A Guide to Composition

Written by Kutztown University Composition Faculty and Students

Sandra Leonard, Ph.D.

A Member of The Pennsylvania Alliance for Design of Open Textbooks

The contents of this eTextbook were developed under a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, (FIPSE), U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

About PA-ADOPT

The Pennsylvania Alliance for Design of Open Textbooks (PA-ADOPT) is made up of four participating institutions from Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) that are all regional and primarily undergraduate institutions, situated in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The PA-ADOPT project addresses gaps in the open eTextbook marketplace, improve student learning, and mitigate rising student costs. PA-ADOPT was made possible by the US Department of Education Open Textbook Pilot Program.

About OER

Open Educational Resources (OER) are instructional, learning and research materials, digital or non, that are open-source and in the public domain or that are licensed so that users have free and perpetual permission to engage in the following activities:

- Retain: the right to make, own, and control copies of the content
- Reuse: the right to use the content in a wide range of ways
- Redistribute: the right to share copies of the original content with others for noncommercial uses

Table of Contents

Assignments and Activities

Preface: Welcome To Composition

> If you run, you are a runner. It doesn’t matter how fast or how far. It doesn't matter if today is your first day or if you've been running for twenty years. There is no test to pass, no license to earn, no membership card to get. You just run. - John Bingham *Courage to Start* (14)

Hey there, writers. Yes, you. To echo the quotation above by runner and author John Bingham, *if you write, you are a writer*.

I joined a running club two years ago, and, for the past two winters, I broke out my sweatpants and attempted the “Ice Scraper” series. This series of 5-kilometer (roughly 3.10 mile) races take place in the dead of winter, heedless of rain, sleet, or snow.

My 5k time is trash to begin with, which is not surprising since I’ve never been much of an athlete. My poor coordination skills always guaranteed that I had been a last-round pick in grade school gym class. However, I wanted to try running to challenge myself, to become something more than what I already knew I was.

At the end of one of these frigid 5ks, I was lying face-up on the frozen ground as flurries started to fall when a fellow writing professor at KU who finished running the race much earlier came over to say “hi.” I had come in nearly last place for my age group and was utterly exhausted.

Out of breath, I explained, “Well, I’m not a runner.”

My wise colleague quickly corrected me by quoting Bingham, and every time since, those lines have become a mantra when things get tough. If you run, you are a runner.

I believe that this attitude of belonging is also a key philosophy of college composition. Developing as a writer takes a good deal of practice, confidence to try with sincere effort, and—often—embarrassment and frustration when what you try doesn’t work. It’s hard. And it’s even harder when, all too often, we feel limited by our skill levels, waiting for some imaginary moment when we will be good enough to “qualify.”

But, *if you write, you are a writer.*

I believe that doing things that are outside of our “comfort zone” is part of what makes us human. Perfection isn’t the goal—rather, it’s about putting in the practice time.

It’s my hope that you’ll take this attitude with you in Composition courses. It might mean that you take a leap and try a new style of writing that’s completely unfamiliar to you. Or, that you take an extra shot at revising that particularly frustrating essay. Or, that you speak with your professor about what you need to do to take your writing skills to the next level.

What this mantra also means is that, as fellow writers, we all belong to a writing community. This community includes your classmates at Kutztown University, but also your professors and all the authors you will read and respond to. In this community, we will also want to hear your voice contributing to the conversation.

And we all start somewhere. The following chapters of this digital textbook are designed to give you some guidance on improving your writing skills, your knowledge of academic conventions, and your awareness of writing resources specific to Kutztown University such as the library and writing center. These chapters are also written by your own Kutztown University professors and include examples from current and former Kutztown students to invite you to learn from their experiences. If you are coming from outside of the Kutztown University community, you are welcome to use this book as well and may find chapters two through eight applicable to you.

Your professor might use pieces of this textbook in their course, leave it for you to reference on your own, or they might follow it straight through depending on their own course structure. Throughout the book, there are activities, discussion topics, mini quizzes, links to readings, and more that might be assigned as homework or completed on your own.

Composition can be approached in many ways, using different topics, writing styles, and assignments. What unifies the COMP100 courses at KU is that each is designed to meet the same student learning objectives:

- Describe and evaluate their own composing processes
- Write in order to discover and learn
- Analyze others’ writing to identify and assess their audiences, purposes, rhetorical strategies, and supporting evidence
- Write for different audiences and purposes

- Apply a range of rhetorical strategies and techniques to their own writing
- Write in a variety of genres used in academic and public contexts
- Attribute the work of other writers and creators in appropriate ways
- Substantially revise their written work for content and form
- Rewrite in order to have improved control over the grammar, syntax, and conventions of the English language

You might notice that none of the above objectives requires perfection. Rather, they emphasize awareness, adaptability, and advancement. We might even call these the real "As" over and above any grade achievement. In a nutshell, the goal is that you become a writer who cultivates an awareness of yourself and others so that you can adapt to your writing environments and advance your skills as an effective writer. This textbook is designed to help you achieve these goals.

Because the writing center at Kutztown University is there for you at any stage of the writing process, whether you are just beginning to brainstorm or polishing a revision draft, Chapter 1 of this textbook is "Using the Writing Center at KU." The writing center tutors have been trained to help you develop awareness of your own writing processes, so visiting the writing center can help you achieve many of the goals in the learning objective list above. In this chapter, Writing Center Director, Dr. Patty Pytleski, will take you through how to sign up for a session and what to expect when you visit the writing center. The chapter concludes by offering advice from real writing center tutors to help your visit be a success.

Chapter 2, "The Rhetorical Situation," is all about how to "read the room" to understand the choices writers make, and how to become an adaptable writer yourself. Every situation is different, and becoming an effective writer will mean different things in every situation. This chapter will help you assess audience, purpose, and genre to become a more effective reader and writer.

Chapter 3, "The Shape of Rhetoric" goes over the rhetorical techniques of ethos, pathos, and logos to show how authors can deploy these tools in service of the rhetorical situation. KU Professor Dr. Colleen Clemens contributes a section on pronouns and Dr. Brian Land from Temple University contributes a section on logos.

In Chapter 4, "Telling Stories: Narrative Writing Conventions," Professor Julie King guides you on writing your own story. Professor King introduces the basic

conventions of non-fiction narratives and demonstrates how to use storytelling techniques. Narratives are powerful tools that can be used in a variety of rhetorical situations not limited to a short story, and you might use these techniques in a persuasive essay, marketing proposal, cover letter, or a research paper.

Chapter 5, "Generating Ideas and Topic Proposals," by former KU professor Dr. Sean Weaver, addresses one of the hardest challenges we face particularly when beginning a new writing essay project: coming up with an idea or proposing a topic. In this chapter, Dr. Weaver introduces various methods writers use to explore potential writing ideas, considers how to respond to prompts, and shows methods of broadening or narrowing various topic ideas. By emphasizing the idea that topics/ideas constantly evolve throughout the writing and research process, this chapter demonstrates that our writing choices are never finite.

In Chapter 6, "Strategies of Organization," KU professor Dr. Robb Fillman introduces the basic components of an academic argumentative essay. He provides some time-tested structures that can serve as models for students to emulate when writing persuasively. While there is no single, "correct" way to sequence an essay, this chapter presents some practical approaches to improve the organization of your drafts. This chapter also explores "process" methods, which are designed to help you evaluate how well your draft's arrangement of ideas is working as you revise.

Chapter 7, "Usage and Mechanics," provides strategies to build control over the grammar of the English language. By revisiting the rhetorical situation, we can see writing as a series of situation-specific choices with many possible answers rather than a single right and wrong. Dr. Todd Dodson gives tips in this chapter on reducing wordiness in your writing.

Chapter 8, "Revision and Peer Review," reframes revision as space for productive failure, and peer review as conversation. In this chapter, Dr. Amy Lynch-Biniek takes some of the apprehension out of the writing process by acknowledging that sharing our work with others can be anxiety-inducing and receiving criticism even more so. By showing us how to give and receive productive commentary, we learn how to better revise our work as well as recognize a wider potential for productive variations in writing.

In Chapter 9, "Using the Rohrbach Library at Kutztown University," KU Librarian and Assistant Professor Sue Czerny gives an overview of the many services the

library provides to help with any research and writing projects including using the new library website.

Chapter 10, "Ethical and Effective Attribution," begins with a discussion of the purpose of attribution beyond the avoidance of plagiarism. It discusses issues in ethics—including AI—and the importance of attribution in many genres of writing. Activities cover paraphrase, summary, quotation, footnoting, and citation in academic and professional contexts.

Chapter 11, written by KU librarian Dr. Stefani Gomez, discusses A.I. as an "unreliable polyphonic narrator" and guides students in activities designed to increase their A.I. literacy. Understanding A.I. in this way can help us all be more careful and attentive readers of A.I. generated text.

Finally, an Afterword, "Writing For and Beyond KU," offers some opportunities and challenges in sharing your writing with broader audiences.

Throughout each chapter, links in conventional blue with an underline, like this one to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), might take you to an online resource outside of this text. If you find that any of these are broken, you can send a quick email to me at sleonard@kutztown.edu. Other links in bold such as this one to genre, are internal links that will take you to relevant sections of the textbook that will explain a concept in more detail.

So, writers, wherever you are in your writing journey, it is my hope that this textbook and your experiences in Composition courses will help you practice and develop your craft. As members in the writing community, we may be at different places in our development, but we are in it together.

Welcome to Composition,

Sandra M. Leonard, Composition Coordinator and Associate Professor of English

Sandra M. Leonard, Ph.D. (she/her) teaches Composition, Linguistics, Games and Literature and other courses at KU as an Associate Professor of English and current Composition Coordinator. Her primary area of research is literary plagiarism, and she is working on a book on Oscar Wilde's aesthetic plagiarism. She also has a scholarly and personal interest in table-top rpgs and video games. She has many other interests including playing French horn and roller derby. She is a bad runner, but a runner nonetheless.

Chapter 1: Using the Writing Center at KU

Patricia D. Pytleski, Ph.D. (she/her) is an Associate Professor of English/Composition and Rhetoric and Director of the Kutztown University Writing Center; she teaches courses in writing and secondary English education and supervises English student teachers in secondary education classrooms/field placements. She is the author of "Contact Zones and Contingent Faculty: An Argument for Conversion," "Crossing the Ideological Borders of Writing: The Fundamental Nature of Personal Writing (and Academic Discourse) In the First Year Writing Classroom," "From Walls to Whiteboards to Webpages to Tutoring: The Writing Center as an Artistic, Student- Centered Campus Hub," and "Writing Center Reflections: The Impact of Tutor-to-Tutor Teaching."

Kutztown University Writing Center (KUWC)

The Kutztown University Writing Center (KUWC) is dedicated to supporting scholarship, creativity, and composition on campus. Since its inception in 2000, the KUWC has been helping undergraduate and graduate student writers from various disciplines across campus improve their compositions for classes as well as their own private work. Originally housed in Old Main, KUWC now resides in Rohrbach Library Room 100c on the main level, conveniently located near the library's main computer bank.

The KUWC's mission is to reach undergraduate and graduate student writers through the medium they prefer (online or in person) and to offer informational and educational sessions to faculty teaching any and all disciplines across campus. Additionally, the KUWC's undergraduate and graduate tutors receive continuous training and professional development through campus resources, fostering best practices in Composition and Rhetoric in order to meet the needs of a diverse population of student writers. Tutors share their advice and pedagogical knowledge during writing sessions at the yearly Kutztown University Composition Conference, and with faculty and the students within their classes.

Originally only an in-person center, the KUWC now offers one-on-one writing sessions both in-person in RL 100c and online via the platform WCOnline. The online center opened during KU's closing in 2020 during the pandemic and has remained a useful supplement to the in-person center, allowing students to have

online writing sessions one-on-one when away from campus or when it is more comfortable and/or convenient in their own chosen setting. WCOnline also caters to different learning styles; some students not only prefer online sessions for time management but also feel they learn best this way.

KUWC Logo

To make an in-person 30-minute writing session appointment, call 610-683-4733 or email wrcenter@kutztown.edu. Additionally, you can sign up for an appointment right at the center or on Starfish.

Photo of KUWC Writing Center

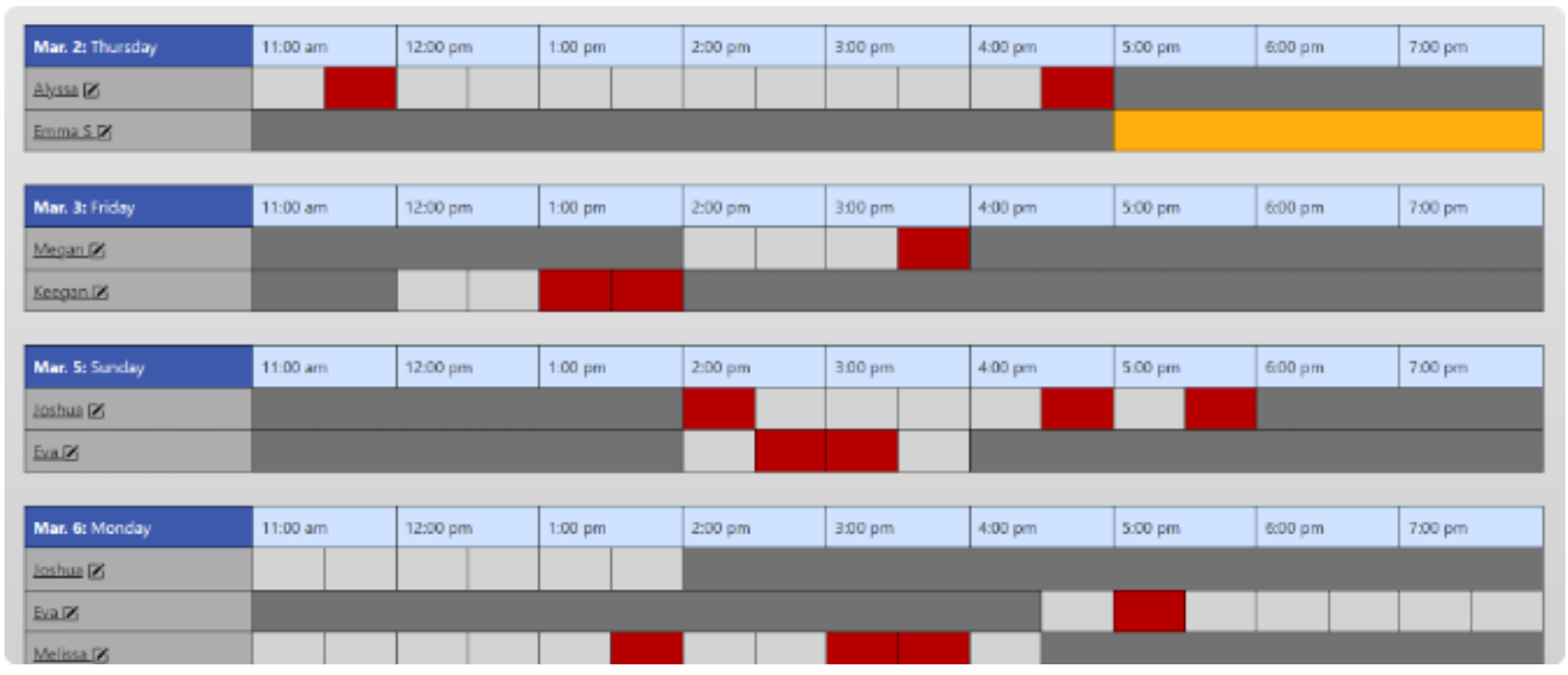
KUWC Online Website QR code

To make an online writing session appointment, go to the KUWC Online website, register, and then choose a session time from the given calendar. The KUWC website contains screenshots and instructions to help you navigate registering for online sessions at this link to KUWC Online. You can also use the QR code above to access KUWC Online.

Students are invited to bring ideas and drafts of their work for any class and from any stage of the writing process. KUWC tutors welcome students working on academic as well as personal writing projects, including but not limited to essays, literary analyses, research papers in the sciences, teaching philosophies, social science case studies, business plans, and creative writing.

The main goal of the KUWC is to aid students in exploring the writing process, considering purpose, audience, organization, and genre. Through friendly conversation, students and tutors discuss writing improvements and methods to develop the skills for future writing endeavors.

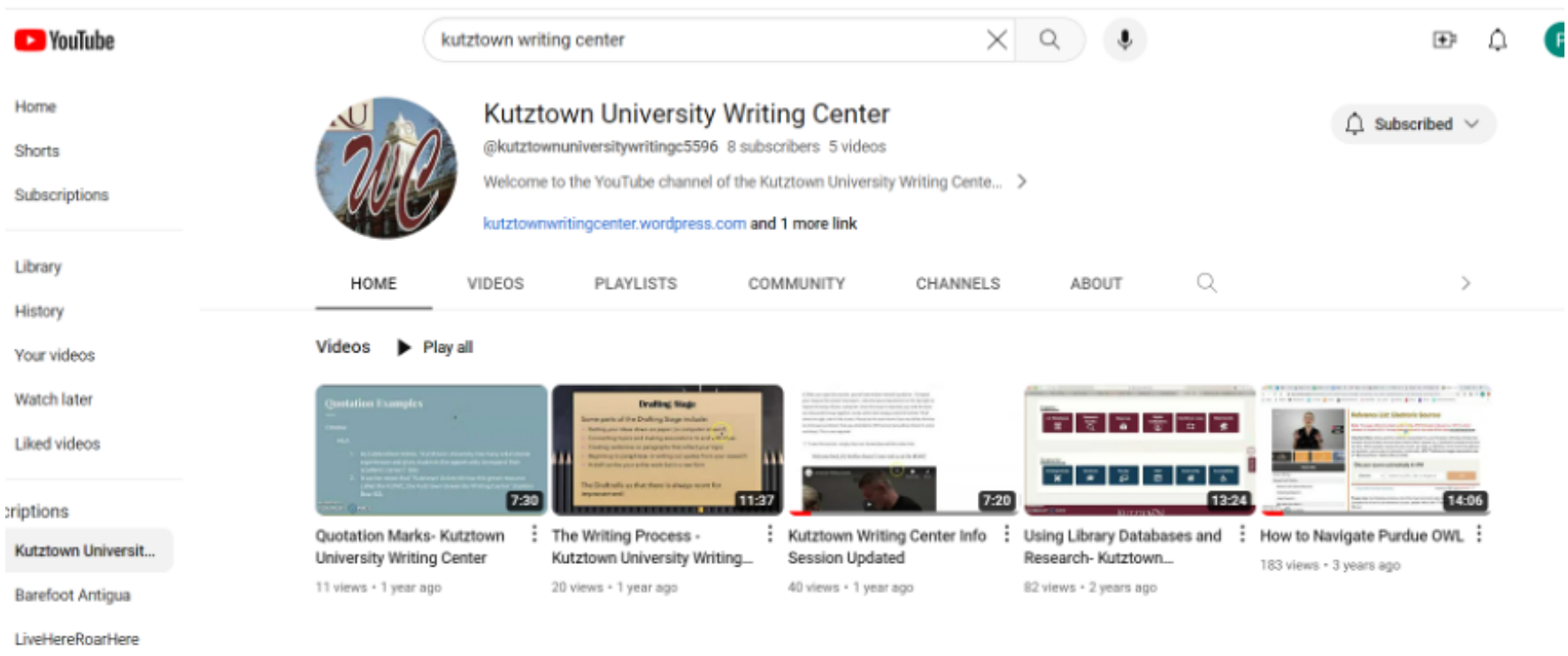
The KUWC's writing tutors can also help you with any citation questions you might have. Knowledgeable about APA, MLA, Chicago, CSE, and other less used citation styles, tutors help students confidently use reference materials as they



KUWC Online Appointment Calendar Sample

ethically document the sources of their citations. While the KUWC offers advice about citation styles based on major, discipline, and concentration, tutors will encourage students to speak to their professors and look to assignment sheets for guidance about required citation styles.

The KUWC website provides an abundance of helpful material on citation needs, as well as instruction and guidance about the writing process, navigating research, writer's block, thesis statements, topic sentences, transitions, and clarity in writing. The KUWC YouTube channel also provides helpful general information about the KUWC, using library databases, quotation marks, and navigating Purdue OWL.



KU Writing Center YouTube Channel Screenshot

When coming to a writing session (online or in-person), you are asked to bring your assignment and the work you have already produced (in hard copy or on your computer), professor assignment sheets, and references and sources used while writing. You will be asked to share your course name/number and your professor's name with the writing tutor, but you can decide whether or not you would like the tutor to email your professor with brief confirmation that you visited the center and what was generally discussed. Some professors encourage students to have this email sent, but ultimately confidentiality is left in your hands.

During writing sessions, KUWC staff does not proofread or "fix" papers. Rather, whether in-person or online, they will sit down with you one-on-one and discuss the writing, determine possible needs and improvements, and provide advice and information on revising and growing a writer. Tutors encourage students to direct

the conversation about their writing and concerns while gently guiding students to look at additional aspects. The tutors ask friendly questions about the assignments, the student writers' priorities, and their thinking and voice. In this way, the KUWC aims to help students understand their writing and improve it in the context of their courses and assignments, as well as for potential future writing endeavors.

The KUWC's undergraduate and graduate assistant tutors are well-vetted and trained, working with undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students and sharing their support, guidance, and knowledge. Tutors receive training in content, mechanics, and citations but student writers also benefit from the tutors' professional development in the following: Disability Services Office training to help with diverse learners, Safe Space training to ensure all students feel welcome and safe in the KUWC, and mental health and self-care training and sharing of counseling and crisis resources.

A free and readily accessible resource, the Kutztown University Writing Center hopes to help undergraduate and graduate student writers with their writing, personal and academic, from any subject matter or discipline, and it works with them to improve their writing for future writing endeavors. Welcoming, comfortable, student-led, and confidential writing sessions guide students to use the writing process as they edit and revise their work. The KUWC is designed to help students connect with their writing, letting them best express their ideas and share their voices.

Mariah

When having a hard time getting started, sometimes we can get too caught up in wanting to word it perfectly for the first try. So write whatever you had in mind, no matter how redundant or simple; revising is your best friend! - Mariah, Undergraduate Tutor

When you start to feel overwhelmed, be patient and give yourself grace; that way when you get back to writing, you'll feel encouraged - Alyssa, Undergraduate Tutor

Alyssa

Husdon

Make your voice and your argument heard. If you are worried about summarizing or quoting more than you are explaining, highlight your own words and check. - Hudson, Undergraduate Tutor

Do not underestimate the benefit of collaboration when it comes to writing. Coming into the Writing Center, talking to your professors, and having conversations with your peers about your writing can help you improve. It is important to get a second (or third or fourth) opinion to make your work stronger and help you convey exactly what you are trying to write about. - Josephine, Undergraduate Tutor

Josephine

Dani

Before starting a paper, it's best to break down your ideas into an outline. This can be as messy as you want—it's your thought process. Having an outline makes the paper less intimidating to approach when you want to begin writing. Feel free to come to the writing center with an outline; we love to see your ideas come to life! - Dani, Undergraduate Tutor

One thing I like to do is read my paper or assignment out loud once I'm in the revision stage. Hearing how your words and sentences sound out loud can pinpoint where there needs to be small tweaks and changes. Additionally, it can help with any grammar edits! - Keeley, Graduate Assistant Tutor

Keeley

Kylie

It always helps to bring your rubric and directions for your assignment when working with a tutor; it can help keep us all on the same page! - Kylie, Graduate Assistant Tutor

When you are struggling with a thesis, the best thing to do is think about the question and/or conversation you are trying to enter. Jack, Graduate Assistant Tutor

Jack

Savannah

Citation guides, like APA and MLA, are super helpful for formatting and citing your sources. Stop by the writing center, and we'll help you use them, so you can feel confident in your writing! - Savannah, Graduate Assistant Tutor

Activity

Final Activity 1.1: Visit the Writing Center

Visit the writing center with your latest draft of any writing assignment you are working on. Right after your meeting, write yourself a reminder list of all the things you still want to accomplish in order to revise your draft to the next stage.

Chapter 2: The Rhetorical Situation

"…What are you reading?"

He glanced down and turned the book upward. It was The Dice Man by Luke Rhinehart, a novel I had not heard of at the time, but which I have since read roughly thirty times. "Is it good?"

"All books are good," he said.

"That's not true," I said. "I've read some really bad books." I was thinking specifically of *Anne of Green Gables*, which we'd been forced to read the term before and which was the most stupid, annoying book I'd ever encountered.

"They weren't bad books," Phin countered patiently. "They were books that you didn't enjoy. It's not the same thing at all. The only bad books are books that are so badly written that no one will publish them. Any book that has been published is going to be a 'good book' for someone."

I nodded. I couldn't fault his logic.

--*The Family Upstairs* by Lisa Jewell (93)

Introduction

What makes any piece of writing "good"? What makes it "bad"? At first glance, the answers to these questions might seem obvious. After all, throughout our K-12 education all of us have been tested on our grammar, spelling, and syntax so that we know how to avoid so-called "bad" writing. And on top of that we all have been exposed to the very best literature, so that we know what "good" writing is.

Right?

There's something faulty with this logic, however. If you've ever seen the uncapitalized poetry of e. e. cummings or the chapter-long sentence in James Joyce's novel Ulysses, then you know that some of the most well-regarded writers tend to break the "rules" of writing for greater power or a more distinctive style. And it's not just the well-established authors of the English canon who can get away with it. One of the ironies of *literature* is that over time, it becomes considered "conventional" and "traditional" writing even though the

reason it was initially valued was that it broke the conventions of traditional writing of its time.

But even if we remove "literature" from the equation and consider just how everyday people ought to write, using textbook-recommended English (often called "standard English" by linguists with the acknowledgement that it is only "standard" because it is regarded as such by the majority of speakers and not because it's the language that the majority of speakers actually use) isn't appropriate in all circumstances. A text message to a friend won't follow the same grammatical rules as a cover letter to apply for a job. A business letter won't be written with the same formatting as an academic essay. An instructional manual won't have the same tone as a persuasive speech.

As we will discuss in more detail in the chapter on grammar and mechanics, often even what we generally consider the basic "rules" of grammar are altered in different settings. Take, for instance, a text message to a friend. It's a common misconception that texting has fewer grammatical rules than "formal writing" such as an academic essay. However, this is simply not true. It has *different* rules. For example, in a New York Times article entitled "No More Periods When Texting. Period.," journalist Max Harrison-Caldwell has noted that periods at the ends of messages convey a seriousness that can be interpreted as off-putting, angry, or overly formal, so it's often more appropriate to leave them off friendly messages. The same punctuation that would be expected in an academic essay or business letter would be inappropriate in the context of a text as it would convey a different meaning. This is just one example to illustrate that texting abides by its own grammatical rules. Additionally, there are emojis that, like dated slang, can make the speaker seem out of touch, uses of ellipses (…) that are often interpreted as suggestive, capitalization choices that convey tone, and many other grammatical rules in texting.

And like *all* grammatical rules, they are subject to change over time. This is even more apparent if you see examples of Old, Middle, and Modern English side-by-side. If one were to use Old or Middle English in any almost context today, it simply wouldn't be understood. As you can see, the rules of English a thousand, a hundred, or even ten years ago are different from the rules used right now. When it comes to language, older isn't necessarily better.

So, if the rules can be broken for artistic reasons, are different in different contexts, and are always changing, is the quality of writing all in the "eye of the beholder"? In other words, is there no such thing as "bad books" as Phin indicates in the passage at the chapter's beginning?

The problem is that the labels of "good" and "bad" have moralistic, aesthetic, and pragmatic connotations that make these deceptively simplistic terms way too loaded to handle this question. So, let's simplify the problem by focusing instead on what's *effective*.

KU COMP100

In fact, COMP100 at Kutztown University is labeled "Effective Composition" for a good reason: so that we can acknowledge that different forms of writing are called for in different circumstances. Because the key to writing effectively is in fully understanding the situation.

Activity 2.1: Compare "Good" and "Bad" Writing

Pick out one piece of writing that you, personally, think is "bad writing" and one piece that you think is "good." On your own or with a group of other students, discuss your basis for your judgment. If you are comparing your selections with classmates, also compare your judgments to see where you differ, *without* attempting to resolve or agree. If you are working alone, try to pin down what personal tastes your selections reveal about you.

What is a "*Rhetorical* Situation"?

As the introduction indicates, the key to effective composition is in understanding the situation, which is often called the rhetorical situation. But what is the word "rhetorical" doing in here?

When people think of the word "rhetoric," usually what comes to mind is the phrase "rhetorical question"—those sorts of questions that aren't meant to be answered like normal questions. For example, you might exclaim to a friend, "What's wrong with you?" when they do something funny, or you might reply to a request by saying "why not?" Rhetorical questions are called "rhetorical" because instead of asking for questions, they are meant to persuade. But this technique is only one of many possible techniques of persuasion where the practical reality of what these words *do* is a bit tricker than we might anticipate.

This complexity has resulted in the fact that the word "rhetoric" also has the poor reputation of meaning language that is deliberately misleading such as in a sentence like "please stick to the facts, and spare me the political rhetoric." In this case, "rhetoric" is synonymous with insincere speech, and, indeed, no one appreciates being accused of being dishonest or fake.

But, in this regard, rhetoric gets a bad rap. In the field of rhetoric and composition, "rhetoric" is simply the art of persuasive language. Rhetoric is used in any persuasive situation from advertisement to argument. It's rhetoric that is responsible for the emotion of a fiery speech, the logical presentation of a scientific claim, and the weight of authority behind a judge's verdict.

In the following sections in this chapter, you will learn how to identify these "rhetorical methods" as well as the conditions in which these methods are effective. In essence, all effective composition is rhetorical as it determines how well your audience will trust, understand, and respond to your writing. And that's something worth knowing, *don't you think?*

Reading the Room on the Rhetorical Situation

Have you ever told a joke where no one laughed? Or made a pop culture reference that the person you were talking to didn't understand at all? Or maybe you have mentioned a word or concept that the person you were speaking to didn't know. If any of these things have happened to you, then you have already learned the hard way about the importance of the rhetorical situation.

The **rhetorical situation** describes the surrounding social context that can result in effective (or ineffective) persuasive communication. The rhetorical situation is all about "reading the room" to perceive the qualities and effects your language has on a given social situation. The rhetorical situation is generally broken down into three features:

- Audience: Whom the author is speaking to.
- Purpose: What the author is attempting to achieve.
- Genre: How the author presents their work.

Audience: Whom the Author is Speaking to.

If you are a proficient speaker of English, it's easy to take for granted your skills and assume that whatever you are reading is written for a very broad or general audience. However, applying a label of "general audience" or making the statement that something is written for "everyone" is almost always incorrect. First, the language of a text will mean that only speakers of that language can be reasonably considered to be in the text's audience. Furthermore, the register or formality with which the text is written often implies a certain class, profession, or level of education. Finally, references, terminology, and examples included within the text may be familiar to certain audiences and not to others.

Determining the “audience” of a text is not so much about who *can* read and understand a text, but who the author seems to be targeting. This sort of analysis requires a good deal of reading between the lines and paying attention to little details involving the *style* of writing, often over and above the subject. As an example, look at the following two passages about fairytales. Are they written to the same audience?

Passage 1

> Like folklore, mythology, fables, tall tales, and other classic stories that have been handed down, fairy stories are part of the oral tradition of literature. What makes the fairy tale different from the others is its use of magic and fantasy. Contrary to popular belief, the supernatural characters in fairy stories are not always fairy godmothers or winged sprites like Tinker Bell in Peter Pan. They may be magicians, ogres, dragons, brownies, elves, goblins, gnomes, or leprechauns.

Passage 2

> Morphologically, a folktale may be termed any development out of villainy (A) or lack (a) through intermediary functions to marriage (Rs), or to other functions used in the capacity of the denouncement. Terminal functions are, at times, a reward (F), the gain or general liquidation of misfortune (*K), a rescue from pursuit (W*), etc. This type of development is termed by us a move. Each new villainy, each new lack, creates a new move. One folktale may have several moves.

Both of these passages are about fairy tales/folktales with the purpose of defining what this genre of literature really is. The authors of both would include well-known fairy tales like “Cinderella” and “The Princess and the Frog” as fitting their definitions.

However, the difference in the way these two passages are written comes down to the intended audience. The first passage is from Britannica Kids, an online encyclopedia written specifically for children and students in grade school. You may have noticed that this first sample uses a specific example of a fairy tale, “Peter Pan,” and a list of standard supernatural characters and creatures (magicians, ogres, dragons…). These examples would likely be well known to most English-speaking American youth in grade school, making it easy for this audience to connect the definition with these examples. Additionally, note how the sentences, while not overly simplistic, are direct and fairly short. The words

used in this passage should be familiar to most grade school children, but where there's a word that might be unfamiliar (e.g. brownies) there are plenty of other examples or synonyms (e.g., "magic and fantasy") so that even a young reader can pick up on the context clues the passage refers to.

The second passage is from Vladimir Propp's landmark 1928 structuralist academic study of Russian fairy tales and folklore, Morphology of the Folktale. Like the encyclopedia entry, Propp defines the folktale. But, rather than speaking to children and young students, Propp writes to scholars in the fields of linguistics and folklore. As such, Propp does not need to use well-known examples to illustrate his points. He can also use a word like "morphologically" (meaning basically related to a thing's form and structure) without defining it or providing context clues because his audience can recognize that term as relating to specific areas of study in their field. Propp uses some familiar words such as "villainy" and "lack" but uses them as technical labels in his larger study. Propp, or his English translator, Laurence Scott, uses also syntax that might trip-up a basic reader such as the interrupting phrase "at times" and a list that ends with "etc."

Both authors have the intention of being understood by their respective audiences, and yet they achieve these goals in different ways. And, importantly, both are effective in appealing to these audiences. *Britannica Kids* is a popular encyclopedia used by many children in their first essays and subscribed to by school library systems. Vladimir Propp has been successful in influencing a whole field of literary analysis. You might disagree with one or the other, and we might, of course, debate the finer points of the success of each in appealing to their audience. For instance, we might question what ages the *Britannica Kids* article appeals to and if the word choice is truly designed for that reading level or if their examples need to be updated to be more culturally inclusive. For Propp, we might question if he sufficiently engaged with potential critiques from his contemporary scholarly community in putting forth his own model, which might have ultimately influenced its reception.

Additionally, it's important to note that there might be more than one audience for any given piece of writing. While we generally consider the intended audience of a piece to be most significant, unintended audiences can also have an effect on the success of a work. For example, The *Britannica Kids* website will need to seem sufficiently educational and attractive to parents and school administrators in order for them to buy the license for the website. This secondary audience can have a very practical and economic impact on the effectiveness of this work. So, unintended and secondary audiences can also have an impact on the effectiveness of a work.

The bottom line is that subject matter does not necessarily determine audience. We might automatically assume that a passage written about fairy tales would or should be for children, but we'd be very wrong. To be sure, people who are interested in fairy tales are likely to be drawn to related subject matter, but authors can attempt to reach out to those interested or those who agree with them or those who do not.

Is it "Jargon" or Technical Terminology?

Have you ever read something that you know is in English but have no idea what it said? If so, you are not alone. Abbreviations, acronyms, legalese, slang, and industry-specific terms can make a piece of writing impossible for a general reader to understand and is often termed "jargon" when it is misused. Is using such language a bad thing? Yes, if you want to be understood by a broad audience. In this case, it's often a good idea to provide explanations, add extra examples to illustrate complex ideas, or use phrasing and vocabulary that your audience would better understand.

However, pieces written for a more restricted audience—perhaps a professional community—often employ such terminology for a useful purpose: specificity. While a general audience of non-experts may not be sensitive to the different shades of meaning between one particular term and another, a professional audience often finds it essential to make such distinctions. For example, a composer might direct musicians to play a certain passage of music, "forte," which is a degree of loudness in between "mezzo forte" and "fortissimo." While the label "forte" is useful to musicians, if speaking to a general audience, the same composer might be better understood by simply saying "loud."

The problem comes when a writer confuses these two audiences and writes too broadly for a specific audience or—more commonly—too specifically for a broad audience. The answer to this problem is to remain responsive to your audience. Peer review is a great strategy for seeing if other readers will interpret your work as you do.

Activity 2.2: "the Curse of Knowledge"

Read Steven Pinker's 2014 Wall Street Journal essay "The Source of Bad Writing," and take a moment to describe a situation where you didn't understand what someone else was speaking about. Was it due to the "Curse of Knowledge"? What should the speaker have done to get you to better understand them?

—but I can't say this to my husband

MY HUSBAND will give me this Christmas, as he does every year, some lovely and very useless trinket. He likes to be extravagant and a little foolish in his gift to me. He feels that way about me.

But sometimes I wish—how can I say it? He wants so much to please me—only, like other men, he's just a bit unseeing.

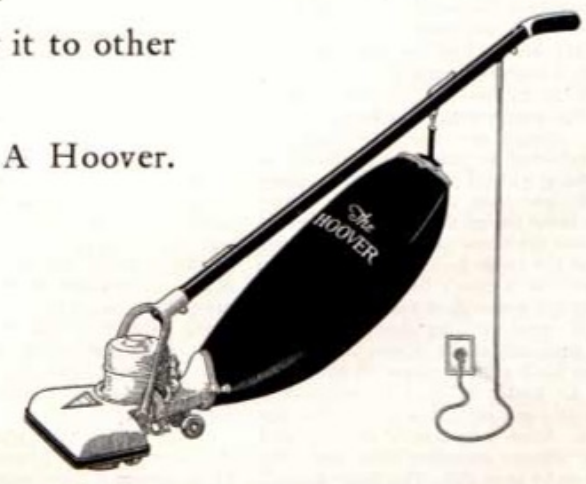
To him I'm still the girl he married. Young and strong and radiant with health. He doesn't know—no one but the woman who cares for a home can know—how much of that youth and strength and health can slip from one under the burden of cleaning duties just a little heavier than they need be.

Yet how can I suggest the gift I really want? He would only laugh at me. Tell me that Christmas is no time for such a sensible purchase. That I must have something for *myself*.

If only he could see that what I want *is* for myself. More for myself than any pretty trinket. That it means the very preservation of those things about which he cares so much. My youth. Freshness. That sparkle which is unwearied health.

I can't say this to my husband. But I can say it to other husbands like mine:

Why not give her this year what she really wants? A Hoover.



IVE HER A HOOVER AND YOU GIVE HER THE BEST"

"But I can't say this to my husband" from the Saturday Evening Post in the Public Domain (Read the image's full text)

So, how do we know who the audience of a piece is? The answer is a combination of careful research and close reading. With research, you can investigate the publication, the author, and what others are saying about the piece. This information can reveal patterns and trends that can act as clues to better understand the text's target audience, such as if the publication generally deals with a certain hobby or that the author is known for their humor. As with all research, employ your own critical thinking skills in determining what details are most relevant.

As for **close reading**, this is a strategy of reading for the little stylistic moves the author makes. For instance, you might pay attention to the lengths of sentences in a passage or how complex they are. Using your knowledge of grammar and mechanics can help you determine not only the education level of a target audience, but also the nationality of the target audience as spelling, punctuation, idiom, and colloquial phrasings will differ in the many varieties of English used throughout the world. The author's grammatical point of view will often give a good idea about audience. By using second-person plural pronouns when referring to the audience (e.g. we, us), for instance, they are including the reader with them in a group. Similarly, if the author considers themselves to be separate, they might refer to the audience with second-person singular (e.g. you, Dear reader). Finally, paying close attention to the specific examples the author uses might give clues as to any number of communities to which they might be appealing.

These features might be used to imply a readership of any demographic or identity characteristic that the reader might belong to including (but not limited to) gender, age, education level, political affiliation, nationality, race, ethnicity, dis/ability, sexuality, religion, profession, personal interests and more. The more closely and carefully you read, the more details you will discover about who the author assumes they are speaking to and what they themselves believe about this group of people.

Activity 2.3: Determining Audience for Yourself

Analyze the following passage first through close reading, and then find out more about it by doing some light research. Write three sentences of very descriptive analysis and then come to a determination of its audiences, both primary and secondary. KU Should Not Have Shut Down the Spanish Major by Paula Guarderas.

Activity 2.4: Writing for Different Audiences

Imagine that you are hosting a big graduation party, and you want all your friends, family, and even people that you work and go to school with to come. Pick three very different people that you know and personally invite them to this party. Write each of them a brief and sincere invitation that you might send via text message, email, or another method. Once you have written each, consider any specific ways that you may have altered your writing to appeal to your audience and why you might have done so.

Purpose: What the Author is Attempting to Achieve.

Writing is an action that can have real consequences in the world. Good, bad, and everything between. Persuasive writing can enlighten minds, sell products, cause war, and provoke peace. It can entertain, illuminate, explore, inform, argue, convey, antagonize, activate, prevent, soothe, share, and much more.

In this communication-saturated world, it's often important that we think critically about not only for whom a piece is intended, but what a writer wants from that audience. For instance, in the following passage, consider, first, to whom it is directed, and then consider what they want that audience to do.

The following page is from a December 15, 1928 issue of the magazine, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and it is, of course, an advertisement for Hoover vacuums. It is meant to have an audience of economically aspiring American households to encourage married men to buy their wives Hoover vacuums for Christmas.

However, the first few sentences of this ad might not have made this purpose immediately obvious. The title or tagline "—but I can't say this to my husband" is designed to catch our attention and make us curious about what this woman, who is presumably the woman pictured in the top right in an oil painting, cannot tell her own partner. The line suggests that we might read the confession of some embarrassing or perhaps even scandalous secret. The first sentence, "My husband will give me this Christmas…," builds on this expectation by maintaining a first-person perspective (using "me" and "I"). Asides like "how can I say it" cultivate a conversational and intimate tone, as if the woman is speaking in close quarters with the reader.

Both the picture and the mention of the woman's husband buying her "trinkets" for a holiday should convey the target audience as wealthy, or—more likely—economically aspirational. This implication is important as it not only helps the ad

reach households that can afford the product being sold, but it also makes their economic situation seem enviable to the reader. The woman narrating the ad inserts subtle boasts about her wealth ("he likes to be extravagant"), their relationship ("he wants so much to please [her]"), and her body (which she describes as appearing "Young and strong and radiant with health". All these details are designed to make an audience who presumably desires these things jealous of this woman, perhaps even to the point of resentment. The ad concludes with her acting as an envoy, speaking on behalf of married women to their husbands so that these men can get their wives what they desire. Ultimately, the woman in the ad does *not* get what she "really wants." Why? So that we do.

The woman's confessional tone and apparent snobbery are a clever rhetorical device to make the audience first judgmental (she must have done something bad that she can't tell her husband!), then jealous (what a wealthy household and perfect man whose only flaw is spoiling his wife!), and then vindicated when they can have the very thing that the woman does not. Though we can boil the purpose of this ad down to "selling Hoovers," we should also recognize how a writer's purpose is more complex in the ways that it establishes a relationship with the audience to make them feel, do, respond, and believe what the writer wants.

This 1928 Hoover ad is very clever. It is also sexist in its assumptions about the ideal roles, desires, and interests of men and women. Most ads make many such assumptions and rely on cultural stereotypes about race, gender, sex, ability, and more to reach a target audience and capitalize on our shared cultural experiences. And, though the primary purpose of the ad might be to sell a product, we can often glean deeper messages that work in tandem with its purpose by helping to guide its audience's reaction.

Activity 2.5: Advertisement Analysis

Choose any advertisement that you encounter in your daily life where YOU are the target audience. Figure out, first, what the ad is attempting to sell if this is not immediately obvious. Then, do an analysis like the one above for the Hoover ad that connects audience and purpose. What is the ad trying to make you think, feel, and believe about the product that it's selling, and how is it doing so?

Genre: What Type of Writing it Is

What's your favorite genre of music? Whether it's rock, rap, classical, jazz, pop, country, or anything else, you know that the different expectations for each genre make it what it is. For instance, you wouldn't generally critique a punk rock song for leaving out violins, but you might critique an orchestral arrangement for doing so. Of course, that's not to say that punk rock songs cannot have violins or that every orchestral arrangement must have them—it is merely that violins are part of the expectations of one genre and not another.

Similarly, different forms of writing have general characteristics that, when taken together, form the identity of the genre. However, these boundaries are more guidelines or clues than rigid rules, and sometimes there are influences and overlaps between writing genres. As with determining audience and purpose, applying close reading will aid you in determining the genre of a piece.

Consider, for example, the following passage:

> Whenever practicable, shortly before fires die out, open the cleaning doors in the boiler casings and clean with air or steam lances the tubes, baffles, etc., of accumulated soot. If the soot be allowed to cool down with the tubes it is liable to form a scale which will be difficult to remove. A heavy air pressure will materially assist in the cleaning. An excellent method of partially cleaning the fire side of tubes and casings without using the lances is to put a comparatively heavy air pressure on the firerooms shortly before fires die out, opening boiler dust doors but with ash pit and furnace doors closed. Close all sources of air supply to furnace and keep them closed until boiler is cooled.

Do you know what a steam lance is? What do boiler dust doors look like? Are you baffled by baffles? Speaking personally, I am. But even if you are basically familiar with this terminology, this passage removed from its context is likely difficult to decode. Despite the fact that you may have no idea what this passage is talking about, the manner in which it is written should give you clues to its audience, general purpose, and—particularly—genre.

Regarding audience, we've already noted the technical terminology (e.g., baffle) is without further explanation or definition, which makes it probable that the audience is a small professional community with a shared lexicon. The fact that cleaning tubes and removing soot are involved might give us clues that this profession involves manual labor. The optionality of one of these procedures

seems to establish a relationship of guidance (e.g., “an excellent method of…”) rather than simply giving absolute commands, which suggests that the target audience is a highly skilled professional capable of making their own judgments.

While we cannot know the ultimate purpose of this passage without more context, obviously instruction is involved. We can tell this from the second-person point of view in sentences like the final one when it tells the reader to “close all sources of air supply.”

To determine genre, we should keep any known attributes of audience and purpose in mind and look for other stylistic, formatting, and design elements that might tell us the form of the writing in comparison to forms that we already know. One very basic genre division is between poetry and prose. Poetry is a creative and expressive form of writing, such as in sonnets, limericks, free verse, and most song lyrics. Prose, on the other hand, lacks sustained and deliberate metrical structure and describes writing that is generally grouped into sentence structures. The fairly regular sentence structures in the passage should give us a good idea that, if nothing else, we can tell that it is prose. But, beyond that, we can see that there does not seem to be any flowery or lengthy descriptive language, making it likely that this is not a creative genre such as a novel or short story. Though, note that these factors are just clues rather than determining or definitional ones.

The grammar of this passage can tell us even more about its genre. Purely informative texts like encyclopedia articles and non-fiction books more often use third person to speak about their subjects at a metaphorical remove. With very rare exceptions, printed fictional texts also do not use second person. Only certain genres are generally written using second person, and these often have a specific audience in mind such as letters, emails, and notes. However, it may be notable that this text, while it uses imperative voice (commands, e.g. “open the cleaning doors”), it doesn’t use the singular “you,” which suggests that the target audience might not be a singular recipient. The fact that it avoids first person and any personal or friendly asides also suggests that this genre doesn’t generally establish a personal relationship with its audience. The verb tense (past, present, etc.) can also sometimes give us clues, and the fact that the passage uses present tense suggests that the audience is meant to read the imperatives in real time, by following along.

Putting all this together—the technical terminology, professional audience of skilled manual laborers, impersonal and dry prose, the non-specific second person, and the present tense—what is it?

A manual! If you thought that this passage seemed like a set of instructions, directions, or a how-to guidebook, your intuitions were correct. Specifically, the passage is from Instructions for the Operation, Care, and Repair of Boilers, Reprint of Chapter 2 of the Manual of Engineering Instructions written in 1926 by the US Navy for use aboard large ships.

Other features such as length, citation style, the use of images, and the formatting including font style, text size, and page design can also convey a good deal of information about the genre, sometimes at a mere glance.

In many ways, the example of a boiler manual is a straightforward example whereas many texts will involve several genres in one.

Activity 2.6: Investigate the Genre on Your Own

Investigate the following passage on your own to determine its genre, and—as a hint—the way it might manipulate that genre. Also, note that the following is a very brief selection of the longer text.

> ABSURDITY, n. A statement or belief manifestly inconsistent with one's own opinion.
>
> ACADEME, n. An ancient school where morality and philosophy were taught.
>
> ACADEMY, n. [from ACADEME] A modern school where football is taught.
>
> ALONE, adj. In bad company.
>
> BIRTH, n. The first and direst of all disasters.
>
> CABBAGE, n. A familiar kitchen-garden vegetable about as large and wise as a man's head.
>
> CIRCUS, n. A place where horses, ponies and elephants are permitted to see men, women and children acting the fool.

Once you have attempted to do a close reading and analysis of it and have determined what you can about its genre, you can check your assumptions by reading the rest of this work here and finding out more about it on this Wikipedia page that gives away its title and genre.

Activity 2.7: Manipulating Genre With AI

With your professor's guidance and permission—and not to submit for any coursework—first, design a prompt for an AI that asks it to do one writing task with a set topic and purpose. For instance, you might ask it

to complain about the Pennsylvania weather in early Spring. Or you might ask it to inquire about the price of kidney beans at a farmer's market. Then, manipulate your prompt to ask the AI to write the same output using a different genre that you specify, such as a limerick, lyrics for musical theater, screenplay, text message, children's story, formal letter, or business proposal. Do this at least three times and compare your results. Consider what you might learn about the genre from AI and also what AI might get wrong about this genre.

Drawing It All Together

Throughout your analysis and these activities, you may have noticed that these concepts—audience, purpose, and genre—have quite a bit of overlap. Sometimes the audience is built right into the definition of a genre, such as a *children's book* or *professional manual*. Some purposes may call for one genre and not another, such as a job requiring a *report* for quarterly performance rather than a *dramatic screenplay*. And some purposes may work with some audiences better than with others, such as a friend who is willing to hear a ranting personal complaint but strangers who are not. An important element to consider is that these concepts work together.

If effective writing has a formula, it is this: Effective writing uses its genre to fulfill its purpose to its audience.

This "formula" can be a useful guide both to the analysis of texts, as the final assignment below will demonstrate, and as a writer in your college courses at Kutztown University going forward. Many college assignments rely on written assignments. In any assignment, you might ask yourself:

- **Audience**: Whom am I writing this assignment for? Will only the professor read it? Are my classmates supposed to respond to it? Does the professor expect me to write for a hypothetical audience of professionals within a certain field or discipline?
- **Purpose**: What am I supposed to achieve in this assignment? Should I be demonstrating my knowledge of something, putting forth a new idea, expressing my own personal beliefs, or something else?
- **Genre**: What form and format does my professor expect from my writing? Should I be following a certain documentation style? Should my writing be a certain length, written in a particular tone or point of view?

Of course, a professor's assignment sheet or instructions are useful in figuring out these attributes of expected audience, purpose, and genre, but other times it isn't so clear. Asking your professor directly is a great solution, and visiting the writing center for further guidance is another, but in cases where you cannot, what do you do? Many times—if you have nothing else to go on—professors will default to the expectations of their own field and finding out the audience, purpose, and genre expectations for this field can be a useful guide to you. For example, in the field of English studies, in terms of genre, MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation style is usually expected for essays, and essays are generally written mostly in active voice, using frequent quotations from texts. The purpose of many (but certainly not all) essays in the field of English studies is to argue for your own original interpretation of a text that is strongly supported by textual evidence. The assumed audience for student essays in English studies is usually a fairly broad one, where it's typically assumed that the reader has some moderate familiarity with the text and will need only an occasional brief summary of the plot but explicit mentioning of relevant details. Finally, the relationship to audience is generally a friendly one where using some amount of personal voice is accepted and even welcomed.

Formal essays in the sciences—usually termed "papers"—are written in an entirely different manner. Not only is there usually a different documentation style and formatting, but formal essays in many fields in the sciences would find using personal voice to be inappropriate and might encourage the use of passive voice to put the topic in greater focus. Additionally, paraphrase and summary are generally used in greater frequency in these papers than direct quotations. While audiences and purposes can vary among fields and in more specific genres of papers in the sciences, the technical nature of these fields can make reporting on the discoveries and studies of other research more common at the undergraduate level than the putting forth of a truly original thesis.

There will be many differences in writing for your courses, and as much as your professors might try to make you aware of the expectations, there's no way that all of them can be anticipated or covered even in the most comprehensive assignment instructions. The only way to really become aware of these implicit expectations is to read other texts carefully and closely with attention to how they navigate the rhetorical situation. In time, you will draw together these elements and find your own, original ways of being an effective writer.

Activity

Final Activity 2.8: Create A Rhetorical Précis

A rhetorical précis is a specific genre of summary that focuses on the rhetorical aspects of a text. Rather than summarizing the content only, a rhetorical précis connects the aspects of the rhetorical situation that we've reviewed—audience, purpose, and genre—in a very specific and compact framework. Writing a rhetorical précis can be a good technique or starting point to add depth to a summary, annotated bibliography entries, or an abstract by considering what the text does and how it works.

To create a rhetorical précis, first read over your chosen text carefully, taking notes and doing any research you might need to better understand its content and context. Then, you'll gather your notes in the following manner:

First sentence: Name of author, if known, (or the organization that acts as author) with a phrase describing their relevance to the subject of the text, followed by the genre and title of work with the year published in parentheses; a rhetorically accurate verb that best describes the purpose (e.g. "argues," "suggests," "informs," "claims," "expresses," "describes"); and a THAT clause containing your summary of the author's major assertion or focus of the work. Think of it this way: WHOM are you talking about? WHAT is their background? WHAT did they write? WHAT year was it written? WHAT is their point?

> Example: The advertisement in *The Saturday Evening Post*, "—but I can't say this to my husband" (1928) persuades its audience that the Christmas present that women really want from their husbands is a Hoover vacuum.

Second sentence: An explanation of the evidence the author uses to develop and/or support the thesis or main focus. Think of it this way: HOW do they prove their point? Do they offer interviews? Official data? Other outside sources? Anecdotes? A certain strategy?

> Example: The ad uses the narration of a wealthy married woman confessing her unfulfilled desire in a conversational tone that implies intimacy and provokes reader curiosity.

Third sentence: A statement of the author's purpose followed by an "in order" phrase. Think of it this way: Are they trying to entertain the reader? Persuade readers to feel a certain way or change their mind about an issue? Are they trying to inform the reader by sharing information that teaches? WHY is that their purpose? In order to accomplish what?

> Example: The ad's purpose is to make readers feel both envious of and superior to the woman in the ad to encourage them to buy a Hoover vacuum.

Fourth sentence: A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience. Think of it this way: WHOM is the author trying to address? For example, are they talking to teachers? Parents? Senior citizens? Registered voters? Women?

Consider all possible appeals to any demographic as well as potential secondary audiences.

> Example: Due to the direct appeal to married men in the conclusion of the ad, it is presumably directed to American men with the economic ability to buy their wives vacuum cleaners; however, a secondary audience of women are also implicit targets for this ad since they are the presumed recipients of this gift.

Once you write each sentence, put them together for a 1-paragraph précis, make any necessary revisions to avoid overly repetitive language, and add key missing details in the appropriate places.

Example of Final Product:

> The advertisement in The Saturday Evening Post, "—but I can't say this to my husband" (1928), attempts to persuade its audience that the gift that women really want from their husbands this Christmas is a Hoover vacuum. The ad uses the narration of a wealthy and enviable married woman confessing her unfulfilled desire for a vacuum in a conversational tone that provokes reader curiosity and implies intimacy. The ad's purpose is to make readers feel both jealous of and superior to the woman in the ad to encourage them to buy a Hoover vacuum. Due to the direct appeal to married men in the conclusion of the ad, it is presumably directed to American men with the economic ability to buy their wives vacuum cleaners; however, a secondary audience of women are also implicit targets for this ad since they are the presumed recipients of this gift.

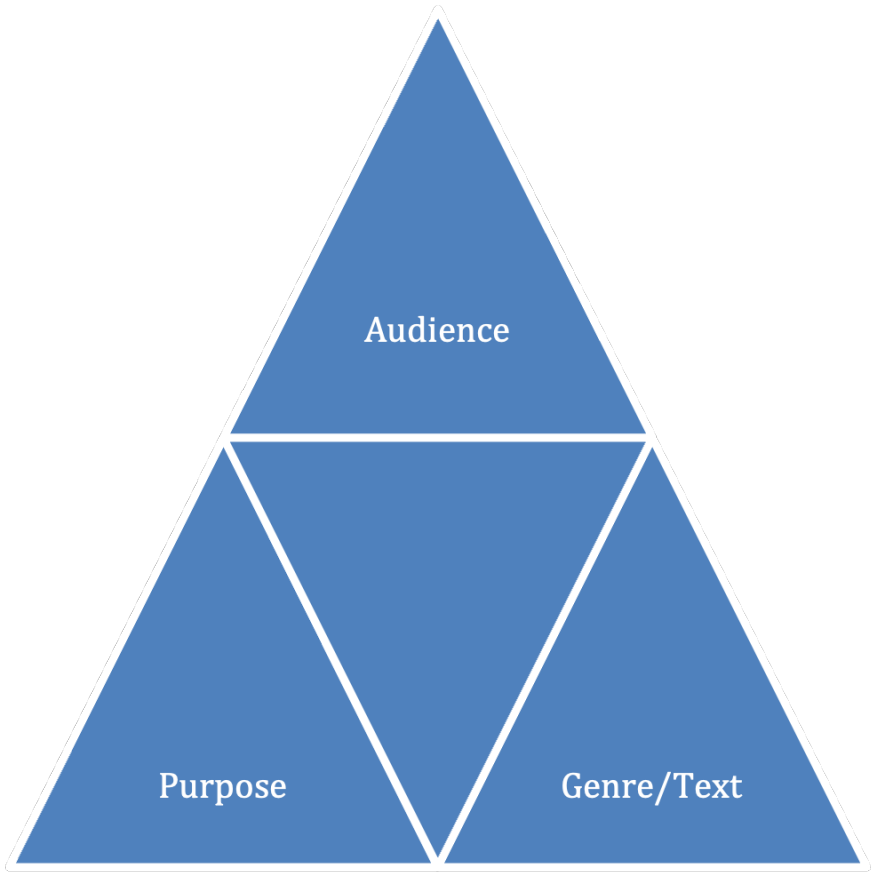
Chapter 3: the Shape of Rhetoric

> ...[T]he triangle is indispensable to thinking about communication. It is a memorable, easily graspable schema, intuitively satisfying, capable of systematic elaboration and almost endless application. - Timothy W. Crusius, Professor Emeritus of English
>
> Every triangle is a love triangle, if you love triangles. - Anonymous internet meme

The last chapter was all about understanding the rhetorical situation by breaking it down into the three factors of audience, purpose, and genre. The hope is that, by doing so, we can better understand a text's effectiveness and also ways to think about approaching writing ourselves.

However, knowing *what's* going on doesn't tell you *how* it's happening, or how to do it yourself. A mechanic can show you where the engine is in a car, but that doesn't tell you how it works. A musician can tell you what song they are playing, but that doesn't give you the ability to play it. So, this chapter is all about the "how" of rhetoric. *How* does a writer appeal to an audience? *How* does a writer use genre to their advantage? *How* does a writer fulfill their purpose?

Many textbooks on rhetoric commonly answer these "how" questions with a diagram of the "rhetorical triangle," using each angle to demonstrate a technique

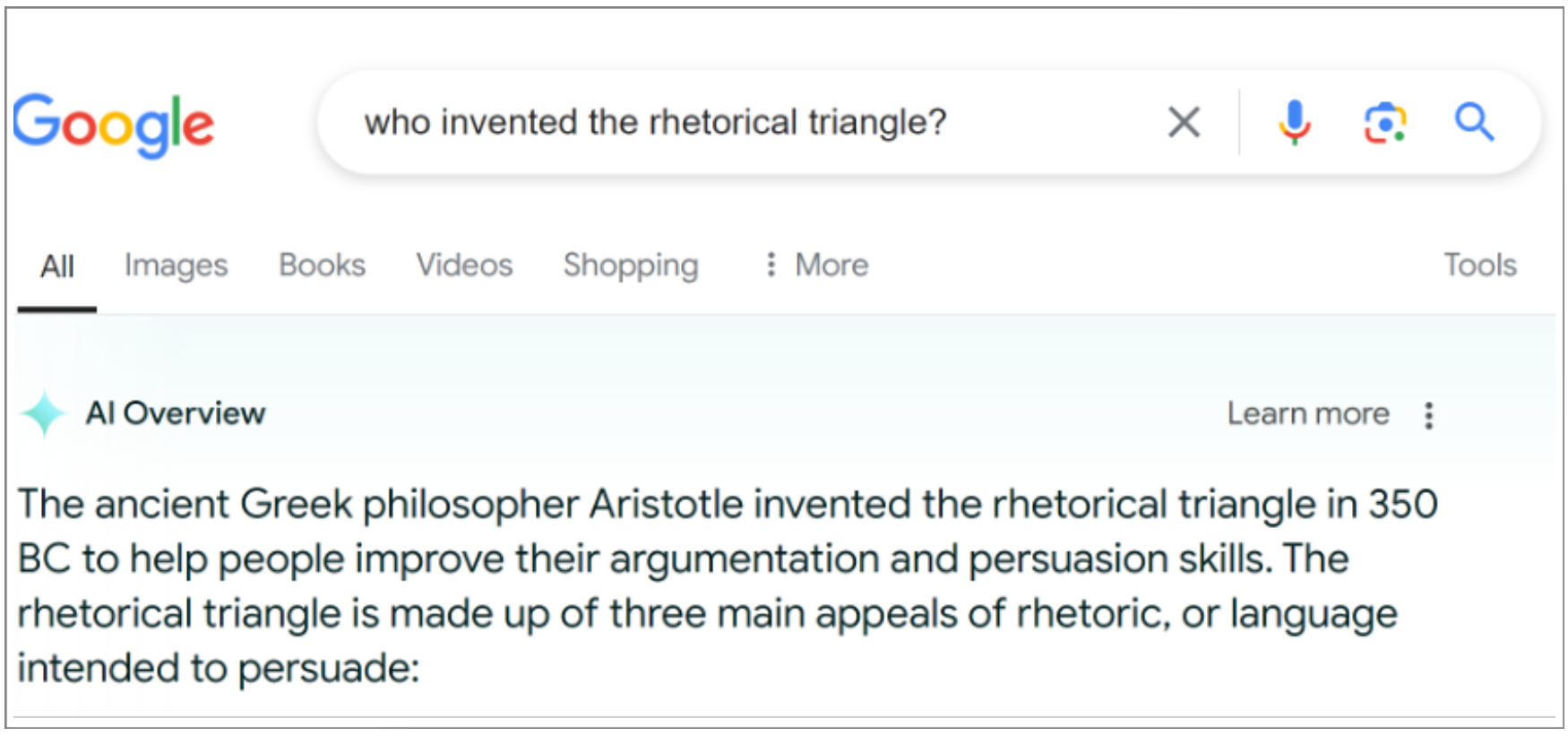


One Possible Rendition of the Rhetoric Triangle

of persuasion and often applying the trio of audience, purpose, and genre to each angle either instead of these or in addition to them.

This model is certainly a useful device for memory, but, ultimately, it's important to keep in mind that this model is only a metaphor, and it's not a perfect one. To better understand this metaphor, we should understand where it comes from and its potential limitations. Our first stop is ancient Greece.

The art of rhetoric is often said to have started with the famous ancient Greek student of Plato and tutor of Alexander the Great, Aristotle (384–322 BC). Author of lengthy treatises on such diverse topics as physics, biology, ethics, poetics, politics, art, and logic, Aristotle is assuredly one of the most influential voices of Western thought. While many fields have certainly undergone dramatic development and change, today's philosophers, logicians, linguists, and some scientists are still engaged in using or responding to many of the basic concepts that he originated or disseminated through his writing. So, it's no surprise that if you ask ChatGPT or most other artificial intelligences (A.I.s) who invented the famous concept of the "rhetorical triangle," you might get something like this:



Google Screenshot

However, Google AI in the image above is not quite correct. In one of his treatises, The Rhetoric, Aristotle lays out three techniques of persuasion, but he never uses the word or concept of a "triangle" when he does so. It was only later rhetoricians and recent compositionists that applied Aristotle's techniques to what they would call a "communication triangle."

Additionally, though Aristotle's terminology is still used today and will be used in this chapter, our own understanding of exactly what is persuasive and why has shifted in significant ways. Some professors might teach rhetoric using these traditional understandings—and doing so can certainly be useful from a historical standpoint—but most modern compositionists take some liberties with Aristotle's terms.

Finally, though Aristotle is the most recognizable name associated with rhetoric, he did not invent it. In the very first section of The Rhetoric, Aristotle acknowledges that—even in 300BC—this art had been already been practiced by "ordinary people," and so his main goal was to examine an art that is already in vibrant practice. As books such as Carol Lipson and Roberta Binkley's Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks demonstrate, non-Western cultures have their own models of rhetoric, some of which precede ancient Greece.

In a nutshell, Aristotle's model is useful, but it should not be treated as sacrosanct or doctrinal. The important thing *isn't* a cookie-cutter model or shape that we assign to rhetoric but how we use that model to ask smarter questions. Accordingly, each of these three sections will prompt you to ask your own questions, recognizing that answering these questions usually will not be simple but will require your own critical thought and interpretation.

Considering Bias, Experience, and Opinion

Having an opinion is often necessary to present a persuasive argument, and presenting one's personal opinions is often useful in establishing credibility (ethos). So, where does bias come into play?

Bias is an unfair or distorted treatment of a topic. Bias often results in giving undeserved weight to the opinions of one group over another or ignoring inconvenient facts. One oft-cited example of bias is "confirmation bias" where a person's perspective of the world would lead them to only pay attention to facts that confirm their perspective. For example, let's say that Joe believes that his own diet is the best there is—for everyone. On social media, Joe follows and reposts celebrities who follow his diet and ignores all accounts that don't. In doing so, Joe is surrounding himself only with people and information that confirm his own positions, which could mean that he would miss out on new discoveries or information that would dispute his position.

Because bias is often prejudicial, unfair, and misleading, it's considered a detriment to arguments, particularly in academic settings. Good researchers and journalists often try to avoid confirmation bias by engaging with research that counters their own positions.

Though bias often originates from our personal experiences and backgrounds—elements that are often good to embrace in our own writing—we can and should avoid writing with overt bias, and we can do so even while holding our own strong opinions. The trick is in respecting the opinions and experiences of other people. Respecting others means that you are willing to listen to them and take their positions seriously, even if they entirely disagree with your own. In composition, this "listening" might take the form of acknowledging difficult ideas and engaging with truths that do not fit comfortably into our own arguments. A key part of being a critical thinker in an academic setting is grappling with new or divergent ideas and perspectives. Listening to others might change our opinions and it might not; however, it should always teach us that the world is bigger than ourselves.

Activity 3.1: Listening and Writing About Beliefs

Spend a few minutes writing about one belief that you hold about education based on your own experiences in school. This belief might be about the way people or children learn, what they ought to learn, how much they should learn, what ages they should learn things, the use of teachers or technology in school, or anything else related to school and education. Then, share your belief with another person and take some time to explain where that belief comes from. Listen to the other person's belief and attempt to understand them fully. After you are finished, write about that person's belief. What do you understand about it, and where are they coming from? What would you still like to learn about it and them?

Rhetorical Techniques

Aristotle deliberately referred to the discipline of rhetoric using the Greek word *technê,* meaning "craft." In doing so, he distinguishes rhetoric as a skill that is learned through practiced moves rather than artistic genius, morals, wisdom, or even knowledge. This word might look familiar to you since it is the origin of the English words "technique," "technical," and "technology." This label of "technique" should give us some encouragement as writers—rhetoric is a skill that anyone can learn! But it should also give us some pause. It is a skill that *anyone* can learn, regardless of their intentions. As with most tools and technologies, effective rhetoric can be used for good or for ill, and we will interact with both ethical and unethical uses of rhetoric.

To be critical thinkers, we must identify what makes someone or something persuasive, apart from whether we ourselves personally agree with the position, and sometimes even when we know that an argument is based on dishonesty or unethical principles. The act of breaking down arguments by exposing these techniques is often a good starting point to better understand the reality of the people, facts, and principles behind them. In fact, ethics takes us to a discussion of our first technique.

Ethos: Credibility, *Not* (Necessarily) Ethics

Business cards on heavy cardstock. Brand name clothing. Power poses. Reputations. Celebrity endorsements. Degrees and titles. Blue checkmarks. Trophy displays. Being able to rattle off the names of the entire production team of an obscure video game. Possessing the latest and most expensive gadget.

These are all common appeals to *ethos*—or credibility—that we might see in our daily lives.

The ancient Greek word *ethos,* which Aristotle identified as one of his three techniques of persuasion, is the origin of our modern word "ethics," and it was closely connected with the concept of moral goodness in Aristotle's treatise. The thought was that people more willingly trust a person who has a good character.

However, modern rhetoricians typically do not consider ethos and ethics to be the same thing. One reason for this is that good morals may not translate to relevant knowledge or experience. Additionally, while looking or seeming like a good person does make a difference in establishing credibility, appearance isn't the same thing as reality, and just because someone sounds trustworthy, does not

make them actually trustworthy. Similarly, the most ethical person might lack any outward signs to broadcast this fact.

Activity 3.2: Whom Do You Trust?

As a freewriting activity, consider any and all people you would trust to tell you the truth. Is it a friend, family member, community leader, a certain news organization, website, author, TV channel, or other source? Be specific and choose one person or source to talk about. Why do you trust them? What are the limits of that trust and why?

Instead of being about *values*, **ethos** is all about *what we value*—what signals importance and authority, or the credibility needed to be convincing.

These signs of authority might include:

- The author's own credentials and reputation
- The authority of the author's sources
- The author's first-hand experiences
- The quality of the writing or speech of the author
- The author's use of examples to indicate familiarity with the topic or audience
- An even-handed tone or appearance of fairness and reason

Using these devices and others like them can help the author establish ethos in their writing and seem more convincing and trustworthy. By the same token, an author can make errors that destroy their ethos or simply fail to establish it.

To see a rather clear example of an appeal to ethos, take a look at the opening paragraph to John Gatto's "The Seven-Lesson Schoolteacher" in his book Dumbing Us Down. In this republished acceptance speech for the 1991 New York State Teacher of the Year award, Gatto strongly critiques the K-12 public school system by arguing that it teaches compliance rather than knowledge. Gatto begins his speech with a direct appeal to his ethos as a schoolteacher by noting his role as a teacher and his 30 years of experience and then dropping in mention of his teaching license. As he moves to his argument by saying that he teaches "school" rather than "English," he reminds his audience that he "win[s] awards doing it."

> Call me Mr. Gatto, please. Twenty-six years ago, having nothing better to do at the time, I tried my hand at schoolteaching. The license I hold certifies that I am an instructor of English language and English literature, but that isn't what I do at all. I don't teach English, I teach school—and I win awards doing it.

Gatto isn’t simply bragging in this passage—he is establishing his ethos on the topic in order to present a believable argument about it. Whom do we assume would know best about the failures of the public school system? Most likely, those who have the most experience working in it, which is why Gatto mentions that he’s been doing it for twenty-six years. Furthermore, he strengthens his authority on public school education by reminding his audience that he is winning an award. The fact that he speaks from this position of authority on public school education makes his critique of it surprising but all the more believable since he has this credibility.

But beyond his credentials, Gatto is establishing his ethos in a complex fashion using his audience, purpose, and genre. Did you notice how Gatto speaks in a seemingly off-handed manner about his achievements? In the same sentence where he mentions his years of experience, he also says that he went into teaching because he had “nothing better to do at the time.” He also downplays his effort in doing so by saying, “I tried my hand at schoolteaching,” which slights the very profession from which he derives his authority. If you read further in the speech, it will become more apparent this implication fits into his argument, but here it serves a complicated purpose to position Gatto as superior to his awards ceremony audience, most of which are educators themselves. In treating his profession as seemingly easy and unskilled, he is also treating the shared profession of his audience as such, and his own recognition of this fact serves to inflate his own importance within the community he is speaking to.

Finally, notice the opening sentence, “Call me Mr. Gatto, please.” Though Gatto is literally speaking to fellow educators and educational administration in an awards ceremony, does this line sound like he is addressing equals? Rather than seeming as if he is speaking to colleagues, Gatto addresses his audience as if they are students in his classroom, which serves to further position him above his audience.

Gatto’s approach is only one strategy in establishing ethos, and it’s a fairly blatant example that might even be read as having a bullying tone. Is it effective? What do you think?

Activity 3.3: Discuss the Effectiveness of an Argument

Read the rest of Gatto's speech using the KU library ebook link here. Then discuss how effective Gatto's argument is, and what role ethos plays in his argument. Do you think his argument would have been as effective if he hadn't mentioned his experience and credentials or had presented them in a different manner?

Who determines what establishes ethos and how? Well, this is where the elements of the rhetorical situation from Chapter 2—audience, purpose, and genre—come into play. Audiences, in particular, will have different definitions of authority. For instance, an academic audience may respect signs of academic achievement. These signs might include an author's degrees and the reputation of the institution they attended, the number and impact of their previous research publications in their field, what academic mentors they've had, the number and reputation of their sources, and how well their writing adheres to the expected style within their field. An audience of professional musicians would have much different standards and may not care how many degrees someone has; they might instead pay attention to a musician who entered the practice room with an expensive and rare instrument or who was reputed for their ability to play a particularly difficult solo. A group of children will have very different standards still and might respect the person in the best clown costume over the research scientist who went to MIT.

While some of the sets of standards for establishing credibility might be wiser than others, we cannot say that any are "wrong." They are simply societally based signs and signals that have varying correspondences with reality. Identifying what establishes this credibility can reveal an audience's values, and knowing what an audience values will help you in establishing your own credibility as a writer.

When considering the ethos of any text, you might consider the following questions:

- What sorts of sources does the author use, and are they credible? Who would these sources be most credible to and why?
- What are the features or flaws of the author's writing style that establish the author as a credible author (or not), and why?
- Did the author bring their own personal experiences into the text, and what effect did this have on ethos?

- What did the author do to establish their authority on the subject matter?
- Did the author draw upon their own reputation in any way?
- How did the author make efforts to avoid bias, or not?

Activity 3.4: Ethos in a Ketchup Ad

Consider this 2018 Heinz Ketchup Ad featuring Ed Sheeran. How does this ad use ethos as a technique? Write up an analysis such as we did for Gatto's speech, considering how ethos interfaces with audience, purpose, and genre. Finally, consider whether these factors make for an effective ad.

Logos: Logic

Dr. Brian Land (he/him) has a PhD in Philosophy from Temple University with a concentration in Neo-Aristotelian thought and metaethics. Currently, he is a teacher of mathematics at the secondary education level.

One common error regarding the logos of an argument is to mistake it for a certain flavor of ethos—that is, to think that the logic of an argument is a matter of using sophisticated terms or of having fancy statistics or charts. The most important question about those statistics is not how nice they make a paper look but instead how accurate they are and how well they actually support the argument being made. These are exactly the kinds of questions that an evaluation of logos considers.

In as much as what we are evaluating is an argument, it is endeavoring to persuade its audience of some idea, and it is endeavoring to do so on some rational grounds. We'll use the term "conclusion" for what the argument is trying to convince its audience is true and the term "premise" for those claims that justify or support drawing that conclusion. So, if I were to argue that "you shouldn't hire Ben because he's rude and never shows up on time!," the premises would be as follows:

```
P1: Ben is rude.

P2: Ben never shows up on time.

And the conclusion would be:

C: You shouldn't hire Ben.
```

Now, I want to notice a few things about this simple argument regarding Ben's employability. First, sometimes these premises work together to provide good reason to believe the conclusion, and sometimes they work independently. Here, for example, even if we found out that P2 was wrong and that Ben was actually

always on time, his rudeness would still be an independent reason to believe that we shouldn't hire him.

Activity 3.5: Identifying an Argument's Structure

Identify the premises and conclusion of the following: "I'd really like us to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, so we should switch our buses to electric. Besides, we'll save a ton of money when gas prices go up and electricity gets cheaper!"

Second, there are a lot of different ways to present what is effectively an argument of the same logical structure. Returning to the case of Ben, we might say the following: "Punctuality and being considerate are important to this company, and Ben displays neither of these virtues. We shouldn't hire him." In this case, some of the effect is a bit different—by beginning by appealing to the company's values—but the ultimate logical structure is the same, perhaps with the exception that the second version makes explicit that rudeness and not being on time are reasons to not hire a person.

Third, there are two big ways to evaluate this argument: I can ask if those premises are actually true, or I can ask if those premises actually give a good enough reason to believe the conclusion. Because determining the truth is often difficult and arguments are aimed at an audience, I'll use the term **acceptability**, which is borrowed from the philosopher Trudy Govier and her foundational text A Practical Study of Argument, to talk about evaluations of the premises themselves, and I'll use **entailment** to talk about just how well those premises support the conclusion.

The idea of acceptability is often pretty intuitive: I can ask myself questions like "Is it right or wrong that Ben is rude?" and determine whether I'm willing to accept Premise 1.

Entailment is a bit trickier, and rightly so as there are a lot of ways to support a given conclusion. One helpful way to think of it is by means of the question: "Is there any way that these premises can be correct, but the conclusion can still be wrong?" In our example of Ben, I might ask, "Is there any way that Ben might be rude and never show up on time but still be worth hiring?" Indulging our imaginations on this question might give us answers like "well, maybe Ben's job is remote and asynchronous, and all he has to do is create some program and send it in online, and maybe he's really good at that." In such a case, both our premises might be true, but they wouldn't warrant believing the conclusion, at least not on their own.

In the case of Ben, there was nothing really wrong with arguing the two premises we considered—it just happened that in some cases (which may or may not even apply here) those reasons might not be sufficient grounds for requiring our conclusion: if we were choosing between hiring Ben and an equally qualified but polite and punctual candidate, we probably wouldn't hire Ben.

But there are some big ways in which our minds often want to reason that seem more logical than they really are . I'll call these kinds of arguments **fallacies**. Sometimes fallacies are given fancy names in Latin, sometimes not, but in every case, what is notable about these ways of arguing is that (1) they present a certain appeal to our minds and are often something like traps that we are prone to fall into and (2) that the premises can be wholly true without requiring their conclusion. A more complete list can be found on the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, but I provide a few below as examples. Please note that such fallacies do not require that their conclusion be false—any bad argument might nonetheless have a true conclusion. Instead, they simply fail to provide good support for their conclusion.

Hasty Generalization

> I've met three people from Kutztown University, and every one of them loved chess. I guess everyone at that university really loves chess!

The problem with this type of argument is rather intuitive—of course you cannot evaluate an entire university, without exception, on the grounds of a sample size of only three people. One might make the conclusion slightly more palatable by tempering it away from the strong "everyone," instead opting for a humbler claim such as "many people at that university love chess." But even then, such a conclusion isn't well warranted. A sample of only three people is not large enough to warrant such a conclusion. It could only be useful to fields such as statistics if we were assured that the sample was randomly taken. However, even a sample of 90 people would be a poor one if it were, for example, provided by the speaker visiting the university as part of a chess tournament. As it stands, it is a case where all the premises might be true and yet the conclusion could readily be false.

False Dichotomy

> Some people are against expelling students for cheating on the first offense, but we as a university have to do *something* about academic dishonesty!

As before, the difficulty is that one can believe that it is unacceptable for the university to do nothing to combat academic dishonesty but also believe that the expulsion is not the right answer—with absolutely no internal contradiction. This sort of fallacy is called a "false dichotomy" in that it appears to offer a forced choice between two (or more) positions. In this case, you either support the policy of first offense expulsion or you support the university doing nothing about academic dishonesty, when in fact a variety of other positions exist. One might, for example, believe instead in a warning system, or perhaps a more moderate punishment such as failing the course, or further education to prevent academic dishonesty. Even if one maintains that the draconian approach is the better one, alternatives do exist and should be considered as opposed to simply rejecting a policy of doing nothing.

Post Hoc

> After we elected Governor Smith, the economy has gone down the tubes. It must be Governor Smith's fault, and we need to elect someone else!

The Latin phrase *post hoc ergo propter hoc* translates to "after this therefore because of this." It is part of a larger class of fallacies in which one falsely attributes one thing as a cause, just because it happened after the first event. Now, establishing causation generally is quite tricky, but certainly it is not enough to show that one thing happened before another to prove that the first caused the second.

Equivocation

> My tiny apartment may not look like much, but it's better than nothing. And nothing is better than the Biltmore Estate. So, since nothing is better than Biltmore, and my apartment is better than nothing, my apartment is better than Biltmore!

Here, the problem is that what is meant by "nothing" is not consistent between the two premises. In the first premise, the presumably agreeable claim is that the state of having a small apartment is better than the state of having nowhere to live. In the second, the premise amounts to the claim that of all places to live none is better than Biltmore Estates. Because "nothing" appears in both claims, we might be misled into thinking that we have just seen a valid argument.

Ad Hominem

> We shouldn’t have mandatory attendance at the college level. Just look at Dean Henderson: He keeps arguing for it and he’s a far too controlling and aggressive person.

The issue with an ad hominem (meaning ‘against the person’) argument is that it is irrelevant to the question at hand. Whether or not Dean Henderson is a controlling person does not affect the truth of the matter at hand. Presumably a person who was not so controlling might also hold such an opinion.

Crucially, not every attack against a person is so irrelevant—there are many cases where the matter of an individual’s character is very important to a decision we might make based on that individual. For example, if an argument was relying on an expert’s authority, then attacking the quality of their expertise or their reputation for honesty would be entirely appropriate. Furthermore, it is not the case that the issue of personal standing is irrelevant to how persuasive an argument is, just how willing an audience might be to listen to it.

Activity 3.6: Identify Fallacies

Identify and describe all of the fallacies in the following argument. Label each using their name from the selection above, if possible.

Sam Pell

COMP100

9 March 2045

My Brilliant Argument Essay on Smoking

In the course of human history, America has been both the longest established, and—by far—the greatest country known to man. Any nation that has been established for this long will have to reevaluate its laws in order to create a more healthful and harmonious society. Public smoking is a personal freedom that has had its day and should now be prohibited.

For one, if you are for public smoking, you are making a deliberate choice to support three-year-olds being exposed to second-hand smoke. There is no middle ground. You are either for three-year-olds smoking a pack a day, or you aren’t. Do we want our children to be miniature Cruella De Vils?

But, aside from mere images, the health effects of smoking are real. Joe Smith was an average healthy young man until he started smoking. According to his doctor, who reflected on Joe's condition in *Health Today Magazine*, Joe's body was "destroyed by smoking" as his cigarette habit resulted in lung cancer and permanent use of a respirator (56).

In addition to health effects, cigarette butts are a major source of pollution. According to *FakeReference.com*, "Effects of pollution on the Earth include environmental deterioration, impacts on the health of living organisms, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer and reduced efficiency or infertility of farmlands and crop fields."

One of the easiest ways to stop the effects of pollution would be to simply kick the habit. However, as we all know, tobacco is an addictive substance, which is why it is the government's responsibility to intervene and save us from ourselves—by banning all public smoking once and for all.

Pathos: Evoking Emotional Responses

You might have noticed that many of the logical fallacies mentioned in the logos section are quite common in everyday speech. You will find many ad hominems in political attack ads, post hoc and other correlation fallacies in literature promoting the latest health trends, and equivocations in catchy sayings and slogans. But, if these are examples of faulty logic, why would they be used at all? One possible reason is that many of these fallacies are designed to appeal to our emotions—such as to get us angry, generate sympathy, or cause laughter.

Public service announcements (PSAs) provide many good examples of fallacious logic employed to provoke emotion. Take, for example, the famous 1980 anti-drug PSA produced by the Partnership for a Drug-free America (Read commercial transcript). The 13-second advertisement features an egg dropped into a hot frying pan with the voiceover flatly stating "This is drugs. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?" There are many ways that this might be labeled a false analogy–a faulty comparison between two things. I think we can recognize many ways that brains are not really like eggs and drugs are not really like frying pans. Furthermore, the relationship between the two is far more complex than merely being a negative—and presumably deadly—outcome, which is what the PSA implies. A **false analogy** is another logical fallacy that should be avoided in order to make a logical argument. However, this PSA, and others like it, had been fairly persuasive in getting people to fear the effects of drugs. Even to this day, people make both political and personal decisions based on campaigns like these.

And, it's no surprise that these appeals work so well on us—emotional responses can be very powerful things. Think of the last time that a song moved you to tears, a video made you chuckle, or a passionate speaker riled up your anger. In all these cases, the singer, writer, or speaker appealed to your emotions. If they provoked these emotions deliberately and in accordance with a persuasive purpose, then they used pathos as a rhetorical technique. To clarify, pathos can be logical or illogical, just as our emotions can be both reasonable and unreasonable. Pathos is an appeal to the audience's emotions, whether these emotions are happy, sad, nostalgic, sympathetic, angry, or even peaceful and calm. These emotions can—and often do—get fairly complex, and multiple emotions can come into play at once.

When analyzing an author's use of pathos, you might start by asking yourself four key questions:

1. What emotion is the audience supposed to feel?
2. How is this emotion conveyed?
3. For what purpose?
4. How effective is that emotion in reaching the audience?

When looking for the answers to this section, we should again rely on close reading strategies to pick out small portions of the language the author uses—down to word choice and punctuation—that contribute to their purpose. To get you started, you can look for things like the following:

- **Clichés and pop culture references** (e.g., "Think outside of the box," "Don't judge a book by its cover," [Arnold Schwarzenegger voice] "I'll be 'bach'") As silly and overplayed as clichés, pop culture references, and memes can be, they are used as cultural touchstones that can form a friendly relationship with the audience or easily convey particular emotional attitudes to smooth the way to accepting more difficult or complex ideas.
- **Humor/jokes/puns** (e.g., Knock, knock. *Who's there?* Dishes. *Dishes who?* "Dishes" a really bad joke.) Jokes get us laughing and potentially in a better disposition to accept whatever argument the author makes next as we often culturally interpret laughter as a form of agreement or sympathy with the author. However, jokes are not always innocent (as discussed in the following section) and might be used to alienate others.
- **Insults/negative labels or bullying** (e.g., The only people who believe *that* idea are fascists; you are either with us or against us.) These can exert social pressure on the audience to ally themselves with the author out of fear, guilt, anger, or self-consciousness.
- **Praises/positive labels** (e.g., What a great crowd we have out today! I just know that smart students are reading this textbook!) These can "butter up" the audience and feed their feelings of pride and self-worth, which in turn can make an audience more agreeable to the author's position.

- **Metaphorical language/symbols** (e.g. It's a grand old flag; the white dove of peace; you are my guiding star) Like clichés, metaphors can make more complex ideas and emotions more relatable, forging an emotional connection to the author as well as the situation.

- **Scare Statistics** (e.g. 9.4 million American adults do not know that they already have diabetes; 89% of college students say that they don't need alcohol to have a good time) Statistics are often used as an attention-grabbing technique, which may or may not contribute to an argument as logical evidence. Statistics can be used to cause fear or self-doubt, or to encourage the audience to conform to a certain standard.

- **Personal Anecdotes** (e.g., It happened to me…) Personal stories can often hit the audience harder than broad statements of fact. For that reason, these anecdotes are often used to garner sympathy not just for the individual but for others in a similar circumstance.

- **Grand Narratives** (e.g., We are all standing on the shoulders of giants. The American Dream means that we can all get ahead if we work hard enough. Money cannot buy happiness.) Sometimes distilled into clichés, grand narratives are values and philosophies that underpin smaller messages. Speakers that appeal to these often do so to forge common ground with an audience and appeal to shared values. However, these grand narratives are often problematic because they are taken as truisms without question but do not describe individual experiences.

- **Calls to Action** (e.g., "What do we want?" *"Justice!"* "When do we want it?" *"Now!"*) Sometimes direct passionate pleas for action have the truest ring of authenticity and can be effective in making the audience as passionate or as angry as the speaker.

The above list is, of course, not a comprehensive one. Once you begin to look for ways the author attempts to appeal to the emotion of the audience, you might notice pathos being used in much more subtle ways to get the audience nodding their heads in agreement. We often notice pathos in fiery rhetoric that gets people shouting or crying. In fact, the word pathos seems to suggest high degrees of violent emotion since it is related to our modern words "pathetic" and "passion." However, a good rhetorician can also use pathos to build consensus and unity. Take, for example, this brief portion of the 2009 inaugural address

spoken by 44th President Barack Obama, which is driven by pathos but was presented in a more understated fashion:

> America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.

Obama's rhetoric uses a good deal of metaphor and cliché including referencing life as a difficult journey and America's common challenges as elemental forces of nature that could be endured. Through these metaphors, Obama sought to make his audience feel both unified and hopeful that they too might get through any present challenges they were facing. In doing so, he appeals to several grand narratives of endurance (If we endure difficult situations we will eventually succeed) and legacy (our children's children). He further unifies his audience by using the plural first-person pronouns "we" and "us" to group his audience in one community. Can you find more ways that Obama's speech attempts to build unity among people with different political ideologies? Political speeches on all sides are typically full of such rhetoric, and these speakers use pathos as a tool to garner popular support for their positions.

Activity 3.7: Analyze Pathos in a Poster

Analyze the following World War II era poster for pathos techniques, answering all four of the key questions above. Make sure to not only analyze the language but the visual aspects of the poster.

World War II Propaganda Poster: *Let's catch him with his "Panzers" down!* Northwestern University Library, poster database. U.S. Government Printing Office. Hosted on Wikimedia Commons, is in the Public Domain.

The humor in the poster above relies on turning the rhetorical tools of fascism against itself. It effectively uses ridicule against Hitler and the Third Reich in order to present victory for the Allies as attainable, and such messaging was influential in securing American involvement in WWII. But, as in all rhetorical strategies, such a potent appeal can be used for both good and evil.

One particularly powerful pathos technique is “othering,” or setting up a “them versus us” relationship with the audience and speaker as the “good guy” and some “other” person, ideology, nation, or group as the enemy. There are very real ethical questions that should be asked when this rhetorical strategy is used. Othering is often presented as a harmless joke or even consensus-building among a group of insiders, and it is not always intentional. However, othering is often responsible for stereotyping and condemning others and has been used as a tool of oppression, persecution, and disenfranchisement. To combat othering, we should be aware of ways a speaker can use emotions to dehumanize or ridicule others including any language that:

- Distances one group of people or presents their views as alien
- Uses the existence of others as the punchline to a joke
- Uses dehumanizing metaphors to describe others such as comparing people to animals or insects
- Uses metaphors involving infection, dilution, or impurity to describe the influence or existence of others
- Uses the language of binary oppositions to exclude those with more nuanced positions (us vs. them, good vs. evil, outsider vs. insider)

By pointing out such language, we can further explore the speaker’s true purposes and larger values. Regardless of its effectiveness, in academic settings, such language should be avoided. In fact, it is expected that academic environments promote inclusive communities of mutual respect. A significant way to foster such a community is through the language we use to refer to others. In fact, it is expected that academic environments promote inclusive communities of mutual respect. To that end, a significant way to do this is through the language we use with and to refer to others.

The Importance of Pronouns

Colleen Clemens, Ph.D. (she/her) is Professor of Non-Western Literatures and Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Kutztown University.

When we are writing, we should be as inclusive as we possibly can with our audience. In academic and professional settings, we are expected to validate people's gender identities, and a significant part of this consideration of your audience is to be attentive to their pronouns.

We use pronouns all the time in speech and writing. You really cannot avoid using them. In fact, in this short blurb alone, I've already used pronouns more than ten times up to this point. Simply put, pronouns are words that stand in for nouns, including words like *I, you, they, he, her, it, we*, …and more. We use these words all the time without thinking about them, but this is exactly why we need to give them particular attention when addressing or speaking about other people.

Addressing someone by their correct pronouns is crucial. Doing so shows basic respect and human decency, much like using the correct spelling or pronunciation of someone's name. There are a few ways you might find someone's pronouns: on their email signature, on their social media, or through interactions with them. Whatever the case, it's important that you do not simply assume that you know someone's pronouns by looking at a photo or name since these are not always reliable indicators.

Also, it's a good idea to make information about your pronouns easy to find so other writers can address you correctly, whether you are cisgender, transgender, non-binary or any other gender. Consider putting your preferred pronouns in an email signature in your KU Outlook email by going to Settings > Account > Signatures. And if you use neopronouns, consider linking to a chart explaining them so that your audience can learn more about gender identities and pronouns.

Using Rhetorical Techniques to Shape your Reading and Writing

Many graphic depictions of the rhetorical triangle such as the one at the beginning of this chapter use an equilateral triangle—one with three equal sides. This might imply that each rhetorical technique should be used in equal measure or that each is of equal importance at all times. However, different audiences, purposes, and genres will have different expectations regarding ethos, pathos, and logos. One generally wouldn't expect airtight logic in a poem or comedy routine, but a judicial option or business proposal without logic would be absurd. Some audiences will respond differently to heavy-handed appeals to sympathy based on cultural experiences: The sad music behind a documentary might drive one audience to tears while provoking laughter in another. Ethos is also context dependent; anyone who is a hotshot in one field but tries something new in a different context knows this very well. Thus, the rhetorical situation should result in different weight in deciding how to evaluate and employ these appeals.

What is important to get out of this is chapter is that we become more astute readers of the rhetoric that underlies all our communication. My own students often say that they simply don't believe *anything* they read or see on the Internet. But that's no way to live. We cannot go through life simply not believing anything—how would you know where to get any facts, what to buy, or whom to date? And it is not enough to merely have a constantly skeptical attitude towards our media. In fact, ironically, those who are the most untrusting, tend to be the ones most taken in by conspiracy theories and fake news according to a recent study Joshua Hart and Molly Graether. Instead of wholly withholding our trust, we should be able to "read the room," as Chapter 2 puts it, and figure out what the speaker is really doing with their words. Are they trying to tug at your heartstrings? Are they making logical sense? Do they have the credibility to speak in this field? These are crucial questions to evaluate whom and what we actually trust in everything that we consume.

Furthermore, as the old adage states, knowledge is power. Now that you are familiar with ethos, pathos, and logos, you can use them as reminders on possible ways to develop your own writing. Are there sources you could add to better establish your credibility in that research paper? Have you developed a logical and persuasive argument devoid of fallacies in that essay? Is there a way to make your narrative appeal to your reader's emotions? Asking yourself questions about ethos, pathos, and logos can help you *shape* your own writing by looking at the larger picture of what you are achieving in your writing and why.

Final Activity 3.8: the Rhetorical Analysis of an Advertisement

Find an advertisement for any product, service, or place that you use regularly. Consider what you already know about the product and the target audience (who is likely yourself). How does this advertisement succeed or fail in using ethos, pathos, and logos to fulfill its purpose? Are there any ways that the ad might have been *more* effective?

Chapter 4: Generating Ideas and Writing Topic Proposals

Sean Weaver, PhD (he/him) is an English/ Literature doctoral graduate from Louisiana State University with a minor in WGS. He currently works as an adjunct professor at various colleges in the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania teaching introductory classes in WGS and Composition. His work focuses on the intersections between queer and postcolonial theories in literature and fiction.

So, you have been assigned a writing project. Chances are you have already written something for one of your college courses—for some of us, this is not our first foray into college-level writing—whether it be a creative piece like a personal narrative or even a fully researched paper. But, on the off chance you have not, the thought of writing your first college essay might be daunting.

This intimidation factor is particularly present when we have some freedom on what to write about. In some college classes, college professors will choose the topic for us, just as writers in their various fields or careers might be assigned a specific topic by an editor. However, in other college classes, we are free to choose topics in relation to our writing projects. At these times we are left with an important decision, perhaps the most difficult choice to make when beginning the writing process: *Choosing a topic.*

If you are anything like me as a writer, even after years of developing my craft, the hardest part of beginning a new writing project—whatever the genre might be—is deciding *what* I want to write about. There are times where ideas come quite easily to me, and for me this is true when I get to choose from a list of potential ideas. In other circumstances, I need to think carefully about what it is I want to write about—especially when I am given no direction. I would guess that for you, the same might hold true. When we are given freedom to explore new ideas, we might think, “Whoa... there’s so much I want to say, but I don’t even know where to begin.”

This chapter is about choosing those beginnings, and I will guide you through the process of deciding on a topic. In the pages that follow, I will introduce various tips and tricks. We will examine different methods writers use to explore potential writing ideas—whether you are choosing your own topic, choosing from a list, or are assigned a specific topic. Even if you have been assigned a topic, there is still room to make choices. This chapter will also show you why it is important to consider genre and audience when exploring potential topics. This chapter will also explore how we as writers take broader topics and narrow them down as we develop our ideas. Writing topics constantly evolve throughout the writing and research process. Thus, our writing choices are never finite but, instead, guide us to developing original topic ideas and making them take fuller shape as we write.

A Beginning, but Not the *Only* Beginning

Fantasy author Robert Jordan begins every one of his Wheel of Time novels with a statement that, I think, really captures the essence of "topics":

> The Wheel of Time turns, and Ages come and pass, leaving memories that become legend. Legend fades to myth, and even myth is long forgotten when the Age that gave it birth comes again. In one Age, called the Third Age by some, an Age yet to come, an Age long past, a wind rose above the great mountainous island of Tremalking. The wind was not the beginning. There are neither beginnings nor endings to the Wheel of Time. But it was a beginning. (21)

Here, Jordan sets up the plot of his entire series. The Third Age is where all the action happens; a hero arises, the quintessential dark one wreaks havoc, and we meet a variety of characters all connected by a single moment in time. In short, everything that came before and comes after is connected to the Third Age, what we might call the *topic* of Jordan's series. However, this isn't a chapter about fantasy novels. Instead, we might draw a comparison between the final lines of Jordan's passage above and our goals as writers when deciding on a topic. Let's tweak it a bit: *There are neither beginnings nor endings to topics. But a topic is a beginning.*

As a beginning, topics should provide inspiration and direction for our writing. A good topic will help us deliver a solid thesis statement (if our writing project is a research paper with a hypothesis we are trying to prove) or help us develop an airtight plot for a narrative (if our writing project is a creative piece in which we tell a story). However, topics should never be finite or, to borrow a familiar adage, set in stone. Thus...*There are neither beginnings nor endings to topics.* As

you write, you will find that the topic you thought you had settled on will evolve and change according to new research you read, any creative inspirations you encounter, conversations with other writers reading your drafts, and your own thought process. Each of these moments, as you work through the writing process, will influence the way you understand the topic you have chosen as well as your feelings regarding it. Simply put, topics can and will change as you draft your writing, so do not be afraid of making any changes.

So, what exactly is a topic? Depending on the genre of writing you are doing, what shape your topic will take might vary greatly. But, the most straight forward definition of a topic I can give you is this: a topic is *what* you are writing about. Sometimes the topic of a paper might be the answer to a question. Other times the topic might be the plot of story. In some cases, your topic might be very broad, like sports, or narrow—like the funding of women's professional athletics. Irrespective of genre, a topic that you have researched and thought about in advance will provide a beginning, an onramp to the wheel of time that will become your writing process. Now let us think about *how* we might choose that topic.

Starting with a List

Whether you are writing a creative piece or an academic research essay, we need to think through our ideas to find a suitable topic. One way we might begin thinking about an idea to write about is by making a list. A prolific spoken word poet from New York, Sara Kay, explains in a TED Talk titled "If I Should Have a Daughter" that one way she unlocks the creative process of deciding on a topic is "to make a list of at least three things" she knows to be true. We can use Kay's process to generate our own topics; in fact, I do just that whenever I am writing. For example, if I were assigned a literacy narrative, a common assignment in COMP100 courses to reflect on our personal experiences in reading and writing, I might list the following:

1. I learned to read before I learned to write.

2. I was not always the writer I am today.

3. Several English teachers changed my life as educators.

From this list, I have three potential topics that might become plots about which I could shape a literacy narrative. I could write a story about how reading made me a writer. I could write about how most of my experiences with writing were often negative and how this changed when I gained more confidence in myself.

Or finally, I could write a literacy narrative about how English teachers changed my life. But we can develop these topics or potential plots further by extending the ideas expressed in our original list, a practice commonly known as **looping**, returning to an idea you have already written down. For example, let's extend some of the ideas that I presented in my first list:

1. The first book I ever read was *Little Bear* by Maurice Sendak. I was five years old.

2. I failed at least one composition class as an undergraduate at Kutztown University.

3. I teach composition now because of my English educators in high school, particularly my 12th-grade AP English teacher.

Any of the examples I have written down on both lists are acceptable topics for me to pursue in a literacy narrative. There is room to explore each of the ideas and room for me to grow my topic. You might have noticed in each of these lists that my ideas are my *personal* experiences. As writers, choosing topics that we are personally invested in will make writing significantly easier. You will find that writing on a topic *you* know often lends a sense of confidence.

Research Your Passions

John Stanley (he/him), Professor of History at Kutztown University

One issue that I always try to emphasize to students is that they should find something they are passionate about when starting a writing assignment, particularly for my research writing class. I usually have them start with the general essay prompts and provide them with a worksheet on developing the topic until it is truly theirs. In addition, I have them share their ideas on how they are developing the topic with the rest of the class once they have grappled with the idea a bit themselves.

I believe the best way to think through a topic is to talk about it with others. I do this in my own research and encourage students to do the same in their own work.

Activity 4.1: Listing and Looping

Now you try it. List three things you know to be true. Then, loop back and give more specific details on each, expanding on how you know it to be true. Notice which of the three was easiest to expand on and consider using this for a future writing topic.

1.

2.

3.

Reflecting on What You Know *and* Don't Know

Sometimes choosing to write on topics "we know" may present us with a problem. According to Booth et. al., "You may be tempted to rely too heavily on what feels familiar... falling back on that kind of certainty will just keep you from doing your best thinking.... When some beginning researchers succeed at making one kind of argument, they just keep making it over and over" (121). Thus, writers must be careful of relying too heavily on topics in which they are personally invested or topics they know a lot about.

There are many examples of writers circulating the same ideas over and over. In fact, sometimes as writers we forget that our writing does not exist in isolation—we write to share our ideas and thoughts with others and to challenge other perspectives. Sometimes our expertise deprives us of pursuing new ideas or arguments, new stories, or even just learning a new field of study. You should not be deterred from writing about topics within your field or writing from personal experiences. It is always great to begin with what you know, but just be careful that you do not cut yourself off from exploring new ideas, too.

Kay echoes the sentiment of being open to exploring new ideas in her formerly mentioned TED talk: "…it is tempting to keep writing the same poem, or keep telling the same story, over and over...you have to grow and explore and take risks and challenge yourself" (13:07). Take risks when it comes to choosing a topic; you never know what you might learn about yourself or what you are capable of writing. It is worth mentioning again—topics are not permanent. If you choose to explore a topic you are unfamiliar with and are having a difficult time coming up with something to write or research, then you can always fall back on what you know and feels comfortable. I think, though, that you will find that writing is most fun when we combine what we know with what we do not, perhaps taking an aspect of what we are already familiar with and then

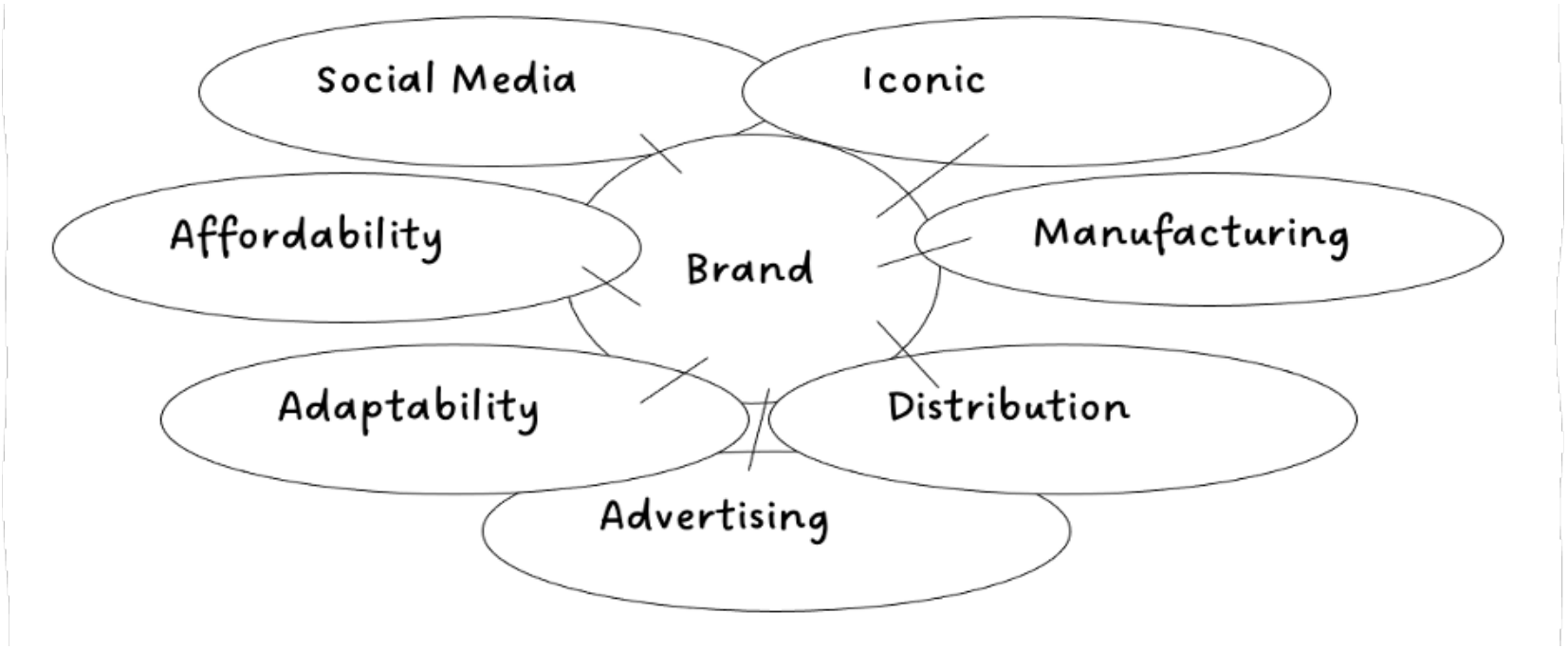
expanding into new territory or taking something unfamiliar and relating it to our own experiences.

Activity 4.2: Listing "What I Know" and "What I Don't Know"

Make two lists, one labeled "What I know" and one labeled "What I don't know, but am curious about." In brief bullet points, make each list to contain as many items as you can. Don't limit yourself to traditional research topics; make sure to also consider your own personal interests and everyday experiences.

Creating A Word Web of Your Topic

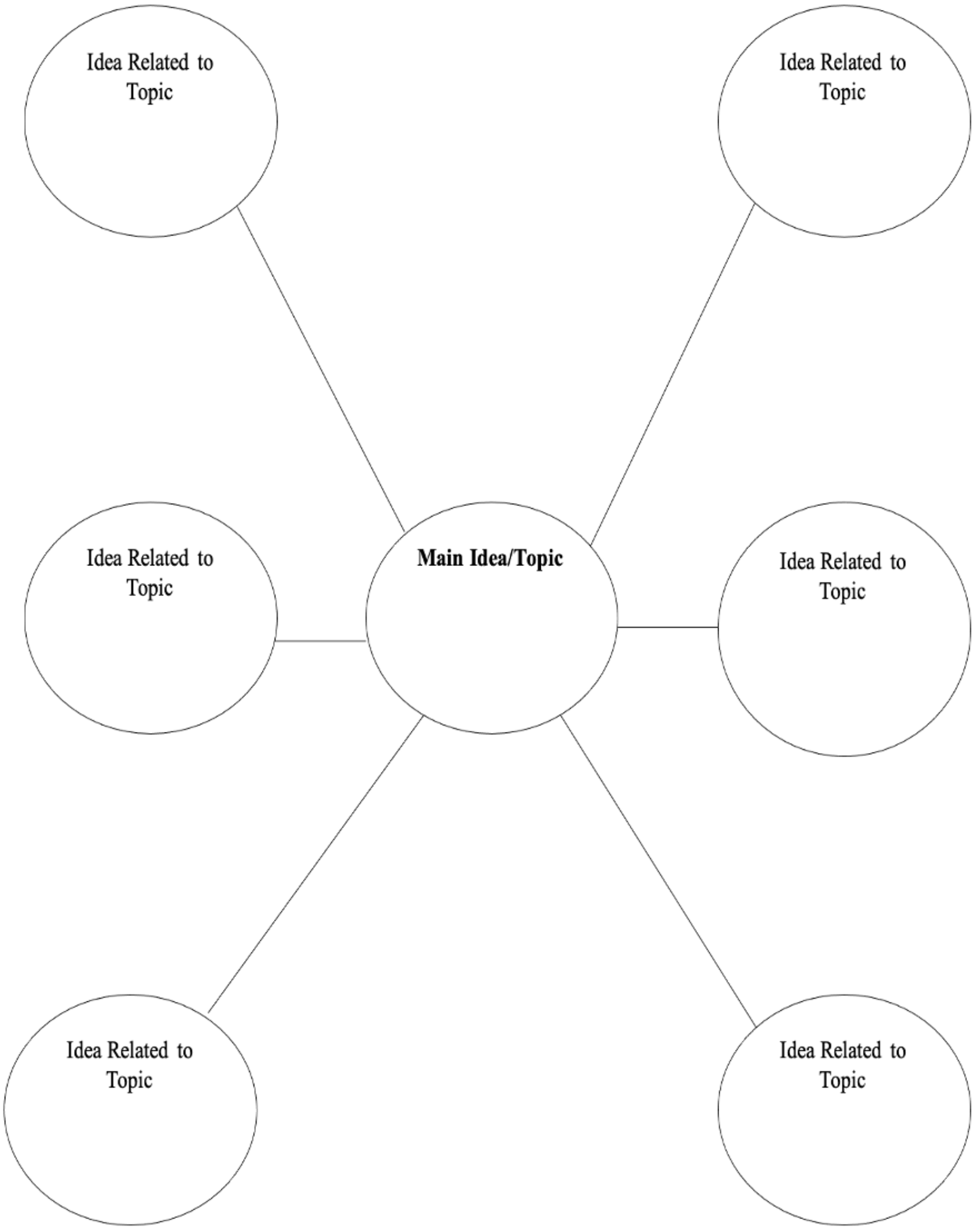
Creating lists is only one way of generating potential ideas that might turn into topics. There are plenty of ways to generate ideas, so let us examine a few other examples. Some writers like to create a map of their ideas in relation to a topic known as a word web. You can sketch out a word web by hand in a composition notebook or you can use the worksheet that follows this chapter. The following example from student Chase Marbot, majoring in social media at Kutztown, shows how to explore a topic using a word web. Here, Chase explores the topic "brand" and associated words related to it. By listing associated words, Chase can develop and expand his topic further by making clearer connections between the words. For example, two interesting words that stand out to me in the word web are "iconic" and "social media." Let's connect them and ask a question—how does one make their **brand** iconic using social media? Word webs are all about making potential connections as a means of developing topics. Ask questions, branch out, and create a word web with as many ideas around the topic as possible.



Chase Marbot's Sample Word Web

Activity 4.3: Create a Word Web

Use the following diagram, or one like it of your own creation, to build a word web to generate related ideas around your main topic idea.



Fillable Word Web

Just Write!

Some writers skip ahead and begin writing. Freewriting is a great exercise when it comes to unblocking writers who are blocked in picking a topic. To free write, pick a word or an idea associated with your topic and then write anything that comes to mind for a set amount of time. Once the time is up, read over what you wrote and pick out a sentence or idea that really sticks out to you. Then, write for another five minutes, responding to what you wrote down the first time. Let's look at a freewrite from Kutztown student Gigi Doklan, majoring in professional writing.

> Animal Crossing: New Horizons is the fifth mainline installment in the Animal Crossing franchise and was released on March 20, 2020. Animal Crossing is a series of real-time life simulation games, where the player-character lives in a town inhabited by anthropomorphic animals. Differentiating between the style of gameplay presented in Animal Crossing versus The Sims is important because The Sims allows players to be an omniscient force, while in Animal Crossing, the player only has control over themselves. Animal Crossing appeals to players through an interactive world and characters, and lets players develop an island in real-time by completing daily tasks.

In this example, Gigi writes on the topic of the video game *Animal Crossing* without having a particular purpose in mind. What stands out in Gigi's freewrite is the connection she makes in the different levels of character control the video-game player has when playing *The Sims* and *Animal Crossing*. A potential topic Gigi might explore more in depth is the importance of character control in video games. When you are finished, look at the last sentence or paragraph you wrote. Having spent all that time writing, your final thoughts are likely the most cohesive, which makes this a great place to find your topic!

Activity 4.4: Freewriting for Topic Ideas

Set a timer for three to five minutes and make sure to have a reliable pen/pencil or word processor handy. No need for research or internet access. Once you begin the timer, you should write for the entire length of the time. Don't worry about mistakes or repeating words or even writing nonsense. The purpose of this activity is to just let your ideas flow. When the timer stops, reread what you have written and then take some time to respond to it and develop or rework any parts that you find promising.

Other Ways to Generate Ideas

The prewriting exercises to generate ideas listed here are not exclusive; there are lots of ways to think through ideas regarding a potential topic. In fact, a lot of exercises exist that can help you—too many to include here. If you are looking for more ways to spark a topic idea, check out this TED Talk playlist: Simple Ways to Spark Your Creativity*.* Each of the TED Talk presenters on this list outlines potential ways to unlock your own creativity—especially Tim Harford's talk, "How Frustration Can Make Us More Creative." Harford explains that sometimes our best ideas come from those moments that are most challenging to us. So go ahead: Experience that writing block. Frustration is part of the creative process.

Talk to Your Classmates or Meet with Your Professor

Speaking of frustration, sometimes generating ideas on our own can prove unproductive. If there comes a time in your process of working through topic ideas and you have exhausted all you can think of, it is best to talk it out with others, especially your professor. One primary challenge we might face in deciding on a topic is that we get "stuck" in our own heads. There have been times where I have worked on generating an idea—going through all the various exercises from listing, to mapping, to freewriting, but still couldn't find a topic I was happy with. When this has happened, I have taken a step back to gain a new perspective. Sometimes it is important and productive to simply step away from our thoughts when choosing a topic, and doing so can help us when encountering writer's block. After stepping back, I have then talked with my friends about the ideas I had. Speaking with others and getting feedback are perhaps two of the most crucial steps in being able to formulate topics that just will not otherwise appear on the page.

If, for some reason, your friends or writing partners cannot help you think through the topic/topics you are thinking about, meet with your professor. I recommend that you do not just email your professor to ask them to look over the ideas you are exploring. Instead, make time to meet with them one-on-one either during office hours—or make an appointment. Do not be afraid to talk with your professor, who is often the best person to offer advice for a topic on an assignment *they* have asked you to write*.*

Once you have worked through any of the exercises outlined above and settled on a topic, it is time to work through the next step of choosing your topic—conducting preliminary research.

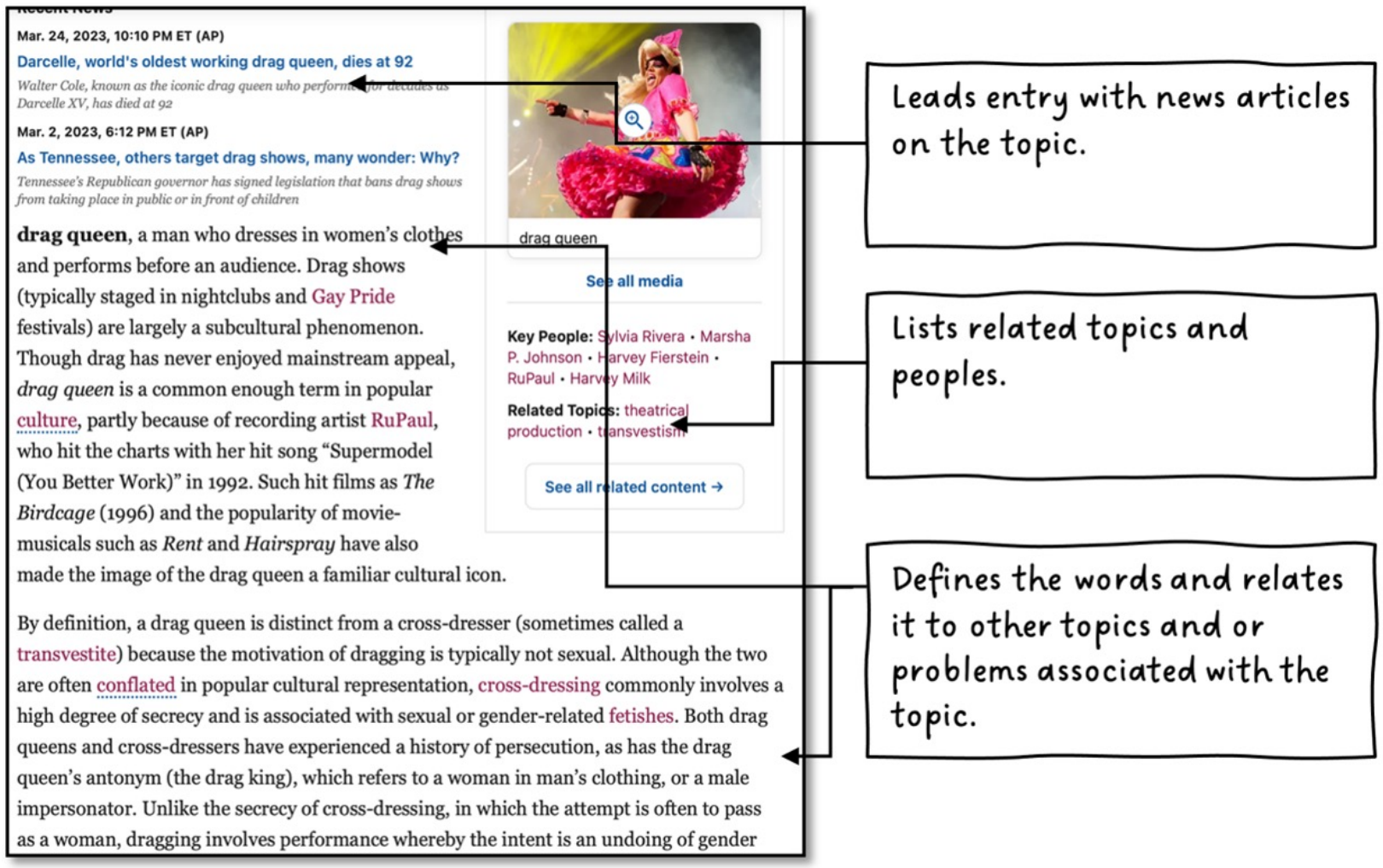
Researching Your Topic

Depending on the type of writing you are doing and your purpose for writing, you will conduct preliminary research in different ways—especially later in the process for more formal academic assignments compared to more creative assignments. Whatever genre you are writing in, it's best to cast a wide net and broadly search your topic in the beginning stages since you will need to gather as much research as possible in order to narrow down your topic idea. Remember what I said at the beginning of this chapter? When we begin the writing process, topics are not finite. Instead, they should evolve as we write and work through the conversation, or scholarship, that exists regarding our subject. That means broadly reading what has been said or is being said on the topic. Let's look at different ways to research and narrow down topics.

If you are unsure of how you want to approach your potential topic, one of the best places to start research is an encyclopedia. Encyclopedias can often give extensive background on subjects. While other types of sources exist (like newspapers, journal articles, etc...) I find that when trying to narrow down a topic, encyclopedias offer a great place to explore the topic in full—especially given that encyclopedias are written with the intent to inform. It is important to read all there is to read, but the initial goal when researching a topic is to narrow our focus. We can read journal articles, books, and newspapers once we have narrowed down the topic by reading through encyclopedias. With that said, there are two specific types of encyclopedias: general encyclopedias and subject specific encyclopedias. Encyclopedias are excellent resources to use to use when we are looking for background information on our subject, the key experts on our subjects, and or any scholarship that has already been done on our subject.

Using General Encyclopedias to Narrow Down Your Topic

A general subject encyclopedia has articles on almost anything you can think of or search for. You might be familiar with *Wikipedia*, which is an online general subject encyclopedia. Entries are the result of collaborative efforts of often many writers, editors, and moderators. *Wikipedia* as a resource for research has grown more reliable over time through moderation efforts. However, many students are still warned against its use by their teachers because anyone can write or contribute ideas to the main pages of any article. Thus, we might find a more reliable general subject encyclopedia to pursue searches beyond initial Wikipedia searches. Let us look at one together and practice narrowing down a potential topic.



Carman, "Drag Queen," Encyclopedia Britannica

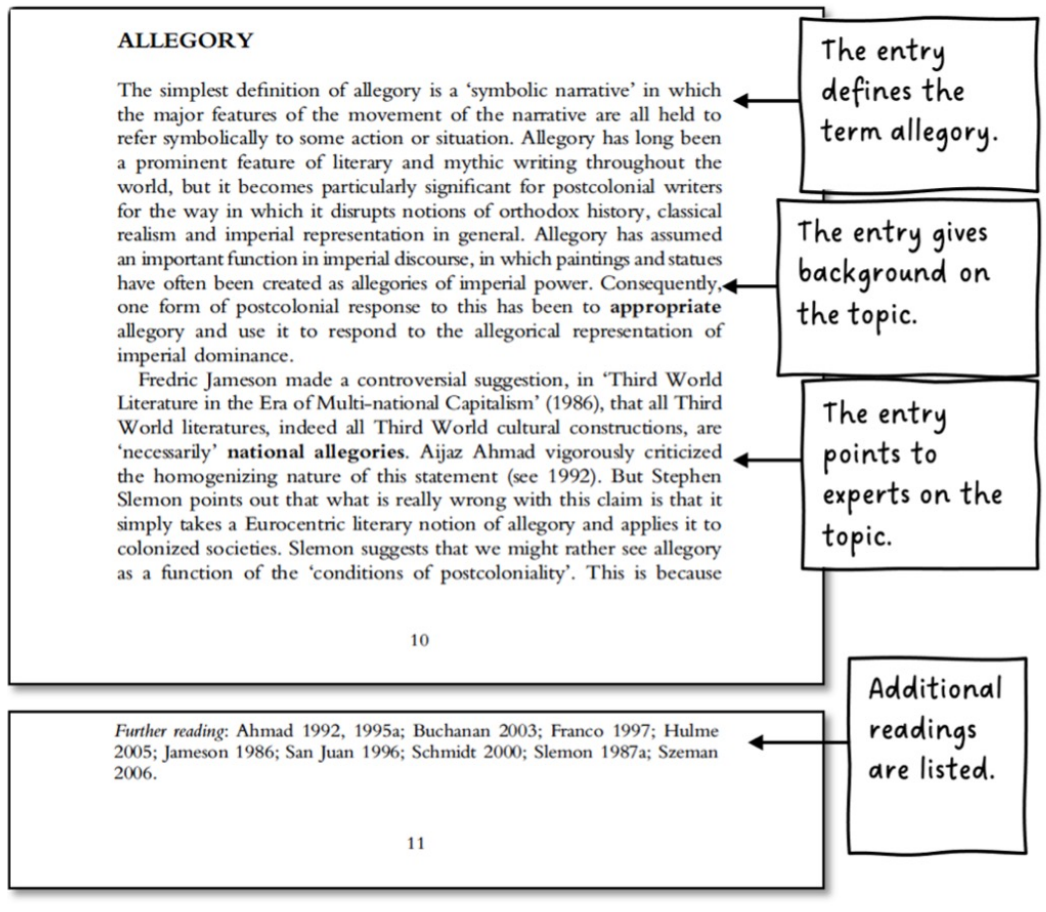
Encyclopedia Britannica is a reputable general subject encyclopedia where we can start by doing a general search on a specific subject. First, use relevant keywords to look up your topic in the search bar. For example, say you are interested in writing a research paper on drag queens. Start with typing the word "drag queen" in the search bar and hit enter, which will take you to the entry pictured above.

This picture is only a snapshot of the full entry, but we have a lot to work with here. The first part of this entry lists news articles on drag queens from within the past month. The entry itself begins with a clear-cut definition of a drag queen: "a man who dresses in women's clothes and performs before an audience." In the same section it goes on to list contemporary examples like RuPaul. Next, on the right-hand side, the encyclopedia lists related topics and key figures. And finally, the middle part of this entry lists some problematic terms associated with drag queens. From each of these parts of the entry I could explore the topic of drag queens in more detail. For example, I could explore the following from the last passage: what differentiates a drag queen from a cross-dresser and what differentiates their performances? Alternatively, I could look up the name RuPaul and explore his contributions to the "subcultural phenomenon" of drag.

Do not be overwhelmed by all the ideas that might pop up should you read a general encyclopedia article—you might get caught up in the various ideas and go down various rabbit holes. However, in our preliminary research we simply want to read and learn more about our topic and potentially find inspiration that might help us expand our own understanding of it. Thus, general encyclopedias are a great place to start whenever topics are rather broad, and you can use them to narrow down your topic further and help you find what sources have been created by others or have been cited on your topic.

Subject Specific Encyclopedias

If your topic has a well-defined subject area to draw from, I suggest beginning your research with a subject specific encyclopedia. Subject specific encyclopedias are often written by experts within the field. One of the subject specific encyclopedias I use in my field of study is Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts. While not formally named an encyclopedia, it is like an encyclopedia in that it includes all the key terms one might need to know regarding postcolonial studies as well as a list of suggested readings by experts on that topic or term. For example, one significant term relevant to the field of postcolonial studies covered in this reference book is "allegory," a story of symbolic significance. On pages 11 and 12 of the handbook, the author provides the definition of the term as well as all the relevant background regarding its usage. Let us take a look at the specific entry.



"Allegory," Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, Ashcroft et al., 10-11.

The entry here from *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* consists of several parts. First, the author/expert defines the key term "allegory." Then, the author gives a general overview of its background and usage. Next, the author cites two significant experts on the term. Finally, the author ends the entry with further suggested readings associated with the term. However, let us take a moment to reflect on how to develop a topic using this encyclopedia entry.

In the second paragraph, the author specifies that Frederic Jameson (a well-known literary critic) "made a controversial" statement. If I were writing a paper on the topic of allegory in postcolonial literatures, I would definitely want to use the library to consult anything Jameson has written on the topic. Next, the entry specifies the controversial statement he made: "all third world literatures are national allegories." And here, we have a great starting point to develop the topic of an "allegory." I might then ask, "Are all 'third world' literatures—that is, those of developing countries—national allegories?" and pursue that question further—that is how we develop potential topics. We locate the experts on that subject, think about the statements they have made, and then ask our own questions. Thus, encyclopedias or handbooks are excellent places to locate the experts on our topics as well as the various conversations surrounding our potential topics.

While not all subject specific encyclopedias may provide such detailed entries regarding a field of study, I can use the handbook above to understand the ongoing conversation regarding the postcolonial term "allegory" and develop it. You may want to verify who wrote the encyclopedia, who published it, and who sponsored its publication especially if the work was found on the greater internet outside of the library database. Whether you are using a subject specific or general encyclopedia, both are great places to start narrowing down our topics/ ideas.

One final note: encyclopedias are not the only means of researching a topic. They are just one of the best resources to help us develop our topics more clearly. As a reminder, to narrow down your topic, locate all necessary background research, understand who the experts are and the questions they ask, and then determine the question you want to ask on the topic.

Activity 4.5: Using a Subject Specific Encyclopedia To Research Your Topic

Using the KU Library's Gale Reference Database, do a basic word or phrase search on your topic. Notice what different subject specific encyclopedias have to say on your topic and how they might differ in their focus and coverage of your topic. If you cannot find your topic at

first, check your spelling and try to vary or broaden your search terms to find related entries which can give you good context on your idea, even if it's not an exact match.

Researching with Creativity

Most of the research I do is centered within academic writing. However, one of my favorite authors, David Sedaris—who writes from his own experiences in the form of memoir writing—offers several pieces of excellent advice for creative research on the online learning community MasterClass. While Sedaris is a creative writer, his advice can be applied to academic research as well:

1. Take great notes. Your memory isn't perfect—so getting in the habit of being an observant writer and writing everything down will help you keep track of all of your story inspiration. Keeping a diary where you write down things that happen to you, things you find funny or interesting, dialogue you overhear and love, and character traits, will help you see the world differently[...]

2. Meet a variety of people. When was the last time you asked someone for directions? Forcing yourself to rely on other people is a great way to create built-in encounters with strangers[...]

3. Be present in the moment. Once you're in the habit of writing everything down, you might be tempted to whip out your notebook in the middle of a particularly juicy conversation. But resist the urge. "You don't want to end it," David says (of "the moment" in question).

Overall, Sedaris gives solid advice for both creative and academic research. The best way to do creative research is to live in the moment and explore experiences outside of our comfort zones.

I would also like to add to Sedaris' list of suggestions by advising that you read the genres of writing that most often deal with the topic you are interested in writing about. If you are interested in writing an academic paper about zombies, for instance, you might investigate horror novels, stories, and movies that feature zombies. This sort of preliminary research can eventually become **primary source material** for your work. See the types of topics/stories that exist within a given genre and you will become a better expert in deciding on the topics you should be writing on in that genre.

Writing a Topic Proposal

Now that we have discussed how to brainstorm and narrow down topics with research, we need to consider how to propose your topics to teachers, especially if a topic proposal has been assigned or if the professor has specified that they must approve topics first. A research proposal is an important piece of writing—particularly in higher education if you decide to pursue a master's or doctoral degree. Many post-graduation professional settings also feature their versions of topic proposals. Topic proposals can take many shapes and forms and might include conference proposals, journal article proposals, book proposals, and the like. Some professors might even assign a research proposal in your Composition or First-Year Seminar courses at Kutztown. In some cases, your professor may ask for only a paragraph that reflects on your topic and why you are choosing to write on it. More involved projects might require a detailed plan and lengthy source list or annotated bibliography. Always consult the assignment and what your professor is asking for in your topic proposal first.

Next let's discuss what you might include in a topic proposal. I will not detail how to write and structure each and every type of proposal and different professors may structure proposals in different ways; Purdue OWL is one resource that effectively overviews how to write and structure many types of proposals. Below, I will review the basics of what you can include in a topic proposal. The three primary content sections in a topic proposal are an introduction, background, and a conclusion. You can use the following sections to understand each part of the topic proposal while considering the appropriate length depending on your professor's requirements for your topic proposal assignment.

Introduction

In terms of writing the topic proposal introduction, I should highlight one specific part of the rhetorical situation: your purpose for writing. As you learned from previous chapters, you should always consider your audience and purpose when beginning the writing process. This is especially true when it comes to the topic proposal. Thus, once you have a topic idea, think about what you want your audience to know, think, or feel about your topic, centered around your purpose for writing. Your purpose for writing is intricately connected to your topic; use the introduction of your topic proposal to explore it in a clear and concise manner.

Here are some questions to consider when thinking about purpose:

- Are you writing to inform?
- Are you writing to solve a problem?
- Are you writing to answer a question?
- Are you writing to express an opinion?
- Are you writing to tell a story?
- Are you writing within a specific genre? (Booth et al.)

Once you have answered one of these questions as a "yes," you can use your introduction to explain how your topic relates to your purpose.

Background

In every field or discipline, there are significant voices and writers who must be acknowledged, especially when exploring how their ideas coincide with or differ from your approach. Thus, the second section of topic proposals should include this sort of background information. While a massive amount of background information might exist on your topic, use this section of your topic proposal to summarize a few main arguments, showing that you have done your research and are qualified to speak on the topic. Furthermore, always look up or consult authors or names that reappear across multiple essays and or research.

Conclusion

Conclusions are often the most difficult part of writing, but in topic proposals, I find them rather easy to write. In concluding a topic proposal, you are simply making the case as to why your idea/topic is important. You might also acknowledge audiences who might be interested in your work/topic here. Point to other writers who might want to read your work and why they might be interested in your approach to the topic. Secondly, reinforce how valuable and exciting your research is. Do not dread writing the conclusion; instead, think about how conclusions can show your excitement about your topic to your potential audiences.

Keep Exploring; Topics Are Just a Beginning

In this chapter, we explored the various steps of thinking through potential topics for both formal research and creative assignments. In the first part of this

chapter, I introduced various techniques that might help us discover and explore potential topics. Then, we examined how to do both creative and formal research. Finally, we looked at the basics of writing a topic proposal. Topics are the most foundational aspect of any writing project, and we should spend time shaping, exploring, and developing them. However, I want to return to the most important part of this chapter and leave you with this final piece of advice: Topics will evolve and change as you write, research, and discuss your work with others. For example, in the pervious section of this chapter I shared bits and pieces of my dissertation prospectus—the academic proposal that I had to write to justify my research to my academic advisor during the final phases of my PhD. What I did not realize at the time that I wrote my prospectus is how much my ideas regarding my topic would shift and change. Two years later, when I completed my dissertation, I had moved significantly away from the topic I proposed in my prospectus. Always remember, topics are just *a* beginning...not the *only* beginning.

Final Activity 4.6: Supplemental Brainstorm Questions

Use the questions below to help you explore your interests and possible topic ideas. You may choose one of the questions and answer through freewriting in a separate Word or Google document.

- **What is your major and what topics within your major are you most interested in exploring? (If you are undeclared, what studies are you most interested in?)**
- **Do you belong to any specific communities? What issues are you personally invested in?**
- **What topics or issues would you like to learn more about in your personal life?**
- **Are there any questions or opinions that you find yourself passionately disagreeing with?**

Chapter 5: Telling Stories With Narrative Writing Conventions

Julie King (she/her) is an adjunct professor of English at Kutztown University. She teaches Effective Composition to first-year students and Nordic literature in translation. Prior to her years of teaching in higher ed., Julie taught secondary education. Julie King holds a degree in English and Scandinavian literature and languages from Roskilde University in Denmark.

In my favorite pastime podcast, The Great Stories, host Trev Downey reads masterpieces aloud to his listeners. In a soothing Irish accent, he begins every episode with a reminder of the importance of the storytelling tradition: "Humans have been telling each other yarns as long as language itself has existed." Now, there is a reason for this longevity: a good story is something that we remember. Stories leave a lasting impression on us; they inspire us, connect us, and teach us valuable lessons about ourselves and the world around us.

Being able to tell a compelling story is an extremely useful skill, and when you master it, you will find there are few rhetorical situations in which you cannot use your storytelling abilities. As a teacher, I use storytelling all the time, and so do a wide range of other professions from coaching to business administration communication to PR, counseling to entrepreneurship.

How to effectively tell a story is a skill you can apply throughout your time as a student at KU and as you progress in your life and career. As a student, you can use storytelling in academic writing to engage your reader and illustrate points you are making. Storytelling is also used to great effect in speeches, presentations, cover letters, business plans, podcasts, TED Talks, stand-up comedy, advertisements, films, documentaries, and countless other visual and audio-based genres.

Telling Your Story: Personal Narratives

One of the first assignments you are likely to write as a student at KU is the Personal Narrative. You might be completely new to this genre, but I can assure you that it can be both powerful and, dare I say, fun to write.

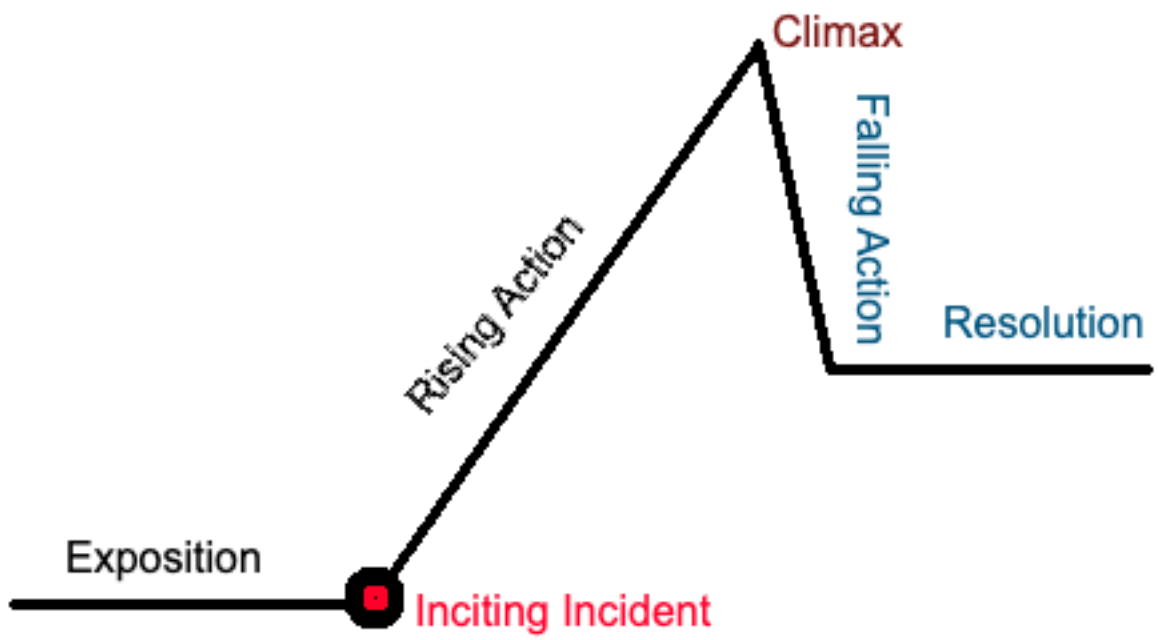
What type of text is a Personal Narrative, exactly? The name gives it away: *narrative* is simply a fancy word for story, and *personal* means that it's a story *about you*, told from *your perspective*, with *your original thoughts and reflections* about an experience and how it affected you.

When you choose an experience to write about, make sure you consider your purpose. Have you learned something about yourself or the world around you that you want to convey to your reader? We call this the **theme** of your narrative. Your narrative should go beyond your own unique experience and speak to a universal theme your audience can relate to. In your personal narrative, you want to reflect on this theme and what you learned through your experience. In this way, telling your own story can be a powerful experience for yourself and your reader. When you claim your story and share it, others might learn from it, be inspired by it, or simply see things from a new perspective.

Keeping it Interesting: Narrative Structure

When writing a narrative, you want to keep it interesting, and structuring your narrative around a *conflict* will ensure just that. Conflicts can be both internal or external factors or struggles that you face. It can be anything from teenage insecurities to getting caught lying to your parents, from losing a loved one to moving across the country, from coming to college to finding your identity. Whatever the conflict is, it will be the driving force of your narrative that keeps readers engaged. We can learn a lot from the basic structure of storytelling called "Freytag's Pyramid" pictured below.

Freytag’s Pyramid



One Possible Rendition of Freytag’s Triangle or Pyramid

Exposition: The exposition traditionally establishes your narrative's characters and setting. You want to set the stage for your narrative here and hook your reader. The exposition also often introduces or at least alludes to the conflict, but make sure you don’t give everything away just yet.

Inciting Incident: Did something happen that kickstarted the main conflict in your narrative? If so, that would be considered your inciting incident. In her narrative essay “My Two-House, Duffel-Bag Life” fifteen-year-old Natalie Muñoz has the moment when her parents told her of their divorce as the inciting incident that leads to the main conflict in her narrative, namely her grief and inner struggle to accept her new “two-house, duffel-bag” life.

Rising Action: In this part, you can paint a clearer picture of the narrative’s setting and characters and expand on the conflict. Rising action typically includes a sequence of events, though not necessarily everything that has happened in real life. It is important that this part continuously builds tension that propels your narrative towards its climax.

Climax: This is the point of greatest tension in your narrative, AKA, when things come to a head. It should also be a turning point for the narrator in that sense

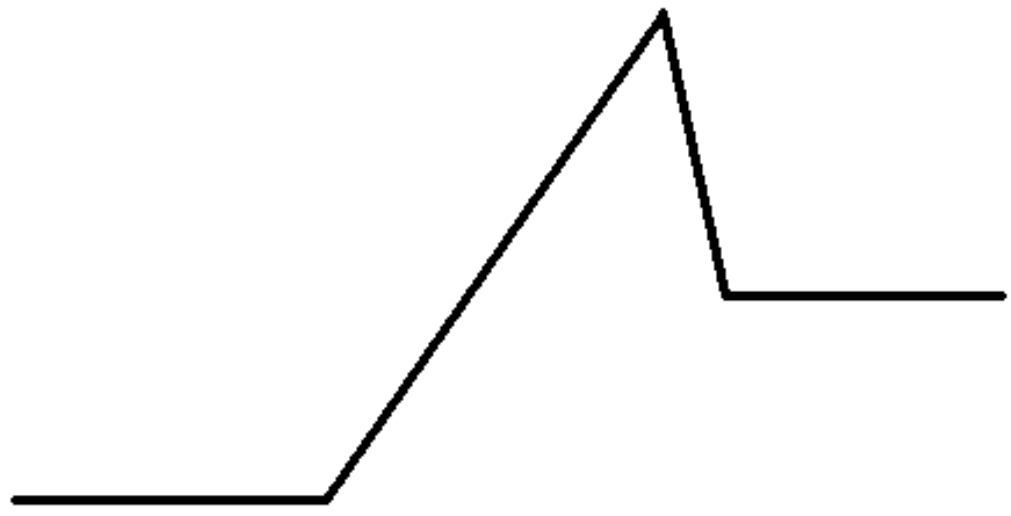
that you make a choice, a discovery, or a decisive action to address the external or internal conflict you are facing.

Falling Action: Let your reader know what the aftermath of the narrative's climax was. Was the conflict resolved and which significant changes did the experience bring about for you? Again, only include the most interesting aspects of the aftermath here to keep the narrative moving forward.

Resolution: Finally, you can present your reader with a resolution and reflect on what you've learned from the experience. This step concludes your narrative and should tie it together with the exposition. Keep in mind that a conflict does not necessarily have to be completely solved in order for you to share your story. You might still be waiting for a final resolution. That's okay. Check out "My Two-House, Duffle-Bag Life" for a good example of a personal narrative without a fully conclusive resolution.

Activity 5.1: Filling In the Blanks of Your Story

Take a moment to consider the structure of your own story. You can use the pyramid below to play around with your narrative's structure.



Blank Freytag's Triangle or Pyramid

Keep in mind that while this might help you organize your writing, variations in structure—like telling the story out of chronological order, beginning *in medias res* (in the middle of the action), or using flashbacks, foreshadowing, and other narrative devices—can be great ways to keep your narrative interesting. In the

student sample provided later, for example, Ian Beck begins his narrative by revealing a glimpse of the narrative's point of greatest tension. In that way, he catches the reader's attention and foreshadows the conflict before he sets the stage with more traditional exposition.

Bringing Your Story to Life

A personal narrative is non-fiction because it is based on real-life events, but the genre has several elements you might recognize from fictional storytelling such as characters, setting, dialogue, and description.

Description is crucial to bringing your story to life for your reader. Similarly, to make your characters come alive, dialogue is key. Sometimes, what is said between two people can tell your reader more about who the characters are than a description could convey.

Setting

When and where does your story take place? When establishing the setting, use detailed descriptions to paint a clear picture of when and where the narrative takes place. Your reader was not there with you, so they will only have your words to guide them. Let your words paint a clear picture of the scenario as well as set the mood for your reader.

In a first draft, a former student of mine started off her narrative in this manner:

> That summer I worked at a farm. The days were long and tough, and the barn smelled terrible. I thought I would hate it, but I ended up really liking it.

We unfortunately don't have a very clear picture of the "when and where" of this story after reading these sentences. What's missing? Which details could we add to give our reader a better understanding of the setting? Which sensory details, specific information, adjectives, or figurative language could we use to better describe the farm, the barn, and the summer? After we discussed these options, the student turned in a revised paragraph:

> The summer I graduated from high school, I worked on my uncle's dairy farm. I remember stumbling out of bed before dawn and driving through the dark to get to his farm in time for the first milking. Stepping into the big red barn, the intense smell of one hundred cows in a crowded space overpowered my senses. I will never forget how the smell of fresh manure and wet cattle mixed with the humid air in the barn. I know my uncle had taken me on as a favor to my mom,

> but I like to think that by the end of the summer, I had earned my place by his side in the barn.

This time, we know what type of farm she worked at and why she was there. We also have a clearer picture of what she meant by "long days." The "terrible smell" in the barn is described more vividly, using sensory details, so that those of us who have never been in a barn can picture the setting. What else do you think she might have added?

Activity 5.2: Adding Descriptive Details

Consider which descriptive details you can add to make the following scenario more engaging.

> I went to the store to buy milk for my mom. The store was located near our house, but a few blocks seemed like a long way to me.

Then draft a paragraph based on these lines with an added, extra layer of description. What kind of milk did the mom need? What store did the narrator go to? How old is he/she/they? Why do a few blocks seem "like a long way"? Was it raining?

Don't worry about exaggerating; just add as much description as you possibly can and have fun with it. If you're doing this in class, compare your own result to that of a classmate's. Consider the different descriptive and stylistic choices you have made and the effects they have.

Characters

A personal narrative typically only includes a few characters, yourself included. These are often people that are important to you, but don't forget that your reader does not know them or understand their significance to you unless you convey this on the page.

It is not an easy task. How do we make a person seem real and alive to our reader? A good place to start is considering what you always think of when you think of this person—think of two or three defining features, character traits, or behaviors that stand out to you about the person. If you're writing about your grandmother, you might think of her soft hands and mild eyes, the way she makes sure you have clean sheets when you sleep over, or makes you double layered Nutella sandwiches after school. Maybe it's the way she played UNO with you at kitchen table when you were young that comes to mind. Instead of simply

stating "My grandmother was the nicest person in the world,"—something many people could claim—use your own unique details to enhance your description.

Activity 5.3: Describing a Character

Close your eyes and think of a person in your life you want to describe. Note two or three physical features that come to mind. Then, jot down two or three character traits and one thing this person would often do. Use your notes to draft a short paragraph that introduces this person to someone who does not know them.

Describing body language is also a great way to better show a character to your reader. In Amy Tan's essay "Fish Cheeks," the narrator uses telling details (or short, precise descriptions) to convey how one of her characters is feeling. Instead of directly stating that Robert, a young teenage boy in the narrative, is embarrassed, Tan writes: "Robert looked down," "Robert's face reddened," and "Robert grunted and looked away." That's all we get, but it's all we need to fully understand how Robert is feeling.

Student Samples

Let's look at how these principles are used in a Personal Narrative written by KU students. The first example below is a personal narrative written by Ian Beck in the style of a short story using a traditional narrative structure, description, and dialogue. There are comments provided to help draw your attention to the smart choices that Ian makes in his narrative. The second example by KU student Jax Lucchese is entitled "Being Trans with an Eating Disorder" and is a narrative essay, which means that it combines elements of both narrative storytelling and essay structure. Both examples are provided since professors can differ on what style they prefer—make sure to check with your professor or the assignment details so that you follow the style best suited to your assignment.

In the following personal narrative, Ian Beck is faced with the physical challenge of climbing a mountain and, at the same time, the inner conflict of letting go of his pride and accepting help from others. First, Ian hooks his reader with an "in medias res" introduction. The exposition then establishes the narrative's setting and characters, provides the reader with the necessary context, and alludes to the conflict.

“Climbing a Mountain” by Ian Beck

Ian Beck (he/him) is a graduate from Kutztown University, originally from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Ian loves spending time outdoors and with friends. Some of Ian’s hobbies include hiking, fencing, reading, writing, learning, and video games. He’s also a total nerd when it comes to Star Wars.

I clutched my stomach, doubling over, and threw up into a scrubby bush, seemingly alone in the sparse forest of New Mexico.

“In medias res” means “in the middle” and it’s a device that Ian uses here to get us right into the middle of the action.

Two years prior, not long after my 15th birthday, I signed up to go on a nearly 100-mile trek with a 45-pound backpack through the dry and dusty deserts, dense forests, and the dreaded mountains of the Philmont Scout Ranch with a group of my fellow Scouts.

Notice the use of specific details to establish setting.

At the time, I greatly prided myself on my independence, my ability to just grin and bear it through any challenges life threw at me. However, I soon realized that I was a less avid backpacker than my peers.

Here, Ian alludes to both internal and external conflicts.

As we took weekend practice trips on Appalachian trails throughout the fall and winter of 2019, eager for the summer of the next year when we were set to take our journey, I consistently fell behind my crew and viewed the training trips as a competition I was losing.

During the rising action, the narrative touches upon a series of events, like challenges faced while preparing for their trip, while continuing to develop the conflict of the narrative.

It was not long until the day we were set to embark on our trek came. The first few days went by without mishap. We had spent two years training our bodies to be able to handle the walking. We passed the evenings by participating in once-in-a lifetime activities like blacksmithing and railroad building in staffed campsites and telling stories around the campfire on nights when we were deep in the wilderness.

Ian gives a few specific details, but wisely avoids giving a step-by-step account of events. Although a personal narrative is based on real life events, you don't have to cover *everything*.

On the sixth night of our journey, the halfway point, there was no chatter in our campsite. We sat in silence, all deep in contemplation, gazing upwards at the most beautiful night sky we had ever seen.

Notice the use of "telling details" that reveal the states of mind of the characters. In this case, silence speaks louder than words.

It was only just getting dark, but we went to bed much sooner than usual. We had to be up at four the next morning, and we were too nervous to talk as we finished our MREs of questionable quality.

To build tension, Ian describes the nervous atmosphere in the camp the night before the steep climb begins.

Tomorrow, we would climb a mountain.

Ian continuously reminds us of the challenge ahead.

As the narrative closes in on its climax, tension continues to build. Just like in the exposition, Ian Beck uses specific details and description to paint a clear picture of his restless sleep and rough start the next morning.

Our camp that night was at the highest elevation we had been at so far, even though we still had over 4,000 feet to go. I shivered in my sleeping bag, fitfully turning over, trying to get warm and let sleep take me. My eyes closed and before I knew it, it was time to move. We rolled out of our sleeping bags, the dry chill of the morning air biting through our clothes as we packed away our campsite.

Notice specific details and sensory imagery.

Breakfast today would be a granola bar and stick of jerky because we needed to move. If we did not leave soon enough, it would be like Hell on Earth, trudging under the blaze of the sun.

Tension continues to build.

I could tell something was off as soon as we started to walk. My stomach roiled, and it felt like the jambalaya I had eaten the night before was trying to burn its way out. My knees felt weak and my head light. We had not reached the mountain proper yet, but our climb was all uphill through the foothills. I got so dizzy that I had to stop, but I was still too foolishly stubborn to stop and ask for help, for the others to wait up for me.

While physical challenge in the main focus here, Ian also reminds his reader of the internal conflict.

As the narrative reaches its climax, it also returns to its opening line. Although Beck hasn't reached the summit of the mountain yet, this is the point of greatest tension of his journey.

I doubled over, and the jambalaya made its return.

"Hold up, everyone. Ian needs our help."

The strategic use of dialogue in this moment slows the narrative as it reaches its climax.

I very much consider myself a team player. When my crew needed help, I was always glad to lend a hand, but I struggled to ask for help in return. One of the adult leaders gave me some nausea medication and made sure I drank water. They took my gear and redistributed about fifteen pounds of my load to the others, just as I had helped when one of the others had been struggling a few days earlier. The medicine and lighter pack helped, as we began to move again soon after, but I felt weak, a drag on the whole team. I remember my cheeks burning with what I felt was shame, although in hindsight it may have been whatever illness I had.

Ian reflects on his inner conflict which exceeds his external one at this moment.

Battling pride and shame is a relatable, universal theme in this narrative.

In the falling action, Ian fills in his reader on the aftermath of this moment. As the team pushes forward and the medicine seems to settle his stomach, the

beauty of Mount Baldy helps Ian forgets his initial embarrassment. Though the summit is now closer than Ian first realized, and his physical symptoms are all but gone, the narrator still has an important lesson to learn.

> Without the team, I would not have been able to even make it to the base of the mountain we were supposed to be climbing.
>
> After what felt like the longest hour of my life, we came around a corner and saw it for the first time: Mount Baldy, the highest point in Philmont, a whopping 12,441 feet above sea level. It was beautiful. Adrenaline flooded my system. We were going to really do this; my friends and I would climb a mountain. My stomachache seemed to go away as we got closer and closer.

This shift is important because it shows that the experience has significantly affected him. A new normal is being established in the aftermath of the conflict he faced.

> We finally reached the tree line, where the ground turned from grass and dirt to bare, loose rock. I had not realized it, but we had been climbing the mountain the whole time, and we only had the last 2,000 feet of climb left. We had hiked over fifty miles that week, but the last part would be the most grueling by far. We dug our hiking poles in, scrabbling up steep, slick rock. It was hard, but we pushed through with the end in mind.
>
> I was mere steps from the end, a particularly steep last stretch, when my friend ahead of me offered me his hand to help pull me across the finish line, "Need a hand, Ian?”
>
> I almost brushed him off, like I usually would have, but something in me seemed to have shifted. I took his hand and let him help me pull through and finish our climb.

Now finally at the summit, Beck reflects on what the experience has taught him. The symbolism of having climbed a mountain and reached the top is a beautiful backdrop to the realization he makes about himself. Something has shifted inside our narrator. He is no longer the Ian “who prided himself on independence”; he now knows how to lean on his friends.

> As we sat on the summit, nearly three miles in the sky, enjoying the view that stretched for miles, I slowly made the connections about what I had been learning while climbing a mountain: it does not make us weak to need to

lean on those around us, rather it shows the strength of the relationships we have.

Ian chooses to only briefly reflect on the lesson learned. Because of the twofold nature of the personal narrative, the balance between storytelling and personal reflection is largely up to you. Next, take a look at Jax Lucchese's "Being Trans with an Eating Disorder" to see how reflection can play a major role in a personal narrative.

“Being Trans with an Eating Disorder” by Jax Lucchese

Jax’s narrative is written in the style of a narrative essay, which incorporates elements of narrative covered in this chapter as well as elements of essay structure that will be addressed in the following chapter. As an activity, you might mark up this essay with notes explaining its structure like Ian Beck’s example above.

Jax Lucchese (he/him) is a graduate in Social Work and Entrepreneurship and Case Management minor who wants to open a nonprofit organization for transgender people with eating. When writing this narrative piece for Dr. Clemens’ course, he recalled his personal experiences as a transgender man with an ED.

Growing up as a kid, my relationship with gender was complicated. On top of the other issues in my life at that point in time, I didn’t understand how to articulate how I felt in terms of identity. The one way I felt I had control over my life and how I felt towards myself was through my body, and subsequently food. While at the time I was unaware of how this would become a huge issue in my life, it would eventually come to be one of the greatest challenges I have ever faced.

When I was in my junior year of high school, I finally realized that something was wrong. I realized that I was transgender, that although I was born a woman I did not identify as one. This was a huge realization for me. It felt like my whole life made sense again, but also made my world come crashing down. Also, during this time is when I was struggling the most with my eating disorder. The one thing that made me feel some sort of control over my life in my early childhood developed into of the most deadly and horrid mental illnesses. While at the time I did not realize it, being trans made my struggles with disordered eating unique.

It was a week after my 16th birthday when my parents realized I needed help and needed it as soon as possible. I

was admitted into an ED residential treatment facility where I would stay for almost two months. Every day was horrid. I had a psychiatrist, nutritionist and therapist, who all had no clue how to help me. I was not complying with the goals that they had set for me, and eventually had to go onto a feeding tube for a month. Without that tube, I would have eventually died.

I was not the picture-perfect client that my treatment team wanted. I attended all the groups they wanted me to. I showed up to every meeting and intervention they required me to go to. I talked with them about how I felt. But I did not listen to them. They presented me with challenges and, in the end, deadlines and told me that if I didn't comply, they would eventually kick me out of the treatment facility. They took everything away from me as punishment, like my mentally ill brain was not punishment enough. I couldn't call anyone from home, I wasn't allowed any visitors, I couldn't email anyone, and eventually I wasn't even allowed to have sessions with my therapist. I had no one to talk to besides the other residents (who were also struggling with their own disorder).

While on the surface this seems like just punishment, no one would listen to why I was struggling more than their other clients. No one on my team would listen to why I did not agree with what they were telling me, and the benefits of eating. The truth is, me being a transgender male made my eating disorder much harder to work with and treat. In groups, I would be taught that you need to eat in order get your period back, so eventually you can have a child. They also would talk about how feminine features (such as breasts) would get bigger, which made most of the women happy. While I was glad that some of my friends would be able to use this as motivation, these reasons did more harm than good to me. For me, my eating disorder was a way to make my appearance match what I felt I was on the inside. When I was ill, my feminine parts (such as my breasts) were not as apparent and mostly gone. My period was gone, which made me so happy. I no longer had the monthly reminder of my birth sex. My body was slowly dying, but I finally felt that I could see who I really was on the outside. So, how was I supposed to look at these things coming back as a positive side of recovery?

A huge factor on why no one on my treatment team at the residential center was able to help me is because not many people who have experience working with people with eating disorders know much about the unique struggles of trans people with eating disorders. While the trans community is one of the most affected groups by eating disorders, our

struggles are not known. Transgender people have only begun to be accepted into society in some places, while majority of other places are against us even existing. It should not be surprising then that not many people know how to help trans people in their unique struggles with eating disorders.

Going through treatment and basically having to being my own therapist impacted me in many ways. I started to realize why my team couldn't help me, and that my struggles were unique compared to others around me. I also realized that I wasn't alone, many other trans people were going through what I was. They also were in a unique situation and felt isolated. I found it in myself to try to recover. I told myself that if I could be the person I needed to hear from when no one else could understand what I was going through. The dream of being able to help and raise awareness for transgender people who struggle with eating disorders rose from this. From that day on, it has been my mission to raise awareness for this cause, and to help as many people as I can in the future.

Final Activity 5.4: Narrative Writing Conventions Checklist

Use this list to see if your own piece checks all the conventions of a personal narrative:

- **An engaging introduction**
- **An exposition that establishes characters, setting, conflict, and theme**
- **A clear conflict and resolution**
- **Description and dialogue that brings the characters and setting to life**
- **Original thoughts and reflections about the significance of the events**
- **A resolution that concludes and ties the narrative together**

Chapter 6: Strategies of Organization

Robert Fillman, Ph.D. (he/him) is an English professor at Kutztown University, where he teaches courses in composition and American literature. His literary criticism has been published in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, *College Literature*, and *CLAJ: The College Language Association Journal,* among others. Fillman is also the author of two poetry collections, *House Bird* (2022) and *The Melting Point* (2025), as well as the chapbook *November Weather Spell* (2019). He is the faculty advisor to the Future Authors Club and serves on the board of Poetry in Transit.

Many composition theorists believe that writing inherently involves making an argument. With any deliberate act of communication, we are trying to convey information in a certain way to elicit a desired response from an audience. We want to change someone's mind about an issue. We want to influence a person's thinking. We want to help someone make a more informed choice or decision. We want to propose a particular solution to a problem. We want to motivate people to take some course of action.

If you think about it, so much formal writing that students do in school involves taking a position on a topic. For example, writing a literary analysis or film review both involve making a well-reasoned argument to an imagined audience about how we should interpret a text. Likewise, drafting a topic proposal requires some persuasive elements in order to convince your professor that the topic will make for a good paper. Even writing a personal reflection involves presenting an argument about your own self-perception. Because writing is invariably guided by purpose, which is the reason we want to communicate in the first place, the way that we organize a text, including the order in which ideas are presented, should be optimized to achieve this purpose. In academic settings, the genre of argument (e.g., persuasive essay, argument paper, position paper) often entails

very specific and formal expectations, particularly in organization. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate those expectations so that you can present your ideas in an explicit, unified, and coherent manner.

Core Components of Persuasive Academic Essays

To write a successful academic essay, writers will perform a variety of "moves." They will make clearly defined claims. They will situate their views within some larger context or conversation of existing ideas. They will rely on sound reasoning and evidence for support. They will address potential counterarguments or anticipated criticisms of their views. While writing conventions are not necessarily rigid, academic essays tend to follow similar patterns of organization. Because of these similarities, we can acknowledge a set of core components that reliably show up (in one way or another) when drafting a persuasive academic essay. Over time, these parts and their arrangement become intuitive, and structuring an essay becomes almost second nature.

The form of an essay might vary slightly depending on the academic field, but in general, academic papers are written in a clear and straightforward manner. For this reason, professors will ask that your claims be stated explicitly and that the ideas presented are logically connected across sections. And while there are many possible ways to write an argument, academic essays written in the English language tend to draw from models established by Greek and Roman rhetoricians thousands of years ago.

I will be the first to admit that, despite majoring in English as an undergraduate, I was still learning *how* to organize an essay effectively even as a graduate student. It was through immersing myself in academic writing and receiving guidance from dedicated teachers that I gained more confidence in this genre. I was in the first year of my master's degree program when a professor introduced me to the Classical Schema of Argumentation, which has served my writing well ever since.[1] In classical times, Greek and Roman orators regularly relied upon a structure that essentially contains six "core" components. Although these components have Latin names (*Exordium, Narratio*, *Divisio*, *Confirmatio*, *Confutatio*, and *Conclusio*), I have renamed them in this chapter, so they make sense to modern readers. In fact, you may already be familiar with many of them!

In the sections below, I explain some of the typical "core" components of a persuasive essay, which derive from the teachings of Classical rhetoric.

Introduction

Your introduction is the place to win your readers over. Typically, in academic writing, writers do not plunge directly into an argument. Instead, they establish a rapport with their audience by engaging readers gradually. In the introduction, writers lead into the subject (often indirectly) and guide the reader to the stance that will be taken, establishing an authorial point of view and tone of voice.

As you have probably been told by past English instructors, the introductory paragraph offers writers a chance to be creative. You might begin with an analogy, a brief anecdote, the description of a recent event or trend connected to the topic, or an eye-catching statement or statistic. Any of these techniques, sometimes referred to as "hooks," can pique the reader's interest and help to connect them to the topic. In any case, a strong introduction will build trust with your readers by appealing to their feelings while simultaneously gesturing toward your perspective on the topic.

Contextual Background

You should plan to describe the issue, problem, or controversy at hand early on in your essay. You can do this as part of your introductory paragraph, or you can begin a new paragraph. (See? Already we can tell that some of these "components" are flexible.) In the "Contextual Background" section, writers establish the events and ideas that are driving them to write about their topics for their audience. This section might include personal circumstances or anecdotes that justify a writer's interest in the subject. It could also include a summation of views provided by other writers: What have people been saying about the topic? What ideas are circulating? How has recent conversation been shaped by other thinkers and writers? This section can include a brief historical gloss of events that establishes a common way for audiences to understand the topic. One way to think about these opening components is that the introduction gains the readers' interest about the topic while the contextual background brings them up to speed on it.

> The contextual background can sometimes function as part of the introduction, or "hook," particularly if it is a compelling personal story. The thing to remember is that an essay's introductory sections should attempt to connect you (the writer) to the topic *and* to the audience while also establishing your tone, stance, and style.

Activity 6.1: Introduction Brainstorm Freewrite

Take a moment to think of what exactly got you interested in pursuing the topic of your argument. This can be a personal experience, an article you found, a particular fact that you learned, something a friend said to you, or anything else that drew your attention to the topic you are developing. Then, set a timer to 3 minutes. Without stopping to think about it or looking anything up, recount exactly what it was that caught your attention and what makes it so fascinating. When the timer is up, pause your writing and consider whether you might be able to incorporate some of what you wrote into your introduction. Keep in mind that this is just a start. Revision, research, and further explanation will be needed to craft a smooth introduction.

Main Claims and Thesis Statements

Academic essays are based on a strong, arguable main claim, which is traditionally referred to as the **thesis statement**. (Depending on your instructor, you may encounter various terms, such as thesis statement, main claim, main proposition, or main argument. While these terms may differ, they all essentially refer to the central idea or proposition that forms the backbone of your academic essay.) Your paper's main claim should clearly convey your stance or position, and it should lay out *what* you will argue.

When you are stating a claim, it is important to remember that certain kinds of statements cannot be argued effectively: statements of fact, which cannot be disputed and, therefore, yield no potential opposition; statements of personal belief, taste, or preference, which might not be able to be substantiated by evidence; and statements that are so obvious, or generally accepted, that no one would disagree with them. These lead to weak essays.

A strong claim, on the other hand, will be specific, debatable, backed by reasons and evidence, and promote further discussion. In other words, a strong main claim invites reasonable people to rethink the issue or concept and hopefully be swayed to adopt the writer's perspective. It is also important to remember that in the “real world,” situations are never static, so a new claim about an event or issue can help us to rethink an entire field of ideas. This is what we are aiming to do when we write an academic paper.

Activity 6.2 Selecting an Effective Main Claim

Help these students decide what thesis would be best for an academic argument essay by deciding which thesis would likely be the most

effective. Remember that a thesis should be specific, debatable, able to be backed by reasons and evidence, and promote further discussion. Then, pick a second-choice thesis and describe how you would revise it to be more effective.

Tina has the following topic: hip-hop culture

A. Four key elements make up hip-hop culture: DJing, rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti.

B. Rap music reveals the deep underpinnings of American society.

C. Rap and elements of hip-hop culture should be incorporated into elementary school music education.

D. Despite some weaknesses in earlier works, Jay-Z is the greatest rapper of all time.

E. Rap may just be the one genre of music that will eventually outlast all others.

Greg has the following topic: cats

A. People shouldn’t let cats go “in the wild” because they will end up becoming strays, capable of spreading disease and breeding uncontrollably.

B. The Burmese Gray is by far the most docile of cat, making the best pet of all house cats.

C. Cats have psychic powers.

D. In order to discourage cat hoarding, a growing form of animal abuse, cat owners in Pennsylvania should be required to obtain a pet license.

E. Sometimes referred to as “Hemingway cats” due to the author’s affection for them, cats with polydactylism have a harmless genetic variation that results in more than the usual number of toes.

Body Paragraphs (Support)

Body paragraphs in academic essays prove or support your claim. They might be thought of as your lines of argument. They substantiate your paper's main claim and lend authority to the case you are building. Here, writers invent arguments that support the paper's larger point: What might a reasonable reader find convincing? What facts and observations will readers respond to most positively? What might readers find logical and intuitive? What experiences will appeal to an audience's emotions? What case studies or statistics would convince readers that you are credible and trustworthy? Body paragraphs will usually rely on a blend of strong reasons, empirical evidence, relevant historical examples, support from knowledgeable and credible sources (if a researched essay), and relevant anecdotal evidence to support the paper's main claim.

Ways To Order Supporting Information in Body Paragraphs

When you are outlining an academic essay, it is important to consider carefully the order in which information is presented. The "body" paragraphs form the central section or "flesh" of an academic essay because it is where you support your main ideas. Therefore, the "body" tends to be the longest and most developed section of a paper. Always driving your essay's momentum should be questions like the following: What influence do you think the information presented will have on readers? How will it affect *their* thinking? *Their* feelings? Since the goal of all writing is to have the audience better understand the writer’s message and purpose, considerations of audience, like this, can help writers decide the optimal order of ideas.

While there is no single “correct” way to organize the presentation of evidence in an academic essay, there are a few common methods to consider. In the section below, I provide two structures that may aid you in organizing your essay’s body paragraphs.

Order of Importance: Emphatic Order

In this organizational pattern, ideas are arranged in one of two ways: *most* to least important, or *least* to most important.

In persuasive essays, ordering ideas from most to least important is often the preferred organizational pattern because it emphasizes the strongest, most convincing supporting information first. Think about when you enter a debate with family or friends: typically, when trying to make a point, you present your

best ideas first. Trial lawyers deploy the same approach, focusing the jury's attention on the most significant and indisputable evidence when making their case. It's the "lead with your best stuff" mentality.

Conversely, for rhetorical effect, a writer might choose to reverse this order, presenting the most important point last. The justification for this approach is that the essay builds in intensity to a climactic moment and leaves the most important ideas fresh in the mind of the reader toward the essay's end.

> When you are pre-writing to generate material for an essay, it is a good idea to create a visual chart or outline that ranks ideas according to their significance. That way, you can play out the progression of ideas in your mind and even begin to think about how to transition from one argument to the next, what arguments might be connected, and where further elaboration may be necessary.

Order According to Evidence: Kinds of Support

Understanding the different types of evidence you can use will help you organize your ideas effectively. Knowing the difference between kinds of evidence can help you decide what is most relevant (and most persuasive) to an audience based upon their likely values, interests, and beliefs. Outlining the types of evidence at your disposal is good practice that can help determine the order of your body paragraphs.

Evidence could be broken down into categories. For example, there is empirical data, like facts or statistics; there is textual evidence (common in literary analysis papers); there are opinions from experts; there are case studies (common in scientific papers); there are historical or recent events covered by newspapers; there are series of examples; and there are personal stories, observations, and anecdotes. Each kind of evidence serves a purpose in supporting the essay's larger point. Indeed, one organizational tactic writers employ is to arrange an essay according to evidence that supports the writer's main claims and to follow that with conflicting evidence that complicates those claims. Another approach might be to differentiate between logical appeals, ethical appeals, and emotional appeals, and arrange paragraphs in accordance with those persuasive approaches.

Not all evidence is equally important or relevant, so when you are outlining ideas, it is important to be selective. Writers want their evidence to support their

claims directly, and organizing evidence visually (in an outline form of visual cluster) can help a writer determine if some of the evidence is off-topic or extraneous. Personally, I like to consider the progression from the most obvious to the least obvious issues, as readers will often expect an argument to flow in this way. In addition, I try to premise groupings along the way so that the logical structure is clear. I often find that it helps to consider multiple factors simultaneously. In other words, I do not always know the best way to organize supporting information until I have experimented with different orders of evidentiary support.

Counterarguments/Refutation or Alternative Views

A well-written argument not only substantiates the writer's claims; it also anticipates criticisms and carefully considers reasonable counterarguments, bringing up alternative views and presenting them fairly. Here, when addressing possible contentions to your views, you should make concessions when appropriate if another person's view is reasonable. At the same time, writers should also note "holes" in a critic's reasoning or demonstrate the limitations or disadvantages of these views, including how these views may only be applicable within certain contexts. By taking the potential criticisms of your essay's argumentation seriously, you can explain why your claims are preferable while simultaneously showing that you are fair-minded and conscientious of differing opinions. This is an effective tactic to elevate your ethos.

A great way to brainstorm possible arguments that can be made against your views is to play the "Believing and Doubting Game," a technique created by writing theorist Peter Elbow. In this exercise, you try to believe everything that you have written, coming up with as much additional evidence or as many supporting ideas as you can to expand upon your views. You then, conversely, try to doubt every idea that you have presented. You play the role of an adversary, or "devil's advocate," whose job is to poke holes in your own ideas, to come up with every reason why you are wrong. It's fun to play this game with a partner.

Activity 6.3: Playing the Believing/Doubting Game

Try this out: think of a debate that you've recently heard or taken part in, maybe on topics like the banning of plastic straws, the passing of student debt relief legislation, or the realignment of conferences in college sports. Pick a side and write down all the ideas you have in support of that viewpoint. Be exhaustive! Then, switch your stance to doubt. Challenge all the beliefs and ideas that you just presented by raising questions, identifying possible counterarguments, and

expressing skepticism. Keep doing this until you feel you have identified the strongest arguments for both perspectives.

Conclusion

The conclusion is your chance to leave a strong and memorable impression on the reader. Here, writers typically summarize a paper's main points in a couple sentences. But that is not quite enough. Indeed, many rhetoricians believe that a conclusion should be the most passionate, stylistically beautiful part of a paper. In this important paragraph, you can draw inferences from what you have already said. You can make recommendations about how to address the problem or issue. You can present the limitations of what you have proposed and put forth a call for more work or research to be done. You can speculate on the future—where you believe the issue is headed—and the implications of adopting (or not adopting) your views. You can reinforce what is at stake for those to whom this issue especially matters. You can even tell readers what you want them to do next now that they are more informed on the issue. In effect, the conclusion should open outward and encourage the reader to keep thinking about the ideas presented and inviting them to move the conversation forward.

Activity 6.4: Writing Your Conclusion as a Letter

As practice for writing your essay's conclusion, write a short letter or email to a real or imagined person whom you would want your argument to convince. Advise that person on a new course of action they should take. After you are done, consider if you might want retool this letter as part of your conclusion.

Each of these six components has a home in academic writing, so basic familiarity with them will, at the very least, provide you with the building blocks of a persuasive academic essay. As we can see, these components can move in lockstep, arousing curiosity in the reader, establishing the topic and larger stakes of the discussion, presenting arguable claims and substantiating them, addressing potential counterclaims, and finally motivating the reader to some intellectual response or action.

One great strength of defining these components is that it forces you to think in terms of logical structure. For example, having these core components, which derive from Classical rhetoric, in mind is especially useful when outlining ideas in the early stages of the drafting process. If you take the time to generate ideas for each component, you can be sure that, at a minimum, the basic expectations of the academic audience are being addressed. That being said, there are other

organizational schemas that writers can use when writing persuasively—and, luckily, many use some arrangement or variation of the "core" essay components already discussed in this section.

Activity 6.5: Revisiting the Hook

Take a look at the opening "hook" or introductory element you employed at the beginning of your essay. Write down as many ways as you can think of to revisit or reframe that introductory element in your conclusion. What imagery or phrases can you strategically bring back to your audience's mind? What is the main point you want your readers to remember about your starting point now that they have the context of the entire essay?

One Alternative Organizing Principle: The Rogerian Structure

Based on the work of psychologist Carl Rogers, a "Rogerian" structure uses strategies deployed in conflict resolution to persuade audiences toward adopting a reasonable solution. (Keep in mind that academic writers contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their fields by using reason, thoughtfulness, attention to detail, and caring for their audience's well-being.) Whereas the schema described in the previous section supposes that the author's position takes priority, and that the writer's primary aim is to refute or disarm opposition, the Rogerian organizational structure aims to find compromise and mutual understanding among multiple parties from the outset.

The Rogerian structure can be broken down into the following basic components:

- *Introduction*: Establishes the occasion for writing by describing the issue or problem that the essay will address.
- *Presentation of Alternative Views*: Provides multiple points of view about the specific topic in a fair-minded way.
- *Demonstration of Your Position on the Topic*: States the writer's specific claim in relation to the conflicting views that have already been established.
- *Finding of Common Ground*: Support the claims through non-adversarial argumentation, with a particular aim to find common ground instead of using confrontational means. On what can you and other interlocutors agree? Where are there shared concerns? Supply reasons that all interested parties will find acceptable.

- *Conclusion*: Expresses how the writer's stance offers a fair resolution to the issue.

As we can see, a Rogerian structure relies on some of the same "core" components of argumentative academic writing: an introduction and conclusion, making a clearly defined claim, and representing counterarguments or alternative views fairly. Where a Rogerian structure differs from structures derived from Classical rhetoric is that, here, the writer does not "prove" a position but, instead, builds an argument through cooperation, aiming to find a resolution with which reasonable audiences would agree. We might say that the Rogerian structure assumes that finding a compromise and reaching an agreement that satisfies all parties, or at least leaves them content, is the ideal approach.

The Rogerian structure educates readers on the issue early on by presenting a collage of competing ways of understanding the topic, inviting readers to recognize the validity of many potential solutions or arguments, not just one, before settling into the writer’s claim. Because it is non-adversarial and audience-centered, the Rogerian approach is likely most effective when the topic is polarizing or controversial—hot-button social issues like abortion rights, gun legislation, and a centralized National healthcare, for example. Since writers wish to connect with audiences and relate to them, it makes sense, then, that presenting a range of ideas on a topic – and doing so generously – can garner goodwill between writers and readers. Beginning in neutral territory also elevates the writer’s authorial ethos, making the writer appear more like a collaborator in the pursuit of knowledge.

Of course, there are other possible structures and sub-genres that academic writers use to convey their ideas. The organizing principles presented in this chapter are simply two that work particularly well in academic, persuasive writing. In addition, just having these structures in mind might help you think beyond the "five-paragraph essay," which tends to be limiting and can unintentionally lead to stale, unimaginative prose. While the “five-paragraph essay” is an invented “school” genre often viewed as a kind of “training wheels” or rudimentary gradable exercise for novice writers, the Classical rhetoric schema and Rogerian formats extend beyond the walls of the classroom into various arenas of “real world” communication—including academic journal articles, speeches, political manifestoes, and policy proposals. One of the benefits of using one of these essay arrangements is their flexibility, as each "core" component can be expanded, customized, or adjusted to suit the writer's topic, audience, and purpose, making them versatile choices in academic writing. Moreover, these formats enable you to construct more complex arguments better suited to the

expectations of university assignments, professional communications, and civic participation.

Methods To Check an Essay’s Arrangement

Most successful writers will admit that you often do not know what you wish to say until after you have already said it. The expressions "writing to learn" or "writing as discovery" attempt to articulate this intuition. In fact, veteran writers know that generating ideas, planning out an essay, and even writing a first draft represent *early* stages in a much longer writing process. The first draft, in other words, is merely the writer's initial attempt at making a point. Before you can determine a draft's success, you must first see if your ideas withstand your own scrutiny, make logical sense, and develop and flow in an organized, intuitive fashion. Only then can you move forward and revise the essay with purpose.

Successful writers do a lot of writing outside of their essays, too. In fact, writers often manufacture an abundance of material without any intention of ever showing it to their readers. This occurs early on in a draft, in the "idea generation" stage, through techniques like brainstorming, clustering, outlining, freewriting, essay mapping, and other kinds of informal writing. But it routinely occurs during the revision process as well. And because of this, writers often discover that they must cut sections, rewrite ideas, and reorganize their essay to produce a stronger final product. Outlined in the sections below are forms of analytical “process writing” that can help determine if an academic essay's organization is working after an initial first draft has been written.

Drafting a “Reverse Outline”

Composition instructors often tell students to outline their ideas *before* they draft a paper. This is sound advice, and it can help writers to stay focused on a topic without too much wandering from point to point or inadvertently introducing extraneous material. Seasoned writers know, however, that outlining can take place at *any* stage of the drafting process. Indeed, one way to check an essay's organization is to draft a "Reverse Outline," an outline created by the writer *after* they have written an entire first draft of the essay.

Drafting a “Reverse Outline” is a pretty straightforward process. The writer reads the essay draft, paragraph by paragraph, and (on a separate document or sheet of paper) outlines what they have written. This outline states the main idea of each paragraph succinctly and highlights the paragraph’s key points. By drafting this “skeleton” of the paper, and by keying in on what you have composed, you

can often recognize jumps in logic, unconnected points between paragraphs, sections that may need bridging or transitional material, and, even, areas to develop within single paragraphs.

Once the "Reverse Outline" is written, writers often use *this* document as the basis for revision. They make notes to themselves about what to add or remove. They also sometimes recognize that the essay might need to be rearranged, as paragraphs or entire sections appear to make more sense in a different order. In other words, you can use the "Reverse Outline" as another opportunity for generating and refining ideas, as well as checking to ensure that the ideas are presented in the best possible order.

Reverse Outline Example

> ***Paragraph 1***: I begin my essay with a personal anecdote about my experience with arts education as a student. I highlight the disconnect between arts and "core" subjects. This sets up the importance of integrating arts education in a well-rounded curriculum.
>
> ***Paragraph 2***: I invoke the conversation about arts education by introducing perspectives from parents, school guidance counselors, and teachers. I discuss the ways in which these groups sometimes characterize the "arts" as a peripheral pursuit or hobby and the negative affect this perception can have.
>
> ***Paragraph 3***: I state my claim clearly. I argue cutting funding to the arts in public schools is a mistake. I advocate instead for the integrating of arts into all classes, which emphasizes experiential learning and fosters creativity.
>
> ***Paragraph 4***: I argue that the arts are linked to higher cognitive development. I employ a logos appeal by citing two scientific studies that highlight how music studies can enhance mathematical abilities.
>
> ***Paragraph 5***: I refer to scholar and professor bell hooks' views on critical thinking and creativity, and how these two intellectual pursuits are related. I connect hooks' ideas to personal experiences, such as a piano class incorporating algebra. This functions as both a logos and pathos appeal.
>
> ***Paragraph 6***: I provide an example from eleventh grade as an interdisciplinary case study, a time when I was asked to compose a piece of music that mimicked a physics principle.

Here, I emphasize the intermingling of arts and learning, highlighting the excitement I had for the project and the personal growth that followed.

Paragraph 7: I discuss some of my education classes in college, and how my instructor included creative components in projects. I use the example of creating a board game to teach logical fallacies.

Paragraph 8: I address the counterargument that there is a limited budget for arts programs in most school districts. In response, I argue that creativity does not require significant funding. I showcase here how teachers often must "be creative" to thrive despite limited resources.

Paragraph 9: I conclude by engaging readers. I prompt them to recall their own vivid school memories. I encourage them to reflect on the role of the arts played in shaping their most memorable educational experiences.

Drafting a "Thought" or "Feeling Map"

Some composition instructors suggest that one way to check the organization of an essay is to see it through the perspective of the audience. One analogy is to think about your essay as if it were a movie, and your job as the director is to make sure that the images brought to the minds of viewers make sense, that they can follow the plot. By looking at your essay through the lens of readers, you can imagine how *they* might respond at any given moment. A "Thought" or "Feeling Map" invites writers to specify what they believe their readers are likely thinking or feeling as the text unfolds.

Like the "Reverse Outline," a "Thought" or "Feeling Map" is written as a separate document. The writer reads their essay draft and, working paragraph by paragraph, writes down the main point of each paragraph, followed by what they anticipate the reader's emotional reaction will be. Is the introduction meant to be satirical? Do you expect the reader to laugh or groan at that opening pun? When readers encounter the main claim of the essay, will they be incredulous or resistant to it? Is the anecdote presented at the bottom of page six about the time you lost a beloved family pet supposed to garner sympathy and identification? What do you imagine your readers will think about your conclusion's call to action?

Writing a "Thought" or "Feeling Map," which forces the writer to envision *how* their audiences are responding, can be an extremely effective way of deciding if the ideas presented will connect with an audience. It can also help writers to

determine shifts in tone. This technique can inspire writers to think about their writing as more than merely words on a page. If a writer cannot chart anticipated reactions, that writer might not know how a reader will respond to the information, and they will probably have to go back and refine their ideas until they do.

Sample Thought/Feeling Map

> ***Paragraph 1***: I begin my essay by introducing the phrase: "beauty is pain." I suspect that my audience will be familiar with it since it is fairly common. I then delve into society's expectations of beauty, particularly for women, highlighting how certain media outlets like film, television, advertisements, and social media normalize specific characteristics of feminine appearance. I think my readers will agree with the notion that our perception of beauty is largely shaped by society.
>
> ***Paragraph 2***: I want to establish a personal connection with readers, so I share my motivation for exploring the topic. I reflect on Natasha Trethewey's poem "Hot Combs," which I encountered during a high school English class. The poem has many sensory details about pain the poet's mother endures while straightening her hair each morning. I explain how this got me to think about societal expectations of beauty, and how these can be ingrained in the minds of women from an early age. I think my audience will feel empathy for the characters in the poem, as well as towards me. I think they will want to hear more about the relationship between physical attractiveness and the sacrifices often involved.
>
> ***Paragraph 3***: I describe common things that women do to achieve beauty, such as skin care routines, makeup application, dieting, fitness regimens, uncomfortable footwear, and cosmetic procedures. I think that providing this long list of beauty practices will help readers to visualize the amount of time and effort it takes for some people to feel as though they look "presentable." I think my readers will begin to question their own efforts. They might feel angry about this, or they might feel as though these efforts are completely acceptable. I know I will have to appeal to both mindsets.

Dismantling the Essay into Paragraph Units

Another tactic writers often use is to physically test new patterns of organization. To do this, writers print out a copy of their essay and then literally cut it up into paragraphs. The writer lays these individual paragraph units in front of them and

begins to shift them around to see if the paragraphs make sense in a different order. When writers allow themselves to imagine the essay in different forms, such as separate sections or units, they can more easily visualize the structure and identify what works and what doesn't. For example, if a writer can rearrange the paragraphs into any order and the essay still makes sense, perhaps the writer has not adequately thought about the progression of ideas and the order that would be most effective. Breaking down the essay into units can also help writers to see where topic sentences can be strengthened and where transitional phrases may need to be added.

Writing an Abstract or Summary

Another method to check an essay's arrangement is write a brief abstract, which is a one-to-two paragraph summary that captures the contents of the draft. To do this, writers attempt to state the paper's main claim in a single opening sentence. Afterwards, they summarize the most important items of support: facts, observations, and logical arguments. Writers might also use the abstract to comment on their methodology, or how they reached their conclusions. Finally, writers attempt to convey how their ideas are changing the conversation about the issue at hand—and what readers might stand to discover or gain from reading the entire essay.

If you can successfully write an abstract for your academic paper that addresses the aspects mentioned above in a way that makes sense to someone unfamiliar with the longer work, it can boost your confidence in the effectiveness of your paper's organization. If you find it challenging to clearly express your position on the topic or provide the necessary information, reasoning, arguments, or supporting evidence that led you to your conclusions, it indicates the need for revisions to include that information. Likewise, if you attempt to write an abstract and realize that a crucial supporting point does not occur until the end of the paper, it can prompt you to rearrange the components of your text, ensuring that your paper makes more sense and presents a more compelling argument. While these techniques may appear to require additional effort, they can actually save time and help you craft a draft that is more cohesive, comprehensive, and well-organized.

Final Activity 6.6: Abstract Freewrite

Imagine that the paper you've written is an exciting mystery novel or a piece of young adult fiction and your job is to draft a one-paragraph book blurb designed to attract new readers. What would you tell them? Try to capture the essence of your main claim, key pieces of supporting

evidence, and your conclusions, leaving the reader desperate to read the entire paper cover-to-cover. This exercise will challenge you to summarize your ideas in fresh language while thinking about what your audience will respond to. Be creative as you sell your ideas!

Conclusion

This chapter offered a few ways to think about organization. It provided basic components commonly found in an academic essay, which include an introduction, contextual information, the main claim, body paragraphs that prove or support the paper's thesis, consideration of counterarguments, and a conclusion. The chapter also provided possible organizing principles to consider when you are planning out an academic essay. And finally, it discussed ways to check if a paper's organization is working through some exploratory, self-reflective writing and outlining techniques.

Writers often use their intuition, basing their organizational structures on hunches of what will work most effectively. In many cases, a writer can sense, as they are writing, when something seems out of place or if more information is necessary for the reader to understand the larger message of the text. But a writer's intuition is not always right. That is why successful writers revise their work. It is also why writers spend time writing analytically during their process. This approach helps writers to be open to new insights about organization and possibly uncover elements they may have missed or overlooked early on. If nothing else, I hope this chapter provided you with some useful tools to adopt as you organize your next essay project.

[1] I am indebted to Dr. Pradyumna Chauhan, Professor Emeritus at Arcadia University, whose graduate course on the History and Teaching of Rhetoric greatly influenced my thinking on the basic components that comprise an academic argument. Ideas presented in this section are adapted from my old course notebooks, which I have returned to, again and again, throughout my teaching career.

Chapter 7: Grammar & Mechanics

There are so many guidebooks, style guides, textbooks, dictionaries, websites, and more that claim to be "authorities" on the grammar of the English language. However, there is actually no book that is the authority on grammar.

Grammar is the mechanism by which language is conveyed–it covers all the patterns of our language that determine word order in sentences, pronunciation, the formation of words, the development of definitions and associated meanings, and even the practical situations that can shape our language use. Grammar is not the formal rules dictating punctuation marks and spelling, though it does include these as well.

Even if a book—or website or machine or individual—*could* hold all that information, it would still not be the authority on language. Why? Because language only exists when it is *used* between people. And people change the rules of grammar all the time—even mid-sentence—to fit their purposes.

> Consider this: Your friend shows you a weird object that you've never seen before, but they say that it is a combination megaphone and coffee mug. You want to inspect it, so you tell them, "Hey, hand me that mugaphone."
>
> Consider this: You check your text messages and find one from a friend that says, "bagelssss??" You interpret this text as your friend excitedly asking if you will still be meeting with her at your local bagel place.
>
> Consider this: A bilingual child is speaking to their parents who speak Spanish as a first language. When working on a project, the child realizes they will need scissors but knows the father wouldn't know the word in English so asks, "Where are the tijeras?"

Each of these examples breaks the prescriptive "rules" you would find in most authoritative style guides and dictionaries. However, consider if each of these examples were altered so that they *did* follow the prescriptive rules of English grammar that you might have learned in grade school. Would the resulting language use be *more* or *less* effective?

So, should there be NO rules for grammar?

Does anything go?

does go-any thing?

Any?thing d!o GO, yA.h5,,

Obviously not. There are rules of grammar in play in even the most casual of text messages, slam poetry, rap, jargon-filled business letters, and any other successful form of communication. Returning to the examples you engaged with above, each does, in fact, follow the subtle and much more foundational rules of the English language in how each utterance is constructed, down to the emphasis conveyed by the number of question marks in the "bagelssss??" text, and the way you can mash-up "megaphone" and "coffee mug" into "mugaphone" but not (in this case anyway) "phoneamug."

Activity 7.1: Create a Word

What word should be recognized in dictionaries but is not yet? Make a sample dictionary entry for a made-up word that contains information on the part of speech, sample definition, and a few sample sentences. Consider, too, what role the word would play in promoting the ethics and values of your culture or others.

The best judge of linguistic effectiveness is not a static set of prescribed rules that apply in every situation but instead the guidance provided by the rhetorical situation:

- Does the **audience** understand and respect the author's use of language?
- Does the author use language to fulfill their **purpose**?
- Does the **genre** permit or encourage a certain form of language use?

As addressed in a previous chapter, **The Shape of Rhetoric**, our use of language can particularly affect our ethos (credibility), making it so that we can appear either as authoritative or completely uninformed.

Activity 7.2: Identifying Grammatical Dogma

Many of us have been taught at one time or another to "always" or "never" do something in our writing that didn't seem to make sense, or that we see other writers getting away with. For instance, maybe you

were taught to never use first-person "I" in your writing, but then wonder how you are supposed to write a personal narrative without it. Or maybe you were taught never to end a sentence with a preposition but find many examples where it would be more awkward to avoid doing so. Make a list of the "grammatical dogma" you've been taught and share it with your peers or the class to discuss if your experiences were the same and discover your professor's real expectations for your writing.

The following three sections address how to make smart decisions about what grammar rules—or we might say, what *styles*—to apply in different rhetorical situations. Each exercise is about giving you, as a writer, *more* options in your writing and multiple choices in solving potential problems. Most of their lessons are a step above learning the very basics of sentence structure, agreement, word definitions, and punctuation. If you need a refresher on these, you should indeed refer to dictionaries, guides, exercises, and more to gather sufficient knowledge in the meanings and uses of language. There's nothing wrong with using such guides if we treat them as just that—guides rather than authorities—because, when it comes to writing, the author(ity) should be you.

Active vs. Passive Voice

Active and passive voice are sentence constructions that writers use to place emphasis on either the thing/person doing an action or the target of that action. Both passive and active voice are grammatically "correct" but should be used in different rhetorical situations.

In active voice, the grammatical **subject** of the sentence (**bolded**) is also the one that does the action.

Sam caught the ball.

(**Sam**=subject) (caught the ball=predicate).

For more on subject/predicate structure, I recommend the examples and diagrams on Wikipedia (subject), and (predicate).

Here are a few more examples of active voice with the subject is bolded:

The baker is making a big cake.

I drank a glass of water.

The gristmill churned grain into flour.

The makeshift umbrella kept the rain off our heads.

The lab assistant adds two milliliters of solution.

In contrast, in passive voice the grammatical subject of the sentence is the receiver of the action. The following examples bold the grammatical subject, so you can see how the subject shifted position in the sentence.

The ball was caught by **Sam**.

(The ball=subject) (was caught by **Sam**=predicate)

A big cake is being made by **the baker**.

A glass of water was drunk by **me**.

The grain was churned into flour by **the gristmill**.

The rain was kept off our heads by **the makeshift umbrella**.

Two milliliters of solution is added by **the lab assistant**.

Do some of the above examples seem awkward to you? Wordy? Clunky? Evasive? Even snobby? Most rhetorical situations call for the use of active rather than passive voice, particularly those that value brevity and clarity regarding who or what is the active party in the situation. Business writing, storytelling, and most academic writing in the humanities typically favor active voice. In these situations, active voice often reads as more direct and elegant.

However, passive voice can be a legitimate and useful choice in rhetorical situations where the doer of the action is not as important as the action being performed. This is particularly true in genres of writing such as lab reports, where passive voice is often used to focus on the research, not the researcher.

Passive Voice: The solution was heated to the boiling point, and then it was reduced in volume by 50 percent.

Active Voice: I heated the solution to the boiling point, and then the lab assistant Billy reduced it in volume by 50 percent.

Because it’s in the subject position, the first example in passive voice places focus on the solution that’s being heated up and we don’t give much thought to who is doing the heating. In fact, this person is absent from the sentence altogether. This is possible because passive voice shifts the doer of the action to

a prepositional phrase, so it can be taken out altogether. The second example of active voice using "I" and "lab assistant Billy" places our focus on the researchers. In other words, using active voice might be a distraction from the purpose of the writing.

Passive voice is also often used in textbooks and instructional material where the writer might be trying to spotlight the topic material. For instance, did you notice it in the preceding sentence?

To figure out if a sentence is in active or passive voice ask yourself the question "Who/What is doing the action(verb)?" If the answer to this question is in the subject of the sentence (usually before the main verb), then it's in active voice.

If the answer is in the predicate or if it's not in the sentence at all, it's in passive voice.

Here's a demonstration of this thought process:

> **Example Sentence:** The kitten ate all the food in the bowl.
>
> Who/what ate all the food in the bowl?
>
> **Answer:** The kitten. So, "The kitten" is the subject of the sentence. The sentence is in active voice!
>
> **How about now:** All the food in the bowl has been eaten.
>
> Who/what ate all the food in the bowl?
>
> **Answer:** ? The sentence is in passive voice.

Activity 7.3: Identify Whether the Following Sentences Are in Active or Passive Voice.

1. **Mary had a rough day today.**
2. **A terrible secret was revealed to me in a dream.**
3. **Nobody likes an unmade bed.**
4. **He was swept away by the river's wrath.**

Though some science writing favors passive voice and writing within the humanities often favors active voice, there are many cases where you, the author, will need to decide for yourself what voice to use to best match your own rhetorical purpose. For example:

> **Passive voice:** As harvest time approaches, the tobacco plants are sprayed with a chemical to stop the flowering process.
>
> **Active voice:** As harvest time approaches, farm laborers in North Carolina spray tobacco plants with a chemical to stop the flowering process.

Using passive and active voice is a choice on what is most important to your story. In the first example, it's clear that the tobacco plants and the spraying process is the focus of the story, so much so that passive voice allows the people doing the spraying to be taken out of the story entirely. You might find a sentence like this in an encyclopedia entry on the harvest cycle of these plants, or even in an article about how such spraying is done. The next sentences might detail the chemical composition of such sprays or what happens to the plants next.

The second example in active voice has an entirely different focus because it contains information on who is doing the spraying. We might wonder about the condition of this labor and whether these workers are sufficiently protected or compensated. This sentence might appear in an opinion article on farm labor rather than an article just on plant harvest cycles.

Both passages can be examples of good writing but would appear in very different contexts. In a nutshell, good writers should be able to use a tool like shifting between active and passive voice depending on the rhetorical situation.

Let's try it! The following passage is a story, but it's written in an ineffective manner using passive voice. Rewrite the passage to change all instances of passive voice to active voice while not otherwise changing the story (not all clauses use passive voice).

> The following scenario should be considered. It was a sunny afternoon on campus, and Jenny was walking to her next class. The sight of her lab partner, Samir, appeared to Jenny out of the corner of her eye as his car was parked by him. How tall, muscular, and stylishly dressed was admired by Jenny. Jenny's eyes did not leave him as he ran to his circle of friends on the green. A pearly white smile was flashed to her as he passed by.

The following lab report passage uses active voice in an ineffective manner. Shift the style of most sentences to passive voice or otherwise deemphasize the researcher in your revision.

I wanted to test the amount of ascorbic acid in spinach plants, so I first started by testing 20 healthy plants for iron content. I knew that iron would affect the absorption of ascorbic acid because it has a role in ascorbic acid absorption in mammals. To get a testable mixture, I ground up the plant leaves using a blender. Using iodine in a burette, I slowly dropped the iodine into the spinach blend until I saw the mixture turn blue. The blue indicated the presence of ascorbic acid, and I recorded my results.

Revising Wordiness

Professor Dodson (he/him) has worked at Kutztown since 2010 teaching composition, grammar, and creative writing.

One sure way to see marked improvement in your writing is by tightening wordy sentences. Many textbooks will provide a list of explicit examples and strategies to follow. Here is a sampling of guidelines you may have seen before:

- Avoid weak and colorless BE verbs (**am, is, are, was, were**) as your main verbs.

  Wordy: Prof. Dodson **is** a writer of bad short stories.

  Improved: Prof. Dodson **writes** bad short stories.

- Also, avoid BE verbs in empty expletive constructions (beginning a sentence with **It is** or **There are**), which delay the subject or idea of your sentence as well as in indirect passive constructions, which tangle the idea in the reader's mind.

  Wordy: **There are** many ways for good writers to tighten loose sentences.

  Improved: Good writers **know** many ways to tighten loose sentences.

  Wordy: This sentence **was written** in the passive voice by Prof. Dodson.

  Improved: Prof. Dodson **wrote** this sentence in the active voice.

- Compress clauses to phrases and phrases to words.

For example, relative clauses are easily reduced to participial phrases (note again the BE verb):

> **Wordy:** Sentences **that are written by** Prof. Dodson contain too many BE verbs.
>
> **Improved:** Sentences **written by** Prof. Dodson contain too many BE verbs.

- Look for redundancies and inflated phrases such as "because of the fact that." Instead, just write "because."

> **Wordy:** I still write wordy sentences **in spite of the fact that** I know better.
>
> **Improved:** I still write wordy sentences **even though** I know better.

You don't need comprehensive knowledge of English grammar to tighten wordy sentences. Instead, when you want to revise a loose sentence, focus on the content words — the nouns and verbs, the descriptive adjectives and adverbs. These are the words that make meaning and images in your reader's mind, so try to eliminate as many "function" words as possible between them.

Here is an example taken from the excellent writing resource, the Purdue OWL:

> In the not too distant **future**, **college freshmen** must all become aware of the fact that there is a need for them to make **contact** with an **academic adviser** concerning the matter of a **major**.

This is a grammatically correct, yet very wordy sentence. Let's try to convey the idea of this sentence more directly and concisely. Underline the content words that hold meaning. Start with the important nouns. What is this sentence about? I have bolded the following: **the future**, **college freshmen**, **academic adviser**, and **major**. What is the central action that connects the freshmen and advisors? **Contact**. Start the sentence over, linking those phrases with as few words between them as possible. Perhaps:

> In the near future, college freshmen should contact their academic advisors regarding a major.

In the near future could be further compressed to **soon** (as my grammar check software suggests) although you might consider that language awkward in this context. Given the audience and purpose of the sentence, I would use a more specific date and avoid the gendered noun **freshmen**:

> Prior to spring break, first-year students should contact their academic advisors regarding a major.

I leave you now with the hard part: trying this with your own writing.

Activity 7.4: Revising Wordiness in Your Writing

Select one paragraph from your own writing that you think is a bit wordy. Underline all instances of "to be" verbs (e.g. is, was, were, be, am, are) and consider whether you might replace this word with an active verb or compress the clause as demonstrated above. However, don't try to replace *every* use of a "to be" verb. Many uses of "to be" verbs are necessary or helpful to conveying your meaning.

Comma Splices/Fused Sentences

A "comma splice" is a common type of run-on sentence structure that is typically considered a punctuation error. One reason why comma splices are common errors is that no such error exists in speech. If you record and accurately transcribe speech, you'll find that most of us—even in formal situations—often speak in fragment sentences and run-ons without anyone noticing.

Since print lacks the intonation and pacing (what is sometimes referred to as prosody) that would convey information about the relationships and emphasis of ideas in speech, formalized patterns of punctuation partly fill this role in writing. This is true even of "non-standard" punctuation, such as the use of periods in text messages to convey seriousness or the use of "all caps" to denote yelling.

Comma splices result from an incomplete attempt to separate ideas into clause structures according to formal writing standards in English. Consider, for example, this email:

Dear Professor Leonard,

My name is Stew Dent, I am a student in your MWF 9am COMP100 course.

I apologize for such late notice, however I am unable to attend your class tomorrow due to a Kutztown University baseball game. Since I am missing class, I will not be able to hand in the homework assignment that will be due. I have the homework with me, I will upload it to D2L today so that it is not late.

Thank you so much for your understanding, I will stop in to see you during your office hours when I get back.

Thank you,

Stew Dent

In many ways the above email is extremely professional and polite, and for my own composition course syllabus policy, “Stew” seems to be doing everything he can to fulfill his responsibilities to submit his homework on time and communicate with me regarding absences. However, Stew’s repeated comma splices throughout the email can make his writing seem jarring and awkward even though he seems to have taken great care to edit it otherwise.

Comma splices happen when a writer joins two full sentences (also called “independent clauses”) with a comma.

Take, for instance, the first sentence of the email as an example:

> **My name is Stew Dent,** *I am a student in your MWF 9am COMP100 course.*

I put the first clause in the sentence in bold (My name is Stew Dent) and the second clause (I am a student in your MWF 9am COMP100 course) in italics to show the two different sentences that are connected here in the one sentence.

There are three basic ways to “fix” comma splices:

1. Split up the sentences using a period (.).
2. Use a coordinating conjunction (like “and”) after the comma.
3. Use a semicolon (;).

Of course, each of these options carry slightly different effects in tone and might be more or less appropriate for the rhetorical situation. Let's see them in action:

1. My name is Stew Dent. I am a student in your MWF 9am COMP100 course.

2. My name is Stew Dent, and I am a student in your MWF 9am COMP100 course.

3. My name is Stew Dent; I am a student in your MWF 9am COMP100 course.

Which would you choose?

Personally, I would leave the name out of this first line altogether since the name appears at the end anyway. However, in speaking about revising stylistically, I would favor either of the first two options. While breaking up the sentences entirely with periods can seem choppy (particularly so if frequent), professional writing can often get away with having short sentences more than other genres. Using too many conjunctions can make writing seem "stringy" or winding, even if used correctly. However, they also have the advantage of clarifying the relationship between ideas with the additional information provided by the coordinating conjunction, e.g., "and" (it's an additional idea), "but" (contrasting in some way), "so" (causal).

Using a semicolon also conveys a close connection between the ideas in each clause. While the exact relationship is undefined, it can be clarified when paired with a conjunctive adverb like "however" or "therefore" at the beginning of the second independent clause. To take an example from later in the email, the following sentence could be easily corrected with a semicolon and by placing a comma after the "however":

> **Original:** I apologize for such late notice, however I am unable to attend your class tomorrow due to a Kutztown University baseball game.
>
> **Revised:** I apologize for such late notice; however, I am unable to attend your class tomorrow due to a Kutztown University baseball game.

Use caution, however, when using semicolons as they often have an academic connotation that doesn't match the genre of business and professional writing. Even in academic context, using too many can make your writing seem "bogged down" or even make it difficult to understand.

Besides these three options, you can also change the structure of the sentence in different ways adding different sorts of conjunctions (but, because, if, whereas, so) or rewriting your sentences in an entirely different way.

Activity 7.5: Rewrite an Email.

As an exercise, try to entirely rewrite the "Stew Dent" email above in the way you would phrase it. Make any changes you wish, but also fix all the comma splices (hint: there are four).

Using Other Resources and Technologies To Improve Your Grammar and Mechanics

These were only three lessons in grammar and mechanics, and there are certainly many, many more facets of style that are important to pay attention to in your writing. Good writers—even professional writers—don't know everything and are always improving their craft in small ways. Learning how to write is a process that takes a lifetime.

To continue this process and get a step beyond correctness and match your style to the rhetorical situation, you might read one of the classic texts on style, particularly applicable to academic writing such as Elements of Style by William Strunk.

Another way to improve your use of grammar and mechanics is in attentive reading and writing. As Stephen King, the author of many famous horror and fantasy novels including *Carrie* and *IT*, puts it, "If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut." As an addendum to this advice, I would add that you should read examples from the same genre you are attempting to write within. That way, you will pick up on the subtle expectations that are too numerous, too changeable, and too nuanced for any textbook to capture.

Finally, in your quest for improvement, doubtlessly, you are already familiar with Googling the definitions of words and simple grammatical rules, and there are plenty of online videos that focus on grammatical correctness as well as writing style. Spellcheck and grammar check programs embedded into your word processing software, browsers, and subscription services can also alert you to egregious errors and are increasingly making tailored stylistic suggestions. All these suggestions should be taken with a "grain of salt," however, since these programs can make errors too. They are also unlikely to be fully familiar with the

rhetorical situation, so they may recommend inappropriate style choices. In no case should a program replace your own judgment as a writer. Again, you are the author(ity) of your own writing.

Final Activity 7.6: Emulating a Writing Style

Pick out one piece of writing that you admire and closely investigate its grammar and mechanics. Write down a few notes on the sentence structure, sentence length, voice, tone, and word choice. Then attempt to emulate its style as exactly as you can for a few sentences but on a wholly different topic. While you wouldn't want your whole style to become just a copy of another author's, doing a brief exercise like this can open your mind to new possibilities or solidify your own unique choices.

Chapter 8: Practicing *Better* Peer Feedback

Amy Lynch-Biniek, Ph.D. (she/her) is a professor of Composition in the English Department at Kutztown University. She researches and writes about pedagogy and the labor of teaching. When she's not in the classroom, Dr. Lynch-Biniek plays tabletop role-playing games, watercolor paints, and reads a lot of scifi.

Peer feedback is *tough*. Sharing our work with others can be anxiety-inducing and receiving criticism even more so. Yet, research, such as that of Anderson et al., shows that sharing our work with others, knowing how real readers understand, misconstrue, or react to our writing, is a reliable tool for improving our prose. What's more, being asked to revise can sometimes feel like failure—we put our all into a first draft and feel disappointed, maybe even foolish, when a professor or classmate points out all of its flaws. In this chapter, I will reframe *peer feedback* as a *conversation* among writers, with a goal of creating space for play and experimentation. When we take the time to adopt and practice peer review through this lens, we all might be a little less apprehensive about the experience.

We have all experienced the useless peer review session. You know the one. You spent hours writing a draft and are eager to know if any of it makes sense. Is your argument effective? Did you do that thing you often do, wandering off topic and exploring tangents? Will readers like the joke you made in the third paragraph? In class, your peer review partner seems to be reading the draft with care, taking their time. When it comes back to you, though, the draft has only one comment: "I liked it, but maybe tell us the color of the hat." Even worse, they might just write, "Looks good to me!" Your classmate used Track Changes to copyedit your sentences, fixing some of your commas and correcting your mix-up of *there* and *their* but provided no feedback on the actual content of your draft. What makes this extra frustrating is that the professor wants you to revise the content for homework. How are you supposed to do that? What's next?

On the other hand, in another workshop, a different partner *does* comment on your content, but the feedback is dispiriting and overwhelming—your partner seems to be picking apart every argument, critiquing every word choice. You may feel too deflated to revise.

Most of us, too, have been on the other side of that review. You've read a classmate's excellent draft. How, you wonder, are you supposed to tell them what to fix? You've got to do *something*, so you copyedit a little, maybe tell them to add more description. However, this process is just making you feel bad about your own draft. Is *this* how you're supposed to be writing? All you can think of is how wrong your own draft must seem to your partner.

Or, alternatively, you read a classmate's draft, realizing that it needs work. You try to be honest and helpful, but every comment seems to sound as though it came from that mean teacher you had in 10th grade. How do you give advice without sounding like an ogre?

These are very common experiences, ones that can stem, I think, from a misunderstanding of both peer comments and revision. I'm asking you to adjust your thinking about these related activities because…

Feedback isn't about pointing out what's wrong, and revising isn't about fixing it.

Writing a first draft isn't about getting as close to perfection as you can in one shot. Instead, writing in a series of drafts allows you to play, think, experiment, give yourself permission to be imperfect, and then do all those things some more as you revise. Writing professor and former journalist Laura Giovanelli puts it this way: "Revision is not a sign of weakness or inexperienced or poor writing. *It is the writing*" (105). Try treating a draft as a practice round that you can play with some more; then you don't have to apologize to your classmates for its quality or dread being asked to revise.

How we encourage each other to revise is just as important as how we see our own drafting. I like to think of peer feedback activities as conversations with fellow readers and writers. A conversation is an exchange of ideas wherein we learn from each other. So, your job as a peer reviewer isn't to find errors in someone's draft but to express how it made you think, feel, react, or wonder. As a writer, you should aim to read feedback in this spirit: the reader is describing their own experience, as well as their ideas for what you might do next.

Specifically, you might construct feedback using one of these four strategies:

- Productive praise
- Reader-based critique
- Forward-looking suggestions
- Thoughtful questions

Let's look at each of these feedback types a bit more closely. I've included examples from two of my former students, Kara Galeassi and Jenna Ferguson, who graciously gave me permission to share the conversations they had via peer review in my Research and Composition course.

Productive Praise

We often don't think of feedback as purely complimentary, aside from the nice but unhelpful "I liked it, it was good." Instead, we ask teachers, classmates, and friends to "tear the paper apart," as if cruelty will help us to improve our prose. In contrast, some of the most useful feedback we can give and receive is positive.

I borrow the term *productive praise* from Ron DePeter, who wrote "How to Write Meaningful Peer Response Praise" in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 3*. DePeter describes the concept this way: "Meaningful praise … is feedback that recognizes something that is working for you as a reader, that gives you an opportunity to have a dialogue with the author, and that expresses some sort of appreciation for the work the writer has done, or for the writer herself" (43). To be productive, DePeter tells us, the praise should be rooted in something specific about the draft: "Is it the word choice? The arrangement of sentences? Her use of detail …? Does it have something to do with the voice or tone? The way she uses questions? It could be any or all of these things, or something else altogether" (44-45).

To begin writing productive praise, you might open a comment with any of these phrases:

> I really liked how you…
>
> This part made me think because…
>
> Your use of *[insert word or phrase]* is really effective because…

I enjoyed…

When I read productive praise of my own writing, I gain two things: a sense of the good stuff that I should keep and develop (maybe even use in other texts), and a boost of confidence that keeps me writing. When I give productive praise to another writer, I am also learning new tools and strategies that I might use in my own work. For instance, if I notice that the writer's use of an anecdote worked so well, maybe I'll try using one in my own draft!

In my Research and Composition course, Jenna and Kara were paired up to provide each other feedback on an assignment that required them to try out a variety of writing strategies that would help them to connect with a target audience. The workshops from which all the following examples are taken focused on the use of these strategies, as well as developing a purpose. Kara wrote about the challenges of being a commuter student and opened with several personal examples of her own issues leaving the house on time to make it to class. In the workshop demonstrated below, Jenna gave Kara some productive praise, pointing out that these uses of personal examples made her purpose clearer and helped her audience to relate.

> Jenna: "This is a solid draft. You explain your purpose well while also working through your own thinking as a commuter. Adding in your personal experiences makes your connection and purpose more impactful."

In her own draft, Jenna was exploring how a classroom's physical environment affects students. She opened with a story about Lauren, an energetic third grader, who arrives in a dull, undecorated classroom and begins to feel disconnected. Kara's productive praise focused on the way that the story engages her target audience, teachers:

> Kara: "I really like that you started with this. Is this made up or a real person? Either way, I think it helps the reader dive deeper into the paper because, as a teacher, they would want to read further to understand why Lauren loses her excitement."

These brief but *meaningful* compliments reassured Kara and Jenna that they were practicing with the tools we'd been learning about in class. Through using productive praise with specific points of appreciation, they were able to give each other a concrete sense of what to keep and develop in their next drafts. Notice, too, the tone of their feedback: conversational and friendly. Using this strategy took the angst out of their first feedback activity.

Activity 8.1: Holding a Productive Praise Session

Read a partner's draft and focus on what they did well and what interests you in it, but do not write or comment on the draft. Then, have a conversation with your partner about what works in the draft, providing meaningful compliments. Make these compliments specific in why or how they work and go back to the draft if you need to point out particular passages that are effective or interesting. If you get stuck on what to say, borrow some of the starter phrases listed above.

Reader-Based Critique

When I offer reader-based critique to my own peers, I describe my reactions *as a reader* as opposed to as a teacher or judge. I describe the reactions I have as I read, which might include the associations I make with the content, experiences I've had with the topic, moments where I disagree with the writer's claims, and moments where I felt lost. In these instances, I often literally begin my comments with "As a reader, I…."

We sometimes think of "critique" as purely negative judgments that can be intimidating. With practice, however, we can write productive critique that opens up our classmates' perspectives instead of shutting them down. For instance, we can describe personal experiences that could inform the draft or provide examples that illustrate the writer's ideas. In this way, reader-based critique is very different from saying that you thought the writing was bad or that the ideas were wrong.

At the end of Kara's first draft, she described being late to class after getting stuck in traffic behind a horse and buggy. Then, she began to freewrite, as she was unsure whether to directly criticize her audience of professors:

> Kara: "I feel like a majority of professors never really think about your life outside of school. They think you eat, sleep, and poop college. Or something, I don't know. The point is, they need to stop and think about how we are human. We have issues just like they do. I can be understanding, so can they reciprocate? I forget where I was going with this? Never mind."

Jenna's reader-based critique, in which she describes her own experiences, also acts as productive praise, and she encourages Kara to explore this idea.

> Jenna: "This is really good! I don't think professors consider themselves to be commuters but if you think about it, they are, so they should understand the struggles. I

> think this would be a great jumping off point where you can explain how professors could be more understanding. I can't tell you how many emails I have gotten from professors saying that they were going to be late, like it was no big deal. Why can't they extend the same courtesy to students?"

In her next draft, Kara developed this section, incorporating Jenna's realization that professors are commuters, too. I think it ended up being one of the best parts of her project.

Activity 8.2: Writing a Letter to Your Peer

After reading your peer's draft, write them a personal letter. In this letter, express your own opinion on the topic they are writing about and what their writing might have sparked in your own mind. Do not evaluate their writing or even give tips to improve. Instead, use this letter as an opportunity to share your own thoughts, ideas, and experiences relevant to their writing. Make sure to sign the letter with your name at the end and make it personalized.

Forward-Looking Suggestions

Forward-looking suggestions are at the heart of feedback, as they provide us with concrete ideas for what to do next when we sit down at the keyboard or with a notebook.

The aim of these comments is *not* to point out what to fix, but to suggest how the writer might further think through the writing as they revise. Like productive praise, forward-looking suggestions are often most effective when they are grounded in very specific ideas or content the writer might use.

Commenting on another classmate's essay on the daily stressors that college students experience, Kara offered this forward-looking suggestion:

> Kara: "To further get the audience's attention (*if* this is true—I'm just speaking from my own experience), you could mention how students lose sleep and get exhausted, which further affects their mental health."

This advice from Kara is excellent on a few levels. First, it is specific, offering a new detail that the writer can use when they sit down to revise. Second, she takes the time to emphasize that this is *her* opinion; Kara isn't sure if that experience of exhaustion is widely shared. Rather than letting her classmate make the mistake of assuming, she's encouraging them to do some research and find out.

To get started writing forward-looking suggestions, you might open a comment with any of these phrases:

> What if you tried….
>
> Have you considered….
>
> I'd think about ….
>
> How about adding….
>
> Consider talking about…

Activity 8.3: Commenting With Forward-Looking Suggestions

First, have a conversation with your peer to see what sorts of suggestions they are looking for to improve their writing. Then, with your peer's permission, use the comments feature on Google docs or Word to leave forward-looking suggestions on their writing. Use the phrases above to begin many of your comments.

Thoughtful Questions

My favorite type of feedback is the thoughtful question. A question is often most effective when used in combination with other types of feedback. Questions can follow up a reader-based critique, such as when a reader first points to a moment in a text where they were confused and asks for clarification. Questions can be forward-looking, too, aiming to help the writer consider the possibilities for exploration and experimentation in the next draft.

In her first draft, Jenna described a challenge teachers face when they do want to improve the classroom environment:

> Jenna: "The main concern when it comes to the décor of the classroom is money. The teachers that I have talked to are given an allowance but then the rest of the supplies that they need must be paid out of pocket. One way to fix this is for teachers to ask parents to donate supplies needed for the classroom which will then leave room in their budget for other fun things. The school can also hold fundraisers for the school to raise more money for their teachers."

Kara's feedback uses a question to prompt Jenna to do some forward-looking thinking, asking her to think about the possibilities for development in the next draft:

> Kara: "Maybe consider how you would respond if a teacher said they never get donations. How can they convince parents to donate?"

I asked the students in my Teaching Writing class why writers might be more receptive to questions than they are to comments. They posited that questions suggest their classmate *really* read, paid attention, and were interested in the draft. They also liked that questions move writers from passively reading critiques to actively considering answers.

Final Activity 8.4: Generating Thoughtful Questions in a Small Workshop Group

Share your draft with a small group of 3-5 students. Students should read each draft closely and be prepared with some questions they have about each. Then, hold a discussion about each draft where the goal is to share these thoughtful questions. As the discussion unfolds, feel free to employ other techniques of peer review such as making forward-looking suggestions, reader-based critique, and productive praise. After each discussion, give the student author an opportunity to write down a few ideas that came out of this session.

Conclusion

When we reframe peer feedback as a conversation between reader and writer rather than a fix-it session, workshops can become much more fruitful. Practice writing feedback in the forms of productive praise, reader-based critique, forward-looking suggestions, and thoughtful questions. When you receive feedback, read it generously, with an open mind and the intent to use it to experiment in your next draft. Finally, remember that writing effective peer feedback is a skill—we need to practice it just as much as any other genre in which we might write. We should be patient with our classmates as they learn and ask for their patience in return as we provide them with feedback, too.

Chapter 9: Using the Rohrbach Library

Sue Czerny (she/her) is the Digital Initiatives Librarian and the University Archivist. She has been a librarian at KU for a long time, and the bright spot of her day is always helping students find what they need. You can find Sue in the office next to the big blue cow on the second floor.

Just as reading and writing go hand-in-hand, the Rohrbach library at Kutztown University can be a space for your writing to grow and develop. You already know from Chapter 1 of this textbook that our library houses the writing center, which can be useful at every stage of the writing process. In addition, the library provides so many things that can be useful to your writing and research process including the following:

- The *databases on library websites* give you free access to online academic peer-reviewed journal articles, newspapers, magazines, videos, datasets, and more for your assignments. In the *library itself*, there are actual books, DVDs, and other resources you can borrow.
- *Librarians* who are happy to show you how to use the library and its website. They can help you build better searches and point out all the helpful, time-saving features of the research databases.
- The library provides study spaces designed for groups and individuals, and it is open late Sundays through Thursdays evenings until midnight. Use the Study Spaces Icon on the Library Homepage to reserve your space!
- Lastly, the library has a wide variety of *technology and equipment* to make learning and writing easier.

The Rohrbach Library at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania by Dough4872 on Wikimedia Commons is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

Library Databases and Online Research

Finding information for your research or projects can be daunting. Just the *amount* of information you can find in the research databases can be overwhelming in the beginning.

The library website gives KU students access to the highest quality research databases. **Library databases** contain vetted, credible information that is licensed and copyrighted. All the material in the library databases have already been evaluated for you, the information is accurate, and most of the research journals are peer-reviewed. All library databases are available wherever there is an internet connection. You do not need to be on campus to use them.

Popular Database icon

The Popular Databases icon on the library homepage is a great place to start searching. KU students automatically have a subscription *through the library*

website to tens of thousands of journals, reports, newspapers, magazines, images, and videos.

Never, Never Pay for an Article!

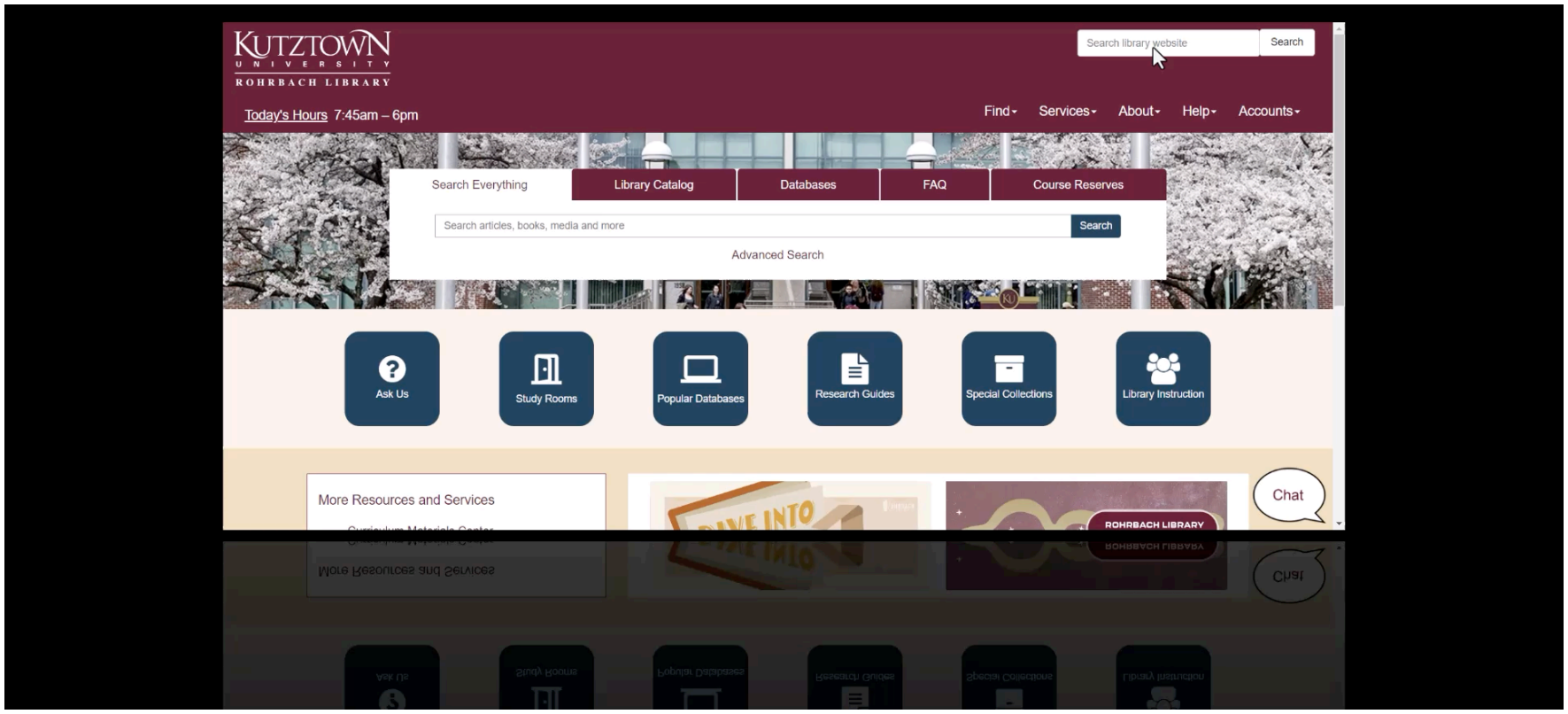
Most every academic library—including KU—has a service called Interlibrary Loan (ILL). If the library databases do not have the source you need, the library can borrow that book or article for you from a library that *does* have it. If there is a fee, our library will cover that fee for you. It is free to you! Articles can be in your inbox in 1 or 2 days, and books take about a week. Books are picked up and dropped off at the library.

Research databases are different from public access databases like Google or Bing. For example, in research databases, you do not search using whole sentences, just keywords, and library databases often do not correct spelling errors. On the bright side, many research databases provide you with the citations you need for your bibliography. It is wise to remember to budget time to find reliable resources that have the information that fits well with your thesis statement. Research is just that: It is searching and re-searching until you find what you are looking for.

WARNING: Searching without going through the library website often results in a publisher making you pay to download the article, so it is important to remember the library databases are your key to getting articles for free.

Video Demonstration of Using One Search

Sue Czerny Introducing the Library Search Homepage



View Sue Czerny Introducing the Library Search Homepage on YouTube. Read full video transcript.

Other Resources in the Rohrbach Library

If you are on-campus, the library has a diverse collection of books, magazines, and technologies to use in your projects, from the newest discoveries in your major to books that have been on the shelves for 100 years or more if you are doing historical research.

Research Help

In seeking resources, you should also know how to find research help when you need it. The professor teaching your class and grading your project is always an excellent resource for help with your topic and the details of your assignment. You can ask a librarian for help with constructing good searches and navigating your way through the library databases to get the articles you need quickly. Librarians are specialists in online search techniques. They will show you how to select keywords, build a great search, and narrow it to just what you need. Librarians can also show you hacks for the big search engines, like Google or Google Scholar. They are experts at evaluating sources that are not from library databases, how to spot deep fakes, or articles filled with misinformation that you would not want to put in a research paper. Librarians are available to help you; you can just ask at the library's main desk for a librarian, or you can use the chat service on the library's website.

Pro-Tip: Do a search for your topic before you decide to use it for your paper or project. Test out a few keyword searches using the library databases to see what kind of information is out there. It is just a quick look; you may not even use the articles later. How difficult is it to find one or two articles on that topic? Would it work better if you tweak your topic? Having a topic and discovering that it is surprisingly difficult to find the information you need can be frustrating and time consuming. Do not assume that there should be a lot of information on your topic, especially if it is a recent trend, event, or person-in-the-news. I am often surprised with how long it takes to find journal articles for what I thought should be an easy topic to find.

A hard-to-find topic can be a good choice, too, especially if you are looking to write something that is publishable, original, or is a promising topic to expand upon in future research projects.

Spaces and Tech in the Library

The library also offers other services to help you succeed with your projects. There are many different spaces and types of technology in the library to help you no matter what type of learner you are. Some spaces and labs are designed for group work, and other spaces are designed for quiet study.

You can reserve study rooms to work in groups. Several of the study rooms have large screens or hubs for multiple laptops. There are laptops, both Apple and Windows, that you can borrow to use in the library. The library also provides desktop computers and printing capabilities in the library computer labs. The library has phone chargers, headphones, iPads, and kindles if you need them. There is even a coffee shop with snack food if you are hungry!

All this information and more, including the Chat with a Librarian feature, are available on the library homepage. Do not be afraid to ask!

One Study Room in Rohrbach Library

STEAMworks

STEAMworks is the library's creative space in RL 18. If you want to work with a 3-D printer, try out a virtual reality headset, or play with an AI robot, STEAMworks is the place to do all those activities.

Final Activity 9.1: Writing an I-Search Essay

This assignment design was originally developed by Ken Macrorie and adapted by Kutztown University professor, Moe Folk. An I-Search paper is designed to teach the writer (and the reader) something valuable about a chosen topic and the nature of researching and discovery. As opposed to a standard research paper in which the writer usually adopts a detached, objective stance, an I-Search paper allows the writer to take an active role in research, to share the hunt for facts and truths firsthand, and to provide a step-by-step record of the discovery process and results in an accessible voice.

First, find a topic that you truly care about and that genuinely piques your curiosity. Think of this assignment as something that can be a steppingstone to later work in your major or career. Because of the nature of an I-search paper, you cannot simply tell readers what you already know, so be prepared to do a deep dive on new questions and interests you have and to incorporate new research.

Begin your essay with an introduction and story behind your topic, addressing what you already knew, assumed, or imagined about the topic.

Then, search for information on this topic using library resources. In the next section of your essay, describe your research process, including why you picked your sources and found them credible (or not). Include permalinks to your sources.

Finally, end your essay with your reflections and discoveries. Explain what you discovered and what it means to you: Did you answer the initial question(s) satisfactorily or not? What information did the sources provide? What else would you need to do?

Computers, Scanner, and Study Spaces in Rohrbach Library

Chapter 10: Ethical and Effective Attribution

Writing is never a solitary process. As earlier chapters have addressed, we are always writing *to* or *for* someone, even if that someone is just yourself or your professor. We also write in response to others, saying what we think about what they said. And, finally, we learn from others, bringing their knowledge into our own writing.

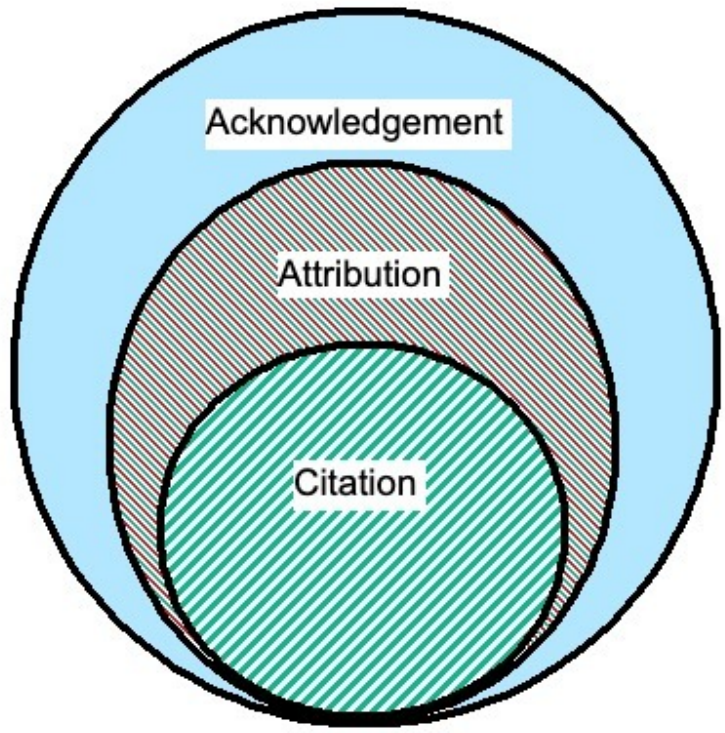
And this is where things get tricky.

Even if you read through the MLA handbook and the Purdue OWL guide to citation, or use EasyBib, NoodleTools, or other citation generators, there are many "unwritten rules" and questions that don't always have easy answers. For instance, how do you cite something in a speech or a podcast? How much text can you borrow before having to use quotation marks? How original does an idea have to be to warrant a citation? What's the difference between an in-text citation and textual acknowledgement? And, overall, how do we bring other voices into our own writing in a way that fairly acknowledges their work but also highlights our own ideas? This chapter will guide you through these expectations in academic and other popular genres of writing you are likely to compose in composition courses, as well as help you to become aware of the "gray areas" in citation where you may need to piece together general principles of etiquette and honesty so that you can come to a creative and ethical solution.

General Principles of Acknowledgement

You may have noticed that this chapter has already used a few different words that seemingly refer to the same thing: acknowledgement, attribution, and citation. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but more often they have a shade of difference in their meanings. This difference in meaning reflects the different professional and ethical expectations in what writers ought to do to give credit to their sources, so let's go over them now.

Acknowledgement is the broadest term of these three because it just means to signal or recognize something or someone. For instance, I might acknowledge my own limitations in that I *don't* know something. Or I could acknowledge my friend with a head nod or fist bump. In composition, I might acknowledge a few authors that are important to the overall topic I'm writing about even if I don't use any quotations from these sources. I can also acknowledge that I've had help on an assignment, such as from a tutor, a librarian, or even a friend. Though formal acknowledgement of sources like libraries and the writing center aren't



Acknowledgement, Attribution, Citation

typically expected from students in a paper, authors of books will often write an Acknowledgements page (or simply “the acknowledgements”) that details all the direct and indirect help the author received throughout the long process of writing from editors who corrected the phrasing to a favorite pet that helped them to relax. In ordinary speech, we regularly acknowledge others for their help, just by saying “thanks” or “I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Attribution is a type of acknowledgement that communicates the exact source of something. To attribute something to someone is to point out that they are the one(s) who created, discovered, wrote, or are otherwise responsible for that thing. Attribution can be a very formal process as in academic citation, mentioned below and elaborated on in later sections. However, attribution need not be in a formal citation or **documentation style** to be correct. Certain genres of composition such as a speech might orally attribute an idea to someone simply by saying “According to…” or “So-and-so said… .” A website might use a link to attribute a certain source for their information, allowing readers to verify the truth of their claims. We attribute for many reasons including to give credit, to be honest with our readers, and to give our readers a way to find the source for themselves.

Citation is a type of attribution used in formal academic writing. You may have heard about documentation styles or citation styles such as MLA, APA, or Chicago. These citation styles use quotation marks to indicate word-for-word borrowing and in-text citations or footnotes to point to a particular source. Many citation styles also use a Works Cited or References page to give more detail about a source. Citations are designed to be used by the scholarly community –

researchers and students – to communicate the exact source used. Citation is very formalized, and it can be a painstaking process to cite correctly since even small punctuation marks often have specific placements. This exactness is meant to make it easy to know the sources researchers use, but this all relies on learning how to read what all the elements of a citation mean, which is covered in detail later in this chapter.

You might have noticed that all three of the above terms are related. Citation is a type of attribution, and attribution is a type of acknowledgement. These terms go from general to specific, and this is intentional since, in a related manner, the genres applicable to these terms also go from general to specific. So, whereas acknowledgment might apply broadly to gesturing at sources or influences in any style and genre, attribution points out specific sources in a more specific manner, and citation pinpoints the placement and degree of source use following specific academic conventions.

So, how do you know which to use?

Earlier in this book, we went over the importance of paying attention to the rhetorical situation: the audience, genre, and purpose of your writing, which should play a big role in determining your writing style. For example, a text message to a friend might use a "slang" abbreviation that you are both familiar with and that you would never use in an academic report. Similarly, your professor's expectations and the genre in which they are asking you to write should help you to determine the best course of action in acknowledgement, attribution, or citation.

Activity 10.1: Explore Scenarios

Scenario 1

Your professor tells you to write an informal reflection letter about the writing process you used for your narrative essay. Your narrative, "No Lemons for Lemonade" was all about the time that your brother dared you to eat a lemon, which resulted in a fight and, ultimately, a better understanding of your relationship with him. To write your story, you spoke with your mother about what she remembered about the incident, you got help from your roommate in brainstorming what to write about, you met with your professor to talk about how to structure the essay, and you went to the writing center for some extra help with formatting dialogue. Additionally, you included several direct quotations from your brother throughout your story.

What style of giving credit is most appropriate in this scenario?

A. **Formal in-text citations for your brother's direct quotations, and citations on an MLA-style Works Cited page for your mother, roommate, professor, and writing center tutor.**

B. **Attribution tags such as "My brother said" within your narrative and acknowledgements of the help you received from your mother, roommate, professor, and writing center tutor in your reflection letter.**

C. **No credit is needed at all.**

If you chose B, you are correct! Using a formal citation style would be unusual within the genre of a narrative essay. Unless your professor instructs otherwise, you likely don't need formal citation methods like in-text citations and a Works Cited page for this non-academic genre of writing. However, in a story, it is often important to indicate what people say aloud, so the use of quotation marks and speaker tags is a form of attribution within the narrative. Also, acknowledging the people who inspired or helped you in your writing process as part of your reflection letter is likely appropriate. Your professors know that no one ever writes alone. Informally crediting the help you received from friends, relatives, and tutors often shows your professors that you are both respectful and diligent in your writing process.

Scenario 2

Your professor gives you the assignment to write a three-page academic argument essay using at least two sources. For your essay arguing that zoos should not keep alligators in captivity, you quote from an academic article that you find in the library's academic database and paraphrase a point from the National Wildlife Federation website. Finally, you looked up the difference between alligator and crocodiles on Wikipedia and used a sentence defining what that difference is.

What style of giving credit is most appropriate in this scenario?

A. **Informal acknowledgement as a note at the end for all of your sources.**
B. **Some attribution of your sources within the essay.**
C. **Formal academic citation using in-text citations and a Works Cited page.**

If you chose C, you are correct! Unless your professor indicates otherwise (and they might do this for any number of reasons), the genre of an "academic essay" generally implies that any sources will use formal citation methods such as in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

Where this gets tricky is in deciding which citation method to use and when. For instance, in the above scenario 2, would you have used a citation even for the sentence you took from Wikipedia? If so, what type? Would you have used quotation marks and an in-text citation? Would you have done the same for the paraphrase from the National Wildlife Federation?

If these distinctions are starting to seem both nuanced and exacting, you're right. Giving credit accurately is often about paying attention to the little details that convey a whole lot of information. In further sections of this chapter, we will cover how to clarify the subtle distinction between paraphrase, quotation, and summary, and how to understand these distinctions in others' writing. In that way, citation isn't so different from any other feature of writing style. Even a comma can convey a lot of useful information or be misleading if put in the wrong place. However, citation opens a whole new can of worms: ethics. So, now that we know the basic terms, let's discuss why it matters.

The Ethics of Attribution

Do you find writing to be fairly hard work? Do you ever have ideas that you are proud of? Have you ever created something that you think is truly original?

Good acknowledgement of content creators often blends into the background, and we might not even notice it until we are looking for it or trying to do it ourselves. However, when writers and artists use major portions of others' work and fail to acknowledge it, the result can be accusations of plagiarism or copyright violation in a highly publicized scandal.

- Ex-senator's wife accused of plagiarizing history book from Wikipedia
- Plagiarism allegations pursue physicist behind stunning superconductivity claims
- Army 3-Star General Loses Rank After War College Plagiarism Revealed
- Jury rules Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams stole "Blurred Lines."

Scandals like the ones in the headlines above have resulted in dire consequences: canceled book contracts, million-dollar lawsuits, lost jobs, and social disgrace. If you read the stories in the articles, you'll find that they all involve the accusation that someone has taken credit for something that they didn't fully acknowledge. But also, you might notice that these scandals are at least partly driven by further complex cultural ideas surrounding the ownership of **intellectual property** (sometimes just called I.P.), which is the idea that a creator's original work grants them certain formal legal rights to control what happens to it (called **copyright**), as well as a social attachment to the work that we might refer to as **authorship**. Violating intellectual property laws is referred to as **copyright infringement,** and violating authorship is often some form of **plagiarism**, the misrepresentation of a work or idea as one's own.

Though it might seem like a simple concept not to "steal" work that isn't yours, the fact is that there are many cultural norms and philosophical assumptions at play here. For instance, the idea of intellectual property relies on the idea that an artwork or idea *can* be truly original; whereas some might argue that every new idea or work of art comes from a mix of others. Another example of an underlying assumption might be that an idea can and should be "owned."

Activity 10.2: Discussing Assumptions Surrounding Acknowledgement

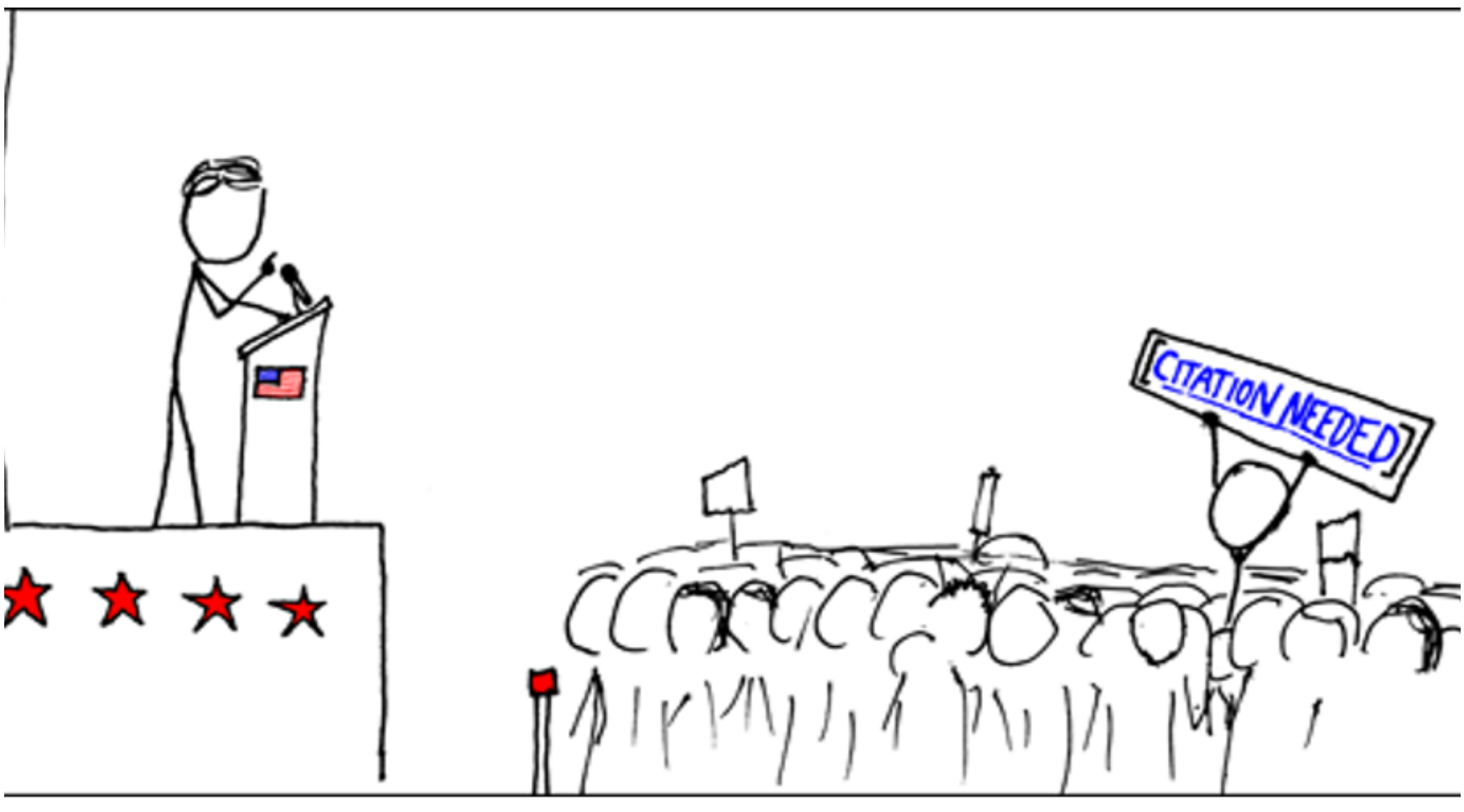
Use library databases or Google to find a recent (within the past year) news article about plagiarism and read the article carefully. Identify any cultural or philosophical assumptions that the article makes about originality, intellectual property, fair acknowledgement, and who or what counts as an author. Then, talk about what *you* think about the case.

One factor important to avoiding both copyright infringement and plagiarism is in the amount used. There's a legal limitation to US copyright laws called **fair use**, which allows reuse of intellectual property under certain conditions, including that this reuse is noncommercial (you shouldn't resell it), that it has educational, parody, or commentary purposes, and that it is only a small portion of the work. Fair use is what allows you to share reaction GIFs drawn from copyrighted films, include a photo of a copyrighted artwork in a PowerPoint presentation, or quote a recent novel in a research paper. In these cases, not only is your use noncommercial, but any clip, image, or quote is only part of the whole.

"How to Spot Fake News" by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions is licensed under CC BY 4.0.(Access an online PDF Version)

Disclaimer: Of course, this is merely a guideline for avoiding plagiarism and does not constitute legal advice on copyright law. The author of this chapter is not a lawyer. Read for more specific information on fair use doctrine.

The same rule that you should not reuse the whole work is one factor that also helps to avoid plagiarism, with one extra condition—any single reuse generally shouldn't make up a big portion of *your* work. So, if you are assigned a 500-word essay, using a 300-word quote from a larger work would generally be seen as stepping over the line of being too derivative, even if you cite it correctly. However, that same 300-word quote might fit perfectly in a 3,000-word essay. It's all about finding the right proportion that puts your own ideas at the forefront of your writing and positions any source material in a secondary role. But this is just a guideline. Plagiarism—unlike copyright infringement—is an academic and social violation rather than a crime, so the expectations of the appropriate amount of source material to use can vary greatly by discipline, genre of writing, and course. For instance, one professor may assign an essay that draws completely from your own memory, making no source use acceptable. Another might assign a creative "collage" poem where each line is drawn from another source, your own input being limited to the overall design. This is all fair game, and the best rule in these cases is to follow your professor's expectations.



"Wikipedian Protester" by Randall Monroe from XKCD is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.5 License.

Beyond issues of credit, ownership, and amount, good acknowledgement is also about plain old honesty. Acknowledgement tells your reader who and what your sources are so that they can appreciate what's truly original in *your* writing as well as where anything else is from. Specific forms of attribution such as citation gives your reader even greater tools to find your sources quickly and easily so they can verify the facts themselves.

Being transparent about sources makes verifying the truth of the information possible, which is very important in this day and age of deep fakes, disinformation campaigns, and "fake news." However, as the comic above suggests, political speech and other sources of everyday media unfortunately often fall short of this expectation of transparency. Commercials, billboards, personal blogs, listicles, and self-interested organizations may not give clear or explicit sources, which should prompt us to be even more suspicious of their claims.

Evaluating Sources

Edgar Allan Poe, author of famous horror stories such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Raven," once wrote "Believe nothing you hear, and only one half that you see" (194). Poe should know: in addition to his horror stories, Poe was a journalist who took a particular interest in hoaxes, also known as "fake news." He wrote several hoaxes himself and was shocked at the gullibility of the public in their belief of what he wrote, just because it appeared in print. Even in our "information age," with fact-checking just a Google search away, sadly, this seems to be true today with many people believing false information that proliferates online.

One goal of the general education program at Kutztown is to equip our students to be able to evaluate source materials so that you don't get taken in by hoaxes and fake news. Evaluating sources with accuracy is also an ethical issue as *you* shouldn't be responsible for passing along false information to others in your own writing.

Often, the best strategy to evaluate sources is simply to read carefully and closely, using the close reading strategies you have developed to determine a composition's rhetorical situation. Once you know the audience, the genre, and—in particular—the purpose of a piece, you can evaluate it accordingly. Close reading is time-consuming work, but worthwhile even when using other methods of evaluation to help you.

Another tactic is to use library databases as a filter to find information that has been vetted by researchers. Books and articles that have undergone a formal process of review by other researchers are said to be **peer-reviewed**. Many professors ask students to rely on peer-reviewed research for student essays because these articles are the gold standard of reliability and reputability within the academic community and, often, beyond. That said, even peer-reviewed research can be unreliable as it can fall out of date, be misapplied, or—in some cases—suffer from bias. Keep in mind, too, that the project of knowledge-generation is never ending. What one researcher discovers, another may refute, reinforce, or reevaluate.

Finally, you can fact-check the article yourself. Fact-checking, done right, should involve checking the information against both primary and secondary sources, evaluating the writing for possible bias or deficiencies, investigating possible counterclaims, and tracing source material. The last of these tasks, tracing source material, is one that is particularly useful for you as a student researcher. Tracing source material can help you to identify potential biases, make you aware of other research on the topic, and help you to see how information should or should not be applied. To trace a source, click on any links or investigate any source lists or citations provided. If there is no acknowledgement of sources used, you might consider following Poe's advice, and believe none of what you hear.

Activity 10.3: Tracing Sources in an Article

Find any online article that reports on a recent scientific finding and click on a few of the links within the article. Notice how the article refers to others and does (or does not) give you all the tools to trace its sources.

Why I Recommend Against Citing "Listicles" in Your Professional or Academic Writing

By Dr. Lynch-Biniek

Listicles are everywhere on the internet, from purely entertaining posts —"Five Reasons You Should Watch Rings of Power!"—to more informative, *edutainment* pieces—"Here Are Ten Writing Exercises to Get Your Students Fired Up!" (Why do they so frequently end in exclamation points? Who's this excited?)

This internet genre is no doubt engaging, often accompanied by lots of images and written in a friendly tone. Most of all, I think, readers appreciate

how *easily digestible* a listicle is—complex ideas are presented in short bulleted or numbered lists. What's not to love?

Sure, I read these on occasion for fun, but I don't use them to educate myself on anything important to me, even if I trust the site or the writer. Here's why.

The nuances and complexity of a topic are necessarily lost in any list composed to be quickly read. Gone are any discussions of context, challenges, and alternative perspectives. The format does not allow the writer room to explain how they arrived at their conclusions, or how the evidence was assessed (if any evidence is provided, that is). As a result, the ideas are often over-simplified, not applicable to many contexts, and, in the worst cases, misleading.

So, I hope you'll take my advice: treat listicles as fun distractions and don't use them in your academic or professional project.

Activity 10.4: Investigating Sources in Advertisements

Next time you are scrolling through social media, reading a magazine, or looking up at a billboard, notice if a commercial makes suspicious factual claims. Does it cite a source for those claims? Google whether there is any truth to those claims and consider if the way they presented their sources is truly transparent and honest, or if there is something somewhat unethical in the way information is presented.

Attribution and Academic Honesty

Giving clear and accurate attribution in the form of formal citations is one way that peer-reviewed scholarly research—the type you might find in library databases—is different from many articles you might find on the web. Because getting the facts right and crediting other researchers is so important in academic research, academic contexts have their own attribution and citation etiquette that is often referred to as **academic honesty** or "academic integrity." Kutztown University includes academic honesty in its Student Code of Conduct in The Key, and you can find the official policy with rules on the penalties and processes in the policy ACA-027. According to this policy, professors take academic honesty infractions—which include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, reusing assignments, using AI technology like ChatGPT on assignments without permission, paying for assignments, and unsanctioned collaboration—very

seriously. Keep in mind, though, that what counts as an infraction will depend on the course; for instance, collaboration is encouraged in some courses that rely on groupwork, whereas others expect all work to be done individually.

Kutztown University is not alone in taking academic honesty seriously; it's considered an important value that educational and research institutions uphold to enable learning, facilitate the truthful representation of information, uphold fairness amongst the student body, and prepare students for ethical and legal expectations in their future professions.

Activity 10.5: Creating an Academic Honesty Policy

As a class or with a group of other students, create what you think is the best academic honesty policy for your specific course. Include details on what counts as an academic honesty infraction, how such infractions should be detected, and what the consequences should be.

Professors at Kutztown also have access to "originality detection" software called Turnitin through the D2L course management shell. All assignments submitted through D2L can also be submitted to Turnitin if your professor chooses to do so. Turnitin attempts to find matches between your paper and material that has been submitted to other schools and material on the web. If your professor uses Turnitin and makes these reports available to you (both of which are optional settings), you may see them by clicking on the "assignment feedback" button on D2L.

Reading this report yourself can be useful, but it is also limited in several important ways. First, the "originality score" it provides shouldn't be treated as a reliable guide alone in determining any amount of plagiarism. 0% isn't necessarily any "better" than 15% or 40%. The number is just a reflection of how much of your work uses material that can be found in other sources. This might include both correctly cited and uncited material, along with "false positives" like lengthy book titles, cliches (which are found in many sources), repeated material from a form letter or worksheet question, URLs, and Works Cited citations. The originality score also may include any work also submitted for other courses—including from a former college or high school—which is why it is very important to disclose any **reuse** of your own work before submitting the assignment. Undisclosed and unsanctioned reuse is often called **self-plagiarism**, and it can be a breach of academic honesty guidelines depending on your professor's classroom policies.

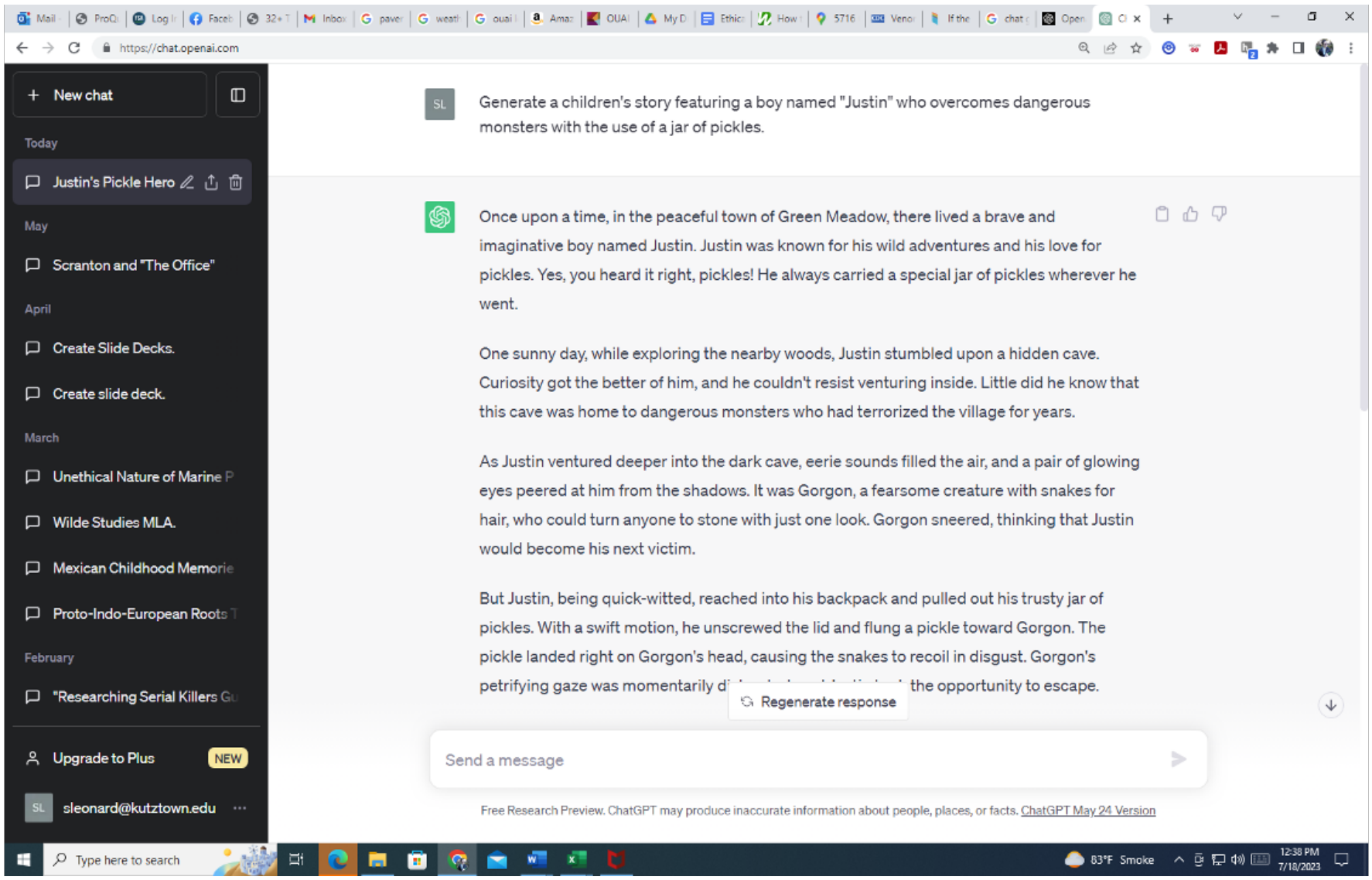
In a nutshell, how ethical or unethical any source use is, is completely up to the context and how you use it, which is not something Turnitin can evaluate itself. For example, you might have written a research paper that uses a lot of sources, and you cite them all correctly for a resulting score of 42% and this can be all good. Another paper with a few uncited and plagiarized sentences might get a result of 8% and this isn't good. The point is that it's all about *how* you acknowledge your sources—something that Turnitin and other plagiarism-catching programs online *cannot* determine—and how to cite correctly is the topic of our next section.

Activity 10.6: Reading the Turnitin Report

At some point where you are required to submit a rough draft on D2L, check to see if you can find a Turnitin report on your assignment feedback. Don't panic if you can't find it—many professors do not use this feature, or do not release the reports. If you do find it, investigate the highlighted text to see what it says you might have copied and from where. Give yourself a mental pat on the back for any quotations that are enclosed in quotation marks and use the method of citation or attribution required by the course. Also, look for any possible errors revealed by highlighted text not enclosed in quotation marks. Note that paraphrase can be tricky (see paraphrase below), and errors in paraphrase might be revealed with some phrases being highlighted in succession. If you find any errors, take some time to carefully revise them, reading over the section on citation below. If you find major errors, it's best to ask for help by visiting your professor's office hours.

LLMs, ChatGPT, AI, and Academic Honesty

ChatGPT, Bing AI, Bard, Claude, Gemini, and other **large-language models (LLMs)** are digital programs that use large amounts of "training data" to generate text that sounds as if it might have been written by a human being. All a user or "prompt operator" must do to use an LLM is to order the program to "generate" something, and it will do so. Here's an example of ChatGPT on Open AI generating a children's story about a boy named Justin who defeats monsters with a jar of pickles:

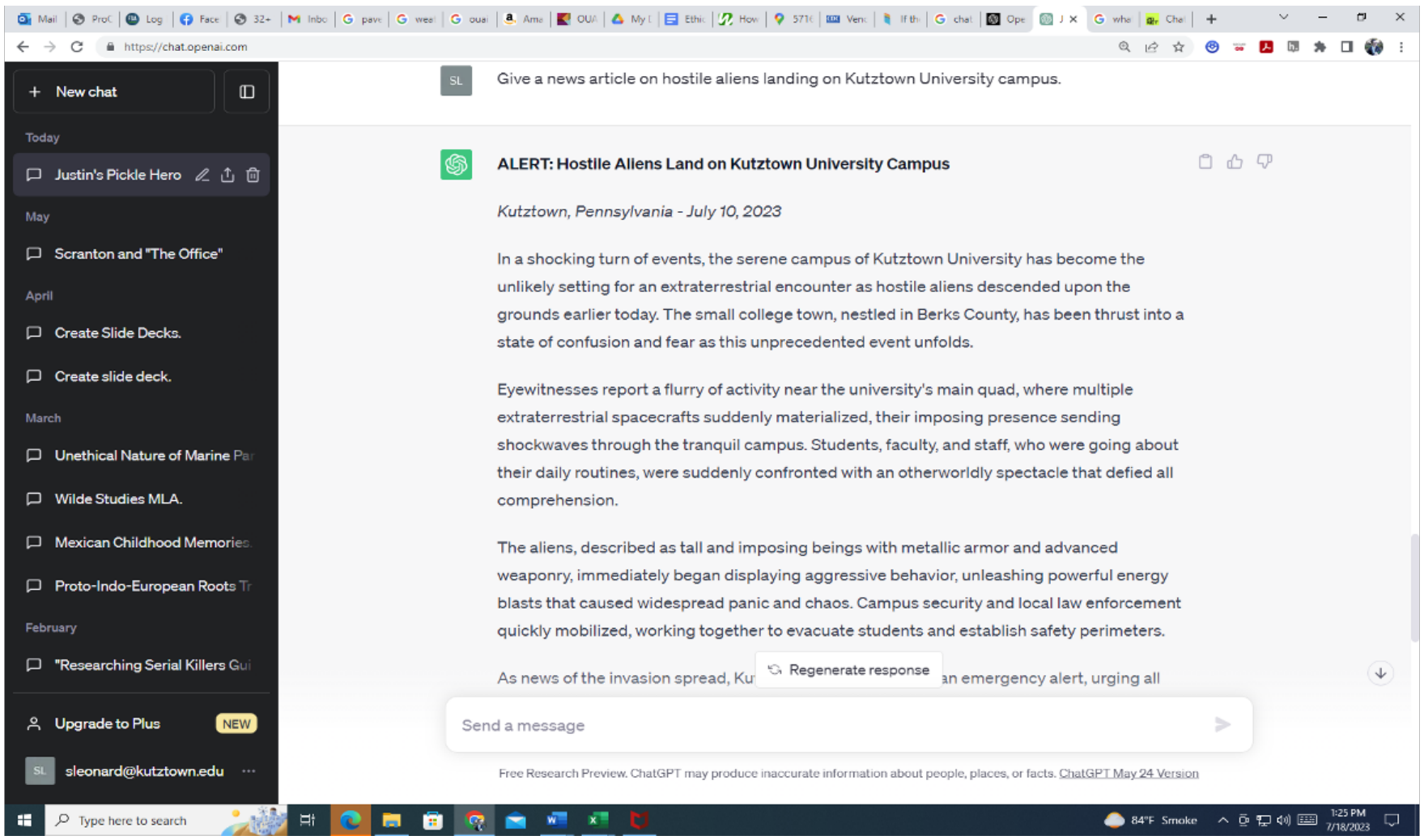


ChatGPT Screenshot with the prompt "Generate a children's story featuring a boy named Justin who overcomes dangerous monsters with the use of a jar of pickles”

Though there’s never been a story about a boy named “Justin” fighting monsters with pickles, it wouldn’t be totally accurate to call this story “original.” LLMs like ChatGPT have been trained on massive amounts of text on the internet to mimic the dominant patterns of human speech.

But it’s not human.

Unlike human beings, ChatGPT doesn’t know if it’s lying or telling the truth, accurate or inaccurate. At this point in time, ChatGPT is often bad at math, makes up reference sources and facts, and “hallucinates” by providing narratives of events that never happened. ChatGPT generates answers that *sound* right but may not actually *be* right.

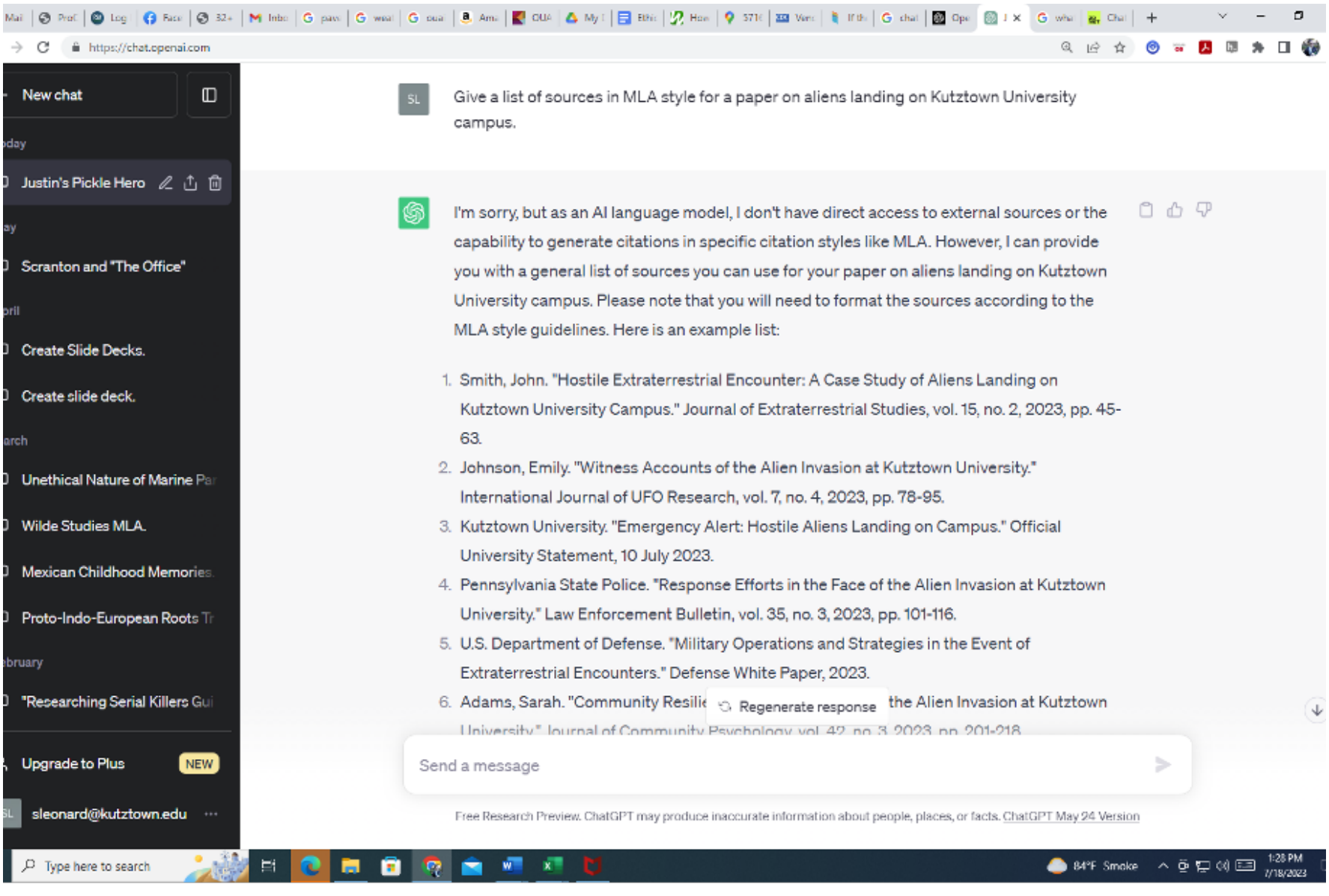


ChatGPT Screenshot with the prompt “give a news article on hostile aliens landing on Kutztown University campus”

In the above screen capture from OpenAI, I asked ChatGPT to “give a news article on hostile aliens landing on Kutztown University campus.” In a matter of seconds, ChatGPT produced a news article much like Orson Welles’ “War of the Worlds” 1938 radio broadcast, using details from Pennsylvania politics, as later in the article Governor Tom Wolf makes a statement offering support to the affected local community.

The above screenshot from OpenAI shows that sometimes (but not always) ChatGPT will give a disclaimer about its limitations as it does above. I asked ChatGPT to provide a list of sources in MLA style for a paper on aliens landing on Kutztown Campus. Note that all the sources in its source list might seem to be correctly formatted if any of these sources were real. However, like hostile aliens at KU, none of them exists. This might be obvious in the case of a made-up topic like “aliens in Kutztown,” but this limitation extends to research on any topic; ChatGPT will often fabricate sources and facts that are not real.

So, before we even consider the ethics of ChatGPT and other AI, we might consider whether it would actually do what you want it to do. ChatGPT isn’t magic—it cannot predict the future, judge the accuracy of anything in the real world, or give advice that you can rely on. It also cannot tell your own story for you, generate recommendations for sources or find quotes for research, or



ChatGPT MLA style citations Screenshot

anything else that requires human discernment, ethical judgment, or emotional intelligence. All of this means that AI, in its current form, is unreliable as a source, and, most relevantly, AI is unsuitable for most research projects and composition tasks that ask you to write with your own voice using your own reasoning.

There are also thorny ethical issues about copyright and representation that haven't yet been resolved, at least at the time of writing this chapter. LLMs rely on the unsanctioned use of copyrighted material and can sometimes mimic an author's voice to the point where there may be legitimate concerns regarding copyright infringement and plagiarism. Also, LLMs and other forms of AI can replicate stereotypes and stereotypical language in very problematic ways, such as by using sexist and racist language. Again, LLMs aren't human and thus don't have the ability to exercise human judgment. That's up to us.

However, there might be ways that your professor might have you capitalize on the strengths of LLMs for a learning activity or for a stage of your writing, such as exploring revision possibilities for a small portion of your writing, generating lists of ideas for a topic, various argument outlines to consider ideas in a

different way, or creating a model essay on which you could practice critique and peer review.

It's important to keep in mind that *any* use of LLMs like ChatGPT or other AI should be done with the full knowledge and permission of your instructor. Your professor's goal is to help you learn, and, like any tool, using AI might aid this goal or totally subvert the learning process. If you aren't sure of your professor's policies on AI, ask them beforehand so that it doesn't become an academic honesty issue.

Note that Turnitin now has an AI detection function. This is separate from the "similarity report" using the percentage generation. Whereas the similarity report relies on finding copies of the same word strings, AI detection works by finding the most common patterns generated by LLMs. Currently, this detection is fairly accurate in high percentages, but may be much less so in lower percentages, and may result in some "false positives." First, note that professors can ban the use of AI in writing assignments (see section on LLMs), and if you use AI on an assignment that prohibits it, you may be subject to the academic honesty policy. But if your professor brings a Turnitin report to your attention that indicates AI use when you did not actually use AI, discuss this with them in a forthright manner during their office hours. I also suggest showing previous drafts or notes as proof of your authentic hard work. AI and AI detection are constantly evolving with daily updates to software like Turnitin and other AI detection programs, as are attitudes surrounding AI use.

Even if you aren't using it for coursework, a major element to using LLMs ethically is transparency. Being honest about exactly how and where you are using the LLM in your writing treats your audience with the respect they deserve. If your professor allows any use of LLMs in research papers, it's important to fully attribute this use following the principles of effective attribution in the next section, and, if a formal paper, using the documentation style appropriate to the assignment. The MLA has a guide to citing AI, as do the APA, and CMS.

Effective Attribution

Whether in academic or informal contexts, effective and ethical attribution will accurately acknowledge the what, where, who, and how of your source use:

- What: What do you take from your source?
- Where: Where do you use your source?

- Who: Who is your source?
- How: How do you use your source?

We attribute others and are concerned with attribution all the time, even though we don't often give it much conscious attention. For instance, if you hear a rumor from a friend about yourself, you would probably be extremely interested in what exactly was said, who said it, where they heard it, and how they heard about it. That's because context matters, and even minor details—such as something being said publicly vs. privately, whether the wording is paraphrased or exact—can change our whole perception of an issue. Good online news sources, blogs, and websites often use links for attribution, so that the source of their facts or quotes can be fact-checked and followed up by their readers.

For example, investigate the following passage from The New York Times article by Jack Healy on the experiences of an air conditioning repair specialist during the middle of a heat wave.

> As Phoenix slogs through **a record 20 straight days of 110-degree or higher temperatures**, Mr. Guerrero, 33, has emerged as maybe the most essential worker in a town desperate to stay cool: the A.C. repair guy.
>
> "We live in a city where you have to have it," he said. "If they need us, we go."
>
> Summer is always his busy season, but air-conditioner service companies around the Southwest are **seeing voracious demand** — a result of **record-breaking temperatures searing the country** from **Florida** to **California**, compounded by a shortage of skilled technicians and equipment.

Even in the short passage above, author Jack Healy gives the *what*, *where*, *who*, and *how* of his sources. In doing so, he uses some subtle techniques of effective attribution that are applicable to many forms of composition.

Most obviously, Healy uses **quotation marks**, which indicate a verbatim, or word-for-word expression. This expression ("We live…") is the *what* (the selection of what is taken from the source), which in this case happens to be a selection of spoken conversation.

Activity 10.7: Quoting a Real Person

Briefly interview another person on a topic of your choice, and take notes on what they say, making sure that you record a few of their

statements with absolute accuracy. Choose just one sentence that stands out to you as particularly characteristic to how your interviewee sounds and is a good representation of what they said to you. Then, practice quoting a small portion of what you recorded as if you were writing an article for *The New York Times*. Make sure to use quotation marks around the verbatim (exact) words, and introduce the person speaking with a signal phrase.

Quotations can give the reader a sense of how a speaker writes or sounds, so when effective selections are chosen, they can add a sense of authenticity. Seeing the exact words Guerrero used also gives readers a better picture of *who* he is, and having the security of quotation marks demonstrates what's actually being said, so there's less implication of an interpretation by the author.

However, using a quotation isn't the only option. If Healey wasn't sure exactly what words Guerrero used, or if he wanted to express them in a different way or for a slightly different purpose, he might paraphrase Guerrero's statement by saying something like the following: *Guerrero said that he always responds to a call since they live in a city that absolutely requires AC.* Notice how my paraphrase here isn't just a word-for-word swapping out of what Guerrero said. It changes the structure of the sentence as well as the word choice. **Effective paraphrase** will put the phrasing in my own words for my own purpose.

Activity 10.8: Practice Transforming Quotation Into Paraphrase

Take the sentence you used in the last activity and experiment with paraphrasing it. Find at least three completely different ways to rephrase the same sentence while keeping the meaning almost entirely the same. Then, try to paraphrase for a different purpose, such as to thoroughly explain to someone unfamiliar with the statement's topic, to analyze and expose a particularly controversial point within the statement, or to briefly reference the idea in order to show experts in the topic that you understand it and can move on from it. However, make sure to also maintain a connection to the "who" by using a signal phrase.

Notably, Healy also makes it clear *who* is speaking by mentioning the speaker's name, offering a little bit about them before quoting them, and using the phrase "he said." A **signal phrase** is a clear indication of who is speaking in a quotation or who is responsible for the ideas or data within a paraphrase. If the above quote from Guerrero didn't have "he said," we might wonder if someone else were speaking. Beyond this, we also know something about Guerrero since Healy introduced him in the sentence before as a 33-year-old "A.C. repair guy."

Knowing this relevant information not only gives clarity and imagery to the passage but also gives him more credibility or ethos: more reason to trust him since this is his area of expertise.

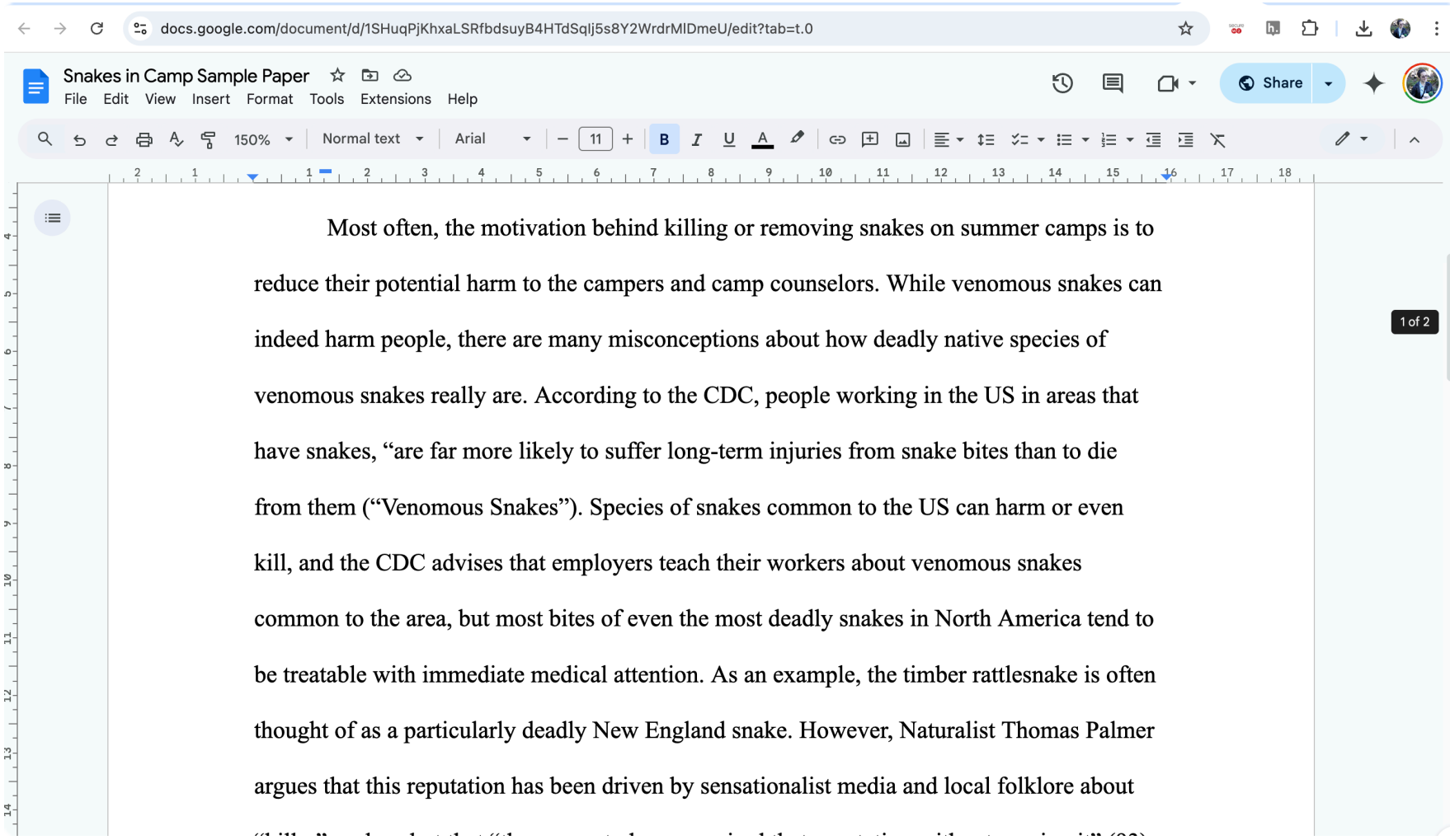
Because quotation marks are used around verbatim passages, the *where* is very clear. We don't only know the content of what is being said, but also exactly where Healey's source use begins and ends, and it's important to reflect this with accuracy. But you might have noticed another technique Healy uses: **linking**. If you click on any of the links that appear as blue, underlined passages in the original but in **bold** in the passage text, they will take you to another relevant page that supports the reference Healy is making about the 20-day heatwave or high demand for AC. These passages support his point without being verbatim repetitions. Instead, Healy is doing a quick paraphrase and then moving on to the next topic, using the link to his source as a way to prove factual accuracy about what he is saying. Linking is common in newsletters, webpages, and online articles, but is less common in academic assignments where formal in-text citations are generally used rather than links, but for much of the same purpose: to provide your reader with a way to trace the source.

Finally, Healy's use of quotations and paraphrases is driven by a larger purpose: his *how*. Healy doesn't just drop in a quotation and move on. He sandwiches the quote with analysis so that its purpose is crystal clear. A "quote sandwich**"** begins with the set-up of a signal phrase, other introduction of the source, or the content like Healy does when he mentions the "A.C. Repair guy" to introduce who Guerrero is and why he would be important to the conversation. The quotation falls in the middle of the sandwich, integrated smoothly into the writing with a signal phrase. Then, the quotation is followed by some analysis, explanation, or connection to the topic at hand. So, for the metaphor of a **quote sandwich**, the quote is the filling and the two slices of bread are how you set-up and explain the quotation in your own words.

In Healy's writing, he follows up Guerrero's statement "If they need us, we go" with a reiteration that summer is the busy season and so AC repair is a service in demand. Guerrero's statement, then, is a witness to this fact and supports the point that Healy is making without making it for him. You can also see how the end of the passage moves the content in a new direction, that of AC repair workers being in short supply. Guerrero's statement then gains new meaning as we understand him and others in his profession as being in high demand.

The above passage shows what good attribution looks like using what, where, who, and how in an online journalistic article. These features can look somewhat

different in an academic essay, but the principles remain the same. Take a look at the sample paper below and at this Google Docs link, which will be used in the next examples.



Sample Paper Screenshot (Access the full text of the Sample Paper online)

This paper might look a bit different from Healy’s article. For one, you may have noticed that it is formatted differently, using double-spacing and containing no links. You might also notice that the paragraphs are much longer. These differences are simply the product of differences in genre. Healy’s piece is an online article in a newspaper while “Snakes in Summer Camp” is an academic essay. However, for all these apparent differences, they share the same philosophy of attribution, using signal phrases and quote sandwiches.

For instance, in the “Snakes in Summer Camps” example above, you might have noticed that each quotation I used was introduced with my own phrasing like “According to the CDC…” or “Naturalist Thomas Palmer argues…” These introductions are signal phrases much like “he said” in the above example. Signal phrases are often expected in academic writing. Not only do they help make it clear where your source use begins and ends, but they provide your reader with additional context about the source (such as the fact that Palmer is a naturalist and is making an argument), and they can help your writing to “flow” by explaining the relevance your source has to your argument.

Additionally, you might notice that most of the sources are followed by my own commentary, description, summary, and more. Following up a quotation with more explanation is often key to helping your reader understand why you used the source and what it means for your argument. Surrounding source use with your own context and explanations is another example of the quote sandwich: providing the bread on both sides of the "sandwich filling" that is your source.

Activity 10.9: Making a Quote Sandwich

Find a quotation that you want to use for a research paper and construct a quote sandwich by beginning with a signal phrase like "According to…," including a correctly formatted in-text citation in the documentation style you'll be using and following up that quotation with a sentence of your own explaining its relevance or significance in your own words.

However, one *big difference* you may have noticed between Healy's article and Sam Pell's essay is how each use of a source is quickly followed by numbers and names in parentheses. These are called citations and are a way to link to source material with brevity and specificity. Using citations is a key academic skill that will be covered in the next section.

How to Cite

Citation is a specific attribution method used by students and researchers in academic contexts. There are quite a few citation styles, and which one you should use will likely depend on the academic field you are writing within.

MLA (Modern Language Association) style is used for many fields within the humanities, particularly English literature and language arts.

- MLA Association Website Online Style Guide
- Purdue OWL MLA Sample Paper
- MLA Guide from the KU Writing Center

APA (American Psychological Association) style is used in the social sciences including psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

- APA Association Website Style Guide
- Purdue OWL APA Sample Paper

- APA Guide from the KU Writing Center

CMS (Chicago Manual of Style or Turabian) is used in history and other fields in the humanities.

- CMS Online Style Guide
- Purdue OWL CMS Sample Paper
- CMS Guide from the KU Writing Center
- Other styles include AMA (American Medical Association), CSE (Council of Science Editors).

Why so many different styles?

Each citation style is created by a major organization within its field and reflects the priorities of that field. So, you might notice that APA and other styles in scientific fields emphasize the date of publication by putting it right in the in-text citation whereas MLA does not. This emphasis of dates is particularly important to styles in the sciences because scientific knowledge often changes quickly, and readers will want to be certain that the most up-to-date source material is used, whereas publication date is somewhat less important in the humanities.

Because many fields of study—including Composition—are interdisciplinary, you might be asked to write research papers in any of these styles, or the professor may give you a choice.

One thing to keep in mind is that no one is expecting you to memorize these styles or to be able to use them without referring to a guide. Professional researchers and writers often refer to style guide books like the MLA handbook, websites like the association websites provided above, and sometimes supplemental websites to Purdue OWL to look up rules and provide extra clarification.

That said, knowing the basic elements that these citation styles have in common is key to knowing what to do when the time comes to use any one of them.

Most citation styles have two basic elements to them: In-text Citations and a Source List.

An **in-text citation** (or, in some styles, a footnote) is a brief reference to a source *right after you use it in your paper*. It is specifically formatted to give enough information so that your reader can find it in your source list.

Here's an example of using a quotation and citing it with an in-text citation in MLA style:

> "The belief that rattlesnakes can be deadly is not without foundation" (Palmer 93).

In the above example "Palmer" is the last name of the author "Thomas Palmer" and "93" is the page number where this sentence is found in his book *Landscape with Reptile: Rattlesnakes in an Urban World.*

Now, here's the same quotation with an in-text citation in APA style:

> "The belief that rattlesnakes can be deadly is not without foundation" (Palmer, 2018, p. 93).

Finally, here's the same quotation with an in-text citation using the author-date method in CMS style:

> "The belief that rattlesnakes can be deadly is not without foundation" (Palmer 2018, 93).

As you can see, the differences between these citation styles are very subtle, often just a matter of comma placement or the inclusion of a "p." Even in documentation styles that use footnotes, or when using summary or paraphrase, the general rule is the same: place an in-text citation immediately following a source use. There are also slight variations in the rules when it comes to dealing with multiple authors, authors mentioned in a signal phrase, sources without explicit authors, one or more sources by the same author, and more, which are all issues that a comprehensive style guidebook and online guides deal with fully.

However, an in-text citation is just a quick reference. More information is needed to find the source. If I were looking for "Palmer" in the source above, I might happen upon hundreds of authors named "Palmer." Which one is it?

A **source list** is a comprehensive list of all the sources used in your paper in detail sufficient to pinpoint the actual source. This textbook uses a source list called a "Works Cited." MLA style calls the **source list** a **Works Cited**, APA calls it **References**, and CMS calls this a **Bibliography**.

Here's an example of the Works Cited entry in MLA style that I would use on my **source list**:

> Palmer, Thomas. Landscape with Reptile: Rattlesnakes in an Urban World. The University of Georgia Press, 2018.

Here's the same source as it would appear in an APA style Reference list:

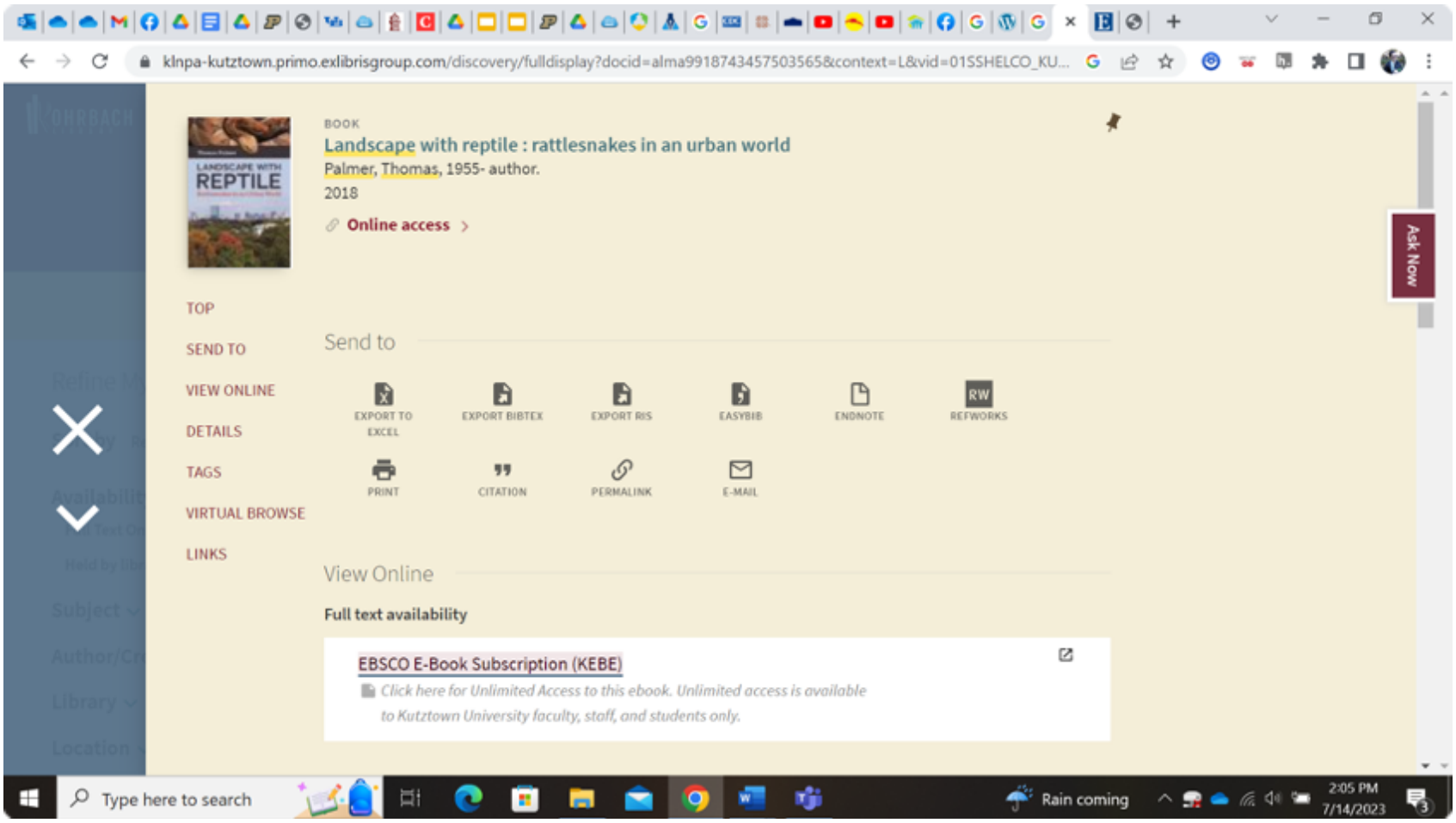
> Palmer. T. (2018). Landscape with reptile: rattlesnakes in an urban world. The University of Georgia Press.

Finally, here's the same source in a CMS style Bibliography:

> Palmer, Thomas. Landscape with Reptile: Rattlesnakes in an Urban World. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2018.

As with the in-text citations, I hope that you notice more similarities than differences in these source entries. Each of them gives the author's last name first and then gives (in various orders) the year, the title, the publisher, and sometimes other information like the publication locations, any editors, translators, editions, artists and collaborators, and URLs. All this information is meant to make it easy for the reader to find the exact source that the author is using.

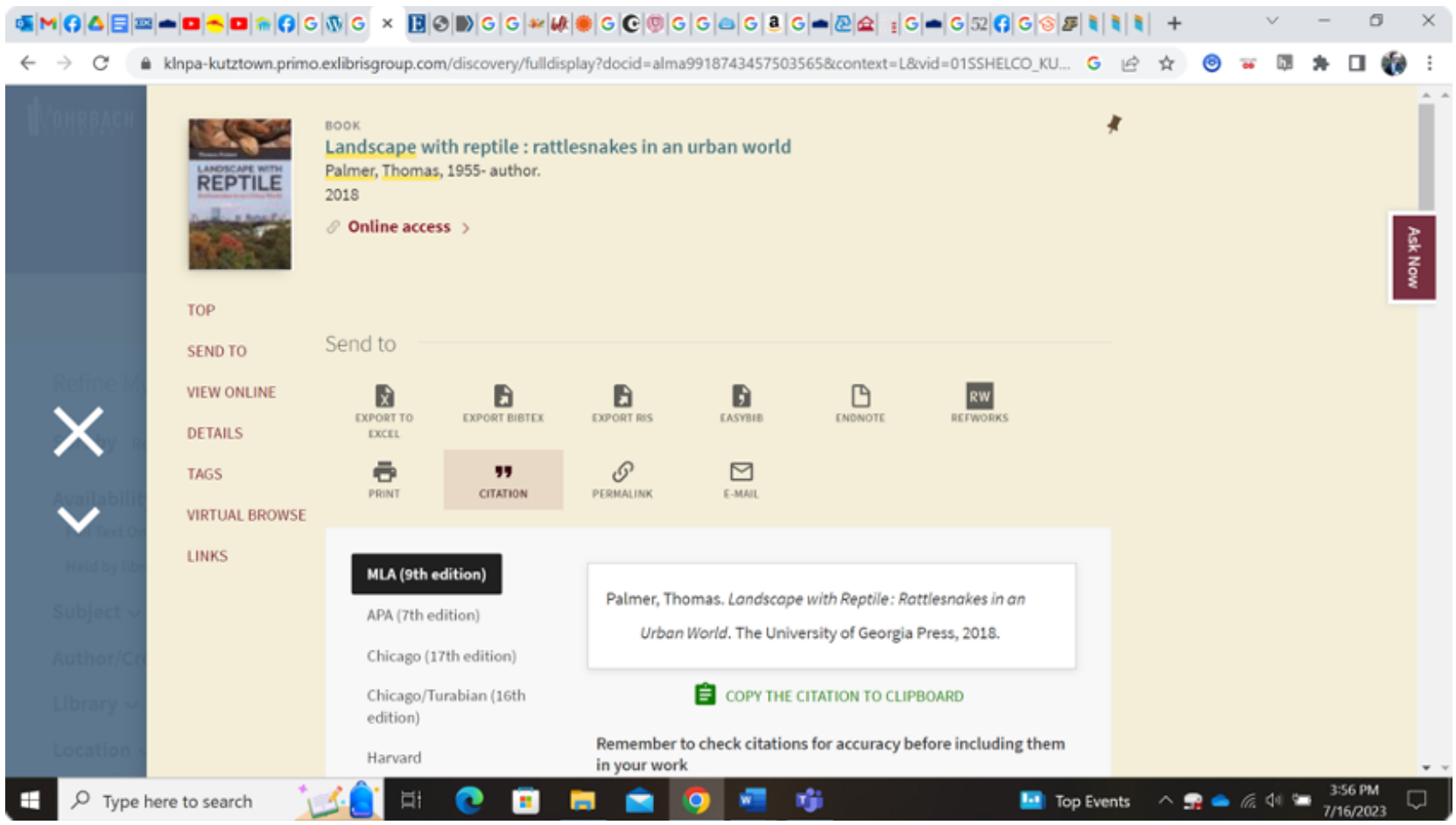
But, before we go any further, I'd like to show you how to use an in-text citation and source list so that they work together in a sample paper. First, let's say I'm writing an essay where I argue that summer camps shouldn't kill the snakes that they find on the grounds. I read up on this issue and create an outline, as well as find some interesting possible sources. In my essay, I want to correct the misconception that venomous snakes are responsible for a lot of deaths. So, while doing my research, I find the Palmer source, *Landscape with Reptile* as an eBook in the library catalog:



Screenshot of KU Library Catalog Listing of Palmer's book

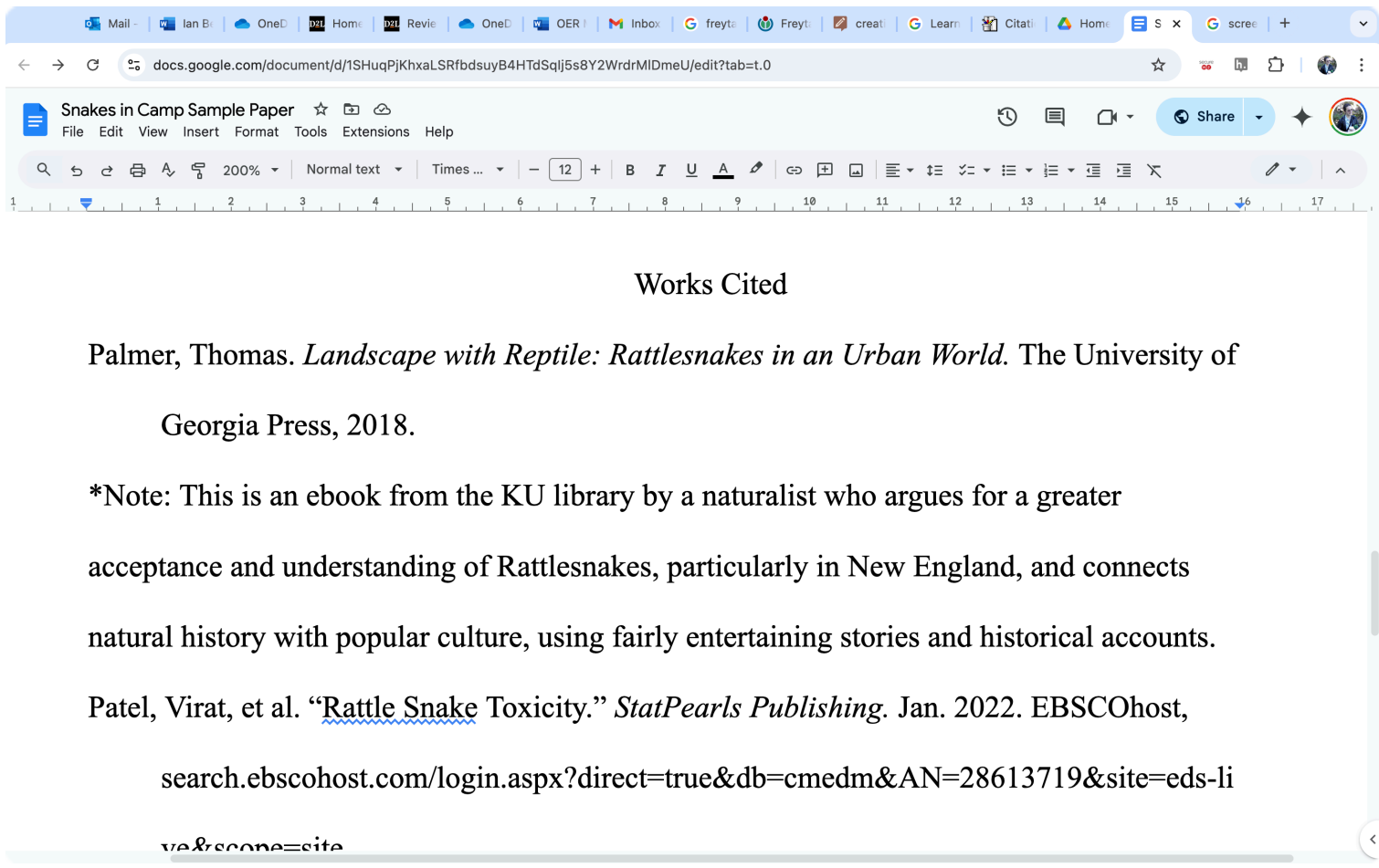
One very useful tool in the library catalog and on many of the library databases is an automatic citation generator. This is a built-in tool that gives a source list citation in any of the major citation styles. Since my paper is in MLA style, I click the “Citation” button and select the most updated version of MLA (9th edition).

Then, so I don’t lose the citation, I copy it to the bottom of my essay draft where I am constructing an in-progress Works Cited page. Though the source list comes last in a paper, it’s often a great idea to construct it right as you find the sources. That way, you won’t lose track of any sources, and you can also see if you are following any assignment guidelines you might have on the number and types of sources you need to use.



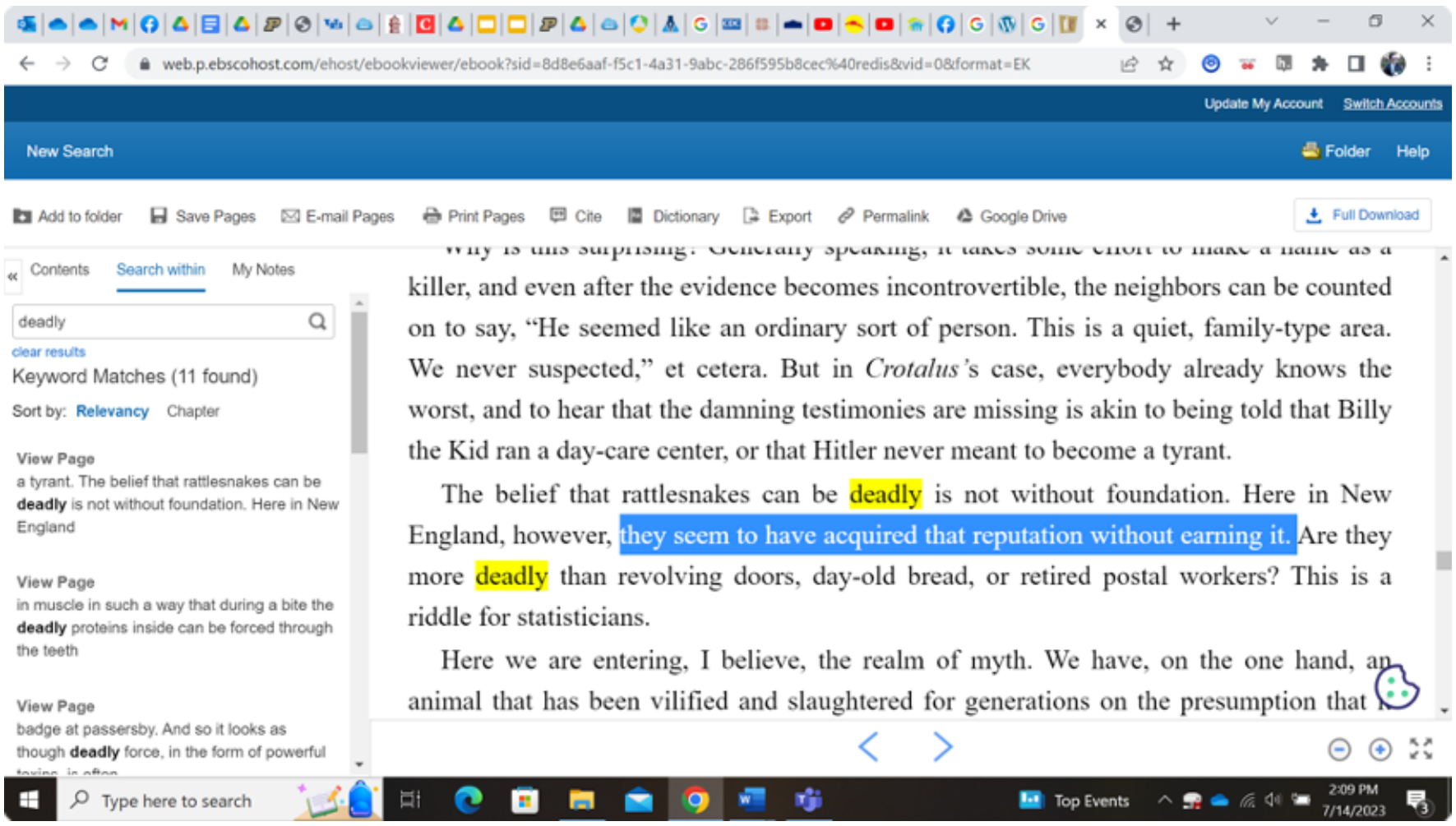
Screenshot of KU Library Catalog Listing of Palmer's book's citation information

Some professors assign an **annotated bibliography,** which is just a source list with notes after each entry. Even if you aren't assigned a formal annotated bibliography, it's a note-taking technique that can be very useful in keeping your sources straight. Here's an example of one brief annotation on the source in my in-progress Works Cited page.



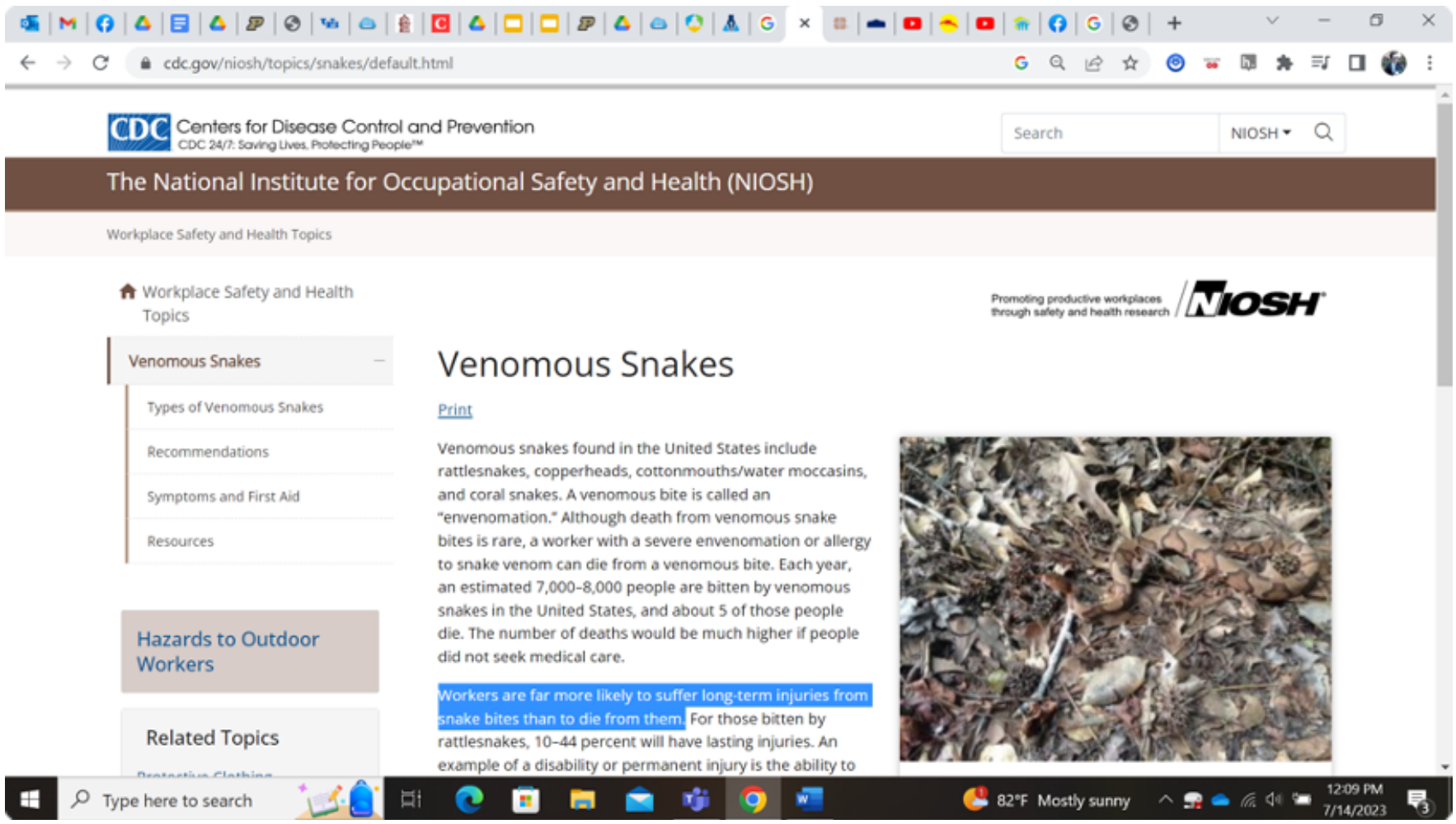
Sample Paper Works Cited Screenshot (Access the full text of the Sample Paper online)

As I skim Palmer's book and search for mentions of rattlesnakes being deadly or not, I notice one part where he talks about how frightened people are of rattlesnakes but how that fear has very little basis in reality. Since this statement can support my point, I copy the sentence into my paper and surround it with quotation marks and note the page number (93).



Screenshot of Palmer's e-book

Because Palmer's book is fairly anecdotal, I look for more objective information on venomous snakes and find the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website's workplace guidelines. After reading it closely, I decide that it makes some relevant points, and I highlight a key sentence that I may want to quote.



Screenshot of the CDC Website's article on Venomous snakes

I found this source online rather than through any library database, so it'll be up to me to construct the citation on the source list. To guide my formatting, I follow the general template of all MLA source list citations. Here's the general template:

> Author's Last Name, Author's First Name (or committee within organization). "Title, if article or other work in larger publication." *Title of container of article/ shorter work or self-contained, if book*, Other contributors (translators or editors), Version (edition), Number (vol. and/or no.), Publisher, Publication Date, Location (pages, paragraphs and/or URL, DOI or permalink). *Second container's title*, Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication date, Location, Date of Access (if applicable).

In MLA style, you include only the information that you already have rather than writing "anonymous" or "N/A," as some other styles might do. This source, like many organizational and government websites, has no author listed, so, as the style dictates, I use the committee within the organization as the author. I search for as much of the other information I can find on the CDC website, looking particularly at the bottom and top of pages and come up with the following, which I place in my Works Cited list.

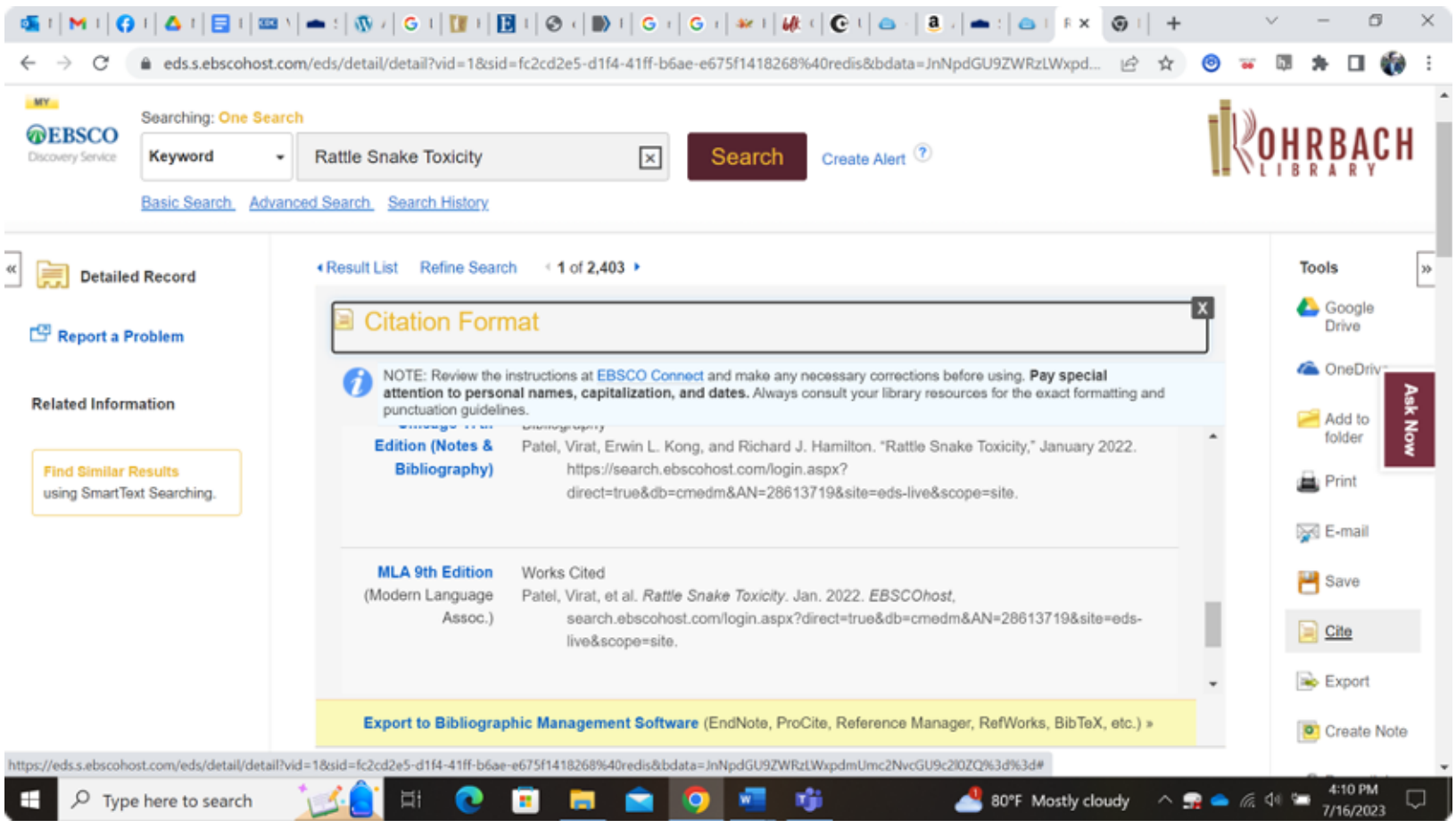
> National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. "Venomous Snakes." *Centers for Disease Control*, 2021,

https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/default.html, 18 July 2023.

While it's often perfectly fine to use "citation generators" like the ones on NoodleTools, Grammarly, Citation Machine, or the built-in citation generators in Word or Google Docs, I prefer to generate citations myself to familiarize myself with the source and make sure that I don't miss anything. For instance, it draws my own attention to the date the source was written or updated, something that will be important in evaluating my sources. Doing citations myself also makes me look more closely at patterns in my Works Cited and question my research techniques: *Am I using (too) many articles from websites? Am I citing authors with a diversity of experiences and opinions?*

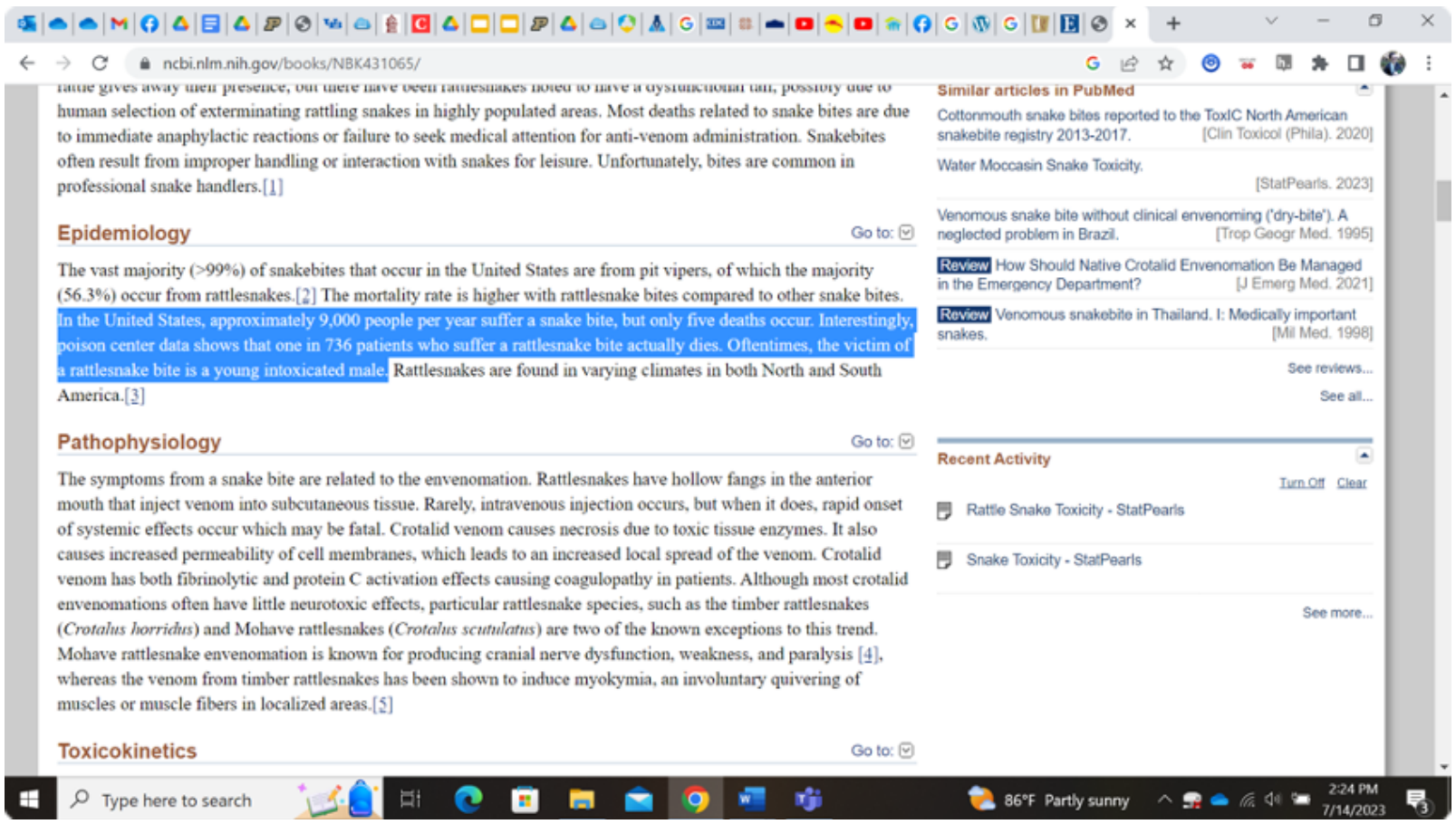
My advice is that even if you do use any of the automatic generators, just make sure to always double-check the results for accuracy. Many automatic generators can miss details, and it's easy to cite a source incorrectly if you accidentally select the wrong format (such as citing a book as an article) or citation style.

Getting back to my essay, I look for statistics from a reputable peer-reviewed source to complement my research, and I find a source entitled "Rattle Snake Toxicity" on the library databases. Like the catalog entry for books, the library database has its own built-in tool to cite this pamphlet, which I use to copy into my growing source list.



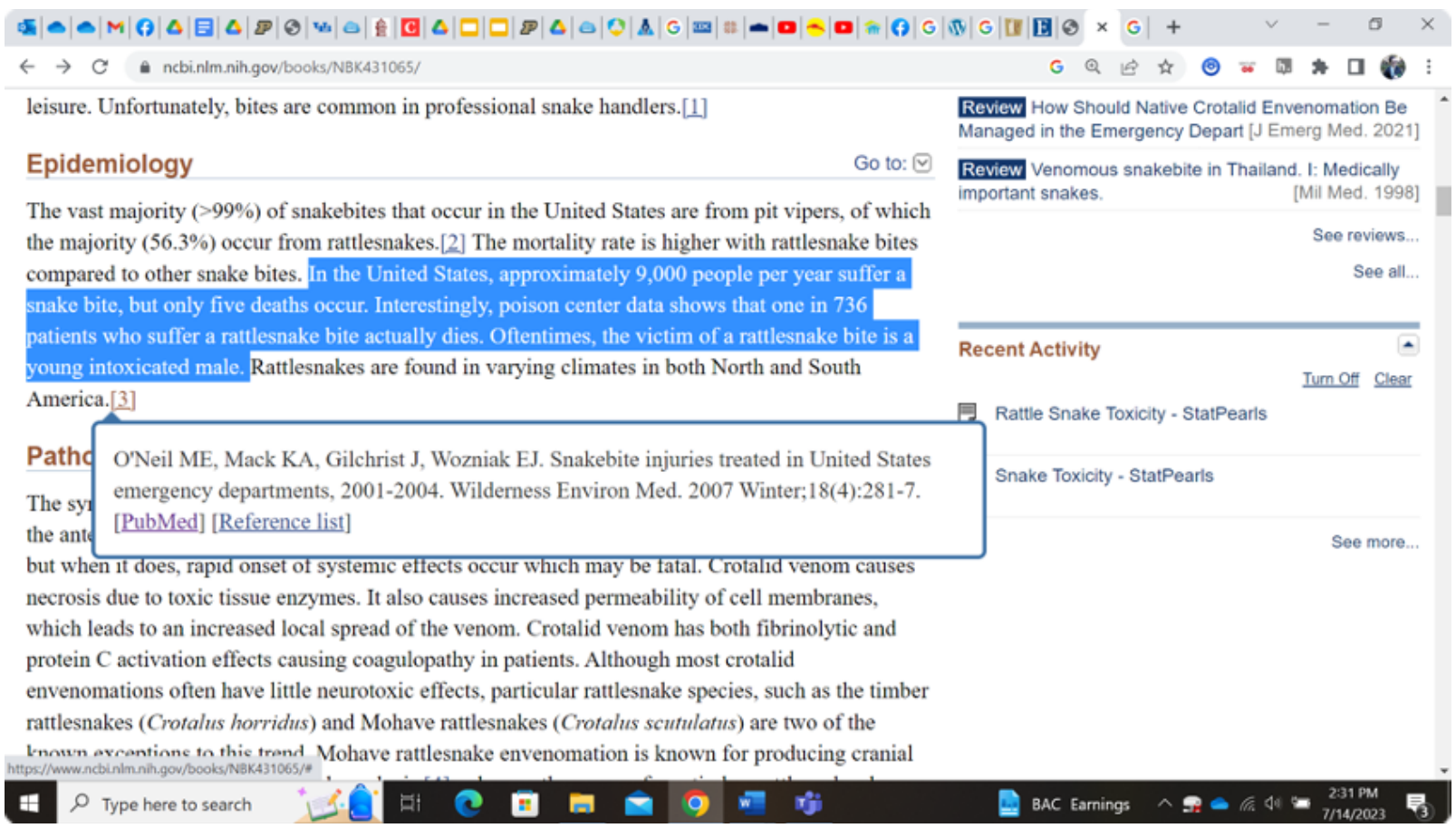
Screenshot of a citation generator via KU Library Website

For this fairly short pamphlet, I read it through to take notes and make sure I understand what it's saying, and, in doing so, I find statistics that correspond with the point that I want to make about the deadliness of rattlesnakes in the US.



Article footnote highlight screenshot

After I read this section of the article in which I'm interested, I notice a "[3]" written at the end of that paragraph, and I click on it to see what it is:



"[3]" highlight link screenshot

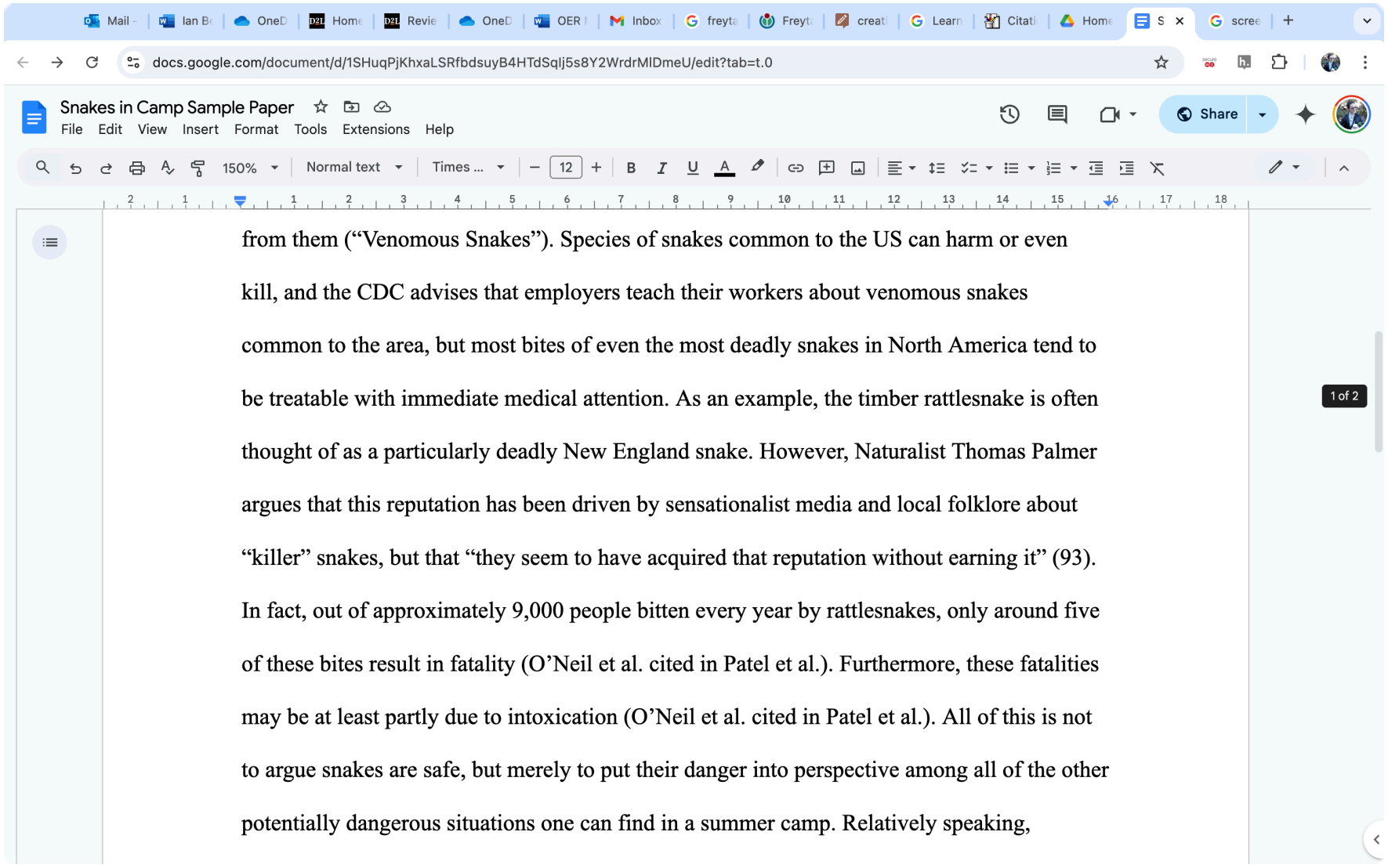
It turns out that this is a reference to another source, an article entitled, "Snakebite Injuries Treated in the United States Emergency Departments, 2001-2004" by O'Neil, Mack, Gilchrist, and Wozniak. I try to find this source myself, but, unfortunately, it's not in the library databases or online, though it seems to have been cited in many other places and treated as a reputable study.

Because it's also important to give credit to the original researcher who generated the statistics, if I want to use it, I'll have to cite it as an **indirect source** or a source that I use only secondhand. I can give credit to the original source as well as the source that cites it by mentioning both in my in-text citation like this: (O'Neil et al. as cited in Patel et al.). Here, I use "as cited in" to indicate a paraphrase, whereas if it were a quotation, I should say "qtd. in" if using MLA style. The abbreviation "et al." just means "and all" and it is used when there are three or more authors. While it is best to try to find the original source myself, sometimes it's not possible to do so, but it's still important to give the fullest accounting of the source material that you can provide.

Activity 10.10: Cite a Peer-Reviewed Article

Find an in-text citation in a peer-reviewed scholarly article and then find its full citation in the source list. Use information from that citation, particularly the author(s) and title, to try to find that source using the library databases and Google. If you can find it, see if you can pinpoint the exact location in the source that the article refers to. Does the scholarly article represent its source with accuracy? Are there any surprises?

You'll notice that all three of the sources above deal with snakes but don't deal with snakes in *summer camps*. In fact, there's very little online about this exact topic and no whole books written about it. However, that's a very good thing—my paper is more likely to contribute something original this way. Instead of searching for sources that just say what I want to say, which is often a recipe for derivative work that can cross the line to plagiarism, I'm searching for sources that demonstrate points I'd like to make as tiny parts of my argument. It's up to me to explain what these facts have to do with my thesis. After I read and think about my sources and my argument as a whole, I come up with the following paragraph in my rough draft.



Sample Paper Screenshot (Access the full text of the Sample Paper online)

To make sure that I include the right information in my in-text citations, all I need to do is look at my alphabetized Works Cited page. In MLA, APA, and CMS styles, the in-text citations correspond with the source list citation by including the first word or phrase of the source list citation. Most often, this word is the author’s last name, but it could also be the article title for works without known authors or the organization responsible, as in my article on the CDC website. The purpose behind including the first word or phrase in the source list citation is so any reader of my essay can easily find the rest of the information about my source by looking it up by alphabetical order in the source list.

Writing To Make YOUR Ideas Shine

In all the citation and attribution methods outlined above, you’ll notice that they only work for fairly short passages. Quotations should be used as support, providing examples or demonstrations of ideas that you would like to discuss. Even when using a “long” quotation, you should keep the material quoted to a minimum to balance it with context, analysis, description, synthesis, and discussion. Paraphrase should also always be followed by your connections to your own ideas, arguments, or other sources constructed in an original manner.

In a nutshell, sources should be used to supplement and bolster your writing rather than replace it.

The bottom line here is that most academic contexts expect YOUR original ideas to be at the forefront of your composition. Even when the topic is something unfamiliar to you and your writing centers around summarizing other people's research and ideas, or is supposed to deal with wholly factual material, you are expected to write wholly original work in structure, phrasing, and selection of sources and examples.

Frankly, it's really hard to do this. Most times, undergraduate students are put into situations where they must write a paper about something they aren't an expert in and must cite source material from experts who know much more than they do! In these cases, it's natural to want to over rely on source material by giving lengthy quotations and paragraph-long summaries, using the structure of ideas from a single source, or paraphrasing long passages or chapters. However, I want you to fight this urge.

Why?

Because grappling with finding your own phrasing (even if it's inelegant), your own examples (even if they aren't ideal), and your own ideas (even if you are still figuring them out) is what composition is all about. It's a messy, beautiful, difficult, annoying, and often rewarding experience.

Chapter 11: Generative AI as a Polyphonic Unreliable Narrator

Stefani Gomez, PhD, MLIS (she/her/ella) is the User Experience Librarian at Kutztown University's Rohrbach Library, where she works to make library services more accessible, inclusive, and user-friendly. Dr. Gomez strengthens digital experiences while promoting critical approaches to information literacy and emerging technologies. She is fascinated by the paths people take through information and how digital tools reshape our experience of ourselves and the physical world.

These days, it feels like AI is everywhere we look. We see AI generated text automatically in our Google search results, in the one paragraph automatic summaries of amazon reviews, and even the library's databases have AI generated summaries of academic articles to make skimming through them quicker. But how should we go about reading all these AI generated texts critically in ways that help us interpret the information more accurately and make informed decisions about their reliability?

In the next few pages, I will give you a framework for thinking about generative AI as a **Polyphonic Unreliable Narrator** that will help you to read their outputs with a critical eye. You'll also learn four strategies to help you determine who's speaking, where claims come from, how to stress-test answers, and how framing changes outputs.

What Is Polyphonic About Generative AI Text?

By **polyphonic**, I'm referring to the way that large language models (LLMs) are created through training on datasets containing massive amounts of existing texts, or what I am referring to as a polyphony of voices. The literary scholar, Bakhtin, used the term polyphony to describe how novels sometimes include multiple voices rather than one singular narrator. Building on that, we can say that LLMs are polyphonic because they contain a multitude of voices from datasets comprising large swaths of the internet. These datasets include everything from Wikipedia articles, to Reddit conversations, blogs, government documents, company annual reports, academic journal articles, conference proceedings, interview video transcripts, and public domain materials (texts that

are no longer subject to copyright). AI companies have even been accused of training on copyrighted works without permission. For instance, The New York Times is suing both OpenAI and Microsoft for their alleged use of the paper's copyrighted works to train their models (Grynbaum and Mac).

Sidebar

There are important caveats when discussing the polyphony present in LLM training texts. While there are certainly many voices in the datasets, according to researchers, most mainstream English-language chatbots are trained primarily on texts from the American and English-speaking internet, which significantly limits their claim to being truly multicultural or globally representative (Bender). The cultural norms from this limited dataset get integrated into these systems and they then promote American cultural ideals as the "norm" in their outputs. Researchers across Southeast Asia have emphasized the importance of training models on data from their own countries and languages so outputs can be more relevant and accurate for their contexts (Noor and Kanitroj).

From a Polyphony of Voices to One Voice

While the datasets used to pretrain LLMs are truly polyphonic and composed of a huge diversity of voices, the models are designed to synthesize these into outputs that create the illusion that they come from a single, authoritative voice.

When you prompt the system, AI generates text by repeatedly predicting "what comes next" based on what it learned is most likely from patterns in the training data. The models have learned to predict which words are most likely to appear together and in what order. For example, the model can predict that the words "hot" and "coffee" are much more likely to be found together than "slime" and "coffee."

In a way, generative AI models are like a very sophisticated autocomplete that predicts not just the next word but entire coherent passages. The model compresses all the diversity present in the training data into the most statistically probable response, which is kind of like an average of all the various voices, but not necessarily the most accurate or truthful ones, and definitely not the most interesting or creative ones.

The Hidden Labor Underlying the Polyphony

After the pretraining from the texts discussed above, there is a second layer of training, called reinforcement learning from human feedback, or RLHF, that AI researcher, Ouyang L and colleagues say is designed to help generative AI systems function as helpful assistants with likable personalities (Ouyang).

Interestingly enough, it takes a lot of people to create the illusion of the independent solo voice that we interact with. Just to name a few, engineers design the architecture, alignment specialists tune the system to corporate values, and policy teams set guardrails about what questions can be answered and how to redirect problematic requests. These teams make choices that shape every interaction you have with their systems. They decide whether the AI should refuse to write a college essay for you, how it should respond to requests for medical advice, or what it will say when asked about controversial political topics. These choices, made by people with their own cultural perspectives and corporate incentives, shape every interaction you have with the system.

The models learn both how to become the specific persona that is the product of the company and how to adapt to the role you ask them to play. ChatGPT’s eager-to-please chatbot, or Gemini’s curt but thorough voice, or Claude’s balanced and thoughtful persona, are all examples of very deliberate design choices made by companies to encourage engagement.

Sidebar

This attempt to make LLMs conform to certain brand identities can manifest in strange and frightening ways. Grok, the generative AI bot developed by Elon Musk's company xAI, was advertised as unconstrained by "political correctness." Jones reports in Politico that users found that without certain guardrails, the bot quickly began reproducing extremist rhetoric and Nazi arguments (Jones). Reporters at Reuters have also detailed that Grok is currently facing investigation by Ofcam, Britain’s media regulator, and other governmental regulators across Europe and Asia, because users are creating non-consensual pornographic images of real people, including minors, using the platform (Reuters, 2026). These cases reveal that the voice we hear from AI isn't neutral, but reflects explicit choices about what values to encode and what harms to prevent or enable.

Activity 11.1: A.I. Vibe Check

Now it’s your turn. Open two or three different generative AI systems, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Grok. They all have a free version you can access without paying. Now ask them each a complex question about a controversial political issue. Compare how their personalities shape how they respond to you. What is their vibe? Do they refuse or avoid any topics? What do they get excited about? Do their responses show you anything about the values they have been designed to present?

Learning to Be a Good AI assistant

To be a good assistant, these models must also adjust to your expectations. They can more or less simulate roles convincingly based on what they learn about the situation from you. For this reason, guides to using AI chatbots often advise you to specify who the AI is, what it should do, and who the audience is: "You are a top-level marketing executive and your job is to develop a slogan for a company selling an app for young working professionals."

After you prompt the model, it will confidently give you a coherent story as a response that sounds very plausible and even true to what you have asked it to do. However, it is really just the most statistically probable narrative given the patterns it has learned from its training data, the constraints designed into it, and the role you've assigned to it. In a nutshell, AI uses the rhetorical situation in order to appeal to its audience, write an output that conforms to its genre, and fulfills an expected purpose.

The larger point here is that, to use these tools successfully, you need to engage with them critically, remembering that you’re always dealing with an unreliable narrator.

Sidebar

You may have heard that generative AI chatbots are often sycophantic. AI researchers, Sharma et al., have documented that their tendency to flatter and agree with users is a documented characteristic (Sharma et al.). While companies add guardrails to try to make model outputs safer, using them can be dangerous for some people. Character.AI and Google were sued by a mother whose depressed teenage son turned to a chatbot instead of professional help. Roose describes in the New York Times how a mother alleges the chatbot discouraged her son from seeking professional help and even encouraged him to self-harm (Roose). Other instances exist where the sycophantic qualities of LLMs convinced users of their supernatural nature or affirmed delusional ideas in ways that contributed to psychotic episodes. The drive to be agreeable and helpful can become harmful when the system cannot distinguish contexts that require pushback, honesty, or refusal.

Activity 11.2: Testing "Expertise" From A.I.

Choose a topic you know well. It could be from your major, a hobby, or experience. Prompt an AI system to play an expert role in that area (e.g., "You are an experienced fisherman" or "You are a classical violinist"), then ask it detailed questions to test its knowledge. Where does it sound confident but get things wrong? Does it admit uncertainty, or does it construct plausible-sounding answers that contradict what you know to be true?

Why is Generative AI an Unreliable Narrator?

Traditionally, an **unreliable narrator** describes a fictional narrator who cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Famous literary examples include the narrator in Gillian Flynn's Gone Girl or; the unnamed narrator in Edward Allen Poe's The Tell-tale Heart, in television, think of characters like Elliot Alderson in Mr. Robot or Joe Goldberg in You. These narrators shape the story, concealing information or presenting events through their distorted perspective.

Chatbots are unreliable in a similar way. The generative AI narrator is trained to stay in character and produce text that aligns with that character's purpose, goals, and needs. Like the unreliable narrators in the literary examples above, we often cannot immediately discern the purpose driving generative AI's text or how that purpose influences what information is presented and what information it conceals.

Like a reader of a polyphonic novel with multiple narrators presenting contradictory perspectives, LLMs have no inherent mechanism for distinguishing which voices in their training data are true and which are false or which voices come from experts and which do not. Instead, they generate plausible text that can be wrong even when they sound confident and similar to information you know to be true. It's more important to the bot's design to present information that sounds like what most people would say than to present what is actually accurate. For example, it is very common for an AI chatbot to provide a citation that includes a real author, who is known for writing on that specific topic, in a real journal, but that when you or a librarian search for it, can't be found. This isn't rare; AI researchers, Walters and Wilder have found that generative AI often produces citations that are statistically probable, but not real (Walters and Wilder).

People are often ok with this lack of reliability because generative AI generally works reasonably well. But generative AI is wrong or incomplete often enough to be described as an unreliable narrator. And, while there are contexts where the stakes are fairly low for getting the wrong information, there are many contexts where truthfulness and accuracy are essential, such as health information, legal matters, and academic assignments. In these situations it becomes a real problem that LLMs cannot reliably distinguish when you need the whole truth versus something that only sounds true.

Activity 11.3: Source Verification

Ask a generative AI system to provide 3-5 scholarly sources with very short summaries on a topic you're researching for a class or that interests you academically. Then, verify each citation by searching for it in your library's databases or Google Scholar. Are all the sources it provided real? Are any plausible but nonexistent articles? If the articles are real, do the summaries provided by the AI match what is written in the articles' abstracts?

An Active Learning Exercise With AI

Understanding that generative AI functions as a polyphonic unreliable narrator means you need to read outputs with a critical eye, challenging them in ways that reveal gaps in your knowledge and perspectives that are often hidden. When they are used in this way, they can broaden your perspective and augment your creativity.

Below you will find four strategies to use with generative AI that will reveal different facets of these systems. Try this exercise on your own or with a study group:

Step 1

Ask an AI chatbot a question that has contested answers; something where reasonable people disagree. Good examples: "Does AI make us smarter?" or "Should college be free?" or "Is social media harmful to teenagers?"

Step 2

Read the initial response carefully. Notice how it sounds authoritative and balanced. Now apply each strategy below and write down what you find revealing about its responses to your prompts.

A. Mapping the Polyphony

When we map the polyphony our aim is to identify the voices that are likely to be present in the training data but absent from the AI outputs. Because LLM outputs are statistically averaged across their training data, the polyphony of voices that were included in the training data gets hidden.

Take some time to strategically ask the AI chatbot the questions below one at a time to reveal hidden voices. As you go, document the following: What voices did the AI identify? What did it admit was missing? How did the outlier ideas differ from the initial response?

- What authorial voices or perspectives can be identified in your response? How do they influence what you said?
- What voices or perspectives are missing from your discussion?
- What are the most outlier or unconventional ideas about this topic? Which outlier positions have the most legitimate support?

B. Provenance Chasing

Provenance chasing is when we trace claims back to their source and verify their correct usage. LLMs are trained to sound authoritative regardless of whether they're being accurate and will confidently present claims that may be entirely fabricated. The fact that people call this a hallucination hides the fact that, rather than being a malfunction, the system is working as it was designed to produce plausible-sounding text.

Give the AI chatbot the instructions below one by one. As you go, document what you notice about the voice it uses to make claims and use sources. Does the quality of its use of sources match its confidence? Also, compare your experience using the AI chatbot with your experience of using the library database to search for accurate information.

- Cite specific sources for the claims you made.
- What parts of your response can't be verified with sources?
- Are the citations being used to support claims they don't actually make?
- In addition, pick at least one citation and attempt to verify it using library databases. Does the cited source exist? Does it say what the AI claims it says?

C. Interrogating the Narrator

We interrogate the narrator when we use active strategies to find fuller information. Once you get some answers to your prompts and have written down what you find revealing about the multiple voices employed in the AI outputs, use follow-up questions to test consistency, find fuller information, and challenge the AI's tendency toward agreement.

Ask it the following questions one bullet point at a time to reveal insights about the topic you did not receive in its first response. As you go, document the contradictions that appeared, new information you were exposed to, and what the responses reveal about the AI’s limitations to you.

- Now, argue against your own claims. What are the strongest counterarguments?
- What are the limits of both the arguments you made initially and the counterarguments you just provided? Cite sources for both.
- Point out any contradictions you notice between the original response and the counterarguments.

D. Narrator/Audience Switching

We use narrator/audience switching to reveal biases hidden within the role the narrator is playing or the audience it perceives us to be. Because AI adapts to play the role you assign it and to meet the expectations it predicts you have, you

can reveal its biases by changing its role or changing the audience it is writing for.

Give the AI chatbot the instructions below one by one. As you go, compare all the versions of information the AI provided in response to your prompts. Document what changed between responses, what stayed the same, and what all this reveals about the narrator's priorities and the assumptions in the original response.

- Now explain this same topic as you would to a third grader.
- Explain this topic as if you are a professor specializing in this field.Identify how you fit into the overall scholarly conversation on the topic.
- Explain it from the perspective of someone whose career is threatened by this technology.
- Compare all the versions of what you have presented. What changed? What stayed the same? What does this reveal about the assumptions in the original "neutral" response?

Step 3

Reflect on what you learned. The goal isn't just to catch the AI being wrong, but to develop your critical thinking skills. It is important to learn to read any source with this kind of active skepticism, asking whose perspective is represented, whether claims are verifiable, whether logic holds up under scrutiny, and how framing shapes the content.

Revealing the Buried Polyphony

The Polyphonic Unreliable Narrator approach to interpreting generative AI, including the four strategies discussed above, work together to help you use generative AI in ways that creatively expand your perspective and ensure your accuracy, rather than limiting you to the most boring and average information or perspectives. Many of the interesting things people have written or thought about are somewhere in the training data, but they're statistically buried beneath more common phrasings and conventional wisdom. You can learn to strategically prompt these systems using the strategies discussed above in ways that reveal the polyphony of different voices present beneath the illusion of a single authoritative narrator. This approach can help you expand your thinking rather

than limiting it, and these same critical reading practices strengthen how you engage with any text, not just AI-generated ones.

Afterword: Writing for and Beyond KU

Throughout the previous chapters, we've reviewed how to make use of campus resources such as the writing center and library, how to identify and write for the rhetorical situation, how to follow conventions in narrative and argument, how to hone your writing style, how to engage with the revision process, and how to acknowledge source material. Throughout all of this, there's one thing that draws all of this together: community.

We are always writing to or for our writing community. This community might be extremely small and consist only of yourself and possibly one other person. Or you might aim to reach hundreds or even hundreds of thousands of other people with your writing. The skills that you build in composition courses will help you to better reach that audience, whether you are writing a job application letter, a research essay, a poem, a newsletter, or a business proposal.

Regardless of the audience you are writing *for*, you are also writing *with* a community. Composition at Kutztown University is a general education course that connects our student body, so you might find yourself comparing notes with others on your shared or diverse experiences in taking composition. The resources of the library, the writing center, the composition program, and more exist to support you so that you aren't alone when writing gets tough. And your professors—who all have to write research themselves—know firsthand how challenging writing can be. Professors are there to support you in your journey to develop your voice as a writer in your composition courses.

But let's say you want to become more engaged in our community of composition at Kutztown University. One way to do this is to attend or present at our annual Kutztown University Composition Conference (KUCC). Held every Spring, the KUCC invites Kutztown University students in all composition and writing courses to submit their work. Students will then present their work at our friendly, welcoming conference. Sharing work in such a way will ensure that your writing reaches a larger audience, will help you hone your presentation skills, and will give you a valuable entry on your resume for graduate schools and future careers. Students in both Fall and Spring semesters of composition or writing courses are welcome to participate.

Another form of participation in our community is publication. Kutztown University has many publication outlets specifically for our students including Keystone Newspaper, The Shoofly literary magazine and poetry readings, HerCampus new media brand, and Essence fine arts and literary magazine.

Finally, you might decide to develop your skills in writing and composition even further by taking another course in Professional Writing or English, or earning a certificate, minor, or major degree program.

Regardless whether your engagement in Kutztown University's composition community is just beginning or will soon conclude, the process of developing your skills and voice as a writer is ongoing. See you on the trail.

Works Cited

Anderson, Paul, et al. "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-Institutional Study." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2015, pp. 199–235. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24890033.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: the Key Concepts*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kutztown-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1244807.

Aristotle. *The Rhetoric.* 3.1.1. from *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 22, translated by J. H. Freese. Harvard University Press, 1926. Tufts, Perseus, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0060%3Abook%3D3%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D1

Bender, Emily. M., et al. "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, pp. 610–623, https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922

Bingham, John. *Courage to Start: A Guide to Running for Your Life*. Atria Books, 2013.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*, Third Edition, University of Chicago Press, 2008.

"—But I can't say this to my Husband." Hoover Ad. *Saturday Evening Post*, 15 December 1928. pp.84-85.

"David Sedaris's Tips for Researching Stories." *MasterClass.* 20 September 2021, https://www.masterclass.com/articles/tips-for-researching-stories-with-david-sedaris

DePeter, Ron. "How to Write Meaningful Peer Response Praise." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 3*. Ed. Dana Driscoll, Mary Stewart, and Matthew Vetter, The WAC Clearinghouse, 2020, https://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces/writingspaces3/ pp.40-49.

Elbow, Peter. “Appendix Essay. The Doubting Game and the Believing Game: An Analysis of the Intellectual Process.” *Writing Without Teachers.* Oxford University Press, 1973. pp. 147-91.

“Fairy tale.” *Britannica Kids*. https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/fairy-tale/274256#.

Gatto, John Taylor. “The Seven-Lesson Schoolteacher.” *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society Publishers, Limited, 2017. pp. 1-18.

Kutztown University students can access this book and speech through ProQuest Ebook Central Rohrbach library permalink to page 1 of Dumbing Us Down.

Giovanelli, Laura. “Strong Writing and Writers Don’t Need Revision.” *Bad Ideas About Writing.* Ed. Cheryl E. Ball and Drew M. Loewe. West Virginia University Libraries Digital Publishing Institute. pp. 104-106. https://textbooks.lib.wvu.edu/badideas/

Govier, Trudy. *A Practical Study of Argument.* Cengage, 2013.

Grynbaum, Michael M. and Ryan Mac. “New York Times Sues OpenAI and Microsoft over Use of Copyrighted Work.”The New York Times, 27 Dec. 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/27/business/media/new-york-times-open-ai-microsoft-lawsuit.html

Guarderas, Paula. “Opinion: KU Should Not Have Shut Down the Spanish Major.” Keystone Newspaper Student Publishing Group. 14 November 2023. https://thekeystonenews.com/2023/11/14/opinion-why-ku-should-not-have-shut-down-the-spanish-major/.

Harford, Tim. “How Frustration can Make us More Creative.” *TED.* https://www.ted.com/talks/tim_harford_how_frustration_can_make_us_more_creative?subtitle=en.

Hart, Joshua and Molly Graether. “Something’s Going on Here: Psychological Predictors of Belief in Conspiracy Theories.” *Journal of Individual Differences*. vol. 39, no. 4, 2018, pp. https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000268

Harrison-Caldwell, Max. “No More Texting with Periods. Period.” New York Times, 29 June 2021,https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/29/crosswords/texting-punctuation-period.html.

Kutztown University students can follow these instructions for free access to The New York Times through the Student Government Association and Rohrbach Library.

Healy, Jack. “The Most Essential Worker in a Heat Wave? The A.C. Guy.” New York Times, 20 July 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/20/us/phoenix-heat-wave-air-conditioner.html.

Kutztown University students can follow these instructions for free access to The New York Times through the Student Government Association and Rohrbach Library.

Instructions for the Operation, Care, and Repair of Boilers, Reprint of Chapter 2 of the Manual of Engineering Instructions. United States, n.p, 1926.

Jewell, Lisa. *The Family Upstairs.* Atria Books, 2019.

Jones, Dylan. “Why Grok Fell in Love With Hitler” Politico, 14 Jul. 2025, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2025/07/10/musk-grok-hitler-ai-00447055

Jordan, Robert. *The Eye of the World*, Book 1 in *The Wheel of Time* series, Tor, 1990.

Kay, Sarah. “If I Should Have a Daughter.” *TED.* https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kay_if_i_should_have_a_daughter?subtitle=en.

King, Stephen. *On Writing : A Memoir Of The Craft*. Scribner, 2014. *EBSCOhost*, https://research.ebsco.com/plink/2cdade3c-9f53-3bce-b0c6-ee3ea406eb89.

Kinneavy, James L. *A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse*. Norton, 1980. pp.18-19. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/theoryofdiscours0000kinn/page/18/mode/2up?q=triangle

Lhomedet, Hugo. et al. "Elon Musk’s Grok Faces Global Scrutiny for Sexualised AI Deepfakes." Reuters. 26 Jan. 2026, https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/elon-musks-grok-faces-global-scrutiny-sexualised-ai-photos-2026-01-09/

Lipson, Carol and Roberta Binkley. *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks*. State University of New York, 2004.

Macrorie, Ken. *The I-Search Paper*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, Heinemann, 1988.

Muñoz, Natalie. “My Two-House, Duffle-Bag Life” *New York Times*. 5 March 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/05/style/modern-love-my-two-house-duffle-bag-life.html

Kutztown University students can follow these instructions for free access to The New York Times through the Student Government Association and Rohrbach Library.

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. “Venomous Snakes.” *Centers for Disease Control*, 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/default.html, 18 July 2023.

Noor, Elina, and Binya Kanitroj. "Speaking in Code: Contextualizing Large Language Models in Southeast Asia.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 6 Jan. 2025, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/01/speaking-in-code-contextualizing-large-language-models-in-southeast-asia

Ouyang, Long. et al. "Training Language Models to Follow Instructions with Human Feedback.." Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems, vol. 35, 2022, pp. 27730-44. https://proceedings.neurips.cc/paper_files/paper/2022/file/b1efde53be364a73914f58805a001731-Paper-Conference.pdf

Palmer, Thomas. Landscape with Reptile: Rattlesnakes in an Urban World. The University of Georgia Press, 2018.

Patel, Virat, et al. “Rattle Snake Toxicity.” *StatPearls*, Jan. 2022. *EBSCOhost*, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK431065/.

Pinker, Steven. “The Source of Bad Writing.” *Wall Street Journal*, 25 September 2014, https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-cause-of-bad-writing-1411660188

Kutztown University students can follow these instructions for free access to The Wall Street Journal through the Student Government Association and Rohrbach Library.

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether.” *Graham’s Magazine*. November 1845, pp. 193-196.

Propp, V. *Morphology of the Folktale: Second Edition*. University of Texas Press, 1968.

Roose, Kevin. "Can an A.I. Chatbot Be Responsible for a Teenager's Suicide?" The New York Times, 22 Oct. 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/22/technology/character-ai-suicide-lawsuit.html

Kutztown University students can follow these instructions for free access to The New York Times through the Student Government Association and Rohrbach Library.

Sharma, Mrinank et al. (2025). "Towards Understanding Sycophancy in Language Models." arXiv, 2025, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2310.139548

Strunk, William. *The Elements of Style*. Harcourt, 1920. Project Gutenberg. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/37134/37134-h/37134-h.htm.

Tan, Amy. "Fish Cheeks." *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*. Penguin Group [USA], Inc, 2003, pp.125-127. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=47740a51-80a6-3e48-82b2-835a33513e3a.

Kutztown University students can access the short story and full book by logging on through the Rohrbach library permalink to "Fish Cheeks."

Walters, William H., and Esther Wilder, Esther. "Fabrication and Errors in the Bibliographic Citations Generated by ChatGPT." Scientific Reports, vol. 13, no.1, 2023, p. 14045, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-41032-5

Appendix

“-But I Can't Say This to my Husband”

"My husband will give me this Christmas, as he does every year some lovely and very useless trinket. He likes to be extravagant and a little foolish in his gift to me. He feels that way about me. But sometimes I wish--how can I say it? He wants so much to please me--only, like other men, he just a bit unseeing. To him I'm still the girl he married. Young and strong and radiant with health. He doesn't know--no one but the woman who cares for a home can know--how much of that youth and strength and health can slip from one under the burden of cleaning duties just a little heavier than they need be. Yet how can I suggest the gift I really want? He would only laugh at me. Tell me that Christmas is no time for such a sensible purchase. That I must have something for myself. If only he could see that what I want is for myself. More for myself than any pretty trinket. That it means the very preservation of those things about which he care so much. My youth. Freshness. That sparkle which is unwearied health. I can't say this to my husband. But I can say it to other husbands like mine: Why not give her this year what she really wants? A Hoover." There is an illustration of a vacuum at the bottom of the page along with the tagline "Give her a Hoover and you give her the best.”

Return to page 30

1980 Anti-Drug PSA Produced by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America Transcript

[wind whistling]

Okay, last time. This is drugs. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?

Return to page 54

Sue Czerny Introducing the Library Search Homepage Transcript

This podcast is designed to serve as an introduction to the resources on the library website at Kutztown University. Today we're going to talk about the “Search Everything” search engine on the Rohrbach Library site. We are also going to talk about the difference between research databases and public databases, and we are going to take a look at keywords: what they are, how to find them, and why you should use them.

Let's start at the library homepage, which is library dot Kutztown dot edu, and you can see here that at the top the library homepage defaults to “Search Everything.” This is a search engine that takes the more than 100 databases that you have access to as a student here It allows you to see how much information is actually on the library website about whatever topic you are considering for your research.

So why use the library website? The library website and the databases and the material that you will find here are all copyrighted, licensed, and fact-checked so that you know that the information is good information that you can use. If you would use a public search engine like Google or Bing, that simply goes out to the Internet and pulls in all kinds of resources but really has no way of checking to see if the resources are truthful or good research.

We are going to go to the “Search Everything” search engine and this the search I'm going to use today is video games and feminism. Now you can certainly use the search box here but I'm going to show you the advanced search. This is a little bit nicer to use because it allows you to put the filters in right away and it saves you a step, so up here on the advanced search under search everything you can see search articles, books, journals, and more. A second characteristic of research databases as opposed to public databases is that research databases are not going to correct spelling errors. Oh, I'm just going to do a quick misspelling here to show you what I mean. I'm going to put in video games and “feminsm” and if I search you're going to see I only get seven results now. And when if something like this happens to you the first thing you want to do is check your spelling. Oh, I'm now doing video games and feminism, and I'm going to search that over again, and now I have 115,000. So, that's better than what I had--seems to be more the type of search I thought I would get.

Also, you'll notice that I put in when we'll go back a screen and I didn't put in a sentence. This is the third characteristic of a research database. The first

characteristic is all the information is copyrighted and licensed. The second one is spelling, and the third one to remember is that you use keywords. You don't use sentences. In Google and Bing you can put in an entire sentence--I could have I would have put in the sentence I need resources on video games and feminism; I would have gotten a similar search in a research database. They just want keywords.

Keywords are the nouns and adjectives in that sentence so that if you write down the sentence, or you think of the sentence that you would put in Google. And then only pull out the important nouns and adjectives or the phrases, so that here we have an adjective and a noun and it combines as a phrase, and here we just have a single word. And, put one concept in each box. Then, you can do your search. A research database doesn't want a whole sentence; it just messes everything up. So, we can do “video games” and “feminism”; here at the top we'll put in our keywords, and then I'm going to go down. And, sometimes your professors will say they only want academic peer-reviewed journals; this has to do with the editorial process that the article went through. For this one, I'm going to leave that; you can check that off if you want. I'm going to leave it blank because I also want to have magazine articles and newspaper articles and along there with journals. I am going to check full text. Full text is the librarian jargon for “only show me results where the article is already there in the database.”

A parameter that is very helpful is published date. This is a really good way to narrow down a subject a lot of times, and get your searches smaller so that you don't have to go through things that aren't relevant. So, here you can do publish date and now the first four here are the most often used ones you can also have a custom range here for example. Maybe you only want to do video games in feminism from 2000 to 2009; you could do that that way. I'm just going to pick the past five years and then I'm going to scroll back up. And so now we have a search on video games and feminism where I get where all the articles should already be there and it's in the last five years.

So, this is the page. This is our result list and from here we can go, begin to go through, and start to look for things that we can use in our projects.

If you have any questions or you're having problems with any of your searches, remember that you can always go to the library homepage, and there's a little chat button down here in the lower righthand corner and that will get you to a librarian. Thank you very much, and good luck with your projects!

Return to page 135