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part 1

Academic Literacies

Whenever we enter a new community — start a new job, move to a new town, join a new club — there are certain things we need to learn. The same is true upon entering the academic world. We need to be able to **READ** and **WRITE** in certain ways. We're routinely called on to **SUMMARIZE** something we've heard or read, and to **RESPOND** in some way. And to succeed, we need to develop certain **HABITS OF MIND** — everyday things such as asking questions and being persistent. The following chapters provide guidelines to help you develop these fundamental academic literacies — and know what's expected of you in academic communities.

Academic Literacies

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1

Writing in Academic Contexts

Write an essay arguing whether genes or environment do more to determine people's intelligence. Research and write a report on the environmental effects of electricity-generating windmills. Work with a team to write a proposal and create a multimedia presentation for a sales campaign. Whatever you're studying, you're surely going to be doing a lot of writing, in classes from various disciplines — the above assignments, for example, are from psychology, environmental science, and marketing. Academic writing can serve a number of different purposes — to **ARGUE** for what you think about a topic and why, to **REPORT** on what's known about an issue, to **PROPOSE A SOLUTION** for some problem, and so on. Whatever your topics or purposes, all academic writing follows certain conventions, ones you'll need to master in order to join the conversations going on across campus. This chapter describes what's expected of academic writing — and of academic writers.

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What's Expected of Academic Writing

Evidence that you've considered the subject thoughtfully. Whether you're composing a report, an argument, or some other kind of writing, you need to demonstrate that you've thought seriously about the topic and done any necessary research. You can use various ways to show that you've considered the subject carefully, from citing authoritative sources to incorporating information you learned in class to pointing out connections among ideas.



An indication of why your topic matters. You need to help your readers understand why your topic is worth exploring and why your writing is worth reading. Even if you are writing in response to an assigned topic, you can better make your point and achieve your purpose by showing your readers why your topic is important and why they should care about it. For example, in “Throwing Like a Girl,” James Fallows explains why his topic, the differences between the ways men and women throw a baseball, is worth writing about:

The phrase “throwing like a girl” has become an embattled and offensive one. Feminists smart at its implication that to do something “like a girl” is to do it the wrong way. Recently, on the heels of the O. J. Simpson case, a book appeared in which the phrase was used to help explain why male athletes, especially football players, were involved in so many assaults against women. Having been trained (like most American boys) to dread the accusation of doing anything “like a girl,” athletes were said to grow into the assumption that women were valueless, and natural prey.

By explaining that the topic matters because it reflects attitudes about gender that have potentially serious consequences, he gives readers reason to read on about the mechanics of “throwing like a girl.”

A response to what others have said. Whatever your topic, it’s unlikely that you’ll be the first one to write about it. And if, as this chapter assumes, all academic writing is part of a larger conversation, you are in a way adding your own voice to that conversation. One good way of doing that is to present your ideas as a response to what others have said about your topic — to begin by quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing what others have said and then to agree, disagree, or both.

For example, in an essay arguing that organ sales will save lives, Joanna MacKay says, “Some agree with Pope John Paul II that the selling of organs is morally wrong and violates ‘the dignity of the human person.’” But she then responds — and disagrees, arguing that “the morals we hold are not absolute truths” and that “peasants of third world countries” might not agree with the pope.



A clear, appropriately qualified thesis. When you write in an academic context, you’re expected to state your main point explicitly, often in a **THESIS** statement. MIT student Joanna MacKay states her thesis clearly in her essay “Organ Sales Will Save Lives”: “Governments should not ban the sale of human organs; they should regulate it.” Often you’ll need to **QUALIFY** your thesis statement to acknowledge that the subject is complicated and there may be more than one way of seeing it or exceptions to the generalization you’re making about it. Here, for example, is a qualified thesis, from an essay evaluating the movie *Juno* by Ali Heinkamp, a student at Wright State University: “Although the situations *Juno*’s characters find themselves in and their dialogue may be criticized as unrealistic, the film, written by Diablo Cody and directed by Jason Reitman, successfully portrays the emotions of a teen being shoved into maturity way too fast.” Heinkamp makes a claim that *Juno* achieves its main goal, while acknowledging at the beginning of the sentence that the film may be flawed.

Good reasons supported by evidence. You need to provide good reasons for your thesis and evidence to support those reasons. For example, Joanna MacKay offers several reasons why sales of human kidneys should be legalized: there is a surplus of kidneys, the risk to the donor is not great, and legalization would allow the trade in kidneys to be regulated. Evidence to support your reasons sometimes comes from your own experience but more often from published research and scholarship, research you do yourself or firsthand accounts by others.

Compared with other kinds of writing, academic writing is generally expected to be more objective and less emotional. You may find *Romeo and Juliet* deeply moving or cry when you watch *Titanic* — but when you write about the play or the film for a class, you must do so using evidence from the text to support your thesis. You may find someone’s ideas deeply offensive, but you should respond to them with reason rather than with emotional appeals or personal attacks.

Acknowledgment of multiple perspectives. Debates and arguments in popular media are often framed in “pro/con” terms, as if there were only



two sides to any given issue. Once you begin seriously studying a topic, though, you're likely to find that there are several sides and that each of them deserves serious consideration. In your academic writing, you need to represent fairly the range of perspectives on your topic — to explore three, four, or more positions on it as you research and write. In her report, "Does Texting Affect Writing," Marywood University student Michaela Cullington, for example, examines texting from several points of view: teachers' impressions of the influence of texting on student writing, the results of several research studies, and her own survey research.

A confident, authoritative stance. If one goal of academic writing is to contribute to a larger conversation, your tone should convey confidence and establish your authority to write about your subject. Ways to achieve such a tone include using active verbs ("X claims" rather than "it seems"), avoiding such phrases as "in my opinion" and "I think," and writing in a straightforward, direct style. Your writing should send the message that you've done the research, analysis, and thinking and know what you're talking about. For example, here is the final paragraph of Michaela Cullington's essay on texting and writing:

On the basis of my own research, expert research, and personal observations, I can confidently state that texting is not interfering with students' use of standard written English and has no effect on their writing abilities in general. It is interesting to look at the dynamics of the arguments over these issues. Teachers and parents who claim that they are seeing a decline in the writing abilities of their students and children mainly support the negative-impact argument. Other teachers and researchers suggest that texting provides a way for teens to practice writing in a casual setting and thus helps prepare them to write formally. Experts and students themselves, however, report that they see no effect, positive or negative. Anecdotal experiences should not overshadow the actual evidence.

Cullington's use of simple, declarative sentences ("Other teachers and researchers suggest..."; "Anecdotal experiences should not overshadow...") and her straightforward summary of the arguments surrounding texting,



along with her strong, unequivocal ending ("texting is not interfering with students' use of standard written English"), lend her writing a confident tone. Her stance sends the message that she's done the research and knows what she's talking about.

Carefully documented sources. Clearly acknowledging sources and documenting them carefully and correctly is a basic requirement of academic writing. When you use the words or ideas of others — including visuals, video, or audio — those sources must be documented in the text and in a works cited or references list at the end. (If you're writing something that will appear online, you may also refer readers to your sources by using hyperlinks in the text; ask your instructor if you need to include a list of references or works cited as well.)

Careful attention to correctness. Whether you're writing something formal or informal, in an essay or an email, you should always write in complete sentences, use appropriate capitalization and punctuation, and check that your spelling is correct. In general, academic writing is no place for colloquial language, slang, or texting abbreviations. If you're quoting someone, you can reproduce that person's writing or speech exactly, but in your own writing you try hard to be correct — and always proofread carefully.

What's Expected of College Writers: The WPA Outcomes

Writing is not a multiple-choice test; it doesn't have right and wrong answers that are easily graded. Instead, your readers, whether they're teachers or anyone else, are likely to read your writing with various things in mind: does it make sense, does it meet the demands of the assignment, is the grammar correct, to name just a few of the things readers may look for. Different readers may notice different things, so sometimes it may seem to you that their response — and your grade — is unpredictable. It should be good to know, then, that writing teachers across the nation have come to some agreement on certain "outcomes," what college students



should know and be able to do by the time you finish a first-year writing course. These outcomes have been defined by the National Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA). Here's a brief summary of these outcomes and how *The Norton Field Guide* can help you meet them.

Knowledge of Rhetoric

- *Understand the rhetorical situation of texts that you read and write.* See Chapters 5–9 and the many prompts for Considering the Rhetorical Situation throughout the book.
- *Read and write texts in a number of different genres and understand how your purpose may influence your writing.* See Chapters 10–22 for guidelines on writing in thirteen genres, Chapter 23 on mixing genres, and Chapter 24 for help choosing genres when you need to.
- *Adjust your voice, tone, level of formality, design, and medium as is necessary and appropriate.* See Chapter 8 on stance and tone and Chapter 9 for help thinking about medium and design.
- *Choose the media that will best suit your audience, purpose, and the rest of your rhetorical situation.* See Chapters 9 and 54.

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing

- *Read and write to inquire, learn, think critically, and communicate.* See Chapters 1 and 2 on academic writing and reading, and Chapter 25 on writing as inquiry. Chapters 10–13 provide genre-specific prompts to help you think critically about a draft.
- *Read for content, argumentative strategies, and rhetorical effectiveness.* Chapter 7 provides guidance on reading texts with a critical eye, Chapter 11 teaches how to analyze a text, and Chapter 47 shows how to evaluate sources.
- *Find and evaluate popular and scholarly sources.* Chapter 46 teaches how to use databases and other methods to find sources, and Chapter 47 shows how to evaluate the sources you find.



- *Use sources in various ways to support your ideas.* Chapter 36 suggests strategies for supporting your ideas, and Chapter 49 shows how to incorporate ideas from sources into your writing to support your ideas.

Processes

- *Use writing processes to compose texts and explore ideas in various media.* Part 4 covers all stages of the processes writers use, from generating ideas and text to drafting to getting response and revising to editing and proofreading. Each of the thirteen genre chapters (10–22) includes a guide that leads you through the process of writing in that genre.
- *Collaborate with others on your own writing and on group tasks.* Chapter 26 offers guidelines for working with others, Chapter 30 provides general prompts for getting and giving response, and Chapters 10–13 provide genre-specific prompts for reading a draft with a critical eye.
- *Reflect on your own writing processes.* Chapters 10–13 provide genre-specific questions to help you take stock of your work, and Chapter 29 offers guidance in thinking about your own writing process. Chapter 32 provides prompts to help you reflect on a writing portfolio.

Knowledge of Conventions

- *Use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.* Chapter 31 provides tips to help you edit and proofread for your writing. Chapters 10–13 offer genre-specific advice for editing and proofreading.
- *Understand and use genre conventions and formats in your writing.* Chapter 7 provides an overview of genres and how to think about them. Part 3 covers thirteen genres, describing the key features and conventions of each one.
- *Understand intellectual property and document sources appropriately.* Chapter 50 offers guidance on the ethical use of sources, Chapter 51 provides an overview of documentation styles, and Chapters 52 and 53 provide templates for documenting in MLA and APA styles.



2 Reading in Academic Contexts



We read newspapers to know about the events of the day. We read textbooks to learn about history, chemistry, and other academic topics — and other academic sources to do research and develop arguments. We read tweets and blogs to follow (and participate in) conversations about issues that interest us. And as writers, we read our own writing to make sure it says what we mean it to say and proofread our final drafts to make sure they say it correctly. In other words, we read many kinds of texts for many different purposes. This chapter offers a number of strategies for various kinds of reading you do in academic contexts.

TAKING STOCK OF YOUR READING

One way to become a better reader is to understand your reading process; if you know what you do when you read, you're in a position to decide what you need to change or improve. Consider the answers to the following questions:

- What do you read for pleasure? for work? for school? Consider all the sorts of reading you do: books, magazines, and newspapers, websites, Facebook, texts, blogs, product instructions.
- When you're facing a reading assignment, what do you do? Do you do certain things to get comfortable? Do you play music or seek quiet? Do you plan your reading time or set reading goals for yourself? Do you flip through or skim the text before settling down to read it, or do you start at the beginning and work through it?
- When you begin to read something for an assignment, do you make sure you understand the purpose of the assignment — why you

must read this text? Do you ever ask your instructor (or whoever else assigned the reading) what its purpose is?

- How do you motivate yourself to read material you don't have any interest in? How do you deal with boredom while reading?
- Does your mind wander? If you realize that you haven't been paying attention and don't know what you just read, what do you do?
- Do you ever highlight, underline, or annotate text as you read? Do you take notes? If so, what do you mark or write down? Why?
- When you read text you don't understand, what do you do?
- As you anticipate and read an assigned text, what attitudes or feelings do you typically have? If they differ from reading to reading, why do they?
- What do you do when you've finished reading an assigned text? Write out notes? Think about what you've just read? Move on to the next task? Something else?
- How well do your reading processes work for you, both in school and otherwise? What would you like to change? What can you do to change?

The rest of this chapter offers advice and strategies that you may find helpful as you work to improve your reading skills.

READING STRATEGICALLY

Academic reading is challenging because it makes several demands on you at once. Textbooks present new vocabulary and new concepts, and picking out the main ideas can be difficult. Scholarly articles present content and arguments you need to understand, but they often assume that readers already know key concepts and vocabulary and so don't generally provide background information. As you read more texts in an academic field and begin to participate in its conversations, the reading will become easier, but in the meantime you can develop strategies that will help you to read effectively.



Thinking about What You Want to Learn

To learn anything, we need to place new information into the context of what we already know. For example, to understand photosynthesis, we need to already know something about plants, energy, and air, among other things. To learn a new language, we draw on similarities and differences between it and any other languages we know. A method of bringing to conscious attention our current knowledge on a topic and of helping us articulate our purposes for reading is a list-making process called KWL+. To use it, create a table with three columns:

<i>K: What I Know</i>	<i>W: What I Want to Know</i>	<i>L: What I Learned</i>

Before you begin reading a text, list in the “K” column what you already know about the topic. Brainstorm ideas, and list terms or phrases that come to mind. Then group them into categories. Also before reading, or after reading the first few paragraphs, list in the “W” column questions you have that you expect, want, or hope to be answered as you read. Number or reorder the questions by their importance to you.

Then, as you read the text or afterward, list in the “L” column what you learned from the text. Compare your “L” list with your “W” list to see what you still want or need to know (the “+”) — and what you learned that you didn’t expect.

Previewing the Text

It’s usually a good idea to start by skimming a text — read the title and subtitle, any headings, the first and last paragraphs, the first sentences of all the other paragraphs. Study any illustrations and other visuals. Your

goal is to get a sense of where the text is heading. At this point, don’t stop to look up unfamiliar words; just mark them in some way to look up later.

Adjusting Your Reading Speed to Different Texts

Different texts require different kinds of effort. Some that are simple and straightforward can be skimmed fairly quickly. With academic texts, though, you usually need to read more slowly and carefully, matching the pace of your reading to the difficulty of the text. You’ll likely need to skim the text for an overview of the basic ideas and then go back to read it closely. And then you may need to read it yet again. (But do try always to read quickly enough to focus on the meanings of sentences and paragraphs, not just individual words.) With visual texts, too, you’ll often need to look at them several times, moving from gaining an overall impression to closely examining the structure, layout, and other visual features — and exploring how those features relate to any accompanying verbal text.

Looking for Organizational Cues

As you read, look for cues that signal the way the text’s ideas are organized and how each part relates to the ones around it:

The **introductory paragraph and thesis** often offer a preview of the topics to be discussed and the order in which they will be addressed. Here, for example, is a typical thesis statement for a report: *Types of prisons in the United States include minimum and medium security, close security, maximum security, and supermax*. The report that follows should explain each type of prison in the order stated in the thesis.

Transitions help **GUIDE READERS** in following the direction of the writer’s thinking from idea to idea. For example, “however” indicates an idea that contradicts or limits what has just been said, while “furthermore” indicates one that adds to or supports it.

Headings identify a text's major and minor sections, by means of both the headings' content and their design.

Thinking about Your Initial Response

Some readers find it helps to make brief notes about their first response to a text, noting their reaction and thinking a little about why they reacted as they did.

What are your initial reactions? Describe both your intellectual reaction and any emotional reaction, and identify places in the text that caused you to react as you did. An intellectual reaction might consist of an evaluation ("I disagree with this position because . . ."), a connection ("This idea reminds me of . . ."), or an elaboration ("Another example of this point is . . ."). An emotional reaction could include approval or disapproval ("YES! This is exactly right!" "NO! This is so wrong!"), an expression of feeling ("This passage makes me so sad"), or one of appreciation ("This is said so beautifully"). If you had no particular reaction, note that, too.

What accounts for your reactions? Are they rooted in personal experiences? aspects of your personality? positions you hold on an issue? As much as possible, you want to keep your opinions from interfering with your understanding of what you're reading, so it's important to try to identify those opinions up front.

Dealing with Difficult Texts

Let's face it: some texts are difficult. You may have no interest in the subject matter, or lack background knowledge or vocabulary necessary for understanding the text, or simply not have a clear sense of why you have to read the text at all. Whatever the reason, reading such texts can be a challenge. Here are some tips for dealing with them:



Look for something familiar. Texts often seem difficult or boring because we don't know enough about the topic or about the larger conversation surrounding it to read them effectively. By skimming the headings, the abstract or introduction, and the conclusion, you may find something that relates to something you already know or are at least interested in — and being aware of that prior knowledge can help you see how this new material relates to it.

Look for "landmarks." Reading a challenging academic text the first time through can be like driving to an unfamiliar destination on roads you've never traveled: you don't know where you're headed, you don't recognize anything along the way, and you're not sure how long getting there will take. As you drive the route again, though, you see landmarks along the way that help you know where you're going. The same goes for reading a difficult text: sometimes you need to get through it once just to get some idea of what it's about. On the second reading, now that you have "driven the route," look for the ways that the parts of the text relate to one another, to other texts or course information, or to other knowledge you have.

Monitor your understanding. You may have had the experience of reading a text and suddenly realizing that you have no idea what you just read. Being able to monitor your reading — to sense when you aren't understanding the text and need to reread, focus your attention, look up unfamiliar terms, take some notes, or take a break — can make you a more efficient and better reader. Keep these questions in mind as you read: What is my purpose for reading this text? Am I understanding it? Does it make sense? Should I slow down, reread, annotate? skim ahead and then come back? pause to reflect?

Be persistent. Research shows that many students respond to difficult texts by assuming they're "too dumb to get it" — and quit reading. Successful students, on the other hand, report that if they keep at a text, they will come to understand it. Some of them even see difficult texts as challenges: "I'm going to keep working on this until I make sense of it."



Remember that reading is an active process, and the more you work at it the more successful you will be.

Annotating

Many readers find it helps to annotate as they read: highlighting keywords, phrases, sentences; connecting ideas with lines or symbols; writing comments or questions in the margin or on sticky notes; circling new words so you can look up the definitions later; noting anything that seems noteworthy or questionable. Annotating forces you to read for more than just the surface meaning. Especially when you are going to be writing about or responding to a text, annotating creates a record of things you may want to refer to.

Annotate as if you're having a conversation with the author, someone you take seriously but whose words you do not accept without question. Put your part of the conversation in the margin, asking questions, talking back: "What's this mean?" "So what?" "Says who?" "Where's evidence?" "Yes!" "Whoa!" or even ☺ or ☺ or texting shorthand like LOL or INTRSTN. If you're reading a text online, you may be able to copy it and annotate it electronically. If so, make your annotations a different color from the text itself.

What you annotate depends upon your **PURPOSE**, or what you're most interested in. If you're analyzing a text that makes an explicit argument, you would probably underline the **THESIS STATEMENT**, and then the **REASONS AND EVIDENCE** that support that statement. It might help to restate those ideas in your own words in the margins — in order to understand them, you need to put them in your own words! If you are trying to **IDENTIFY PATTERNS**, you might highlight each pattern in a different color or mark it with a sticky note and write any questions or notes about it in that color. You might annotate a visual text by circling and identifying important parts of the image.

There are some texts that you cannot annotate, of course — library books, some materials you read on the web, and so on. Then you will need to use sticky notes or make notes elsewhere, and you might find it useful to keep a reading log for this purpose.

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A Sample Annotated Text

Here is an excerpt from *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*, a book by Harvard professor Michael J. Sandel, annotated by a writer who was doing research for a report on the awarding of military medals:

What Wounds Deserve the Purple Heart?

On some issues, questions of virtue and honor are too obvious to deny. Consider the recent debate over who should qualify for the Purple Heart. Since 1932, the U.S. military has awarded the medal to soldiers wounded or killed in battle by enemy action. In addition to the honor, the medal entitles recipients to special privileges in veterans' hospitals.

Purple Heart given for wounding or death in battle.

Since the beginning of the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, growing numbers of veterans have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and treated for the condition. Symptoms include recurring nightmares, severe depression, and suicide. At least three hundred thousand veterans reportedly suffer from traumatic stress or major depression. Advocates for these veterans have proposed that they, too, should qualify for the Purple Heart. Since psychological injuries can be at least as debilitating as physical ones, they argue, soldiers who suffer these wounds should receive the medal.

PTSD increasingly common among veterans.

After a Pentagon advisory group studied the question, the Pentagon announced, in 2009, that the Purple Heart would be reserved for soldiers with physical injuries. Veterans suffering from mental disorders and psychological trauma would not be eligible, even though they qualify for government-supported medical treatment and disability payments. The Pentagon offered two reasons for its decision: traumatic stress disorders are not intentionally caused by enemy action, and they are difficult to diagnose objectively.

Argument: Vets with PTSD should be eligible for PH because psych. injuries are as serious as physical.

Did the Pentagon make the right decision? Taken by themselves, its reasons are unconvincing. In the Iraq War, one of the most common injuries recognized with the Purple Heart has been a punctured eardrum, caused by explosions at close range. But unlike bullets and bombs, such explosions are not a deliberate enemy tactic intended to injure or kill; they are (like traumatic stress) a damaging side effect of battlefield action. And while traumatic disorders may be more difficult

2009: Military says no: PTSD injuries "not intentionally caused by enemy" and are hard to diagnose.

PTSD is like punctured eardrums, which do get the PH.



PH "honors sacrifice, not bravery." Injury enough. So what kind of injury?

Wow: one vet's group insists that for PH, soldier must bleed!

Good quote!

Argument based on different ideas about what counts as a military virtue.

to diagnose than a broken limb, the injury they inflict can be more severe and long-lasting.

As the wider debate about the Purple Heart revealed, the real issue is about the meaning of the medal and the virtues it honors. What, then, are the relevant virtues? Unlike other military medals, the Purple Heart honors sacrifice, not bravery. It requires no heroic act, only an injury inflicted by the enemy. The question is what kind of injury should count.

A veteran's group called the Military Order of the Purple Heart opposed awarding the medal for psychological injuries, claiming that doing so would "debase" the honor. A spokesman for the group stated that "shedding blood" should be an essential qualification. He didn't explain why bloodless injuries shouldn't count. But Tyler E. Boudreau, a former Marine captain who favors including psychological injuries, offers a compelling analysis of the dispute. He attributes the opposition to a deep-seated attitude in the military that views post-traumatic stress as a kind of weakness. "The same culture that demands tough-mindedness also encourages skepticism toward the suggestion that the violence of war can hurt the healthiest of minds . . . Sadly, as long as our military culture bears at least a quiet contempt for the psychological wounds of war, it is unlikely those veterans will ever see a Purple Heart."

So the debate over the Purple Heart is more than a medical or clinical dispute about how to determine the veracity of injury. At the heart of the disagreement are rival conceptions of moral character and military valor. Those who insist that only bleeding wounds should count believe that post-traumatic stress reflects a weakness of character unworthy of honor. Those who believe that psychological wounds should qualify argue that veterans suffering long-term trauma and severe depression have sacrificed for their country as surely, and as honorably, as those who've lost a limb. The dispute over the Purple Heart illustrates the moral logic of Aristotle's theory of justice. We can't determine who deserves a military medal without asking what virtues the medal properly honors. And to answer that question, we have to assess competing conceptions of character and sacrifice.

— Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*



Coding

You may also find it useful to record your thoughts as you read by using a coding system — for example, using "X" to indicate passages that contradict your assumptions, or "?" for ones that puzzle you. You can make up your own coding system, of course, but you could start with this one*:

- ✓ Confirms what you thought
- X Contradicts what you thought
- ? Puzzles you
- ?? Confuses you
- ! Surprises you
- ☆ Strikes you as important
- Is new or interesting to you

You might also circle new words that you'll want to look up later and highlight or underline key phrases.

Summarizing

Writing a summary, boiling down a text to its main ideas, can help you understand it. To do so, you need to identify which ideas in the text are crucial to its meaning. Then you put those crucial ideas into your own words, creating a brief version that accurately sums up the text. Here, for example, is a summary of Sandel's analysis of the Purple Heart debate:

In "What Wounds Deserve the Purple Heart?," Harvard professor Michael J. Sandel explores the debate over eligibility for the Purple Heart, the medal given to soldiers who die or are wounded in battle. Some argue that soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder

*Adapted from Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman, *Subjects Matter: Every Teacher's Guide to Content-Area Reading*.



should qualify for the medal because psychological injuries are as serious as physical ones. However, the military disagrees, since PTSD injuries are not “intentionally caused by enemy action” and are hard to diagnose. Sandel observes that the dispute centers on how “character” and “sacrifice” are defined. Those who insist that soldiers must have had physical wounds to be eligible for the Purple Heart see psychological wounds as reflecting “weakness of character,” while others argue that veterans with PTSD and other psychological traumas have sacrificed honorably for their country.

Thinking about How the Text Works: What It Says, What It Does

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Sometimes you’ll need to think about how a text works, how its parts fit together. You may be assigned to analyze a text, or you may just need to make sense of a difficult text, to think about how the ideas all relate to one another. Whatever your purpose, a good way to think about a text structure is by **OUTLINING** it, paragraph by paragraph. If you’re interested in analyzing its ideas, look at what each paragraph says; if, on the other hand, you’re concerned with how the ideas are presented, pay attention to what each paragraph does.

What it says. Write a sentence that identifies what each paragraph says. Once you’ve done that for the whole text, look for patterns in the topics the writer addresses. Pay attention to the order in which the topics are presented. Also look for gaps, ideas the writer has left unsaid. Such paragraph-by-paragraph outlining of the content can help you see how the writer has arranged ideas and how that arrangement builds an argument or develops a topic. Here, for example, is an outline of Michael Granof’s proposal, “Course Requirement: Extortion”; the essay may be found on pages 235–37. The numbers in the left column refer to the essay’s paragraphs.

- 1 College textbooks cost several times more than other books.
- 2 However, a proposed solution to the cost problem would only make things worse.



- 3 This proposal, to promote sales of used textbooks, would actually cause textbook costs to rise, because the sale of used books is a main reason new texts cost so much.
- 4 There is another way to lower costs.
- 5 Used textbooks are already being marketed and sold very efficiently.
- 6 Because of this, most new textbook sales take place in the first semester after they’re published, forcing publishers to raise prices before used books take over the market.
- 7 In response, textbooks are revised every few years, whether or not the content is outdated, and the texts are “bundled” with other materials that can’t be used again.
- 8–9 A better solution would be to consider textbooks to be like computer software and issue “site licenses” to universities. Once instructors choose textbooks, the university would pay publishers fees per student for their use.
- 10 Publishers would earn money for the use of the textbooks, and students’ costs would be much lower.
- 11 Students could use an electronic text or buy a print copy for additional money. The print copies would cost less because the publisher would make most of its profits on the site license fees.
- 12 This arrangement would have no impact on teaching, unlike other proposals that focus on using electronic materials or using “no frills” textbooks and might negatively affect students’ learning.
- 13 This proposal would reduce the cost of attending college and help students and their families.

What it does. Identify the function of each paragraph. Starting with the first paragraph, ask, What does this paragraph do? Does it introduce a topic? provide background for a topic to come? describe something? define something? entice me to read further? something else? What does the second paragraph do? the third? As you go through the text, you may identify groups of paragraphs that have a single purpose. Here is a



functional outline of Granof's essay (again, the numbers on the left refer to the paragraphs):

- 1 Introduces the topic by defining a problem
- 2 Introduces a flawed solution
- 3 Explains the flawed solution and the problem with it
- 4 Introduces a better solution
- 5–7 Describes the current situation and the dynamics of the problem
- 8 Outlines the author's proposed solution
- 9–10 Explains the proposed solution
- 11–12 Describes the benefits and effects of the proposed solution
- 13 Concludes

Reading Visual Texts

Photos, drawings, graphs, diagrams, and charts are frequently used to help convey important information and often make powerful arguments themselves. So learning to read and interpret visual texts is just as necessary as it is for written texts.

Taking visuals seriously. Remember that visuals are texts themselves, not just decoration. When they appear as part of a written text, they may introduce information not discussed elsewhere in the text. Or they might illustrate concepts hard to grasp from words alone. In either case, it's important to pay close attention to any visuals in a written text.

Looking at any title, caption, or other written text that's part of a visual will help you understand its main idea. It might also help to think about its purpose: Why did the writer include it? What information does it add or emphasize? What argument is it making? See, for example, how a psychology textbook uses visuals to help explain two ways that information can be represented:



Analogical and Symbolic Representations

When we think about information, we use two basic types of internal representations: analogical and symbolic.

Analogical representations usually correspond to images. They have some characteristics of actual objects. Therefore, they are analogous to actual objects. For example, maps correspond to geographical layouts. Family trees depict branching relationships between relatives. A clock corresponds directly to the passage of time. **Figure 2.1a** is a drawing of a violin from a particular perspective. This drawing is an analogical representation.

Figure 2.1 Analogical Versus Symbolic Representations

(a) (b)



Violin

(a) Analogical representations, such as this picture of a violin, have some characteristics of the objects they represent.

(b) Symbolic representations, such as the word *violin*, are abstract and do not have relationships to the physical qualities of objects.

By contrast, **symbolic representations** are abstract. These representations usually consist of words or ideas. They do not have relationships to physical qualities of objects in the world. The word *hamburger* is a symbolic representation that usually represents a cooked patty of beef served on a bun. The word *violin* stands for a musical instrument (Figure 2.1b).

— Sarah Grison, Todd Heatherton, and Michael Gazzaniga, *Psychology in Your Life*

The headings tell you the topic: analogical and symbolic representations. The paragraphs define the two types of representation, and the illustrations present a visual example of each type. The visuals make the information in the written text easier to understand by illustrating the differences between the two.

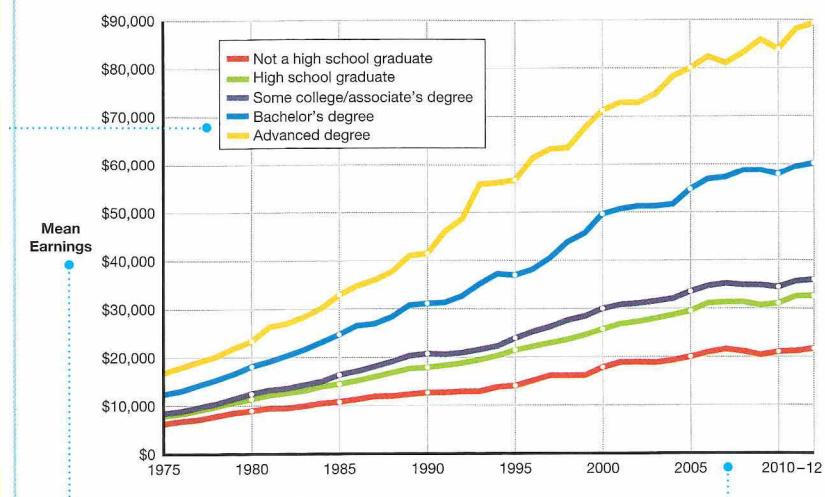


Title: Indicates the topic.

Legend: Explains the symbols used. Here, colors show the different categories.

Source: The origin of the data.

• **Figure 2.2 Mean Earnings by Educational Attainment, 1975–2012**



• SOURCE U.S. Bureau of the Census 2013

Y-axis: Defines the independent variable (something that doesn't change depending on other factors).

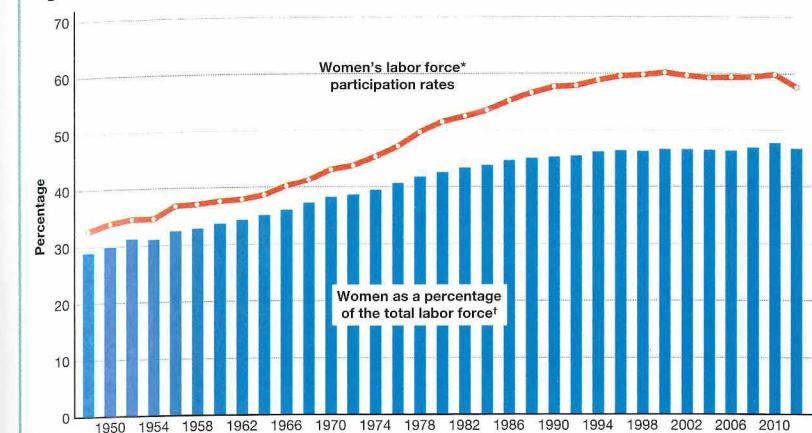
X-axis: Defines the dependent variable (something that changes, depending on other factors).

Reading charts and graphs. To read the information in charts and graphs, you need to look for different things depending on what type of chart or graph you're considering. A line graph, for example, usually contains certain elements: title, legend, x-axis, y-axis, and source information. Figure 2.2 shows one such graph taken from a sociology textbook.

Other types of charts and graphs include some of these same elements. But the specific elements vary according to the different kinds of information being presented, and some charts and graphs can be challenging to read. For example, the chart in Figure 2.3, from the same textbook, includes elements of both bar and line graphs to depict two trends at once: the red line shows the percentage of women in the United States



• **Figure 2.3 Women's Participation in the Labor Force in the United States, 1948–2012**



*Women in the labor force as a percent of all civilian women age sixteen and over.

†Women in the labor force as a percent of the total labor force (both men and women) age sixteen and over.

SOURCE U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014

who were in the labor force over a sixty-five-year period, and the blue bars show the percentage of U.S. workers who were women during that same period. Both trends are shown in two-year increments. To make sense of this chart, you need to read the title, the y-axis labels, and the labels and their definitions carefully.

Reading Onscreen

Research shows that we tend to read differently onscreen than we do when we read print texts: we skim and sample, often reading a sentence or two and then jumping to another site, another text. If we need to scroll the page to continue, we often don't bother. In general, we don't read as carefully as we do when reading print texts, and we're less likely to reread



or take other steps if we find that we don't understand something. Following are some strategies that might help you read effectively onscreen.

Adjust your reading speed and effort to your purpose. Many students use the web to get an overview of a topic and find potential sources. In that case, skimming and browsing are sensible and appropriate tactics. If you're reading to evaluate a source or find specific information on a topic, though, you probably need to read more slowly and carefully.

Keep your purpose in mind as you read. Clicking on hyperlinks and jumping from site to site can be tempting. Resist the temptation! Making a list of specific questions you're seeking to answer can help you stay focused and on task.

Print out longer texts. Some people find reading online to be harder on their eyes than reading pages of print, and many find that they comprehend and remember information in longer texts better if they read them in print. Reading a long text is similar to walking through an unfamiliar neighborhood: we form a mental map of the text as we read and then associate the information with its location in the text, making remembering easier. Since forming such a map is more difficult when reading an electronic text, printing out texts you need to read carefully may be a good strategy.

READING CRITICALLY

113-14 ▲

To read academic texts effectively, you need to read them critically, to look beyond the words on the page or screen to the **RHETORICAL CONTEXT** of the text and the argument it makes. Academic texts — both the ones you read and the ones you write — are parts of ongoing scholarly conversations, in which writers respond to the ideas and assertions of others in order to advance knowledge. To enter those conversations, you must first read carefully and critically to understand the rhetorical situation



and the larger context within which a writer wrote and the argument the text makes.

Considering the Rhetorical Situation

As a reader, you need to think about the message that the writer wants to articulate, including the intended audience and the writer's attitude toward that audience and the topic, as well as about the genre, medium, and design of the text.

PURPOSE

What is the writer's purpose? To entertain? inform? persuade readers to think something or take some action? What is your purpose for reading this text?

55-56

AUDIENCE

Who is the intended audience? Are you a member of that group? If not, should you expect that you'll need to look up unfamiliar terms or concepts or that you'll run into assumptions you don't necessarily share? How is the writer addressing the audience — as an expert addressing those less knowledgeable? an outsider addressing insiders?

57-60

GENRE

What is the genre? Is it a report? an argument? an analysis? something else? Knowing the genre can help you to anticipate certain key features.

61-63

STANCE

Who is the writer, and what is his or her stance? Critical? Curious? Opinionated? Objective? Passionate? Indifferent? Something else? Knowing the stance affects the way you understand a text, whether you're inclined to agree or disagree with it, to take it seriously, and so on.

64-67

MEDIA / DESIGN

What is the medium, and how does it affect the way you read? If it's a print text, what do you know about the publisher? If it's on the web, who sponsors the site, and when was it last updated? Are there any headings, summaries, or other elements that highlight key parts of the text?

68-70



419–27
380–87

478–90

Identifying Patterns

Look for notable patterns in the text — recurring words and their synonyms, as well as repeated phrases, metaphors and other images, and types of sentences. Some readers find it helps to highlight patterns in various colors. Does the author repeatedly rely on any particular writing strategies: **NARRATION?** **COMPARISON?** Something else?

Another kind of pattern it might be important to consider is the kind of evidence the text provides. Is it more opinion than facts? nothing but statistics? If many sources are cited, is the information presented in any patterns — as **QUOTATIONS?** **PARAPHRASES?** **SUMMARIES?** Are there repeated references to certain experts or sources?

In visual texts, look for patterns of color, shape, and line. What's in the foreground, and what's in the background? What's completely visible, partly visible, or hidden? In both verbal and visual texts, look for omissions and anomalies: What isn't there that you would expect to find? Is there anything that doesn't really fit in?

If you discover patterns, then you need to consider what, if anything, they mean in terms of what the writer is saying. What do they reveal about the writer's underlying premises and beliefs? What do they tell you about the writer's strategies for persuading readers to accept the truth of what he or she is saying?

See how color-coding an essay by New York Times columnist William Safire on the meaning of the Gettysburg Address reveals several patterns in the language Safire uses. In this excerpt from the essay, which was published just before the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Safire develops his analysis through several patterns. Religious references are colored yellow; references to a “national spirit,” green; references to life, death, and rebirth, blue; and places where Safire directly addresses the reader, gray.

But the selection of this poetic political sermon as the oratorical centerpiece of our observance need not be only an exercise. . . . now, as then, a national spirit rose from the ashes of destruction.

Here is how to listen to Lincoln's all-too-familiar speech with new ears.



In those 266 words, you will hear the word *dedicate* five times. . . .

Those five pillars of dedication rested on a fundamant of religious metaphor. From a president not known for his *piety* — indeed, often criticized for his supposed lack of *faith* — came a speech rooted in the theme of national *resurrection*. The speech is grounded in *conception*, *birth*, *death*, and *rebirth*.

Consider the barrage of images of *birth* in the opening sentence. . . .

Finally, the nation's spirit rises from this scene of *death*: “that this nation, under God, shall have a *new birth of freedom*.” *Conception*, *birth*, *death*, *rebirth*. The nation, purified in this fiery trial of war, is *resurrected*. Through the sacrifice of its sons, the sundered nation would be *reborn* as one. . . .

Do not listen on Sept. 11 only to Lincoln's famous words and comforting cadences. Think about how Lincoln's message encompasses but goes beyond paying “fitting and proper” respect to the *dead* and the *bereaved*. His *sermon* at Gettysburg reminds “us the living” of our “unfinished work” and “the great task remaining before us” — to resolve that this generation's response to the *deaths* of thousands of our people leads to “a new birth of freedom.”

The color coding helps us to see patterns in Safire's language, just as Safire reveals patterns in Lincoln's words. He offers an interpretation of Lincoln's address as a “poetic political sermon,” and the words he uses throughout support that interpretation. At the end, he repeats the assertion that Lincoln's address is a sermon, inviting us to consider it differently. Safire's repeated commands (“Consider,” “Do not listen,” “Think about”) offer additional insight into how he wishes to position himself in relation to his readers.

Analyzing the Argument

All texts make some kind of argument, claiming something and then offering reasons and evidence as support for any claim. As a critical reader, you need to look closely at the argument a text makes — to recognize all the claims it makes, consider the support it offers for those claims, and decide how you want to respond. What do you think, and why? Here are some questions to consider when analyzing an argument:



345-47

5

358-59

359-67

370

367

367-69

368-69

370-72

- **What claim is the text making?** What is the writer's main point? Is it stated as a **THESIS**, or only implied? Is it limited or **QUALIFIED** somehow? If not, should it have been?
- **How is the claim supported?** What **REASONS** does the writer provide for the claim, and what **EVIDENCE** is given for the reasons? What kind of evidence is it? Facts? Statistics? Examples? Expert opinions? Images? How convincing do you find the reasons and evidence? Is there enough evidence?
- **What appeals besides logical ones are used?** Does the writer appeal to readers' **EMOTIONS**? try to establish **COMMON GROUND**? demonstrate his or her **CREDIBILITY** as trustworthy and knowledgeable? How successful are these appeals?
- **Are any COUNTERARGUMENTS acknowledged?** If so, are they presented accurately and respectfully? Does the writer concede any value to them or try to refute them? How successfully does he or she deal with them?
- **What outside sources of information does the writer cite?** What kinds of sources are they, and how credible do they seem? Are they current and authoritative? How well do they support the argument?
- **Do you detect any FALLACIES?** Fallacies are arguments that involve faulty reasoning. Because they often seem plausible, they can be persuasive. It is important, therefore, that you question the legitimacy of such reasoning when you run across it.

Believing and Doubting

290-91

289-90

One way to develop a response to a text is to play the Believing and Doubting Game, sometimes called reading with and against the grain. Your goal is to **LIST** or **FREEWRITE** notes as you read, writing out as many reasons as you can think of for believing what the writer says (reading with the grain) and then as many as you can for doubting it (reading against the grain).

academic literacies

rhetorical situations

genres

processes

strategies

 research
MLA / APA

media / design



First, try to look at the world through the writer's perspective. Try to understand his or her reasons for arguing as he or she does, even if you strongly disagree. Then reread the text, trying to doubt everything in it: try to find every flaw in the argument, every possible way it can be refuted — even if you totally agree with it. Developed by writing theorist Peter Elbow, the believing and doubting game helps you consider new ideas and question ideas you already have — and at the same time will see where you stand in relation to the ideas in the text you're reading.

Considering the Larger Context

All texts are part of ongoing conversations with other texts that have dealt with the topic of the text. An essay arguing for handgun trigger locks is part of an ongoing conversation on gun control, which is itself part of a conversation on individual rights and responsibilities. Academic texts document their sources in part to show their relationship to the ongoing scholarly conversation on a particular topic. In fact, any time you're reading to learn, you're probably reading for some larger context. Whatever your reading goals, being aware of that larger context can help you better understand what you're reading. Here are some specific aspects of the text to pay attention to:

Who else cares about this topic? Especially when you're reading in order to learn about a topic, the texts you read will often reveal which people or groups are part of the conversation — and might be sources of further reading. For example, an essay describing the formation of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky could be of interest to geologists, spelunkers, travel writers, or tourists. If you're reading such an essay while doing research on the cave, you should consider how the audience to whom the writer is writing determines the nature of the information provided — and its suitability as a source for your research.

What conversations is this text part of? Does the text refer to any concepts or ideas that give you some sense that it's part of a larger

conversation? An argument on airport security measures, for example, is part of larger conversations about government response to terrorism, the limits of freedom in a democracy, and the possibilities of using technology to detect weapons and explosives, among others.

What terms does the writer use? Do any terms or specialized language reflect the writer's allegiance to a particular group or academic discipline? If you run across words like *false consciousness*, *ideology*, and *hegemony*, for example, you might guess that the text was written by a Marxist scholar.

What other writers or sources does the writer cite? Do the other writers have a particular academic specialty, belong to an identifiable intellectual school, share similar political leanings? If an article on politics cites Paul Krugman and Barbara Ehrenreich in support of its argument, you might assume that the writer holds liberal opinions; if it cites Ross Douthat and Amity Schlaes, the writer is likely a conservative.

- 469–72
- 289–97
- 301–5
- 306–12
- 313–17

IF YOU NEED MORE HELP

See Chapter 47, **EVALUATING SOURCES**, for questions to help you analyze a text's rhetorical situation. See also Chapter 27 on **GENERATING IDEAS AND TEXT**; you can adapt those methods as ways of looking at texts, especially clustering and cubing. And see also Chapter 29 on **ASSESSING YOUR OWN WRITING**, Chapter 30 on **GETTING RESPONSE AND REVISING**, and Chapter 31 on **EDITING AND PROOFREADING** if you need advice for reading your own writing.



Summarizing and Responding: Where Reading Meets Writing

Summarizing a text helps us to see and understand its main points and to think about what it says. Responding to that text then prompts us to think about — and say — what we think. Together, summarizing and responding to texts is one way that we engage with the ideas of others. In a history course, you might summarize and respond to an essay arguing that Civil War photographers did not accurately capture the realities of the battlefield. In a philosophy course, you might summarize Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and respond to its portrayal of knowledge as shadows on a wall.

And in much of the writing that you do, you'll need to cite the ideas of others, both as context for your own thinking and as evidence to support your arguments. In fact, unless you're Adam, there's probably no topic you'll write about that someone else hasn't already written about — and one way of introducing what you have to say is as a response to something others have said about your topic. A good way of doing that is by summarizing what they've said, using the summary as a launching pad for what you say. This chapter offers advice for summarizing and responding, writing tasks you'll have occasion to do in many of your college classes — and provides a short guide to writing a summary/response essay, a common assignment in composition classes.

SUMMARIZING

In many of your college courses, you'll likely be asked to summarize what someone else has said. Boiling down a text to its basic ideas helps you focus on the text, figure out what the writer has said, and understand (and remember) what you're reading. In fact, summarizing is an essential