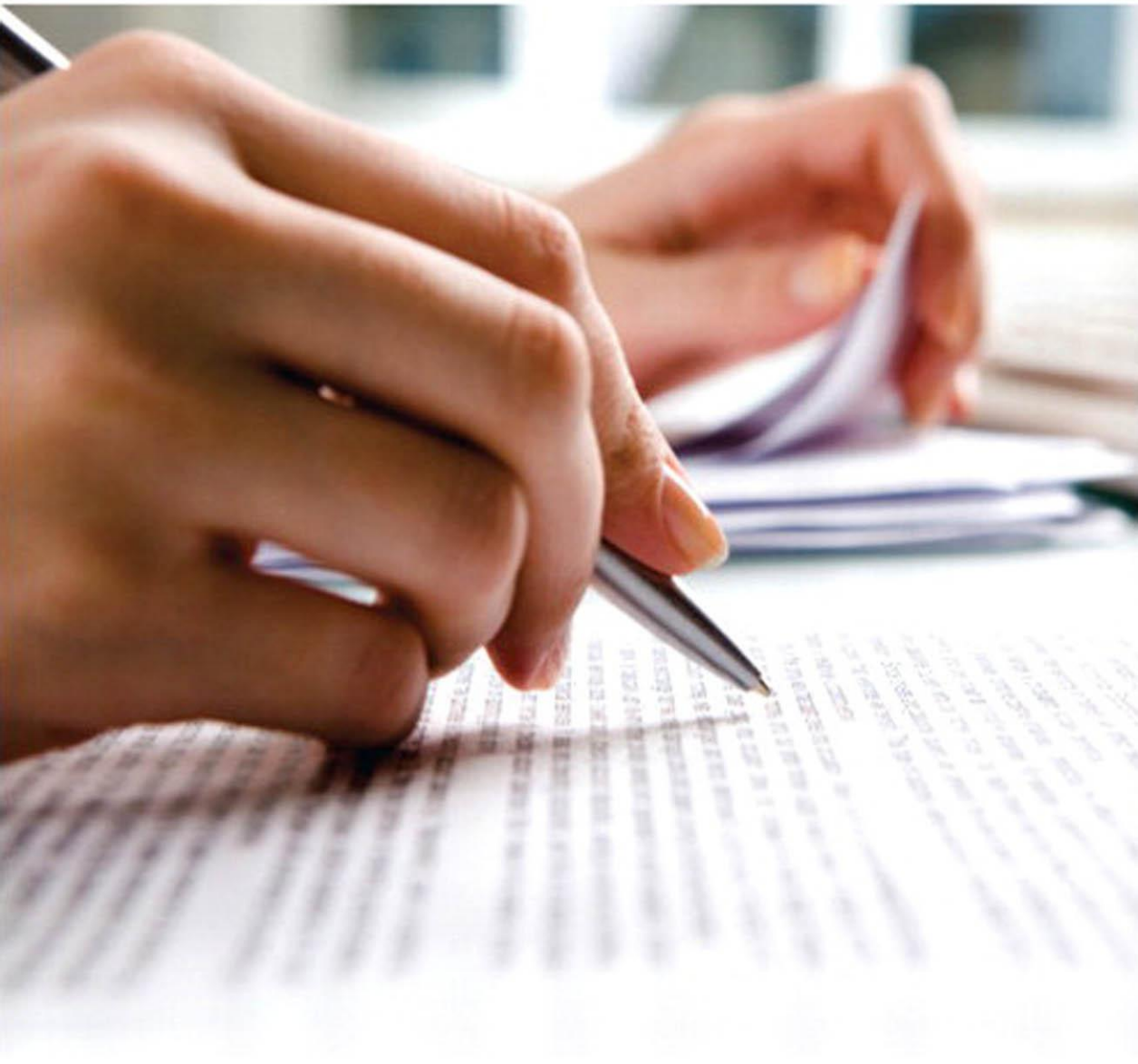
THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE STUDENT WRITER'S MANUAL

SIXTH EDITION



WILLIAM A. JOHNSON, JR. | RICHARD P. RETTIG
GREGORY M. SCOTT | STEPHEN M. GARRISON

The Criminal Justice Student Writer's Manual

Sixth Edition

William A. Johnson, Jr.
University of Central Oklahoma

Richard P. Rettig
Eastern Oregon University

Gregory M. Scott
University of Central Oklahoma

Stephen M. Garrison
University of Central Oklahoma

PEARSON

Boston Columbus Indianapolis New York San Francisco Upper Saddle River
Amsterdam Cape Town Dubai London Madrid Milan Munich Paris Montreal Toronto
Delhi Mexico City Sao Paulo Sydney Hong Kong Seoul Singapore Taipei Tokyo

Editorial Director: Vernon R. Anthony
Acquisition Editor: Sara Eilert
Program Manager: Alicia Ritchey
Editorial Assistant: Lynda Cramer
Director of Marketing: David Gesell
Marketing Manager: Mary Salzman
Senior Marketing Coordinator: Alicia Wozniak
Marketing Assistant: Les Roberts
Team Lead for Project Management: JoEllen Gohr
Senior Project Manager: Steve Robb and Susan Hannahs
Senior Operations Specialist: Deidra M. Skahill
Creative Director: Andrea Nix
Art Director: Jayne Conte
Text and Cover Designer: Suzanne Behnke
Cover Image: Shutterstock
Media Project Manager: Leslie Brado
Media Project Coordinator: April Cleland
Full-Service Project Management: Anandakrishnan Natarajan, Integra Software Services, Ltd.
Composition: Integra Software Services, Ltd.
Printer/Binder: Edwards Brothers Malloy State Street
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color, Hagerstown
Text Font: Palatino 10/12

Credits and acknowledgments borrowed from other sources and reproduced, with permission, in this textbook appear on the appropriate page within text.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Johnson, William A.,
The criminal justice student writer's manual/William A. Johnson, Jr., Richard P. Rettig, Gregory M. Scott, Stephen M. Garrison. — 6th ed.
pages cm
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-351438-4 (alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 0-13-351438-2 (alk. paper)
1. Criminal justice, Administration of—Research—United States. 2. Legal composition—United States. 3. Report writing—United States. I. Title.
HV9950.J643 2015
808.06'6364—dc23

2013035297

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PEARSON

ISBN 10: 0-13-351438-2
ISBN 13: 978-0-13-351438-4

Contents

Preface ix

PART I A HANDBOOK OF STYLE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE 1

Chapter 1 Writing as Communication 1

Writing to Learn 1

The Irony of Writing 2

Challenge Yourself 4

Maintain Self-Confidence 5

The Writing Process 6

Learning the Nature of the Process 6

Planning 7

Drafting 18

Revising 23

Editing 25

Proofreading 27

Chapter 2 Writing Competently 28

Guidelines for the Competent Writer 28

Consider Your Audience 29

Aim for Consistency 30

Have Confidence in What You Already Know about Writing! 30

Eliminate Chronic Errors 31

Punctuation, Grammar, and Spelling 31
Apostrophes 31
Capitalization 32
Colons 34
Commas 35
Misplaced Modifiers 38
Parallelism 39
Fused (Run-on) Sentences 41
Pronoun Errors 42
Quotation Marks 44
Semicolons 46
Sentence Fragments 47
Spelling 49

PART II PAPER FORMATS AND CITATIONS 53

Chapter 3 Student Paper Formats 53
Preliminary Considerations 53
Margins 54
Pagination 55
Title Page 55
Abstract 56
Executive Summary 57
Outline Summary 60
Table of Contents 60
Lists of Tables and Figures 61
Text 62
Headings and Subheadings 62
Tables 63
Illustrations and Figures 64
Reference Listing 64
Appendixes 65

Chapter 4 Citing Sources in ASA Style 66
Introduction to ASA Style 66
What to Document 66

ASA Style in Papers 67
Text Citations in ASA Style 68
Samples of ASA Citation Style 68
References in ASA Style 76
Samples of ASA Reference Style 77
Electronic Sources 87
Text Citations for Electronic Sources 88
References for Electronic Sources 88

Chapter 5 Citing Sources in APA Style 93
Introduction to APA Style 93
What to Document 93
Text Citations in APA Style 94
Samples of APA Citation Style 94
References in APA Style 101
Samples of APA Reference Style 102

PART III HOW TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE 115

Chapter 6 Organizing the Research Process 115
Strategy for the Research Process 115
Understand Your Assignment 116
Establish Your Topic 116
Set Your Purpose 116
Determine Your Audience 117
Decide on Your Kind of Research 117
Keep Your Perspective 119
Effective Research Methods 119
Establish an Effective Schedule 119
Give Yourself Plenty of Time 119
Do Background Reading 120
Narrow Your Topic and Establish a Working Thesis 121
Develop a Working Bibliography 122
Write for Needed Information 122
Evaluate Written Sources 123
Use Photocopies and Download Articles 124

Determine whether to Conduct Interviews or Surveys 125
Draft a Thesis and Outline 125
Write a First Draft 126
Obtain Feedback 126
Avoid Plagiarism 126
When to Quote 127
How to Paraphrase 128
Avoid Plagiarism when Paraphrasing 129

Chapter 7 Information Sources 130
Criminal Justice online 130
Library Research 130

PART IV BRIEF AND APPLIED WRITING ASSIGNMENTS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE 133

Chapter 8 Reaction Papers 133
Select a Suitable Reaction Statement 133
Explain Your Selection 135
Clearly Define the Issue Addressed in the Statement 135
Clearly State Your Position on the Issue 135
Defend Your Position 135
Conclude Concisely 136
A Sample Reaction Paper 136

Chapter 9 Article Critiques and Book Reviews 139
Article Critiques 139
Choosing an Article 139
Writing the Critique 140
A Sample Article Critique 142
Book Reviews 145
Objectives of a Book Review 145
Sample Book Reviews 146
Elements of a Book Review 148
Types of Book Reviews: Reflective and Analytical 150
Format and Length of a Book Review 151

Chapter 10 Annotated Bibliographies 152
What Is an Annotated Bibliography? 152
Why Write an Annotated Bibliography? 153
Who Uses Annotated Bibliographies? 153
What Is the Content of an Annotated Bibliography? 154
Introduction 154
Citations 154
Annotations 154
To Quote or Not to Quote? 155
Summation 155
Evaluation 156
Reflection 156
Sample Annotated Bibliographies 156

PART V REPORT WRITING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE 159

Chapter 11 Writing a Police Report 159
What Is a Police Report? 159
Why Write Police Reports? 160
Who Uses Police Reports? 160
Tips for Writing Effective Police Reports 160
Put the Subject First 161
Be Careful with Pronouns 162
Use Active Verbs 162
Employ a Clear Writing Style 163
Assemble Meaningful Information 164
What Is in the Narrative of a Good Police Report? 166
Sample Narrative Police Reports 167

Chapter 12 Writing Probation and Parole Reports 175
What are Probation and Parole Reports? 175
Tips for Writing Effective Probation and Parole Reports 175
The Daily Journal 177
Violation Reports 178
Presentence Investigation Reports 179

PART VI CASE STUDIES AND POLICY ANALYSES 183

Chapter 13 Criminal Justice Agency Case Studies 183
What Is a Case Study? 183
Using Case Studies in Research 184
Limitations of the Case Study Method 185
Types of Case Studies Written in Criminal Justice 185
How to Conduct a Criminal Justice Agency Case Study 186
Selecting a Topic 187
The Importance of Interviews 188
Elements of the Case Study Paper 188
Contents 188
Text 189
A Sample Case Study 191
Summary 205

Chapter 14 Criminal Justice Policy Analysis Papers 206
Learn The Basics of Policy Analysis 206
What Is Policy Analysis? 206
Write A Policy Analysis Paper 208
The Contents of a Policy Analysis Paper 208
Parameters of the Text 208
The Format of a Policy Analysis Paper 208
Analysis of A criminal Justice Policy 210
A Sample Policy Analysis Paper 212

Glossary 222
References 245
Index 247

Preface

NEW TO THE SIXTH EDITION

- Updated material on "Citing Sources in ASA Style," Chapter 4
- Updated material on "Citing Sources in APA Style," Chapter 5
- Updated material on "Criminal Justice Online," Chapter 7
- New example for "Writing Probation and Parole Reports," Chapter 12
- Extensive renovation of Chapter 14, "Criminal Justice Policy Analysis Papers"
- Updates and revisions throughout the entire manual

The more complex criminal justice systems become, the greater the need for clear, direct communication. The sad reality is that many people have difficulty writing a simple declarative sentence. In all areas of criminal justice, no skill is recognized as more important than the ability to get messages on paper clearly in order to get business done. If you learn to write well, you will be more valuable in whatever line of work you pursue.

Administrators in criminal justice agencies are looking for people who can condense a mass of data to one sheet of clear comment. They are looking for men and women who can report the day-to-day activities of a complex system concisely and accurately. Administrators want more than undigested, descriptive data; they want to know what the experts in each area believe the data mean.

This book is designed to help you improve your writing. You will find principles and guidelines to help you write complex reports as well as summarize information into condensed presentations. Good writers know and use the terminology of their discipline. In writing reports and professional communication, criminal justice professionals often need to draw from the lexicon of several disciplines, for example law enforcement, forensics, psychology, sociology, law,

and management. We have included a broad and extensive glossary to aid you in writing the assignments in this manual. As you continue to use this manual throughout your college and professional career, we hope your writing skills evolve and aid you in attaining your professional goals and objectives.

INSTRUCTOR SUPPLEMENTS

To access supplementary materials online, instructors need to request an instructor access code. Go to **www.pearsonhighered.com/irc**, where you can register for an instructor access code. Within 48 hours after registering, you will receive a confirming email, including an instructor access code. Once you have received your code, go to the site and log on.

ALTERNATE VERSIONS

eBooks This text is also available in multiple eBook formats including Adobe Reader and CourseSmart. *CourseSmart* is an exciting new choice for students looking to save money. As an alternative to purchasing the printed textbook, students can purchase an electronic version of the same content. With a *CourseSmart* eTextbook, students can search the text, make notes online, print out reading assignments that incorporate lecture notes, and bookmark important passages for later review. For more information, or to purchase access to the *CourseSmart* eTextbook, visit **www.coursesmart.com**.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Gary Bauer, Sara Eilert, Lynda Cramer, and all who assisted in the production of this book. A special thanks to Judge Sid Brown for his assistance in the new example for "Writing Probation and Parole Reports."

William Johnson
Richard Rettig
Gregory Scott
Stephen Garrison

PART 1

A HANDBOOK OF STYLE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Chapter 1

Writing as Communication

WRITING TO LEARN

Writing is a way of ordering your experience. Think about it: No matter what you are writing—it may be a paper for your introductory criminal justice class, a short story, a limerick, a grocery list—you are putting pieces of your world together in new ways and making yourself freshly conscious of these pieces. This is one of the reasons writing is so hard. From the infinite welter of data that your mind continually processes and locks in your memory, you are selecting only certain items significant to the task at hand, relating them to other items, and phrasing them in a new coherence. You are mapping a part of your universe that has hitherto been unknown territory. You are gaining a little more control over the processes by which you interact with the world around you.

Writing is, therefore, one of the best ways to learn. This statement may sound odd at first. If you are an unpracticed writer, you may share a common notion that the only purpose writing can have is to express what you already know or think. Any learning that you as a writer might do has already been accomplished by the time your pen meets the paper. In this view, your task is to inform and even surprise the reader. But if you are a practiced writer, you know that at any moment

as you write, you are capable of surprising yourself by discovering information you never knew that you knew. And it is surprise that you look for: the shock of seeing what happens in your own mind when you drop an old, established opinion into a batch of new facts or bump into a cherished belief from a different angle. Writing synthesizes new understanding for the writer. E. M. Forster's famous question—"How do I know what I think until I see what I say?"—is one that all of us could ask. We make meaning as we write, jolting ourselves by little discoveries into a larger and more interesting universe.

The Irony of Writing

Good writing helps the reader become aware of the ironies and paradoxes of human existence. One such paradox is that good writing expresses both that which is unique about the writer and, at the same time, that which is common, not to the writer alone, but to every human being. Many of America's most famous political statements share this double attribute of mirroring the singular and the ordinary. For example, read the following excerpts from President Franklin Roosevelt's first inaugural address, spoken on March 4, 1933, in the middle of the Great Depression; then answer this question: Is what Roosevelt said famous in history because its expression is extraordinary or because it appeals to something that is basic to every human being?

> This is pre-eminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So first of all let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.
>
> In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things. Values have shrunken to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen, government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.
>
> More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment.
>
> Yet our distress comes from no failure of substance. We are stricken by no plague of locusts. Compared with the perils which our forefathers conquered because they believed and were not afraid, we have still much to be thankful for. Nature still offers her bounty and human efforts have multiplied it. Plenty is at our doorstep, but a generous use of it languishes in the very sight of the supply.…

> The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit.
>
> Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.
>
> The joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits. These dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow-men.
>
> (Roosevelt 1933)

The help that writing gives us with learning and with controlling what we learn is one of the major reasons why your criminal justice instructors will require a great deal of writing from you. Learning the complex and diverse world of the criminal justice professional takes more than a passive ingestion of facts. You have to come to grips with social issues and with your own attitudes toward them. When you write in a class on criminal justice or juvenile delinquency, you are entering into the world of professional researchers in the same way they do—testing theory against fact and fact against belief.

Virtually everything that happens in the discipline of criminal justice happens on paper first. Documents are wrestled into shape before their contents can affect the public. Meaningful social programs are written before they are implemented. The written word has helped bring slaves to freedom, end wars, create new opportunities in the workplace, and shape the values of nations. Often, gaining recognition for ourselves and our ideas depends less upon what we say than upon how we say it. Accurate and persuasive writing is absolutely vital to the criminal justice professional.

Learning by Writing

A way of testing the notion that writing is a powerful learning tool is by rewriting your notes from a recent class lecture. The type of class does not matter; it can be history, chemistry, criminal justice, whatever. If possible, choose a difficult class, one in which you are feeling somewhat unsure of the material and one for which you have taken copious notes.

As you rewrite, provide the transitional elements (the connecting phrases like *in order to*, *because of*, and, *but*, *however*) that you were unable to supply in class because of the press of time. Furnish your own examples or illustrations of the ideas expressed in the lecture.

This experiment will force you to supply necessary coherence out of your own thought processes. See if the loss of time it takes you to rewrite the notes is not more than compensated for by a gain in your understanding of the lecture material.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

There is no way around it: Writing is a struggle. Do you think you are the only one to feel this way? Take heart! Writing is hard for everybody, great writers included. Bringing order into the world is never easy. Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize in literature, once wrote, "I believe in miracles in every area of life except writing. Experience has shown me that there are no miracles in writing. The only thing that produces good writing is hard work" (Lunsford and Connors 1992:2).

Hard work was evident in the words of John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address. As you read the following excerpts from Kennedy's speech, what images come to mind? Historians tend to consider a president "great" when his words live longer than his deeds in the minds of the people. Do you think this will be—or has been—true of Kennedy?

> We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end as well as a beginning—signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago.
>
> The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.
>
> We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.…
>
> In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hours of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.
>
> And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.
>
> My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.
>
> (Kennedy 1961)

One reason writing is difficult is that it is not actually a single activity at all but a process consisting of several activities that can overlap each other, with two or more sometimes operating *simultaneously* as you labor to organize and phrase

your thoughts. (We will discuss these activities later in this chapter.) The writing process tends to be sloppy for everyone; it is often a frustrating search for meaning and for the best way to articulate that meaning.

Frustrating though that search may sometimes be, it need not be futile. Remember this: The writing process makes use of skills that we all have. The ability to write, in other words, is not some magical competence bestowed on the rare, fortunate individual. While few of us may achieve the proficiency of Isaac Singer, we are all capable of phrasing thoughts clearly and in a well-organized fashion. But learning how to do so takes practice.

The one sure way to improve your writing is to write. One of the toughest but most important jobs in writing is to maintain enthusiasm for your writing project. Commitment may sometimes be complicated, given the difficulties that are inherent in the writing process and that can be made worse when the project is unappealing at first glance. How, for example, can you be enthusiastic about having to write a paper analyzing prison reform when you know little about the American correctional system and see no real use in writing about it?

One of the worst mistakes that unpracticed student writers make is to fail to assume responsibility for keeping themselves interested in their writing. No matter how hard it may seem at first to drum up interest in your topic, *you have to do it*—that is, if you want to write a paper you can be proud of, one that contributes useful material and a fresh point of view to the topic. One thing is guaranteed: If you are bored with your writing, your reader will be, too. So what can you do to keep your interest and energy level high?

Challenge yourself. Think of your paper not as an assignment but as a piece of writing that has a point to make. To get this point across persuasively is the real reason why you are writing, not the simple fact that a teacher has assigned you a project. If someone were to ask you why you are writing your paper and your immediate, unthinking response is, "Because I've been given a writing assignment," or "Because I want a good grade," or some other nonanswer along these lines, your paper may be in trouble.

If, on the other hand, your first impulse is to explain the challenge of your main point—"I'm writing to show how prison reform will benefit both inmates and the American taxpayer"—then you are thinking usefully about your topic.

MAINTAIN SELF-CONFIDENCE

Having confidence in your ability to write well about your topic is essential for good writing. This does not mean that you will always know what the end result of a particular writing activity will be. In fact, you have to cultivate your ability to tolerate a high degree of uncertainty while weighing evidence, testing hypotheses,

and experimenting with organizational strategies and wording. Be ready for temporary confusion and for seeming dead ends, and remember that every writer faces these obstacles. It is from your struggle to combine fact with fact, to buttress conjecture with evidence, that order arises.

Do not be intimidated by the amount and quality of work that others have already done in your field of inquiry. The array of opinion and evidence that confronts you in the published literature can be confusing. But remember that no important topic is ever exhausted. *There are always gaps*—questions that have not yet been satisfactorily explored either in the published research on a subject or in the prevailing popular opinion. It is in these gaps that you establish your own authority, your own sense of control.

Remember that the various stages of the writing process reinforce each other. Establishing a solid motivation strengthens your sense of confidence about the project, which in turn influences how successfully you organize and write. If you start out well, using good work habits, and give yourself ample time for the various activities to coalesce, you should produce a paper that will reflect your best work, one that your audience will find both readable and useful.

THE WRITING PROCESS

LEARNING THE NATURE OF THE PROCESS

As you engage in the writing process, you are doing many different things at once. While planning, you are no doubt defining the audience for your paper at the same time that you are thinking about the paper's purpose. As you draft the paper, you may organize your next sentence while revising the one you have just written. Different parts of the writing process overlap, and much of the difficulty of writing is that so many things happen at once. Through practice—in other words, through *writing*—it is possible to learn how to control those parts of the process that can in fact be controlled and to encourage those mysterious, less controllable activities.

No two people go about writing in exactly the same way. It is important for you to recognize routines—modes of thought as well as individual exercises—that help you negotiate the process successfully. And it is also important to give yourself as much time as possible to complete the process. Procrastination is one of the writer's greatest enemies. It saps confidence, undermines energy, destroys concentration. Working regularly and following a well-planned schedule as closely as possible often make the difference between a successful paper and an embarrassment.

Although the various parts of the writing process are interwoven, there is naturally a general order to the work of writing. You have to start somewhere!

What follows is a description of the various stages of the writing process—*planning*, *drafting*, *revising*, *editing*, and *proofreading*—along with suggestions on how to approach each most successfully.

PLANNING

Planning includes all activities that lead up to the writing of the first draft. The particular activities in this stage differ from person to person. Some writers, for instance, prefer to compile a formal outline before writing that draft. Some writers perform brief writing exercises to jump-start their imaginations. Some draw diagrams; some doodle. Later we will look at a few starting strategies, and you can determine which may help you.

Now, however, let us discuss certain early choices that all writers must make during the planning stage. These choices concern *topic*, *purpose*, and *audience*, three elements that make up the writing context, or the terms under which we all write. Every time you write, even if you are writing a diary entry or a note to your banker, these elements are present. You may not give conscious consideration to all of them in each piece of writing that you do, but it is extremely important to think carefully about them when writing a criminal justice paper. Some or all of these defining elements may be dictated by your assignment, yet you will always have a degree of control over them.

Selecting a Topic

No matter how restrictive an assignment may seem, there is no reason to feel trapped by it. Within any assigned subject you can find a range of topics to explore. What you are looking for is a topic that engages your own interest. Let your curiosity be your guide. If, for example, you have been assigned the subject of prison reform, then guide yourself to find some issue concerning prison reform that interests you. (How does inmate education—for example, taking college courses by correspondence or television—affect recidivism? Should inmates incarcerated for violent offenses be allowed to "bulk up" by lifting weights?) Any good topic comes with a set of questions; you may well find that your interest picks up if you simply begin asking questions.

One strong recommendation: Ask your questions on paper. Like most other mental activities, the process of exploring your way through a topic is transformed when you write down your thoughts as they come instead of letting them fly through your mind unrecorded. Remember the old adage from Louis Agassiz: "A pen is often the best of eyes" (Pearce 1958:106).

While it is vital to be interested in your topic, you do not have to know much about it at the outset of your investigation. In fact, having too heartfelt a commitment to a topic can be an impediment to writing about it; emotions can get in the way of objectivity. Better often to choose a topic that has piqued your interest yet

remained something of a mystery to you: a topic discussed in one of your classes, perhaps, or mentioned on television or in a conversation with friends.

Narrowing a Topic

The task of narrowing your topic offers you a tremendous opportunity to establish a measure of control over the writing project. It is up to you to hone your topic to just the right shape and size to suit both your own interests and the requirements of the assignment. Do a good job of it, and you will go a long way toward guaranteeing yourself sufficient motivation and confidence for the tasks ahead of you. If you do not narrow your topic well, somewhere along the way you may find yourself directionless and out of energy.

Generally, the first topics that come to your mind will be too large to handle in your research paper. For example, the topic of gun control has generated a tremendous number of published news articles and reports recently by experts in the field. Despite all the attention turned toward this topic, however, there is still plenty of room for you to investigate it on a level that has real meaning to you and that does not merely recapitulate the published research. What about an analysis of how enactment of the Brady bill has affected handgun crimes in your city? The problem with most topics is not that they are too narrow or too completely explored, but rather that they are so rich it is difficult to choose the most useful

Narrowing Topics

Without doing research, see how you can narrow the following general topics; for example:

General topic	**Narrowed topics**
Juvenile delinquency	Labeling serious habitual offenders: harassment or public safety?
	Substance abuse and delinquent behavior
	Kids that kill: juvenile delinquents or adult murderers?

Now try narrowing the following general topics:

Crime in America	Political corruption
International terrorism	Costs of incarceration
Education	Affirmative action hiring policies
Freedom of speech	Freedom to bear arms
Gun control	Training police officers

ways to address them. Take some time to narrow your topic. Think through the possibilities that occur to you, and as always, jot down your thoughts.

Students in an undergraduate course on criminology were told to write an essay of 2500 words on one of the following topics. Next to each general topic is an example of how students narrowed it to make a manageable paper topic.

General Topic	**Paper Topic**
Homicide	The effect of homicide on the black male population in the United States
Teenage Crimes	The role of drug involvement in teenage crimes in the United States
Prisons	Should U.S. prisons be run by the private sector?

Finding a Thesis

As you plan your writing, be on the lookout for an idea that can serve as your thesis. A thesis is not a fact, which can be immediately verified by data, but an assertion worth discussing, an argument with more than one possible conclusion. Your thesis sentence will reveal to your reader not only the argument you have chosen but also your orientation toward it and the conclusion that your paper will attempt to prove.

In looking for a thesis, you are doing many jobs at once:

1. You are limiting the amount and kind of material that you must cover, thus making it manageable.
2. You are increasing your own interest in the narrowing field of study.
3. You are working to establish your paper's purpose, the reason why you are writing about your topic. (If the only reason you can see for writing is to earn a good grade, then you probably won't!)
4. You are establishing your notion of who your audience is and what sort of approach to the subject might best catch their interest.

In short, you are gaining control over your writing context. For this reason, it is a good idea to come up with a thesis early on, a *working thesis*, which will very probably change as your thinking deepens but which will allow you to establish a measure of order in the planning stage.

The Thesis Sentence

The introduction of your paper will contain a sentence that expresses the task that you intend to accomplish. This thesis sentence communicates your main idea, the one you are going to support, defend, or illustrate. The thesis sets up an expectation in the reader's mind that is your job to satisfy. But in the planning stage a thesis sentence is more than just the statement that informs your reader of your

goal. It is a valuable tool to help you narrow your focus and confirm in your own mind your paper's purpose.

Developing a Thesis

A Crime and Society class was assigned to write a 20-page paper studying a problem currently being faced by the municipal authorities in their own city. The choice of the problem was left up to the students. One class member, Mark Gonzales, decided to investigate the problem posed to the city by the large number of abandoned buildings in a downtown neighborhood that he drove through on his way to the university. His first working thesis read as follows:

Abandoned houses breed crime.

The problem with this thesis, as Mark found out, was that it was not an idea that could be argued but rather a fact that could be easily corroborated by the sources he began to consult. As Mark read reports from such sources as the Urban Land Institute and the City Planning Commission and talked with representatives from the Community Planning Department, he began to get interested in the dilemma his city faced in responding to the problem of abandoned buildings. Here is Mark's second working thesis:

Removal of abandoned buildings is a major problem facing the city.

This thesis narrowed the topic somewhat and gave Mark an opportunity to use material from his research, but there was still no real comment attached to it. It still stated a bare fact, easily proved. At this point, Mark became interested in the still narrower topic of how building removal should best be handled. He found that the major issue was funding the demolition and that different civic groups favored different funding methods. As Mark explored the arguments for and against funding plans, he began to feel that one of them might be best for the city. Mark's third working thesis:

Providing alternative shelter for homeless people reduces crime associated with abandoned buildings.

Note how this thesis narrows the focus of Mark's paper even further than the other two while also presenting an arguable hypothesis. It tells Mark what he has to do in his paper, just as it tells his reader what to expect.

At some time during your preliminary thinking on a topic, you should consult the library to see how much published work has already been done. This search is beneficial in at least two ways:

1. It acquaints you with a body of writing that will become very important in the research phase of the paper.
2. It gives you a sense of how your topic is generally addressed by the community of scholars you are joining. Is the topic as important as you think it is? Has there already been so much research on the topic as to make your inquiry, in its present formulation, irrelevant?

As you go about determining your topic, remember that one goal of criminal justice writing in college is to enhance your own understanding of the social and social-psychological process, to build an accurate model of the way social institutions work. Let this goal help you to aim your research into those areas that you know are important to your knowledge of the discipline.

Defining Your Purpose

There are many ways to classify the purposes of writing, but in general, most writing is undertaken either to inform or to persuade an audience. The goal of informative or expository writing is, simply, to impart information about a particular subject, while the aim of persuasive writing is to convince your reader of your point of view on an issue. The distinction between expository and persuasive writing is not hard and fast, and most criminal justice writing has elements of both types. Most effective writing, however, is clearly focused on either exposition or persuasion. When you begin writing, consciously select a primary approach of exposition or persuasion and then set out to achieve that goal.

Suppose you have been required to write a paper explaining how parents' attitudes affect their children's choice of colleges. If you are writing an expository paper, your task could be to describe in as coherent and impartial a way as possible the attitudes of the parents and the choices of their children. If, however, your paper attempts to convince your reader that parental attitudes often result in children making poor choices, you are now writing to persuade, and your strategy is radically different. You will now need to explain the negative effects of parental attitudes. Persuasive writing seeks to influence the opinions of its audience toward its subject.

Know what you want to say. By the time of your final draft, you must have a very sound notion of the point you wish to argue. If, as you write that final draft, someone were to ask you to state your thesis, you should be able to give a satisfactory answer with a minimum of delay and no prompting. If, on the other hand, you have to hedge your answer because you cannot easily express your thesis, you may not yet be ready to write a final draft.

Watch out for bias! There is no such thing as pure objectivity. You are not a machine. No matter how hard you may try to produce an objective paper, the fact is that every choice you make as you write is influenced to some extent by your personal beliefs and opinions. What you tell your readers is *truth*, in other words, is influenced, often without your knowing, by a multitude of factors: your environment, upbringing, and education; your attitude toward your audience; your political affiliation; your race and gender; your career goals; and your ambitions for the paper you are writing. The influence of such factors can be very subtle, and it is something you must work to identify in your own writing as well as in the writing

Knowing What You Want to Say

Two writers have been asked to state the theses of their papers. Which one of the writers better understands the writing task?

- *Writer 1:* "My paper is about police–community relations."
- *Writer 2:* "My paper argues that improving communication between the police and citizens in the community raises morale among police officers and helps people take greater responsibility for important issues within the community."

The second writer has a clear view of her task. The first knows what her topic is—police–community relations—but may not yet know what it is about these relations that fosters important changes within the community. It may be that you will have to write a rough draft or two or engage in various prewriting activities in order to arrive at a secure understanding of your task.

of others in order not to mislead or be misled. Remember that one of the reasons for writing is *self-discovery*. The writing you will do in criminal justice classes—as well as the writing you will do for the rest of your life—will give you a chance to discover and confront honestly your own views on your subjects. Responsible writers keep an eye on their own biases and are honest about them with their readers.

Defining Your Audience

In any class that requires you to write, it may sometimes be difficult to remember that the point of your writing is not simply to jump through the technical hoops imposed by the assignment. The point is *communication*, the transmission of your knowledge and your conclusions to the reader in a way that suits you. Your task is to pass to your reader the spark of your own enthusiasm for your topic. Readers who were indifferent to your topic should look at it in a new way after reading your paper. This is the great challenge of writing: to enter into your reader's mind and leave behind both new knowledge and new questions.

It is tempting to think that most writing problems would be solved if the writer could view the writing as if it had been produced by another person. The discrepancy between the understanding of the writer and that of the audience is the single greatest impediment to accurate communication. To overcome this barrier, you must consider your audience's needs. By the time you begin drafting, most if not all of your ideas will have begun to attain coherent shape in your mind, so that virtually any words in which you try to phrase those ideas will reflect your thought accurately—*to you*. Your readers, however, do not already hold the conclusions that you have so painstakingly achieved. If you omit from your writing

the material that is necessary to complete your readers' understanding of your argument, they may well not be able to supply that information themselves.

The potential for misunderstanding is present for any audience, whether it is made up of general readers, experts in the field, or your professor, who is reading, in part, to see how well you have mastered the constraints that govern the relationship between writer and reader. Make your presentation as complete as possible, bearing in mind your audience's knowledge of your topic.

Using Invention Strategies

We have discussed various methods of selecting and narrowing the topic of a paper. As your focus on a specific topic sharpens, you will naturally begin to think about the kinds of information that will go into the paper. In the case of papers not requiring formal research, that material comes largely from your own recollections. Indeed, one of the reasons instructors assign such papers is to convince you of the incredible richness of your memory, the vastness and variety of the "database" you have accumulated and which, moment by moment, you continue to build.

So vast is your horde of information that it is sometimes difficult to find within it the material that would best suit your paper. In other words, finding out what you already know about a topic is not always easy. *Invention*, a term borrowed from classical rhetoric, refers to the task of discovering, or recovering from memory, such information. As we write, we go through some sort of invention procedure that helps us explore our topic. Some writers seem to have little problem coming up with material; others need more help. Over the centuries writers have devised different exercises that can help locate useful material housed in memory. We shall look at a few of these briefly.

Freewriting

Freewriting is an activity that forces you to get something down on paper. There is no waiting around for inspiration. Instead, you set yourself a time limit—perhaps three or five minutes—and write for that length of time without stopping, not even to lift the pen from the paper or your hands from the keyboard. Focus on the topic, and don't let the difficulty of finding relevant material stop you from writing. If necessary, you may begin by writing, over and over, some seemingly useless phrase, such as "I cannot think of anything to write about" or perhaps the name of your topic. Eventually, something else will occur to you. (It is surprising how long a three-minute freewriting session can seem to last!) At the end of the freewriting, look over what you have produced for anything of use. Much of the writing will be unusable, but there may be an insight or two that you did not know you possessed.

Besides helping to recover from your memory usable material for your paper, freewriting has other benefits. First, it takes little time to do, which means you may repeat the exercise as often as you like within a relatively short span of time. Second, it breaks down some of the resistance that stands between you and the act of writing. There is no initial struggle to find something to say; you just *write*.

Freewriting

The teacher in Shelby Johnson's second-year Family as a Social Institution class assigned Shelby a paper to write focusing on some aspect of American family life. Shelby, who felt her understanding of the family as an institution was slight, tried to get her mind started on the job of finding a topic that interested her with a two-minute freewriting. Thinking about the family and child development, Shelby wrote steadily for three minutes without lifting her pen from the paper. Here is the result of her freewriting:

> Family family family family family family family what do I know? My family—father mother sister. Joely. Parents Mom and Dad. Carole and Don. Child development. My development. Okay okay okay okay okay. Both parents were present all my life. Both worked. Professionals. Dad at the school, Mom at the office. Sometimes we wished Mom was at home. The bedtimes she missed, Joely griping and that night she cried. That old empty feeling. Emptinesssssss. The way the air conditioner sounded when the house was quiet. That might be interesting: working parents, the effects on kids. A personal view. Two-paycheck families. Necessary nowadays—why not before? What's happened to make two jobs necessary. No. Back up. Go back to life in two-income family. I like it. Where to start. I could interview Mom. Get recent statistics on two-paycheck families. Where???? Ask in library tomorrow.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is simply making a list of ideas about a topic. It can be done quickly and at first without any need to order items into a coherent pattern. The point is to write down everything that occurs to you quickly and as briefly as possible, using individual words or short phrases. Once you have a good-sized list of items, you can then group the items according to relationships that you see among them. Brainstorming thus allows you to uncover both ideas stored in your memory and useful associations among those ideas.

Brainstorming

A professor in a criminal justice class asked her students to write a 700-word paper, in the form of a letter to be translated and published in a Warsaw newspaper, giving Polish readers useful advice about living in a democracy. One student, Chelsea Blake, started thinking about the assignment by brainstorming. First, she simply wrote down anything that occurred to her:

Voting rights	Welfare	Freedom of press
Protest movements	Everybody equal	Minorities
Racial prejudice	The American Dream	Injustice

The individual	No job security	Lobbyists and PACs
Justice takes time	Psychological factors	Aristocracy of wealth
Size of bureaucracy	Market economy	Many choices

Thinking through her list, Chelsea decided to rearrange it into two lists, one devoted to positive aspects of life in a democracy, the other to negative aspects. At this point she decided to discard some items that were redundant or did not seem to have much potential. As you can see, Chelsea had some questions about where some of her items would fit.

Positive	**Negative**
Voting rights	Aristocracy of wealth
Freedom of the press	Justice takes time
Everybody equal	Racial prejudice
The American Dream	Welfare
Psychological factors	Lobbyists and PACs
Protest movements (positive?)	Size of bureaucracy

At this point, Chelsea decided that her topic would be the ways in which money and special interests affect a democratically elected government. Which items on her lists would be relevant to Chelsea's paper?

Asking Questions

It is always possible to ask most or all of the following questions about any topic: *Who*? *What*? *When*? *Where*? *Why*? *How*? These questions force you to approach the topic as a journalist does, setting it within different perspectives that can then be compared.

Asking Questions

For a class in criminal law, a professor asked her class to write a paper describing the impact of Supreme Court clerks on the decision-making process. One student developed the following questions as he began to think about a thesis:

- *Who* are the Supreme Court's clerks? (How old? Of what ethnicity and gender are they? What are their politics?)
- *What* are their qualifications for the job?

(*continued*)

- *What* exactly is their job?
- *When* during the Court term are they most influential?
- *Where* do they come from? (Is there any geographical pattern discernible in the way they are chosen? Any pattern regarding religion? Do certain law schools contribute a significantly greater number of clerks than any others?)
- *How* are they chosen? (appointed? elected?)
- *When* in their careers do they serve?
- *Why* are they chosen as they are?
- *Who* have been some influential Court clerks? (Have any gone on to sit on the bench themselves?)

Can you think of other questions that would make for useful inquiry?

Maintaining Flexibility

As you engage in invention strategies you are also doing other work. You are still narrowing your topic, for example, as well as making decisions that will affect your choice of tone or audience. You are moving forward on all fronts, with each decision you make affecting the others. This means you must be flexible to allow for slight adjustments in your understanding of the paper's development and of your goal. Never be so determined to prove a particular theory that you fail to notice when your own understanding of it changes. *Stay objective*.

Organizing Your Writing

A paper that has all the facts but gives them to the reader in an ineffective order will confuse rather than inform or persuade. While there are various methods of grouping ideas, none is potentially more effective than *outlining*. Unfortunately, no organizing process is more often misunderstood.

Outlining for Yourself

Outlining can do two jobs. First, it can force you, the writer, to gain a better understanding of your ideas by arranging them according to their interrelationships. There is one primary rule of outlining: Ideas of equal weight are placed on the same level within the outline. This rule requires you to determine the relative importance of your ideas. You have to decide which ideas are of the same type or order and into which subtopic each idea best fits.

If, in the planning stage, you carefully arrange your ideas in a coherent outline, your grasp of the topic will be greatly enhanced. You will have linked your

ideas logically together and given a basic structure to the body of the paper. This sort of subordinating and coordinating activity is difficult, however, and as a result, inexperienced writers sometimes begin to write their first draft without an effective outline, hoping for the best. This hope is usually unfulfilled, especially in complex papers involving research.

Outlining for Your Reader

The second job an outline can perform is to serve as a reader's blueprint to the paper, summarizing its points and their interrelationships. A busy person can quickly get a sense of your paper's goal and the argument you have used to promote it by consulting your outline. The clarity and coherence of the outline help to determine how much attention your audience will give to your ideas.

While neither the American Sociological Association (ASA) nor the American Psychological Association (APA) in their style guides formally require the inclusion of an outline with a paper submitted for publication to a professional journal, both the fourth edition of the *ASA Style Guide* (2010:42) and the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA* (2010:62–63) advocate the use of organizational headings, based on formal outline patterning, within the paper's text. Indeed, a formal outline is such a useful tool that your criminal justice instructor may require you to submit one. A look at the model presented in other chapters of this manual will show you how strictly these formal outlines are structured. But while you must pay close attention to the requirements of the accompanying outline, do not forget how powerful a tool an outline can be in the early planning stages of your paper.

Organizing Thoughts

Juan, a student in a second-year criminal justice class, researched the impact of a worker-retraining program in his state and came up with the following facts and theories. Number them in logical order.

_____ A growing number of workers in the state do not possess the basic skills and education demanded by employers.

_____ The number of dislocated workers in the state increased from 21,000 in 1982 to 32,000 in 1992.

_____ A public policy to retrain uneducated workers would allow them to move into new and expanding sectors of the state economy.

_____ Investment in high technology would allow the state's employers to remain competitive in the production of goods and services in both domestic and foreign markets.

_____ The economy is becoming more global and more competitive.

Formal Outline Pattern

Following this pattern accurately during the planning stage of your paper helps to guarantee that your ideas are placed logically. A thesis sentence prefaces an organized outline.

Thesis sentence (prefaces the organized outline)

I. First main idea
   A. First subordinate idea
      1. Reason, example, or illustration
      2. Reason, example, or illustration
         a. Detail supporting reason #2
         b. Detail supporting reason #2
         c. Detail supporting reason #2
   B. Second subordinate idea
II. Second main idea

Notice that each level of the paper must have more than one entry; for every A there must be at least a B (and, if required, a C, D, etc.); for every 1 there must be a 2. This arrangement forces you to compare ideas, looking carefully at each one to determine its place among the others. The insistence on assigning relative values to your ideas is what makes your outline an effective organizing tool.

Knowing the Patterns of Criminal Justice Papers

The structure of any particular type of criminal justice paper is governed by a formal pattern. When rigid external controls are placed on their writing, some writers tend to feel stifled, their creativity impeded by this kind of "paint-by-numbers" approach to structure. It is vital to the success of your paper that you never allow yourself to be overwhelmed by the pattern rules for any type of paper. Remember that such controls exist not to limit your creativity but to make the paper immediately and easily useful to its intended audience. It is as necessary to write clearly and confidently in a case study or a policy analysis paper as in a term paper for English literature, a résumé, a short story, or a job application letter.

DRAFTING

The planning stage of the writing process is followed by the writing of the first draft. Using your thesis and outline as direction markers, you must now weave your amalgam of ideas, researched data, and persuasion strategies into logically ordered sentences and paragraphs. Though adequate prewriting may facilitate

the drafting, it still will not be easy. Writers establish their own individual methods of encouraging themselves to forge ahead with the draft, but here are some tips to bear in mind.

1. Remember that this is a *rough draft*, not the final paper. At this stage, it is not necessary that every word be the best possible word. Do not put that sort of pressure on yourself. You must not allow anything to slow you down now. Writing is not like sculpting in stone, where every chip is permanent; you can always go back to your draft later and add, delete, reword, or rearrange. *No matter how much effort you have put into planning, you cannot be sure how much of this first draft you will eventually keep*. It may take several drafts to get one that you find satisfactory.
2. Give yourself sufficient time to write. Don't delay the first draft by telling yourself there is still more research to do. You cannot uncover all the material there is to know on a particular subject, so don't fool yourself into trying. Remember that writing is a process of discovery. You may have to begin writing before you can see exactly what sort of final research you need to do. Keep in mind that there are other tasks waiting for you after the first draft is finished, so allow for them as you determine your writing schedule. It is also very important to give yourself time to write because the more time that passes after you have written a draft, the better your ability to view it with greater objectivity. It is very difficult to evaluate your writing accurately soon after you complete it. You need to cool down, to recover from the effort of putting all those words together. The "colder" you get on your writing, the better able you are to read it as if it were written by someone else and thus acknowledge the changes you will need to make to strengthen the paper.
3. Stay sharp. Keep in mind the plan you created for yourself as you narrowed your topic, composed a thesis sentence, and outlined the material. But if you begin to feel a strong need to change the plan a bit, do not be afraid to do so. Be ready for surprises dealt to you by your own growing understanding of the topic. Your goal is to record your best thinking on the subject as accurately as possible.

Paragraph Development

There is no absolute requirement for the structure of any paragraph in your paper except that all its sentences must be clearly related to each other and each must carry the job of saying what you want to say about your thesis *one step farther*. In other words, any sentence that simply restates something said in another sentence anywhere else in the paper is a waste of your time and the reader's. It is not unusual for a paragraph to have, somewhere in it, a *topic* sentence that serves as the key to the paragraph's organization and announces the paragraph's connection to the paper's thesis. But not all paragraphs need topic sentences.

What all paragraphs in the paper *do* need is an organizational strategy. Here are four typical organizational models, any one of which—if you keep it in mind—can help you build a coherent paragraph:

- *Chronological organization.* The sentences of the paragraph describe a series of events or steps or observations as they occur over time. This happens, then that, and then that.
- *Spatial organization.* The sentences of the paragraph record details of its subject in some logical order: top to bottom, up to down, outside to inside.
- *General-to-specific organization.* The paragraph starts with a statement of its main idea and then goes into detail as it discusses that idea.
- *Specific-to-general organization.* The paragraph begins with smaller, nuts-and-bolts details, arranging them into a larger pattern that, by the end of the paragraph, leads to the conclusion that is the paragraph's main idea.

These are not the only organizational strategies available to you, and, of course, different paragraphs in a paper can use different strategies, though a paragraph that employs more than one organizational plan is risking incoherence. The essential thing to remember is that each sentence in the paragraph must bear a logical relationship to the one before it and the one after it. It is this notion of *interconnectedness* that can prevent you from getting off track and stuffing extraneous material in your paragraphs.

Let's look, for example, at a paragraph in a student paper whose thesis idea is that recent research is locating and charting factors that lead to marital dissatisfaction. The following paragraph occurs, roughly, in the middle of the paper:

> The large majority of professional literature agrees that the transition to parenthood affects marital satisfaction (Abbey, Andrews, and Halman 1994; Campbell 1989; Hunt 1995; Kephart and Jedlicka 1991; Levy-Skiff 1994; Lewis 1989; Stephenson 1988; Turner and Helms 1994). Although some researchers conclude otherwise, most believe children cause a decrease in marital happiness (Lewis 1989; Turner and Helms 1994). Usually this unhappiness is greater among women, probably due to the added responsibilities. This unhappiness increases if the husband does little to help out with the added responsibilities (Abbey, Andrews, and Halman 1994; Hunt 1995; Levy-Skiff 1994).

Does the paragraph's organization correspond to any of the four strategies listed earlier in the chapter? It clearly moves from a general topic—the fact that parenthood may affect a couple's marital happiness—to the more specific topic of *how* having children can cause such a change in marital satisfaction.

Do not expect paragraphs as precise as this one to come to you easily as you write your first draft. Like all other aspects of the writing process, paragraph development is a challenge. But remember, one of the helpful facts about paragraphs is that they are relatively small, especially compared to the overall scope of your paper. Each paragraph can basically do only one job—handle or help to handle a single idea, which is itself only a part of the overall development of the larger thesis idea. The fact that paragraphs are small and are aimed at a single task

means that it is relatively easy to revise them. By focusing clearly on the single job a paragraph does and filtering out all the paper's other claims for your attention, you should gain enough clarity of vision during the revision process to understand what you need to do to make that paragraph work better.

Language Choices

To be convincing, your writing needs to be authoritative. That is, you have to sound as if you have confidence in your ability to convey your ideas in words. Sentences that sound stilted or that suffer from weak phrasing or the use of clichés are not going to win supporters for the positions that you express in your paper. So a major question becomes: How can I sound confident? Here are some points to consider as you work to convey to your reader that necessary sense of authority.

Level of Formality

Tone is one of the primary methods by which you signal to the readers who you are and what your attitude is toward them and toward your topic. Your major decision is which level of language formality is most appropriate to your audience. The informal tone you would use in a letter to a friend might well be out of place in a paper on police corruption written for your criminal justice professor. Remember that tone is only part of the overall decision that you make about how to present your information. Formality is, to some extent, a function of individual word choices and phrasing. Is it appropriate to use contractions like *isn't* or *they'll*? Would the strategic use of a sentence fragment for effect be out of place? The use of informal language, the personal *I*, and the second-person *you* is traditionally forbidden—for better or worse—in certain kinds of writing. Often part of the challenge of writing a formal paper is simply how to give your prose bite while staying within the conventions.

Jargon

One way to lose readers quickly is to overwhelm them with jargon—phrases that have a special, usually technical, meaning within your discipline but which are unfamiliar to the average reader. The occasional use of jargon may add an effective touch of atmosphere, but anything more than that will severely dampen a reader's enthusiasm for the paper. Often the writer uses jargon in an effort to impress the reader by sounding lofty or knowledgeable. Unfortunately, all jargon usually does is cause confusion. In fact, the use of jargon indicates a writer's lack of connection to the audience.

Criminal justice writing is a haven for jargon. Perhaps writers of professional journals and certain policy analysis papers believe their readers are all completely attuned to their terminology. It may be that these writers occasionally hope to obscure damaging information or potentially unpopular ideas in confusing language. In other cases, the problem could simply be unclear thinking by the writer.

Revising Jargon

What words in the following sentence, from a published article in a journal, are examples of jargon? Can you rewrite the sentence to clarify its meaning?

> The implementation of statute-mandated regulated inputs exceeds the conceptualization of the administrative technicians.

Whatever the reason, the fact is that criminal justice papers too often sound like prose made by machines to be read by machines.

Students may feel that, in order to be accepted as criminal justice professionals, their papers should conform to the practices of their published peers. *This is a mistake*. Remember that it is never better to write a cluttered or confusing sentence than a clear one and that burying your ideas in jargon defeats the effort that you went through to form them.

Clichés

In the heat of composition, as you are looking for words to help form your ideas, it is sometimes easy to plug in a *cliché*—a phrase that has attained universal recognition by overuse. (Note: Clichés differ from jargon in that clichés are part of the general public's everyday language, while jargon is specific to the language of experts in a particular field.) Our vocabularies are brimming with clichés:

- It's *raining cats and dogs*.
- That issue is *dead as a doornail*.
- It's time for the governor to *face the music*.
- Angry voters *made a beeline* for the ballot box.

The problem with clichés is that they are virtually meaningless. Once colorful means of expression, they have lost their color through overuse, and they tend to bleed energy and color from the surrounding words. When revising, replace clichés with wording that more accurately conveys your point.

Descriptive Language

Language that appeals to the readers' senses will always engage their interest more fully than language that is abstract. This is especially important for writing in disciplines that tend to deal in abstracts, such as criminal justice. The typical criminal justice paper, with its discussions of abstract principles, demographics, or deterministic outcomes, is usually in danger of floating off into abstraction, with each paragraph drifting farther away from the felt life of the readers. Whenever appropriate, appeal to your readers' sense of sight, hearing, taste, touch, or smell.

Using Descriptive Language

Which of the following two sentences is more effective?

1. The housing project had deteriorated since the last inspection.
2. Since the last inspection, deterioration of the housing project had become evident in the stench rising from the plumbing, grime on the walls and floors, and the sound of rats scurrying in the hallways.

Gender-Neutral Writing

Language can be a very powerful method of either reinforcing or destroying cultural stereotypes. By treating the sexes in subtly different ways in your language, you may unknowingly be committing an act of discrimination. A common example is the use of the pronoun *he* to refer to a person whose gender has not been identified. But there are many other writing situations in which sexist and/or ethnic bias may appear. In order to avoid gender bias, the fourth edition of the *ASA Style Guide* (2010:4) recommends replacing words like *man*, *men*, or *mankind* with *person*, *people*, or *humankind*. When both sexes must be referred to in a sentence, use *he or she*, *her or him*, *or his or hers* instead of *he/she*, *him/her*, or *his/hers*.

Some writers, faced with this dilemma, alternate the use of male and female personal pronouns; others use the plural to avoid the need to use a pronoun of either gender:

Sexist:	A lawyer should always treat his client with respect.
Nonsexist:	A lawyer should always treat his or her client with respect.
Nonsexist:	Lawyers should always treat their clients with respect.
Sexist:	Man is a political animal.
Nonsexist:	People are political animals.

Remember that language is more than the mere vehicle of your thought. Your words shape perceptions for your readers. How *well* you say something will profoundly affect your readers' response to *what* you say. Sexist language denies to a large number of your readers the basic right to fair and equal treatment. Be aware of this common form of discrimination.

REVISING

Revising is one of the most important steps in assuring the success of your essay. While unpracticed writers often think of revision as little more than making sure all the *i*'s are dotted and *t*'s are crossed, it is much more than that. Revising is

reseeing the essay, looking at it from other perspectives, trying always to align your view with the one that will be held by your audience. Research indicates that we are actually revising all the time, in every phase of the writing process as we reread phrases, rethink the placement of an item in an outline, or test a new topic sentence for a paragraph. Subjecting your entire hard-fought draft to cold, objective scrutiny is one of the toughest activities to master, but it is absolutely necessary. You must make sure that you have said everything that needs to be said clearly and in logical order. One confusing passage, and the reader's attention is deflected from where you want it to be. Suddenly the reader has to become a detective, trying to figure out why you wrote what you did and what you meant by it. You do not want to throw such obstacles in the path of understanding. Here are some tips to help you with revision.

1. *Give yourself adequate time for revision.* As just discussed, you need time to become "cold" on your paper in order to analyze it objectively. After you have written your draft, spend some time away from it. When you return, try to think of it as someone else's paper.
2. *Read the paper carefully.* This is tougher than it sounds. One good strategy is to read it aloud or to have a friend read it aloud while you listen. (Note, however, that friends are usually not the best critics. They are rarely trained in revision techniques and are often unwilling to risk disappointing you by giving your paper a really thorough examination.)
3. *Have a list of specific items to check.* It is important to revise in an orderly fashion, in stages, looking first at large concerns, such as the overall structure, and then rereading for problems with smaller elements such as paragraph organization or sentence structure.
4. *Check for unity.* Unity is the clear and logical relation of all parts of the essay to its thesis. Make sure that every paragraph relates well to the whole of the paper and is in the right place.
5. *Check for coherence.* Make sure there are no gaps between the different parts of the argument. Look to see that you have adequate *transition* everywhere it is needed. Transitional elements are markers indicating places where the paper's focus or attitude changes. Transitional elements can be one word long—*however*, *although*, *unfortunately*, *luckily*—or as long as a sentence or a paragraph: *In order to appreciate fully the importance of democracy as a shaping presence in post–cold war Polish politics, it is necessary to examine briefly the Poles' last historical attempt to implement democratic government*. Transitional elements rarely introduce new material. Instead, they are direction pointers, either indicating a shift to new subject matter or signaling how the writer wishes certain material to be interpreted by the reader. Because you, the writer, already know where and why your paper changes direction and how you want particular passages to be received, it can be very difficult for you to catch those places in your paper where transition is needed.

6. *Avoid unnecessary repetition.* Two types of repetition can annoy a reader: repetition of content and of wording.

Repetition of content occurs when you return to a subject that you have already discussed. Ideally, you should consider a topic *once*, memorably, and then move on to your next topic. Organizing a paper is a difficult task, however, that usually occurs through a process of enlightenment in terms of purposes and strategies, and repetition of content can happen even if you have used prewriting strategies. What is worse, it can be difficult for you to be aware of the repetition in your own writing. As you write and revise, remember that any unnecessary repetition of content in your final draft is potentially annoying to your readers, who are working to make sense of the argument they are reading and do not want to be distracted by a passage repeating material they have already encountered. You must train yourself, through practice, to look for material that you have repeated unnecessarily.

Repetition of wording occurs when you overuse certain phrases or words. This can make your prose sound choppy and uninspired, as the following examples demonstrate:

- The subcommittee's report on prison reform will surprise a number of people. A number of people will want copies of the report.
- The chairman said at a press conference that he is happy with the report. He will circulate it to the local news agencies in the morning. He will also make sure that the city council has copies.
- I became upset when I heard how the committee had voted. I called the chairman and expressed my reservations about the committee's decision. I told him I felt that he had let the teachers and students of the state down. I also issued a press statement.

The last passage illustrates a condition known by composition teachers as the *I-syndrome*. Can you hear how such duplicated phrasing can hurt a paper? Your language should sound fresh and energetic. Make sure, before you submit your final draft, to read through your paper carefully, looking for such repetition.

Not all repetition is bad. You may wish to repeat a phrase for rhetorical effect or special emphasis: *I came. I saw. I conquered*. Just make sure that any repetition in your paper is intentional, placed there to produce a specific effect.

EDITING

Editing is sometimes confused with the more involved process of revising. But editing happens later, after you have wrestled through your first draft—and maybe your second and third—and arrived at the final draft. Even though your draft now contains all the information you want to impart and has arranged the information to your satisfaction, there are still many factors to check, such as

sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. It is at this point that an unpracticed writer might be less than vigilant. After all, most of the work on the paper is finished; the big jobs of discovering material and organizing and drafting it have been completed. But watch out! Editing is as important as any other job in the writing process. Any error that you allow in the final draft will count against you in the mind of the reader. It may not seem fair, but a minor error—a misspelling or the confusing placement of a comma—will make a much greater impression on your reader than perhaps it should. Remember that everything about your paper is your responsibility, including getting even the supposedly little jobs right. Careless editing undermines the effectiveness of your paper. It would be a shame if all the hard work you put into prewriting, drafting, and revising were to be damaged because you carelessly allowed a comma splice!

Most of the tips given for revising hold for editing as well. It is best to edit in stages, looking for only one or two kinds of errors each time you reread the paper. Focus especially on errors that you remember committing in the past. If, for instance, you know you have a tendency to misplace commas, go through your paper looking at each comma carefully. If you have a weakness for writing unintentional sentence fragments, read each sentence aloud to make sure that it is indeed a complete sentence. Have you accidentally shifted verb tenses anywhere, moving from past to present tense for no reason? Do all the subjects in your sentences agree in number with their verbs? Now is the time to find out.

Watch out for *miscues*—problems with a sentence that the writer simply does not see. Remember that your search for errors is hampered in two ways:

1. As the writer, you hope not to find any errors with your writing. This desire not to find mistakes can cause you to miss sighting them when they occur.
2. Since you know your material so well, it is easy as you read to supply a missing word or piece of punctuation unconsciously, as if it is present.

How difficult is it to see that something is missing in the following sentence:

Unfortunately, legislators often have too little regard their constituents.

We can even guess that the missing word is probably *for*, which should be inserted after *regard*. It is quite possible, however, that the writer of the sentence would automatically supply the missing *for*, as if it were on the page. This is a miscue, which can be hard for writers to spot because they are so close to their material.

One tactic for catching mistakes in sentence structure is to read the sentences aloud, starting with the last one in the paper and then moving to the next-to-last, then the previous sentence, thus going backward through the paper (reading each sentence in the normal, left-to-right manner, of course) until you reach the first sentence of the introduction. This backward progression strips each sentence of its rhetorical context and helps you to focus on its internal structure.

Editing is the stage where you finally answer those minor questions that you put off earlier when you were wrestling with wording and organization. Any ambiguities regarding the use of abbreviations, italics, numerals, capital letters, titles

(when do you capitalize *president*, for example?), hyphens, dashes (usually created on a typewriter or computer by striking the hyphen key twice), apostrophes, and quotation marks have to be cleared up now. You must also check to see that you have used the required formats for footnotes, endnotes, margins, and page numbers.

Guessing is not allowed. Sometimes unpracticed writers who realize that they don't quite understand a particular rule of grammar, punctuation, or format do nothing to fill that knowledge gap. Instead, they rely on guesswork and their own logic—which is not always up to the task of dealing with so contrary a language as English—to get them through problems that they could solve if only they referred to a writing manual. Remember that it does not matter to the reader why or how an error shows up in your writing. It only matters that you have dropped your guard. You must not allow a careless error to undo the good work that you have done.

PROOFREADING

Before you hand in your final version of the paper, it is vital that you check it over one more time to make sure there are no errors of any sort. This job is called *proofreading* or *proofing*. In essence, you are looking for many of the same things you checked for during editing, but now you are doing it on the last draft, which is about to be submitted to your audience. Proofreading is as important as editing; you may have missed an error that you still have time to find, or an error may have been introduced when the draft was last revised. Like every other stage of the writing process, proofreading is your responsibility.

At this point, you must check for typing mistakes: transposed or deleted letters, words, phrases, or punctuation. If you have had the paper professionally keyed, you still must check it carefully. Do not rely solely on the proofreader. If you are creating your paper on a computer or a word processor, it is possible for you unintentionally to insert a command that alters your document drastically by slicing out a word, line, or sentence at the touch of a key. Make sure such accidental deletions have not occurred.

Above all else, remember that your paper represents you. It is a product of your best thinking, your most energetic and imaginative response to a writing challenge. If you have maintained your enthusiasm for the project and worked through the different stages of the writing process honestly and carefully, you should produce a paper you can be proud of and one that will serve its readers well.

Chapter 2

Writing Competently

GUIDELINES FOR THE COMPETENT WRITER

Good writing places your thoughts in your readers' minds in exactly the way you want them to be there. It tells your readers just what you want them to know without telling them anything you do not wish to say. That may sound odd, but the fact is that writers have to be careful not to let unwanted messages slip into their writing. Look, for example, at the following passage, taken from a paper analyzing the impact of a worker-retraining program in the writer's state. Hidden within the prose is a message that jeopardizes the paper's success. Can you detect the message?

> Recent articles written on the subject of dislocated workers have had little to say about the particular problems dealt with in this paper. Since few of these articles focus on the problem at the local level.

Chances are, when you reached the end of the second "sentence," you felt that something was missing and perceived a gap in logic or coherence, so you went back through both sentences to find the place where things had gone wrong. The second sentence is actually not a sentence at all. It does have certain features of a sentence—a subject (*few*) and a verb (*focus*)—but its first word (*Since*) subordinates the entire clause that follows, taking away its ability to stand on its own as a complete idea. The second "sentence," which is properly called a *subordinate clause*, merely fills in some information about the first sentence, telling us why recent articles about dislocated workers fail to deal with problems discussed in the present paper.

The sort of error represented by the second "sentence" is commonly called a *sentence fragment*, and it conveys to the reader a message that no writer wants to send: that the writer either is careless or—worse—has not mastered the language. Language errors such as fragments, misplaced commas, or shifts in verb tense send out warnings in the readers' minds. As a result the readers lose a little of their concentration on the issue being

discussed. They become distracted and begin to wonder about the language competency of the writer. The writing loses effectiveness.

Note: Whatever goal you set for your paper, whether you want it to persuade, describe, analyze, or speculate, you must also set another goal: to *display language competence*. If your paper does not meet this goal, it will not completely achieve its other aims. Language errors spread doubt like a virus; they jeopardize all the hard work you have done on your paper.

Credibility in the job market depends upon language competence. Anyone who doubts this should remember the beating that Vice President Dan Quayle took in the press for misspelling the word *potato* at a spelling bee in 1992. His error caused a storm of humiliating publicity for the hapless Quayle, adding to an impression of his general incompetence.

Correctness is relative. Although they may seem minor, the sort of language errors we are discussing—often called *surface errors*—can be extremely damaging in certain kinds of writing. Surface errors come in a variety of types, including misspellings, punctuation problems, grammar errors, and the inconsistent use of abbreviations, capitalization, or numerals. These errors are an affront to your reader's notion of correctness, and therein lies one of their biggest problems. Different audiences tolerate different levels of correctness. You know that you can get away with surface errors in, say, a letter to a friend, who will not judge you harshly for them, while those same errors in a job application letter might eliminate you from consideration for the position. Correctness depends to an extent upon context.

Another problem is that the rules governing correctness shift over time. What would have been an error to your grandmother's generation—the splitting of an infinitive, for example, or the ending of a sentence with a preposition—is taken in stride today by most readers. So how do you write correctly when the rules shift from person to person and over time? Here are some tips.

Consider Your Audience

One of the great risks of writing is that even the simplest choices regarding wording or punctuation can sometimes prejudice your audience against you in ways that may seem unfair. For example, look again at the old grammar rule forbidding the splitting of infinitives. After decades of counseling students to *never* split an infinitive (something this sentence has just done), composition experts now concede that a split infinitive is not a grammar crime. But suppose you have written a position paper trying to convince your city council of the need to hire security personnel for the library, and half of the council members—the people you wish to convince—remember their eighth-grade grammar teacher's now outdated warning about splitting infinitives. How will they respond when you tell them, in your introduction, that librarians are compelled *to always accompany* visitors to the rare book room because of the threat of vandalism? How much of their attention have you suddenly lost because of their automatic recollection of what is now

a nonrule? It is possible, in other words, to write correctly and still offend your readers' notions of language competence.

Make sure that you tailor the surface features and the degree of formality of your writing to the level of competency that your readers require. When in doubt, take a conservative approach. Your audience might be just as distracted by contractions as by a split infinitive.

Aim for Consistency

When dealing with a language question for which there are different answers—such as whether or not to place a comma after the second item in a series of three ("The mayor's speech addressed taxes, housing for the poor, and the job situation")—always use the same strategy. If, for example, you avoid splitting one infinitive, avoid splitting all infinitives in your paper.

Have Confidence in What You Already Know about Writing!

It is easy for inexperienced writers to allow their occasional mistakes to shake their confidence in their writing ability. The fact is, however, most of what we know about writing is correct. We are all capable, for example, of writing grammatically sound phrases, even if we cannot list the rules by which we achieve coherence. Most writers who worry about their chronic errors have fewer than they think. Becoming distressed about errors makes writing more difficult.

Grammar

As various composition theorists have pointed out, the word *grammar* has several definitions. One meaning is "the formal patterns in which words must be arranged in order to convey meaning." We learn these patterns very early in life and use them spontaneously without thinking about them. Our understanding of grammatical patterns is extremely sophisticated, despite the fact that few of us can actually cite the rules by which the patterns work. Hartwell (1985:111) tested grammar learning by asking native English speakers of different ages and levels of education, including high school teachers, to arrange these words in natural order:

French the young girls four

Everyone could produce the natural order for this phrase: "the four young French girls." Yet none of Hartwell's respondents said they knew the rule that governs the order of the words.

Eliminate Chronic Errors

But if just thinking about our errors has a negative effect on our writing, how do we learn to write more correctly? Perhaps the best answer is simply to write as often as possible. Give yourself practice in putting your thoughts into written shape—and get lots of practice in revising and proofing your work. And as you write and revise, be honest with yourself—and patient. Chronic errors are like bad habits; getting rid of them takes time.

You probably know of one or two problem areas in your writing that you could have eliminated but have not done so. Instead, you have fudged your writing at the critical points, relying upon half-remembered formulas from past English classes or trying to come up with logical solutions to your writing problems. (*Warning*: The English language does not always work in a way that seems logical.) You may have simply decided that comma rules are unlearnable or that you will never understand the difference between the verbs *lay* and *lie*. And so you guess, and come up with the wrong answer a good part of the time. What a shame, when just a little extra work would give you mastery over those few gaps in your understanding and boost your confidence as well.

Instead of continuing with this sort of guesswork and living with the gaps in your knowledge, why not face the problem areas now and learn the rules that have heretofore escaped you? What follows is a discussion of those surface features of writing where errors most commonly occur. You will probably be familiar with most if not all of the rules discussed, but there may well be a few you have not yet mastered. Now is the time to do so.

PUNCTUATION, GRAMMAR, AND SPELLING

Apostrophes

An apostrophe is used to show possession; when you wish to say that something belongs to someone or to something, you add either an apostrophe and an *s* or an apostrophe alone to the word that represents the owner.

When the owner is *singular* (a single person or thing), the apostrophe precedes an added *s*:

- According to Mr. Pederson's secretary, the board meeting has been canceled.
- The school's management team reduced crime problems last year.
- Somebody's briefcase was left in the classroom.

The same rule applies if the word showing possession is a plural that does not end in *s*:

- The women's club provided screening services for at-risk youth and their families.
- Professor Logan has proven himself a tireless worker for children's rights.

When the word expressing ownership is a *plural* ending in *s*, the apostrophe follows the *s*:

- The new procedure was discussed at the youth workers' conference.

There are two ways to form the possessive for two or more nouns:

1. To show joint possession (both nouns owning the same thing or things), the last noun in the series is possessive: Billy and Richard's first draft was completed yesterday.
2. To indicate that each noun owns an item or items individually, each noun must show possession: Professor Wynn's and Professor Camacho's speeches took different approaches to the same problem.

The apostrophe is important—an obvious statement when you consider the difference in meaning between the following two sentences:

1. Be sure to pick up the psychiatrist's things on your way to the airport.
2. Be sure to pick up the psychiatrists' things on your way to the airport.

In the first of these sentences, you have only one psychiatrist to worry about, while in the second, you have at least two!

CAPITALIZATION

When to Capitalize

Here is a brief summary of some hard-to-remember capitalization rules.

1. You may, if you choose, capitalize the first letter of the first word in a sentence that follows a colon, but you do not have to do so. Make sure, however, that you use one pattern consistently throughout your paper:
   - Our instructions are explicit: Do not allow anyone into the conference without an identification badge.
   - Our instructions are explicit: do not allow anyone into the conference without an identification badge.
2. Capitalize *proper nouns* (nouns naming specific people, places, or things) and *proper adjectives* (adjectives made from proper nouns). A common noun following the proper adjective is usually not

capitalized, nor is a common article preceding the proper adjective (such as *a*, *an*, or *the*):

Proper Nouns	**Proper Adjectives**
England	English sociologists
Iraq	the Iraqi educator
Shakespeare	a Shakespearean tragedy

Proper nouns include:

- Names *of monuments and buildings.* The Washington Monument, the Empire State Building, the Library of Congress
- *Historical events, eras, and certain terms concerning calendar dates.* The Civil War, the Dark Ages, Monday, December, Columbus Day
- *Parts of the country.* North, Southwest, Eastern Seaboard, the West Coast, New England

Note: When words like *north, south, east, west, northwest* are used to designate direction rather than geographical region, they are not capitalized: We drove *east* to Boston and then made a tour of the *East Coast*.

- *Words referring to race, religion, or nationality.* Islam, Muslim, Caucasian, Asian, African American, Slavic, Arab, Jewish, Hebrew, Buddhism, Buddhists, Southern Baptists, the Bible, the Koran, American
- *Names of languages.* English, Chinese, Latin, Sanskrit
- *Titles of corporations, institutions, businesses, universities, and organizations.* Dow Chemical, General Motors, the National Endowment for the Humanities, University of Tennessee, Colby College, Kiwanis Club, American Association of Retired Persons, the Oklahoma State Senate

Note: Some words once considered proper nouns or adjectives have, over time, become common, such as french fries, pasteurized milk, arabic numerals, and italics.

3. Titles of individuals may be capitalized if they precede a proper name; otherwise, titles are usually not capitalized.

- The committee honored Dean Furmanski.
- The committee honored the deans from the other colleges.
- We phoned Doctor MacKay, who arrived shortly afterward.
- We phoned the doctor, who arrived shortly afterward.
- A story on Queen Elizabeth's health appeared in yesterday's paper.
- A story on the queen's health appeared in yesterday's paper.
- Pope John Paul's visit to Colorado was a public relations success.
- The pope's visit to Colorado was a public relations success.

When Not to Capitalize

In general, you do not capitalize nouns when your reference is nonspecific. For example, you would not capitalize the phrase *the senator*, but you would capitalize *Senator Smith*. The second reference is as much a title as it is a mere term of identification, while the first reference is a mere identifier. Likewise, there is a difference in degree of specificity between the phrase the *state treasury* and the *Texas State Treasury*.

Note: The meaning of a term may change somewhat depending on capitalization. What, for example, might be the difference between a *Democrat* and a *democrat*? When capitalized, the word refers to a member of a specific political party; when not capitalized, it refers to someone who believes in a democratic form of government.

Capitalization depends to some extent on the context of your writing. For example, if you are writing a policy analysis for a specific corporation, you may capitalize words and phrases referring to that corporation—such as *Board of Directors*, *Chairman of the Board*, and *the Institute*—that would not be capitalized in a paper written for a more general audience. Likewise, in some contexts it is not unusual to see titles of certain powerful officials capitalized even when not accompanying a proper noun: The President's visit to the New York City bombing site was considered a success.

COLONS

We all know certain uses for the colon. A colon can, for example, separate the parts of a statement of time (4:25 A.M.), separate chapter and verse in a biblical quotation (John 3:16), and close the salutation of a business letter (Dear Senator Keaton:). But the colon has other uses that can add an extra degree of flexibility to sentence structure.

The colon can introduce into a sentence certain kinds of material, such as a list, a quotation, or a restatement or description of material mentioned earlier:

- *List.* The committee's research proposal promised to do three things: (1) establish the extent of the problem, (2) examine several possible solutions, and (3) estimate the cost of each solution.
- *Quotation.* In his speech, the mayor challenged us with these words: "How will your council's work make a difference in the life of our city?"
- *Restatement or description.* Ahead of us, according to the senator's chief of staff, lay the biggest job of all: convincing our constituents of the plan's benefits.

COMMAS

The comma is perhaps the most troublesome of all marks of punctuation, no doubt because its use is governed by so many variables, such as sentence length, rhetorical emphasis, and changing notions of style. The most common problems are outlined here.

The Comma Splice

A comma splice is the joining of two complete sentences by only a comma:

- An impeachment is merely an indictment of a government official, actual removal usually requires a vote by a legislative body.
- An unemployed worker who has been effectively retrained is no longer an economic problem for the community, he has become an asset.
- It might be possible for the city to assess fees on the sale of real estate, however, such a move would be criticized by the community of real estate developers.

In each of these passages, two complete sentences (also called *independent clauses*) have been spliced together by a comma, which is an inadequate break between the two sentences.

One foolproof way to check your paper for comma splices is to read carefully the structures on both sides of each comma. If you find a complete sentence on each side and if the sentence following the comma does not begin with a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, *yet*), then you have found a comma splice.

Simply reading the draft through to try to "hear" the comma splices may not work, since the rhetorical features of your prose—its "movement"—may make it hard to detect this kind of sentence completeness error. There are five commonly used ways to correct comma splices.

1. Place a period between the two independent clauses:

   Incorrect: Physicians receive many benefits from their affiliation with clients, there are liabilities as well.

   Correct: Physicians receive many benefits from their affiliation with clients. There are liabilities as well.

2. Place a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, *yet*) between the sentences:

   Incorrect: The chairperson's speech described the major differences of opinion over the department situation, it also suggested a possible course of action.

Correct: The chairperson's speech described the major differences of opinion over the departmental situation, and it also suggested a possible course of action.

3. Place a semicolon between the independent clauses:

   Incorrect: Some people believe that the federal government should play a large role in establishing a housing policy for the homeless, many others disagree.

   Correct: Some people believe that the federal government should play a large role in establishing a housing policy for the homeless; many others disagree.

4. Rewrite the two clauses of the comma splice as one independent clause:

   Incorrect: Television programs play a substantial part in the development of delinquent attitudes, however, they were not found to be the deciding factor in determining the behavior of juvenile delinquents.

   Correct: Television programs were found to play a substantial but not a decisive role in determining the delinquent behavior of juveniles.

5. Change one of the two independent clauses into a dependent clause by beginning it with a subordinating word (*although*, *after*, *as*, *because*, *before*, *if*, *though*, *unless*, *when*, *which*, *where*), which prevents the clause from being able to stand on its own as a complete sentence.

   Incorrect: The student meeting was held last Tuesday, there was a poor turnout.

   Correct: When the student meeting was held last Tuesday, there was a poor turnout.

Commas in a Compound Sentence

A *compound sentence* is comprised of two or more independent clauses—two complete sentences. When these two clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction, the conjunction should be preceded by a comma to signal the reader that another independent clause follows. (This is the second method for fixing a comma splice described earlier.) When the comma is missing, the reader is not expecting to find the second half of a compound sentence and may be distracted from the text.

As the following examples indicate, the missing comma is especially a problem in longer sentences or in sentences in which other coordinating conjunctions

appear. Notice how the comma sorts out the two main parts of the compound sentence, eliminating confusion:

- *Without the comma.* The senator promised to visit the hospital and investigate the problem and then he called the press conference to a close.
- *With the comma.* The senator promised to visit the hospital and investigate the problem, and then he called the press conference to a close.
- *Without the comma.* The water board can neither make policy nor enforce it nor can its members serve on auxiliary water committees.
- *With the comma.* The water board can neither make policy nor enforce it, nor can its members serve on auxiliary water committees.

An exception to this rule arises in shorter sentences, where the comma may not be necessary to make the meaning clear:

- The mayor phoned and we thanked him for his support.

However, it is never wrong to place a comma before the conjunction between the independent clauses. If you are the least bit unsure of your audience's notions about what makes for proper grammar, it is a good idea to take the conservative approach and use the comma:

- The mayor phoned, and we thanked him for his support.

Commas with Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Elements

A *nonrestrictive element* is part of a sentence—a word, phrase, or clause—that adds information about another element in the sentence without restricting or limiting its meaning. While this information may be useful, the nonrestrictive element is not needed for the sentence to make sense. To signal its inessential nature, the nonrestrictive element is set off from the rest of the sentence with commas.

The failure to use commas to indicate the nonrestrictive nature of a sentence element can cause confusion. See, for example, how the presence or absence of commas affects our understanding of the following sentence:

1. The judge was talking with the policeman, who won the outstanding service award last year.
2. The judge was talking with the policeman who won the outstanding service award last year.

Can you see that the comma changes the meaning of the sentence? In the first version, the comma makes the information that follows it incidental: *The judge was talking with the policeman, who happens to have won the service award last year.* In the second version, the information following the word *policeman* is

important to the sense of the sentence; it tells us specifically *which* policeman—presumably there is more than one—the judge was addressing. Here the lack of a comma has transformed the material following the word *policeman* into a *restrictive element*, which means that it is necessary to our understanding of the sentence.

Be sure that in your paper you make a clear distinction between nonrestrictive and restrictive elements by setting off the nonrestrictive elements with commas.

Commas in a Series

A series is any two or more items of a similar nature that appear consecutively in a sentence. The items may be individual words, phrases, or clauses. In a series of three or more items, the items are separated by commas:

- *The senator*, *the mayor*, *and the police chief* all attended the ceremony.
- Because of the new zoning regulations, *all trailer parks must be moved out of the neighborhood*, *all small businesses must apply for recertification and tax status*, and *the two local churches must repave their parking lots*.

The final comma in the series, the one before the *and*, is sometimes left out, especially in newspaper writing. This practice, however, can make for confusion, especially in longer complicated sentences, like the second example. Here is the way that sentence would read without the final, or *serial*, comma:

- Because of the new zoning regulations, all trailer parks must be moved out of the neighborhood, all small businesses must apply for recertification and tax status and the two local churches must repave their parking lots.

Notice that without a comma the division between the second and third items in the series is not clear. This is the sort of ambiguous structure that can cause a reader to backtrack and lose concentration. You can avoid such confusion by always using that final comma. Remember, however, that if you do decide to include it, do so *consistently*; make sure it appears in every series in your paper.

MISPLACED MODIFIERS

A *modifier* is a word or group of words used to describe, or modify, another word in a sentence. A *misplaced modifier*, sometimes called a dangling modifier, appears at either the beginning or end of a sentence and seems to be describing some word other than the one the writer obviously intended. The modifier therefore "dangles," disconnected from its correct meaning. It is often hard for the writer to spot

a dangling modifier, but readers can—and will—find them, and the result can be disastrous for the sentence, as the following examples demonstrate:

Incorrect: Flying low over Washington, the White House was seen.

Correct: Flying low over Washington, we saw the White House.

Incorrect: Worried at the cost of the program, sections of the bill were trimmed in committee.

Correct: Worried at the cost of the program, the committee trimmed sections of the bill.

Incorrect: To lobby for prison reform, a lot of effort went into the TV ads.

Correct: The lobby group put a lot of effort into the TV ads advocating prison reform.

Incorrect: Stunned, the TV broadcast the defeated senator's concession speech.

Correct: The TV broadcast the stunned senator's concession speech.

Note that in the first two incorrect sentences, the confusion is largely due to the use of *passive-voice verbs*: "the prison *was seen*," "sections of the proposal *were trimmed*." Often, though not always, a dangling modifier results from the fact that the actor in the sentence—*we* in the first sentence, *the committee* in the second—is either distanced from the modifier or obliterated by the passive-voice verb. It is a good idea to avoid passive voice unless you have a specific reason for using it.

One way to check for dangling modifiers is to examine all modifiers at the beginnings or endings of your sentences. Look especially for *to be* phrases (to lobby) or for words ending in *-ing* or *-ed* at the start of the modifier. Then check to see if the word being modified is always in plain sight and close enough to the phrase to be properly connected.

PARALLELISM

Series of two or more words, phrases, or clauses within a sentence should have the same grammatical structure, which is called *parallelism*. Parallel structures can add power and balance to your writing by creating a strong rhetorical rhythm. Here is a famous example of parallelism from the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. (The capitalization follows that of the original eighteenth-century document; parallel structures have been italicized.)

> We the People of the United States, in Order *to form a more perfect Union, Establish Justice, insure Domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish* this Constitution for the United States of America.

There are actually two series in this sentence, the first composed of six phrases that each complete the infinitive phrase beginning with the word *to*

(*to form, [to] Establish, [to] insure, [to] provide, [to] promote, [to] secure*), the second consisting of two verbs (*do ordain and [do] establish*). These parallel series appeal to our love of balance and pattern, and they give an authoritative tone to the sentence. The writer, we feel, has thought long and carefully about the matter at hand and has taken firm control of it.

Because we find a special satisfaction in balanced structures, we are more likely to remember ideas phrased in parallelisms than in less highly ordered language. For this reason, as well as for the sense of authority and control that they suggest, parallel structures are common in well-written speeches:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.
>
> Declaration of Independence, 1776

> But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.
>
> Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863

> Let us never negotiate out of fear. But never let us fear to negotiate.…Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.
>
> John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, 1961

Faulty Parallelism

If the parallelism of a passage is not carefully maintained, the writing can seem sloppy and out of balance. Scan your writing to make sure that all series and lists have parallel structure. The following examples show how to correct faulty parallelism:

Incorrect: The mayor promises not only to reform the police department but also *the giving of raises* to all city employees. [Connective structures such as *not only … but also* and *both … and* introduce elements that should be parallel.]

Correct: The mayor promises not only *to reform* the police department but also *to give raises* to all city employees.

Incorrect: The cost *of doing nothing* is greater than the cost *to renovate* the apartment block.

Correct: The cost *of doing* nothing is greater than the cost *of renovating* the apartment block.

Incorrect: Here are the items on the committee's agenda: (1) *to discuss* the new property tax, (2) *to revise* the wording of the city charter, (3) *a vote* on the city manager's request for an assistant.

Correct: Here are the items on the committee's agenda: (1) *to discuss* the new property tax, (2) *to revise* the wording of the city charter, (3) *to vote* on the city manager's request for an assistant.

FUSED (RUN-ON) SENTENCES

A *fused sentence* is one in which two or more independent clauses (passages that can stand as complete sentences) have been joined together without the aid of any suitable connecting word, phrase, or punctuation. The sentences have been run together. As you can see, there are several ways to correct a fused sentence:

Incorrect: The council members were exhausted they had debated for two hours.

Correct: The council members were exhausted. They had debated for two hours. [The linked independent clauses have been separated into two sentences.]

Correct: The council members were exhausted; they had debated for two hours. [A semicolon marks the break between the two clauses.]

Correct: The council members were exhausted, having debated for two hours. [The second independent clause has been rephrased as a dependent clause.]

Incorrect: Our policy analysis impressed the committee it also convinced them to reconsider their action.

Correct: Our policy analysis impressed the committee and also convinced them to reconsider their action. [The second clause has been rephrased as part of the first clause.]

Correct: Our policy analysis impressed the committee, and it also convinced them to reconsider their action. [The two clauses have been separated by a comma and a coordinating word.]

Although a fused sentence is easily noticeable to the reader, it can be maddeningly difficult for the writer to catch in proofreading. Unpracticed writers tend to read through the fused spots, sometimes supplying the break that is usually heard when sentences are spoken. To check for fused sentences, read the independent clauses in your paper carefully, making sure that there are adequate breaks among all of them.

Pronoun Errors

Its versus It's

Do not make the mistake of trying to form the possessive of *it* in the same way that you form the possessive of most nouns. The pronoun *it* shows possession by simply adding an *s*:

- The prosecuting attorney argued the case on *its* merits.

The word *it's* is a contraction, meaning *it is*:

- It's the most expensive program ever launched by the prison.

What makes the *its/it's* rule so confusing is that most nouns form the singular possessive by adding an apostrophe and an *s*:

- The *jury's* verdict startled the crowd.

When proofreading, any time you come to the word *it's*, substitute the phrase *it is* while you read. If the phrase makes sense, you have used the correct form. Consider the following uses of *it's*:

- The newspaper article was misleading in *it's* analysis of the election.

Now read it as *it is*:

- The newspaper article was misleading in *it is* analysis of the election.

If the phrase makes no sense, substitute *its* for *it's*:

- The newspaper article was misleading in *its* analysis of the election.

Vague Pronoun Reference

Pronouns are words that stand in place of nouns or other pronouns that have already been mentioned in your writing. The most common pronouns include *he*, *she*, *it*, *they*, *them*, *those*, *which*, and *who*. You must make sure that there is no confusion about the word to which each pronoun refers:

- The mayor said that *he* would support our bill if the city council would also back *it*.
- The piece of legislation *which* drew the most criticism was the bill concerning housing for the poor.

The word that is replaced by the pronoun is called its *antecedent*. To check the accuracy of your pronoun references, ask yourself this question: To what

does the pronoun refer? Then answer the question carefully, making sure that there is not more than one possible antecedent. Consider the following example:

- Several special interest groups decided to defeat the new health care bill. *This* became the turning point of the government's reform campaign.

To what does the word *This* refer? The immediate answer seems to be the word *bill* at the end of the previous sentence. It is more likely the writer was referring to the attempt of the special interest groups to defeat the bill, but there is no word in the first sentence that refers specifically to this action. The reference is unclear. One way to clarify the reference is to change the beginning of the second sentence:

- Several special interest groups decided to defeat the new health-care bill. *Their attack on the bill* became the turning point of the government's reform campaign.

Here is another example:

- When John F. Kennedy appointed his brother Robert to the position of U.S. Attorney General, *he* had little idea how widespread the corruption in the Teamsters Union was.

To whom does the word *he* refer? It is unclear whether the writer is referring to John or to Robert Kennedy. One way to clarify the reference is simply to repeat the antecedent instead of using a pronoun:

- When President John F. Kennedy appointed his brother Robert to the position of U.S. Attorney General, *Robert* had little idea how widespread the corruption in the Teamsters Union was.

Pronoun Agreement

Remember that a pronoun must agree with its antecedent in both gender and number, as the following examples demonstrate:

- Mayor Smith said that *he* appreciated our club's support in the election.
- One reporter asked the senator what *she* would do if the President offered *her* a cabinet post.
- Having listened to our case, the judge decided to rule on *it* within the week.
- Engineers working on the housing project said *they* were pleased with the renovation so far.

The following words, however, can become troublesome antecedents. They may look like plural pronouns but are actually singular:

Anyone	Each	Either	Everybody	Everyone
Nobody	No one	Somebody	Someone	

A pronoun referring to one of these words in a sentence must be singular, too.

Incorrect: *Each* of the women in the support group brought *their* children.

Correct: *Each* of the women in the support group brought *her* children.

Incorrect: Has *everybody* received *their* ballot?

Correct: Has *everybody* received *his or her* ballot? [The two gender-specific pronouns are used to avoid sexist language.]

Correct: Have *all* the delegates received *their* ballots? [The singular antecedent has been changed to a plural one.]

Shifts in Person

It is important to avoid shifting among first person (*I*, *we*), second person (*you*), and third person (*she*, *he*, *it*, *one*, *they*) unnecessarily. Such shifts can cause confusion:

Incorrect: *Most people* [third person] who seek a job find that if *you* [second person] tell the truth during *your* interviews, *you* will gain the voters' respect.

Correct: *Most people* who seek a job find that if *they* tell the truth during *their* interviews, *they* will win the voters' respect.

Incorrect: *One* [third person singular] cannot tell whether *they* [third person plural] are cut out for public office until they decide to run.

Correct: *One* cannot tell whether *one* is cut out for public office until *one* decides to run.

QUOTATION MARKS

It can be difficult to remember when to use quotation marks and where they go in relation to other marks of punctuation. When faced with these questions, inexperienced writers often try to rely on logic rather than on a rulebook, but the rules do not always seem to rely on logic. The only way to make sure of your use of quotation marks is to *memorize* the rules. Luckily, there are not many.