THE LITTLE, BROWN HANDBOOK

FOURTEENTH EDITION

H. RAMSEY FOWLER &
JANE E. AARON &
MICHAEL GREER

Plan of the Book

The Little, Brown Handbook

Fourteenth Edition

H. Ramsey Fowler
St. Edward's University

Jane E. Aaron

Michael Greer
University of Arkansas at Little Rock

330 Hudson Street, NY NY 10013

Director of English: Karon Bowers
Executive Producer and Publisher: Aron Keesbury
Development Editor: David Kear
Marketing Manager: Nicholas Bolt
Program Manager: Rachel Harbour
Project Manager: Kathy Smith, Cenveo® Publisher Services
Cover Designer: Pentagram
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Preface

The Little, Brown Handbook always addresses both the current and the recurrent needs of writing students and teachers. This edition is no exception. Writing and its teaching change continuously, and the handbook has changed substantially in content. At the same time, much about writing does not change, and the handbook remains a comprehensive, clear, and accessible guide to a host of writing situations and challenges.

What's new in the 14th edition

As a new author on this edition, I have made revisions guided by reviewer feedback and by my own experience teaching college writing in online and face-to-face classrooms. Students today read and write using their medium of choice: the mobile phone. I have made revisions throughout the book to speak to student experience and needs, while respecting the longstanding effectiveness of *The Little, Brown Handbook*. The most notable new feature of the 14th edition is its availability in the digital Revel platform, as detailed below.

New sample student papers: All of the student samples in the book, from short works in progress to complete papers, are new to this edition. More than 90 student samples are included. The topics and sources used in these new sample papers are timely and attuned to student interests.

- Sample informative essay on funding for college athletics (Chapter 2)
- Sample essay responding to a reading, "Is *Google* Making Us Stupid?" by Nicholas Carr (Chapter 3)
- Sample critical analysis of a text, analyzing an essay on selfies from *Psychology Today* (Chapter 7)
- Sample critical analysis of a visual: a Web advertisement for *Savethefood.com* (Chapter 7)
- Sample proposal argument on online courses (Chapter 9)
- Sample research paper in MLA style, on sustainable agriculture (Chapter 47)
- Sample literary research paper in MLA style, on *Rachel* by Angelina Weld Grimké (Chapter 47)
- Sample literary analysis paper in MLA style, on *The Country of the Pointed Firs* by Sarah Orne Jewett (Chapter 48)
- Sample research paper in APA style, on perceptions of mental illness on college campuses (Chapter 50)
- Sample lab report in CSE style, on caterpillar self-defense (Chapter 51)

New learning objectives and chapter architecture: Every chapter now begins with a list of learning objectives that help students understand what they are expected to learn and do in each chapter. These objectives are written using language that reflects Bloom's taxonomy of learning, and the objectives also align in many cases with the *WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition*. These learning objectives not only guide students, they also help instructors tasked with aligning course content with departmental or institutional outcomes statements for their courses.

Main sections of each chapter are aligned with the chapter learning objectives, reinforcing the active learning model built into the language of the objectives.

Updated documentation coverage: MLA published the 8th edition of its *Handbook* in 2016, and the *Chicago Manual of Style* was published in a new 17th edition late in 2017. All model papers and sample citations in the book have been updated to align with the new documentation styles.

New chapter on writing about literature. Chapter 48 is entirely new to this edition, and it follows a student as she reads, responds to, and writes about a novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, by Sarah Orne Jewett.

New coverage of multimodal and online composing (Chapter 5).

New coverage of composing for social media in workplace and public situations (Chapter 11).

New coverage and visual examples of database searches (Chapter 42).

A handbook for many purposes

The Little, Brown Handbook is actually many books in one. It is designed to support the different roles writing teachers serve, from writing coach and mentor, to research guide, editor, and reader.

A guide to academic writing

The handbook gives students a solid foundation in the goals and requirements of college writing.

- Chapter 6 on academic writing includes an overview of common academic genres, such as responses, critical analyses, arguments, informative and personal writing, and research papers and reports. The discussion highlights key features of each genre and points students to examples in the handbook.
- Eighteen examples of academic writing in varied genres appear throughout the handbook, among them a new critical analysis of an advertisement and a new social-science research report documented in APA style.
- With each of the sample papers, a summary box titled "The writing situation" gives an overview of the situation to which the

student responded—subject, purpose, audience, genre, and use of sources—thus connecting concepts with actual writing.

- Emphasizing critical analysis and writing, Chapter 7 on critical reading and writing includes two full-length opinion pieces as exercises in critical reading, a new advertisement with a student's analysis, a revised discussion of writing critically about texts and visuals, and a new critical analysis paper.
- Pulling together key material on academic integrity, Chapter 6 on academic writing and Chapter 44 on plagiarism discuss developing one's own perspective on a topic, using and managing sources, and avoiding plagiarism. Other chapters throughout the handbook reinforce these important topics.
- Synthesis receives special emphasis wherever students might need help balancing their own and others' views, such as in responding to texts and visuals.
- Parts 9 and 10 give students a solid foundation in research writing and writing in the disciplines (literature, other humanities, social sciences, natural and applied sciences), along with extensive coverage of documentation in MLA, Chicago, APA, and CSE styles.

A guide to research writing

With detailed advice, the handbook always attends closely to research writing. The discussion stresses using the library Web site as the gateway to finding sources, managing information, evaluating and synthesizing sources, integrating source material, and avoiding plagiarism.

- Coverage of the working bibliography groups sources by type, reflecting a streamlined approach to source material throughout the handbook.
- The discussion of libraries' Web sites covers various ways students may search for sources—catalog, databases, and research guides.
- A revised discussion of keywords and subject headings helps students develop and refine their search terms.
- A streamlined discussion of gathering information from sources stresses keeping accurate records of source material, marking borrowed words and ideas clearly, and using synthesis.
- A chapter on documenting sources explains key features of source documentation, defines the relationship between in-text citations and a bibliography, and presents pros and cons of bibliography software.
- To help students develop their own perspectives on their research subjects, the text advises asking questions, entering into dialog with sources, and presenting multiple views fairly and responsibly.
- The discussion of evaluating sources—library, Web, and social media—helps students discern purposes and distinguish between

reliable and unreliable sources. Case studies show the application of critical criteria to sample articles, Web documents, and a blog.
- The extensive chapter on avoiding plagiarism discusses deliberate and careless plagiarism, shows examples of plagiarized and revised sentences, and gives updated advice about avoiding plagiarism with online sources.
- Two complete research papers illustrate MLA style. One of them is a paper-in-progress, following a student through the research process and culminating in an annotated essay on sustainable agriculture.

An updated guide to documentation

The extensive coverage of four documentation styles—MLA, Chicago, APA, and CSE—reflects each style's latest version.

- Chapters for all four styles group sources by type, thus simplifying the process of finding appropriate models and clarifying differences among print, database, Web, and other sources.
- Updated, annotated samples of key source types illustrate MLA and APA documentation, showing students how to find the bibliographical information needed to cite each type and highlighting the distinctions among different source media.
- The chapter on MLA documentation reflects the new 8th edition of the *MLA Handbook*. In addition, the sample papers and other examples that show MLA have been updated to reflect the latest MLA guidelines.
- A complete social-science research report shows APA style in the context of student writing.
- The chapter on CSE documentation reflects the new 8th edition of *Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers*.
- For all styles, color highlighting makes authors, titles, dates, and other citation elements easy to grasp.

A guide to writing as a process

The handbook takes a practical approach to assessing the writing situation, generating ideas, developing the thesis statement, revising, and other elements of the writing process.

- An expanded discussion of thesis covers using the thesis statement to preview organization.
- A reorganized presentation of drafting, revising, and editing distinguishes revising more clearly as a step separate from editing.
- A revised discussion of preparing a writing portfolio gives an overview of common formats and requirements.
- Chapter 4 on paragraphs offers new, relevant examples illustrating important concepts of coherence, organization, and development.

- A revised and streamlined chapter on presenting writing focuses on essential information related to document design, visuals and other media, writing for online environments, and oral presentations.

A guide to usage, grammar, and punctuation

The handbook's core reference material reliably and concisely explains basic concepts and common errors, provides hundreds of annotated examples from across the curriculum, and offers frequent exercises (including end-of-part exercises that combine several kinds of problems).

- Throughout the handbook, revised explanations of grammar concepts and rules simplify the presentation and emphasize key material.
- Dozens of new and revised examples and exercises clarify and test important concepts.
- Two common trouble spots—sentence fragments and passive voice—are discussed in great detail and illustrated with examples.
- Examples in Part 8 on effective words show common shortcuts of texting and other electronic communication and how to revise them for academic writing.
- Summary and checklist boxes provide quick-reference help with color highlighting to distinguish sentence elements.

A guide to visual and media literacy

The handbook helps students process nonverbal information and use it effectively in their writing.

- A student work-in-progress illustrates the process of analyzing an advertisement and culminates in a sample critical analysis.
- Detailed help with preparing or finding illustrations appears in Chapter 5 on presenting writing and Chapter 42 on finding sources.
- Thorough discussions of critically reading advertisements, graphs, and other visuals appear in Chapter 7 on critical reading, Chapter 8 on reading arguments, and Chapter 43 on working with sources.

A guide for writing beyond the classroom

Chapter 11 on public writing extends the handbook's usefulness beyond academic writing.

- Discussions of writing for social media encourage students to consider their potential audience now and in the future, whether they are writing to express themselves or to represent an organization.
- Updated coverage of writing a job application discusses cover letters, résumés, and professional online profiles.

A guide for culturally and linguistically diverse writers

In sections labeled Culture and Language, the handbook provides extensive rhetorical and grammatical help, with examples, for writers whose first language or dialect is not standard American English.

- Fully integrated coverage, instead of a separate section, means that students can find what they need without having to know which problems they do and don't share with native SAE speakers.

An accessible reference guide

The handbook is designed to be easy to use.

- Streamlined explanations and new explanatory headings make key information easier to find.
- A clean, uncluttered page design uses color and type clearly to distinguish parts of the book and elements of the pages.
- Color highlighting in boxes and on documentation models distinguishes important elements.
- Annotations on both visual and verbal examples connect principles and illustrations.
- More than 160 boxes provide summaries and checklists of key information.

Revel

Revel is an interactive learning environment that deeply engages students and prepares them for class. Media and assessment integrated directly within the authors' narrative lets students read, explore interactive content, and practice in one continuous learning path. Thanks to the dynamic reading experience in Revel, students come to class prepared to discuss, apply, and learn from instructors and from each other.

Learn more about Revel

http://www.pearson.com/revel

Supplements

Make more time for your students with instructor resources that offer effective learning assessments and classroom engagement. Pearson's partnership with educators does not end with the delivery of course materials; Pearson is there with you on the first day of class and beyond. A dedicated team of local Pearson representatives will work with you to not only choose course materials but also integrate them into your class and assess their effectiveness. Our goal is your goal—to improve instruction with each semester.

Pearson is pleased to offer the following resources to qualified adopters of *The Little, Brown Handbook*. Several of these supplements are available to instantly download from Revel or on the Instructor Resource Center (IRC); please visit the IRC at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc to register for access.

- *Instructor's Resource Manual* Create a comprehensive roadmap for teaching classroom, online, or hybrid courses. Designed for new and experienced instructors, the Instructor's Resource Manual includes learning objectives, lecture and discussion suggestions, activities for in or out of class, research activities, participation activities, and suggested readings, series, and films as well as a Revel features section. Available within Revel and on the IRC.
- *PowerPoint Presentation* Make lectures more enriching for students. The PowerPoint Presentation includes a full lecture outline and photos and figures from the textbook and Revel edition. Available on the IRC.
- *The Little, Brown Handbook Answer Key* provides answers to the handbook's exercises.
- *Diagnostic and Editing Tests and Exercises* are cross-referenced to *The Little, Brown Handbook* and are available online.

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My first and most important debt of gratitude is to Jane E. Aaron, whose work through many editions of this handbook leaves me with some very large shoes to fill. I can only hope to carry on her legacy of quality, accuracy, and usefulness. Having pored over every page of this handbook many times now, I continue to be awed by its gentle, guiding awareness of the needs of student writers.

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smoothing out many awkward sentences. Heather Tolliver at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock contributed a number of examples and sources as an adept research assistant. David Kear has been a wonderful contributor of ideas, energy, clarity, and creativity as development editor, keeping both sanity and humor intact through a long and challenging publishing journey.

Part 1

The Process of Writing

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1.1

Chapter 1
Assessing the Writing Situation

Learning Objectives

1.1 Describe writing as a process.
1.2 Analyze the writing situation.
1.3 Define and analyze your audience.
1.4 Define your purpose.
1.5 Choose and narrow a subject.
1.6 Identify your genre and medium.

1.1 How Writing Happens

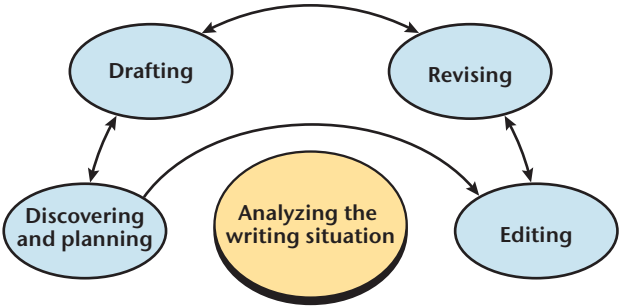
1.1 Describe writing as a process.

Every time you sit down to write, you embark on a **writing process**—the term for all the activities, mental and physical, that go into creating what eventually becomes a finished piece of work. Even for experienced writers the process is often messy, which is one reason that it can be difficult. Though we may get a sense of flow and orderliness from a published essay, we can safely assume that the writer had to work hard to achieve those qualities. Most good writers revise and rewrite several times as their ideas take shape.

No single writing process works for all writers in all situations. Even an individual writer may adapt his or her process to the task at hand. You may use one process for writing a personal essay for a blog and a different process for a formal research report. Still, most writers experience writing as a **recursive** process in which the following stages overlap and influence one another:

- **Analyzing the writing situation:** considering the audience, purpose, subject, genre (type of writing), and other elements of a project.
- **Discovering and planning:** posing a question, gathering information, focusing on a central theme, and organizing material.
- **Drafting:** answering the question and expressing and connecting ideas.
- **Revising:** reconsidering the central question or idea, rethinking and improving content and organization, developing supporting ideas more thoroughly, and deleting unnecessary or tangential material.
- **Editing:** improving sentences and checking grammar, punctuation, word choice, and presentation.

Figure 1.1 The writing process



Exercise 1.1 Starting a writing journal

Think about successful writing experiences you have had. Then think about contrasting experiences, where you felt stressed or challenged by a writing task. What do these experiences reveal to you about writing, particularly your successes and problems with it? Consider the following questions:

Why are some writing tasks easier than others?
What stages of the writing process are you good at? Which stages challenge you? Why?
Do you have trouble finding ideas or expressing them?
Do you worry about grammar and spelling?
Do your readers usually understand what you mean?
Do you like to experiment with language?

Record your thoughts as part of a continuing journal (or blog) that tracks your experiences as a writer. As you complete writing assignments, keep adding to the journal, noting especially which strategies seem most helpful to you. Your aim is to reflect on your writing so that you can develop a dependable, repeatable writing process that works for you.

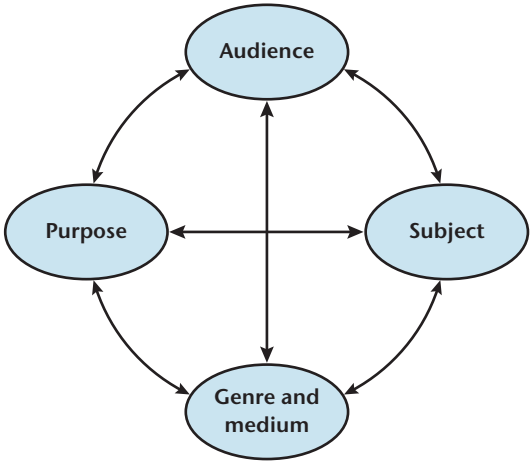
1.2 The Writing Situation

1.2 Analyze the writing situation.

Writing never happens in a vacuum. As a writer, you compose a project in response to some situation. For example, you may be asked to write a statement of purpose as part of an application to a college or degree program. You may need to write a cover letter to include with a résumé when you apply for a job. Or you may be assigned to write a lab report in a chemistry class. In each case, your writing responds to the needs of a specific **writing situation** (sometimes also called the **rhetorical situation**), and learning how to analyze a writing situation is an important skill.

dev 1.2

Figure 1.2 The elements of the writing situation



The main elements of a writing situation include the **audience** (who are you writing for?), your **purpose** (why are you writing?), your **subject** (what are you writing about?), and the **genre and medium** (what form will your writing take?). To analyze a writing situation, take some time to ask questions about your audience, purpose, subject, genre, and medium, and consider how these elements interact with each other in the context of the situation as a whole.

Audience

- **Who will read your writing?** Will your readers be interested in your writing or not? If not, how can you make your writing interesting to them?
- **What do your readers already know and think about your subject?** What characteristics—such as education or political views—might influence their response?
- **Where and when will your audience encounter your writing?** Busy professionals in a workplace setting may have very different needs as readers than, say, a friend reading a personal narrative for enjoyment.
- **How should you project yourself in your writing?** What role should you play in relation to your readers, and what information should you provide? How informal or formal should your writing be?
- **What do you want readers to do or think after they read your writing?** How will you know if your writing has successfully connected with your audience?

Purpose

- **What aim does your assignment specify?** For instance, does it ask you to explain a process or argue a position?

- **Why are you writing?** What do you need to achieve in your writing? Are you writing to fulfill an assignment, to express yourself, to provide information, to argue a case, or to propose a solution?
- **What do you want your work to accomplish?** What effect do you intend it to have on readers?

Subject

- **What does your writing assignment require you to write about?** If you don't have a specific assignment, what subjects might be appropriate for the situation?
- **What interests you about the subject?** What do you already know about it? What questions do you have about it?
- **What kinds of evidence will best suit your subject, purpose, audience, and genre?** What combination of facts, examples, and expert opinions will support your ideas?
- **Does your assignment require research?** Will you need to consult sources or conduct interviews, surveys, or experiments?
- **Even if research is not required, what information do you need to develop your subject?** How will you obtain it?

Genre and medium

- **What genre, or type of writing, does the assignment call for?** Are you to write an analysis, a report, a proposal, or some other type? Or are you free to choose a genre in which to write?
- **What are the conventions of the genre you are using?** For example, readers might expect a claim supported by evidence, a solution to a defined problem, clear description, or easy-to-find information.
- **What medium will you use to present your writing?** Will you deliver it on paper, online, or orally? What does the presentation method require in terms of preparation time, special skills, and use of technology?
- **What are the basic requirements of the writing task?** Consider requirements for length, deadline, subject, purpose, audience, and genre. What leeway do you have?
- **What format or method of presentation does the assignment specify or imply?** Does the situation call for a written essay, or can you use a slide presentation or other visual media?
- **How might you use illustrations, video, and other media to achieve your purpose?**
- **What documentation style should you use to cite your sources?**

Exercise 1.2 Analyzing a writing situation

The following writing project was assigned in a course in writing for the workplace. What does the assignment specify about the elements of the writing situation? What does it imply? Given this assignment, how would you answer the preceding questions about the writing situation?

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1.3

Assignment: Write a short informative report. Your report should present an answer to this question: What types of writing do people in my field produce? Your audience for the report is other students in your field. Your report should cite at least three sources and include at least two visual elements (sample documents, photos, icons, charts, or other graphic elements). Your report can be delivered in one of three formats. You have the option of delivering a written memo report (two to three pages in length), a slide presentation (six to ten slides, with presenter notes to represent the "speaking script" you would use to deliver the report to a live audience), or an infographic.

1.3 Audience

1.3 Define and analyze your audience.

Your audience will often be specified or implied in a writing assignment. When you write an editorial for the student newspaper, your audience consists of other students at your school. When you write a report on a physics experiment, your audience consists of your physics instructor and perhaps your classmates. Considering the needs and expectations of your readers can help you form or focus a question about your subject, gather answers to the question, and ultimately decide what to say and how to say it.

1.3.1 Knowing what readers expect

As a reader yourself, you know what readers expect from writing:

- **Context:** a link between what they read and their own knowledge and experiences.
- **Predictability:** an understanding of the writer's purpose and how it is being achieved.
- **Information:** the specific facts, examples, and other details that make the subject clear, interesting, and convincing.
- **Respect:** a sense that the writer respects their values and beliefs, their backgrounds, and their intelligence.
- **Voice:** a sense that the writer is a real person whose thoughts and values are expressed in the writing.
- **Readability, clarity, and correctness:** writing that is organized, focused, and free of unnecessary stumbling blocks and mistakes.

For much academic and public writing, readers have definite needs and expectations. In other areas where the conventions of structure and presentation are less well defined, for example in blogs or personal essays, your choices are even more numerous. The following questions can help you define and analyze your audience in order to make more informed choices.

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1.3

Questions about audience

Identity and expectations

- **Who *are* my readers?**
- **What are my readers' expectations for the genre of my writing?** Do they expect features such as a particular organization and format, distinctive kinds of evidence, or a certain style of documenting sources?
- **What do I want readers to know or do after reading my work?** How should I make that clear to them?
- **How should I project myself to readers?** How formal or informal will they expect me to be? What role and tone should I assume?

Characteristics, knowledge, and attitudes

- **What characteristics of readers are relevant for my subject and purpose?** For instance:

  Age and sex
  Occupation: students, professional colleagues, etc.
  Social or economic role: subject-matter experts, voters, car buyers, potential employers, etc.
  Economic or educational background
  Ethnic background
  Political, religious, or moral beliefs and values
  Hobbies or activities

- **How will the characteristics of readers influence their attitudes toward my subject?**
- **What do readers already know and *not* know about my subject?** How much do I have to tell them? What aspects of my subject will be interesting and relevant to them?
- **How should I handle any specialized terms?** Will readers know them? If not, should I define them or avoid them?
- **What ideas, arguments, or information might surprise, excite, or offend readers?** How should I handle these points?
- **What misconceptions might readers have of my subject and/or my approach to it?** How can I dispel these misconceptions?

Uses and format

- **What will readers do with my writing?** Should I expect them to read every word from beginning to end, to scan for information, to look for conclusions? Can I help readers by providing a summary, headings, illustrations, or other aids?

1.3.2 Expressing your voice

Your sense of your audience will influence three key elements of what you write:

- **The specific information you use to gain and keep the attention of readers and to guide them to accept your conclusions.** This information

may consist of concrete details, facts, examples, or other evidence that makes your ideas clear, supports your assertions, and suits your readers' needs. The evidence may come from your experience or from outside sources.

- **The role you choose to play in relation to your readers.** Depending on your purpose and your attitude toward your topic, you will want readers to perceive you in a certain way. The possible roles are many and varied—for instance, scholar, storyteller, lecturer, guide, reporter, advocate, inspirer.
- **The tone you use. Tone** in writing is like tone of voice in speaking: words and sentence structures on the page convey some of the same information as pitch and volume in the voice. Depending on your aims and what you think your readers will expect and respond to, your tone may be formal or informal. The attitude you convey may be serious or light, forceful or calm, irritated or cheerful.

These three elements contribute to what's often called **voice**: your projection of yourself into the writing. Your voice conveys your sense of the world as it applies to the particular writing situation: this subject, this purpose, this audience. Voice can vary quite a bit from one writing situation to another, as the following memos illustrate. Both were written by a student who worked part-time in a small company and wanted to get the company to recycle paper. But the two memos address different readers.

To coworkers

Ever notice how much paper collects in your trash basket every day? Well, most of it can be recycled with little effort, I promise. Basically, all you need to do is set a bag or box near your desk and deposit wastepaper in it. I know, space is cramped in these little cubicles. But can't we all accept a little more crowding when the earth's at stake? . . .

Voice: a peer who is thoughtful, cheerful, and sympathetic

Information: how employees could handle recycling; no mention of costs

Role: colleague

Tone: informal, personal (*Ever notice; Well; you; I know, space is cramped*)

To management

In my four months here, I have observed that all of us throw out baskets of potentially recyclable paper every day. Considering the drain on our forest resources and the pressure on landfills that paper causes, we could make a valuable contribution to the environmental movement by helping to recycle the paper we use. At the company where I worked before, employees separate clean wastepaper from other trash at their desks. The maintenance staff collects trash in two receptacles, and the trash hauler (the same one we use here) makes separate pickups. I do not know what the hauler charges for handling recyclable material. . . .

Voice: a subordinate who is thoughtful, responsible, and serious

Information: specific reasons; view of company as a whole; reference to another company; problem of cost

Role: employee

Tone: formal, serious (*Considering the drain; forest resources; valuable contribution;* no *you*)

Exercise 1.3 Considering audience

Choose one of the following subjects and, for each audience specified, ask the questions about audience (above). Decide on four points you would make, the role you would assume, and the tone you would adopt for each audience. Then write a paragraph for each based on your decisions.

1. The effects of "study drugs" like Adderall: for college students and for parents of college students
2. Your opposition to a proposed law requiring adult bicyclists to wear helmets: for cyclists who oppose the law and for people who favor it
3. Why your neighbors should remove the wrecked truck from their front yard: for your neighbors and for your town zoning board

Exercise 1.4 Considering your past work: Writing for a specific audience

How did audience figure in a piece of writing you've done in the recent past—perhaps an essay for an application or a paper for a course? Who were your readers? How did your awareness of them influence your voice? At what point in the writing process did you find it most productive to consider your readers consciously?

Exercise 1.5 Analyzing the audience for your essay

Use the questions about audience (above) to determine as much as you can about the probable readers of your informative report (Exercise 1.2). What might be an appropriate voice for your writing? What specific information will your readers need? What role do you want to assume? What tone will best convey your attitude toward your topic?

1.4 Purpose

1.4 Define your purpose.

When you write, your **purpose** is your chief reason for communicating something about a topic to a particular audience. Purpose connects the specific situation in which you are working to the goal you hope to achieve. It is your answer to a potential reader's question, "So what?"

The general purposes for writing

- To *entertain* readers
- To *express* your feelings or ideas
- To *explain* something to readers (exposition)
- To *persuade* readers to accept or act on your opinion (argument)

1.4.1 Defining a general purpose

Your purpose may fall into one of four general categories: entertainment, self-expression, explanation, or persuasion. These purposes may overlap in a single piece of writing, but usually one predominates. The dominant purpose will influence your particular slant on your topic, the supporting details you choose, and even the words you use.

In college or public writing, by far the most common purposes are explanation and persuasion:

- **Writing that is mainly explanatory and informative is often called *exposition*** (from a Latin word meaning "to explain or set forth"). Using examples, facts, and other evidence, you present an idea about your subject so that readers understand it as you do. Almost any subject is suitable for exposition: how to pitch a knuckleball, why you want to major in business, the implications of a new discovery in genetics, the interpretation of a short story, the causes of an economic slump. Exposition is the kind of writing encountered most often in newspapers, magazines, and textbooks.
- **Writing that is primarily persuasive is often called *argument.*** Using examples, facts, and other evidence, you support your position on a debatable subject so that readers will at least consider your view and perhaps agree with it or act on it. A newspaper editorial favoring more bike lanes, a business proposal for a new hiring policy, a student paper recommending more foreign language courses or defending a theory about human psychological development—all these are arguments.

1.4.2 Defining a specific purpose

A writing assignment will often specify or imply both a general and a specific purpose. Say, for instance, that a psychology teacher assigns a review of the research on infants' perception of color. You know that the purpose is generally to explain and, more specifically, to summarize and analyze the established research on the subject. You want readers to understand the current state of the investigation into the subject. In addition, you want your instructor to see that you can competently read and write about others' work.

Here are more examples of specific purposes:

> To explain the methods and results of an engineering experiment so that readers understand and accept your conclusions
>
> To explain the reasons for a new policy on technology use in classrooms so that students understand why the guidelines are needed
>
> To persuade readers to support the college administration's plan for more required courses

With any writing assignment, try to define your specific purpose as soon as you have formed a question about your subject.

Don't worry if you feel uncertain of your purpose at the start. Sometimes you may not discover your purpose until you begin drafting, or you may find that your initial sense of purpose changes as you move through the writing process.

Exercise 1.6 Finding purpose in assignments

For each of the topics in Exercise 1.3, suggest a likely general purpose (entertainment, self-expression, explanation, persuasion) and try to define a specific purpose as well.

Exercise 1.7 Considering your past work: Defining a purpose

Look over two or three things you've written in the past year or so. What was your specific purpose in each one? How did the purpose influence your writing? Did you achieve your purpose?

Exercise 1.8 Defining a purpose for your essay

For your informative report, use your thinking so far about your subject (Exercise 1.2) to define a general and specific purpose for your writing.

1.5 Subject

1.5 Choose and narrow a subject.

For most college writing, you will write in response to an assignment. The assignment may specify your subject, or it may leave the choice to you. Whether the subject is assigned or not, it will probably need thought if it is to achieve these aims:

- **The subject should be suitable for the assignment.**
- **It should be neither too general nor too limited** for the length of the project and the deadline assigned.
- **It should be something that interests you and that you are willing to learn more about.**

1.5.1 Responding to a specific assignment

Many assignments will set boundaries for your subject. For instance, you might be asked to discuss what makes psychotherapy effective, to prepare a lab report on a physics experiment, or to analyze a character in a short story.

Such assignments may seem to leave little room for you to move around, but in fact you'll have several questions to answer:

- **What's wanted from you?** Writing assignments often contain words such as *discuss, describe, analyze, report, interpret, explain,*

define, argue, and *evaluate.* These words specify your approach to your subject, the kind of thinking expected, your general purpose, and even the form your writing should take.

- **For whom are you writing?** Many assignments will specify or imply your readers, but sometimes you will have to figure out for yourself who your audience is and what they expect from you.
- **What kind of research is required, if any?** Sometimes an assignment specifies the kinds of sources you are expected to consult, and you can use such information to choose your subject. (If you are unsure whether research is required, check with your instructor.)

1.5.2 Responding to a general assignment

Some assignments specify features such as length and amount of research, but they leave the choice of subject entirely to you. Others are somewhat more focused—for instance, "Respond to a reading assigned in this course" or "Discuss a proposal for solving a local social problem"—but still give you much leeway in choosing a particular reading or a particular proposal. To find your approach, consider your own experiences or interests:

- **What subject do you already know something about or have you been wondering about?** Athletic scholarships? Unemployment in your town?
- **Have you recently disagreed with someone over a substantial issue?** The change in relations between men and women? The cost of health insurance?
- **What have you read or seen lately?** A fascinating book? A violent or funny movie? An effective Web advertisement or television commercial?
- **What topic in the reading or class discussion for a course has intrigued you?** An economic issue such as taxes? A psychological problem such as depression?
- **What makes you especially happy or especially angry?** A volunteer activity? The behavior of your neighbors?
- **Which of your own or others' dislikes and preferences would you like to understand better?** The demand for hybrid cars? The decision to become a vegetarian?

Once you have a subject, you'll also need to answer the questions in the bulleted list on specific assignments.

1.5.3 Narrowing a subject to a question

Let's say you've decided to write about social media or about a character in a short story. You've got a subject, but it's still broad, worthy of a lengthy article if not a whole book. For a relatively brief paper, you'll need a narrow focus in order to provide the specific details that make writing significant and interesting—all within the required length and deadline.

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One helpful technique for narrowing a subject is to ask focused questions about it, seeking one that seems appropriate for your assignment and that promises to sustain your interest throughout the writing process. The following examples illustrate how questioning can scale down broad subjects to specific subjects that are limited and manageable:

Broad subjects	Specific subjects
Social media	What draws people to social media? How do sites like *Snapchat* or *Instagram* alter the ways people interact? What privacy protections should the sites provide for users?
Mrs. Mallard in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"	What changes does Mrs. Mallard undergo? Why does Mrs. Mallard respond as she does to news of her husband's death? What does the story's irony contribute to the character of Mrs. Mallard?
Lincoln's weaknesses as President	What was Lincoln's most significant error as commander-in-chief of the Union army? Why did Lincoln delay emancipating the slaves? Why did Lincoln have difficulties controlling his cabinet?
Federal aid to college students	Which students should be entitled to federal aid? How adequate are the kinds of federal aid available to college students? Why should the federal government aid college students?

As these examples illustrate, your questions should not lend themselves to yes-or-no answers but should require further thinking.

Here are some guidelines for posing questions:

- **Reread the assignment.** Consider what it tells you about purpose, audience, genre, sources, length, and deadline.
- **Pursue your interests.** If questions don't come easily, try freewriting or brainstorming or use a tree diagram.
- **Ask as many questions as you can think of.**
- **Test the question that seems most interesting and appropriate by roughly sketching out the main ideas.** Consider how many paragraphs or pages of specific facts, examples, and other details you would need to pin those ideas down. This thinking should give you at least a vague idea of how much work you'd have to do and how long the resulting paper might be.
- **Break a too-broad question down further, and repeat the previous step.**

Don't be discouraged if the perfect question does not come easily or early. You may find that you need to do some planning and writing, exploring different facets of the general subject and pursuing

your specific interests, before you hit on the best question. And the question you select may require further narrowing or may shift subtly or even dramatically as you move through the writing process.

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Exercise 1.9 Narrowing subjects

Following are some general writing assignments. Use the given information and your own interests to pose specific questions for three of these assignments.

1. For a writing course, consider how *YouTube* is altering the experience of popular culture. Length: three pages. Deadline: one week.
2. For a course in sociology, research and analyze the effects of a proposed immigration policy. Length: unspecified. Deadline: four weeks.
3. For a writing course, read and respond to an essay in a text you are using. Length: three pages. Deadline: two weeks.
4. For a government course, consider possible term limits on legislators. Length: five pages. Deadline: two weeks.
5. For a letter to the editor of the town newspaper, describe the effects of a proposed new power plant on your community. Length: two pages. Deadline: unspecified.

Exercise 1.10 Considering your past work: Choosing and narrowing a subject

Think of something you've recently written—perhaps an application essay, a business report, or a term paper. How did your subject evolve from beginning to end? In retrospect, was it appropriate for your writing situation? How, if at all, might it have been modified?

Exercise 1.11 Choosing and narrowing a subject for your essay

As the first step in developing a three- to four-page essay for the instructor and the other students in your writing course, choose a subject and narrow it. Use the guidelines in the previous section to come up with a question that is suitably interesting, appropriate, and specific.

1.6 Genre and Medium

1.6 Identify your genre and medium.

Writers use familiar **genres**, or types of writing, to express their ideas. A genre is a pattern or form that is commonly used by writers in a particular situation. For example, in college you will be asked to write in a wide range of genres such as analyses, lab reports, reviews, proposals, oral presentations, even blog posts. In a workplace setting,

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writing situations often call for genres like reports, memos, and proposals.

A genre is the conventional form that writing takes in a certain context. In academic writing, genre conventions help to further the aims of the disciplines; for instance, the features of a lab report emphasize the procedures, results, and conclusion that are important in scientific investigation. The conventions also help to improve communication because the writer knows what readers expect and readers can predict what they will encounter in the writing. Suppose your instructor assigns an argument essay and asks classmates to read one another's drafts. As you approach one paper titled "Animal Rights," you expect the essay to contain the conventional elements of argument: an introduction, a main claim or thesis about animal rights, paragraphs that develop that claim with evidence, and a conclusion. When the draft meets your expectations in these respects, you can settle into its substance. However, if instead of an argument you find a funny narrative about the writer's dog, your thwarted expectations will throw off your response. Searching for the argument, you might even miss the humor in the story.

When you receive a writing assignment, be sure to understand any requirements relating to genre:

- **Is a specific genre being assigned?** An assignment that asks you to write an analysis, an argument, or a report has specified the genre for you to use. In contrast, an assignment that asks you to write for the purpose of recruiting new members to a club leaves the choice of genre up to you—perhaps a flyer to post on campus, a brochure to hand out in the cafeteria, an e-mail message, or a *Facebook* post.
- **What are the conventions of the genre?** Your instructor and/or your textbook will probably outline the requirements for you. You can also learn about a genre by reading samples of it.
- **What flexibility do you have?** Within their conventions, most genres still allow room for your own approach and voice. Again, reading samples will show you much about your options.

Closely related to genre is the concept of **medium**. Medium refers to the technology or platform you might use to present a specific genre. For example, a proposal (genre) might be presented in the form of a written essay, a slide presentation, or an online video. Your choice of medium should be determined by the needs of the audience and by the other elements in the writing situation.

- **Is a medium being assigned?** Sometimes an assignment will specify that you deliver a project in a medium. You may be asked, for example, to deliver a proposal in the medium of a slide presentation.
- **What does your audience expect?** If your audience expects a formal written report, you may not want to deliver your project in

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the medium of a comic video. In other situations, your audience may welcome a more casual or innovative use of medium.

- **What flexibility do you have?** In some writing situations, you may have a choice of medium. You might decide, for example, that a process explanation showing nursing students how to insert an IV line would be better delivered as a video than as a detailed set of written instructions.

Exercise 1.12 Thinking about genre

Following is a list of writing genres in no particular order. You should be familiar with most of them even if you haven't studied or written in them.

personal essay	blog post
video presentation	memoir
oral report	written report
letter to the editor	slide presentation

For each of the following subject-audience pairs, suggest one of the above genres that might be appropriate and explain why you think its features would work.

1. Subject: your memories of learning to read. Audience: your writing class.
2. Subject: state laws against texting while driving. Audience: sixteen-year-olds.
3. Subject: a new cyberbullying policy on your campus. Audience: students on your campus.
4. Subject: the carbon footprint of dogs. Audience: people in your city.
5. Subject: results of a survey on dating behavior on your campus. Audience: a psychology class.

Exercise 1.13 Considering your past work: Analyzing genre

Look over two or three things you've recently written, such as an application essay, a report, an essay for class, or a letter of complaint. Can you identify the genre of each piece? How does what you wrote meet your readers' expectations for the genre? How does your writing change from one genre to another?

Exercise 1.14 Determining the medium for your project

Exercise 1.2 includes an assignment for an informative report with three options for the choice of medium (memo report, slide presentation, or infographic). Use your thinking so far about the audience, purpose, and subject of your report to make a decision about which medium you would choose. Why did you make that choice? What expectations do readers have for a project in that medium?

Chapter 2
Discovering and Shaping Ideas

Learning Objectives

2.1 Use invention strategies to discover ideas.
2.2 Develop a thesis.
2.3 Organize ideas.

2.1 Invention

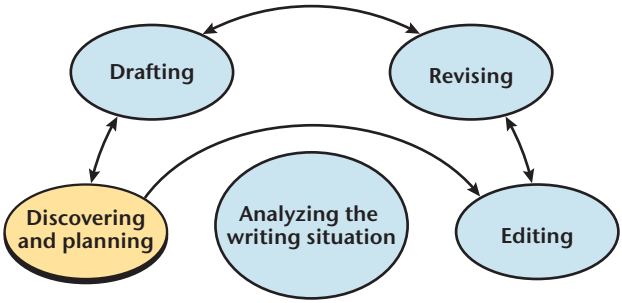
2.1 Use invention strategies to discover ideas.

Many college writing projects ask you to address a significant question related to your subject. For some projects, you may have little difficulty finding something substantial to say. But when you're stuck for ideas, you'll have to get your mind working to coax out serious and interesting thoughts.

The following pages describe strategies for discovering ideas. These methods are to be selected from, not followed in sequence: some may help you during early stages of the writing process, even before you're sure of your topic; others may help you later on; and one or two may not help at all. Give yourself ample time with the strategies, experimenting to discover which ones work best for you.

Whatever discovery techniques you use, do your work in writing, not just in your head. Your work will then be retrievable, and the act of writing will help you concentrate and lead you to fresh, sometimes surprising, insights.

Figure 2.1 Discovering and planning



Culture and language

The discovery process encouraged here rewards rapid writing without a lot of thinking beforehand about what you will write or how. If your first language is not standard American English, you may find it helpful initially to do this exploratory writing in your native language or dialect and then to translate the worthwhile material for use in your drafts. This process can be productive, but it is extra work. Eventually, you'll want to move to composing in standard American English.

2.1.1 Reading

Many assignments require you to respond to reading or to consult texts as sources for your writing. But even when reading is not required, it can help you locate or develop a subject by introducing you to new ideas or by expanding on what you already know.

For example, say you were writing in favor of amateur athletics, a subject to which you had given a lot of thought. You might be inclined to proceed entirely on your own, drawing on facts, examples, and opinions already in your head. But a little digging in sources might suggest new ideas. For instance, an article in *Sports Illustrated* could explain recent lawsuits about payment of college athletes, or a comment on a blog could suggest an argument in favor of amateurism that hadn't occurred to you. *Remember: whenever you use the information or ideas of others in your writing, you must acknowledge your sources in order to avoid the serious offense of plagiarism*.

Techniques for discovering a subject

- Read
- Keep a journal
- Observe your surroundings
- Freewrite
- Brainstorm
- Mind map
- Use the journalist's questions
- Use the patterns of development

Often you will be given an assignment that asks you to use a text or texts in your writing. In a composition course, Erica Vela's instructor distributed "Is *Google* Making Us Stupid?" in which Nicholas Carr analyzes the effects of the Internet on reading and the human mind. The instructor's assignment calls for a response to reading.

Instructor's assignment

Nicholas Carr poses a question: "Is *Google* Making Us Stupid?" Carr argues that the Internet is changing the way we read and process information. He describes his own experience as a reader using a colorful metaphor: "Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski." The Internet, in short, is turning us into superficial readers who lack the capacity for sustained, deep engagement. As a college student, how do you respond to Carr's argument? How does the Internet affect the way you read? How does the Internet also affect your learning process and your interactions with other people?

To respond to Carr's essay, Vela had to digest its argument. On first reading the essay, she had found it convincing because Carr's description matched her own experience: she noticed her own tendency to get distracted when reading online. After rereading the essay, however, Vela was not persuaded that the picture was as dark as Carr suggests. She began to think of many benefits that come from reading online, and she began to develop her own angle on the topic in her journal.

Student's journal entry

Carr makes some excellent points. The Internet is absolutely changing the way I read and the way that I process information. It seems like I used to be able to read entire books in a single sitting, but now I struggle to read more than twenty pages at a time. Plus, I can't concentrate very well if I'm logged on the Internet. I tend to jump from Web site to Web site, constantly stimulating my brain with new information. However, I do see a benefit—especially as a college student. I've never set foot in the university library. I can complete my research through the online database, accessing scholarship from across the globe. I've also taken multiple online classes where I've interacted with my professors and classmates through video calls and online collaboration. I appreciate all the benefits of the Internet, but sometimes I miss curling up with a good book, too.

When you read for ideas, you need to be active, probing the text and illustrations with your mind, nurturing any sparks they ignite. Always write while you read, taking notes on content and—just as important—on what the content makes you *think*.

2.1.2 Keeping a journal

A **journal** is a place to record your responses, thoughts, and observations about what you read, see, hear, or experience. It can also be a good source of ideas for writing. It is a kind of diary, but one more concerned with ideas than with day-to-day events. *Journal* comes from the Latin for "daily," and many journal keepers do write faithfully every day; others make entries less regularly, when the mood strikes or an insight occurs or they have a problem to work out.

Advantages of a journal

When you write in a journal, you are writing to yourself. That means you don't have to worry about main ideas, organization, correct

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grammar and spelling, or any of the other requirements of writing for others. You can work out your ideas and feelings without the pressure of an audience "out there" who will evaluate your thinking and expression. The freedom and flexibility of a journal can be liberating. Like many others, you may find writing easier, more fun, and more rewarding than you thought possible.

You can keep a journal either on paper (such as a notebook) or on a computer. If you write in the journal every day, or almost, even just for a few minutes, the routine will loosen up your writing muscles and improve your confidence. Indeed, journal keepers often become dependent on the process for the writing practice it gives them, the concentrated thought it encourages, and the connection it fosters between personal, private experience and public information and events.

Culture and language

A journal can be especially helpful if your first language is not standard American English. You can practice writing to improve your fluency, try out sentence patterns, and experiment with vocabulary words. Equally important, you can experiment with applying what you know from experience to what you read and observe.

Uses of a journal

The writing you produce in your journal will help you learn and grow. Even the personal and seemingly nonacademic entries can supply ideas when you are seeking a subject to write about or you are developing an essay.

In 2.1.1, you read Erica Vela's journal response to an essay. The next two student samples give a taste of journal writing for different purposes. In the first, Chris Eller tries to work out a personal problem about communication with his spouse.

Student's journal entry

It seems like Elizabeth and I fight all the time. Marriage is more difficult than I expected. We argue about everything—money, housework, our extended families. We even argue about breakfast cereal. I don't doubt our relationship; we've just lost the ability to communicate with each other. How do we stop arguing and start talking again?

In the second example, Mandy Powers ponders something she learned from her rhetoric textbook.

Student's journal entry

How do modern-day commercials use Aristotle's rhetorical appeals? Advertisers want to persuade viewers to take an action by developing an argument. In these shortened arguments, advertisers tend to focus on quick appeals to ethics (*ethos*) or emotions (*pathos*) and avoid longer appeals to logic (*logos*) as evidenced by countless celebrity endorsements and images of animals in danger.

Two uses of a journal are discussed in other chapters: a reading journal, in which you think critically (in writing) about what you read; and a research journal, in which you record your activities and ideas while you pursue a research project. But you can use a journal for other purposes as well.

- **Prepare for or respond to a course you're taking** by puzzling over a reading or a class discussion.
- **Build ideas for specific writing assignments.**
- **Sketch possible designs for a Web composition.**
- **Explore your reactions to events, trends, or the media.**
- **Write about your own history:** an event in your family's past, a troubling incident in your life, a change you've seen.
- **Analyze a relationship that disturbs you.**
- **Practice various forms or styles of writing**—for instance, poems or songs, reviews of movies, or reports for TV news.

2.1.3 Observing your surroundings

Sometimes you can find a good subject or good ideas by looking around you, not in the half-conscious way most of us move from place to place in our daily lives but deliberately, all senses alert. On a bus, for instance, are there certain types of passengers? What seems to be on the driver's mind? On campus, which buildings stand out? Do bicyclists and pedestrians coexist peacefully?

To get the most from observation, you should have a device or a notepad and pen handy for taking notes and making sketches. Take photos with your phone to remind yourself of details later. (When observing or photographing people, keep some distance, take photographs quickly, and avoid staring. Otherwise your subjects will feel uneasy.) Back at your desk, study your notes, sketches, or photographs for oddities or patterns that you'd like to explore further.

In some academic writing, you'll be expected to formalize observation and perhaps combine it with surveys, interviews, or experiments.

2.1.4 Freewriting

Writing into a subject

Many writers find subjects or discover ideas by **freewriting**: writing without stopping for a certain amount of time (five or ten minutes) or to a certain length (one page). The goal of freewriting is to generate ideas and information from *within* yourself by going around the self-critical part of your mind. The physical act of freewriting may give you access to ideas you were unaware of. You let words themselves suggest other words. *What* you write is not important; that you *keep* writing is. Don't stop, even if that means repeating the same words until new words come. Don't go back to reread, don't censor ideas that seem off-track or repetitious, and above all don't stop to edit: grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, and spelling are irrelevant at this stage.

The following freewriting by Daquan Cook drew him into the subject of funding for college athletics.

Student's freewriting

Seems like some colleges and universities value athletics more than the academics. Our football coach makes more than the chancellor—he's the highest paid public employee in the state! Is his job truly worth that much? Why? Out of balance. Maybe too much money in college sports like football and basketball? Ads? TV? March Madness is huge. Madness everywhere in college sports. Schools build stadiums, arenas, and facilities—academic programs get cut at the same time. Time for colleges and universities to rethink their priorities—are they focused on educating students or giving alumni something to do on Saturday afternoons in the fall? How to push for change?

If you can dim your screen, try **invisible writing** to keep moving forward while freewriting. As you type on a dark screen, the computer will record what you type but keep it from you and thus prevent you from tinkering with your prose. Invisible writing may feel uncomfortable at first, but it can free your mind and allow very creative results.

Culture and language

Invisible writing can be especially helpful if you are uneasy writing in standard English and you tend to worry about errors while writing. The blank computer screen leaves you no choice but to explore ideas without paying attention to the way you are expressing them. If you choose to write with the monitor on, concentrate on *what* you want to say, not *how* you are saying it.

Focused freewriting

Focused freewriting is more concentrated: you start with your question about your subject and answer it without stopping for, say, fifteen minutes or one full page. As in all freewriting, you push to bypass mental blocks and self-consciousness, not debating what to say or editing what you've written. With focused freewriting, though, you let the physical act of writing take you into and around your subject.

An example of focused freewriting can be found in Erica Vela's journal response to Nicholas Carr's "Is *Google* Making Us Stupid?" (2.1.1). Because she already had an idea about Carr's essay, Vela was able to start there and expand on the idea.

2.1.5 Brainstorming

In **brainstorming**, you focus intently on your subject for a fixed amount of time (ten or fifteen minutes), pushing yourself to list every idea and detail that comes to mind. Like freewriting, brainstorming requires turning off your internal editor so that you keep moving ahead instead of going back over what you have already

written to correct it. It makes no difference whether the ideas and details are expressed in phrases or complete sentences. It makes no difference if they seem silly or irrelevant. Just keep pushing. If you are working on a computer, the technique of invisible writing, described above, can help you move forward.

Following is an example of brainstorming by a student, Joyanna Logan. She was responding to the question *What can a summer internship offer?*

Student's brainstorming

summer internships offer—
- real-world experience
  - learned how to communicate in the workplace after years of communicating as an academic
  - allowed (forced?) to work collaboratively with different teams
  - realized that the work in this field is difficult with little to no reward
  - decided to change majors—this field is absolutely not for me!
- opportunity to build a professional network
  - Mrs. Queen: quiet but extremely intelligent; offered a lot of wisdom during my crisis of major
  - Mr. Jones: mean and nasty; do not want in network—only supervisors interacted with him on purpose
- résumé entry
  - not in my field since major change, but still shows evidence of abilities
  - gained skills in résumé writing and job interviews
  - maybe use Mrs. Q as a reference?
- possible job offer post-graduation
  - would not willingly work in that office . . . maybe as a very last resort with no other options
- confidence builder
  - applied skills learned at university to workplace
  - challenged to meet and interact with new people—can be difficult as an introvert

When you have exhausted your ideas on a topic, you can edit and shape the list into a preliminary outline of your paper.

2.1.6 Mind mapping

Like freewriting and list making, the technique of **mind mapping** uses free association to produce rapid, unedited work. But it also emphasizes the *relationships* between ideas by combining writing and nonlinear drawing. Start with your topic at a center point and then radiate outward with ideas. Pursue related ideas in a branching structure until you have exhausted that line of thinking. Then do the same with other ideas, staying open to connections, continuously branching out or drawing arrows.

Figure 2.2 shows how Daquan Cook used the technique for ten minutes to expand on the topic of money in college football, an idea he developed through freewriting (2.1.4).

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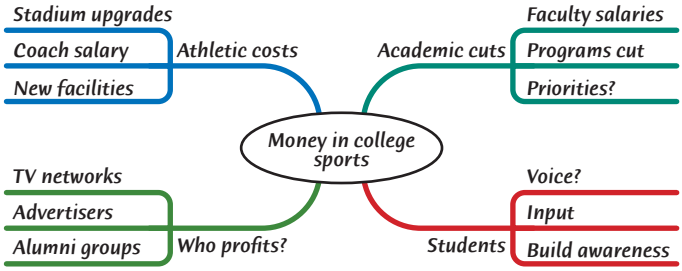
Figure 2.2 Mind mapping



2.1.7 Using the journalist's questions

Asking yourself a set of questions about your subject—and writing out the answers—can help you look at the subject objectively and see fresh possibilities in it. Asking questions can also provide some structure to the development of ideas.

A journalist with a story to report poses this set of questions:

- **Who was involved?**
- **What happened, and what were the results?**
- **When did it happen?**
- **Where did it happen?**
- **Why did it happen?**
- **How did it happen?**

These questions can also be useful in probing an essay subject, especially if you are telling a story or examining causes and effects.

2.1.8 Using the patterns of development

The **patterns of development**—such as narration, definition, and classification—are ways we think about and understand a vast range of subjects, from our own daily experiences to the most complex scientific theories. They also serve as strategies and patterns for writing about these subjects, and can be used to organize paragraphs.

To see your subject from many angles and discover ideas about it, you can ask the following questions based on the patterns of development. Not all these questions will be productive, but at least a few should suggest possibilities.

How did it happen?

In **narration** you develop the subject as a story, with important events usually arranged chronologically (as they occurred in time): for instance, an exciting basketball game or the steps leading to a war.

How does it look, sound, feel, smell, taste?

In **description** you use sensory details to give a clear impression of a person, place, thing, or feeling, such as a species of animal, a machine, a friend, a building, or an experience.

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What are examples of it or reasons for it?

The pattern of **illustration** suggests development with one or more examples of the subject (one student's experience as a campaign volunteer, say, or three states' laws against Internet gambling) or with the reasons for believing or doing something (three reasons for majoring in English, four reasons for increasing federal aid to college students).

What is it? What does it encompass, and what does it exclude?

These questions lead to **definition**: specifying what the subject is and what it is not in order to give a precise sense of its meaning. Abstract terms—such as *justice, friendship,* and *art*—especially need defining.

What are its parts or characteristics?

Using the pattern of **division** or **analysis**, you separate a subject such as a bicycle or a short story into its elements and examine the relationships among elements.

What groups or categories can it be sorted into?

Classification involves separating a large group (such as cars) into smaller groups (conventional gas, hybrid, plug-in electric) based on the characteristics of the individual items (the kinds of engines). Another example: academic, business, personal, literary, and other types of writing.

How is it like, or different from, other things?

With **comparison and contrast** you point out the similarities and differences between ideas, objects, people, places, and so on: the differences between two similar computer systems, for instance, or the similarities between two opposing political candidates.

Is it comparable to something that is in a different class but more familiar to readers?

This question leads to **analogy**, an extended comparison of unlike subjects. Analogy is often used to explain a topic that may be unfamiliar to readers (for instance, the relationships of atoms in a molecule) by reference to a familiar topic (two people dancing close together).

Why did it happen, or what results did it have?

With **cause-and-effect analysis**, you explain why something happened or what its consequences were or will be, or both: the causes of cerebral palsy, the effects of a Supreme Court decision, the causes and effects of a gradual change in the climate.

How do you do it, or how does it work?

In **process analysis**, you explain how the subject happens (how a plant grows, how a robot works) or how to accomplish it (how to write an essay).

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Exercise 2.1 Considering your past work: Discovering ideas

In the past how have you generated ideas for writing? Have you used any of the techniques described above? Have you found the process especially enjoyable or difficult? If some writing tasks were easier than others, what do you think made the difference?

Exercise 2.2 Keeping a journal

If you haven't already started a journal, try to do so now. Every day for at least a week, write for at least fifteen minutes about anything on your mind. At the end of the week, write about your experience. What did you like about journal writing? What didn't you like? What did you learn about yourself or the world from the writing? How can you use this knowledge?

Exercise 2.3 Using freewriting, brainstorming, or mind mapping

If you haven't tried any of them before, experiment with freewriting, brainstorming, or mind mapping. Continue with the subject you selected in Exercise 1.11, or begin with a new subject. Write or map for at least ten minutes without stopping to reread and edit. When you finish your experiment, examine what you have written for ideas and relationships that could help you develop the subject. What do you think of the technique you tried? Did you have any difficulties with it? Did it help you loosen up and generate ideas?

Exercise 2.4 Sending an online query

When you have spent some time developing your subject, consider any doubts you may have or any information you still need. Send a message to your classmates posing your questions and asking for their advice and insights.

Exercise 2.5 Developing your subject

Use at least two of the discovery strategies discussed above to develop a topic. (Later exercises for your essay-in-progress will be based on the ideas you generate in this exercise.)

2.2 Thesis

2.2 Develop a thesis.

Your readers will expect your essay to be focused on a central idea, or **thesis**, to which all the essay's paragraphs, all its general statements and specific information, relate. The thesis is the controlling

idea, the main point, the conclusion you draw from your evidence. In answering your question about your subject, the thesis is the intellectual position you are taking.

Often the thesis is expressed in a one- or two-sentence **thesis statement** toward the beginning of an essay. As an expression of the thesis, the thesis statement serves five important functions.

Functions of the thesis statement

- **The thesis statement narrows your subject to a single, central idea.**
- **It claims something specific and significant about your subject.**
- **It conveys your purpose for writing.**
- **It establishes your voice and stance toward your readers.**
- **It previews the arrangement of ideas in your essay.** (Not all thesis statements work as a preview, but many do.)

2.2.1 Starting with a thesis question

A thesis statement probably will not leap fully formed into your head. Many writers begin the process of developing a thesis by turning the assignment into a **thesis question**. If you used questions to narrow your subject (2.1.7), the thesis question continues this approach but with a sharper focus. A thesis question can help you figure out your position, organize your ideas, start drafting, and stay on track.

Consider again Erica Vela's assignment:

> As a college student, how do you respond to Carr's argument? How does the Internet affect the way you read? How does the Internet also affect your learning process and your interactions with other people?

Responding to the assignment, Vela first rephrased it as two questions:

> To what extent do I agree or disagree with Carr's argument that the Internet is changing the way we read and process information?
>
> How have my learning process and personal interactions changed?

Then Vela reread Carr's essay to clarify the disagreement she first expressed in her journal writing and to begin applying this response to her own experiences as an online reader and student. The result was a single question that would guide her thinking:

> How does my positive educational experience counter Carr's argument that the Internet is negatively changing the way that we process information?

2.2.2 Moving from thesis question to thesis statement

Drafting a thesis statement can occur at almost any time in the writing process. Some instructors suggest that students develop a thesis

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statement when they have a good stock of ideas, to give a definite sense of direction. Other instructors suggest that students work with their thesis question at least through drafting, to keep their options open. And no matter when it's drafted, a thesis statement can change during the writing process, as the writer discovers ideas and expresses them in sentences.

Erica Vela chose to try writing her thesis statement before drafting. Working from her thesis question, she wrote a sentence that named a topic and made a claim about it:

> The ability to shrink the globe and bring information and education to my fingertips proves that Nicholas Carr's reservations about the Internet are shortsighted.

Vela's topic is the influence of the Internet on reading and learning, and her claim is that Carr's argument is too pessimistic. Although Vela later revised her thesis statement, this draft statement gave her direction, and she used it in the first draft of her paper.

Following are more examples of thesis questions and answering thesis statements. Each statement consists of a topic and a claim. Notice how each statement also expresses purpose. Statements 1–3 are **explanatory**: the writers mainly want to explain something to readers, such as the benefits of military service. Statements 4–6 are **argumentative**: the authors mainly want to convince readers of something, such as the need to outlaw drivers' use of cell phones. Most of the thesis statements you write in college papers will be either explanatory or argumentative.

Thesis question	Explanatory thesis statement
1. What are the advantages of serving in the US military?	Military service teaches teamwork, discipline, and job-related skills that transfer well to civilian life. [**Topic:** military service. **Claim:** teaches skills that transfer to civilian life.]
2. Why did Abraham Lincoln delay in emancipating the slaves?	Lincoln delayed emancipating any slaves until 1863 because his primary goal was to restore and preserve the Union, with or without slavery. [**Topic**: Lincoln's delay. **Claim**: was caused by his goal of preserving the Union.]
3. What steps can prevent juvenile crime?	Juveniles can be diverted from crime by active learning programs, full-time sports, frequent contact with positive role models, and intervention by consistent mentors. [**Topic:** juvenile crime. **Claim:** can be prevented in four ways.]

Thesis question	Argumentative thesis statement
4. Why should drivers' use of cell phones be banned?	Drivers' use of cell phones should be outlawed because people who talk and drive at the same time cause accidents. [**Topic**: drivers' use of cell phones. **Claim:** should be outlawed because it causes accidents.]
5. Which college students should be entitled to federal aid?	As an investment in its own economy, the federal government should provide a tuition grant to any college student who qualifies academically. [**Topic:** federal aid. **Claim:** should be provided to any college student who qualifies academically.]
6. Why should strip-mining be controlled?	Strip-mining should be tightly controlled in this region to reduce its pollution of water resources, its destruction of the land, and its devastating effects on people's lives. [**Topic:** strip-mining. **Claim:** should be tightly controlled for three reasons.]

Culture and language

In some cultures it is considered rude or unnecessary for a writer to state his or her main idea outright or to state it near the beginning. When writing in American schools or workplaces, you can assume that your readers expect a clear and early idea of what you think.

2.2.3 Using the thesis statement to preview organization

You can write a thesis statement that suggests the organization of your essay. Readers often appreciate such a preview, and students often prefer it because it helps them organize their main points and keep on track during drafting. Several statements in the preceding section preview the organization:

Thesis statement	Organization of essay
Military service teaches teamwork, discipline, and job-related skills that transfer well to civilian life.	Three aspects of military service that transfer well to civilian life.
Juveniles can be diverted from crime by active learning programs, full-time sports, frequent contact with positive role models, and intervention by consistent mentors.	Four ways to reduce juvenile crime.

Thesis statement	Organization of essay
Strip-mining should be tightly controlled in this region to reduce its pollution of water resources, its destruction of the land, and its devastating effects on people's lives.	Three reasons for controlling strip-mining.

2.2.4 Revising a thesis statement

You may have to write and rewrite a thesis statement before you come to a conclusion about your position.

Focusing the claim

Erica Vela used her draft thesis statement in the first draft of her paper, but it didn't work well at that stage. She saw that it put too little emphasis on her actual topic (*the benefits of online reading*) and overstated her disagreement with Carr (*proves . . . is shortsighted*). In addition, a peer reviewer's comment showed Vela that her claim wasn't specific: Carrs's advice is *too shortsighted* for what? In her first revision, Vela tried to emphasize her intended subject:

> Online learning opportunities

Then she worked on her claim:

> . . . show that the Internet provides a benefit of sharing information across the globe.

This statement clarified the claim (*provides a benefit . . .*) and said why the subject was significant (*. . . sharing information across the globe*). However, Vela had dropped her own experience with online education, which was a key point in her response to Carr's essay. Vela tried again, adding her experience:

> My experience of online education shows that the Internet provides opportunities for learning and sharing information across the globe.

For her final revision, Vela responded to another peer reviewer's suggestion that she state her disagreement with Carr more clearly:

> My experience of online education offers a benefit that Nicholas Carr overlooks: the Internet provides more opportunities for learning in areas where there are no well-stocked libraries or centers of higher education while offering more ways to access information from across the globe.

Considering audience

Often you must deliberately consider your audience as you draft a thesis statement. One student, Ryan Jones, was writing an argument for more diversity in student organizations. He arrived fairly easily at his initial claim:

> We have a diverse student body, and they need student organizations that support them.

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However, to persuade school administrators to take action, Jones realized that he needed to focus on them as his audience and to strengthen his voice:

> By providing many diverse student organizations and initiatives, the university offers additional support to these students, increasing enrollment and retention through graduation and reducing attrition.

Testing the thesis statement

As you draft and revise your thesis statement over the course of the writing process, test it by asking the questions in the following box.

Checklist for revising the thesis statement

- How well does the **subject** of your statement capture the subject of your writing?
- What **claim** does your statement make about your subject?
- What is the **significance** of the claim? How does it answer "So what?" and convey your purpose?
- How can the claim be **limited** or made more **specific**? Does it state a single idea and clarify the boundaries of the idea?
- How **unified** is the statement? How does each word and phrase contribute to a single idea?
- How well does the statement **preview the organization** of your writing?

Here are other examples of thesis statements revised to meet these requirements:

Original	Revised
Cell phones can be convenient, but they can also be dangerous. [Not unified: how do the two parts of the sentence relate?]	The convenience of cell phones does not justify the risks of driving while talking or texting.
This new product brought in over $300,000 last year. [A statement of fact, not a claim about the product: what is significant about the product's success?]	This new product succeeded because of its innovative marketing campaign, including widespread press coverage, in-store entertainment, and a consumer newsletter.
People should not go on fad diets. [A vague statement that needs limiting with one or more reasons: what's wrong with fad diets?]	Fad diets can be dangerous when they deprive the body of essential nutrients or rely excessively on potentially harmful foods.
Televised sports are different from live sports. [A general statement: how are they different, and why is the difference significant?]	Although television cannot transmit all the excitement of a live game, its closeups and slow-motion replays reveal much about the players and the strategy of the game.

Original	Revised
Television viewing can reduce loneliness, cause laughter, and teach children. [Previews organization: what is the writer's attitude toward the subject?]	Despite its many faults, television has at least one strong virtue: it provides replacement voices that can ease loneliness, spark healthful laughter, and even educate young children.

You may sometimes need more than one sentence for your thesis statement, particularly if it requires some buildup:

> Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits that interfere with clear thinking. Getting rid of these habits is a first step to political regeneration. —Adapted from George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

Exercise 2.6 Evaluating thesis statements

Evaluate the following thesis statements, considering whether each one makes a claim that is sufficiently significant, specific, and unified. Rewrite the statements as necessary to meet these goals.

1. Aggression usually leads to violence, injury, and even death, and we should use it constructively.
2. The religion of Islam is widely misunderstood in the United States.
3. Manners are a kind of social glue.
4. One episode of a radio talk show amply illustrates both the appeal of such shows and their silliness.
5. The poem is about motherhood.

Exercise 2.7 Considering your past work: Developing a thesis

Have you been aware in the past of focusing your essays on a central idea, or thesis? Have you found it more efficient to try to pin down your idea early or to let it evolve during drafting? To what extent has a thesis helped or hindered you in shaping your draft?

Exercise 2.8 Drafting and revising your own thesis statement

Continuing from Exercise 2.5, write a thesis statement for your essay-in-progress. As much as possible at this point, your statement should be significant, specific, and unified, and it should convey your attitude toward your subject.

2.3 Organization

2.3 Organize ideas.

An effective essay has a recognizable shape—an arrangement of parts that guides readers, helping them see how ideas and details relate to

each other and contribute to the whole. You may sometimes let an effective organization emerge over one or more drafts. But many writers find that organizing ideas to some extent before drafting can provide a helpful sense of direction. If you feel uncertain about the course your essay should follow or have a complicated topic with many parts, devising a shape for your material can clarify your options.

Before you begin organizing your material, look over all the writing you've done so far—freewriting, notes from reading—and pull together a master list of all the ideas and details that you think you might want to include.

2.3.1 Distinguishing the general and the specific

To organize material for an essay, you need to distinguish general and specific ideas and see the relationships between ideas. **General** and **specific** refer to the number of instances or objects included in a group signified by a word. The "ladder" below illustrates a general-to-specific hierarchy.

Most general
- life form
- plant
- flowering plant
- rose
- American Beauty rose
- Uncle Dan's prize-winning American Beauty rose

Most specific

Here are some tips for arranging the ideas in your preliminary writing:

- **Underline, boldface, or circle the most general ideas.** These are the ideas that offer the main support for your thesis statement. They will be more general than the evidence that supports them.
- **Make connections between each general idea and the more specific details that support it.** On paper, write each general idea down with space beneath it, and add specific information in the appropriate spaces. On a computer, rearrange supporting information under more general points. You can use the Comment function to add notes about connections.
- **Respect the meanings of ideas.** Think through the implications of ideas as you sort them. Otherwise, your hierarchies could become jumbled, with *rose,* for instance, illogically subordinated to *animal,* or *life form* somehow subordinated to *rose*.
- **Remove information that doesn't fit.** If you worry about losing deleted information, transfer the notes to a separate sheet of paper or word-processing file.
- **Fill holes where support seems skimpy.** If you recognize a hole but don't know what to fill it with, try using a discovery technique such as freewriting or drawing, or go back to your research sources.

- **Experiment with various arrangements of general ideas and supporting information.** Seek an order that presents your material clearly and logically. On paper, you can cut the master list apart and paste or tape each general idea and its support on a separate piece of paper. Then try different orders for the pages. On a computer, save the master list in a new file before you move blocks of text.

2.3.2 Choosing an organizing tool

Some writers view outlines as constraints, but they need not be dull or confining. There are different kinds of outlines, some more flexible than others. All of them can enlarge and clarify your thinking, showing you patterns of general and specific, suggesting proportions, and highlighting gaps or overlaps in coverage.

Many writers use outlines not only before but also after drafting—to check the underlying structure of the draft when revising. No matter when it's made, though, an outline can be changed to reflect changes in your thinking. View any outline you make as a tentative sketch, not as a fixed diagram.

A scratch or informal outline

For many essays, especially those with a simple structure, a basic list of ideas and their support will provide adequate direction for your writing.

A **scratch outline** lists the key points of the paper in the order they will be covered. Here are Erica Vela's thesis statement and scratch outline for her essay on reading and learning online:

Thesis statement

My experience of online education offers a benefit that Nicholas Carr overlooks: the Internet provides more opportunities for learning in areas where there are no well-stocked libraries or centers of higher education while offering more ways to access information from across the globe.

Scratch outline

Changes in how we process information
- Carr's reservations
- My experiences

My educational experience
- Long-distance research
- Online student
- Personal interactions

Vela put more into this outline than its simplicity might imply, not only working out an order for her ideas but also sketching their implications.

An **informal outline** is usually more detailed than a scratch outline, including key general points as well as the specific evidence for them. A student's thesis statement and informal outline appear below.

Thesis statement

After Yumbo's gender discrimination scandal was exposed by *The New York Times*, the company struggled to recover their reputation with investors, employees, and consumers.

Informal outline

Background on Yumbo scandal
- Informal gender policies
- *New York Times* story and company press release

Outreach to investors
- Administrative changes
- Policy changes
- Letters

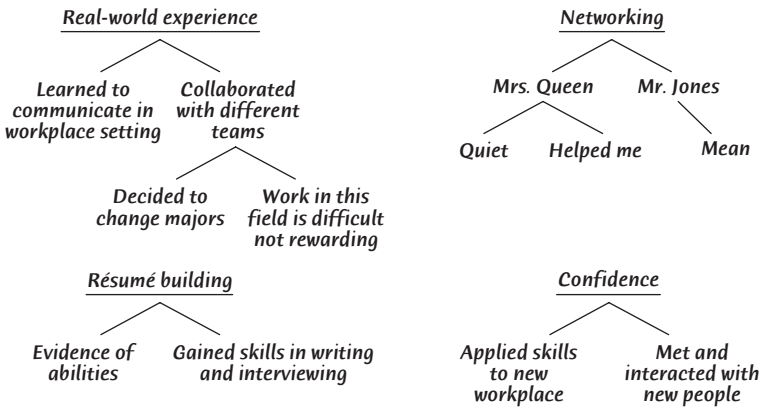
Outreach to employees
- Companywide cultural diversity training
- New employee handbooks
- Letters

Outreach to consumers
- Press conference
- Discounted products
- Advertising

A tree diagram

In a **tree diagram**, ideas and details branch out in increasing specificity. Like any outline, the diagram can expose gaps, overlaps, and digressions. But unlike more linear outlines, it can be supplemented and extended indefinitely, so it is easy to alter for new ideas and arrangements discovered during drafting and revision.

Figure 2.3 A sample tree diagram



Look at the thesis statement below and the corresponding tree diagram in Figure 2.3 by Joyanna Logan, based on her earlier brainstorming about a summer job.

Thesis statement

Spending eight weeks in an internship saved me thousands of dollars and gave me a head start on my career.

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A formal outline

For complex topics requiring complex arrangements of ideas and support, you may construct a **formal outline**. More rigidly arranged and more detailed than other outlines, a formal outline not only lays out main ideas and their support but also shows the relative importance of all the essay's elements and how they connect with one another.

Because of its structure, a formal outline can be an excellent tool for planning a revision. For instance, you might use an outline to check that your organization is logical. Erica Vela created the following formal outline to plan expansions and other changes that were suggested by readers of her first draft.

Thesis statement

My experience of online education offers a benefit that Nicholas Carr overlooks: the Internet provides more opportunities for learning in areas where there are no well-stocked libraries or centers of higher education while offering more ways to access information from across the globe.

Formal outline

I. Summary of Carr's article
   A. Reasons for concern
      1. Damaging attention and concentration
      2. Removing the human element in thinking process
   B. Contexts for Carr's article
      1. Carr's age and personal experience
      2. Transition from print to digital reading
II. My online learning experiences
   A. Rural access to information
      1. Online libraries and databases
         a. Distance from campus and public libraries
         b. Access to full text sources through online databases and archives
      2. Online stores
   B. Online post-secondary education
      1. Online classes
      2. Online interaction with professors/peers
III. Comparisons with other technological advancements
   A. Plato's *Phaedrus* and the development of writing
   B. The printing press and the development of the publishing industry

Vela's outline illustrates several principles of outlining that can help ensure completeness, balance, and clear relationships. (These principles largely depend on distinguishing between the general and the specific.)

- **All the outline's parts are systematically indented and labeled.** Roman numerals (I, II) label primary divisions of the essay,

followed by capital letters (A, B) for secondary divisions, Arabic numerals (1, 2) for principal supporting points, and small letters (a, b) for detailed supporting points, as needed. Each succeeding level contains more specific information than the one before it.

- **The outline divides the material into several groups.**
- **Within each part of the outline, distinct topics of equal generality appear in parallel headings.**
- **All subdivided headings in the outline break into at least two parts** because a topic cannot logically be divided into only one part. Any single subdivision should be matched with another subdivision, combined with the heading above it, or rechecked for its relevance to the heading above it.
- **All headings are expressed in parallel grammatical form.** Vela's is a **topic outline**, in which the headings consist of a noun with modifiers. In a **sentence outline**, all headings are expressed as full sentences.
- **The outline covers only the body of the essay, omitting the introduction and the conclusion.** The beginning and the ending are important in the essay itself, but you need not include them in the outline unless you are required to do so or you anticipate special problems with their organization.

Principles of the formal outline

- Labels and indentions indicate order and relative importance.
- Sections and subsections reflect logical relationships.
- Topics of equal generality appear in parallel headings.
- Each subdivision has at least two parts.
- Headings are expressed in parallel grammatical form.
- The introduction and conclusion may be omitted (though not, of course, from the essay).

2.3.3 Choosing a structure

Introduction, body, and conclusion

Structure is one of the features that distinguish genres of writing. For instance, a social-science research report generally has distinct sections in an established order: abstract, introduction, method, results, and discussion. Many academic genres, particularly those in the humanities, do not come with such a detailed plan, but they still share a basic shape:

- **The *introduction*, usually a paragraph or two, captures and focuses readers' attention.** At a minimum, it announces and clarifies the topic. Often it ends with the thesis statement, making a commitment that the rest of the work delivers on.

- **The *body* of the essay develops the thesis and thus fulfills the commitment of the introduction.** The paragraphs in the body develop the general points that support the thesis—the items that would be labeled with Roman numerals and capital letters in a formal outline. These general points are like the legs of a table supporting the top, the thesis. Each general point may take a paragraph or more, with the bulk of the content providing the details, examples, and reasons (the wood of each table leg) to support the general point and thus the thesis.
- **The *conclusion* gives readers something to take away from the writing**—a summary of ideas, for instance, or a suggested course of action.

Culture and language

If you are not used to reading and writing American academic prose, its pattern of introduction-body-conclusion and the particular organizations discussed next may seem unfamiliar. For instance, instead of introductions that focus quickly on the topic and thesis, you may be used to openings that establish personal connections with readers or that approach the thesis indirectly. And instead of body paragraphs that first emphasize general points and then support those points with specific evidence, you may be used to general statements without support (because writers can assume that readers will supply the evidence themselves) or to evidence without explanation (because writers can assume that readers will infer the general points themselves). When writing American academic prose, you need to take into account readers' expectations for directness and for the statement and support of general points.

Organizing the body by space or time

Two organizational schemes—spatial and chronological—grow naturally out of the topic.

Spatial

A **spatial organization** is especially appropriate for essays that describe a place, an object, or a person. Following the way people normally survey something, you move through space from a chosen starting point to other features of the subject. Describing a building, for instance, you might begin with an impression of the whole, then scan exterior details from top to bottom, and then describe interior spaces.

Chronological

A **chronological organization** reports events as they occurred in time, usually from first to last. This pattern, like spatial organization, corresponds to readers' own experiences and expectations. It suits an essay in which you do one of the following:

- **Recount a sequence of events,** such as a championship baseball game or the Battle of Gettysburg.

- **Explain a process from beginning to end**—for instance, how to run a marathon or how a tree converts carbon dioxide to oxygen.
- **Explain the causes that led to an effect**, such as the lobbying that helped to push a bill through the legislature. Alternatively, explain how a cause, such as a flood or a book, had multiple effects.
- **Tell a story about yourself or someone else.**
- **Provide background**—for instance, the making of a film you are analyzing or the procedure used in an experiment you are reporting.

Organizing the body for emphasis

Some organizational schemes must be imposed on ideas and information to aid readers' understanding and achieve a desired emphasis.

General to specific

The **general-to-specific scheme** is common in expository and argumentative essays that start with a general discussion of the main points and then proceed to specific examples, facts, or other evidence. The following thesis statement forecasts a general-to-specific organization:

> As an investment in its own economy, the United States should provide a tuition grant to any college student who qualifies academically.

The body of the essay might first elaborate on the basic argument and then provide the supporting data.

Specific to general

Sometimes you may anticipate that readers will not appreciate or agree with your general ideas before they see the support for them—for instance, in an argumentative essay that takes an unpopular view. In these cases a **specific-to-general scheme** can arouse readers' interest in specific examples or other evidence, and you can let the evidence build to statements of more general ideas. The following thesis statement could be developed in this way:

> Although most of us are unaware of the public relations campaigns directed at us, they can significantly affect the way we think and live.

The writer might introduce the essay with a specific example of a public relations campaign and use it throughout the essay to illustrate the effects of public relations campaigns.

Problem-solution

Many arguments use a **problem-solution scheme**: first outline a problem that needs solving; then propose a solution. (If the solution involves steps toward a goal, it may be arranged chronologically.) The following thesis statement announces a problem-solution paper:

> To protect users' privacy, social-networking sites such as *Facebook* should make removing photographs, videos, and other links a transparent and simple process.

Climax

A common scheme in both explanations and arguments is the **climactic organization**, in which ideas unfold in order of increasing drama or importance to reach a climax. For example, the following thesis statement lists three effects of strip-mining in order of their increasing severity, and the essay would cover them in the same order:

> Strip-mining should be tightly controlled in this region to reduce its pollution of water resources, its destruction of the land, and its devastating effects on people's lives.

As this example suggests, the climactic organization works well in arguments because it leaves readers with the most important point freshest in their minds. In exposition, such an arrangement can create suspense and thus hold readers' attention.

Familiarity or complexity

Expository essays can also be arranged to take readers' knowledge of the subject into account. An essay on the effects of air pollution might proceed from **most familiar to least familiar**—from effects readers are likely to know to ones they may not know. Similarly, an explanation of animals' nervous systems might proceed from **simplest to most complex**, so that the explanation of each nervous system provides a basis for readers to understand the more difficult one following.

2.3.4 Checking for unity and coherence

In conceiving your organization and writing your essay, you should be aware of two qualities of effective writing that relate to organization: unity and coherence. When you perceive that someone's writing "flows well," you are probably appreciating these two qualities. An essay has **unity** if all its parts relate to and support the thesis statement. Check for unity with these questions:

- **Is each main section relevant to the main idea (thesis) of the essay?**
- **Within main sections, does each example or detail support the principal idea of that section?**

An essay has **coherence** if readers can see the relationships among parts and move easily from one thought to the next. Check for coherence with these questions:

- **Do the ideas follow in a clear sequence?**
- **Are the parts of the essay logically connected?**
- **Are the connections clear and smooth?**

A unified and coherent outline will not necessarily guide you to a unified and coherent essay because so much can change during drafting. Thus you shouldn't be too hard on your outline, in case a seemingly wayward idea proves useful. But do cut obvious digressions and rearrange material that clearly needs moving.

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The writing situation: Informative essay

- **Audience:** Classmates, instructor, others who are interested in funding for college sports
- **Purpose:** To inform readers about challenges posed by the high costs of college sports
- **Subject:** Balancing academic and athletic priorities; student's choice for an essay assigned in a first-year writing course
- **Genre and medium:** Informative essay—writing that seeks to teach readers about a subject

Sample essay (informative)

The following essay illustrates some ways of achieving unity and coherence (described in the annotations).

Athletics or Academics: Setting Priorities at Colleges and Universities

College athletics is a booming business throughout many publicly funded colleges and universities, particularly sports like football and basketball. These programs bring in millions of dollars in revenue from ticket and merchandise sales, televised events, profit-sharing conferences, and donations from wealthy fans and alumni. Yet many of these same athletic departments are losing money and depend on college and university budgets to make up the difference.

Introduction establishes subject of essay

Informative thesis statement

So how does a college or university repair that kind of deficit? Athletic departments are rarely asked to curb their own spending. Stadiums and other athletic facilities are replaced or renovated regularly, in an effort to stay in step with other programs. Private planes are purchased to aid in recruiting. Some head coaches earn millions of dollars a year—more than the college or university chancellor, and in some cases, more than any other public employee in the state.

Question is linked to thesis statement

Paragraph developed with evidence supporting its idea

Publicly funded colleges and universities are funded by state revenues—in other words, tax dollars. Politicians of all stripes might publicly support the athletic programs in their state, wearing branded merchandise and making appearances at games, but most are reluctant to ask for a tax increase to support these same programs. Therefore, university budgets remain relatively stagnant as athletic department spending increases.

Paragraph developed with evidence supporting its idea

Paragraph idea, linked to thesis statement

So how do colleges and universities find money in their budgets? They often start by attempting to increase revenue streams. Tuition seldom remains static at colleges and universities. Increases in tuition are often used to offset discretionary spending. In other words, these funds can be funneled to any area that needs additional money. If raising tuition isn't an option, some colleges and universities increase student fees to support the athletic department.

Question introduces new paragraph, linked to thesis statement

Paragraph developed with evidence supporting its idea