WRITING TODAY

FOURTH EDITION

RICHARD JOHNSON-SHEEHAN & CHARLES PAINE

WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition	Where *Writing Today* addresses these outcomes
Processes By the end of first-year composition, students should • Develop a writing project through multiple drafts • Develop flexible strategies for reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing • Use composing processes and tools as a means to discover and reconsider ideas • Experience the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes • Learn to give and act on productive feedback to works in progress • Adapt composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities • Reflect on the development of composing practices and how those practices influence their work	**PART 1 Getting Started** shows how to use your analysis of the rhetorical situation and an understanding of genre to guide you through the writing process, while reading critically and reflecting on your writing. **PART 2 Using Genres to Express Ideas** is structured so that each chapter mirrors the writing process, beginning with an overview of the genre and moving through the writing process, from invention to organizing and drafting, choosing the appropriate style and design, and strategically revising. **PART 3 Developing a Writing Process** provides an abundance of traditional and technology-enhanced strategies to choose from as you work through the stages of the writing process, from inventing ideas, to drafting and revising, to reflecting on your work. **PART 4 Strategies for Shaping Ideas** explains how to work collaboratively with your peers and give them helpful feedback on their work. **PART 6 Getting Your Ideas Out There** helps you use electronic and other media to make your writing accessible to the readers you want to reach. Every chapter addresses opportunities and strategies for communicating with a variety of media and genres.
Knowledge of Conventions By the end of first-year composition, students should • Develop knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling, through practice in composing and revising • Understand why genre conventions for structure, paragraphing, tone, and mechanics vary • Gain experience negotiating variations in genre conventions • Learn common formats and/or design features for different kinds of texts • Explore the concepts of intellectual property (such as fair use and copyright) that motivate documentation conventions • Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work	**PART 1 Getting Started** gives you a practical and theoretical grounding in the conventions and audience expectations of various genres. **PART 2 Using Genres to Express Ideas** helps you master the conventions for ten common genres and a variety of related genres and microgenres. **PART 3 Developing a Writing Process** offers both time-tested and innovative strategies for inventing, drafting, designing, and revising your work to meet the needs of your audience. **PART 4 Strategies for Shaping Ideas** helps you write effective introductions and conclusions and develop meaningful paragraphs that use rhetorical strategies appropriate to the genre. **PART 5 Doing Research** offers visual tutorials explaining how to responsibly and accurately incorporate and cite sources. **PART 7 Anthology of Readings** provides 26 readings that invite you to examine how writers negotiate the conventions of ten major genres. **PART 8 Handbook** serves as your accessible guide to grammar, punctuation, and other linguistic features of standard American English.

Writing Today

Fourth Edition

Richard Johnson-Sheehan
Purdue University

Charles Paine
University of New Mexico

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress.

Contents

11 Commentaries (Argument) 164

12 Arguments (Argument) 184

Part 3
Developing a Writing Process

16 Inventing Ideas and Prewriting — 297

17 Organizing and Drafting — 310

18 Choosing a Style — 322

19 Designing 333

20 Revising and Editing 346

Part 4
Strategies for Shaping Ideas

21 Developing Paragraphs and Sections 361

22 Using Basic Rhetorical Patterns 370

Part 5
Doing Research

Preface

This new edition of *Writing Today* marks an important turning point in this highly successful series, and it's a turn we are very excited about. *Writing Today* has long been a leader in teaching students the genres and rhetorical strategies that will help them succeed in their advanced college courses, their careers, and their civic lives. Since the first edition, this book has featured practical writing skills that are founded on solid theoretical, historical, and empirical principles of rhetoric. With each new edition, we have also kept pace with the evolving cultural and technological trends that affect all of our lives. At our core, we still firmly believe the following three principles that we used in writing the first edition:

1. Students want to master writing skills that will help them be successful in college, their careers, and their civic lives.
2. Students want to learn from a guide that presents information clearly, simply, visually, and in a way that is easy to access.
3. Writing instructors prefer teaching tools that are practical, flexible, and theoretically sound, allowing them to adapt these tools' content to their own teaching practices and style.

So, what's the big turning point? In this fourth edition, we have elevated *reflection* as a pillar of the writing experience. Reflection has always been a feature of *Writing Today*, but we have now made it one of the central concepts of the book. This change is most evident in a new Chapter 5, "Reflecting Critically, Starting Your Portfolio," which helps students step back from the writing process and reflect critically on their own work. As we write in Chapter 5,

Reflecting on your writing will help you become a stronger and more versatile person, not just a better writer. Reflection helps you to step back and take a breath, allowing you recognize what you already do well and figure out what you can do better. It allows you adapt your writing skills to both the everyday and unpredictable situations that you will encounter in college and your career. Being reflective helps you to see the big picture, sort it all out, and get to the bottom of things.

In other words, reflection isn't simply about helping students write better. It helps them figure out *why* they made specific rhetorical decisions. Reflection is a process that helps a writer become a better person—intellectually stronger, more aware, more versatile, and more resilient. Reflection helps students transition beyond the concrete patterns they may have learned in high school, allowing them to transfer their existing rhetorical abilities into more advanced "real-world" practices and situations.

In nearly every chapter, *Writing Today*, 4e, incorporates reflection as a central component of generating ideas, organizing them into familiar patterns, expressing those ideas clearly and persuasively, and using design to make documents accessible and attractive. We have centralized reflection as a component of the writing process from prewriting a rough draft to proofreading the final version. We want students to learn how to write well but also to gain a deep understanding of their motives, their values, and why they and others express themselves in specific ways. Critical reflection helps them understand their strengths as writers, so they can become more versatile and independent.

That said, the core concepts of *Writing Today* are still all here. *Writing Today* teaches *genres* of writing (memoirs, analyses, reports, proposals, etc.) and *strategies* for writing (narration, comparison, argumentation, etc.) as well as *processes* for writing (planning, drafting, revising, etc.). This approach helps students understand that genres are not rigid templates but are rather a set of versatile tools that guide every aspect of the writing process. *Writing Today* helps students to develop *genre awareness* and *genre know-how* so they can get things done with words and images.

By design, *Writing Today* is an easy-to-use book that fits the way today's students read and learn. Students respond best to an interactive writing style, so our instruction is brief and to the point. Key terms are immediately defined and reinforced. Sections and paragraphs are kept short to make them accessible. Important points are clearly labeled and supported by helpful visuals. We emphasize practical application and keep the academic explanations to a minimum, even though *Writing Today* is thoroughly grounded in contemporary theories of rhetoric and writing.

We also maximize flexibility for instructors. Our own experiences as writing teachers and writing program administrators tell us that instructors can be successful in a variety of different ways. The best books on college writing provide multiple pathways that work for a diverse group of instructors, allowing them to be creative and innovative. With *Writing Today*, instructors can choose the order in which they teach the chapters and combine them into units that fit their course designs.

Our approach is informed by our own classroom experience and by much of the research done in the field of writing studies over the last twenty years. The approach is also supported by findings emerging from our research with the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College (a collaboration between the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Council of Writing Program Administrators). Surveys conducted since 2008 by the CSWC of hundreds of thousands of students at over 200 different schools found that when faculty assigned challenging and diverse writing assignments, students reported deeper learning, increased practical competence, and greater personal and social gains.

What's New in the Fourth Edition

Critical Reflection as a Pillar of Writing. Almost all chapters in the book introduce reflection as an important component of the writing process. Students are encouraged to step back and look at their work critically, while reflecting on how their writing embodies their own motives, values, and cultures.

New Chapter on Critical Reflection. A new Chapter 5, "Reflecting Critically, Starting Your Portfolio" offers strategies that will help students "look backward" to prior experiences, "look inward" at their choices, and "look forward" to how they will reach future goals.

New Engaging Design. Instructors who have used *Writing Today* before will immediately notice the new design, which is more open, brighter, colorful, and accessible. The new design works well with both the print and online versions of *Writing Today,* and students will appreciate a design that "pops."

Enhanced Coverage of Citing Sources. In Chapter 27 and elsewhere, we pay even more attention to properly citing sources and avoiding plagiarism. The Internet, as we all know, is creating new challenges with the citation of sources. We are always looking for ways to incorporate new methods and new technologies to help students manage and cite their sources properly while avoiding plagiarism.

Additional Focus on Assessment. The importance of assessment at the university level continues to grow as stakeholders ask universities to prove that they are "adding value." The terminology of assessment is built into the fabric of *Writing Today* in a seamless way, so instructors and students can respond successfully to assessment rubrics and evaluation tools.

New Microgenres. Instructors have been sending us ideas for new microgenres to add to *Writing Today*. (We cannot include them all, but keep sending them.) Here are some new microgenres in this edition: The "portrait" in Chapter 7, the "slam" in Chapter 8, and the "online comment" in Chapter 11.

New Microgenre Examples. We have replaced just about all the microgenre examples with new examples that students will enjoy reading, discussing, and modeling.

New Engaging, Effective Readings. Over 25 new readings cover topics such as racial equality, video games, the Second Amendment, fast food, depression, and more to keep class discussion lively and suggest a range of topics students might consider for their own writing.

Features of This Book

Interactive Writing Style. Instruction is brief and to the point. Key concepts are immediately defined and reinforced. Paragraphs are short and introduced by heads that preview content. This interactive style helps students skim, ask questions, and access information when they are ready for it—putting them in control of their learning.

At-A-Glance. Each chapter in Part 2 opens with a diagram that shows one or two common ways to organize a genre's key elements, giving an immediate and visual orientation to the genre. Students learn to adapt this organization to suit their rhetorical situation as they read the chapter.

End-of-Chapter Activities. Exercises conclude every chapter in the book to help students understand and practice concepts and strategies.

- **Talk About This** questions prompt classroom discussion.
- **Try This Out** exercises suggest informal writing activities students can complete in class or as homework.
- **Explore This** lets students find their own microgenres and explore how they are used in public spaces.
- **Write This** prompts facilitate longer, formal writing assignments.

One Student's Work. A student-written example in each chapter in Part 2 shows the kinds of issues students might explore in a specific genre of writing as well as the angles they might take. Annotations highlight the writer's key rhetorical decisions so the reading can be used either for discussion or as a model.

Quick Start Guide. This practical review includes action steps and appears in each chapter to get students writing quickly. Students spend less time reading about writing and more time working on their own compositions. They can also use the Quick Start Guide as a preview to gain familiarity with a genre before reading the chapter.

Microgenre. A microgenre applies features of major genres to narrow rhetorical situations. For example, in Chapter 13, students apply features of a proposal to a pitch; in Chapter 6, those of a memoir to a literacy narrative. Each Microgenre in Part 2 includes a description, an example, and a writing activity, encouraging students to experiment and play by stretching genre conventions.

Readings and Prompts. Six readings—two in each project chapter and four in each anthology chapter—offer models of each genre. Question sets after each reading encourage critical engagement.

- **A Closer Look** questions facilitate analytical reading.
- **Ideas for Writing** questions prompt responses, analyses, and different genres of writing.
- **A Multimodal Approach.** Today's writers compose electronic texts, work with visual and audio tools, insert graphics, and collaborate with others online. Each chapter includes strategies for working in a multimodal environment. Multimodal assignments appear in "Write This" activities. Chapters in Part 6 offer guidance on creating and posting compositions in online environments.

How This Book Is Organized

Writing Today features brief chapters and plainly labeled sections, creating obvious access points that help students find what they need when they need it.

PART 1
Getting Started

Purposefully brief, the first four chapters are designed to get students up and running right away. They introduce the five elements of rhetorical situations (topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context) and explain why and how using genres will help students to write successfully. The fourth chapter teaches strategies for reading critically and thinking analytically. The new Chapter 5 on reflection gives instructors the ability to introduce reflection as part of the writing process early in the course and help students set up their writing portfolios.

PART 2
Using Genres to Express Ideas

These chapters help students master ten commonly assigned kinds of writing that form the foundation

of an adaptable portfolio of skills. Students explore expressive, informative, analytical, persuasive, and argumentative genres that help them respond effectively to a majority of academic and workplace writing situations.

PART 3
Developing a Writing Process

Stand-alone chapters on planning, organization, style, design, and revision offer strategies students can apply to any writing situation. Instructors can assign them alongside the genre chapters.

PART 4
Strategies for Shaping Ideas

Straightforward chapters on drafting introductions and conclusions, developing paragraphs and sections, and incorporating rhetorical strategies (such as narration, classification, and comparison and contrast) provide resources for writing those sections of papers where students often find themselves stuck. A chapter on argument explores appeals and fallacies, and a chapter on collaboration helps students work effectively in groups.

PART 5
Doing Research

The ability to research effectively is critical to students' success in college and in their careers. Students learn to engage in inquiry-driven research, evaluate sources, and work with sources by paraphrasing, quoting, and synthesizing. Up-to-date coverage of MLA and APA styles includes citation examples and model papers.

PART 6
Getting Your Ideas Out There

Today's students have more opportunities to present their work publicly than ever before. Students learn how to use social networking and other Web applications for rhetorical purposes. Students learn best practices for creating a professional portfolio of their work. Basics such as succeeding on essay exams and giving presentations are covered in depth as well.

PART 7
Anthology of Readings

The anthology showcases the ten genres of writing explored in Part 2, organized into six themes:

college and a new life; identity and human nature; culture and entertainment; place and environment; health and safety; and science and technology. These additional readings serve as models, suggest situations in which specific genres are particularly effective, offer material for response, and help students discover their own research topics.

PART 8
Handbook

Designed to be as accessible and usable as possible, the handbook gives students a quick resource for issues of grammar, usage, and punctuation.

Ways to Fit This Book to Your Teaching Approach

Flexibility is a chief strength of *Writing Today*. The first five chapters form a foundation, but remaining chapters can be taught in any order or combination to suit individual teaching approaches and objectives.

A Process Approach.   Students want to learn a writing process that suits their own working habits and writing styles. The chapters in Part 2 tailor the writing process with strategies specific to different genres. Part 3, "Developing a Writing Process," provides additional chapters on prewriting, drafting, designing, revising, and editing that can be assigned with any project.

A Genre-Based Approach.   Genres are tools writers can use to help them invent ideas and plan, research and draft, design and edit. *Writing Today* covers real-world writing—such as analyses, reviews, reports, and proposals—that help students solve real problems and achieve specific goals.

A Transfer and Reflection Approach.   The skills and knowledge students learn from *Writing Today* will "transfer" to their advanced courses and their careers. Students will also learn how to "reflect" on the rhetorical choices they make. Chapter 5, "Reflecting Critically, Starting Your Portfolio" offers a foundation for transfer and reflection. Then, throughout *Writing Today*, students are encouraged to consider the numerous, usually unconscious, choices they make as they write.

A Purposes or Aims-Based Approach.   Instructors who teach an aims approach to writing encourage students to be aware of their audience and purpose as they write to express, inform, analyze, or persuade. This approach works hand-in-hand with a genre-based approach.

A Strategies or Patterns-Based Approach.   Instructors who teach rhetorical patterns (narrative, description, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, etc.), will find them embedded in this book. Part 4, "Strategies for Shaping Ideas," shows how strategies work with and within genres to help students organize and shape their ideas.

An Academic Approach.   Students learn the kinds of writing common in the general education curriculum, such as narratives, rhetorical analyses, literary analyses, reviews, and argument essays. They also learn the foundations of the kinds of writing common in advanced academic classes, such as profiles, commentaries, reports, and proposals.

An Argument-Based Approach.   *Writing Today* presents a rhetorical approach to writing. Several genres in Part 2, such as rhetorical analyses, commentaries, arguments, and proposals, are purposefully designed to be argument-based; this content is labeled with ARGUMENT in the table of contents. Chapter 23 helps students determine what is arguable and anticipate opposing points of view.

An Integrated, Multimodal Approach.   Instructors teaching multimodal composition courses know there are few writing guides that teach critical twenty-first-century composing skills and even fewer that offer multimodal assignments. *Writing Today* offers strategies for writers to plan and collaborate online, include visuals in print texts, create visual texts, create media projects, and post compositions to the Web.

Distance Learning and Online Teaching.   *Writing Today* was designed to be easily adaptable to online and hybrid learning environments. The book's comprehensiveness and flexibility provide strong scaffolding on which distance learning, online, and hybrid courses can be developed. Its highly accessible design allows students to quickly find the information they need while learning on their own and composing at their computers.

Correlation to the Revised (2014) WPA Outcomes Statement

Writing Today helps teachers and students address learning outcomes for first-year composition courses identified by the Council of Writing Program Administrators: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; knowledge of conventions; and composing in electronic environments. Both of us have been leaders in this organization, and we believe strongly that these outcomes reflect the kinds of abilities that students should master in these courses. Specific connections between chapters and the WPA Outcomes appear in the Instructor's Manual.

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
 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 to 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 *Writing Today*. These supplements are available to instantly

download from Revel or on the Instructor Resource Center (IRC); please visit the IRC at www.pearson-highered.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 *Power-Point* Presentation includes a full lecture outline and photos and figures from the textbook and Revel edition. Available on the IRC.

Acknowledgments

A book like this is never the work of just one or two people, even though our names appear on the cover. We would like to thank our editors, Joe Opiela and Anne Brunell Ehrenworth, for their great ideas and persistence. We would also like to thank our colleagues, Scott Sanders, Susan Romano, Wanda Martin, Michelle Kells, Karen Olson, David Blakesley, Irwin Weiser, and Shirley Rose, for their feedback on our ideas. We also want to thank our students, especially our graduate students, for trying out some of these materials in their classes and helping us refine the ideas and approaches in this book.

We are appreciative of our thoughtful and enthusiastic reviewers, whose feedback helped us improve the effectiveness of *Writing Today* as a teaching and learning tool: Shawn Adamson, *Genesee Community College;* Diana Agy, *Jackson College;* Ryan Allen, *University of Louisville;* Jennifer Aly, *University of Hawai'i Maui College;* Ellen Arnold, *Coastal Carolina University;* Katherine Baker, *College of Southern Nevada;* John Barrett, *Richland College;* Sharon Bartkovich, *College of Coastal Georgia;* Lisa Bickmore, *Salt Lake Community College;* Jacqueline A. Blackwell, *Thomas Nelson Community College;* Patricia Webb Boyd, *Arizona State University;* Jo Ann Buck, *Guilford Technical Community College;* Gary Cale, *Jackson College;* Genesea M. Carter, *The University of New Mexico;* Jacqueline Cason, *University of Alaska Anchorage;* John Castellarin, *Germanna Community College;* Marlys Cervantes, *Cowley College;* Ron Christiansen, *Salt Lake Community College;* Gail S. Corso, *Neumann University;* Paul Craven, *Alamance Community College;* T. Allen Culpepper, *Tulsa Community College, Southeast Campus;* Tamera Davis, *Northern Oklahoma College;* Louise Dekreon Watsjold, *University of Alaska Chugia—Eagle River Campus;* Dominic Delli Carpini, *York College of Pennsylvania;* Jason DePolo, *North Carolina A&T State University;* Paul Dombrowski, *University of Central Florida;* Carlton Downey, *Houston Community College;* Chitralekha Duttagupta, *Arizona State University;* Jeremiah Dyehouse, *The University of Rhode Island;* Charles Ellis, *Wiregrass Georgia Technical College;* Adrian Evans, *Bishop State Community College;* Linda Fantroy, *Bishop State Community College;* William FitzGerald, *Rutgers University–Camden;* Mary Sue Fox, *Central New Mexico Community College;* Dayna V. Goldstein, *Georgia Southern University;* Deborah Goodwyn, *Virginia State University;* Pamela Hardman, *Cuyahoga Community College;* Susanmarie Harrington, *The University of Vermont;* Matthew Hartman, *Ball State University;* Karen Hattaway, *San Jacinto College North;* Dave Higginbotham, *University of Nevada, Reno;* Matthew Horn, *Cuyahoga Community College;* Krista Jackman, *The University of New Hampshire;* Jay Jordan, *The University of Utah;* Chad Jorgensen, *Metropolitan Community College;* Brian Kirby, *El Paso Community College;* Margaret Konkol, *University at Buffalo, The State University of New York;* Andrew J. Kunka, *University of South Carolina Sumter;* Betty LaFace, *Bainbridge College;* Karen Laing, *College of Southern Nevada;* William B. Lalicker, *West Chester University of Pennsylvania;* Steve Lazenby, *University of North Carolina at Charlotte;* Robert Lively, *Truckee Meadows Community College;* MacGregor Frank, *Guilford Technical Community College;* Joleen Malcolm, *University of West Florida;* Terri Mann, *El Paso Community College;* Linda Martin, *Coastal Carolina University;* Rachel Maverick, *Richland College;* Sharon McCamy, *ITT Technical Institute;* Miles McCrimmon, *J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College;* James McWard, *Johnson County Community College;* Eileen Medeiros, *Johnson & Wales University;* Shellie Michael, *Volunteer State*

Community College; Susan Miller, *The University of Utah;* Rhonda Morris, *Santa Fe College;* Mary Ellen Muesing, *University of North Carolina at Charlotte;* Lori Mumpower, *University of Alaska Anchorage;* Margie Nelson, *El Paso Community College;* Sarah Nielsen, *DeVry University;* Annie Nguyen, *Community College of Baltimore County;* Matthew Oliver, *Old Dominion University;* Michael Pennell, *The University of Rhode Island;* Jason Pickavance, *Salt Lake Community College;* Jennifer Pooler-Courtney, *The University of Texas at Tyler;* Sarah A. Quirk, *Waubonsee Community College;* Timothy D. Ray, *West Chester University of Pennsylvania;* Peggy L. Richards, *The University of Akron;* Shewanda Riley, *Tarrant County College–Northeast*

Campus; Christy Rishoi, *Mott College;* Mauricio Rodriguez, *El Paso Community College;* Jane Rosecrans, *J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College;* Dan Royer, *Grand Valley State University;* Stephen Ruffus, *Salt Lake Community College;* Andrew Scott, *Ball State University;* Brittany Stephenson, *Salt Lake Community College;* Mitchell Summerlin, *Calhoun Community College;* Stacey Tartar-Esch, *West Chester University of Pennsylvania;* Bradley A. Waltman, *College of Southern Nevada;* Elizabeth Wardle, *University of Central Florida;* Leah Williams, *The University of New Hampshire;* Margaret Wintersole, *Laredo Community College;* Kristy Wooten, *Catawba Valley Community College,* and John Ziebell, *College of Southern Nevada.*

About the Authors

Richard Johnson-Sheehan is a Professor of Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue University. At Purdue, he has directed the Introductory Composition program and served as the Director of the Purdue Writing Lab and the Purdue OWL. He has mentored new teachers of composition for many years. He teaches a variety of courses in composition, professional writing, medical writing, environmental writing, and writing program administration, as well as classical rhetoric and the rhetoric of science. He has published widely in these areas. His books on writing include *Argument Today*, coauthored with Charles Paine, *Technical Communication Today,* now in its sixth edition, and *Writing Proposals,* now in its second edition. Professor Johnson-Sheehan was awarded the 2008 Fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing. In 2017, he was awarded the J.R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching by the Society for Technical Communication.

Charles Paine is a Professor of English at the University of New Mexico, where he directs the Core Writing and the Rhetoric and Writing programs. He teaches first-year composition and courses in writing pedagogy, the history of rhetoric and composition, and other areas. His published books span a variety of topics in rhetoric and composition, including *The Resistant Writer* (a history of composition studies), *Teaching with Student Texts* (a co-edited collection of essays on teaching writing), and *Argument Today* (an argument-based textbook). An active member of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, he has served on its Executive Board and served as co-leader of the WPA Summer Conference Workshop. He cofounded and coordinates the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College, a joint effort of the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. The Consortium conducts general research into the ways that undergraduate writing can lead to enhanced learning, engagement, and other gains related to student success.

Chapter 1
Writing and Genres

In this chapter, you will learn how to—

1.1 describe what genres are and how they help writers and readers communicate.

1.2 use genres to communicate with readers.

1.3 develop a writing process that will help you write efficiently and effectively.

1.4 use "genre know-how" to become a versatile writer in college and in the workplace.

Writing gives you the power to get things done with words and images. It allows you to respond successfully to the people and events around you, whether you are trying to strengthen your community, pitch a new idea at work, or just text with your friends.

The emergence of new writing situations—new places for writing, new readers, and new media—means writing today involves more than just getting words and images onto a page or screen. Writers need to handle a wide variety of situations with diverse groups of people and rapidly changing technologies. Learning to navigate among these complex situations is the real challenge of writing in today's world.

Writing gives you the power to think critically, express your ideas clearly, and persuade others. Today, being able to communicate effectively is vital to your success in college and in your career. In this book, you will learn to use powerful communication tools that will be key to your success.

What Are Genres?

1.1 **Describe what genres are and how they help writers and readers communicate.**

Writing Today uses a *genre-based approach* to writing that is easy to learn and incredibly powerful. Defining the word *genre* is difficult. Sometimes, genres are defined by their structure alone (e.g., "A report has five parts: introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion"). But this understanding of genre is too simplistic. Genres are

not fixed or rigid patterns to be followed mechanically. They are not templates into which we insert sentences and paragraphs.

Genres are ways of writing and speaking that help people interact, communicate, and work together. In other words, genres reflect the things people do, and they are always evolving because human activities change over time to suit new social situations and fresh challenges. Genres *do* offer stable but flexible patterns for responding to typical situations. More importantly, though, they reflect how people act, react, and interact in these situations. Genres are meeting places—and *meaning* places. They are places where writers and readers make meaning together.

Using Genres to Write Successfully

1.2   **Use genres to communicate with readers.**

For writers, genres offer flexible patterns that reflect how people interact with each other. Genres provide strategies for analyzing and interpreting what is happening around you. Once you understand your current situation, you can then use genres to focus your creativity, generate new ideas, and present your ideas to others.

Readers use genres, too. For readers, genres are guideposts for orienting themselves to a text. Genres help readers anticipate what they are likely to find in a document and how they can use the information in it. When you understand what your readers expect, you can make strategic choices about what information you will include and how you will present it (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 College Writing Requires Genre Know-How

Writing matters because it is one way people get things done. College writing will teach you "genre know-how," the ability to size up writing situations and respond to them appropriately.

Genres in Movies

How do genres work? To answer this question, let's talk about how genres work in movies (Figure 1.2). Movie genres include romantic comedies, action flicks, documentaries, murder mysteries, musicals, science fiction and fantasy, horror, thrillers, and others. These genres aren't formulas that the writers and directors must follow. Instead, they are familiar patterns that audiences will recognize and understand.

Once audience members recognize the genre of a movie, they form specific expectations about what kinds of things they will—and will not—experience. For example, a romantic comedy usually explores the amusing awkwardness and pratfalls of a new relationship. Two people meet and feel an attraction to each other. But then, events beyond their control keep them apart and cause humorous misunderstandings. Eventually, the two star-crossed lovers realize they truly do love each other and find a way at the end of the movie to be together.

Figure 1.2 Movie Genres

Usually, moviegoers recognize the genre of a movie even before they step into the theater. Movie studios use posters and previews to help audiences know what to expect and how to interpret the movie.

Directors of successful romantic comedies use the boundaries and conventions of this genre to help them work creatively and produce a film that is familiar but also fresh. Genres aid the director's creativity by providing guidelines about how the movie should be structured, scripted, visually designed, musically scored, and even edited.

The genre of a movie helps the director figure out its content, organization, style, and design. Likewise, knowing the movie's genre helps the audience figure out what the movie is about and its basic story. Movies that flop often fail to follow a recognizable genre. If the movie doesn't follow a genre, the audience may not "get it." Even worse, movies flop when they merely follow a genre in a predictable or formulaic way. Unoriginal movies are painfully predictable and shallow.

Successful directors, like successful writers, first need to understand the genres they are using. Genres help them figure out where to start and how to proceed. They allow both directors and writers to create something fresh and new, while also helping them to organize and control their message in a way that others will recognize and comprehend. Good writers (like good movie directors) are always balancing the familiar and stable with the unique and dynamic.

Writing with Genres

Here are the most important things to remember about genres:

GENRES ARE FLEXIBLE.   Genres are as flexible and changeable as the human activities they represent. They aren't formulas to be followed mechanically. Instead, a genre can be bent or stretched to fit your specific topic, purpose, and readers.

GENRES ARE ADAPTABLE TO VARIOUS SITUATIONS.   When the readers or context changes, a genre needs to be adjusted to suit the new situation. An argument that worked previously with some readers or in a particular context might not work with different readers or in another context.

GENRES EVOLVE TO SUIT VARIOUS FIELDS.   Each discipline and discourse community adapts common genres to its own needs and purposes. A report written by a biologist, for example, will share many characteristics with a report written by a manager at a corporation, but there will also be notable differences in the content, organization, style, and design of the text.

GENRES SHAPE SITUATIONS AND READERS.   When you choose a particular genre, you are deciding what kinds of issues will be highlighted and what role your readers will play. For instance, readers know that when they encounter a memoir (a literary genre), they should read thoroughly and follow the story line. Quite differently, when readers encounter a business proposal (a workplace genre), they assume that they can "raid" the text for the specific information they need—that is, they can skip and skim.

GENRES CAN BE PLAYED WITH.   You can be creative and play with the conventions of genres. You can combine, blend, or even "mash up" genres into new ones. Genres are stretchy. But if you are going to go against your readers' expectations of the genre, you need to do so consciously and with a specific purpose in mind.

Genres and the Writing Process

1.3   **Develop a writing process that will help you write efficiently and effectively.**

So how can genres help you write better? Think of something you already do well. To do something well, you first needed to learn the *process* for doing it. Someone else— perhaps a teacher, coach, parent, or friend—showed you the process and helped you get better at it (Figure 1.3).

Writing is similar to the other activities you enjoy. To write well, you first need to learn a reliable writing process with help from your professors. Strong writers aren't born with a special gift, and they aren't necessarily smarter than anyone else. Strong writers have simply mastered a reliable writing process that allows them to generate new ideas and shape those ideas into something readers will find interesting and useful.

Figure 1.3 Learning to Do Something Involves Learning a Process

In order to do something you enjoy, you first had to learn a step-by-step process for doing it. Once you mastered the process and it became second nature, you could make it yours by refining and adapting it.

Using a Writing Process

Over time, you will develop your own unique writing process, but the following six steps work well as a starting place:

ANALYZE THE RHETORICAL SITUATION.   Define your topic, state your purpose, and analyze your readers and the contexts in which your text will be read or used.

INVENT YOUR IDEAS.   Use inquiry and research to generate your own ideas and discover what others already know about your topic.

ORGANIZE AND DRAFT YOUR PAPER.   Use your understanding of the genre you're working with to arrange and compose your ideas into familiar patterns that your readers will recognize and find useful.

CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE STYLE.   Use techniques of plain and persuasive style to clarify your writing and make it more compelling.

DESIGN YOUR DOCUMENT.   Develop an appropriate page layout and use visual or audio features to make your ideas more accessible and attractive to readers.

REVISE AND EDIT YOUR WORK.   Improve your writing by rewriting, reorganizing, editing, and proofreading your work.

Experienced writers tend to handle each of these steps separately, but a writing process shouldn't be followed mechanically from one step to the next. Instead, experienced writers tend to move around among these steps as needed (Figure 1.4).

Why bother with a writing process at all? A reliable writing process helps you do things one step at a time. In the long run, following a writing process will save you time and will help you to write with more confidence and creativity.

Figure 1.4   A Writing Process

Good writers tend to go through steps as they develop their work. They move among these steps in ways that fit their own work habits and personalities.
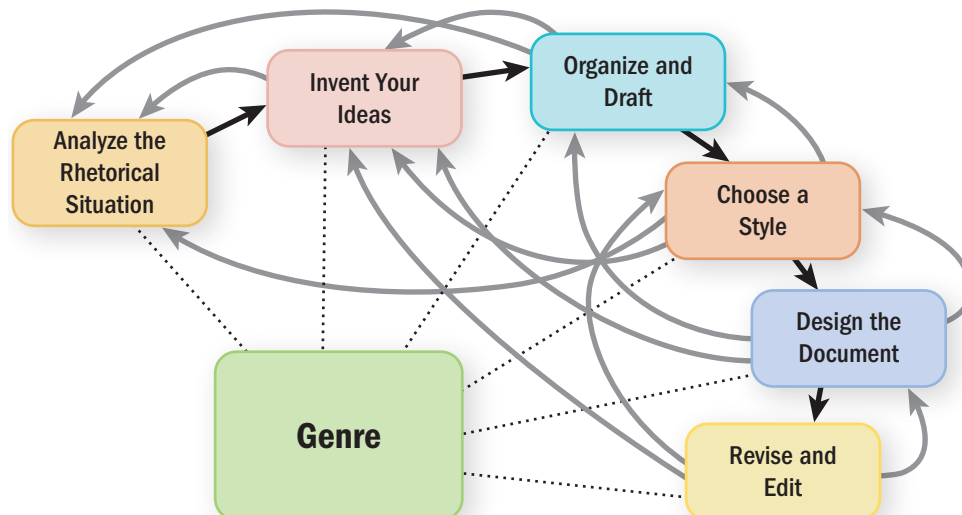
Using Genre as a Guiding Concept

The genre you are using will influence each stage of your writing process, as shown in Figure 1.4. For example, if you are writing a movie review, the "review genre" (discussed in Chapter 8, "Reviews") will help you make decisions about what kinds of information your readers will expect. Should you tell them the plot of the movie? Should you describe the characters? Should you give away the ending? The genre will provide you with a model organization, so you can arrange your ideas in a pattern that your readers will expect. The genre will also help you to make informed decisions about what kinds of style and document design would work for your review.

The purpose of a genre is to help you figure out how people tend to act, react, and interact in the situation in which you are writing. So if you tell your readers you are giving them a "movie review," they will have some predictable expectations about the content, organization, style, and design of your text. Your job, as a writer, is to meet your readers halfway. You want to meet their expectations as much as possible, while also presenting your argument in a way that will help you achieve your own purpose.

Transfer: Using Genres in College and in Your Career

1.4   **Use "genre know-how" to become a versatile writer in college and in the workplace.**

The genre-based approach to writing might be new to you, but it's really just the next step toward preparing you to succeed in college and in your career. By learning how to use the genres in this book, you will develop *genre know-how*, the practical knowledge and skill to write effectively for a variety of purposes and situations. You will learn how to recognize and adapt genres for your own needs, and you will learn how to use this genre know-how to adjust your writing for unique situations and specific readers.

In other words, the communication skills you learn in this book will "transfer" to your advanced classes and to your career. Now is a good time to begin mastering the genres you will need to be a successful and versatile writer.

Quick Start Guide

At the end of each chapter in this book, you will find something called the "Quick Start Guide." The purpose of the Quick Start Guides is to help you get up and running as soon as possible. You can use these guides for review or to preview the essential information in the chapter. Here is the essential information in this chapter.

Know what a genre is.   Genres are ways of writing and speaking that help people communicate and work together in specific situations. Genres offer relatively stable patterns for writing, but more importantly, they reflect how humans act, react, and interact in everyday situations. Genres are meeting places—and *meaning* places.

Learn "genre know-how."   Genre know-how is the ability to use genres to analyze and interpret what is happening around you. With this how-to knowledge, you will be able to adapt your writing to new situations and to focus your creativity, generate new ideas, and present those ideas to others.

Keep in mind that genres are flexible.   Genres are as flexible and changeable as the human activities they represent. They need to be adjusted to suit evolving situations. They can be stretched, blended, and messed around with to fit unique situations.

Develop your writing process.   A writing process leads you from your basic idea to a finished document, from inventing ideas to final editing. Developing and refining your writing process will save you time and effort in the long run.

Use genres in college and in your career.   A genre-based approach to writing helps you master a "genre set" that will transfer to your advanced college courses and to the workplace. The genre set taught in this book will cover most of the texts you will write in college and in your career.

Activities for Genres

Talk About This

1. With a group of people in your class, have each person talk briefly about his or her favorite movie genre; then, as a group, choose one of those genres to discuss. Describe the genre and its common features.
2. In your group, brainstorm and list all the television shows you can think of. Then divide these shows into genres. What characteristics did you use to sort these shows into categories? How do the producers of these shows follow and bend the genres to come up with something new?
3. With your group, brainstorm a list of all the restaurant genres you can think of. Then choose one restaurant genre to explore further. How does the genre of the restaurant encourage specific kinds of behavior from its employees and its customers?

Try This Out

1. On the Internet, find a Web page or Web site that conforms to a familiar Web-site genre. For your professor (who may not know about this genre), write a one-page document that describes the Web site and explains the genre and how it works.
2. When a movie uses the well-known features of a genre to make fun of that genre, it's called a *parody*. Write a one-page description of a movie that parodies a particular genre, the genre it makes fun of, and the features of the genre that are specifically targeted by the parody.
3. For five minutes, freewrite about your favorite movie or television show. Freewriting means just putting your pen on the paper (or your fingers on the

keyboard) and writing anything that comes to mind. Then, in your group, discuss what you wrote in your freewrite.

4. Consider a kind of writing activity that you are good at (e.g., texting, e-mail, essays, short stories). What kind of content is typical; how is that content organized; what kind of language is used? In what ways does the genre determine who can and cannot participate?

5. Imagine that you have been asked to direct a movie that crosses two very different genres. For example, you might be asked to tell a horror story as a romantic comedy, or you might be asked to convert a historical documentary into an action flick. In a one-page paper written for your professor, explain how this merging of genres might offer some creative opportunities.

Write This

1. **Analyze a genre.** Find a longer nonfiction document that seems to be using a specific genre. Write a two-page analysis in which you describe the document's content, organization, style, and design.

2. **Review a movie for a Web site or blog.** Write a three-page review of a movie that you could post on a blog or movie review Web site. In your review, identify the genre of the movie and the common characteristics of that genre. Then show your readers how the movie exhibits those characteristics. Toward the end of your review, tell your readers whether you think the movie is good by discussing how well it works within its genre.

Chapter 2
Topic, Angle, Purpose

In this chapter, you will learn how to—

2.1 develop and narrow your topic to respond to any writing situation.

2.2 develop your angle, the unique perspective you'll bring to the topic.

2.3 identify your purpose, or what you want to accomplish.

2.4 use your identified purpose to develop a thesis sentence (or main point).

2.5 choose the appropriate genre for your purpose.

One of your professors just handed you a new writing assignment. What should you do first? Take a deep breath. Then, read the assignment closely and ask yourself a few specific questions about what you need to do:

What am I being asked to write about? (Topic)

What is new or has changed recently about this topic? (Angle)

What exactly is the assignment asking me to do or accomplish? (Purpose)

Who will read this document, and what do they expect? (Readers)

Where and when will they be reading this document? (Context)

Whether you are writing for your class or for the workplace, you can use these key questions to help you identify the basic elements of your document's "rhetorical situation" (Figure 2.1).

The rhetorical situation has five elements: topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context. In this chapter, we will discuss the first three elements. Gaining a clear understanding of your topic, angle, and purpose will help you figure out what you are writing about and what you want to prove. It will also help you decide which genre is most appropriate for your writing project.

Figure 2.1 Five Elements of the Rhetorical Situation

Before you start writing, consider these five elements that make up your unique rhetorical situation. This will help you get started on your work.
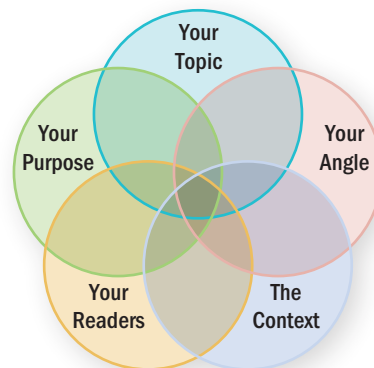
Topic: What Am I Writing About?

2.1 Develop and narrow your topic to respond to any writing situation.

In college, your professors will either provide the topics for your papers or ask you to come up with your own. When your professor supplies the topic, he or she will usually define the topic broadly, saying something like this:

> For this paper, I want you to write about the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

> Our next project will research "dating and mating in college," and we will be using our own campus for field research.

If your professor does not supply a topic, you should pick a topic that intrigues you and one about which you have something interesting to say. If you have no idea what you want to write about, make a list of ten topics that you like to read or talk about. In that list you should be able find something you would enjoy spending some time writing about.

In your career, you will write about topics that are different than the ones you wrote about in college. Nevertheless, you should still begin by clearly identifying your topic. For instance, your supervisor or a client may request a document from you in the following way:

> Our organization is interested in receiving a proposal that shows how we can lower our energy costs with wind and solar power.

> We want you to explore and report on the causes behind the sudden rise in violence in the Franklin South neighborhood.

Once you have clearly identified your topic, you should explore its boundaries or scope, trying to figure out what is "inside" and what is "outside" the topic. A good way to determine the boundaries of your topic is to create a concept map like the one shown in Figure 2.2.

To make a concept map, start out by writing your topic in the middle of a sheet of paper or your computer screen. Circle it, and then write down everything connected with it that comes to mind. Mapping on paper works well, but if you prefer mapping on screen you can use free or low-cost apps like *Coggle, XMind, Freemind,* or *Inspiration.*

Figure 2.2 Creating a Concept Map About Your Topic

A concept map is a helpful way to get your ideas onto the screen or a piece of paper.
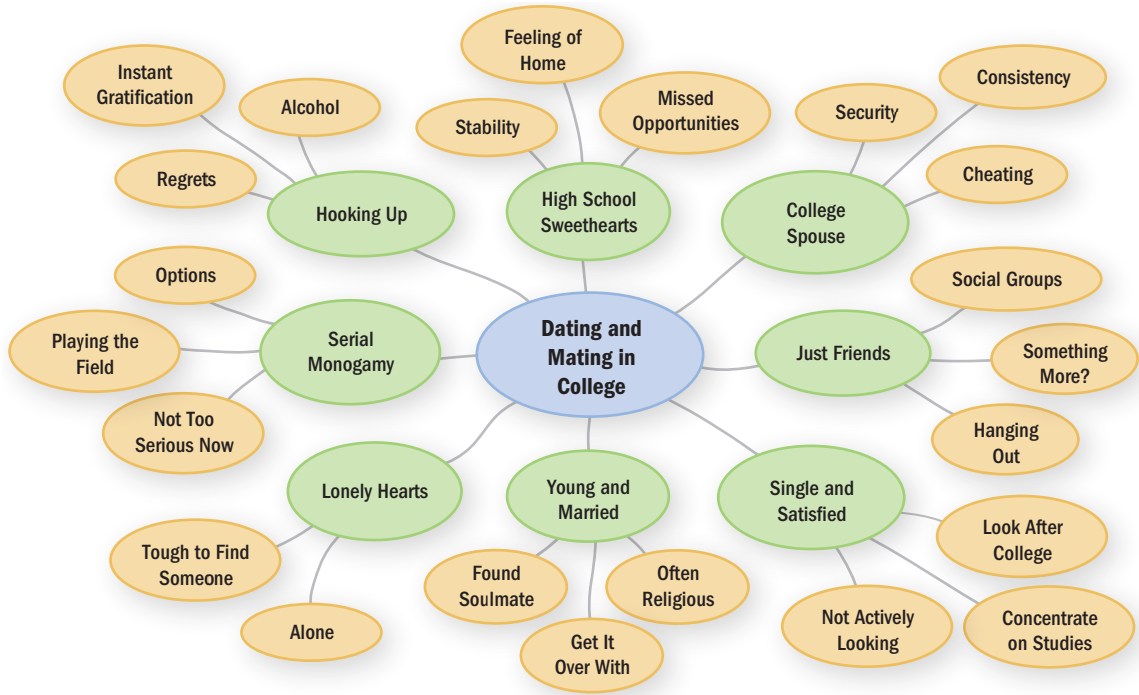
While mapping, write down all the things you already know about your topic. Then, as you begin to run out of ideas, go online and enter some of the words from your map into a search engine like *Google, Yahoo!*, or *Bing*. The search engine will bring up links to numerous other sources of information about your topic. Read through these sources and add more ideas to your concept map.

As your map fills out, you might ask yourself whether the topic is too large for the amount of time you have available. If so, pick the most interesting ideas from your map and create a second concept map around them alone. This second map should help you narrow your topic to something you can handle.

Angle: What Is New About the Topic?

2.2 **Develop your angle, the unique perspective you'll bring to the topic.**

You don't need to discover a new topic for your writing assignment. Instead, you need to come up with a new *angle* on an existing topic. Your angle is your unique perspective or view on the issue. A good way to identify a new angle is to ask yourself, "What has changed about this topic that makes it interesting right now?" Another question

you can ask is, "What unique experiences, expertise, or knowledge do I have about this topic?"

Let's consider these two questions separately.

What Has Changed That Makes This Topic Interesting Right Now?

Imagine you are searching for information about college dating trends. At your library, you find a 2011 book by Laura Sessions Stepp titled *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love, and Lose at Both* (Figure 2.3). The book seems a little out of date, but you mostly agree with the author's main points, especially her arguments about women avoiding long-term relationships while in college so they can focus on their studies and careers. However, you also believe social networking like *Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram,* and *Tumblr* have somewhat cooled off the hooking up culture that once existed. Now, college students can use social networking to get that feeling of intimacy with others rather than seeking intimacy by pairing off for the night. That could be your angle on this topic.

Figure 2.3 A Book on Your Topic

This book, published in 2011, looks like a great source for information on your topic, but dating has changed since 2011. Your own experiences as a college student today may give you some new ways to see the topic.
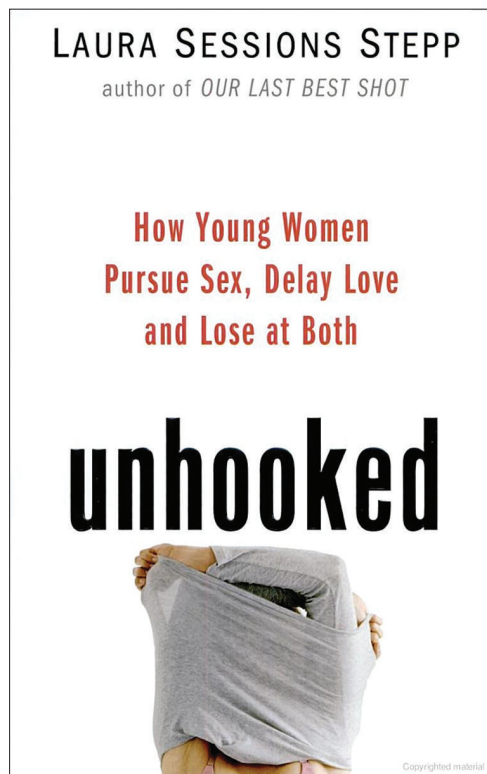
What Unique Experiences, Expertise, or Knowledge Do I Have About This Topic?

Your experiences as a college student give you some additional insights or "angles" into the real college dating scene. For example, perhaps your own experiences tell you that the hooking-up culture has been replaced by a culture of "serial monogamy" in which college students now go through a series of short-term emotional and physical relationships while they are in college. These so-called monogamous relationships may last a few months or perhaps a year, but most people don't expect them to lead to marriage. That's another possible angle on this topic.

To see if one of these angles works, do some freewriting to get your ideas on the screen. Freewriting involves opening a new page in your word processor and writing anything that comes to mind. Freewrite for about five minutes, and don't stop to correct or revise. If you run out of material, type and finish the phrases, "What I really mean to say is . . ." or "I remember . . ." These kinds of prompts will help you get rolling again.

Dating and mating in college is a very large topic—too large for a five- to ten-page paper. But if you explore a specific angle (e.g., the shift from a hooking-up culture to a culture of serial monogamous relationships), you can say something new and interesting about how people date and mate in college.

Purpose: What Do I Want to Accomplish?

2.3   Identify your purpose, or what you want to accomplish.

Your purpose is what you want to accomplish. Everything you write has a purpose, even informal kinds of writing like texting. Whenever you speak or write, you are trying to inform, ask a question, flirt, persuade, impress, or just have fun. When writing for college or for the workplace, figure out what you want to achieve (your purpose) before you get too far into the writing process.

Your professor may have already identified a purpose for your paper in the assignment, so check there first. Assignments based on the topics given on page 10 might look like this:

> Your objective in this paper is to show how Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of nonviolent tactics changed the dynamics of racial conflict in the 1960s, undermining the presumption of white dominance among blacks and whites.

> Use close observation of students on our campus to support or debunk some of the common assumptions about dating and mating in college.

If you need to come up with your own purpose for the paper, ask yourself what you believe and what you would like to prove about your topic. For example, at the end of the freewrite in Figure 2.4, a purpose statement is starting to form:
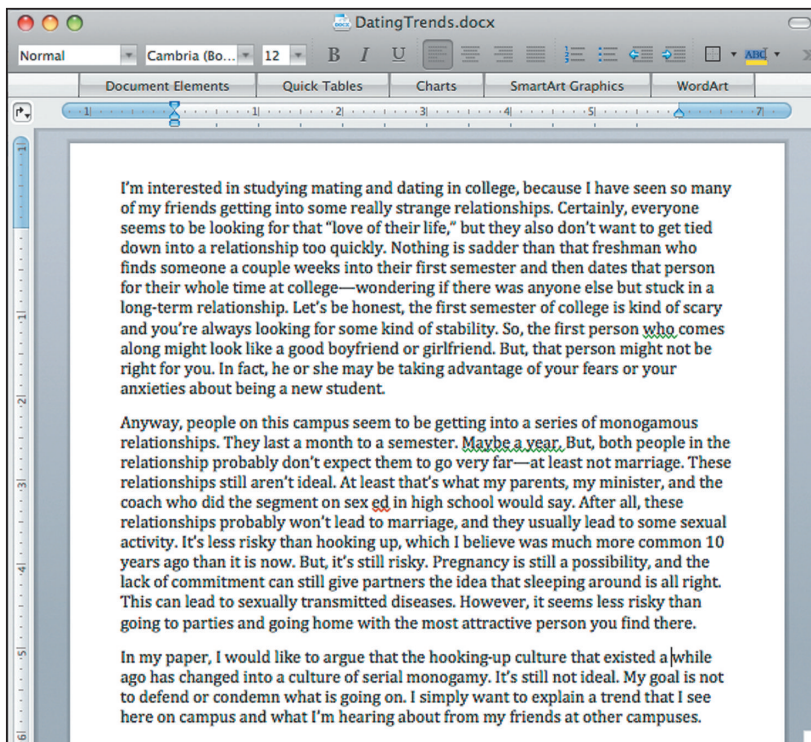
Figure 2.4 Freewriting to Find Your Angle

Freewriting about your topic helps you test your new angle. Just write freely for five to ten minutes without making revisions or corrections.

> In my paper, I would like to argue that the hooking-up culture that existed a decade ago has evolved into a culture of serial monogamy. It's still not ideal. My goal is not to defend or condemn what is going on. I simply want to explain a trend that I see here on campus and what I'm hearing about from my friends at other campuses.

This statement is still a bit rough and it lacks a clear focus, but the purpose of the project is starting to take shape.

Are You Informing or Persuading?

At this point, your purpose statement can help you figure out two important things about your paper. First, it will help you determine whether you are trying to *inform* your readers about something or whether you are trying to *persuade* them. Second, your purpose statement will help you come up with your paper's working thesis.

You might find it helpful to remember that in almost everything you write in college and in the workplace, your primary purpose involves informing or persuading. So your purpose statement will usually be built around these kinds of verbs:

Informative Papers: inform, describe, define, review, notify, advise, explain, demonstrate

Persuasive Papers: persuade, convince, argue, recommend, advocate, urge, defend, justify, support

Once you determine whether you are informing or persuading your readers, you will find it much easier to come up with a thesis statement that will focus your paper.

Thesis Statement (Main Claim)

2.4   **Use your identified purpose to develop a thesis sentence (or main point).**

Your paper's *thesis statement* (also known as your "main point" or "main claim") should be similar to your purpose statement. A purpose statement guides you, as the *writer,* by helping you develop your ideas and draft your paper. Your thesis statement guides your *readers* by announcing the main point or claim of the paper.

The thesis statement in your paper will usually first appear in your introduction (Figure 2.5). Then it reappears, typically with more emphasis, in the conclusion.

In special cases, you may choose to use a "question thesis" or "implied thesis" in which a question or open-ended comment in the introduction sets up a thesis statement that appears only in the conclusion of the document.

There are four major types of thesis statements:

INFORMATIVE THESIS.   As its name implies, an informative thesis is appropriate when your purpose is to inform readers, not to persuade them:

> Natural threats to Florida's cities include hurricanes, floods, and even tsunamis.

Figure 2.5 A Prominent Thesis Statement Orients Readers

Your thesis statement should help readers understand your main point or claim quickly and clearly.

Turnbow 1

Katelyn Turnbow

Professor Thompson

English 102

15 October 2014

Lives Not Worth the Money?

The outbreak and spread of Ebola has brought new attention to equally lethal diseases that are often forgotten. The idea of a forgotten disease is almost absurd, a disease for which a cure is available but not given, effective, but never given a chance to work. We are often of the belief that human life is invaluable. In reality, however, the cures that do not make money for the manufacturer are simply not made at all. One need only look at African Sleeping Sickness (WHO). There is a cure, but the victims who would benefit from the drug are poor and considered "unprofitable" by the pharmaceutical industry. It remains, however, a drug company's ethical responsibility to care for the people that its drugs can save, even when helping others is not profitable.

West African Sleeping Sickness, also known as African Trypanosomiasis or HAT, was discovered in 1902 and it kills over 50,000 people a year. These victims,

Your thesis sentence will usually appear at the end of the introduction.

Irish and Chinese immigrants were the bulk of the labor force that built the First Transcontinental Railroad.

Both of these thesis statements are informative because they aren't asking readers to agree or disagree with them. Instead, the writers are trying to *inform* readers about the topic in a neutral way.

ARGUMENTATIVE THESIS.   An argumentative thesis states a claim that your readers can choose to agree or disagree with. This kind of thesis usually has two features—an *assertion* and *backing*:

Assertion	The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should re-exert its authority over
Backing	violence on television, because American children who watch violent shows are becoming desensitized to the consequences of cruel behavior.

QUESTION OR OPEN-ENDED THESIS. Occasionally you may want to hold off on stating your main point, saving it for the end of the paper. In these situations, a question or open-ended thesis may be your best choice, especially if you are arguing about something controversial or making a controversial point:

> What is the best way to ensure that guns are not used to commit crimes while also protecting the constitutional rights of gun owners?

> The question explored in this research paper is whether drones can be safely used to deliver pizzas and other food products on the Penn State campus.

When you use a question or open-ended thesis in your paper's introduction, the conclusion of your paper needs to clearly express your thesis statement. That way, the question or open-ended sentence you posed in your introduction is answered at the end of your paper.

IMPLIED THESIS. In some situations, you might choose not to state your thesis explicitly. Genres that use the narrative pattern, such as memoirs, some profiles, and narrative argument papers, sometimes don't need an explicit thesis statement. In these situations, the author's purpose is to move readers toward thoughtful reflection rather than to inform or persuade them about a single specific point. Other times, the author might feel the overall message will be more powerful if readers figure out the main point for themselves. If you choose not to include a thesis statement, you need to make sure the main point of your text comes through clearly for your readers, even though you aren't stating it explicitly.

Choosing the Appropriate Genre

2.5   **Choose the appropriate genre for your purpose.**

Besides helping you come up with your thesis statement, your purpose statement will also help you figure out which genre is appropriate for your paper. In some cases, your professor has already identified the genre by asking you to write a "review," a "literary analysis," a "proposal," or a "research paper." If so, you can turn to that chapter in this book to learn about the expectations for that genre (Chapters 6–15).

If your professor doesn't specify a genre, the best way to figure out which one would work best is to look closely at your purpose statement. Your thesis sentence will signal which genre would be best for your paper. Look for verbs like "argue," "propose," "analyze," "explain," or "research." These verbs will often tip you off to the genre you need (argument paper, proposal, analytical report, explainer, or research paper).

The genre that fits your purpose statement will help you make strategic decisions about how you are going to invent the content of your paper, organize it, develop an appropriate style, and design it for your readers.

Quick Start Guide

Ready to start right now? Here are some techniques and strategies for identifying your topic, angle, and purpose.

Identify your topic. Your professor may assign a topic or may ask you to come up with one yourself. Either way, figure out what interests you about the topic. Then use a concept map to determine issues related to your topic.

Narrow your topic. Ask yourself whether the topic is appropriate for the amount of time you have available. If it seems too large, pick the most interesting ideas from your concept map and create a second map around them. This second map should help you narrow your topic to something you can handle.

Develop your angle. Your angle is your unique perspective on the topic. A good way to develop an angle is to ask yourself, "What has changed recently about this topic that makes it especially interesting right now?" You might also ask what unique perspective you could offer on this issue.

Write down your purpose. Your purpose is what you want to accomplish—that is, what you want to explain or prove to your readers. Decide whether you are *informing* or *persuading* your readers, or doing something else. Then write a thesis statement that tells exactly what you are going to do. Keep in mind that your thesis will probably change as you develop your drafts.

Choose the appropriate genre. The best way to figure out which genre would work best for your project is to look closely at your purpose statement and thesis statement. The verb that identifies your purpose or thesis will often signal which genre you should use. In some cases, your professor will tell you which genre to use.

Activities for Topic, Angle, Purpose

Talk About This

1. With a small group in class, list some topics that people often discuss and argue about. For example, what do people talk about on news Web sites or sports radio? What do they argue about at local gathering places like cafés, restaurants, or bars? What are some things people discuss with their friends or families? Together, come up with ten things people in your group have discussed or argued about over the last few days.

2. Take a look at today's news on Web sites like *CNN.com, FoxNews.com, Vox.com*, or *MSNBC.com*. What are some of the topics in the news today? You will notice that new topics aren't all that common. However, reporters are always developing new angles on topics that lead to new and interesting insights. With your group, discuss the new angles you notice on these topics. What has changed recently that helped these reporters find new angles on existing topics?

3. Find an opinion piece in your local or campus newspaper or on the Internet. Examine the thesis. Does the author accurately and clearly announce the main point in a thesis statement? If the thesis is not stated, is it clear to you what point the author wanted to make? What kind of thesis is used—informational, argumentative, question, or implied? Do you think the author chose the best kind of thesis for this piece, or would a different kind of thesis statement have worked better?

Try This Out

1. List five topics that you might be interested in writing about this semester. They can include anything that captures your imagination. Then, for each of these topics, ask yourself, "What is new or has changed recently about this topic?" Using your answers to this question, write down two possible angles for each topic.

2. Think of a topic that catches your interest. For five minutes, create a concept map that includes everything you can think of about this topic. Now, look at your concept map and find a part of this topic that you would like to explore further. Next, freewrite on that part for five more minutes and see what kinds of ideas begin to emerge. In what ways would this "narrower" topic be easier to write about than the topic you started with?

3. Pick a topic that interests you and develop a purpose statement for a paper about that topic. Your purpose statement doesn't need to be perfect right now, but try to describe what you want to achieve in your paper. Do you want to inform your readers about your topic or do you want to persuade them? Now, build your purpose statement around one of the words shown in the list on page 14.

4. Using the topic and purpose statement from the exercise above, identify which genre would be most appropriate for writing about this topic. Now, flip to that chapter in Part 2, "Using Genres to Express Ideas," to see what that genre usually involves.

5. Using the topic and purpose statement from Exercise 3, first decide what kind of thesis statement you think would work best (informative, argumentative, question, or implied). Now, write down your thesis statement. Try to come up with a thesis statement that captures your paper's main point clearly and completely.

Write This

1. **Identify the topic, angle, and purpose of an assignment.** Choose a writing assignment from one of your professors. Using the steps and concepts discussed in this chapter, determine the topic you are being asked to write about and come up with a unique angle on it. Then draft a purpose statement for your assignment. Write an e-mail to your professor in which you identify the topic, angle, and purpose of the paper you will be writing. Then discuss which genre would be most appropriate for this assignment and why.

2. **E-mail your professor about a new angle on a topic.** Pick any topic that interests you and find a new angle on that topic. Use concept mapping to explore and narrow your topic. Then write a rough purpose statement that shows what you want to achieve in your paper.

   Choose a genre that would help you to say something meaningful and interesting about this issue. Turn to the chapter in Part 2 that discusses the genre you chose. Using the At-A-Glance diagram that appears early in the chapter, sketch a brief outline on this topic.

   Finally, write an e-mail to your professor in which you explain how you would go about writing an argument on this topic. Explain your topic, angle, and purpose, as well as the genre you would use. Tell your professor why you think your approach to the topic would be effective for your readers.

Chapter 3
Readers, Contexts, and Rhetorical Situations

∨ In this chapter, you will learn—

3.1 how to profile your readers to understand their needs, values, and attitudes.

3.2 how to figure out how context—where readers read and the mediums they use—shapes your readers' experience.

3.3 how to recognize the importance of discourse communities in college and in the workplace.

Writing and reading happen in social and rhetorical contexts. In college and in your career, you will need to write to real people who are reading your work at specific times and in specific places. Your writing needs to inform them, persuade them, and achieve your purpose. Your writing must speak to their specific needs, values, and attitudes.

In the previous chapter, you learned how to identify your topic, angle, and purpose. In this chapter, you will learn how to achieve your purpose by developing *reader profiles* and sizing up the *contexts* in which people will read your work. Together, this information makes up the *rhetorical situation*—that is, the topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context.

Each rhetorical situation is unique, because every new situation puts into play a writer with a purpose, writing for specific readers who are encountering the work at a unique time and place. When you have sized up the rhetorical situation, you can figure out what genre will best help you accomplish what you want to achieve. Understanding your readers and the contexts in which they will experience your work will help you adjust the genre to fit both your goals and your readers' expectations.

Profiling Readers

3.1 **Profile your readers to understand their needs, values, and attitudes.**

Before you start writing, develop a reader profile that helps you adapt your ideas to your readers' needs and the situations in which they will use your document.

A profile is an overview of your readers' traits and characteristics. At a minimum, you should develop a *brief reader profile* that gives you a working understanding of the people who will be reading your text. If time allows, create an *extended reader profile* that will give you a more in-depth view of their needs, values, and attitudes.

A Brief Reader Profile

To create a brief reader profile, you can use the Five-W and How questions to describe the kinds of people who will be reading your text (Figure 3.1).

WHO ARE MY READERS?   What are their personal characteristics? How young or old are they? What cultures do they come from? Are they familiar with your topic already or are they completely new to it?

WHAT ARE THEIR EXPECTATIONS?   What information do they need from you to make a decision? What ideas excite them, and what bores them? What information do they need to accomplish their personal and professional goals?

WHERE WILL THEY BE READING?   Will your readers be sitting at their desks, in a meeting, or on an airplane? Will they be reading from a printed page, a computer screen, a tablet computer, or a small-screen device like a smartphone?

WHEN WILL THEY BE READING?   Will they be reading when the issue is hot and under discussion? Does the time of day affect how they will read your document?

WHY WILL THEY BE READING?   Why will they pick up your document? Do they want to be informed, or do they need to be persuaded?

HOW WILL THEY BE READING?   Will they read slowly and carefully? Will they skip and skim? Will they read some parts carefully and other parts quickly or not at all?

Figure 3.1 Elements of a Brief Reader Profile

You can quickly profile your readers by simply answering the Five-W and How questions.
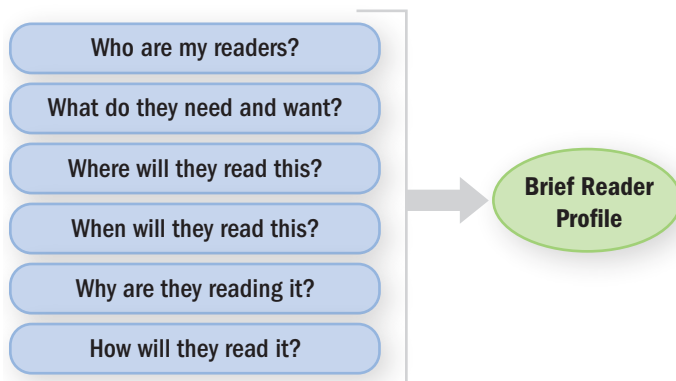
Your answers to the Five-W and How questions will give you a brief reader profile to help you start writing.

An Extended Reader Profile

When you are writing complex or high-stakes documents, like proposals or formal reports, you should create an *extended reader profile* that goes beyond answering the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How questions. An extended reader profile will help you to better anticipate your readers' needs, values, and attitudes toward you and your topic.

WHAT ARE THEIR NEEDS?   Your readers probably picked up your document because they *need* something. Do they need specific information about your topic? What do they need in order to do something or achieve a goal? What are their life goals, and what do they need to achieve them? Make a list of the two to five needs that your readers expect you to fulfill in your document for it to be useful to them.

It helps to think broadly about what people in general need and why. American psychologist Abraham Maslow developed a helpful tool for identifying people's needs. He suggested that human needs could be organized into five levels that move from lower-level *physiological needs* (food, air, sleep) to higher-level *self-actualization needs* (creativity, spontaneity, morality). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as it is called, is often illustrated as a pyramid like the one in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This pyramid is helpful in figuring out how people rank what they need. Usually the needs at lower levels (physiological, safety) need to be satisfied before people are concerned about the needs at the higher levels (self-actualization) on the pyramid.

Source: Based on Maslow, Abraham. (1943). "A Theory of Human Motivation." In *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 430-437.

morality
creativity
spontaneity
problem-solving
lack of prejudice
acceptance of facts   **Self-actualization**

self-esteem, confidence,
achievement, respect of others   **Self-esteem**

friendship, family, sexual intimacy   **Love and Belonging**

health, security of body, security of
employment, security of family, security of property   **Safety**

food, breathing, water, sleep, sex, homeostasis, excretion   **Physiological**

One thing to keep in mind is that Maslow's ranking of needs is culturally dependent, so people from different cultures may value some needs more than others.

WHAT ARE THEIR VALUES?   *Values* involve personal beliefs, social conventions, and cultural expectations. Your readers' values have been formed through their personal experiences, family or religious upbringing, and social/cultural influences.

Personal values.   Like you, your readers have beliefs, principles, and standards of behavior that are important to them. Think about your readers' upbringings and experiences. What are their core beliefs? What makes your readers and their values unique or different?

Customs of their society.   Think about how your readers behave with others in their own social circles. What expectations do their friends and family place on them? What traditions or codes govern their behavior?

Cultural values.   Your readers' culture may influence their behavior in ways even they don't fully understand. What do people in their culture value? How are these cultural values similar to or different from your cultural values?

Mistakenly, writers sometimes assume that their readers hold the same values as they do. Even people who seem similar to you in background and upbringing may have very different ways of seeing the world.

WHAT IS THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD YOU AND THE ISSUE?   Your readers will also have a particular *attitude* about your topic and, perhaps, about you. Will they be excited about your topic or will they find it boring? Are they concerned, apathetic, happy, or upset about your topic? Do you think they already accept your ideas, or are they deeply skeptical? What are their positive or negative feelings about you and the issue?

If your readers are positive and welcoming toward your views, you will want to encourage their goodwill by giving them compelling reasons to agree with you. If they are negative or resistant, you will want to use solid reasoning, sufficient examples, and good style to counter their resistance and help them understand your point of view.

Using a Reader Analysis Worksheet

Anticipating all of your readers' needs, values, and attitudes can be especially difficult if you try to do it all in your head. That's why professional writers often use a Reader Analysis Worksheet like the one shown in Figure 3.3 to help them create an extended profile of their readers.

Using the Reader Analysis Worksheet is easy. On the left, list the types of people who are likely to read your document, ranking them by importance. Then, fill in what you know about their needs, values, and attitudes. If you don't know enough to fill a square, just put a question mark (?) in that area. Question marks signal places where you need to do some additional research on your readers.

An extended reader profile blends your answers to the Five-W and How questions with the information you added to the Reader Analysis Worksheet. These two reader analysis tools should give you a strong understanding of your readers and how they will interpret your document.

Figure 3.3 A Reader Analysis Worksheet

A Reader Analysis Worksheet is a helpful tool for understanding your readers and making good decisions about the content, organization, style, and design of your document.

Types of Readers	Needs	Values	Attitudes
Most Important Readers:			
Second Most Important Readers:			
Third Most Important Readers:			

Analyzing the Context

3.2 **Figure out how context—where readers read and the mediums they use— shapes your readers' experience.**

The *context* of your document involves the external influences that will shape how your readers interpret and react to your writing. Keep in mind that readers react to a text moment by moment, so the happenings around them can influence their understanding of your document.

Your readers will be influenced by three kinds of contexts: place, medium, and social and political issues.

Place

Earlier, when you developed a brief profile of your readers, you answered the Where and When questions to figure out the locations and times in which your readers would use your document. Now go a little deeper to put yourself in your readers' place.

What are the physical features of this place?

What is visible around the readers, and what can they hear?

What is moving or changing in this place?

Who else is in this place, and what do they want from my readers?

What is the history and culture of this place, and how does it shape how people view things?

Figure 3.4 The Influence of Place

The place where your readers encounter your writing will strongly influence their interpretation of your ideas.

A place is never static. Places are always changing. So figure out how this place is changing and evolving in ways that influence your readers and their interpretation of your text (Figure 3.4).

The genre of your document may help you to imagine the places where people are likely to read it. Memoirs, profiles, reviews, and commentaries tend to be read in less formal settings—at home, on the bus, or in a café. Proposals and reports tend to be read in office settings, and they are often discussed in meetings. Once you know the genre of your document, you can make decisions about how it should be designed and what would make it more readable in a specific place.

Medium

The medium is the technology that your readers will use to interact with your document. Each medium (e.g., paper, Web site, public presentation, video, podcast) readers will shape how has its strengths and weaknesses. Each interpret your words and react to your ideas.

PAPER DOCUMENTS.   Paper documents are often read more closely than on-screen documents. With paper, your readers may be patient with longer paragraphs and extended reasoning. Document design, which is discussed in Chapter 19, "Designing," can make a paper document more attractive and help people read more efficiently. In print documents, readers appreciate graphics and photographs that enhance and reinforce the words on the page.

ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS.   When people read text on a screen, they usually "raid" it, reading selectively for the information they need. They tend to be impatient with long documents, and they generally avoid reading lengthy paragraphs. They appreciate informative and interesting visuals like graphs, charts, and photographs that will enhance their understanding. Chapter 30, "Writing with Social Networking," has more ideas about how to write for the screen.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS.   Presentations tend to be much more visual than on-screen and print documents. A presentation made with *PowerPoint* or *Keynote* usually boils an original text down to bullet points that highlight major issues and important facts. Turn to Chapter 32, "Presenting Your Work," for more ideas about how to make great presentations.

PODCASTS OR VIDEOS.   A podcast or video needs to be concise and focused. Hearing or seeing a text can be very powerful in this multimedia age; however, amateur-made podcasts and videos are easy to spot. The people listening to your podcast or watching your video will expect a polished, tight presentation that is carefully produced. Turn to Chapter 30 for more information about making podcasts and videos.
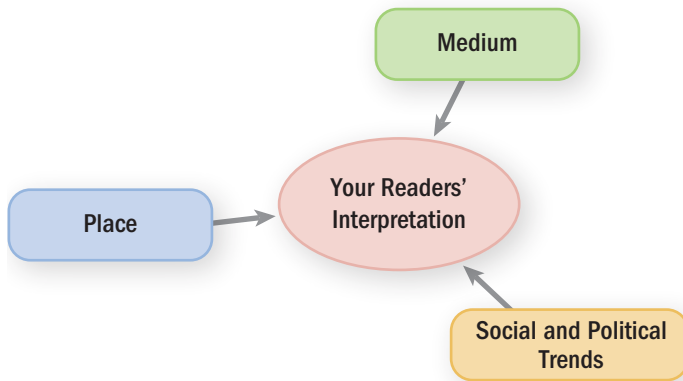
Figure 3.5 The Importance of Context

The context—which includes place, medium, and social and political trends—will shape how your readers interpret your document, as well as their reactions to it.

Social and Political Influences

Now, think about the current trends and events that will influence how your readers interpret what you are telling them.

SOCIAL TRENDS. Pay attention to the social trends that are influencing you, your topic, and your readers. You originally decided to write about this topic because you believe it is important right now. What are the larger social trends that will influence how people in the near and distant future understand this topic? What is changing in your society that makes this issue so significant? Most importantly, how do these trends directly or indirectly affect your readers?

ECONOMIC TRENDS. For many issues, it all comes down to money. What economic factors will influence your readers? How does their economic status shape how they will interpret your arguments? What larger economic trends are influencing you and your readers?

POLITICAL TRENDS. Also, keep any political trends in mind as you analyze the context for your document. On a micropolitical level, how will your ideas affect your readers' relationships with you, their families, their colleagues, or their supervisors? On a macropolitical level, how will political trends at the local, state, federal, and international levels shape how your readers interpret your ideas?

Naturally, readers respond to the immediate context in which they live (Figure 3.5). If you understand how place, medium, and social and political trends influence your readers, you can adapt your work to their specific needs, values, and attitudes.

Discourse Communities and the Rhetorical Situation

3.3 Recognize the importance of discourse communities in college and in the workplace.

In *Writing Today*, you will learn how to write for various discourse communities. A discourse community is a group of people who share common goals, values, and

Figure 3.6 Formal and Informal Discourse Communities

A discourse community is a group of people who share common goals, values, and customs.

customs. There are both *informal* discourse communities and *formal* discourse communities (Figure 3.6).

An example of an informal discourse community would be students at your college or university. Even though you are each unique, you and your fellow students have similar goals, values, and habits because you are experiencing similar things in a shared place and time. Your relationships with other students aren't governed by established rules or conventions, so the discourse community is informal.

Formal discourse communities are more constrained by rules and conventions. Lawyers, engineers, scientists, medical doctors, and other professionals are discourse communities of people who share specialized knowledge, practices, and standards. If you want to join one of these discourse communities, you need to learn what they know, how they do things, and what rules they follow.

Why is this important? Learning to write in college requires much more than learning how to put together good sentences, paragraphs, and essays. Writing involves learning how to gain entrance into the informal and formal discourse communities you want to join.

That's one major reason you are going to college. If you want to be a scientist, engineer, psychologist, or musician, you need to learn the knowledge, genres, and conventions that these formal discourse communities use and value. Even if you are just texting with your friends or designing a poster for a party on your dorm floor, you should be aware that these informal communities also have expectations about your message's content, organization, style, and design.

As you think about the rhetorical situation (topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context), keep your own and your readers' shared discourse community in mind. We will come back to this concept of discourse communities throughout this book. Our point here is that being aware of discourse communities will help you write more clearly and persuasively.

Quick Start Guide

Need to quickly analyze your readers and the context for your document? Here are some steps to help you get started.

Create a brief profile of your readers.   Using the Five-W and How questions, figure out *who* your readers are, *what* they need, *where* and *when* they will be reading the document, *why* they are reading it, and *how* they will be reading it. A sentence or two for each question should be enough to develop a brief profile.

Know your readers' expectations.   On a basic level, what are the two to five pieces of information your readers *expect* or *need* you to tell them for your document to be useful?

Figure out your readers' values.   Write down your readers' personal, social, and cultural values, and try to anticipate how these values will shape your document.

Anticipate your readers' attitudes about you and your topic.   Try to figure out what your readers' mindset will be. Will they be excited or bored, concerned or apathetic, glad or angry, optimistic or pessimistic? Are they already convinced or deeply skeptical? Do they feel positive or negative about you and your topic? Will they welcome your views or be hostile toward them?

Think about how place and medium affect your readers.   The physical place where they are reading may affect how closely they are reading and dictate what they need you to highlight for them. The medium of your document (e.g., paper, screen, presentation, podcast) will also shape how people interpret your ideas.

Consider social and political trends.   Identify any current trends or events that might color your readers' understanding of your writing. What social trends affect your topic? How does money influence the situation? How does your project touch on micropolitical and macropolitical trends?

Keep your discourse community in mind.   A discourse community includes people who share common goals, values, and customs. To participate in a discourse community, you need to learn what they know, how they do things, and what conventions they follow.

Activities for Readers, Contexts, and Rhetorical Situations

Talk About This

1. Choose an advertisement from a magazine or a newspaper. In a group, figure out the advertisement's purpose, target readers, and the contexts in which it was used. Be as specific and thorough as you can as you define the following:

   • *Purpose:* What is the advertisement trying to do? Use key words like *persuade, inform, entertain,* and others to describe its objectives.

   • *Readers:* What are the needs, values, and attitudes of the target readers? How does the advertisement try to use those needs, values, and attitudes to its advantage?

- *Context:* Describe the place and medium of the advertisement as well as the social, economic, and political trends that might influence how it is interpreted. How do these contextual factors influence how readers respond to this ad?

Finally, do you think the ad is effective in persuading or influencing its intended readers? For which readers would it be most effective, and for which ones would it be least effective?

2. Think of a time when you did not communicate effectively. With your group, discuss why the communication failed. What happened? Describe how you misread the situation, and why the audience or readers reacted as they did. How would you have handled the situation better if you had known the needs, values, and attitudes of the audience or readers? If you had better understood the social and political issues, how might your message have been more successful?

3. With your group, make a list of ten things that motivate people to agree with others or to take action. Discuss how these motives influence the ways people make decisions in real life. What are some ways you could use these motivations in your written work to persuade or influence people?

Try This Out

1. Imagine that you are an advertising specialist who has been asked to develop an ad campaign to sell "smart" eyewear like Google Glass to people over 60 years old. Figure out these customers' needs, values, and attitudes toward the product. Then take notes about how place and social and political factors shape their decisions about buying this kind of wearable technology. In a one-page memo to your professor, explain how you might use this knowledge to create an advertising campaign for this new market.

2. You have probably seen electronic billboards that use light-emitting diodes (LEDs) to display content. These billboards offer more flexibility than traditional billboard media, because different advertisements can be displayed at different times of the day.

Imagine that you are creating ads for these kinds of billboards. First, choose a product you want to advertise. Now create two thumbnail sketches (with images and words) for the billboard for two different contexts:

- *Context A:* rush hour, when drivers are stopped at traffic lights in front of the billboard for as long as 90 seconds.

- *Context B:* normal drive time, when drivers may not stop at all, but drive by and have as little as 2 seconds to glance at the billboard. Write a one-page memo explaining how the two versions differ in response to the differing contexts. Explain why each version's design and content is right for the context.

3. For your next project in this class, do a brief reader analysis in which you answer the Five-W and How questions about your readers. Then do an expanded reader analysis in which you explore their needs, values, and attitudes. In a one-page memo to your professor, explain the differences between your brief analysis and the extended analysis. What does the extended analysis reveal that the brief

analysis didn't reveal? Would the brief analysis be enough for this project or do you think the extended analysis would help you write a more effective document? Why?

Write This

1. **Evaluate an argument.** Find an opinion article about an issue that interests you and write a two-page review in which you discuss how well the writer has adapted his or her article for its context. You can find a variety of opinion articles in your local or school newspapers (in the "opinion" section) or on the Internet (blogs, personal pages, online newspaper opinion sections and the responses to them). Mark up the text, paying attention to how the writer addresses the following contextual issues:

   • *Place:* How does the place in which the article was published influence how readers will interact with it? Where is someone likely to read this article and how does that physical place influence how readers will interpret its message?

   • *Medium:* How does the medium shape the way people read the text and what they will focus on?

   • *Social and Political Trends:* What have people been saying about the issue? If it's a hot topic, what makes it hot? What larger trends have motivated the writer to present this argument?

   In your evaluation, explain how the author of this opinion article adjusted his or her argument to the context in which it appears. Discuss whether you felt the opinion article succeeded. How might it be improved?

2. **Rewrite an online text for a different reader.** Find a brief document on the Internet that is aimed toward a specific kind of reader. Then rewrite the document for a completely different type of reader. For example, if it was originally aimed at a young reader, rewrite it for an older reader.

   To complete this assignment, you will need to do a brief and extended reader analysis of your new readers.

   When you are finished rewriting the document, write a brief reflective e-mail to your professor in which you describe how the change in readers altered your choices about the content, organization, style, and design of your rewrite. Attach your new version of the text to your e-mail.

Chapter 4
Reading Critically, Thinking Analytically

In this chapter, you will learn how to—

4.1 "look through" and "look at" texts.

4.2 use seven strategies for analyzing and responding to texts at a deeper level.

4.3 use critical reading to strengthen your writing.

Critical reading means analyzing a text closely through cultural, ethical, and political perspectives. Reading this way means adopting an inquiring and even skeptical stance toward the text, allowing you to explore insights that go beyond its apparent meaning.

When you read critically you aren't discovering the so-called "hidden" or "real" meaning of a text. In reality, a text's meaning is rarely hidden, but it's also not always obvious. As a critical reader, your job is to read texts closely and think about them analytically so you can better understand their cultural, ethical, and political significance. When reading a text critically, you are going deeper, doing things like:

- asking insightful and challenging questions
- figuring out why people believe some things and are skeptical of others
- evaluating the reasoning, authority, and emotion in the text
- contextualizing the text culturally, ethically, and politically
- analyzing the text based on your own values and beliefs

Critical reading is also a key component of good writing (Figure 4.1). In college courses and in your career, you will be working with new and unfamiliar kinds of texts while interpreting images, films, and experiences. In this chapter, you will learn a variety of critical reading strategies that will help you better understand words and images at a deeper level. You will learn strategies for analytical thinking, helping you look beyond the surface meaning of texts to gain a critical understanding of what their authors are saying and how they are trying to influence their readers.

Looking Through and Looking At a Text

4.1   **"Look through" and "look at" texts.**

When reading critically, you should think of yourself as interpreting the text in two different ways: *looking through* and *looking at*.[1]

Looking *Through* a Text

Most of the time, you are *looking through* a text, reading the words and viewing the images to figure out *what* the author is saying. You are primarily paying attention to what it says, not how it says it—to the content of each text, not its organization, style, or medium. Your goal is to understand the text's main points while gathering the information it provides.

Looking *At* a Text

Other times, you are *looking at* a text, exploring *why* the author or authors made particular choices:

- *Genre:* choice of genre, including decisions about content, organization, style, design, and medium.

- *Persuasion strategies:* uses of reasoning, appeals to authority, and appeals to emotion.

- *Style and diction:* uses of specific words and phrasing, including metaphors, irony, specialized terms, sayings, profanity, or slang.

Reading critically is a process of toggling back and forth between "looking through" and "looking at" to understand both *what* a text says and *why* it says it that way (Figure 4.2). This back-and-forth process will help you analyze the author's underlying motives and values. You can then better understand the cultural, ethical, and political influences that shaped the writing of the text.

Reading Critically: Seven Strategies

4.2   **Use seven strategies for analyzing and responding to texts at a deeper level.**

The key to critical reading is to read *actively*. Imagine that you and the author are having a conversation. You should take in what the author is saying, but you also need to *respond* to the author's ideas.

Figure 4.1 Combining Critical Reading with Writing

As you improve your critical reading skills, you will also improve your ability to write effectively.

---
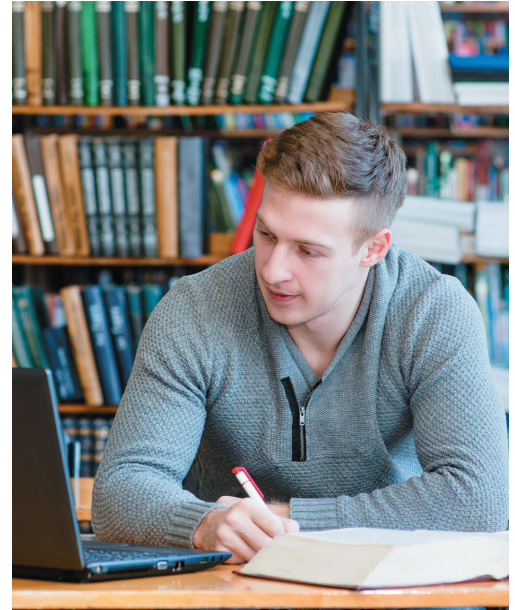
[1] Richard A. Lanham, *Analyzing Prose*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2003), 193–213.

Figure 4.2 Toggling Between *Looking Through* and *Looking At* a Text

Reading critically involves both looking through and looking at texts.

Looking *At* the Text
How and Why

- Organization and style
- Motives and values
- Reasoning and evidence
- Design features
- Voice and tone
- Cultural references
- Choice of medium

Looking *Through* the Text
What

- Ideas and content
- Main point
- Facts
- Quotations
- Descriptions
- Definitions

While you read, be constantly aware of how you are reacting to the author's ideas. Do you agree with these ideas? Do you find them surprising, new, or interesting? Are they mundane, outdated, or unrealistic? Do they make you angry, happy, skeptical, or persuaded? Does the author offer ideas, arguments, or evidence you can use in your own writing? What information in this text isn't useful to you?

Strategy 1: Preview the Text

When you start reading a text, give yourself a few moments to size it up. Ask yourself some basic questions:

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR FEATURES OF THIS TEXT? Scan and skim through the text to gather a sense of the text's topic and main point. Pay special attention to the following features:

- **Title and subtitle**—make guesses about the text's purpose and main point based on the words in the title and subtitle.
- **Author**—look up the author or authors on the Internet to better understand their expertise in the area as well as their values and potential biases.
- **Chapters and headings**—scan the text's chapter titles, headings, and subheadings to figure out its organization and major sections.
- **Visuals**—browse any graphs, charts, photographs, drawings, and other images to gain an overall sense of the text's topic.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEXT?   Find the place where the author or authors explain why they wrote the text. In a book, the authors will often use the preface to explain their purpose and what motivated them to write. In texts such as articles or reports, the authors will usually signal what they are trying to accomplish in the introduction or conclusion.

WHAT IS THE GENRE OF THE TEXT?   Identify the genre of the text by analyzing its content, organization, style, and design. What do you normally expect from this genre? Is it the appropriate genre to achieve the authors' purpose? For this genre, what choices about content, organization, style, design, and medium would you expect to find?

WHAT IS YOUR FIRST RESPONSE?   Pay attention to your initial reactions to the text. What seems to be grabbing your attention? What seems new and interesting? What doesn't seem new or interesting? Based on your first impression, do you think you will agree or disagree with the authors? Do you think the material will be challenging or easy to understand?

Strategy 2: Play the Believing and Doubting Game

Peter Elbow, a scholar of rhetoric and writing, invented a close reading strategy called the "Believing and Doubting Game" that will help you analyze a text from different points of view.

The Believing Game—Imagine you are someone who believes (1) *what* the author says is completely sound, interesting, and important and (2) *how* the author has expressed these ideas is amazing or brilliant. You want to play the role of someone who is completely taken in by the argument in the text, whether you personally agree with it or not.

The Doubting Game—Now pretend you are a harsh critic, someone who is deeply skeptical or even negative about the author's main points and methods for expressing them. Search out and highlight the argument's factual shortcomings and logical flaws. Look for ideas and assumptions that a skeptical reader would reject. Repeatedly ask, "So what?" or "Who cares?" or "Why would the author do *that*?" as you read and re-read.

Once you have studied the text from the perspectives of a "believer" and a "doubter," you can then create a *synthesis* of both perspectives that will help you develop your own personal response to the text (Figure 4.3). More than likely, you won't absolutely believe or absolutely reject the author's argument. Instead, your synthesis will be somewhere between these two extremes.

    Elbow's term, "game," is a good choice for this kind of critical reading.

Figure 4.3 Playing the Believing and Doubting Game

Playing the Believing and Doubting Game allows you to see a text from completely opposite perspectives. Then you can come up with a synthesis that combines the best aspects of each point of view.

BELIEVING   DOUBTING

SYNTHESIS