

You send a text message to your best friend confirming weekend plans. Later on, you put together an analysis of cost-cutting possibilities for the manager of the company you're working for. And later still, just before calling it a day, you pull out the notes you took on your biology experiment and write up the lab report that is due tomorrow. In between, you probably do a lot of other writing as well—notes, lists, blog entries, and so on.

These are the kinds of writing most of us do every day, more or less easily, yet each demands that we make various important choices. In your text message, you probably use a kind of shorthand, not bothering to write complete sentences or even entire words. For your boss, however, you probably choose to be more formal and "correct." And for your lab report, you probably choose to follow the format your instructor has demonstrated. In each case, the choices you make are based on your rhetorical situation—the entire context for the writing.

Rhetorical situations include many elements: assignment and purpose; topic; audience; stance and tone; medium, genre, and format; and visuals. Writers should make careful choices about all these elements in order to communicate effectively.

### 1a Academic writing

Expectations about academic writing vary considerably from field to field (see Chapter 5), but becoming familiar with widespread conventions will prepare you well for writing in most academic contexts.

**Establishing authority.** Most instructors expect you to begin to establish your own authority—to become a constructive critic who can analyze and interpret the work of others. These practices can help you establish authority:

- Assume that your opinions count (as long as they are informed rather than tossed out with little thought) and that your audience expects you to present them in a well-reasoned manner. *but careful*
- Show your familiarity with the ideas and works of others, both from the assigned course reading and from good points your instructor and classmates have made.



*in Barry*  
**Being direct and clear.** Research for this book confirms that readers depend on writers to organize and present their material—using sections, paragraphs, sentences, arguments, details, and source citations—to aid understanding. Good academic writing prepares readers for what is coming next, provides definitions, and includes topic sentences. To achieve directness in your writing, try the following strategies:

- State your main point early and clearly.
- Avoid overqualifying your statements. Instead of writing *I think the facts reveal*, come right out and say *The facts reveal*.
- Avoid digressions. If you use an anecdote or example from personal experience, be sure it relates directly to the point you are making.
- Use appropriate evidence, such as examples and concrete details, to support each point.
- Make obvious and clear transitions from point to point. The first sentence of a new paragraph should reach back to the paragraph before and then look forward to what comes next.
- Follow logical organizational patterns.
- Design and format the project appropriately for the audience and purpose you have in mind (see Chapter 5).

### ✓ CHECKLIST

#### U.S. Academic Style

- Consider your purpose and audience carefully, making sure that your topic is appropriate to both. (1b-d)
- State your **claim** or **thesis** explicitly, and support it with evidence and authorities of various kinds. (Chapter 3)
- Carefully document all of your sources. (Chapters 42-45)
- Make explicit links between ideas.
- Use the appropriate level of formality. (Chapter 32a)
- Use conventional formats for academic genres.
- Use conventional grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics. (Chapters 7-28)
- Use an easy-to-read type size and typeface, conventional margins, and double spacing. (Chapter 6)



### Assignments and purposes

When you have a specific writing assignment, what does it ask you to do? Look for words such as define, explain, prove, and analyze. Keep in mind that these words may differ in meaning from discipline to discipline or from job to job. <sup>the assignment</sup> What information do you need to complete the assignment? Think about whether you will need to do research or (or create) graphics and visual information. Keep in mind the assignment's specific requirements for length, genre, medium, format, organization, and deadline. Consider the primary purpose for writing—is it to inform, summarize, or persuade? to respond to a question, or about a topic, or make recommendations? to express your own feelings? If you are unclear about the primary purpose, talk with the person who gave you the assignment.

### Topic

Choose a topic, try answering the following questions:

- Is the topic interesting and important to you?
- Is the topic focused enough for you to write about it in the time and space allowed?
- Do you have some ideas about how to pursue the topic?

If you have a topic in mind, ask yourself a few more questions:

- What do you know about the topic?
- What seems important—or unimportant—about it?
- What do you expect to conclude about the topic? (Remember that you may change your mind.)
- What do you need to find out about the topic?

For information on exploring a topic, see 2a.

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### Audience

- What audience do you most want to reach—people who are already sympathetic to your views? people who disagree with your views? members of a group you belong to? members of a group you don't belong to?
- In what ways are the members of your audience different from you? from one another? Consider such factors as education, age, gender, occupation, region, social class,

*Taylor 1*



ethnic and cultural heritage, politics, religion, marital status, and sexual orientation.

- What assumptions can you legitimately make about your audience? What might they value—brevity, originality, conformity, honesty, wit, seriousness, thrift? How can you appeal to their values? *of author*
- What sorts of information and evidence will your audience find most compelling—quotations from experts? personal experiences? photographs? diagrams or charts? *relevant*
- What responses do you want as a result of what you write? How can you make clear what you want to happen? (For more on audience, see 29d.)

### 1e Stance and tone

Knowing your own stance—where you are coming from—can help you think about ways to get your readers to understand and perhaps share your views. What is your overall attitude toward the topic—approval? disapproval? curiosity? indifference? What social, political, religious, or other factors account for your attitude? You should also be aware of any preconceptions about your topic that may affect your stance.

Your purpose, audience, and stance will help to determine the tone your writing should take. Should it be humorous? serious? impassioned? helpful? Think about ways to show that you are knowledgeable and trustworthy. *ethos*

### 1f Media, genre, and formats

- What medium is most appropriate for your project—print, or something else? (For more on writing for other media, see Chapter 4.)
- What genre (or form) does your task call for—a report? a review? an essay? a letter? a Web site? a speech? a multimedia presentation? *video*
- If you are creating a document, what formats or design conventions are appropriate? Find out which formats are most often used in similar situations. If you are unsure about what format to use, ask your instructor or supervisor for guidance.
- What organizational patterns are most appropriate for your topic, purpose, and audience? Will you use chronological order or some other order, such as



problem-solution or cause-effect? Should you use headings and subheadings to help readers follow your organization? (For more on headings, see 6c.)

**Visuals** *ez? (8 symbols/center)*

Special attention to how the look of your writing fits its use and intended audience, and to how well your text and visuals work together. Think carefully about when to use visuals and when to emphasize visuals.

Does your topic call for visuals? If so, what kind? Visuals should add meaning or clarity, not just decoration.

Choose visuals that can help you capture your readers' interest, emphasize a point you have already made in your text, present information that is difficult to convey in words, or communicate with audiences who have different language skills and abilities.

Place each visual as near as possible to the text it illustrates.

Remember to introduce each visual clearly: *As the map to the right depicts . . .*

Comment on the significance or effect of each visual: *Figure 1 corroborates the claim made by geneticists: while the human genome may be mapped, it is far from understood.*

Does the particular visual you are considering convey the tone you want to achieve? Is that tone appropriate for your audience, purpose, and topic?

What will your audience expect this writing to look like? (For more on designing documents, see Chapter 6.)

**Language and style**

- What level of formality is most appropriate—extremely informal, as in an email to a friend? moderately formal, as in a letter to someone you know only slightly? very formal, as in legal or institutional documents? (See 32a.)
- What forms of address are most appropriate for your audience? Will they appreciate jargon or slang? Are words from another language or other varieties of English appropriate? (See Chapter 31.)
- What kind of sentence style will be most appropriate—short, straightforward sentences that convey information clearly and concisely? longer descriptive sentences that create a picture in readers' minds or evoke emotional

responses? lists of phrases to give directions? brief sentence fragments to get a point across quickly and informally?

**FOR MULTILINGUAL WRITERS**

**Bringing in Other Languages**

Even when you write in English, you may want to include words, phrases, or passages in another language. If so, consider whether your readers will understand that language and whether you need to provide a translation, as in this example from John (Fire) Lama Deer's "Talking to the Owls and Butterflies":

Listen to the air. You can hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it. *Woniya waken*—the holy air—which renews all by its breath. *Woniya, woniya waken*—spirit, life, breath, renewal—it means all that.

In this instance, more than one translation is necessary because the phrase Lama Deer is discussing has multiple meanings in English.

*Meaning*

**2**

**Exploring, Planning, and Drafting**

One student defines drafting as the time in a writing project "when the rubber meets the road." As you explore your topic, decide on a thesis, organize materials to support that central idea, and sketch out a plan, you have already begun the drafting process.

**2a**

**Exploring a topic** *plw*

Among the most important parts of the writing process are choosing a topic (see 1c), exploring what you know about it, and determining what you need to find out. These strategies can help you explore your topic:

- **Brainstorm.** Try out ideas, alone or with another person. Jot down key words and phrases about the topic, and see what they prompt you to think about next.

[bedfordstmartins.com/easywriter](http://bedfordstmartins.com/easywriter) To see student drafts, click on **Student Writing**.



rewrite without stopping for ten minutes or so to see that insights or ideas you come up with.

Draw or make word pictures about your topic.

Try clustering—writing your topic on a sheet of paper, then writing related thoughts near the topic idea. Circle each idea or phrase, and draw lines to show how ideas are connected.

Ask questions about the topic: What is it? What caused it? What is it like or unlike? What larger system is the topic a part of? What do people say about it? Or choose the journalist's questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

### Developing a working thesis

After you have explored your topic, craft a working thesis. It includes two parts: a topic, which states what you are writing about, and a comment, which makes an important statement about the topic.

TOPIC	COMMENT
The existence of global warming	is questioned by politicians more often than by scientists.

TOPIC	COMMENT
The current health care crisis	arises from three major causes.

A successful working thesis has three characteristics:

- It is potentially interesting to the intended audience.
- It is as specific as possible. *vs. beak and (arrow)*
- It limits the topic enough to make it manageable.

### FOR MULTILINGUAL WRITERS

#### Stating a Thesis

In some cultures, it is considered rude to state an opinion outright. In the United States, however, academic and business practices require writers to make key positions explicitly clear.



### 2c Gathering evidence and doing research

What kinds of evidence will be most persuasive to your audience and most effective in the field you are working in—historical precedents? expert testimony? statistical data? experimental results? personal anecdotes? Knowing what kinds of evidence count most in a particular field or with particular audiences will help you make appropriate choices.

If the evidence you need calls for research, determine what research you need to do:

- Make a list of what you already know about your topic.
- Keep track of where information comes from so you can return to your sources later.
- What else do you need to know, and where are you likely to find good sources of information? Consider library resources, authoritative online sources, field research, and so on.

(For more on research, see Chapters 38–41.)

### 2d Planning and drafting

Sketch out a rough plan for organizing your writing, as in the following example:

#### WORKING THESIS

Increased motorcycle use demands reorganization of parking lots.

#### INTRODUCTION

- Give background and overview of the current situation (motorcycle use is up).
- State my purpose (to offer solutions to the problem identified in the thesis).

#### BODY

- Describe the current situation (tell about my research in area parking lots).
- Describe the problem in detail (report on statistics; cars vs. cycles).
- Present two possible solutions (enlarge lots, or reallocate space).





## VISION

Recommend against first solution because of cost and space limitations.

Recommend second solution, and summarize its benefits.

Once you have come up with a plan, these guidelines help you complete a draft:

Keep all information close at hand and arranged in the order of your plan.

Before beginning, create a folder for your project and, within it, create two subfolders—one labeled “sources” and the other labeled “drafts.” As you write, save your work into the “drafts” folder. Choose a file name that you will recognize instantly, and include the draft number in the file name: *human genome draft 1*. As you revise, save a copy of each new draft and change the draft number (*human genome draft 2*). Also back up your work.

Try to write in stretches of at least thirty minutes; writing will get easier as you go along. *100 minutes*

Don't get bogged down with details such as word choice or mechanics.

Remember that a draft is never perfect. Concentrate on getting all your ideas down. *then fix up.*

Stop writing at a logical place, one where you know what will come next. Doing so will make it easier to resume writing later. *and/or make note of page #*

## e Developing paragraphs

There are three qualities essential to most academic paragraphs: unity, development, and coherence.

**Unity.** An effective paragraph focuses on one main idea. You can achieve unity by stating the main idea clearly in the topic sentence—the sentence that relates all other sentences in the paragraph to that idea. Like a thesis (see 17), the topic sentence includes a topic and a comment on that topic. A topic sentence often begins a paragraph, but may come at the end—or be implied rather than stated directly.

**Development.** In addition to being unified, a paragraph should hold readers' interest and explore its topic fully,



## ✓ CHECKLIST

### Strong Paragraphs

Most readers of English have certain expectations about paragraphs:

- Paragraphs begin and end with important information.
- The opening sentence is often the topic sentence that tells what the paragraph is about.
- The middle of the paragraph develops the idea.
- The end may sum up the paragraph's contents, closing the discussion of an idea and anticipating the paragraph that follows.
- A paragraph makes sense as a whole; the words and sentences are clearly related.
- A paragraph relates to other paragraphs around it.

using whatever details, evidence, and examples are necessary. Without such development, a paragraph may seem lifeless and abstract. ✓

Most good academic writing backs up general ideas with specifics. Shifting between the general and the specific is especially important at the paragraph level. If a paragraph contains nothing but specific details, its meaning may not be clear—but if a paragraph makes only general statements, it may seem boring or unconvincing.

**Coherence.** A paragraph has coherence—or flows—if its details fit together in a way that readers can easily follow. The following methods can help you achieve paragraph coherence:

- **ORGANIZATION.** When you arrange information in a particular order, you help readers move from one point to another. Many paragraphs also follow a general-to-specific or specific-to-general pattern.
- **REPETITION.** Repeating key words and phrases—or pronouns that refer to them, or synonyms—not only links sentences but also suggests the importance of those words and phrases, contributing to coherence. *myk*
- **PARALLEL STRUCTURES.** Structures that are grammatically similar, or parallel, are another effective way to bring coherence to a paragraph. (See Chapter 17.)





**TRANSITIONS.** Transitional words and phrases, such as *after*, *for example*, and *however*, bring coherence to a paragraph by helping readers follow the progression of one idea to the next.

Some methods you use to create coherent paragraphs are used to link paragraphs so that a whole piece of writing flows smoothly. You can create links to previous paragraphs by repeating or paraphrasing key words and phrases and by using parallelism and transitions.

## Reviewing

Ask your classmates or your instructor to respond to your draft, asking questions like these:

What do you see as the major point, claim, or thesis?

How convincing is the evidence? What can I do to support my thesis more fully?

What points are unclear? How can I clarify them?

How easy is it to follow my organization? How can I improve?

What can I do to make my draft more interesting?

## Revising

Revising means using others' comments along with your own analysis of the draft to make sure it is as complete, clear, and effective as possible. These questions can help you revise:

- How does the draft accomplish its purpose?
- Does the title tell what the draft is about?
- Is the thesis clearly stated, and does it contain a topic and a comment?
- How does the introduction catch readers' attention?
- Will the draft interest and appeal to its audience?
- How does the draft indicate your stance on the topic?
- What are the main points that illustrate or support the thesis? Are they clear? Do you need to add material to the points or add new points?
- Are the ideas presented in an order that will make sense to readers?
- Are the points clearly linked by logical transitions?



- Have you documented your research appropriately?
- How are visuals and other sources (if any) integrated into your draft? Are they clearly labeled and referred to in the draft? Have you commented on their significance?
- How does the draft conclude? Is the conclusion memorable?

## 2h Editing

Once you are satisfied with your revised draft's big picture, edit your writing to make sure that every detail is as correct as you can make it.

- Read your draft aloud to make sure it flows smoothly and to find typos or other mistakes.
- Are your sentences varied in length and in pattern or type?
- Have you used active verbs and effective language?
- Are all sentences complete and correct?
- Have you used the spell checker—and double-checked its recommendations?
- Have you chosen an effective design and used white space, headings, and color appropriately?
- Have you proofread one last time, going word for word?

(For more on troubleshooting your writing, see "Find It. Fix It." on pp. 1–10.)

## 2i Reflecting

Thinking back on what you've learned helps make that learning stick. Whether or not your instructor requires you to write a formal reflection on a writing course or piece of writing, make time to think about what you have learned from the experience.

Your development as a writer. The following questions can help you think about your writing:

- What lessons have you learned from the writing? How will they help you with future writing projects?
- What aspects of your writing give you most confidence? What needs additional work, and what can you do to improve?
- What confused you during this writing? How did you resolve your questions?

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## CHECKLIST

## Guidelines for Critical Reading

**PREVIEW THE TEXT.** What does the title tell you? What do you already know about the subject? What opinions do you have? What do you hope to learn?

**FIND INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR.** What purpose, expertise, and possible biases can you identify?

**CONSIDER THE CONTEXT.** Where, when, and how was the text published or presented? Who is the intended audience?

**READ AND ANNOTATE THE TEXT.** What key terms and ideas do you find? What do you agree and disagree with? What sources does the text cite? What do you find confusing? What do you need to look up?

**SUMMARIZE THE TEXT.** What are the major or most important ideas?

**ANALYZE THE TEXT.** What are the main points? How do words and images work together? What are the author's underlying assumptions? Was the author's purpose accomplished?

**CONSIDER THE EVIDENCE.** How does the text back up what it says? Does it seem trustworthy?

**CONSIDER THE TEXT'S EFFECT.** What is intriguing, puzzling, or irritating about the text? What would you like to know more about?

**REREAD, AND CHECK UNDERSTANDING.** Can you put the meaning into your own words?

## 3b Thinking critically about visuals

Being visually literate—being able to read an image and understand how it aims to persuade or manipulate—is crucial to becoming a critical thinker. Visual literacy requires you to analyze images and the arguments they contain. Thinking about the following elements of a visual text can help:

## DESIGN

- What do you notice first? Why is your attention drawn to that spot, and what effect does this have on your response?



- How does the composition affect the message? Why are some elements in the foreground and others in the background? Why might the composition be arranged as it is? What effect do the designer's choices have on the way you feel about the design?
- How does the use of color enhance or conflict with the images and words? Is color used for highlighting? Is the use of color appropriate?
- If the visual contains both words and images, how do the two relate? How well do they work together? If no words appear, is the message clear without them? Why or why not?
- Is any part of the composition repeated? If so, is the repetition effective?

## CREATOR

- Who created the visual? What other work has the creator done?
- What attitude does he or she seem to have toward this work? What effect is the visual supposed to have on others?

## CONTENT

- What is the subject? How well do visuals explain the subject?

## CONTEXT

- Where and in what form did the visual originally appear?
- What can you infer about the message from the visual's original context?

## AUDIENCE

- Who is the intended audience? Does it include you? If so, does the visual affect you the way its creator intended?
- What assumptions does the visual make about the audience's values?