however, will be longer or more complex, so you will need a plan for handling them.

For any expository writing—nonfiction or informational writing—your first comprehension goal is to identify the main points and relate any details to those main points. Because college-level texts can be challenging, you must monitor your reading comprehension. You must stop periodically and assess how well you understand your reading. Finally, you can improve comprehension by taking the time to determine which strategies work best for you and putting those strategies into practice.

COMPREHENSION

Organization and selection of facts and ideas

Re-tell _____ in your own words.

What is the main idea of _____?

What differences exist between _____?

Can you write a brief outline?

Identifying the Main Points

In college, you will read a wide variety of materials, including the following:

- Textbooks: These usually include summaries, glossaries, comprehension questions, and other study aids.
- Nonfiction trade books: These are less likely to include the study features found in textbooks.
- Popular magazine, newspaper, or web articles: These are usually written for a general audience.
- Scholarly books and journal articles: These are written for an audience of specialists in a given field.

Regardless of what type of expository text you are assigned to read, your primary comprehension goal is to identify the main point: the most important idea the writer wants to communicate and often states early on. Finding the main point gives you a framework to organize the details presented in the reading and relate the reading to concepts you learned in class or through other reading assignments. After identifying the main point, you will find the supporting points, the details, facts, and explanations that develop and clarify the main point.

Some texts make that task relatively easy. Textbooks, for instance, include the aforementioned features, headings, and subheadings intended to make it easier for students to identify core concepts. Graphic features like sidebars, diagrams, and charts help students understand complex information and

distinguish between essential and inessential points. When you are assigned to read from a textbook, be sure to use available comprehension aids to help you identify the main points.

Trade books and popular articles may not be written specifically for educational purposes; nevertheless, they also include features that can help you identify the main ideas. These features include the following:

- **Trade books.** Many trade books include an introduction that presents the writer's main ideas and purpose for writing. Reading chapter titles (and any subtitles within the chapter) will help you understand what is covered. It also helps to read a chapter's beginning and ending paragraphs closely. These paragraphs often sum up the main ideas presented.
- **Popular articles.** Reading the headings and introductory paragraphs carefully is crucial. In magazine articles, these features (along with the closing paragraphs) present the main concepts. Hard news articles in newspapers present the gist of the news story in the lead paragraph, while subsequent paragraphs present increasingly general details.

Scholar books and journal articles are at the far end of the reading difficulty scale. Because these texts are written for a specialized, highly educated audience, the authors presume

their readers are already familiar with the topic. The language and writing style is sophisticated and sometimes dense.

When you read scholarly books and journal articles, try to apply the same strategies discussed earlier. The introduction usually presents the writer's thesis, and the idea or hypothesis the writer is trying to prove. Headings and subheadings can help you understand how the writer has organized support for his or her thesis. Additionally, academic journal articles often include a summary at the beginning, called an abstract, and electronic databases include summaries of articles, too.

Monitoring Your Comprehension

Finding the main idea and paying attention to text features as you read helps you figure out what you should know. However, it is just as important to figure out what you do not know and develop a strategy to deal with it.

Textbooks often include comprehension questions in the margins or at the end of a section or chapter. As you read, occasionally stop to answer these questions on paper or in your head. Use them to identify sections you must reread, read more carefully, or ask your instructor about later.

Even when a text does not have built-in comprehension features, you can actively monitor your own comprehension. Try these strategies, adapting them as needed to suit different kinds of texts:

1. **Summarize.** At the end of each section, pause to

summarize the main points in a few sentences. If you have trouble doing so, revisit that section.

2. **Ask and answer questions.** When you begin reading a section, try to identify two to three questions you should be able to answer after you finish it. Write down your questions and use them to test yourself on the reading. If you cannot answer a question, try to determine why. Is the answer buried in that section of the reading but just not coming across to you? Or do you expect to find the answer in another part of the reading?
3. **Do not read in a vacuum.** Look for opportunities to discuss the reading with your classmates. Many instructors set up online discussion forums or blogs specifically for that purpose. Participating in these discussions can help you determine whether your understanding of the main points is the same as your peers.

These discussions can also serve as a reality check. It might be exceptionally challenging if everyone in the class struggled with the reading. If it was a breeze for everyone but you, you may need to see your instructor for help.

Tip

Students are often reluctant to seek help. At FSCJ, we have [Tutoring Services](#) where you can get help with your reading assignments for all your classes. They feel like doing so marks them as slow, weak, or demanding. The truth is every learner occasionally struggles. If you sincerely try to keep up with the course reading but feel like you are in over your head, seek help. Speak up in class, schedule a meeting with your instructor, or visit your university learning center for assistance.

Deal with the problem as early in the semester as you can. Instructors respect students who are proactive about their own learning. Most instructors will work hard to help students who make the effort to help themselves.

Taking It to the Next Level: Active Reading

Now that you have acquainted (or reacquainted) yourself with useful planning and comprehension strategies, college reading assignments may feel more manageable. You know what you must do to finish your reading and ensure you grasp the main points. However, the most successful college students are competent, active, engaged readers.

Using the SQ3R Strategy

One strategy you can use to become a more active, engaged reader is the **SQ3R strategy**, a step-by-step process to follow before, during, and after reading. You may already use some variation of it.

In essence, the **SQ3R** process works like this:

1. **S**urvey the text in advance.
2. Form **q**uestions before you start reading.
3. **R**ead the text.
4. **R**ecite and/or record important points during and after reading.

5. **Review** and reflect on the text after you read it.

Before you read, you **survey or preview** the text. As noted earlier, reading introductory paragraphs and headings can help you determine the author's main point and identify what important topics will be covered. However, surveying does not stop there. Look over sidebars, photographs, and other text or graphic features that catch your eye. Skim a few paragraphs. Preview any boldfaced or italicized vocabulary terms. This will help you form a first impression of the material.

Next, start **brainstorming** questions about the text. What do you expect to learn from the reading? You may find that some questions come to mind immediately based on your initial survey or previous readings and class discussions. If not, try using headings and subheadings in the text to formulate questions. For instance, if one heading in your textbook reads "Medicare and Medicaid," you might ask yourself these questions:

- When was Medicare and Medicaid legislation enacted? Why?
- What are the major differences between these two

programs?

Although some of your questions may be simply factual, try to come up with a few more open-ended. Asking in-depth questions will help you stay more engaged as you read.

The next step is simple: **read**. As you read, notice whether your first impressions of the text were correct. Are the author's main points and overall approach about the same as what you predicted—or does the text contain a few surprises? Also, look for answers to your earlier questions and begin forming new questions. Continue to revise your impressions and questions as you read.

While you are reading, occasionally **pause** to recite or record important points. It is best to do this at the end of each section or when there is an obvious shift in the writer's train of thought. Put the book aside for a moment and recite aloud the main points of the section or any important answers you found there. You might also record ideas by jotting down a few brief notes in addition to, or instead of, reciting aloud. Either way, the physical act of articulating information makes you more likely to remember it.

After you have completed the reading, take some time to **review** the material more thoroughly. If the textbook includes review questions or your instructor has provided a study guide, use these tools to guide your review. You will want to record information in a more detailed format than you used during reading, such as in an outline or a list.

As you review the material, **reflect** on what you learned. Did anything surprise you, upset you, or make you think? Did you strongly agree or disagree with any points in the text? What topics would you like to explore further? Jot down your reflections in your notes. (Instructors sometimes require students to write brief response papers or maintain a reading journal. Use these assignments to help you reflect on what you read.)

Using Other Active Reading Strategies

The SQ3R process encompasses a number of valuable active reading strategies: previewing a text, making predictions, asking and answering questions, and summarizing. You can use the following additional strategies to deepen further your understanding of what you read.

- Connect what you read to what you already know. Look for ways the reading supports, extends, or challenges concepts you have learned elsewhere.
- Relate the reading to your own life. What statements, people, or situations relate to your personal experiences?
- Visualize. For both fiction and nonfiction texts, try to picture what is described. Visualizing is especially helpful when reading a narrative text, such as a novel or a historical account, or when you read expository text that describes a process, such as how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

- Pay attention to graphics as well as text. Photographs, diagrams, flow charts, tables, and other graphics can help make abstract ideas more concrete and understandable.
- Understand the text in context. Understanding context means thinking about who wrote the text, when and where it was written, the author's purpose for writing it, and what assumptions or agendas influenced the author's ideas. For instance, two writers might address the subject of health care reform, but if one article is an opinion piece and one is a news story, the context is different.
- Plan to talk or write about what you read. Jot down a few questions or comments in your notebook so you can bring them up in class. (This also gives you a source of topic ideas for papers and presentations later in the semester.) Discuss the reading on a class discussion board or blog about it.

Common Writing Assignments

College writing assignments serve a different purpose than the typical writing assignments you completed in high school. In high school, teachers generally focus on teaching you to write in a variety of modes and formats, including personal writing, expository writing, research papers, creative writing, and writing short answers and essays for exams. Over time, these assignments help you build a foundation of writing skills.

In college, many instructors will expect you to have that foundation already.

Your college composition courses will focus on writing for its own sake, helping you make the transition to college-level writing assignments. However, writing assignments serve a different purpose in most other college courses. In those courses, you may use writing as one tool among many for learning how to think about a particular academic discipline.

Additionally, certain assignments teach you how to meet the expectations for professional writing in a given field. Depending on the class, you might be asked to write a lab report, a case study, a literary analysis, a business plan, or an account of a personal interview. You will need to learn and follow the standard conventions for those types of written products.

Finally, personal and creative writing assignments are less common in college than in high school. College courses emphasize expository writing, writing that explains or informs. Often expository writing assignments will incorporate outside research, too. Some classes will also require persuasive writing assignments in which you state and support your position on an issue. College instructors will hold you to a higher standard when it comes to supporting your ideas with reasons and evidence.

Table 1.2, “Common Types of College Writing Assignments,” lists some of the most common types of college writing assignments. It includes minor, less formal assignments as well as major ones. Which specific assignments you encounter will depend on the courses you take and the learning objectives developed by your instructors.

Table 1.2 Common Types of College Writing Assignments

Assignment Type	Description	Example
Personal Response Paper	Expresses and explains your response to a reading assignment, a provocative quote, or a specific issue; may be very brief (sometimes a page or less) or more in-depth	For an environmental science course, students watch and write about President Obama's June 15, 2010, speech about the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.
Summary	Restates the main points of a longer passage objectively and in your own words	For a psychology course, students write a one-page summary of an article about a man suffering from short-term memory loss.
Position Paper	States and defends your position on an issue (often a controversial issue)	For a medical ethics course, students state and support their position on using stem cell research in medicine.
Problem-Solution Paper	Presents a problem, explains its causes, and proposes and explains a solution	For a business administration course, a student presents a plan for implementing an office recycling program without increasing operating costs.

Literary Analysis	States a thesis about a particular literary work (or works) and develops the thesis with evidence from the work and, sometimes, from additional sources	For a literature course, a student compares two novels by the twentieth-century African American writer Richard Wright.
Research Review or Survey	Sums up available research findings on a particular topic	For a course in media studies, a student reviews the past twenty years of research on whether violence in television and movies is correlated with violent behavior.
Case Study or Case Analysis	Investigates a particular person, group, or event in depth for the purpose of drawing a larger conclusion from the analysis	For an education course, a student writes a case study of a developmentally disabled child whose academic performance improved because of a behavioral-modification program.
Laboratory Report	Presents a laboratory experiment, including the hypothesis, methods of data collection, results, and conclusions	For a psychology course, a group of students presents the results of an experiment in which they explored whether sleep deprivation produced memory deficits in lab rats.

Research Journal	Records a student's ideas and findings during the course of a long-term research project	For an education course, a student maintains a journal throughout a semester-long research project at a local elementary school.
Research Paper	Presents a thesis and supports it with original research and/or other researchers' findings on the topic; can take several different formats depending on the subject area	For examples of typical research projects, see Chapter 12 "Writing a Research Paper"

Key Takeaways

College-level reading and writing assignments differ from high school assignments, both in quantity and quality.

- Managing college reading assignments successfully requires you to:
 - plan and manage your time

- set a purpose for reading
 - practice effective comprehension strategies
 - use active reading strategies to deepen your understanding of the text.
- College writing assignments place greater emphasis on *learning to think critically* about a particular discipline and less emphasis on personal and creative writing.

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1.2 DEVELOPING STUDY SKILLS

Developing Study Skills Introduction

You now have a general idea of what to expect from your college courses. You have probably received course syllabi, started on your first few assignments, and begun applying the strategies you learned.

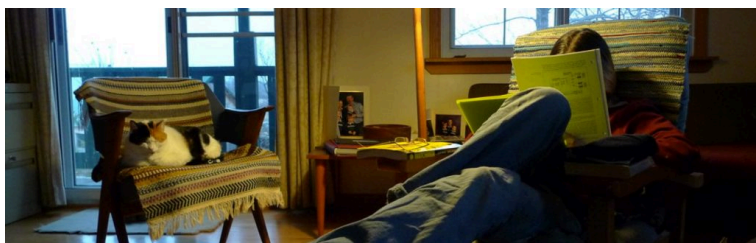
At the beginning of the semester, your workload is relatively light. This is the perfect time to improve your study skills and establish good habits. When the demands on your time and energy become more intense, you will have a system in place for handling them.

This section covers specific strategies for managing your time effectively. You will also learn about different note-taking systems that you can use to organize and record information efficiently.

As you work through this section, remember that every student is different. The strategies presented here are tried and true techniques that work well for many people. However, you may need to adapt them slightly to develop a system that works well for you personally. If your friend swears by her smartphone, but you hate carrying extra electronic gadgets

around, then using a smartphone will not be the best organizational strategy for you.

Read with an open mind, and consider what techniques have been effective (or ineffective) for you in the past. Which habits from high school or work life could help you succeed in college? Which habits might get in your way? What changes might you need to make?



Understanding Yourself as a Learner

To succeed in college—or any situation where you must master new concepts and skills—it helps to know what makes you tick. For decades, educational researchers and organizational psychologists have examined how people take in and assimilate new information, how some people learn differently, and what conditions make students and workers most productive. Here are just a few questions to think about:

- What times of day are you most productive? If your energy peaks early, you might benefit from blocking out early morning time for studying or writing. If you are a night owl, set aside a few evenings a week for

schoolwork.

- How much clutter can you handle in your workspace? Some people work fine at a messy desk and know exactly where to find what they need in their stack of papers; however, most benefit from maintaining a neat, organized space.
- How well do you juggle potential distractions in your environment? If you can study at home without being tempted to turn on the television, check your e-mail, fix a snack, and so on, you may make the home your workspace. However, if you need a less distracting environment to stay focused, you may be able to find one on your college's campus or in your community.
- Does a little background noise help or hinder your productivity? Some people work better when listening to background music or the low hum of conversation in a coffee shop. Others need total silence.
- Do you stay on task when you work with a partner or group? A study partner or group can sometimes be invaluable. However, working this way takes extra planning and effort, so use the time productively. If you find that group study sessions turn into social occasions, you may study better on your own.
- How do you manage stress? Accept that you will feel stressed out at certain points in the semester. In your day-to-day routine, make time for activities that help you reduce stress, such as exercising, spending time with

friends, or just scheduling downtime to relax.



Time Management

In college, you have increased freedom to structure your time as you please. With that freedom comes increased responsibility. High school teachers often take it upon themselves to track down students who miss class or forget assignments. College instructors, however, expect you to take full responsibility for managing yourself and completing your work on time.



Getting Started: Short- and Long-Term Planning

At the beginning of the semester, establish a weekly routine for when you will study and write. A general guideline is that for every hour spent in class, students should expect to spend another two to three hours reading, writing, and studying for tests. Therefore, if you are taking a biology course that meets three times a week for an hour at a time, you can expect to spend six to nine hours per week on it outside of class. You will need to budget time for each class just like an employer schedules shifts at work, and you must make that study time a priority.

That may sound like a lot when taking multiple classes, but it is manageable if you plan your time carefully. A typical full-time schedule of fifteen credit hours translates into thirty to forty-five hours per week spent on schoolwork outside of class. All in all, a full-time student would spend about as much time on school each week as an employee spends on work. Balancing school and a job can be more challenging but still doable.

In addition to setting aside regular work periods, you will need to plan ahead to handle more intense demands, such as studying for exams and writing major papers. At the beginning of the semester, go through your course syllabi and mark all major due dates and exam dates on a calendar. Use a format you check regularly, such as your smartphone or the calendar feature in your e-mail.

Tip

The two- to three-hour rule may sound intimidating. However, keep in mind that this is only a rule of thumb. Realistically, some courses will be more challenging than others, and the demands will ebb and flow throughout the semester. You may have trouble-free weeks and stressful weeks. When you schedule your classes, try to balance introductory-level classes with more advanced classes so that your workload stays manageable.

Staying Consistent: Time Management Dos and Don'ts

Setting up a schedule is easy. Sticking with it, however, may create challenges. A schedule that looks great on paper may prove to be unrealistic. Sometimes, despite students' best intentions, they procrastinate or pull all-nighters to finish a paper or study for an exam.

Remember, however, that your weekly schedule and

semester calendar are time-management tools. Like any tool, their effectiveness depends on the user: you. Leaving a tool in the box unused (e.g., if you set up your schedule and then forget about it) will not help you complete the task. And if, for some reason, a particular tool or strategy is not getting the job done, you need to figure out why and maybe try using something else.

With that in mind, read the list of time-management dos and don'ts. Keep this list handy as a reference you can use throughout the semester to “troubleshoot” if your schoolwork is getting off track.



Dos

1. Set aside time to regularly review your schedule or calendar and update or adjust

them as needed.

2. Be realistic when you schedule study time. Do not plan to write your paper on Friday night when everyone else is out socializing. When Friday comes, you might end up abandoning your plans and hanging out with your friends.
3. Be honest with yourself about where your time goes. Do not waste your study time on distractions like e-mail and social networking sites.
4. Accept that occasionally your work may get a little off track. No one is perfect.
5. Accept that sometimes you may not have time for all the fun things you want.
6. Recognize times when you feel overextended. Sometimes you may need to get through an especially demanding week. However, you may need to scale back on some of your commitments if you feel exhausted and overworked.
7. Have a plan for handling high-stress periods, such as final exam week. Try to reduce your other commitments during

those periods—for instance, by scheduling time off from your job. Build in some time for relaxing activities, too.

Don'ts

1. Do not procrastinate on challenging assignments. Instead, break them into smaller, manageable tasks that can be accomplished one at a time.
2. Do not fall into the trap of “all-or-nothing” thinking: “There is no way I can fit in a three-hour study session today, so I will just wait until the weekend.” Extended periods of free time are hard to come by, so find ways to use small blocks of time productively. For instance, if you have a free half hour between classes, use it to preview a chapter or brainstorm ideas for an essay.
3. Do not fall into the trap of letting things slide and promising yourself, “I will do better next week.” When next week comes, the accumulated undone tasks will seem even more intimidating, and you will

- find it harder to complete them.
4. Do not rely on caffeine and sugar to compensate for lack of sleep. These stimulants may temporarily perk you up, but your brain functions best when rested.

Key Takeaways

- Understanding your individual learning style and preferences can help you identify the study and time-management strategies that will work best for you.
- To manage your time effectively, looking at the short-term (daily and weekly schedules) and the long-term (major semester deadlines) is important.
- To manage your time effectively, be consistent about maintaining your schedule. If

your schedule is not working for you, make adjustments.

- A good note-taking system must differentiate among major points, related subtopics, and supporting details, allowing you to record and organize information quickly. Choose the format that is most effective for you.

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1.3 BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL COLLEGE WRITER

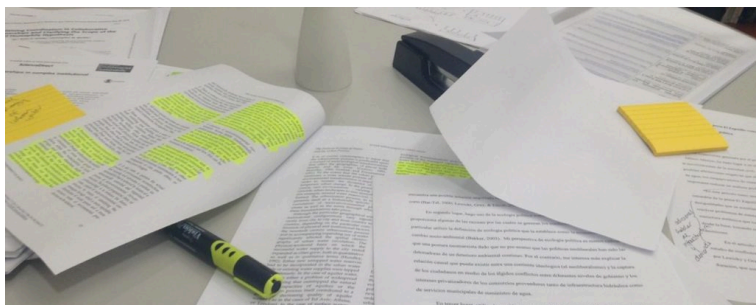
In the preceding sections, you learned what you could expect from college and identified strategies you can use to manage your work. These strategies will help you succeed in any college course. This section covers more about how to handle the demands college places upon you as a writer. The general techniques you will learn will help ensure your success on any writing task, whether you complete a bluebook exam in an hour or an in-depth research project over several weeks.

Putting It All Together: Strategies for Success



Writing well is difficult. Even people who write for a living sometimes struggle to get their thoughts on the page. Even people who enjoy writing have days when they would rather do anything else. Writing assignments can be stressful or even intimidating for people who do not like writing or do not think of themselves as good writers. And, of course, you cannot get through college without having to write—sometimes a lot, and often at a higher level than you are used to.

No magic formula will make writing quick and easy. However, you can use strategies and resources to manage writing assignments easily. This section presents a broad overview of these strategies and resources. The remaining sections of this class provide more detailed, comprehensive instruction to help you succeed at various assignments. The college will challenge you as a writer, but it is also a unique opportunity to grow.



Using the Writing Process

Good writers use some variation of the following process to complete a writing project successfully. The Writing Process will be covered in more detail in other sections.

The Writing Process

1. **Prewriting.** In this step, the writer generates ideas to write about and begins developing these ideas.
2. **Outlining** a structure of ideas. In this step, the writer determines the overall organizational structure of the writing and creates an outline to organize ideas. Usually, this step involves some additional fleshing out of the ideas generated in the

first step.

3. Writing a **rough draft**. In this step, the writer uses the work completed in prewriting to develop a first draft. The draft covers the ideas the writer brainstormed and follows the organizational plan laid out in the first step.
4. **Revising**. In this step, the writer revisits the draft to review and, if necessary, reshape its content. This stage involves moderate and sometimes significant changes: adding or deleting a paragraph, phrasing the main point differently, expanding on an important idea, reorganizing content, and so forth.
5. **Editing**. In this step, the writer reviews the draft to make additional changes. Editing involves making changes to improve style and adherence to standard writing conventions—for instance, replacing a vague word with a more precise one or fixing errors in grammar and spelling. Once this stage is complete,

the work is finished and ready to share with others.

Chances are, you have already used this process as a writer. You may also have used it for other creative projects, such as developing a sketch into a finished painting or composing a song. The steps listed above apply broadly to any project that involves creative thinking. You come up with ideas (often vague at first), work to give them some structure, make a first attempt, figure out what needs improving, and refine it until you are satisfied.

Most people have used this creative process in one way or another, but many have misconceptions about using it to write. Here are a few of the **most common misconceptions** students have about the writing process:

- “I do not have to waste time on prewriting if I understand the assignment.” Even if the task is straightforward and you feel ready to start writing, take some time to develop ideas before you plunge into your draft. Freewriting—writing about the topic without stopping for a set period of time—is one prewriting technique you might try in that situation.

- “It is important to complete a formal, numbered outline for every writing assignment.” For some assignments, such as long research papers, proceeding without a formal outline can be very difficult. However, a structured set of notes or a detailed graphic organizer may suffice for other assignments. The important thing is that you have a solid plan for organizing ideas and details.
- “My draft will be better if I write it when I feel inspired.” By all means, take advantage of those moments of inspiration. However, understand that sometimes you must write when you are not in the mood. Sit down and start your draft even if you do not feel like it. If necessary, force yourself to write for just one hour. By the end of the hour, you may be far more engaged and motivated to continue. If not, at least you will have accomplished part of the task.
- “My instructor will tell me everything I need to revise.” If your instructor chooses to review drafts, the feedback can help you improve. However, it is still your job, not your instructor’s, to transform the draft to a final, polished piece. That task will be much easier if you give your best effort to the draft before submitting it. Do not just go through and implement your instructor’s corrections during revision. Take time to determine what you can change to make the work the best.
- “I am a good writer, so I do not need to revise or edit.”

Even talented writers still need to revise and edit their work. At the very least, doing so will help you catch an embarrassing typo or two. Revising and editing are the steps that make good writers into great writers.

Tip

The writing process also applies to timed writing tasks, such as essay exams. Before you begin writing, read the question thoroughly and think about the main points to include in your response. Use scrap paper to sketch out a very brief outline. Keep an eye on the clock as you write your response so you will have time to review it and make any needed changes before turning in your exam.

Managing Your Time

When your instructor gives you a writing assignment, write the due date on your calendar. Then work backward from the due date to set aside blocks of time when you will work on the assignment. Always plan at least two sessions of writing time per assignment so that you are not trying to move from step

1 to step 5 in one evening. Trying to work that fast is stressful and does not yield great results. You will plan, think, and write better if you space out the steps.

Ideally, you should set aside at least three separate blocks of time to work on a writing assignment: one for prewriting and outlining one for drafting, and one for revising and editing. Sometimes those steps may be compressed into just a few days. If you have a couple weeks to work on a paper, space out the five steps over multiple sessions. Long-term projects, such as research papers, require more time for each step.

Tip

In certain situations, you may be unable to allow time between the different steps of the writing process. For instance, you may be asked to write in class or complete a brief response paper overnight. If the time available is minimal, apply a modified version of the writing process (as you would do for an essay exam). It is still essential to give the assignment thought and effort. However, these types of assignments are less formal, and instructors may not expect them to be as polished as formal papers. When in doubt,

ask the instructor about expectations, resources that will be available during the writing exam, and if they have any tips to prepare you to demonstrate your writing skills effectively.

Setting Goals



One key to succeeding as a student and writer is setting short- and long-term goals for yourself. You have already glimpsed the kind of short-term goals a student might set.

To do well in college, staying focused on how your day-to-day actions determine your long-term success is important. You may not have defined your career goals or chosen a major yet. Even so, you surely have some overarching goals for what you want out of college: to expand your career options, to increase your earning power, or just to learn something new. In time, you will define your long-term goals more explicitly.

Doing solid, steady work, day by day and week by week, will help you meet those goals.

Using College Resources

Students sometimes find college overwhelming because they do not know about, or are reluctant to use, the resources available to them. Some aspects of college will be challenging. However, you may become frustrated and overwhelmed if you try to handle every challenge alone.

Universities have resources in place to help students cope with challenges. Your student fees help pay for resources such as a health center or tutoring, so use them if needed. The following are some of the resources you might use if you find you need help:

- Your instructor. If you are making an honest effort but still struggling with a particular course, set up a time to meet with your instructor and discuss what you can do to improve. He or she may be able to shed light on a confusing concept or

give you strategies to catch up.

- [Your academic counselor \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Many universities assign students an academic counselor who can help them choose courses and ensure that they fulfill degree and major requirements.
- [The academic resource center. \(Links to an external site.\)](#) These centers offer various services, ranging from general coaching in study skills to tutoring for specific courses. Find out what your school offers and use the services you need.
- [The writing center \(Links to an external site.\)](#). These centers employ tutors to help you manage college-level writing assignments. They will not write or edit your paper for you, but they can help you through the stages of the writing process. (In some schools, the writing center is part of the academic resource center.)
- [The career resource center \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Visit the career resource center for guidance in choosing a career path, developing a résumé, and finding

and applying for jobs.

- [Health Center Counseling services \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Many universities offer psychological counseling for free or for a low fee. Use these services if you need help coping with a difficult personal situation or managing depression, anxiety, or other problems. **At FSCJ, also call: (904) 384-1800 (local), (855) 384-1800 (toll-free)**

Students sometimes neglect to use available resources due to limited time, unwillingness to admit there is a problem, or embarrassment about needing to ask for help. Unfortunately, ignoring a problem makes it harder to cope with later. Waiting until the end of the semester may also mean fewer resources are available since many other students are also seeking last-minute help.

Overview: College Writing Skills

You now have a solid foundation of skills and strategies you can use to succeed in college. The remainder of this book will provide you with guidance on specific aspects of writing, ranging from grammar and style conventions to how to write a research paper.

For any college writing assignment, use these strategies:

- Plan ahead. Divide the work into smaller, manageable tasks, and set aside time to accomplish each task in turn.
- Make sure you understand the assignment requirements, and if necessary, clarify them with your instructor. Think carefully about the purpose of the writing, the intended audience, the topics you will need to address, and any specific requirements of the writing form.
- Complete each step of the writing process. With practice, using this process will come automatically to you.
- Use the resources available to you. Remember that most colleges have specific services to help students with their writing.

Key Takeaways

- Following the writing process steps helps students complete any writing assignment more successfully.
- To manage writing assignments, it is best to work backward from the due date, allotting appropriate time to complete each step of the writing process.
- Setting concrete long- and short-term goals helps students stay focused and motivated.
- A variety of university resources are available to help students with writing and with other aspects of college life.

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PART II

CHAPTER 2: WRITING BASICS: WHAT MAKES A GOOD SENTENCE?

2.1 SENTENCE WRITING

Imagine you are reading a book for school. You need to find important details that you can use for an assignment. However, when you begin to read, you notice that the book has very little punctuation. Sentences fail to form complete paragraphs and instead form one block of text without clear organization. Most likely, this book would frustrate and confuse you. Without clear and concise sentences, it is difficult to find the information you need.

For both students and professionals, clear communication is important. Whether you are typing an e-mail or writing a report, it is your responsibility to present your thoughts and ideas clearly and precisely. Writing in complete sentences is one way to ensure that you communicate well. This section covers how to recognize and write basic sentence structures and how to avoid some common writing errors.

Components of a Sentence

Clearly written, complete sentences require key information: a subject, a verb and a complete idea. A sentence needs to

make sense on its own. Sometimes, complete sentences are also called independent clauses. A clause is a group of words that may make up a sentence. An independent clause is a group of words that may stand alone as a complete, grammatically correct thought.

All complete sentences have at least one independent clause. You can identify an independent clause by reading it on its own and looking for the subject and the verb.

Subjects

When you read a sentence, you may first look for the subject, or what the sentence is about. The subject usually appears at the beginning of a sentence as a noun or a pronoun. A noun is a word that identifies a person, place, thing, or idea. A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun. Common pronouns are I, he, she, it, you, they, and we. In the following sentences, the subject is underlined once.

Malik is the project manager for this project.He will give us our assignments.

In these sentences, the subject is a person: Malik. The pronoun He replaces and refers back to Malik.

The computer lab is where we will work. It will be open twenty-four hours a day.

In the first sentence, the subject is a place: computer lab. In

the second sentence, the pronoun *It* substitutes for computer lab as the subject.

The project will run for three weeks. It will have a quick turnaround.

In the first sentence, the subject is a thing: project. In the second sentence, the pronoun *It* stands in for the project.

Compound Subjects

A sentence may have more than one person, place, or thing as the subject. These subjects are called compound subjects. Compound subjects are useful when you want to discuss several subjects at once.

Desmond and Maria have been working on that design for almost a year.

Books, magazines, and online articles are all good resources.

Prepositional Phrases

You will often read a sentence with more than one noun or pronoun. You may encounter a group of words that includes a preposition with a noun or a pronoun. Prepositions connect

a noun, pronoun, or verb to another word that describes or modifies that noun, pronoun, or verb. Common prepositions include *in*, *on*, *under*, *near*, *by*, *with*, and *about*. A prepositional phrase is a group of words that begin with a preposition. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and modifies or describes a word. It cannot act as the subject of a sentence. The following italicized phrases are examples of prepositional phrases.

We went on a business trip. That restaurant with the famous pizza was on the way. We stopped for lunch.

Exercise 1

Read the following sentences. Underline the subjects, and circle the prepositional phrases.

1. The gym is open until nine o'clock tonight.
2. We went to the store to get some ice.
3. The student with the most extra credit will win a homework pass.
4. Maya and Tia found an abandoned cat by the side of the road.
5. The driver of that pickup truck skidded on the ice.
6. Anita won the race with time to spare.
7. The people who work for that company were surprised

- about the merger.
8. Working in haste means that you are more likely to make mistakes.
 9. The soundtrack has over sixty songs in languages from around the world.
 10. His latest invention does not work, but it has inspired the rest of us.
-

Verbs

Once you locate the subject of a sentence, you can move on to the next part of a complete sentence: the verb. A verb is often an action word that shows what the subject is doing. A verb can also link the subject to a describing word. There are three types of verbs that you can use in a sentence: action verbs, linking verbs, or helping verbs.

Action Verbs

A verb that connects the subject to an action is called an action verb. An action verb answers the question what is the subject doing? In the following sentences, the words italicized are action verbs.

The dog *barked* at the jogger.

He *gave* a short speech before we ate.

Linking Verbs

A verb can often connect the subject of the sentence to a describing word. This type of verb is called a linking verb because it links the subject to a describing word. In the following sentences, the italicized words are linking verbs.

The coat *was* old and dirty.

The clock *seemed* broken.

If you have trouble telling the difference between action verbs and linking verbs, remember that an action verb shows that the subject is doing something, whereas a linking verb simply connects the subject to another word that describes or modifies the subject. A few verbs can be used as either action verbs or linking verbs.

Action verb: **The boy *looked* for his glove.**

Linking verb: **The boy *looked* tired.**

Although both sentences use the same verb, the two sentences have completely different meanings. In the first sentence, the verb describes the boy's action. In the second sentence, the verb describes the boy's appearance.

Helping Verbs

A third type of verb you may use as you write is a helping verb. Helping verbs are verbs that are used with the main verb to

describe a mood or tense. Helping verbs are usually a form of be, do, or have. The word can is also used as a helping verb.

The restaurant *is known* for its variety of dishes.

He *does speak* up when prompted in class.

We *have seen* that movie three times.

She *can tell* when someone walks on her lawn.

Tip

Keep the subject and verb in mind when you write or edit sentences. As you write, ask yourself these questions to keep yourself on track:

Subject: Who or what is the sentence about?

Verb: Which word shows an action or links the subject to a description?

Exercise 2

Copy each sentence onto your own sheet of paper and underline the verb(s) twice. Name the type of verb(s) used in the sentence in the space provided (LV, HV, or V).

1. The cat sounds ready to come back inside. _____
2. We have not eaten dinner yet. _____
3. It took four people to move the broken-down car.

4. The book was filled with notes from class. _____

5. We walked from room to room, inspecting for damages.

 6. Harold was expecting a package in the mail. _____
 7. The clothes still felt damp even though they had been through the dryer twice. _____
 8. The teacher who runs the studio is often praised for his restoration work on old masterpieces. _____
-

Sentence Structure, Including Fragments and Run-ons

Now that you know what makes a complete sentence—a subject and a verb—you can use other parts of speech to build on this basic structure. Good writers use a variety of sentence structures to make their work more interesting. This section covers different sentence structures that you can use to make longer, more complex sentences.

Sentence Patterns

Six basic subject-verb patterns can enhance your writing. A sample sentence is provided for each pattern. As you read each sentence, take note of where each part of the sentence falls. Notice that some sentence patterns use action verbs and others use linking verbs.

Subject–Verb

Computers hum.

Subject–Linking Verb–Noun

Computers are tools.

Subject–Linking Verb–Adjective

Computers are expensive.

Subject–Verb–Adverb

Computers calculate quickly.

Subject–Verb–Direct Object

Sally rides a motorcycle.

When you write a sentence with a direct object (DO), make sure that the DO receives the action of the verb.

Subject–Verb–Indirect Object–Direct Object

In this sentence structure, an indirect object explains to whom or to what the action is being done. The indirect object is a noun or pronoun, and it comes before the direct object in a sentence.

My coworker gave me the reports.

Collaboration

Find an article in a newspaper, a magazine, or online that interests you. Bring it to class or post it online. Then, looking at a classmate's article, identify one example of each part of a sentence (S, V, LV, N, Adj, Adv, DO, IO). Please share or post your results.

Fragments

The sentences you have encountered so far have been independent clauses. As you look more closely at your past writing assignments, you may notice that some of your sentences are not complete. A sentence that is missing a subject or a verb is called a fragment. A fragment may include a description or may express part of an idea, but it does not express a complete thought.

Fragment: **Children helping in the kitchen.**

Complete sentence: **Children helping in the kitchen often make a mess.**

You can easily fix a fragment by adding the missing subject or verb. In the example, the sentence was missing a verb. Adding often make a mess creates an S-V-N sentence structure.

See whether you can identify what is missing in the following fragments.

Fragment: **Told her about the broken vase.**

Complete sentence: **I told her about the broken vase.**

Fragment: **The store down on Main Street.**

Complete sentence: **The store down on Main Street sells music.**

Common Sentence Errors

Fragments often occur because of some common error, such as starting a sentence with a preposition, a dependent word, an infinitive, or a gerund. If you use the six basic sentence patterns when you write, you should be able to avoid these errors and thus avoid writing fragments.

When you see a preposition, check to see that it is part of a sentence containing a subject and a verb. If it is not connected to a complete sentence, it is a fragment, and you will need to fix this type of fragment by combining it with another sentence. You can add the prepositional phrase to the end of the sentence. If you add it to the beginning of the other sentence, insert a comma after the prepositional phrase.

Example A

Incorrect: After walking two miles. John remembered his wallet.

Correct: After walking two miles, John remembered his wallet.

Example B

Incorrect: The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner. When it was switched on.

Correct: When the vacuum cleaner was switched on, the dog growled.

Correct: The dog growled at the vacuum cleaner when it was switched on.

Clauses that start with a dependent word—such as since,

because, without, or unless—are similar to prepositional phrases. Like prepositional phrases, these clauses can be fragments if they are not connected to an independent clause containing a subject and a verb. To fix the problem, you can add such a fragment to the beginning or end of a sentence. If the fragment is added at the beginning of a sentence, add a comma.

Incorrect: Because we lost power. The entire family overslept.

Correct: Because we lost power, the entire family overslept.

Correct: The entire family overslept because we lost power.

Incorrect: He has been seeing a physical therapist. Since his accident.

Correct: Since his accident, he has been seeing a physical therapist.

Correct: He has seeing a physical therapist since his accident.

When you encounter a word ending in -ing in a sentence, identify whether or not this word is used as a verb in the sentence. You may also look for a helping verb. If the word is not used as a verb or if no helping verb is used with the -ing verb form, the verb is being used as a noun. An -ing verb form used as a noun is called a gerund.

Verb: I was working on homework until midnight.

Noun: Working on homework until midnight makes me tired the next morning.

Once you know whether the -ing word is acting as a noun or a verb, look at the rest of the sentence. Does the entire sentence make sense on its own? If not, what you are looking at is a fragment. You will need to either add the parts of speech that are missing or combine the fragment with a nearby sentence.

Incorrect: Taking deep breaths. Saul prepared for his presentation.

Correct: Taking deep breaths, Saul prepared for his presentation.

Correct: Saul prepared for his presentation. He was taking deep breaths.

Incorrect: Congratulating the entire team. Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Correct: She was congratulating the entire team. Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Correct: Congratulating the entire team, Sarah raised her glass to toast their success.

Another error in sentence construction is a fragment that begins with an infinitive. An infinitive is a verb paired with the word to; for example, to run, to write, or to reach. Although infinitives are verbs, they can be used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. You can correct a fragment that begins with an infinitive by either combining it with another sentence or adding the parts of speech that are missing.

Incorrect: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes. To reach the one thousand mark.

Correct: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes to reach the one thousand mark.

Correct: We needed to make three hundred more paper cranes. We wanted to reach the one thousand mark.

Exercise 4

Copy the following sentences onto your own sheet of paper and circle the fragments. Then combine the fragment with the independent clause to create a complete sentence.

1. Working without taking a break. We try to get as much work done as we can in an hour.
2. I needed to bring work home. In order to meet the deadline.
3. Unless the ground thaws before spring break. We won't be planting any tulips this year.
4. Turning the lights off after he was done in the kitchen. Robert tries to conserve energy whenever possible.
5. You'll find what you need if you look. On the shelf next to the potted plant.
6. To find the perfect apartment. Deidre scoured the

classifieds each day.

Run-on Sentences

Just as short, incomplete sentences can be problematic, lengthy sentences can be problematic too. Sentences with two or more independent clauses that have been incorrectly combined are known as run-on sentences. A run-on sentence may be either a fused sentence or a comma splice.

Fused sentence: A family of foxes lived under our shed young foxes played all over the yard.

Comma splice: We looked outside, the kids were hopping on the trampoline.

When two complete sentences are combined into one without any punctuation, the result is a fused sentence. When two complete sentences are joined by a comma, the result is a comma splice. Both errors can easily be fixed.

Punctuation

One way to correct run-on sentences is to correct the punctuation. For example, adding a period will correct the run-on by creating two separate sentences.

Run-on: There were no seats left, we had to stand in the back.

Correct: There were no seats left. We had to stand in the back.

Using a semicolon between the two complete sentences will also correct the error. A semicolon allows you to keep the two closely related ideas together in one sentence. When you punctuate with a semicolon, make sure that both parts of the sentence are independent clauses. For more information on semicolons, see [Section 2.4.2 “Capitalize Proper Nouns”](#).

Run-on: The accident closed both lanes of traffic we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

Complete sentence: The accident closed both lanes of traffic; we waited an hour for the wreckage to be cleared.

When you use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses, you may wish to add a transition word to show the connection between the two thoughts. After the semicolon, add the transition word and follow it with a comma. For more information on transition words, see [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#).

Run-on: The project was put on hold we didn’t have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Complete sentence: The project was put on hold; however, we didn’t have time to slow down, so we kept working.

Coordinating Conjunctions

You can also fix run-on sentences by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction. A coordinating conjunction acts as a link between two independent clauses.

Tip

These are the seven coordinating conjunctions that you can use: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so. Use these words appropriately when you want to link the two independent clauses. The acronym FANBOYS will help you remember this group of coordinating conjunctions.

Run-on: The new printer was installed, no one knew how to use it.

Complete sentence: The new printer was installed, but no one knew how to use it.

Dependent Words

Adding dependent words is another way to link independent clauses. Like the coordinating conjunctions, dependent words show a relationship between two independent clauses.

Run-on: We took the elevator, the others still got there before us.

Complete sentence: Although we took the elevator, the others got there before us.

Run-on: Cobwebs covered the furniture, the room hadn't been used in years.

Complete sentence: Cobwebs covered the furniture because the room hadn't been used in years.

Exercise 5

A reader can get lost or lose interest in material that is too dense and rambling. Use what you have learned about run-on sentences to correct the following passages:

1. The report is due on Wednesday but we're flying back from Miami that morning. I told the project manager that we would be able to get the report to her later that day she suggested that we come back a day early to get the report done and I told her we had meetings until our flight took off. We e-mailed our contact who said that they would check with his boss, she said that the project could afford a delay as long as they wouldn't have to make any edits or changes to the file our new deadline is next Friday.
2. Anna tried getting a reservation at the restaurant, but when she called they said that there was a waiting list so

she put our names down on the list when the day of our reservation arrived we only had to wait thirty minutes because a table opened up unexpectedly which was good because we were able to catch a movie after dinner in the time we'd expected to wait to be seated.

3. Without a doubt, my favorite artist is Leonardo da Vinci, not because of his paintings but because of his fascinating designs, models, and sketches, including plans for scuba gear, a flying machine, and a life-size mechanical lion that actually walked and moved its head. His paintings are beautiful too, especially when you see the computer enhanced versions researchers use a variety of methods to discover and enhance the paintings' original colors, the result of which are stunningly vibrant and yet delicate displays of the man's genius.

Key Takeaways

- A sentence is complete when it contains both a subject and verb. A complete sentence

makes sense on its own.

- Every sentence must have a subject, which usually appears at the beginning of the sentence. A subject may be a noun (a person, place, or thing) or a pronoun.
- A compound subject contains more than one noun.
- A prepositional phrase describes, or modifies, another word in the sentence but cannot be the subject of a sentence.
- A verb is often an action word that indicates what the subject is doing. Verbs may be action verbs, linking verbs, or helping verbs.
- Variety in sentence structure and length improves writing by making it more interesting and more complex.
- Focusing on the six basic sentence patterns will enhance your writing.
- Fragments and run-on sentences are two common errors in sentence construction.
- Fragments can be corrected by adding a missing subject or verb. Fragments that begin with a preposition or a dependent word can be corrected by combining the fragment with another sentence.

- Run-on sentences can be corrected by adding appropriate punctuation or adding a coordinating conjunction.
-

This is adapted from “Chapter 2: Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?” of the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

2.2 SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

In the workplace, you want to present a professional image. Your outfit or suit says something about you when meeting face-to-face, and your writing represents you in your absence. Grammatical mistakes in your writing or even in speaking make a negative impression on coworkers, clients, and potential employers. Subject-verb agreement is one of the most common errors that people make. Having a solid understanding of this concept is critical when making a good impression, and it will help ensure that your ideas are communicated clearly.

Agreement

Agreement in speech and in writing refers to the proper grammatical match between words and phrases. Parts of sentences must agree, or correspond with other parts, in number, person, case, and gender.

- Number. All parts must match in singular or plural

forms.

- Person. All parts must match in first person (I), second person (you), or third person (he, she, it, they) forms.
- Case. All parts must match in subjective (I, you, he, she, it, they, we), objective (me, her, him, them, us), or possessive (my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, their, theirs, our, ours) forms.
- Gender. All parts must match in male or female forms

Subject-verb agreement describes the proper match between subjects and verbs.

Because subjects and verbs are singular or plural, the subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must agree in number. That is, a singular subject belongs with a singular verb form, and a plural subject belongs with a plural verb form.

Singular: The cat *jumps* over the fence.

Plural: The cats *jump* over the fence.

Regular Verbs

Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern. For example, in the third person singular, regular verbs always end in -s. Other forms of regular verbs do not end in -s. Study the following regular verb forms in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I live.	We live.
Second Person	You live.	You live.
Third Person	He/She/It lives.	They live.

Tip

Add an -es to the third person singular form of regular verbs that end in -sh, -x, -ch, and -s. (I wish/He wishes, I fix/She fixes, I watch/It watches, I kiss/He kisses.)

Singular: I read everyday.

Plural: We read everyday.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the first person singular and the first person plural.

Singular: You stretch before you go to bed.

Plural: You stretch before every game.

In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the second person singular and the second person plural. In the singular form, the pronoun you refers to one person. In the plural form, the pronoun you refers to a group of people, such as a team.

Singular: My mother walks to work every morning.

In this sentence, the subject is mother. Because the sentence only refers to one mother, the subject is singular. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person singular form.

Plural: My friends like the same music as I do.

In this sentence, the subject is friends. Because this subject refers to more than one person, the subject is plural. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person plural form.

Tip

Many singular subjects can be made plural by adding an -s. Most regular verbs in the present tense end with an -s in the third person singular. This does not make the verbs plural.

Singular subject, singular verb: The cat races across the yard.

Plural subject, plural verb: The cats race across the yard.

EXERCISE 1

On your own sheet of paper, write the correct verb form for each of the following sentences.

1. I (brush/brushes) my teeth twice a day.
 2. You (wear/wears) the same shoes every time we go out.
 3. He (kick/kicks) the soccer ball into the goal.
 4. She (watch/watches) foreign films.
 5. Catherine (hide/hides) behind the door.
 6. We (want/wants) to have dinner with you.
 7. You (work/works) together to finish the project.
 8. They (need/needs) to score another point to win the game.
 9. It (eat/eats) four times a day.
 10. David (fix/fixes) his own motorcycle.
-

Irregular Verbs

Not all verbs follow a predictable pattern. These verbs are called irregular verbs. Some of the most common irregular verbs are be, have, and do. Learn the forms of these verbs in the present tense to avoid errors in subject-verb agreement.

Be

Study the different forms of the verb to be in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I am.	We are.
Second Person	You are.	You are.
Third Person	He/She/It is.	They are.

Have

Study the different forms of the verb to have in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I have.	We have.
Second Person	You have.	You have.
Third Person	He/She/It has.	They have.

Do

Study the different forms of the verb to do in the present tense.

	Singular Form	Plural Form
First Person	I do.	We do.
Second Person	You do.	You do.
Third person	He/She/It does.	They do.

Exercise 2

Complete the following sentences by writing the correct present tense form of be, have, or do. Use your own sheet of paper to complete this exercise.

1. I _____ sure that you will succeed.
 2. They _____ front-row tickets to the show.
 3. He _____ a great Elvis impersonation.
 4. We _____ so excited to meet you in person!
 5. She _____ a fever and a sore throat.
 6. You _____ not know what you are talking about.
 7. You _____ all going to pass this class.
 8. She _____ not going to like that.
 9. It _____ appear to be the right size.
 10. They _____ ready to take this job seriously.
-

Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

Errors in subject-verb agreement may occur when

- a sentence contains a compound subject;
- the subject of the sentence is separate from the verb;
- the subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun, such as anyone or everyone;
- the subject of the sentence is a collective noun, such as team or organization;
- the subject appears after the verb.

Recognizing the sources of common errors in subject-verb agreement will help you avoid these errors in your writing. This section covers the subject-verb agreement errors in more detail.

Compound Subjects

A compound subject is formed by two or more nouns and the coordinating conjunctions and, or, or nor. A compound subject can be made of singular subjects, plural subjects, or a combination of singular and plural subjects.

Compound subjects combined with and take a plural verb form.

Two singular subjects: Alicia and Miguel ride their bikes to the beach.

Two plural subjects: The girls and the boys ride their bikes to the beach.

Singular and plural subjects: Alicia and the boys ride their bikes to the beach.

Compound subjects combined with *or* and *nor* are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb.

Two Singular Subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor Rianna wants to eat at the restaurant.

Two plural subjects: Neither the kids nor the adults want to eat at the restaurant.

Singular and plural subjects: Neither Elizabeth nor the kids want to eat at the restaurant.

Plural and singular subjects: Neither the kids nor Elizabeth wants to eat at the restaurant.

Two singular subjects: Either you or Jason takes the furniture out of the garage.

Two plural subjects: Either you or the twins take the furniture out of the garage.

Singular and plural subjects: Either Jason or the twins take the furniture out of the garage.

Plural and singular subjects: Either the twins or Jason takes the furniture out of the garage.

Tip

If you can substitute the word *they* for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third person plural verb form.

Separation of Subjects and Verbs

As you read or write, you may come across a sentence that contains a phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Often, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses add more information to the sentence and appear between the subject and the verb. However, the subject and the verb must still agree.

If you have trouble finding the subject and verb, cross out or ignore the phrases and clauses that begin with prepositions or dependent words. The subject of a sentence will never be in a prepositional phrase or dependent clause.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a prepositional phrase:

The students with the best grades win the academic awards.

The puppy under the table is my favorite.

The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a dependent clause:

The car that I bought has power steering and a sunroof.

The representatives who are courteous sell the most tickets.

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns refer to an unspecified person, thing, or number. When an indefinite pronoun serves as the subject of a sentence, you will often use a singular verb form.

However, keep in mind that exceptions arise. Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form. To determine whether to use a singular or plural verb with an indefinite pronoun, consider the noun that the pronoun would refer to. If the noun is plural, then use a plural verb with the indefinite pronoun. View the chart to see a list of common indefinite pronouns and the verb forms they agree with.

Indefinite Pronouns That Always Take a Singular Verb	Indefinite Pronouns That Can Take a Singular or Plural Verb
anybody, anyone, anything	All
each	Any
everybody, everyone, everything	None
much	Some
many	
nobody, no one, nothing	
somebody, someone, something	

Singular: Everybody in the kitchen sings along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun everybody takes a singular verb form because everybody refers to a group performing the same action as a single unit.

Plural: All the people in the kitchen sing along when that song comes on the radio.

The indefinite pronoun all takes a plural verb form because all refers to the plural noun people. Because people is plural, all is plural.

Singular: All the cake is on the floor.

In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun all takes a singular verb form because all refers to the singular noun cake. Because cake is singular, all is singular.

Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and considers those people, places, or things one singular unit. Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb. Some commonly used collective nouns are group, team, army, flock, family, and class.

Singular: The class is going on a field trip.

In this sentence, class is a collective noun. Although the class consists of many students, the class is treated as a singular unit and requires a singular verb form.

The Subject Follows the Verb

You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. In other words, the subject of the sentence may not appear where you expect it to appear. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb.

Here or There

In sentences that begin with here or there, the subject follows the verb.

Here is my wallet!

There are thirty dolphins in the water.

If you have trouble identifying the subject and the verb in sentences that start with here or there; it may help to reverse the order of the sentence so the subject comes first.

My wallet is here!

Thirty dolphins are in the water.

Questions

When you ask questions, a question word (who, what, where, when, why, or how) appears first. The verb and then the subject follow.

Tip

If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in questions, try answering the question being asked.

Exercise 3

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following sentences. If there are no errors in subject-verb agreement, write OK. Copy the corrected sentence or the word OK on your own sheet of notebook paper.

1. My dog and cats chases each other all the time.

2. The books that are in my library is the best I have ever read.
 3. Everyone are going to the concert except me.
 4. My family are moving to California.
 5. Here is the lake I told you about.
 6. There is the newspapers I was supposed to deliver.
 7. Which room is bigger?
 8. When are the movie going to start?
 9. My sister and brother cleans up after themselves.
 10. Some of the clothes is packed away in the attic.
-

Exercise 4

Correct the errors in subject-verb agreement in the following paragraph. Copy the paragraph on a piece of notebook paper and make corrections.

Dear Hiring Manager,

I feels that I am the ideal candidate for the receptionist position at your company. I has three years of experience as a receptionist in a company that is similar to yours. My phone skills and written communication is excellent. These skills, and others that I have learned on the job, helps me understand that every person in a company helps make the business a success. At my current job, the team always say that I am very helpful. Everyone appreciate when I go the extra mile to get the job

done right. My current employer and coworkers feels that I am an asset to the team. I is efficient and organized. Is there any other details about me that you would like to know? If so, please contact me. Here are my résumé. You can reach me by e-mail or phone. I looks forward to speaking with you in person.

Thanks,

Felicia Fellini

Key Takeaways

- Parts of sentences must agree in number, person, case, and gender.
- A verb must always agree with its subject in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb; a plural subject requires a plural verb.
- Irregular verbs do not follow a predictable pattern in their singular and plural forms. Common irregular verbs are to be, to have, and to do.
- A compound subject is formed when two or

more nouns are joined by the words *and*, *or*, or *nor*.

- In some sentences, the subject and verb may be separated by a phrase or clause, but the verb must still agree with the subject.
- Indefinite pronouns, such as *anyone*, *each*, *everyone*, *many*, *no one*, and *something*, refer to unspecified people or objects. Most indefinite pronouns are singular.
- A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and treats those people, places, or things one singular unit. Collective nouns require singular verbs.
- In sentences that begin with *here* and *there*, the subject follows the verb.
- In questions, the subject follows the verb.

This is adapted from “Chapter 2: Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?” of the book [Successful Writing](#)

[Links to an external site.](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing),

2.3 VERB TENSE

Suppose you must give an oral presentation about what you did last summer. How do you make it clear that you are talking about the past and not about the present or the future? Using the correct verb tense can help you do this.

It is important to use the proper verb tense. Otherwise, your listener might judge you harshly. Mistakes in tense often leave a listener or reader with a negative impression.

Regular Verbs

Verbs indicate actions or states of being in the past, present, or future using tenses. Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from the present to past tense. For example, to form a past-tense or past-participle verb form, add -ed or -d to the end of a verb. You can avoid mistakes by understanding this basic pattern.

Verb tense identifies the time of action described in a sentence. Verbs take different forms to indicate different tenses. Verb tenses indicate

- an action or state of being in the present,

- an action or state of being in the past,
- an action or state of being in the future.

Helping verbs, such as be and have, also work to create verb tenses, such as the future tense.

Present tense: Tim walks to the store. (singular subject)

Present tense: Sue and Kimmy walk to the store. (Plural subject)

Past tense: Yesterday, they walked to the store for milk. (Plural subject)

Future tense: Tomorrow, Kimmy will walk to the store to buy some bread.

EXERCISE 1

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tenses. Write the corrected sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. The Dust Bowl (is, was, will be) a name given to a period of very destructive dust storms that occurred in the United States during the 1930s.
2. Historians today (consider, considered, will consider) The Dust Bowl to be one of the worst weather of events

in American history.

3. The Dust Bowl mostly (affects, affected, will affect) the states of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.
 4. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to occur in these dry regions, but not to the devastating degree of the 1930s.
 5. The dust storms during The Dust Bowl (cause, caused, will cause) irreparable damage to farms and the environment for a period of several years.
 6. When early settlers (move, moved, will move) into this area, they (remove, removed, will remove) the natural prairie grasses in order to plant crops and graze their cattle.
 7. They did not (realize, realized, will realize) that the grasses kept the soil in place.
 8. There (is, was, will be) also a severe drought that (affects, affected, will affect) the region.
 9. The worst dust storm (happens, happened, will happen) on April 14, 1935, a day called Black Sunday.
 10. The Dust Bowl era finally came to end in 1939 when the rains (arrive, arrived, will arrive).
 11. Dust storms (continue, continued, will continue) to affect the region, but hopefully they will not be as destructive as the storms of the 1930s.
-

Irregular Verbs

The past tense of irregular verbs is not formed using the patterns that regular verbs follow. Study [Table 2.1 “Irregular Verbs”](#)

[Links to an external site.](#), which lists the most common irregular verbs.

Tip

The best way to learn irregular verbs is to memorize them. With the help of a classmate, create flashcards of irregular verbs and test yourselves until you master them.

Table 2.1 Irregular Verbs

Simple Present	Past	Past Participle	Simple Present	Past	Past Participle
be	was, were	done	lose	lost	
become	became	become	make	made	made
begin	began	begun	mean	meant	meant
blow	blew	blown	meet	met	met
break	broke	broken	pay	paid	paid
bring	brought	brought	put	put	put
build	built	built	quit	quit	quit
burst	burst	burst	read	read	read
buy	bought	bought	ride	rode	ridden
catch	caught	caught	ring	rang	rung
choose	chose	chosen	rise	rose	risen
come	came	come	run	ran	run
cut	cut	cut	say	said	said
dive	dove (dived)	dove/ dived	see	saw	seen
do	did	done	seek	sought	sought
draw	drew	drawn	sell	sold	sold
drink	drank	drunk	send	sent	sent
drive	drove	driven	set	set	set

eat	ate	eaten	shake	shook	shaken
fall	fell	fallen	shine	shone (shined)	shone/ shined
feed	fed	fed	shrink	shrank	shrunk
feel	felt	felt	sing	sang	sung
fight	fought	fought	sit	sat	sat
find	found	found	sleep	slept	slept
fly	flew	flown	speak	spoke	spoken
forget	forgot	forgotten	spend	spent	spent
forgive	forgave	forgiven	spring	sprang	sprung
freeze	froze	frozen	stand	stood	stood
get	got	got/ gotten	steal	stole	stolen
give	gave	given	strike	struck	struck
go	went	gone	swim	swam	swum
grow	grew	grown	swing	swang/ swung	swung
have	had	had	take	took	taken
hear	heard	heard	teach	taught	taught
hide	hid	hidden	tear	tore	torn
hold	held	held	tell	told	told
hurt	hurt	hurt	think	thought	thought
keep	kept	kept	throw	threw	thrown
know	knew	known	understand	understood	understood

lay	laid	laid	wake	woke	waken
lead	led	led	wear	wore	worn
leave	left	left	win	won	won
let	let	let	wind	wound	wound
lie	lay	lain			

Here we consider using irregular verbs.

Present tense: Lauren keeps all her letters.

Past tense: Lauren kept all her letters.

Future tense: Lauren will keep all her letters.

Exercise 2

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct form of the irregular verb in simple present, simple past, or simple future tense. Copy the corrected sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Marina finally (forgived, forgave, will forgive) her sister for snooping around her room.
2. The house (shook, shook, shakes) as the airplane rumbled overhead.
3. I (bayed, bought, buy) several items of clothing at the thrift store on Wednesday.
4. She (put, putted, puts) the lotion in her shopping basket

- and proceeded to the checkout line.
5. The prized goose (layed, laid, lay) several golden eggs last night.
 6. Mr. Batista (teached, taught, taughted) the class how to use correct punctuation.
 7. I (drink, drank, will drink) several glasses of sparkling cider instead of champagne on New Year's Eve next year.
 8. Although Hector (grewed, grew, grows) three inches in one year, we still called him "Little Hector."
 9. Yesterday our tour guide (lead, led, will lead) us through the maze of people in Times Square.
 10. The rock band (burst, bursted, bursts) onto the music scene with their catchy songs.
-

Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, write a sentence using the correct form of the verb tense shown below.

1. Throw (past)
 2. Paint (simple present)
 3. Smile (future)
 4. Tell (past)
 5. Share (simple present)
-

Maintaining Consistent Verb Tense

Consistent verb tense means the same verb tense is used throughout a sentence or a paragraph. As you write and revise, it is important to use the same verb tense consistently and to avoid shifting from one tense to another unless there is a good reason for the tense shift. In the following box, see whether you notice the difference between a sentence with consistent tense and one with inconsistent tense.

Inconsistent tense: The crowd starts cheering as Melina approached the finish line.

Consistent tense: The crowd started cheering as Melina approached the finish line.

Consistent tense: The crowd starts cheering as Melina approaches the finish line.

Tip

In some cases, clear communication will call for different tenses. Look at the following example:

When I was a teenager, I wanted to be a firefighter, but now I am studying computer science.

If the time frame for each action or state is different, a tense shift is appropriate.

Exercise 4

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the inconsistent verb tense. Copy the corrected paragraph onto your own sheet of paper.

In the Middle Ages, most people lived in villages and work as agricultural laborers, or peasants. Every village has a “lord,” and the peasants worked on his land. Much of what they produce go to the lord and his family. What little food was leftover goes to support the peasants’ families. In return for their labor, the lord offers them protection. A peasant’s day usually began before sunrise and involves long hours of backbreaking work, which includes plowing the land, planting seeds, and cutting crops for harvesting. The working life of a peasant in the Middle Ages is usually demanding and exhausting.

Key Takeaways

- Verb tense helps you express when an event takes place.
- Regular verbs follow regular patterns when shifting from present to past tense.

- Irregular verbs do not follow regular, predictable patterns when shifting from present to past tense.
- Using consistent verb tense is a key element to effective writing.

This is adapted from “Chapter 2: Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?” of the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#)

2.4 CAPITALIZATION

Text messages, casual e-mails, and instant messages often ignore the rules of capitalization. In fact, it can seem unnecessary to capitalize in these contexts. In other, more formal forms of communication, however, knowing the basic rules of capitalization and using capitalization correctly gives the reader the impression that you choose your words carefully and care about the ideas you are conveying.

Capitalize the First Word of a Sentence

Incorrect: the museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

Correct: The museum has a new butterfly exhibit.

Incorrect: cooking can be therapeutic.

Correct: Cooking can be therapeutic.

Capitalize Proper Nouns

Proper nouns—the names of specific people, nationalities, languages, places, objects, streets, months, days of the week,

buildings, events, or titles of individuals—are always capitalized.

Incorrect: He grew up in harlem, new york.

Correct: He grew up in Harlem, New York.

Incorrect: The sears tower in chicago has a new name.

Correct: The Sears Tower in Chicago has a new name.

Tip

Always capitalize nationalities, races, languages, and religions. For example, American, African American, Hispanic, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on.

Do not capitalize nouns for people, places, things, streets, buildings, events, and titles when the noun is used in general or common way. See the following chart for the difference between proper nouns and common nouns.

Though months and days are capitalized (March June Monday Saturday), the five seasons are NOT (summer, fall, autumn, winter, spring), unless added in a holiday or event like Spring Break.

Common Noun	Proper Noun
museum	The Art Institute of Chicago
theater	Apollo Theater
country	Malaysia
uncle	Uncle Javier
doctor	Dr. Jackson
book	Pride and Prejudice
college	Smith College
war	the Spanish-American War
historical event	The Renaissance
school subjects:	Specific Courses:
math	Mr. Smith's Math Class
algebra	College Algebra
biology	Biology 2310
spring, fall	Spring Break, Fall Fest

Exercise 1

On your own sheet of paper, write five proper nouns for each common noun that is listed. The first one has been done for you.

Common noun: river Nile River

Common noun: musician

Common noun: magazine

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Capitalize Days of the Week, Months of the Year, and Holidays

Incorrect: On wednesday, I will be travelling to Austin for a music festival.

Correct: On Wednesday, I will be travelling to Austin for a music festival.

Incorrect: The fourth of july is my favorite holiday.

Correct: The Fourth of July is my favorite holiday.

Capitalize Titles

Incorrect: the play, fences, by August Wilson, is one of my favorites.

Correct: The play, Fences, by August Wilson, is one of my favorites.

Incorrect: The president of the united states will be speaking at my university.

Correct: The President of the United States will be speaking at my university.

Tip

Computer-related words such as “Internet” and “World Wide Web” are usually capitalized; however, “e-mail” and “online” are never capitalized.

Exercise 2

Edit the following sentences by correcting the capitalization of the titles or names.

1. The prince of england enjoys playing polo.
 2. “Ode to a nightingale” is a sad poem.
 3. My sister loves to read magazines such as the new yorker.
 4. The house on Mango street is an excellent novel written by Sandra Cisneros.
 5. My physician, dr. alvarez, always makes me feel comfortable in her office.
-

Exercise 3

Edit the following paragraphs by correcting the capitalization.

david grann’s the lost City of Z mimics the snake-like winding of the amazon River. The three distinct Stories that

are introduced are like twists in the River. First, the Author describes his own journey to the amazon in the present day, which is contrasted by an account of percy fawcett's voyage in 1925 and a depiction of James Lynch's expedition in 1996. Where does the river lead these explorers? the answer is one that both the Author and the reader are hungry to discover.

The first lines of the preface pull the reader in immediately because we know the author, david grann, is lost in the amazon. It is a compelling beginning not only because it's thrilling but also because this is a true account of grann's experience. grann has dropped the reader smack in the middle of his conflict by admitting the recklessness of his decision to come to this place. the suspense is further perpetuated by his unnerving observation that he always considered himself A Neutral Witness, never getting personally involved in his stories, a notion that is swiftly contradicted in the opening pages, as the reader can clearly perceive that he is in a dire predicament—and frighteningly involved.

Writing at Work

Did you know that, if you use all capital letters to convey a message, the capital letters come across like shouting? In addition, all capital letters are actually more difficult to read and may annoy the reader. To avoid “shouting” at or annoying

your reader, follow the rules of capitalization and find other ways to emphasize your point.

Key Takeaways

- Learning and applying the basic rules of capitalization is a fundamental aspect of good writing.
- Identifying and correcting errors in capitalization is an important writing skill.

This is adapted from “Chapter 2: Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?” of the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

2.5 PRONOUNS

If there were no pronouns, all types of writing would be quite tedious to read. We would soon be frustrated by reading sentences like Bob said that Bob was tired or Christina told the class that Christina received an A. Pronouns help a writer avoid constant repetition. Knowing just how pronouns work is an important aspect of clear and concise writing.

Pronoun Agreement

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of (or refers back to) a noun or another pronoun. The word or words a pronoun refers to is called the antecedent of the pronoun.

1. Lani complained that she was exhausted.

She refers to Lani.

Lani is the antecedent of she.

2. Jeremy left the party early, so I did not see him until Monday at work.

Him refers to Jeremy.

Jeremy is the antecedent of him.

3. Crina and Rosalie have been best friends ever since they were freshman in high school.

They refers to Crina and Rosalie.

Crina and Rosalie is the antecedent of they.

Pronoun agreement errors occur when the pronoun and the antecedent do not match or agree with each other. There are several types of pronoun agreement.

Agreement in Number

If the pronoun takes the place of or refers to a singular noun, the pronoun must also be singular.

Correct: If a student wants to return a book to the bookstore, they must have a receipt.

Correct but old fashioned: If a student wants to return a book to the bookstore, he or she must have a receipt.

Correct- best for general situation: If students want to return a book to the bookstore, they must have a receipt.

In modern cases, in which gender should not be assumed or assigned, THEY can replace he or she, THEIR can replace his or her, THEM can replace him or her

Correct: If a student, wants to return a book to the bookstore, they must have a receipt.

	Singular Pronouns			Plural Pronouns		
First Person	I	me	my (mine)	we	us	our (ours)
Second Person	you	you	your (yours)	you	you	your (your)
Third Person	he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her, its	they	them	their (theirs)

If you use a consistent person, your reader is less likely to be confused.

Incorrect: When a person goes to a restaurant, you should leave a tip.

Correct: When a person goes to a restaurant, he or she should leave a tip.

Correct: When we go to a restaurant, I should leave a tip.

Exercise 1

Edit the following paragraph by correcting pronoun agreement errors in number and person.

Over spring break I visited my older cousin, Diana, and they took me to a butterfly exhibit at a museum. Diana and I have been close ever since she was young. Our mothers are twin sisters, and she is inseparable! Diana knows how much I love

butterflies, so it was their special present to me. I have a soft spot for caterpillars too. I love them because something about the way it transforms is so interesting to me. One summer my grandmother gave me a butterfly growing kit, and you got to see the entire life cycle of five Painted Lady butterflies. I even got to set it free. So when my cousin said they wanted to take me to the butterfly exhibit, I was really excited!

Indefinite Pronouns and Agreement

Indefinite pronouns are usually singular and do not refer to a specific person or thing. Note that a pronoun that refers to an indefinite singular pronoun should also be singular. The following are some common indefinite pronouns.

Common Indefinite Pronouns

all	each one	few	nothing	several
any	each other	many	one	some
anybody	either	neither	one another	somebody
anything	everybody	nobody	oneself	someone
both	everyone	none	other	something
each	everything	no one	others	anyone

Correct: Everyone should do what they can to help. (in

modern times, a singular THEY can be used if gender is undefined)

Correct but old fashioned: Everyone should do what he or she can to help.

Correct: Someone left their backpack in the library. (in modern times, a singular THEIR can be used if gender is undefined)

Correct but old fashioned: Someone left his or her backpack in the library.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns suggest more than one person but are usually considered singular. Look over the following examples of collective nouns.

Common Collective Nouns

audience	faculty	public
band	family	school
class	government	society
committee	group	team
company	jury	tribe

Incorrect: Lara's company will have their annual picnic next week.

Correct: Lara's company will have its annual picnic next week.

Exercise 2

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct pronoun. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper. Then circle the noun the pronoun replaces.

1. In the current economy, nobody wants to waste _____ money on frivolous things.
2. If anybody chooses to go to medical school, _____ must be prepared to work long hours.
3. The plumbing crew did _____ best to repair the broken pipes before the next ice storm.
4. If someone is rude to you, try giving _____ a smile in return.
5. My family has _____ faults, but I still love them no matter what.
6. The school of education plans to train _____ students to be literacy tutors.
7. The commencement speaker said that each student has a responsibility toward _____.

8. My mother's singing group has _____ rehearsals on Thursday evenings.
 9. No one should suffer _____ pains alone.
 10. I thought the flock of birds lost _____ way in the storm.
-

Subject and Object Pronouns

Subject pronouns function as subjects in a sentence. Object pronouns function as the object of a verb or of a preposition.

Singular Pronouns		Plural Pronouns	
Subject	Object	Subject	Object
I	me	we	us
you	you	you	you
he, she, it	him, her, it	they	them

The following sentences show pronouns as subjects:

1. She loves the Blue Ridge Mountains in the fall.
2. Every summer, they picked up litter from national parks.

The following sentences show pronouns as objects:

1. Marie leaned over and kissed him.
 2. Jane moved it to the corner.
-

Tip

Note that a pronoun can also be the object of a preposition.

Near them, the children played.

My mother stood between us.

The pronouns *us* and *them* are objects of the prepositions *near* and *between*. They answer the questions *near whom?* And *between whom?*

Compound subject pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the subject of the sentence.

The following sentences show pronouns with compound subjects:

Incorrect: *Me and Harriet* visited the Grand Canyon last summer.

Correct: *Harriet and I* visited the Grand Canyon last summer.

Correct: *Jenna accompanied Harriet and me* on our trip.

Tip

Note that object pronouns are never used in the subject position.

One way to remember this rule is to remove the other subject in a compound subject, leave only the pronoun, and see whether the sentence makes sense. For example, *Me* visited the Grand Canyon last summer sounds immediately incorrect.

Compound object pronouns are two or more pronouns joined by a conjunction or a preposition that function as the object of the sentence.

Incorrect: I have a good feeling about *Janice and I*.

Correct: I have a good feeling about *Janice and me*.

Tip

It is correct to write Janice and me, as opposed to me and Janice. Just remember it is more polite to refer to yourself last.

Exercise 3

Revise the following sentences in which the subject and object pronouns are used incorrectly. Copy the revised sentence onto your own sheet of paper. Write a C for each sentence that is correct.

1. Meera and me enjoy doing yoga together on Sundays.
 2. She and him have decided to sell their house.
 3. Between you and I, I do not think Jeffrey will win the election.
 4. Us and our friends have game night the first Thursday of every month.
 5. They and I met while on vacation in Mexico.
 6. Napping on the beach never gets boring for Alice and I.
 7. New Year's Eve is not a good time for she and I to have a serious talk.
 8. You exercise much more often than me.
 9. I am going to the comedy club with Yolanda and she.
 10. The cooking instructor taught her and me a lot.
-

Who versus Whom

Who or whoever is always the subject of a verb. Use who or whoever when the pronoun performs the action indicated by the verb.

Who won the marathon last Tuesday?

I wonder who came up with that terrible idea!

On the other hand, whom and whomever serve as objects. They are used when the pronoun does not perform an action. Use whom or whomever when the pronoun is the direct object of a verb or the object of a preposition.

Whom did Frank marry the third time? (direct object of verb)

From whom did you buy that old record player? (object of preposition)

Tip

If you are having trouble deciding when to use who and whom, try this trick. Take the following sentence:

Who/Whom do I consider my best friend?

Reorder the sentence in your head, using either he or him in place of who or whom.

I consider him my best friend.

I consider he my best friend.

Which sentence sounds better? The first one, of course. So the trick is, if you can use him, you should use whom. Listen for the M in whom, him, or them.

Exercise 4

Complete the following sentences by adding who or whom.
Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. _____ hit the home run?
2. I remember _____ won the Academy Award for Best Actor last year.
3. To _____ is the letter addressed?
4. I have no idea _____ left the iron on, but I am going to find out.
5. _____ are you going to recommend for the internship?
6. With _____ are you going to Hawaii?
7. No one knew _____ the famous actor was.
8. _____ in the office knows how to fix the copy machine?
9. From _____ did you get the concert tickets?
10. No one knew _____ ate the cake mom was saving.

Key Takeaways

- Pronouns and their antecedents need to agree in number and person. Usually, both are in the same sentence
- Most indefinite pronouns are singular though in modern times a singular THEY or THEM or THEIR can be used if gender is not defined.
- Collective nouns are usually singular.
- Pronouns can function as subjects or objects.
- Subject pronouns are never used as objects, and object pronouns are never used as subjects.
- Who serves as a subject of a verb.
- Whom serves as an object of a sentence or the object of a preposition.

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2.6 ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Adjectives and Adverbs

An adjective is a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. It often answers questions such as which one, what kind, or how many?

1. The green sweater belongs to Iris.
 2. She looks beautiful.
- In sentence 1, the adjective green describes the noun sweater.
 - In sentence 2, the adjective beautiful describes the pronoun she.
 - An adverb is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs frequently end in -ly. They answer questions such as how, to what extent, why, when, and where.
 - Bertrand sings horribly.
 - My sociology instructor is extremely wise.
 - He threw the ball very accurately.

- In sentence 3, *horribly* describes the verb *sings*. How does Bertrand sing? He sings *horribly*.
 - In sentence 4, *extremely* describes the adjective *wise*. How wise is the instructor? *Extremelywise*.
 - In sentence 5, *very* describes the adverb *accurately*. How accurately did he throw the ball? *Very accurately*.
-

Exercise 1

Complete the following sentences by adding the correct adjective or adverb from the list in the previous section. Identify the word as an adjective or an adverb (Adj, Adv).

1. Frederick _____ choked on the piece of chicken when he saw Margaret walk through the door.
2. His _____ eyes looked at everyone and everything as if they were specimens in a biology lab.
3. Despite her pessimistic views on life, Lauren believes that most people have _____ hearts.
4. Although Stefan took the criticism _____, he remained calm.
5. The child developed a _____ imagination because he read a lot of books.
6. Madeleine spoke _____ while she was visiting her grandmother in the hospital.

7. Hector's most _____ possession was his father's bass guitar from the 1970s.
 8. My definition of a _____ afternoon is walking to the park on a beautiful day, spreading out my blanket, and losing myself in a good book.
 9. She _____ eyed her new coworker and wondered if he was single.
 10. At the party, Denise _____ devoured two pieces of pepperoni pizza and a several slices of ripe watermelon.
-

Comparative versus Superlative

Comparative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare two people or things.

1. Jorge is thin.
 2. Steven is thinner than Jorge.
- Sentence 1 describes Jorge with the adjective thin.
 - Sentence 2 compares Jorge to Steven, stating that Steven is thinner. So thinner is the comparative form of thin.

Form comparatives in one of the following two ways:

1. If the adjective or adverb is a one syllable word, add -er to

it to form the comparative. For example, big, fast, and short would become bigger, faster, and shorter in the comparative form.

2. If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word more in front of it to form the comparative. For example, happily, comfortable, and jealous would become more happily, more comfortable, and more jealous in the comparative.

Superlative adjectives and adverbs are used to compare more than two people or two things.

1. Jackie is the loudest cheerleader on the squad.
 2. Kenyatta was voted the most confident student by her graduating class.
- Sentence 1 shows that Jackie is not just louder than one other person, but she is the loudest of all the cheerleaders on the squad.
 - Sentence 2 shows that Kenyatta was voted the most confident student of all the students in her class.

Form superlatives in one of the following two ways:

1. If the adjective or adverb is a one-syllable word, add -est to form the superlative. For example, big, fast, and short would become biggest, fastest, and shortest in the

superlative form.

2. If the adjective or adverb is a word of two or more syllables, place the word most in front of it. For example, happily, comfortable, and jealous would become most happily, most comfortable, and most jealous in the superlative form.

Tip

Remember the following exception: If the word has two syllables and ends in -y, change the -y to an -i and add -est. For example, happy would change to happiest in the superlative form; healthy would change to healthiest.

Exercise 2

Edit the following paragraph by correcting the errors in comparative and superlative adjectives.

Our argument started on the most sunny afternoon that I have ever experienced. Max and I were sitting on my front stoop when I started it. I told him that my dog, Jacko, was more smart than his dog, Merlin. I could not help myself. Merlin never came when he was called, and he chased his tail and barked at rocks. I told Max that Merlin was the most dumbest dog on the block. I guess I was angrier about a bad

grade that I received, so I decided to pick on poor little Merlin. Even though Max insulted Jacko too, I felt I had been more mean. The next day I apologized to Max and brought Merlin some of Jacko's treats. When Merlin placed his paw on my knee and licked my hand, I was the most sorry person on the block.

Collaboration

Share and compare your answers with a classmate.

Irregular Words: Good, Well, Bad, and Badly

Good, well, bad, and badly are often used incorrectly. Study the following chart to learn the correct usage of these words and their comparative and superlative forms.

		Comparative	Superlative
Adjective	good	better	best
Adverb	well	better	best
Adjective	bad	worse	worst
Adverb	badly	worse	worst

Good versus Well

Good is always an adjective—that is, a word that describes a noun or a pronoun. The second sentence is correct because well is an adverb that tells how something is done.

Incorrect: Cecilia felt that she had never done so good on a test.

Correct: Cecilia felt that she had never done so well on a test.

Well is always an adverb that describes a verb, adverb, or adjective. The second sentence is correct because good is an adjective that describes the noun score.

Incorrect: Cecilia's team received a well score.

Correct: Cecilia's team received a good score.

Bad versus Badly

Bad is always an adjective. The second sentence is correct because badly is an adverb that tells how the speaker did on the test.

Incorrect: I did bad on my accounting test because I didn't study.

Correct: I did badly on my accounting test because I didn't study.

Badly is always an adverb. The second sentence is correct

because bad is an adjective that describes the noun thunderstorm.

Incorrect: The coming thunderstorm looked badly.

Correct: The coming thunderstorm looked bad.

Better and Worse

The following are examples of the use of better and worse:

Tyra likes sprinting better than long distance running.

The traffic is worse in Chicago than in Atlanta.

Best and Worst

The following are examples of the use of best and worst:

Tyra sprints best of all the other competitors.

Peter finished worst of all the runners in the race.

Tip

Remember better and worse compare two persons or things. Best and worst compare three or more persons or things.

Exercise 3

Write good, well, bad, or badly to complete each sentence. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Donna always felt _____ if she did not see the sun in the morning.
 2. The school board president gave a _____ speech for once.
 3. Although my dog, Comet, is mischievous, he always behaves _____ at the dog park.
 4. I thought my back injury was _____ at first, but it turned out to be minor.
 5. Steve was shaking _____ from the extreme cold.
 6. Apple crisp is a very _____ dessert that can be made using whole grains instead of white flour.
 7. The meeting with my son's math teacher went very _____.
 8. Juan has a _____ appetite, especially when it comes to dessert.
 9. Magritte thought the guests had a _____ time at the party because most people left early.
 10. She _____ wanted to win the writing contest prize, which included a trip to New York.
-

Exercise 4

Write the correct comparative or superlative form of the word in parentheses. Copy the completed sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. This research paper is _____ (good) than my last one.
 2. Tanaya likes country music _____ (well) of all.
 3. My motorcycle rides _____ (bad) than it did last summer.
 4. That is the _____ (bad) joke my father ever told.
 5. The hockey team played _____ (badly) than it did last season.
 6. Tracey plays guitar _____ (well) than she plays the piano.
 7. It will go down as one of the _____ (bad) movies I have ever seen.
 8. The deforestation in the Amazon is _____ (bad) than it was last year.
 9. Movie ticket sales are _____ (good) this year than last.
 10. My husband says mystery novels are the _____ (good) types of books
-

Writing at Work

The irregular words good, well, bad, and badly are often misused along with their comparative and superlative forms better, best, worse, and worst. You may not hear the difference between worse and worst, and therefore type it incorrectly. In a formal or business-like tone, use each of these words to write eight separate sentences. Assume these sentences will be seen and judged by your current or future employer.

Key Takeaways

- Adjectives describe a noun or a pronoun.
- Adverbs describe a verb, adjective, or another adverb.
- Most adverbs are formed by adding -ly to an adjective.
- Comparative adjectives and adverbs compare two persons or things.
- Superlative adjectives or adverbs compare more than two persons or things.
- The adjectives good and bad and the adverbs well and badly are unique in their comparative

and superlative forms and require special attention.

This is adapted from “Chapter 2: Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?” of the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

2.7 MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that clarifies or describes another word, phrase, or clause. Sometimes writers use modifiers incorrectly, leading to strange and unintentionally humorous sentences. The two common types of modifier errors are called misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. If either of these errors occurs, readers can no longer read smoothly. Instead, they become stumped trying to figure out what the writer meant to say. A writer's goal must always be to communicate clearly and to avoid distracting the reader with strange sentences or awkward sentence constructions. The good news is that these errors can be easily overcome.

Misplaced Modifiers

A misplaced modifier is a modifier that is placed too far from the word or words it modifies. Misplaced modifiers make the sentence awkward and sometimes unintentionally humorous.

Incorrect: She wore a bicycle helmet on her head that was too large.

Correct: She wore a bicycle helmet that was too large on her head.

Notice the incorrect sentence it sounds as if her head was too large! Of course, the writer refers to the helmet, not the person's head. The corrected version of the sentence clarifies the writer's meaning.

Look at the following two examples:

Incorrect: They bought a kitten for my brother they call Shadow.

Correct: They bought a kitten they call Shadow for my brother.

In the incorrect sentence, it seems that the brother's name is Shadow. That's because the modifier is too far from the word it modifies, which is kitten.

Incorrect: The patient was referred to the physician with stomach pains.

Correct: The patient with stomach pains was referred to the physician.

The incorrect sentence reads as if the physician has stomach pains! What the writer means is that the patient has stomach pains.

Tip

Simple modifiers like only, almost, just, nearly, and barely often get used incorrectly because writers often stick them in the wrong place.

Confusing: Tyler almost found fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

Repaired: Tyler found almost fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

How do you almost find something? Either you find it, or you do not. The repaired sentence is much clearer.

Exercise 1

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences to correct the misplaced modifiers.

1. The young lady was walking the dog on the telephone.
2. I heard that there was a robbery on the evening news.
3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller for the baby that he called “Speed Racer.”
4. Rolling down the mountain, the explorer stopped the boulder with his powerful foot.
5. We are looking for a babysitter for our precious six-year-old who doesn’t drink or smoke and owns a car.
6. The teacher served cookies to the children wrapped in aluminum foil.

7. The mysterious woman walked toward the car holding an umbrella.
 8. We returned the wine to the waiter that was sour.
 9. Charlie spotted a stray puppy driving home from work.
 10. I ate nothing but a cold bowl of noodles for dinner.
-

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that describes something that has been left out of the sentence. When there is nothing that the word, phrase, or clause can modify, the modifier is said to dangle.

Incorrect: Riding in the sports car, the world whizzed by rapidly.

Correct: As Jane was riding in the sports car, the world whizzed by rapidly.

In the incorrect sentence, riding in the sports car is dangling. The reader is left wondering who is riding in the sports car. The writer must tell the reader!

Incorrect: Walking home at night, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: As Jonas was walking home at night, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

Correct: The trees looked like spooky aliens as Jonas was walking home at night.

In the incorrect sentence walking home at night is dangling. Who is walking home at night? Jonas. Note that there are two different ways the dangling modifier can be corrected.

Incorrect: To win the spelling bee, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

Correct: If we want to win the spelling bee this year, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

In the incorrect sentence, to win the spelling bee is dangling. Who wants to win the spelling bee? We do!

Tip

The following three steps will help you quickly spot a dangling modifier:

1. Look for an -ing modifier at the beginning of your sentence or another modifying phrase:
 1. Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie. (Painting is the -ing modifier.)
 2. Underline the first noun that follows it:
 1. Painting for three hours at night, the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.
 3. Make sure the modifier and noun go together logically. If they do not, it is very likely you have a dangling modifier.
 4. After identifying the dangling modifier, rewrite the sentence.
 1. Painting for three hours at night, Maggie finally finished the kitchen.
-
-

Exercise 2

Rewrite the following the sentences onto your own sheet of paper to correct the dangling modifiers.

1. Bent over backward, the posture was very challenging.
 2. Making discoveries about new creatures, this is an interesting time to be a biologist.
 3. Walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.
 4. Playing a guitar in the bedroom, the cat was seen under the bed.
 5. Packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.
 6. While looking in the mirror, the towel swayed in the breeze.
 7. While driving to the veterinarian's office, the dog nervously whined.
 8. The priceless painting drew large crowds when walking into the museum.
 9. Piled up next to the bookshelf, I chose a romance novel.
 10. Chewing furiously, the gum fell out of my mouth.
-

Exercise 3

Rewrite the following paragraph correcting all the misplaced and dangling modifiers.

I bought a fresh loaf of bread for my sandwich shopping in the grocery store. Wanting to make a delicious sandwich, the mayonnaise was thickly spread. Placing the cold cuts on the bread, the lettuce was placed on top. I cut the sandwich in half with a knife turning on the radio. Biting into the sandwich, my favorite song blared loudly in my ears. Humming and chewing, my sandwich went down smoothly. Smiling, my sandwich will be made again, but next time I will add cheese.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

- Misplaced and dangling modifiers make sentences difficult to understand.
- Misplaced and dangling modifiers distract the

reader.

- There are several effective ways to identify and correct misplaced and dangling modifiers.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

PART III

CHAPTER 3: PUNCTUATION

3.1 COMMAS

One of the punctuation clues to reading you may encounter is the comma. A comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause in a sentence or a separation of things in a list. Commas can be used in a variety of ways. Look at some of the following sentences to see how you might use a comma when writing a sentence.

- Introductory word: Personally, I think the practice is helpful.
- Lists: The wind destroyed the barn, the tool shed, and the back porch.
- Coordinating adjectives: He was tired, hungry, and late.
- Conjunctions in compound sentences: The bedroom door was closed, so the children knew their mother was asleep.
- Interrupting words: I knew where it was hidden, of course, but I wanted them to find it themselves.
- Dates, addresses, greetings, and letters: The letter was postmarked December 8, 1945.

Commas after an Introductory Word or Phrase

You may notice a comma that appears near the beginning of the sentence, usually after a word or phrase. This comma lets the reader know where the introductory word or phrase ends, and the main sentence begins.

Without spoiling the surprise, we need to tell her to save the date.

In this sentence, without spoiling the surprise is an introductory phrase, while we need to tell her to save the date is the main sentence. Notice how a comma separates them. When only an introductory word appears in the sentence, a comma also follows the introductory word.

Ironically, she already had plans for that day.

Exercise 1

Look for the introductory word or phrase. On your own sheet of paper, copy the sentence and add a comma to correct the sentence.

1. Suddenly the dog ran into the house.
2. In the blink of an eye the kids were ready to go to the movies.

3. Confused he tried opening the box from the other end.
 4. Every year we go camping in the woods.
 5. Without a doubt green is my favorite color.
 6. Hesitating she looked back at the directions before proceeding.
 7. Fortunately the sleeping baby did not stir when the doorbell rang.
 8. Believe it or not the criminal was able to rob the same bank three times.
-

Commas in a List of Items

When you want to list several nouns in a sentence, you separate each word with a comma. This allows the reader to pause after each item and identify which words are included in the grouping. When you list items in a sentence, put a comma after each noun, then add the word “and” before the last item. However, you do not need to include a comma after the last item.

We'll need to get flour, tomatoes, and cheese at the store.

The pizza will be topped with olives, peppers, and pineapple chunks.

Commas and Coordinating Adjectives

You can use commas to list both adjectives and nouns. A string of adjectives that describe a noun are called coordinating adjectives. These adjectives come before the noun they modify and are separated by commas. One important thing to note, however, is that unlike listing nouns, the word *and* does not always need to be before the last adjective.

It was a bright, windy, clear day.

Our kite glowed red, yellow, and blue in the morning sunlight.

Exercise 2

Use what you have learned so far about comma use to add commas to the following sentences on your own sheet of paper.

1. Monday Tuesday and Wednesday are all booked with meetings.
2. It was a quiet uneventful unproductive day.
3. We'll need to prepare statements for the Franks Todds and Smiths before their portfolio reviews next week.
4. Michael Nita and Desmond finished their report last

- Tuesday.
5. With cold wet aching fingers he was able to secure the sails before the storm.
 6. He wrote his name on the board in clear precise delicate letters.
-

Commas before Conjunctions in Compound Sentences

Commas are sometimes used to separate two independent clauses. The comma comes after the first independent clause, followed by a conjunction, such as for, and, or but. For a full list of conjunctions, see [Chapter 2 “Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?”](#).

He missed class today, and he thinks he will be out tomorrow, too.

He says his fever is gone, but he is still very tired.

Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, create a compound sentence by combining the two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

1. The presentation was scheduled for Monday. The weather delayed the presentation for four days.
 2. He wanted a snack before bedtime. He ate some fruit.
 3. The patient is in the next room. I can hardly hear anything.
 4. We could go camping for vacation. We could go to the beach for vacation.
 5. I want to get a better job. I am taking courses at night.
 6. I cannot move forward on this project. I cannot afford to stop on this project.
 7. Patrice wants to stop for lunch. We will take the next exit to look for a restaurant.
 8. I've got to get this paper done. I have class in ten minutes.
 9. The weather was clear yesterday. We decided to go on a picnic.
 10. I have never dealt with this client before. I know Leonardo has worked with them. Let's ask Leonardo for his help.
-

Commas before and after Interrupting Words

In conversations, you might interrupt your train of thought by giving more details about what you are talking about. In

a sentence, you might interrupt your train of thought with a word or phrase called interrupting words. Interrupting words can come at the beginning or middle of a sentence. When the interrupting words appear at the beginning of the sentence, a comma appears after the word or phrase.

If you can believe it, people once thought the sun and planets orbited around Earth.

Luckily, some people questioned that theory.

When interrupting words come in the middle of a sentence, they are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. You can determine where the commas should go by looking for the part of the sentence that is not essential for the sentence to make sense.

An Italian astronomer, Galileo, proved that Earth orbited the sun.

We have known, for hundreds of years now, that the Earth and other planets exist in a solar system.

Exercise 4

On your own sheet of paper, copy the sentence and insert commas to separate the interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.

1. I asked my neighbors the retired couple from Florida to

- bring in my mail.
2. Without a doubt his work has improved over the last few weeks.
 3. Our professor Mr. Alamut drilled the lessons into our heads.
 4. The meeting is at noon unfortunately which means I will be late for lunch.
 5. We came in time for the last part of dinner but most importantly we came in time for dessert.
 6. All of a sudden our network crashed and we lost our files.
 7. Alex hand the wrench to me before the pipe comes loose again.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Commas in Dates, Addresses, and the Greetings and Closings of Letters

You also use commas when you write the date, such as in cover letters and e-mails. Commas are used when you write the date, include an address, and greet someone.

If you are writing out the full date, add a comma after the

day and before the year. You do not need to add a comma when you write the month and day or when you write the month and the year. If you need to continue the sentence after you add a date that includes the day and year, add a comma after the end of the date.

The letter is postmarked May 4, 2001.

Her birthday is May 5.

He visited the country in July 2009.

I registered for the conference on March 7, 2010, so we should get our tickets soon.

You also use commas when you include addresses and locations. When you include an address in a sentence, be sure to place a comma after the street and after the city. Do not place a comma between the state and the zip code. Like a date, if you need to continue the sentence after adding the address, simply add a comma after the address.

We moved to 4542 Boxcutter Lane, Hope, Missouri 70832.

After moving to Boston, Massachusetts, Eric used public transportation to get to work.

Greetings are also separated by commas. When you write an e-mail or a letter, you add a comma after the greeting word or the person's name. You also need to include a comma after the closing, which is the word or phrase you put before your signature.

Hello,

I would like more information about your job posting.

Thank you,

Anita Al-Sayf

Dear Mrs. Al-Sayf,

Thank you for your letter. Please read the attached document for details.

Sincerely,

Jack Fromont

Exercise 5

On your own sheet of paper, use what you have learned about using commas to edit the following letter.

March 27 2010

Alexa Marché

14 Taylor Drive Apt. 6

New Castle Maine 90342

Dear Mr. Timmons

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am available on Monday the fifth. I can stop by your office at any time. Is your address still 7309 Marcourt Circle #501? Please get back to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you

Alexa

Exercise 6

On your own sheet of paper, use what you have learned about comma usage to edit the following paragraphs.

1. My brother Nathaniel is a collector of many rare unusual things. He has collected lunch boxes limited edition books and hatpins at various points of his life. His current collection of unusual bottles has over fifty pieces. Usually he sells one collection before starting another.
2. Our meeting is scheduled for Thursday March 20. In that time we need to gather all our documents together. Alice is in charge of the timetables and schedules. Tom is in charge of updating the guidelines. I am in charge of the presentation. To prepare for this meeting please print out any e-mails faxes or documents you have referred to when writing your sample.
3. It was a cool crisp autumn day when the group set out. They needed to cover several miles before they made camp so they walked at a brisk pace. The leader of the group Garth kept checking his watch and their GPS location. Isabelle Raoul and Maggie took turns carrying the equipment while Carrie took notes about the wildlife they saw. As a result no one noticed the darkening sky until the first drops of rain splattered on their faces.
4. Please have your report complete and filed by April 15

2010. In your submission letter please include your contact information the position you are applying for and two people we can contact as references. We will not be available for consultation after April 10 but you may contact the office if you have any questions. Thank you HR Department.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

- Punctuation marks provide visual cues to readers to tell them how to read a sentence. Punctuation marks convey meaning.
- Commas indicate a pause or a list in a sentence.
- A comma should be used after an introductory word to separate this word from the main sentence.
- A comma comes after each noun in a list. The word and is added before the last noun, which is not followed by a comma.

- A comma comes after every coordinating adjective except for the last adjective.
- Commas can be used to separate the two independent clauses in compound sentences as long as a conjunction follows the comma.
- Commas are used to separate interrupting words from the rest of the sentence.
- When you write the date, you add a comma between the day and the year. You also add a comma after the year if the sentence continues after the date.
- When they are used in a sentence, addresses have commas after the street address, and the city. If a sentence continues after the address, a comma comes after the zip code.
- When you write a letter, you use commas in your greeting at the beginning and in your closing at the end of your letter.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

3.2 SEMICOLONS

Another punctuation mark that you will encounter is the semicolon (;). Like most punctuation marks, the semicolon can be used in a variety of ways. The semicolon indicates a break in the flow of a sentence but functions differently than a period or a comma. When you encounter a semicolon while reading aloud, this represents a good place to pause and take a breath.

Semicolons to Join Two Independent Clauses

Use a semicolon to combine two closely related independent clauses. Relying on a period to separate the related clauses into two shorter sentences could lead to choppy writing. Using a comma would create an awkward run-on sentence.

Correct: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview; appearances are important.

Choppy: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview. Appearances are important.

Incorrect: Be sure to wear clean, well-pressed clothes to the interview, appearances are important.

Writing the independent clauses as two sentences separated

by a period is correct in this case. However, using a semicolon to combine the clauses can make your writing more interesting by creating a variety of sentence lengths and structures while preserving the flow of ideas.

Semicolons to Join Items in a List

You can also use a semicolon to join items in a list when the items in the list already require commas. Semicolons help the reader distinguish between items in the list.

Correct: The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey; green, brown, and black; or red, green, and brown.

Incorrect: The color combinations we can choose from are black, white, and grey, green, brown, and black, or red, green, and brown.

Using semicolons in this sentence allows the reader to easily distinguish between the three sets of colors.

Tip

Use semicolons to join two main clauses. Do not use semicolons with coordinating conjunctions such as and, or, and but.

Exercise 1

Correct the following sentences on your own sheet of paper by adding semicolons. If the sentence is correct as it is, write OK.

1. I did not notice that you were in the office I was behind the front desk all day.
2. Do you want turkey, spinach, and cheese roast beef, lettuce, and cheese or ham, tomato, and cheese?
3. Please close the blinds there is a glare on the screen.
4. Unbelievably, no one was hurt in the accident.
5. I cannot decide if I want my room to be green, brown, and purple green, black, and brown or green, brown, and dark red.
6. Let's go for a walk the air is so refreshing.

Key Takeaways

- Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
 - Use a semicolon to separate items in a list when those items already require a comma.
-

This is adapted from the book *Successful Writing* (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

3.3 COLONS

The colon (:) is another punctuation mark used to indicate a full stop. Use a colon to introduce lists, quotes, examples, and explanations. You can also use a colon after the greeting in business letters and memos.

Dear Hiring Manager:

To: Human Resources

From: Deanna Dean

Colons to Introduce a List

Use a colon to introduce a list of items. Introduce the list with an independent clause.

The team will tour three states: New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

I have to take four classes this semester: Composition, Statistics, Ethics, and Italian.

Colons to Introduce a Quote

You can use a colon to introduce a quote.

Mark Twain said it best: “When in doubt, tell the truth.”

If a quote is longer than forty words, skip a line after the colon and indent the left margin of the quote five spaces. Because quotations over forty words use line spacing and indentation to indicate a quote, quotation marks are unnecessary.

My father always loved Mark Twain’s words:

There are basically two types of people. People who accomplish things, and people who claim to have accomplished things. The first group is less crowded.

Tip

Long quotations, which are forty words or more, are called block quotations. Block quotations frequently appear in longer essays and research papers. For more information about block quotations, see [Chapter 11 “Writing from Research: What Will I Learn?”](#).

Colons to Introduce Examples or Explanations

Use a colon to introduce an example or to further explain an idea presented in the first part of a sentence. The first part of the sentence must always be an independent clause; that is, it must stand alone as a complete thought with a subject and verb. Do not use a colon after phrases like *such as* or *for example*.

Correct: Our company offers many publishing services: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Incorrect: Our company offers many publishing services, such as: writing, editing, and reviewing.

Tip

Capitalize the first letter following a colon for a proper noun, the beginning of a quote, or the first letter of another independent clause. Do NOT capitalize if the information following the colon is not a complete sentence.

Proper noun: We visited three countries: Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Beginning of a quote: My mother loved this line from Hamlet: “To thine own self be true.”

Two independent clauses: There are drawbacks to modern technology: My brother’s cell phone died and he lost a lot of phone numbers.

Incorrect: The recipe is simple: Tomato, basil, and avocado.

Exercise 1

On your own sheet of paper, correct the following sentences by adding semicolons or colons where needed. If the sentence does not need a semicolon or colon, write OK.

1. Don't give up you never know what tomorrow brings.
2. Our records show that the patient was admitted on March 9, 2010 January 13, 2010 and November 16, 2009.
3. Allow me to introduce myself I am the greatest ice-carver in the world.
4. Where I come from there are three ways to get to the grocery store by car, by bus, and by foot.
5. Listen closely you will want to remember this speech.
6. I have lived in Sedona, Arizona Baltimore, Maryland and Knoxville, Tennessee.
7. The boss's message was clear Lateness would not be tolerated.
8. Next semester, we will read some more contemporary authors, such as Vonnegut, Miller, and Orwell.
9. My little sister said what we were all thinking "We should have stayed home."
10. Trust me I have done this before.

Key Takeaways

- Use a colon to introduce a list, quote, or example.
- Use a colon after a greeting in business letters and memos.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

3.7 DASHES

A dash (—) is a punctuation mark used to set off information in a sentence for emphasis. You can enclose text between two dashes, or use just one dash. To create a dash in Microsoft Word, type two hyphens together. Do not put a space between dashes and text.

Arrive to the interview early—but not too early.

Any of the suits—except for the purple one—should be fine to wear.

Exercise 1

On your own sheet of paper, clarify the following sentences by adding dashes. If the sentence is clear as it is, write OK.

1. Which hairstyle do you prefer short or long?
2. I don't know I hadn't even thought about that.
3. Guess what I got the job!
4. I will be happy to work over the weekend if I can have Monday off.
5. You have all the qualities that we are looking for in a

candidate intelligence, dedication, and a strong work ethic.

Key Takeaways

- Dashes indicate a pause in text.
- Dashes set off information in a sentence to show emphasis.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

3.4 QUOTES

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 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 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

The difference between exact wording and paraphrasing is extremely important in many businesses. For legal purposes or to do a job correctly, knowing exactly what the client, customer, or supervisor said can be important. 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.).

Exercise 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.

1. Yasmin said, I don't feel like cooking. Let's go out to eat.
2. Where should we go? said Russell.

3. Yasmin said it didn't matter to her.
 4. I know, said Russell, let's go to the Two Roads Juice Bar.
 5. Perfect! said Yasmin.
 6. Did you know that the name of the Juice Bar is a reference to a poem? asked Russell.
 7. I didn't! exclaimed Yasmin. Which poem?
 8. The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost Russell explained.
 9. Oh! said Yasmin, Is that the one that starts with the line, Two roads diverged in a yellow wood?
 10. That's the one said Russell.
-

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.
-

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

3.8 HYPHENS

A hyphen (-) looks similar to a dash but is shorter and used differently.

Hyphens between Two Adjectives That Work as One

Use a hyphen to combine words that work together to form a single description.

The fifty-five-year-old athlete was just as qualified for the marathon as his younger opponents.

My doctor recommended against taking the medication, since it can be habit-forming.

My study group focused on preparing for the mid-year review.

Hyphens When a Word Breaks at the End of a Line

Use a hyphen to divide a word across two lines of text. You may notice that most word-processing programs will do this for you. If you must manually insert a hyphen, place the hyphen between two syllables. If you are unsure where to place the hyphen, consult a dictionary or move the entire word to the next line.

My supervisor was concerned that the team meeting would conflict with the client meeting.

Key Takeaways

- Hyphens join words that work as one adjective.
 - Hyphens break words across two lines of text.
-

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

3.5 APOSTROPHES

An apostrophe (') is a punctuation mark used with a noun to show possession or indicate where a letter has been left out to form a contraction.

Possession

An apostrophe and the letter s indicate who or what owns something. To show possession with a singular noun, add 's.

Jen's dance routine mesmerized everyone in the room.

The dog's leash is hanging on the hook beside the door.

Jess's sister is also coming to the party.

Notice that singular nouns that end in s still take the apostrophe s ('s) ending to show possession.

To show possession with a plural noun that ends in s, just add an apostrophe ('). If the plural noun does not end in s, add an apostrophe and an s ('s).

Plural noun that ends in s: The drummers' sticks all moved in the same rhythm, like a machine.

Plural noun that does not end in s: The people's votes

clearly showed that no one supported the management decision.

Contractions

A contraction is a word that is formed by combining two words. An apostrophe shows where one or more letters have been left out in a contraction. Contractions are commonly used in informal writing but not in formal writing.

I do not like ice cream.

I don't like ice cream.

Notice how the words do and not have been combined to form the contraction don't. The apostrophe shows where the o in not has been left out.

We will see you later.

We'll see you later.

Look at the chart for some examples of commonly used contractions.

aren't	are not
can't	cannot
doesn't	does not
don't	do not
isn't	is not
he'll	he will
I'll	I will
she'll	she will
they'll	they will
you'll	you will
it's	it is, it has
let's	let us
she's	she is, she has
there's	there is, there has
who's	who is, who has

Tip

Be careful not to confuse it's with its. It's is a contraction of the words it and is. Its is a possessive pronoun.

It's cold and rainy outside. (It is cold and rainy outside.)

The cat was chasing its tail. (Shows that the tail belongs to the cat.)

When in doubt, substitute the words it is in a sentence. If sentence still makes sense, use the contraction it's.

Exercise 1

Correct the following sentences on your own sheet of paper by adding apostrophes. If the sentence is correct as it is, write OK.

1. “What a beautiful child! She has her mothers eyes.”
 2. My brothers wife is one of my best friends.
 3. I couldnt believe it when I found out that I got the job!
 4. My supervisors informed me that I wouldnt be able to take the days off.
 5. Each of the students responses were unique.
 6. Wont you please join me for dinner tonight?
-

Key Takeaways

- Use apostrophes to show possession. Add 's to singular nouns and plural nouns that do not end in s. Add ' to plural nouns that end in s.
- Use apostrophes in contractions to show

where a letter or letters have been left out.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

3.6 PARENTHESES

Parentheses () are punctuation marks that are always used in pairs and contain material that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence. Parentheses must never contain the subject or verb of a sentence. A sentence should make sense if you delete any text within parentheses and the parentheses.

Attack of the Killer Potatoes has to be the worst movie I have seen (so far).

Your spinach and garlic salad is one of the most delicious (and nutritious) foods I have ever tasted!

Exercise 1

On your own sheet of paper, clarify the following sentences by adding parentheses. If the sentence is clear as it is, write OK.

1. Are you going to the seminar this weekend I am?
2. I recommend that you try the sushi bar unless you don't like sushi.
3. I was able to solve the puzzle after taking a few moments to think about it.

4. Please complete the questionnaire at the end of this letter.
 5. Has anyone besides me read the assignment?
 6. Please be sure to circle not underline the correct answers.
-

Key Takeaways

- Parentheses enclose information that is secondary to the meaning of a sentence.
 - Parentheses are always used in pairs.
-

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

PART IV

CHAPTER 4: WORKING WITH WORDS: WHICH WORD IS RIGHT?

4.1 COMMONLY CONFUSED WORDS

Just as a mason uses bricks to build sturdy homes, writers use words to build successful documents. Consider the construction of a building. Builders need to use tough, reliable materials to build a solid and structurally sound skyscraper. Every part is necessary, from the foundation to the roof and floor in between. Writers need to use strong, meaningful words from the first sentence to the last and in every sentence in between.

You already know many words you use daily as part of your writing and speaking vocabulary. You probably also know that certain words fit better in certain situations. Letters, e-mails, and even quickly jotted grocery lists require the proper selection of vocabulary. Imagine you are writing a grocery list to purchase the ingredients for a recipe but accidentally write down cilantro when the recipe calls for parsley. Even though cilantro and parsley look remarkably alike, each produces a very different effect on food. This seemingly small error could radically alter the flavor of your dish!

A solid everyday vocabulary will help you while writing, but learning new words and avoiding common word errors will make a real impression on your readers. Experienced writers

know that careful word selection and usage can lead to more polished, more meaningful work. This chapter covers word choice and vocabulary-building strategies that will improve your writing.

Commonly Confused Words

Some words in English cause trouble for speakers and writers because these words share a similar pronunciation, meaning, or spelling with another word. These words are called commonly confused words. For example, read aloud the following sentences containing the commonly confused words *new* and *knew*:

I liked her new sweater.

I knew she would wear that sweater today.

These words may sound alike, but they carry different usages and meanings. *New* is an adjective that describes the sweater, and *knew* is the past tense of the verb *to know*. To read more about adjectives, verbs, and other parts of speech, see [Chapter 2 “Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?”](#).

Recognizing Commonly Confused Words

New and knew are just two of the words that can be confusing because of their similarities. Familiarize yourself with the following list of commonly confused words. Recognizing these words in your own writing and in other pieces of writing can help you choose the correct word.

Commonly Confused Words

A, An, And

- A (article). Used before a word that begins with a consonant.
- a key, a mouse, a screen
- An (article). Used before a word that begins with a vowel.
- an airplane, an ocean, an igloo
- And (conjunction). Connects two or more words together.
- peanut butter and jelly, pen and pencil, jump and shout

Accept, Except

- Accept (verb). Means to take or agree to something offered.

- They accepted our proposal for the conference.
- Except (conjunction). Means only or but.
- We could fly there except the tickets cost too much.

Affect, Effect

- Affect (verb). Means to create a change.
- Hurricane winds affect the amount of rainfall.
- Effect (noun). Means an outcome or result.
- The heavy rains will have an effect on the crop growth.

Are, Our

- Are (verb). A conjugated form of the verb to be.
- My cousins are all tall and blonde.
- Our (pronoun). Indicates possession, usually follows the pronoun we.
- We will bring our cameras to take pictures.

By, Buy

- By (preposition). Means next to.
- My glasses are by the bed.
- Buy (verb). Means to purchase.
- I will buy new glasses after the doctor's appointment.

Its, It's

- Its (pronoun). A form of it that shows possession.
- The butterfly flapped its wings.
- It's (contraction). Joins the words it and is.
- It's the most beautiful butterfly I have ever seen.

Know, No

- Know (verb). Means to understand or possess knowledge.
- I know the male peacock sports the brilliant feathers.
- No. Used to make a negative.
- I have no time to visit the zoo this weekend.

Loose, Lose

- Loose (adjective). Describes something that is not tight or is detached.
- Without a belt, her pants are loose on her waist.
- Lose (verb). Means to forget, to give up, or to fail to earn something.
- She will lose even more weight after finishing the marathon training.

Of, Have

- Of (preposition). Means from or about.
- I studied maps of the city to know where to rent a new

apartment.

- Have (verb). Means to possess something.
- I have many friends to help me move.
- Have (linking verb). Used to connect verbs.
- I should have helped her with that heavy box.

Quite, Quiet, Quit

- Quite (adverb). Means really or truly.
- My work will require quite a lot of concentration.
- Quiet (adjective). Means not loud.
- I need a quiet room to complete the assignments.
- Quit (verb). Means to stop or to end.
- I will quit when I am hungry for dinner.

Right, Write

- Right (adjective). Means proper or correct.
- When bowling, she practices the right form.
- Right (adjective). Also means the opposite of left.
- The ball curved to the right and hit the last pin.
- Write (verb). Means to communicate on paper.
- After the team members bowl, I will write down their scores.

Set, Sit

- Set (verb). Means to put an item down.
- She set the mug on the saucer.
- Set (noun). Means a group of similar objects.
- All the mugs and saucers belonged in a set.
- Sit (verb). Means to lower oneself down on a chair or another place
- I'll sit on the sofa while she brews the tea.

Suppose, Supposed

- Suppose (verb). Means to think or to consider
- I suppose I will bake the bread, because no one else has the recipe.
- Suppose (verb). Means to suggest.
- Suppose we all split the cost of the dinner.
- Supposed (verb). The past tense form of the verb suppose, meaning required or allowed.
- She was supposed to create the menu.

Than, Then

- Than (conjunction). Used to connect two or more items when comparing
- Registered nurses require less schooling than doctors.
- Then (adverb). Means next or at a specific time.
- Doctors first complete medical school and then obtain a residency.

Their, They're, There

- Their (pronoun). A form of they that shows possession.
- The dog walker feeds their dogs everyday at two o'clock.
- They're (contraction). Joins the words they and are.
- They're the sweetest dogs in the neighborhood.
- There (adverb). Indicates a particular place.
- The dogs' bowls are over there, next to the pantry.
- There (pronoun). Indicates the presence of something
- There are more treats if the dogs behave.

To, Two, Too

- To (preposition). Indicates movement.
- Let's go to the circus.
- To. A word that completes an infinitive verb.
- to play, to ride, to watch.
- Two. The number after one. It describes how many.
- Two clowns squirted the elephants with water.
- Too (adverb). Means also or very.
- The tents were too loud, and we left.

Use, Used

- Use (verb). Means to apply for some purpose.
- We use a weed whacker to trim the hedges.
- Used. The past tense form of the verb to use

- He used the lawnmower last night before it rained.
- Used to. Indicates something done in the past but not in the present
- He used to hire a team to landscape, but now he landscapes alone.

Who's, Whose

- Who's (contraction). Joins the words who and either is or has.
- Who's the new student? Who's met him?
- Whose (pronoun). A form of who that shows possession.
- Whose schedule allows them to take the new student on a campus tour?

Your, You're

- Your (pronoun). A form of you that shows possession.
- Your book bag is unzipped.
- You're (contraction). Joins the words you and are.
- You're the girl with the unzipped book bag.

The English language contains so many words; no one can say for certain how many words exist. In fact, many words in English are borrowed from other languages. Many words have multiple meanings and forms, further expanding the

immeasurable number of English words. Although the list of commonly confused words serves as a helpful guide, even these words may have more meanings than shown here. When in doubt, consult an expert: the dictionary!

Exercise 1

Complete the following sentences by selecting the correct word.

1. My little cousin turns _____(to, too, two) years old tomorrow.
2. The next-door neighbor's dog is _____(quite, quiet, quit) loud. He barks constantly throughout the night.
3. _____(Your, You're) mother called this morning to talk about the party.
4. I would rather eat a slice of chocolate cake _____(than, then) eat a chocolate muffin.
5. Before the meeting, he drank a cup of coffee and _____(than, then) brushed his teeth.
6. Do you have any _____(loose, lose) change to pay the parking meter?
7. Father must _____(have, of) left his briefcase at the office.
8. Before playing ice hockey, I was _____(suppose,

- supposed) to read the contract, but I only skimmed it and signed my name quickly, which may _____ (affect, effect) my understanding of the rules.
9. Tonight she will _____ (set, sit) down and _____ (right, write) a cover letter to accompany her résumé and job application.
10. It must be fall, because the leaves _____ (are, our) changing, and _____ (it's, its) getting darker earlier.
-

Strategies to Avoid Commonly Confused Words

When writing, you need to choose the correct word according to its spelling and meaning in the context. Not only does selecting the correct word improve your vocabulary and your writing, but it also makes a good impression on your readers. It also helps reduce confusion and improve clarity. The following strategies can help you avoid misusing confusing words.

1. Use a dictionary. Keep a dictionary at your desk while you write. Look up words when you are uncertain of their meanings or spellings. Many dictionaries are also available online, and the Internet's easy access will not slow you down. Check out your cell phone or smartphone to see if a dictionary app is available.

2. Keep a list of words you commonly confuse. Be aware of the words that often confuse you. When you notice a pattern of confusing words, keep a list nearby, and consult the list as you write. Check the list again before you submit an assignment to your instructor.
 3. Study the list of commonly confused words. You may not yet know which words confuse you, but before you sit down to write, study the words on the list. Prepare your mind for working with words by reviewing the commonly confused words identified in this chapter.
-

Tip

Commonly confused words appear in many locations, not just at work or at school. Be on the lookout for misused words wherever you find yourself throughout the day. Make a mental note of the error and remember its correction for your own pieces of writing.

Writing at Work

All employers value effective communication. Employers pay attention to your vocabulary from an application to an interview to the first month on the job. You do not need a large vocabulary to succeed, but you do need to be able to express yourself clearly and avoid commonly misused words.

When giving an important presentation on the effect of inflation on profit margins, you must know the difference between effect and affect and choose the correct word. When writing an e-mail to confirm deliveries, you must know if the shipment will arrive in to days, too days, or twodays. Confusion may arise if you choose the wrong word.

Consistently using the proper words will improve your communication and make a positive impression on your boss and colleagues.

Exercise 2

The following paragraph contains eleven errors. Find each misused word and correct it by adding the proper word.

The original United States Declaration of Independence sets in a case at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom as part of the National Archives in Washington, DC. Since 1952, over one million visitors each year of passed through the Rotunda too snap a photograph to capture they're experience. Although signs state, "No Flash Photography," forgetful tourists leave the flash on, an a bright light flickers for just a millisecond. This millisecond of light may not seem like enough to effect the precious document, but supposed how much light could be generated when all those milliseconds are added up. According to the National Archives administrators,

its enough to significantly damage the historic document. So, now, the signs display quite a different message: “No Photography.” Visitors continue to travel to see the Declaration that began a new country, but know longer can personal pictures serve as mementos. The administrators’ compromise, they say, is a visit to the gift shop for a preprinted photograph.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

- In order to write accurately, it is important for writers to be aware of commonly confused words.
- Although commonly confused words may look alike or sound alike, their meanings are very different.
- Consulting the dictionary is one way to make sure you are using the correct word in your

writing. You may also keep a list of commonly confused words nearby when you write or study the chart in this book.

- Choosing the proper words leaves a positive impression on your readers.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

4.3 WORD CHOICE

Effective writing involves making conscious choices with words. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some freewriting exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, writing an outline, and even selected your sources. When writing your first draft, consider which words to use to convey your ideas to the reader best.

Some writers are picky about word choice as they start drafting. They may practice specific strategies, such as using a dictionary and thesaurus, using words and phrases with proper connotations, and avoiding slang, clichés, and overly general words.

Once you understand these tricks of the trade, you can move ahead confidently in writing your assignment. Remember, the skill and accuracy of your word choice is a major factors in developing your writing style. Precise selection of your words will help you be more clearly understood—in both writing and speaking.

Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus

Even professional writers need help with the meanings, spellings, pronunciations, and uses of particular words. In fact, they rely on dictionaries to help them write better. No one knows every word in the English language and their multiple uses and meanings, so all writers, from novices to professionals, can benefit from the use of dictionaries.

Most dictionaries provide the following information:

- Spelling. How the word and its different forms are spelled.
- Pronunciation. How to say the word.
- Part of speech. The function of the word.
- Definition. The meaning of the word.
- Synonyms. Words that have similar meanings.
- Etymology. The history of the word.

Look at the following sample dictionary entry and see which of the preceding information you can identify:

myth, mith, n. [Gr. mythos, a word, a fable, a legend.] A fable or legend embodying the convictions of a people as to their gods or other divine beings, their own beginnings and early history and the heroes connected with it, or the origin of the world; any invented story; something or someone having no existence in fact.—myth • ic, myth • i • cal

Like a dictionary, a thesaurus is another indispensable

writing tool. A thesaurus gives you a list of synonyms, words that have the same (or very close to the same) meaning as another word. It also lists antonyms, words with the opposite meaning of the word. A thesaurus will help you when you are looking for the perfect word with just the right meaning to convey your ideas. It will also help you learn more words and use the ones you already know more correctly.

precocious adj. She's such a precocious little girl!: uncommonly smart, mature, advanced, smart, bright, brilliant, gifted, quick, clever, apt.

Ant. slow, backward, stupid.

Using Proper Connotations

A denotation is the dictionary definition of a word. A connotation, on the other hand, is the emotional or cultural meaning attached to a word. The connotation of a word can be positive, negative, or neutral. Keep in mind the connotative meaning when choosing a word.

Scrawny

- Denotation: Exceptionally thin and slight or meager in body or size.
- Word used in a sentence: Although he was a premature baby and a scrawny child, Martin has developed into a

strong man.

- Connotation: (Negative) In this sentence the word scrawny may have a negative connotation in the readers' minds. They might find it to mean a weakness or a personal flaw; however, the word fits into the sentence appropriately.

Skinny

- Denotation: Lacking sufficient flesh, very thin.
- Word used in a sentence: Skinny jeans have become very fashionable in the past couple of years.
- Connotation: (Positive) Based on cultural and personal impressions of what it means to be skinny, the reader may have positive connotations of the word skinny.

Lean

- Denotation: Lacking or deficient in flesh; containing little or no fat.
- Word used in a sentence: My brother has a lean figure, whereas I have a more muscular build.
- Connotation: (Neutral) In this sentence, lean has a neutral connotation. It does not call to mind an overly skinny person like the word scrawny, nor does imply the positive cultural impressions of the word skinny. It is merely a neutral descriptive word.

Notice that all the words have a very similar denotation; however, the connotations of each word differ.

Exercise 1

In each of the following items, you will find words with similar denotations. Identify the words' connotations as positive, negative, or neutral by writing the word in the appropriate box. Copy the chart onto your own piece of paper.

1. curious, nosy, interested
2. lazy, relaxed, slow
3. courageous, foolhardy, assured
4. new, newfangled, modern
5. mansion, shack, residence
6. spinster, unmarried woman, career woman
7. giggle, laugh, cackle
8. boring, routine, prosaic
9. noted, notorious, famous
10. assertive, confident, pushy

Positive Negative Neutral

Avoiding Slang

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads and may be used by or familiar to only a specific group of people. Most people use slang when they speak and in personal correspondences, such as e-mails, text messages, and instant messages. Slang is appropriate between friends in an informal context but should be avoided in formal academic writing.

Writing at Work

Frequent exposure to media and popular culture has desensitized many of us to slang. In certain situations, using slang at work may not be problematic, but keep in mind that

words can have a powerful effect. Slang in professional e-mails or during meetings may convey the wrong message or even mistakenly offend someone.

Exercise 2

Edit the following paragraph by replacing the slang words and phrases with more formal language. Rewrite the paragraph on your own sheet of paper.

I felt like such an airhead when I got up to give my speech. As I walked toward the podium, I banged my knee on a chair. Man, I felt like such a klutz. On top of that, I kept saying “like” and “um,” and I could not stop fidgeting. I was so stressed out about being up there. I feel like I’ve been practicing this speech 24/7, and I still bombed. It was ten minutes of me going off about how we sometimes have to do things we don’t enjoy doing. Wow, did I ever prove my point. My speech was so bad I’m surprised that people didn’t boo. My teacher said not to sweat it, though. Everyone gets nervous his or her first time speaking in public, and she said, with time, I would become a whiz at this speech giving stuff. I wonder if I have the guts to do it again.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Avoiding Clichés

Clichés are descriptive expressions that have lost their effectiveness because they are overused. Writing that uses clichés often suffers from a lack of originality and insight. Avoiding clichés in formal writing will help you write in original and fresh ways.

- Clichéd: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes my blood boil.
- Plain: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me really angry.
- Original: Whenever my brother and I get into an argument, he always says something that makes me want to go to the gym and punch the bag for a few hours.

Tip

Think about all the cliché phrases that you hear in popular music or in everyday conversation. What would happen if these clichés were transformed into something unique?

Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, revise the following sentences by replacing the clichés with fresh, original descriptions.

1. She is writing a memoir in which she will air her family's dirty laundry.
 2. Fran had an ax to grind with Benny, and she planned to confront him that night at the party.
 3. Mr. Muller was at his wit's end with the rowdy class of seventh graders.
 4. The bottom line is that Greg was fired because he missed too many days of work.
 5. Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet with just one paycheck.
 6. My brain is fried from pulling an all-nighter.
 7. Maria left the dishes in the sink all week to give Jeff a taste of his own medicine.
 8. While they were at the carnival Janice exclaimed, "Time sure does fly when you are having fun!"
 9. Jeremy became tongue-tied after the interviewer asked him where he saw himself in five years.
 10. Jordan was dressed to the nines that night.
-

Avoiding Overly General Words

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring your words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

- General: My new puppy is cute.
 - Specific: My new puppy is a ball of white fuzz with the biggest black eyes I have ever seen.

 - General: My teacher told us that plagiarism is bad.
 - Specific: My teacher, Ms. Atwater, created a presentation detailing exactly how plagiarism is illegal and unethical.
-

Exercise 4

Revise the following sentences by replacing the overly general words with more precise and attractive language. Write the new sentences on your own sheet of paper.

1. Reilly got into her car and drove off.

2. I would like to travel to outer space because it would be amazing.
 3. Jane came home after a bad day at the office.
 4. I thought Milo's essay was fascinating.
 5. The dog walked up the street.
 6. The coal miners were tired after a long day.
 7. The tropical fish are pretty.
 8. I sweat a lot after running.
 9. The goalie blocked the shot.
 10. I enjoyed my Mexican meal.
-

Key Takeaways

- Using a dictionary and thesaurus as you write will improve your writing by improving your word choice.
 - Connotations of words may be positive, neutral, or negative.
 - Slang, clichés, and overly general words should be avoided in academic writing.
-

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

PART V

CHAPTER 6: WRITING PARAGRAPHS: SEPARATING IDEAS AND SHAPING CONTENT

6.1 PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, TONE, AND CONTENT

Imagine reading one long block of text, with each idea blurring into the next. Even if you read a thrilling novel or an interesting news article, you will likely lose interest in what the author says quickly. It is helpful to position yourself as a reader during the writing process. Ask yourself whether you can focus easily on each point you make. One technique that effective writers use is to begin a fresh paragraph for each new idea they introduce.

Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks. One paragraph focuses on only one main idea and presents coherent sentences supporting that point. Because all the sentences in one paragraph support the same point, a paragraph may stand alone. To create longer assignments and to discuss more than one point, writers group together paragraphs.

Three elements shape the content of each paragraph:

1. Purpose. The reason the writer composes the paragraph.
2. Tone. The attitude the writer conveys about the paragraph's subject.

3. Audience. The individual or group whom the writer intends to address.

The assignment's purpose, audience, and tone dictate what the paragraph covers and how it will support one main point. This section covers how purpose, audience, and tone affect reading and writing paragraphs.

Identifying Common Academic Purposes

The purpose of a piece of writing identifies the reason you write a particular document. Basically, the purpose of a piece of writing answers the question, "Why?" For example, why write a play? To entertain a packed theater. Why write instructions to the babysitter? Inform him or her of your schedule and rules. Why write a letter to your congressman? To persuade him to address your community's needs.

In academic settings, the reasons for writing fulfill four main purposes: to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate. You will encounter these four purposes as you read for your classes and as you read for work or pleasure. Because reading and writing work together, your writing skills will improve as you read.

Eventually, your instructors will ask you to complete

assignments specifically designed to meet one of the four purposes. As you will see, the purpose of writing will guide you through each part of the paper, helping you make decisions about content and style. For now, identifying these purposes by reading paragraphs will prepare you to write individual paragraphs and to build longer assignments.

Summary Paragraphs

A summary shrinks a large amount of information into only the essentials. You probably summarize events, books, and movies daily. Think about the last blockbuster movie you saw or the last novel you read. Chances are, at some point in a casual conversation with a friend, coworker, or classmate, you compressed all the action in a two-hour film or in a two-hundred-page book into a brief description of the major plot movements. While in conversation, you probably described the major highlights, or the main points in just a few sentences, using your own vocabulary and manner of speaking.

Similarly, a summary paragraph condenses a long piece of writing into a smaller paragraph by extracting only the vital information. A summary uses only the writer's own words. Like the summary's purpose in daily conversation, the purpose of an academic summary paragraph is to maintain all the essential information from a longer document. Although

shorter than the original writing, a summary should still communicate all the key points and support. In other words, summary paragraphs should be succinct and to the point.

A summary of the report should briefly present all the main points and supporting details.

The summary retains the key points made by the writers of the original report but omits most of the statistical data. Summaries need not contain all the specific facts and figures in the original document; they provide only an overview of the essential information.

Analysis Paragraphs

An analysis separates complex materials into their different parts and studies how the parts relate to one another. For example, the analysis of simple table salt would require a deconstruction of its parts—the elements sodium (Na) and chloride (Cl). Then, scientists would study how the two elements interact to create the compound NaCl, or sodium chloride, which is also called simple table salt.

The analysis is not limited to the sciences, of course. An analysis paragraph in academic writing fulfills the same purpose. Instead of deconstructing compounds, academic analysis paragraphs typically deconstruct documents. An analysis takes apart a primary source (an essay, a book, an

article, etc.) point by point. It communicates the document's main points by examining individual points and identifying how they relate to one another.

The analysis does not simply repeat information from the original report but considers how the points within the report relate to one another. By doing this, the student uncovers a discrepancy between the points backed up by statistics and those requiring additional information. Analyzing a document involves a close examination of each of the individual parts and how they work together.

Synthesis Paragraphs

A synthesis combines two or more items to create an entirely new item. Consider the electronic musical instrument aptly named the synthesizer. It looks like a simple keyboard but displays a dashboard of switches, buttons, and levers. With the flip of a few switches, a musician may combine the distinct sounds of a piano, a flute, or a guitar—or any other combination of instruments—to create a new sound. The synthesizer's purpose is to blend the notes from individual instruments to form new, unique notes.

An academic synthesis aims to blend individual documents into a new document. An academic synthesis paragraph considers the main points from one or more pieces of writing

and links the main points together to create a new point, one not replicated in either document.

The synthesis paragraphs consider each source and use information from each to create a new thesis. A good synthesis does not repeat information; the writer uses a variety of sources to create a new idea.

Evaluation Paragraphs

An evaluation judges the value of something and determines its worth. Evaluations in everyday experiences are often dictated by set standards and influenced by opinion and prior knowledge. For example, at work, a supervisor may complete an employee evaluation by judging his subordinate's performance based on the company's goals. If the company focuses on improving communication, the supervisor will rate the employee's customer service according to a standard scale. However, the evaluation still depends on the supervisor's opinion and prior experience with the employee. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine how well the employee performs at his or her job.

An academic evaluation communicates your opinion, and its justifications, about a document or a topic of discussion. Evaluations are influenced by your reading of the document, your prior knowledge, and your prior experience with the

topic or issue. Because an evaluation incorporates your point of view and reasons for your point of view, it typically requires more critical thinking and a combination of summary, analysis, and synthesis skills. Thus evaluation paragraphs often follow summary, analysis, and synthesis paragraphs.

The evaluation paragraph incorporates the student's personal judgment within the evaluation. Evaluating a document requires prior knowledge that is often based on additional research.

Tip

When reviewing directions for assignments, look for the verbs summarize, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate. Instructors often use these words to clearly indicate the assignment's purpose. These words will cue you on how to complete the assignment because you will know its exact purpose.

Exercise 1

Read the following paragraphs about four films and then identify the purpose of each paragraph.

1. This film could easily have been cut down to less than two hours. By the final scene, I noticed that most of my fellow moviegoers were snoozing in their seats and were

barely paying attention to what was happening on screen. Although the director sticks diligently to the book, he tries too hard to cram in all the action, which is just too ambitious for such a detail-oriented story. If you want my advice, read the book and give the movie a miss.

2. During the opening scene, we learn that the character Laura is adopted and that she has spent the past three years desperately trying to track down her real parents. Having exhausted all the usual options—adoption agencies, online searches, family trees, and so on—she is on the verge of giving up when she meets a stranger on a bus. The chance encounter leads to a complicated chain of events that ultimately result in Laura getting her lifelong wish. But is it really what she wants? Throughout the rest of the film, Laura discovers that sometimes the past is best left where it belongs.
3. To create the feeling of being gripped in a vice, the director, May Lee, uses a variety of elements to gradually increase the tension. The creepy, haunting melody that subtly enhances the earlier scenes becomes ever more insistent, rising to a disturbing crescendo toward the end of the movie. The desperation of the actors, combined with the claustrophobic atmosphere and tight camera angles create a realistic firestorm, from which there is little hope of escape. Walking out of the theater at the end feels like staggering out of a Roman dungeon.
4. The scene in which Campbell and his fellow prisoners

assist the guards in shutting down the riot immediately strikes the viewer as unrealistic. Based on the recent reports on prison riots in both Detroit and California, it seems highly unlikely that a posse of hardened criminals will intentionally help their captors at the risk of inciting future revenge from other inmates. Instead, both news reports and psychological studies indicate that prisoners who do not actively participate in a riot will go back to their cells and avoid conflict altogether. Examples of this lack of attention to detail occur throughout the film, making it almost unbearable to watch.

Collaboration

Share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

Thinking about the purpose of writing a report in the workplace can help focus and structure the document. A summary should provide colleagues with a factual overview of your findings without going into too much specific detail. In contrast, an evaluation should include your personal opinion, along with supporting evidence, research, or examples to back it up. Listen for words such as summarize, analyze, synthesize,

or evaluate when your boss asks you to complete a report to help determine a purpose for writing.

Exercise 2

Consider the essay most recently assigned to you. Identify the most effective academic purpose for the assignment.

My _____ assignment:

My _____ purpose:

Identifying the Audience

Imagine you must give a presentation to a group of executives in an office. Weeks before the big day, you spend time creating and rehearsing the presentation. You must make important, careful decisions not only about the content but also about your delivery. Will the presentation require technology to project figures and charts? Should the presentation define important words, or will the executives already know the terms? Should you wear your suit and dress shirt? The answers to these questions will help you develop an appropriate

relationship with your audience, making them more receptive to your message.

Now imagine you must explain the same business concepts from your presentation to a group of high school students. Those important questions you previously answered may now require different answers. The figures and charts may be too sophisticated, and the terms will certainly require definitions. You may even reconsider your outfit and sport a more casual look. Because the audience has shifted, your presentation and delivery will shift as well to create a new relationship with the new audience.

In these two situations, the audience—the individuals who will watch and listen to the presentation—plays a role in the development of presentation. As you prepare the presentation, you visualize the audience to anticipate their expectations and reactions. What you imagine affects the information you choose to present and how you will present it. Then, during the presentation, you meet the audience in person and discover immediately how well you perform.

Although the audience for writing assignments—your readers—may not appear in person, they play an equally vital role. Even in everyday writing activities, you identify your readers' characteristics, interests, and expectations before making decisions about what you write. In fact, thinking about audience has become so common that you may not even detect the audience-driven decisions.

For example, you update your status on a social networking

site with the awareness of who will digitally follow the post. If you want to brag about a good grade, you may write the post to please family members. If you want to describe a funny moment, you may write with your friends' senses of humor in mind. Even at work, you send e-mails with an awareness of an unintended receiver who could intercept the message.

In other words, being aware of “invisible” readers is a skill you most likely already possess and one you rely on every day. Consider the following paragraphs. Which one would the author send to her parents? Which one would she send to her best friend?

Example A

Last Saturday, I volunteered at a local hospital. The visit was fun and rewarding. I even learned how to do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR. Unfortunately, I think caught a cold from one of the patients. This week, I will rest in bed and drink plenty of clear fluids. I hope I am well by next Saturday to volunteer again.

Example B

OMG! You won't believe this! My advisor forced me to do my community service hours at this hospital all weekend! We learned CPR but we did it on dummies, not even real peeps. And some kid sneezed on me and got me sick! I was so bored and sniffing all weekend; I hope I don't have to go back next week. I def do NOT want to miss the basketball tournament!

Most likely, you matched each paragraph to its intended audience with little hesitation. Because each paragraph reveals

the author's relationship with her intended readers, you can identify the audience fairly quickly. When writing your own paragraphs, you must engage with your audience to build an appropriate relationship given your subject. Imagining your readers during each stage of the writing process will help you make decisions about your writing. Ultimately, the people you visualize will affect what and how you write.

Tip

While giving a speech, you may articulate an inspiring or critical message, but if you left your hair a mess and laced up mismatched shoes, your audience would not take you seriously. They may be too distracted by your appearance to listen to your words.

Similarly, grammar and sentence structure serve as the appearance of a piece of writing. Polishing your work using correct grammar will impress your readers and allow them to focus on what you have to say.

Because focusing on audience will enhance your writing, your process, and your finished product, you must consider the specific traits of your audience members. Use your imagination to anticipate the readers' demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations.

- **Demographics.** These measure important data about a group of people, such as their age range, their ethnicity, their religious beliefs, or their gender. Certain topics and assignments will require these kinds of considerations about your audience. For other topics and assignments, these measurements may not influence your writing in the end. Regardless, it is important to consider demographics when you begin to think about your purpose for writing.
 - **Education.** Education considers the audience's level of schooling. If audience members have earned a doctorate degree, for example, you may need to elevate your style and use more formal language. Or, if audience members are still in college, you could write in a more relaxed style. An audience member's major or emphasis may also dictate your writing.
 - **Prior knowledge.** This refers to what the audience already knows about your topic. If your readers have studied certain topics, they may already know some terms and concepts related to the topic. You may decide whether to define terms and explain concepts based on your audience's prior knowledge. Although you cannot peer inside the brains of
-

your readers to discover their knowledge, you can make reasonable assumptions. For instance, a nursing major would presumably know more about health-related topics than a business major would.

- **Expectations.** These indicate what readers will look for while reading your assignment. Readers may expect consistencies in the assignment’s appearance, such as correct grammar and traditional formatting like double-spaced lines and legible font. Readers may also have content-based expectations given the assignment’s purpose and organization. In an essay titled “The Economics of Enlightenment: The Effects of Rising Tuition,” for example, audience members may expect to read about the economic repercussions of college tuition costs.
-
-

Exercise 3

On your own sheet of paper, generate a list of characteristics under each category for each audience. This list will help you later when you read about tone and content.

1. Your classmates

- Demographics

—

- Education

-
- Prior knowledge

-
- Expectations

-
- Your instructor

- Demographics

-
- Education

-
- Prior knowledge

-
- Expectations

-
- The head of your academic department

- Demographics

-
- Education

-
-
- Prior knowledge
-

-
- Expectations
-

-
- - Now think about your next writing assignment. Identify the purpose (you may use the same purpose listed in [Note 6.12 “Exercise 2”](#)), and then identify the audience. Create a list of characteristics under each category.
 - My assignment:
-

-
- My purpose:
-

-
- My audience:
-

-
- Demographics
-

-
- Education

-
- Prior knowledge
-

- Expectations
-

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Keep in mind that as your topic shifts in the writing process, your audience may also shift. For more information about the writing process, see [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#).

Also, remember that decisions about style depend on audience, purpose, and content. Identifying your audience’s demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how you write, but purpose and content play an equally important role. The next subsection covers how to select an appropriate tone to match the audience and purpose.

Selecting an Appropriate Tone

Tone identifies a speaker's attitude toward a subject or another person. You may pick up a person's tone of voice fairly easily in conversation. A friend who tells you about her weekend may speak excitedly about a fun skiing trip. An instructor who means business may speak in a low, slow voice to emphasize her serious mood. Or, a coworker who needs to let off some steam after a long meeting may crack a sarcastic joke.

Just as speakers transmit emotion through voice, writers can transmit through writing a range of attitudes, from excited and humorous to somber and critical. These emotions create connections among the audience, the author, and the subject, ultimately building a relationship between the audience and the text. To stimulate these connections, writers intimate their attitudes and feelings with useful devices, such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language. Keep in mind that the writer's attitude should always appropriately match the audience and the purpose.

Read the following paragraph and consider the writer's tone. How would you describe the writer's attitude toward wildlife conservation?

Many species of plants and animals are disappearing right before our eyes. If we don't act fast, it might be too late to save them. Human activities, including pollution, deforestation, hunting, and overpopulation, are devastating the natural environment. Without our help, many species will not survive

long enough for our children to see them in the wild. Take the tiger, for example. Today, tigers occupy just 7 percent of their historical range, and many local populations are already extinct. Hunted for their beautiful pelt and other body parts, the tiger population has plummeted from one hundred thousand in 1920 to just a few thousand. Contact your local wildlife conservation society today to find out how you can stop this terrible destruction.

Exercise 4

Think about the assignment and purpose you selected in [Note 6.12 “Exercise 2”](#), and the audience you selected in [Note 6.16 “Exercise 3”](#). Now, identify the tone you would use in the assignment.

My _____ assignment:

My _____ purpose:

My _____ audience:

My _____ tone:

Choosing Appropriate, Interesting Content

Content refers to all the written substance in a document. After selecting an audience and a purpose, you must choose what information will make it to the page. Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations, but no matter the type, the information must be appropriate and interesting for the audience and purpose. An essay written for third graders that summarizes the legislative process, for example, would have to contain succinct and simple content.

Content is also shaped by tone. When the tone matches the content, the audience will be more engaged, and you will build a stronger relationship with your readers. Consider that audience of third graders. You would choose simple content that the audience will easily understand, and you would express that content through an enthusiastic tone. The same considerations apply to all audiences and purposes.

Key Takeaways

- Paragraphs separate ideas into logical, manageable chunks of information.
- The content of each paragraph and document is shaped by purpose, audience, and tone.
- The four common academic purposes are to summarize, to analyze, to synthesize, and to evaluate.
- Identifying the audience's demographics, education, prior knowledge, and expectations will affect how and what you write.
- Devices such as sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and formal or informal language communicate tone and create a relationship between the writer and his or her audience.
- Content may consist of examples, statistics, facts, anecdotes, testimonies, and observations. All content must be appropriate and interesting for the audience, purpose and tone.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

6.2 EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR WRITING A PARAGRAPH

Now that you have identified common purposes for writing and learned how to select appropriate content for a particular audience, you can think about the structure of a paragraph in greater detail. Composing an effective paragraph requires a method similar to building a house. You may have the finest content or materials, but if you do not arrange them in the correct order, then the final product will not hold together very well.

A strong paragraph contains three distinct components:

1. **Topic sentence.** The topic sentence is the main idea of the paragraph.
2. **Body.** The body is composed of supporting sentences that develop the main point.
3. **Conclusion.** The conclusion is the final sentence that summarizes the main point.

The foundation of a good paragraph is the topic sentence, which expresses the paragraph's main idea. The topic sentence

relates to the thesis, or main point, of the essay (see [Chapter 9 “Writing Essays: From Start to Finish”](#) for more information about thesis statements) and guides the reader by signposting what the paragraph is about. All the sentences in the rest of the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.

This section covers the major components of a paragraph and examines how to develop an effective topic sentence.

Developing a Topic Sentence

Pick up any newspaper or magazine and read the first sentence of an article. Are you fairly confident that you know what the rest of the article is about? If so, you have likely read the topic sentence. An effective topic sentence combines a main idea with the writer’s personal attitude or opinion. It serves to orient the reader and provides an indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph. Read the following example.

Creating a national set of standards for math and English education will improve student learning in many states.

This topic sentence declares a favorable position for standardizing math and English education. After reading this sentence, a reader might reasonably expect the writer to provide supporting details and facts as to why standardizing

math and English education might improve student learning in many states. If the purpose of the essay is actually to evaluate education in only one particular state, or to discuss math or English education specifically, then the topic sentence is misleading.

Tip

When writing a draft of an essay, allow a friend or colleague to read the opening line of your first paragraph. Ask your reader to predict what your paper will be about. If he or she is unable to guess your topic accurately, you should consider revising your topic sentence so that it clearly defines your purpose in writing.

Main Idea versus Controlling Idea

Topic sentences contain both a main idea (the subject, or topic that the writer is discussing) and a controlling idea (the writer's specific stance on that subject). Just as a thesis statement includes an idea that controls a document's focus (as you will read about in [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#)), a topic sentence must also contain a controlling idea to direct the paragraph. Different writers may use the same main idea but can steer their paragraph in a number of

different directions according to their stance on the subject. Read the following examples.

- **Marijuana is a destructive influence on teens and causes long-term brain damage.**
- **The antinausea properties in marijuana are a lifeline for many cancer patients.**
- **Legalizing marijuana would create a higher demand for Class A and Class B drugs.**

Although the main idea—marijuana—is the same in all three topic sentences, the controlling idea differs depending on the writer’s viewpoint.

Exercise 1

Circle the main idea and underline the controlling idea in each of the following topic sentences.

1. Exercising three times a week is the only way to maintain good physical health.
2. Sexism and racism are still rampant in today’s workplace.
3. Raising the legal driving age to twenty-one would decrease road traffic accidents.
4. Owning a business is the only way to achieve financial

- success.
5. Dog owners should be prohibited from taking their pets on public beaches.
-

Characteristics of a Good Topic Sentence

Five characteristics define a good topic sentence:

1. A good topic sentence provides an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.
 1. Weak example. People rarely give firefighters the credit they deserve for such a physically and emotionally demanding job. (The paragraph is about a specific incident that involved firefighters; therefore, this topic sentence is too general.)
 2. Stronger example. During the October riots, Unit 3B went beyond the call of duty. (This topic sentence is more specific and indicates that the paragraph will contain information about a particular incident involving Unit 3B.)
2. A good topic sentence contains both a topic and a controlling idea or opinion.
 1. Weak example. In this paper, I am going to discuss the rising suicide rate among young professionals.

- (This topic sentence provides a main idea, but it does not present a controlling idea, or thesis.)
2. Stronger example. The rising suicide rate among young professionals is a cause for immediate concern. (This topic sentence presents the writer's opinion on the subject of rising suicide rates among young professionals.)
 3. A good topic sentence is clear and easy to follow.
 1. Weak example. In general, writing an essay, thesis, or other academic or nonacademic document is considerably easier and of much higher quality if you first construct an outline, of which there are many different types. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but both are buried beneath the confusing sentence structure and unnecessary vocabulary. These obstacles make it difficult for the reader to follow.)
 2. Stronger example. Most forms of writing can be improved by first creating an outline. (This topic sentence cuts out unnecessary verbiage and simplifies the previous statement, making it easier for the reader to follow.)
 4. A good topic sentence does not include supporting details.
 1. Weak example. Salaries should be capped in baseball for many reasons, most importantly so we don't allow the same team to win year after year.

(This topic sentence includes a supporting detail that should be included later in the paragraph to back up the main point.)

2. Stronger example. Introducing a salary cap would improve the game of baseball for many reasons.

(This topic sentence omits the additional supporting detail so that it can be expanded upon later in the paragraph.)

5. A good topic sentence engages the reader by using interesting vocabulary.

1. Weak example. The military deserves better equipment. (This topic sentence includes a main idea and a controlling thesis, but the language is bland and unexciting.)

2. Stronger example. The appalling lack of resources provided to the military is outrageous and requires our immediate attention. (This topic sentence reiterates the same idea and controlling thesis, but adjectives such as appalling and immediate better engage the reader. These words also indicate the writer's tone.)
-

Exercise 2

Choose the most effective topic sentence from the following sentence pairs.

a. This paper will discuss the likelihood of the Democrats winning the next election.

b. To boost their chances of winning the next election, the Democrats need to listen to public opinion.

a. The unrealistic demands of union workers are crippling the economy for three main reasons.

b. Union workers are crippling the economy because companies are unable to remain competitive as a result of added financial pressure.

a. Authors are losing money as a result of technological advances.

b. The introduction of new technology will devastate the literary world.

a. Rap music is produced by untalented individuals with oversized egos.

b. This essay will consider whether talent is required in the rap music industry.

Exercise 3

Using the tips on developing effective topic sentences in this section, create a topic sentence on each of the following subjects. Remember to include a controlling idea as well as a main idea. Write your responses on your own sheet of paper.

1. An endangered species
 2. The cost of fuel
 3. The legal drinking age
 4. A controversial film or novel
-

Writing at Work

When creating a workplace document, use the “top-down” approach—keep the topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph so that readers immediately understand the gist of the message. This method saves busy colleagues precious time and effort trying to figure out the main points and relevant details.

Headings are another helpful tool. In a text-heavy document, break up each paragraph with individual headings. These serve as useful navigation aids, enabling colleagues to skim through the document and locate paragraphs that are relevant to them.

Developing Paragraphs That Use Topic Sentences, Supporting Ideas, and Transitions Effectively

Learning how to develop a good topic sentence is the first step toward writing a solid paragraph. Once you have composed your topic sentence, you have a guideline for the rest of the paragraph. To complete the paragraph, a writer must support the topic sentence with additional information and summarize the main point with a concluding sentence.

This section identifies the three major structural parts of a paragraph and covers how to develop a paragraph using transitional words and phrases.

Identifying Parts of a Paragraph

An effective paragraph contains three main parts: a topic sentence, the body, and the concluding sentence.

A topic sentence is often the first sentence of a paragraph. This chapter has already discussed its purpose—to express a main idea combined with the writer’s attitude about the subject.

The body of the paragraph usually follows, containing

supporting details. Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence.

The concluding sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It reminds the reader of the main point by restating it in different words.

Read the following paragraph. The topic sentence is highlighted for you.

After reading the new TV guide this week, I had just one thought—why are we still being bombarded with reality shows? This season, the plague of reality television continues to darken our airwaves. Along with the return of viewer favorites, we are to be cursed with yet another mindless creation. Prisoner follows the daily lives of eight suburban housewives who have chosen to be put in jail for the purposes of this fake psychological experiment. A preview for the first episode shows the usual tears and tantrums associated with reality television. I dread to think what producers will come up with next season, but if any of them are reading this blog—stop it! We’ve had enough reality television to last us a lifetime!

The first sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It tells the reader that the paragraph will be about reality television shows, and it expresses the writer’s distaste for these shows through the use of the word bombarded.

Each of the following sentences in the paragraph supports the topic sentence by providing further information about a specific reality television show. The final sentence is the concluding sentence. It reiterates the main point that viewers are bored with reality television shows by using different words from the topic sentence.

Paragraphs that begin with the topic sentence move from the general to the specific. They open with a general statement about a subject (reality shows) and then discuss specific examples (the reality show Prisoner). Most academic essays contain the topic sentence at the beginning of the first paragraph.

Now take a look at the following paragraph. The topic sentence is highlighted for you.

Last year, a cat traveled 130 miles to reach its family, who had moved to another state and had left their pet behind. Even though it had never been to their new home, the cat was able to track down its former owners. A dog in my neighborhood can predict when its master is about to have a seizure. It makes sure that he does not hurt himself during an epileptic fit. **Compared to many animals, our own senses are almost dull.**

The last sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It draws on specific examples (a cat that tracked down its owners

and a dog that can predict seizures) and then makes a general statement that draws a conclusion from these examples (animals' senses are better than humans'). In this case, the supporting sentences are placed before the topic sentence and the concluding sentence is the same as the topic sentence.

This technique is frequently used in persuasive writing. The writer produces detailed examples to support his or her point, preparing the reader to accept the concluding topic sentence as the truth.

Sometimes, the topic sentence appears in the middle of a paragraph. Read the following example. The topic sentence is underlined for you.

For many years, I suffered from severe anxiety every time I took an exam. Hours before the exam, my heart would begin pounding, my legs would shake, and sometimes I would become physically unable to move. Last year, I was referred to a specialist and finally found a way to control my anxiety—breathing exercises. It seems so simple, but by doing just a few breathing exercises a couple of hours before an exam, I gradually controlled my anxiety. The exercises help slow my heart rate and make me feel less anxious. Better yet, they require no pills, no equipment, and very little time. It's amazing how just breathing correctly has helped me learn to manage my anxiety symptoms.

In this paragraph, the underlined sentence is the topic sentence. It expresses the main idea—that breathing exercises can help control anxiety. The preceding sentences enable the writer to build up to his main point (breathing exercises can help control anxiety) by using a personal anecdote (how he used to suffer from anxiety). The supporting sentences then expand on how breathing exercises help the writer by providing additional information. The last sentence is the concluding sentence and restates how breathing can help manage anxiety.

Placing a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph is often used in creative writing. If you notice that you have used a topic sentence in the middle of a paragraph in an academic essay, read through it carefully to ensure that it contains only one major topic. To read more about topic sentences and where they appear in paragraphs, see [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#).

Implied Topic Sentences

Some well-organized paragraphs do not contain a topic sentence at all. Instead of being directly stated, the main idea is implied in the content of the paragraph. Read the following example:

Heaving herself up the stairs, Luella had to pause for breath

several times. She let out a wheeze as she sat down heavily in the wooden rocking chair. Tao approached her cautiously as if she might crumble at the slightest touch. He studied her face, like parchment; stretched across the bones so finely he could almost see right through the skin to the decaying muscle underneath. Luella smiled a toothless grin.

Although no single sentence in this paragraph states the main idea, the entire paragraph focuses on one concept—that Luella is extremely old. The topic sentence is thus implied rather than stated. This technique is often used in descriptive or narrative writing. Implied topic sentences work well if the writer has a firm idea of what he or she intends to say in the paragraph and sticks to it. However, a paragraph loses its effectiveness if an implied topic sentence is too subtle or the writer loses focus.

Tip

Avoid using implied topic sentences in an informational document. Readers often lose patience if they are unable to quickly grasp what the writer is trying to say. The clearest and most efficient way to communicate in an informational document is to position the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph.

Exercise 4

Identify the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence in the following paragraph.

The desert provides a harsh environment in which few mammals are able to adapt. Of these hardy creatures, the kangaroo rat is possibly the most fascinating. Able to live in some of the most arid parts of the southwest, the kangaroo rat neither sweats nor pants to keep cool. Its specialized kidneys enable it to survive on a miniscule amount of water. Unlike other desert creatures, the kangaroo rat does not store water in its body but instead is able to convert the dry seeds it eats into moisture. Its ability to adapt to such a hostile environment makes the kangaroo rat a truly amazing creature.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Supporting Sentences

If you consider a paragraph a hamburger, the supporting sentences are the meat inside the bun. They make up the body of the paragraph by explaining, proving, or enhancing the controlling idea in the topic sentence. Most paragraphs contain three to six supporting sentences depending on the

audience and purpose for writing. A supporting sentence usually offers one of the following:

- Reason
- Sentence: The refusal of the baby boom generation to retire is contributing to the current lack of available jobs.
- Fact
- Sentence: Many families now rely on older relatives to support them financially.
- Statistic
- Sentence: Nearly 10 percent of adults are currently unemployed in the United States.
- Quotation
- Sentence: “We will not allow this situation to continue,” stated Senator Johns.
- Example
- Sentence: Last year, Bill was asked to retire at the age of fifty-five.

The type of supporting sentence you choose will depend on what you are writing and why you are writing. For example, if you are attempting to persuade your audience to take a particular position you should rely on facts, statistics, and concrete examples, rather than personal opinions. Read the following example:

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car.
(Topic sentence)

First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. (Supporting sentence 1: statistic)

Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. (Supporting sentence 2: fact)

Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. (Supporting sentence 3: reason)

Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. (Supporting sentence 4: example)

“It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said. “The running costs are far lower than previous gas powered vehicles I’ve owned.” (Supporting sentence 5: quotation)

Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future. (Concluding sentence)

To find information for your supporting sentences, you might consider using one of the following sources:

- Reference book
- Encyclopedia
- Website
- Biography/autobiography
- Map
- Dictionary

- Newspaper/magazine
- Interview
- Previous experience
- Personal research

To read more about sources and research, see [Chapter 11](#) [“Writing from Research: What Will I Learn?”](#).

Tip

When searching for information on the Internet, remember that some websites are more reliable than others. websites ending in .gov or .edu are generally more reliable than websites ending in .com or .org. Wikis and blogs are not reliable sources of information because they are subject to inaccuracies.

Concluding Sentences

An effective concluding sentence draws together all the ideas you have raised in your paragraph. It reminds readers of the main point—the topic sentence—without restating it in exactly the same words. Using the hamburger example, the top bun (the topic sentence) and the bottom bun (the concluding sentence) are very similar. They frame the “meat” or body of

the paragraph. Compare the topic sentence and concluding sentence from the previous example:

Topic sentence: There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car.

Concluding sentence: Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

Notice the use of the synonyms advantages and benefits. The concluding sentence reiterates the idea that owning a hybrid is advantageous without using the exact same words. It also summarizes two examples of the advantages covered in the supporting sentences: low running costs and environmental benefits.

You should avoid introducing any new ideas into your concluding sentence. A conclusion is intended to provide the reader with a sense of completion. Introducing a subject that is not covered in the paragraph will confuse the reader and weaken your writing.

A concluding sentence may do any of the following:

- Restate the main idea.
- Example: Childhood obesity is a growing problem in the United States.
- Summarize the key points in the paragraph.
- Example: A lack of healthy choices, poor parenting, and an addiction to video games are among the many factors

contributing to childhood obesity.

- Draw a conclusion based on the information in the paragraph.
 - Example: These statistics indicate that unless we take action, childhood obesity rates will continue to rise.
 - Make a prediction, suggestion, or recommendation about the information in the paragraph.
 - Example: Based on this research, more than 60 percent of children in the United States will be morbidly obese by the year 2030 unless we take evasive action.
 - Offer an additional observation about the controlling idea.
 - Example: Childhood obesity is an entirely preventable tragedy.
-

Exercise 5

On your own paper, write one example of each type of concluding sentence based on a topic of your choice.

Transitions

A strong paragraph moves seamlessly from the topic sentence

into the supporting sentences and on to the concluding sentence. Writers use transitional words and phrases to help organize a paragraph and ensure that ideas logically connect to one another. A transition is a connecting word that describes a relationship between ideas. Take another look at the earlier example:

There are numerous advantages to owning a hybrid car. First, they get 20 percent to 35 percent more miles to the gallon than a fuel-efficient gas-powered vehicle. Second, they produce very few emissions during low speed city driving. Because they do not require gas, hybrid cars reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which helps lower prices at the pump. Alex bought a hybrid car two years ago and has been extremely impressed with its performance. “It’s the cheapest car I’ve ever had,” she said. “The running costs are far lower than previous gas-powered vehicles I’ve owned.” Given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex’s example in the near future.

Each of the underlined words is a transition word. Words such as first and second are transition words that show sequence or clarify order. They help organize the writer’s ideas by showing that he or she has another point to make in support of the topic sentence. Other transition words that show order include third, also, and furthermore.

The transition word because is a transition word of consequence that continues a line of thought. It indicates that

the writer will provide an explanation of a result. In this sentence, the writer explains why hybrid cars will reduce dependency on fossil fuels (because they do not require gas). Other transition words of consequence include as a result, so that, since, or for this reason.

To include a summarizing transition in her concluding sentence, the writer could rewrite the final sentence as follows:

In conclusion, given the low running costs and environmental benefits of owning a hybrid car, it is likely that many more people will follow Alex's example in the near future.

The following chart provides useful transition words to connect supporting and concluding sentences. See [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#) for a more comprehensive look at transitional words and phrases.

Table 6.1 Useful Transitional Words and Phrases

For Supporting Sentences					
above all	but	for instance	in particular	moreover	subsequently
also	conversely	furthermore	later on	nevertheless	therefore
aside from	correspondingly	however	likewise	on one hand	to begin with
at the same time	for example	in addition	meanwhile	on the contrary	
For Concluding Sentences					
after all	all things considered	in brief	in summary	on the whole	to sum up
all in all	finally	in conclusion	on balance	thus	

Exercise 6

Using your own paper, write a paragraph on a topic of your choice. Be sure to include a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence and use transitional words and phrases to link your ideas.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

Transitional words and phrases are useful tools to incorporate into workplace documents. They guide the reader through the document, clarifying relationships between sentences and paragraphs so that the reader understands why they have been written in that particular order.

For example, when writing an instructional memo, it may be helpful to consider the following transitional words and phrases: before you begin, first, next, then, finally, after you have completed. Using these transitions as a template to write your memo will provide readers with clear, logical instructions about a particular process and the order in which steps are supposed to be completed.

Key Takeaways

- A good paragraph contains three distinct components: a topic sentence, body, and concluding sentence.

- The topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph combined with the writer's attitude or opinion about the topic.
- Good topic sentences contain both a main idea and a controlling idea, are clear and easy to follow, use engaging vocabulary, and provide an accurate indication of what will follow in the rest of the paragraph.
- Topic sentences may be placed at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph. In most academic essays, the topic sentence is placed at the beginning of a paragraph.
- Supporting sentences help explain, prove, or enhance the topic sentence by offering facts, reasons, statistics, quotations, or examples.
- Concluding sentences summarize the key points in a paragraph and reiterate the main idea without repeating it word for word.
- Transitional words and phrases help organize ideas in a paragraph and show how these ideas relate to one another.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

PART VI

CHAPTER 7: REFINING YOUR WRITING: HOW DO I IMPROVE MY WRITING TECHNIQUE?

Learning Objectives

1. Identify ways to vary sentence structure.
2. Write and revise sentence structure at the beginning of sentences.
3. Write and revise sentence structure by connecting ideas.

7.1 SENTENCE VARIETY

Sentence Variety

Have you ever ordered a restaurant dish and been unhappy with its taste, even though it contained most of your favorite ingredients? Just as a meal might lack the finishing touches needed to spice it up, a paragraph might also contain all the basic components but still lack the stylistic finesse required to engage a reader. Sometimes writers have a tendency to reuse the same sentence pattern throughout their writing. Like any repetitive task, reading text that contains too many sentences with the same length and structure can become monotonous and boring. Experienced writers mix it up by using various sentence patterns, rhythms, and lengths.

In this chapter, you will follow a student named Naomi, who has written a draft of an essay but needs to refine her writing. This section discusses how to introduce sentence variety into writing, how to open sentences using various techniques, and how to use different types of sentence structure when connecting ideas. You can use these techniques when revising a paper to bring life and rhythm to your work. They will also make reading your work more enjoyable.



Incorporating Sentence Variety

Experienced writers incorporate sentence variety into their writing by varying sentence style and structure. Using a mixture of different sentence structures reduces repetition and emphasizes important points in the text. Read the following example:

During my time in the office, I have achieved several goals. I have helped increase funding for local schools. I have reduced crime rates in the neighborhood. I have encouraged young people to get involved in their community. My competitor argues that she is the better choice in the upcoming election. I argue that it is ridiculous to fix something that isn't broken. If you re-elect me this year, I promise to continue to serve this community.

In this extract from an election campaign, the writer uses short, simple sentences of a similar length and style. Writers often mistakenly believe that this technique makes the text more clear for the reader, but the result is a choppy,

unsophisticated paragraph that does not grab the audience's attention. Now read the revised paragraph with sentence variety:

During my time in office, I have helped increase funding for local schools, reduced crime rates in the neighborhood, and encouraged young people to get involved in their community. Why fix what isn't broken? If you re-elect me this year, I will continue to achieve great things for this community. Don't take a chance on an unknown contender; vote for the proven success.

Notice how introducing a short rhetorical question among the longer sentences in the paragraph effectively keeps the reader's attention. In the revised version, the writer combines the choppy sentences at the beginning into one longer sentence, which adds rhythm and interest to the paragraph.

Tip

Effective writers often implement the “rule of three,” which is the thought that things containing three elements are more memorable and more satisfying to readers than any other number. Try to use a series of three when providing examples, grouping adjectives, or generating a list.

Variety Exercise

Combine each set of simple sentences into a compound or a

complex sentence. Write the combined sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. Heroin is an extremely addictive drug. Thousands of heroin addicts die each year.
2. Shakespeare's writing is still relevant today. He wrote about timeless themes. These themes include love, hate, jealousy, death, and destiny.
3. Prewriting is a vital stage of the writing process. Prewriting helps you organize your ideas. Types of prewriting include outlining, brainstorming, and idea mapping.
4. Mitch Bancroft is a famous writer. He also serves as a governor on the local school board. Mitch's two children attend the school.



Using Sentence Variety at the Beginning of Sentences

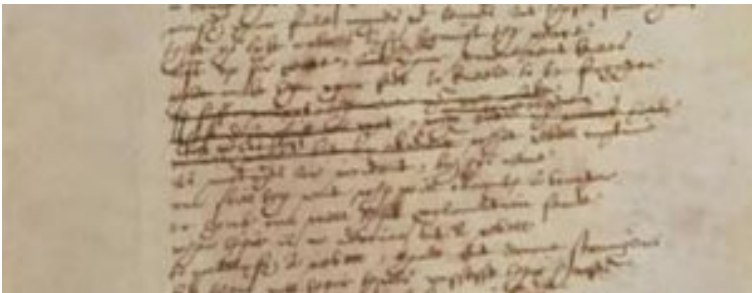
Read the following sentences and consider what they all have in common:

John and Amanda will be analyzing this week's financial report.

The car screeched to a halt just a few inches away from the young boy.

Students rarely come to the exam adequately prepared.

If you are having trouble figuring out why these sentences are similar, try underlining the subject in each. You will notice that the subject is positioned at the beginning of each sentence—John and Amanda, the car, and students. Since the subject-verb-object pattern is the simplest sentence structure, many writers overuse this technique, resulting in repetitive paragraphs with little sentence variety.



Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

One technique you can use to avoid beginning a sentence with the subject is to use an adverb. An adverb is a word that describes a verb, adjective, or other adverb and often ends in -ly. Examples of adverbs include quickly, softly, quietly, angrily, and timidly. Read the following sentences:

She slowly turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

Slowly, she turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

In the second sentence, the adverb slowly is placed at the beginning of the sentence. If you read the two sentences aloud, you will notice that moving the adverb changes the rhythm of the sentence and slightly alters its meaning. The second sentence emphasizes how the subject moves—slowly—creating a buildup of tension. This technique is effective in fictional writing.

Note that a comma usually follows an adverb used at the beginning of a sentence. A comma indicates that the reader should pause briefly, which creates a useful rhetorical device. Read the following sentences aloud and consider the effect of pausing after the adverb:

Cautiously, he unlocked the kennel and waited for the dog's reaction.

Solemnly, the policeman approached the mayor and placed him under arrest.

Suddenly, he slammed the door shut and sprinted across the street.

In an academic essay, moving an adverb to the beginning of a sentence serves to vary the rhythm of a paragraph and increase sentence variety.

Tip

Adverbs of time—which indicate when an action takes place—do not always require a comma when used at the beginning of a sentence. Adverbs of time include words such as yesterday, today, later, sometimes, often, and now.

Adverb Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences by moving the adverbs to the beginning.

1. The red truck sped furiously past the camper van, blaring its horn.
2. Jeff snatched at the bread hungrily, polishing off three slices in under a minute.
3. Underage drinking typically results from peer pressure and lack of parental attention.
4. The firefighters bravely tackled the blaze, but they were

beaten back by flames.

5. Mayor Johnson privately acknowledged that the budget was excessive and that further discussion was needed.



Starting a Sentence with a Prepositional Phrase

A prepositional phrase is a group of words that behaves as an adjective or an adverb, modifying a noun or a verb. Prepositional phrases contain a preposition (a word that specifies place, direction, or time) and an object of the preposition (a noun phrase or pronoun that follows the preposition).

Table 7.1 Common Prepositions

above	beneath	into	till
across	beside	like	toward
against	between	near	under
after	beyond	off	underneath
among	by	on	until
around	despite	over	up
at	except	past	with
before	for	since	without
behind	from	through	
below	inside	throughout	

Read the following sentence:

The terrified child hid underneath the table.

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase is underneath the table. The preposition underneath relates to the object that follows the preposition—the table. Adjectives may be placed between the preposition and the object in a prepositional phrase.

The terrified child hid underneath the heavy wooden table.

Some prepositional phrases can be moved to the beginning of a sentence to create variety in a piece of writing. Look at the following revised sentence:

Underneath the heavy wooden table, the terrified child hid.

Notice that when the prepositional phrase is moved to the beginning of the sentence, the emphasis shifts from the subject—the terrified child—to the location in which the child is hiding. Words placed at the beginning or end of a sentence generally receive the greatest emphasis. Take a look at the following examples. The prepositional phrase is underlined in each:

- The bandaged man waited in the doctor's office.
- In the doctor's office, the bandaged man waited.
- My train leaves the station at 6:45 a.m.
- At 6:45 a.m., my train leaves the station.
- Teenagers exchange drugs and money under the railway bridge.
- Under the railway bridge, teenagers exchange drugs and money.
- Prepositional phrases are useful in any type of writing.
- In any type of writing, prepositional phrases are useful.

Unmovable Prepositional Phrases

Not all prepositional phrases can be placed at the beginning of a sentence. Read the following sentence:

I would like a chocolate sundae without whipped cream.

In this sentence, without whipped cream is the prepositional phrase. Because it describes the chocolate sundae, it cannot be moved to the beginning of the sentence. “Without whipped cream I would like a chocolate sundae” does not make as much (if any) sense. To determine whether a prepositional phrase can be moved, we must determine the meaning of the sentence.



Overuse of Prepositional Phrases

Experienced writers often include more than one prepositional phrase in a sentence; however, it is important not to overload your writing. Using too many modifiers in a paragraph may create an unintentionally comical effect as the following example shows:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall, near the schoolyard, where children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

A sentence is not necessarily effective just because it is long

and complex. If your sentence appears cluttered with prepositional phrases, divide it into two shorter sentences. The previous sentence is far more effective when written as two simpler sentences:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall. In the nearby schoolyard, children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

Starting a Sentence by Inverting the Subject and Verb

As we noted earlier, most writers follow the subject-verb-object sentence structure. In an inverted sentence, the order is reversed so that the subject follows the verb. Read the following sentence pairs:

1. A truck was parked in the driveway.
 2. Parked in the driveway was a truck.
-
1. A copy of the file is attached.
 2. Attached is a copy of the file.

Notice how the second sentence in each pair places more emphasis on the subject—a truck in the first example and the file in the second. This technique is useful for drawing the reader's attention to your primary area of focus.



Inverted Sentence Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences as inverted sentences.

1. Teresa will never attempt to run another marathon.
2. A detailed job description is enclosed with this letter.
3. Bathroom facilities are across the hall to the left of the water cooler.
4. The well-dressed stranger stumbled through the doorway.
5. My colleagues remain unconvinced about the proposed merger.



Connecting Ideas to Increase Sentence Variety

Reviewing and rewriting the beginning of sentences is a good way of introducing sentence variety into your writing. Another useful technique is to connect two sentences using a modifier, a relative clause, or an appositive. This section examines how to connect ideas across several sentences to increase sentence variety and improve writing.

Joining Ideas Using an -ing Modifier

Sometimes it is possible to combine two sentences by converting one of them into a modifier using the -ing verb

form—singing, dancing, swimming. A modifier is a word or phrase that qualifies the meaning of another element in the sentence. Read the following example:

Original sentences: Steve checked the computer system. He discovered a virus.

Revised sentence: Checking the computer system, Steve discovered a virus.

To connect two sentences using an -ing modifier, add -ing to one of the verbs in the sentences (checking) and delete the subject (Steve). Use a comma to separate the modifier from the subject of the sentence. It is important to make sure that the main idea in your revised sentence is contained in the main clause, not in the modifier. In this example, the main idea is that Steve discovered a virus, not that he checked the computer system.

In the following example, an -ing modifier indicates that two actions are occurring at the same time:

1. Noticing the police car, she shifted gears and slowed down.
2. This means that she slowed down at the same time she noticed the police car.
3. Barking loudly, the dog ran across the driveway.
4. This means that the dog barked as it ran across the driveway.

You can add an -ing modifier to the beginning or the end of a sentence, depending on which fits best.

Beginning: Conducting a survey among her friends, Amanda found that few were happy in their jobs.

End: Maria filed the final report, meeting her deadline.

Dangling Modifiers

A common mistake when combining sentences using the -ing verb form is to misplace the modifier so that it is not logically connected to the rest of the sentence. This creates a dangling modifier. Look at the following example:

Jogging across the parking lot, my breath grew ragged and shallow.

In this sentence, jogging across the parking lot seems to modify my breath. Since breath cannot jog, the sentence should be rewritten so that the subject is placed immediately after the modifier or added to the dangling phrase.

Jogging across the parking lot, I felt my breath grow ragged and shallow.



Joining Ideas Using an -ed Modifier

Some sentences can be combined using an -ed verb form—stopped, finished, played. To use this method, one of the sentences must contain a form of be as a helping verb in addition to the -ed verb form. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: The Jones family was delayed by a traffic jam. They arrived several hours after the party started.

Revised sentence: Delayed by a traffic jam, the Jones family arrived several hours after the party started.

In the original version, was acts as a helping verb—it has no meaning by itself, but it serves a grammatical function by placing the main verb (delayed) in the perfect tense.

To connect two sentences using an -ed modifier, drop the helping verb (was) and the subject (the Jones family) from the sentence with an -ed verb form. This forms a modifying phrase (delayed by a traffic jam) that can be added to the beginning

or end of the other sentence according to which fits best. As with the -ing modifier, be careful to place the word that the phrase modifies immediately after the phrase in order to avoid a dangling modifier.

Using -ing or -ed modifiers can help streamline your writing by drawing obvious connections between two sentences.

Joining Ideas Using a Relative Clause

Another technique that writers use to combine sentences is to join them using a relative clause. A relative clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and describes a noun. Relative clauses function as adjectives by answering questions such as which one? or what kind? Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun, such as who, which, where, why, or when. Read the following examples:

Original sentences: The managing director is visiting the company next week. He lives in Seattle.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who lives in Seattle, is visiting the company next week.

To connect two sentences using a relative clause, substitute the subject of one of the sentences (he) for a relative pronoun (who). This gives you a relative clause (who lives in Seattle) that can be placed next to the noun it describes (the managing director). Make sure to keep the sentence you want to emphasize as the main clause. For example, reversing the main clause and subordinate clause in the preceding sentence

emphasizes where the managing director lives, not the fact that he is visiting the company.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who is visiting the company next week, lives in Seattle.

Relative clauses are a useful way of providing additional, nonessential information in a sentence.

Tip

To check the punctuation of relative clauses, assess whether or not the clause can be taken out of the sentence without changing its meaning. If the relative clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be placed in commas. If the relative clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it does not require commas around it.

Joining Ideas Using an Appositive

An appositive is a word or group of words that describes or renames a noun or pronoun. Incorporating appositives into your writing is a useful way of combining sentences that are too short and choppy. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: Harland Sanders began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930. He is Colonel Sanders or “the Colonel.”

Revised sentence: Harland Sanders, “the Colonel,” began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930.

In the revised sentence, “the Colonel” is an appositive

because it renames Harland Sanders. To combine two sentences using an appositive, drop the subject and verb from the sentence that renames the noun and turn it into a phrase. Note that in the previous example, the appositive is positioned immediately after the noun it describes. An appositive may be placed anywhere in a sentence, but it must come directly before or after the noun to which it refers:

Appositive after noun: Scott, a poorly trained athlete, was not expected to win the race.

Appositive before noun: A poorly trained athlete, Scott was not expected to win the race.

Unlike relative clauses, appositives are always punctuated by a comma or a set commas.

Writing Exercise

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentence pairs as one sentence using the techniques you have learned in this section.

1. Baby sharks are called pups. Pups can be born in one of three ways.
2. The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south.
3. Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in the 2008 Olympics. He is a champion swimmer.

4. Ashley introduced her colleague Dan to her husband, Jim. She speculated that the two of them would have a lot in common.
5. Cacao is harvested by hand. It is then sold to chocolate-processing companies at the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

Key Takeaways

- Sentence variety reduces repetition in a piece of writing and adds emphasis to important points in the text.
 - Sentence variety can be introduced to the beginning of sentences by starting a sentence with an adverb, starting a sentence with a prepositional phrase, or by inverting the subject and verb.
 - Combine ideas, using modifiers, relative clauses, or appositives, to achieve sentence variety.
-

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7.2 COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

In the previous section, we learned how to use different patterns to create sentence variety and to add emphasis to important points in our writing. Next, we will examine two ways in which we can join sentences with related ideas:

- Coordination. Joining two related ideas of equal importance.
- Subordination. Joining two related ideas of unequal importance.

Connecting sentences with coordinate or subordinate clauses creates more coherent paragraphs and produces more effective writing.

Coordination

Coordination joins two independent clauses that contain related ideas of equal importance.

Original sentences: I spent my entire paycheck last week. I am staying home this weekend.

In their current form, these sentences contain two separate ideas that may or may not be related. Am I staying home this week because I spent my paycheck, or is there another reason for my lack of enthusiasm to leave the house? To indicate a relationship between the two ideas, we can use the coordinating conjunction so:

Revised sentence: I spent my entire paycheck last week, so I am staying home this weekend.

The revised sentence illustrates that the two ideas are connected. Notice that the sentence retains two independent clauses (I spent my entire paycheck; I am staying home this weekend) because each can stand alone as a complete idea.

Conjunctions

A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two independent clauses. The most common coordinating conjunctions are for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so. Note that a comma precedes the coordinating conjunction when joining two clauses.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction (notice punctuation)	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
I will not be attending the dance.	, for (indicates a reason or cause)	I have no one to go with.	I will not be attending the dance, for I have no one to go with.
I plan to stay home.	, and (joins two ideas)	I will complete an essay for class.	I plan to stay home, and I will complete an essay for class.
Jessie isn't going to be at the dance.	, nor (indicates a negative)	Tom won't be there either.	Jessie isn't going to be at the dance, nor will Tom be there.
The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance.	, but (indicates a contrast)	I don't think many people are going.	The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, but I don't think many people are going.
I might go to the next fundraising event.	, or (offers an alternative)	I might donate some money to the cause.	I might go to the next fundraising event, or I might donate some money to the cause.

My parents are worried that I am antisocial.	, yet (indicates a contrast)	I have many friends at school.	My parents are worried that I am antisocial, yet I have many friends at school.
Buying a new dress is expensive.	, so (indicates a result)	By staying home I will save money.	Buying a new dress is expensive, so by staying home I will save money.

Tip

To help you remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, think of the acronym FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. Remember that when you use a coordinating conjunction in a sentence, a comma should precede it because the comma changes the meaning of the word.

For example: FOR = preposition meaning “intended”
“purposed”

Comma + FOR = conjunction meaning “because”

SO and YET have similar meaning or part-of-speech changes

Conjunctive Adverbs

Another method of joining two independent clauses with related and equal ideas is to use a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon (see [Chapter 2, “Writing Basics: What Makes a](#)

[Good Sentence?](#)” for information on semicolon usage). A conjunctive adverb is a linking word that demonstrates a relationship between two clauses. Read the following sentences:

Original sentences: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics. She trains every day.

Since these sentences contain two equal and related ideas, they may be joined using a conjunctive adverb. Now, read the revised sentence:

Revised sentence: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics; therefore, she trains every day.

The revised sentence explains the relationship between Bridget’s desire to take part in the next Olympics and her daily training. Notice that the conjunctive adverb comes after a semicolon that separates the two clauses and is followed by a comma.

Review the following chart of some common conjunctive adverbs with examples of how they are used:

Function	Conjunctive Adverb (notice punctuation)	Example
	; also,	
Addition	; furthermore, ; moreover, ; besides,	Alicia was late for class and stuck in traffic; furthermore, her shoe heel had broken and she had forgotten her lunch.
Comparison	; similarly, ; likewise,	Recycling aluminum cans is beneficial to the environment; similarly, reusing plastic bags and switching off lights reduces waste.
Contrast	; instead, ; however, ; conversely,	Most people do not walk to work; instead, they drive or take the train.
Emphasis	; namely, ; certainly, ; indeed,	The Siberian tiger is a rare creature; indeed, there are fewer than five hundred left in the wild.
Cause and Effect	; accordingly, ; consequently, ; hence, ; thus,	I missed my train this morning; consequently, I was late for my meeting.
Time	; finally, ; next, ; subsequently, ; then,	Tim crossed the barrier, jumped over the wall, and pushed through the hole in the fence; finally, he made it to the station.

Coordination/Subordination Exercise

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using either a coordinating conjunction or a conjunctive adverb.

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor's building. He owns several cats and a parrot.
2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving. Many people continue to use their phones illegally.
3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs. By the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.
4. Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water. Flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer. The tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip. He called the manufacturer for advice.



Subordination

Subordination joins two sentences with related ideas by merging them into a main clause (a complete sentence) and a dependent clause (a construction that relies on the main clause to complete its meaning). Coordination allows a writer to give equal weight to the two ideas that are being combined, and subordination enables a writer to emphasize one idea over the other. Take a look at the following sentences:

Original sentences: Tracy stopped to help the injured man.
She would be late for work.

To illustrate that these two ideas are related, we can rewrite them as a single sentence using the subordinating conjunction *even though*.

Revised sentence: *Even though* Tracy would be late for work, she stopped to help the injured man.

In the revised version, we now have an independent clause (she stopped to help the injured man) that stands as a complete sentence and a dependent clause (*even though* Tracy would be

late for work) that is subordinate to the main clause. Notice that the revised sentence emphasizes the fact that Tracy stopped to help the injured man, rather than the fact she would be late for work. We could also write the sentence this way:

Revised sentence: Tracy stopped to help the injured man even though she would be late for work.

The meaning remains the same in both sentences, with the subordinating conjunction *even though* introducing the dependent clause.

Tip

To punctuate sentences correctly, look at the position of the main clause and the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, use a comma. If the subordinate clause follows the main clause, no punctuation is required.

Subordinating Conjunctions

A subordinating conjunction is a word that joins a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. Review the following chart of some common subordinating conjunctions and examples of how they are used:

Function	Subordinating Conjunction (notice lack of commas)	Example
Concession	although while though whereas even though	Sarah completed her report even though she had to stay late to get it done.
Condition	if unless until	Until we know what is causing the problem, we will not be able to fix it.
Manner	as if as though	Everyone in the conference room stopped talking at once, as though they had been stunned into silence.
Place	where wherever	Rita is in San Jose where she has several important client meetings.
Reason	because since so that in order that	Because the air conditioning was turned up so high, everyone in the office wore sweaters.
Time	after before while once when	After the meeting had finished, we all went to lunch.

Subordination Exercise

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a subordinating conjunction.

1. Jake is going to Mexico. There are beautiful beaches in Mexico.
2. A snowstorm disrupted traffic all over the east coast. There will be long delivery delays this week.
3. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high. I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
4. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables. Ashley marinated the chicken.
5. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

Key Takeaways

- Coordination and subordination join two sentences with related ideas.
- Coordination joins sentences with related and equal ideas, whereas subordination joins sentences with related but unequal ideas.
- Sentences can be coordinated using either a coordinating conjunction and a comma or a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon.

- Subordinate sentences are characterized by the use of a subordinate conjunction.
- In a subordinate sentence, a comma is used to separate the main clause from the dependent clause if the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

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“[molly and frankie are good friends. and only about a month apart in age, tho’ frankie is twice her size. he’s a big cat. but molly still bosses him around. as she should.](#)” by [julochka](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

7.3 PARALLELISM

Parallelism

Earlier in this chapter, we learned that increasing sentence variety adds interest to a piece of writing and makes the reading process more enjoyable for others. Using a mixture of sentence lengths and patterns throughout an essay is an important writing technique. However, it is equally important to avoid introducing variation within individual sentences. A strong sentence is composed of balanced parts that all have the same structure. In this section, we will examine how to create a balanced sentence structure by using parallelism.

Using Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of similar structure in related words, clauses, or phrases. It creates a sense of rhythm and balance within a sentence. As readers, we often correct faulty parallelism—a lack of parallel structure—intuitively because an unbalanced sentence sounds awkward and poorly constructed. Read the following sentences aloud:

Faulty parallelism: Kelly had to iron, do the washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Faulty parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.

Faulty parallelism: Ali prefers jeans to wearing a suit.

All of these sentences contain faulty parallelism. Although they are factually correct, the construction is clunky and confusing. In the first example, three different verb forms are used. In the second and third examples, the writer begins each sentence by using a noun (coordination, jeans), but ends with a phrase (to have good eyesight, wearing a suit). Now read the same three sentences that have correct parallelism.

Correct parallelism: Kelly had to do the ironing, washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Correct parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.

Correct parallelism: Ali prefers wearing jeans to wearing a suit.

When these sentences are written using a parallel structure, they sound more aesthetically pleasing because they are balanced. Repetition of grammatical construction also minimizes the amount of work the reader has to do to decode the sentence. This enables the reader to focus on the main idea in the sentence and not on how the sentence is put together.

Tip

A simple way to check for parallelism in your writing is to make sure you have paired nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, and so on. Underline each element in a sentence and check that the corresponding element uses the same grammatical form.

Creating Parallelism Using Coordinating Conjunctions

When you connect two clauses using a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), make sure that the same grammatical structure is used on each side of the conjunction. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like to listen to music and talking to friendson the phone.

Correct parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like listening to music and talking to friendson the phone.

The first sentence uses two different verb forms (to listen, talking). In the second sentence, the grammatical construction on each side of the coordinating conjunction (and) is the same, creating a parallel sentence.

The same technique should be used for joining items or lists in a series:

Faulty parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether

the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages.

Correct parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lower workers' wages.

The first sentence contains two items that use the same verb construction (reduce, cut) and a third item that uses a different verb form (lowering). The second sentence uses the same verb construction in all three items, creating a parallel structure.

Parallelism Exercise

Revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using coordinating conjunctions.

1. Mr. Holloway enjoys reading and to play his guitar at weekends.
 2. The doctor told Mrs. Franklin that she should either eat less or should exercise more.
 3. Breaking out of the prison compound, the escapees moved carefully, quietly, and were quick on their feet.
 4. I have read the book, but I have not watched the movie version.
 5. Deal with a full inbox first thing in the morning, or by setting aside short periods of time in which to answer e-mail queries.
-

Parallelism Using Than or As

When you are making a comparison, the two items being compared should have a parallel structure. Comparing two items without using parallel structure can lead to confusion about what is being compared. Comparisons frequently use the words *than* or *as*, and the items on each side of these comparison words should be parallel. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: Swimming in the ocean is much tougher than a pool.

Correct parallelism: Swimming in the ocean is much tougher than swimming in a pool.

In the first sentence, the elements before the comparison word (*than*) are not equal to the elements after the comparison word. It appears that the writer is comparing an action (swimming) with a noun (a pool). In the second sentence, the writer uses the same grammatical construction to create a parallel structure. This clarifies that an action is being compared with another action.

To correct some instances of faulty parallelism, it may be necessary to add or delete words in a sentence.

Faulty parallelism: A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.

Correct parallelism: Going for a brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as going for a run.

In this example, it is necessary to add the verb phrase *going*

for to the sentence in order to clarify that the act of walking is being compared to the act of running.

Parallelism Exercise 2

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using *than* or *as*.

1. I would rather work at a second job to pay for a new car than a loan.
 2. How you look in the workplace is just as important as your behavior.
 3. The firefighter spoke more of his childhood than he talked about his job.
 4. Indian cuisine is far tastier than the food of Great Britain.
 5. Jim's opponent was as tall as Jim and he carried far more weight.
-

Creating Parallelism Using Correlative Conjunctions

A correlative conjunction is a paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the

relationship between them. Common correlative conjunctions include the following:

- either...or
- not only...but also
- neither...nor
- whether...or
- rather...than
- both...and

Correlative conjunctions should follow the same grammatical structure to create a parallel sentence. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: We can neither wait for something to happen nor can we take evasive action.

Correct parallelism: We can neither wait for something to happen nor take evasive action.

When using a correlative conjunction, the words, phrases, or clauses following each part should be parallel. In the first sentence, the construction of the second part of the sentence does not match the construction of the first part. In the second sentence, omitting needless words and matching verb constructions create a parallel structure. Sometimes, rearranging a sentence corrects faulty parallelism.

Faulty parallelism: It was both a long movie and poorly written.

Correct parallelism: The movie was both long and poorly written.

Tip

To see examples of parallelism in use, read some of the great historical speeches by rhetoricians such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Notice how they use parallel structures to emphasize important points and to create a smooth, easily understandable oration.

Here is a link to text, audio, video, and the music of Martin Luther King's speech "I Have a Dream": <http://www.mlkonline.net/dream.html> (Links to an external site.)

Parallelism Exercise 3

Revise each of the following sentences on your own sheet of paper to create parallel structure using correlative conjunctions.

1. The cyclist owns both a mountain bike and has a racing bike.
2. The movie not only contained lots of action, but also it offered an important lesson.
3. My current job is neither exciting nor is it meaningful.
4. Jason would rather listen to his father than be taking advice from me.
5. We are neither interested in buying a vacuum cleaner nor

do we want to utilize your carpet cleaning service.

Key Takeaways

- Parallelism creates a sense of rhythm and balance in writing by using the same grammatical structure to express equal ideas.
- Faulty parallelism occurs when elements of a sentence are not balanced, causing the sentence to sound clunky and awkward.
- Parallelism may be created by connecting two clauses or making a list using coordinating conjunctions, by comparing two items using *than* or *as*; or by connecting two parts of a sentence using correlative conjunctions.

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PART VII

CHAPTER 8: THE WRITING PROCESS: HOW DO I BEGIN?

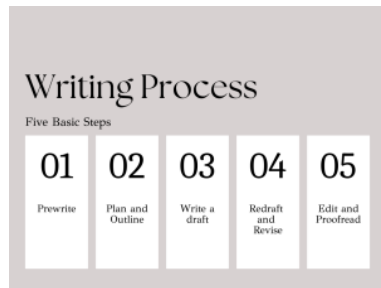
Chapter Objective

1. Use prewriting strategies to choose a topic and narrow the focus.

8.1 APPLY PREWRITING MODELS

These are the five steps in the writing process:

1. Prewriting
2. Outlining the structure of ideas
3. Writing a rough draft
4. Revision
5. Editing



Prewriting

If you, a student, have to write a paper about how busy you are in a typical week, then drawing out a typical weekly schedule on a calendar is a prewriting exercise.

Effective writing can be simply described as good ideas that are expressed well and arranged in the proper order. This chapter will allow you to work on all these important aspects of writing. Although many more prewriting strategies exist, this chapter covers six:

- using experience and observations
- freewriting

- asking questions
- brainstorming
- mapping
- searching the Internet.

The strategies in this chapter can help you overcome the fear of the blank page and confidently begin the writing process.

If you think that a blank sheet of paper or a blinking cursor on the computer screen is a scary sight, you are not alone. Many writers, students, and employees find that beginning to write can be intimidating. However, experienced writers remind themselves that writing, like other everyday activities, is a process when faced with a blank page. Every process, from writing to cooking, bike riding, and learning to use a new cell phone, will get significantly easier with practice.

Just as you need a recipe, ingredients, and proper tools to cook a delicious meal, you also need a plan, resources, and adequate time to create a well-written composition. In other words, writing is a process that requires following steps and using strategies to accomplish your goals.

With a written assignment, once you have begun the process, you can think or meditate about the process steps away from the desk, while walking the dog, driving, or whatever. Therefore, the time between writing sessions can be very productive. If you start your paper early, then you will have more time for thinking.

Prewriting



Prewriting is the stage of the writing process during which you transfer your abstract thoughts into more concrete ideas in ink on paper (or in type on a computer screen). Although prewriting techniques can be helpful in all stages of the writing process, the following four strategies are best used when initially deciding on a topic:

1. Using experience and observations
2. Reading
3. Freewriting
4. Asking questions

At this stage in the writing process, choosing a general topic is OK. Later you will learn more prewriting strategies that will narrow the focus of the topic.



Choosing a Topic

In addition to understanding that writing is a process, writers also understand that choosing a good general topic for an assignment is an essential step. Sometimes your instructor will give you an idea to begin an assignment, and other times your instructor will ask you to come up with a topic on your own. A good topic not only covers what an assignment will be about but also fits the assignment's purpose and its audience.

In this chapter, you will follow a writer named Mariah as she prepares a piece of writing. You will also be planning one of your own. The first important step is for you to tell yourself why you are writing (to inform, to explain, or some other purpose) and for whom you are writing. Write your purpose and your audience on your own sheet of paper, and keep the

paper close by as you read and complete exercises in this chapter.

My

purpose:

My

audience:

Using Experience and Observations

When selecting a topic, you may also want to consider something that interests you or something based on your own life and personal experiences. Even everyday observations can lead to interesting topics. After writers think about their experiences and observations, they often take notes on paper to better develop their thoughts. These notes help writers discover what they have to say about their topic.

Tip

Have you seen an attention-grabbing story on your local news channel? Many current issues appear on television, magazines, and on the Internet. These can all provide inspiration for your writing.

Reading

Reading plays a vital role in all the stages of the writing process, but it first figures in the development of ideas and topics.

Different kinds of documents can help you choose a topic and also develop that topic. For example, a magazine advertising the latest research on the threat of global warming may catch your eye in the supermarket. This cover may interest you, and you may consider global warming as a topic. Or maybe a novel's courtroom drama sparks your curiosity about a particular lawsuit or legal controversy.

After you choose a topic, critical reading is essential to developing a topic. While reading almost any document, you evaluate the author's point of view by considering his main idea and support. When you judge the author's argument, you discover more about the author's opinion and your own. If this step already seems daunting, remember that even the best writers must use prewriting strategies to generate ideas.

Tip

The steps in the writing process may seem time-consuming at first, but following these steps will save you time in the future. The more you plan in the beginning by reading and using prewriting strategies, the less time you may spend writing and editing later because your ideas will develop more swiftly.

Prewriting strategies depend on your critical reading skills. Reading prewriting exercises (and outlines and drafts later in the writing process) will further develop your topic and ideas. As you continue to follow the writing process, you will see how Mariah uses critical reading skills to assess her own prewriting exercises.

Freewriting

Freewriting is an exercise in which you write freely about any topic for three to five minutes (usually three to five minutes). During the time limit, you may jot down any thoughts that come to your mind. Try not to worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, write as quickly as you can without stopping. If you get stuck, copy the same word or phrase repeatedly until you develop a new thought.

Writing often comes easier when you have a personal connection with your chosen topic. Remember, to generate ideas in your freewriting, you may also think about readings that you have enjoyed or that have challenged your thinking. Doing this may lead your thoughts in interesting directions.

Recording your thoughts on paper will help you discover what you have to say about a topic. When writing quickly, try not to doubt or question your ideas. Allow yourself to write freely and unselfconsciously. Once you start writing with a few limitations, you may have more to say than you first realized. Your flow of thoughts can lead you to discover even more ideas about the topic. Freewriting may even lead you to discover another topic that excites you even more.

Tip

Some prewriting strategies can be used together. For example, you could use experience and observations to come up with a topic related to your course studies. Then you could use freewriting to describe your topic in more detail and figure out what you have to say about it.

Asking Questions

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? In everyday situations, you pose these kinds of questions to get more information. Who will be my partner for the project? When is the next meeting? Why is my car making that odd noise? Even the title of this chapter begins with the question “How do I begin?”

You seek the answers to these questions to gain knowledge, to better understand your daily experiences, and to plan for the future. Asking these types of questions will also help you with the writing process. As you choose your topic, answering these questions can help you revisit the ideas you already have and generate new ways to think about your topic. You may also discover aspects of the topic that are unfamiliar to you and that you would like to learn more about. All these idea-gathering techniques will help you plan for future work on your assignment.

Tip

Prewriting is purpose-driven; it does not follow a set of hard-and-fast rules. The purpose of prewriting is to find and explore ideas so that you will be prepared to write. A prewriting technique like asking questions can help you find and explore a topic. The key to effective prewriting is using the best techniques for your thinking process. Freewriting may not seem to fit your thinking process, but keep an open mind. It may work better than you think. Perhaps brainstorming a list of topics might better fit your personal style. Mariah found freewriting and asking questions to be fruitful strategies to use. In your own prewriting, use the 5WH questions in any way that benefits your planning.

More Prewriting Techniques

Tip

You may find that you need to adjust your topic as you move through the writing stages (and as you complete the exercises in this chapter). If your chosen topic is not working, you can repeat the prewriting activities until you find a better one. Be warned, the first idea to come to mind is often not a good topic. When students have a choice of topics possible topics, only then they can choose the best.

The prewriting techniques of freewriting and asking questions helped Mariah think more about her topic, but the following prewriting strategies can help her (and you) narrow the focus of the topic:

- Brainstorming
- Idea mapping
- Searching the Internet

Narrowing the Focus

Narrowing the focus means breaking up the topic into subtopics, or more specific points. Generating lots of subtopics will help you eventually select the ones that fit the assignment and appeal to you and your audience.

After rereading her syllabus, Mariah realized her general topic, mass media, is too broad for her class's short paper requirement. Three pages are not enough to cover all the concerns in mass media today. Mariah also realized that although her readers are other communications majors who are interested in the topic, they may want to read a paper about a particular issue in mass media.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is similar to list making. You can make a list on your own or in a group with your classmates. Start with a blank sheet of paper (or a blank computer document) and write your general topic across the top. Underneath your topic, make a list of more specific ideas. Think of your general topic as a broad category and the list items as things that fit in that category. Often you will find that one item can lead to the next,

creating a flow of ideas that can help you narrow your focus to a more specific paper topic.

Idea Mapping

Idea mapping allows you to visualize your ideas on paper using circles, lines, and arrows. This technique is also known as clustering because ideas are broken down and clustered, or grouped together. Many writers like this method because the shapes show how the ideas relate or connect, and writers can find a focused topic from the connections mapped. Using idea mapping, you might discover interesting connections between topics that you had not thought of before.

To create an idea map, start with your general topic in a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Then write specific ideas around it and use lines or arrows to connect them together. Add and cluster as many ideas as you can think of.

Key Takeaways

- All writers rely on steps and strategies to begin the writing process.

- The steps in the writing process are prewriting, outlining, writing a rough draft, revising, and editing.
- Prewriting is the transfer of ideas from abstract thoughts into words, phrases, and sentences on paper.
- A good topic interests the writer, appeals to the audience, and fits the purpose of the assignment.
- Writers often choose a general topic first and then narrow the focus to a more specific topic.

This is from “Apply Prewriting Models”, section 8.1 from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

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8.2 OUTLINING

Your prewriting activities and readings have helped you gather information for your assignment. The more you sort through the pieces of information you found, the more you will begin to see the connections between them. Patterns and gaps may begin to stand out. But only when you start to organize your ideas will you be able to translate your raw insights into a form that will communicate meaning to your audience.

Tip

Longer papers require more reading and planning than shorter papers do. Most writers discover that the more they know about a topic, the more they can write about it with intelligence and interest.

Organizing Ideas



When you write, you need to organize your ideas in an order that makes sense. The writing you complete in all your courses exposes how analytically and critically your mind works. In some courses, the only direct contact you may have with your instructor is through the assignments you write for the course. You can make a good impression by spending time ordering your ideas.

Order refers to your choice of what to present first, second, third, and so on in your writing. The order you pick closely relates to your purpose for writing that particular assignment. For example, when telling a story, it may be important first to describe the background for the action. Or you may need first to describe a 3-D movie projector or a television studio to help

readers visualize the setting and scene. You may want to group your support effectively to convince readers that your point of view on an issue is well-reasoned and worthy of belief.

In longer pieces of writing, you may organize different parts in different ways so that your purpose stands out clearly and all parts of the paper work together to develop your main point consistently.

Methods of Organizing Writing

The three common methods of organizing writing are **chronological order, spatial order, and order of importance**. You need to keep these methods of organization in mind as you plan how to arrange the information you have gathered in an outline. An outline is a written plan that serves as a skeleton for your paragraphs. Later, when you draft paragraphs in the next stage of the writing process, you will add support to create “flesh” and “muscle” for your assignment.

When you write, your goal is not only to complete an assignment but also to write for a specific purpose—perhaps to inform, explain, persuade, or combine these purposes. Your purpose for writing should always be in the back of your mind because it will help you decide which pieces of information belong together and how you will order them. In other words, choose the order that will most effectively fit your purpose and

support your main point. Table 8.1, “Order versus Purpose,” shows the connection between order and purpose.

Table 8.1 Order versus Purpose

Order	Purpose
Chronological Order	To explain the history of an event or a topic
	To tell a story or relate an experience
	To explain how to do or make something
Spatial Order	To explain the steps in a process
	To help readers visualize something as you want them to see it
Order of Importance	To create a main impression using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
	To persuade or convince
	To rank items by their importance, benefit, or significance

If you, a student, are writing a paper about how busy you are in a typical week, then you might just write the paper about your days, Monday to Sunday or Sunday to Saturday. This is a chronological order choice.

For a paper about your week, other organizational choices might be:

- Monday/Wednesday, Tuesday/Thursday, Weekends
- Days, Nights, Weekends
- Mornings, Afternoons, Evenings

- School, Work, Family or Play

Your brain will choose a good way to organize any paper if you let it.

Writing a Thesis Statement

One legitimate question readers always ask about a piece of writing is “What is the big idea?” (You may even ask this question when you are the reader, critically reading an assignment or another document.) Every nonfiction writing task—from the short essay to the ten-page term paper to the lengthy senior thesis—needs a big idea, or a controlling idea, as the spine for the work. The controlling idea is the main idea that you want to present and develop. **“The Point of the Paper” is a good way to think about a thesis statement.**

Tip

For a longer piece of writing, the main idea should be broader than the main idea for a shorter piece of writing. Be sure to frame a main idea that is appropriate for the length of the assignment. Ask yourself, “How many pages will it take for me to explain and explore this main idea in detail?” Be reasonable with your estimate. Then expand or trim it to fit the required length.

The big idea, or controlling idea, you want to present in an essay is expressed in a thesis statement. A thesis statement is often one sentence long, and it states your point of view. The thesis statement is not the topic of the piece of writing but rather what you have to say about that topic and what is important to tell readers.

Table 8.2 Topics and Thesis Statements

Topic	Thesis Statement
Music piracy	The recording industry fears that so-called music piracy will diminish profits and destroy markets, but it cannot be more wrong.
The number of consumer choices available in media gear	Everyone wants the newest and the best digital technology, but the choices are extensive, and the specifications are often confusing.
E-books and online newspapers increasing their share of the market	E-books and online newspapers will bring an end to print media as we know it.
Online education and the new media	Someday, students and teachers will send avatars to their online classrooms.

The first thesis statement you write will be a preliminary thesis statement or a working thesis statement. You will need it when you begin to outline your assignment as a way to organize it. As you continue to develop the arrangement, you can limit your working thesis statement if it is too broad or expand it if it proves too narrow for what you want to say.

Writing an Outline

For an essay question on a test or a brief oral presentation in class, all you may need to prepare is a short, informal outline in which you jot down key ideas in the order you will present them. This kind of outline reminds you to stay focused in a stressful situation and to include all the good ideas that help you explain or prove your point.

For a longer assignment, like an essay or a research paper, many college instructors require students to submit a formal outline before writing a major paper as a way to be sure you are on the right track and are working in an organized manner. A formal outline is a detailed guide that shows how all your supporting ideas relate to each other. It helps you distinguish between ideas that are of equal importance and ones that are of lesser importance. You build your paper based on the framework created by the outline.

Tip

Instructors may also require you to submit an outline with your final draft to check the direction of the assignment and the logic of your final draft. If you are required to submit an outline with the final draft of a paper, remember to revise the outline to reflect any changes you made while writing the paper.

There are two types of formal outlines: the topic outline and the sentence outline. You format both types of formal outlines in the same way.

- Place your introduction and thesis statement at the beginning, under roman numeral I.
- Use roman numerals (II, III, IV, V, etc.) to identify main points that develop the thesis statement.
- Use capital letters (A, B, C, D, etc.) to divide your main points into parts.
- Use arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.) if you need to subdivide any As, Bs, or Cs into smaller parts.
- End with the final roman numeral expressing your idea for your conclusion.

Here is what the skeleton of a traditional formal outline looks like. The indention helps clarify how the ideas are related.

1. Introduction

2. Thesis statement
3. Main point 1 → becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 1
 1. Supporting detail → becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 1
 1. Subpoint
 2. Subpoint
 2. Supporting detail
 1. Subpoint
 2. Subpoint
 3. Supporting detail
 1. Subpoint
 2. Subpoint
4. Main point 2 → becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 2
 1. Supporting detail
 2. Supporting detail
 3. Supporting detail
5. Main point 3 → becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 3
 1. Supporting detail
 2. Supporting detail
 3. Supporting detail
6. Conclusion

Tip

In an outline, any supporting detail can be developed with subpoints. For simplicity, the model shows them only under the first main point.

Tip

Formal outlines are often quite rigid in their organization. As many instructors will specify, you cannot subdivide one point if it is only one part. For example, for every roman numeral I, there must be a For every A, there must be a B. For every arabic numeral 1, there must be a 2. See for yourself on the sample outlines that follow.

Constructing Topic Outlines

A topic outline is the same as a sentence outline except you use words or phrases instead of complete sentences. Words and phrases keep the outline short and easier to comprehend. All the headings, however, must be written in parallel structure.

Outlining Checklist

Writing an Effective Topic Outline

This checklist can help you write an effective topic outline

for your assignment. It will also help you discover where you may need to do additional reading or prewriting.

- Do I have a controlling idea that guides the development of the entire piece of writing?
- Do I have three or more main points that I want to make in this piece of writing? Does each main point connect to my controlling idea?
- Is my outline in the best order—chronological order, spatial order, or order of importance—for me to present my main points? Will this order help me get my main point across?
- Do I have supporting details that will help me inform, explain, or prove my main points?
- Do I need to add more support? If so, where?
- Do I need to make any adjustments in my working thesis statement before I consider it the final version?

Key Takeaways

- Writers must put their ideas in order, so the assignment makes sense. The most common

orders are chronological, spatial, and order of importance.

- After gathering and evaluating the information you found for your essay, the next step is to write a working or preliminary thesis statement.
- The working thesis statement expresses the main idea you want to develop in the entire writing. It can be modified as you continue the writing process.
- Effective writers prepare a formal outline to organize their main ideas and supporting details in the order they will be presented.
- A topic outline uses words and phrases to express ideas.
- A sentence outline uses complete sentences to express ideas.
- The writer's thesis statement begins the outline, and the outline ends with suggestions for the concluding paragraph.

This is from “Outlining,” section 8.2 of the book [Successful](#)

[Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

“[Outline for book three on an envelope taped above my desk \(another list of ten...\)](#)” by [Austin Kleon](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

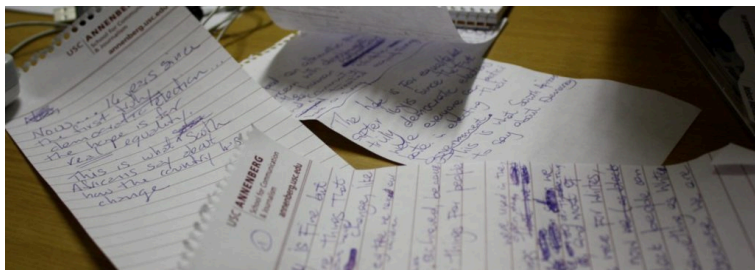
1.

8.3 DRAFTING

Drafting

Drafting is the stage of the writing process in which you develop a complete first version of a piece of writing.

Even professional writers admit that an empty page scares them because they feel they need to come up with something fresh and original whenever they open a blank document on their computers. Because you have completed the first two steps in the writing process, you have already recovered from empty page syndrome. You have hours of prewriting and planning already done. You know what will go on that blank page: what you wrote in your outline.



Making the Writing Process Work for You

The writing process benefits writers because it encourages alternatives to standard practices while motivating them to develop their best ideas. For instance, the following approaches, done alone or in combination with others, may improve your writing and help you move forward in the writing process:

- Begin writing with the part you know the most about. You can start with the third paragraph in your outline if ideas come easily to mind. You can start with the second paragraph or the first paragraph, too. Although paragraphs may vary in length, keep in mind that short paragraphs may contain insufficient support. Readers may also think the writing is abrupt. Long paragraphs may be wordy and may lose your reader's interest. As a guideline, try to write paragraphs longer than one sentence but shorter than the length of an entire double-spaced page.
- Write one paragraph at a time and then stop. If you complete the assignment on time, you may choose how many paragraphs you complete in one sitting. Pace yourself. On the other hand, try not to procrastinate. Writers should always meet their deadlines.

- Take short breaks to refresh your mind. This tip might be most useful if you are writing a multipage report or essay. Still, if you are antsy or cannot concentrate, take a break to let your mind rest. But do not let breaks extend too long. If you spend too much time away from your essay, you may have trouble starting again. You may forget key points or lose momentum. Try setting an alarm to limit your break, and when the time is up, return to your desk to write.
- Be reasonable with your goals. If you decide to take ten-minute breaks, try to stick to that goal. If you told yourself that you need more facts, then commit to finding them. Holding yourself to your own goals will create successful writing assignments.
- Keep your audience and purpose in mind as you write. These aspects of writing are just as important when writing a single paragraph for your essay as when considering the direction of the entire essay.

Of all these considerations, keeping your purpose and audience at the front of your mind is the most important key to writing success. If your purpose is to persuade, for example, you will present your facts and details in the most logical and convincing way you can.

Your purpose will guide your mind as you compose your sentences. Your audience will guide word choice. Are you writing for experts, for a general audience, for other college

students, or for people who know very little about your topic? Keep asking yourself what your readers, with their background and experience, need to be told in order to understand your ideas. How can you best express your ideas so they are totally clear and your communication is effective?

Tip

You may want to identify your purpose and audience on an index card that you clip to your paper (or keep next to your computer). On that card, you may want to write notes to yourself—perhaps about what that audience might not know or what it needs to know—so that you will be sure to address those issues when you write. It may be a good idea also to state exactly what you want to explain to that audience, or to inform them of, or to persuade them about.

Setting Goals for Your First Draft

A draft is a complete version of a piece of writing, but it is not the final version. The step in the writing process after drafting, as you may remember, is revising. During revising, you will have the opportunity to make changes to your first draft before you put the finishing touches on it during the editing and proofreading stage. A first draft gives you a working version that you can later improve.

Tip

If you invest some time now to investigate how the reviewing tool in your word processor works, you will be able to use it with confidence during the revision stage of the writing process. Then, when you start to revise, set your reviewing tool to track any changes you make, so you will be able to tinker with text and commit only those final changes you want to keep.



Discovering the Basic Elements of a First Draft

If you have been using the information in this chapter step by step to help you develop an assignment, you already have both a formal topic outline and a formal sentence outline to direct your writing. Knowing what a first draft looks like will help you make the creative leap from the outline to the first draft. A first draft should include the following elements:

- An introduction that piques the audience's interest, tells what the essay is about, and motivates readers to keep

reading.

- A thesis statement that presents the main point, or controlling idea, of the entire piece of writing.
- A topic sentence in each paragraph that states the main idea of the paragraph and implies how that main idea connects to the thesis statement.
- Supporting sentences in each paragraph that develop or explain the topic sentence. These can be specific facts, examples, anecdotes, or other details that elaborate on the topic sentence.
- A conclusion that reinforces the thesis statement and leaves the audience with a feeling of completion.

These elements follow the standard five-paragraph essay format you probably first encountered in high school. This basic format is valid for most essays you will write in college, even much longer ones.

The Role of Topic Sentences

Topic sentences make the structure of a text and the writer's basic arguments easy to locate and comprehend. In college writing, using a topic sentence in each paragraph of the essay is the standard rule. However, the topic sentence does not always have to be the first sentence in your paragraph even if it the first item in your formal outline.

Tip

When you begin to draft your paragraphs, you should follow your outline fairly closely. After all, you spent valuable time developing those ideas. However, as you begin to express your ideas in complete sentences, it might strike you that the topic sentence might work better at the end of the paragraph or in the middle. Try it. Writing a draft, by its nature, is a good time for experimentation.

The topic sentence can be a paragraph's first, middle, or final sentence. The assignment's audience and purpose often determine where a topic sentence belongs. When the purpose of the assignment is to persuade, for example, the topic sentence should be the first sentence in a paragraph. In a persuasive essay, the writer's point of view should be clearly expressed at the beginning of each paragraph.

Choosing where to position the topic sentence depends not only on your audience and purpose but also on the essay's arrangement, or order. When you organize information according to order of importance, the topic sentence may be the final sentence in a paragraph. All the supporting sentences build up to the topic sentence. Chronological order may also position the topic sentence as the final sentence because the controlling idea of the paragraph may make the most sense at the end of a sequence.

When you organize information according to spatial order, a topic sentence may appear as the middle sentence in a

paragraph. An essay arranged by spatial order often contains paragraphs that begin with descriptions. A reader may first need a visual in his or her mind before understanding the development of the paragraph. When the topic sentence is in the middle, it unites the details that come before it with the ones that come after it.

Tip

As you read critically throughout the writing process, keep topic sentences in mind. You may discover topic sentences that are not always located at the beginning of a paragraph. For example, fiction writers customarily use topic ideas, either expressed or implied, to move readers through their texts. In nonfiction writing, such as popular magazines, topic sentences are often used when the author thinks it is appropriate (based on the audience and the purpose, of course). A single topic sentence might even control the development of a number of paragraphs.

Developing topic sentences and thinking about their placement in a paragraph will prepare you to write the rest of the paragraph.

Paragraphs

The paragraph is the main structural component of an essay as well as other forms of writing. Each paragraph of an essay adds another related main idea to support the writer's thesis,

or controlling idea. Each related main idea is supported and developed with facts, examples, and other details that explain it. By exploring and refining one main idea at a time, writers build a strong case for their thesis.

Paragraph Length

How long should a paragraph be?

One answer to this important question may be “long enough”—long enough for you to address your points and explain your main idea. To grab attention or to present succinct supporting ideas, a paragraph can be fairly short and consist of two to three sentences. A paragraph in a complex essay about some abstract point in philosophy or archaeology can be three-quarters of a page or more long. A long paragraph is acceptable in college-level writing as long as the writer maintains close focus on the topic and does not ramble. In general, try to keep the paragraphs longer than one sentence but shorter than one full page of double-spaced text.

Tip

Journalistic style often calls for brief two- or three-sentence paragraphs because of how people read the news, both online and in print. Blogs and other online information sources often adopt this paragraphing style, too. Readers often skim the first paragraphs of a great many articles before settling on the handful of stories they want to read in detail.

You may find that a particular paragraph you write may be

longer than one that will hold your audience's interest. In such cases, you should divide the paragraph into two or more shorter paragraphs, adding a topic statement or some kind of transitional word or phrase at the start of the new paragraph. Transition words or phrases show the connection between the two ideas.

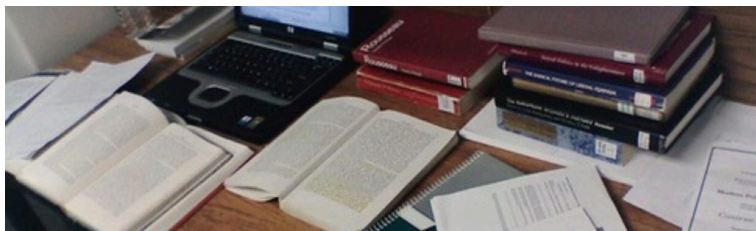
In all cases, however, be guided by what your instructor wants and expects to find in your draft. Many instructors will expect you to develop a mature college-level style as you progress through the semester's assignments.

Writing a Title

A writer's best choice for a title is one that alludes to the main point of the entire essay. Like the headline in a newspaper or the big, bold title in a magazine, an essay's title gives the audience a first peek at the content. If readers like the title, they are likely to keep reading. Keep in mind titles should not be complete sentences. The first letters of the first and last words are always capitalized. The first letters of major words should also be capitalized, while the first letters of smaller articles and prepositions are not capitalized.

Tip

The information compiled under each roman numeral will become a paragraph in your final paper. In the previous example, the outline follows the standard five-paragraph essay arrangement, but longer essays will require more paragraphs and thus more roman numerals. If you think that a paragraph might become too long or stringy, add an additional paragraph to your outline, renumbering the main points appropriately.



Key Takeaways

- - Make the writing process work for you. Use any and all of the strategies that help you move forward in the writing process.
 - Always be aware of your purpose for

writing and the needs of your audience. Cater to those needs in every sensible way.

- Remember to include all the key structural parts of an essay: a thesis statement that is part of your introductory paragraph, three or more body paragraphs as described in your outline, and a concluding paragraph. Then add an engaging title to draw in readers.
- Write paragraphs of an appropriate length for your writing assignment. Paragraphs in college-level writing can be a page long, as long as they cover the main topics in your outline.
- Use your topic outline or your sentence outline to guide the development of your paragraphs and the elaboration of your ideas. Each main idea, indicated by a roman numeral in your outline, becomes the topic of a new paragraph. Develop it with the supporting details and the subpoints of those details that you included in your outline.

- Generally speaking, write your introduction and conclusion last, after you have fleshed out the body paragraphs.
- Writers must put their ideas in order so the assignment makes sense. The most common orders are chronological order, spatial order, and order of importance.
- After gathering and evaluating the information you found for your essay, the next step is to write a working, or preliminary, thesis statement.
- The working thesis statement expresses the main idea that you want to develop in the entire piece of writing. It can be modified as you continue the writing process.
- Effective writers prepare a formal outline to organize their main ideas and supporting details in the order they will be presented.
- A topic outline uses words and phrases to express the ideas.
- A sentence outline uses complete sentences to express the ideas.

- The writer's thesis statement begins the outline, and the outline ends with suggestions for the concluding paragraph.
- All writers rely on steps and strategies to begin the writing process.
- The steps in the writing process are prewriting, outlining, writing a rough draft, revising, and editing.
- Prewriting is the transfer of ideas from abstract thoughts into words, phrases, and sentences on paper.
- A good topic interests the writer, appeals to the audience, and fits the purpose of the assignment.
- Writers often choose a general topic first and then narrow the focus to a more specific topic.

This is from “Drafting,” section 8.3 of the book [Successful](#)

[Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

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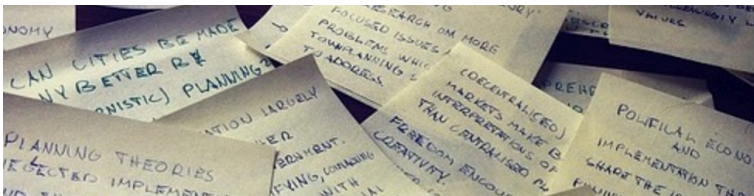
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8.4 REVISING AND EDITING

Revising and Editing

Revising and editing are the two tasks you undertake to improve your essay significantly. Both are very important elements of the writing process. You may think that a completed first draft means little improvement is needed. However, even experienced writers need to improve their drafts and rely on peers during revising and editing. You may know that athletes miss catches, fumble balls, or overshoot goals. Dancers forget steps, turn too slowly, or miss beats. For both athletes and dancers, the more they practice, the stronger their performance will become. Web designers seek better images, a more clever design, or a more appealing background for their web pages. Writing has the same capacity to profit from improvement and revision.



Understanding the Purpose of Revising and Editing

Revising and editing allow you to examine two important aspects of your writing separately so that you can give each task your undivided attention.

- When you revise, you take a second look at your ideas. You might add, cut, move, or change information in order to make your ideas more straightforward, more accurate, more interesting, or more convincing.
- When you edit, you take a second look at how you expressed your ideas. You add or change words. You fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. You improve your writing style. You make your essay into a polished, mature piece of writing, the end product of your best efforts.

Tip

How do you get the best out of your revisions and editing? Here are some strategies that writers have developed to look at their first drafts from a fresh perspective. Try them over the course of this semester; then keep using the ones that bring results.

- Take a break. You are proud of what you wrote, but you might be too close to it to make changes. Set aside your writing for a few hours or even a day until you can look at it objectively.
- Ask someone you trust for feedback and constructive criticism.
- Pretend you are one of your readers. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why?
- Use the resources that your college provides. Find out where your school's writing lab is located and ask about the assistance they provide online and in person.

Many people hear the words critic, critical, and criticism and pick up only negative vibes that provoke feelings that make them blush, grumble, or shout. However, as a writer and a thinker, you need to learn to be critical of yourself in a positive way and have high expectations for your work. You also need to train your eye and trust your ability to fix what needs fixing. For this, you need to teach yourself where to look.

Creating Unity and Coherence

Following your outline closely offers a reasonable guarantee that your writing will stay on purpose and not drift away from the controlling idea. However, when writers are rushed, tired, or cannot find the right words, their writing may become less than it wants. Their writing may no longer be clear and concise, and they may be adding information that is not needed to develop the main idea.

When a piece of writing has unity, all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay belong and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense. When the writing has coherence, the ideas flow smoothly. The wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and from paragraph to paragraph.

Tip

Reading your writing aloud will often help you find problems with unity and coherence. Listen for the clarity and flow of your ideas. Identify where you find yourself confused, and write a note about possible fixes.

Creating Unity

Sometimes writers get caught up in the moment and cannot resist a good digression. Even though you might enjoy such detours when you chat with friends, unplanned digressions usually harm a piece of writing.

Tip

When you reread your writing to find revisions to make, look for each type of problem in a separate sweep. Read it straight through once to locate any problems with unity. Read it straight through a second time to find problems with coherence. You may follow this same practice during many stages of the writing process.

Creating Coherence

Careful writers use transitions to clarify how the ideas in their sentences and paragraphs are related. These words and phrases help the writing flow smoothly. Adding transitions is not the only way to improve coherence, but they are often useful and give a mature feel to your essays. [Table 8.3 “Common Transitional Words and Phrases” \(Links to an external site.\)](#) groups many common transitions according to their purpose.

Table 8.3 Common Transitional Words and Phrases

Transitions That Show Sequence or Time

after	before	later
afterward	before long	meanwhile
as soon as	finally	next
at first	first, second, third	soon
at last	in the first place	then

Transitions That Show Position

above	across	at the bottom
at the top	behind	below
beside	beyond	inside
near	next to	opposite
to the left, to the right, to the side	under	where

Transitions That Show a Conclusion

indeed	hence	in conclusion
in the final analysis	therefore	thus

Transitions That Continue a Line of Thought

consequently	furthermore	additionally
because	besides the fact	following this idea further
in addition	in the same way	moreover
looking further	considering..., it is clear that	

Transitions That Change a Line of Thought

but	yet	however
nevertheless	on the contrary	on the other hand

Transitions That Show Importance

above all	best	especially
in fact	more important	most important
most	worst	

Transitions That Introduce the Final Thoughts in a Paragraph or Essay

finally	last	in conclusion
most of all	least of all	last of all

All-Purpose Transitions to Open Paragraphs or to Connect Ideas Inside Paragraphs

admittedly	at this point	certainly
granted	it is true	generally speaking
in general	in this situation	no doubt
no one denies	obviously	of course
to be sure	undoubtedly	unquestionably

Transitions that Introduce Examples

for instance	for example
--------------	-------------

Transitions That Clarify the Order of Events or Steps

first, second, third	generally, furthermore, finally	in the first place, also, last
----------------------	------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

in the first place,
furthermore, finally

in the first place,
likewise, lastly

Tip

Many writers make their revisions on a printed copy and then transfer them to the version on-screen. They conventionally use a small arrow called a caret (^) to show where to insert an addition or correction.

Being Clear and Concise

Some writers are very methodical and painstaking when they write a first draft. Other writers unleash many words to get out all they feel they need to say. Does either of these composing styles match your style? Or is your composing style somewhere in between? No matter which description best fits you, the first draft of almost every piece of writing, no matter its author, can be made clearer and more concise.

If you have a tendency to write too much, you will need to look for unnecessary words. If you have a tendency to be vague or imprecise in your wording, you will need to find specific words to replace any overly general language.

Identifying Wordiness

Sometimes writers use too many words when fewer words appeal more to their audience and better fit their purpose. Here are some common examples of wordiness to look for in your draft. Eliminating wordiness helps all readers because it makes your ideas clear, direct, and straightforward.

- Sentences that begin with *There is*, or *There are*.
 - **Wordy:** *There are two major experiments that the Biology Department sponsors.*
 - **Revised:** The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.
 - **Sentences with unnecessary modifiers.**
 - **Wordy:** Two extremely famous and well-known consumer advocates spoke eloquently in favor of the proposed important legislation.
 - **Revised:** Two well-known consumer advocates spoke in favor of the proposed legislation.
- Sentences with deadwood phrases that add little to the meaning. Be judicious when you use phrases such as *in terms of*, *with a mind to*, *on the subject of*, *as to whether or not*, *more or less*, *as far as...is concerned*, and similar expressions. You can usually find a more straightforward way to state your point.
 - **Wordy:** *As a world leader in the field of green technology, the company plans to focus its*

efforts in the area of geothermal energy.

- *A report as to whether or not to use geysers as an energy source is in the process of preparation.*
- **Revised:** As a world leader in green technology, the company plans to focus on geothermal energy.
- **A report about using geysers as an energy source is in preparation.**
- Sentences in the passive voice or with forms of the verb to be. Sentences with passive-voice verbs often create confusion, because the subject of the sentence does not perform an action. Sentences are clearer when the subject of the sentence performs the action and is followed by a strong verb. Use strong active-voice verbs in place of forms of to be, which can lead to wordiness. Avoid passive voice when you can.
 - **Wordy:** It might perhaps be said that using a GPS device is something that is a benefit to drivers who have a poor sense of direction.
 - **Revised:** Using a GPS device benefits drivers who have a poor sense of direction.
- Sentences with constructions that can be shortened.
 - *Wordy: The e-book reader, which is a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone.*
 - *My over-sixty uncle bought an e-book reader,*

and his wife bought an e-book reader, too.

- **Revised:** The e-book reader, a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone.
- **My over-sixty uncle and his wife both bought e-book readers.**

Choosing Specific, Appropriate Words

Most college essays should be written in formal English, suitable for an academic situation. Follow these principles to be sure that your word choice is appropriate.

- Avoid slang. Find alternatives to bumner, kewl, and rad.
- Avoid language that is overly casual. Write about “men and women” rather than “girls and guys” unless you are trying to create a specific effect. A formal tone calls for formal language.
- Avoid contractions. Use do not in place of don’t, I am in place of I’m, have not in place of haven’t, and so on. Contractions are considered casual speech.
- Avoid clichés. Overused expressions such as green with envy, face the music, better late than never, and similar expressions are empty of meaning and may not appeal to your audience.
- Be careful when you use words that sound alike but have

different meanings. Some examples are allusion/illusion, complement/compliment, council/counsel, concurrent/consecutive, founder/flounder, and historic/historical.

When in doubt, check a dictionary.

- Choose words with the connotations you want.
Choosing a word for its connotations is as important in formal essay writing as it is in all kinds of writing. Compare the positive connotations of the word proud and the negative connotations of arrogant and conceited.
- Use specific words rather than overly general words.
Find synonyms for thing, people, nice, good, bad, interesting, and other vague words. Or use specific details to make your exact meaning clear.

Completing a Peer Review

After working so closely with a piece of writing, writers often need to step back and ask for a more objective reader. Writers need feedback from readers who can respond only to the words on the page. When they are ready, writers show their drafts to someone they respect and who can give an honest response about their strengths and weaknesses.

You, too, can ask a peer to read your draft when it is ready. After evaluating the feedback and assessing what is most

helpful, the reader's feedback will help you when you revise your draft. This process is called peer review.

You can work with a partner in your class and identify specific ways to strengthen each other's essays. Although you may be uncomfortable sharing your writing at first, remember that each writer is working toward the same goal: a final draft that fits the audience and the purpose. Maintaining a positive attitude when providing feedback will put you and your partner at ease. If your instructor doesn't provide you with specific questions or a rubric to use when evaluating a peer's essay, consider the following questions:

Questions for Peer Review

Title _____ of _____ essay:

Date: _____

Writer's _____ name:

Peer _____ reviewer's _____ name:

1. This essay is
about _____
_____.
2. Your main points in this essay

are _____
_____.

3. What I most liked about this essay
is _____
_____.

4. These three points struck me as your strongest:

1. Point:

2. Why:

3. Point:

4. Why:

5. Point:

6. Why:

5. These places in your essay are not clear to me:

1. Where:

2. Needs improvement

because _____

3. Where:

4. Needs improvement because

5. Where:

6. Needs improvement because

6. The one additional change you could make that would
improve this essay significantly is

—

Using Feedback Objectively

The purpose of peer feedback is to receive constructive criticism of your essay. Your peer reviewer is your first real audience, and you can learn what confuses and delights a

reader to improve your work before sharing the final draft with a wider audience (or your intended audience).

It may not be necessary to incorporate every recommendation your peer reviewer makes. However, if you start to observe a pattern in the responses you receive from peer reviewers, you might want to take that feedback into consideration in future assignments. For example, if you read consistent comments about a need for more research, you may consider including more research in future assignments.

Using Feedback from Multiple Sources

You might get feedback from more than one reader as you share different stages of your revised draft. In this situation, you may receive feedback from readers who do not understand the assignment or lack your involvement and enthusiasm for it.

You need to evaluate the responses you receive according to two important criteria:

1. Determine if the feedback supports the purpose of the assignment.
2. Determine if the suggested revisions are appropriate to the audience.

Then, using these standards, accept or reject revision feedback.

Editing Your Draft

So far, all your changes have been content changes. Perhaps with the help of peer feedback, you have made sure that you sufficiently supported your ideas. You have checked for problems with unity and coherence. You have examined your essay for word choice, revising to cut unnecessary words and replacing weak wording with specific and appropriate wording.

The next step after revising the content is editing. When you edit, you examine the surface features of your text. You examine your spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation. You also ensure you use the proper format when creating your finished assignment.

Tip

Editing often takes time. Budgeting time into the writing process allows you to complete additional edits after revising. Editing and proofreading your writing helps you create a finished work that represents your best efforts. Here are a few more tips to remember about your readers:

- Readers do not notice correct spelling, but they do notice misspellings.
- Readers look past your sentences to get to your ideas—unless the sentences are awkward, poorly constructed, and frustrating to read.
- Readers notice when every sentence has the same rhythm as every other sentence, with no variety.
- Readers do not cheer when you use *there*, *their*, and *they*’re correctly, but they notice when you do not.
- Readers will notice the care with which you handled your assignment and your attention to detail in delivering an error-free document.

The first section of this book offers a useful review of grammar, mechanics, and usage. Use it to help you eliminate major errors in your writing and refine your understanding of the conventions of language. Do not hesitate to ask for help from peer tutors in your academic department or the college’s writing lab. In the meantime, use the checklist to help you edit your writing.

Revising and Editing

Checklist

Editing Your Writing

Grammar

- Are some sentences actually sentence fragments?
- Are some sentences run-on sentences? How can I correct them?
- Do some sentences need conjunctions between independent clauses?
- Does every verb agree with its subject?
- Is every verb in the correct tense?
- Are tense forms, especially for irregular verbs, written correctly?
- Have I used subject, object, and possessive personal pronouns correctly?
- Have I used who and whom correctly?
- Is the antecedent of every pronoun clear?
- Do all personal pronouns agree with their antecedents?
- Have I used the correct comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs?
- Is it clear which word a participial phrase modifies, or is it a dangling modifier?

Sentence Structure

- Are all my sentences simple sentences, or do I vary my

sentence structure?

- Have I chosen the best coordinating or subordinating conjunctions to join clauses?
- Have I created long, overpacked sentences that should be shortened for clarity?
- Do I see any mistakes in parallel structure?

Punctuation

- Does every sentence end with the correct end punctuation?
- Can I justify the use of every exclamation point?
- Have I used apostrophes correctly to write all singular and plural possessive forms?
- Have I used quotation marks correctly?

Mechanics and Usage

- Can I find any spelling errors? How can I correct them?
- Have I used capital letters where they are needed?
- Have I written abbreviations, where allowed, correctly?
- Can I find any errors in the use of commonly confused words, such as to/too/two?

Tip

Be careful about relying too much on spelling checkers and grammar checkers. A spelling checker cannot recognize that you meant to write principle but wrote principal instead. A grammar checker often queries constructions that are perfectly correct. The program does not understand your meaning; it makes its check against a general set of formulas that might not apply in each instance. If you use a grammar checker, accept the suggestions that make sense, but consider why the suggestions came up.

If you need additional proofreading help, ask a reliable friend, a classmate, or a peer tutor to make a final pass on your paper to look for anything you missed.

Tip

Proofreading requires patience; it is very easy to read past a mistake. Set your paper aside for at least a few hours, if not a day or more, so your mind will rest. Some professional proofreaders read a text backward so they can concentrate on spelling and punctuation. Another helpful technique is to slowly read a paper aloud, paying attention to every word, letter, and punctuation mark.

Formatting Your Essay

Remember to use the proper format when creating your finished assignment. Sometimes an instructor, a department,

or a college will require students to follow specific instructions on titles, margins, page numbers, or the location of the writer's name. These requirements may be more detailed and rigid for research projects and term papers, which often observe the American Psychological Association (APA) or Modern Language Association (MLA) style guides, especially when citations of sources are included.

To ensure the format is correct and follows any specific instructions, check before submitting an assignment.



Key Takeaways

- Revising and editing are the stages of the writing process in which you improve your work before producing a final draft.
- You add, cut, move, or change information during revising to improve content.
- During editing, you take a second look at the

words and sentences you used to express your ideas and fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure.

- Unity in writing means that all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong together and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense.
- Coherence in writing means that the writer's wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and between paragraphs.
- Transitional words and phrases effectively make writing more coherent.
- Writing should be clear and concise, with no unnecessary words.
- Effective formal writing uses specific, appropriate words and avoids slang, contractions, clichés, and overly general words.
- Peer reviews, done properly, can give writers objective feedback about their writing. It is the writer's responsibility to evaluate the results of peer reviews and incorporate only useful feedback.
- Remember to budget time for careful editing

and proofreading. Use all available resources to improve your editing skills, including editing checklists, peer editing, and your institution's writing lab.

This is from “Revising and Editing,” section 8.4 of the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0). For details on it (including licensing), [click here](#).

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PART VIII

CHAPTER 9: WRITING ESSAYS FROM START TO FINISH

9.1 DEVELOPING A STRONG, CLEAR THESIS STATEMENT

Elements of Thesis Statements

Have you ever known someone who was not very good at telling stories? You probably had trouble following his train of thought as he jumped around from point to point, either being too brief in places that needed further explanation or providing too many details on a meaningless element. Maybe he told the end of the story first, then moved to the beginning and later added details to the middle. His ideas were probably scattered, and the story did not flow very well. When the story was over, you probably had many questions.

Just as a personal anecdote can be disorganized, an essay can fall into the same trap of being out of order and confusing. That is why writers need a thesis statement to provide a specific focus for their essay and to organize what they are about to discuss in the body.

Like a topic sentence summarizes a single paragraph, the

thesis statement summarizes an entire essay. It tells the reader the point you want to make in your essay, while the essay itself supports that point. It is like a signpost that signals the essay's destination. You should form your thesis before you begin to organize an essay, but you may find that it needs revision as the essay develops.

A Strong Thesis Statement

A strong thesis statement contains the following qualities.

Specificity. A thesis statement must concentrate on a specific area of a general topic. As you may recall, the creation of a thesis statement begins when you choose a broad subject and then narrow down its parts until you pinpoint a specific aspect of that topic. For example, health care is a broad topic, but a proper thesis statement would focus on a specific area of that topic, such as options for individuals without health care coverage.

Precision. A strong thesis statement must be precise enough to allow for a coherent argument and to remain focused on the topic. If the specific topic is options for individuals without health care coverage, then your precise thesis statement must make an exact claim about it, such as that limited options exist for those who are uninsured by their employers. You must further pinpoint what you are going to

discuss regarding these limited effects, such as whom they affect and what the cause is.

Ability to be argued. A thesis statement must present a relevant and specific argument. A factual statement often is not considered arguable. Be sure your thesis statement contains a point of view that can be supported with evidence.

Ability to be demonstrated. For any claim you make in your thesis, you must be able to provide reasons and examples for your opinion. You can rely on personal observations in order to do this, or you can consult outside sources to demonstrate that what you assert is valid. Examples and details back a worthy argument.

Forcefulness. A forceful thesis statement shows readers that you are, in fact, making an argument. The tone is assertive and takes a stance that others might oppose.

Confidence. In addition to using force in your thesis statement, you must also use confidence in your claim. Phrases such as I feel or I believe actually weaken the readers' sense of your confidence because these phrases imply that you are the only person who feels the way you do. In other words, your stance has insufficient backing. Taking an authoritative stance on the matter persuades your readers to have faith in your argument and open their minds to what you have to say.

Tip

Even in a personal essay that allows the use of first person, your thesis should not contain phrases such as “*in my opinion*” or “*I believe*”. These statements reduce your credibility and weaken your argument. Your opinion is more convincing when you use a firm attitude.

Examples of Appropriate Thesis Statements

Each of the following thesis statements meets several of the following requirements:

- Specificity
 - Precision
 - Ability to be argued
 - Ability to be demonstrated
 - Forcefulness
 - Confidence
-
1. The societal and personal struggles of Troy Maxon in the play *Fences* symbolize the challenge of black males who lived through segregation and integration in the United States.

2. Closing all American borders for a period of five years is one solution that will tackle illegal immigration.
 3. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Romeo and Juliet* spoils the outcome for the audience and weakens the plot.
 4. J. D. Salinger's character in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield, is a confused rebel who voices his disgust with phonies, yet in an effort to protect himself, he acts like a phony on many occasions.
 5. Compared to an absolute divorce, no-fault divorce is less expensive, promotes fairer settlements, and reflects a more realistic view of the causes for marital breakdown.
 6. Exposing children from an early age to the dangers of drug abuse is a sure method of preventing future drug addicts.
 7. In today's crumbling job market, a high school diploma is not significant enough education to land a stable, lucrative job.
-

Tip

You can find thesis statements in many places, such as in the news; in the opinions of friends, coworkers or teachers; and even in songs you hear on the radio. Become aware of thesis statements in everyday life by paying attention to people's opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Pay attention to your own everyday thesis statements as well, as these can become material for future essays.

Thesis Mistakes to Avoid

Now that you have read about the contents of a good thesis statement and have seen examples, take a look at the pitfalls to avoid when composing your own thesis:

A thesis is weak when it is simply a declaration of your subject or a description of what you will discuss in your essay.

- Weak thesis statement: **My paper will explain why imagination is more important than knowledge.**

A thesis is weak when it makes an unreasonable or outrageous claim or insults the opposing side.

- Weak thesis statement: **Religious radicals across America are trying to legislate their Puritanical beliefs by banning required high school books.**

A thesis is weak when it contains an obvious fact or something that no one can disagree with or provides a dead end.

- Weak thesis statement: **Advertising companies use sex to sell their products.**

A thesis is weak when the statement is too broad.

- Weak thesis statement: **The life of Abraham Lincoln**

was long and challenging.

Thesis Statement Revision

Your thesis will probably change as you write, so you will need to modify it to reflect exactly what you have discussed in your essay. Remember that your thesis statement begins as a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process for the purpose of planning and guiding your writing.

Working thesis statements often become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revision helps you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of the paper.

Tip

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you grow closer to a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

Ways to Revise Your Thesis

You can cut down on irrelevant aspects and revise your thesis by taking the following steps:

1. Pinpoint and replace all nonspecific words, such as people, everything, society, or life, with more precise words in order to reduce any vagueness.

Working thesis: Young people have to work hard to succeed in life.

Revised thesis: Recent college graduates must have discipline and persistence in order to find and maintain a stable job in which they can use and be appreciated for their talents.

1. The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing those general words like people and work hard, the writer can better focus his or her research and gain more direction in his or her writing.
2. Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking yourself questions that narrow your thesis.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

Revised thesis: **The welfare system keeps a socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.**

1. A joke means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, the writer can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for joke. The writer should ask himself or herself questions similar to the 5WH questions. By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, the writer more accurately defines his or her stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.
2. Replace any linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs are forms of the verb to be, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

Working thesis: **Kansas City school teachers are not paid enough.**

Revised thesis: **The Kansas City legislature cannot afford to pay its educators, resulting in job cuts and resignations in a district that sorely needs highly qualified and dedicated teachers.**

1. The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word *are*. Linking verbs often make thesis statements weak because they do not express action. Rather, they connect words and phrases to the second half of the sentence. Readers might wonder, “Why are they not paid enough?” But this statement does not compel them to ask many more questions. The writer should ask himself or herself questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement, one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue:

- Who is not paying the teachers enough?
- What is considered “enough”?
- What is the problem?
- What are the results
- Omit any general claims that are hard to support.

Working thesis: **Today’s teenage girls are too sexualized.**

Revised thesis: **Teenage girls who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a woman’s worth depends on her sensuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and behavior.**

- It is true that some young women in today’s society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all girls. Many girls have strict parents, dress

appropriately, and do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school and high school. The writer of this thesis should ask the following questions:

- Which teenage girls?
 - What constitutes “too” sexualized?
 - Why are they behaving that way?
 - Where does this behavior show up?
 - What are the repercussions?
-

Key Takeaways

- Proper essays require a thesis statement to provide a specific focus and suggest how the essay will be organized.
- A thesis statement is your interpretation of the subject, not the topic itself.
- A strong thesis is specific, precise, forceful, confident, and is able to be demonstrated.
- A strong thesis challenges readers with a

point of view that can be debated and can be supported with evidence.

- A weak thesis is simply a declaration of your topic or contains an obvious fact that cannot be argued.
- Depending on your topic, it may or may not be appropriate to use first person point of view.
- Revise your thesis by ensuring all words are specific, all ideas are exact, and all verbs express action.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

9.2 WRITING BODY PARAGRAPHS OBJECTIVES

Writing Body Paragraphs

If your thesis gives the reader a road map to your essay, then body paragraphs should closely follow that map. The reader should be able to predict what follows your introductory paragraph by simply reading the thesis statement.

The body paragraphs present the evidence you have gathered to confirm your thesis. Before you begin to support your thesis in the body, you must find information from a variety of sources that support and give credit to what you are trying to prove.

Select Primary Support for Your Thesis

Without primary support, your argument is not likely to be

convincing. Primary support can be described as the major points you choose to expand on your thesis. It is the most important information you select to argue for your point of view. Each point you choose will be incorporated into the topic sentence for each body paragraph you write. Your primary supporting points are further supported by supporting details within the paragraphs.

Tip

Remember that a worthy argument is backed by examples. In order to construct a valid argument, good writers conduct lots of background research and take careful notes. They also talk to people knowledgeable about a topic in order to understand its implications before writing about it.

Identify the Characteristics of Good Primary Support

To fulfill the requirements of good primary support, the information you choose must meet the following standards:

Be specific. Your main points about your thesis and the examples you use to expand on those points need to be specific. Use specific examples to provide the evidence and to build

upon your general ideas. These types of examples give your reader something narrow to focus on, and if used properly, they leave little doubt about your claim. While general examples convey the necessary information, they are not nearly as compelling or useful in writing because they are too obvious and typical.

Be relevant to the thesis. Primary support is considered strong when it relates directly to the thesis. Primary support should show, explain, or prove your main argument without delving into irrelevant details. When faced with lots of information that could be used to prove your thesis, you may think you need to include it all in your body paragraphs. But effective writers resist the temptation to lose focus. Choose your examples wisely by making sure they directly connect to your thesis.

Be detailed. Remember that your thesis, while specific, should not be very detailed. The body paragraphs are where you develop the discussion that a thorough essay requires. Using detailed support shows readers that you have considered all the facts and chosen only the most precise details to enhance your point of view.

Prewrite to Identify Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis

Statement

Recall that when you prewrite, you essentially list examples or reasons why you support your stance. Stemming from each point, you further provide details to support those reasons. After prewriting, you are then able to look back at the information and choose the most compelling pieces you will use in your body paragraphs.

Select the Most Effective Primary Supporting Points for a Thesis Statement

After you have prewritten about your working thesis statement, you may have generated a lot of information, which may be edited out later. Remember that your primary support must be relevant to your thesis. Remind yourself of your main argument, and delete any ideas that do not directly relate to it. Omitting unrelated ideas ensures that you will use only the most convincing information in your body paragraphs. Choose at least three of only the most compelling points. These will serve as the topic sentences for your body paragraphs.

Types of Evidence

When you support your thesis, you are revealing evidence. Evidence includes anything that can help support your stance. The following are the kinds of evidence you will encounter as you conduct your research:

Facts. Facts are the best kind of evidence to use because they often cannot be disputed. They can support your stance by providing background information on or a solid foundation for your point of view. However, some facts may still need explanation. For example, the sentence “The most populated state in the United States is California” is a pure fact, but it may require some explanation to make it relevant to your specific argument.

Judgments. Judgments are conclusions drawn from the given facts. Judgments are more credible than opinions because they are founded upon careful reasoning and examination of a topic.

Testimony. Testimony consists of direct quotations from either an eyewitness or an expert witness. An eyewitness is someone who has direct experience with a subject; he adds authenticity to an argument based on facts. An expert witness is a person who has extensive experience with a topic. This person studies the facts and provides commentary based on either facts or judgments, or both. An expert witness adds authority and credibility to an argument.

Personal observation. Personal observation is similar to

testimony, but personal observation consists of your testimony. It reflects what you know to be true because you have experiences and have formed either opinions or judgments about them. For instance, if you are one of five children and your thesis states that being part of a large family is beneficial to a child's social development, you could use your own experience to support your thesis.

Tip

You can consult a vast pool of resources to gather support for your stance. Citing relevant information from reliable sources ensures that your reader will take you seriously and consider your assertions. Use any of the following sources for your essay: newspapers or news organization websites, magazines, encyclopedias, and scholarly journals, which are periodicals that address topics in a specialized field.

Supporting Topic Sentences

Each body paragraph contains a topic sentence that states one aspect of your thesis and then expands upon it. Like the thesis statement, each topic sentence should be specific and supported by concrete details, facts, or explanations.

Each body paragraph should comprise the following elements.

topic sentence + supporting details (examples, reasons, or arguments)

Topic sentences indicate the location and main points of the basic arguments of your essay.

These sentences are vital to writing your body paragraphs because they always refer back to and support your thesis statement. Topic sentences are linked to the ideas you have introduced in your thesis, thus reminding readers what your essay is about. A paragraph without a clearly identified topic sentence may be unclear and scattered, just like an essay without a thesis statement.

Here is an example of a thesis statement.

Author J.D. Salinger relied primarily on his personal life and belief system as the foundation for the themes in the majority of his works.

The following topic sentence is a primary support point for the thesis. The topic sentence states exactly what the controlling idea of the paragraph is. Later, you will see the writer immediately provide support for the sentence.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced themes in many of his works.

Draft Supporting Detail Sentences For Each Primary Support Sentence

After deciding which primary support points you will use as your topic sentences, you must add details to clarify and demonstrate each of those points. These supporting details provide examples, facts, or evidence that support the topic sentence.

The writer drafts possible supporting detail sentences for each primary support sentence based on the thesis statement:

Thesis statement: Unleashed dogs on city streets are a dangerous nuisance.

Supporting point 1: Dogs can scare cyclists and pedestrians.

Supporting details:

1. Cyclists are forced to zigzag on the road.
2. School children panic and turn wildly on their bikes.
3. People who are walking at night freeze in fear.

Supporting point 2: Loose dogs are traffic hazards

Supporting details:

1. Dogs in the street make people swerve their cars.
2. To avoid dogs, drivers run into other cars or pedestrians.

3. Children coaxing dogs across busy streets create danger.

Supporting point 3: Unleashed dogs damage gardens.

Supporting details:

1. They step on flowers and vegetables.
 2. They destroy hedges by urinating on them.
 3. They mess up lawns by digging holes.
-

An Example of a Body Paragraph

The following paragraph contains supporting detail sentences for the primary support sentence (the topic sentence), which is underlined.

Salinger, a World War II veteran, suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder, a disorder that influenced the themes in many of his works. He did not hide his mental anguish over the horrors of war and once told his daughter, “You never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose, no matter how long you live.” His short story “A Perfect Day for a Bananafish” details a day in the life of a WWII veteran who was recently released from an army hospital for

psychiatric problems. The man acts questionably with a little girl he meets on the beach before he returns to his hotel room and commits suicide. Another short story, “For Esmé—with Love and Squalor,” is narrated by a traumatized soldier who sparks an unusual relationship with a young girl he meets before he departs to partake in D-Day. Finally, in Salinger’s only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, he continues with the theme of posttraumatic stress, though not directly related to war. From a rest home for the mentally ill, sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of his nervous breakdown following the death of his younger brother.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

- Your body paragraphs should closely follow the path set forth by your thesis statement.
- Strong body paragraphs contain evidence that supports your thesis.

- Primary support comprises the most important points you use to support your thesis.
- Strong primary support is specific, detailed, and relevant to the thesis.
- Prewriting helps you determine your most compelling primary support.
- Evidence includes facts, judgments, testimony, and personal observation.
- Reliable sources may include newspapers, magazines, academic journals, books, encyclopedias, and firsthand testimony.
- A topic sentence presents one point of your thesis statement while the information in the rest of the paragraph supports that point.
- A body paragraph comprises a topic sentence plus supporting details.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

9.3 ORGANIZING YOUR WRITING

The method of organization you choose for your essay is just as important as its content. Without a clear organizational pattern, your reader could become confused and lose interest. The way you structure your essay helps your readers draw connections between the body and the thesis, and the structure also keeps you focused as you plan and write the essay. Choosing your organizational pattern before you outline ensures that each body paragraph works to support and develop your thesis.

This section covers three ways to organize body paragraphs:

1. Chronological order
2. Order of importance
3. Spatial order

When you begin to draft your essay, your ideas may seem to flow from your mind in a seemingly random manner. Your readers, who bring to the table different backgrounds, viewpoints, and ideas, need you to clearly organize these ideas in order to help process and accept them.

A solid organizational pattern gives your ideas a path that

you can follow as you develop your draft. Knowing how you will organize your paragraphs allows you to better express and analyze your thoughts. Planning the structure of your essay before you choose supporting evidence helps you conduct more effective and targeted research.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

In [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#), you learned that chronological arrangement has the following purposes:

- To explain the history of an event or a topic
- To tell a story or relate an experience
- To explain how to do or to make something
- To explain the steps in a process

Chronological order is mostly used in expository writing, which is a form of writing that narrates, describes, informs, or explains a process. When using chronological order, arrange

the events in the order that they actually happened, or will happen if you are giving instructions. This method requires you to use words such as *first*, *second*, *then*, *after that*, *later*, and *finally*. These transition words guide you and your reader through the paper as you expand your thesis.

For example, if you are writing an essay about the history of the airline industry, you would begin with its conception and detail the essential timeline events up until present day. You would follow the chain of events using words such as *first*, *then*, *next*, and so on.

Exercise 1

Choose an accomplishment you have achieved in your life. The important moment could be in sports, schooling, or extracurricular activities. On your own sheet of paper, list the steps you took to reach your goal. Try to be as specific as possible with the steps you took. Pay attention to using transition words to focus your writing.

Keep in mind that chronological order is most appropriate for the following purposes:

- Writing essays containing heavy research
- Writing essays with the aim of listing, explaining, or

narrating

- Writing essays that analyze literary works such as poems, plays, or books
-
-

TIP

When using chronological order, your introduction should indicate the information you will cover and in what order, and the introduction should also establish the relevance of the information. Your body paragraphs should then provide clear divisions or steps in chronology. You can divide your paragraphs by time (such as decades, wars, or other historical events) or by the same structure of the work you are examining (such as a line-by-line explication of a poem).

EXERCISE 2

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that describes a process you are familiar with and can do well. Assume that your reader is unfamiliar with the procedure. Remember to use the chronological key words, such as *first*, *second*, *then*, and *finally*.

ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Recall from [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#) that order of importance is best used for the following purposes:

- Persuading and convincing
- Ranking items by their importance, benefit, or significance
- Illustrating a situation, problem, or solution

Most essays move from the least to the most important point,

and the paragraphs are arranged in an effort to build the essay's strength. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to begin with your most important supporting point, such as in an essay that contains a thesis that is highly debatable. When writing a persuasive essay, it is best to begin with the most important point because it immediately captivates your readers and compels them to continue reading.

For example, if you were supporting your thesis that homework is detrimental to the education of high school students, you would want to present your most convincing argument first, and then move on to the less important points for your case.

Some key transitional words you should use with this method of organization are *most importantly*, *almost as importantly*, *just as importantly*, and *finally*.

Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that discusses a passion of yours. Your passion could be music, a particular sport, filmmaking, and so on. Your paragraph should be built upon the reasons why you feel so strongly. Briefly discuss your reasons in the order of least to greatest importance.

SPATIAL ORDER

As stated in [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#), spatial order is best used for the following purposes:

- Helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it
- Evoking a scene using the senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound)
- Writing a descriptive essay

Spatial order means that you explain or describe objects as they are arranged around you in your space, for example in a bedroom. As the writer, you create a picture for your reader, and their perspective is the viewpoint from which you describe what is around you.

The view must move in an orderly, logical progression, giving the reader clear directional signals to follow from place to place. The key to using this method is to choose a specific starting point and then guide the reader to follow your eye as it moves in an orderly trajectory from your starting point.

Pay attention to the following student’s description of her bedroom and how she guides the reader through the viewing process, foot by foot.

Attached to my bedroom wall is a small wooden rack dangling with red and turquoise necklaces that shimmer as you enter. Just to the right of the rack is my window, framed by billowy white curtains. The peace of such an image is a stark contrast to my desk, which sits to the right of the window, layered in textbooks, crumpled papers, coffee cups, and an overflowing ashtray. Turning my head to the right, I see a set of two bare windows that frame the trees outside the glass like a 3D painting. Below the windows is an oak chest from which blankets and scarves are protruding. Against the wall opposite the billowy curtains is an antique dresser, on top of which sits a jewelry box and a few picture frames. A tall mirror attached to the dresser takes up most of the wall, which is the color of lavender.

The paragraph incorporates two objectives you have learned in this chapter: using an implied topic sentence and applying spatial order. Often in a descriptive essay, the two work together.

The following are possible transition words to include when using spatial order:

- Just to the left or just to the right
 - Behind
 - Between
 - On the left or on the right
 - Across from
 - A little further down
 - To the south, to the east, and so on
 - A few yards away
 - Turning left or turning right
-

EXERCISE 4

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph using spatial order that describes your commute to work, school, or another location you visit often.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Key Takeaways

- The way you organize your body paragraphs ensures you and your readers stay focused on and draw connections to, your thesis statement.
- A strong organizational pattern allows you to articulate, analyze, and clarify your thoughts.
- Planning the organizational structure for your essay before you begin to search for supporting evidence helps you conduct more

effective and directed research.

- Chronological order is most commonly used in expository writing. It is useful for explaining the history of your subject, for telling a story, or for explaining a process.
- Order of importance is most appropriate in a persuasion paper as well as for essays in which you rank things, people, or events by their significance.
- Spatial order describes things as they are arranged in space and is best for helping readers visualize something as you want them to see it; it creates a dominant impression.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

9.4 WRITING INTRODUCTORY AND CONCLUSION PARAGRAPHS

Introductions

Picture your introduction as a storefront window: You have a certain amount of space to attract your customers (readers) to your goods (subject) and bring them inside your store (discussion). Once you have enticed them with something intriguing, you then point them in a specific direction and try to make the sale (convince them to accept your thesis).

Your introduction is an invitation to your readers to consider what you have to say and then to follow your train of thought as you expand upon your thesis statement.

An introduction serves the following purposes:

1. Establishes your voice and tone, or your attitude, toward the subject
2. Introduces the general topic of the essay
3. States the thesis that will be supported in the body

paragraphs

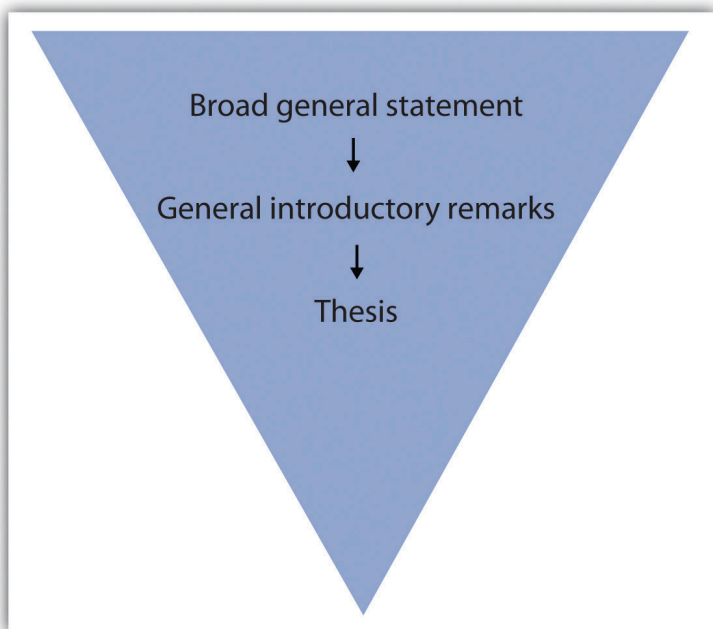
First impressions are crucial and can leave lasting effects in your reader's mind, which is why the introduction is so important to your essay. If your introductory paragraph is dull or disjointed, your reader probably will not have much interest in continuing with the essay.

Attracting Interest in Your Introductory Paragraph

Your introduction should begin with an engaging statement devised to provoke your readers' interest. In the next few sentences, introduce them to your topic by stating general facts or ideas about the subject. As you move deeper into your introduction, you gradually narrow the focus, moving closer to your thesis. Moving smoothly and logically from your introductory remarks to your thesis statement can be achieved using a **funnel technique**, as illustrated in the diagram

in Figure

9.1.



Capture Reader's Interest

Immediately capturing your readers' interest increases the chances of having them read what you are about to discuss. You can garner curiosity for your essay in a number of ways. Try to get your readers personally involved by doing any of the following:

- Appealing to their emotions

- Using logic
 - Beginning with a provocative question or opinion
 - Opening with a startling statistic or surprising fact
 - Raising a question or series of questions
 - Presenting an explanation or rationalization for your essay
 - Opening with a relevant quotation or incident
 - Opening with a striking image
 - Including a personal anecdote
-

Writing Conclusions

It is not unusual to want to rush when you approach your conclusion, and even experienced writers may fade. But what good writers remember is that it is vital to put just as much attention into the conclusion as in the rest of the essay. After all, a hasty ending can undermine an otherwise strong essay.

A conclusion that does not correspond to the rest of your essay, has loose ends, or is unorganized can unsettle your readers and raise doubts about the entire essay. However, if you have worked hard to write the introduction and body, your conclusion can often be the most logical part to compose.

Anatomy of a Strong Conclusion

Keep in mind that the ideas in your conclusion must conform to the rest of your essay. In order to tie these components together, restate your thesis at the beginning of your conclusion. This helps you assemble, in an orderly fashion, all the information you have explained in the body. Repeating your thesis reminds your readers of the major arguments you have been trying to prove and also indicates that your essay is drawing to a close. A strong conclusion also reviews your main points and emphasizes the importance of the topic.

The construction of the conclusion is similar to the introduction, in which you make general introductory statements and then present your thesis. The difference is that in the conclusion you first paraphrase, or state in different words, your thesis and then follow up with general concluding remarks. These sentences should progressively broaden the focus of your thesis and maneuver your readers out of the essay.

Many writers like to end their essays with a final emphatic statement. This strong closing statement will cause your readers to continue thinking about the implications of your essay; it will make your conclusion, and thus your essay, more memorable. Another powerful technique is to challenge your readers to make a change in either their thoughts or their

actions. Challenging your readers to see the subject through new eyes is a powerful way to ease yourself and your readers out of the essay.

Tip

When closing your essay, do not expressly state that you are drawing to a close. Relying on statements such as in conclusion, it is clear that, as you can see, or in summation is unnecessary and can be considered trite.

Conclusions to Avoid

It is wise to avoid doing any of the following in your conclusion:

- Introducing new material
- Contradicting your thesis
- Changing your thesis
- Using apologies or disclaimers

Introducing new material in your conclusion has an unsettling effect on your reader. When you raise new points, you make your reader want more information, which you could not possibly provide in the limited space of your final paragraph.

Contradicting or changing your thesis statement causes your readers to think that you do not actually have a conviction about your topic. After all, you have spent several paragraphs adhering to a singular point of view. When you change sides or open up your point of view in the conclusion, your reader becomes less inclined to believe your original argument.

By apologizing for your opinion or stating that you know it is tough to digest, you are in fact admitting that even you know what you have discussed is irrelevant or unconvincing. You do not want your readers to feel this way. Effective writers stand by their thesis statement and do not stray from it.

Key Takeaways

- A strong opening captures your readers' interest and introduces them to your topic before you present your thesis statement.
- An introduction should restate your thesis, review your main points, and emphasize the

importance of the topic.

- Carefully chosen diction in both the introduction and conclusion prevents any confusing or boring ideas.
- A conclusion that does not connect to the rest of the essay can diminish the effect of your paper.
- The conclusion should remain true to your thesis statement. It is best to avoid changing your tone or your main idea and avoid introducing any new material.
- Closing with a final emphatic statement provides closure for your readers and makes your essay more memorable.

This is adapted from the book [Successful Writing](#) (v. 1.0).

This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.