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GETTING STARTED
The Writing Fellows Program at Stonehill

The Writing Program and the Center for Writing and Academic Achievement (CWAA) are pleased to offer the Writing Fellows Program to support writing-intensive courses at Stonehill. A Writing Fellow at Stonehill is an undergraduate teaching assistant who has received instruction and practice in supporting writing activities in the classroom and giving feedback in writing. All Fellows must successfully complete the three-credit seminar, WRI 369: Writing and Peer Tutoring and participate in an initial orientation and ongoing supervisory meetings. They may work up to five hours per week.

The Writing Fellow's Role in the Classroom

A Writing Fellow's main responsibility is to support and facilitate writing activities in and out of the classroom, including the following:

- Respond to drafts of student papers and informal assignments prior to them being submitted for a final grade.
- Collaborate with faculty on crafting and “auditioning” writing assignments.
- Facilitate or participate in small-group discussions of student work or structured peer review sessions.
- Serve as liaisons to the CWAA to facilitate referrals for one-to-one tutoring.
- Provide tutoring support for individual students by appointment in the CWAA.
- Respond online to student blogs or discussion forums and chats on eLearn.
- Facilitate the process of assembling student portfolios and submitting them on eLearn.

Writing Fellows should not be asked to:

- Proctor examinations.
- Grade assignments, high-stakes papers or examinations.
- Conduct research unrelated to class preparation.
- Provide clerical support to faculty.
- Provide one-to-one tutoring outside of the CWAA.
- Discipline students.

How to apply: The CWAA has a staff of trained Fellows to work with you and your class. Please complete and return the attached application to the CWAA by December 13th, 2013. Inquiries should be directed to Devon Sprague, Director of the Center for Writing and Academic Achievement at dsprague@stonehill.edu or 508-565-1751. Faculty are welcome to nominate students for the Writing and Peer Tutoring course, which will be offered in the fall.
What Distinguishes a Writing Fellow from a TA?

**Writing Fellows**
- **Purpose** – to support writing activities inside or outside the classroom
- **Focus** – on writing
- **Primary Responsibilities:**
  - Respond to drafts and informal assignments
  - Lead structured small-group discussions of student work
  - Meet individually with students to discuss specific writing assignments
- **Size** – Work with individuals and small groups
- **Method** – provide helpful, individual feedback on writing assignments

**TAs**
- **Purpose** – to provide the faculty with supplemental instruction
- **Focus** – on content
- **Primary Responsibilities**
  - Assist with exam preparation and co-curricular activities
  - Correct objective assignments, quizzes, and homework
  - Conduct course related research
- **Size** – Work with the entire class as a whole or individual students
- **Method** – Provide general help by holding review sessions

- **Both**
  - Maintain 3.0 GPA and adhere to confidentiality and code of conduct
- **Do NOT grade exams or final papers**
- **Encourage independent learning**
Conversations to have with your professor:

Remind your professor to:
  o Mention the Writing Fellows on the syllabus—or to provide a written classroom policy about the required consultations with Writing Fellows.
  o Add the Writing Fellows and their contact info to the eLearn site.
  o Specify a policy with respect to students submitting late papers or not scheduling or showing up for consultation with Writing Fellows.

The syllabus and the timing of the paper assignments
  o When is the first draft due? There should be a specific due date listed.
  o Will you be meeting individually with all students? Is there enough time to meet with all the students before the revised paper is due?
  o How long will each paper be? Is this too much work for Fellows? Too little?

The writing assignments
  o Is there a written description of the assignments yet?
  o If there is, get all the assignment details: length, goal, parameters, audience, etc.
  o Is the writing assignment clear and do-able to you, as a student?
  o Is there a copy of a recent paper that successfully accomplishes the assignment?

Writing in general
  o What is the professor's attitude toward writing?
  o What does the professor expect the students to accomplish as writers?
  o If the class requires the students to write according to specific disciplinary conventions, will the students receive any instruction in those conventions?
  o What happens if students don’t show up for their required consultations? Does the professor have a policy to penalize those students? Should the Writing Fellows notify the professor of any problems with specific students?
  o Should students submit original/fellowed draft with completed/revised paper?

Logistics to be carefully arranged:
  o On which dates should the Writing Fellows visit the class? How much time will they have? Should they come at the beginning or the end of the class session?
  o Where can Writing Fellows pick up the drafts?
Online Writing / Tutoring Resources
Dr. Todd Gernes, Stonehill College

Purdue University OWL
  •  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/
One of the oldest and most comprehensive writing resources online. Note the section focusing on tutoring writing.

MIT Writing and Communication Center
  •  http://writing.mit.edu/wcc
A state-of-the-art online writing resource for MIT students and faculty.

The Writing Center at George Mason University
  •  http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/
A well designed website with good, printable handouts.

The Writing Center at the University of Toledo
  •  http://www.utoledo.edu/centers/writingcenter/
Another well-designed website with helpful handouts.

Michigan Tech Writing Center
  •  http://www.hu.mtu.edu/hu_dept/wc/
An artfully designed, user friendly website.

Center for Communication Practices at Rensselaer
  •  http://www.ccp.rpi.edu/
Check out the e-handouts section.

The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
  •  http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/
Note the section with ESL handouts.

KU Writing Center at the University of Kansas
  •  http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/
The site features handouts from OWLs across the country, introducing you to other resources that may offer more specialized instruction.
GIVING WRITTEN FEEDBACK
Writing Fellows Feedback

What is written feedback and why is it important?

Writing Fellows create written feedback by using a global note and some marginal comments to respond to a student’s essay on paper. This type of response is important since it is not always possible to meet with students in person. In these instances, giving written feedback enables Writing Fellows to continue serving as a resource for students in spite of busy schedules. On the other hand, written feedback can also be used in combination with live conferences. The written notes may serve as a helpful reminder of the topics discussed during the meeting, while also providing students with a concrete place to start their revisions.

How should Writing Fellows create written feedback?

The specific style of written feedback will vary from person to person, but there are some core components that are crucial to creating useful feedback. Fellows should give global feedback in the form of a note at the end of a student’s paper and include only sparing marginal comments. It is important to personalize the note by addressing the student by name in the beginning and signing the Fellow’s name at the end. This helps reassure students that the Fellow put time and effort into writing the comments.

First, the feedback should start out by identifying something positive in the student’s work. All writers have strengths and highlighting them helps them figure out what they should continue doing. This can also soften the impact of criticism. The feedback should include an example of the strength within the essay so that students can fully understand the Fellow’s praise.
After writing positive comments, the Fellow should then identify weaknesses in the student’s paper. Start by addressing higher-order concerns first, such as unsuitable thesis statements, unorganized paragraphs, unclear arguments, etc. It is important to avoid using commands and accusatory language (you need to change this, your paragraph organization is wrong for this type of paper, etc.). This style of writing may cause students to become defensive or feel ashamed of their work. Instead, Fellows can use questions that provoke critical thinking to communicate their observations. For instance, a Fellow might ask a student with a weak thesis statement, what is the main point of your paper? Does your thesis statement convey this point clearly and specifically? The feedback should provide an example of the weakness and a potential strategy for addressing it. What is your main point of the paper? How does each individual paragraph relate back to the main point? Is there a way you could make the connection clearer?

Lower-order concerns, such as grammar and style, should also be addressed in the feedback. In order to differentiate between a simple typo and an actual misunderstanding of a concept, look for reoccurring errors in the essay. After identifying the most important grammatical concern, provide the student with one or two examples, but do not fix every error in the paper. Correcting their own errors helps students internalize the concepts. It may be also be helpful to provide students with an online resource or refer them to a text that explains the grammar rule. In order to keep the feedback on track, Fellows should make sure to address the most important issues instead of personal pet peeves. It is also beneficial for them to limit comments to crucial problems, since raising too many points may overwhelm students.

Overall, Fellows should focus on keeping feedback objective, friendly, and focused.
Writing Fellows Feedback Model and Examples

Model for Feedback

1) Strength
2) Example of strength
3) Most Important Higher-Order Issue
4) Strategy to Address Higher-Order Issue
5) Most Important Lower-Order Issue

Written Feedback on Essay Examples:

Hello John,

It seems like you put a lot of thought into this essay! This shows through the depth of your argument in the body paragraphs and numerous supporting examples. However, as I mentioned in the marginal comments, there seems to be disconnect between the introduction (which focuses on basketball in general) and the body paragraphs (which focus on Kobe Bryant and Michael Jordan). How can you refocus the introduction to make it more specific? Can you rework your thesis statement to more accurately reflect your argument? After reworking the introduction and thesis, it may be helpful to take a second look at the topic sentences for your paragraphs. Do the topic sentences match the newly created main point of the essay? How does each paragraph connect to each other and to the larger argument?

In regards to surface level issues, it may be helpful to take a second look at comma usage in this essay; particularly in regards to non-restrictive clauses. Take a look at my marginal comments and the linked Purdue OWL article for more information in this topic!

Let me know if you have any questions and good luck with the final draft.

~Jane
Jane,

You make your reasoning clear throughout the essay by fully describing your thought process by defining an idea and then explaining why you feel that way. The 2nd to last paragraph is a perfect example of a place where you do this and it helps the reader follow your argument!

When revising, it might be helpful to review your organization by making sure that all of your paragraphs connect to each other and relate back the main point of the essay. Paragraph 3 may be a great place to start with this process.

Also, don’t forget to take a second look at sentence structure. Ask yourself: Do all of my sentences contain a clear beginning, middle and end? If you are unsure if your sentences are complete, then you can refer to this Purdue OWL website about parts of a sentence for guidance.

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/598/01/

Please let me know if you have any questions about my feedback!

~John
Jim Thorpe, The Greatest Athlete of All Time

Gold medalist in the Olympics are rare, a gold medalist who was also the best football player of his time, and who played six years of professional baseball is unheard of. Jim Thorpe accomplished all of this; he was an athlete like no other. It is nearly impossible the be the best at one sport, but to be the best at multiple is something that has never been done before, and most likely will never be done again. Jim Thorpe was easily the greatest athlete of the 20th century, and is the greatest athlete of all time by being great at so many different sports.

Jim Thorpe was born in 1887 on an Indian reservation in Oklahoma. In 1904 he went to school at Carlisle Industrial Indian School. This was a school that helped American Indian to learn trades and get jobs off campus. He began his athletic career here were he made third team all state in 1908, 1909, and first team in 1910 for both track and football. His coach was Pop Warner, and is a big reason why Thorpe was so good(cmgvww.com). This was the start of an evolution, of one man dominating the sports world.

The pentathlon and decathlon are the two hardest events in track and field. The pentathlon was made up of 5 different events: long jump, javelin throw, 200m race, discus throw, and 1500m races(wikiki.com). Like wise the Decathlon was made up of 10 events: 100m race, long jump, shot put, high jump, 400m race, 110m hurdles, discus...
throw, pole vault, javelin throw, and 1500m race in that order. The decathlon is usually considered the best athlete of that time because it is a combination of so many sports and events. Not only do you have to be physical strong, in amazing shape, and great from, you also need to have a strong mental mindset because this events will exhaust you and make you lose focus.

Thorpe traveled to Sweden in 1912 for the Olympic games. At a very young age of 24, he absolutely dominated. In the pentathlon he won every event except for javelin, which he got second in, giving him the gold medal and leaving everyone in the dust (sports-reference.com). He won by an astounding amount and no one was even close to catching him. Before the pentathlon he also 4th in high jump and 7th in long jump, which are also great results (sports-reference.com). This was just the start to his Olympic domination.

The last event of the track and field Olympics is always the decathlon, because it shows the greatest of the track and field athletes. Jim Thorpe took 1st place in 5 of the 10 events, and the lowest position he got was 4th (sports-reference.com). This is incredible, not only did he dominate those 5 events, he also did extremely well in the rest. Most people would be thrilled with a 4th place in anything in the Olympics. He got his second gold medal of the Olympics, and created a world record. Since he won the decathlon, he was the greatest track and field participant of his time, and proved just how great of an athlete he was.

After his glorious win, Thorpe went to the ceremonies were he would get his gold medal and be known as the best decathlete to ever live. As he was getting his
award the king of Sweden, Gustav V told Thorpe “You are the greatest athlete in the world” (espn.com). Not only did he win the decathlon, but the king of Sweden, host of the Olympic games, told him that he was the best athlete in the world. This shows just how much he dominated the competition. Not every decathlete hears those words, so he must have really impressed everyone.

After dominating the Olympics Thorpe decided to move on to something new. He went and played baseball for the New York Giants in outfield. He played for 9 years with 3 different teams. Although his career batting average was only .252 this is still very good for someone who also won the decathlon and thought he would do something different. He started with a very low average of .143 in the first year, and the years after were not much better. In his last 3 years he has an average of .329, and an all time high of .333 in 1919 (espn.go.com) When he just started to play he was not that great of a player, but by the end of his career he became a good player. A batting average of .333 is a great average in the MLB today. Not only was he an amazing athlete, but also he was an amazing learner, and learned to play the game very well.

He was also an amazing football player. When he was at Carlisle he lead the team to a national championship in 1912, the same year he was his gold medals (espn.com) So not only was he a great track athlete at this time, he was also playing football and was very good at it. Some would say he was almost better at football then he was at track, which would be incredible.

While playing baseball, he was also playing professional football. Football was not as big as it is today, and he did not make much money from it, which is why he
played baseball. He played from 1915-1919, playing with 5 different teams (cmgww.com). 14 years is a long time to be playing professional football, especially after winning 2 Olympic gold medals, and while playing professional baseball. He won three pro titles with the Canton Bulldogs in his first 4 years in the league (espn.com). He was a dominant force on the field and played for a very long time, showing how athletic he really was.

When you look at the professional football league, there are offensive players and defensive players, and special teams. Rarely do you see someone who plays on all three sides of the ball, and makes a huge impact. Thorpe was an incredible running back that could plow through defenders, but he could also make exquisitely painful tackles, and make huge plays. Along with tackling on special teams, he could also drop kick 50 yard field goals, which is a very hard thing to do (espn.com). He was won of the most well rounded football players to ever play the game, not many people play on all three sides of the ball. Those that do usually are not mentionable on any of the sides. This just goes to show how good of an athlete he really was. He was the best athlete in football, and also in track, and very well could have been the most athletic person in baseball at this time.

Jim Thorpe was the greatest athlete to ever live. It is very rare for someone to play a professional sport. It is also very rare for someone to win an Olympic medal. For someone to dominate two professional sports, and too win the decathlon, the hardest of all Olympic medals, is unheard of, and is legendary. There are other great athletes like Jim Brown and Bo Jackson who were great at one or two sports, but that isn't the same.
No one is on the same level as Jim Thorpe, and his athleticism will always be remembered. He is the greatest athlete of all time, and one who will be in the record books for a very long time.

Works Cited


John,

Making an argument that a certain person is the best athlete ever is a great topic for an argument essay since it is definitely controversial! The essay gives a lot of detailed information about Thorpe; especially in the second paragraph. However, it might be helpful to refine your argument a bit. What is your main point of the essay? Does the thesis statement state that as explicitly as possible? If possible, try to keep the main points of the essay, and especially topic sentences of paragraphs, specific to Thorpe rather than general observations about sports. This will help the argument seem more focused.

Also, it may be beneficial to take a second look at the essay and make sure that the tense is consistent throughout the entire essay. If you would like more information on avoiding unnecessary text shifts, feel free to visit Purdue OWL or your Pocket Handbook. Lastly, consider keeping an eye out for commas, apostrophes, and citation issues. My marginal comments give examples of where this may be particularly beneficial.

Let me know if you have any questions and good luck with the revision process!

~Brittany
Questioning As an Effective Strategy for Tutoring

There are many more questions that you can ask students besides the ones listed below and all of these questions will not apply to every session. However, this can serve as a helpful cheat-sheet if you are unsure of what to do next in an appointment.

Getting Started

What are you working on?

Do you have the assignment prompt with you?

When is the paper due?

What are you hoping to accomplish in this session?

Have you received any feedback from your professor?

What do you think after hearing the paper out loud?

Digging Deeper

What is the main point of your paper?

Do you think that your thesis statement clearly conveys your main point?

Could someone argue against your thesis?

Does your thesis statement answer the “so what” question? Why should the reader care about your thesis?

Will the reader be left asking “how” or “why”? If so, this might mean that you need to be explain your ideas more or use more precise language.

What is the main point of your paragraph?
**Digging Deeper (Continued)**

Does your topic sentence tell the reader what this paragraph is going to be about?

Is there more than one idea in the paragraph? If so, do you have any ideas about how to focus more?

What is the connection between all of your ideas? Why is each paragraph arranged in that particular ways and how do they relate back to the main point of your paper?

Can you tell me more about this in your own words?

What do you mean when you say…?

**Wrapping up**

Have you cited all of your sources?

Can you summarize what we talked about?

What are your steps for revision?

Would you like to schedule a follow-up appointment?

Did you find this session helpful?

Is there anything else that you would like to work on at this time?
Responding to Problems: A Facilitative Approach

Once you’ve diagnosed a writer’s writing problems, you are ready to craft your response. There are four kinds of responses that you can make: facilitative, directive, corrective, and evaluative. We believe that writers learn best when tutors and writing assistants respond in ways that are primarily facilitative - that is, when they make responses that help writers to discover their own ideas and strategies for improving their papers.

What is the Facilitative Approach?

Facilitative remarks avoid telling a writer what to do - Change this; rearrange that. Instead, they raise questions that are carefully crafted so that they encourage a writer to consider her ideas and their expression more fully. These questions might be general - for example, Where is your thesis sentence? More often, however, they are specific, addressing a weakness in very particular terms. For example:

- Your introduction talks in general terms about the strengths and weaknesses of various presidents; you conclude the paragraph by announcing that your paper will consider Bush and his presidency. However, you don’t declare the terms of your discussion. What do you plan to argue about Bush’s strengths and weaknesses as president?

Facilitative remarks are not always phrased as questions. Very often, a declarative sentence can be facilitative in that it challenges a writer, asking her to reconsider some aspect of her paper. For example:

- I’m not following the connection you seem to be making between presidential privilege and the downfall of the American political system.
You might also find facilitative remarks taking the form of suggestions. Note the plural noun: if you make one suggestion, the writer may follow it without thinking; if you make several, he must consider them all and choose from them - or come up with an alternative.

It's important to understand that while the facilitative response is in spirit very different from the directive, its aim is to lead writers to a desired end. Indeed, the facilitative approach involves asking what one might call the "leading question." In other words, simply asking questions of a writer doesn't do the trick. These questions need to be propelled by a plan. (See Example: Facilitative Commentary.)

Still, you should proceed cautiously when asking leading questions: be happy to lead, but be just as happy to follow when the writer takes off in a new direction. Be prepared to think on your feet, and to come up with new strategies to facilitate any fresh, exciting turn in the writer's process.

Why Use the Facilitative Approach?

The idea behind the facilitative response is that student writers best learn to write when they are made responsible for their own writing and re-writing decisions. The facilitative question or comment permits writers to retain this important responsibility by locating authority and authorship with the writer. Tutors and writing assistants who respond facilitatively do not give writers easy answers. Nor do they provide them with explicit directions for revision. Rather, they raise questions that encourage writers to think about their writing problems and to choose from among a variety of solutions.
The Limitations of the Facilitative Approach

Despite its strengths, the facilitative approach is no panacea. It does not solve every writing problem you'll encounter. Nor does it work with every writer. Sometimes, in fact, tutors and writing assistants find the facilitative approach annoying, or unnecessarily coy. "Why ask questions when you're simply baiting the writer for an answer? Isn't it better sometimes simply to tell the writer, in simple terms, what she needs to do?"

These questions are fair. Sometimes, writers do need direction. And sometimes stubborn adherence to the facilitative approach results in a silly game of cat and mouse. Still, it's a method that we believe in and that has worked well for our student writers for more than a decade. Our advice to you is to be patient with the method, and to trust that it works. Sometimes what seems like a silly cat and mouse game to you can be an enormously valuable teaching moment for your student writer.

For those instances where the facilitative approach doesn't seem to be working, we offer these alternate ways of responding.

Directive Responses

Sometimes, writers need and ask for explicit writing advice: they want to know, in simple terms, where the writing went wrong, and why. In this case, you'll want to consider offering direction.

For example, if something is clearly wrong with a paper - and you see a clear and simple solution - tell the writer: for example, to move a paragraph, to omit a sentence, or to change a word. Remember, though, that directive responses - such as "omit" - are more instructive when they are accompanied by some explanation: Should the writer omit a sentence because it is redundant? Because it is irrelevant? Because it doesn't make sense?
Corrective Responses

The third category of remarks that a tutor or writing assistant makes on papers might be classified as corrective remarks. Typically, these are copy-editing remarks that point out errors in syntax and grammar. There are several ways of making corrective remarks on papers - most of which we cover in our section on grammar.

Evaluative Responses (The Grade)

The last category of response is one that you won't be asked to make: the grade.

In your remarks as a writing assistant, you should do nothing to predict a student's grade. Do not, for example, say, "If you tighten up the structure of this essay, I'm sure it will be an 'A'." Nor should you ever comment on grades that a professor has given. Even if you feel that a professor has really burned a student, and even if that student is a friend of yours, and even if he's crying or complaining bitterly, do not tell the student that he deserved a better grade. You have neither the right nor the qualifications to grade student papers.
Example: Facilitative Commentary

Affirmative Action laws were designed to make up for America’s enslavement and centuries of oppression of Black people. [Your language seems to rally the reader to support affirmative action, yet your essay finds fault with it. How might you reconcile this contradiction?] They were correcting laws, the aim of which were to eliminate injustice. But in the end, new injustices have been created by these laws. The most harmful of which is the inability of qualified students to pursue their dreams and get into the really important professional schools, like medicine and law. [Fragment.] Why is race relevant to who makes a good doctor or lawyer? And how do we even measure merit? Is part of that measurement race? Where do we put it in the mix when we are considering whether you’re good enough for graduate school? Is it more important than the standardized exams, professor recommendations and GPA - all of which, in the end, are just as prejudiced? [You raise a lot of questions here, but you don’t offer any answers. Which question drives the essay?] After all, a man isn’t measured by tests or by the color of his skin. In the end, all measurements of a person are flawed. But none are more flawed than the measurement of a person by their [pronoun agreement?] race. [Your thesis promises to critique the various measurements of merit - in particular, the "measurement" according to race. Do you think that your essay fulfills that promise? Is this promise the real point of your essay?]
Nowadays, kids [Why this word?] trying to get into professional schools should understand that the GREs and LSATs and MCATs and other standardized tests aren’t a good way to test how smart you are or even ability. [Can you use a parallel structure?] Minorities themselves complain that these tests are biased against them. What do these tests measure except an ability to take a test? Steven Lobrawski argues that they measure how predictable a thinker will be. Moreover, Susan Worbal notes that lower test scores by minority applicants are accepted over higher scores by majority applicants. [Who are these authorities and why did you choose them? What about spokespersons for the other side?] If scores can be overlooked for minorities, why can’t they be overlooked for majorities? Is the importance of race greater than the importance of test scores? Is your success as a lawyer or doctor predicted by them?

Professor recommendations are also unfair. Why should a professor’s opinion get you in or keep you out of the school?

Aren't professors as prejudice ['Prejudice" is a noun. "Prejudiced" is the adjective that you are looking for, I think.] as anyone? Their subjectivity isn't nearly as objective as standardized scores. So why are they so important anyway? Some students aren't even able to get to know their professors well - usually because the professor is never at his office hours, or because the student has too much integrity to kiss up to the professor. The same is true about GPAs. [New idea? New paragraph? Or perhaps construct the topic sentence to include both ideas?] Should one bad term where a student had a personal crisis or an adjustment problem haunt him forever? Should this kind of mistake be able to keep him from realizing his dream? Affirmative action allows students who have had difficult upbringings to make up for it. Are other students given the chance to make up for his own problems? Is this fair? [Again, you rely on rhetorical/unanswered questions. Why? They seem to obscure your argument. What position drives these questions?]
Anyhow, affirmative action is like beating a dead horse. And its caused more injustices than its fixed. Its [it's] not fair to minorities and women, [Are you comfortable speaking for women and minorities?] who feel like they don't really deserve to be where they are, and it's unfair to whites who are rejected from law school and denied their dreams. [Is this what drives the essay? If so, you might want to consider: a) declaring this up front, and/or b) considering your position more objectively and analytically. See below...] Schools should find more fair ways to admit students.

[(Address the student by name...)]

Your essay raises some provocative questions about college admission standards. However, the course assignment asked you to deal explicitly with affirmative action and its controversial role in the admissions process. How are some of the issues you raise - such as GPA and the availability of professors during office hours - relevant to the affirmative action issue? Is your paper a consideration of merit? A critique of admissions' prejudices? What argument are you presenting here?

One rhetorical device that contributes to the sense that your argument remains unclear is your use of rhetorical questions. As I stated, you raise several provocative questions - perhaps too many - and you leave them unanswered. Can you determine which questions are most essential? Can you answer these questions, outlining your reasons? If you can, you'll discover your paper's thesis and its structure.
As you develop your argument, consider what proponents of affirmative action might say. Why was it developed? What positive effects has it had? Acknowledging the "other side" helps you to create an argument with backbone. It also helps you to gain objectivity - something that is eclipsed in this essay, perhaps by your own experiences? If so, you'll want to contain your personal experience - either by declaring it and getting it out of the way, or by using it to inform (but not to drive) your essay.

If you have any questions regarding these comments, contact me.

(Sign your name...)]
BREAKING DOWN THE ESSAY
Diagnosing Problems: Ways of Reading Student Papers

Before you can help students to become better writers, you need to become a better reader of their prose. A good diagnostician of student writing is, first and foremost, a sensitive and attentive reader, capable of reading a text in multiple and complex ways. She reads as what Virginia Woolf called a "common" reader - a person who is curious, responsive, and open to what lies on the page. She also reads empathetically, in order to get to know the writer and her processes. And finally, she reads critically, so that she is able to gather the thoughts that will together form her response.

Reading as a Common Reader

When you read as a common reader, you take note of the experience of reading: Are you interested? Bored? Confused? Enraged? Or are you satisfied, even inspired by your reading? It's important when reading an essay to keep in touch with your responses as a common reader; these responses will point you in the direction of a paper's strengths and weaknesses. If you were confused, it's likely that the writing has gone awry; if you were moved, it's likely that the writer has written forcefully.

Moreover, keeping in touch with your "common reader" responses makes you less likely to read exclusively as an evaluator. Instead of weighing every word and turn of phrase, you can allow the language and ideas of the paper to make their impression on you. A common reader is receptive to what he is reading. He suspends his disbelief, waiting until the end of the essay before he reacts critically. Keep close to your responses as a common reader; they will inform the more critical responses that you make later on.
Reading to Get to Know the Writer

When you read a paper, you will need to give some of your attention to thinking about who the writer is. After all, you are working with an individual person, not simply with an individual paper. The paper can give you a wealth of information from which you can infer what is going on with the writer. As you read, ask yourself:

- Is the writer engaged with what he's written?
- What is the writer's explicit purpose?
- What hidden assumptions or prejudices are implicit in the paper?
- What stance does the writer seem to be taking towards his audience?
- What assumptions (correct or incorrect) does the writer make about the writing process?
- What does the writer understand (or misunderstand) about academic writing?

These questions can prove very valuable. For example, consider the writer's explicit purpose - that is, the purpose that he declares in his thesis. Then consider whether or not the writer has another agenda - other purposes or assumptions that he never quite declares. Often the writer's hidden assumptions about his topic - or even about the writing process itself - can undermine an essay. In short, as a tutor or writing assistant you need to be sensitive not only to what's on the page, but also to what's been left off.

Reading to Respond

As you read an essay, part of your mind will be taking in what the writer is saying while another part is busy scrambling for how you might make a response. Several processes are going on as you formulate this response:
• **First, you're diagnosing the paper, noting what's strong and what's not.** You're struggling to follow the writer's argument, but you're also noting where the argument is going wrong, and you're beginning to hypothesize about why.

• **Second, you're keeping a running list of what sorts of problems the paper has.** *Thesis problems? Check. Structural problems? Check. Trouble with paragraphs? Not really: internally they're not bad; they just don't seem to fit together to form an argument. Sentences? Tend to run on a bit. Some comma problems. A nice turn of phrase here and there.* This check list will be very useful as you formulate your formal response to the paper.

• **Finally, you're beginning to think of ways that you might craft your response.** What are you going to say? As you read, you look for examples of the issues you hope to talk about. You start to weigh problems, one against the other, so that you can prioritize your remarks. You get a "feel" for the student as a person and a writer, and you consider the tone you'll use to address your concerns. And all of this goes on before you open your mouth or pick up your pen to comment.
How to Read an Assignment

Assignments usually ask you to demonstrate that you have immersed yourself in the course material and that you’ve done some thinking on your own; questions not treated at length in class often serve as assignments. Fortunately, if you’ve put the time into getting to know the material, then you’ve almost certainly begun thinking independently. In responding to assignments, keep in mind the following advice.

- **Beware of straying.** Especially in the draft stage, "discussion" and "analysis" can lead you from one intrinsically interesting problem to another, then another, and then ... You may wind up following a garden of forking paths and lose your way. To prevent this, stop periodically while drafting your essay and reread the assignment. Its purposes are likely to become clearer.

- **Consider the assignment in relation to previous and upcoming assignments.** Ask yourself what is new about the task you’re setting out to do. Instructors often design assignments to build in complexity. Knowing where an assignment falls in this progression can help you concentrate on the specific, fresh challenges at hand.

Understanding some key words commonly used in assignments also may simplify your task. Toward this end, let's take a look at two seemingly impenetrable instructions: "discuss" and "analyze."

1. **Discuss the role of gender in bringing about the French Revolution.** "Discuss" is easy to misunderstand because the word calls to mind the oral/spoken dimension of communication. "Discuss" suggests conversation, which often is casual and undirected. In the context of an assignment, however, discussion entails fulfilling a defined and organized task: to construct an argument that considers and responds to an ample range of materials. To "discuss," in assignment language, means to make a broad argument about a set of arguments you have studied. In the case above, you can do this by

   - pointing to consistencies and inconsistencies in the evidence of gendered causes of the Revolution;
   - raising the implications of these consistencies and/or inconsistencies (perhaps they suggest a limited role for gender as catalyst);
   - evaluating different claims about the role of gender;
   - and asking what is gained and what is lost by focusing on gendered symbols, icons and events.

A weak discussion essay in response to the question above might simply list a few aspects of the Revolution—the image of Liberty, the executions of the King and Marie Antoinette, the cry "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite!"—and make separate comments about how each, being "gendered," is therefore a powerful political force. Such an essay would offer no original thesis, but instead restate the question asked in the assignment (i.e., "The role of gender was very important in the French Revolution" or "Gender did not play a large role in the French Revolution").
In a strong discussion essay, the thesis would go beyond a basic restatement of the assignment question. You might test the similarities and differences of the revolutionary aspects being discussed. You might draw on fresh or unexpected evidence, perhaps using as a source an intriguing reading that was only briefly touched upon in lecture.

2. Analyze two of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, including one not discussed in class, as literary works and in terms of sources/analogues. The words 'analyze' and 'analysis' may seem to denote highly advanced, even arcane skills, possessed in virtual monopoly by mathematicians and scientists. Happily, the terms refer to mental activity we all perform regularly; the terms just need decoding. "Analyze" means two things in this specific assignment prompt.

• First, you need to divide the two tales into parts, elements, or features. You might start with a basic approach: looking at the beginning, middle, and end. These structural features of literary works—and of historical events and many other subjects of academic study—may seem simple or even simplistic, but they can yield surprising insights when examined closely.

• Alternatively, you might begin at a more complex level of analysis. For example, you might search for and distinguish between kinds of humor in the two tales and their sources in Boccaccio or the Roman de la Rose: banter, wordplay, bawdy jokes, pranks, burlesque, satire, etc.

• Second, you need to consider the two tales critically to arrive at some reward for having observed how the tales are made and where they came from (their sources/analogues). In the course of your essay, you might work your way to investigating Chaucer's broader attitude toward his sources, which alternates between playful variation and strict adherence. Your complex analysis of kinds of humor might reveal differing conceptions of masculine and feminine between Chaucer and his literary sources, or some other important cultural distinction.

Analysis involves both a set of observations about the composition or workings of your subject and a critical approach that keeps you from noticing just anything—from excessive listing or summarizing—and instead leads you to construct an interpretation, using textual evidence to support your ideas.

Some Final Advice

If, having read the assignment carefully, you're still confused by it, don't hesitate to ask for clarification from your instructor. He or she may be able to elucidate the question or to furnish some sample responses to the assignment. Knowing the expectations of an assignment can help when you're feeling puzzled. Conversely, knowing the boundaries can head off trouble if you're contemplating an unorthodox approach. In either case, before you go to your instructor, it's a good idea to list, underline or circle the specific places in the assignment where the language makes you feel uncertain.

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How to Make an Outline

What is an Outline?

An outline is a formal system used to think about and organize your paper. For example, you can use it to see whether your ideas connect to each other, what order of ideas works best, or whether you have sufficient evidence to support each of your points. Outlines can be useful for any paper to help you see the overall picture.

There are two kinds of outlines: the topic outline and the sentence outline.

- The topic outline consists of short phrases. It is particularly useful when you are dealing with a number of different issues that could be arranged in a variety of ways in your paper.

- The sentence outline is done in full sentences. It is normally used when your paper focuses on complex details. The sentence outline is especially useful for this kind of paper because sentences themselves have many of the details in them. A sentence outline also allows you to include those details in the sentences instead of having to create an outline of many short phrases that goes on page after page.

Both topic and sentence outlines follow rigid formats, using Roman and Arabic numerals along with capital and small letters of the alphabet. This helps both you and anyone who reads your outline to follow your organization easily. This is the kind of outline most commonly used for classroom papers and speeches (see the example at the end of this paper). There is no rule for which type of outline is best. Choose the one that you think works best for your paper.

Make the Outline

1. Identify the topic. The topic of your paper is important. Try to sum up the point of your paper in one sentence or phrase. This will help your paper stay focused on the main point.

2. Identify the main categories. What main points will you cover? The introduction usually introduces all of your main points, then the rest of paper can be spent developing those points.

3. Create the first category. What is the first point you want to cover? If the paper centers around a complicated term, a definition is often a good place to start. For a paper about a particular theory, giving the general background on the theory can be a good place to begin.

4. Create subcategories. After you have the main point, create points under it that provide support for the main point. The number of categories that you use depends on the amount of information that you are going to cover; there is no right or wrong number to use.

By convention, each category consists of a minimum of two entries. If your first category is Roman numeral I, your outline must also have a category labeled roman numeral II; if you have a capital letter A under category I, you must also have a capital letter B. Whether you then go on to have capital letters C, D, E, etc., is up to you, depending on the amount of material you are going to cover. You are required to have only two of each numbered or lettered category.
The completed outline could look like this:

Television and Children's Violence

I. Introduction
   A. Does television cause violence?
      1. Brief mention of previous areas of research
      2. Identify causation dilemma
   B. Present studies on both sides
      1. Some studies are "for"
      2. Some studies are "against"
   C. After weighing evidence it appears that TV does not cause violence

II. Research "For"
   A. First study "for"
      1. Method
      2. Results
      3. Analysis of their conclusions
         a. insufficient sample size
         b. but representative sample
   B. Second study "for"
      1. Method
      2. Results
      3. Analysis of their conclusions
         a. faulty instructions
         b. poor control group

III. Research "Against"

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A. Study "against"
   1. Method
   2. Results
   3. Analysis of their conclusions
      a. Perfect controls
      b. No unwarranted generalizations

B. Second study "against"
   1. Method
   2. Results
   3. Analysis of their conclusions
      a. Large sample size
      b. Real world setting
      c. But typical problems with external validity

IV. Conclusion
   A. Studies "for" all have poor methodology
   B. Studies "against" all have good methodology
   C. Research doesn't support that TV causes violence
   D. More research needed

Keep Your Outline Flexible

Although the format of an outline is rigid, it shouldn't make you inflexible about how to write your paper. Often when you start writing, especially about a subject that you don't know well, the paper takes new directions. If your paper changes direction, or you add new sections, then feel free to change the outline—just as you would make corrections on a crude map as you become more familiar with the terrain you are exploring. Major reorganizations are not uncommon; your outline will help you stay organized and focused.

However, when your paper diverges from your outline, it can also mean that you have lost your focus, and hence the structure of your paper. How do you know whether to change the paper to fit the outline or change the outline to fit the paper? A good way to check yourself is to use the paper to recreate the
outline. This is extremely useful for checking the organization of the paper. If the resulting outline says what you want it to say in an order that is easy to follow, the organization of your paper has been successful. If you discover that it's difficult to create an outline from what you have written, then you need to revise the paper. Your outline can help you with this, because the problems in the outline will show you where the paper has become disorganized.
1c Draft a working thesis.

As you explore your topic and identify questions to investigate, you will begin to see possible ways to focus your material. At this point, try to settle on a tentative central idea. The more complex your topic, the more your focus will change as your drafts evolve. For many types of writing, you will be able to assert your central idea in a sentence or two. Such a statement, which ordinarily appears in the opening paragraph of your finished essay, is called a thesis statement (see also 2a).

A thesis is often one or more of the following:

- the answer to a question you have posed
- the resolution of a problem you have identified
- a statement that takes a position on a debatable topic

A tentative or working thesis will help you organize your draft. Don't worry about the exact wording because your main point may change as you refine your efforts. Here, for example, are one student's efforts to pose a question and draft a thesis statement for an essay in his film course.

**QUESTION**

In Rebel without a Cause, how does the filmmaker show that Jim Stark becomes alienated from his family and friends?

**WORKING THESIS**

In Rebel without a Cause, Jim Stark, the main character, is often seen literally on the edge of physical danger, suggesting that he is becoming more and more agitated by his family and by society.

The working thesis will need to be revised as the student thinks through and revises his paper, but it provides a useful place to start writing.

Here, another student identifies and responds to a problem to focus an argument paper.

**PROBLEM**

Americans who earn average incomes cannot run effective national political campaigns.

**WORKING THESIS**

Congress should pass legislation that would make it possible for Americans who are not wealthy to be viable candidates in national political campaigns.
Testing a working thesis

Once you have come up with a working thesis, you can use the following questions to evaluate it.

- Does your thesis answer a question, propose a solution to a problem, or take a position in a debate?
- Does the thesis require an essay's worth of development? Or will you run out of points too quickly?
- Is the thesis too obvious? If you cannot come up with interpretations that oppose your own, consider revising your thesis.
- Can you support your thesis with the evidence available?
- Can you explain why readers will want to read an essay with this thesis? Can you respond when a reader asks "So what?" or "Why does it matter?"

Keep in mind as you draft your working thesis that an effective thesis is a promise to the reader; it points both the writer and the reader in a definite direction. For a more detailed discussion of the thesis, see 2a.

1d Sketch a plan.

Once you have drafted a working thesis, listing and organizing your supporting ideas is a good next step. Creating outlines, whether formal or informal, can help you make sure your writing is credible and logical and can help you identify any gaps in your support.

When to use an informal outline

You might want to sketch an informal outline to see how you will support your thesis and to figure out a tentative structure for your ideas. Informal outlines can take many forms. Perhaps the most common is simply the thesis followed by a list of major ideas.
Working thesis: Television advertising should be regulated to help prevent childhood obesity.

- Children watch more television than ever.
- Snacks marketed to children are often unhealthy and fattening.
- Childhood obesity can cause sleep disorders and other problems.
- Addressing these health problems costs taxpayers billions of dollars.
- Therefore, these ads are actually costing the public money.
- If advertising is free speech, do we have the right to regulate it?
- We regulate alcohol and cigarette ads on television, so why not advertisements for soda and junk food?

If you began by jotting down a list of ideas (see p. 15), you can turn the list into a rough outline by crossing out some ideas, adding others, and putting the ideas in a logical order.

**When to use a formal outline**

Early in the writing process, rough outlines have certain advantages: They can be produced quickly, they are obviously tentative, and they can be revised easily. However, a formal outline may be useful later in the writing process, after you have written a rough draft, especially if your topic is complex. It can help you see whether the parts of your essay work together and whether your essay's structure is logical.

The following formal outline brought order to the research paper in 60c, on Internet surveillance in the workplace. The student's thesis is an important part of the outline. Everything else in the outline supports it, either directly or indirectly.

**Thesis:** Although companies often have legitimate concerns that lead them to monitor employees' Internet usage—from expensive security breaches to reduced productivity—the benefits of electronic surveillance are outweighed by its costs to employees' privacy and autonomy.

**I.** Although employers have always monitored employees, electronic surveillance is more efficient than other methods.
   A. Employers can gather data in large quantities.
   B. Electronic surveillance can be continuous.
III. Despite valid concerns, employers should value employee morale and autonomy and avoid creating an atmosphere of distrust.
   A. Setting the boundaries for employee autonomy is difficult in the wired workplace.
      1. Using the Internet is the most popular way of wasting time at work.
      2. Employers can’t easily determine if employees are working or surfing the Web.
   B. Surveillance can create resentment among employees.
      1. Web surfing can relieve stress, and restricting it can generate tension between managers and workers.
      2. Enforcing Internet usage can seem arbitrary.

IV. Surveillance may not increase employee productivity, and trust may benefit productivity.
   A. A company shouldn’t care how many hours salaried employees work as long as they get the job done.
   B. Casual Internet use can actually benefit companies.
      1. The Internet may spark business ideas.
      2. The Internet may suggest ideas about how to operate more efficiently.

V. Employees’ rights to privacy are not well defined by the law.
   A. Few federal guidelines on electronic surveillance exist.
   B. Employers and employees are negotiating the boundaries without legal guidance.
   C. As technological capabilities increase, the need to define boundaries will also increase.
to support the assertion with authorities or statistics, the resulting essay is not an argument but a report.  
Like facts, expressions of personal feelings are not arguable assertions. Whereas facts are unarguable because they can be definitively proved true or false, feelings are unarguable because they are purely subjective. 
You can declare, for example, that you detest eight o'clock classes, but you cannot offer an argument to support this assertion. All you can do is explain why you feel as you do. If, however, you were to restate the assertion as "Eight o'clock classes are counterproductive," you could then construct an argument that does not depend solely on your subjective feelings, memories, or preferences. Your argument could be based on causes and support that apply to others as well as to yourself. For example, you might argue that students' ability to learn is at an especially low ebb immediately after breakfast and provide scientific support for this assertion—in addition, perhaps, to personal experience and reports of interviews with your friends. 

Use clear and precise wording. 
The way a thesis is worded is as important as its arguability. The wording of a thesis, especially in its key terms, must be clear and precise. Consider the following assertion: "Democracy is a way of life." The meaning of this claim is uncertain, partly because the word democracy is abstract and partly because the phrase way of life is imprecise. Abstract ideas like democracy, freedom, and patriotism are by their very nature hard to grasp, and they become even less clear with overuse. Too often, such words take on connotations that may obscure the meaning you want to emphasize. 
Way of life is fuzzy. What does it mean? Does it refer to daily life, to a general philosophy or attitude toward life, or to something else? 
Thus, a thesis is vague if its meaning is unclear; it is arguable if it has more than one possible meaning. For example, the statement "My English instructor is mad" can be understood in two ways. The teacher is either angry or insane. Obviously, there are two very different assertions. You would not want readers to think one when you actually mean the other. 
Whenever you write an argument, you should pay special attention to the way you phrase your thesis and take care to avoid vague and ambiguous language. 

Qualify the thesis appropriately. 
In addition to being arguable and clear, an argument thesis must make appropriate qualifications that suit your writing situation. If you are confident that your case is so strong that readers will accept your argument without question, state your thesis emphatically and unconditionally. If, however, you expect readers to challenge your assumptions or conclusions, you must qualify your statement. Qualifying a thesis makes it more likely that readers will take it seriously. Expressions like probably, very likely, apparently, and it seems all serve to qualify a thesis. 

EXERCISE 19.1 
Write an assertion of opinion that states your position on one of the following controversial issues:
- Should English be the official language of the United States and the only language used in local, state, and federal governments' oral and written communications?
- Should teenagers be required to get their parents' permission to obtain birth control information and contraceptives?
- Should high schools or colleges require students to perform community service as a condition for graduation?
- Should marriage between same-sex couples be legal?

Constructing a persuasive argument on any of these issues would obviously require careful deliberation and research. For this exercise, however, all you need to do is construct an arguable, clear, and appropriately qualified thesis.

EXERCISE 19.2 
Find the thesis in one of the argument essays in Chapters 6–10. Then decide whether the thesis meets the three requirements: that it be arguable, clear, and appropriately qualified.

EXERCISE 19.3 
If you have written an argument essay or are currently working on one of the argument assignments in Chapters 6–10, consider whether your essay thesis is arguable, clear, and appropriately qualified. If you believe it does not meet these requirements, revise it accordingly.

Giving Reasons and Support 
Whether you are arguing a position, proposing a solution, justifying an evaluation, or speculating about causes, you need to give reasons and support for your thesis. 
Think of reasons as the main points supporting your thesis. Often they answer the question Why do you think so? For example, if you assert among friends that you value a certain movie highly, one of your friends might ask, "Why do you like it so much?" And you might answer, "Because it has challenging ideas, unusual camera work, and memorable acting." Similarly, you might oppose restrictions on students' use of offensive language at your college because such restrictions would make students reluctant to enter into free debate, because offensive speech is hard to define, and because restrictions violate the free-speech clause of the First Amendment. These reasons phrases are your reasons. You may have one or many reasons, depending on your subject and your writing situation. 
For your argument to succeed with your readers, you must not only give reasons but also support your reasons. The main kinds of support writers use are examples, statistics, authorities, anecdotes, and textual evidence. Following is a discussion and illustration of each kind of support, along with standards for judging its reliability.
ASSERTING A THESIS

A research question will help you identify the specific aspect of the topic you wish to explore. Once you have selected a topic, list the different features of that piece that are most interesting to you. These are limited topics and they should help you find a specific angle to use when approaching your topic.

To formulate your research question, rephrase your limited topic in question form. Brainstorm questions about it based on your interests, response to the reading, and points of discussion you’ve considered from class.

Consider your topic, purpose, and audience. Ask: What questions do you have? What do others say? What do you think?

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The purpose of this critical essay is to demonstrate that baseball has been displaced as America’s favorite sport in favor of more high intensity sports.

STATEMENT OF THESIS: Baseball has long been considered America’s pastime, but in recent decades due to the game duration and scoring structure, baseball has receded into the background while more intense sports, such as basketball and ice hockey, have come to captivate contemporary fans.

Write out thesis statements for your topic according to these assertions:

1. Assertion of opinion:
2. Assertion of policy:
3. Assertion of evaluation:
4. Assertion of cause:

Write your thesis statement here:

The most important question to answer: Is your thesis arguable, clear, and appropriately qualified? Please explain how so.
Writing Topic Sentences

A **topic sentence** (also known as a **focus sentence**) encapsulates or organises an entire **paragraph**, and you should be careful to include one in most of your major paragraphs. Although topic sentences may appear anywhere in a paragraph, in academic essays they often appear at the beginning.

It might be helpful to think of a topic sentence as working in two directions simultaneously. It relates the paragraph to the essay's **thesis**, and thereby acts as a signpost for the argument of the paper as a whole, but it also defines the scope of the paragraph itself. For example, consider the following topic sentence:

> Many fast-food chains make their profits from adding a special ingredient called "forget sauce" to their foods.

If this **sentence** controls the paragraph that follows, then all sentences in the paragraph must relate in some way to fast food, profit, and "forget sauce":

> Made largely from edible oil products, this condiment is never listed on the menu.

This sentence fits in with the topic sentence because it is a description of the composition of "forget sauce."

> In addition, this well-kept industry secret is the reason why ingredients are never listed on the packaging of victuals sold by these restaurants.

The transitional phrase "In addition" relates the composition of "forget sauce" to secret fast-food industry practices.

> "Forget sauce" has a chemical property which causes temporary amnesia in consumers.

Now the paragraph moves on to the short-term effect on consumers:

> After spending too much money on barely edible food bereft of any nutritional value, most consumers swear they will never repeat such a disagreeable experience.

This sentence describes its longer-term effects:

> Within a short period, however, the chemical in "forget sauce" takes effect, and they can be depended upon to return and spend, older but no wiser.

Finally, I finish the paragraph by "proving" the claim contained in the topic sentence, that many fast-food chains make their profits from adding a special ingredient called "forget sauce" to their foods.
Analyzing a Topic Sentence

Topic sentences often act like tiny thesis statements. Like a thesis statement, a topic sentence makes a claim of some sort. As the thesis statement is the unifying force in the essay, so the topic sentence must be the unifying force in the paragraph. Further, as is the case with the thesis statement, when the topic sentence makes a claim, the paragraph which follows must expand, describe, or prove it in some way. Topic sentences make a point and give reasons or examples to support it.

Consider the last paragraph about topic sentences, beginning with the topic sentence itself:

Topic sentences often act like tiny thesis statements.

This is my claim, or the point I will prove in the following paragraph. All the sentences that follow this topic sentence must relate to it in some way.

Like a thesis statement, a topic sentence makes a claim of some sort. As the thesis statement is the unifying force in the essay, so the topic sentence must be the unifying force in the paragraph.

These two sentences show how the reader can compare thesis statements and topic sentences: they both make a claim and they both provide a focus for the writing which follows.

Further, as is the case with the thesis statement, when the topic sentence makes a claim, the paragraph which follows must expand, describe, or prove it in some way.

Using the transitional word "further" to relate this sentence to those preceding it, I expand on my topic sentence by suggesting ways a topic sentence is related to the sentences that follow it.

Topic sentences make a point and give reasons or examples to support it.

Finally, I wrap up the paragraph by stating exactly how topic sentences act rather like tiny thesis statements.

Written by Dorothy Turner
Teaching Thinking Through Teaching Revision

Composition research confirms that most students do not revise their essays, as the term revision is understood by expert writers. Of course, students think they are revising, but usually they are merely editing—checking spelling, making word substitutions, tinkering with sentences, deciding on punctuation. (Classic early studies of the revising behavior of novices versus experts include Faigley and Witte, 1981; Sommers, 1980; Flower, 1979; and Beach, 1976. Recent works on teaching revision include Booth, Colomb, and Williams, 2008; Harris, 2006; and Gopen, 2004.)

What our students need to understand is that for expert writers the actual act of writing causes further discovery, development, and modification of ideas. If one examines the evolving drafts of an expert writer, one sees the messy, recursive process of thinking itself as new ideas emerge during the drafting process. Expert writers do extensive rewriting; the final products often being substantially different from the first drafts. (To encourage this kind of global revision, I often tell students that a "C" paper is an "A" paper turned in too soon.)

The foregoing description differs from an older positivist model of the writing process that many of us of a certain age were taught in school. The old model looked like this:

A Positivist Model of the Writing Process

1. Choose a topic.
2. Narrow it.
3. Write a thesis.
4. Make an outline.
5. Write a draft.
6. Revise.
7. Edit.

This description presupposes what Elbow (1973) calls the "think, then write" model of composing in which writers discover, clarify, and organize their ideas before they start to write. But it seriously misrepresents the way most academic writers actually compose. For example, few scholars report starting an article by choosing a topic and then narrowing it. Rather, academic writers report being gradually drawn into a conversation about a question that does not yet seem resolved. The writer-to-be finds this conversation somehow unsatisfactory; something is missing, wrongheaded,
unexplained, or otherwise puzzling. Similarly, having focused on a problem, only rarely does a skilled academic writer write a thesis statement and outline before embarking on extensive exploration, conversation, correspondence with colleagues, and, even on some occasions, writing one or more drafts. A thesis statement often marks a moment of discovery and clarification— an "aha!" experience ("So this is my point! There is my argument in a nutshell!") rather than a formalized planning device at the very start of the process.

Presenting students with this problem-driven model of the writing process has a distinct advantage for teachers. It allows them to link the teaching of writing to their own interests in teaching modes of inquiry and discovery in their disciplines. Their goal is to get students personally engaged with the kinds of questions that propel writers through the writing process. Thus, the writing process itself becomes a powerful means of active learning in the discipline.

Why Don't Students Revise?

One of our major goals is to teach thinking through revision. We need to understand more clearly why students do not revise. Our first tendency may be to blame students' lack of motivation or their ineffective time management. They do not revise because they are not interested in their work or do not care about it or simply put off getting started until the night before a paper is due. But other explanations should also be considered.

For example, one hypothesis, influenced by Piagetian theory, argues that revision requires the ability to "decenter" (Kroll, 1978; Bradford, 1586)—that is, to think like a reader instead of a writer. One of Piaget's observations is that persons identified as concrete operational reasoners have difficulty shifting perspectives. It is hard for them, for example, to see themselves as someone else. They may have trouble imagining the view from the perspective of a lecturer standing in front of a class. By analogy, novice writers may have difficulty imagining their drafts from a reader's perspective. If a passage seems clear to the writer, he or she believes that it is immediately clear to the reader also. Novice writers may simply not recognize the reader's confusion and consequently not recognize the need to fill in gaps, to link new information to old information, or to arrange material in the order needed by readers.

Related theories emphasize students' lack of familiarity with academic genres or with the complexity of addressing rhetorical problems (purpose, audience, genre) as well as subject matter problems. What drives revision for mature writers is their awareness of the complex relationships among a piece of writing's parts—how its argument must accommodate opposing views, for example, while also contributing something new to the conversation. Thus, mature writers need multiple drafts because, in the face of many different goals and rhetorical constraints, they can concentrate on only one or two problems at a time.

Another contributing factor may be the increasingly common strategy of composing and revising entirely on computer screens without paper drafts. When word processing first came into vogue, several researchers (Derleth, 1986, Horovitz, 1987) noted that although word processing facilitates sentence-level revision as well as some larger-scale revisions such as additions, deletions, and block moves of text, it may actually discourage major recontextualizing of a text—the kind of global revision that leads to substantial dismantling and rewriting. By revising from the screen rather than from a hard copy, writers see only narrow windows of their text rather than the whole. Global revision often requires the writer to revisit earlier passages, to compare, for example, a topic sentence on page 3 with what was forecast on page 2. Such a bird's-eye overview of a text is easier with hard copy than on screen, where scrolling backward is time-consuming.

Whatever the cause of students' failure to revise, teachers need to create an academic environment that encourages revision. The importance of revision has been highlighted by the NCSSE/WPA research on writing assignments that contribute to deep learning (Anderson, Aron, Canvish, and Palmer, 2009). This research identifies the presence of "interactive elements" in an assignment as the first of three criteria for best practices.

These interactive elements include building into the assignment opportunities for in-class brainstorming, peer review, teacher feedback on drafts, or visits to a writing center. (See Chapter Six for further discussion of the NCSSE/WPA research.)

Fifteen Suggestions for Encouraging Revision

In the spirit of this research, I offer fifteen suggestions for promoting revision by building interactive elements into an assignment or a course.

1. Prepares a problem-driven model of the writing process. Instead of asking students to choose "topics" and narrow them, encourage students to pose questions or problems and explore them. Show how inquiry and writing are related.

2. Gite problem-focused writing assignments. Students are most apt to revise when their essays must be responsive to genuine problems. See Chapter Six for advice on creating writing assignments that guide students toward a problem-theory structure.
3. Create active learning tasks that help students become users and explorers of questions. Students need to be asked by questions and to appreciate how the urge to write grows out of the writer’s desire to say something new about a question or problem. Through classroom activities that let students explore their own questions to questions, students rehearse the thinking strategies that underlie revision. Chapters Eight through Thirteen focus on strategies for active learning.

4. Incorporate two-staged exploratory writing into your course. Chapter Seven suggests numerous ways to incorporate exploratory writing into a course. Exploratory writing gives students the space, incentives, and tools for more elaborated and complex thinking.

5. Build talk time and writing center conferences into the writing process. Student writers need to talk about their ideas with others by discussing with classmates, friends, or writing center consultants/taffers. Writers need to have some ideas off a list of other ideas, to test arguments, to see how audiences react, and to get feedback on drafts. In this regard, consider having students talk about their ideas in small groups before they write their first drafts. On many campuses, the writing center director can arrange for writing center consultants/taffers to conduct tutorial brainstorming or drill workshops in class. Also encourage one-on-one writing center consultations. One of the most important services offered by writing centers is the opportunity for students to talk through their ideas in the early stages of drafting.

6. Interact in the writing process by having students submit something to you. Take advantage of the simultaneous nature of thesis-based writing by having students submit to you their problem proposals, thesis statements, outlining statements, or self-writing assignments. Use these brief pieces of writing to identify persons who need extra help. Much of this work can be done online through electronic bulletin boards or other courseware. See Chapter Fifteen for further details.

7. Build process requirements into the assignment, including due dates for drafts. If students are going to stay up all night to finish a paper in due time, that will be all right for a mandatory rough draft rather than for a finished product.

8. Develop strategies for your review of drafts, either in class or out of class. After students have completed a rough draft, we in advance of the final due date, have students exchange drafts and serve as “readers” for each other. See Chapter Fifteen for advice on conducting peer reviews.

9. Build writing conferences, especially for students who are having difficulty with the assignment. Traditionally, teachers in American universities spend more time writing comments on finished products than on holding conferences, earlier in the writing process. As a guideline, time spent “correcting” finished products is not as valuable as time spent in conference with students at the rough draft stage. See Chapter Fifteen for suggestions.

10. Require students to submit all drafts, titles, and timelines along with final drafts. Have students staple their final copies on top of draft material arranged chronologically like geological strata. Notice will you have evidence of your students’ writing process, but you will also set up a powerful defense against plagiarism.

11. Allow continued or make revision-oriented comments on typed next-to-final drafts. Many students are motivated toward revision by the hope of an improved grade. If students have an opportunity to revise an essay after you have made your comments, you will strike a major blow for writing as a process. See Chapters Five, Fifteen, and Seventeen for advice on writing marginal and end comments that encourage revision rather than cosmetic editing.

12. Bring in examples of your own work in progress to show students what goes through the writing process yourself. Students must know that their teacher also struggles with writing. The more you can show students your own difficulties as a writer, the more they can improve their own self-images.

13. Give advice on mechanics of revising. If students compose entirely online, explain the advantages of revising on a double-spaced hard copy rather than on the screen. This strategy leaves plenty of room on the page for cutting out and revising while making it easier to look back at earlier pages for inserting large-scale mapping statements, subheadings, and other structural cues.

14. Don’t overemphasize essay exams. Symbolically, essay exams convey the message that writing is a transcription of already clear ideas rather than a means of discovering and making meaning. They suggest that revision is not important and that good writing produce acceptable finished copy in one draft. Although essay exams obviously have an important place in liberal education, they should not substitute for writing that goes through multiple drafts. See Chapter Twelve for further discussion of essay exams.

15. Hold to high standards for finished products. Teachers are so used to seeing early drafts as final copy that they often forget how good a globally revised essay can be when teachers demand excellence. Students do not see much point in revision if they can earn A’s or B’s for their quickly edited first drafts.
Conclusion: The Implications of Writing as a Means of Thinking in the Undergraduate Curriculum

As this chapter has tried to show, teaching thesis-based analytical and argumentative writing means teaching the thinking processes that underlie academic inquiry. To use writing as a means of thinking, teachers need to make the design of writing assignments a significant part of course preparation and to adopt teaching strategies that give students repeated, active practice at exploring disciplinary questions and problems. Additionally, it is important to emphasize inquiry, question asking, and cognitive dissonance in courses and, whenever possible, to show that scholars in a discipline often disagree about answers to key questions. By teaching a problem-driven model of the writing process, teachers send a message to the Skylers of the world that good writing is not a pretty package for disguising ignorance. Rather it is a way of discovering, making, and communicating meanings that are significant, interesting, and challenging.
Revising with comments

Be specific

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMENT

When readers say that you need to “be specific,” the comment often signals that you could strengthen your writing with additional details.

In this body paragraph, a student responds to an assignment that asked him to interview a group of international students and describe the challenges of studying in the United States.

There are many cultural differences between the United States and Italy. Italian citizens do not share many of the same attitudes or values as American citizens. Such differences make it hard for some Italian students to feel comfortable coming to the United States for extended periods of time, even for an academic year.

The student presents a claim but doesn’t include specific examples or evidence to support the claim. To revise, the student might focus on one specific example of cultural differences between the United States and Italy. The student might then ask: What vivid details illustrate this cultural difference? The answer to that question will provide specific evidence to inform and persuade readers.

SIMILAR COMMENTS: need examples • too general • evidence?

STRATEGIES FOR REVISIGN WHEN YOUR WRITING NEEDS TO BE MORE SPECIFIC

1. Reread your topic sentence to understand the focus of the paragraph.
2. Ask questions. Does the paragraph contain claims that need support? What does the paragraph promise? Have you provided evidence — specific examples, vivid details and illustrations, statistics and facts — to help readers understand your ideas and find them persuasive?
3. Interpret your evidence. Remember that details and examples don’t speak for themselves. You’ll need to show readers how your evidence supports your claims.

More help with using specific evidence: 6e
HIGHER/LOWER
ORDER
CONCERNS
Chapter Six

What Tutoring Is
Models and Strategies

This chapter discusses responding to a writer's work in ways that address higher order concerns (HOCs), lower order concerns (LOCs), and the piece as a whole. The HOC and LOC sections model specific tutorials, while the section about addressing the piece as a whole presents feedback techniques and strategies.

Higher Order Concerns

Higher order concerns (HOCs), which are central to the meaning and communication of the piece, are matters of thesis and focus, development, structure and organization, and voice. These areas are important in the tutorial because they are central to the piece of writing. It makes sense for tutors and writers to begin with HOCs because improvements in these areas can dramatically change a piece. Even if writers may want to talk about other issues, tutors can honor the writer's desires and still move in the direction of these most important HOCs.

Thesis/Focus Tutorial

With sixty years of teaching and consulting experience between us, we have found certain problems to be common among English 101 writers. One of the most common is thesis/focus. (Another is development, discussed in the next section). Having a clear thesis and a precise focus is essential to good writing and helps the writer see what is essential to include. Too often, writers, especially in early drafts, write down lots of information without considering how it is related to what they want to say. Other times, writers stick to only what is directly related to what they want to say, but what they want to say is too broad and panoramic in conception. It is crucial that tutors be ready and able to work with writers on their thesis or focus. Whether the piece is an essay for English 101 or a seventh-grade history report, thesis/focus should be the first thing on the tutor's agenda. Tutors can use many strategies and questions to help writers clarify their thesis and sharpen their focus.

Tutor Questions

• What's the central issue of your piece?
• What's the one dominant impression you want your piece to make?
• When the reader is finished reading, what do you want him to walk away with?
• If your roommate, colleague, or sibling walked up to you and asked what you were writing about, what would you say?

Strategies

• One-sentence summary. One strategy that is both easy and useful is Elbow's (1973) "one-sentence summary." Ask the writer to make a one-sentence summary of the piece. Usually one of two things happens. If the writer has difficulty writing the summary, intervene to discuss the reasons for the difficulty. If he writes the summary easily, relying on what is in his head or what he thinks the piece is about, compare the summary directly to the actual paper, showing where each says things that are not in the other. Summarizing requires conceptualization and the concomitant distinguishing of major issues and minor ideas, essential to getting on a clear thesis or precise focus.

• Nutshelling and teaching. Linda Flower's (1981) "nutshelling and teaching" activity also requires the writer to make decisions about major issues and minor ideas. Ask the writer to orally explain the essence of the piece while you take notes. Then, working from your notes, orally express that essence back to her. Discuss and negotiate the expression of the essence until the writer agrees that you have captured the essence, then ask her to role-play being a teacher who is trying to teach the essence to an audience that is like the writer's audience for the piece. This process of explaining, negotiating, and teaching requires the writer to sort through the major and minor levels of the piece.
• Talk aloud. Muriel Harris (1996) describes another oral exercise that can be used to help the writer see problems with a thesis or focus. (Oral exercises are particularly helpful with most writers since most people have far more oral language experience than written language experience.) Read the writer's paper silently, interrupting your reading to talk aloud about what you're seeing in the paper. Have the writer take notes. This process lets the writer see how the paper drifts from focus to focus. When you've finished reading, ask, "Okay, so what is the paper about?" In the process of answering, the writer notes the lack of precise focus. She not only decides what the focus of the paper is (probably by establishing a hierarchy to the points the focus drifts among), but often finds that this paper contains the seed for one or more future papers because some of the points deserve to be major issues in their own paper. Working on thesis/focus can sometimes be a heuristic for discovering future paper topics.

• Make a promise. Harris also describes a "promise" strategy. Explain that a thesis or focus is like a promise made to the reader. Ask the writer to complete this statement: "I promise that I will talk about _______ in this (or these) ways," listing the major ideas used in the draft and evaluating how well each helps the piece fulfill the promise. As in the "talk aloud" exercise, the writer has the opportunity to create an appropriate hierarchy for the ideas and their relationship to the central issue, and oral language is used to mediate both the revision of the current draft and, ultimately, the student's growth in writing. As with all the strategies described, it's not the procedure itself that powers the tutoring session, but rather the conversational interaction in which the strategy is set. The questions and comments the tutor makes are at the heart of the success of the tutoring session.

• Create a headline or bumper sticker. Ask the writer to give her piece a headline or to make up a bumper sticker based on the piece. Either of these requires that the writer find the one thing that is central to the piece and say something about it. A title can just be a subject ("Causes of the Civil War"), but a headline or bumper stickers has a subject and says something about it ("Deep Creek Lake Rated Best Vacation Spot"); "________ Is Not a Family Value"). Identifying the subject helps the writer create the hierarchy necessary to nail down the focus by locating the single most essential issue: saying something about the subject lets her begin to understand what ideas might be included in the piece because they fit what she wants to say.

Example of Thesis/Focus Tutorial. Here's an example of how the thesis/focus strategies might work. A student wrote about a lacquered wooden box that her grandfather had made for her grandmother. The piece opened with a detailed description of the box, talked about how her grandfather had made it, then described how much her grandmother and grandfather were in love. The piece finished with how her grandmother uses the box today.

The tutor drew her out to find which of the four issues she really wanted to foreground. She said that she wanted to show the box to the others in class; so, the opening description was the key part and the rest was added just to "fill it out." Once the tutor helped her clarify that showing the box was important, he moved on to development strategies to help the student develop her description of the box so that she would not feel the need to fill the piece out with unrelated information. If the student had said that she wanted two or more of the four main ideas as her focus, the tutor could work with her on creating first an introduction that would show how the ideas went together, then transitions to hold them together.

Effective tutorials on thesis/focus are a combination of using a strategy and conversing about the results of that strategy. The headline or bumper sticker strategy could be used for that same lacquer box paper. If the student wanted to show the box to the class, her headline might be "Beautiful Lacquer Box Created by Pittsburgh Man," or her bumper sticker might be "Lacquer Boxes Don't Lack Anything." Each of these suggests that the appearance of the box is the central issue, so the tutor could ask why the other three ideas were there. But if the headline was "Pittsburgh Man Makes Beautiful Lacquer Boxes," the part of the piece about how her grandfather made the box might be the central idea. Or if her bumper sticker said "Love Is a Lacquer Box," the student may see her grandparents' love as central.

Whatever the writer's central ideas, these strategies are a way to start discussing the necessity of clarifying the thesis/focus.

Development Tutorial

Development is a crucial feature of any piece of writing. Writers gain insight into what points to develop and how to develop them when they work on thesis/focus, and they gain even further insight when they work on organization/structure (discussed below). But often a piece has development as a primary problem: Its thesis is clear and its structure is reasonable, but it just doesn't say enough. First drafts often suffer from underdevelopment because the writer is laying out what he wants to say, scanning the topography of his ideas and sketching a map. Development problems also arise because many
writers rely on their oral language experience as a first guide for writing, not realizing that writing must be more explicit and specific than speech because it has none of the tone of voice or contextual features of speech.

Whether students are laying out ideas in a cursory fashion or writing like speech, tutors will see many drafts that need to be developed. Tutors can use many strategies and questions to help writers find and express ideas to fill out underdeveloped papers and get the writer to start reflecting on development problems.

**Tutor Questions**
- Tell me more.
- Point to places where you think a reader might want you to tell more.
- If you read this aloud to a few readers, what do you think their first questions would be about?
- If black were the color of the parts with lots of information, gray the color of those with less information, and white those with even less information, what color would this part of the piece be?

**Strategies**
- **Focused free writing.** We train tutors to use an adaptation of Elbow's (1973) idea of free writing that we call "focused free writing." Ask the writer to focus on a portion of the draft that needs development, writing anything and everything he can remember—words, phrases, full sentences—not worrying about spelling or punctuation, just writing. If a writer has written about a football game and has said nothing about the fans in the stands, he may decide that details about them would add color and excitement to the description of the game. Ask the writer to free write for about five minutes on everything he can remember about the fans in the stands. Decide together where the new information might fit, then have the writer shape it into coherent sentences and insert it into the draft.
- **Oral composing.** Oral composing can help the writer develop a draft or part of a draft. Instruct the writer, "Tell—off the top of your head—what you think you might write. Speak as if you were talking to yourself." Take notes while the writer speaks. Like focused free writing, this exercise helps the writer shape relevant ideas, phrases, and sentences that can be incorporated into the draft where development is thin. If the paper needs further development after oral composing, do a second round of oral composing.

* Mapping. Emily Meyer and Louise Smith (1987) suggest using mapping to help writers develop a portion of the piece or the piece as a whole. You can do the mapping as you listen to the writer talk about her topic, or the writer can do it herself as a way of laying out the lay of the land of her ideas and issues. Mapping isn't just list making. It is a graphic and visual technique that forces the writer to decide which of the ideas in the piece are important and how they are related to each other. As the writer or tutor adds a word or phrase to the developing graphic, the relationship of that word or phrase to all other entries must be considered. Lines are used to connect entries with each other, suggesting their relationships. Graphic devices such as thick, dotted, or double lines; circles and rectangles; arrows and shading or colors can be added to say more about the relationships. Drawing a map can lead the writer to making real discoveries about the topic, including that the issues and ideas she originally thought important aren't any longer and may be deleted. Once all the entries and relationships have been stirred and restirred, you may want to redraw the map to make it more sensible. We discourage redrawing graphically (unless the mapping is being done using software that makes it easy), because clarity can be achieved by doing the redrawing in writing. Throughout the process, keep the door to exploration and discovery open by avoiding preconceived or canned visualizations and premature closure or editing.

* Matrices. Matrices are common devices in research and data analysis. For tutoring sessions, matrices are most often two-dimensional, with one axis listing important issues or ideas, the other listing what is known about them. One writing center used matrix "skeletons" that a tutor or writer could grab during a tutoring session and use to create a matrix specific to the piece of writing being discussed. You can create a matrix while the writer talks, or the writer can create one as a way to think about the topic: Matrices are powerful analytic tools since they require that major categories of issues be created and related. They are probably best to use when the writer knows a lot about the topic, so much so that his problem may be displaying all his knowledge at any given moment. Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman (1984), discussing matrices as research data analysis tools, suggest three matrices—that are useful in getting a handle on understanding phenomena: role matrices, which lay out the roles people play along one axis; time matrices, which use a chronology style to show beginning, middle, and end or past, present, and future; and effect matrices, which display the major effects of a phenomenon. The three types can be combined (roles over time, effects by roles, etc.). Use matrices with caution: Making a good one requires that the writer
know a lot about the topic. If he doesn't, some of the other development strategies may be more useful and productive.

* Playing your thoughts: Linda Flower and John Hayes' (1977) describe a number of strategies for generating ideas that they call "playing your thoughts." They include in this category a traditional favorite among creative thinkers—brainstorming, the oral and non-judgmental sharing of ideas, stimulated by the tutor's and writer's associative play off each other's ideas as they emerge. They also include staging a scenario (role-playing) as a way to develop ideas, especially narratives or descriptions of people's interactions. In role-playing, writer and tutor take on roles and invent dialogue as a way to explore words, gestures, facial expressions, and positions likely to be used by people in the writer's piece. Flower and Hayes also describe playing out an analogy ("This topic is like X"), in which writer and tutor extend the topic by working out one or more analogies to things the writer already knows well ("increasing sales is like playing the infield"). Flower and Hayes finish by reminding tutors that sometimes pieces are best developed by resting, getting away from the topic and doing something else.

Example of a Development Tutorial: A student came to the writing center with a paper about Raystown Lake, a large recreational lake in central Pennsylvania. The paper was short (less than a page), so the tutor was on the alert for development possibilities. The piece opened with a three-line description of the lake, then covered boating, swimming, fishing, hiking, bicycling, and camping. Only one of the topics received more than two sentences: Fishing stretched to five. The tutor noticed the imbalance and asked, "When you go to Raystown, what do you spend most of your time doing?" She received the expected answer: "Fishing, suppose." The tutor thought that the problem with the piece was not with development but with thesis/focus—the writer wanted to write about fishing at Raystown but felt obligated to mention all the other activities too. But when the tutor said, "If you spend most of your time fishing, why don't you write about that?" the answer was quick and firm: "Because I want to talk about all the things you can do there." The tutor saw that the problem was with development after all—the writer really did want to describe all the activities a visitor could do.

The tutor decided to use oral composing to develop the thinnest elements. After talking with the writer, "I've never been there. Why don't you tell me about boating, swimming, and all those things. I'll take notes in case we can use any of this stuff in the paper." After an almost twelve-minute monologue by the writer, the tutor had almost one and a half pages of notes about all the activities. The student noticed this and said, "Whoa, your notes are longer than my paper. I guess I better make it longer." The tutor said, "Good idea. You can use all the stuff in these notes."

What if the tutor had used a different strategy? She probably chose the best one in oral composing. She could have had the student do focused free writing to develop each idea in turn, but doing focused free writing seven times in a row would have been burdensome. Mapping seems like a possibility, but it is best applied to situations where the tutor wants the writer to discover the relationships between major ideas and develop material about each. In this piece all the ideas are parallel—they are all activities at Raystown. A matrix would be necessary because careful analysis is not the issue, and a matrix with just one dimension turns out to be more like a list than a matrix. Brainstorming would have generated material but no written record for the writer to use during revision. Role-playing is best for stories that are focused on human interaction. Completing the analogy might have yielded some insight but would be burdensome to do seven times. Resting is probably what the writer had done too much of already. This successful tutoring session was the result of the tutor's choosing the most appropriate strategy.

Structure/Organization Tutorial

Tutors will frequently work with a writer whose draft has a clear thesis/focus, is well developed, and has appropriate voice/tone, but that could be improved, sometimes dramatically, by restructuring or reorganizing. All the bricks are there; now they need to be made into a fireplace. Structure and organization problems often exist because the writer simply has not thought about the topic enough to see the connections. Sometimes, the ideas aren't connected explicitly enough to the thesis/focus; or the logic of the connections between major subparts is fuzzy; or the internal structure/organization of the subparts or paragraphs lacks explicitness or logic. Structure and organization problems can be dealt with using any of the strategies below.

The overall goal of the tutoring for structure/organization is to have the writer become aware of the problems, so we recommend the tutor use strategies that will reveal the structure/organization separately from the actual language, which the writer has often not been able to see past. Once the structure/organization is more visible, the tutor can begin to question the writer about revising it, noting changes in order or hierarchy, repetitions, and deletions or additions. As Irene Clark (1985) reminds us, the final question for
the tutor is always "why"? why did the writer choose this struc-
ture/organization. Structure and organization don't just happen as
we write, certainly not in later drafts; they are a conscious and
adaptable feature of written pieces that the writer can manipulate
for her purposes.

**Tutor Questions**
- Tell me how you tied each part/subpart to the thesis/focus.
- What do you think a reader would see as the major parts of your
  piece?
- Do you think the piece could be significantly improved by reordering
  the major parts or the subparts of a specific section?
- Do you think the piece could be improved by making sure that the
divisions between the parts are more noticeable to the reader?

**Strategies,**
- **Just talk about it.** Often drafts that seem poorly organized are rea-
  rally just preliminary; the writer hasn't reflected carefully about the
  thesis/focus. Holding a simple conversation that asks for a statement of the
  thesis and the major issues within it may be enough to have the
  writer see the inadequacy of an early draft. Frequently, writers also
  refine their thesis/focus and develop their draft with issues that were
  missed in the work that lead to the present draft. What appear as
  structure/organization problems often disappear the first time the
  writer thinks through a piece fully.
- **Skeleton.** This strategy is a cousin to outlining, but we call it "mak-
  ing a skeleton" because so many students have bad associations with
  outlining, which was over-stressed in English classes for years. The
  numbering of levels that is part of traditional outlining is discarded so
  that the result is a vertical, two-level list that makes the parts of the
  piece visible in a way that can be the basis of discussion. To make a
  skeleton, draw up, or have the writer draw up, a vertical list of the
  major ideas, including under each its minor supporting ideas. One of
  the advantages of the skeleton is that it can be sketched quickly and
  casually, so it need not overpower the rest of the tutorial.
- **Tree diagram.** Beverly Clark (1985) and others recommend creat-
  ing a tree diagram to reveal the structure/organization of a piece. A
tree is a kind of visual outline that combines the levels of a skeleton
  with the tangibility of mapping, producing a vertical diagram. Ask the
  writer to write the thesis/focus at the top center of a sheet of paper
  held sideways. One level below, the writer records the major issues or
  ideas of the piece, connecting each to the statement of thesis/focus
  with a line. The writer adds a third level of minor and supporting ideas
  below the row of major ideas, drawing a line to connect each minor
  idea to the major idea it supports. Finally, the writer clusters the
  explanatory ideas for each of the minor supporting ideas on a fourth
  level and connects them to their related idea. The graphic and visual
  nature of the tree diagram makes it more acceptable to students who
  are burned out on outlining.
- **Coloring.** Irene Clark (1985) recommends coloring sentences that
  are related to the same major ideas and should, therefore, ultimately
  be grouped together. Using a supply of colored pens or highlighters, ask
  the writer to underline or highlight each sentence that contains ideas
  related to the different minor ideas. Then ask for a revision that groups
  the colors into sections. Use further conversation to deal with what the
  order or hierarchy among the different sections should be.
- **Outlining.** Traditional outlining has at least two advantages for
  tutors. First, almost everyone knows how to do it, so no time need be
  spent on teaching the strategy itself. Second, the numbering and let-
ering typical of outlining allow for a kind of shorthand to be used
  when discussing a piece: "Are 2c and 3b really the same thing?"
  "What about an order like 2, 4, 1, 3?" "Should 2 be under 1, not its
  equal?"
- **Transitions.** Upon closer examination, you may find that a piece
  that seems disorganized is really suffering from implied or idiosyn-
  cratic transitions between major ideas and the thesis/focus; between
  the minor ideas and their related major idea; or both. First ask the
  writer to use one of the strategies for making the structure/organiza-
  tion more visible. Then ask how and why the various major parts are
  connected, in each case calling for an explicit word or phrase to act as
  a transition. We supply our tutors with a short list of transitions (avail-
  able in most writing handbooks) that the writer can choose from at
  each idea boundary.

**Example of a Structure/Organization Tutorial.** In a tutorial
between a trained peer tutor (a college senior) and a freshman that
took place at a university writing center, the writer brought in a
draft of a summary of a magazine article about a small religious book
publishing company. The writer expected to get quick proofreading
advice from the tutor. But after the tutor listened to the author read
the summary aloud, he immediately recognized that the draft lacked
coherence. The facts from the original magazine article were there,
apparently reproduced simply and dryly in the order in which they
had appeared, so that the writer's summary had no sense of priori-
Strategies that can bring writers to a greater awareness of the voice in their piece. When they sense that voice/tone is the area most in need of improvement, the tutors can then quickly teach the nature of voice in writing using the two views and one of the four strategies to help the writer see what voice is dominant in the piece. The tutor then discusses the writer's audience and purpose for the piece.

**Tutor Questions**
- Is the voice you hear in the piece the one you expect to hear, given the audience and purpose of your piece?
- What kind of clothes is the person you created wearing, and do they seem appropriate?
- Is the piece the right mix of tough, sweet, and stuffy; formal, consultative, and casual?

**Strategies**
- **Voice:** tough, sweet, and stuffy. The first of the two ways we teach tutors to explain voice in writing uses Walker Gibson's (1966) studies of American prose style. He categorizes American prose as being a mixture of just three different types of styles—tough, sweet, and stuffy.

  **Tough** style is the voice of a hard person who has been around, who is worldly-wise and experienced—a person like Hemingway, Bogart, or certain sports writers. The language is simple and direct. Strong feelings are concealed behind a manner that is curt, quick, and to the point.

  **Sweet** style is the style of advertising. The persona speaks directly and informally to the reader as a particular person, often addressing the reader as "you." The intention is to secure intimacy, and the language is ingeniously contrived—sometimes to the point of stylized exaggeration—to build a bridge of warmth and closeness with the reader (for example, in Toyota's "I love what you do for me!").

  **Stuffy** style is the language of bureaucracy, officialdom, and some professions, often written in the voice of the organization or group. It is inflated and refuses to assume a personal connection. Legislation, contracts, research proposals, and some scholarly journals are written in stuffy style.

These three—tough, sweet, and stuffy—are mixed to form the voice of contemporary American prose. Sometimes one is used exclusively or predominates, but more often all are present to varying degrees.
• Voice: formal, consultative, and casual. The second view of voice we teach tutors is Martin Joos’ (1961) ideas about levels of formality in modern English. Joos lays out a five-part spectrum of levels. Tutors rarely encounter the levels at the two extremes—frozen language, the language of law and contracts; and intimate language, the language of love letters. We concentrate on the center three: formal, consultative, and casual.

**Formal** voice is the voice of a research report in a professional journal. Its purpose is to inform a distant audience about technical or specialized information.

**Consultative** voice is the level at which the work of the world gets done. Its purpose is to inform, but it distances the reader less than formal voice does, perhaps even helping the reader understand the general background of an issue. Consultative voice is the voice of the policy statement and the office memo.

**Casual** voice is the level for friends and insiders. It is the ‘voice of a personal letter or an e-mail to an office buddy. It assumes that the writer and reader share much in the way of knowledge and experience.

Applying Joos’ view lets tutors both see and describe the mixtures of voice that make up the level of formality in a specific piece. A mixture of two or even three levels is common.

**Read aloud.** Though they may not have experience with voice in writing, writers typically have an experienced—even sophisticated—ear for voice in speech. To help the writer “hear” the voice in a piece, ask her to read aloud at regular speaking volume. Then ask her to describe the voice heard and evaluate its appropriateness to the given audience and purpose. Some writers aren’t comfortable reading aloud; if that seems to be the case with your writer, offer to read aloud yourself.

**Audience and/or purpose analysis.** To begin to deal indirectly with issue of voice, first deal with audience and purpose to get a sense of what voice would be appropriate for the piece. Many rhetoric handbooks describe sophisticated analysis schemes. Audience can be analyzed for such concerns as values, power relationship, personal closeness to the writer, current knowledge of the topic, and expectations for pieces like the present one. Purpose can be analyzed for such traditional rhetorical concerns as persuasion, explanation, reaction, justification, and personal connection. Once the writer understands the piece’s audience and purpose, he can often describe what voice would be appropriate.

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**Metaphors and analogies.** Ask the writer for metaphors or analogies for the voice or level of formality she thinks appropriate to the piece’s audience and purpose. Use questions like these:

- If someone were speaking in this voice, how would they dress?
- What music would they listen to?
- What would their facial expression be like?
- What would they order for dinner?
- What car would they drive?

Ask the writer to draw a picture or find a photo that depicts the appropriate persona or the present voice in the piece.

**Role-play.** Many of the pieces you’ll work with will have a defined and specific audience. Use role-playing to bring that audience to the foreground. Ask the writer about the audience to help him clarify its salient characteristics. Then ask the writer to role-play one member of the potential audience while you role-play another. For example, to role-play how a boss might react to a memo, ask the writer about the boss, then ask him to play the boss while you play a higher-level boss. This kind of role-playing often helps the writer discover the appropriate level of formality.

**Example of voice/tone tutorial.** In one tutorial, a first-year college student said flat out that he wrote a paper to show his English teacher what a good writer he was. He described a weekend at a state park with statements like these:

> It’s a weekend of highly related emotions and values to be contemplated through your retrieval of mediated thought... Given... quite unusual. You seem to mediate and interpret your own intentions.

The tutor asked the student to read the piece aloud in a regular speaking voice. After about four sentences, the student chuckled and the tutor asked why. The student said, “I never write like that. . . . except in English class.” With further discussion, the student reported that this was the type of writing that always got him an 8 in AP English in high-school. The tutor then explained the two styles of voice and asked the student to decide which type of voice he, the writer, seemed best for the piece. The writer chose “tough with some sweet” and “consultative but on the casual side.” Shook his head with a chuckle, and set off to rewrite.

An art history major brought her first paper from the first course
she took her major to a writing center tutor. She was concerned about whether or not "it sounded smart enough... like a major should write." The tutor explained the two theories of voice, and the student decided that the assignment, to analyze a painting, was best done "tough and stuffy about equal" and "consultative with a little formal." She had written sentences like these:

Penetrating from top to bottom, filling the picture to the middle, they [elements of perspective]: create a reverential movement which affects even the placement of mass and color... Contrast of color and recession of space, therefore, create the subject matter and the theme of the painting.

In the discussion that followed, tutor and writer agreed that the piece generally hit the appropriate tough/stuffy and consultative/formal balance. The writer left the tutorial feeling that she had indeed entered the discourse community of art history majors.

Lower Order Concerns

Lower order concerns (LOCs), which are vital to preparing any finished piece, are matters related to surface appearance, correctness, and standard rules of written English. It makes sense for tutors and writers to shift attention to these matters once LOCs have been addressed. Tutors must have a sense of what's important to work on, since it would be a disservice to simply help a writer clean up a handful of errors in a draft that is otherwise devoid of ideas, leaving a paper that is technically correct but lacking in substance.

When you judge that it is time to zero in on LOCs, usually later in the process of writing a piece, look at the sentence structure and mechanics of the draft. Pose these questions and recommend appropriate strategies:

Direct Statement Tutorial

Tutor Question

* Have you used the subject-verb-object (S-V-O) sentence where possible, thus avoiding the wordiness of passive voice and the sentence beginning "there is," "there are," and so on?

Strategy

* Nouns into verbs. Help the writer look for words that are in noun form but could be transformed into verb form. These words often end

in "-ment" or "-tion." By changing "reduction" to "reduce," for example, you can make a statement leaner and more direct.

Sentence Combining Tutorial

Tutor Question

* Are there sentences that can be combined?

Strategies

* Key words. If you notice that a writer has a tendency to string short, choppy sentences together in a way that creates an immature style, help him identify key words in each statement that can be incorporated into slightly longer, fuller sentences.

* Reshuffle. If a writer seems locked into a dominant sentence pattern (for example, sentences frequently begin with a dependent clause), suggest that he reshuffle the sentences. Options for combining sentences, embedding information, and achieving sentence pattern variety include using relative clauses, noun substitutes, subordination, coordination, appositive, participles, prepositional phrases, and absolutes.

* Creative nonfiction. Refer the student to a work of a creative nonfiction writer such as John McPhee, Joan Didion, or Frank McCourt. Virtually any page of such a writer's work will put the student in touch with artfully worded sentences that vary in length and style. In a single page or even a paragraph, McPhee and others conduct a virtual clinic on how to skillfully employ the repertoire of sentence types available.

Wordiness Tutorial

Tutor Question

* Can you eliminate unnecessary words?

Strategies

* Adverbs. It is arbitrary, but rewarding, to recommend that the writer search for and delete all adverbs ("basically," "virtually," "surprisingly," "really"), then later restore the ones that are indispensable to enhancing description.

* Filler. Help the writer weed out the extra words that are typically found in conversation ("you know," "well," "now").

* Duplicates. Help the writer delete doubled words ("each and every," "first and foremost").
What Tutoring Is

- Redundant modifiers. Help the writer drop redundant modifiers ("future plans," "final outcome").
- Redundant categories. Help the writer eliminate redundant categories ("period of time," "large in size," "pink in color").

Cohesion Tutorial

Tutor Question
- Is the movement from sentence to sentence clear?

Strategy
- Establish connections. Help the writer determine if there is a sense of cohesion or connectedness as sentences are spun out one after the other. Look for verbal cues (transitional words) or graphic cues (headings, underlinings that reinforce points being made) that help build bridges and establish ties between the information in one sentence and the information introduced in the next one.

Spelling Tutorial

Tutor Question
- What types of spelling errors did you make?

Strategies
- Reference tools. Urge the writer to use spelling-checker software, which, although fallible, can be helpful and time-saving. Or show the writer how to use a spelling dictionary, which lets a reader locate the proper spelling of a word in seconds.
- Word logs. Recommend that the writer keep a personalized log of her most commonly misspelled words to refer to.
- Simplified rules. Look for common sources of spelling errors (such as diphthongs—"ie" and "ei"), then simplify which spelling rules the writer needs to memorize.
- Pronunciation. Help the writer with spelling errors that stem from pronunciation by alerting him to differences between his pronunciation and the pronunciation dictated by the standard spelling.

Fragments Tutorial

Tutor Question
- Are sentence boundaries correctly indicated?

Strategies
- Tag questions, yes-no questions, embedding. Teach writers to use the tag questions, yes-no questions, and embedding operations invented by Rei Noguchi (1991) to detect and correct fragments. Here's how each operation would use this sentence from Seymour Hersh's "On the Nuclear Edge," from the March 29, 1993, New Yorker:

Pakistan was rewarded for its support with large amounts of American military and economic aid.

The idea is to show the writer how to test a potentially problematic sentence to determine whether or not it has a subject (a sentence fragment lacks a subject).

Tag question: Pakistan was rewarded for its support by large amounts of American military and economic aid, weren't they? (The pronoun at the end of the tag question refers to the subject of the sentence—or identifies the lack of a subject.)

Yes-no question: Was Pakistan rewarded for its support by large amounts of military and economic aid? (The "helping" verb has been moved; the subject is the first noun to the immediate right of the moved auxiliary verb.)

Embedding: They refused to believe that Pakistan was rewarded for its support by large amounts of military and economic aid. (Use embedding to identify sentences [or fragment errors] by opening the sentence with "They refused to believe the idea that.") Our example would pass this test as a sentence.)

- "To" and "-ing" words. When "to" or an "-ing" word appears at or near the start of a word group, a fragment may result. For example:

Larry walked all over the neighborhood yesterday. Trying to find his dog Bo.

At the expensive restaurant, John used his napkin. To impress his date.

An "-ing" or "to" fragment can often be corrected by attaching the fragment to the sentence that comes before or after it.

Comma Splice and Run-on Tutorial

Tutor Question
- Do some of the sentences seem to be fused or rushing forward?

Strategies
- Pronouns. A comma splice (improperly using a comma to connect sentences) or run-on sentence (fusing two sentences together with no
punctuation to signal the end of one and the beginning of the other often occurs when the second independent clause begins with a pronoun. Teach the writer to look for such instances and change the punctuation to correct them.

Wrong: Mark McGwire is a power hitter, he set the major league record for home runs in one season.
Correct: Mark McGwire is a power hitter. He set the major league record for home runs in one season.

* Transition words. Another leading cause of comma splices and run-ons is when the second independent clause begins with a conjunctive adverb or other transition word.

Wrong: Mark McGwire is a power hitter, however, he had never come close to hitting seventy home runs before.
Correct: Mark McGwire is a power hitter. However, he had never come close to hitting seventy home runs before.

* Misplaced examples. Comma splices and run-ons often occur when the second independent clause explains or gives an example of the information in the first independent clause.

Wrong: Mark McGwire has had many productive baseball seasons, the summer of 1998 was his most spectacular so far.
Correct: Mark McGwire has had many productive baseball seasons. The summer of 1998 was his most spectacular so far.

* Verb Agreement Tutorial

**Tutor Question**

* When your subject says "one," does your verb say "one" too?

**Strategy**

* De Beaugrande's approach. Muriel Harris (1986) summarizes Robert de Beaugrande's approach for helping writers first find the verb in a sentence this way:

1. Insert a "denial word" into a statement (doesn't/don't, didn't/ don't/won't).
2. The "agreeing verb" of the original statement is the one located after the denial word.

Example: Our boss wants to call a meeting.
Our boss doesn't want to call a meeting.
(This is especially helpful for students who wonder whether "want" or "call" may be the verb here.) (127)

**General Proofreading Tutorial**

**Tutor Question**

* Have you tried other "finishing up" strategies?

**Strategies**

* Online assistance. Recommend that the writer consult online writing labs (OWLS) for online writing handbooks or grammar handouts (see the "Electronic Resources" section at the back of the book).

* Line screen. A big challenge in helping writers proofread their own text is making sure they stay on task and don't get sidetracked by reading for content. One way to do this is to have the writer use a line screen, or even just a ruler, to view only one line at a time. This makes reading tough, but improves proofreading.

* Sentence sequence. Tell the writer to read the piece backward, sentence by sentence, to catch spelling errors and omissions. Reading sentences out of sequence will let the writer concentrate on individual words.

* Page sequence. Encourage the writer to read pages out of order. This is another way of taking words and ideas out of their original context, which enables the writer-proofreader to review each page as a discrete unit.

* Cluster. Remind the writer that mistakes tend to cluster; if she finds one typographical error, she should look carefully nearby for others.

* Read aloud. Have the writer read the piece aloud to himself. Hearing his own words often lets a writer catch incongruous word combinations or words or word endings that he has inadvertently omitted.
If black were the color of the parts with lots of information, gray the color of those with less information, and white those with even less information, what color would this part of your piece be?

Strategies
focused free writing
oral composition
mapping
matrices
playing your thoughts

Questions About Structure/Organization
How did you tie each part and subpart to the thesis/focus?
What do you think a reader would see as the major parts of your piece?
Do you think the piece could be significantly improved by reordering the major parts or the subparts in a specific section?
Do you think the piece could be improved by making the divisions between parts more noticeable to the reader?

Strategies
just talk about it
skeleton
tree diagram
coloring
outlining
transitions

Questions About Voice/Tone
Is the voice in the piece the one you expect to hear given the audience and purpose of the piece?
What kind of clothes is the persona you created wearing, and do they seem appropriate?
Is the piece the right mix of tough, sweet, stuffy, formal, consultative, and casual?

Strategies
tough/sweet/stuffy
formal/consultative/casual
read aloud
audience/purpose analysis

metaphors and analogies
role-play

For LOCs

Questions
Have you used the subject-verb-object sentence?
Are there sentences that can be combined?
Can you eliminate unnecessary words?
Is the movement from sentence to sentence clear?
What types of spelling errors did you make?
Are the sentence boundaries correctly marked?
Do some of the sentences seem to be fused or rushing forward?
When your subject says “one,” does your verb say “one,” too?
Does your piece say “today,” “yesterday,” and “tomorrow” consistently throughout?
Have you tried other “finishing up” strategies?

At the end of the tutorial session, if it seems appropriate, recommend self-help materials to the writer and invite her back for another visit soon. If the session took place in a writing center, do the necessary record keeping.
Attending to Grammar

A Brief Introduction

Grammar is more than just a set of rules. It is the ever-evolving structure of our language, a field which merits study, invites analysis, and promises fascination.

Don't believe us? Didn't think you would.

The fact is that grammar can be pretty dull: no one likes rules, and memorizing rules is far worse than applying them. (Remember studying for your driver's test?) However, as I've said, grammar is more than this: it is an understanding of how language works, of how meaning is made, and of how it is broken.

You understand more about grammar than you think you do. Brought up as English speakers, you know when to use articles, for example, or how to construct different tenses, probably without even thinking about it. (Non-native speakers of English may struggle with these matters for years.)

However, when you write, even as a native speaker of English, you will encounter problems and questions that you may not know how to answer. "Who" or "whom?" Comma or no comma? Passive, or active?

To answer these questions, you will want to have a handbook on hand. Handbooks are available at RWIT; tutors are also available to help you find what you need.

Most Commonly Occurring Errors

Would grammar seem more manageable to you if we told you that writers tend to make the same twenty mistakes over and over again? In fact, a study of error by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors shows that twenty different mistakes comprise 91.5 percent of all errors in student texts. If you can control these twenty errors, you will go a long way in creating prose that is correct and clear.

Below is an overview of these errors, listed according to the frequency with which they occur. Look for them in your own prose.

1. Missing comma after introductory phrases.

For example: After the devastation of the siege of Leningrad the Soviets were left with the task of rebuilding their population as well as their city. (A comma should be placed after "Leningrad.")
2. **Vague pronoun reference.**

For example: The boy and his father knew that he was in trouble. (Who is in trouble? The boy? His Father? Some other person?)

3. **Missing comma in compound sentence.**

For example: Wordsworth spent a good deal of time in the Lake District with his sister Dorothy and the two of them were rarely apart. (Comma should be placed before the "and.")

4. **Wrong word.**

This speaks for itself.

5. **No comma in nonrestrictive relative clauses.**

Here you need to distinguish between a *restrictive* relative clause and a *nonrestrictive* relative clause. Consider the sentence, "My brother in the red shirt likes ice cream." If you have TWO brothers, then the information about the shirt is restrictive, in that it is necessary to defining WHICH brother likes ice cream. Restrictive clauses, because they are essential to identifying the noun, use no commas. However, if you have ONE brother, then the information about the shirt is not necessary to identifying your brother. It is NON-RESTRICTIVE and, therefore, requires commas: "My brother, in the red shirt, likes ice cream."

6. **Wrong/missing inflected ends.**

"Inflected ends" refers to a category of grammatical errors that you might know individually by other names - subject-verb agreement, who/whom confusion, and so on. The term "inflected endings" refers to something you already understand: adding a letter or syllable to the end of a word changes its grammatical function in the sentence. For example, adding "ed" to a verb shifts that verb from present to past tense. Adding an "s" to a noun makes that noun plural. A common mistake involving wrong or missing inflected ends is in the usage of who/whom. "Who" is a pronoun with a subjective case; "whom" is a pronoun with an objective case. We say "Who is the speaker of the day?" because "who" in this case refers to the subject of the sentence. But we say, "To whom am I speaking?" because, here, the pronoun is an object of the preposition "to."

7. **Wrong/missing preposition.**

Occasionally prepositions will throw you. Consider, for example which is better: "different from," or "different than?" Though both are used widely, "different from" is considered grammatically correct. The same debate surrounds the words "toward" and "towards." Though both are used, "toward" is preferred in writing. When in doubt, check a handbook.
8. **Comma splice.**

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined only with a comma. For example: "Picasso was profoundly affected by the war in Spain, it led to the painting of great masterpieces like *Guernica.*" A comma splice also occurs when a comma is used to divide a subject from its verb. For example: "The young Picasso felt stifled in art school in Spain, and wanted to leave." (The subject "Picasso" is separated from one of its verbs "wanted." There should be no comma in this sentence, unless you are playing with grammatical correctness for the sake of emphasis - a dangerous sport for unconfident or inexperienced writers.)

9. **Possessive apostrophe error.**

Sometimes apostrophes are incorrectly left out; other times, they are incorrectly put in (her's, their's, etc.)

10. **Tense shift.**

Be careful to stay in a consistent tense. Too often students move from past to present tense without good reason. The reader will find this annoying.

11. **Unnecessary shift in person.**

Don't shift from "I" to "we" or from "one" to "you" unless you have a rationale for doing so.

12. **Sentence fragment.**

Silly things, to be avoided. Unless, like here, you are using them to achieve a certain effect. Remember: sentences traditionally have both subjects and verbs. Don't violate this convention carelessly.

13. **Wrong tense or verb form.**

Though students generally understand how to build tenses, sometimes they use the wrong tense, saying, for example, "In the evenings, I like to *lay* on the couch and watch TV" "Lay" in this instance is the past tense of the verb, "to lie." The sentence should read: "In the evenings, I like to *lie* on the couch and watch TV." (Please note that "to lay" is a separate verb meaning "to place in a certain position."
14. Subject-verb agreement.

This gets tricky when you are using collective nouns or pronouns and you think of them as plural nouns: "The committee wants [not want] a resolution to the problem." Mistakes like this also occur when your verb is far from your subject. For example, "The media, who has all the power in this nation and abuses it consistently, uses its influence for ill more often than good." (Note that media is an "it," not a "they." The verbs are chosen accordingly.)


Whenever you list things, use a comma. You'll find a difference of opinion as to whether the next-to-last noun (the noun before the "and") requires a comma. ("Apples, oranges, pears, and bananas...") Our advice is to use the comma because sometimes your list will include pairs of things: "For Christmas she wanted books and tapes, peace and love, and for all the world to be happy." If you are in the habit of using a comma before the "and," you'll avoid confusion in sentences like this one.

16. Pronoun agreement error.

Many students have a problem with pronoun agreement. They will write a sentence like "Everyone is entitled to their opinion." The problem is, "everyone" is a singular pronoun. You will have to use "his" or "her."

17. Unnecessary commas with restrictive clauses.

See the explanation for number five, above.

18. Run-on, fused sentence.

Run-on sentences are sentences that run on forever, they are sentences that ought to have been two or even three sentences but the writer didn't stop to sort them out, leaving the reader feeling exhausted by the sentence's end which is too long in coming. (Get the picture?) Fused sentences occur when two independent clauses are put together without a comma, semi-colon, or conjunction. For example: "Researchers investigated several possible vaccines for the virus then they settled on one"


Modifiers are any adjectives, adverbs, phrases, or clauses that a writer uses to elaborate on something. Modifiers, when used wisely, enhance your writing. But if they are not well-considered - or if they are put in the wrong places in your sentences - the results can be less than eloquent. Consider, for example, this sentence: "The professor wrote a paper on sexual harassment in his office." Is the sexual harassment going on in the professor's office? Or is his office the place where the professor is writing? One hopes that the latter is true. If it is, then the
original sentence contains a **misplaced modifier** and should be re-written accordingly: "In his office, the professor wrote a paper on sexual harassment." Always put your modifiers next to the nouns they modify.

**Dangling modifiers** are a different kind of problem. They intend to modify something that isn't in the sentence. Consider this: "As a young girl, my father baked bread and gardened." The writer means to say, "When I was a young girl, my father baked bread and gardened." The modifying phrase "as a young girl" refers to some noun not in the sentence. It is, therefore, a dangling modifier. Other dangling modifiers are more difficult to spot, however. Consider this sentence: "Walking through the woods, my heart ached." Is it your heart that is walking through the woods? It is more accurate (and more grammatical) to say, "Walking through the woods, I felt an ache in my heart." Here you avoid the dangling modifier.

20. *Its/it's* error.

"Its" is a possessive pronoun. "It's" is a contraction for "it is."

Becoming Your Own Grammar Tutor

Many of these errors you will find easy to spot and to correct. Perhaps you learned in high school to look for subject-verb agreement. Perhaps you consistently catch any confusion between "it's" and "its." Still, some of these errors will be harder to catch. How can you learn to handle these errors and to become your own grammar tutor?

**The first thing that you might do is to make a trip to RWIT.** We have tutors here that might help you with grammar questions. They might help you to see patterns of error in your work, and they can give you advice as to how to eliminate these errors. They can also help you to get used to using a handbook. Every student writer should have a handbook on his desk as he writes. Even the experienced writer comes across grammar questions that she needs answered. In creating this Web page, for example, I consulted my handbook three times.

When reading your papers for grammar errors, you'll want to make note of a few things.

- **First, determine whether the error is a matter of carelessness, or a pattern of error.**

If you find a single run-on in your paper, there's probably not much to worry about. Fix it, and be on your way. But if you notice that you tend to run on again and again, it's time to think about the run-on. Do you understand the boundaries of the sentence? Do you understand the grammatical principles at work in determining these boundaries? If you think that you don't, consult a tutor and/or a handbook. Come up with strategies for addressing the problem so that it doesn't occur in future drafts.

- **Second, prioritize among your errors.**
If you find that your grammar problems are serious ones, determine which of the problems are most serious and address them first. Problems that interfere with a reader's understanding of your paper - misplaced modifiers, for example, or mistakes in punctuation - ought to be addressed first. If you have trouble determining which mistakes are most serious, visit RWIT. Our tutors can help you to map a course of study in matters of grammar.

- Third, practice writing sentences.

The only way to learn to write grammatically is to practice, practice, practice. If your writing is very weak, you might benefit from doing sentence exercises in handbooks to strengthen your understanding of grammatical principles. You will also want to use our Grammar Drills. If your writing is fair to middling, you can play with your own sentences, writing and rewriting them to see how using commas, for example, might change the effect or even the meaning of a sentence.

- And finally, understand that grammar COUNTS.

Your professors expect writing that is correct. They are irritated when you give them papers plagued by error. Your professors may or may not mark the errors on your papers. Don't expect that if you have no red ink on your paper that it is error free. Some professors feel that you should have mastered grammar before college and that it is not their responsibility to point out your mistakes to you. Others will be more helpful and will let you know when your grammar has gone astray. Still, it is your responsibility to master the rules of the language that you speak and write. Learn them well.
Grammar

On this page: Grammar and the Facilitative Approach · Marking Grammatical Errors · Descriptive vs. Descriptive Grammar · The Twenty Most Common Grammatical Errors · A Brief Glossary of Terms · Grammar Links and Resources

GRAMMAR AND THE FACILITATIVE APPROACH

The facilitative approach to teaching writing may not at first seem conducive to the teaching of grammar. After all, when a tutor sees blatant and consistent errors in a text, what is she supposed to do? Ask questions about the error, or give good, solid directions as to how to fix the error? The answer is not as simple as you might think.

Simply "fixing" error in a writer's text doesn't do the writer any good. The tutor, after all, is applying her own knowledge rather than instructing the writer. To make the matter more troublesome, instruction in grammar, for some reason that has evaded English teachers, doesn't seem to "stick" with students. Remember how many times you were taught the difference between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, and their accompanying punctuation rules? Can you tell me the rule now?

As tutors, you will be facing this problem with nearly every writer that you see. How can you explain a grammar rule so that the writer will understand it, remember it, and employ it correctly the next time he writes a paper?

We can offer no solution to this problem that will work 100% of the time. What we can offer is a way of looking at grammar that will help you to make it more relevant to the writing and thinking processes.

First of all, it is easier to see why grammar is important when you understand the idea that, in written expression, form and content are not
two separate entities. When you alter the form of expression, you alter
(sometimes subtly, sometimes drastically) its content. Similarly, an error in
form might reveal that there is something wrong with the content. Consider,
for example, a vague antecedent reference: the sentence contains two or
three "its", but it isn't clear to what, exactly, these "its" refer. Perhaps this is
an error of form only: the writer was careless, and didn't bother to fill in the
blank for the reader. But perhaps the problem is deeper than this: perhaps
the writer is not sure herself what "it" is. And perhaps this is the problem
with the entire paper.

By understanding that problems with grammar may reveal problems with
thinking and content, the tutor can approach grammar in a way that is more
meaningful to the writer, and to that particular paper. In other words, you
can discuss antecedent references with writers until their eyes glaze over
and their stomachs rumble, and still have very little success. However, if you
can tie a grammar error to a more general tendency in the student's writing
or thinking habits, then he will be more apt to understand the error, and to
avoid it next time he writes.

Remember: grammatical errors are often connected to errors in thinking.
When you read an essay, keep one eye on error - not simply noting it, but
looking for categories of error. Are there several antecedent problems?
Fragment problems? And so on. And do these categories fit into some larger
category of error? For example, if antecedent references are unclear, and
most of the fragments don't have subjects, then you might guess that the
writer is having trouble naming her topic. You're then on alert: do these
errors suggest that the writer does not yet have a clear idea about what she
is trying to say? Addressing error in terms of the more critical thinking
problems may prove effective in teaching both grammar and the process of
writing to students who have serious writing problems.

MARKING GRAMMATICAL ERRORS
Tutors have an easier job with grammatical error than do writing assistants.
After all, the writer is sitting beside you when you tutor, and you can engage
him in a discussion about the errors, determine what he knows and doesn't
know, illustrate right from wrong, and be on your way.
3. No comma in compound sentence
4. Wrong word
5. No comma around non-restrictive clauses
6. Wrong/missing inflected endings
7. Wrong/missing preposition
8. Comma Splices
9. Possessive apostrophe error
10. Tense shift
11. Unnecessary shift in person
12. Sentence fragment
13. Wrong tense or verb form
14. Subject-verb agreement
15. Lack of comma in a series
16. Pronoun agreement error
17. Unnecessary commas with restrictive clauses
18. Run on, fused sentence
19. Dangling, misplaced modifier
20. Its/It’s error

If you'd like a complete definition of any of these errors, please check the grammar page on our student site.

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF TERMS
What follows is not a comprehensive overview of grammatical terms. Rather, it is a list of the terms that we think you must know if you are going to help students with their writing.

The Basic Units of a Sentence
Phrase: A group of words which lacks either a subject or a predicate, or both. For example: "And for years tried to change me." (no subject) Or: "Moonlight in my dorm room." (no predicate) Or: "While at school." (no subject or predicate).

Clause: A group of words that has a subject and predicate. A clause can be dependent or independent. For examples, see below.
Dependent Clause: A group of words which contains a subject and a verb but which cannot stand alone. For example: "Although I am very homesick."

Independent Clause: A group of words which contains a subject and a verb and which can stand alone. For example: "I am going home next weekend."

Types of Sentences
Simple Sentence: An independent clause.

Compound Sentence: Two or more independent clauses which are joined together by means of a coordinate conjunction (such as "and," "but," "or," "for," "yet") or a semi-colon. For example: "I am going home next weekend, but this weekend I have to work." (Or: "I am going home next weekend; this weekend I have to work.")

Complex Sentence: At least one dependent clause combined with at least one independent clause by some means of subordination. For example: "Although I am very homesick, I will not be going home this weekend."

Ways of Combining Sentences
Coordination: The method of joining together two independent clauses by employing either a coordinating conjunction or a semi-colon. One employs coordination when both ideas in the sentence are perceived as being of equal importance. For example: "I am very homesick; I want to go home."

Subordination: The method of joining at least one dependent clause to an independent clause. One employs subordination when one wants to show that the information in one part of a sentence is less significant than the information in another part. For example: "Because I have to work, I can't go home this weekend." (The fact of not going home is perceived as more important than the fact of having to work). The different methods of subordination follow:

The Adverb Clause
Adverb clauses indicate time, place, cause or reason, purpose or result, and condition. For example:

- Time: "John repaired the flat tire while I made sandwiches." (Rather than "John repaired the flat tire, and I made sandwiches.")
Grammar Problems

Fragment: A phrase or dependent clause that is offered to the reader as if it were a complete sentence. For example: "While I was lonely." Or: "Which is the only thing I could do." And so on.

The solution: Attach the fragment to another sentence, or transform it into an independent clause. For example: "While I was lonely, I thought of you." Or: "Writing you a letter was the only thing I could do."

Run-on: A sentence in which too many dependent and/or independent clauses are joined together. For example: "While I was lonely, I thought of you and because writing you a letter was the only thing I could do I got out a pen and I found some paper and I started this epistle to you while you sleep." The solution: Edit the sentence into several shorter sentences.

Agreement Issues: A verb must agree in number with its noun, and a pronoun must agree with its antecedent. If they don't agree, then the sentence's clarity is destroyed. For example: "The repetition of the drum beats help to stir emotions." (The subject is repetition; the verb should be "helps," not "help.") And: "Each of the students had their papers evaluated by a tutor." ("Each" is singular. The pronoun should be "his" or "her.") For more about these agreement issues, check a handbook.

The Passive Voice: Generally, the active voice is seen as preferable to the passive voice. For example: "Little attention was paid to the dying man," is seen as less emphatic than, "The passers-by paid little attention to the dying man." However, when the receiver of the action is more important than the actor, the passive voice is preferable. For example: "Millions of Jews were exterminated in the holocaust" emphasizes the Jews who died, while "The Germans killed millions of Jews" emphasizes the Nazis and their crimes. The sentence you write will depend on which effect you are trying to achieve.

Modifiers, Misplaced and Dangling: Nothing can make a sentence more ridiculous than a misplaced or dangling modifier. Consider the following examples:

- The professor wrote a paper on murder in his basement study.
- We served ice-cream to our guests in paper plates.
WRITERS WITH
SPECIFIC NEEDS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Blocking.** In the first session, the student indicated, “I’ll never get it,” was very quiet, and said he didn’t even know the questions to ask. In the second session, you began making some progress reviewing previously material, and the student left with some pieces to continue to work on. Now, in the third session, the student has arrived indicating that he tried working on the material but is stuck and will not learn it. | • Begin the session by asking the student questions that you know can be easily answered—open-ended questions that do not have right or wrong answers.  
• Start with easier material and scaffold your questions to more difficult material.  
• Provide continual support and feedback to the student.  
• Reinforce successes. |
| **Confusion.** The student arrives at the tutoring session complaining that she has tried everything but nothing works. She says she studies all the time but is still not getting good grades on the tests and made a D on the last exam. She comments that she is not sure she knows what the professor wants. | • Have the student explain exactly what she is doing when she is studying for the course exams. (She may have been taught ineffective as well as inefficient methods.) If possible, complete an exam analysis with the student and determine the source (text, lecture, others) of the material that was missed on the exam.  
• Help the student see patterns in the course material. Make concept maps or outlines for the text chapters. Make concept cards that can be used to study course material. |
| **Miracle Seeking.** The student arrives at the tutoring session on time. He has a math homework set that is due the next day. He tells the tutor that he is so glad that he learned about his availability because he didn’t know what to do before. Now he wants the tutor to handle all the homework problems so he can submit the homework tomorrow. | • Be clear on the goals of the tutoring session and your role as a tutor.  
• Make sure that the student is holding the pencil as you work together. Indicate that you will provide support, but the student will complete the work.  
• Suggest a time management workshop or work with the student to create a homework study plan to complete homework before it is due. |
| **Over-Enthusiasm.** Two weeks remain in the semester when a student makes an appointment to see you. At the end of the semester, he explains that he has failed the last two exams and needs to make an A on the comprehensive final in order to pass the course. The student would like to schedule a 2-hour appointment with you every day for the next two weeks to get caught up on the assignment. He tells you that he must pass this course to move to the next course, and he is already behind. He knows that you can help him pass the course. | • Make sure that the student understands tutoring policies. (How many hours are allowed per week?)  
• Clarify the goals of the tutoring session.  
• Create a study plan with the student so he can begin to identify tasks to accomplish outside the tutoring session.  
• Help the student to set realistic goals for the course.  
• Refer the student to an advisor to discuss course options and possibly a back-up plan for the next semester. |
| **Resisting.** In your first appointment with a new student, you began by having the student explain the struggles she faced in the course. You then suggested several strategies that you could work on during the session, but after each option, she explained that she has already tried it and it does not work. You finally agree on an approach. In the next session, the student comes without implementing the suggested changes and says she just didn’t try it. | • Spend some time understanding the student’s needs. What are her goals?  
• Provide time in the session to listen to the student’s frustrations.  
• Empathize with the student. Let her know that you found the material difficult, too.  
• Show the student how you have implemented changes in similar situations (even your current courses). |

**Figure 2** Scenario and solution cards for group activity.
### Dealing With Difficult Tutoring Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLOCKING</th>
<th>BEHAVIOR CHARACTERISTIC OF DIFFICULT TUTORING SITUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students typically withhold or avoid communication. When questioned, they may say, &quot;I don't know,&quot; and then remain silent. Blocking students typically have a low tolerance for frustration and become agitated, saying &quot;I'll never get it.&quot; They may respond emotionally to frustration or become uncomfortably quiet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

| CONFUSION | Confusion is a variation of blocking; however, instead of withholding communication, students try to focus the content of the session on their own frustration. They say they do not know what the professor wants or where they should start. They may question the value of course content, asking, "Why do we have to know this, anyway?" |

| MIRACLE SEEKING | Students expect tutors to take control of the tutoring transaction. They believe that their tutors are the solution to their problems; they have unrealistically high expectations for the tutors. Students may flatter tutors or compliment their skill often, and although tutors may feel good about the compliments, tutors may find themselves enabling students and doing too much of the work. |

| OVER-ENTHUSIASM | This situation is a variation of miracle-seeking, but students want to complete all the work. Students have inflated goals and expect tutors to devote themselves to the cause. Students may request additional tutoring hours beyond limits set by policy, offer to pay for additional sessions, or contact tutors after hours for additional help. Students want tutors to devote extra time and resources to assist them. |

| RESISTING | Students directly or indirectly oppose changing their behaviors. They fail to implement agreed-upon strategies or complete work prior to sessions. Students may directly refute tutors' use of strategies during a session or question tutors' credibility in the subject area. Students may appear confrontational or hostile toward tutors. Tutors may interpret resistance as lack of interest in the course or in college. |

| REACTIVITY | Students are more about seeking approval, pleasing others, avoiding conflict, and maintaining relationships than about expressing genuine concerns. They may therefore prefer less challenging assignments and courses. Students may not believe that their thoughts and ideas are as important as the tutors'. Students may also be anxious and overly concerned about being liked. |

| EVASION | Students may or may not consciously realize that they are avoiding the content of tutoring sessions by discussing topics unrelated to the tutoring sessions, such as social or current events, and changing the topic of conversation several times throughout sessions. Students who are more aware of their evasion may provide vague, worded responses or provide several plausible answers without choosing one particular answer, in an attempt to manipulate tutors to provide answers. |

**FIGURE 1** Methods for evaluating tutee needs.
Understanding and Assisting Students with Learning Disabilities

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability affects the manner in which individuals take in information, organize it, retain it and express the knowledge and understanding which they possess. Although adults with learning disabilities have average to superior intelligence, they may have serious deficits in reading comprehension, spelling, mechanics of writing, math computation and/or problem solving. Notable individuals such as Woodrow Wilson, Albert Einstein, Nelson Rockefeller, Thomas Edison, and Hans Christian Anderson were able to make significant contributions despite their learning disability. The major underlying disorders in basic psychological processes include difficulties in perceiving information, retaining what is heard or seen and in expressing what one knows either through oral or written language.

College students with learning disabilities may exhibit the following characteristics:

- **Long term** difficulty in reading, writing, spelling, foreign language, grammatical usage and/or using numerical concepts in contrast with average or superior skills in other areas.

- Distractibility by background noise or visual stimulation; has difficulty concentrating.

- Difficulty recalling common words; uses hands a lot and calls things: "What-cha-ma-cal- it" or "Thing-a-ma-jig".

- Takes twice or three times longer to read than other people. Has to go back two or three times to understand what was read.

- Severe inability to spell or to recall irregularly spelled words.

- Difficulty with quantitative concepts including calculation, time and space.

- Difficulty taking notes and listening to a lecture at the same time.

- Slowed processing of information: needs "think time" to respond to questions, to retrieve information or to solve problems.

- Poor organizational skills, including organizing thoughts on a page and time managing skills.

What are some methods for providing assistance to students with learning disabilities?

1. Compensatory strategies: Working around the areas of deficit and using strengths to acquire knowledge (i.e. taped textbooks for students with reading disorders, or use of visualization or color coding to reinforce learning for students with auditory processing deficits).

2. Learning Strategies - Teaching how to learn, developing strategies for time management skills, writing essays, test-taking skills, and reading strategies

3. Tutorial - Providing instruction in specific content areas.
**Tutors for students with learning disabilities should:**

1. Understand the special needs of college students with learning disabilities.
2. Provide success experience so students are not discouraged.
3. Help students understand the requirements and objectives of the courses in which they are enrolled.
4. Prepare structured lessons with each unit divided into small parts.
5. Relate tutoring to student's real-life experiences.
6. Help students understand and recall subject matter material.
7. Help students develop ways to commit facts and information.
8. Help students establish study goals and specific objectives.
9. Help students prioritize and schedule their assignments.
10. Facilitate a positive rapport. The relationship between tutor and the student is critical.

**What are some strategies that tutors can use during tutorial sessions?**

1. Provide structured, consistent sessions that include:
   a. Review of previous lesson.
   b. Overview of material to be presented.
   c. Summary at close of the session.
   d. Emphasis of important points, main ideas and key concepts.
   e. Timelines for completing each assignment and segments of assignment.
   f. Clearly defined expectations and student's responsibilities.

2. Provide feedback and monitoring (Did you understand that concept, shall I explain further?)
   Maintain eye contact and practice active listening skills to give feedback.

3. Ensure that printed materials and chalkboard writing are visually clear and well sized.

4. Present material auditorily as well as visually.

5. Review information provided by the professor during the last class session. Clarify any concepts and define any word the student does not know. Keep explanations concrete and relate them to student's life experiences whenever possible.

6. Review assignments given by the professor during the last class session; be sure student understands assignments, knows how to do it, and knows due date.
7. Check assignments the student is about to turn in to course professors. Examine them to be sure they are consistent with the assignment given by the professor. Check for clarity, organization, spelling and grammatical errors, and general legibility and neatness.

8. Assist the student to develop a plan for continued self-study, this is necessary if the student is to develop independence; otherwise student may study only in the presence of the tutor.

9. Arrange for on-going exchange of information with professor regarding progress and needs. Contact between professor and tutor is critical to success. Request a course syllabus and appropriate handouts. Ask professor to indicate those topics for which tutoring would be most helpful for that student.

10. Present course content in small, sequential steps.

11. Present material from concept to details- from the whole to the parts (Students with learning disabilities have strong conceptual skills).

12. Provide opportunities for participation, questions, and discussion to monitor understanding of new concepts and assignments.

13. Students may misinterpret the requirements or the major themes of the assigned reading; study questions may need to be formed; it is important never to assume anything, but to question the student first.

14. In some instances, guided reading through the assignment may be necessary (i.e. significant reading difficulty) emphasizing major points and themes. Provide a list of technical vocabulary.

15. Get to know the student as a person, ask them what has been helpful in the past; what is their best learning style.

16. Work with the LD specialist to develop strategies specific to that student's preferred learning style. (i.e. may need enlarged printed materials; may need to reiterate content; may be able to memorize only through mnemonic strategies, visualization or verbalization).

STUDENTS WITH ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY

Students who return to college after experiencing a traumatic injury may experience some residual effects of the injury in cognitive and communicative areas. Head injuries may impact ability to acquire new information, ability to focus on a task, speed of processing information, language functions, and spatial and abstract reasoning.

Tutors can help students with acquired brain injury by assisting them to develop strategies to retrieve and organize information. They may need to adjust the speed of presentation and quantity of new information, and to provide concrete examples to facilitate understanding.

ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

Students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) have long term difficulty attending and concentrating on learning related activities, including reading, listening, writing and problem solving. Symptoms include significant problems attending to details, difficulty sustaining attention in lectures and/or reading assignments, engaging in tasks that require sustained mental effort, and in filtering out extraneous stimuli. Students with ADD can be assisted in a tutorial setting with well-organized sessions in distraction-free areas. Information may need to be divided into smaller units. Students with ADD may require assistance organizing their assignments and managing their study time.
Ten Tips For ESL Tutorials

- **Explain the goals, procedures, and participant roles for a tutorial.**
  Many students may not be familiar with the peer tutoring model. They may expect explicit instruction from you, the authority on writing. A brief, but careful explanation of how we work together can eliminate a lot of potential frustration.

- **Emphasize the assignment.**
  Even if you read the assignment sheet together, ask students to explain it in their own words to make sure they have identified the critical instructions and tasks.

- **Emphasize the planning.**
  Ask for an overview (e.g., “Before we start reading, could you tell me about your paper. What’s it about? What are the major sections of the paper? What are the main points you’re making? How have you sequenced those points?” etc.) You are activating a mental overview, which will help students envision the larger project and help them identify where they are having difficulty at that level.

- **Emphasize the content and organization.**
  During the goal-setting phase, students will often say they’d like to make sure their English is okay. This is a legitimate concern, but it could be a waste of time to correct sentences that may disappear during revision. If students ask you to “just check the grammar,” validate that you’ll be happy to help them identify language problems, ask what other concerns they have, and then work together to prioritize their concerns.

- **Ask if students would prefer to read or to listen.**
  Some students may find it helpful to read their own work aloud, but others may find it to be an extra processing burden. In other words, students may be so focused on correct pronunciation or reading proficiency that they are not able to concentrate on (or notice) anything about the draft. If you read, you allow the student to attend to various aspects of the draft while they listen.

- **Concentrate on the macro-structure—the entire piece of writing.**
  Is it focused, developed, and organized? Can you follow the major structure? You may be distracted by a number of errors, but keep in mind that ESL writers, like native English writers, benefit from thoughtful questions and genuine reader response. Pay sincere attention.
Read through mistakes that do not interfere with your understanding.
The text may have a lot of minor errors that are noticable but not confusing. Read the text as it’s written, but read naturally through the minor errors, without stopping over every little thing. If you stumble a bit with a slightly confusing error, the writer will probably notice your hesitation. If you can move forward, do so and return to that error later if necessary.

If some language related issue seriously interferes with your understanding, either stop reading and try to identify the problem or mark that place in the text for your attention when you finish reading.
If you stop, ask the writer for clarification (“I’m not sure what you mean here. / I don’t understand this sentence / this phrasing. Can you explain this to me a little bit more?”). Once the issue is resolved, continue reading.

Emphasize vocabulary development.
Encourage students to pay attention to groups of words that often occur together (“lexical chunks” or “collocations”). If you find vocabulary errors, ask students for alternatives and give them time to think of a few before you make suggestions. If necessary, provide several choices for rephrasing instead of a single alternative. However, if there really is only one way to say it, by all means, provide the correction. Encourage students to use their native language as a resource. They (and you) can work with translation when they are truly at a loss.

Emphasize proofreading strategies.
When students are ready to focus on language, ask several questions: What do you normally have trouble with? How do you normally proofread for that? What are you specifically concerned about in this draft? What did you have trouble with when you were writing? etc. Learn as much as you can about the writer’s own difficulties and strategies, and then work with them very much as you would with a native English speaker. Explain that you will concentrate on the errors that are most confusing first and then work on the less confusing, but perhaps more frequent, errors. If the correction is rule-based, work with the rule and proofreading strategies. If it is item-based, like an idiom, try to elicit the correction, but provide it if necessary.
WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES
A Brief Guide to Writing the English Paper

The Challenges of Writing About English Literature

Writing begins with the act of reading. While this statement is true for most college papers, strong English papers tend to be the product of highly attentive reading (and re-reading). When your instructors ask you to do a “close reading,” they are asking you to read not only for content, but also for structures and patterns. When you perform a close reading, then, you observe how form and content interact. In some cases, form reinforces content: for example, in John Donne’s Holy Sonnet 14, where the speaker invites God’s “force” “to break, blow, burn and make [him] new.” Here, the stressed monosyllables of the verbs “break,” “blow” and “burn” evoke analogical force that the speaker invites from God. In other cases, form raises questions about content: for example, a repeated denial of guilt will likely raise questions about the speaker’s professed innocence.

When you close read, take an inductive approach. Start by observing particular details in the text, such as a repeated image or word, an unexpected development, or even a contradiction. Often, a detail—such as a repeated image—can help you to identify a question about the text that warrants further examination. So annotate details that strike you as you read. Some of those details will eventually help you to work towards a thesis. And don’t worry if a detail seems trivial. If you can make a case about how an apparently trivial detail reveals something significant about the text, then your paper will have a thought-provoking thesis to argue.

Common Types of English Papers

Many assignments will ask you to analyze a single text. Others, however, will ask you to read two or more texts in relation to each other, or to consider a text in light of claims made by other scholars and critics. For most assignments, close reading will be central to your paper.

While some assignment guidelines will suggest topics and spell out expectations in detail, others will offer little more than a page limit. Approaching the writing process in the absence of assigned topics can be daunting, but remember that you have resources: in sections, you will probably have encountered some examples of close reading in lecture; in lectures, you will have encountered some of the course’s central questions and claims. The paper is a chance for you to extend a claim offered in lecture, or to analyze a passage neglected in lecture. In either case, your analysis should do more than recapitulate claims aired in lecture and section.

Because different instructors have different goals for an assignment, you should always ask your professor or TA if you have questions. These general guidelines should apply in most cases:

- A close reading of a single text: Depending on the length of the text, you will need to be more or less selective about what you choose to consider. In the case of a sonnet, you will probably have enough room to analyze the text more thoroughly than you would in the case of a novel, for example, though even here you will probably not analyze every single detail. By contrast, in the case of a novel, you might analyze a repeated scene, image, or object (for example, scenes of train travel, images of decay, or objects such as or typewriters). Alternately, you might...
analyze a perplexing scene (such as a novel’s ending, albeit probably in relation to an earlier moment in the novel). But even when analyzing shorter works, you will need to be selective. Although you might notice numerous interesting details as you read, not all of those details will help you to organize a focused argument the text. For example, if you are focusing on depictions of sensory experience in Keats’ "Ode to a Nightingale," you probably do not need to analyze the image of a homeless Ruth in stanza 7, unless this image helps you to develop your case about sensory experience in the poem.

- A theoretically-informed close reading. In some courses, you will be asked to analyze a poem, a play, or a novel by using a critical theory (psychoanalytic, postcolonial, gender, etc.). For example, you might use Kristeva’s theory of abjection to analyze mother-daughter relations in Toni Morrison’s novel Beloved. Critical theories provide focus for your analysis; if "abjection" is the guiding concept for your paper, you should focus on the scenes in the novel that are most relevant to the concept.

- A historically-informed close reading. In courses with a historicalist orientation, you might use less self-consciously literary documents, such as newspapers or devotional manuals, to develop your analysis of a literary work. For example, to analyze how Robinson Crusoe makes sense of his island experiences, you might use Puritan tracts that narrate events in terms of how God organizes them. The tracts could help you to show not only how Robinson Crusoe draws on Puritan narrative conventions, but also—more significantly—how the novel revises those conventions.

- A comparison of two texts. When analyzing two texts, you might look for unexpected contrasts between apparently similar texts, or unexpected similarities between apparently dissimilar texts, or for how one text revises or transforms the other. Keep in mind that not all of the similarities, differences, and transformations you identify will be relevant to an argument about the relationship between the two texts. As you work towards a thesis, you will need to decide which of those similarities, differences, or transformations to focus on. Moreover, unless instructed otherwise, you do not need to allot equal space to each text (unless this 50/50 allocation serves your thesis well, of course). Often you will find that one text helps to develop your analysis of another text. For example, you might analyze the transformation of Ariel’s song from The Tempest in T. S. Eliot’s poem, The Waste Land. Insofar as this analysis is interested in the afterlife of Ariel’s song in a later poem, you would likely allot more space to analyzing allusions to Ariel’s song in The Waste Land (after initially establishing the song’s significance in Shakespeare’s play, of course).

- A response paper. A response paper is a great opportunity to practice your close reading skills without having to develop an entire argument. In most cases, a solid approach is to select a rich passage that rewards analysis (for example, one that depicts an important scene or a recurring image) and close read it. While response papers are a flexible genre, they are not invitations for impressionistic accounts of whether you liked the work or a particular character. Instead, you might use your close reading to raise a question about the text—to open up further investigation, rather than to supply a solution.

- A research paper. In most cases, you will receive guidance from the professor on the scope of the research paper. It is likely that you will be expected to consult sources other than the assigned readings. Holle is your best bet for book titles, and the MLA bibliography (available through e-resources) for articles. When reading articles, make sure that they have been peer reviewed; you might also ask your TP to recommend reputable journals in the field.

When analyzing two texts, you might look for unexpected contrasts between apparently similar texts, or unexpected similarities between apparently dissimilar texts, or for how one text revises or transforms the other. Keep in mind that not all of the similarities, differences, and transformations you identify will be relevant to an argument about the relationship between the two texts.
Taking the First Steps: Close Reading Towards a Thesis

Below are two examples of how close reading can help you work towards formulating a thesis for your paper. While neither is a complete recipe for an English paper, both should give you some idea of the kinds of textual features close readers look for and the kinds of questions they ask.

Example #1: Close Reading Practice

Let’s say that you decide to write on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s autobiography, Confessions. Rousseau’s autobiography is notably the work of a novelist, and it has been read as a novel by numerous scholars of literature. Because Rousseau’s Confessions is a long work, your analysis will need to be selective. One way to narrow your focus is to look at a pattern of repetition: a repeated scene (say, a theft), a repeated object (say, a book), or a repeated word (say, “heart”). If a scene or an object is depicted repeatedly, it is probably important for the book as a whole. In most cases, it will be depicted in different ways that complicate or conflict with each other. A consideration of this kind of fiction could trigger a thought-provoking thesis. Here’s one way you might break down the process of reading towards a thesis:

1) Identify a pattern of repetition. Let’s take the example of the word “heart.” Rousseau uses this word compulsively. From page one, “heart” seems to designate Rousseau’s most authentic and sincere self; it also seems to serve as a guarantor of “truth,” for instance when Rousseau asserts that his “heart is content” with the accuracy of the autobiographical stories he has recounted. But it is worth wondering whether a word used as frequently as “heart” might have some other, less obvious meanings. As mentioned, it is rare in a literary work for a charged, often repeated word to mean exactly the same thing every time. As you read Rousseau’s Confessions, mark all the instances of the word “heart.” Once you have finished the book, you can then proceed to...

If a scene or an object is depicted repeatedly, it is probably important for the book as a whole. In most cases, it will be depicted in different ways that will complicate or conflict with each other.

2) Make a list of passages in which the word “heart” appears. This should be a list not just of page numbers but of quotations. With a couple of pages of “hits” for the word “heart,” you will have a body of data that you can begin to analyze.

3) Identify the different meanings of the word “heart” and analyze their relationships. How does “heart” seem to function primarily, according to Rousseau? And what other functions and capacities does it have in the text? You might notice that Rousseau’s heart is very susceptible to fantasies: when he fantasizes about being a soldier, his “heart swelled at this noble idea”; elsewhere, he admits that “love of the marvelous comes naturally to the human heart.” In these cases, the heart seems to foster illusions—quite a contrast to the primary definition of the heart as a sincere guarantor of truth! This tension is worth identifying and analyzing. If Rousseau’s autobiography is invested in a heart-based model of the self, what are some of its investment’s unexpected consequences for how the autobiography constructs a self—consequences which Rousseau himself doesn’t acknowledge? As you notice relationships between different meanings, ask questions about them. The meaning of the word “heart,” however obvious it might be to you in day-to-day conversation, is not obvious in Rousseau’s autobiography. Use the less obvious meanings and functions to interrogate the more obvious meanings and functions.

4) Select a “friction-rich” relationship to focus on in your thesis. Some of the meanings of “heart” will seem more unexpected than others. In your paper, you need not account for every single usage of the word “heart”; select the examples that are most in tension with the primary meaning of “heart” as the seat of an authentic self and a guarantor of truth. With the above data, you are in a position to make an argument about how a self gets constructed in Rousseau’s work and what the unacknowledged limitations of that construction are. So you might argue the following: “From the outset, Rousseau’s autobiography represents the heart as the seat of Rousseau’s most authentic and truthful self. However, as Rousseau’s personal narrative develops, the heart assumes other functions: it fuels personal fantasies and superstitions, for example. The conflict between Rousseau’s early, dominant characterization of the heart and its later more delusional capacities suggests that the concept of an authentic self is more volatile, more unreliable, than Rousseau admits. Indeed, insofar as a self’s authenticity rides on the subjective emotions of the heart, authenticity appears to be a rather unreliable guarantor of truth. If Rousseau’s autobiography formulates a model of the authentic, feeling self that remains familiar today, it ultimately puts pressure on that model.”
Notice that this thesis does not judge Rousseau as a human being. Instead, it makes a claim about how a self is constructed in a particular work—a work that occupies a particular historical moment when selves have a particular vocabulary available to them. Ultimately, you are analyzing "a piece of language" and not a human being. Consequently, you do not need either to judge or to justify Rousseau. Write about Rousseau's autobiography as you might write about a first-person fictional narrative (which, like Rousseau, has a culturally-specific vocabulary with which to depict a self).

Finally, keep in mind that there are a number of ways to approach Rousseau's text. Analyzing a pattern of repetition is hardly the only one. For example, you might close read a pivotal scene in the Confessions, such as the scene in which Rousseau accuses a maid of stealing a ribbon that he himself has stolen. Even when focusing on a pivotal scene, however, you might probably analyze it in relation to other moments in the text in which Rousseau discusses guilt, relationships with women, etc. Usually it is through a set of relationships between words, images, or scenes that one can better understand the significance of a single scene.

In short, as you start to make sense of the poem, consider the conventions and structures of the poetic genre you're encountering.

**Example 2: Close Reading Poetry**

Let's say you're asked to write a paper about William Wordsworth's sonnet, "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3rd, 1802." At first reading, the poem might seem like a straightforward, poetic description of what the speaker sees and feels while looking at London on a beautiful summer morning. But how might you figure out what else is going on in the poem?

1) **Begin by identifying structures and developments in the text. Look for unexpected developments.** Notice that Wordsworth's poem is a modified Petrarchan sonnet, consisting of an octave (or, two quatrains) and a sestet. (The rhyme scheme goes abba abba cdcd, instead of the usual Petrarchan cdecde.) Usually in a Petrarchan sonnet there is a turn (or volta) between the octave and the sestet. This is a good place to start looking for transitions and developments in the poem, but it's not the only place to begin. When reading this poem you might also consider the relevance of the structure of the English sonnet, in which the final couplet (the final two lines) marks a development in the speaker's attitude—some change in point of view or mood. In short, as you start to make sense of the poem, consider the conventions and structures of the poetic genre you're encountering.

In the case of Wordsworth's sonnet, you might consider the final two lines as a quatrains in the English tradition: "Dear God! The very houses seem asleep! And all that mighty heart [i.e., the city] is lying still!" There's a lot of emotion in these final lines, as the exclamation marks suggest. But what kind of emotion is it? Has it changed since the earlier description of the speaker's pleasurable response to "a sight so touching"? To get a handle on the final couplet, you might consider that the "still" heart amounts to a dead heart. So by the final line, the poem seems to be in unexpectedly sinister territory, in contrast to the superlatively "fair" city of the first line. This contrast marks a strange, unexpected development—a development worth analyzing further. To that end, you might ask: How does the poem arrive at this strange final couplet? In other words, you need to...

2) **Analyze how the unexpected development happens.** You've noticed a transition from a "fair" city to a dead city. How does the speaker get from "fair" to dead? Look for figures—for metaphor, similes, synecdoche, personification, etc. (For more on figures, see the indispensable Abrams, cited below.) In Wordsworth's poem, the speaker notably personifies the city from line 4 onward, where the city "dost, like a garment, weart/ The beauty of the morning; silent, bare." So the city takes on the aspect of a human being (which can die), and the poem has now moved from the realm of empirical description to fiction: (as line 1’s use of "seem" suggests).

3) **Reflect on the significance of the unexpected development in the poem as a whole.** Having noticed an unexpected development, put you in an excellent position to begin formulating a thesis. Your thesis won't simply point out the development, however; it will make an argument about the development's significance. To recap, we have observed a transition from beauty to something more sinister, a transition enabled by the use of figurative language (specifically, personification). So figurative language is the mechanism that appears to enable, even trigger, the unexpected development. It appears to have a power—an agency—not only to vibrate but also to kill what it depicts.

As you consider this development and how it happens, you might look for moments when the development is foreshadowed: notice, for example, words like "lie" in the line "Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie": why "lie"? Why don't they "stand"?) and phrases like "a calm so deep"—which might describe sleep, but could also describe death.

4) **Parlay the unexpected development into a thesis.** With these observations in mind, we might devise a thesis.
about the volatile power of poetic language dramatized by the unexpected development from life to death in Wordsworth’s poem. We might argue that:

“Wordsworth’s sonnet about London offers a case study about the volatility of poetic language. If poetic language begins by identifying the city through personification, ultimately personification depicts the city’s demise. In short, the poetic device that represents the city’s beauty is as volatile as it is powerful, exemplifying the instability of poetic language. Notice a couple of features of this thesis:

• It identifies a transition (from vivid beauty to death) and gives an account of the significance of that transition (the ‘culprit’ is a volatile poetic language, which is no mere passive tool as it turns out).

• The thesis identifies a tension between two moments in the poem and doesn’t try to tidy up or argue away that tension. This thesis is interested in a complication, in the unexpected and even uncomfortable transition from life to death. Weird complications tend to offer richer material than complications easily overcome and tensions tidily reconciled.

• The thesis isn’t particularly combative or controversial. Instead, it offers a way of understanding the poem that wouldn’t be apparent to a first-time reader, engaging the conceptual question of poetic language’s power by analyzing particular details in the poem itself.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU READ A TEXT

Below are some questions that will help you develop a more active and interrogative mode of reading. Not all of these questions will be appropriate for every text, of course, and sometimes the answers to appropriate questions still won’t yield potential theses. Nonetheless, these questions provide a good starting place for close reading.

For novels and short stories

• What is the genre of the text? What are the conventions of that genre, and what do those conventions lead us to expect as readers? Are those expectations always realized? Is there a mix of genres (as there is, for example, in Jane Eyre, which is a gothic bildungsroman)? If so, how do the conventions of those different genres interact? (In the case of Jane Eyre, there’s a fraught interaction between development or ‘bildung’ (which looks ahead to the future) and haunting (which implicates the past).)

• Is the narrator first- or third-person, omniscient or not? What does the narrator’s position suggest about the characters and events depicted in the text? How much do we know about the narrator? How reliable is he or she?

• Does anybody (narrator included) contradict himself or herself? How can we make sense of this contradiction? Does it mark a development, a response to a new environment, or something else?

• Is there a gap in the story—a secret or an event that is never depicted but only alluded to? What is the effect of such a gap on how we read the story? How can we analyze the gap without trying to fill it in? For example, in Henry James’ novel The Turn of the Screw, we are never informed of the substance of Quint’s horrifying crime against the children. Rather than trying to name the crime, we can instead analyze how the story’s gaps and secrets induce a “paranoid” mode of reading, whereby every detail seems to harbor deep, repressed meanings.

For Poems

• What kind of poem is this? What is the poem’s rhyme scheme? How does its rhyme scheme structure and dramatize the poem’s content?

• What kinds of relationships develop between rhymed words? Do rhymed words reinforce each others’ meanings or ironize them? For example, Alexander Pope’s poem, The Rape of the Lock, regularly pairs serious and trivial words, such as “despair” and “hair” to exemplify the intimacy of serious emotions and trivial circumstances in his mock-epic poem.

• Who is the speaker? What can we infer about his or her environment? Does his or her mood remain constant throughout the poem or does it change? What are the significant changes of mood and mind in the poem?

In the case of drama, you will likely ask a combination of questions relevant both to prose and to poetry. Finally, notice what kinds of questions are not listed above. For example: what did the author intend? In some single-author courses you might work with manuscript drafts and biography, and thereby have sources with which to speculate about an author’s intentions. More often, however, you will not have enough evidence to speculate intelligently about the author’s intentions. In the absence of such evidence, orient your claims towards the text.
Tips and Conventions

Like any genre, the English paper follows some conventions you’ll want to be aware of. If you have any questions about your paper, consult your TF or professor—for clarification on the assignment, for tips on how to approach the paper, and to receive preliminary feedback on paper ideas. If the guidelines offered here conflict with what your TF or professor tells you, you should of course follow their advice.

- **Avoid plot summary.** A paper that recounts what happened in a novel (or a play)—or that analyzes selected scenes in the same order they occur in the novel—is letting the novel’s author rather than the paper’s author structure the paper’s argument. Sometimes papers fall into plot summary because a student imagines that he or she is writing for a reader unfamiliar with the novel. But if you imagine that you are writing for someone who has read the novel at least once, then you don’t need to restate the plot for your reader. Instead, you can focus on selected scenes, briefly identifying them before analyzing significant details. Resist shadowing the novel’s chronology in your own paper. One rule of thumb is to begin with the most obvious piece of evidence and move progressively to the least obvious piece of evidence. Ultimately, you should plot your own paper.

- **Use block quotations appropriately.** When quoting longer stretches of prose (more than four lines in your paper), set it off from the body of the paper in an indented block quotation. In the case of poetry, more than three lines of verse should be quoted en bloc. Block quotations are a great opportunity to do some extended close reading. When you use a block quotation, make sure that it is rich enough to reward extended analysis (which should be at least as long as the quotation itself). A well-chosen block quotation will not only corroborate a claim that you have already argued, but will also offer a new, related emphasis or implication for your argument to pursue. In this way, block quotations can help your argument to maintain momentum, averting the stagnant paper structure in which a thesis is followed by a list of illustrative examples.

- **Avoid basing your argument on opinion.** Sometimes a work of literature provokes personal feelings and opinions in a reader. When this happens, the reader should try to suspend those personal feelings and opinions as he or she reads, paying attention instead to structures and features in the text. Textual evidence and not personal conviction should be the basis of your thesis and argument.

- **Focus on speakers, not authors.** Because English papers make claims about texts rather than about authors, first-person poems and narratives have a “speaker” or “narrator” who should not be confused with the author. David Copperfield, while he has autobiographical features, is not Charles Dickens himself. Likewise, “Rousseau” in his Confessions is a linguistic construct with an ambiguous relationship to the man himself. Therefore, as a reader of Rousseau’s Confessions, you have evidence to make a claim about the linguistic construct or “character” of “Rousseau” rather than about “Rousseau” the man.

- **Write in the present tense.** Because English papers approach literary works as linguistic artifacts rather than as historical documents, they discuss characters and events in the present tense rather than the past tense. For example, one might write: "In Middlemarch, Dorothea expresses relief that Casaubon does not enjoy piano music.”

If you’re taking a historical approach to literary analysis, keep in mind that when referring to historical events outside of the novel you should use the past tense, as you would in a history paper. For example, “Although Dorothea has little interest in music, George Eliot herself was very interested in music.”

- **Use MLA style citations.** Because English papers quote frequently, often from the same text, they cite page numbers parenthetically. For example: “Dorothea expresses disdain for ‘domestic music and feminine fine art’ (65).”

**Further Reading**


Special thanks to James Englert and Leah Price.

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WRITING CENTER BRIEF GUIDE SERIES

A Brief Guide to Writing the History Paper

The Challenges of Writing About (a.k.a., Making) History

At first glance, writing about history can seem like an overwhelming task. History’s subject matter is immense, encompassing all of human affairs in the recorded past — up until the moment, that is, that you started reading this guide. Because no one person can possibly consult all of these records, no work of history can ever pretend to be comprehensive or universal. At the same time, history’s subject matter is partially irretrievable. Barren the invention of time travel, no scholar can experience the past firsthand or recreate its conditions in a laboratory setting. Historians must rely on the fragmentary records that survive from the time period under study, which necessarily reveal just part of the story. For these reasons, the guiding principles behind all historical writing must be selection and interpretation: the thoughtful selection of topics and questions that seem most interesting, and the responsible interpretation of sources in order to construct meaningful arguments.

Subjective decisions about what to include, what to exclude, and how to understand it make history writing manageable in the first place. No less importantly, they also make it controversial, because scholars are bound to disagree with the judgments of other scholars. You can think of history writing, then, as an ongoing argument or debate over this unavoidable process of selection and interpretation. Your first challenge as a writer is to find a way to enter this conversation.

Common Types of History Papers

History papers come in all shapes and sizes. Some papers are narrative (organized like a story according to chronology, or the sequence of events), and some are analytical (organized like an essay according to the topic’s internal logic). Some papers are concerned with history (not just what happened, of course, but why and how it happened), and some are interested in historiography (i.e., how other historians have written history, specifically the peculiarities of different works, scholars, or schools of thought). Some papers emphasize social or cultural history, others political or military history, and still others intellectual or economic (or any other genre of history). In undergraduate courses, you’ll most likely notice a distinction between review essays (often based on your responses to assigned readings from the course syllabus) and research papers, typically requiring additional research in a library or archive on a topic of your own choosing). Different types of history papers naturally require different amounts of research, analysis, and interpretation.

Despite this variety, historical arguments often assume a common form. If you’re struggling to develop an argument for your paper, you might want to reframe one of the following rhetorical gambits (see next section). Think of these approaches as ready-made suits that you can try on and tailor for the purposes of your assignment. Once you decide on a wearable argument, declare it to your reader in clear, succinct prose in your thesis statement. This initial statement of your thesis will almost always appear in the opening paragraph(s) of a shorter essay or the opening section of a longer paper.

Harvard College
Writing Program
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Harvard University
Familiar Arguments in Review Essays

- **Scenario #1**: Scholars have disagreed about my topic, and my paper explains why one party in the debate has been more convincing than the other(s).
- **Scenario #2**: Scholars have disagreed about my topic, and my paper demonstrates why the entire debate needs to be recast in a more meaningful direction.
- **Scenario #3**: Scholars have (more or less) agreed about my topic, and my paper argues for a different, better, or more nuanced interpretation.

Familiar Arguments in Research Papers

- **Scenario #1**: No one has written about my topic. Despite this scholarly neglect, my paper explains the significance of my research topic and offers a provisional interpretation of this new material.
- **Scenario #2**: A few scholars have written about my topic, but gaps and deficiencies in the literature still exist. My paper examines new or different evidence to correct these shortcomings.
- **Scenario #3**: Many scholars have written about my topic. Despite this attention, my paper calls for a reassessment of the existing literature based on recent findings, new methodologies, or original questions.

Think differently. Treat the conventional wisdom on your topic with a dose of skepticism. Question your own basic assumptions. For instance, were the "Dark Ages" really a period of intellectual stagnation in Europe?

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**TAKING THE FIRST STEP**

If the prospect of making your own selections and defending your own interpretations sounds daunting, how do you position yourself to enter the conversation? Here are some tried-and-true strategies that historians often employ:

- **Unscramble your assignment.** Has your instructor already selected the salient documents or narrowed the field of possibilities? Build off this initial foundation as you develop an original argument. (For additional guidance, see the helpful handout by the Harvard Writing Center on "How to Read an Assignment".)
- **Ask the right questions.** Underclassmen, sometimes unfamiliar with the rigors of college history courses, often conceive of history as a descriptive record of what happened in the past (e.g., the U.S. Army Air Forces dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945). But interpretative questions — such as why and how certain events happened in the past — typically offer more fruitful subjects for exploration. For instance, in an essay on Japan’s surrender at the end of the Second World War, students might want to ask why President Truman decided to use the atomic bomb against imperial Japan or how a confluence of specific factors led him to that epochal decision.
- **Start small.** Read a few documents closely with an eye for patterns or common themes. Do you see a way to reconcile these initial perspectives? As you read additional documents, does your original hypothesis (or simple hunch) hold up?
- **Start big.** Begin with a meaty question (see above), and locate sources that might help you answer it. Test potential answers against the evidence you collect.
- **Think about change (or continuity) over time.** Assign provisional bookends to your topic, and consider the passage of time from point A to point B. What changed? What stayed the same? Can you explain this outcome?
- **Think differently.** Treat the conventional wisdom on your topic with a dose of skepticism. Question your own basic assumptions. For instance, were the "Dark Ages" really a period of intellectual stagnation in Europe?
Sources for Historical Analysis

Whatever the assignment, all historical writing depends on sources. Once scholars have located a topic and formulated a set of historical questions, they turn to sources to begin answering them. Sources essentially come in two varieties:

- **Primary sources** are materials produced in the time period under study; they reflect the immediate concerns and perspectives of participants in the historical drama. Common examples include diaries, correspondence, dispatches, newspaper editorials, speeches, economic data, literature, art, and film.

- **Secondary sources** are materials produced after the time period under study, they consider the historical subject with a degree of hindsight and generally select, analyze, and incorporate evidence (derived from primary sources) to make an argument. Works of scholarship are the most common secondary sources.

Because of space and time constraints, you will not be able to marshal an exhaustive body of evidence. Instead, think carefully and critically about what evidence to include, what to exclude, and how to frame your analysis. Make sure to consider reasonable counterarguments.

Note that many sources can serve as either primary or secondary sources, depending on your topic and particular frame of reference. Edward Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, for instance, can represent a secondary source (if your topic is imperial Rome in the first millennium) or a primary source (if your subject is imperial Britain in the eighteenth century, when Gibbon wrote his masterpiece). Regardless of such categorization, you should treat any source with a critical eye. Sources do not answer historical questions on their own; they yield evidence only after a process of interrogation and analysis.

A Historian’s Use of Evidence

Students unfamiliar with historical analysis often confuse sources with evidence. Sources, at best, provide raw materials (metaphorical straw and clay) that scholars fashion into evidence (brick) to assemble a historical argument (structure). In order to collect this evidence, historians interrogate sources by reading closely and asking critical questions:

- **Who** produced this source? Is the author’s biography (i.e., viewpoints and personal background) relevant to understanding this source? Was the author biased or dishonest? Did he or she have an agenda?

- **When** was this source created? **Where**? Is it representative of other sources created at the same time? In what ways is it a product of its particular time, place, or context?

- **Why** did the author produce this source? For what audience and purpose? Did the author make this purpose (or argument) explicit or implicit? Was it intended for public or private use? Is it a work of scholarship, fiction, art, or propaganda?

- **How** does this source compare with other sources you have analyzed for this assignment? Does it privilege a particular point of view? Incorporate or neglect significant pieces of evidence? Structure its argument according to similar (or different) time periods, geographies, participants, themes, or events?

Although your teachers will expect a persuasive thesis statement, they will ultimately judge your argument’s success on the collection, organization, and presentation of its evidence. Once again, selection is essential. Because of space and time constraints, you will not be able to marshal an exhaustive body of evidence. (Don’t worry! Even if you had a lifetime to devote to this project, you could never be exhaustive.) Instead, think carefully and critically about what evidence to include, what to exclude, and how to frame your analysis. Because issues of selection and interpretation are at the heart of most historical disagreements, make sure to consider reasonable counterarguments to your thesis. Effective essays anticipate the reader’s likely responses and address (if not reconcile) contradictory pieces of evidence, rather than simply ignoring them.
Conventions of History Writing

Historians not only disagree about interpretations of the past; they also disagree about proper ways of writing about the past. Each historian writes (and, for your more immediate purposes, evaluates) essays according to his or her own preferred criteria. Before you embark on your project, consult the assignment prompt once again, and make sure that you understand its directions. If you are unclear about the expectations for your essay, ask your instructor for clarification. Above all else, listen to your instructor’s guidance, even if it means disregarding the advice offered in this guide.

Nonetheless, professional historians have generally agreed on a number of conventions, or practices, that distinguish history writing from writing in other academic disciplines. As you compose or revise your history paper, consider these guidelines:

- **Write in the past tense.** Some students have been taught to eschew their prose by writing in the “literary present” tense. Such prose, while acceptable in other disciplines, represents poor historical thinking. Since all historical events (including the composition of primary and secondary sources) took place at some point in the past, write about them in the past tense.

- **Avoid vague generalizations.** Historians value specificity, not equivocal phrases like “once upon a time” or “people always say that…”

- **Avoid presentism or anachronisms.** Resist the temptation to relate all historical arguments or concerns back to the present. Rather, investigate the past on its own terms. Take care not to jumble the chronological order of events.

- **Treat your historical subject with respect.** Aspire to understand, rather than judge, the past. Remember that historical actors were not privy to contemporary values or assumptions and that no historical generation (including our own) is perfect.

- **Paraphrase if you can, quote if you must.** Many students rely on quotations as a crutch, missing an opportunity to develop their skills of historical analysis. Instead, quote sparingly. When you do quote, introduce the source and context of every remark for the benefit of the unfamiliar reader.

- **Provide necessary context.** Good historical writing involves active commentary and rigorous engagement with the material. As a historian, you are responsible for interrogating sources, interpreting evidence, and reporting your findings about the interplay of text and context.

- **Employ a responsible and consistent citation style.** Historians generally use footnotes or endnotes (as keeping with the Chicago humanities style) to provide references or supplemental information, though some assignments might allow parenthetical citations. Remember that your credibility and integrity as a scholar is at stake. See Gordon Harvey’s Writing with Source and Kate L. Turabian’s Manual for detailed instruction.

- **Write in a formal, academic voice.** Avoid using the first or second person (e.g., “I” and “you”), and shy away from passive sentence constructions. Phrases such as “I think” or “in my opinion” are redundant in expository writing.

- **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** Your readers will thank you.

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For Further Reading

Students interested in additional practical guidance on the challenges of writing history should consult the following sources:


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A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper

The Challenges of Philosophical Writing

The aim of the assignments in your philosophy classes is to get you doing philosophy, but what is philosophy, and how is it to be done? The answer is complicated. Philosophers are often motivated by one or more of what we might call the “Big Questions,” such as: How should we live? Is there free will? How do we know anything? or, What is truth? While philosophers do not agree among themselves on either the range of proper philosophical questions or the proper methods of answering them, they do agree that merely expressing one’s personal opinions on controversial topics like these is not doing philosophy. Rather, philosophers insist on the method of first attaining clarity about the exact question being asked, and then providing answers supported by clear, logically structured arguments.

An ideal philosophical argument should lead the reader in undeniable logical steps from obviously true premises to an unassailable conclusion. A negative argument is an objection that tries to show that a claim, theory, or argument is mistaken; if it does so successfully, we say that it refutes it. A positive argument tries to support a claim or theory, for example, the view that there is genuine free will, or the view that we should never eat animals. Positive philosophical arguments about the Big Questions that are ideal are extremely hard to construct, and philosophers interested in formulating or criticizing such arguments usually end up discussing other questions that may at first seem petty or contrived. These questions motivate philosophers because they see, after investigation, to be logically related to the Big Questions and to shed light on them. So, for example, while trying to answer Big Questions like those above, philosophers might find themselves discussing questions like (respectively): When would it be morally permissible to push someone into the path of a speeding trolley? What is a cause? Do I know that I have hands? Is there an external world? While arguing about these questions may appear silly or pointless, the satisfactions of philosophy are often derived from, first, discovering and explicating how they are logically connected to the Big Questions, and second, constructing and defending philosophical arguments to answer them in turn. Good philosophy proceeds with modest, careful and clear steps.

Structuring a Philosophy Paper

Philosophy assignments generally ask you to consider some thesis or argument, often a thesis or argument that has been presented by another philosopher (a thesis is a claim that may be true or false). Given this thesis or argument, you may be asked to do one or more of the following: explain it, offer an argument in support of it, offer an objection to it, defend against an objection to it, evaluate the arguments for and against it, discuss what consequences it might have, determine whether some other thesis or argument commits one to it (i.e., if I accepted the other thesis or argument, would I be rationally required to accept this one because I accept the other one?), or determine whether some other view can be held consistently with it. No matter which of these tasks you are asked to complete, your paper should normally meet the following structural requirements:
• Begin by formulating your precise thesis. State your thesis clearly and concisely in your introduction so that your reader understands what your paper sets out to achieve. Get to the point quickly and without digression. Don’t try to introduce your argument within a grand historical narrative, for example. Your thesis does not have to be the same as any thesis mentioned in the assignment, although in some cases it may be.

**GOOD WRITING EXAMPLE**

Jen was an excellent philosophy writer who received the following assignment:

**Evaluate Smith’s argument for the claim that people lack free will.**

Jen decided before she began writing her paper that Smith’s argument ultimately fails because it trades on an ambiguity. Accordingly, she began her paper with the following sentence:

*In this paper, I will refute Smith’s argument against the existence of free will by showing that it trades on an ambiguity.*

Jen’s thesis, then, was that Smith’s argument is invalid because it trades on an ambiguity — and she stated it clearly right at the beginning of her paper. Note that Jen need not say anything at all about the truth or falsity of the thesis that people lack free will; even if Smith’s argument for it is invalid, it might still be true that people lack free will.

• Explain briefly how you will argue in favor of your thesis. In the example above, Jen’s thesis itself is stated in such a way as to indicate how the argument for it will proceed. Jen might reasonably have chosen to enlarge a little on this explanation, for example by indicating in her introduction which term in Smith’s argument is ambiguous, or by indicating why she thinks others may have overlooked the ambiguity.

Take care to clearly indicate when you are speaking in your own voice, and when you are explicating someone else’s argument or point of view but not yourself advocating it.

• Define technical or ambiguous terms used in your thesis or your argument. You will need to define for your reader any special or unclear terms that appear in your thesis, or in the discussion at hand. Write so that you could be clearly understood by a student who has taken some classes in philosophy but not this particular class. (Think of this imaginary reader whenever you need to decide how much you need to say to set up a discussion, or to judge the overall clarity of your work.)

• If necessary, motivate your thesis (i.e. explain to your reader why they should care about it). You’ll need to do this, especially in longer assignments, when it isn’t clear why a reader would care about the truth of the claim you are arguing for.

• If necessary, explain the argument you will be critiquing. If your assignment asks you to critique someone else’s argument (as in the example above), you will need to explain that argument before presenting your critique of it. Sometimes, the entire task of an assignment will be simply to explain an argument originated by somebody else, rather than to provide an argument for your own thesis. While you will not always be expected to provide your own completely original arguments or theories in philosophy papers, you must always practice philosophy. This means that you should explain the argument in your own words and according to your own understanding of the steps involved in it. You will need to be very clear on the precise logical structure of an author’s argument (N.B. this may not be clearly represented by the order in which the argument is written down in the reading). Don’t try to impress your reader with your wide knowledge by summarizing everything in a particular article, or everything you have learned about the topic: stick to explaining only the details that are essential to the author’s argument for the particular thesis and to your own argument for your thesis. Also take care to clearly indicate when you are speaking in your own voice, and when you are explicating someone else’s argument or point of view but not yourself advocating it.
POOR WRITING EXAMPLE

In answer to the previously mentioned assignment, George wrote a paper arguing that there was free will on the grounds that George was himself aware of making all kinds of free choices every day. His conclusion was that Smith’s argument (which he had not explained, and mentioned only at the end of the paper) must be false, since there is free will.

George’s professor asked him to rewrite, telling him that he had failed to engage with Smith’s argument in the first draft. Here is an excerpt from George’s less-than-successful rewrite...

... Smith says on p.9, “The truth of causal determinism having been established by this argument from elimination, we shall move on to prove incompatibilism.” Smith then says that the source of an agent’s actions is some event that occurred before he was even born. If an event occurred before someone was born, it cannot be a product of his choices. Therefore incompatibilism is true. On p.10, Smith addresses the objection that...

George does not properly explain and analyze the logic of Smith’s argument (a philosophy paper), but rather reports what Smith says and the way in which it appears in the text (a book report). In the first sentence George quotes Smith directly where there is no need to do so, and he provides no explanation of Smith’s sentence or the technical terms in it that shows that George actually understands it. In his second sentence, George just follows Smith’s text while paraphrasing it. In his third, George may be attempting to: (i) simply paraphrase Smith, or (ii) paraphrase and endorse Smith’s claim, or (iii) make his own personal point – but to the reader it is left ambiguous what George thinks Smith’s view is and what George’s own view is.

If you use a claim that your reader might find doubtful, then you must try to give the reader convincing reasons for accepting it.

GOOD WRITING EXAMPLE:

After offering her argument, Jen summarized her conclusion and introduced an objection as follows:

As I have shown clearly in my reconstruction of Smith’s argument, the word “free” as it appears in Smith’s first premise (meaning unauxed) must be interpreted differently from the word “free” as it appears in Smith’s second premise (meaning unauxed) – otherwise at least one of those premises would be highly implausible. But in that case, Smith’s argument is logically invalid.

It might be objected that I have interpreted Smith’s argument unfaithfully. I can think of only one other reasonable interpretation of Smith’s argument. It uses the same two premises but has a different third premise...

Jen might reply to the objection she has imagined by showing that Smith’s argument would suffer some other defect if it were reconstructed in the way the objection suggests, such as resting on a logical fallacy or an implausible premise.
You should always raise and reply to the strongest objections you can think of rather than making up unconvincing objections that you find it easier to reply to. If you cannot think of a decisive reply to an objection, you should admit this, and then give your reader some reason to think the objection might not succeed anyway. If you cannot offer such a reason, you might have to go back and revise the thesis that you want to argue for. In some cases, the correct response to an objection, if you cannot answer it, will be to start your paper over and argue for a point of view opposite to that which you started with. If this happens to you, congratulations on making a philosophical discovery!

Sometimes, an assignment will contain instructions to think of one or more objections to your thesis and defend against them. Generally, except for the very shortest assignments, of three double-spaced pages or less, you should take such a requirement to be implicit even if it isn’t mentioned outright. Also except in these very brief papers:

- Briefly conclude by explaining what you think your argument has established.

In presenting your argument, be straightforward in your language, and say precisely what you mean. At times you will need to use examples or otherwise elaborate, yet you must still be as concise as possible – unnecessary words or information will distract and confuse your reader.

HOW TO GET IT DONE

Don’t try to write a philosophy paper from scratch, from beginning to end: you must leave plenty of time to plan things out first. Think about the assigned topic for a while, and figure out a possible thesis and a rough argument for it in your head. If you’re finding this hard, start writing rough sketches of relevant ideas. You’ll throw a lot of this material away later, but the act of writing can help you to think things through. When you’re ready, begin to develop a master outline on paper. Your outline should show your thesis and your argument in abbreviated form but with maximal logical clarity; try to use one line for each logical step of your argument. Make sure it includes potential objections and replies, using just a couple of lines for each.

You’ll almost certainly find, as you produce your outline, that you need to revise pieces of your argument or even your entire answer. Keep writing sketches of pieces of your paper throughout the outlining process if it helps. Continue revising the outline until the argument in it is completely clear and satisfactory to you. (Try explaining your argument to someone else; if you can’t explain it, your outline needs more work!) At this point, write a first complete draft of your paper from your outline, focusing on clarity of the overall structure of your argument.

Once you have a first draft in hand, continue to revise it, with both the argument’s structure and your particular word choices in mind. Save your drafts as you go along, so that you can go back if you change your mind. Read your paper out loud or have a friend read it to work out which parts of your argument might confuse or fail to persuade the reader and need more work. Be open to changing your mind and your arguments at all stages of the process, and keep your outline up to date as you do. Your final draft should offer the clearest expression you can manage of your final, properly outlined argument.
Evidence

From your philosophy instructor, a request for evidence for a claim is generally a request for an argument, or for a better argument. While philosophers may from time to time make use of scientific generalizations or results, they generally avoid the messy and specialized business of collecting and arguing about empirical data, and confine their investigations to their armchairs. This is a broad generalization; sometimes empirical evidence from psychology, physics or other fields of inquiry can be put to good use in philosophical arguments. But if you do use such evidence from elsewhere, never just assume that it solves your philosophical question: be careful to explain exactly why it is relevant and exactly what we can conclude from it, and do make sure that you accurately report what the scientists have to tell us.

Philosophers still find a lot to argue about even when they put empirical questions aside. For one thing, the question of what sort of empirical evidence would be needed to decide the answer to a question might itself be a non-empirical question that philosophers discuss. For another, philosophers spend a lot of time discussing how different claims (which may be empirical) relate logically to each other. For example, a common philosophical project is to show how two or more views cannot be held consistently with each other, or to show that although two views are consistent with one another, they too can entail an implausible third claim. If successful, this type of argument, known as a reductio ad absurdum or reductio ad absurdum in short, shows that we have reason to reject at least one of its premises.

Philosophical arguments are not always in the form of a reductio; we often need to start from some basic premises that our ultimate conclusions will depend on. Unless they are scientific results as mentioned above, they should generally be claims that any reasonable reader can be expected to agree with, and they might be drawn from common experience, or from our stronger intuitions. So, for example, one might begin an argument with the intuition that murder is wrong if anything at all is wrong, or with the common experience that things look smaller when they are further away. When you introduce a set of basic premises, you should be careful to avoid the fallacy of begging the question – which is to say, using any premises that one would reasonably doubt if not for one’s prior acceptance of the conclusion the argument attempts to establish. (This is the correct logical use of the phrase “begs the question”, by the way. Avoid using the phrase “begs the question” to mean raises the question, at least in philosophy papers.)

EXAMPLE OF A QUESTION-BEGGING ARGUMENT

• Premise (1): I have religious experiences.
• Premise (2): If anyone has religious experiences, then God exists.
• Conclusion: God exists.

Note that in this argument, the term “religious experiences” is ambiguous between two readings. On one reading, it means genuine experiences of something supernatural. On this reading, premise (2) is plausible, but premise (1) is question-begging, since one would have to assume that God exists to think that one has had a religious experience. On a second reading, “religious experiences” means experiences as if of something supernatural. But on this reading, premise (2) is implausible. Finally, the argument is not logically valid (it is equivocal) if the term “religious experiences” means a different thing in each of the two premises. If the writer of this argument had defined his terms more carefully, its weakness would be clear. Ambiguous terms in philosophical arguments are a common problem, and can mask other weaknesses.

EXAMPLE OF A REDUCTIO

• Premise 1: People sometimes ought morally to do what they are not in fact going to do.
• Premise 2: If a person morally ought to do something, then they could do what they ought to do (Principle that “Ought Implies Can”).
• Premise 3: If a person is in fact going to do one thing, then it is not the case that they could do something else (Determinism).
• Conclusion (from 2 and 3): People never ought morally to do what they are not in fact going to do.

Here, the conclusion contradicts the first premise. If the argument is logically valid, it shows that the three premises of the argument cannot all be true. A further argument would be needed to show which of the three premises ought to be rejected.

Since a lot of the things philosophers talk about are very abstract, it may be difficult to bring our common experiences and intuitions to bear on them. This is one place where examples may be a useful source of evidence. Examples can also help clarify the intended meaning of terms. Philosophers make great use of hypothetical examples in particular, and you should feel free to use them yourself.
A GOOD USE OF EXAMPLES

Jen is arguing for the thesis that it is permissible for me to perform some actions that have foreseen side effects which wouldn’t be permissible to aim at directly. She uses examples successfully both to elucidate the notion of a “foreseen side-effect,” and to help bring our intuitions to bear on her thesis:

A foreseen side-effect of an action is an event or state of affairs that one does not aim at when one acts, but that one knows will likely result from one’s action. For example, I decide to drive to class in order to save time. I know that my driving will leave the parking space in front of my house empty. The empty parking space is a foreseen side-effect of my action. I don’t aim at it, because my aim is only to get myself to school faster.

...To help prove my point about the difference in permissibility between aims and foreseen side-effects, I will use the following hypothetical example: Bill the bomber pilot has decided to bomb an important munitions factory. Bill knows that the factory is next to a hospital, and that about 1,000 civilian casualties are likely. But bombing the factory will bring an early defeat to the enemy by cutting their arms flow. This will demoralize them and help end the war. Bill’s action, I contend, may be permissible. Now I’ll just alter the case slightly: Bob the bomber pilot has decided to bomb a munitions factory. Bob knows that the factory is next to a hospital, and that about 1,000 civilian casualties are likely. In fact, bombing the factory is the best way to bring about such a high number of casualties, and this is why Bob has decided to bomb there. Bringing about this many civilian casualties will help weaken the enemy’s resolve and thereby bring an early end to the war. (It will also have a side-effect of cutting their arms flow). I contend that Bob’s action is clearly impermissible.

Examples like these might bring clear moral intuitions, and if Jen can construct an example in which the can convince us that it is indeed clear that something would be permissible as a foreseen side-effect but not as an aim, she will have a good argument for her thesis.

There are a couple of types of “evidence” that you should not use in philosophy papers. Do not argue that a claim is true, or is likely to be true, just because someone of great authority believed it. Authorities can be wrong, and philosophers want to see the arguments for a view. And do not argue from what the dictionary says about something. If the dictionary defines truth as “correspondence with reality”, you cannot use this as an argument that truth is correspondence with reality because either you are treating the dictionary as an authority, or you are citing it as a reporter of common usage. But philosophers don’t want to know what most people think or assume about what truth is; they want to know what is actually the case! (N.B.: you may also be misled when you consult the dictionary because some words have technical philosophical meanings within the subject that differ from their ordinary usage.)

Sources

You may freely use the arguments of other philosophers in your paper as long as you credit them appropriately, and also do your own philosophical thinking. Again, if you need to explain someone else’s argument, you must do so in your own words and according to your own clear understanding of the logical steps involved in it. It is also extremely important that when you explain the arguments of other philosophers, you interpret them honestly. This does not mean that you are barred from criticizing them, but rather that you must interpret each author as holding the strongest possible argument consistent with what they have written. If a philosopher’s argument seems obviously wrong, then you probably do not understand it properly. Even if a philosopher’s argument seems right, you must take great care to avoid combining their argument with any other argument that sounds similar to it.

You can help yourself to avoid these difficulties by training yourself to read philosophy articles extremely slowly and carefully in order to understand the precise steps of the author’s argument. It is not unusual to have to read a philosophy article several times in order to grasp its details. Philosophy is difficult by nature: it is hard to make things even harder, make sure that the argument in your paper is absolutely as clear and easy to understand as possible!

If you are asked to offer an argument or an objection and the assignment does not require that it be your own, then you may generally use one that you have learned in class or from the readings, with proper credit. In this case, you should not only put the argument in your own words and in the logical form that seems clearest to you, but also see whether there is any way in which you can improve on the argument you have heard. Perhaps you can offer reasons to modify it, or offer extra considerations in defense of it that help explain why you yourself find it plausible. Look for ways to show that you are doing your own philosophical reasoning.
Conventions

Certain conventions are helpful and generally expected in philosophical writing:

- **Avoid direct quotes.** If you need to quote, quote sparingly, and follow your quotes by explaining what the author means in your own words. (There are times when brief direct quotes can be helpful, for example when you want to present and interpret a potential ambiguity in the text of an author’s argument.) When you paraphrase, you must do philosophical work in doing so: explain any ambiguous terms or technical terms in the source, and remember that your task is not to explain the author's sentences in the text but his or her argument: aim to show that you’ve understood it and aren’t merely repeating it in different words.

- **Use first person personal pronouns and possessive pronouns freely; signpost.** Phrases such as “I will use the term ‘realist’ to mean…” are useful in clarifying your use of concepts and terminology. Phrases such as, “I will argue that…”, “I will now show that…”, “I will give three examples…”, “My second objection is…” or “My argument has shown that…” are an extremely useful aid to communicating the structure of your arguments and your paper overall. Use “sign-posting” phrases like these frequently in your papers in order to give your reader a clear sense of where your argument is going at all times (note that such sign-posting phrases are not always formulated first-personally, e.g. “Smith offers three main objections… Smith’s first objection is… but it might be replied that… Smith’s second objection is …”).

Use “sign-posting” phrases frequently to give your reader a clear sense of where your argument is going.

- **Say exactly what you mean, and no more than you need to say.** Use simple prose and short, simple sentences. If you can complete your argument in fewer pages than the assignment allows, look for premises or steps that might need further support, or anticipate and answer additional objections. Add examples where they may help to clarify the meaning of a concept or a claim or to persuade a doubtful reader of something. A philosophy paper should establish a modest point as clearly, carefully, and concisely as possible.

- **Be careful with specialized language.** Certain terms and phrases are reserved in philosophy for special, narrow meanings that are peculiar to the subject. These include *deduction*, *begs the question*, *valid*, *invalid*, *sound*, and *unsound* (used to describe arguments), and *vague* (used to describe terms or concepts). Understand how these words are used in philosophy before you use any of them in your writing.

FOR FURTHER READING

- For a longer guide on this topic, see:
  A Guide to Philosophical Writing by Elijah Chudnoff.
  [http://isites.harvard.edu/~ek24101](http://isites.harvard.edu/~ek24101)

- Jim Pryor’s web page at:
  [http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching](http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching)
  has some other introductory resources you will find useful, including his "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy" (because you need to learn to read in philosophy before you can write!) and some notes on “Philosophical Terms and Methods.”

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The Challenges of Writing in Psychology

Psychology writing, like writing in the other sciences, is meant to inform the reader about a new idea, theory or experiment. Toward this end, academic psychologists emphasize the importance of clarity and brevity in writing while minimizing descriptive language and complex sentence structure. The best writers of psychology have the ability to make complex ideas understandable to people outside of their area of expertise.

When you write a psychology paper, you are, above all, writing to convey factual knowledge that is supported by research. You are striving to be precise, and thus you should expect every word you write to be read literally. Psychology writing can be very dense, with many references to previous research. Writers of psychology almost never directly quote a source. Instead, they distill the essence of the idea or finding, and cite the appropriate source. In the humanities, writers may repeat words or phrases for emphasis; in psychology writers rarely repeat words and phrases, and when they do so it is only to aid in clarity.

Common Types of Psychology Papers

Research psychologists engage in a variety of kinds of writing, including grant proposals, research applications and renewals, review articles, research articles, and textbooks.

As a student, you are most likely to be asked to write one of two types of papers, either a report of your own actual or predicted data, which we call an empirical paper, or a summary of other people's research, which we call a literature review. These two types of papers follow the same writing conventions, though their format is slightly different. For both types of papers it is useful to think of Daryl Bem's (2003) metaphor of an hourglass—you start out with a broad introduction, then you narrow your focus so that it gets closer and closer to your specific topic and point, and then toward the end you start to broaden the paper again to focus on the big picture. This structure allows the writer to provide context for the paper's central point. Remember: You need both a topic and a point; even in a literature review, it's not enough simply to reiterate what you've read—you need to add something of your own, some insight or perspective. The context should allow the reader both to understand why what you write is important and to understand your contribution. If you aren't sure how much context is appropriate to offer in your introduction, you should ask your instructor.

Research Summary/Literature Review

The primary goal of a research summary or literature review paper is to synthesize research on a topic in psychology while also shedding new light on that topic. Writing a literature review paper involves first doing substantial research both online and in the library. The goal of your research should be not just to find all of the relevant articles on the topic, but also to evaluate those sources. Reliable sources in psychology are generally those that have been peer-reviewed by other experts in the field prior to publication. (See Sources section below.)
for more information). When you are writing a literature review, you should not rely on other research summaries; rather you should go to original sources. Original sources are empirical sources—those that report research findings for the first time.

After reviewing the research on your topic, you will want to come up with a thesis statement for your paper. Your thesis statement should present some conclusion about the research on that topic—a statement that summarizes, integrates, or reinterprets the data. Your thesis may be, for example, a theory that explains why two sets of research seem contradictory or a theory of how two seemingly disparate research traditions are relevant to one another.

Literature reviews are not divided into a fixed set of specific sections, but you should use subheadings when introducing new topic areas within a paper. At the very least a good research summary should include a clear introduction, a body in which the evidence is presented, and a discussion. Here are some questions to consider as you draft your research summary:

- **Introduction** Why is this topic important? What is the history of the topic? What are the related theories or findings? What is your claim or thesis statement?

- **Body** What is the evidence that supports your claim? What evidence runs contrary to your claim and how do you reconcile that with your claim? The body of your paper should describe the research that has previously been done on this topic, as well as any controversies or alternate opinions. At each stage of your discussion, you should relate the evidence you present to the major conclusions you are trying to make.

- **Discussion/Conclusion/Implications**—What is your final conclusion? What questions remain? What does your conclusion mean for other people’s theories or explanations? In this final section you will want to synthesize the findings you described in the body into a succinct summary. You should return to the issues that you raised in the introduction, and close the loop. You should also discuss the possible implications of your argument for existing theories and for everyday life.

**Empirical Paper or Research Proposal**

An empirical paper or proposal should describe a proposed or completed study in enough detail to demonstrate what question the research was designed to answer, what is known about the topic (which makes it clear why your study is needed and important), exactly what was done or will be done in the experiment, and what the findings do or will mean to the field. Your senior thesis will be an empirical paper; in some courses you will be asked to design a research study but not to conduct the research. This is a research proposal. This type of paper tends to be divided into six parts, indicated by subheadings:

- **Abstract** The abstract is a summary (usually 150 words or fewer) that provides the reader a framework for what is to come. The abstract should appear on a separate page and should summarize each of the paper’s sections in a sentence or two. The abstract should be comprehensible even if the reader never actually reads the full paper.

- **Introduction** The introduction should begin on the page after the abstract, and should not be labeled with a subheading. In the introduction you provide your reader with information about what question you have tackled (or plan to tackle) and how that question relates to other work in the field. You should focus on explaining why the question is important, summarizing the history of the question, and describing previous theories and data that are relevant to the study you will describe. Finally, you should present the hypothesis that you have tested (or will test) in your study. You should also note alternative possible answers to the question you raise, and indicate how your study will allow you to gather support for the hypothesis and at the same time rule out the alternative possibilities. A study that will produce results that are consistent with all possible hypotheses is of no interest.

- **Method** The method section explains how the study was conducted (or how it will be conducted). This section details the study’s participants, the materials used in the study, and the procedure the participants followed (or will follow) in the study. The format for the method section is specified in the APA style guide. You should include enough details so that another person could replicate your study precisely, without consulting you.

- **Results/Predicted Results** What did the study find or what do you expect it will find? In this section your job is to provide the evidence that psychologists believe best—data. In addition to detailing the results of the study, you will need to describe any steps you took in cleaning up the data (e.g., removing outliers, computing composite variables), the analyses used, and the results of those analyses. For a proposal you still need to describe how you will clean the data and what analyses you will conduct. Sometimes, for proposals, professors will want you to speculate about what the results will look like. Present first the results that bear directly on your hypothesis, and always present the descriptive statistics (typically means and standard errors of the mean, often in a graph) along with the inferential statistics (such as tests of an analysis of variance).

- **Discussion** In the discussion section, your main job is to synthesize the results and offer your conclusions. What do these results mean? How do these findings
A Psychologist’s Use of Evidence

In psychology, evidence for one’s conclusions should rely on data, rather than people’s opinions. For example, in order to conclude that Americans’ attitudes toward gay rights have become more liberal, you would have to rely on empirical demonstrations of the liberalization of attitudes. You might say something like “Previous research has demonstrated that attitudes toward gay rights have become more liberal over the last two decades (Jones, 2006; Smith, 1999)” or “In a 30-year longitudinal survey, Smith (1999) found that attitudes toward gay rights became more liberal.” On the other hand, a statement like “Smith argues that attitudes toward gay rights have liberalized over the last two decades” would not be considered evidence in a psychology paper because psychologists do not consider opinions or direct quotations to constitute evidence unless they are accompanied by substantial empirical evidence. It is certainly acceptable to cite an opinion as a starting point for a discussion or as a claim that requires further examination; however, it is not acceptable to use opinions as evidence. For example, a philosopher may have argued that morality is innate. You could insert this argument even if the philosopher did not have data to back up the claim as long as you state clearly that you are citing an opinion (e.g., “Smith (2004) argues that morality is innate, which raises a question for further research” but you could not state “Morality is innate (Smith, 2004).”).

Similarly, statements such as “Hurricane Katrina was a disaster” should not be stated as facts in a research paper. Ideally, such statements would be more specific (e.g., “Hurricane Katrina resulted in thousands of deaths, which researchers have attributed to the ineffective response by the U.S. government (Anderson, 2007; Williams, 2006).”). Even if the statement is something you (or your professor) personally believe, you cannot state it as fact unless there are data to serve as evidence.

Sources used by Psychologists

Most of your sources for psychology papers will be empirical reports found in journals, though you may also cite literature reviews, chapters, or books from time to time. If you look at the reference section of your paper and the majority of your references are secondary reports of data, such as chapters and books, you will probably need to find more original empirical papers. It is important to rely directly on empirical papers because when you cite from other authors’ summaries, you are asking your reader to gamble that the person whom you are citing understood and correctly represented the finding in question. On rare occasions it is not possible to find an original source, and in those rare occasions you will have to cite the secondary source. But in general, overuse of secondary sources is considered sloppy scholarship.

One way to locate primary or empirical sources is to look up some of the empirical papers that your summary paper cites as a starting point. Whenever possible, you should cite articles from peer-reviewed journals. “Peer-reviewed” means that a journal requires that an article be reviewed by experts in the field before it is published. Findings that have not been published in peer-reviewed journals run a risk of having flawed methods, statistics, or conclusions.

You will likely search for articles either on PsycINFO or Google Scholar. Both search engines provide information on how many times an article has been cited by other scholars. In general, an article that has been cited many times will be considered more central to the field than one that has not been cited. Of course, if a paper has only been published recently, it will not yet have been cited multiple times.

The citation of sources is very important in psychology. For all papers you will write for courses, you will use APA style. The best way to learn APA style is to buy the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. This book is updated every few years with guidelines for how to cite papers. Some websites also describe APA format, but these websites may not be updated when new editions of the APA manual are published.
CONVENTIONS OF WRITING IN PSYCHOLOGY

Although psychologists will generally agree on the writing conventions below, it is always a good idea to check with your instructor about expectations for a specific assignment.

- Avoid surprises. Psychologists like to be led through a paper without major surprises along the way. This means being very clear about what points you’re trying to make and always showing how new evidence or theories relate to the bigger point of a paper. One easy way to remember this is to think that your reader wants to know where you’re going in the intro, where you are during your presentation of evidence and where you’ve been in your discussion.

- Avoid direct quotations. Psychologists seldom use direct quotes. Rather, they distill the essence (not paraphrase, in the sense of just re-arranging the words) the statements of other researchers and cite those researchers’ work.

For example, Frank (1982) demonstrates that peer evaluations and performance in school are the main contributors to adolescent self-esteem. It is preferable to Frank wrote, “Our results indicate that adolescent self-esteem is directly attributable to peer evaluations and scholastic achievement.”

- Use bias-free language. Psychologists use bias-free language, which typically means that they refer to people as those people refer to themselves (for more information see the APA Publication Guide). For example,
  - Do not use the male pronoun as a generic. Use he or she, his or hers, etc.
  - Use phrases such as “people with autism” rather than “autistics”
  - Use the phrase “gay men and lesbians” rather than “homosexuals”
  - Don’t define people by what they aren’t. For example, don’t say non-White. Instead, say what people are – e.g., “Asian” or “African American.” Keep in mind that not all people of African heritage are Americans and thus African-American is not a synonym for Black.

- Avoid jargon or overly unusual words except when it is absolutely necessary.
- Be succinct and avoid wordiness.
- Use headings and subheadings.
- Always include a title for your paper.
- The words “I” and “We” should always refer to the authors of a paper and not to people in general. You should check with your instructor if you have questions about using the first person as use of the first person is not encouraged in APA style.
- Use active rather than passive voice.
- Use the word “participants” rather than “subjects”
- The word data is a plural word (e.g., The data were...). Datum is the singular form of data.

FOR FURTHER READING

  (also available at http://dbem.ws/online_pubs.html#writing)

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Religious Studies

What this handout is about

This handout will help you to write research papers in religious studies. The staff of the Writing Center wrote this handout with the undergraduate student population at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) specifically in mind. However, this handout does not address every kind of writing task that religious studies instructors at UNC-CH assign. So in addition to reading this handout, we also recommend that you speak directly with your instructor about her or his particular expectations for an assignment.

Religious studies is an interdisciplinary field

Before starting on your first writing assignment, you should know that religious studies is a deeply interdisciplinary field, and that your instructor may assign writing projects that require you to use theories and methods drawn from many other departments, programs, and curricula of study. At UNC-CH, these other fields may include:


The interdisciplinary character of religious studies is part of what makes the study of religion at UNC-CH so interesting. However, it also makes writing in religious studies very challenging because your instructors will expect that you learn about religions and about a wide range of theories and methods for studying them.

Usually, you can write your papers for religious studies in a similar way as you would write papers for classes in any of the above-mentioned disciplines. But because religion is a topic with a few peculiar characteristics, you should know about what makes writing for religious studies unique. Thus, even though religious studies uses many of the same theories and methods as other university disciplines, this handout emphasizes the unique aspects of writing for religious studies.

Religion vs. religious studies—special considerations
Writing for religious studies takes place within a secular, academic environment, rather than a faith-oriented community. For this reason, the goal of any paper in religious studies should not be to demonstrate or refute provocative religious concepts, such as the existence of God, the idea of reincarnation, or the possibility of burning in hell. By nature, such issues are supernatural and/or metaphysical and thus not open to rational inquiry.

A more appropriate approach in religious studies involves contextualizing such questions. You might examine a particular Buddhist’s conception of reincarnation, Nietzsche’s questioning of the existence of God, or a piece of medieval Catholic artwork that depicts eternal damnation. In other words, your reader will likely be more interested in what a particular historical figure, community, or text reveals about such issues than what you actually believe.

This distinction is especially important to keep in mind when analyzing evidence and making an argument. Take care not to allow personal beliefs to predetermine your conclusions. Always do your best to begin with a fresh evaluation of the evidence. While a certain bias is always brought to any investigation, awareness is nevertheless critical. A common risk is the tendency to evaluate material in light of your religious convictions. While problematic for a variety of reasons, this particular mode of analysis is simply inappropriate in any scholarly, argumentative paper. It is also ineffective, as you cannot anticipate that your reader will share your assumptions. If personal opinions, rather than reasoned evidence, serve as the premise of an argument, then the conclusions will be flawed and easily refuted. Thus, neither faith nor received tradition (such as the lessons or stories you may have been taught in church) constitutes a valid basis for an argument in academic writing. Do your best then to set aside personal convictions as you research, analyze, and compose. Ideally, your final product will present a reasoned argument that gives no indication of your religious beliefs.

You may be wondering then, "how do I go about investigating religious material if a religious perspective is not to be employed?" Well, there are plenty of options. As noted above, religious studies is an interdisciplinary field. Various modes of investigation are possible—literary, historical, cultural, sociological, anthropological, etc. One significant aspect of these approaches is their tendency to contextualize religious phenomena (beliefs, rituals, etc). Every religion arises within a particular environment, which inevitably affects the development of the religion. When you explore a religion’s context, seemingly mystifying aspects of the tradition often become more comprehensible. We now shift to the various approaches to researching and writing in religious studies.

Writing tasks in religious studies

Because religious studies is such an interdisciplinary field, religious studies instructors assign many different kinds of writing tasks. In religious studies courses at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, you may be assigned one or more of the following kinds of common writing tasks:

- Comparative essays
• Critical readings of religious texts
• Ethnographic studies
• Historical analyses
• Journal entries

This diversity of writing tasks is another reason why religious studies is such an interesting and challenging field. However, it also requires that you know how to complete the particular writing task that your instructor assigns. This section of the handout will help you to complete a few of these key tasks.

Comparative essays

Comparative essays require that you discuss both similarities and differences between the things you compare, and that you discuss the similarities and differences relative to a particular theory. In other words, your comparative essay must be more than a list of similarities and differences. Rather, your discussion of similarities and differences must support some larger theoretical point or issue that is larger than any of the items in your comparison.

For example, if you decide to compare Chinese folk rituals for honoring ancestors and Hindu rituals for honoring deities, you should do more than describe the similarity that each kind of ritual usually involves food and candles or lamps, and the difference that the Chinese rituals oftentimes occur without an altar whereas the Hindu rituals require some kind of altar. In addition to describing these (and other) similarities and differences, you should also discuss what your comparison of these specific rituals reveals about food and altars relative to a particular theory of ritual. Thus in this example, the theoretical issues of food, altars, and rituals are at the analytical core of your paper, instead of simply a discussion of specific similarities and differences between the Chinese and Hindu rituals themselves.

A thesis sentence for the simple example above might read: Even though Chinese rituals for honoring ancestors and Hindu rituals for honoring deities both involve food offerings, the differences between these rituals regarding their need for an altar demonstrates that “John Doe’s” theory of ritual sacrifice cannot account for cross-cultural variations in ritual practices.

In sum, a good comparison paper should accomplish the following tasks:

• Describe each thing that you compare in terms of the social, historical, and cultural environments to which it belongs.
• Explain the larger theoretical point or issue that is at the analytical core of your essay.
• Compare each thing with the others at the descriptive level to identify their similarities and differences, and individually compare each thing with your paper’s larger theoretical point or issue.
• Conclude your paper by explaining what your comparisons at both the descriptive and the theoretical levels demonstrate about the value of the theoretical issue or point that is at the analytical core of your paper.

Critical readings of religious texts
Writing for religious studies may also involve critical examinations of sacred and/or traditionally authoritative texts. While it may initially seem irreverent, a critical reading of a sacred text is not necessarily so. Often, you can utilize methods of literary analysis. For instance, evaluating the genre of a particular text may lend weight to its interpretation. Issues related to authorship, source material, and historical context also deserve attention. In addition, you might explore common themes and motifs, or undertake a character analysis. A comparative study, utilizing multiple texts, is yet another possibility.

Though often associated with sacred texts, the concept of divine inspiration belongs in a faith-oriented environment and therefore should not be invoked as evidence in academic writing. Setting aside such a presumption, however, does not entail a lack of respect for the text. An alternative approach often employed in religious studies involves treating the texts as literature. In fact, literary texts are perhaps best understood when one is aware of the situation surrounding the origins of the text. Many religious texts, including biblical literature, were not sacred at their inception, but acquire sanctity over time.

The opening chapters of the book of Genesis, for instance, provide various possibilities for literary analysis. The text actually depicts not one, but two creation accounts. Setting aside the question of whether or not they are reconcilable, you may explore the distinctive features of each. Different authors composed the accounts during different historical periods, and consequently reflect different interests. You may utilize the historical context of one account to better understand its unique themes. A comparison of the accounts is another option. You may also investigate the manner in which the two separate accounts were eventually placed side by side.

The study of religion, of course, does not rely exclusively on sacred texts. Non-sacred religious and secular literature, including fiction, often demands examination in religious studies. Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, for instance, reveals many fascinating aspects of popular, medieval Christianity. Graham Greene’s The Power and the Glory depicts the political repression of Catholicism in early modern Mexico through the tale of an alcoholic priest.

For additional guidance, please refer to our handout on writing about literature. Our handout on writing poetry explications may also be applicable to certain religious texts.

**Ethnographic studies**

Ethnography in religious studies is a research method that involves observing religious actions and interviewing its participants. Ethnography becomes useful in religious studies when it is important to know what religious persons and communities are doing and saying together today. Ethnographic writing is challenging for three reasons:

1. Ethnographic writing actually includes several different kinds of writing tasks, including fieldnotes, interview notes, scene notes, and the final paper itself.
2. The primary sources for ethnographic writing come from your own experiences, observations, and interviews with other people in a fieldwork setting.
3. Ethnographic writing demands a clear and strong ethical commitment on your part to protect the well-being of the people about whom you write.

A full discussion of these challenges is beyond the scope of this handout, but the following links will direct you to a few helpful discussions of these challenges:

- A brief overview of ethnography.
- How to write fieldnotes.
- How to prepare for and write-up (transcribe) interviews.
- How to develop a thesis and argument in ethnographic writing.
- How to draft an ethnographic paper.

**Historical analyses**

As noted, religious studies is a diverse field, incorporating a variety of disciplines. The study of history is a common component, particularly at UNC. Similar theories and methods can be applied, for instance, to the study of American religious history and American political history. The historical study of religion may be further divided into specific sub-fields. One might, for instance, examine the social history of early Christianity, the political history of ancient Israel, the literary history of Persian religious poetry, or the military history of early medieval Islam.

Essential to historical analysis is the use of primary evidence, which includes both documentary sources and material remains. Documentary evidence, particularly literature, is perhaps the more prevalent type and requires particular consideration in relation to religious studies.

As a historian examines the reliability of the source in hopes of uncovering particular historical data, she must also admit that certain aspects of religious traditions are not susceptible to historical inquiry by their very nature. For instance, miracles are by definition highly improbable and thus not open to historical investigation. So, if one undertakes a historical study of the figure of Jesus, the question of whether or not Jesus experienced a bodily resurrection (a miracle), though significant from a theological perspective, is beyond the scope of the inquiry and must ultimately remain unresolved. Regardless of how you settle this issue theologically, the historical question requires an alternative approach.

While the mystery of the miracle remains, the literary evidence reporting the resurrection retains its value for the purposes of historical analysis. A historian could investigate the manner in which the various early Christian writers depicted the event and, in doing so, make a historical claim related to the development of early Christian theology. In summary, a fruitful inquiry considers not how you perceive the resurrection event, but how early Christians interpreted it. In determining the latter, you are well on your way to making a historical claim.

For additional guidance, especially in terms of evaluating historical sources, please turn to our handout on writing in history handout. You might also find our handout on writing in art history useful.

**Journal entries**
Unlike a personal journal or a diary, academic journals are not the place for merely recording your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Instead, you analyze your own thinking as a student in an academic journal by raising questions about course materials and experimenting with potential answers to them. Thus, journal entries are less formal than a fully developed research paper, and they give you the opportunity to sharpen your critical thinking skills by cutting to the core of issues quickly and succinctly. They do this because journal entries don’t need to be finished products. Rather, journal entries should reflect your current thinking about issues raised by your course materials, even (and especially) when you are still puzzling through questions and their possible solutions.

Here are some questions that you can write about in your journal entries (but you do not have to write about all of them; these are just examples to guide your writing):

**Questions about individual source materials**

What are the main issues raised by each of the sources in your course materials? Are these issues handled adequately by your sources, or are there shortcomings in the way these issues are treated? If so, what are these shortcomings, and what are the possible strategies that you could use to remedy them? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your own possible remedies?

**Comparative questions about your sources**

How do the views expressed by the sources in your course materials compare with each other? Over what issues are there major points of agreement and disagreement? What causes their agreement or disagreement? Is it a difference or similarity in theory, method, topic, data, approach? How would you evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of each source’s point of view, and which criteria do you use to evaluate them? How would you use the sources in your course materials to construct your own arguments? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your own, developing point of view?

**Questions about your own thinking**

What are your own reactions to the materials in your course? When you find something interesting in your course materials, what do you think is motivating your interest? With what in your course materials do you agree or disagree, and why? Can you find support in the course materials for your points of interest, agreement, and disagreement, or are your reactions driven primarily by factors drawn from outside the frame of your course? If the origins of your reactions come from sources that reside primarily outside the course, then how will you manage them relative to the core issues raised in your course? Can they be an asset to you as you think through your course materials, or will they be a liability?

*Some definitions in religious studies*
Oftentimes, how you write in religious studies significantly depends on the vocabulary you use and how you use it. The best way to ensure that you are using words with definitions that are appropriate for the kind of paper that you are writing is to make sure that you thoroughly understand—and are able correctly to use—the vocabulary in your course readings. But in addition, you may want to use more general terms in your writing. For the definitions of general terms, you should consult either the Oxford English Dictionary or the Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion. Below are a few definitions of common, general terms in religious studies to help you get started with your writing.

(These definitions are based primarily on The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion, 1995):

- **Belief**: A "belief" is an attitude or idea that motivates a person to act.
- **Deity**: "Deity" is a general term for a god or goddess.
- **Faith**: The term "faith" is closely associated with Protestant Christian attitudes toward religion because it implies that religions are sets of beliefs.
- **Holy Books**: The term "holy books" refers to texts that are considered as authoritative or sacred within a tradition. Holy books can be written, oral, or both.
- **Ritual**: The term "ritual" refers to a system of actions and beliefs. A ritual has several stages, generally including a distinctive beginning, middle, and end, as well as pre-ritual and post-ritual stages.
- **Tradition**: The term "tradition" refers to the transmission of received practices, customs, and knowledge. In some religions, traditions refer primarily to holy books; in others, to religious practices; in still others, "tradition" refers to both holy books and religious practices.

**Works consulted**

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


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A GUIDE TO WRITING SCIENTIFIC PAPERS

Scientific experiments are demanding, exciting endeavors, but, to have an impact, results must be communicated to others. A research paper is a method of communication, an attempt to tell others about some specific data that you have gathered and what you think those data mean in the context of your research. The "rules" of writing a scientific paper are rigid and are different from those that apply when you write an English theme or a library research paper. For clear communication, the paper obviously requires proper usage of the English language and this will be considered in evaluating your reports. Scientific papers must be written clearly and concisely so that readers with backgrounds similar to yours can understand easily what you have done and how you have done it should they want to repeat or extend your work. When writing papers for the biology department, you can assume that your audience will be readers like yourselves with similar knowledge.

Although scientific journals differ somewhat in their specific requirements, a general format that would be acceptable for most biological journals is:

Title
Abstract
Introduction
Materials and Methods
Results
Discussion
Conclusions
Acknowledgments
Literature Cited

The section headings (Abstract, Introduction, etc.) should be centered and the body of each section should follow immediately below the heading. Do not begin each section on a new page. If one section ends part of the way down the page, the next section heading follows immediately on the same page.

One important general rule to keep in mind is that a scientific paper is a report about something that has been done in the past. Most of the paper should be written in the PAST TENSE (was, were). The present tense (is, are) is used when stating generalizations or conclusions. The present tense is most often used in the Introduction,
Discussion and Conclusion sections of papers. The paper should read as a narrative in which the author describes what was done and what results were obtained from that work.

**TITLE**

Every scientific paper must have a self-explanatory title. By reading the title, the work being reported should be clear to the reader without having to read the paper itself. The title, "A Biology Lab Report", tells the reader nothing. An example of a good, self-explanatory title would be: "The Effects of Light and Temperature on the Growth of Populations of the Bacterium, *Escherichia coli*". This title reports exactly what the researcher has done by stating three things:

1. The environmental factors that were manipulated (light, temperature).
2. The parameter that was measured (growth).
3. The specific organism that was studied (the bacterium, *Escherichia coli*).

If the title had been only "Effects of Light and Temperature on *Escherichia coli*", the reader would have to guess which parameters were measured. (That is, were the effects on reproduction, survival, dry weight or something else?) If the title had been "Effect of Environmental Factors on Growth of *Escherichia coli*", the reader would not know which environmental factors were manipulated. If the title had been "Effects of Light and Temperature on the Growth of an Organism", then the reader would not know which organism was studied. In any of the above cases, the reader would be forced to read more of the paper to understand what the researcher had done.

Exceptions do occur: If several factors were manipulated, all of them do not have to be listed. Instead, "Effects of Several Environmental Factors on Growth of Populations of *Escherichia coli*" (if more than two or three factors were manipulated) would be appropriate. The same applies if more than two or three organisms were studied. For example, "Effects of Light and Temperature on the Growth of Four Species of Bacteria" would be correct. The researcher would then include the names of the bacteria in the Materials and Methods section of the paper.

**ABSTRACT**

The abstract section in a scientific paper is a concise digest of the content of the paper. An abstract is more than a summary. A summary is a brief restatement of preceding text that is intended to orient a reader who has studied the preceding text. An abstract is intended to be self-explanatory without reference to the paper, but is not a substitute for the paper.
The abstract should present, in about 250 words, the purpose of the paper, general materials and methods (including, if any, the scientific and common names of organisms), summarized results, and the major conclusions. Do not include any information that is not contained in the body of the paper. Exclude detailed descriptions of organisms, materials and methods. Tables or figures, references to tables or figures, or references to literature cited usually are not included in this section. The abstract is usually written last. An easy way to write the abstract is to extract the most important points from each section of the paper and then use those points to construct a brief description of your study.

INTRODUCTION

The Introduction is the statement of the problem that you investigated. It should give readers enough information to appreciate your specific objectives within a larger theoretical framework. After placing your work in a broader context, you should state the specific question(s) to be answered. This section may also include background information about the problem such as a summary of any research that has been done on the problem in the past and how the present experiment will help to clarify or expand the knowledge in this general area. All background information gathered from other sources must, of course, be appropriately cited. (Proper citation of references will be described later.)

A helpful strategy in this section is to go from the general, theoretical framework to your specific question. However, do not make the Introduction too broad. Remember that you are writing for classmates who have knowledge similar to yours. Present only the most relevant ideas and get quickly to the point of the paper. For examples, see the Appendix.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section explains how and, where relevant, when the experiment was done. The researcher describes the experimental design, the apparatus, methods of gathering data and type of control. If any work was done in a natural habitat, the worker describes the study area, states its location and explains when the work was done. If specimens were collected for study, where and when that material was collected are stated. The general rule to remember is that the Materials and Methods section should be detailed and clear enough so that any reader knowledgeable in basic scientific techniques could duplicate the study if she/he wished to do so. For examples, see the Appendix.

DO NOT write this section as though it were directions in a laboratory exercise book. Instead of writing:

First pour agar into six petri plates. Then inoculate the plates with the bacteria. Then put the plates into the incubator . . .

Simply describe how the experiment was done:
Six petri plates were prepared with agar and inoculated with the bacteria. The plates were incubated for ten hours.

Also, **DO NOT LIST** the equipment used in the experiment. The materials that were used in the research are simply mentioned in the narrative as the experimental procedure is described in detail. If well-known methods were used without changes, simply name the methods (e.g., standard microscopic techniques; standard spectrophotometric techniques). If modified standard techniques were used, describe the changes.

**RESULTS**

Here the researcher presents **summarized** data for inspection using **narrative text** and, where appropriate, tables and figures to display summarized data. Only the results are presented. No interpretation of the data or conclusions about what the data might mean are given in this section. Data assembled in tables and/or figures should **supplement** the text and present the data in an easily understandable form. **Do not present raw data!** If tables and/or figures are used, they must be accompanied by **narrative text**. Do not repeat extensively in the text the data you have presented in tables and figures. But, do not restrict yourself to passing comments either. (For example, only stating that "Results are shown in Table 1." is not appropriate.) The text **describes** the data presented in the tables and figures and calls attention to the important data that the researcher will discuss in the Discussion section and will use to support Conclusions. (Rules to follow when constructing and presenting figures and tables are presented in a later section of this guide.)

**DISCUSSION**

Here, the researcher **interprets** the data in terms of any patterns that were observed, any relationships among experimental variables that are important and any correlations between variables that are discernible. The author should include any explanations of how the results differed from those hypothesized, or how the results were either different from or similar to those of any related experiments performed by other researchers. Remember that experiments do not always need to show major differences or trends to be important. "Negative" results also need to be explained and may represent something important--perhaps a new or changed focus for your research.

A useful strategy in discussing your experiment is to relate your specific results back to the broad theoretical context presented in the Introduction. Since your Introduction went from the general to a specific question, going from the specific back to the general will help to tie your ideas and arguments together.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This section simply states what the researcher thinks the data mean, and, as such, should relate directly back to the problem/question stated in the introduction.
section should not offer any reasons for those particular conclusions—these should have been presented in the Discussion section. By looking at only the Introduction and Conclusions sections, a reader should have a good idea of what the researcher has investigated and discovered even though the specific details of how the work was done would not be known.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this section you should give credit to people who have helped you with the research or with writing the paper. If your work has been supported by a grant, you would also give credit for that in this section.

LITERATURE CITED

This section lists, in alphabetical order by author, all published information that was referred to anywhere in the text of the paper. It provides the readers with the information needed should they want to refer to the original literature on the general problem. Note that the Literature Cited section includes only those references that were actually mentioned (cited) in the paper. Any other information that the researcher may have read about the problem but did not mention in the paper is not included in this section. This is why the section is called "Literature Cited" instead of "References" or "Bibliography".

The system of citing reference material in scientific journals varies with the particular journal. The method that you will follow is the "author-date" system. Listed below are several examples of how citations should be presented in the text of your paper. The name(s) of the author(s) and year of publication are included in the body of the text. Sentence structure determines the placement of the parentheses.

**One author:** 'Scott's (1990) model fails to ...' or 'The stream model (Scott 1990) is ...'

**Two authors:** 'Libby and Libby (1991) show...' or 'Previous moose migration studies (Libby and Libby 1991) ...'

**Three or more authors:** 'Roche et al. (1991) reported that ...' or 'During April, moose sightings increased over those in a previous study (Roche et al. 1991) ...'

Entries in the Literature Cited section are listed alphabetically by author(s) and chronologically for papers by the same author(s). The following citations illustrate the details of punctuation and order of information for a journal article, book, Internet source, and your laboratory packet.

Generally, most references will be to the primary literature (i.e., journal articles) and, to a lesser extent, books. Popular literature and the Internet should be used sparingly and with caution. Other sources such as book chapters and pamphlets typically have their own specific citation formats. If necessary, be sure to find out what these formats are and use them appropriately.


This guide is based on a paper by Gubanich, A.A. 1977. Writing the scientific paper in the investigative lab. Amer. Biol. Teacher, 39(1): 27-34.

**APPENDIX**

Examples from the scientific literature that illustrate material in various sections of a scientific paper.

**ABSTRACTS:**


Went's classical experiment on the diffusion of auxin activity from unilaterally illuminated oat coleoptile tips (Went 1928), was repeated as precisely as possible. In agreement with Went's data with the *Avena* curvature assay, the agar blocks from the illuminated side of oat (*Avena sativa* L. cv. Victory) coleoptile tips had, on the average, 38% of the auxin activity of those from the shaded side. However, determination of the absolute amounts of indole-3-acetic acid (IAA) in the agar blocks, using a physicochemical assay following purification, showed that the IAA was evenly distributed in the blocks from the illuminated and shaded sides. In
the blocks from the shaded and dark-control halves the amounts of IAA were 2.5 times higher than the auxin activity measured by the Avena curvature test, and in those from the illuminated half even 7 times higher. Chromatography of the diffusates prior to the Avena curvature test demonstrated that the amounts of two growth inhibitors, especially of the more polar one, were significantly higher in the agar blocks from the illuminated side than in those from the shaded side and the dark control. These results show that the basic experiment from which the Cholodny-Went theory was derived does not justify this theory. The data rather indicate that phototropism is caused by the light-induced, local accumulation of growth inhibitors against a background of even auxin distribution, the diffusion of auxin being unaffected.


Inducible defensive responses in plants are known to be activated locally and systematically by signaling molecules that are produced at sites of pathogen or insect attacks, but only one chemical signal, ethylene, is known to travel through the atmosphere to activate plant defensive genes. Methyl jasmonate, a common plant secondary compound, when applied to surfaces of tomato plants, induces the synthesis of defensive proteinase inhibitor proteins in the treated plants and in nearby plants as well. The presence of methyl jasmonate in the atmosphere of chambers containing plants from three species of two families, Solanaceae and Fabaceae, results in the accumulation of proteinase inhibitors in leaves of all three species. When sagebrush, Artemesia tridentata, a plant shown to possess methyl jasmonate in leaf surface structures, is incubated in chambers with tomato plants, proteinase inhibitor accumulation is induced in the tomato leaves, demonstrating that interplant communication can occur from leaves of one species of plant to leaves of another species to activate the expression of defensive genes.

INTRODUCTIONS:


The failure or inability of an individual to produce functional gametes under a given set of environmental conditions is known as sterility. Male sterility in plants is generally associated with the lack of production of viable pollen; however its expression can vary (Frankel and Galun 1977, Kaul 1988). In any event, male sterility is of fundamental importance in the production of hybrid seeds and in breeding programs.

Plant growth substances, both exogenously applied and endogenous, have often been implicated in the regulation of male sterility in several plant species (Frankel and Galun
Cytokinins, gibberellins, auxins and abscisic acid, as well as polyamines, are all known to affect pollen and stamen development in a number of species (e.g., Sawhney 1974, Ahokas 1982, Saini and Aspinall 1982, Rastogi and Sawhney 1990, Nakajima et al. 1991, Singh et al. 1992).

The objective of this study was to determine a possible relationship between endogenous cytokinins with male sterility in the genic male sterile system in *Brassica napus*. Thus, an analysis of a number of cytokinins in various organs of the wild type and genic male sterile plants was conducted.


A major goal of plant ecology is to explain spatial variation in a species frequency of occurrence. Spatial variation in seed predation may contribute to spatial variation in plant frequency by reducing seed supply sufficiently to limit seedling emergence more at one location than another (Louda 1982, Anderson 1989). Spatial variation in seed predation is well documented (e.g., Janzen 1971, 1975; Bertness et al. 1987; Smith 1987), but few investigators tested whether differential seed predation resulted in differential seedling emergence (e.g., Louda 1982, 1983). Since factors such as dense ground cover may suppress seedling emergence regardless of the amount of seed predation (Harper 1977), additional studies are needed to clarify the effect of seed predation on seedling emergence. Therefore, we examined the effects of both seed predation and ground cover (i.e., plant biomass and litter) on seedling emergence of some old-field forbs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:


 Seeds of *Raphanus sativus* L. var. *hortensis* f. *shogoin* were sown and germinated in petri dishes on 4 layers of paper-towel (Kimberly-Clark Corp.) moistened with distilled water. After 3 days in darkness at 25°C, 4-mm hypocotyl segments were excised below the hook of the 3 cm long etiolated seedlings. After subapical segments were held for 1 h in darkness at 25°C in distilled water, they were transferred to 1 mM IAA solution or mixed media containing 1 mM IAA and raphanusanin B (1 or 3 mM). In other experiments, segments were preincubated for 1 h in small petri dishes containing 1 mM IAA solution, and then raphanusanin B was added to the medium (final concentrations 1 or 3 mM). Segment lengths were measured using a microscope with microgauge. All manipulations were carried out under dim green light (3mW m-2).


Schizosaccharomyces pombe h90, the homothallic, readily sporing haploid strain, was used. The strain was maintained on malt extract-yeast extract (MY) agar as described by Tanaka and Kanbe (1986). Cells were cultured on a MY slant at 30°C for 48 h, transferred to MY broth and cultures at 30°C overnight. Cells at the exponential phase were spread on a MY plate and further incubated at 30°C for 4 to 6 h before harvesting for microscopy.

Cells were fixed with a solution of 3% paraformaldehyde in a 50mM-phosphate buffer containing 1mM-MgCl2 (pH 6.8) at room temperature for 2 h. After washing with the buffer, cells were treated with Novozyme 234 (Novo Industri A/S, Bagsvaerd, Denmark) for 60 min at 30°C with reciprocal shaking to remove the cell wall. For the staining of F-actin, cells were washed and suspended in Rh-ph solution (Molecular Probes, Inc., Eugene, OR, USA) diluted 20 times in 50 mM-phosphate-buffered saline containing 1mM-MgCl2 (PBS, pH 7.3) at room temperature for 2 h. Nuclei were stained by 4,6-diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI) in NS buffer described by Suzuki et al. (1982). Preparations were examined with an Olympus BHS-RFK epifluorescence microscope using a U-G dichroic mirror with excitation filter BP490 for Rh-ph staining and UG1 for DAPI, and were photographed on Kodak Tmax400 film.

[This section continued to describe preparation for electron microscopy and the three-dimensional reconstruction of serial sections.]

RESULTS:


As shown in Table 1, the growth of roots treated with 10 mM Ca2+ was approximately 30% greater than the controls for a 3.5 h period following Ca2+ application to Alaska pea roots and approximately 80% greater than control for 12 h following the treatment in ageotropum pea. However, the growth of Alaska pea roots did not differ from that of control roots when measured 12 h after Ca2+ treatment. Roots of Silver Queen corn also showed an increase of approximately 70% in growth 3 h following application of 20 mM Ca2+ (Table 1). Such symmetrical treatment of root caps with Ca2+ did not cause curvature of the roots.

[The results section continued for several more paragraphs.]


Gold particles were predominant over the nuclear nucleolus-like bodies (NLBs) (Fig. 9). Although the distribution histogram of gold particles over the nuclear NLBs showed that labelling varied from 40 to 130 particles mm-2, most of that fell in the range of 80 - 90 particles mm-2 (Fig. 4). The quantitative estimation of labelling, which represented the
average number of gold particles per mm², indicated the labelling over the nuclear NLBs to be twice as strong as that over the loosened chromatin, and four times as strong as that over the condensed chromatin (Table 2).

[The results section continued for several more paragraphs.]

DISCUSSION:


The effect of Ca²⁺ on root elongation has been reported to be both stimulatory and inhibitory (Burström 1969, Evans et al. 1990, Hasenstein and Evans 1986). In those initial studies, however, the whole root was treated with Ca²⁺. Because the site of action for Ca²⁺ in gravitropism is considered to be the root cap rather than the zone of elongation, we focused on the role of the Ca²⁺/cap interaction in root growth as well as in gravitropic responses. We found that Ca²⁺ at 10 or 20 mM applied to the cap end of pea and corn roots mediated elongation growth of roots for at least 3 to 4 h following treatment. Unilateral application of 1 to 20 mM Ca²⁺ to the root cap always induced unequivocal curvature of roots away from the Ca²⁺ source in Alaska pea and to a greater extent in the roots of the agravitropic mutant, ageotropum (Figs. 1 and 2). Roots of Merit and Silver Queen corn also always curved away from Ca²⁺ applied to the cap, although a somewhat higher concentration was required for the response than in the pea roots. [Several sentences were omitted here.] These results show a strong correlation between an increase of Ca²⁺ levels in the root cap and stimulation of root elongation. The results are in contrast to the previously proposed model that an increased level of Ca²⁺ in the root cap mediated inhibition of root growth (Hasenstein et al. 1988).

[The discussion continued for several more paragraphs.]

CONCLUSIONS:


The present study demonstrates that phototropism in radish hypocotyls is caused by a gradient of growth inhibition which depends on the light intensity through the amounts of growth inhibitor, and thus strongly supports the Blaauw (Blaauw 1915) hypothesis, explaining phototropism as an effect of local growth inhibition by light.


The striking agreement between changes in microtubule orientation observed at the outer epidermal wall during tropic bending and during induction or straight growth by external
auxin strongly indicates that auxin is, in fact, functionally involved in mediating asymmetric growth leading to organ curvature.

There is no evidence that short-term growth of epidermal cells is controlled through the orientation of microfibrils. Also the data do not prove a causal relationship between auxin action on microtubule orientation and tropic curvature. However, our results do show that microtubule reorientation is a specific auxin-mediated response which can be used as a diagnostic test for an asymmetric distribution of the hormone, correlated with asymmetric growth.

Resource Taken From Colby College

http://www.colby.edu/biology/Bl17x/writing_papers.html
WRAPPING UP
Self-Evaluation for (Name):__________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistance In Class</th>
<th>My Contribution</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Faculty and/or Student Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback in Writing</td>
<td>My Contribution</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Faculty and/or Student Response</td>
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118
Achievements: __________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Things you would do differently next time: ________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
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____________________________________________________________________
Are you interested in serving as a Fellow next semester? Why or why not?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Overall evaluation of your work this semester: ____________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
**Writing Fellows Program Evaluation – Writing Fellows**

**Directions:** Please select the response that corresponds to your level of agreement with the statements listed below. Then, fill in the open response questions on the back of the page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My overall experience with the program was positive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The CWAA provided me with enough resources to fulfill my position as a Writing Fellow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations for my role as a Writing Fellow were clearly defined.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations for my role as a Writing Fellow were reasonable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I knew who to speak to about any problems or concerns with the program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any problems that I encountered during the program were adequately addressed by the CWAA or my professor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Head Fellow was a useful resource.</td>
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<td>The in-person training sessions helped prepare me for my role as a Writing Fellow.</td>
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<td>I had an impact on student success with writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would enjoy the opportunity to work as a Writing Fellow in the Future.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. What aspects of the training sessions did you find helpful?

2. What would you change about the training?

3. Based on the following statement, please check all options that apply to your role as a Writing Fellow. “This semester, I…”

☐ Collaborated with faculty on crafting and “auditioning” writing assignments.
☐ Responded to drafts of student papers and informal assignments prior to them being submitted for a final grade.
☐ Facilitated or participated in small-group discussions of student work or structured peer review sessions.
☐ Serves as a liaison to the CWAA to facilitate referrals for one-to-one tutoring.
☐ Provided tutoring support for individual students by appointment in the CWAA.
☐ Responded online to student blogs or discussion forums and chats on e-learn.
☐ Facilitated the process of assembling student portfolios and submitting them on e-learn.
☐ Other:

4. Would you describe your relationship with your Professor as directive, collaborative, or self-guided?

5. Do you have any suggestions for improving the Writing Fellows program in the future?

6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the Writing Fellows program, or your role as a Writing Fellow?
**Stonehill College**

**Writing Fellow Evaluation – Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Information</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name Of Writing Fellow:</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Writing Fellow was friendly and encouraging.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Writing Fellow was prompt and reliable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I felt comfortable asking my Writing Fellow for assistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Writing Fellow made himself/herself available to students outside of class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Writing Fellow was concerned with my ability to do well in the class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Writing Fellow was knowledgeable about writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Writing Fellow encouraged me to use outside resources (lib guides, Writing Center, etc.).</td>
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<tr>
<td>It was easy to get in touch with my Writing Fellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Writing Fellow explained concepts in a meaningful way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, my experience with my Writing Fellow was positive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend my Writing Fellow to other students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What advice would you give this Writing Fellow to enhance his or her ability to enhance his or her academic support and your learning? Please write your response below.
Bibliography


