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WRITING FOR SUCCESS – 1ST CANADIAN EDITION

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Chapter 11. Developing a Convincing Argument

In this chapter, we will be applying the concepts presented to you in **Chapter 10: Persuasion**. Working through the self-practice exercise will help you to develop a strong, convincing argument on a topic of your choice. At the end of **Section 11.3: Organizing Your Ideas**, you will need to produce an outline to show to your instructor.

11.1 Coming Up With a Topic

Learning Objectives

- Identify the requirements for your persuasive essay

- Generate ideas on a topic for your persuasive essay
- Formulate a research question
- Create a working thesis showing your topic and your controlling point of view
- Conduct preliminary research

The Requirements This assessment is divided into three parts (the requirements of each are described below): A formal outline due week 11 A rough draft due week 12 A final draft due week 13. You will receive 2.5% each for parts 1 and 2, and the final essay is worth 25%.

Essay 3: Persuasion (2.5%+2.5%+25%)

Choose a controversial topic on which you can base a persuasive discussion of 1,350 to 1,500 words.

You must:

- Demonstrate the application of dialectics and consideration of altering points of view
- Construct and follow a logical argument discussion
- Provide supporting evidence from five to seven supplemental sources and include a reference page and citations.

Part A: Essay 3: Persuasive formal outline/5 marks (2.5%) **Due week 11**

Create a formal, sentence outline for your instructor's approval. You must include:

- A working thesis
- A working outline
- Topic sentences for each supporting paragraph
- Notes of how you plan to develop your ideas
- The sourcing information of where you will get evidence to support your ideas.

You will be marked on level of completion of the five components described above. You do not have to stick to the outline exactly when you start working on your draft, but you will need to demonstrate you have done some of the preliminary work.

Part B: Essay 3: Persuasive draft/10 marks (2.5%)Due week 12****

Create a first draft of your persuasive essay. You must include:

- A complete introduction
- A complete conclusion
- Paragraph development
- A demonstration of idea development
- A draft reference page

Part C: Essay 3: Persuasive final submission/100 marks (25%)**Due week 13**

Write a 1,350 to 1,500 word persuasive essay on a controversial topic. Use the thesis, evidence, opposing argument, and concessionary statement as the basis for writing a full persuasive essay. You must include:

An engaging introduction

Clear explanations of all the evidence you present

A strong conclusion.

The Controversy A **controversial topic** is one on which people have strong views. Imagine the type of discussion that can become really heated, usually when the subject is something people are passionate about. But a person who is passionate about a particular issue does not necessarily mean he or she recognizes the merits of the other view (although that often happens); it just means that the person has collected evidence (from a variety of sources) and synthesized those ideas to arrive at a particular point of view. When you are trying to choose your topic for your persuasive paper, it is easier if you choose a topic about which you feel very strongly. You probably have realized by this point that when you are writing, it is a lot easier to write about a topic you already have some background knowledge on, and something you are extremely interested in. This helps to engage you and keep you interested in the writing process. No matter the topic you eventually decide to discuss, there are a few things you need to think about before you begin the writing process. You will need to make sure your subject is: **Significant**. Is a discussion of this topic one that has the potential to contribute to a field of study? Will it make an impact? This does not mean every discussion has to change lives, but it needs to be something relatively important. For example, a significant topic would be to convince your reader that eating at fast-food restaurants is detrimental to people's cardiovascular system. A less significant discussion would be if you were to try to convince your reader why one fast-food restaurant is better than another. **Singular**. This means you need to focus on one subject. Using the fast-food restaurant example, if you were to focus on both the effects on the cardiovascular *and* endocrine system, the discussion would lose that singular focus and there would be too much for you to cover. **Specific**.

Similar to the point above, your topic needs to be narrow enough to allow for you to really discuss the topic within the essay parameters (i.e., word count). Many writers are afraid of getting too specific because they feel they will run out of things to say. If you develop the idea completely and give thorough explanations and plenty of examples, the specificity should not be a problem. **Supportable.** Does evidence for what you want to discuss actually exist? There is probably some form of evidence out there even for the most obscure topics or points of view. However, you need to remember you should use credible sources. Someone's opinions posted on a blog about why one fast-food restaurant is the best does not count as credible support for your ideas.

Self-Practice EXERCISE 11.1

In previous chapters, you learned strategies for generating and narrowing a topic for a research paper. Review the list of general topics below. Also, think about which topics you feel very strongly.

Freewrite for five minutes on one of the topics below. Remember, you will need to focus your ideas to a manageable size for a five- to seven-page research paper.

You are also welcome to choose another topic; you may want to double-check with your instructor if it is suitable. It is important to remember that you want your paper to be unique and stand out from others'; writing on overly common topics may not help with this. Since we have already discussed *the death penalty* as a form of punishment in the last chapter and already developed ideas, you should probably not choose this topic because your instructor wants you to demonstrate you have applied the process of critical thinking on another topic.

Identify the key words you will use in the next self-practice exercise to preliminary research to narrow down your topic.

Some appropriate controversial topics are:

- Illegal immigration in Canada
- Bias in the media
- The role of religion in educational systems
- The possibility of life in outer space
- Modern day slavery around the world, ie. Human trafficking
- Foreign policy
- Television and advertising

- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Gender roles and the workplace
- Driving and cell phones

Formulating a Research Question

In forming a research question, you are setting a goal for your research. Your main research question should be substantial enough to form the guiding principle of your paper, but focused enough to guide your research. A strong research question requires you not only to find information but also to put together different pieces of information, interpret and analyze them, and figure out what you think. As you consider potential research questions, ask yourself whether they would be too hard or too easy to answer.

To determine your research question, review the freewriting you completed earlier. Skim through books, articles, and websites and list the questions you have. (You may wish to use the 5WH strategy to help you formulate questions.) Include simple, factual questions and more complex questions that require analysis and interpretation. Determine your main question—the primary focus of your paper—and several subquestions that you will need to research to answer that main question.

Here are the research questions Jorge will use to focus his research. Notice that his main research question has no obvious, straightforward answer. Jorge will need to research his subquestions, which address narrower topics, to answer his main question.

Topic: *Low-carbohydrate diets*

Main question: *Are low-carbohydrate diets as effective as they have been portrayed to be by media sources?*

Subquestions:

Who can benefit from following a low-carbohydrate diet?

What are the supposed advantages to following a low-carbohydrate diet?

When did low-carb diets become a "hot" topic in the media?

Where do average consumers get information about diet and nutrition?

Why has the low-carb approach received so much media attention?

How do low-carb diets work?

Self-Practice EXERCISE 11.2

Using the ideas you came up with in Self–Practice Exercise 11.1, create a research question you would like to find the answer to through your research and persuasive paper development. This is something you will use to help guide you in your writing and to check back with to make sure you are answering that question along the way.

Collaborate with a partner and share your questions. Describe your topic and point of view and ask your partner if that question connects to that topic and point of view.

Self Practice EXERCISE 11.3

Working with the topic you have identified, use the research skills you learned in previous chapters to locate approximately five potentially useful print or electronic sources of information about the topic.

Create a list that includes the following:

One subject-specific periodicals database likely to include relevant articles on your topic

Two articles about your topic written for an educated general audience

At least one article about your topic written for an audience with specialized knowledge

Organize your list of resources into primary and secondary sources. What makes them either primary or secondary? Pick one primary source and one secondary source and write a sentence or two summarizing the information that each provides.

Then answer these questions:

What type of primary source did you choose? Who wrote it, and why? Do you think this source provides accurate information, or is it biased in some way?

Where did the information in the secondary source come from? Was the author citing an initial study, piece of literature, or work of art? Where could you find the primary source?

Self-practice EXERCISE 11.4

With the topic from Self-Practice Exercise 11.1 and the preliminary research you conducted in Self-Practice 11.3 and referring to Section 10.2: The Structure of a Persuasive Essay, develop a working thesis and scratch outline.

Note that after reading **Section 11.2: Dialectics**, you will most likely revise your outline.

How to Be Really Convincing Sometimes it can be very challenging to convince someone of your ideas and that your point of view is valid. If your reader has strong contrary views or has had emotional experiences in the past connected to that topic, your job in persuading will be more challenging. However, if you consider your audience and tone (as discussed in **Section 10.3: Being Critical**) and think about the answers to the following questions in **Checklist 11.1, Who Is My Audience?**, you will be better able to predict possible objections your reader may have to your argument and address those accordingly. It will also help you make recognize how much and what kind of background information you need to provide your reader with context for your discussion.

Checklist 11.1 Who Is My Audience?

Who are my readers?

What do they already know on the subject?

What are they likely to be interested in?

How impartial or biased are they?

Is the subject one that may challenge their ethical or moral beliefs?

What values do we share?

What types of evidence will be most effective?

Self-practice EXERCISE 11.5

Look back at the two persuasive essay examples in Section 10.4: Examples: Persuasive Essays. With a partner, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each example. Look at

the credibility, tone, appropriateness to audience, and completeness of the ideas presented.

Example 1

Strengths Weaknesses

Example 2

Strengths Weaknesses

Collaboration: With your partner, discuss how you could make each of these arguments stronger.

11.2 Dialectics

Learning Objectives

- Explain the components, practice, and benefits of dialectical thinking
- Conduct a dialect discussion to consider other points of view on your topic

As you read in **Chapter 10, Section 10.3: Being Critical**, a strong persuasive essay will respectfully identify and discuss perspectives of the same topic. When you do this, you are presenting a well-rounded and complete discussion to your reader that shows you have critically thought about the topic and have been selective in choosing your points. As a result, there is a higher probability that you will convince your reader. The process of looking at multiple sides of a topic is called **dialectics**.

Dialectics is the act of using logical reasoning to combine, juxtapose, or synthesize opposing ideas to arrive at a strong conclusion.

The Components of Dialectics To begin the dialectic process, you first need to come up with an

idea of what topic will be discussed; this is the **thesis** behind the discussion. Once you have determined your thesis, through various methods (the easiest being discussion with someone else), you will explore opposing sides to the topic, eventually discovering at least one **antithesis**. Combining those two perspectives, you can then make your own conclusions. Maybe this process will result in you standing by the original thesis, or maybe the antithesis is incredibly convincing and you will switch sides of the argument, or maybe you still believe the original thesis but accept there are other conditions that have credibility as well. This end result is called the **synthesis**: the blending of ideas. Essentially, the process would look like this:



Considering both your thesis and the discovered antithetical perspectives will help you to arrive at a wider view of a topic: one that has more credibility. Looking back to the persuasive essay samples you read in **Section 10.4** and discussed in **Self-Practice Exercise 11.5**, consider to what degree the authors acknowledged opposing views. How did they justify their opinions? Consider how integrating dialectics into each of those arguments to a greater degree would have strengthened their points of view, ultimately making their arguments more convincing.

Self-practice EXERCISE 11.6

Based on the thesis “Governments use capital punishment as an effective tool for deterring violent crime,” answer the following questions and complete the table.

What is your stance on this statement? To what extent do you agree/disagree?

Complete the table considering the thesis statement given above.

First complete the side of the table with ideas supporting the point of view you described in question #1.

Then, challenge yourself to come up with ideas (you may need to do a little bit of research)

that would support the other side of the discussion.

Supporting the statement Against the statement

Collaboration: Discuss your answers with a partner. Do you both have the same ideas, or can you add to your list based on what your partner has come up with.

After coming up with and considering the other perspective, has your point of view changed at all?

Do you still stick by your same point of view 100 percent? Or do you concede that there are valid points from the other perspective?

Self-Practice Exercise 11.7/Discussion 3

Using both the scratch outline and the working thesis you created in **Self-Practice Exercise 11.4**, create a table like the one you used in **Self-Practice Exercise 11.6**, only filling in the side with information that supports your thesis.

Once you have created that table with your thesis given, share your table and thesis with a classmate.

Collaborate: Conduct a dialectic discussion on your topic and possible for and against the working thesis you presented. Add any points to your original table.

Remember to be aware of the process of synthesis you have gone through. Did your original point of view change at all? Is there anything you can make concessions on being valid? This may impact your thesis.

Using one or two of the opposing ideas your partner helped you come up with, revise your scratch outline from **Self-Practice Exercise 11.4**.

11.3 Organizing Your Ideas

Learning Objectives

- Revise your working thesis
- Create an outline including your thesis and main and supporting points
- Determine an appropriate organizational structure for a persuasive essay that uses critical analysis to connect your ideas and information taken from sources

For this section, you will need to refer back to **Section 10.2: The Structure of a Persuasive Essay** to help you piece your supporting and opposing ideas together.

Creating an Introduction and Thesis

The persuasive essay begins with an engaging introduction that presents the general topic. The thesis typically appears somewhere in the introduction and states the writer's point of view.

Re-evaluate Your Working Thesis

A careful analysis of your notes will help you re-evaluate your working thesis and determine whether you need to revise it. Remember that your working thesis was the starting point—not necessarily the end point—of your research. You should revise your working thesis if your ideas changed based on what you read. Even if your sources generally confirmed your preliminary thinking on the topic, it is still a good idea to tweak the wording of your thesis to incorporate the specific details you learned from research.

Jorge realized that his working thesis oversimplified the issues. He still believed that the media was exaggerating the benefits of low-carb diets. However, his research led him to conclude that these diets did have some advantages. Read Jorge's revised thesis.

Although following a low-carbohydrate diet can benefit some people, these diets are not necessarily the best option for everyone who wants to lose weight or improve their health.

Tip

Avoid forming a thesis based on a negative claim. For example, “The hourly minimum wage is not high enough for the average worker to live on.” This is probably a true statement, but persuasive arguments should make a positive case. That is, the thesis statement should focus on how the hourly minimum wage is low or insufficient.

Self-practice EXERCISE 11.8

On a sheet of paper, use your working thesis and the revised outline from Self-Practice Exercise 11.7 and list the types of evidence you might use in support of that thesis. Essentially, you are expanding your outline to include more source information.

Synthesizing and Organizing Information

By now, your thinking on your topic is taking shape. You have a sense of what major ideas to address in your paper, what points you can easily support, and what questions or subtopics might need a little more thought. In short, you have begun the process of synthesizing information—that is, of putting the pieces together into a coherent whole.

It is normal to find this part of the process a little difficult. Some questions or concepts may still be unclear to you. You may not yet know how you will tie all of your research together. Synthesizing information is a complex, demanding mental task, and even experienced researchers struggle with it at times. A little uncertainty is often a good sign! It means you are challenging yourself to work thoughtfully with your topic instead of simply restating the same information.

Synthesizing Information

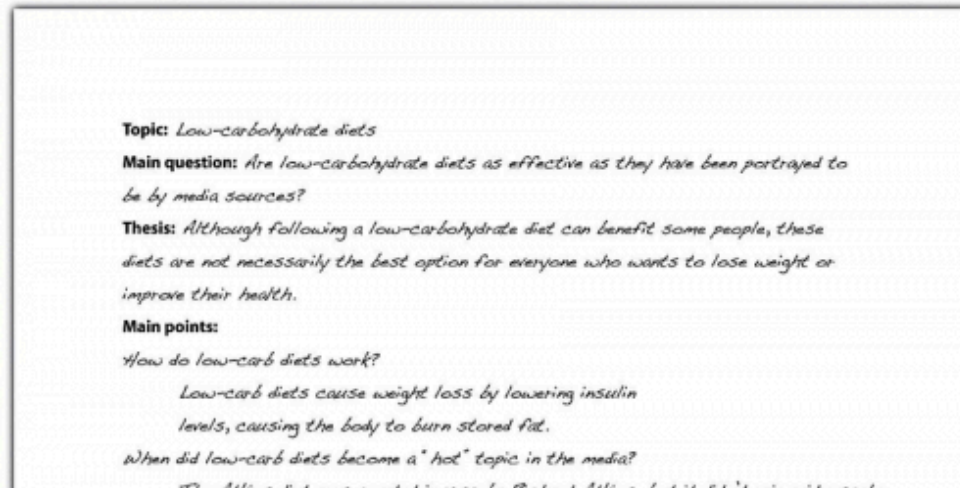
You have already considered how your notes fit with your working thesis. Now, take your synthesis a step further. Organize your notes with headings that correspond to points and subpoints you came up with through dialectics and compiled in your outline, which you presented to your instructor. As you proceed, you might identify some more important subtopics that were not part of your original plan, or you might decide that some points are not relevant to your paper.

Categorize information carefully and continue to think critically about the material. Ask yourself whether the sources are reliable and whether the connections between ideas are clear.

Remember, your ideas and conclusions will shape the paper. They are the glue that holds the rest of the content together. As you work, begin jotting down the big ideas you will use to connect the

dots for your reader. (If you are not sure where to begin, try answering your major research question and subquestions. Add and answer new questions as appropriate.) You might record these big ideas on sticky notes or type and highlight them within an electronic document.

Jorge looked back on the list of research questions that he had written down earlier. He changed a few to match his new thesis, and he began a rough outline for his paper.



You may be wondering how your ideas are supposed to shape the paper, especially since you are writing a research paper based on your research. Integrating your ideas and your information from research is a complex process, and sometimes it can be difficult to separate the two.

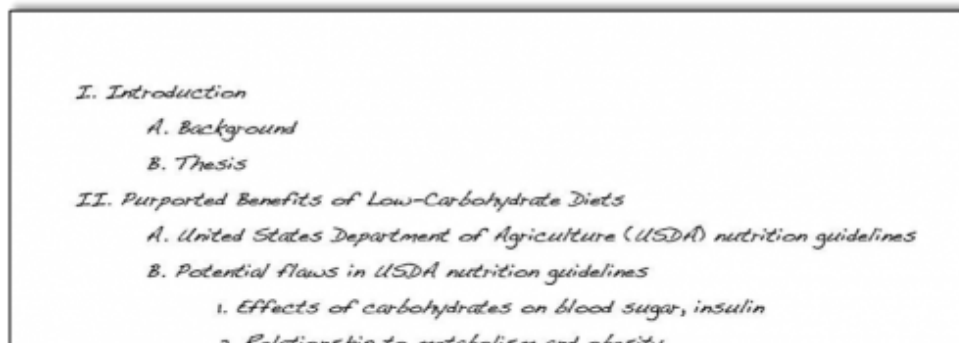
Some paragraphs in your paper will consist mostly of details from your research. That is fine, as long as you explain what those details mean or how they are linked. You should also include sentences and transitions that show the relationship between different facts from your research by grouping related ideas or pointing out connections or contrasts. The result is that you are not simply presenting information; you are synthesizing, analyzing, and interpreting it.

Plan How to Organize Your Paper

The final step to complete before beginning your draft is to choose an organizational structure. For some assignments, this may be determined by the instructor's requirements. For instance, if you are asked to explore the impact of a new communications device, a cause-and-effect struc-

ture is obviously appropriate. In other cases, you will need to determine the structure based on what suits your topic and purpose.

The purpose of Jorge's paper was primarily to persuade. With that in mind, he planned the following outline.



Essay 3: outline (2.5%)

Review the organizational structure discussed in **Chapter 10: Persuasion**. Working with the notes you organized earlier, follow these steps to begin planning how to organize your paper.

Create an outline that includes your working thesis, major subtopics, and supporting points.

The major headings in your outline will become sections or paragraphs in your paper. Remember that your ideas should form the backbone of the paper. For each major section of your outline, write a topic sentence stating the main point you will make in that section.

As you complete step 2, you may find that some points are too complex to explain in a sentence. Consider whether any major sections of your outline need to be broken up and jot down additional topic sentences as needed.

Review your notes and determine how the different pieces of information fit into your outline as supporting points.

Add any sources you have identified that you plan on using to support your ideas.

Collaboration

- Please share the outline you created with a classmate.

- Examine your classmate's outline and see if any questions come to mind or if you see any area that would benefit from an additional point or clarification. Return the outlines to each other and compare observations.
- After you have discussed your formal outline with a classmate, submit it to your instructor for approval.

You will receive up to 2.5% toward your final grade depending on how thoroughly you have conducted a dialectical discussion and developed your outline.

11.4 Critical Thinking and Research Applications

Learning Objectives

- Analyze source materials to determine how they support or refute the thesis
- Identify connections between source materials and eliminate redundant or irrelevant source materials

At this point in your project, you are preparing to move from the research phase to the writing phase. You have gathered much of the information you will use, and soon you will be ready to begin writing your draft. This section helps you transition smoothly from one phase to the next.

Beginning writers sometimes attempt to transform a pile of note cards into a formal research paper without any intermediary step. This approach presents problems. The writer's original question and thesis may be buried in a flood of disconnected details taken from research sources. The first draft may present redundant or contradictory information. Worst of all, the writer's ideas and voice may be lost.

An effective research paper focuses on the writer's ideas—from the question that sparked the research process to how the writer answers that question based on the research findings. Before beginning a draft, or even an outline, good writers pause and reflect. They ask themselves questions such as the following:

How has my thinking changed based on my research? What have I learned?

Was my working thesis on target? Do I need to rework my thesis based on what I have learned?

How does the information in my sources mesh with my research questions and help me answer those questions? Have any additional important questions or subtopics come up that I will need to address in my paper?

How do my sources complement each other? What ideas or facts recur in multiple sources?

Where do my sources disagree with each other, and why?

In this section, you will reflect on your research and review the information you have gathered. You will determine what you now think about your topic. You will **synthesize**, or put together, different pieces of information that help you answer your research questions. Finally, you will determine the organizational structure that works best for your paper and revise the outline you have already made and had approved to be a more formal sentence outline (an outline that contains more information like topic sentences, your supporting ideas organized more appropriately, and the sources you plan to use).

Selecting Useful Information

At this point in the research process, you have gathered information from a wide variety of sources. Now it is time to think about how you will use this information as a writer.

When you conduct research, you keep an open mind and seek out many promising sources. You take notes on any information that looks like it might help you answer your research questions. Often, new ideas and terms come up in your reading, and these, too, find their way into your notes. You may record facts or quotations that catch your attention even if they did not seem immediately relevant to your research question. By now, you have probably amassed an impressively detailed collection of notes. You will not use all of your notes in your paper.

Good researchers are thorough. They look at multiple perspectives, facts, and ideas related to their topic, and they gather a great deal of information. Effective writers, however, are selective. They determine which information is most relevant and appropriate for their purpose. They include details that develop or explain their ideas—and they leave out details that do not. The writer, not the pile of notes, is the controlling force. The writer shapes the content of the research paper.

In **Chapter 7: Sources: Choosing the Right Ones**, you used strategies to filter out unreliable or irrelevant sources and details. Now you will apply your critical thinking skills to the information you recorded—analyzing how it is relevant, determining how it meshes with your ideas, and finding how it forms connections and patterns.

Writing at Work

When you create workplace documents based on research, selectivity remains important. A project team may spend months conducting market surveys to prepare for rolling out a new product, but few managers have time to read the research in its entirety. Most employees want the re-

search distilled into a few well-supported points. Focused, concise writing is highly valued in the workplace.

Identify Information That Supports Your Thesis

Begin by identifying the notes that clearly support your thesis. Mark or group these, either physically or using the cut-and-paste function in your word processing program. As you identify the crucial details that support your thesis, make sure you analyze them critically. Ask the following questions to focus your thinking:

Is this detail from a reliable, high-quality source? Is it appropriate for me to cite this source in an academic paper? The bulk of the support for your thesis should come from reliable, reputable sources. If most of the details that support your thesis are from less-reliable sources, you may need to do additional research or modify your thesis.

Is the link between this information and my thesis obvious, or will I need to explain it to my readers? Remember, you have spent more time thinking and reading about this topic than your audience. Some connections might be obvious to both you and your readers. More often, however, you will need to provide the analysis or explanation that shows how the information supports your thesis. As you read through your notes, jot down ideas you have for making those connections clear.

What personal biases or experiences might affect the way I interpret this information? No researcher is 100 percent objective. We all have personal opinions and experiences that influence our reactions to what we read and learn. Good researchers are aware of this human tendency. They keep an open mind when they read opinions or facts that contradict their beliefs.

Tip

It can be tempting to ignore information that does not support your thesis or that contradicts it outright. However, such information is important. At the very least, it gives you a sense of what has been written about the issue. More importantly, it can help you question and refine your own thinking so that writing your research paper is a true learning process.

Find Connections between Your Sources

As you find connections between your ideas and information in your sources, also look for information that connects your sources. Do most sources seem to agree on a particular idea? Are some facts mentioned repeatedly in many different sources? What key terms or major concepts come up in most of your sources regardless of whether the sources agree on the finer points? Identifying these connections will help you identify important ideas to discuss in your paper.

Look for subtler ways your sources complement one another, too. Does one author refer to

another's book or article? How do sources that are more recent build upon the ideas developed in earlier sources?

Be aware of any redundancies in your sources. If you have amassed solid support from a reputable source, such as a scholarly journal, there is no need to cite the same facts from an online encyclopedia article that is many steps removed from any primary research. If a given source adds nothing new to your discussion and you can cite a stronger source for the same information, use the stronger source.

Determine how you will address any contradictions found among different sources. For instance, if one source cites a startling fact that you cannot confirm anywhere else, it is safe to dismiss the information as unreliable. However, if you find significant disagreements among reliable sources, you will need to review them and evaluate each source. Which source presents a more sound argument or more solid evidence? It is up to you to determine which source is the most credible and why.

Finally, do not ignore any information simply because it does not support your thesis. Carefully consider how that information fits into the big picture of your research. You may decide that the source is unreliable or the information is not relevant, or you may decide that it is an important point you need to bring up. What matters is that you give it careful consideration.

Self-practice EXERCISE 11.9

Consider the information you have included in the outline that was approved by your instructor and the source information you compiled in Self-Practice Exercise 11.8. Apply the information in this section to critically evaluate the usefulness, relevance, and appropriateness of the sources you have selected to support your ideas. Eliminate any that you feel take you off topic or are not credible sources.

Key Takeaways

- An effective research paper focuses on presenting the writer's ideas using information from research as support.
- Effective writers spend time reviewing, synthesizing, and organizing their research notes before they begin drafting a research paper.

- It is important for writers to revisit their research questions and working thesis as they transition from the research phase to the writing phase of a project. Usually, the working thesis will need at least minor adjustments.
- To organize a research paper, writers choose a structure that is appropriate for the topic and purpose. Longer papers may make use of more than one structure.

Journal entry #11

Write multiple paragraphs responding to the following. This is your final journal entry, so you want to make sure you reflect on what you have learned throughout the semester and your general writing skills.

What is the topic around which you would like to base your persuasive essay discussion?

Why did you choose this topic?

What challenges do you think you may face when writing about this topic?

Reflect on your writing skill development over the semester. Be as specific as possible.

What are you most confident doing? What do you still need to practise?

What do you think is your biggest accomplishment this semester?

Remember as mentioned in the Assessment Descriptions in your syllabus:

You will be expected to respond to the questions by reflecting on and discussing your experiences with the semester's material.

When writing your journals, you should focus on freewriting—writing without (overly) considering formal writing structures – but remember that it will be read by the instructor, who needs to be able to understand your ideas.

Your instructor will begin reading your Journal Package 2 this week. (2.5%)

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