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Pacific Writing: College Writing for Pacific's Core 2 Seminar

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PACIFIC WRITING!

College Writing for Pacific's Core 2 Seminar

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Introduction for Pacific Core Instructors and Students

What is Core 2?

Core 2 is Pacific's reading, critical thinking, and writing-instruction seminar primarily for first-year students. All sections include some common elements, like **reading long-form narrative prose** and **writing instruction**, and all sections feature **expository, thesis-driven writing in response to the course readings**. Sections are taught by a variety of faculty from across the university.

Each individual section of Core 2 is thematic, with an overall theme and readings chosen by the instructor. This is an important feature of Pacific's Core 2, and something that differentiates it from more generic "Freshman Composition" courses. Good writing is always purposeful; it never takes place in a vacuum, disconnected from some overarching purpose, context, or ongoing conversation. A generic composition class, where students read a random assortment of disconnected essays, and write in response to those, misses this key ingredient that makes writing meaningful.

All Pacific students, by the time they graduate, should know how to pursue intellectual questions in a purposeful manner. For example, a capstone might ask Seniors to assemble their own reading list/research materials to let them explore different facets of their question. Core 2's thematic nature is designed to model this process. When a Core 2 instructor designs their section, they start with the overarching theme or question—the context that will make the course readings and student writing meaningful—then they choose the longer and shorter works that students will read.

Core 1 Learning Objectives:		Core 2 Learning Objectives:
Small Group Communication	→	**Writing:** In Core 2 you will learn to produce clear, concise, nuanced, and persuasive prose.
Problem Solving	→	**Critical Thinking:** In Core 2 you will learn to explore problems, formulate positions by integrating competing perspectives, and support conclusions with evidence.
Information Literacy	→	**Reading:** In Core 2 you will learn to read closely and critically, and to analyze the purpose, audience, context, and conventions in literary and long-form writing.

Students will find that **Core 2 is designed to build on the skills that you learned in Core 1**, as you can see in the chart on the previous page. In Core 2, you will continue developing your communication skills, as the focus changes from small group oral to written communication. You will find that critical thinking skills are a natural outgrowth of problem-solving skills, and that your information literacy skills will be related to the kinds of reading skills that Core 2 develops.

A Note on Long-Form Narrative Texts

You might wonder why long-form narrative texts (like novels, long-form narrative non-fiction, memoirs, etc.) are a feature of every Core 2 section.

Incoming Pacific students typically have had a fair amount of practice reading through texts for information content, and reproducing this information on exams or papers. This kind of reading is primarily the skill and experience of reading textbooks, and it belongs to the "information literacy" skill of Core 1. Students will have ample exposure to this textbook type of reading in most programs at Pacific.

In specifying complex, nuanced, literary, and long-form texts, Core 2 is designed around a different set of skills and advantages for the student. In fact, devoting time to reading literary, long-form, narrative texts unlocks a host of surprisingly practical thinking skills. For example, in a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review*, Christine Seifert notes:

> Research suggests that reading literary fiction is an effective way to enhance the brain's ability to keep an open mind while processing information, a necessary skill for effective decision-making. In a 2013 study, researchers examined something called the need for cognitive closure, or the desire to "reach a quick conclusion in decision-making and an aversion to ambiguity and confusion." Individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure rely heavily on "early information cues," meaning they struggle to change their minds as new information becomes available. They also produce fewer individual hypotheses about alternative explanations, which makes them more confident in their own initial (and potentially flawed) beliefs. A high need for cognitive closure also means individuals gravitate toward smaller bits of information and fewer viewpoints. Individuals who resist the need for cognitive closure tend to be more thoughtful, more creative, and more comfortable with competing narratives—all characteristics of high EQ [Emotional Intelligence]. (link)

What is *Pacific Writing!*?

With each section of Core 2 following its own theme and serving up its own readings, it is important that there be a unifying element that is common across all the Core 2 sections. Since Core 2 is a *writing instruction* class (not just a *writing intensive* class), it makes good sense that this unifying element be *a common writing textbook*.

There are many college-level writing instruction textbooks available on the market. But, for a variety of reasons, the textbooks available from the major publishing behemoths are not great at meeting Core 2's specific needs:

- Commercially available writing textbooks tend to be *quite long*, often 500 pages or more. That means they are likely to take over the whole class if an instructor diligently tries to work through most of the book with their students, which would leave little room for the other, more substantial readings that establish the section's theme. If the writing textbook is so big that it pushes out the thematic readings—the whole context and purpose of writing in the first place—that would defeat the purpose of Core 2.

- They tend to be expensive! The cost of higher education is outrageous enough without burdening our students with additional costs of textbooks that are much more expensive than they should be. The cost of a commercial writing textbook, along with its supplemental materials, on-line access codes, (and no used books available because the edition changes every other year!) can be in the neighborhood of $100.

- They often presuppose that the students are writing in response to essays, not longer-form narrative prose, and not in the context of a single theme for an entire semester.

- They often presuppose that the students are writing in response *to a specific collection of essays*, which of course they sell separately.

Producing our own writing textbook for Core 2 solves all these problems.

- It can be short! At less than 200 pages, it's the right size to serve as a writing instruction supplement to your section's other, meatier thematic readings.

- It can be free! *Pacific Writing!* is released under a Creative Commons license, so it will always be freely available to anyone who wants it. Since it's free to students and instructors, there's not the same obligation for

instructors to use all of it. It's no problem if an instructor decides to use only parts of it or replace sections with their own writing instruction materials. 100% of the goal of a free, Creative Commons licensed textbook is to be the best help it can for students to learn the skills and material. 0% of the goal is to separate students from their money.

- It can be tailored to exactly the kind of reading and writing that will happen in Core 2, and designed from the ground up to work well with any Core 2 theme.

My overarching goals in putting *Pacific Writing!* together are:

Make the writing process as unintimidating as possible for students. To that end *Pacific Writing!* takes a very pragmatic approach to writing instruction. The writing process is broken down into manageable, discrete steps, which can be practiced and mastered on their own. Where possible, I've avoided unnecessary terminology and theory, focusing instead on the different simple tasks that a writer does as they write. *Pacific Writing!* encourages all student writers to identify and play to their strengths as writers, and offers helpful, practical tips for improving areas where they are weak.

Make writing instruction as easy (and unintimidating) as possible for instructors. To that end, the book and chapters are designed to be modular, and every chapter ends with suggestions for in-class activities and student exercises.

Provide a resource that can grow and develop as Core 2 does. A beautiful feature of an electronically distributed free textbook is that it can be updated and improved on the fly! Are there things *Pacific Writing!* could cover which would help your section of Core 2? Are there parts that are confusing, or could be explained in a better way? Let me know!

Serve as a common Pacific writing resource. Instructors of other classes at Pacific may find it useful to have a freely available writing instruction guide that their students are already familiar with. With that in mind, although the majority of the book focuses on the kinds of reading and writing that will happen in Core 2, I've included a Research writing chapter at the end.

What is "Creative Commons" anyway?

Creative Commons is a great way for authors, musicians, photographers and other creators to share their work freely, and to allow others to build off of their work.

You can read about Creative Commons here, or here on Wikipedia.

It's a way of thinking about creative work that's more about *sharing* culture rather than *owning* it. It believes that a healthy culture grows and prospers by sharing, adapting, remixing, learning from and borrowing from others. Culture and creativity function better as a "Commons" than a bunch of individually owned pieces of private property.

Creative Commons is behind some of the most useful tools on the internet, like Wikipedia, but I believe it is an especially useful way to think about educational resources. Unlike private, for-profit businesses, the University model is built on the idea that knowledge and research should be published and shared, both for the good of humanity and also to encourage further research and further refinement of knowledge. That's the same idea that's behind Creative Commons. I wish more student textbooks were released this way!

Licensing

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Sources

The overall framework of this book and much of the content is from *You, Writing!* which is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). Authors: Alexandra Glynn, Kelli Hallsten Erickson, and Amy Jo Swing. Unless otherwise stated, a chapter in this book is likely to be an adaptation of a chapter from this source.

Sections the "Drafting", "Revising", and "Proofreading" chapters of *You, Writing!* were adapted from *Business English for Success,* which was adapted by The Saylor Foundation under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 License without attribution as requested by the work's original creator or licensee.

Part of the "Why Write?" chapter was adapted from the Excelsior Online Writing Lab under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). https://owl.excelsior.edu/writing-process/writing-process-overview/

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Parts of “The Research Process” chapter were adapted from *English Composition: Connect, Collaborate, Communicate*, by Ann Inoshita, Karyl Garland, Kate Sims, Jeanne K. Tsutsui Keuma, and Tasha Williams under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

1 Why Write?

Almost every college student in the world takes a class in writing. It's a given. Why? Why is writing important? Don't you just need to be able to write a few college papers and a résumé to get a job? And can't you just get ChatGPT or another AI product to do your writing for you?

You *will* need to write papers and résumés, but writing is actually much more important than just that. Writing is the major way people communicate in the 21st century, especially in any professional or business context. Writing things down is one of the best tools we have to remember things, and it's often the clearest way to share our knowledge, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and perspectives with others. Writing is frequently the best tool to persuade people, or to have an impact on the world. Even more fundamentally, writing things out even helps us *think* better, and organize our thoughts more clearly. The connectivity of the internet has made writing even more important, bringing us more services and platforms than ever to share our thoughts in writing. We write everywhere, all the time, across the globe.

Image: EFF-Graphics (CC BY 3.0 US) Source

As A Student

Writing is important for you as a Pacific student because your writing is often how you show your thinking and your learning to your professors. Your skills at writing and your skills at critical thinking go hand-in-hand, because writing is the tangible result of thinking. And learning how to think—how to develop your own ideas and concepts—is the purpose of a college education. Even though the end result of writing would appear to be a *product* (the essay), writing itself is a *process* through which you ask questions;

create, develop, hone, and organize ideas; argue a point; search for evidence to support or challenge your ideas…and so on. The point here is that writing really involves all the other creative and critical thinking processes you'll be mastering as a Pacific student. Learning to write well will help you sharpen those other skills.

By the way, this is one of the reasons why thinking you can rely on a tool like ChatGPT is really not in your best interests as a student. Here's a good way to think of it:

If the entire point of an essay assignment were just to produce 1200 words of text—no matter how bland, unoriginal, or inaccurate—then a tool like ChatGPT would be a fine choice for the job. It would be similar to using a calculator as tool to add together a bunch of numbers. In both of those cases, you only care about the product produced at the end, not the process.

But remember that the purpose of writing in Core 2 is not to simply produce an essay. The purpose is to refine, develop, and ultimately show off all of those thinking skills which will be important for your future success as a Pacific student and beyond. You shouldn't want to sleep on the opportunity to improve a set of skills that will be so important to your academic and professional success!

In Your Professional Life

Writing will be even more important for you after you graduate from Pacific! No matter your career choice, writing will be crucial to your success and advancement. Much of the work in today's world takes place in writing, such as in email communication, online collaboration, and harnessing social media. The way you express yourself in writing is often the first and only impression a potential client has of you professionally, and in a large organization your "paper trail" of emails and reports can form the basis of how your bosses know your work and evaluate you.

Maybe you are thinking "Not in my major! Not for my career! I'm here to learn some specific technical skills, and I'll be doing those when I'm working. I'll never need to write again!" If this is what you are hoping, I am sorry to break it to you, but you'll be surprised at how much communication and writing will matter in your performance reviews, even as a fresh Pacific grad in your first job. And consider your future career path. Even if you begin your career focusing mostly on the technical skills that you trained for as a student, will you still be doing those same fresh-out-of-college technical tasks five years later? Ten years later?

Most successful career paths have a natural progression to them. You may start out mostly doing the technical skills that you trained for in college, but advancement in your career will mean taking on a leadership role—managing a project or two, or leading a team of fresh-out-of-college grads who will be doing the technical skills. As I'm sure you've guessed, managing and leading involve a whole lot of writing and

communication skills, no matter what the field. Further into your career, you might not be managing projects or teams day to day. Instead, you might be looking at the bigger picture, working with others to think carefully about how your company or your industry might change and grow in the future, and devising plans and strategies. By this point, whatever technical skills you may have started out with specific to your college major, almost all of your work will be reading, writing, problem solving, communicating, and critical thinking—the very skills that are the focus of Pacific's Core seminar program!

Unsurprisingly, these Core skills are also some of the most crucial skills employers look for in any field. Even giant tech companies realize that these skills can be better indicators of success than narrow technical expertise. According to *The Washington Post*, "The seven top characteristics of success at Google are all soft skills: being a good coach; communicating and listening well; possessing insights into others (including others' different values and points of view); having empathy toward and being supportive of one's colleagues; being a good critical thinker and problem solver; and being able to make connections across complex ideas" (Strauss).

Google, like many companies, finds that workers who can think, communicate, and work with each other are more productive than employees who are more STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) focused. This goes for pretty much every job out there from pharmacist to electrical engineer to college president.

Writing well will help you be better at any job you have. Think about the skills you develop with college writing: Asking the right questions; creating, developing, honing, and organizing complex ideas; searching for evidence to support, challenge, or expand these ideas; and arguing your position effectively. It's pretty easy to see how the skills you develop from writing at Pacific translate to professional success!

In Your Personal Life

Even in your personal life, writing is a powerful tool. Writing out your thoughts on a complex or emotional issue can help you sort out exactly what you think or feel. Writing out your aspirations can help keep you on target, and can help you plan out your more complicated or difficult goals. Writing creatively can be a source of great joy, self-discovery and satisfaction, and it can allow you to express yourself to others.

Think about times you have received written comments that moved you, for good or bad: made you laugh, smile, cry, put butterflies in your stomach. Writing has the power to change people in surprising ways.

As you read through *Pacific Writing!* think about the ways you will use writing skills in your academic life, your professional life, and your personal life. Writing well is a skill that will get you far, no matter what path you decide to take!

The good news is that learning to write better isn't impossible. It doesn't even need to be very difficult, no matter how much anxiety about writing you've experienced in the past. *Pacific Writing!* breaks down the writing process into manageable chunks, different steps or tasks that each have their own suggestions and techniques for improvement. With enough practice and some commitment on your part, I promise you that you *will* improve your writing skills in Core 2!

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Group Activity: Think of all the different ways you might use writing as a Pacific student, in your job, or in your personal life. What are some ways writing well can help you in each of these three areas?
2. Individual Activity: What are some of the ways you would like to improve your writing in Core 2? Do you have any specific hang-ups or anxieties about writing in Core 2, or any specific goals you would like to achieve?

2 A Writing Process for Core 2 Writers

You've probably heard statements like these (maybe you've even said them yourself):

"I've never been good at grammar."

"Writing isn't really my thing. I think I'm more left-brained."

"I'm just not creative, so I can't write well."

These statements have echoed across classrooms all over the country and the response from most teachers of writing is the same: *writing takes practice!* No one ever woke up being good at astrophysics or mountain biking or piano playing. Even those who might pick up those activities easily had a foundation of skills and practice to build on and each came to mastery of their activity differently. This is true for writers, too. This is true for you!

Writing is a process, and although many writers follow a similar process, each writer is unique. Think of your writing process as your fingerprint. It has the same characteristics as most fingerprints, swirls and lines and patterns, but yours is unique to you. The key in writing well is to know your process and make it work for you.

So, what is a writing process?

2.1 The basic writing process chart

These ten steps are the basic building blocks of a writing process, and a good student writer will do each of these steps at some point as they produce a paper for

Core 2 or for future classes at Pacific. In fact, these ten distinct steps are so important to good writing that they will each get their own separate chapter in this book!

But, ten steps?! Maybe this all seems a little intimidating. Or maybe you're thinking "I've written papers before, and I don't think I've ever done ten steps, in order! When I write it feels more organic, not so mechanical!" If that's you, don't worry! And don't let the chart discourage you. It's presented as a tool to help you understand the different things you can be doing when you write, including things you might have overlooked. It's not trying to make every student into exactly the same kind of writer, or trying to suggest that the only way to write well is by following a single, rigid formula.

But all writers do have a process. And every time you write anything you're following a process, whether you know it or not!

Let's look at an everyday example. Even writing a shopping list is a process:

Understand the Assignment: Who is the reader? Is this for me or someone else? That informs other decisions. What is my purpose? Do I want a huge shopping trip, multiple stops or a short in and out?

Explore: What do I need? What do I want? What goes together? Make a list.

Write a Thesis: You need an overall plan! Especially if you're handing the list to someone else, create a heading that leads the audience to the goal. Are you shopping for a major event like a party? Are there specific needs of your guests (vegetarian, gluten free)?

Organize: Redo the list based on organization (for a grocery store, it might be how the store is laid out: grocery, meat, canned goods, condiments, dairy, bread). Your goal is efficiency. Get in, get the stuff, get out.

Draft: Write the list in the organizational format chosen.

Revise: Look it over. Is it legible? If you made the list for someone else, will they understand what it all means? Did you miss anything? Do you need checkboxes? Do you need to add specific brands, types, amounts, or descriptions?

Proofread: Check to make sure everything is there, and clear to understand.

In writing, the trick is to find your process, to see what you do and how you do it. The idea behind *Pacific Writing!* is that the more you know about all the specific things a writer *can* do, the more options you'll have when you sit down to write, and the easier writing will become. Each of the following chapters is presented in the same spirit, as a set of tools or techniques that good writers tend to include in their process, which you can make use of yourself to make your writing better. The hope is that by breaking the writing process down into a bunch of smaller steps, each with their own set of tricks and techniques for improvement, the process of improving your writing will become *less* intimidating, not more!

But don't think you need to always follow the basic writing process chart in order! Hardly anyone ever does! At the very least, each writer will spend different amounts of time on the different steps of the process. And even though these steps are presented in a straightforward, logical order, your real writing process is really unlikely to be this linear and orderly. And that's ok!

On the next page is a more realistic version of how the writing process might look for you when you are working on your first paper for Core 2…

2.2 More realistic writing process chart

As you can see, for most writers the process goes back and forth. Writers might have a thesis and organization and begin drafting. Then by the time they get to page

three they realize what they *really* want to write about, so they go back and revise the thesis. Then the organization might need to change too, and they might go back and re-read some of what they are writing about to make sure it still fits. Once the draft is done, the introduction and conclusion might need to be rewritten because they no longer represent what the paper is trying to do.

Especially when revising, writers often go back to all of the previous parts of the process: thinking about whether the writing meets audience and purpose, whether the thesis still holds true, if the organization is still working, if the style is still clear and consistent.

Revising sometimes means scrapping everything and starting over. Some writers get their most creative ideas when they are editing. Whatever works best for you is OK, because there are different processes for different people.

2.3 Different processes for different people

If you look again at that writing process chart, with the ten different steps for writing, you'll see that each step is its own particular task or job. These ten different jobs use your brain in different ways. For example, reading, editing, and proofreading are more likely to use your analytical skills, while exploring and drafting are more likely to release your creative mind. Other tasks, like organizing or revising, are likely to combine your analytical and creative abilities in different ways. Do you think of yourself as a creative person? Or are you more comfortable with analytical tasks? Everyone is different, so certain parts of the writing process will come more naturally to you.

If you understand this about yourself, you can play to your strengths. For example, choose a thesis that will let you analyze the text more carefully if that's your comfort zone. Or choose a paper topic that lets you make some really creative comparisons if that's you strong suit!

You might find that some steps are easier for you than others. And you might also find that you write best when you *combine* certain steps. For example, some writers just can't start until they've outlined their whole paper, and know exactly what they'll be saying. Others are much more comfortable with organizing and planning while they are writing, finding that their best ideas come to them in the flow of creation.

What kind of writer are you?

Are you a sprinter?

Do you have lots of ideas and want to get to them quickly?

If so, you probably skip to drafting and spend a lot of time on revising.

Try spending more time on the start of the writing process. Spend more time on defining audience and purpose and on exploring and planning. Then revising might not be a Herculean task.

Are you a jogger?

Do you try to go through the writing process one step at a time?

Maybe some parts are harder than others, like organization or writing a thesis?

Try new strategies for those parts of the writing process that are most difficult. If revision is hard, get lots of feedback and learn to critique others. If audience and purpose make no sense, spend some time looking at how other writers bend their writing to their audiences and purpose.

Are you a tightrope walker?

Do you want everything to be perfect before you set it down on paper?

Are you a perfectionist? If so, you probably spend a lot of time at the start of the writing process but have more trouble with revising.

Try being willing to make changes in revision based on looking at organization, audience, and purpose. Is everything in the paper *really* working together? Don't be afraid to get rid of parts and start over.

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Group or Individual Activity: How would you describe your personal writing process? What is your strong suit—your favorite part of writing that you are best at?
2. Group or Individual Activity: Are there any steps you would add to the writing process chart? Or any you would take away?
3. Individual Activity: Which step looks like the most trouble to you? Can you think of ways to make it easier?

3 Reading Carefully, Critically, and Creatively

3.1 Different Kinds of Reading

Why is there a chapter on reading? I mean, if you're able to *read this chapter* in the first place, doesn't that mean you already know how to read?

When you read for college, you'll be doing something that's actually quite different from most of the other reading you do in your day-to-day life. This chapter focuses on the **careful**, **critical**, and **creative** reading skills that will make you a successful and efficient reader for Core 2, and in your other Pacific courses.

Now more than ever, the world is full of content to read. You read things on the web; you read things on your phone; you read things in your social media apps. You read emails from your professors and announcements from the university. You read a never-ending stream of texts and updates and social media posts from friends and family. There's more content available to you now than ever before in human history, and you've got technology in your pocket to deliver that content to you wherever you are and at any time, enough to fill every possible idle moment with fresh content to scroll through, browse, and read. Chances are if you're sitting in the classroom waiting for class to start, you'll be browsing through some kind of content on your phone!

There's so much content available to us 24/7 that we're not in the habit of reading all of it particularly carefully. Instead, **we've become masters of skimming!** When we're looking at articles on a news feed, we browse. We might read a headline and click it, then scroll the article for a few seconds. If nothing catches our eye we click back. When we're scrolling through content on a social media app, we graze, often very quickly. We look at this for a second, we look at that for a second, we keep scrolling.

Skimming is an efficient reading strategy when we're trying to do something practical as well. If you're trying to build something and you've got a set of instructions, you'll probably skim through until you find the exact steps you need to follow. If you're trying to cook a recipe from a website, you'll scroll past the author's life story and the philosophical musings, and jump right to the part where you pre-heat the oven.

If you typically read by skimming, congratulations! This kind of skimming is the smartest, sanest, most practical way to handle the deluge of content we're faced with every day. It would be completely crazy to sit down and try to read an entire website carefully, from start to finish. How would you even know where to start, or know when you were done? Likewise, it would be insane to try to carefully read every word of every post on the literally endless scroll of a social media feed.

The problem is that the kind of reading you will be expected to do for Core 2 and your other classes at Pacific uses a fundamentally different skill set from the skimming that works best for almost all the other reading you do in your day-to-day life. College reading generally requires starting at the beginning of the text at some point in the reading process, and reading the entire thing through to the end, concentrating on the author's developing argument or narrative as you go. It's a very different way of focusing and paying attention than when you are skimming.

If you struggle with this kind of reading, don't despair! We are all so good at skimming content that even excellent students (and your professors!) sometimes struggle to move beyond those skimming skills and focus on reading **carefully**, **critically**, and **creatively**.

3.2 Careful Reading

3.2.1 Informative Texts

Careful reading of an article, a textbook chapter, or other informative texts means getting a good understanding of the author's complete argument, and the information they are presenting.

Pre-Reading

Sometimes the most efficient way to get this understanding is to start with those skimming skills I talked about in the last section and begin with an activity that some writing instructors call **pre-reading**. Pre-reading is basically using your skimming skills to glance over the text, and get a sense of what it is about, what sections it has, how those sections are arranged, and so forth.

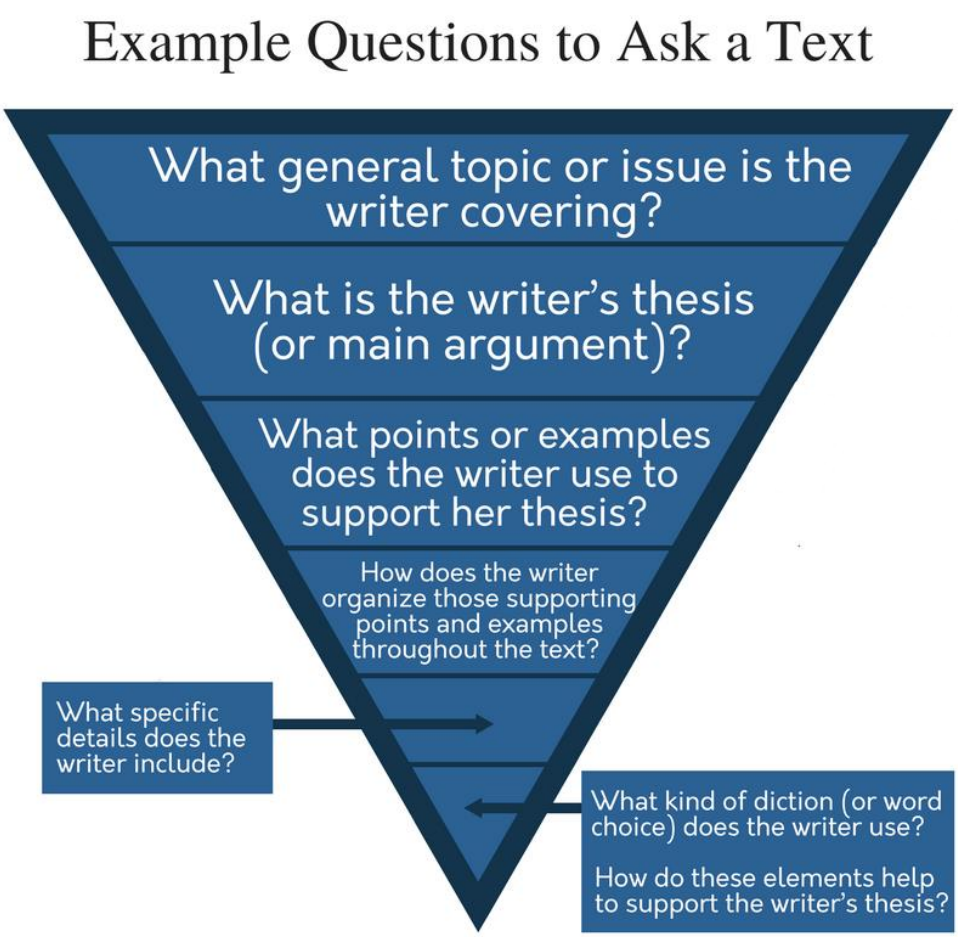
Some questions to ask during pre-reading might be:

- What is the title of the text? Does it give a clear indication of the subject?
- Who is the author? Is any biographical information about the author included?
- Is there a summary, or an abstract?
- What main idea emerges from the introductory paragraph, or the conclusion?
- Are there any organizational elements that stand out, such as headings, numbering, bullet points, or other types of lists?
- Are there any editorial elements that stand out, such as words in italics, bold print, or in a large font size? Are there sidebars, or separated boxes of text that are formatted differently (a common feature of textbooks)?
- Are there links to follow? Clicking them might lead you to resources that will help you better understand the text's subject.
- Are there any photos or illustrations that give a sense of the subject??

Reading

This is where the part that's different from your day-to-day online reading kicks in. The next step is to actually read the text completely. The good news is your pre-reading has given you an overall picture of what to expect and helped you build a schema of what the author wants you to know at the end of the reading. If the pre-reading has worked well, giving you clues to the text's content, your actual in-depth reading will be easier and more effective. And you'll begin reading with your curiosity already aroused, which is a great way to start!

You can think of careful reading as **answering a set of questions about the text**, a set of questions that gets more and more focused. Notice that the broadest questions can probably be answered by pre-reading or skimming, but the narrower ones will require a careful full reading of the text:



So after you've done your pre-reading, what's the best way to do tackle a careful, full reading of your assigned text?

Sit down (in your ideal setting and at your ideal time, if possible) and prepare to read. Finding the right space, both physically and mentally, is more important than you might think! Do whatever you need to do to minimize distractions during your reading session. (This may include putting your smartphone and other technology in another room.) Have paper and pen available to take notes.

Read carefully, stopping and rereading sections you don't quite understand. Be sure to look up words you're not familiar with. Most of us are good contextual readers; that is, we can usually figure out what an unfamiliar word means based on the content around it. But in your academic, college-level reading, every word is important, and some words carry enough power to change the meaning of a sentence or to launch it into a whole new level of detail. Also, some words have different meanings in the academic setting than in our more casual everyday lives. When you hit a word you don't know, stop, make a note in the margin (or on a piece of paper), and look it up. If you find that stopping to look up individual words is too distracting, you can mark all the unknown words you run into and then look them all up when you've finished reading.

And remember, you're not alone! **Core 2 is a discussion-based class, so if there are parts of the reading you're having particular trouble with, mark those sections and ask about them in class!** Your classmates will be grateful you did, because if you've gotten confused, chances are some of your classmates were confused as well!

3.2.2 Narrative Texts

When you're reading **narrative texts**, that is **texts that are telling a story** and not just giving us information and an argument, it often makes more sense to skip the pre-reading and dive right in. Authors who write narrative prose assume that their readers will start at the beginning and just read.

With narrative texts, there are also some additional questions we can add to the list to help you read more carefully:

- What happens in the story? Who are the people involved, and how are they interacting? What is motivating them? What are they trying to accomplish, and what is holding them back? Thinking about a story this way can help you get a better grasp of it as a reader!
- Look for descriptions: How do they make you feel about what is being described? Every word you read in the story was deliberately chosen by the author. When describing something, why did the author choose those details to highlight and not others?

- Look for imagery: These are like descriptions, but they are more exaggerated. Things like metaphors and similes can be good clues as to how the author wants us to understand something in the text.
- A good author doesn't just tell a story. They present a unique outlook too! Reading a good book is like looking out at the world through someone else's eyes for a while. What does the book help you notice or help you understand that you wouldn't see on your own?
- Sometimes it's helpful to think about the author's possible motive. Sometimes an author spells out how they want you to understand their themes, with subtle or not-so-subtle hints. Sometimes an author is more interested in raising questions, issues, or topics, but not necessarily answering them. Are there some ambiguities or open questions that the author is inviting you to think about as a reader?
- What context is the author writing from? Sometimes the specific cultural context—the time period the author is writing in, the country or region they are from, all the details that make up the author's life experience—influences what ends up on the page as much as the author does. Authors write books, but the prevailing cultural ideas of the author's time period sometimes have as much to do with what ends up on the page as the author does. Can your recognize ways the text is "dated", or otherwise representative of the author's cultural context?
- Finally, unlike textbooks, longform narrative texts like novels or memoirs are primarily meant to be enjoyed and indulged in! Unlike textbooks, every novel you have ever been assigned to read for a class was *not* written with classroom assignments in mind—it was written (and sold, and bought, and avidly read) because regular people wanted to read it as a recreational activity, for pleasure or to stimulate their imagination or for the deeply satisfying experience of looking at life and the world around them with fresh eyes. Try to keep this in mind as you read, and keep an eye out for what makes this reading a joyful experience. I know this can be especially hard to do in a class where the reading is required, where it's been chosen *for* you, not chosen *by* you. But trying to understand why people would have chosen to *read* the book can be just as insightful as trying to understand why the author *wrote* the book. Is there humor? Or clever ways of seeing things? Or a character with a very relatable problem, struggling to solve it creatively? Or "life lessons" that resonate with you? Does it help you escape the world by showing you a very different alternative to the way we live now, or does it validate feelings or experiences you've had by showing you other people coping with them? Understanding what makes narrative text enjoyable and valuable to readers can be a big part of "getting" it!

3.3 Critical Reading

3.3.1 Informative Texts

Critical reading does not just mean that you are looking for what's wrong with a text (although during your critical process, you may well do that). Instead, thinking critically means reading like you're a critic or commentator whose job it is to analyze a text beyond its surface. This means keeping a healthy perspective, what we call a "critical distance" from the text, rather than just digesting what it says and absorbing it without question.

Core 1 Callback:

What did you learn in your Core 1 section about assessing the accuracy and quality of informative texts?

That's a part of critical reading!

Those lessons apply here in Core 2 as well, and the rest of your Pacific classes.

Critical reading means remembering that everything you read, and I mean *everything*, is a text written by a specific author, and that this author had a specific purpose for writing what they did. So when you're reading, don't just consider what the text says and accept it at face value. Keep in mind who is writing it, and what they hope to accomplish. That means thinking about what effect the author intends to produce on their reader, and being aware of what effect the text has had on *you* as the read it. Does the author want to persuade, inspire, provoke humor, or simply inform their readers? Can you see the process through which the writer achieves (or does not achieve) their desired effect?

Remember, being a critical reader does *not* mean always being a suspicious reader, or a paranoid reader. You can comfortably assume that your textbook authors and the authors of articles you read for class are presenting their arguments and information in good faith.

But critical reading is a necessary part of *writing because that's how **you** enter the conversation*. If you are reading something like it's some kind of infallible text, then you can't really talk back to it. Remembering that what you read was written by a person like you—with opinions and arguments and maybe an agenda—means you can confidently talk back. If you disagree with a text, what is the point of contention? If you agree with it, how do you think you can expand or build upon the argument put forth?

3.3.2 Narrative Texts

For narrative texts, critical reading can take a couple of different forms.

Narrative Non-Fiction

For narrative non-fiction, like a **memoir** or an **autobiography**, you can ask the same kinds of questions you ask for other information-based texts. But also, think of all the different ways *narrative* non-fiction is different from something more straightforward, like an encyclopedia entry, about the same topic.

Narrative non-fiction may have all the same facts as the encyclopedia, but those facts are arranged as a story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Those facts now have protagonists and antagonists. As readers, we get emotionally involved in a story in ways we never would with facts in an encyclopedia or textbook.

For an author, taking history or current events or other non-fiction facts and turning them into a story is a powerful tool. They know that for readers, stories are usually going to be much more engaging than encyclopedia entries. They react much more strongly to non-fiction events and issues when there is a story to follow.

But that means it's even more important to read narrative non-fiction critically! Why did the author choose to tell the story the way they did? Who are you rooting for, and rooting against, in the narrative? Are you more likely to have a certain emotional response to the non-fiction facts, just because of the way the author set up the story? Note that this kind of emotional manipulation isn't always a bad thing, like when an author uses it to help you truly understand a situation or empathize with a group of people they are writing about. But a critical reader will remember to ask if the narrative's emotional setup is fair and accurate. Because it might be the difference between reality, and reality TV!

This is probably easiest to understand if you're reading a memoir or autobiography in your Core 2 class. If I'm writing the story of my own life, I'm pretty likely to portray myself in a positive way! A critical reader of an autobiography will remember that every true story is made by choosing certain facts and events, and stringing them together in a way that makes sense. The facts tell the story you want them to tell. A critical reader will consider why the author chose to dramatize the facts and events they did, and wonder what they might have left out.

Narrative Fiction

For narrative fiction, being a good critical reader gets a little trickier. After all, we know that fiction is *made up* by definition. A fictitious story is never true or factual. So

how do you read fiction with the same kind of critical eye you can use when you read non-fiction?

A great place to start is to ask yourself how "true to life" the narrative fiction is. Bear in mind that many authors will exaggerate certain things on purpose in fiction, either for comic effect or to help make a point or to make the story more interesting, and that can be totally fine. In fact, it's a good idea to start reading with an open mind, even if things seem exaggerated or weird or even incorrect. This is called "suspension of disbelief" and it's necessary if you want to enjoy fiction. For example, if you're watching a movie about a superhero who can fly, you won't enjoy it very much if you keep saying "Wrong! People can't fly! That's impossible!" every time they do. You suspend your disbelief (in this case, your knowledge that people can't *really* fly) for the duration of the film.

But sometimes you'll read something and maybe the character's motives just don't make sense, or people act in ways that seem really unrealistic to you. Or maybe the story is set in a particular historical period or geographical region, and you start to feel that the author is getting a lot of the details wrong, or maybe intentionally distorting them, whitewashing away problems or depicting characters in ways that seem too stereotypical or unfair.

In that case, a critical attitude as a reader can be a very healthy thing. We do read long-form narrative prose partly to see the world through someone else's eyes, to get the author's viewpoint or perspective. But sometimes that viewpoint can be wrong, or unhelpful.

3.4 Creative Reading (a.k.a., Responsive Reading)

3.4.1 Informative Texts

How many times have you read a page in a book, or even just a paragraph, and by the end of it thought to yourself, "I have no idea what I just read; I can't remember any of it"? Almost everyone has done it, and it's particularly easy to do when you don't care about the material, are not interested in the material, or if the material is full of difficult or new concepts. If you don't feel engaged with a text, then you will passively read it, failing to pay attention to substance and structure. Passive reading results in zero gains; you will get nothing from what you have just read.

On the other hand, creative or responsive reading is based on active reading because you actively engage with the text and you have a response to it. This means thinking about the text before you begin to read it, asking yourself questions as you read it as well as after you have read it, taking notes or annotating the text, summarizing what you have read, and, finally, evaluating the text. Completing these steps will help

you to engage with a text, even if you don't find it particularly interesting, which may be the case when it comes to assigned readings for some of your classes. In fact, creative reading may even help you to develop an interest in the text even when you thought that you initially had none.

Core 1 Callback:

Do you remember doing notetaking and making an annotated bibliography in Core 1? Those are some of the same skills you'll use for critical and responsive reading in Core 2!

Read With Pen In Hand

As children, most of us were told never to write in books, but now that you're a college student, your teachers will tell you just the opposite. Writing in your texts as you read—annotating them—is encouraged! It's a powerful strategy for engaging with a text and entering a discussion with it. You can jot down questions and ideas as they come to you. You might underline important sections, circle words you don't understand, and use your own set of symbols to highlight portions that you feel are important. Capturing these ideas as they occur to you is important, for they may play a role in not just understanding the text better but also in your college assignments. If you don't make notes as you go, today's great observation will likely become tomorrow's forgotten detail.

Annotating (a.k.a., notetaking) does not need to be complicated:

- Underline, highlight, or mark sections of the text that seem important, interesting, or confusing.
- Be selective about which sections to mark; if you end up highlighting most of a page or even most of a paragraph, nothing will stand out, and you will have defeated the purpose of annotating.
- Use symbols to represent your thoughts. If you are annotating with a pen in the margin of your book, sometimes a little drawing can capture your thoughts better than a bunch of words.
- Asterisks or stars might go next to an important sentence or idea.
- Question marks might indicate a point or section that you find confusing or questionable in some way. These can be great for marking questions to raise during class discussion!
- Exclamation marks might go next to a point that you find surprising.
- Abbreviations can represent your thoughts in the same way symbols can. For example, you may write "Def." or "Bkgnd" in the margins to label a section that provides definition or background info for an idea or concept. Think of typical terms that you would use to summarize or describe sections or ideas in a text, and come up with abbreviations that make sense to you.
- Write down questions that you have as you read. And then ask these questions in class discussion!

- Mark words that are unfamiliar to you or keep a running list of those words in your notebook.
- Mark key terms or main ideas in topic sentences.
- Identify key passages that relate to other course readings, or to the course theme. Marking these when you read can be a huge head start when it's time to write a paper!
- Identify the thesis statement in the text (if it is explicitly stated).

Many students also like to keep **reading journals**. A good way is to write a quick summary of your reading right after you've finished, and your responses. Capture the reading's main points and discuss any questions you had or any ideas that were raised.

3.4.2 Narrative Texts

What does creative or responsive reading mean when it comes to reading stories, novels, or other narrative texts?

A lot of creative reading for literature just extends what we covered in the Careful Reading section. Your own thoughts about how the plot unfolds, about the author's possible motive or point of view or *why* they wrote the narrative in just the way they did are all great starts for framing your own response to the text!

Thinking about what the imagery might mean, or about how the author's context influenced what they wrote can also be a good start toward having your own interpretation of the text. Remember to annotate or mark sections of the text that use interesting imagery, or interesting language, especially if you think you'll be writing about them later.

Once you've read the whole text, take a moment to sit back and think *What were the author's main themes here? And what is the author's viewpoint on those themes?* Answering those questions are a great way to come up with your own interpretation.

Another great way to read creatively is ask yourself how this text relates to other things you've read or experienced, either in Core 2, another class, or on your own.

If all that feels a little daunting, you can start from an even simpler level: How does reading this text make you feel? What does it remind you of? How can you relate to it? What does it make you think about? If you could sit down with the author, what would you ask them about, or what insights would you be eager to share? What do you think the author gets right? Are there things in the narrative that seem unrealistic to you, or you think the author gets wrong?

Thinking about any of these questions is a great start on reading narrative texts creatively and having a response to the text.

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Model Active Reading. Read aloud sections of the class reading, pausing to comment on what your thoughts are as you go. Your professor might do this for the whole class, or this can be done by students in small groups.
2. Group Activity: Share Annotations. For a shorter piece of reading, or a section of a longer work, share your annotations with each other, and talk about annotation strategies that work for you.
3. Group Activity: Reflect on the challenges you face with reading, and share practical tips and solutions. What worked well in Core 1?

4 Understanding the Assignment by Considering Audience and Purpose

If, on the first day of class, a college instructor told you just to write a paper, what would you do? No other directions—just "Write a paper." How would you proceed? Would you just sit down and begin writing whatever came to mind, such as the prospects for this year's Pacific Tigers Women's Basketball season, or how much you dislike the type of cheese called *fontina*? Even if you did start writing, how would you know you were going to get a good grade on the paper?

You wouldn't.

Why?

Because you have no idea what the expectations of the assignment are or who the writing is for! You do not know the audience or purpose of the writing assignment.

4.1 Audience and Purpose

Any time you write anything, your **audience**—a.k.a., the reader(s) you are writing for—and your **purpose** in writing always have a big impact on how your writing should come out. That's because good writing is always *functional*—which means people use writing to accomplish something, to have a specific effect on the reader(s).

Or if you want to think about it a different way, saying that purpose and audience are important for your writing means that effective writing is always a *tool* that needs to hit a *target*.

It's a tool, with a job to do, and the job you need your writing to do will determine what kind of tool you use. For example, you probably wouldn't write a love letter to help you remember what you need to buy at the store, and you probably wouldn't make a post on Instagram to turn in as your resume when applying for a job. That would be like trying to use a table saw to hammer in a nail!

All writing has a specific job to do, whether it's to persuade, or to inform, or to remember something, or to express a feeling or an idea to others (like in a letter or song) or privately to yourself (like in a diary). Whenever you write anything down, you are doing so *for a reason.*

How successful your writing is at its purpose depends a lot on who's going to read it—the audience. That's your target. If you're writing to persuade someone who is mostly in agreement with you, the document you produce will be different than if you

were writing to persuade someone who is initially very skeptical. Those two different readers are very different kinds of target! Taking class notes for yourself will look different from taking notes to share with a friend who was absent that day. Even something like jotting down instructions for how to find your Core 2 syllabus on Canvas will look different if you're writing them for yourself, or for your tech-savvy friend, or for your weird friend who has lived in a cave his whole life and never seen a computer before.

If you take any advanced writing or communication class later in your college career, you'll learn *a lot* more about how audience and purpose shape every form of professional communication in every career! Whole textbooks have been written about purpose and audience in writing, and rightly so. They are very, very important for effective writing!

For now, it's enough to understand that effective writing is like a tool that you use to accomplish the specific task or purpose, and that it's most effective when it's fine-tuned for the person or people that will be reading it!

4.2 What does this mean for your writing in Core 2?

When you think about writing papers for class, purpose and audience get pretty weird pretty quickly. As Peter Elbow explains:

> When you write for a teacher you are usually swimming against the stream of natural communication. The natural direction of communication is to explain what you understand to someone who doesn't understand it. But in writing an essay for a teacher your task is usually to explain what you are still engaged in trying to understand to someone who understands it better. (219)

Weird, right?

4.2.1 Audience for a Paper Assignment

The audience for your paper is … your professor? Usually when you write for an audience of one, you write a letter or email. But college papers aren't written like letters; they're written like articles for a hypothetical group of readers that you don't actually know much about. There's a fundamental mismatch between the real-life audience and the form your writing takes. It's kind of bizarre, really.

It helps to remember the key tenet of the university model: you're a junior scholar joining the academic community, entering a conversation with the other essay writers and other authors that you'll be reading. Academic papers, in which scholars report the

results of their research and thinking to one another, are the lifeblood of scholarship, carrying useful ideas and information to all parts of the academic world.

Unless there is a particular audience specified in the assignment, you would do well to imagine yourself writing for a group of peers who have some introductory knowledge of what you're writing about but are unfamiliar with the specific topic you're discussing. Imagine them being interested in your topic but also busy; try to write something that is well worth your readers' time. Keeping an audience like this in mind will help you distinguish common knowledge in the field from that which must be defined and explained in your paper. Understanding your audience like this also resolves the audience mismatch that Elbow describes. As he notes, "You don't write to teachers, you write for them"(220).

4.2.2 Purpose for a Paper Assignment

But what about purpose? This one is a little more straightforward.

In college, the overall purpose of writing papers is to help you learn, and to demonstrate your learning to your professor! Your Pacific professor wants to see you work through complex ideas and deepen your knowledge through the process of producing the paper. Each assignment you do in your entire Pacific student career—be it an argumentative paper, reaction paper, reflective paper, lab report, discussion question, blog post, essay exam, project proposal, or what have you—is ultimately about your learning. To succeed with writing assignments (and benefit from them) it's sometimes a good idea to think about their learning-related purposes. As you write for the hypothetical audience of peer junior scholars, you're demonstrating to your professor how far you've gotten in analyzing your topic.

That's the overall purpose of writing college essays, but the specific purpose for any given assignment can usually be found in the assignment prompt!

Often, the handout or assignment description in Canvas—what professors call the assignment prompt—will explain the purpose of the assignment, the required parameters (such as length), and the criteria for evaluation. Sometimes, though—especially when you are new to college writing—you will encounter the baffling situation in which you comprehend every single sentence in the prompt but still have absolutely no idea how to approach the assignment. You're not doing anything wrong in a situation like that. It just means that further analysis and discussion of the assignment is in order. Here are some tips:

1. *Focus on the verbs*. Look for verbs like "compare," "explain," "justify," "reflect" or the all-purpose "analyze." Remember how I said that all writing is a tool, to accomplish a specific purpose? Well, the verbs in the writing prompt are telling you exactly what job(s) you need to do in the paper! Also, notice how

those abstract verbs have to do with different ways of thinking? You're not just producing a paper as an artifact; you're conveying, in written form, some intellectual work you have done. The verbs in the paper assignment are showing you what kind of thinking are you supposed to do to deepen your learning.

2. *Look for questions.* This might sound obvious, but if your professor is asking a question in the paper assignment, they probably want to see you try to answer it! Keep in mind, sometimes professors may ask basically the same question a couple of different ways in an assignment. They might do this because what doesn't click for one student might click for another. Or maybe different questions are different ways to think about the paper topic. But in general, questions are a really clear way that professors communicate what they'd like you to accomplish in your paper.
3. *Look for options.* Often a professor will want to give their students some choice between different ways to respond to an essay assignment. Maybe you can choose different texts to compare and contrast. Maybe you can choose among a set of different writing prompts. Choices like that help you really personalize your essay, so be aware of them. (And if you've got a really cool, creative idea for an essay topic that doesn't quite fit the prompt but still lets you dive deep into the course readings and topics, *ask your professor if you can modify the prompt for the essay you have in mind!* Of course, you definitely need to get permission to do this ahead of time! Otherwise, you're just writing an essay that doesn't fit the prompt.)
4. *Put the assignment in context*. Especially in a class like Core 2, a lot of your writing assignments should come out of work that you've already been doing in the reading and in the class discussion and activities. If you've been reading a novel for the past three weeks of class and talking about it from a variety of angles, chances are that your writing assignment will involve synthesizing some of your thoughts from class discussion or from smaller exercises into a more formal thesis-driven paper. In other words, in a class like Core 2, the writing assignment shouldn't surprise you!
5. *Think about assignment sequences*. Many professors think in terms of assignment sequences, and you might see these in a variety of classes you take at Pacific. For example, a social science professor may ask you to write about a controversial issue three times: first, arguing for one side of the debate; second, arguing for another; and finally, from a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, incorporating text produced in the first two assignments. A sequence like that is designed to help you think through a complex issue. Another common one is a scaffolded research paper sequence: you first propose a topic, then prepare an annotated bibliography, then a first draft, then a final draft, and, perhaps, a reflective paper. The preparatory assignments help ensure that you're on the right track, beginning the research process long before the final due date, and taking the time to consider recasting your thesis, finding additional sources, or reorganizing

your discussion. In Core 2 it's possible that your professor will structure the writing assignments so that they build on each other in some way, perhaps by asking you to compare the reading you've just completed with reading from earlier in the course, or asking you to consider the larger topic of the class for a final assignment.

6. *Consider the rubric*. Is there a rubric, which will be used to evaluate your writing? Yes there is! The Core 2 rubric won't tell you anything about the specific topic of a specific paper assignment, but it will tell you what the professor will be looking for in general as they read through your paper. Reading the rubric can help you figure out the kinds of thinking and intellectual work your professor will be hoping to see in your writing.
7. *Ask for clarification*. Even the most skillfully crafted assignments may need some verbal clarification, and it is totally fine (and even expected) that students will follow up with their Core 2 professors to get guidance on their writing assignments! I'm always delighted when students want to run their paper ideas past me, or ask for help strengthening their argument. Do mind how you ask for help, though. Some instructors may get frustrated when they perceive that students want to skip doing their own thinking and analysis and instead receive an exact recipe for an A paper. Go ahead and ask for clarification of the assignment—that's fine—but try to convey that you want to learn and you're ready to work.

In general, avoid starting a question with "Do we have to …" because Pacific is college, not high school. It's not mandatory, and you are here of your own free will. Similarly, avoid asking your professor what they "want." You're not performing some service for the professor when you write a paper. What they "want" is for you to really think about the material and express those original thoughts, not jump through a hoop.

4.3 Reading a Sample Paper Assignment

Here is a sample essay assignment for *Pacific Writing!* based on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's excellent, haunting short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." I chose this story because it's short (only about 15 pages), easy to read, open to *lots* of different interpretations, and freely available online (since it's in the public domain). We'll use this story and this sample assignment for other examples throughout the rest of the book. Feel free to read the story yourself so you can follow along. You can find it here.

Do note that this sample assignment might be a little different from what you'll see in your Core 2 writing assignments. For one, it's a stand-alone assignment based on a single story. In your Core 2 section you'll be reading a variety of different things, and your essay assignments might ask you to compare or contrast different readings, or to choose among them. Also, your Core 2 section is thematic, so it's very likely that your paper assignments will ask you to interpret the texts you are reading in the context of that theme.

OK, let's look at the assignment:

> For this class we have read and discussed Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper".
>
> Write a thesis-driven paper of approximately 1200 words in which you explore one of the following topics:
>
> 1. Diagnose the condition of the narrator of the story. What do you think is wrong with her? What symptoms in the story make you think this? You might consider what you think would have been the best treatment for the narrator, and why. How does your diagnosis/treatment differ from her husband's?
> 2. Explore how Gilman uses this story to talk about the larger issue of gender dynamics between men and women at the end of the 19th century in America, specifically within marriage. What do you notice about the relationship between men and women in this story, between husbands and wives? What do you think Gilman wants her readers to understand about life as a married woman when she wrote this?
> 3. Women's writing seems to be a pretty important theme in this story. The narrator's husband forbids the narrator from writing, so the story itself is already a kind of transgression. What role does writing play in this story? Why is it so important for the narrator? What does she hope it will enable her to do?

First notice that this assignment is giving you some options. It's right there in the second sentence of the assignment: *explore one of the following topics*! If you skimmed the assignment and missed that crucial bit, you might end up trying to tackle all three of the possible paper topics, and your paper would be a mess.

Notice that each of the three options is a different topic area: The narrator's problem is the first option, gender dynamics is the second option, and the topic of women's writing is the third. Take some time to figure out which topic would be most interesting for you. When you read the assignment, do you already have some ideas about one of them? Do you already start answering the questions in your head? Hint: That one might be the best choice!

Let's say the first option looks like the best choice to you. Now we'll go though it carefully, paying special attention to the verbs—words that are asking you to *do* something—and to the questions.

Option 1 starts with a verb: ***Diagnose*** *the condition of the narrator in the story*. Diagnose means figure out what's wrong with her, so already you know that your professor wants you to give your opinion about what the narrator's problem is. The second sentence, *What do you think is wrong with her?* seems like it's mostly just repeating the idea of the first sentence. So why is it there? "Diagnose" is often thought of as a specifically *medical* term, but this second sentence seems to be opening the door to really anything in her life or her situation that might be causing her trouble.

The next sentence is also a question: *What symptoms in the story make you think this?* As we'll find out, a good paper isn't just your opinion or your idea about a topic. In a good paper, you'll also provide evidence that backs up your opinion or idea! This question is asking for your evidence—the "symptoms" that lead to your "diagnosis".

Notice that we're already starting to get some idea of how you might eventually organize your paper. You'll put forward your interpretation of the narrator's problem, then in the body of the paper you'll back it up with evidence from the story!

The next sentence also has a verb—something the prompt is asking you to do—but it seems to be optional because it says "might": *You **might consider** what you think would have been the best treatment for the narrator, and why.*

An optional suggestion is sometimes included in a prompt because it may help some students clarify their ideas or take their paper further. Maybe, as you think about the narrator's problem, you decide that locking her away and is *not* the best way she can get better. Maybe you think a different approach would have been healthier. Maybe these thoughts give you a clearer vision of what her problem actually is. If an optional suggestion doesn't apply to your paper, you don't have to use it.

Image an adaptation of source.

The final sentence is also a question: *How does your diagnosis/treatment differ from her husband's?* In this story the narrator's husband has decided what's wrong with his wife and how to help her get better. With this last sentence of Option 1, it looks like your professor is asking you to think about how the husband's interpretation of his wife's situation is wrong, and to show why yours is better.

Now that you've carefully read and interpreted the assignment prompt, do you have any clarification questions? As a general rule, if you're unclear about *anything* in an assignment prompt, it's best to ask your professor! Maybe you're still unclear about

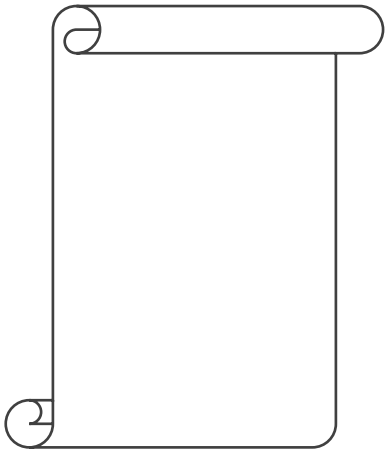
terms like “diagnosis” and “symptoms” and “treatment”. Are you supposed to just stick to medical or psychological things in your paper? Maybe, after reading the story, you decide that her problem isn’t medical or psychological at all, and has more to do with the way her husband treats her. Can that count as your “diagnosis”? That’s not really clear from the wording of the prompt, so go ahead and ask!

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Full Class Activity: When a paper assignment comes out, spend some class time breaking down the assignment, teasing out the verbs, the questions, and the options that students have. What are some different ways to approach the assignment? What are some questions that you could ask to clarify the assignment?
2. Group Activity: Brainstorm some ideas of some creative ways to respond to the assignment. Share your best ideas with the class and the professor.
3. Group Activity: Try writing your own assignment prompt for the readings you’ve been doing in class. What are the features of a good assignment prompt?

5 Exploring: Finding a Topic

Some people are lucky. When confronted with a writing task, they jump right in, tapping away at their keyboards or scribbling notes on their notebook pages, generating text without, it seems, a second thought. They're the "chatty ones" of the writing world (in the best possible way, of course), chatting away while you sit by, staring at your blank page, wracking your brain and pulling out your hair, watching their sentences turn into paragraphs that turn into pages and pages, jealous.



We've all been there. Sometimes it's obvious what to write about, but many times it's not. Even if a topic seems clear, we might be missing out on an even better one because we get stuck on our initial idea. Sometimes we think our ideas are dumb; no one would want to read what we have to say. Sometimes we get a writing assignment and get paralyzed by the length. *I have to write seven pages?* You might think: *There's* nothing *I could write on for seven pages. This is going to be a disaster!*

Okay, **stop**.

You cannot let your internal editor take control this early in the process. In fact, your inner critic needs to step off until you get to *editing*. At this point, you should relax your brain and get it into a place of open curiosity: instead of being paralyzed by the endless possibilities, be excited by those possibilities, and know that you'll be able to find topics and points to make within those topics that will lead to solid writing.

You can do it!

5.1 Pre-writing: Brainstorming

Just like we eased into reading in Chapter 3 with pre-reading exercises, you can ease into writing with pre-writing activities, exercises to help you sort out your ideas and get some thoughts lined up before you start writing the draft of your paper. Just like pre-reading activities can make reading more efficient and enjoyable, pre-writing activities can make writing your essay much easier. If you're prone to "writer's block," then pre-writing activities are for you!

Brainstorming is the classic method of getting as many ideas out as possible while avoiding all judgment of those ideas. It's the first suggestion for exploration because it's entirely natural: as soon as you get a writing assignment, your brain is

flipping through ideas, even if you aren't consciously aware of it. When brainstorming, you're doing the same thing as running through ideas in your mind, only you're writing them down as you think of them.

The trick behind brainstorming is that it frees the creative part of your mind, which is likely to find some interesting perspectives on the reading and come up with a cool paper idea, from the critical part of your mind, which often censors our creative urges before they have fully developed.

For some writers, this separation is necessary to get started, and brainstorming or freewriting activities will be the key to unlock your paper ideas. Other writers work best when their creative impulses are working in tandem with their critical or analytical minds. Remember in Chapter 2 when I said that different people have different writing processes, and the more you know about yours the more you can play to your strengths? If you're the kind of writer to stare at a blank screen, and you just can't get started, chances are brainstorming might be a great tool to try!

Some Possible Brainstorming Activities for a Core 2 Paper

- If you're writing about a narrative text, jot down the main characters, and whatever comes to mind when you think of each of them. You can do the same thing with major scenes, or major locales, or major sections of the book. Get as many words or ideas on the page as you can for each of them!
- If the essay prompt gives you a theme or topic to work with, write down whatever words or ideas come into your mind about this topic or theme. Then write down any characters, scenes, or narrative events you can think of that relate to the words and ideas connected to the topic.
- If the essay prompt asks you to come up with your own paper topic or theme, write down as many ideas and thoughts you have about the novel. Some of these can be ideas you had when reading. Others can be things you remember from class discussion. Or whatever pops into your mind now that you've read the full text.
- Put the essay prompt out of your mind for a while, and just write down whatever thoughts, topics, and ideas come into your head when you think about the book. Does it remind you of other things you've read, or situations in your own life or in the lives of people you know? Write that down too!

The idea is to create a big, messy, unorganized list of things that your brain connects with the book you've read, or with the themes, questions, or options of the writing prompt. It's giving the creative part of your brain full control. Your job during brainstorming is NOT to organize this messy list, or censor it in any way.

When you're done brainstorming you can switch back on the analytical part of your brain and start grouping things, making connections, crossing some things out and underlining others. This organizing step is kind of like mapping. You're got all these ideas on the page, and now you're mapping out how they might be related to each other. It sometimes helps to rewrite some of your ideas as an actual map, especially if you can arrange ideas or characters or scenes into some kind of order.

Somewhere in that messy list you made is the kernel of a great idea for your paper. Look for it! Some writers feel like they need to use everything they wrote down in the brainstorming session in their paper, or at least all the good parts, but that's putting way too much pressure on yourself at this stage. You just need to find a single good idea, a single interesting connection between the text(s) and the assignment prompt, which you can build into a solid thesis for your paper.

5.2 Pre-writing: Freewriting

If brainstorming doesn't work for you, but you still want to unleash your creative mind when you're stuck on a paper topic, you might find that freewriting works better.

Freewriting is just that: free writing. All it costs you is some time. Freewriting allows you to generate text quickly, without judgment, on a specific topic. You'll tend to write in complete sentences in freewriting, but that's not required. There are no rules or proofreading involved, so if there are misspelled or misused words, that's fine. If you have fragment sentences, that's okay too. Turn off your internal editor and let your ideas flow.

The trick to freewriting is that you set a timer for a limited amount of time (try about 10 minutes) and for that time *you write non-stop*, with your pen always in motion, or your fingers always typing. You also *never go back and change or edit anything* while you are freewriting. You just keep moving forward.

If you aren't a very fast typist or writer, a variation on this exercise is to use speech-to-text on your phone, and dictate into a new document. Here the trick is to *never stop talking* and *never look at the screen to read what you've already said*.

To give this a try, read the assignment prompt for the paper you need to write, start your timer, and just start writing *anything* in response to the assignment prompt. Even if you start with something like "*I don't know what I'm going to write about this topic iss oso so comfusing I mean how does it even...*" that's fine. Even if you think you might spend the whole 10 minutes just typing "*I don't know what to say!*" over and over again, that's fine. What's likely to happen is that you'll get bored of typing the same thing over and over, and your mind will wander over the reading or the ideas in the

prompt or some class discussions and you'll start typing things that are a little more on topic.

Just like with brainstorming, the goal of this exercise isn't to use everything you write down. It's just to produce a single idea, a single line, a single sentence or connection that you can later develop into a paper topic and a thesis. Once the timer goes off, stop writing and read over what you wrote, then choose only the very best bit or bits. (Or, if you're on a roll, keep writing! I've seen some students write an entire first draft of their paper, using a 10-minute freewriting session as the launch pad! Granted, a first draft written this way will probably need *a lot* of rewriting, organizing, and editing later on, but for some writers it can be very liberating to go from a blank screen to a full draft in one step!)

You might be surprised at just how well freewriting works for some writers to generate really good paper ideas. The key is that you've given yourself permission to write ten minutes of utter, worthless nonsense. When you begin the freewriting, you're probably going to write garbage for the first few minutes. Almost everyone does. That lowers the bar considerably! You no longer need to write something great to succeed at freewriting; you just need to write something a little better than the worthless stuff you started with!

What kind of writer are you? If you're the kind of writer that gets stuck at the paper topic stage because you're a perfectionist or you've got a strong fear of failure, freewriting can be very liberating because the failure is built right in, right at the start, and you get a free pass for it.

5.3 Pre-writing: Review Your Annotations and Notes

If you've been reading for Core 2 creatively and responsively, then you should already be well on the way to coming up with a solid essay topic. If you need to, go back and review Chapter 3, Section 4, about Creative Reading. All the ideas about annotating as you read, and possibly even keeping a reading journal, can benefit you tremendously at this stage of the writing process as well. They help you read more fully and efficiently, yes, but *they also can help a lot when it comes to formulating an essay topic*!

Review everything you marked, highlighted, annotated, or took notes on while you were reading. Might these passages or notes help you respond to the essay prompt, or guide you to a topic of your own?

5.4 Pre-writing: Short Responses

Finally, the best tool that you have for formulating a paper topic in Core 2 might be an activity that you are already familiar with from your section of Core 1: writing short responses!

Core 1 Callback:

Do you remember the Responses writing exercises from Core 1, in which you wrote out a quick informal response to a reading, discussion, or other activity?

This same activity can be a great start for developing a paper topic!

Think about it this way: your finished paper should feature your ideas, your reasoning as you read the class texts, thought about them, and put forward your own interpretation, argument, and so forth. If you boil that down, that's exactly what a *response* is. You read something, and you respond to it with your own thinking and ideas. No wonder short, written Responses often are a great tool for finding and developing a paper topic and thesis!

As you read a text in Core 2, write out short responses to different sections. At the discretion of your professor, this might even be a planned, recurring classroom activity in your Core 2 class. Return to these responses when it's time to formulate your paper topic and thesis.

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Individual Activities: This whole chapter is exercises and activities to help students find a good topic for their paper. Give some of them a try! Keep in mind that there are different kinds of writers, so some pre-writing activities will work great for some students, but not so well for others. The trick for every writer is to find what works best for them, and play to their strengths!
2. Group Activity: The four pre-writing activities covered in this chapter tend to typically work as solo activities. Are there ways to do them collaboratively? Brainstorming can be especially fun to do in groups. Experiment with some of the others. Can freewriting work as call-and-response with a partner?

6 Writing a Thesis

You've done your reading and thought about the topic. You've done some brainstorming or freewriting, and you have some initial observations, ideas and reactions. You have a pretty good idea of what the assignment prompt is asking for. Now what? Now you need to decide what you personally want to say, what specific point you want to make. Your own unique take, interpretation, insight, or argument: That's the basis of a thesis statement.

6.1 What is a Thesis Statement?

You may have learned about thesis statements in a variety of ways in your education so far. But it helps to break it down to its most basic form.

You can think of your thesis as the **"So what?"** of your paper. This "so what" is present almost every kind of writing: formal papers, emails, presentations, Twitter posts, proposals to clients, notes to your roommate. Every piece of writing generally has a **focus** and a **purpose**.

Don't believe me? Consider this note to your roommate.

Does this meet the criteria of a good thesis?

- Yes, it's a good match for the context because Tai, the audience, wants his girlfriend to continue to date him.
- Yes, it's specific. It says what it needs to say and no more.
- Yes, it's supportable and debatable. It gives a what and a why, and makes a convincing argument for Tai, who might initially disagree.
- Yes, it's providing an answer—*clean the bathroom!*—not just raising a question—*Hmm, I wonder if the bathroom is a little dirty?*

Your paper's thesis statement is one to three sentences that explains the reason you are writing the paper. It tells your reader what your argument will be, and it briefly sketches out how you plan to prove it.

But hold up, isn't *the reason you are writing the paper* because it was assigned in Core 2? If you were not enrolled in Core 2, it's pretty unlikely you'd spontaneously sit

down to write a paper! That's true, but it's helpful to remember that your professors don't assign papers just so you can jump through some hoops. We are interested in your original thoughts and ideas about the topic—the development of your thinking.

Remember the academic model: When you write an essay you're a junior scholar joining the academic community, entering a conversation with the others. Your thesis statement is basically your chance to say *Here's what I think*.

Another way to think about it: Imagine an impatient reader, picking up your paper, and saying "Ugh, what's the point of all this writing? What should I be paying attention to or keeping in mind as I read it? Actually, why should I even bother reading this paper at all?" Your thesis statement exists to answer these questions!

6.2 Using a Working Thesis

Does this sound a little intimidating? For many students, making the step from a handful of observations about a text to a solid argument and thesis statement feels like the hardest part of the whole writing process. If that's you, don't worry! The rest of this chapter will give you some practical strategies shaping your ideas into a thesis so you can start writing.

To take off some pressure, one thing to realize is that almost nobody comes up with a perfect, final version of their thesis statement before they start writing. Many writers start with a general idea of what they want to explore, a so-called "working thesis," and they refine their argument as the write. **You can start with a thesis statement that's somewhat general, unfocused, and weak, and you can revise, strengthen, and change it as you go.** Sometimes you'll discover what it is you really want to say in the middle of writing or planning or organizing your paper, and that's OK.

For example, let's say you've chosen option 2 from our sample essay assignment: Gender dynamics in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper".

> 2) Explore how Gilman uses this story to talk about the larger issue of gender dynamics between men and women at the end of the 19th century in America, specifically within marriage. What do you notice about the relationship between men and women in this story, between husbands and wives? What do you think Gilman wants her readers to understand about life as a married woman when she wrote this?

That's a lot to tackle at once, so maybe you'll start with a working thesis, based on your first reaction:

The way the husband treats his wife in this story is pretty messed up!

That's great! Definitely enough to get started! It would be weak as the *final* thesis of your paper, but it's a terrific working thesis because it gives us something to work with. Let's see how we can develop it into something a little stronger and more fleshed out.

6.3 Developing Your Thesis

6.3.1 By Asking and Answering Questions

Maybe you're familiar with a journalist's six questions: *Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?*

You can develop any working thesis by asking some questions about your thesis, and then answering them.

Maybe *How?* or *What?* are the most obvious questions to start with for this particular working thesis. If you were told that a friend of yours was mistreating another friend, you'd want to know *how* they were mistreating them and *what* they were doing. So, in "The Yellow Wallpaper", *how* is the husband's treatment of his wife messed up? *What* is the husband doing?

Asking questions lets you think about the story (or go back to your reading notes) and make a rough list of possible answers:

- He treats her like a child
- He doesn't encourage her to grow
- (or express herself, or really do anything at all)
- He controls her (Won't let her control her own self)

Using your list, you can add detail to your working thesis:

The husband mistreats his wife in "The Yellow Wallpaper" by treating her like a child, by refusing to let her grow or express herself, and by taking away her self-control.

That's a big improvement, all from asking a simple question!

Some questions might not get you very far at first. For example, if you ask *Who?*, maybe your answer is "The husband and the wife! Like I said!" If this is the case, sometimes pushing a little harder with your question can unlock the deeper insights you need. Who are the husband and the wife specifically? Like, what's the

husband's job? Is the wife young, or is she more experienced? What's their social class, or other life circumstances? After all, Gilman could have written her story with literally any characters she wanted, but these are the specific ones she chose. Who are they?

Answering these *Who?* questions might get you thinking about how the medical profession has historically treated women. Or about the expectations around marriage for the upper classes. Maybe Gilman isn't writing a story about just one messed up relationship. Maybe she's using the story to explore bigger issues. Your working thesis could go in a direction like this:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman uses the husband's and wife's relationship in "The Yellow Wallpaper" to show some of the problems with the way the medical profession treated women at the end of the 19th century.

6.3.2 By Changing an Observation into an Argument

A good thesis statement should contain an argument, which means something you are planning to prove in your paper. So changing an observation into an argument can be a helpful strategy for developing their thesis.

Observation	Argument
What does the text say?	*What do I have to say about the text?*
I noticed _____.	I noticed _____ and it means _____. *or* I noticed _____ and it matters because _____.

Let's give it a try:

The way the husband treats his wife in this story is pretty messed up!

Cool observation, but so what? Why does it matter? What does it mean? Why should I care?

Answering any of these questions and you can improve your working thesis. You will shift from being focused on what Gilman is saying in the story to what *you* are saying about Gilman's story.

The way the husband treats the wife in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is messed up in many ways. In this paper I will argue that Gilman uses the problems in their relationship to highlight some specific ways that marriage was unfair to women at the end of the 19th century.

Notice how this transition from observation to argument makes the thesis much stronger! (And yes, in spite of what you might have learned in high school, it's ok to use "I"—it's *your* argument!)

Another way to think about this is that it's a move from **text** to **context**. The *observation* is about the text—you noticed something about the marriage. The *argument* shows a connection between that one marriage and a greater context—many women's experience of marriage. **Connecting the characters' story to a bigger situation is a great way to develop an argument.**

6.3.3 By Thinking About Whole and Parts

Another reliable way to develop your working thesis into something stronger is to think of it as a **big idea** with small ideas that build up to it. What are the smaller parts (the examples or the steps) that lead to the whole (the big idea of your thesis)?

Using this strategy, we can develop our most recent working thesis even more. What are the "many ways" that the husband mistreats the wife in Gilman's story? What are the related "specific ways" that marriage was unfair to women? Filling in these parts might be just what we need to turn our working thesis into its strongest form yet. Let's give it a try, using the list we brainstormed earlier with *How?* and *What?*:

In this paper I will argue that Gilman uses the problematic relationship between the married couple in "The Yellow Wallpaper" to highlight ways that marriage was unfair to women at the end of the 19th century. Specifically, marriage silenced women, reduced women's autonomy and self-control, and treated women like children.

Remember that a good thesis doesn't just state your argument; it also briefly sketches out how you plan to get there. Thinking about whole and parts in your thesis is a great way to do this. I can already imagine a paragraph about how he silences her by forbidding her to write, a paragraph about how he controls her, and a paragraph about how he treats her like a child.

6.3.4 By Thinking Analysis, not Summary

Much of the writing you're used to doing in school is basically summarizing information. And for many students, writing summaries is their writing comfort zone.

Summary writing is a perfectly good type of writing, especially in a class that's focused on mastering content. If you read a textbook chapter and need to show that you've understood what's in it, writing a summary can be great way to demonstrate that to your teacher.

But in your Core 2 essays, you're being asked for more than just a passive summary of the texts you're reading. You're being asked for your own analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and so forth.

So what's the difference between summary and analysis?

Summary	Analysis
You focus on reproducing the main points or features of the text you read.	You focus on your own interpretation of, or ideas about, the text you read.
You stay as transparent as possible, and avoid including your own spin.	You have something of your own to say, and focus on your argument.
The organization of your writing follows the organization of the text you are summarizing.	The organization of your writing follows the flow of your argument.
You try to cover, more or less equally, all the parts of the text you are summarizing.	You pick and choose the parts of the text you are analyzing, focusing more on the parts that apply to your argument and leaving out parts that are off topic.
You're passive, reproducing other peoples' ideas and thoughts but not adding anything to the conversation.	You're active, jumping into the conversation with your own interpretation, evaluation, or ideas.

So a better thesis sets you up for analysis, not summary. Our starting thesis looks like it might just lead to summary writing:

The way the husband treats his wife in this story is pretty messed up!

With this, the rest of the essay might just be a list or summary of the different ways the wife is mistreated. There's some interpretation there—it's pretty messed up!—but you'll noticed that the more developed thesis is much more about your analysis.

6.4 Elements of a Strong Thesis

So what makes for a strong working thesis? Here are some guidelines:

It is specific

Specific means focused. Think details, not generalizations! Avoid a thesis that is basically "here are some interesting things about this topic", without any thought as to how those things relate to each other through a specific focus, what makes them interesting, etc.

It is supportable

This means there's evidence you can present to convince a reader that your argument is correct. If your thesis is vague, or more of an opinion, it might not be supportable, because it's hard to imagine what reasons you could give for the reader to believe you.

For example, *Broccoli tastes bad!* is not supportable. Maybe it tastes bad to you, but not to me. There isn't evidence you could present to convince someone who doesn't already agree with you. On the other hand, *Over the past ten years, consumers have come to prefer the taste of cauliflower over broccoli* is supportable. (I have no idea if it's *correct*, but it's *supportable*.) Evidence might be sales data, customer surveys, or changing restaurant menus.

It is debatable

This means that a strong thesis is something that a reader might *disagree* with at first. Your argument in your paper is there to convince that initially skeptical reader that you are right.

Things that are supportable, but not debatable, are simple facts. *The ocean has some fish in it* is a claim that I can make, and I can support that claim with all kinds of evidence. But it would be a very weak thesis, because it's hard to imagine a reasonable person making a counter argument.

The idea that a thesis should be debatable goes back to the "So what?" of the thesis statement. If your thesis is too obvious, why should anyone bother reading it? If someone came to you and said "I'm prepared to argue that the ocean has fish. Do you want to hear my long list of reasons?" you'd say "Nah, I'm good." Arguments become interesting when they are open for debate!

It is an answer (not a question)

Sometimes our working thesis statements start out with a question:

What are the different ways Gilman comments on marriage in "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

This can be a great start to get you thinking and writing. Just remember that by the time you're turning in the final draft of your paper, your thesis should *answer* the question you started with!

If you struggle with this, you're not alone! In many ways, writing a thesis goes against our instincts for the usual way we tell something to someone. In normal conversation, we don't want to give away spoilers, or tell the punchline of a joke before we've said the joke itself. Contrary to telling a good story, *your thesis statement should be a complete spoiler for the rest of the paper*! It's not just a statement of the question or the area your paper will explore. It's a full reveal!

It is a good match for the assignment, and rich enough to sustain the rest of the paper

Any kind of writing you do should be a good match for the context you are writing in and the audience you are writing for. An essay is no exception. For an essay, the context is given in the prompt. Ask yourself: Does my working thesis seem like a good answer to the questions raised? Is it a complete answer? Is it an interesting answer—interesting in the sense of going beyond the basic or obvious ways you could respond to the assignment?

In my experience, whenever a student says they are having trouble making their paper long enough or meeting the word count of an assignment, it's almost always because they've given themselves a thesis that is too obvious, or too easy to prove.

In a very real sense, *when you write your thesis statement, you are giving yourself your own personal writing assignment for the rest of your paper*.

If you're trying to write a four page paper but you stall out after two and a half pages and can't think of anything else to say, then maybe you've given yourself too easy a job. Your thesis statement is not rich or complex enough to sustain your writing for the full paper. Go back to that working thesis and develop it more!

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Full Class Activity: Bring in some samples of writing that we don't ordinarily think of as having a thesis. Can you find a thesis in them (or something that serves that role by identifying the purpose and function)? Can you write a thesis for them?
2. Small Group Activity: Brainstorm a list of observations or other ideas about this week's readings. Try developing these rough observations and ideas into good working thesis statements by asking and answering questions, by changing observations into arguments, and by thinking about whole and parts. Share your best working thesis statements with the full class, and share what techniques you used to form your rough ideas into thesis statements.
3. With a Partner: Share your working thesis statement for your current paper assignment with your partner. Your partner should check to see if it meets the five elements of a strong thesis. How could the thesis statement be even stronger?

7 Supporting A Thesis

Supporting a thesis just means backing up what you have to say.

Remember how a good thesis should be supportable and debatable? Your reader might *disagree* with you when they start reading your essay. Supporting your thesis means giving the best reasons you can for that skeptical reader to believe you!

For a lot of academic writing, what that boils down to is research—tracking down the best sources you can find to provide the right combination of facts and perspectives to back you up.

The research process is so important that *Pacific Writing!* has a whole chapter devoted to it at the end of the book. However, tracking down *outside sources* was a focus in Core 1, not so much I Core 2. You probably won't need to do outside research for most of the writing in your Core 2 section. However, if your professor does ask you to back up what you say in your essay with outside sources, or if you want to enhance your essay with outside material, you may want to look through the "Research Process" chapter for the best ways to do that.

Core 1 Callback:

Do you remember the Annotated Bibliography assignment from Core 1? That's a great start on the research process!

Instead of outside research, this chapter will focus more on **how you can back up *your interpretation* of a reading with *quotes from the text***.

7.1 What is a "Good Quote"?

Teachers often tell students to go through the reading and find some "good quotes" to use in your essay. But what exactly makes something a "good quote"?

7.1.1 A good quote is a good fit for your argument

A good quote shows exactly what you say it does.

Let's say you wrote the following sentence, and want to use a quote to back it up:

Although John seems to love his wife, the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," he's actually very controlling, and he stifles her.

You start looking through the story for a good quote, and find this right on the first page: **"John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage."**

Not bad, right? It clearly shows John being a jerk and belittling her, and it establishes that this rude behavior is a part of their marriage.

But is this quote really the best fit for what you're trying to say? Does it really show that he seems to love her? Although you can argue that his laughter is one of the ways he acts controlling, is it the best fit for the sentence you wrote?

A little further into the story, you find this: **"He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction."** Compared to the first one, this second quote is much more on the money!

Tip: A good quote isn't always the *first* thing you find that supports what you want to say. It's the *best* example you can find!

7.1.2 A good quote is nuanced and invites analysis

"He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction."

There's a lot you can unpack in that quote! It certainly does a great job of backing up what you're trying to say, that although John seems to love his wife, he's actually controlling and he stifles her. But even better, this quote helps us dive a lot deeper into that dynamic.

For starters, it's the narrator who is saying this and at least on the surface she seems to be *praising* him for the way he treats her. Some resentment might be there underneath, but it's possible that the narrator isn't aware of it, or can't articulate it. Or maybe she's genuinely grateful? Or a little sarcastic? What do you think?

Looking at the specific word choice in the quote, there's even more to analyze. For example, Gilman has her narrator say he's **"careful and loving."** That's an interesting combination. Does "careful" mean something similar to "loving" here? Or does "careful" contradict "loving" in some way? This is quite open to analysis. What do you think?

Generally, the more mileage you can get out of your quotes, the better!

7.1.3 A good quote is sensitive to context

It's easy to take someone's words out of context, and make it sound like they said something very different from what they intended. The same thing can happen when you quote a text in an essay, so pay attention to where the quote is coming from:

- Is an author raising a point, only to go on and argue against it?
- Is an author saying something sarcastically, or over-stating it for humor?
- Is a *character* saying something that the *author* might disagree with?

Quoting a source always comes with a responsibility. You need to pay attention to the context of the words you are quoting—the rest of the words around them—to make sure that the words you choose reflect the author's intention.

7.1.4 A good quote is succinct

Quotes should be just long enough to get your point across, but no longer. Quoting from a text is like taking food from a buffet. You can take as much as you like, but please use everything you take!

If you've got a long quote, look it over with a critical eye. Is every bit of it necessary to back up what you're saying? Are you planning to analyze every part? If you can get by just fine with a shorter version of the quote, great!

7.1.5 A good quote is not distracting

Have you ever had a friend tell you a story, and they drop some offhand detail that is more interesting than the story they're telling?

"So my Granny and I were going hat shopping. This was last month, right after she got out of jail for human trafficking. Anyway, we found some *really* cute hats! There was a blue one with yellow stripes, and…"

Stop! Your grandmother was a human trafficker?! Tell me about that!

You want your reader to stay focused on your argument when they are reading your paper, not distracted by their own thoughts or interpretations of the text you are analyzing. A *distracting* quote contains ideas that are not relevant to the argument you are making, ideas that might send your reader off on a different path.

Keeping your quotes succinct goes hand in hand with making sure they are not distracting.

7.2 Including Evidence That Isn't a Quote

There are plenty of times you can include evidence to back up what you are saying without needing any kind of quote at all.

A good example of this is when you want to refer to a plot point, something that happens in the narrative. Consider this example from the middle of a student essay:

Another way that John treats the narrator like a child in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is that he decides to move them into the nursery of the house they are renting, instead of a regular bedroom. The narrator says “So we took the nursery, at the top of the house”(3). This shows that John thinks the narrator isn’t just sick, but that she’s also childish, and furthermore…

But that quote—those particular words excerpted from the story—isn’t really doing anything more than letting us know that this happened. You can refer to it without quoting it, like this:

Another way that John treats the narrator like a child in “The Yellow Wallpaper” is that he decides to move them into the nursery of the house they are renting, instead of a regular bedroom (3). This shows that John thinks the narrator isn’t just sick, but that she’s also childish, and furthermore…

That’s better! The actual quote was unnecessary, and only got in the way.

This strategy of including evidence often works fine if the specific words don’t matter, and the thing you are referring to in the text is clear and straightforward.

This becomes especially important if you are writing an essay about some other medium that might not have a lot of text to quote from.

For example, if you’re interpreting **a film** you might use:

- What you see on the screen during an important scene
- What you notice about the setting, or the lighting, or the camera angles
- The expressions on the actors’ faces, their body language, or the way they deliver a line
- The background music, or other sounds that establish the mood

If you’re interpreting **a graphic novel**, you might use:

- How the characters drawn, and colored in
- How are the panels laid out on the page. Are they separate, or are they crowding together, or overlapping and interacting in some way?
- How the art style changes (or doesn’t change) from panel to panel

7.3 How Many Quotes Should You Use?

Use as many quotes as you need to advance and support your argument. There's no magic number for the right number of quotes to include in a paper, because every paper is different.

That said, you should probably have *at least one carefully chosen quote to back up each of your major points*. Good quotes will help you keep your writing focused and specific. Each one is like a solid anchor to the text you are analyzing. Those anchors keep you from drifting off course and from writing just a bunch of generalizations.

You should try to avoid having quotes that are too repetitive (unless you're making an argument that the author keeps repeating a certain idea, or that a character doesn't change their perspective from the beginning to the end, etc.)

Also, keep in mind that the point of writing an essay is to demonstrate your thinking to your professor. If a lot of the words in your essay are just quotes, then there's less space for your own words and thoughts!

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Individual or Group Activity: Start with a working thesis about a reading that you've done in class. Hint: You can use the same ones from Exercise 2 at the end of the last chapter. Go through the reading carefully, and make a list, selecting only the best quotes and other evidence that will help you back up that thesis. Do they meet the requirements of a "good quote"?
2. Group Activity: Find a website of quotes from famous people. (There are plenty of websites like this, some better than others.) Choose some quotes and track them down to their original sources so you can read and understand them in their context. Do the quotes do an honest job of showing the authors' original intentions? Share what you found with the class.
3. With a Partner: Choose a quote from the first exercise, and use it in a paragraph. What's the best way to introduce the quote, and to follow it up, when you're writing an essay?

8 Organizing

Choose Your Path. Image: Eric Sonstroem (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

What's the best path through your essay? Organizing is deciding what order the different parts of your paper should be in. It's charting the best route, deciding the best way one step can lead to the next, leading the reader from the beginning of your paper to the end.

8.1 The importance of organization

Humans like routine. We like to know what to expect.

In almost all types of writing, and especially essays, there is some kind of organization pattern. Just like you wouldn't build a building without a good plan for making it structurally sound, good writing is also planned out and organized.

The organization of a piece creates a framework that guides the reader through your excellent ideas. Of course, you can find examples of writers who twist their writing in unexpected ways, but those are exceptions that are difficult to pull off effectively. And you often find them in the creative modes, rather than academic essays. In general, you'll find using an accepted organizational format not only useful for the reader, but satisfying for you as the structure will lend strength to your ideas.

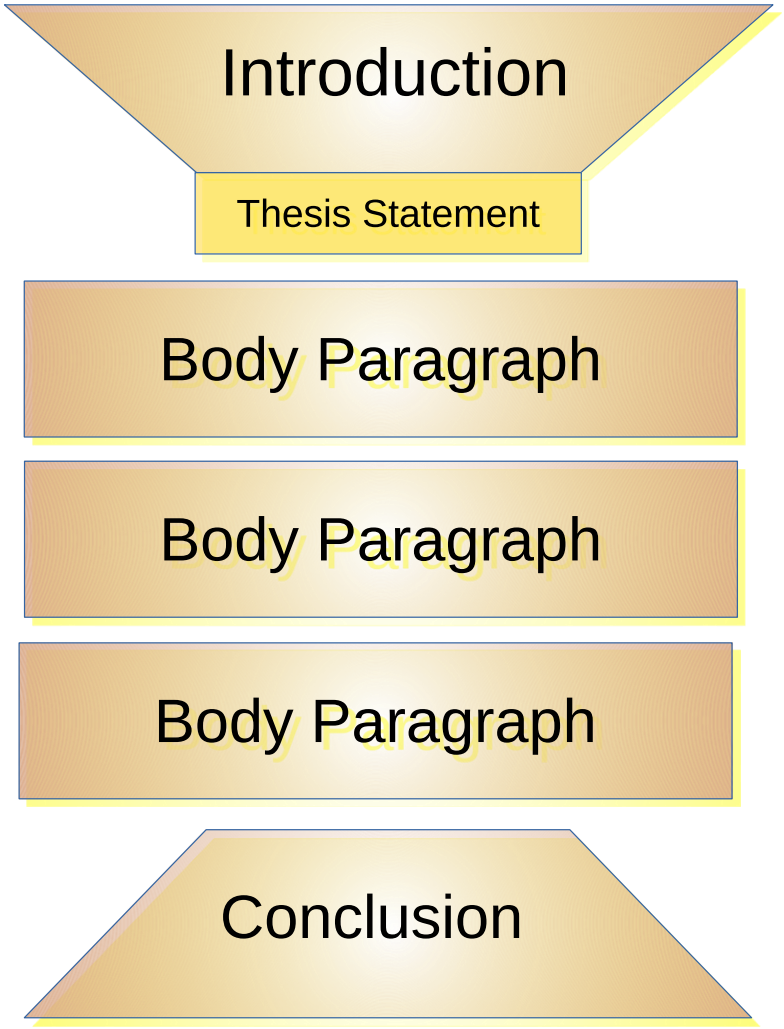
Why is organization important?

- Readers expect it.
- It helps make your ideas clearer.

- It shows you're credible; you know how to organize, so you know what you're doing.
- It helps the flow of your writing, removing reading "stumbling blocks."

8.2 Getting started with organization

So, how do you get started? First, consider the overall structure of any piece of academic writing:



Note that the shape of the introduction in this graphic is wider at the top, because traditionally introductions begin broadly and move to more specific information, ending with the very specific thesis statement. The conclusion, then, goes from the specific essay idea to broader generalizations about the topic.

There are three body paragraphs in this diagram, for a total of five paragraphs. You may have learned about the five paragraph essay in school before, and you might be comfortable with it too. That's great! Now, it's time to expand on this idea.

8.2.1 Essays don't *need* to be 5 paragraphs

The number of paragraphs in your essay should be a choice you make as the essay's author. **Choose the number of paragraphs that will do the best job of showcasing your ideas.** For example, if your essay is exploring a specific topic in three different readings, then three body paragraphs may be just what you need! If you're comparing and contrasting two readings and looking at two different topics in each of them, you might need four body paragraphs. Some essays, like essay questions on a history exam, might require only two paragraphs, while a research paper might require twenty!

In general, though, all essays will follow the introduction, body, conclusion structure. But introductions and conclusions may be more than one paragraph, and you may have any number of body paragraphs.

8.3 Ways to organize

You have several options for organizing your ideas. It helps to remember that each of them is just a different pathway you can take to move through your ideas. Let's explore some of them!

8.3.1 Chronological order: Moving through time

Chronological order is used when relating events in which time plays a crucial role. It's the easiest of the organizational structures because it's one we've used as humans since we started telling each other stories: "Once upon a time…" It's used all the time in the working world, too. For example, in healthcare a patient's chart uses chronological order to explain when things happened. This is a great structure to use when time matters.

If you are writing an essay about the development of the narrator's madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper", chronological order might make sense:

I. Introduction and working thesis—Although it might seem like the narrator's madness increases gradually, it actually moves through four different stages, each with their own specific characteristics.
II. Start of the story, she's totally sane and normal.

III. Stage 1: Obsessing about the wallpaper.
IV. Stage 2: Seeing the woman in the wallpaper.
V. Stage 3: Thinking the woman can get out of the wallpaper.
VI. Stage 4: Thinking she *is* the woman from the wallpaper.
VII. Conclusion.

Because your working thesis is about the way something progresses in time, it makes sense to organize your paper chronologically. If you are writing about the development of a character or a situation, or about the way something *changes* (like an author's ideas from the first chapter to the last), then chronological order might work for you.

Caution: Remember that chronological order works best if your thesis is about changes over time! If you organize your paper chronologically when your argument is about something else, it might not work.

This is an easy trap to fall into. After all, we experience the world chronologically—from the past to the present and into the future—and stories go chronologically—from the beginning to the middle to the end. If you're writing a paper about "The Yellow Wallpaper", shouldn't the first part of the paper always be about the start of the story, then progress through to the end?

If you do that, you run the risk of writing a paper that's mostly just plot summary, and not analysis! When writing about narrative prose, it can be totally fine to use quotes and examples from the end of the story near the start of your paper, and quotes from the beginning at the end**. The bottom line is to make the organization of your paper follow your argument, not follow the plot of what you're writing about!**

8.3.2 Spatial order: Moving through space

Spatial order is used when you are describing things, like objects or structures or geographies. Like chronological order, spatial order is often used in the working world. For example, engineers use thing like technical descriptions, schematics, or blueprints. If you are organizing a description spatially, you might go from left to right, or from top to bottom, or from outside going in, and so on.

You might use spatial order *within a paragraph* of a Core 2 essay to describe something to describe something visually, like a scene in a movie, or the landscape or architecture of a setting, or the path of a character on a journey. Does it make more

sense to describe a haunted house in a horror movie starting from the outside façade in to the rooms inside? Or does describing it from the ground floor up to the attic make more sense for supporting your ideas? What is the best way to present it to your reader, so it matches what your thesis says? Thinking about spatial order lets you choose the best way to describe things and get your ideas across.

It would be rare to organize a whole Core 2 essay spatially, but it's not impossible. For example, if you were writing an essay about a memoir where the author moves back and forth between two different countries, you might make the first part of your paper's body about one country, and the second half about the other, especially if your working thesis was about comparing and contrasting the two locations!

8.3.3 Specific to general: Moving from specifics to general ideas

Maybe the theme of your Core 2 section is *21st Century Monsters*, and you're writing a paper which argues that the zombie movies *Zombieland*, *Shaun of the Dead*, and *Dance of the Dead* all used comedy as social commentary in a way that is typical of the "zombie renaissance" movies of the early 2000s. A good way to organize a paper like this would be to start with the specifics—examples from the different movies of how comedy is used—and work your way to the more general context of zombie movies from this time period.

Specific to general works well here because the main point of your thesis is about the "zombie renaissance" time period. You're using your specific movies as examples to build up to your main point. The payoff is a better understanding of how humor was generally used in this type of movie!

8.3.4 General to specific: Moving from a more general idea to specifics

Let's say you've done a little research into the way women's "hysteria" was diagnosed and treated at the time Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper", specifically the treatment known at the time as the "rest cure". You want to write a paper with a working thesis that the narrator's experience in the story was actually pretty typical of how women were treated by physicians at the time, outrageous as it may seem to modern readers. A good way to organize this paper would be to start with the general—the historical context and the "rest cure"—and then zero in on specific examples in the story that line up with the bigger picture.

General to specific works well here because the main point of your thesis is about explaining the narrator's experience in the story. So you start with the context, and build to the story details. The payoff is a richer understanding of the details in the story, based on what you learned about the general context!

8.3.5 Order of importance: Moving by strength of argument

Have you ever tried to convince somebody, but you have a number of reasons you can give for why you are right? Maybe these reasons are completely independent of each other (meaning you don't need to understand any of them first to understand the others) and none of them builds off the others. How should you organize them to be as convincing as possible?

You might want to start with your strongest point and work down to your weakest. Putting the strongest point first keeps your skeptical audience tuned in—maybe they are somewhat convinced by that first strong reason, and the rest of your reasons finish the job! Or maybe you want to build up to your strongest point, so your argument ends with a bang.

Either choice can be valid, and either choice is way better than not thinking about your organization at all, and just putting in your reasons randomly, or in the order they occurred to you.

8.3.6 Steps of your argument: Moving along the path of your ideas

However, it's rare to have an argument with steps that are completely independent of each other. More often, the best path through your argument is one where the second point you make builds off of the first one, your third point builds off the first two, and so on.

Take a close look at the observations you want to make in your essay, the points and examples you want to use. Does one thing lead to another in a way that builds your argument step by step?

8.3.7 Compare and contrast: Moving back and forth

Much of your writing in Core 2 won't be just about a single text. Instead, you will probably be asked to compare and contrast different texts.

Let's say the theme of your Core 2 section is *Futures For Africa*, and you're writing a paper comparing and contrasting Nnedi Okorafor's 2010 novel *Who Fears Death?* and the 2018 movie *Black Panther*. Your first instinct might be to just divide your paper into two halves, the first one on the novel, and the second one on the movie:

I. Introduction
II. Stuff about *Who Fears Death?*
III. Stuff about *Black Panther*
IV. Conclusion

That's a good start, but it might not be the best choice for a paper like this because with all the stuff about the novel first, and all the stuff about the movie next, it's going to be hard for the reader to see the comparisons and the contrasts that you are making. The risk here is that you'll write two mini-papers, one on the novel and one on the film, rather than a single, unified paper about both of them.

Brainstorming a little more about the novel and the film, you realize that there are certain themes you could talk about that are present in both of them: Colonial power structures, ethnic identity, and self-determination. **Organizing your compare and contrast around the specific themes they have in common can much stronger:**

I. Introduction
II. Historical colonial power structures
    a. In *Who Fears Death?*
    b. In *Black Panther*
III. Ethnic identities
    a. In *Who Fears Death?*
    b. In *Black Panther*
IV. Self-determination and heroism
    a. In *Who Fears Death?*
    b. In *Black Panther*
V. Conclusion

8.3.8 A spectrum: Moving from one extreme to the other

What if you're writing about more than two things? Maybe the theme of your Core 2 section is *Our Climate Future*, and you're asked to write a paper about three different visions of how humanity might respond to climate change.

A good strategy for organizing three or more things like this is to arrange them into a spectrum of some kind. For example, in this case most pessimistic to most optimistic might work.

Taking the time to arrange them into any kind of order will go a long way toward organizing your paper, and it might even help you write or refine your thesis statement as well. You might move from the vague:

These three authors all have different visions of what our response to climate change can be.

To the much more focused:

These three authors have a range of visions for our climate future, from extreme pessimism in the case of Author 1 to the guarded optimism of Author 3. In this paper I'll

explore this shift in hopefulness, and what factors lead each author to draw the conclusions they do.

8.3.9 Extremes and middle ground: Moving to a compromise

One final organizational path that can work really well if you are writing about three (or more) texts is use two of them as extreme examples, and the third as a kind of compromise between those two.

In the case of the three different visions of our climate future, maybe the pessimistic end of the spectrum is a little too pessimistic, and the optimistic author is a little too naïve and hopeful. Maybe the one in the middle seems like the most realistic to you.

In that case, go for something like this:

These three authors map out a range of possible visions of our climate future. Author 1 is very pessimistic, and presents no opportunity at all for human survival, while Author 3 is optimistic, suggesting that only a few minor changes can stabilize climate change. In this paper I will argue that Author 2's compromise between these two extremes presents the most realistic vision of our climate future.

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Individual or Group Activity: Study an essay or article you've read for this class, or other writing that you bring in. What organizational strategy did the author use to guide the reader along the path of the essay's material? Was a single strategy used, or were different strategies combined? Share your analysis with the class.
2. Group Activity: This chapter introduces nine different strategies you can use to organize your material when you write. Consider the most recent writing prompt in your class. Which of these strategies do you think would work well for the prompt? Which would work poorly? Are there other ways that could work? Share your ideas with the class.
3. With a Partner: If you are at the stage of planning, writing, or revising an essay draft, work with a partner to help them think of the different options they have to organize their thoughts in their paper.
4. Group activity: Your instructor will provide you with a random list of facts or observations about a topic. Pick and choose from the list, and organize them into an order that would make sense for a paper. What might the thesis of the paper be?

9 Drafting

What is drafting? Drafting is quickly writing up what you have on your topic, completely to the end.

In other words, a draft is a complete document, even if it's still a bit rough. Whether it is an email to a client, a lab report in chemistry, a research paper, or an essay in Core 2, a draft has the basics of what is going to be in the final version of the assignment.

The good news is, if you have been doing the steps of the writing process in *Pacific Writing!*, you're already most of the way there. If you've written and refined a strong, detailed working thesis, and you've gathered great evidence and organized it well, your first draft may be pretty close to what you eventually turn in. (Just don't neglect revising, editing, and proofreading!)

9.1 Tips for drafting

What are some good things to remember when you start drafting a paper?

- If you can, have some kind of overall plan—a solid working thesis with the main supporting evidence—sketched out and organized before you start drafting. Many writers find that the more organized they are before they start drafting, the easier the drafting process is!

- On the other hand, remember that there are different writing processes for different kinds of writers. If you've been struggling with some of the earlier steps, maybe you're the kind of writer who thinks and plans best while in the process of drafting. There's no harm in starting a draft before your final thesis is nailed down—just be prepared to revise the earlier parts of your paper heavily when your idea finally gels!

- Include the citation information as you go—things like page numbers for quotes, or outside references if you used any. It's a lot easier to do this as you write, rather than trying to go back and find what you looked at and used as sources after you've finished.

- Don't sweat throwing extra stuff into drafts. That is, when in doubt, write it out. When you revise later, you cut or fix things you're not happy with. (But you can't cut later if there is nothing on the page!) So get a lot of stuff down, then you can cut the *least best* (worst!) in the revising process. In this way drafting can be similar to the freewriting process we learned about in the "Exploring" chapter. It's just more organized and purposeful.

- On the other hand, don't worry about every little detail when you're drafting, especially if you're on a roll. For example, maybe you don't have the *very best possible* quote from the novel to prove a point you're making, but you're in the flow of writing and you want to get on to the next point. Feel free to drop in a note to yourself ("Look for a better quote later!") and just keep writing.

Drafting does mean putting all your work together clearly and in an organized way, and seeing how it looks. But it doesn't need to be perfect!

Think of a sculptor, shaping a statue of a person out of wet clay. Some parts might be more detailed and finished—they've got a really clear idea of what the face should look like, so that part is basically done. Other parts might be rougher—a big blob of clay where the hat will be, because they might want a hat on the head but they're not sure what type yet.

Some sculptors might work meticulously and carefully with the wet clay and basically make finished sculpture in one go. Revision for them is just smoothing out some rough edges and adding some extra embellishments. Other sculptors might want to block out the rough shape quickly, then spend most of their creative time in revision, working and reworking the rough shapes into the final, refined form. Both ways are valid!

Whatever type of writer you are, drafting is the process of getting your thoughts down in writing, in more or less the shape and format that your essay will take.

9.2 Drafting introductions

9.2.1 Orienting the reader: Writing an introduction

They shoot the white girl first, but the rest they can take their time.

Sit with that for a minute. Shocking? Yes. Compelling? Yes. Does it make you want to know what's going on? Absolutely. You might not recognize this as the first line from Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise*, but it is a good first line. It not only sets a scene, but it also pulls out any number of emotional reactions.

For an essay (rather than a novel), your introductions don't need to be as earth-shattering, but they do need to do three things:

- Grab the reader's attention
- Give a sense of the direction of ideas in the essay
- Set up any context necessary to understand the thesis statement

No big deal, right? Actually, it can feel like a HUGE deal, and writing the introduction can be so scary for some writers that it stops any forward progress. So, here are the first three rules for writing introductions:

9.2.2 Three rules for writing introductions

Rule Number One: If you don't have ideas for the introduction, skip it!

No, don't skip it altogether—you need to have one!—but if it's freaking you out and stopping you from getting going, write down your working thesis and start working with your body paragraphs first. Sometimes you need to play with the essay ideas for a while before an idea for the introduction alights on your shoulder and demands your attention.

Rule Number Two: Consider your reader!

This brings us to the second rule about introductions. Ask yourself: *What will get my reader's attention?* Ask yourself: What would get *my* attention? Write an introduction that amuses or fascinates you. After all, if you're genuinely delighted, that could rub off on the reader.

Rule Number Three: Get to your thesis!

In the last chapter we talked about your essay's organization as a kind of pathway or journey—good organization is charting the best path through your material, and your thesis statement is a kind of thumbnail roadmap of the path your argument will take. With that in mind, in your introduction you get to be like a tour guide, setting up the tour for your readers before you start walking through it. What do your readers need to know before you get started, so they fully "get" your thesis statement?

In the drafting stage, it's ok to start off a little unfocused, but remember that a good introductory paragraph should be an efficient delivery mechanism for your thesis statement.

9.2.3 Some introduction strategies

If you're still drawing a blank, here are some strategies that might work for you:

- Start with your thesis statement
- Give a brief anecdote or example
- Asking a question

- Pose a contradiction

Formal essays typically start broad to help create context for a topic before narrowing in to land at the specific point of the essay, in the thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph. But sometimes you can put the **thesis statement at the start**, then expand on it or explain it in the rest of the introduction. Consider this example from an informal in-class writing exercise, where students were asked to write a short, impromptu essay about the role of parents:

Parents are heroes because they work hard to show their children the difference between right and wrong, they teach their children compassion, and they help them to grow into stable, loving adults. Parents act as guides for their kids while allowing them to make mistakes, listening to them when their kids need to talk, pushing them along when they're too shy to move on their own, and cheering the loudest when their kids achieve their dreams. It's no easy task to be the steady, moral compass that kids need, as parents are people too, and people make mistakes. As a species, though, we manage more often than not to raise well-adjusted kids who turn into hardworking adults, giving us hope for the future.

Putting the thesis first establishes a clear focus for the writing right away, and it firmly orients the reader into the topic.

Let's say you want to stretch your creativity a bit, though. You might **open with an anecdote**, where you *start with an example, or with a (very short) story that sets up or illustrates what you're going to say*. This is using *narration* to catch the reader's attention. Here's an example of that using the same topic and thesis statement as above:

When my brother was little, he used to get into all sorts of trouble. Because he was just so curious about everything, his desire to check things out often overrode his good sense. This finally got the best of him when he was nine and got stuck in a tree. He climbed up there to look into a bird's nest, and we found him after he started yelling for us. He was twenty feet up there, and before my mom and I knew what was happening, my dad jumped up and started climbing, which was amazing because my father isn't too fond of heights. He got up to Jason and then helped him down, showing him where to put his hands and feet. When they were both safely on the ground, my parents scolded Jason while simultaneously hugging him. He was still terrified, and suddenly, I could see how terrified my dad was, too. I never forgot that moment, and I also came to a realization. Parents aren't just heroes because they will put their lives on the line for their kids. Parents are heroes because they work hard to show their children the difference between right and wrong, they teach their children compassion, and they help them to grow into stable, loving adults.

This works because it gives a specific example of your topic, and it's human nature to enjoy hearing stories. What a great way to draw in your reader!

Another strategy writers employ when writing introductions is **asking a question or two** to catch the reader's attention. Keeping your audience in mind, be smart about the type of question you ask:

- AVOID yes or no questions.
- DO ask questions that get the reader thinking in the direction you're planning on going in within your essay.

Here's an example of a question that will stop your reader in his or her tracks:

Have you ever wondered about how Einstein's String Theory applies to old growth forests?

Why is this a bad question? Simple: what if the reader answers that and says "Uh…no." You've just lost the reader.

Instead, consider your audience: what questions might they actually have about your topic? For example:

When you were a kid, who were your heroes? Was it Luke Skywalker? The President of the United States? An nurse? A firefighter? Heroes come from all walks of life…

This essay begins with an open-ended question that frames the topic (childhood heroes) and gets readers thinking.

If you do start with a question, remember that your introduction needs to get to your thesis statement by the time it's over. Remember what we learned in the "Writing A Thesis" chapter: *Your thesis statement should be a complete spoiler for the rest of the paper*! It's not just a statement of the question or the area your paper will explore. It's a full reveal!

Another strategy that can work well is considering the **contradictions** in your topic, playing Devil's Advocate, and bringing them up right away in the introduction. When it comes to your topic, what clichés are out there? What misunderstandings do people have? Those ideas can help you draft a great introduction. For example:

When kids think about heroes, they often think about Superman or Spiderman in all of their comic book glory. These superheroes fight the bad guys, restoring order in the chaos that the villains create in the comics. They always win in the end because they are the good ones and because they have amazing abilities. What kid hasn't

thought about how cool it would be to have superpowers? What kids often miss, however, and don't understand until they're older, is that their parents are the real superheroes in their lives. The superpowers that parents have may not be bionic vision or super strength, but they have powers that are much more important. Parents are heroes because they work hard to show their children the difference between right and wrong, they teach their children compassion, and they help them to grow into stable, loving adults.

Note that in this sample, there's a contradiction: the cliché idea of heroes as cartoon superheroes, but there's also a rhetorical question. Often, strategies for writing introductions can be combined to great effect.

9.3 Drafting body paragraphs

9.3.1 Stepping through your argument: Writing body paragraphs

Body paragraphs will make up the bulk of your paper, so it's a good idea to have some notion of what they should look like.

Each body paragraph should have a single focus, whether that's a single idea, example, point, or part of your argument. Sometimes when you are drafting, your ideas will run together a bit, and that's totally fine for the drafting stage! But even during drafting it can be helpful to remember this idea that **each body paragraph should focus on just one thing**. Keeping that in mind will help you know when to start a new paragraph. Do you plan to elaborate on what you've been saying in a new way? Do you plan to switch to a new idea, or to the next step of your argument? Then maybe it's time to hit Enter and start a new paragraph.

And always remember, the number of paragraphs in your essay should be shaped by what you are trying to say. You don't need to force it into a five-paragraph structure if that's a bad fit.

How do you organize a good body paragraph? Typically, the order is:

- **A topic sentence, declaring the single point or step of your argument that the paragraph will focus on. Sometimes this establishes a transition from the previous paragraph.**
- **Examples (often quotes), and your analysis of those examples which helps you elaborate on your topic sentence and prove your point.**
- **A concluding sentence, which sometimes helps transition to the next paragraph.**

Consider the following example, a paragraph from the middle of an essay on "The Yellow Wallpaper":

Furthermore, a woman's desires in marriage are naturally subordinate to her husband's, according to Gilman. The narrator, despite wanting to write and be around others, curbs her own wants by mentally echoing the words of her husband: "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" (1). Notice how she interrupts her own thoughts in this sentence to give her husband's opinions. She has clearly become accustomed to neglecting or even suppressing her own desires in accordance with her husband's will, even though it "always makes [her] feel bad". In fact, when the narrator attempts to share her opinions on the house they're staying in for the summer, her husband insists her discomfort is due to "draught" and "shut[s] the window"(2)—literally and figuratively closing the conversation—instead of simply hearing her out. It's clear that Gilman feels that a prerequisite of marriage in late nineteenth century America was, for women, being ready to relinquish one's sense of self.

This starts with a topic sentence (underlined) which clearly establishes the focus of the paragraph to follow. "Furthermore" also helps establish a transition from the paragraph that came before.

The rest of the paragraph is the evidence from the story, and the analysis of that evidence, which clearly support and expand on the topic sentence.

Notice in this example there are two main sub-points: how the narrator shuts her own self down, and how her husband shuts her down. While drafting, the author chose to keep them both in the same paragraph, because both of these sub-points back up the overall focus of the paragraph, and support the topic sentence. That's fine! Maybe in revision, the author will decide to split these two ideas into separate paragraphs, each with their own topic sentence. That would be fine too!

The concluding sentence wraps things up nicely by re-stating (and strengthening) the paragraph's argument.

9.3.2 Strategies for body paragraphs

Just as your essay has an overall organization, you can organize your individual paragraphs using any of the methods from the previous chapter (order of importance, chronological order, etc.)

Notice the way things are organized in any texts you read. For example, in the student writing above, the paragraph's organization has a kind of build up: The topic

sentence states what the point will be, then it builds up to that point with examples and interpretation of those examples, and finally hammers the point home at the end.

If you get stuck in the middle of a body paragraph when you are drafting your essay, one trick that might work to get you started again is to consider this list of words and phrases. Could starting your next sentence with one of these help you expand, clarify, develop, or otherwise move forward with your ideas?

Phrases or words that continue a line of thought:

Consequently	Furthermore	Additionally	Because
Besides the fact	Following this idea	Further	In addition
In the same way	Moreover	Considering…it is clear that	Looking beyond

Phrases or words that change a line of thought:

But	Yet	However
Nevertheless	On the contrary	On the other hand

Phrases or words that show importance:

Above all	Best of all	Especially	In fact
More important	Most important	Most of all	Worst

Phrases or words to open paragraphs or to connect ideas inside paragraphs:

Admittedly	At this point	Certainly	Granted	It is true
Generally speaking	In general	In this situation	No doubt	No one denies
Obviously	Of course	To be sure	Undoubtedly	Unquestionably

Phrases or words that introduce examples:

For instance	For example

Phrases or words that show sequence or time:

After	Before	Later	Afterward	First, … Second, … Third …
Meanwhile	As soon as	Finally	Next	At first

Phrases or words that show position:

Above	Across	At the bottom	At the top	Behind
Below	Beside	Beyond	Inside	Near
Next to	Opposite	To the left, … To the right, …	Under	Where

Phrases or words that show a conclusion:

Indeed	Hence	In conclusion

In the final analysis	Therefore	Thus

9.4 Drafting Conclusions

9.4.1 Making your mark: Writing a conclusion

Let's be honest. When you've spent so much time working out the ideas of your essay, organizing them, and writing an awesome, eye-catching introduction, you might have run out of steam by the time you get to the conclusion. It can feel impossible to maintain the creative momentum through the most boring of paragraphs: the conclusion. So what do many writers do? Easy: they start by writing, "In conclusion…" and sum up what the reader just read.

If that feels off to you, good. It should. Unless you've written a really long essay, a summary-style conclusion isn't appropriate and can even be insulting to the reader: why would you think readers need to be reminded of what they just read? Have more faith in them and in your own writing. If you've done your job in the essay, your ideas will be etched in readers' brains.

You still need to have a conclusion, though. So what's a conscientious writer to do?

9.4.2 Types of conclusions

The easiest way to write a conclusion, especially after you've written a stellar introduction, is to **refer back to the introduction.** So, if you've started by using an anecdote or example, return to that example or anecdote in the conclusion. Maybe there's a different way to see it or understand it after you've argued your essay's thesis? If you spent your introduction bringing up a contradiction and dispelling it, allude to that contradiction again in your conclusion. If you asked a question in the introduction, maybe you can re-visit the answer in the conclusion.

You might also consider **showing the consequences** of your argument, or looking into the crystal ball and **predicting the future**. Let's say you're analyzing Gilman's critique of the "rest cure" in "The Yellow Wallpaper". What are some of the long-term effects of that kind of treatment? Or maybe you're analyzing a current dystopian novel which focuses on the theme of electronic surveillance and the erosion of privacy. What might the future look like if the bleak predictions of the novel come to pass?

Both showing the consequences and predicting the future are forms of **extrapolation**, which means looking at something (in this case, the argument of your paper) and projecting it forward in some way. Extrapolation can be a marvelous way to conclude your paper.

Another option that might endear you to the reader is ending with something funny or catchy. When readers feel good because you utilized the strategy of a **humorous conclusion**, they'll remember that feeling and your take on the topic. You don't need to be a comedian to be funny, either. You can utilize jokes and memes made in popular culture for an impactful conclusion. The key, however (and warning!), is to *consider your audience*. Choose something that will amuse your reader, not just you.

9.5 Tips for overcoming writer's block

Sometimes, when we sit down to write out that first full draft of an essay, it just won't come.

That can happen for different reasons, depending on the kind of writer you are.

9.5.1 Are you a perfectionist?

Give yourself permission to write a first draft that's absolutely terrible. Seriously, give this a try! Some people are much more confident when they are revising something that is already written than when they need to come up with something from scratch. Write a terrible first draft to get it out of the way, and then use your perfectionist energy to improve it!

9.5.2 Are you distracted?

Finding the right environment and mindset for writing can be challenging, especially when we're surrounded by technology that competes for our attention at every moment of the day.

Experiment with different writing routines until you find one that works for you. Maybe you need to turn off wifi on your device, or put your phone on airplane mode? Maybe you need to set a timer, and promise yourself that you will only focus on writing for the next hour? Maybe you need to *shut the door*, and let those around you know that your school work is important so you can't be disturbed? Maybe there's a certain playlist or artist or genre that helps you concentrate, or maybe you need silence?

Different people will have different needs this way, but be aware that if you're having difficulty writing, the problem might be in your environment, not in you.

9.5.3 Are you feeling dumb, or totally inert?

Like you *really* can't think of *anything* interesting to say about the writing prompt? Don't worry! Everybody feels this way sometimes, especially if there's nothing in the topic that has particularly hooked your interest.

One strategy could be to look at a peer's paper or draft, and see how they tackled the assignment. Or you could have another look at the essay prompt. Maybe there's some detail there that gets you started.

You could also read something new on the same basic subject to joggle your brain into action.

Or go back and try brainstorming or freewriting, or other strategies that let you explore the topic without the pressure.

Another strategy that works for some writers is to start writing something else you're comfortable with, *unrelated to the paper topic*. While you're writing, keep the assignment in mind. Maybe this kind of freewriting can morph into something closer to what you need to be writing!

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. In-Class Activity: Drafting is something that you'll naturally get better at the more practice you have doing it. Doing plenty of informal writing activities, in class or out of class, is a great way to develop your confidence and your abilities to draft quickly and efficiently. Your instructor can provide prompts, either related to the reading you've been doing or entirely separate, to allow you to practice drafting. Spend a certain amount of time writing, then share with the class what made the activity difficult or easy for you.
2. In-Class Activity: Try some in-class writing *in modes other than essay writing*. Maybe you can experiment with drafting part of a short story, or song lyrics, or a nursery rhyme. How did writing in that other mode compare to writing an essay? What made it difficult or easy? Are there any lessons you can take from that kind of writing to drafting your essays?
3. With a Partner: Have a writing partner in class, someone you can share drafts with, and who can help keep you accountable and on track.
4. Class Activity: Have an honest conversation about what makes drafting hard, or difficult to get started on. Do you have other strategies for getting started or drafting, not covered in this chapter?

10 Revising

10.1 Re-seeing Your Writing

Wow—you've gone through the whole writing process, thinking about audience and purpose, exploring, creating a thesis, finding your best evidence, organizing, drafting, maybe even researching. Now, you have a completed piece of writing: an essay, email, proposal, research paper, or other form of writing. You're done, right?

Not so fast.

Revising, for most writers, is the most important thing to *improving* your writing, the most crucial part of the writing process. You may think that a completed first draft means little improvement is needed; you just need to fix errors. Even experienced writers improve their drafts, and they rely on peers during revising and editing.

You may know that athletes miss catches, fumble balls, or overshoot goals. Dancers forget steps, turn too slowly, or miss beats. For both athletes and dancers, the more they practice, the stronger their performance will become. Writers have the same capacity to profit from improvement and revision.

When you have a completed draft, you need to go back and check that the draft works. Take a second look at your ideas. You might add, cut, move, or change information to make your ideas clearer, more accurate, more interesting, or more convincing.

10.2 Revising vs. Editing vs. Proofreading

You might be wondering why *Pacific Writing!* breaks down this part of the process into three separate steps: Revising, Editing, and Proofreading. The difference is one of SCALE.

Revising is looking at the paper as a whole, and making big changes to its organization or structure. Revising is sometimes called "global content editing" because it's looking at the big picture.

Editing is more about the writing style, and the way individual paragraphs flow.

Proofreading is looking for little things like grammar and spelling errors. It is sometimes called "copy editing," which means going through a document line by line, word by word, and looking for any little errors.

10.2.1 Chart: Clarifying "Revising" and "Editing" and "Proofreading"

Revising	Editing	Proofreading
Scale of the whole paper	**Scale of the paragraph**	**Scale of the sentence or word**
Organization of the whole paper or argument	Organization within paragraphs or sections	Grammar errors
Adding or deleting sections of the paper	Adding or refining topic sentences	Fixing spelling errors
Rethinking what is being argued	Rethinking style issues, like tone, word choice, repetition, etc.	Rethinking formatting, white space, margins, font, etc.
Questioning main focus of the paper	Questioning choice of quotes, research items, sources, and evidence	Citation accuracy (like MLA or APA, etc.)

Although these three steps or tasks can easily blend together in practice, it can be really useful to remember what makes them different. Often when someone hands us a draft and asks for suggestions to fix it or make it better, we jump right into proofreading mode—looking for spelling or grammar mistakes. We forget that there's a lot of great opportunities to improve a draft at the revising and editing scales!

10.3 The writing process and revision

Revision isn't about fixing the wording or the style of your paper. It's about stepping back and looking at the shape of your paper as a whole. Is this shape really the best it can be for the assignment? Think again about a sculptor blocking out the overall shape of their final sculpture with wet clay. Revision would be stepping back and squinting at the overall mass of clay. Is that the right basic shape? Or maybe a different overall pose would work better?

Revision is so much easier to do if you've had a bit of a "cooling off" period after you've written the first draft. This helps you step back from your writing, and see it more clearly with a critical eye. I know it's not always possible, but budgeting some extra time between writing your draft and revising it is always a good thing!

Even if you don't have extra time to cool off, one great way to think about revision is to go back and revisit all the steps of the writing process you have completed so far, stepping through them again to make sure your draft is still on track.

10.3.1 The writing process chart for revision

- After drafting your paper, look back at your reading notes, or key sections of the text(s) you are writing on.
- Do the argument of your paper and the examples you chose accurately represent what's going on in the text?
- Consider changing your thesis. Or adding a new section. Or deleting an old one.

- Does what you wrote still fit the audience and the purpose?
- Re-read the assignment prompt carefully, with your paper draft in front of you. Does your draft meet all the requirements?
- Is there anything you can add to the paper to make it better fit the prompt? Any section to remove, because it really doesn't belong?

- Do you need to go explore more: find more content and research to support your audience, purpose, and assignment?
- Do you need to go back and start over with a new topic?

Write a Thesis

- Look at your thesis. Does it still fit the content of the essay? Or did you end up adding in stuff, or developing your ideas, in ways you didn't anticipate when you first wrote the thesis?
- Revise the thesis, so it better fits the content of your paper! **The vast majority of paper drafts will benefit from some change to the thesis!**
- Revise content to make sure it supports thesis

Support the Thesis

- Are your evidence, quotes from the text, and any additional research you may have done the best choices for supporting your thesis?
- Are there other quotes or examples that might work better than what you've chosen?
- Are there any holes in your argument, steps you left out or claims that you make that really should have some evidence or a quote to back them up?
- Are there any unnecessary examples, quotes or evidence? (Like two quotes or examples that are basically showing the exact same thing.)

Organize

- Examine the organization of the draft. Are the parts of your paper (steps of your argument) in the best order? Would a different order be better?

- Does the organization still support thesis, audience, and purpose? If not, reorganize and reorder essay.
- Do paragraphs stay focused on one clear idea? If not, break up paragraphs, or reorder them.
- Is it clear how each paragraph ties back to the thesis/claim?
- Are the title, introduction, and conclusion still working to engage readers and support the purpose of the assignment?

Draft

- Re-draft sections of the draft to make them stronger, better supported, and more focused.
- Sometimes, this means re-drafting large sections of the writing piece, or even starting over.
- The good news is, it's often much easier to re-draft a section than to draft it the first time! After all, you can always fall back on your first attempt. Try redrafting the weakest part of your essay.

Revise

- Do this process again! Professional writers might revise and re-draft several times.
- Solicit feedback from peers and professionals on each draft.

Going back through the writing process and asking questions like these is a great way to tackle revising. It helps you identify the kinds of big changes you might consider making!

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Individual or Group Activity: Take an essay or an article that's about any topic. *What would your revision strategy be* if you were to revise the article to make it more focused on a sub-topic, or more appropriate for a specific audience?

   FOR EXAMPLE, let's say you start with a general article about the pros and cons of different dog breeds. If you were the author of the article, how would you revise it if you were focusing on the subtopic of choosing the best breed of dog as a first pet for a child with limited mobility? What sections would you cut out? What might you need to add? What other large-scale changes would you need to make? Now start with the same general article, but this time come up with a revision strategy to make the article more targeted to someone who wants to open a kennel.

   Notice how tweaking the purpose or the targeted reader of the article can make some pretty big global changes necessary. Share what you did with the class.

2. With a Partner: Come up with a revision strategy for your partner's draft. How would you reorganize, rearrange, add or subtract sections to make it better?
3. In class: 13.4 of *Pacific Writing!* provides three sequential peer review worksheets, each one focusing on a different part of the revision process. Do these!

11 Editing

After you have revised your essay (maybe even a couple of times) and the overall content and organization are working, then you can move on to editing.

Editing involves making sure your language and style are consistent, clear and appropriate to your audience.

Revising	Editing	Proofreading
Scale of the whole paper	**Scale of the paragraph**	**Scale of the sentence or word**
Organization of the whole paper or argument	Organization within paragraphs or sections	Grammar errors
Adding or deleting sections of the paper	Adding or refining topic sentences	Fixing spelling errors
Rethinking what is being argued	Rethinking style issues, like tone, word choice, repetition, etc.	Rethinking formatting, white space, margins, font, etc.
Questioning main focus of the paper	Questioning choice of quotes, research items, sources, and evidence	Citation accuracy (like MLA or APA, etc.)

11.1 Style

What is style?

The content of your mind is *what* you are telling. Style is *how* you tell it. In other words, style is *the way you say what's in your mind*. Style has to do with things like sound and rhythm, word choice, where you place words and phrases in sentences, and sentence length and structure. You want to have a style that is going to do justice to the ideas in your mind, and get those ideas across to your audience.

For some students, "writing style" can seem like a vague, elusive and intimidating component of writing. They get hung up on sentence-level expression, thinking that only elegant, erudite sentences will earn top grades.

Some students assume that they'll never produce strong papers if they do not already have some kind of inborn gift for wordsmithing.

Or worse, they break out their thesaurus and try to make their writing as "academic" or "scholarly" as possible, by filling it with as much jargon and complicated prose as they can!

If any of that feels familiar to you, you can relax. Let's step back a second and think of the *purpose* of a good writing style:

A good writing style clearly and efficiently communicates your ideas to your reader.

OK, that's actually pretty simple. You don't need to be a natural-born poet to do that. You don't need a giant vocabulary or a lot of jargon to do that.

It may be true that a lot of academic writing is laden with unnecessary jargon, but the culture is shifting among scholars to favor plainer language and to insist on clarity. Your professors are likely to find a self-consciously highbrow writing style tedious rather than impressive. Remember that the reason we assign essays is to get a window into the development of your *thinking*! A clear and efficient writing style gets out of the way of your ideas, so they can take center stage!

For a good writing style, what you mostly need is the ability to put yourself into your reader's shoes. Ask yourself:

- If I were the reader, would this writing make the idea clear to me?
- Does it flow smoothly and easily, or is it tedious, repetitive, or convoluted?
- Does it keep the reader interested in what I'm saying?

11.2 Editing for Clarity

Here are some strategies for editing for clarity:

One of the most common ways to make sure your writing is clear is to **have someone else read it** and tell you whether or not they understand it. This is great because it's literally testing what writing style needs to do: Get the ideas from your head clearly into the head of your reader. Ask your reader about places where they had trouble understanding, or if they had to go back and re-read any sections. And ask your reader what they think your draft's argument was (without looking at the draft). If they got any of it wrong, maybe that part of your writing could be clearer!

Did I…

- ☐ Have someone else read it?
- ☐ Wait a bit, then give it another look?
- ☐ Talk it through to someone?
- ☐ Read it out loud?

If you don't have another reader handy, then you can try to be that other reader yourself. Set your draft aside for a while, then **take a "fresh" look at it**. Is your writing clear? Are there places that could be explained better?

Another strategy that works surprisingly well for some writers: **Tell someone else what the unclear part of your draft is trying to say!**

If a student is having trouble editing a part of their paper for clarity, I'll frequently ask them to just tell me what it is they're trying to say. Nine times out of ten, the student will say something like "Well basically…", and then go on to explain their point clearly and efficiently, in normal, everyday language. Just write that down, and you've made your prose a lot clearer!

I think this happens because, while many of us have anxiety about our formal writing skills, all of us have a lot of practice with talking. We're a lot more comfortable with speaking naturally in a conversation than we are with writing academically. Use that comfort to your advantage. If you don't have someone else to explain a difficult part of your paper to, just talk to yourself. Even better, talk into a phone with speech-to-text which types what you say. You'll probably need to edit further, but that's a great way to jumpstart the process.

A final way to check your paper for clarity is to **read it out loud to yourself**. When you're just staring at the words on your screen, it can be hard to get a feel for the flow of the writing and the style. Read out loud, and listen to yourself as you go. Are any parts awkward, or cumbersome, or unclear? Are there sentences you stumble over as you try to read them naturally? Mark down anything like that for editing!

11.3 Editing for Consistency

Besides being clear, you should be consistent, or at least have a strategic plan for how the style should change over the course of your paper. Imagine walking up a flight of stairs, but each step is a different distance from the next one. In such a situation, you will spend most of your time trying to figure out where to safely put your foot, rather than getting to the top of the landing efficiently.

This disorienting effect is what you do to your reader when you are inconsistent in your writing. Are some sentences written in a more formal style, but then you jump right to slang in others? Is the writing impassioned at the start of a paragraph, but dry and detached at the end?

This isn't to say that you can't vary your style as you move through your argument. It might be very effective to start a formal paper with an informal or humorous example, or to transition to a more personal tone in your conclusion. In the

editing phase, look for places where your tone shifts randomly, in a way that might be jarring for the reader.

11.4 Editing for Precision

I've said that you should avoid unnecessary jargon, or overly complicated ways of phrasing your thoughts just to sound more "academic." This is true, especially if you're using the thesaurus to choose the longest and most complicated-sounding terms when a simpler word would do the job just as well, if not better.

However, sometimes a simple word or phrase doesn't do the full job you need it to. After all, complicated words (even jargon words) exist for a reason: **They convey meaning more precisely** than the simpler versions.

For example, a thesaurus might list the following as synonyms for "bad": *incorrect, sad, substandard, imperfect, dreadful*. But that doesn't mean that all these words are interchangeable and mean the same thing. If you're describing a "bad" rainstorm, for example, and the rain is especially bad, you might choose to say the storm is *dreadful*. That's more precise than just *bad*. Maybe the rain is dreadful because it's going on and on, and it just won't stop. If that's the case, you might choose to say the storm is *unrelenting*. In this case, *unrelenting* is even more precise than *dreadful*!

But saying the weather is *incorrect* wouldn't make any sense. That's because thesaurus words are not really *synonyms* in the sense that *they mean the same thing*. They don't. Rather, each word means something a little different from the others. Those slight differences in meaning are where precision comes in.

Editing for precision means looking for places where your words or phrases are kind of vague, and asking yourself if more precise language could make your meaning clearer.

Maybe you've got a paragraph in your essay about "The Yellow Wallpaper" which is about the ways the narrator's husband treats her like a child. Your draft paragraph starts with

> John treats his wife, the narrator, pretty badly.

OK, but "pretty badly" is not very precise, and it doesn't really set up what the paragraph is about. How, exactly, does he treat her badly? What's the point you're trying to make here? Let's think about it. How does a person treat someone when they are treating them like a child?

> John trivializes his wife, the narrator, throughout the story.

Wow, that's a lot better. It's better because it's more precise. But there are lots of ways to trivialize someone that aren't specifically about treating them like a child. Let's visit the thesaurus to see if we can't find one that's even more precise.

John infantilizes his wife, the narrator, throughout the story.

Maybe that's even better? In the editing stage, finding words that are open to a lot of different meanings and making them more precise can really improve your draft!

11.5 Editing for Brevity

Editing for brevity means making your writing shorter, and more concise.

Communicating your ideas *efficiently* to your reader means not wasting their time. So editing for brevity means keeping an eye out for parts of your draft that don't serve a specific purpose, and cutting them out.

Tips for making your draft more concise:

1. Look for **sentences that you can cut entirely**. Sometimes when we draft, we'll write out basically the same idea twice. If you're wondering whether a sentence can be cut, try reading the paragraph without it. Does it still make just as much sense, and get your full idea across? If so, it can probably be cut.
2. Look for **words and phrases that you can cut entirely**. Look for parts of sentences that are redundant ("each *and every,*" "*unexpected* surprise," "predictions *about the future*"), meaningless ("*very* unique," "*certain* factors," "*slightly* terrifying"), or clichéd ("as far as the eye can see," or "long march of time").
3. Look for opportunities to **replace longer phrases with shorter phrases or words**. For example, "the way in which" can often be replaced by "how" and "despite the fact that" can usually be replaced by "although." Strong, precise verbs can often replace bloated phrases. Consider this example: "The goal of Alexander the Great was to create a united empire across a vast distance." And compare it to this: "Alexander the Great sought to unite a vast empire."

Caution: It's possible to take editing for brevity too far, and end up with writing that's so tightly packed it's actually *slower* to read.

Consider this example: You might spend a lot of time struggling to understand a difficult and densely written paragraph in a textbook. But maybe a longer section, which breaks the complicated ideas down into simpler parts and gives good examples, would actually be faster for you to read.

Likewise, sometimes repeating a key point can be really helpful to the reader.

The most efficient style for your reader isn't necessarily the shortest one**. The bottom line is to find a style that makes it easy and efficient for your reader to understand your ideas!**

11.6 Editing for Variety

In the editing stage, look at the way your sentences within a paragraph are starting. Are they all starting the same way? If so, maybe consider rewording a few of them! Are all your paragraphs structured exactly alike? Throw some variety in there as well! Of course it's still important to have a consistent overall style to your paper, but varying the way you word things can be really helpful!

Why is variety necessary? Think about how you would feel as a reader, and you saw the same information repeated over and over. You'd start skimming ahead, and rightly so, because repeated information is redundant. What a waste of time!

When your *style* gets very repetitive, like when you start all your sentences the same way, then it starts to feel redundant to your reader in the same way. It might not *be* redundant—maybe each sentence contains new and important information!—but it *feels* redundant, so your reader starts skipping ahead.

11.7 Editing for Tone

You can misunderstand the *content* of what someone says, and you can also misunderstand the *tone*, or spirit, of what they say. Sarcasm in conversation is an example of this. You can tell someone "Great job!" and mean it: He made a delicious cake! Or you can tell someone "Great job!" and not mean it: He forgot to add sugar! That is tone.

Are there parts of your draft where tone matters? Like are you trying to be humorous, or sarcastic, at any point? Are you treating your subject flippantly? Or is your tone heavy and serious? Any tone can be totally appropriate depending on context, but during the editing phase you should ask yourself:

- Is this an appropriate tone for the subject or context?
- Is there a chance that your reader might *misunderstand* your tone, like not realize that you are making a point sarcastically? Or think that you're being sarcastic or dismissive when in fact you're totally serious? (Keep in mind that sarcasm is notoriously difficult to detect in writing, so much so that it's common practice on the internet to explicitly tag a sarcastic comment as sarcasm, even if that sarcasm is obvious to you!)

11.8 Editing for Organization Inside Paragraphs

Just like you looked at the overall organization of your draft in the revising stage, you can look at the way individual paragraphs are organized. This is especially helpful if you have paragraphs that use multiple pieces of evidence to prove the main point.

- How would you describe the order of those pieces of evidence? (If you don't have an immediate answer for this, that's a possible red flag that you didn't organize the paragraph well when you were drafting!)
- Is there an alternate way of organizing your evidence that would make the paragraph stronger, clearer, or easier to understand?

Maybe you have paragraphs that make several points in them, sub-points that all contribute to the paragraph's main point.

- Are these in the most logical order? If you're building up to the paragraph's main point, see if any of the sub-points build off the each other, so they need to go in a certain order.
- Is there a different way to organize the paragraph's argument?

11.9 Editing your Examples

While you're looking at the way your points and your evidence are *organized* inside your paragraphs, it's a good time to ask yourself again:

- Are these examples really the best ones I can choose to support my paragraph's point?

Sometimes it's easier to spot a weak quote when you're focused on the scale of the paragraph. Maybe there are better quotes from the text that will match your paragraph's specific topic more closely.

11.10 Editing your Topic Sentences

Finally, just like you looked at your thesis statement in the revising stage, then fixed it to better match the argument of your paper, you can look at each paragraph's topic sentence in the editing stage and do the same thing.

Maybe you've reorganized a paragraph, so now the topic sentence needs to reflect the new order. Or maybe you just got a better idea of what role that paragraph is playing in your paper, and a better topic sentence will make reading that paragraph easier, clearer, and more efficient for your reader!

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Group Activity: The world is full of examples of poorly written text that could stand some editing for clarity, consistency, precision, etc. Find an example of some writing that could be clearer and more efficient, then edit and rewrite it so that it's better. Share your result with the class and talk about the pros and cons of each group's editing strategy.
2. Individual or Group Activity: Take a paragraph or two, and edit it for brevity, *but take this editing too far, to the point where your rewrite is harder to read, or lacks key information*. Share with the class and talk about how you can find the right balance. (Note: This can also be a full-class activity. The instructor can put the text to be edited up on the screen, and edit it as students call out suggestions.)
3. Individual or Group Activity: Take a paragraph or two that is dull and boring because of its repetitive style. Rewrite it, varying the style, so that it's more interesting to read. Share your result and your strategy with the class.
4. In class: Section 13.4 of *Pacific Writing!* has two different editing-stage peer review worksheets. Try them out!

12 Proofreading

Proofreading is all about fixing errors.

Revising	Editing	Proofreading
Scale of the whole paper	**Scale of the paragraph**	**Scale of the sentence or word**
Organization of the whole paper or argument	Organization within paragraphs or sections	Grammar errors
Adding or deleting sections of the paper	Adding or refining topic sentences	Fixing spelling errors
Rethinking what is being argued	Rethinking style issues, like tone, word choice, repetition, etc.	Rethinking formatting, white space, margins, font, etc.
Questioning main focus of the paper	Questioning choice of quotes, research items, sources, and evidence	Citation accuracy (like MLA or APA, etc.)

12.1 Heads up: This Chapter Will Cover the Rules of Grammar

For many students, learning about grammar rules is the least fun, most dreaded, and most boring part of a writing class. (Honestly, that's true for many writing teachers as well!) There are a lot of strong feelings, and misconceptions, about the importance of grammar rules and "proper English", so it's probably a good idea to address some of those up front.

Some people have the idea that learning how to write with correct grammar and spelling is the most important part (or even the *only* important part) of learning how to write. With this mindset, an ideal writing instruction class would be an endless stream of grammar drills. An "A" paper would be one where all the commas and semicolons were in the right place and nothing was misspelled, regardless of the paper's intellectual content.

I hope it's clear that that is *not* the philosophy behind the writing instruction of Core 2, or of this textbook! At the end of the day, writing is only a tool we use to develop, organize, and focus our thoughts, and to communicate those thoughts clearly

and efficiently to others. "Good writing" can never exist separately from the thoughts, arguments, ideas, and information that it conveys.

So if you are one of those students who feels that you will never be able to write well because you *simply cannot* wrap your head around fussy grammar rules, you can relax right now! There have been nine steps to the writing process before this chapter, and you can show your strength as a writer in any of those earlier steps. Remember that professors assign writing to get a window into the development of your thinking. Those earlier steps, about the development of your ideas, are arguably *more important* than having pristine grammar.

But this brings us to another misconception about the importance of learning grammar conventions.

Some people have the idea that learning grammar is not important or necessary at all. After all, when you're sending a text message to a friend, you pay no attention to grammar, and you understand each other just fine! If everyone can understand each other, then why should spelling or grammar matter at all?

Actually that's pretty reasonable! In the case of texting your friends, it would be *worse writing* if you formatted everything as Standard English sentences in a conversation that's otherwise full of emojis and short-hand slang. "Good writing" is only good if it works clearly and efficiently *in its context and for its audience*. In the context of informal texts, and the audience of your friends, following "proper" writing rules would only slow things down.

But alas, during your academic and professional career, you will be expected to communicate in lots of different contexts, and to many more readers than just your friends, family, and peers. So one reason it's important to learn some grammar is because in some of those contexts, following the rules of Standard English will be the expected norm. Like it or not, you will be judged in these contexts and by these readers if you make grammar and spelling mistakes. With that in mind, it just makes sense to learn the rules, so you have Standard English available as a tool in your writer's toolbox. Then you can use it in contexts where it will help you get ahead!

Another reason proofreading for grammar and spelling is important is because it makes your text *more efficient* for the reader!

Try reading this:

Eww should've consider came to Pacific, because. Small calls size and the teacher care about you're learning.

Maybe you can decipher it. But I'm sure it's more efficient (faster and easier for you to understand) once the grammar and spelling are fixed:

You should consider coming to Pacific, because of the small class sizes and the teachers who care about your learning.

So proofreading for grammar and spelling is worth your effort, because it will help you succeed in some future professional and academic contexts, and also because it makes your writing more efficient. But, it's not the *only* part of good writing.

12.2 The Simple Sentence

You've been writing sentences for years, perhaps even decades. Do you know what makes a complete sentence, though? There are three things:

Subject: The subject is typically a person, place, thing or idea.

Verb: This is the action or state of being (like "is") that the subject is doing or being.

A Complete Thought: You don't need any extra words to make sense of it. For example, a complete thought with a subject and a verb is "I run."

A complete sentence might also be referred to as an "independent clause." A "clause" (not Claus, as in Santa) is a group of words that *may* make up a complete sentence. This means that there are "dependent" clauses too, that have a subject or verb but do not have a complete thought and therefore cannot be complete sentences.

Independent Clause: A group of words that could stand alone as a complete sentence is an independent clause. They are "independent" because they can stand on their own!

Dependent Clause: A group of words *with a subject and a verb*, but not a complete thought, is dependent. The clause is "dependent" because it needs some more words before it can stand as a sentence.

Check out the following sentence that has **three** independent clauses, or complete sentences, in it:

We went to the store, we bought M&Ms and a plastic turtle, and then we went home.

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

and making sure it has a complete thought. You could write three sentences: ***We*** *went to the store.* ***We*** *bought M&Ms and a plastic turtle. And then* ***we*** *went home.* Each of these has a subject (**bold**), and a verb (underlined).

Let's look at an example of an independent clause, which is a clause that can stand alone by itself without the reader thinking "something else is needed for this to be completed and make sense." Again, an independent clause is a complete sentence:

The mustard is too spicy.

That's a complete thought. No reader will think "there is something missing here."

On the other hand, these are examples of clauses that are *not* independent:

Spicy mustard.

There's no verb, and it's an incomplete thought.

Dislikes the spicy mustard.

There's no subject, and it's an incomplete thought.

Since the mustard is too spicy.

It's an incomplete thought. There is the verb "is" and the noun "mustard." But the word "since" changes all that follows it into a dependent idea. Since the mustard is too spicy…what?! We are left waiting for the main thought. The "since" tells us "This part of the sentence is about the **why** of the main part." But it leaves us hanging, waiting for the main subject and verb.

12.3 Subjects

When you read a sentence, you can first look for the subject, or what the sentence is about. The subject usually appears at the beginning of a sentence as a noun or a pronoun.

Noun: A noun is a word that identifies a person, place, thing, or idea.

Pronoun: A pronoun replaces, or stands in for, a noun. For example, *I, he, she, it, you, they,* and *we*.

In the following sentences, the subject is in **bold**:

Marco enjoys an icy cold Cherry Coke with his French fries. **He** doesn't eat particularly well.

In these sentences, the subject is a person: Marco. The pronoun "he" replaces and refers back to Marco.

Chicken Tikka Masala is a delicious dish. **It** is often served with jasmine rice.

In these sentences, the subject is a thing: Chicken Tikka Masala, and the pronoun "it" replaces and refers back to the Chicken Tikka Masala.

Love can hurt. **It** also makes the world turn.

In these sentences, "love" is the idea, and the pronoun "it" replaces and refers back to love.

12.4 Verbs

Once you locate the subject of a sentence, you can move on to the next part of a complete sentence: the verb. A verb is often an action word that shows what the subject is doing. A verb can also link the subject to a describing word. There are three types of verbs that we see in sentences: action verbs, linking verbs, and helping verbs. Action verbs and linking verbs can be the main verbs of a sentence. Helping verbs just help.

12.4.1 Action verbs

Action Verb: A verb that connects the subject to an action is called an action verb. An action verb answers the question, "What is the subject doing?"

The following sentences have action verbs. The subject is **bold** and the verb is *italicized*:

The **dog** *barked* at the runner.

The **man** *gave* a speech about greenhouse gases.

12.4.2 Linking verbs

Linking Verb: A verb that connects the subject of the sentence to a describing word. It's called a "linking verb" because of this connection.

The following sentences have linking verbs. The subject is **bold** and the verb is *italicized*.

The **coat** *was* old and dirty.

The **clock** *seems* slow.

A few verbs can be used as either action verbs or linking verbs.

Action:

The **boy** *looked* for his glove.

Linking:

The **boy** *looked* tired.

Although both sentences use the same verb, the two sentences have completely different meanings. In the first sentence, the verb describes the boy's action. The verb, in this case, takes an object, which in this sentence is "glove." Some verbs take objects. Some verbs do not. In the second sentence, the verb describes the boy's appearance. It says, in essence, **boy=___.**

12.4.3 Helping verbs

Helping Verb: A verb that is used with the main verb for past, present, or future tenses; for emphasis; or for passive voice. They are usually a form of *be*, *do*, or *have*. The word *can* is also used as a helping verb.

In the following sentences, the subject is in **bold**, the helping verb is underlined, and the verb is *italicized*.

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

She does *speak up* when prompted in class.

We have *seen* that movie seventeen times.

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

12.5 Prepositional Phrases

Sometimes *prepositional phrases* will throw off your hunt for subjects and verbs when you're trying to determine if a sentence is complete.

> **Prepositional Phrase:** This is phrase that begins with a preposition, like *in, on, under, near, by, with,* and *about*. Prepositional phrases often include nouns (remember: a noun is a person, place, thing, or idea), but these nouns are not the subject of the sentence.

Here are some examples, with the preposition in **bold**:

Under the moon

By the bodega

In love **with** you

When you're looking for the subject or verb in a sentence, it will never be in the prepositional phrase. Check out the following sentence:

Charles wandered through the aisles in the hardware store on the corner.

This sentence has *three* prepositional phrases:

- **through** the aisles
- **in** the hardware store
- **on** the corner

Whew! So, if you cross out all those prepositional phrases in the sentence, finding the subject and verb is easy:

Charles *wandered* ~~through the aisles in the hardware store on the corner~~.

12.6 Common Sentence Errors: Fragments and Run-Ons

All this talk so far about simple sentences is to help you spot and avoid some of the most common errors in writing: sentence fragments and run-ons.

As we discussed, complete sentences, or independent clauses, contain a subject, a verb, and form complete a thought:

The big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away.

The subject is “cow,” the verb is “walked.” The other words modify or give more information about the subject and the verb.

12.6.1 What is a sentence fragment?

Sentence Fragment: A fragment is a group of words that’s presented as a sentence, but it’s missing something. Maybe it’s missing *the subject* or *the verb,* or maybe *it’s an incomplete thought*.

Here’s an example of a fragment:

Walked quickly and quietly away towards the rabbit.

There is no subject in this group of words. What or who walked? Notice that the word “rabbit” is a noun and can, in its own sentence, be the subject. But in this case, it is part of the prepositional phrase that tells where the walking is towards. Thus, it cannot be the subject, even though it is a noun.

Here's another:

Because the big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away.

The addition of “because” creates an incomplete thought: Because the cow walked away, … what happened?

One type of word that frequently creates fragments when added to the beginning of sentences is a **conjunction**. Conjunctions are words that indicate some sort of connection is coming, like a trailer with a hitch. That part of the sentence needs something with an engine (main subject and verb) to hook up to before it can go anywhere. It needs a simple sentence (independent clause) to hitch to.

Conjunction: This is a word that is placed between two phrases, words or independent clauses. It turns an independent clause into a dependent clause.

List of common conjunctions: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So, Because**,** If**,** Since**,** When**,** While**,** As, Before**,** Wherever, Once, After**,** Although**,** Even if, Even though, Unless**,** Until**,** Where.

Conjunctions are easiest to understand by example. Take any simple sentence:

The dog wagged his tail really hard.

Now add a conjunction:

Because the dog wagged his tail really hard.

What started as a complete sentence is now a sentence fragment. The independent clause was turned into a dependent clause. Because the dog wagged his tail really hard… so what?!

Because the dog wagged his tail really hard, Grandma was knocked out the window.

That's some dog!

12.6.2 How to fix a sentence fragment

Either add the missing words, or hook the fragment onto a sentence that comes before it or after it in the paragraph.

The big brown cow *walked* quickly and quietly away.

Because the big, brown cow walked quickly and quietly away, I didn't *need* to freak out.

In the above examples, the main (simple) subject is underlined, and the verb is in *italics*. In the second sentence, "cow" is no longer the subject, because the word "because" has come in and made that whole clause from "because" to "away" into a dependent clause, a trailer, needing a hitch.

12.6.3 What is a run-on sentence?

Run-on Sentence: This is the term for two complete sentences (independent clauses) that are put together incorrectly.

For example:

I walked down to the store the heat was getting to me.

"I walked down to the store" is a perfectly fine sentence. "The heat was getting to me" is another great sentence. Put them together, though, without proper punctuation, and you have a run-on.

If you separate these two complete sentences with a comma, you have a type of run-on called a comma splice. Note: This is by far the most common type of run-on sentence mistake that you are likely to make!

Comma Splice: A type of run-on sentence where the two complete sentences (independent clauses) are attached (or "spliced") together with a comma is a comma splice.

I walked down to the store, the heat was getting to me.

In the proofreading stage, you can spot comma splices by looking for long-ish sentences with a comma in the middle. If the words on each side of the comma can stand alone as their own, complete sentence, you've found a comma splice!

12.6.4 How to fix a run-on sentence

There are options.

Use a conjunction:

I walked down to the store because the heat was getting to me.

…or use a semicolon:

I walked down to the store; the heat was getting to me.

…or go ahead and use a period.

I walked down to the store. The heat was getting to me.

Another common run-on sentence type looks like this:

As I walked down to the store the heat was getting to me.

It's a run-on because it starts with a conjunction (again, words like *as, because, since, when,* and *if*) but it does not have a comma separating out the two sentence parts. It should look like this:

As I walked down to the store, the heat was getting to me.

Some instructors will also call the clause, "As I walked down to the store" an introductory phrase that needs a comma after it. Or they'll call it a "dependent clause." Whatever the instructor calls it, the comma needs to be there.

12.7 Common Sentence Errors: Verb Forms

Once again, every sentence must have a **subject** and at least one verb.

We drove to south campus and parked on Mendocino, so **we** got to our math class on time.

The verbs are underlined above. A verb in a sentence is that which tells the action, or the state of being. Above, the actions are “drove” and “parked” and “got”. The subject (a pronoun) is "we." Notice that you could write the above as three sentences, and they would all be good sentences:

We drove to south campus.

We parked on Mendocino.

We got to our math class on time.

Verbs can be in three basic tenses in English: past, present, and future. They indicate the time of the action. The above example is written in the past tense. If it were present, it would be

We drive to south campus and park on Mendocino, so we get to our math class on time.

If it were future tense, it would be

We will drive to south campus and will park on Mendocino, so we’ll get to our math class on time.

One common error in writing, with verbs, is that the writer switches verb forms mid-paragraph, or even mid-sentence. That can make things pretty confusing for the reader. For example:

We will drive to south campus and parked on Mendocino, so we get to our math class on time.

Huh?

Another common error in writing, with verbs, is that the tense does not match the subject.

He sit.

In third person singular, there is an “s” at the end of the verb. The “he” already indicates that this is third person singular, so the verb form needs to be “sits.”

When writing a longer sentence, it’s surprisingly easy to put the wrong verb. For example, we might write:

Almira and I, sea-weed draped, rose up out of the ocean. We raced to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We knew there was no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone was roasting corn. Almira and **I go over** to the man selling corn. **We say**, "How much?"

In the second to the last sentence, the verb tense shifts. So then, in revising, we realize we need to change it to all past tense, or else keep it present tense, which is how the above passage ends. Let’s try making it all past tense:

Almira and I, sea-weed draped, rose up out of the ocean. We raced to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We knew there was no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone was roasting corn. Almira and I **went over** to the man selling corn. **We said**, "How much?"

Or we can make it all present tense:

Almira and I, sea-weed draped, **rise up** out of the ocean. We **race** to the beach towel, trailing green slime. We **know** there is no sea-monster after us, but you run faster when you think there is. On the edge of the beach, someone **is roasting** corn. Almira and I **go over** to the man selling corn. We **say**, "How much?"

Either choice is fine in this case, if it’s consistent.

12.8 Common Sentence Errors: Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement

A pronoun stands in place of another noun that has already been named. If we are writing about Frank, we do not keep using his name, saying “Frank skipped dinner, and then Frank shook the dice.” We write, “Frank skipped dinner, and then he shook the dice.” In this case, the antecedent (thing referred to) of the pronoun is Frank.

Antecedent: The antecedent is the word or phrase *which a pronoun refers back to*.

One common writing error is not having your pronoun match the *number* of the antecedent. If the antecedent is singular, use a singular pronoun. If the antecedent is plural, use a plural pronoun.

This banana is dangerous. **It** is covered in spiders!

On Thursdays, **Jim and Kheena** do math together, and then **they** eat.

12.8.1 A note on gendered pronouns and "they"

The English language has always had pronouns that are naturally gender neutral. For example, we don't have separate versions of "I" or "you" or "we" or "they" when we are talking about males or females. Other pronouns, like "he" and "she", have traditionally carried information about the *gender* of the person they are referring to.

This has always made some sentences a little awkward. For example:

When a student forgets to pay _____ tuition, _____ will get dropped from classes.

We don't know the student's gender, so how should we fill in the blanks?

Long ago, a traditionalist might have said "Just use *his* and *he*. The male version of the singular pronoun is great, and it can stand in for both genders just fine!"

When a student forgets to pay his tuition, he will get dropped from classes.

It kind of works, but it's easy to see that this traditional solution is somewhat sexist, a bit like using "Man" to refer to all of humankind. It's also confusing. A female student might wonder if this rule applies to her.

To solve this, during the second half of the 20th century it became commonplace to find solutions that used *both* pronoun forms:

When a student forgets to pay his or her tuition, she or he will get dropped from classes.

This is better in some ways, but it quickly gets cumbersome and wordy to always use both.

Another solution was to deliberately use "he" or "she" equally (but somewhat randomly) when the antecedent's gender is unspecified:

When a student forgets to pay his tuition, she will get dropped from classes.

That's confusing, to say the least!

Other writers simply tried to avoid using singular forms altogether. If your subject is *always* plural, the problem doesn't come up, because "they" is naturally gender neutral.

When students forget to pay their tuition, they will get dropped from their classes.

That's ok, but it's unnecessarily limiting for the writer, because now they *can't* use a singular subject, even if they need to! And in this case, it's also confusing. Does this mean that if some students don't pay tuition, then *all* of them get dropped from the class?

One elegant solution is to use the gender-neutral English pronoun that we already have: *they*.

When a student forgets to pay their tuition, they will get dropped from classes.

This works nicely because we already use "they" colloquially in this sense. "They" is smoother and less awkward than "he or she", and it's also better because it's inclusive of non-binary individuals in a way that "he or she" isn't.

A traditionalist might say that "a student forgets to pay their tuition" is a pronoun/antecedent error, because "a student" is singular and "their" is plural. But languages are ever-changing, and no grammar rule is set in stone forever. Currently "they" and "their" are perfectly acceptable to use as singular pronouns for cases where a single gender is unknown or inappropriate. Indeed, that's the form used throughout *Pacific Writing!*

12.9 Passive and Active Voice

When writing sentences, there are basically two ways to show action: passively and actively.

Passive: The ball was thrown to Brenna at second base.
Active: Rosa threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

Both sentences are complete and convey an action with the verb; however, the first sentence, the passive sentence, almost seems to be missing something. If you try to picture the action, you might see a baseball coming out of nowhere, hurtling toward a girl at second base. In the active sentence the picture is more complete: you can see who threw the ball. Even with the additional information, both sentences are the same length.

In general, active voice is more effective.

Construct your sentences so that someone or something is doing something—not just something being done. Look for "to be" verbs like *is, are, was, were*. These are often a sign of passive voice.

That doesn't mean passive voice can't be useful. When you want to deemphasize the subject or avoid responsibility, passive voice is the way to go. For example, a car company that had a major mechanical issue with their airbags and had to recall millions of cars is probably not going to admit total fault.

An error was made in the production of the airbag in your Brand X car.

This is a useful application of passive voice. If the sentence were active, the company might actually be legally more liable.

Company X made a mistake in the production of airbags…

NO! Don't say that. We'll get sued!

12.9.1 Modifier errors caused by passive voice

Another problem with using passive voice is that it can cause grammatical errors like dangling or misplaced modifiers.

Modifier: This is a descriptive word or phrase that can work like a dependent clause at the start of a sentence.

With pinpoint accuracy, Rosa threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

The phrase "with pinpoint accuracy" is a modifier, describing how Rosa threw the ball. It works fine! Now, try that same phrase with the passive sentence:

With pinpoint accuracy, the ball was thrown to Brenna at second base.

Now what is the phrase describing? From the structure of the sentence, the ball is throwing itself with pinpoint accuracy. In fact, the person who threw with accuracy isn't even in the sentence, so this is a **dangling modifier**.

Even if Rosa was in the sentence but the sentence was still passive, there would be a logic problem:

With pinpoint accuracy, the ball was thrown by Rosa to Brenna at second base.

Now Rosa is there, but the sentence still almost makes it sound like the ball was throwing itself. This is a **misplaced modifier**.

You can correct any of these modifier errors by just changing it to active voice:

With pinpoint accuracy, Rosa threw the ball to Brenna at second base.

12.10 Comma Rules Simplified

One of the hardest things in proofreading is commas. This is because often, unlike with other punctuation, commas are frequently placed based on style considerations. In other words, comma rules are sometimes more flexible.

12.10.1 Use commas in between items in a series

Like this:

Bob likes ice cream, ham sandwiches, and pickled herring blended together into a shake.

12.10.2 Use commas to separate out extra information

You can use commas with introductory phrases, transitional expressions, parentheticals, and the like. This is information that, if removed, will not change the basic meaning of the sentence:

I find lutefisk disgusting, **despite what you say about it.**

Parts of *Raiders of the Lost Ark***, that movie starring Harrison Ford,** were filmed on Pacific's campus!

Hey, did you listen to Dr. Zhou's lecture?

Rhonda, **who constantly forgets things**, left her jacket on the couch.

After the Tigers game, Don and Janice went to the DUC.

Nga accidentally shaved off an eyebrow, **which turned out to be a good look for her.**

12.10.3 Use commas when a subordinate or modifying thought is done

For example:

Even though he wandered around the mall for hours, Javier couldn't find the perfect pair of shoes.

I got sick of waiting for him, *so I went out to the car*.

In the first example, the clause "even though…" is modifying, or giving information about, why and under what circumstances Javier couldn't find (the main subject and verb of the sentence).

In the second, the comma is used in conjunction with the word "so" to move to the second section of the sentence.

12.10.4 Use commas between equally weighted adjectives

He is a silly, fun kid.

Note: silly and fun are of the same "weight" or importance. You could easily say "He is a fun, silly kid" and the sentence sounds natural.

In fact, trying them in reverse is exactly how you can tell if a comma is needed or not! *If it sounds a little off in a different order, then leave the commas out*! Here's an example of adjectives that are *not* equally weighted:

That ridiculous foam rubber clown nose is in the garbage.

You wouldn't say, "That foam rubber ridiculous clown nose…" This means that "ridiculous" and "foam rubber"—and "clown," for that matter—are of different weight, so the adjectives need to be presented in that order in the sentence. In that case, no commas!

12.10.5 Use commas after a city and the state in a sentence

The population of Stockton, California, is over 300,000 people.

12.10.6 Use commas to separate items in a date or address

He was hired on Friday, March 30, 2007, and he reported for work the following Monday at 3601 Pacific Ave., Stockton, California.

12.11 Semicolon Rules Simplified

The rule for using a semicolon is easy: Use it in place of a period, but the sentences (or independent clauses! Remember those?) connected by a semicolon must be logically or thematically related in some way.

YES: Shadi went to the movie by herself; she had a good time.
NO: Shadi went to the movie by herself; it's a sunny day in the neighborhood.

YES: Alfonso is a great dancer; he swings his arms like nobody's business.
NO: Alfonso is a great dancer; the green casserole needs to get thrown out!

Here's another rule for semicolons: Use them instead of commas to separate items in a list if the items in the list have commas in them. (What?) Here's an example:

Dachshunds have several interesting traits, such as short, powerful legs; a territorial bark; a long, low body; and the adorable, sometimes annoying devotion to a single owner.

12.12 Colon Rules Simplified

Colons can be used to introduce a list:

Teachers have a lot on their plates: planning class lessons, executing on those lessons, and grading.

Colons can be used in some cases for emphasis:

I finally chose my college major: English!

Colons can also be used to separate out titles from their subtitles:

Captain America: Civil War

12.13 Apostrophe Rules Simplified

An apostrophe often shows possession. **If the word is singular**, add an apostrophe and an "s" even if the word already ends with an "s." For example:

Russ's shoes stink.

If the word is plural and ends with an "s," just put an apostrophe after the "s."

The princesses' gowns were pretty.

If the word is plural, but does not end in an "s," a word such as "children" or "men" or "moose," then use an apostrophe and an "s."

The children's ice cream melted quickly.

An apostrophe is also used:

-In a contraction, to show that there are letters missing:

You’re (you are)

-To provide clarity when the thing that is plural is just one letter, or a number:

There are three m’s in the word mummy.

In the 90’s we drove muscle cars.

12.14 Spelling

Spelling errors are important to correct in proofreading because they make your writing inefficient for your reader.

Spellcheck is a great tool to get you started by finding the biggest misspellings, but you’ll often need a human eye to find them all.

For example, in English there are many words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings:

affect / effect	*by / bye / buy*
they're / there / their	*then / than*
it's / its	*I / eye*
your / you're	*hear / here*
two / to / too	*right / write*

What if you wrote:

Eye did not see, I to I.

Your audience would perhaps think you were trying to write a riddle, or a grand philosophical commentary on the nature of being and selfhood. Or, they would think you simply did not know that you should have written it:

I did not see eye to eye.

12.15 Overall Format

Finally, cast your eyes over the overall format of the paper. Is the formatting the way you want it, with your name and the title in the right place? Are your margins, font, and citations correct? (Note: See the "The Research Process" chapter for proper citation formats!) Check to see if your instructor provided guidelines for their expected format, either in the prompt itself or perhaps on the syllabus.

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. In-Class Activity: Learning and practicing grammar works best in small doses, throughout the semester! Short exercises to learn or refresh grammar rules can be found in multiple places online, and are best done as quick, repeated, low- or no-stakes classroom activities. One excellent online resource is the Creative Commons licensed interactive "Grammar Refresher" at Excelsior OWL, although there are plenty of other options as well for different types of learners.
2. In-Class Activity: Students can proofread each other's drafts, focusing on specific potential problems. (Note: This can also be a full-class activity. The instructor can put a student volunteer's draft up on the screen, and you can proofread it together as a class.)
3. Note: Students who are English language learners may face an additional set of challenges at the proofreading stage. Pacific's Writing Center offers resources that can help.

13 Bringing it All Together: Peer Review

13.1 Peer Review: A Valuable Tool

Peer review means getting feedback from others.

Peer review can be a structured activity, like in Core 2 where you have classmates read your draft and give suggestions on how to improve it, or when you schedule a one-on-one session at Pacific's Writing Center.

It can also be more informal. For example, you could share your essay draft or your ideas with a friend or roommate while you're writing. On the job, you might share a draft of a report with a colleague to review before you give it to your mutual boss. Or you could share a particularly important email with a family member before you click send.

Peer review is so helpful for writing that you are likely to take advantage of it in some form for your whole life.

What makes peer review so valuable? Remember that *your writing is always a tool which you use for a specific purpose*. In the case of a Core 2 essay, the purpose is to get your ideas across clearly to your reader. And the best way to know if the tool works is to test it, by giving it to someone else to read.

Or think about it this way: *You* already know what ideas your essay is trying to convey, and *you* are already convinced by your argument. That makes it especially hard for you to tell if your essay is effective, clear, and convincing—because you're already convinced!

Having someone else look at your writing is essential. You can draft, revise, edit, proofread, then draft more, revise more, edit more, proofread more, etc., and you will still miss weak spots in your own writing. Even wildly famous writers rely on others to help them revise, polish, and perfect their writing.

13.2 Constructive Criticism

13.2.1 As the author

Peer review means asking the right questions of your reader and being willing to accept *constructive criticism*.

Many people see that word *criticism* and pick up only the negative connotations. But as a writer and a thinker, you can learn to take criticism in a positive way and have

high expectations for your work. Having others see your work will help with this. Remember, every weakness that your peer review finds in your draft is a potential opportunity to grow as a writer and make your writing stronger.

By the way, it's totally natural if you sometimes feel a little sensitive about your writing! Whenever we write, even if it's just a Core 2 essay, it feels like we're putting something of ourselves on the page. *Criticism of our writing* can sometimes feel like *criticism of ourselves*, which can make it hard to stomach negative feedback.

One thing that can really help is to **think of your writing as a craft that you are learning**, not an expression of you as a person. If you were just learning how to bake, you'd welcome feedback on how not to burn the cookies, how to get them the right consistency, how to prevent them from sticking to the pan. Even if you had some experience baking, you would still welcome suggestions to improve your recipes that are already pretty good, like browning the butter ahead of time so the cookies are even richer. When you're learning a craft, suggestions for improvement are easier to see as helpful, not as personal attacks. Bring that same mindset to your writing, and critiques from your peers or your professor will be a lot easier to handle and learn from.

Once you receive feedback from others (the more the better), then you can sift through it to see what is truly helpful. You might find contradictions at times: one reader might love your thesis while another might think it's uninteresting. In the end, you're the boss; you can decide how to change and shape your writing.

The great thing about peer review is that it helps you to look more closely at things. For example, maybe a peer reviewer says your conclusion is confusing, so you should revise it. As the author, you might decide that your conclusion is actually fine, but the reader's confusion gives you a clue: you didn't set up your conclusion's main idea clearly enough in the rest of the paper!

13.2.2 As the reviewer

If you are the peer reviewer, constructive criticism can sometimes be hard to get just right. On one hand, it can be hard for some of us to be critical of our peers at all. *Criticism* seems impolite and rude. Isn't it better just to be nice? The truth is, if you read your classmate's draft and just say "Looks great to me!" you're not being particularly nice or helpful, because you've given the author nothing they can work with to improve their paper.

On the other hand, if you go through their draft and come up with a huge list of errors and mistakes, that can be really dispiriting! When a writer sees their draft just covered in red ink, they might lose confidence.

The best kind of constructive criticism helps the author:

- See the problem.
- Understand the problem.
- See a way to fix the problem and make their writing better.

A whole bunch of cross-outs and red ink might show the author where the problems are, but that won't help them understand or improve. Think of ways to explain why you had trouble with a part of the draft, rather than just identifying the error. What would have made that section work better for you, as the reader?

And definitely look for things that the author did well! "I especially liked the part where you …, because it helped me…." is something any author will be happy to hear!

13.3 When to do Peer Review

Pacific Writing! identifies three different steps after Drafting: Revising, Editing, and Proofreading. When is the best time for peer review?

Actually, you can do peer review at any of these three stages. You can even do peer review before the drafting stage, like at the organizing stage or the working thesis stage, to get some helpful feedback before you even start writing!

But it's important that both the author and the peer reviewer understand what stage the draft is in. For example, you wouldn't want to do a bunch of proofreading—making minor suggestions for grammar and wording within a paragraph—when the author also needs revising suggestions—like remove the whole paragraph, or change the whole direction of the paper by modifying the thesis. Similarly, if the author is in the proofreading stage, telling them to change their thesis would be unhelpful.

For in-class peer review sessions, it's generally much more helpful to make Revising suggestions! That means feedback focused more on the **left side of the chart**:

Revising	Editing	Proofreading
Scale of the whole paper	**Scale of the paragraph**	**Scale of the sentence or word**
Organization of the whole paper or argument	Organization within paragraphs or sections	Grammar errors
Adding or deleting sections of the paper	Adding or refining topic sentences	Fixing spelling errors

Rethinking what is being argued	Rethinking style issues, like tone, word choice, repetition, etc.	Rethinking formatting, white space, margins, font, etc.
Questioning main focus of the paper	Questioning choice of quotes, research items, sources, and evidence	Citation accuracy (like MLA or APA, etc.)

Revising suggestions give the author much more to think about. They're more about the author's actual ideas, and not just about the author's language usage. Good revision scale feedback gives the author interesting *decisions* they can make about their writing, not just *corrections* to their writing.

So if you're just doing one peer review session in class for a paper assignment, consider holding back on suggestions that are just *stylistic changes*. It's likely that your classmate will benefit more from feedback on their *ideas*, and how they can organize them or expand on them!

13.4 Sample Peer Review Sheets

Note to instructors: Most students find it helpful to have guidance for peer review sessions. Here are some sample peer review sheets which can be used in your class section. There are three different peer review sheets that focus on different aspects of the revision stage. These can be used individually or in sequence. There are also two peer review sheets that focus on different aspects of the editing stage. I've also included a couple of all-around sheets, one more basic and the other more advanced. Why so many choices? Students can be overwhelmed by peer editing *everything* in a draft, so it helps to have activities that narrow the focus.

Note that I haven't included a peer review sheet for the proofreading stage, because it would be impossible to cram all of the grammar lessons from chapter 12 onto a single review sheet. If you want your students to have some experience proofreading each other's paper for grammar, it would probably be best to choose a single grammar rule at a time and have students focus on that.

Revising Stage Peer Review Sheet: The Main Ideas

Revising is looking at the paper as a whole, and the biggest thing to pay attention to in any essay is what it's about. This worksheet is more about the main ideas in the draft, rather than the actual writing.

Read through your classmate's essay draft, and put it aside. Can you write out, in your own words, what the paper is trying to say? (What is the author's argument in the paper, the main idea or ideas they are demonstrating?)

Reread the start of the draft. Can you find the author's thesis, and does it match what you thought the paper's argument was? If you have a hard time finding the thesis, or if the thesis doesn't really match what the paper seemed to be about, make a note of this. If it doesn't seem to match the essay assignment, make a note of this too!

Do you agree with the author's thesis? Or agree with some of the ideas, but not others? Or can you think of ways the author could expand their ideas, or make them more precise, nuanced, or complex? Have a conversation with the author and talk about the ideas in the draft. Write down three suggestions for expanding or refining these ideas:

1)

2)

3)

Revising Stage Peer Review Sheet: The Organization

Once you've nailed down the thesis, that is the main ideas of the draft and what the author will be arguing, it's a good time to look at the overall organization of the paper.

Write out the paper's thesis here:

Read through your classmate's draft and make a list of the different parts of the paper as you go. You'll end up with something that looks like an outline. (If the writing is well organized into paragraphs, chances are each new paragraph will be a new part of the argument.)

Checking the parts against the thesis, are there sections that don't belong? (Does each section help to support the thesis? No matter how good a section it is, if it doesn't relate to the thesis, it doesn't belong in the paper.)

Are there any missing sections?

Are the sections of the paper in the best order? Remember that the flow of a thesis-driven essay should follow the stages of the argument, not necessarily follow the order of the examples from the text that is being analyzed! See Chapter 8 of Pacific Writing! for organizational strategies.

Have a conversation with the author about alternate ways to organize their paper, to make it clearer.

Revising Stage Peer Review Sheet: The Evidence

The goal of a thesis-driven paper is to prove the thesis, and that's accomplished by presenting the best evidence possible. (Note: This worksheet works best if you've already completed the previous one, nailing down the different parts of the argument and how they are organized.)

Read through your classmate's draft, and make note of the evidence they provide to support their claims. This is often in the form of quotes from what they are analyzing, but it could be quotes from outside research, or other sources, etc.

Does the author use concrete examples, as in actual quotes, or do they just generalize? Note any places they could use a more concrete example.

Looking at all the parts of their argument from the last worksheet, is there evidence to support *all* the parts of the argument? If not, what parts of their argument do they still need evidence for?

Are there unnecessary examples or quotes, such as two quotes that show exactly the same thing? Or evidence that doesn't support any part of the argument? If so, make a note of those.

Are there any holes in the argument, like steps that are left out, or claims that could use some evidence to back them up?

Are these examples or quotes the very best ones to use? (Finding the perfect quote can be hard! Can you give some suggestions here?)

Finally, does the evidence that's presented in the paper accomplish the goal? Does it thoroughly prove the thesis?

Editing Stage Peer Review Sheet: Style

"Style" can feel like an elusive thing, but you can help your classmate's draft flow better by paying attention to how it sounds. (Note, this activity works best if you can read the draft out loud!)

Read through your classmate's paper out loud, with a pen or a few different colored highlighters at hand. The reason reading out loud is so good is that it will be more obvious which sections slow you down, or confuse you, or made you go back and reread. As you read the paper this way, keep an eye out for any or all of these four things: Clarity, variety, consistency, and brevity.

Marking for Clarity:

As you read through the paper in real time, mark any section where you had to slow down, where you got confused, or where you needed to reread something. Any of the sections you mark this way might be a problem for clarity. The paper's author can look at those sections and try to make them clearer.

If you still don't understand what a section means even after slowing down and re-reading, ask the author to explain it to you verbally. Write down their verbal explanation. (See section 11.2 of Pacific Writing!)

Marking for Variety:

Are there parts that feel very repetitive, due to the wording? For example, three sentences that all start the same way? Mark sections where stylistic variety might help.

Marking for Consistency:

As you read through, does the author's tone of voice seem to change in ways that are confusing or random? Is there wording that suddenly seem sarcastic when it should be serious, for example?

Marking for Brevity:

Are there parts that are unnecessarily long-winded or redundant?
Help the author tighten up the paper so it reads as efficiently as possible.

Editing Stage Peer Review Sheet: Content

The editing stage is a great time to look at a draft paragraph-by-paragraph. Is each paragraph well organized, clear and written in the way that will make for the strongest final draft of the paper? So for this exercise, we're going to look at each paragraph in the draft on its own.

Introductory Paragraph:

Is the thesis statement abundantly clear?

Does the rest of the first paragraph lead up to the thesis statement in a sensible way, or is there extraneous stuff?

For Each Body Paragraph:

Can you easily find the major point? Find the topic sentence and underline it.

Is there a clear, single focus of the paragraph, or would this work better as two or more paragraphs?

Do the paragraph's evidence and reasoning appear in the best order to support the topic sentence?

Is there a smooth and logical transition between this paragraph and the ones around it?

For the Conclusion:

Does the conclusion follow from the rest of the paper?

Overall:

Is the language precise and clear (as opposed to overly general and vague)?

Have a conversation with your classmate about any issues you found, and suggest ways of improving it.

Simple All-Around Peer Review Sheet

1. Read the paper through once, silently or aloud, before you start reading it to provide comments.
2. Comment on the introduction and the goal of the paper. Based on your reading of the opening paragraph(s), what is this paper about? What is the goal? Can you find the thesis?
3. Comment on the conclusion. Is it effective? Is it consistent with the ideas of the opening paragraph?
4. Look at the body of the paper. How is it organized? Are there good supporting details? Offer suggestions, or identify places where you got confused.
5. What's one way the paper as a whole could be improved?

More Detailed All-Around Peer Review Sheet

For the first paragraph:

Find the **Thesis Statement** (the main point that the paper is going to make about its subject). UNDERLINE THE THESIS STATEMENT.

- Does it make sense? (Do you understand what the essay writer plans to show?)
- Is it interesting / detailed enough? (Is it complex enough to sustain a full essay?)
- Do you agree with it? (Suggest ways that the essay writer could modify or qualify it.)
- Does the rest of the first paragraph lead up to the thesis statement in a sensible way, or is there extraneous stuff?

For each subsequent paragraph:

Can you easily find the **major point** of the paragraph? Is there a topic sentence? If so, UNDERLINE THE TOPIC SENTENCE.

- Does this point or issue belong in the paper? (Does it help to support the thesis? No matter how good a point it is, if it doesn't relate to the thesis it doesn't belong.)
- Look for the specific **examples** (quotes, etc.) that the author uses to sustain this point--
    - Are they concrete examples, or does the author just generalize?
    - Do the examples truly support the point or might they lead the paper astray? Alternately, do the examples suggest that the point could be more nuanced?
    - Are they the **best** examples to choose?
    - Will they help the author connect the point or issue back to their thesis? (Knowing the thesis, do you understand why this point is being made, why these examples are included?)
- Is there a smooth and logical **transition** between this paragraph and the ones around it?

For the draft as a whole:

- Does the essay finally prove the thesis and make it completely clear?
- Is the overall organization of the paper effective?
- Are there any holes in the logic? (Does the writer make any assumptions that should be clarified? Are they wrong about the source texts they are using?)

Hint--If the overall structure of the draft doesn't match the thesis statement, or if it seems to be going in different directions or including extra things, can the author clarify the thesis rather than revising the whole paper?

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. In-Class Activity: *Assignment-specific peer review sheet*. The sample peer review sheets in *Pacific Writing!* are fine to use, but it can be even better to have the class make its own peer review sheet that is fine tuned to a specific writing assignment! Either in groups or as a full class, carefully read the assignment prompt. What kinds of things should a peer reviewer look for? What feedback would be most useful *for this particular assignment*? As a class, create a peer review sheet for the assignment, which can be used later on everyone's drafts.
2. In-Class Activity: *Peer review session*. This can be done in small groups of three or four students, which will allow multiple perspectives on each draft. It's best to use a peer review sheet or some other specific guidance from the professor. You can keep the same peer review groups for the whole semester, or you can switch them up each time—there are pros and cons to each way. Remember: Good peer review takes time, so it's best not to rush this activity!
3. With a Partner: Consider having a writing partner throughout the course. This is someone you can share drafts with throughout the semester, for additional feedback.
4. Out of Class Activity: Pacific's Writing Center offers plenty of convenient ways for you to get feedback and guidance at any point of the writing process. As a Pacific student, feel free to use their services at any time!

14 An Example of the Process

Let's see this process in action, with an example of student writing and peer feedback.

You look over the prompt:

> For this class we have read and discussed Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper".
>
> Write a thesis-driven paper of approximately 1200 words in which you explore one of the following topics:
>
> 1. Diagnose the condition of the narrator of the story. What do you think is wrong with her? What symptoms in the story make you think this? You might consider what you think would have been the best treatment for the narrator, and why. How does your diagnosis/treatment differ from her husband's?
> 2. Explore how Gilman uses this story to talk about the larger issue of gender dynamics between men and women at the end of the 19th century in America, specifically within marriage. What do you notice about the relationship between men and women in this story, between husbands and wives? What do you think Gilman wants her readers to understand about life as a married woman when she wrote this?
> 3. Women's writing seems to be a pretty important theme in this story. The narrator's husband forbids the narrator from writing, so the story itself is already a kind of transgression. What role does writing play in this story? Why is it so important for the narrator? What does she hope it will enable her to do?

You've read the story, and you decide that the second option is the one for you, so you highlight what seem like the key elements:

> 2. Explore how Gilman uses this story to talk about the larger issue of gender dynamics between men and women at the end of the 19th century in America, specifically within marriage. What do you notice about the relationship between men and women in this story, between husbands and wives? What do you think Gilman wants her readers to understand about life as a married woman when she wrote this?

Where to begin? How about some **brainstorming**? You write down various themes and features of the story, crossing out those that probably won't apply to your paper, and underlining others. But you'll keep the whole list handy, just in case:

Brainstorming

Themes: sexism, feminism, patriarchy, ~~haunted house~~, self-determination, diagnosis, gender roles, power, ~~the details of the wallpaper pattern~~, like bars in a jail, no clear identity, having a name vs no name

OK, now you need **a working thesis**. You can change it as you go:

Working Thesis

Gilman shows how women's status was inferior to men, especially in marriage during the late nineteenth century.

Great start! But you're not really ready to start organizing yet. How about looking through the story, and underlining or copying out **quotes that might help you support what you're going to say**? You won't need to use all of them, but seeing what you have to work with might give you a good handle on what you can say in the paper:

Support from the Story

"John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (1)

"John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (1)

"If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression - a slight hysterical tendency - what is one to do?" (1)

"Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?" (1)

"I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" (2)

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window (2)

"John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows that there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him" (4)

"John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall" (7)

"Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over." (14)

" I've got out at last," said I, " in spite of you and Jane? And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back! Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!" (18)

Whew, that's a lot of quotes! But it's pretty helpful to see them all in one place. In fact, now that you have some examples, you might want to **take another stab at your working thesis.**

Remember, even though the 10 steps of the writing process are presented in order in *Pacific Writes!* most writers figure out an order that works best for them. And **it's very common to go back and revisit an earlier step** when you have a better idea of what you're doing!

So about that working thesis, certainly "The Yellow Wallpaper" shows that 19th century marriage made women's status inferior to men, but your examples are giving you some ideas about *how that happened*!

~~Gilman shows how women's status was inferior to men, especially in marriage during the late nineteenth century.~~

~~Gilman illustrates how women must sacrifice their own sense of self in marriage.~~

Gilman implies~~indicates~~ that marriage for women can only mean~~leads to~~ the loss of their ~~one's~~ individual identity.

Ah, that's better! You're getting closer, and you know that this is just a working thesis, so you can always enhance it as you go. But you know now that **women's loss of identity** will be the big theme of your paper.

Maybe you're the kind of writer who wants to start drafting right away. Once you get your ideas down on the page, you can organize them later. If so, you'd probably jump right to the drafting stage now, and begin writing!

Or maybe you're the kind of writer who needs everything nailed down before you start. You might make a detailed outline, with all your quotes in order and your topic sentences written out.

Or maybe you're in between. You don't want to plan out *everything*, but you want a little bit of a plan. Even if you're not entirely certain what your final argument will be, you can jot down a quick and easy outline, almost like brainstorming, so you'll have some idea of structure when you write:

Outline

Intro:
- Hook - Women have been oppressed for thousands of years.
- Context for "The Yellow Wallpaper"
- Thesis

Body Paragraph: John's characterization of her
- Unhealthy relationship dynamics
- She's not named = no individual identity

Body Paragraph: Women and self-determination in marriage.
- She can't have her own desires
- The yellow wallpaper as a symbol of liberation

Conclusion:
- Restate and rephrase thesis
- General message/lesson that connects to reality

Not bad! Definitely good enough to get you started drafting.

First Draft

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's a Woman!

Women have faced oppression for millennia. Civilization and the repression of women have gone hand in hand for much of human history. One way women fought against this was by telling their own stories, in spite of the status-quo. Female writers, artists, and poets used their work to reclaim the broader narrative about the symbolic annihilation of women in society. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, most known for her short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," was one such writer. Born in 1860, Gilman lived the larger part of her life in an America where women weren't even allowed to vote. "The Yellow Wallpaper" illustrates the power imbalance in marriage; women must always be ready to compromise the whole of themselves once married. The story follows the first-person perspective of an unnamed woman who spends the summer in an old rented

"ancestral hall" with her husband—a physician. Through the nameless narrator's point of view, Gilman implies that marriage for women can only mean the loss of their identity.

The narrator goes unnamed while her husband doesn't, even while the story is told from her perspective. This stylistic choice indicates immediately that the narrator is not, unlike her husband John, entitled to the individuality that a name signifies. She does not exist outside of being John's wife. Moreover, her namelessness works twofold, by showing the universality of her experience. She can't have a name because being relegated to the margins is something all women can relate to. Thus, the narrator speaks for no married woman and every married woman simultaneously. Additionally, John is characterized as cold, clinical, and abrasive: "John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (1). His attitude towards the narrator demonstrates clearly that he does not view her as an equal. Scoffing openly is not respectful. John's ridicule of his wife is not a singular occurrence either, as the narrator notes, "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (1). Degradation is something she has grown to accept as a fixture of married life. She regards John's mocking resignedly because pushing back would not entail simply pushing back against John, it would go against everything marriage stands for at this time, like the patriarchy. When John denies the narrator's sickness, she can't say a word. When John forces her to take "phosphates or phosphites. . .and tonics" and abstain from working, she can't say a word, because "If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression - a slight hysterical tendency - what is one to do?" (1). Even though the narrator disagrees with her husband, she stoically remarks, "But what is one to do?" (1). She has come to terms with the reality that marriage is synonymous with unwavering submission from the wives' side. Husbands have complete dominion of what their wives ought to do—ought to be like—and it is a severe personal failing for women to not hold up to such standards. If John says she is not sick, then the narrator ought not to be sick.

In marriage, a woman's desires are naturally subordinate to her husband's, according to Gilman. The narrator, despite wanting to write and be around others, curbs her own wants by mentally echoing the words of her husband: "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" (2). She has clearly become accustomed to neglecting or even suppressing her own desires in accordance with her husband's will, even though it "always makes [her] feel bad". Again, "what is one to do?" when a prerequisite of marriage in late nineteenth century America was, for women, being ready to relinquish one's sense of self. In fact, when the narrator attempts to share her opinions on the house they're staying in for the summer, her husband insists her discomfort is due to "draught" and "shut[s] the window"—literally and figuratively—instead of simply hearing her out(2). In addition, John threatens the narrator with "Weir Mitchell" if she doesn't

appease him by recovering faster, and her immediate reaction exemplifies the imbalanced and corrosive power dynamic in their marriage: “But I don't want to go [to Weir Mitchell] at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!” (7). Furthermore, the way the narrator characterizes her bed is reflective of the repressive, ironclad fate marriage bodes for her and many other women. She describes it as “great, immovable” and “nailed down,” (7). It is almost akin to a coffin, showing how women must make their bed and lie in it too when it comes to marriage. The narrator is only liberated once she frees the “woman” in the garish wallpaper who is, in reality, her real self struggling to break free from the shackles of marriage. This is further evidenced by the depiction of the “freed woman”—i.e., the narrator—crawling over John’s unconscious body, which concludes the story. It is only then that the narrator’s name is revealed—Jane (18).

Marriage was basically an acquisition of property for men and a loss of identity for women during Gilman’s lifetime. The narrator’s “illness” throughout the story is just her anger and depression about this situation. The woman that must be freed from the wallpaper is her and all the other women of late nineteenth century America. Men and women plainly did not have equal footing, and women weren’t even entitled to the most fundamental right of all—personhood. Gilman subverted the patriarchal status quo by reclaiming the narrative of marriage from (his)story.

This is a great start, and a solid paper! Let’s see how peer review might help you with the revision process, to make it even better. You ask your peer reviewers to underline the thesis statement in the first paragraph, and what they think are the topic sentences in the body paragraphs. You take some notes on the feedback, and add some notes of your own:

Peer Review

It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane, It’s a Woman! ***(My peer reviewers thought this was a fun title! But they didn’t understand what I was going for. Make it clearer?)***

Women have faced oppression for millennia. Civilization and the repression of women have gone hand in hand for much of human history. ***(This is starting a little too general.)*** One way women fought against this was by telling their own stories, in spite of the status-quo. Female writers, artists, and poets used their work **to reclaim the broader narrative about the symbolic annihilation of women in society.** ***(This is clear to me, but my peer reviewers were having trouble understanding it. Maybe explain this a little differently?)*** Charlotte Perkins Gilman, most known for her short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” was one such writer. Born in 1860, Gilman lived the larger part of her life in an America where women weren’t even allowed to vote. “The Yellow Wallpaper” illustrates the power imbalance in marriage; women must always be ready to compromise the whole of themselves once married. The story follows the first-person perspective of an unnamed woman who spends the

summer in an old rented “ancestral hall” with her husband—a physician. Through the nameless narrator’s point of view, Gilman implies that marriage for women can only mean the loss of their identity. ***(Peer reviewer surprised me by underlining both these sentences as my thesis. I thought only the last one was, but I see their point! That means I should move or take out the middle sentence, because it doesn’t fit!)***

The narrator goes unnamed while her husband doesn’t, even while the story is told from her perspective. ***(Peer reviewer underlined this as my topic sentence, but maybe it’s really the next two sentences. Should I make that clearer? I think it’s already clear enough.)*** This stylistic choice indicates immediately that the narrator is not, unlike her husband John, entitled to the individuality that a name signifies. She does not exist outside of being John’s wife. **Moreover, her namelessness works twofold, by showing the universality of her experience.** ***(Peer reviewer thought this sounded abstract, and suggested I take it out. But it’s a really important point! Reword? Or explain it a different way?)*** She can’t have a name because being relegated to the margins is something all women can relate to. Thus, the narrator speaks for no married woman and every married woman simultaneously. **Additionally, John is characterized as cold, clinical, and abrasive: “John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures” (1).** ***(Peer reviewer suggested starting a new paragraph here, because it seems like a new thought. But I don’t think it is. I’m still trying to show that he belittles her. Maybe I should reword it? Or just take it out?)*** His attitude towards the narrator demonstrates clearly that he does not view her as an equal. Scoffing openly is not respectful. John’s ridicule of his wife is not a singular occurrence either, as the narrator notes, “John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage” (1). Degradation is something she has grown to accept as a fixture of married life. She regards John’s mocking resignedly because pushing back would not mean simply pushing back against John, it would go against everything marriage stands for at this time, like the patriarchy. When John denies the narrator’s sickness, **she can’t say a word**. When John forces her to take “phosphates or phosphites. . .and tonics” and abstain from working, **she can’t say a word** ***(Peer reviewers LOVED the style of repeating “she can’t say a word” :))***, because “If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression - a slight hysterical tendency - what is one to do?” (1). Even though the narrator disagrees with her husband, she stoically remarks, “But what is one to do?” (1). She has come to terms with the reality that marriage is synonymous with unwavering submission from the wives’ side. Husbands have complete dominion of what their wives ought to do—ought to be like—and it is a severe personal failing for women to not hold up to such standards. If John says she is not sick, then the narrator ought not to be sick. ***(Is the paragraph too long? Is there more than one idea in it? She’s nameless, John silences her, and he controls her***

reality. Is that one idea, or three? Maybe I could do one paragraph about her namelessness, and another about John?)

In marriage, a woman's desires are naturally subordinate to her husband's, according to Gilman. The narrator, despite wanting to write and be around others, curbs her own wants by mentally echoing the words of her husband: "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" (2). She has clearly become accustomed to neglecting or even suppressing her own desires in accordance with her husband's will, even though it "always makes [her] feel bad". Again, "what is one to do?" when a prerequisite of marriage in late nineteenth century America was, for women, being ready to relinquish one's sense of self. In fact, **when the narrator attempts to share her opinions** ***(Is suppressing her opinions the same as suppressing her desires?)*** on the house they're staying in for the summer, her husband insists her discomfort is due to "draught" and "shut[s] the window"—literally and figuratively—instead of simply hearing her out(2). **In addition, John threatens the narrator with "Weir Mitchell" if she doesn't appease him by recovering faster, and her immediate reaction exemplifies the imbalanced and corrosive power dynamic in their marriage: "But I don't want to go [to Weir Mitchell] at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!" (7). Furthermore, the way the narrator characterizes her bed is reflective of the repressive, ironclad fate marriage bodes for her and many other women. She describes it as "great, immovable" and "nailed down," (7). It is almost akin to a coffin, showing how women must make their bed and lie in it too when it comes to marriage.** ***(Peer reviewer liked these examples, but wondered if they were really about John repressing her desires. Maybe rethink the focus of this paragraph, and either change the topic sentence, or maybe cut or move the stuff that's not about her desire? Or make it clearer that it is about her desire?)*** The narrator is only liberated once she frees the "woman" in the garish wallpaper who is, in reality, her real self struggling to break free from the shackles of marriage. This is further evidenced by the depiction of the "freed woman"—i.e., the narrator—crawling over John's unconscious body, which concludes the story.

Marriage was basically an acquisition of property for men and a loss of identity for women during Gilman's lifetime. The narrator's "illness" throughout the story is just her anger and depression about this situation. The woman that must be freed from the wallpaper is her and all the other women of late nineteenth century America. Men and women plainly did not have equal footing, and women weren't even entitled to the most fundamental right of all—personhood. Gilman subverted the patriarchal status quo by reclaiming the narrative of marriage from (his)story.

(Peer reviewers loved the conclusion, and so do I! But now that I've read through my draft, I wonder if I could make my thesis more detailed. Married women lose their identity, and Gilman shows that by …?)

Final Draft

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's a Woman! Making Womens' Experience of Marriage Visible in "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Women have faced oppression for much of history, but one way women have fought against this was by telling their own stories, in spite of the status-quo. Female writers, artists, and poets used their work to shine a light on the oppression women faced and to bring the voices of female experience into the public eye. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, most known for her short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," was one such writer. Born in 1860, Gilman lived the larger part of her life in an America where women weren't even allowed to vote. "The Yellow Wallpaper" illustrates the power imbalance in marriage; women must always be ready to compromise the whole of themselves once married. Through the nameless narrator's point of view, Gilman implies that marriage for women can only mean the loss of their identity. They lose their name, and then they lose their ability to maintain their own desires, opinions, and sense of self.

The story follows the first-person perspective of an unnamed woman who spends the summer in an old rented "ancestral hall" with her husband—a physician. The narrator goes unnamed while her husband doesn't, even though the story is told from her perspective. This stylistic choice indicates immediately that the narrator is not, unlike her husband John, entitled to the individuality that a name signifies, just like in traditional marriage when the woman takes on the man's last name. She does not exist outside of being John's wife. Furthermore, by leaving her nameless, Gilman makes her a kind of everywoman. The narrator speaks for no married woman and every married woman simultaneously, because being relegated to the margins is something all women can relate to.

Additionally, John does not view her as an equal, which makes his domination of her seem natural. He belittles her by mocking and silencing her, and by trying to control her own perceptions of her illness and the world around her. John is characterized as cold, clinical, and abrasive: "John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (1). Scoffing openly is hardly respectful! John's ridicule of his wife is not a singular occurrence either, as the narrator notes, "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (1). Degradation is something she has grown to accept as a fixture of married life. She regards John's mocking resignedly because pushing back would not mean simply pushing back against

John, it would go against everything marriage stands for at this time, like the patriarchy. When John denies the narrator's sickness, she can't say a word. When John forces her to take "phosphates or phosphites. . .and tonics" and abstain from working, she can't say a word, because "If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression - a slight hysterical tendency - what is one to do?"(1). Even though the narrator disagrees with her husband, she stoically remarks, "But what is one to do?"(1). She has come to terms with the reality that marriage is synonymous with unwavering submission from the wives' side. Husbands have complete dominion of what their wives ought to do—ought to be like—and it is a severe personal failing for women to not hold up to such standards. If John says she is not sick, then the narrator ought not to be sick.

Marriage is unhealthy for women, according to Gilman, because the woman's own desires, opinions, and even her sense of who she is are subordinate to her husband's ideas about what they should be. The narrator, despite wanting to write and to be around others, curbs her own wants by mentally echoing the words of her husband: "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus - but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad" (2). She clearly has a very good idea of what will make her healthier: writing and being more active in society! But she's become accustomed to negating her own desires in accordance with her husband's will, even though it "always makes [her] feel bad". Again, "what is one to do?" when a prerequisite of marriage in late nineteenth century America was, for women, being ready to relinquish one's sense of self. In fact, when the narrator attempts to share her opinions on the house they're staying in for the summer, her husband insists her discomfort is due to "draught" and "shut[s] the window"—literally and figuratively—instead of simply hearing her out(2). In addition, John threatens the narrator with "Weir Mitchell" if she doesn't appease him by recovering faster, and her immediate reaction exemplifies the imbalanced and corrosive power dynamic in their marriage: "But I don't want to go [to Weir Mitchell] at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!"(7). Furthermore, the way the narrator characterizes her bed is reflective of the repressive, ironclad fate marriage bodes for her and many other women. She describes it as "great, immovable" and "nailed down," (7). It is almost akin to a coffin, showing how women must make their bed and lie in it too when it comes to marriage. The narrator is liberated only once she frees the "woman" in the garish wallpaper who is, in reality, her real self struggling to break free from the shackles of marriage. This is further evidenced by the depiction of the "freed woman"—i.e., the narrator—crawling over John's unconscious body, which concludes the story.

Marriage was basically an acquisition of property for men and a loss of identity for women during Gilman's lifetime. The narrator's "illness" throughout the story is just her anger and depression about this situation. The woman that must be freed from the

wallpaper is her and all the other women of late nineteenth century America. Men and women plainly did not have equal footing, and women weren't even entitled to the most fundamental right of all—personhood. But by writing this story, Gilman subverted the patriarchal status quo by reclaiming the narrative of marriage from (his)story.

15 The Research Process

It's very likely that all the writing you will do in your Core 2 section can be accomplished without any outside research. Pacific's Core seminar program is designed that way on purpose. The research and "Information Literacy" component is a part of Core 1, so that Core 2 can focus on expository and argumentative writing, and on critical thinking skills.

But maybe a little outside research is exactly what you need to enhance your argument, and to bring your Core 2 paper to the next level.

And as a Pacific student, you will find that research will be a large part of your academic writing in other classes. When you boil it down, **all** writing requires you to know your stuff; research is how you know stuff.

15.1 Researching a Writing Assignment

Doing research means having support for what you are writing. There are three basic ways to support your argument:

- Sometimes you can support an argument with nothing more than **logic or reasoning**. Math and Philosophy often work this way, like "2 + 2 = 4" or "I think, therefore I am."

- Although sound logic should be a feature of any good argument, it often works hand in hand with additional **data or information**. The sciences and social sciences are built on this kind of support, whether they are generating data, like a chemist might do in a lab experiment, or building on information that is already known, like a historian who consults parish birth records to support an argument about population trends.

- Sometimes you can support an argument with **other peoples' arguments**. This is mostly how Law works, as well as some of the humanities. Indeed, because academic writing doesn't happen in a vacuum, referencing other peoples' arguments is good strategy generally. When you write, you are participating in an ongoing conversation about your topic. Only a very rude conversationalist would stick their fingers in their ears, pay no attention to what anyone else has said, and just start shouting their opinion!

All three of these methods can be the basis of some good academic research!

It sometimes helps to think of research as asking (and answering) questions. So you can ask:

- What are some ways that **logic or reasoning** applies to my topic? Seeing how other people have reasoned about my topic might give me some good insights!
- What kinds of **data or information** would help enhance or back up my argument? This will convince my reader that my conclusions are solid!
- What have **other people already argued** about my topic? I can use their arguments to help frame my argument, or to support what I want to say!

15.2 A Couple of Warnings!

15.2.1 Don't let early "research" shut down your own thinking

The first instinct that a lot of students have, when confronted with a new assignment prompt (or a new text to read, or a new idea, etc.) is to do a quick Google search. Click on the first couple of things that come up, and you're off and running.

This instinct makes a lot of sense. It can give you a framework for what you're about to read or write or do. It's a great way to get a handle on material that you are struggling with, which can make your work more efficient. For example, if your textbook or your instructor describes something in a way you *just didn't understand*, finding an online source that describes it in a way you *do* get lets you move forward with your learning!

With the internet only seconds away on our phones at all times, it's no wonder that many of us look up new things almost instinctively, without even taking a moment to think about it, form our own idea, or puzzle it out for ourselves.

The danger is that if you Google something *before* you even give yourself the chance to struggle with it, you might be depriving yourself of the actual learning experience that you are paying for at Pacific.

Think about it this way: If I'm going on vacation to Russia, I might pay to take a language class to learn some Russian. But if I just Google all the vocabulary words and phrases instead of learning them, then I'll have accomplished nothing except waste my own time and money, because I'll be no closer to learning the language. It's pretty obvious that this would be a dumb way to learn.

The skills of Core 2—close and careful reading, nuanced and persuasive writing and critical thinking—are maybe less *obvious* than foreign language fluency, but they are *absolutely crucial* for higher levels of success in any career, no matter what your major is at Pacific. You certainly *can* Google up a summary of something before you've tried to read it yourself, but that won't improve your reading skills. You *can* Google up interpretations of a text before you've given your own brain a shot at interpreting it, but that's not going to strengthen your critical thinking abilities.

Jump on Google too soon, and you've just given up control over your essay. You're letting the ideas of others take over your planning, and it might (even unconsciously) color your own thoughts on the topic. This kind of quick and early research hijacks your writing, and the essay becomes a collection of others' ideas, when the point is for you to look at your own ideas and then make them richer by bringing in those outside sources.

What to do instead:

The best thing to do when you're given an assignment and you're not sure where to start is to follow the advice in Chapter Three ("Reading Carefully, Critically, and Creatively") and in Chapter Five ("Exploring: Finding a Topic") for getting some of your own ideas. Don't be afraid of them! The thing about writing with your own ideas is that you will automatically be clearer. Your own thoughts make sense to you, right? They're usually clearer to you than anyone else's thoughts would be!

Once you've landed on a topic, do some freewriting to get as many of your own ideas as possible, even if you're not sure that you'll use all of them in the essay. Look at where you might have some holes in what you know. These incomplete areas can now be filled with research. Fire up those browsers, because *now* it's time to start digging.

15.2.2 Keep an open mind

The best attitude you can have when you conduct your research is that you hope to learn something.

Research to discover the truth, not to prove that something is true.

At its most useful, research is a process of learning something new, not just confirming something you already feel. That means that as your research uncovers information, *you should always be willing to change your thesis or your hypothesis to better fit what your research has found*!

This willingness to change your mind about things when confronted with new evidence has been a key part of higher education ever since the Enlightenment. It is at

the heart of the scientific method, and it's a really basic part of what "learning" means at any liberal arts institution like Pacific.

Learning *is* changing your mind.

Sadly, many of us approach "research" with the exact opposite spirit. We have a pre-conceived notion about what we feel is right or wrong, and our "research" is just a hunt for those sources that back up what we already believe. We might sort through and discard a dozen good sources that are not on "our side" of the argument, and cherry-pick the two we found that we already agree with.

This is especially a problem when we do internet-only research around any topic that's even vaguely controversial, or that anyone has strong feelings about. We can Google a website, article, or social media post that supports *any side of any argument*, no matter how outrageous or incorrect it may be.

The result is that we use "research" like this to buttress up our own ignorance, to further entrench the ideas and opinions we already have.

Research is for opening your mind, not closing it.

Imagine you've argued with someone, and you "lost" the argument. That means the other person convinced you that they were right and you were wrong.

Which one of you benefitted more from this argument?

Actually, it's you! When you "lose" an argument, you are the one who walks away stronger, because now you have a broader perspective on the topic, with new information and insights. You can now see things in a new way, but the "winner" of the argument didn't enhance their perspective or understanding at all. They stayed the same, but you grew!

I know that this will feel counter-intuitive to many of you, but *learning that you're wrong about something is one of the best things that can happen to you!* Every time you understand that you were wrong, you learn, you grow, you develop new cognitive skills you didn't have before and you become wiser.

If you do your research with this attitude, using high quality sources containing information that itself is well researched and fact checked, then you will get the most out of the research process.

15.3 Using Pacific Library

Research-based writing is only as credible as the sources the writer uses. Therefore, a great place to start your research is with the Pacific Library. There you'll find articles, books, multimedia resources, as well as the most valuable resource of all: college librarians! Librarians are trained with the most up-to-date strategies to access scholarly and popular resources that are available to students for college projects. Most of these resources can be accessed online, which makes learning to use the tools of the library even more important and valuable.

Core 1 Callback:

Did you learn about Pacific Library resources in Core 1? That's a great start on the research process!

A great place to start is the library homepage, which includes a search box called PacificSearch. This will let you search through the library catalog, which includes the titles, authors, and subjects of the **books** in Pacific's library (but not the full-text). The PacificSearch tool also searches through some of the library's **article** databases. (Click the articles tab on the results page to see those.) PacificSearch is a very good, comprehensive place to start your search!

To narrow your search for useful articles, you may find it handy to search in the specific article databases which Pacific subscribes to. These will often allow you to search through the full text of the article, which can be very helpful since not everything in an article makes it into the headline or abstract! Here's the full list of searchable databases, including popular choices like Academic Search Complete and JSTOR.

If that full list is a little intimidating, or if you try a search and end up with too many (or too few) results, the Pacific librarians are there to help you find exactly what you need. Here is a launch page that makes it easy to chat with a Pacific librarian, ask a question, or set up an appointment if you need more detailed guidance for your research.

Pacific's library also has a special page of subject guides, which compile information you'll find useful for different kinds of writing and research. For example, here are some subject guides you may find particularly useful:

- Citing Sources
- Evaluating online sources and spotting misinformation
- Pacific Library Writing Resources

Finally, here's another Pacific library page which is a springboard for a full range of student resources.

Tip: Be aware of whether you are searching through a database of article citations (just the titles and author names), article abstracts, or the full text of articles! You'll want to use different search strategies depending on what exactly you are searching through!

For example, if you wanted to do research on recent innovations in torque-sensing pulleys (a component of most continuously variable transmissions), what would you search for? If you were searching in a database of book titles, like Pacific Library's catalog or the WorldCat database, then searching for "torque-sensing pulleys innovations" would almost certainly produce zero results. That's too specific for the title of a whole book! Instead, search a database of titles for "continuously variable transmission" or maybe even "automobile transmission" for what you're looking for. A full book about CVTs will definitely have a chapter or two on torque-sensing pulleys!

On the other hand, if you're searching through a database that includes the full text of millions of articles and news stories, searching for "automobile transmission" would get you far too many results, and it would be difficult to find what you need. In that case "torque-sensing pulley" or even "torque-sensing pully innovations" would be more likely to find you useful sources!

15.4 Using the Internet

The internet is frequently used to find sources for academic essays. However, much of what is found on the web might not be appropriate for college work. You can get better results by searching at scholar.google.com instead of a regular Google search. But note that this might not allow you to access full articles, which the Pacific Library's pages will do.

But don't dismiss the open internet for serious writing! Internet searches can be extremely useful, comprehensive, and convenient tools to use in the research process. The only real drawback is that you'll need to thoroughly assess the credibility of the sources you find (something you won't usually need to do with articles you find in Pacific Library's article databases).

15.5 Determining if Information is Credible

Evaluating the quality of sources is an essential 21st century skill, and it's something your parents' and grandparents' generation didn't systematically learn when they went to school. People are flooded with media of various kinds, much of which tries to get us to buy something or to think in a certain way. So one of the most essential 21st century media survival skills **is information literacy**.

Core 1 Callback:

What did you learn about information literacy and evaluating sources in Core 1?

When it comes to your writing, the fact that there is such a vast quantity of online material available creates a special kind of challenge. How do you choose?! This often means taking the extra time to figure out the most **credible** and **relevant** material. *And note that credible and relevant is not the same thing as just choosing the material that matches your argument the best!*

Because online "facts" can be accessed in just a few moments, it can be tempting to assume that they are just that—factual. Alas, free online information is not always fact, not always verifiable through citations, and not always credible.

Evaluating online sources is detective work! The researcher needs to make decisions about what to search for, how to search, and what type of information is credible and academically appropriate. For example, a student who is writing about the Great Pacific Garbage Vortex will find many sources available through library-based searches, as well as through online resources that could be more current. However, information that comes from the website of a company that produces petrochemicals and plastics will not be as valuable as a source that comes from scholarly research found through Pacific Library.

The following are some questions you can ask about every source you consider for an academic paper:

- Is this source relevant to the topic? Does it give background, explain concepts, and offer support for or an alternative viewpoint on the topic?
- What would make this a credible source? What is the expertise of the person who wrote it? How current is it? Who published it? What was the source of funding for this publication? Would that funding source add bias to the material?

- Are there references or citations that indicate where the information came from? Is it scholarly or written for a general audience?
- What does the language used in the source suggest about the purpose of the piece?
- If the source appears to be a news site, is the article a piece of fact-checked reporting, created to journalistic standards? Or is it an opinion or "op-ed" piece? Is the news site itself an actual, professional publication, with paid, trained journalists? If so, does it strive to be unbiased and factual in its reporting, or does it have an agenda? Or is it more of a news "platform", "contributor network" or "content farm", which anyone can publish on?

Also remember that just because a source *looks* good, that doesn't mean it *is* good. (And by "good," I mean appropriately scholarly or professional for your topic and purpose.) It's very easy to create a professional looking website with bogus content. Not all misinformation you find on the web will be poorly written, look cheesy, or give away some other obvious visual cue!

When you are looking at material on a specific platform online, you can also ask yourself:

- How easy would it be for some random anonymous person to publish misinformation on this platform?

If it's a blogging platform like Wordpress, or a social media platform like Twitter or Facebook, the answer is "It's very, very easy for a random person to publish anything they want!"

On a platform like Wikipedia.org, even though anyone can make an account and edit the content, there's an enthusiastic army of volunteer editors and fact checkers who put proposed changes through some scrutiny, mark sections that still require credible citations, and verify the citations for what's there. Because of that, Wikipedia is *much more likely* to be credible than an article on a blogging platform or social media site, which has no editorial oversight at all.

Even better than the amateur editorial oversight of a platform like Wikipedia, professional news organizations, established scholarly journals, and reputable book publishers typically bring a higher, more professional level of scrutiny to things they publish. How easy would it be for some random person to publish misinformation in this context? Very difficult!

So dig deep! What are this source's sources? What are their credentials, and how can you trust them? Depending on the answers to these questions, writers can begin to feel secure with online sources that are relevant and credible.

15.6 Reading Research Sources

One of the more daunting tasks of research is not finding the sources themselves but actually reading them.

Even if you're a person who loves reading, doing so for pleasure is not the same fact-finding mission that the research mindset requires. When you're reading for research, you're a detective, looking for clues in the world that will help you enhance and sustain your argument. When you think about it in those terms, reading research requires a different set of skills than reading a novel!

The good news that these skills can be easily practiced, and generally won't require you to read everything you find carefully from beginning to end. You can usually get the information you need without making it too difficult on yourself.

15.6.1 Critical reading of sources

Let's say you're looking at a PDF of a journal article you found on an academic database. It's long—over ten pages!—but you know it has information you'd like to use in your essay. How do you wade through it, knowing you'll need to go through many other sources just like it?

First, get clear in your brain what your purpose is. Exactly what information are you looking for? If you know that, you can skim through quickly, and target just the sections you need. Maybe you're mostly interested in understanding the writer's argument to see if it applies to what you're writing. Find their thesis, and you might have your answer right away! Or you might be interested in their research method, or in their sources. Whatever it is you're doing, make sure you've got that clearly in your mind before you start.

Now, it's time to start reading. Your initial impulse might be to start at the beginning and read all the way through. You could do this, of course. Along the way, you might highlight especially useful information, perhaps underlining unknown words to look up later or summarizing in a few words what each paragraph is about. This engagement with the text is good: it keeps you from getting bored and makes it easier later on when you want to review the source again and aren't especially interested in re-reading again from the beginning (who would be?).

When you're done, you might immediately summarize the source in a separate document, recalling the most important information you remember from the text. Remember those annotated bibliographies from Core 1? That's what this is, and it saves you a lot of time if you're juggling a bunch of different sources!

If it makes you feel a little sick thinking about reading straight through, you have other options. First, does the article have an abstract? If so, read that! That will usually tell you if you need to read the whole thing, or help you zero in on just the parts you need. If there's no abstract, find the thesis statement. By reading the central argument of the academic source first, you can decide whether or not you need it!

Second, you might consider the "skim and savor" method. Read the entire introductory paragraph. Then, for most of the rest of the piece, you're skimming. Carefully read the first sentence in the paragraph, and then let your eyes lightly move over the rest of the paragraph, ending with carefully reading the last sentence. If you see something useful, read that part carefully—that's the savoring part. Highlight. Circle. Put hearts and stars around it. Do whatever you need to do to be able to go back and find that part. Then, read the entire concluding paragraph. This tactic will give you a sense of where the most useful information to you is and be able to come back to it quickly.

One last word of advice: keep track of all your sources! You could list of them in a notebook or a document on your computer, email the links to yourself, take pictures of the screen, use an app like Evernote or Google Keep to collect and organize research, use browser bookmarks (don't just rely on open browser tabs!), etc. Do whatever you have to do to make sure all your precious research isn't lost!

15.7 Using Sources in Your Writing

First, a note: it is difficult to talk about quoting, summarizing and paraphrasing without also talking about in-text citation, which is where you say where you got the information that's being quoted, summarized, or paraphrased. **You must always cite outside sources when you use them for your writing. Otherwise, you're committing plagiarism. See the orange box on the next page for more information about plagiarism and how to avoid it.**

There are different types of citation, and more information about those citation types is at the end of this chapter. In this section, I'll show you examples using **MLA** format and **APA** format. It's likely that your professor will ask for you to use one of those two citation types in your paper!

15.7.1 It's a matter of style

Proper **quoting**, **paraphrasing**, and **summarizing** aren't just about grammatical correctness; using them is a fine art. You can choose which of the three you want to use at certain times in your work to support your ideas. They all have different effects,

so as you're deciding which to use and where, consider how a quote's effect might be different from a summary's effect, which are both different from a paraphrase.

Beware: If you use an outside source in any way, shape, or form, you **must** cite it in the text, even if you don't use the source's exact words!

Using an outside source without citing it is plagiarism, which means stealing another person's ideas or words. It can lead to serious academic consequences, as outlined on your syllabus and in Tiger Lore.

The good news is, if you do use an outside source and cite it properly, that can show that you did extra work for your paper! This may even lead to a higher grade on your assignment! If you use the same outside source but *don't* cite it, your grade might instantly become an F.

Bottom Line: Using outside sources is fine*, as long as you cite them!* It's only when you don't cite them that you're plagiarizing. So, simple solution, always cite your sources!

All right. Now, let's get down to business.

15.7.2 Quoting sources: Short quotes

Quoting is the easiest way of incorporating outside sources. But it is not necessarily the best way.

People sometimes have the tendency to dump a bunch of quotes in their papers and think that'll make them look smart. Trust me; it doesn't. Too much quoting will make you look like you don't care, you're lazy, and/or you don't have an original thought of your own, and it also puts several different styles of writing in the same piece, which can interrupt the flow of ideas and read awkwardly. Sometimes, however, quoting is the most effective way of getting the information down, so if you must, be sure to use the author's exact words and put quotation marks around it.

Example: Mentioning the author before the quote:

MLA:

An example of the difficulty of writing papers appears in *Sweet Agony* by Gene Olson: "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (13).

APA:

An example of the difficulty of writing papers appears in *Sweet Agony* by Olson (1972): "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (p. 13).

Note: The phrase "An example of the difficulty of writing papers appears in *Sweet Agony* by Gene Olson:" is called a *signal phrase* or *tag*. Other examples of signal phrases are "Olson states," "Olson claims that" and "Olson suggests." Phrases like these help to introduce source material in quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing. Thoughtful use of tags is important to help you cite correctly, and to encourage the flow of your writing.

Example: The same quote without mentioning the author before it. In this example, the citation information follows the quote, in parenthesis:

MLA:

"There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson 13).

APA:

"There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson, 1972, p. 13).

Consider the effect of citing in the parentheses versus using a tag in the sentence itself. If it's the first time you're using a source in the text, it's not a bad idea to use a tag; after that, you can do either.

15.7.3 Quoting sources: Long quotes (aka, "block" quotes)

For essays written using MLA citations, quotes that are more than four typed lines (not sentences, but *lines as they appear on the page*) make a block quote. For essays written using the APA documentation style, quotes that are more than 40 *words* (or longer), make a block quote.

MLA:

Writing is difficult. Everybody knows this. It has been said over and over through the centuries. As Gene Olson states:

> There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain. Herein lies the ultimate frustration of writing; herein also lies its

> bittersweet charm and challenge. It's like chasing butterflies in a world where there are always more butterflies, each new batch prettier than the last. (13)

APA:

Writing is difficult. Everybody knows this. It has been said over and over through the centuries. As Olson (1972) states:

> There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain. Herein lies the ultimate frustration of writing; herein also lies its bittersweet charm and challenge. It's like chasing butterflies in a world where there are always more butterflies, each new batch prettier than the last. (p. 13)

Note that the indentation takes the place of quotation marks. Block quotes should be used sparingly, as they break up the flow of the paper and can cause reader impatience.

Finally, when quoting, make sure you set up the quote with your own ideas, interpret it in some way for the reader, such as discussing how it fits in with your other ideas. That will help the reader understand the quote itself and why you chose it for your paper.

15.7.4 Quoting sources: Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is when you take an exact quote and put it into your own words and writing style, capturing the same ideas as the original. It is approximately as long as the original as you go sentence-by-sentence, putting the original **all in your own words**. Quotation marks go around the exact phrasing that is borrowed from the original, and paraphrases are always cited.

> *Original quote:* "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson 13).

Paraphrase using **MLA**:

As Gene Olson states in *Sweet Agony*, writing can take a lot out of a person. One can write long and hard, coming up with a ton of text, but one can always do better (13).

Paraphrase using **APA**:

As Olson (1072) states in *Sweet Agony*, writing can take a lot out of a person. One can write long and hard, coming up with a ton of text, but one can always do better (p. 13).

See that? It's the same idea as the original and the same length, but different words. Can you see how this might have a different effect on a reader than a direct quote?

In case you were wondering, here's an example of the original quote paraphrased poorly.

Poor paraphrase:

Writing is a demanding task. One works a long time at it and produces many words, but there's always room for improvement.

This is not good because it is too close to the original, using many of the same words and phrases, and it's also missing a citation. This would be considered plagiarism.

15.7.5 Quoting sources: Summarizing

Summaries supply just the main idea or spirit of the original text. They are shorter and less detailed than paraphrases, and they are significantly shorter than the original text. Though there are no quotation marks (unless you use some of the exact phrasing from the original), you still cite.

Original quote: "There is no more demanding task than writing. No matter how long one works at it, no matter how many words are produced, room for improvement will always remain" (Olson 13).

Summary in **MLA**:

Writing is difficult, mostly because it can always be better (Olson 13).

Summary in **APA**:

Writing is difficult, mostly because it can always be better (Olson, 1972, p. 13).

15.8 Citing Sources

15.8.1 The importance of citation

"Wait," you may say, "Isn't it common knowledge that writing is difficult, and there's always room for improvement? Why would we have to cite this Olson guy if it's common knowledge?" Good question. Here's the answer: If you hadn't thought about including this particular piece of information in your paper until you read Olson's book, cite it. Again: **when in doubt, cite!**

MLA:

Work Cited

Olson, Gene. *Sweet Agony*. Windyridge Press, 1972.

APA:

Reference

Olson, G. (1972). *Sweet agony.* Grants Pass, OR: Windyridge Press.

15.9 Different Citation Styles

Sometimes the citation style you use is your choice, but most often your instructor will say what they would like you to use. The two most common are MLA and APA, with Chicago style coming in third.

MLA, or Modern Language Association, is used most often in the humanities: English, history, the languages, etc. It focuses on the names of authors; because authorial expertise is highly valued in the humanities.

APA, or the American Psychological Association, is used most often in the sciences: biology, chemistry, sociology, and, as the name suggests, psychology, among others. It focuses on dates; this is why you see the copyright date noted after the last name when it's used in a signal phrase in the text.

Chicago style is a little different, because it comes in two different flavors: "Notes and bibliography style" and "Author-date" style". It's sometimes used in the humanities, the arts, and the social sciences.

Following all the fussy rules for proper citation can feel frustrating at first. But it helps to remember that citation rules are not designed to be complicated. They are designed to be practical and efficient.

All three styles serve the same basic function: *efficiently letting your reader know where your outside information, arguments, and quotes come from*. That way a reader can "check your sources."

Citations in these styles have two parts: 1) source information in the actual essay (called an in-text citation) and 2) an alphabetical list of all your sources on its own page(s) at the end.

15.9.1 Pacific guides for MLA, APA, and Chicago style citation

So how can you find out the exact way to cite a source in your paper, using the particular citation style your professor has asked for?

Pacific Library!

- Pacific's guide for MLA citation can be found here
- Pacific's guide for APA citation can be found here
- Pacific's guide for Chicago citation can be found here

15.9.2 Automated citation tools

Some of the busywork of getting your research citations formatted correctly can be handled by software.

As a Pacific student, you automatically have access to the RefWorks citation tool. This will automatically create a works cited page in any style you need from the articles that you download from the Pacific Library. Here's the launch page to get you started using that!

You can find similar, free, open source tools that help you do the same thing, like zoterobib. Zotero even has a browser plugin for Firefox, which lets you generate your bibliography as you browse and quote sources from the web.

Most modern word processors also have built in citation tools. For example, Google Docs, LibreOffice, and Microsoft Word all have features that help you manage and cite your sources.

END OF CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Small Group Activity: Practice assessing the credibility of online sources. Groups should start with a broad research topic, then find online sources about that topic that are credible, and sources that are not so credible. Explain to the class how you determined how credible each source was. What strategies can you use to help you quickly find credible sources?
2. In-Class Activity: Practice using different resources from Pacific Library to research some information. Which databases worked best for you? Which keyword strategies were most effective at getting you the exact information you needed? This can be done individually, in small groups, or as a full class demonstration.
3. Individual Activity: Skimming sources. Your instructor will provide you with a dozen academic articles about a broad topic, and give you a specific research question within that broad topic. Skim through the dozen articles as fast as you can, your goal being to identify one or two of them that you would read more thoroughly for the specific research question. How fast were you able to find the information you needed? Which skimming strategies worked the best? Share your results and your strategies with the class.
4. Individual Activity: Practice including the same information in your text in three different ways: A direct quote, a paraphrase, and a summary. What are the pros and cons of each method? Be prepared to share your examples with the class.

16 Works Cited

Work cited in chapter "Introduction for Pacific Core 2 Instructors and Students"

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Elbow, Peter. *Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process.* Oxford University Press, 1981.