

# C Composing and Revising

## C1 Planning, 3

- a. Assessing the writing situation, 3
- b. Exploring ideas, 3
- c. Formulating a tentative thesis, 10
- d. Sketching a plan, 11

## C2 Drafting, 14

- a. Introduction and thesis, 14
- b. Body, 17
- c. Conclusion, 17

## C3 Revising, 18

- a. Making global revisions, 18
- b. Revising and editing sentences, 22
- c. Proofreading, 23

## C4 Writing

### paragraphs, 24

- a. Focusing on a point, 24
- b. Developing the point, 25
- c. Using patterns of organization, 26
- d. Improving coherence, 31
- e. Adjusting paragraph length, 36

## C5 Designing documents, 37

- a. Layout and format, 38
- b. Headings, 41
- c. Lists, 42
- d. Visuals, 43
- e. Academic formatting, 47
- f. Business formatting, 50

Writing is not a matter of recording already developed thoughts but a process of figuring out what you think. Since it's not possible to think about everything all at once, most experienced writers handle a piece of writing in stages. You will generally move from planning to drafting to revising, but be prepared to return to earlier stages as your ideas develop.

## C1

### Planning

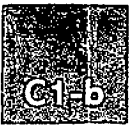
#### C1-a Assess the writing situation.

Begin by taking a look at the writing situation in which you find yourself. Consider your subject, the sources of information available to you, your purpose, your audience, and constraints such as length, document design, review sessions, and deadlines or other assignment requirements. It is likely that you will make final decisions about all of these matters later in the writing process — after a first draft, for example. Nevertheless, you can save yourself time by thinking about as many of them as possible in advance. For a quick checklist, see page 5.

**ACADEMIC ENGLISH** What counts as good writing varies from culture to culture and even among groups within cultures. In some situations, you will need to become familiar with the writing styles — such as direct or indirect, personal or impersonal, plain or embellished — that are valued by the culture or discourse community for which you are writing.

#### C1-b Experiment with ways to explore your subject.

Instead of just plunging into a first draft, experiment with one or more techniques for exploring your subject — perhaps talking and listening, annotating texts and taking notes, listing, clustering, freewriting, or asking the journalist's questions. Whatever technique you turn to, the goal is the same: to generate a wealth of ideas that will lead you to a question, a problem, or an issue that you want to explore further. At this early stage of the writing process, don't censor yourself. Sometimes an idea that initially seems trivial or far-fetched will turn out to be worthwhile.



## Understanding an assignment

### Determining the purpose of the assignment

Usually the wording of an assignment will suggest its purpose. You might be expected to do one of the following:

- ▣ summarize information from textbooks, lectures, or research
- ▣ analyze ideas and concepts
- ▣ take a position on a topic and defend it with evidence
- ▣ create an original argument by combining ideas from different sources

### Understanding how to answer an assignment's questions

Many assignments will ask a *how* or *why* question. Such a question cannot be answered using only facts; you will need to take a position. For example, the question "What are the survival rates for leukemia patients?" can be answered by reporting facts. The question "Why are the survival rates for leukemia patients in one state lower than in a neighboring state?" must be answered with both facts and interpretation.

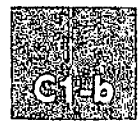
If a list of prompts appears in the assignment, be careful — instructors rarely expect you to answer all of the questions in order. Look instead for topics, themes, or ideas that will help you ask your own questions.

### Recognizing implied questions

When an assignment asks you to *discuss*, *analyze*, *agree* or *disagree*, or *consider* a topic, your instructor will often expect you to answer a *how* or *why* question. For example, "Discuss the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act on special education programs" is another way of saying "How has the No Child Left Behind Act affected special education programs?" Similarly, the assignment "Consider the recent rise of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnoses" is asking you to answer the question "Why are diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder rising?"

ON THE WEB > [dianahacker.com/writersref](http://dianahacker.com/writersref)  
Writing exercises > E-ex C1-1

ON THE WEB > [dianahacker.com/writersref](http://dianahacker.com/writersref)  
Additional resources > Links Library > Composing and revising



## Checklist for assessing the writing situation

### Subject

- ▣ Has a subject (or a range of possible subjects) been given to you, or are you free to choose your own?
- ▣ What interests you about your subject? What questions would you like to explore?
- ▣ How broadly can you cover the subject? Do you need to narrow it to a more specific topic (because of length restrictions, for instance)?

### Sources of information

- ▣ Where will your information come from: Reading? Personal experience? Direct observation? Interviews? Questionnaires?
- ▣ What sort of documentation is required?

### Purpose and audience

- ▣ Why are you writing: To inform readers? To persuade them? To entertain them? To call them to action? Some combination of these?
- ▣ Who are your readers? How well informed are they about your subject? How will they benefit from reading your work?
- ▣ How interested and attentive are your readers? Will they care about your purpose? Will they resist any of your ideas?
- ▣ What is your relationship to them: Student to instructor? Employee to supervisor? Citizen to citizen? Expert to novice? Scholar to scholar?

### Length and document design

- ▣ Do you have any length specifications? If not, what length seems appropriate, given your subject, purpose, and audience?
- ▣ Must you use a particular format for your document? If so, do you have guidelines to follow or examples to consult?

### Reviewers and deadlines

- ▣ Who will be reviewing your draft in progress: Your instructor? A writing center tutor? Your classmates? A friend? Someone in your family?
- ▣ What are your deadlines? How much time will you need to allow for the various stages of writing, including proofreading and printing the final draft?


### Talking and listening




Since writing is a process of figuring out what you think about a subject, it can be useful to try out your ideas on other people. Conversation can deepen and refine your ideas before you even begin to set them down on paper. By talking and listening to others, you can also discover what they find interesting, what they are curious about, and where they disagree with you. If you are planning to advance an argument, you can try it out on listeners with other points of view.

Many writers begin by brainstorming ideas in a group, debating a point with friends, or chatting with an instructor. Others turn to themselves for company — by talking into a tape recorder. Some writers exchange ideas by sending e-mails or instant messages, by joining an Internet chat group, or by following a mailing list discussion. If you are part of a networked classroom, you may be encouraged to share ideas with others in an electronic workshop. For example, a student who participated in the following chat was able to refine her argument before she started drafting her essay on presidential campaign funding.

#### CONVERSATION ABOUT A SUBJECT

State University - 300 Main St. - 12345 - 1234567890 - 1234567890

 **The Composition Chat Room**

<p><b>User Name:</b> <input type="text"/></p> <p><b>Password:</b> <input type="password"/></p> <p></p> <p><a href="#">Forgot your password?</a></p> <p></p> <p></p>	<p><b>Chat Message:</b> <input type="text"/></p> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; min-height: 150px;"> <p>Mia Borek: My paper is about presidential elections, but I'm not sure where to go next.</p> <p>Alex Wu: What ideas do you have?</p> <p>Mia Borek: I've never understood why the government doesn't just pay for the whole presidential campaign.</p> <p>Alex Wu: Wouldn't that end up costing taxpayers a lot?</p> <p>Mia Borek: Maybe. But taxes already fund government services like meals programs and road maintenance. Why shouldn't tax money pay for us to get information about presidential candidates?</p> <p>Alex Wu: Maybe you could interview some taxpayers and see what they think.</p> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">There are 2 users logged on.</p>
--	--

### Annotating texts

When you write about reading, one of the best ways to explore ideas is to mark up the work — on the pages themselves if you own the work, on photocopies or sticky notes if you don't. Annotating a text encourages you to look at it more carefully — to underline key concepts, to note possible contradictions in an argument, to raise questions for further investigation. Here, for example, is a paragraph from an essay on medical ethics as one student annotated it:

What breakthroughs? Do all breakthroughs have the same consequences?

Is everyone really uneasy? Is something a breakthrough if it creates a predicament?

Breakthroughs in genetics present us with a promise and a predicament. The promise is that we may soon be able to treat and prevent a host of debilitating diseases. The predicament is that our newfound genetic knowledge may also enable us Stem cell to manipulate our own nature — to enhance our research? muscles, memories, and moods; to choose the sex, height, and other genetic traits of our children; to make ourselves "better than well." When science moves faster than moral understanding as it does What does he today, men and women struggle to articulate their mean by "moral unease. In liberal societies they reach first for the understanding"? language of autonomy, fairness, and individual rights. But this part of our moral vocabulary is ill equipped to address the hardest questions posed Which ques- by genetic engineering. The genomic revolution tions? He has induced a kind of moral vertigo. doesn't seem to

— Michael Sandel, "The Case against Perfection" be taking sides.

### Listing

Listing ideas is a good way to figure out what you know and what questions you have. You might simply write ideas in the order in which they occur to you — a technique sometimes known as *brainstorming*. Here is a list one student writer jotted down for an essay about funding for college athletics:

Football receives the most funding of any sport.

Funding comes from ticket sales, fundraisers, alumni contributions.

Biggest women's sport is soccer.

Women's soccer team is only ten years old; football team is fifty years old.

Football graduates have had time to earn more money than soccer graduates.

Soccer games don't draw as many fans.

Should funding be equal for all teams?

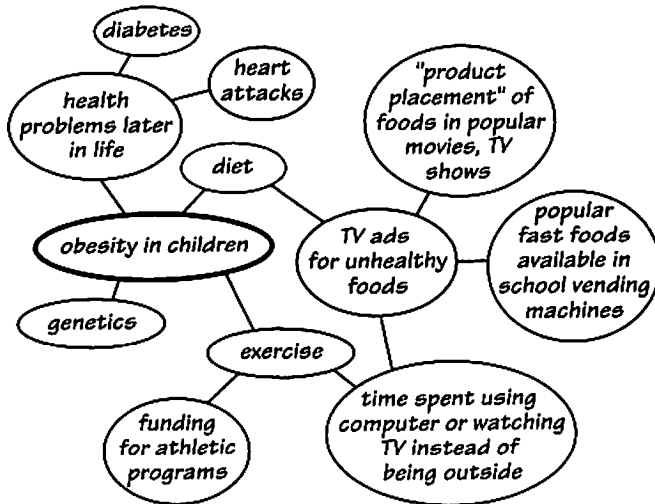
Do alumni have the right to fund whatever they want?

Feel free to rearrange ideas, to group them under general categories, to delete some, and to add others. In other words, treat the initial list as a source of ideas and a springboard to new ideas, not as an outline.

### Clustering

Unlike listing, the technique of clustering highlights relationships among ideas. To cluster ideas, write your topic in the center of a sheet of paper, draw a circle around it, and surround that circle with related ideas connected to it with lines. If some of the satellite ideas lead to more specific clusters, write them down as well. The writer of the following cluster diagram was exploring ideas for an essay on obesity in children.

CLUSTER DIAGRAM



ON THE WEB > [dianahacker.com/writersref](http://dianahacker.com/writersref)

Resources for writers and tutors > Tips from writing tutors:  
Invention strategies

### Freewriting

In its purest form, freewriting is simply nonstop writing. You set aside ten minutes or so and write whatever comes to you, without pausing to think about word choice, spelling, or even meaning. If you get stuck, you can write about being stuck, but you should keep your fingers moving. If nothing much happens, you have lost only ten minutes. It's more likely, though, that something interesting will emerge — an eloquent sentence, an honest expression of feeling, or an idea worth further investigation. To explore ideas on a particular topic, consider using a technique called *focused freewriting*. Again, you write quickly and freely, but this time you focus on a subject and pay attention to the connections among your ideas.

### Asking the journalist's questions

By asking relevant questions, you can generate many ideas — and you can make sure that you have adequately surveyed your subject. When gathering material for a story, journalists routinely ask themselves Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? In addition to helping journalists get started, these questions ensure that they will not overlook an important fact: the date of a prospective summit meeting, for example, or the exact location of a burglary.

Whenever you are writing about events, whether current or historical, asking the journalist's questions is one way to get started. One student, whose subject was the negative reaction in 1915 to D. W. Griffith's silent film *The Birth of a Nation*, began exploring her topic with this set of questions:

Who objected to the film?

What were the objections?

When were the protests first voiced?

Where were protests most strongly expressed?

Why did protesters object to the film?

How did protesters make their views known?

In the academic world, scholars often generate ideas with questions related to a specific discipline: one set of questions for analyzing short stories, another for evaluating experiments in social psychology, still another for reporting field experiences in anthropology. If you are writing in a particular discipline, try to discover the questions that its scholars typically explore (see A4).

### C1-c Formulate a tentative thesis.

As you explore your subject and identify questions you would like to investigate, you will begin to see possible ways to focus your material. At this point, try to settle on a tentative central idea. The more complex your topic, the more your focus will change as your drafts evolve.

For many types of writing, you will be able to assert your central idea in a sentence or two. Such a statement, which ordinarily appears in the opening paragraph of your finished essay, is called a *thesis* (see also C2-a). A thesis is often the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem, or a statement that takes a position on a debatable topic. A successful thesis—like the following, all taken from articles in *Smithsonian* magazine—points both the writer and the reader in a definite direction.

Much maligned and the subject of unwarranted fears, most bats are harmless and highly beneficial.

The American Revolution was the central event in Washington's life, the crucible for his development as a mature man, a prominent statesman, and a national hero.

Raging in mines from Pennsylvania to China, coal fires threaten towns, poison air and water, and add to global warming.

The thesis sentence usually contains a key word or controlling idea that limits its focus. The first two example sentences, for instance, use key words to prepare for essays that focus on the *beneficial* aspects of bats and the role of the American Revolution in the *development* of George Washington. The third example uses a controlling idea: the *effects* of coal fires.

It's a good idea to formulate a tentative thesis early in the writing process, perhaps by jotting it on scratch paper, by putting it at the head of a rough outline, or by drafting an introductory paragraph that includes it. This tentative thesis will help you shape your thoughts. Don't worry about the exact wording because your main point may change as you refine your ideas. Here, for example, is one student's early effort:

In *Rebel without a Cause*, the protagonist, Jim Stark, is often seen literally on the edge of physical danger—walking too close to the swimming pool, leaning over an observation deck, and driving his car toward a cliff.

The thesis that appeared in the student's final draft not only was more polished but also reflected the evolution of the student's ideas.

### Testing a tentative thesis

- Is the thesis too obvious? If you cannot come up with interpretations that oppose your own, consider revising your thesis.
- Can you support your thesis with the evidence available?
- Does the thesis require an essay's worth of development? Or will you run out of points too quickly?
- Can you explain why readers will want to read an essay with this thesis?

The scenes in which Jim Stark is seen on the edge of physical danger—walking too close to the swimming pool, leaning over an observation deck, driving his car toward a cliff—suggest that he is becoming more and more agitated by the constraints of family and society.

For a more detailed discussion of thesis, see C2-a.

### C1-d Sketch a plan.

Once you have generated some ideas and formulated a tentative thesis, you might want to sketch an informal outline to see how you will support your thesis and to begin to structure your ideas. Informal outlines can take many forms. Perhaps the most common is simply the thesis followed by a list of major ideas.

Thesis: Television advertising should be regulated to help prevent childhood obesity.

- Children watch more television than ever.
- Snacks marketed to children are often unhealthy and fattening.
- Childhood obesity can cause diabetes and other health problems.
- Solving these health problems costs taxpayers billions of dollars.
- Therefore, these ads are actually costing the public money.
- But if advertising is free speech, do we have the right to regulate it?
- We regulate liquor and cigarette ads on television, so why not advertising aimed at children?

If you began by jotting down a list of ideas or drawing a clustering diagram, you may be able to turn that list or diagram into a rough outline by crossing out some ideas, adding others, and putting the ideas in a logical order.



### When to use a formal outline

Early in the writing process, rough outlines have certain advantages over their more formal counterparts: They can be produced more quickly, they are more obviously tentative, and they can be revised more easily should the need arise. However, a formal outline may be useful later in the writing process, after you have written a rough draft, especially if your subject matter is complex.

The following formal outline brought order to the research paper that appears in MLA-5b, on Internet surveillance in the workplace. Notice that the student's thesis is an important part of the outline. Everything else in the outline supports it, directly or indirectly.

**Thesis:** Although companies often have legitimate concerns that lead them to monitor employees' Internet usage — from expensive security breaches to reduced productivity — the benefits of electronic surveillance are outweighed by its costs to employees' privacy and autonomy.

- I. Although employers have always monitored employees, electronic surveillance is more efficient.
  - A. Employers can gather data in large quantities.
  - B. Electronic surveillance can be continuous.
  - C. Electronic surveillance can be conducted secretly, with key-stroke logging programs.
- II. Some experts argue that employers have legitimate reasons to monitor employees' Internet usage.
  - A. Unmonitored employees could accidentally breach security.
  - B. Companies are legally accountable for online actions of employees.
- III. Despite valid concerns, employers should value employee morale and autonomy and avoid creating an atmosphere of distrust.
  - A. Setting the boundaries for employee autonomy is difficult in the wired workplace.
    1. Using the Internet is the most popular way of wasting time at work.
    2. Employers can't tell easily if employees are working or surfing the Web.
  - B. Surveillance can create resentment among employees.
    1. Web surfing can relieve stress, and restricting it can generate tension between managers and workers.
    2. Enforcing Internet usage can seem arbitrary.



- IV. Surveillance may not increase employee productivity, and trust may benefit it.
  - A. It shouldn't matter to the company how many hours salaried employees work as long as they get the job done.
  - B. Casual Internet use can actually benefit companies.
    1. The Internet may spark business ideas.
    2. The Internet may suggest ideas about how to operate more efficiently.
- V. Employees' rights to privacy are not well defined by the law.
  - A. Few federal guidelines exist on electronic surveillance.
  - B. Employers and employees are negotiating the boundaries without legal guidance.
  - C. As technological capabilities increase, there will be an increased need to define boundaries.

### Guidelines for constructing an outline

1. Put the thesis at the top.
2. Make items at the same level of generality as parallel as possible (see S1).
3. Use sentences unless phrases are clear.
4. Use the conventional system of numbers and letters for the levels of generality.
  - I.
    - A.
    - B.
      - 1.
      2.
        - a.
        - b.
  - II.
5. Always use at least two subdivisions for a category, since nothing can be divided into fewer than two parts.
6. Limit the number of major sections in the outline; if the list of roman numerals begins to look like a laundry list, find some way of clustering the items into a few major categories with more subcategories.
7. Be flexible; in other words, be prepared to change your outline as your drafts evolve.



## C2

### Drafting

As you rough out an initial draft, focus your attention on ideas and organization. You can think about sentence structure and word choice later. Writing tends to flow better when it is drafted relatively quickly, without many stops and starts. Keep your prewriting materials — lists, outlines, freewriting, and so on — close at hand. In addition to helping you get started, such notes and blueprints will encourage you to keep moving.

For most kinds of writing, an introduction announces the main point, the body paragraphs develop it, and the conclusion drives it home. You can begin drafting, however, at any point. If you find it difficult to introduce a paper that you have not yet written, try drafting the body first and saving the introduction for later.

#### ON THE WEB > [dianahacker.com/writersref](http://dianahacker.com/writersref)

Resources for writers and tutors > Tips from writing tutors:  
Writing introductions and conclusions

### C2-a For most types of writing, draft an introduction that includes a thesis.

Your introduction will usually be a paragraph of 50 to 150 words (in a longer paper, it may be more than one paragraph). Perhaps the most common strategy is to open the paragraph with a few sentences that engage the reader, establish your purpose for writing, and conclude with your main point. The sentence stating the main point is called a *thesis*. (See also C1-c.) In the following examples, the thesis has been italicized.

Credit card companies love to extend credit to college students, especially those just out of high school. Ads for credit cards line campus bulletin boards, flash across commercial Web sites for students, and get stuffed into shopping bags at college bookstores. Why do the companies market their product so vigorously to a population that lacks a substantial credit history and often has no steady source of income? The answer is that significant profits can be earned through high interest rates and assorted penalties and fees. *By granting college students liberal lending arrangements, credit card companies often hook them on a cycle of spending that can ultimately lead to financial ruin.* — Matt Watson, student



As the United States industrialized in the nineteenth century, using desperate immigrant labor, social concerns took a backseat to the task of building a prosperous nation. The government did not regulate industries and did not provide an effective safety net for the poor or for those who became sick or injured on the job. Luckily, immigrants and the poor did have a few advocates. Settlement houses such as Hull-House in Chicago provided information, services, and a place for reform-minded individuals to gather and work to improve the conditions of the urban poor. Alice Hamilton was one of these reformers. *Hamilton's efforts helped to improve the lives of immigrants and drew attention and respect to the problems and people that until then had been virtually ignored.*

— Laurie McDonough, student

Ideally, the sentences leading to the thesis should hook the reader, perhaps with one of the following:

- a startling statistic, an unusual fact, or a vivid example
- a paradoxical statement
- a quotation or a bit of dialogue
- a question
- an analogy
- an anecdote

Whether you are writing for a scholarly audience, a professional audience, or a general audience, you cannot assume your readers' interest in the topic. The hook should spark curiosity and offer readers a reason to continue reading.

Although the thesis frequently appears at the end of the introduction, it can also appear at the beginning. Much work-related writing, in which a straightforward approach is most effective, commonly begins with the thesis.

*Flextime scheduling, which has proved its effectiveness at the Library of Congress, should be introduced on a trial basis at the main branch of the Montgomery County Public Library. By offering flexible work hours, the library can boost employee morale, cut down on absenteeism, and expand its hours of operation.*

— David Warren, student

For some types of writing, it may be difficult or impossible to express the central idea in a thesis sentence; or it may be unwise or unnecessary to put a thesis sentence in the essay itself. A personal narrative, for example, may have a focus too subtle to be distilled in a single sentence, and such a sentence might ruin the story. Strictly informative writing, like that found in many business memos, may



be difficult to summarize in a thesis. In such instances, do not try to force the central idea into a thesis sentence. Instead, think in terms of an overriding purpose, which may or may not be stated directly.

**ACADEMIC ENGLISH** If you come from a culture that prefers an indirect approach in writing, you may feel that asserting a thesis early in an essay sounds *unrefined* or even *rude*. In the United States, however, readers appreciate a direct approach; when you state your point as directly as possible, you show that you value your readers' time.

### Characteristics of an effective thesis

An effective thesis sentence is a central idea that requires supporting evidence; it is of adequate scope for an essay of the assigned length; and it is sharply focused.

A thesis must require proof or further development through facts and details; it cannot itself be a fact or a description.

**TOO FACTUAL** The polygraph was developed by Dr. John A. Larson in 1921.

**REVISED** Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, even under controlled conditions, its use by employers should be banned.

A thesis should be of sufficient scope for your assignment, not too broad and not too narrow. Unless you are writing a book or a very long research paper, the following thesis is too broad.

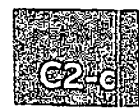
**TOO BROAD** Mapping the human genome has many implications for health and science.

**REVISED** Although scientists can now detect genetic predisposition to specific diseases, not everyone should be tested for these diseases.

A thesis should be sharply focused, not too vague. Avoid fuzzy, hard-to-define words such as *interesting*, *good*, or *disgusting*.

**TOO VAGUE** The way the TV show *ER* portrays doctors and nurses is interesting.

**REVISED** In dramatizing the experiences of doctors and nurses as they treat patients, navigate medical bureaucracy, and negotiate bioethical dilemmas, the TV show *ER* portrays health care professionals as unfailingly caring and noble.



In the process of making a too-vague thesis more precise, you may find yourself outlining the major sections of your paper, as in the preceding example. This technique, known as *blueprinting*, helps readers know exactly what to expect as they read on. It also helps you, the writer, control the shape of your essay.

ON THE WEB > [dianahacker.com/writersref](http://dianahacker.com/writersref)  
Writing exercises > E-ex C2-1 and C2-2

### C2-b Draft the body.

The body of an essay develops support for a thesis, so it's important to have at least a tentative thesis before you start writing. What does your thesis promise readers? Try to keep your response to that question in mind as you draft the body.

If you have sketched a preliminary plan, try to block out your paragraphs accordingly. If you do not have a plan, you would be wise to pause a moment and sketch one (see C1-d). Keep in mind that often you might not know what you want to say until you have written a draft. It is possible to begin without a plan — assuming you are prepared to treat your first attempt as a “discovery draft” that will almost certainly be tossed or rewritten once you discover what you really want to say.

For more advice about paragraphs and paragraphing, see C4.

### C2-c Draft a conclusion.

A conclusion should remind readers of the essay's main idea without dully repeating it. Often the concluding paragraph can be relatively short. By the end of the essay, readers should already understand your main point; your conclusion simply drives it home and, perhaps, leaves readers with something larger to consider.

In addition to echoing your main idea, a conclusion might briefly summarize the essay's key points, propose a course of action, discuss the topic's wider significance, offer advice, or pose a question for future study. To conclude an essay analyzing the shifting roles of women in the military services, one student discusses her topic's implications for society as a whole:

As the military continues to train women in jobs formerly reserved for men, our understanding of women's roles in society will no doubt continue to change. When news reports of women