Let’s Talk…

PART ONE

RHETORIC: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

PART 1 RHETORIC / JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Chapter 1 Listening

LISTENING TO OTHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH WHOM WE DISAGREE, TESTS OUR OWN IDEAS AND BELIEFS. IT FORCES US TO RECOGNIZE, WITH HUMILITY, THAT WE DON’T HAVE A MONOPOLY ON THE TRUTH.

—JANET YELLEN

IF YOU WANT TO BE LISTENED TO, YOU SHOULD PUT IN TIME LISTENING.

—MARGE PIERCY

Why would a book titled *Let’s Talk* begin with a chapter on listening? That’s a good question, and it has an important answer. Talking is (at least) a two-way street: when you talk, you’re talking *to* someone, and you want that someone to listen, to hear what you’re saying, whether it’s calling a clinic to make a doctor’s appointment or talking confidentially with your best friend about whether to break off a relationship. You want—and sometimes need—to be listened to.

You can probably think of times when you've felt like you *weren't* being listened to, or when the person you were talking with was only halfway listening.

Elizabeth MacGregor certainly has such memories. As the first person in her family—and one of only two students in her high school graduating class—to go to college, she remembers feeling insecure when she first arrived at college. "Do I really belong here?" she wondered. Faced with some daunting assignments in the first weeks of fall term, she asked for advice from an older student in her dorm. That person was sympathetic, but he was checking email and was somewhat distracted, responding "don't worry; you'll be fine." She also went to her history instructor's office hours, hoping to get some guidance for doing the first assignment. He merely encouraged her to "start on the assignment early" and wished her luck; he didn't seem to hear what she was really asking for, which was concrete advice on how to address the assignment. Reflecting on these experiences two years later, MacGregor said, "They were well meaning, but they just weren't listening to me."

Or you may be part of a group that feels ignored or not listened to. After the 2018 shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, when a group of predominantly white students started a protest that went viral and led to a huge rally against gun violence, a "march for our lives," students of color at that school pointed out that they'd been talking persistently about gun violence for years and years—but no one was listening to them. Tyah-Amoy Roberts made this point, saying that students of color had "never seen this kind of support" and that they didn't feel as if their voices were "valued as much as those of our white counterparts." In other words, they were speaking up—but no one was listening.

Students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

> Listening is the ultimate sign of respect. What you say when you listen says more than any words.
>
> —THOMAS FRIEDMAN

Or sometimes you may be the one who is not listening. During the 2019 NBA finals, Draymond Green—known for his constant chatter on and off the court—decided he'd been doing too much talking and not enough listening. In particular, he decided to listen to his mother and his fiancée, both of whom told him he needed to learn some self-discipline and especially to stop screaming at the referees. As Green put it:

> Sometimes I'm not mindful, and I'll get a tech and that will just kill the energy of our team. I've really been focused and locked in on that, and I realized I got to a point where I was doing more crying than playing. I'm sure it was disgusting to watch, because I felt disgusting playing that way.
>
> —DRAYMOND GREEN

Draymond Green, frustrated by getting a tech for yelling.

Sometimes we all need to take a good look at our behavior to see if we are doing more talking than listening.

Certainly, careful listening has been in short supply in the last few years, as the divisions in our society have grown deeper and more entrenched and as many people have retreated into their own bubbles or echo chambers where they hear only what they already agree with—and have stopped listening to anyone else. Yet if we don't learn to listen openly and carefully to one another, including those whose views differ from our own, we can't hope to gain understanding and insight into their motivations, hopes, and goals. So that's why this book opens with a chapter calling on you to start by listening and calling on all of us to pay attention to the words of others—and be willing to *hear* what they say.

Think of the times when you have most needed someone to listen—openly and carefully and intently—to something you needed to say: when you were talking through a serious conflict with a family member, for instance, or when you were trying to explain to a professor something you didn't understand about a complex topic. On occasions like these, you want the person you're addressing to really listen—to look up from what they're doing and pay attention to what you're saying. And in return, you'll want to reciprocate, listening—really listening—to what others are saying. At times you may be tempted to jump into a conversation and say what you think; but think again: it's often much more effective to find out what others think before doing so.

> We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak.
>
> —EPICTETUS

Whether you're writing an essay or participating in a face-to-face discussion, you'll need to engage with other people's views. In order to do so, you'll need to listen to what they say—and even to repeat what they say as a way of making sure you've understood before responding with what *you* want to say. This kind of listening is what rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe dubs RHETORICAL LISTENING —opening yourself to the thoughts of others and making the effort not only to hear their words but to take those words in and fully understand them. It means paying attention to what others say as a way of establishing good will and acknowledging the importance of their views. And yes, it means taking seriously and engaging with views that differ, sometimes radically, from your own. See p. 31 for advice on getting to know people different from you.

Rhetorical listening is what middle school teacher Julia Blount asked for in a *Facebook* post following the 2015 riots in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray, who suffered fatal spinal injuries while in police custody:

> Every comment or post I have read today voicing some version of disdain for the people of Baltimore—"I can't understand" or "they're destroying their own community"—tells me that many of you are not listening. I am not asking you to condone or agree with violence. I just need you to listen. . . .

> —JULIA BLOUNT, “Dear White *Facebook* Friends: I Need You to Respect What Black America Is Feeling Right Now.”

Blount went on to call for her friends to expose themselves to unfamiliar perspectives, and to engage in conversation—in other words, to listen rhetorically. Learning to listen this way takes time and attention and practice, but it is a skill you can develop and one that will pay off in better and more effective communication. There aren’t any magic bullets for becoming a good listener, but here are some tips that should put you on your way to achieving that goal.

> ***Listen with an open mind*** and without an agenda. Listen to learn, and with the goal of understanding.
> ***Let others speak*** before stating your own opinions or asking questions. And be sure that any questions you ask are respectful, not judgmental. Ask questions that are open-ended (“What do you think we should do?”) or that clarify, not challenge (“Are you saying—?” rather than “Don’t you think—?”).
>
> ***Turn off your phone*** , and don’t be checking email. Let the other person have your full attention.
> ***Listen with empathy*** to try to see things from the other person’s point of view. Make it a goal to understand their perspective, where they’re coming from. Be on the lookout for COMMON GROUND , things you can agree on: “I can see where you’re coming from.”
> ***Pay attention to body language*** and TONE of voice—yours and theirs. These can give you insight into the message the other person is trying to send. And maintain a respectful tone and posture yourself: lean in, nod your head.
> ***Don’t interrupt*** , and don’t be thinking about what you’re going to say in response.
> ***Summarize*** what the other person says to make sure you understand what they’re saying.
> ***Offer affirmation*** when possible: “Good point; I hadn’t thought of that.”
> ***Make it a point to listen to people whose views differ from yours*** —and whenever possible, talk with them in person. It’s much harder to be dismissive (or mean-spirited, as so often happens online) when you’re speaking face-to-face.

What’s listening got to do with writing?

That’s a good question, and it has a good answer: whatever you’re writing, you need to start by doing your homework—reading up on your topic, doing research, maybe conducting some interviews. That means listening.

> Writing doesn’t begin when you sit down to write. It’s a way of being in the world, and its essence is paying attention.
>
> —JULIA ALVAREZ

And whatever your topic, it's unlikely that you'll be the first to write about it. In fact, when it comes to academic writing, what you write will usually respond to something that others have already said about your topic: they say this, you think that. So after introducing your topic, one effective way to proceed is to SUMMARIZE , QUOTE , or PARAPHRASE what other credible sources have said about your topic and then to present your ideas as a response. And that means listening carefully to what's already been said, not just launching into what you have to say.

So writing is actually a way of participating in a larger conversation, of engaging with the ideas of others. When you quote or summarize or paraphrase sources, you're weaving their words or ideas in with yours—and hopefully responding to them in some way. You can't do that unless you've listened closely to those words and ideas.

Like writing, reading demands listening, really hearing what an author has to say. And if you read rhetorically, not just to absorb information but also to question and respond to the text, you are entering into a dialogue with the author. That too starts with listening.

Listening to views that differ from yours

Fortunately, there are now a number of organizations that provide guidance for listening respectfully and with an open mind, along with opportunities to meet up with people who think differently than you do.

> When you look at election results, the color red doesn't necessarily mean white power. It can also mean there are people who want the world to pay attention to them.
>
> —TREVOR NOAH

One such organization is the Listen First Project, founded by Pearce Godwin with the goal of "mend[ing] the frayed fabric of America by bridging divides one conversation at a time." Listen First has launched the National Conversation Project, which helps people start new conversations, ones dedicated to moving "from *us vs. them* to *me and you.* " In 2018, hundreds of schools, libraries, faith communities, and other groups hosted conversations "grounded in a commitment to 'listen first to understand.'" Go to listenfirstproject.org or www.nationalconversationproject.org if you're interested in joining or hosting such a conversation.

A Listen First poster at a rally during the 2016 presidential election.

I hope you'll take the advice in this chapter to heart, seeking to understand those with whom you may disagree, and learning to become a better listener as you do.

REFLECT! Think of a time when you felt you were being ignored, or not listened to. Why were others not listening—or not listening well enough? Did you try to do something about that, to get them to hear you? If not, why not? Then think of a time when you yourself failed to really listen to someone else. What caused you not to listen carefully? What would you do differently if you could go back and re-live that encounter?

Glossary

RHETORICAL LISTENING, 7-11
A way of listening that is open-minded, accepting, and respectful—of listening to what others say as a way of understanding their PERSPECTIVES and demonstrating respect for their views.
COMMON GROUND, 9, 37-40, 114-16
Shared values. Writers build common ground with AUDIENCES by acknowledging their points of view, seeking areas of compromise, and using language that includes, rather than excludes, those they aim to reach.
TONE, 27, 96
The way a writer's or speaker's STANCE is reflected in the text.
SUMMARIZE
To use your own words and sentence structure to condense someone else's text into a version that gives the main ideas of the original. In academic writing, summarizing requires DOCUMENTATION . *See* PATCHWRITING
QUOTE, 285-90
To cite someone else's words exactly as they were said or written. Quotation is most effective when the wording is worth repeating or makes a point so well that no rewording will do it justice or when you want to cite someone's exact words. Quotations in academic writing need to be acknowledged with DOCUMENTATION .
PARAPHRASE, 284-85, 290-92
To reword a text in about the same number of words but without using the word order or sentence structure of the original. Paraphrasing is generally called for when you want to include the details of a passage but do not need to QUOTE it word for word. Paraphrasing a source in academic writing requires DOCUMENTATION . *See also* PATCHWRITING

PART 1 RHETORIC / JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Chapter 2 Thinking Rhetorically

THE ONLY REAL ALTERNATIVE TO WAR IS RHETORIC.

—WAYNE BOOTH

WE DIDN'T BURN DOWN ANY BUILDINGS. . . .

YOU CAN DO A LOT WITH A PEN AND PAD.

—ICE CUBE

Wayne Booth made the above statement at a conference of writing teachers held only months after 9/11, and it quickly drew a range of responses. Just what did Booth mean by this stark statement? How could rhetoric—usually thought of as the art, theory, and practice of persuasion—act as a counter to war?

A noted critic and scholar, Booth explored these questions throughout his long career, identifying rhetoric as an ethical art that begins with intense listening and that searches for mutual understanding and common ground as alternatives to violence and war. Put another way, two of the most potent tools we have for persuasion are language—and violence: when words fail us, violence often wins the day. Booth sees the careful and ethical use of language as our best approach to keeping violence and war at bay.

In the years since 9/11, Booth's words have echoed again and again as warfare continues to erupt in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. And in the United States, people have protested the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black people at the hands of police. Protesters have held up signs saying "I Can't Breathe" and "No Justice, No Peace," and "Black Lives Matter" has been written in large yellow letters on streets in Washington, DC, and other cities. And after way too many other such killings, protesters have taken to social media as well, using similarly dramatic and memorable statements as rhetorical strategies that have captured and held the attention of people around the world.

Aerial view of Fulton Street in Brooklyn, New York.

Rhetoric as an ethical art

Note that while Booth speaks of rhetoric as an "ethical" art (based on good intentions), rhetoric can also be used for unethical purposes (with bad or evil intent)—as Hitler and other dictators have done. In fact, rhetoric used in unethical ways can itself lead to violence. That's why the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle cautioned that we need to understand rhetoric both to communicate our own ethical messages *and* to be able to recognize and resist unethical messages that others attempt to use against us. That's also why this book defines rhetoric as the practice of ETHICAL communication.

So how can you go about developing your own careful, ethical use of language? One short answer: by developing habits of mind that begin with listening and searching for understanding

before deciding what you yourself think, and by thinking hard about your own beliefs before trying to persuade others to listen to and act on what you say. In other words, by learning to THINK RHETORICALLY .

Learning to think rhetorically can serve you well—at school, at work, even at home. After all, you'll need to communicate successfully with others in order to get things done in a responsible and ethical way. On the job, you and your coworkers might do this kind of thinking to revise a shift schedule so that every worker is treated fairly and no one is required to work double shifts. Or in your college courses, you'll surely encounter class discussions that call for rhetorical thinking—for listening closely and really thinking about what others say before saying what you think.

When a group of college students became aware of how little the temporary workers on their campus were paid, for example, they met with the workers and listened to gather information about the situation. They then mounted a campaign using flyers, social media, speeches, and sit-ins—in other words, using the available means of persuasion—to win attention and convince the administration to raise the workers' pay. These students were thinking and acting rhetorically—and doing so responsibly. Note that these students worked together, both with the workers and with one another. After all, none of us can manage such actions all by ourselves; we need to engage in conversation with others and listen hard to what they say. Perhaps that's what philosopher Kenneth Burke had in mind when he created his famous "parlor" metaphor:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.
>
> —KENNETH BURKE

In this parable, each of us is the person arriving late to a room full of animated conversation; we don't understand what's going on. Yet instead of butting in or trying too quickly to get in on the conversation, we listen closely until we catch on to what people are saying. And *then* we join in, using language and rhetoric carefully to engage with others as we add our own voices to the conversation.

This book aims to teach you to think rhetorically:

- To listen to others carefully and respectfully
- To try to understand what they think, and why—and then to think hard about your own beliefs and where they come from
- To do these things before deciding what you yourself think and trying to persuade others to listen to what you say

Pay attention to what others are saying—and think about why

Thinking rhetorically begins with a willingness to hear the words of others with an open mind. It means paying attention to what others say before and even *as a way* of making your own contributions to a conversation. More than that, it means being open to the thoughts of others and making the effort not only to hear their words but also to take those words in and fully understand what they are saying. It means paying attention to what others say as a way of establishing good will and acknowledging the importance of their views. And most of all, it means engaging with views that differ from your own—and being open to what they say.

> The simple act of paying attention can take you a long way.
>
> —KEANU REEVES

When you enter any conversation, whether at school, at work, or with friends, take the time to understand what's being said rather than rushing to a conclusion or a judgment. Listen carefully to what others are saying, and think about what motivates them: Where are they coming from?

Developing such habits of mind will be useful to you almost every day, whether you're participating in a class discussion, negotiating with friends over what movie to see, or thinking about a local ballot issue to decide how you'll vote. In each case, thinking rhetorically means being flexible, determined to seek out varying—and sometimes conflicting—points of view.

In ancient Rome, the great Roman statesman and orator Cicero argued that considering alternative POINTS OF VIEW and COUNTERARGUMENTS was key to making a successful argument, and it is just as important today. Even when you disagree with a point of view—perhaps especially when you disagree with it—force yourself to see the issue from the viewpoint of its advocates before you reject their positions. Say you're skeptical that hydrogen fuel will be the solution to climate change, for example: don't reject the idea until you've thought hard about what those in favor of it say and carefully considered other possible solutions.

REFLECT! Blogger **Sean Blanda** warns that many of us gravitate on social media to those who think like we do, which often leads to the belief that we are right and that those with other worldviews are "dumb." He argues that we need to "make an honest effort to understand those who are not like us" and to remember that "we might be wrong." Look at some of your own posts. How many different perspectives do you see represented? What might you do to think—and listen—more rhetorically?

Consider the larger context

Thinking hard about the views of others also means considering the larger CONTEXT and how it shapes what they're saying. When you think rhetorically, you may need to do some research,

to investigate whether there are any historical, political, or cultural factors that might account for where someone's beliefs are "coming from."

In analyzing the issue of gun rights, for instance, you would not merely consider your own thinking or read about what others think. In addition, you would look at the issue in a larger context by considering what the US Constitution says about gun ownership and how it's been interpreted over time, thinking about the broader political agendas of both those who advocate for and those who oppose stricter gun control, asking what the economic ramifications of adopting—or rejecting—new gun restrictions might be, and so on. In short, you would try to see the issue from as many different perspectives and in as broad a context as possible before formulating your own stance. And in writing about this issue, you'll draw on these sources—what others have said about the issue—to support your own position and to help you consider other positions.

What do you think, and why?

Examining all points of view on any issue will involve some tough thinking about your own STANCE —literally, where you yourself are coming from—and why you think as you do. Such thinking can help you define your stance or perhaps even lead you to change your mind; in either case, you stand to gain. Just as you need to think hard about the motivations of others, it's important to examine what's motivating you, asking yourself what influences in your life lead you to think as you do or to take certain positions.

Ibram X. Kendi offers an example. When a student from Ghana gave a "monologue" in class detailing negative and racist ideas about Black Americans, Professor Kendi provided data to counter his views, to no avail. After class, however, the discussion continued, with Kendi asking the student if he could name "some racist ideas the British say about Ghanaians." The student hesitated, but then came up with a list of such ideas, which he vehemently agreed were not true. Then Kendi returned to the student's earlier statements about Black Americans, asking him where he got those ideas. On reflection, the student said he got them from his family, friends, and his own observations. And where did he think those people get their ideas about Black Americans? "Probably American Whites," the student said.

> His mind seemed open, so I jumped on in. "So if African Americans went to Ghana, consumed British racist ideas about Ghanaians, and started expressing those ideas to Ghanaians . . . What would you think about that?"
>
> He smiled, surprising me. "I got it," he said, turning to walk out of the classroom.
>
> "Are you sure?" I said. He turned back to me. "Yes, sir. Thanks, Prof."
>
> —IBRAM X. KENDI, *How to Be an Antiracist*

Examining your own stance and motivation is equally important outside the classroom. Suppose you're urging fellow members of a campus group to lobby for a rigorous set of procedures to

deal with accusations of sexual harassment. On one level, you're alarmed by the statistics showing a steep increase in cases of rape on college campuses, and you want to do something about it. But when you think a bit more, you begin to consider the rights of those who stand accused. Maybe a close friend has been a victim of sexual harassment—and maybe another friend has been falsely accused. You begin to realize that the issue of sexual harassment on campus is more complex than you thought. Your commitment to reduce sexual violence still holds, but thinking rhetorically has led you to a more nuanced understanding of what it means to have fairness and justice for all.

Find out what's been said about your topic

Rhetorical thinking calls on you to do some homework, to find out everything you can about what's been said about your topic, to ANALYZE what you find, and then to use that information to inform your own ideas. In other words, you want your own thinking to be well informed and to reflect more than just your own opinion.

To take an everyday example, you should do some pretty serious thinking when deciding on a major purchase, such as a new laptop. You'll want to begin by considering the purchase in the larger context of your life. Why do you need a new laptop right now? If you're considering buying the newest model, is it for practical reasons or just because it seems likely to be the best? Do you want it in part as a status symbol? If you're concerned about the environment, how will you dispose of your current laptop? Analyzing your specific motivations and purposes this way can guide you in drawing up a list of laptops to consider.

Then you'll need to do some RESEARCH , checking out product reports and reviews. Don't just trust the information provided by the company that manufactures and sells the laptops you're considering. Instead, you should consult multiple sources and check them against one another.

You'll also want to consider your findings in light of your priorities. Cost, for instance, may not be as high on your priority list as something else. Such careful thinking will help you come to a sound decision, and then explain it to others. If your parents are helping you buy the laptop, you'll want to consider what they might think, and to anticipate questions they may ask.

You'll also need to recognize and analyze how various rhetorical strategies work to persuade you. You may have been won over by a funny Apple commercial you saw on Super Bowl Sunday. But what made that ad so memorable? To answer that question, you'll need to study it closely, determining just what qualities—a clever script? memorable music? celebrity actors? cute animals? a provocative message?—made the ad so persuasive. Once you've determined that, you'll want to consider whether the laptop will actually live up to the advertiser's promises. This is the kind of research and analysis you will do when you engage in rhetorical thinking.

Give credit

Part of engaging with what others have thought and said is to give credit where credit is due. Acknowledging the work of others will show that you've done your homework and that you want to credit those who have influenced you. The great physicist Isaac Newton famously and graciously gave credit when he wrote to his rival Robert Hooke in 1676, saying:

> You have added much in several ways. . . . If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.
>
> —ISAAC NEWTON

In this letter, Newton acknowledges the work of Hooke before saying, with a fair amount of modesty, that his own contributions were made possible by Hooke and others. In doing so, he is thinking—and acting—rhetorically.

You can give credit informally, as Newton does in this letter, or you can do so formally with a full CITATION and DOCUMENTATION . Which method you choose will depend on your purpose, genre, and the rest of your RHETORICAL SITUATION . Academic writing, for instance, usually requires documentation, but if you're writing for a personal blog, you might embed a link that connects to a work you've cited—or simply give an informal shout-out to a friend who contributed to your thinking. In each case, you'll want to be specific about what words or ideas you've drawn from others, and to be sure it's clear what they say and what you're saying. Such care in crediting your sources contributes to your credibility—and is an important part of ethical, rhetorical thinking.

Be imaginative

Remember that intuition and imagination can often lead to great insights. While you want to think carefully and analytically, don't be afraid to take chances. A little imagination can lead you to new ideas about a topic you're studying and about how to approach it in a way that will interest others. Such insights can often pay off big-time. One student athlete was interested in how the mass media covered the Olympics, and he began doing research on the coverage in *Sports Illustrated* from different periods. So far, so good: he found plenty of information for an essay showing that the magazine had been a major promoter of the Olympics.

While looking through old issues of *Sports Illustrated* , however, he kept feeling that something he was seeing in the early issues was different from current issues . . . though he couldn't quite articulate what. This hunch led him to make an imaginative leap, to study that difference even though it was beyond the topic he had set out to examine. On closer inspection, he found that over the decades *Sports Illustrated* had slowly but surely moved from focusing on teams to depicting only individual stars.

> A hunch is creativity trying to tell you something.
>
> —FRANK CAPRA

This discovery led him to make an argument he would never have made had he not followed his creative hunch—that the evolution of sports from a focus on the team to a focus on individual stars is reflected in the pages of *Sports Illustrated* . It also helped him write a much more interesting—and more persuasive—essay, one that captured the attention not only of his instructor and classmates but also of a local sports newsmagazine, which reprinted his essay. Like this student, you can benefit by using your imagination and listening to your intuition. You just might stumble on something exciting.

The cover on the left shows the 1980 US ice hockey team's "miracle on ice" victory over the USSR; the one on the right shows the 2018 MVP in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

REFLECT! Think about a topic you'd like to explore or a question you'd like to answer. You could do some research . . . or you could begin by thinking *beyond* the box. Draw a picture that captures your topic, or compose a brief rap, or create a meme. If you made a movie about your topic, what would the title be—and who would star in it? In other words, use your imagination!

Put in your oar

So rhetorical thinking offers a toolkit of strategies for entering a conversation, strategies that will help you understand the situation and "put in your oar" and make your voice count. Whatever you say, give some thought to how you want to present yourself and how you can best appeal to your audience. Following are some tips that can help.

- How do you want to come across—as thoughtful? serious? curious? something else?
- What can you do to represent yourself as knowledgeable and CREDIBLE ?
- What can you do to show respect for your AUDIENCE ?
- How can you show that you have your audience's best interests at heart?

Imagine you want to create a campus food pantry and are preparing a presentation for your meeting with the dean and the director of food services. You'll want to come across as knowledgeable and well informed, to show them that you've done your homework. You'll need to present evidence of food insecurity on your campus and of what other colleges have done—statistics about how many students often go hungry, anecdotes about students you know, examples of food pantries that similar schools have created, and so on. You might want to put this information on a PowerPoint slide to reinforce the points you are making.

You'll also want to be careful to demonstrate respect for your audience. That means thanking them for meeting with you, being well prepared, and keeping to the time allotted for the meeting. And you'll want to show that you're aware of the stakes involved and to acknowledge that they have many other issues to deal with. Finally, you'll want to listen carefully to what they say, and with an open mind.

In other words, you'll want to think and act rhetorically—and to use language that shows you have the best interests of the college and its students in mind. You might say you "wish to suggest" that "opening a food pantry is one way to help students who are food insecure"—rather

than expecting your audience to come up with a solution and insisting, perhaps too strongly, that something “needs to be done right now.” This is not to say that you should underestimate the problem; but better to focus on your proposed solution, on how the college can help students who are food insecure.

This kind of rhetorical thinking will go a long way toward making sure you will be listened to and taken seriously.

As the examples in this chapter illustrate, rhetorical thinking involves certain habits of mind that can and should lead to something—often to an action, to making something happen. And when it comes to taking action, those who think rhetorically are in a very strong position. They have listened attentively, engaged with the words and ideas of others, viewed their topic from many alternative perspectives, and done their homework. This kind of rhetorical thinking will set you up to contribute your own ideas—and will increase the likelihood that your ideas will be heard and will inspire real action.

Indeed, the ability to think rhetorically is of great importance in today’s global world, as professors Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein explain:

> The ability to enter complex, many-sided conversations has taken on a special urgency in today’s diverse, post-9/11 world, where the future for all of us may depend on our ability to put ourselves in the shoes of those who think very differently from us. Listening carefully to others, including those who disagree with us, and then engaging with them thoughtfully and respectfully . . . can help us see beyond our own pet beliefs, which may not be shared by everyone. The mere act of acknowledging that someone might disagree with us may not seem like a way to change the world; but it does have the potential to jog us out of our comfort zones, to get us thinking critically about our own beliefs, and perhaps even to change our minds.
>
> —GERALD GRAFF and CATHY BIRKENSTEIN, *“They Say / I Say”: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*

In the long run, if enough of us learn to think rhetorically, we just might achieve Wayne Booth’s goal—to use words (and images) in thoughtful and constructive ways as an alternative to violence and war.

REFLECT! Spend a half hour or so looking back over the above tips for thinking rhetorically, and then make some notes about how many of those tips you currently follow—and to what effect.

Glossary

ETHICS, 14-15
Right or moral conduct, practices, or choices that guide us in life.

THINKING RHETORICALLY, 12-28
Listening to others with an open mind, trying to understand what they think and why—and then examining your own beliefs and where they come from, before deciding what you yourself think.
POINT OF VIEW, 194
The position from which something is considered: first person (*I* or *we*), second person (*you*), or third person (*he, she* , or *they*). *See also* PERSPECTIVES
COUNTERARGUMENT, 16, 90-91, 265
In ARGUMENT , an alternative POSITION or objection to the writer's position. The writer of an argument should not only acknowledge counterarguments but also, if at all possible, accept, accommodate, or refute each counterargument.
CONTEXT, 17, 27-28, 59
Part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION , conditions affecting the text such as what else has been said about a topic; social, economic, and other factors; and any constants such as due date and length.
STANCE, 17-19, 26-27
A writer's attitude toward the subject—for example, reasonable, neutral, angry, curious. Stance is conveyed through TONE and word choice.
ANALYSIS, 132-56
A GENRE of writing in which you look at what a text says and how it says it. Key Features: a SUMMARY of a text or other subject • attention to CONTEXT • a clear INTERPRETATION or judgment • reasonable support for your conclusions
RESEARCH, 83, 103, 159-60
A process of INQUIRY —of gathering information from reliable sources to learn about something, find an answer to a question that interests you, understand or support an ARGUMENT , and more. *See also* FIELD RESEARCH
CITATION, 283-94
In a text, the act of giving information from a source, for example, by QUOTING , PARAPHRASING , or SUMMARIZING . A citation and its corresponding parenthetical DOCUMENTATION , footnote, or endnote provide minimal information about the source; complete information appears in a list of WORKS CITED or REFERENCES at the end of the text.
DOCUMENTATION, 309-44, 360-86
Publication information about the sources cited in a text. IN-TEXT DOCUMENTATION usually appears in parentheses at the point where it's cited or in an endnote or a footnote. Complete documentation usually appears as a list of WORKS CITED or REFERENCES at the end of the text. Documentation styles vary by discipline. *See also* APA STYLE ; MLA STYLE
RHETORICAL SITUATION, 25-28, 81-82
The circumstances that affect writing or other communication, including PURPOSE , AUDIENCE , GENRE , STANCE , CONTEXT , MEDIA , and DESIGN .
CREDIBILITY, 164-66, 297-98
The sense of trustworthiness that a writer conveys through the text.
AUDIENCE, 25-26
Those to whom a text is directed—the people who read, listen to, or view the text. Audience is a key part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION .

THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN RHETORICAL SITUATION

Whatever you're writing—a text to a friend, a job application, an essay exam, a script for a presentation—will call for you to consider your rhetorical situation: your *purpose* for writing, your *stance* toward your topic, the *audience* you want to reach, a *genre* and *medium* for doing so. In addition, you'll want to consider the larger *context* , about both the topic and what you'll need to know to write well about it. These are all things to think about early in the process of writing. The following guidelines will help you do so:

What is your purpose for writing, and what motivates you to do so?

What drives you to write? In college, it may be an assignment. Even then it's likely that you'll write about something that matters, that grabs your attention. But beyond an explicit assignment, what gives you the itch to write? Most likely it will be some issue you're passionate about, and that inspires you to speak up, to add your voice to the conversation. It's worth taking time to explore your purposes for writing: Do you want to explain a topic, to help others understand it? To persuade someone to agree with your position on an issue? To fulfill an assignment? To entertain, or bring a smile to those who read what you write? Whatever your purpose, it affects your choice of genre, medium, design, and content: the material needed to entertain is not the same as that needed to explain a theory or to persuade an audience to support a certain cause. So your purpose becomes your guiding light, one that helps you stay on track.

What audience do you want to reach?

Before starting to write, take some time to think about your potential audiences. Today, that audience might be as narrow as your instructor or as wide as anyone with access to the internet; but the more you can know about who you're writing to, the better chance you have of connecting with them. If your audience is an instructor, for instance, you know that they value clarity, so you should choose your words carefully and make sure that your points are clear. If you're tweeting to friends, however, you can probably assume that they want information about you and your thoughts—and that they won't hold you to a high bar in terms of correctness or precision. Here are some questions for thinking about your audience:

- What do you and your AUDIENCE have in common? Where do you differ?

- What values do they hold, and what kinds of EVIDENCE will they accept? How can you build on any COMMON GROUND you share with them and appeal to their values?
- What do they know about your topic, and how much background information will they need? Can you assume they'll be interested in what you say—and if not, how can you get them interested?
- What do you want your audience to think or do in response to what you say—take your ideas seriously? Take some kind of action?

If your audience is largely unknown, be careful not to assume that they think as you do, value what you value, or have the same cultural and linguistic background as you do. For these audiences, best to take a calm and respectful stance, hoping that they will respond to you in the same way.

What is your stance on your topic, and what do you want to say about it?

Think of stance as your attitude toward the topic. If your topic is one about which you have some depth of knowledge, you may take an authoritative stance: you've done your homework and know what you're talking about. Or you might take a reporter's stance, laying out information you've researched so that others can understand it. Or your stance may be that of a critic who analyzes a text and raises questions about it. On other occasions, you may take up the stance of an advocate, a skeptic, even a cheerleader for an issue you're passionate about. In each case, your stance will guide the TONE you adopt in your writing: whether passionate, objective, curious, outraged, or something else, you'll want to make sure that it reflects your stance and is appropriate to your AUDIENCE and PURPOSE .

What genre(s) will you use?

Academic genres include many of the assignments you regularly receive: REPORTS , ANALYSES , close readings, ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES , research-based ARGUMENTS . All genres. In some cases, you may be assigned to write in a specific genre ("Write an argument related to the maker movement"). But if not, you'll need to decide which genre best matches your purpose, audience, and stance. Then you'll have to make sure that you understand the characteristic features of your chosen genre, including format.

What media will you use, and how will you design what you write?

Closely aligned to the genre you choose are questions of MEDIA and DESIGN . Do your purpose, stance, and audience call for a written print text, perhaps with illustrations? a password-protected website? an oral presentation with slides or handouts? Whether your

medium is oral, print, or digital, you'll need to consider questions of design: what you want the "look" of your text to be—informal or formal, eye-catching or subdued, serious or humorous, and so on. What use of headings, fonts, color, or white space will help achieve your purpose? What VISUALS , video clips, or audio clips might enhance your text?

Consider context: What do you need to know?

Answering this question calls for taking an inventory of what you know about your issue topic. For an assignment that asks you to ANALYZE a text or image, you'll need the ability (and the time) to do a detailed close reading that will uphold your interpretation. For an ARGUMENT on Bollywood films, you might need to research the history of Bollywood, its rise in popularity, and what's already been said about it. For a presentation on the need for more lighting on campus to make it a safer place, you might conduct a survey of student opinion, carry out observations on poorly lit areas of campus, interview campus officials, or track changes to lighting over the years. In all these instances, you would also need to decide whether you need illustrations. Consider your answer to this question in context: How much time do you have to complete the project, and what sources will you need and find available in that time frame?

If you've thought about the questions in this chapter for considering your own rhetorical situation, you should have a pretty good grasp of the circumstances within which you write. It's important to recognize that your writing doesn't come out of nowhere but rather occurs in a particular time and place, in response to particular things others have thought and said, and in relation to those who will be receiving your message.

It's also important to recognize that the advice offered here is itself part of a particular context—of college writing in English-speaking countries. But writing and rhetoric differ across contexts and cultures. That's one more reason to analyze the contexts you're working in as well as the audience you're trying to reach.

Wherever you are, think of yourself as being at the center of an ongoing conversation, one in which what you have to say matters. Then start to write!

REFLECT! Look over something you've written, and think about the rhetorical situation in which you wrote it—your intended audience and purpose, the genre and medium, and so on. Choose one of those elements, and think about how well you addressed it. Then think about what you would have done differently if your rhetorical situation had been different—for example, if you'd written in a different genre or medium—and write a paragraph or two about how your writing would have been different, and why.

Glossary

EVIDENCE, 85-90
In ARGUMENT , the data you present to support your REASONS . Such data may include statistics, calculations, examples, ANECDOTES , QUOTATIONS , case studies, or anything else

that will convince your readers that your reasons are compelling. Evidence should be *sufficient* (enough to show that the reasons have merit) and *relevant* (appropriate to the argument you're making).

COMMON GROUND, 9, 37-40, 114-16

Shared values. Writers build common ground with AUDIENCES by acknowledging their points of view, seeking areas of compromise, and using language that includes, rather than excludes, those they aim to reach.

TONE, 27, 96

The way a writer's or speaker's STANCE is reflected in the text.

AUDIENCE, 25-26

Those to whom a text is directed—the people who read, listen to, or view the text. Audience is a key part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION .

AUDIENCE, 25-26

Those to whom a text is directed—the people who read, listen to, or view the text. Audience is a key part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION .

PURPOSE, 25

In writing, your goal: to explore a topic, to express an opinion, to entertain, to report information, to persuade, and so on. Purpose is one element of the RHETORICAL SITUATION .

REPORT, 157-85

A GENRE of writing that presents information to inform readers on a subject. Key Features: a topic carefully focused for a specific AUDIENCE • definitions of key terms • trustworthy information • appropriate organization and DESIGN • a confident TONE that informs rather than argues. *See also* IMRAD ; PROFILE

ANALYSIS, 132-56

A GENRE of writing in which you look at what a text says and how it says it. Key Features: a SUMMARY of a text or other subject • attention to CONTEXT • a clear INTERPRETATION or judgment • reasonable support for your conclusions

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY, 272-76

A GENRE of writing that gives an overview of published research and scholarship on a topic. Each entry includes complete publication information for a source and a SUMMARY or an ABSTRACT . A *descriptive annotation* summarizes the content of a source without commenting on its value; an *evaluative annotation* gives an opinion about the source along with a description of it. Key Features: complete bibliographic information • a brief SUMMARY or DESCRIPTION of the work • evaluative comments (for an evaluative bibliography) • some indication of how the source will inform your RESEARCH • consistency

ARGUMENT, 99-131

Any text that makes a CLAIM supported by REASONS and EVIDENCE . A GENRE that uses REASONS and EVIDENCE to support a CLAIM . Key Features: an explicit POSITION • a response to what others have said • appropriate background information • a clear indication of why the topic matters • good REASONS and EVIDENCE • attention to more than one POINT OF VIEW • an authoritative TONE • an appeal to readers' values

MEDIA, 191, 205, 226-29

The means of delivering messages—for example, digital, oral, print, and social. The singular of *media* is "medium."

DESIGN, 96-97, 448-58
The way a text is arranged and presented visually. Elements of design include FONTS , colors, illustrations, LAYOUT , and white space.
VISUALS, 455-57, 459-67
Photos, graphs, maps, diagrams, pie charts, tables, videos, and other images. Visuals can be used to support or illustrate a point and also to present information that is easier to understand in a chart or graph than it would be in a paragraph.
ANALYSIS, 132-56
A GENRE of writing in which you look at what a text says and how it says it. Key Features: a SUMMARY of a text or other subject • attention to CONTEXT • a clear INTERPRETATION or judgment • reasonable support for your conclusions
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PART 1 RHETORIC / JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Chapter 3 Engaging Respectfully with Others

LET US TALK WITH—NOT AT—EACH OTHER—IN OUR HOMES, SCHOOLS, WORKPLACES, AND PLACES OF WORSHIP.

—CONDOLEEZZA RICE

WHERE SOMETHING STANDS, SOMETHING ELSE STANDS BESIDE IT.

—IGBO PROVERB

In the late spring of 2017, Oprah Winfrey stood before a cheering crowd of graduating students at Agnes Scott College, urging them to learn to engage respectfully with others. She told the assembled crowd that "two weeks after the election last year" she had invited a group of women voters—half on the right and half on the left, politically—to join her at a diner for "great

croissants with jam." But no one wanted to come, saying they'd "never sat this close" to someone from the other side and didn't want to be around them. Winfrey eventually prevailed and brought the women together, even though they came in "all tight and hardened." But as she goes on to say in her speech, it worked.

> After two and a half hours . . . the women were sitting around the table, listening to each other's stories, hearing both sides, and by the end they were holding hands, exchanging emails and phone numbers, and singing "Reach Out and Touch." . . . Which means it's possible; it can happen. So I want you to work in your own way to change the world in respectful conversations with others. . . . And I want you to enter every situation aware of its context, open to hear the truths of others and most important open to letting the process of changing the world change you.
>
> —OPRAH WINFREY, Agnes Scott College commencement address
>
> Watch Oprah Winfrey's speech at letstalklibrary.com .

You have probably encountered views that differ a great deal from your own in your college classes: after all, that's one good reason for going to college—to learn about people and cultures and places other than those you call home. And some of your instructors may have focused on how to engage in critical conversations without being belligerent or disrespectful. But consider this incident that took place some years ago in one writing class at Ohio State.

Students who were serving as peer reviewers were reading a narrative essay called "The Little Squirrel" in which the author described finding a "small, helpless squirrel" caught in a trap on his family farm. His descriptions of the squirrel were empathetic and emotional as he contemplated his choices: "What should I do now?" he asked. The peer reviewers, expecting him to free the little squirrel, were quite startled when he continued the essay by saying that with only a few seconds hesitation, he pulled out his gun and killed the squirrel. "How could you do that to a little squirrel?" two students demanded, one coming just short of calling him a murderer.

The author responded defensively and said he thought they were being "wimps." At this point, they weren't even talking about the essay anymore, until another student who'd been quietly observing the scene said, "Hold on now! This isn't getting us anywhere. We need to step back and give each other a little space—and a little respect." This intervention allowed the writer to say he thought he had made the ethical decision because the squirrel had a broken leg and wasn't going to survive. In his view, he had done the right thing. Giving him their attention enabled the group to understand his motives better. In addition, they noted that if the author had explained his rationale in the narrative, rather than arousing their empathy for the little squirrel, they might still disagree with his decision but wouldn't have been so horrified and antagonistic to him. In this case, paying respectful attention didn't lead to unanimous agreement, but it did lead to defusing a very contentious situation and to learning about differing views of responsibility and action.

The goal of this chapter is to encourage and guide you as you engage with others: respectfully listening to their stories, their truths—and contributing to a process that may, indeed, change the world. Here are some steps you can take to realize this goal.

Get to know people different from you

It's a commonplace today to point out that we often live and act in "silos," places where we encounter only people who think like we do, who hold the same values we do. Even though the internet has made the whole world available to us, we increasingly choose to interact only with like-minded people—online and in person. We operate in what some call "echo chambers," where we hear our views echoed back to us from every direction. It can be easy, and comforting, to think this is the real world—but it's not! Beyond your own bubble of posts and conversations lie countless others with different views and values.

> To make sense of the world, look to those who see it differently.
>
> —*THE ATLANTIC*

So one of the big challenges we face today is finding ways to get out of our own echo chambers and make an effort to know people who take different positions, hold different values. But simply encountering people who think differently is just the start. Breaking out of our bubbles calls for making the effort to understand those different perspectives, to listen with empathy and an open mind, and to hear where others are literally coming from. As we see in the story Oprah Winfrey tells in her commencement address, even the first step is hard: she had to work to convince the women to simply meet one another, and then she had to persuade them to listen, as she says, with respect. Once they did, things changed: they realized that it's not as easy to dislike or dismiss someone when you're sitting face-to-face.

That's certainly what one Canadian student found when she spent a semester in Washington, DC. She had expected the highlights of her semester to be visiting places like the Smithsonian museums or the Library of Congress, but her greatest experience, as she describes it in a blog post, turned out to be an "unexpected gift: While in DC, I became close, close friends with people I disagree with on almost everything." As she got to know these people, she found that they were

> funny, smart, and kind. We all really liked music. . . . We even lived together. We ate dinner together, every single night. So I couldn't look down on them. I couldn't even consider it. And when you can't look down on someone who fundamentally disagrees with you, when you're busy breaking bread, sharing your days, laughing about the weather . . . well.
>
> —SHAUNA VERT, "Making Friends Who Disagree with You (Is the Healthiest Thing in the World)"

During a conversation with one of her housemates, a deeply conservative Christian from Mississippi, Vert mentioned that she was “pro-choice,” realizing as she did so that this was “dangerous territory.” To her surprise, she met not resistance or rebuke but—curiosity:

> She wanted to know more. Her curiosity fueled my curiosity, and we talked. We didn’t argue—we debated gently, very gently. . . . We laughed at nuance, we self-deprecated, we trusted each other. And we liked each other. Before the conversation, and after the conversation. To recap: Left-wing Canadian meets Bible Belt Republican. Discusses controversial political issues for over an hour. Walks away with a new friend.
>
> Read Shauna Vert’s full blog post at letstalklibrary.com .

This kind of careful, responsible, respectful exchange seems particularly hard in today’s highly polarized society, where anger and hate are fueled by incendiary messages coming from social media and highly partisan news organizations. Just finding people outside our silos to talk with can be hard. But, like Vert, some people have taken up the challenge and acted to find ways to bring people with different views together.

One group aiming to create conversation rather than conflict is the Living Room Conversations project, which offers guidelines for engaging in meaningful discussions on more than fifty specific topics—free speech on campus, the opportunity gap, and more. The founders want these conversations among people who disagree to “increase understanding, reveal common ground, and allow us to discuss possible solutions.” Visit livingroomconversations.org to find the resources to start a “living room” conversation yourself.

> We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.
>
> —MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

The point is that it’s worth making the time to find and engage with those who hold different ideas and values than you do. And this means becoming familiar with sources other people read, too. Get out of your comfort zone, and look beyond the sources you know and trust; look carefully at what “the other side” is reading. Sites like allsides.com that present views from left, right, and center can help. It’s time to shut down the echo chambers, seek out people outside of our silos, and engage respectfully with others.

Practice empathy

Many of the examples above suggest the power of EMPATHY , the ability to share someone else’s feelings. Dylan Marron is someone who directly addresses empathy and shows how it works. As the creator and host of several popular video series on controversial social issues, Marron has gained quite a bit of attention and, he says, “a lot of hate.” Early on, he tried to ignore hateful Comments, but then he started to get interested and began visiting Commenter profiles to learn about the people writing them. Doing so, he said, led him to realize “there was a

human on the other side of the screen"—and prompted him to call some of these people and talk with them on the phone. He shares these conversations on his podcast *Conversations with People Who Hate Me* .

In one of these talks, Marron learned that Josh, who in a Comment had called Marron a "moron" and said that being gay was a sin, had recently graduated from high school, so Marron asked him "how was high school for you?" Josh replied that "it was hell" and elaborated by saying that he'd been bullied by kids who made fun of him for being "bigger." Marron went on to share his own experiences of being bullied, and as the conversation progressed, empathy laid the groundwork that helped them relate to each other.

Dylan Marron, host of a podcast of conversations among people who disagree.

At the end of another conversation, a man who had called Marron a "talentless hack" reflected on the ubiquitous Comment fields where such statements often appear, saying that "the Comment sections are really a way to get your anger at the world out on random strangers"—an insight that made him "rethink the way I interact with people online." Marron's work shows that Comment sections are sometimes used to release anger—and often hate, the very opposite of the kind of empathy that can bring people together. More than that, his work demonstrates the power of practicing empathy and how it can help us to see one another as human, even in the most negative and nasty places.

Watch Dylan Marron's TED Talk and listen to his podcast at letstalklibrary.com .

In his 2018 TED Talk, Marron stresses the importance of empathy, noting, however, that "empathy is not endorsement" and doesn't require us to compromise our deeply held values but, rather, to acknowledge the views of "someone raised to think very differently" than we do. That's the power and the promise of practicing empathy.

Demonstrate respect

If you've never heard Aretha Franklin belt out the lyrics to "Respect," take time to look it up on *YouTube* . Franklin added two now-famous lines along with a chorus to Otis Redding's original song, transforming it into an anthem for all those who are demanding R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

Franklin's message is still a timely one today, when *dis* respect seems so common, especially among those who don't agree. But respect is a two-way street: if we need to stand up and ask for the respect of others, then we also need to respect them. Moreover, we need to invite (and deserve!) respect. Easy to say, but harder to do. So just how can you demonstrate respect for others?

Aretha Franklin onstage in 1968.

- ***Listen*** with genuine interest and an open mind, and without interrupting or making snap judgments.

- ***Be helpful*** and cooperative.
- ***Build bridges*** instead of shutting others out.
- ***Represent other people's views fairly*** and generously—and acknowledge their accomplishments whenever you can.
- ***Ask questions*** rather than issuing orders or challenges.
- ***Apologize*** if you say something you regret. We all make mistakes!
- ***Be sincere*** , and remember to say "thank you."
- ***Be on time*** : even that is a sign of respect.
- ***Do what you say you'll do*** . Keep your promises.

This advice largely holds for writing as well as speaking. Whether online or in print, our written words will usually be more effective if they come across as sincere, cooperative, and fair—and if we acknowledge viewpoints other than our own and consider them evenhandedly. These acts help build bridges in our writing, connecting us to members of our audience, including those who may not agree with us on all things.

If you respect others in these ways, in both writing and speaking, it's more likely that you'll earn their respect in return. Remember that respect can engender respect in return and thus lead to common ground, compromise, and understanding. As the French philosopher Voltaire is reported to have said, "I may disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Search for common ground

Even children learn pretty early on that digging in to opposing positions doesn't usually get very far: "No you can't!" "Yes I can!" can go on forever, without getting anywhere. Rhetoricians in the ancient world understood this very well and thus argued that for conversations to progress, it's necessary to look for and establish some COMMON GROUND , no matter how small. If "No you can't!" moves on to "Well, you can't do that in this particular situation," then maybe the conversation can continue.

> You like dogs? So do I.
>
> —TRISH HALL, *How to Persuade*

This was a strategy that members of a book group used when they were discussing Michelle Obama's *Becoming* . One member set off alarm bells when she said she was shocked by the glossy cover photo, showing the former First Lady with "one shoulder bare." Another member of the group responded, saying she was equally shocked that anyone would make a fuss about what's on the cover rather than focusing on what's inside the book—and went on to say she found the book "deeply moving." Conversation could have stopped right there, at an impasse. But then someone said, "Well, like it or not, it's a story well worth reading." That comment established some common ground they could all agree on—and the conversation continued.

In this case, the stakes were not high: all members of the group were friends, and whether or not they all liked the book, they liked and respected one another. But sometimes the stakes can be very high, and even potentially dangerous. That was certainly the case when Daryl Davis, a Black blues musician, decided to do some research on the history of the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group that had terrorized—and lynched—Black people in the past. Davis's research led him to decide to try to meet with some Klansmen, and to listen to them and try to engage with what they said. He was well aware of the risks he was taking but persevered. Davis has written and lectured widely about these experiences (which eventually led over 200 members to leave the Klan), about the importance of finding common ground, and how the rest of us can go about doing so:

> Look for commonalities. You can find something in five minutes, even with your worst enemy. And build on those. Say I don't like you because you're white and I'm black. . . . And so our contention is based upon our races. But if you say "how do you feel about all these drugs on the street" and I say "I think the law needs to crack down on things that people can get addicted to very easily." . . . and you say "Well, yeah I agree with that." You might even tell me your son started dabbling in drugs. So now I see that you want what I want, that drugs are affecting your family the same way they affect my family. So now we're in agreement. Let's focus on that. And as we focus more and more and find more things in common, things we have in contrast, such as skin color, matter less and less.
>
> —DARYL DAVIS, "How to Argue"

> We're in this boat together. We sink or swim together. And when there's a leak in the boat and people are at risk, it puts all of us at risk.
>
> —SUSAN RICE

Davis reports that he was not always successful—there were some people he met with whom it was impossible to find common ground. Yet he urges us whenever possible to seek out areas of agreement and then areas of compromise, all the while listening carefully and respectfully to one another. And he reminds us that argument doesn't need to be abusive, insulting, or condescending—stances that usually only make things worse. But he notes as well that looking for areas of compromise doesn't mean giving in to ideas you know are not right. As Davis says, "You're going to hear things that you know are absolutely wrong. You will also hear opinions put out as facts." In such cases, he suggests offering facts or other EVIDENCE that disprove the opinion being put forward. Then, if the person still holds to the opinion, try saying something like "I believe you are wrong, but if you think you're right, then bring me the data."

Daryl Davis with Scott Shepherd. Because Davis was willing to listen, respect, and talk with him, Shepherd listened, respected, and talked with Davis, a process that led to his leaving the KKK.

Such a response invites the other person to bring information that may actually carry the conversation forward. So when you hear things you believe to be wrong, be careful to respond

in a civil way, showing data that refutes what the other person says or asking them to show you evidence that *you* are wrong—with the hope of continuing the conversation based on data and evidence rather than mere opinion.

If you sense danger. It's important to remember that some situations may not allow for you to engage with those who disagree vehemently with you—or who perhaps even threaten you. Some social media threads are so hateful and toxic that you'd be wise *not* to engage in the discussion. Remember as well that in the case of clearly dangerous exchanges, simply not engaging isn't enough, especially if the discussion is one that could lead to violence. In such cases, you must remove yourself from the situation as quickly as possible, and then alert the police or a faculty member—or both.

Souad Kirama, who is Muslim, described being confronted by teenage girls in New York who screamed curses and charges of "terrorist" at her, definitely targeting and endangering her. Such a situation allows for little or no possibility for discussion. Kirama had very little choice then but to get to safety, and quickly.

So if you encounter a situation in which all the empathy and efforts to find common ground you can think of fail to work, remember: your own physical safety is paramount.

REFLECT! Some would say it's pointless or even wrong to try to find common ground with people whose views they find hateful or dangerous. **Daryl Davis** would probably disagree. Based on your own experiences, what do you think—and why?

Invite response

Note that all the examples we've provided in this chapter feature dialogue and conversation; the road to understanding and change is never a one-way street. That's why long harangues or speeches—monologues—often have little effect on anyone who doesn't already agree with you. But as Dylan Marron discovered, tuning out is a lot harder in "live" conversations—face-to-face or on the phone. So if you want to engage successfully with people who think differently from you, then inviting them to respond, to join the conversation, is a good way forward. To invite response, you have to make time for it. Rather than rushing forward, hogging the air space, or talking over others, make a space for them to chime in: pause, make eye contact, even ask for response directly—"So how do you feel about what I've just said?"

You can invite response to your writing as well as to your spoken words. Especially online, you can turn on Commenting features and ask explicitly for responses to tweets or social media posts—and then respond (respectfully) to those who leave Comments for you. In doing so, you show that you value what others think and that you really want to hear and understand their views.

Join the conversation: collaborate! engage! participate!

Especially in times of such deep societal divisions, it may be tempting to retreat, to put our heads in the sand and hope that somehow things will get better. But don't give in to that temptation. Your voice is important, your thoughts are important, and you can best make them heard if you engage with other people. That may mean working with groups of like-minded people to speak out—for or against—contentious social issues such as immigration, guns, or environmental protections. That kind of civic engagement and participation is important in a democracy.

> We cannot do democracy without a heavy dose of civility.
>
> —MIKE PENCE

But there are smaller ways, too, like looking beyond those who think as you do, collaborating with them, listening to them, understanding their reasons for thinking as they do—and then searching for a shared goal you can work toward together. As a country, as a world, we have a lot riding on being able to reach across barriers and work together for the common good and to keep on trying even in the most difficult circumstances. And as writers, readers, and thinkers, we all have much to offer in this endeavor. So let's get going!

REFLECT! "Throughout history, generalizations have been made about 'other people,' but the only true generalization you can say about other people is that they are not you. They have done different things than you have. They were raised differently, maybe, or they have seen or heard things, perhaps, about which you don't know. They have different thoughts. Listen to them, and you may find out what everyone is arguing about." That's what **Lemony Snicket** has to say about "other people." Think about your own experiences interacting with people who think differently from you. How much listening have you done, and how much talking? Have you been satisfied with the results? What might you try to do differently next time?

Glossary

EMPATHY, 9, 34-35
The ability to be aware of and understand what someone else is feeling.
COMMON GROUND, 9, 37-40, 114-16
Shared values. Writers build common ground with AUDIENCES by acknowledging their points of view, seeking areas of compromise, and using language that includes, rather than excludes, those they aim to reach.
EVIDENCE, 85-90
In ARGUMENT , the data you present to support your REASONS . Such data may include statistics, calculations, examples, ANECDOTES , QUOTATIONS , case studies, or anything else that will convince your readers that your reasons are compelling. Evidence should be *sufficient* (enough to show that the reasons have merit) and *relevant* (appropriate to the argument you're making).

PART 1 RHETORIC / JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Chapter 4 Developing Academic Habits of Mind

YOU CAN'T BE AFRAID TO FAIL. IT'S THE ONLY WAY YOU SUCCEED—AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SUCCEED ALL THE TIME.

—LeBRON JAMES

JUST TRY NEW THINGS. DON'T BE AFRAID. STEP OUT OF YOUR OWN COMFORT ZONE AND SOAR, ALL RIGHT?

—MICHELLE OBAMA

Have you given some thought to what exactly you want to accomplish in college? What do you want to learn, but more than that: What do you hope to gain from your time in college? When a group of Howard University students asked Michelle Obama what she got from her college experience, she could hardly contain herself. "College did everything for me," she said. And then she offered some advice, saying that going to college "opens up a world of opportunity" and urging them to be open to trying new things, to move out of their comfort zones in order to "soar." That's pretty darned good advice. And it turns out that a nationwide group of writing teachers have figured out some more detailed advice—and identified several habits of mind that are essential for that kind of success in college. This chapter provides guidelines for developing ten habits of mind as you travel the path toward being an active, curious, and engaged reader, writer, and thinker.

Be curious

Inquire, investigate, ask questions. Poke and pry until you find answers. Explore the college catalog, looking for courses you *want* to take, even if they're not required. If you're assigned to do reseach, don't think of it just as an assignment you've got to "get done." Take it as an opportunity to learn something that you don't already know. And do the same with any writing assignments. Whatever position you take in an essay, find out about other POSITIONS —and take them seriously. Be curious about what others think: they just might change your mind. You can practice curiosity by asking questions: What? What *if* ? Why? Why *not* ? Who? How? Where? When?

Two students at Ohio State were tired of walking fifteen minutes through rain and snow from the parking lot to class and wondered why student parking was outdoors rather than in a garage. And why was it so far from the classrooms? Could it be located any closer, and in a garage? They were curious about who makes such decisions and whether students are ever consulted—and so they drafted an op-ed for the student newspaper raising their concerns.

Be open to new ideas

You're sure to encounter all kinds of new ideas in college, and new perspectives. In class or elsewhere, you'll have occasion to discuss ideas with others, including people whose views differ from yours. Make it a goal to understand their views, to try to see the world from their perspective. Ask questions, and be interested in what they say. Resist the temptation to respond too quickly with your own opinions. Remember that they just might be right. And even if they aren't, they'll get you thinking. New ideas do that.

The writing and research you'll do will be all about ideas. Here too you'll need to start by seeking out multiple positions on your topic—and to do so before even thinking about where you stand. What you don't want to do is to start with an idea you already have and simply look for sources that support that idea; you'll never learn anything new if you do that. Seek out ideas and viewpoints that differ from yours. In a campus discussion about anti-racism, for example, be sure to examine your own assumptions and biases and try to put yourself in the position of people with different perspectives—a student from Kenya or Brazil, a descendant of Japanese grandparents who were incarcerated during World War II, a victim of police violence. They'll all have different viewpoints, ones that should be part of the discussion.

Engage

Grapple with ideas: focus. To really focus on something—reading, writing, listening to a lecture, whatever—you need to clear your mind of everything else and pay attention to what you're doing, 100 percent. Turn off your monitor; stop checking email or *Twitter* . ANNOTATING as you read can help you engage with the text: underline key points, scribble questions in the margins. SUMMARIZING can help you understand and remember a difficult or complex text.

If you're in a class that doesn't engage your interest, look for an angle that does. That's what one student did in a physics for nonmajors course. She found physics hard, and abstract—and boring. Then one day her instructor mentioned the physics of *Angry Birds* . That was one of her favorite video games, and calculating acceleration and velocity became much less abstract when it helped her launch the birds. Soon she was knocking over the pig like a champ—and finally enjoying physics.

Angry Birds

Be creative

Explore new ideas, try out new methods, experiment with new approaches. Play around with ideas, and see where they take you. Try BRAINSTORMING and FREEWRITING . If you're struggling to write an essay, for instance, try expressing your ideas in a different MEDIUM . One of my students was taking a course on ancient religious texts, primarily to fulfill a requirement, and when he was assigned to read the Samson and Delilah story in different religious traditions, he used his keen interest in comics to create a graphic narrative of his favorite version. His creative approach to the assignment made it one that he was excited about.

> Creativity is intelligence having fun.
>
> —ALBERT EINSTEIN

If you think about your most successful school endeavors, you'll probably find that creativity played an important role: the science project you created and presented that was unlike anything anyone else imagined; those hip-hop lyrics you wrote to illustrate a point in a history presentation; the marathon you weren't thoroughly prepared for but that you managed to finish—which led to a fascination with effective training processes, which in turn might lead to a senior thesis in human biology.

Be flexible

Whether you're at a small college or a large university, there will be a lot to deal with—classes in multiple fields that call for various kinds of work (labs and lab reports in science classes, long reading lists and essays in English, large textbooks and online homework in Econ), much more work than you've had before now, and maybe you have a part-time job and a young child. Or maybe you're caring for a sick or elderly parent. It's a lot to juggle, and *you* are the one who's responsible for doing all that. This means you need to develop strategies for managing your time, planning for due dates, and keeping yourself on task—and that you'll need to be flexible.

Perhaps you prefer to do your serious reading early in the morning, but one term you have early classes every day. Rather than getting up earlier and earlier, try to stay flexible and find a time later in the day you can devote to your reading assignments. One student was so determined to write a summary of an assigned article that she told herself she couldn't get up from her desk until it was done. Hours later, she was still sitting there, praying for inspiration that just wouldn't come. A little flexibility—getting up and taking a walk, doing another task that she could accomplish easily, or just taking a brief break—would probably have helped her make a fresh start.

Be persistent

Keep at it. Follow through. Take advantage of opportunities to revise and improve. Keep track of what's challenging or hard for you—and look for ways to overcome those obstacles. You've probably already seen the positive effects of persistence in your life, and these effects will double (or triple) in college: successful students don't give up but keep on keeping on.

> It's hard to beat a person who never gives up.
>
> —BABE RUTH

One student who was searching for information on a distant relative who had played a role in the civil rights movement kept coming up empty-handed and was about to give up on the project. But she decided to try one last lead through ancestry.com —and discovered a crucial piece of information that led to a big breakthrough and a sense of personal satisfaction. Her persistence paid off, and it eventually led her to write a profile of her relative introducing that person to the rest of her large extended family.

Take responsibility

The work you do in college will call on you to take responsibility for what you say and write and do. You'll need to take charge of your learning and make the most of your education. That means not just being engaged with the topics you're writing or speaking about, but "owning" what you say about them, standing behind your words. And that also means being able to vouch for the sources you use. Chapter 15 provides tips for determining if a source is reliable.

One student who was very interested in the right-to-die movement in his state began researching arguments on all sides of this debate. Coming to the conclusion that those arguing in favor of the movement were persuasive, he began incorporating some of their arguments into an essay. But something began nagging at him when he realized that several of his sources were saying pretty much exactly the same thing. He traced these sources back to one single source—a website owned by the Euthanasia Society, a group dedicated to assisted suicide. And that discovery led him to do additional research, including sources by groups that oppose assisted suicide and explain their reasons for doing so. This additional research then led him to qualify his conclusions—and to present a more balanced argument about this volatile issue. In short, he was taking responsibility for what he was writing—and for the sources he was using.

Collaborate

Remember to work with others. When it comes to solving problems or coming up with new ideas, two heads are better than one—and more than two is often better still. Lots of your college work will call for collaboration, from conducting an experiment with a lab partner to working with a team to research and present a report. As a writer you're in constant collaboration with those who read and respond to your ideas. Then there's all you'll do online—on *Zoom* , or *Twitter* . All collaboration. And all important: learning to work well with others is as important as anything else you learn in college.

> Talk to the person next to you, make a network, have an open mind, and don't be ashamed to ask for help.
>
> —GAIL MELLOW

Reflect

Think about how you learn, and make it a habit of doing so often. *Where* do you do most of your learning—in class? at the library? at home? *How* does your learning take place—from lectures? textbooks? doing research? talking to others? writing? *Who* takes charge of this learning—instructors? your mom? you? Several major studies identify this kind of purposeful reflection as instrumental to becoming well educated. And many students find that keeping an informal journal to write about what they're learning, how they're learning it, and how they're learning to overcome obstacles leads to better comprehension and better success. One group of students used *Twitter* to share what they were learning, saying that doing so helped them "learn it better."

Don't be afraid to fail

You may remember your grandmother or some other wise person saying "nothing ventured, nothing gained," and they were right! After all, we all learn from our mistakes, from doing something wrong and then keeping at it until we get it right. The first time I tried to ride a bike, I promptly fell off. But with encouragement and a little instruction from my dad, I got back on and kept trying until I was zooming around the neighborhood like an ace. When Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Nick Foles was asked about his amazing career, from barely a starter to a backup, and then eventually to MVP in the 2018 Super Bowl, here's what he said:

> I think the big thing is, don't be afraid to fail. In our society today—*Instagram* , *Twitter* —it's a highlight reel. It's all the good things. And then . . . when you have a rough day . . . you think you're failing. Failure is a part of life . . . a part of building character and growing. . . . I wouldn't be up here if I hadn't fallen thousands of times. Made mistakes. [So] if something's going on in your life and you're struggling? Embrace it. Because you're growing.
>
> —NICK FOLES, 2018 Super Bowl press conference

Nick Foles scoring on fourth-down-and-goal in the 2018 Super Bowl, the first player in Super Bowl history to both throw and catch a touchdown.

It's no coincidence that all these habits of mind go along with what it means to think and act rhetorically. The same practices that make us careful, ethical, and effective communicators (listen, search for understanding, put in your oar) also lead to success in college—or in the Super Bowl. You'll have plenty of opportunities to practice and develop these habits in the writing and reading and speaking and listening you'll do in college. I bet you'll enjoy the ride—and if, like Michelle Obama, you work at it, you too can soar!

REFLECT! What new things have you tried so far in college? And what other new things do you hope to try? Make a bucket list of all that you hope to experience and accomplish before you

graduate. Then get started—and remember: don't be afraid to make mistakes. That's just part of trying new things!

Glossary

POSITION, 43-44
A statement that asserts a belief or a CLAIM . In an ARGUMENT , a position needs to be stated in a THESIS or clearly implied and to be supported with REASONS and EVIDENCE .
ANNOTATING, 44, 56-58
The process of taking notes, underlining key information, and marking aspects of a text that strikes you as important while reading.
SUMMARIZE
To use your own words and sentence structure to condense someone else's text into a version that gives the main ideas of the original. In academic writing, summarizing requires DOCUMENTATION . *See* PATCHWRITING
BRAINSTORMING, 45, 82
A process for GENERATING IDEAS AND TEXT by writing down everything that comes to mind about a topic, then looking for patterns or connections among the ideas.
FREEWRITING, 82
A process for GENERATING IDEAS AND TEXT by writing continuously for several minutes without pausing to read what has been written.
MEDIA, 191, 205, 226-29
The means of delivering messages—for example, digital, oral, print, and social. The singular of *media* is "medium."

PART 2 READING / GET THE MESSAGE

Chapter 5 Reading to Understand, Engage &Respond

THE WORDS ON THE PAGE ARE ONLY HALF THE STORY. THE REST IS WHAT YOU BRING TO THE PARTY.

—TONI MORRISON

Chances are, you read more than you think you do. You read print texts, of course, but you're probably reading even more on a phone, a tablet, a computer, or other devices. Reading is now, as perhaps never before, a basic necessity. In fact, if you think that reading is something you

learned once and for all in the first or second grade, think again. Today, reading calls for strategic effort. As media critic Howard Rheingold sees it, literacy today involves at least five interlocking abilities: attention, participation, collaboration, network awareness, and critical consumption. Of these, attention is first and foremost. In short, you need to work at paying attention to what you read. In *The Economics of Attention* , rhetorician Richard Lanham explains: “We’re drowning in information. What we lack is the human attention needed to make sense of it all.”

When so many texts are vying for our attention, which ones do we choose to read? In order to decide what to read, what to pay attention to, we need to practice what Rheingold calls “infotention,” a word he coined to describe a “mind-machine combination of brain-powered attention skills and computer-powered information filters.” In other words, it helps us to focus. And while some of us can multitask (fighter pilots are one example Rheingold gives of those whose jobs demand it), most of us aren’t good at it and must learn to focus our attention when we read.

READING TO UNDERSTAND

Your first job as a reader is to make sure you understand what you are reading, and why you’re reading it.

Start by previewing

Reading experts tell us that it’s best to begin not by plunging right into a text but by previewing it to get a sense of what it’s about.

> ***Look at the title*** and any subtitle, the first paragraph, and any headings to get a sense of what the text covers.
> ***What do you know*** (and think) about the topic? What do you want to learn about it?
> ***Who are the authors*** , and what’s their expertise? Where do you think they’re coming from? Might they have an agenda?
>
> ***Who’s the publisher*** or sponsor, and what does that tell you about the text’s intended audience and purpose?
> ***Consider any sources*** that are cited. Are they credible?
> ***Look at any visuals*** —photos or drawings, charts, graphs. What information do they contribute?
> ***Consider the design*** . How does it affect the way you understand the text? What do the fonts and any use of color suggest about the text’s TONE ? Are there any sidebars or other features that highlight parts of the text?
> ***What’s your first impression*** of the text, and what interests you the most?

Think about your rhetorical situation

Once you have a sense of what the text is about, think about why you're reading it and the rest of your rhetorical situation.

- What's your PURPOSE for reading? To learn something new? To fulfill an assignment? To prepare for a test? Something else?
- Who's the intended AUDIENCE for the text? What words or images in the text make you think so? Are you a member of this group? If not, there may be unfamiliar terms or references that you'll need to look up.
- What's the GENRE ? An argument? A report? A narrative? An annotated bibliography? Knowing the genre will tell you something about what to expect.
- How does the MEDIUM affect the way you will read the text? Is it a written print text? a podcast? a visual or MULTIMODAL text, such as an infographic?
- Think about the larger CONTEXT . What do you know about the topic and what others say about it? What do you need to find out?
- What's your own STANCE on the topic? Are you an advocate? a critic? an impartial observer?

Read difficult texts strategically

> Reading is an active, imaginative act; it takes work.
>
> —KHALED HOSSEINI

You'll surely encounter texts and subject matter that are hard to understand. Most often these will be ones you're reading not for pleasure but to learn something. You'll want to slow down with such texts, to stop and think—and you might find this easier to do with print texts, where paragraphs and headings and highlighted information help you see the various parts and find key information. Here are some other tips for making your way through difficult texts:

- Read first for what you can understand, and simply mark places that are confusing, things you don't understand, words or concepts you'll need to look up.
- Then choose a modest amount of material to reread—a chapter, or part of a chapter. Figure out how it's organized and see its main points—look at headings, and any THESIS and TOPIC SENTENCES .
- Check to see if there's a SUMMARY at the beginning or end of the text. If so, read it very carefully.
- Reread the hard parts. Slow down, and focus.
- Try to make sense of the parts: this part offers evidence; that paragraph summarizes an alternative view; here's a signal about what's coming next.
- If the text includes VISUALS , what data or other information do they contribute to the message?
- Resist highlighting: it's better to take notes in the margins or on digital sticky notes.

- Get together with one or two classmates, and read together, talking through anything you find difficult to understand.

Glossary

TONE, 27, 96

The way a writer's or speaker's STANCE is reflected in the text.

PURPOSE, 25

In writing, your goal: to explore a topic, to express an opinion, to entertain, to report information, to persuade, and so on. Purpose is one element of the RHETORICAL SITUATION .

AUDIENCE, 25-26

Those to whom a text is directed—the people who read, listen to, or view the text. Audience is a key part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION .

GENRE, 27, 82, 245

A way of classifying things. The genres this book is concerned with are kinds of writing that writers can use to accomplish a certain goal and to reach a particular AUDIENCE . As such, they have well-established features that help guide writers, but they are flexible and change over time, and can be adapted by writers to address their own RHETORICAL SITUATIONS . Genres covered in this book include ANALYSES , ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES , ARGUMENTS , NARRATIVES , REPORTS , SUMMARY/RESPONSE , and VISUAL ANALYSES .

MEDIA, 191, 205, 226-29

The means of delivering messages—for example, digital, oral, print, and social. The singular of *media* is "medium."

MULTIMODAL WRITING, 223-39

Writing that uses more than one MODE of expression—for example: linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural.

CONTEXT, 17, 27-28, 59

Part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION , conditions affecting the text such as what else has been said about a topic; social, economic, and other factors; and any constants such as due date and length.

STANCE, 17-19, 26-27

A writer's attitude toward the subject—for example, reasonable, neutral, angry, curious. Stance is conveyed through TONE and word choice.

THESIS, 84-85

A statement that identifies the topic and main point of a piece of writing, giving readers an idea of what the text will cover.

TOPIC SENTENCE, 95

A sentence, often at the beginning of a paragraph, that states the paragraph's main point. The details in the rest of the paragraph should support the topic sentence.

SUMMARY/RESPONSE, 203-22

A GENRE of writing that conveys a text's main ideas in condensed form and engages with those ideas by ARGUING a position, ANALYZING the text, or REFLECTING on what it says. Key Features: identification of the author and title • a concise summary • an explicit response • support for your response

VISUALS, 455-57, 459-67

Photos, graphs, maps, diagrams, pie charts, tables, videos, and other images. Visuals can be used to support or illustrate a point and also to present information that is easier to understand in a chart or graph than it would be in a paragraph.

ENGAGING WITH WHAT YOU READ

Engagement is one of the habits of mind that are crucial to success in college and to the reading you do there. You're "engaged" as a reader when you approach a text with an open mind, ready to listen to what it has to say. This kind of engagement may come naturally when you're reading something you want to read. But what about texts you're assigned to read, ones you wouldn't read otherwise? How do you engage productively with them? There's no magic wand you can wave to make this happen, but here's a little advice, based on what students have told me about how they can get "into" an assigned text.

First, find your comfort zone, a place where you can concentrate. A comfy lounge chair? A chair with good back support? Starbucks? Wherever it is, getting up to stretch every half hour or so will help you maintain focus. Then choose the medium or device that helps you focus. Some readers like print text best for taking notes. Others prefer ebooks, which can be read on a Kindle or similar device to avoid the distractions phones and computers have.

And consider reading with a classmate. Particularly with difficult texts, two heads are usually better than one—and discussing any text with someone else will help you both to engage with it.

Try to explain something in the text to a friend: if you can get the major points across, you've understood it!

Annotate as you read

Annotating enables you to note the key points in the text. Do what literary critic Anatole Broyard once recommended: "Stomp around in it . . . underlining passages, scribbling in the margins, leaving [your] mark." Broyard's point echoes what reading experts say: the more you "stomp around" in a text, the better you'll understand it and engage with what it says. Here are some points to look for as you read and annotate:

> What CLAIMS does the text make? Note any THESIS statement.
> What REASONS and EVIDENCE are offered to support any claims—examples, DEFINITIONS , and so on?
> Identify any key terms (and look them up if necessary).
>
> Note places in the text where the author demonstrates AUTHORITY to write on the topic.
> What is the author's STANCE toward the topic—passionate? skeptical? neutral? something else? Note any words that reflect the author's stance.
> How would you describe the author's STYLE and TONE —formal? conversational? skeptical? something else? Mark words that establish that, and think about how they affect the way you react to the text.
> Mark any COUNTERARGUMENTS or other perspectives. How fairly are those views described, and how does the author respond to them?
> Consider any sources cited in the text and think about whether you can trust them. If you have any doubts, FACT-CHECK .
> Pay attention to the DESIGN and any VISUALS , and think about how they affect the message.
> Underline any points that are unclear or confusing, and jot down your questions in the margins.
> Note anything you find surprising—and why. Chapter 6 provides tips for checking anything that's questionable.
> Give some thought to anything in the text that you question or disagree with; keep an open mind!

A sample annotated text

On the following page is the opening of an essay about minority student clubs on college campuses written by Gabriela Moro, a student at the University of Notre Dame. See how one reader has annotated her text—and how it helped that reader engage with her argument. You can read Moro's full essay on page 123 .

> Minority representation on US college campuses has increased significasntly in recent years, and many schools have made it a priority to increase diversity on their

campuses in order to prepare students for a culturally diverse US democratic society (Hurtado and Ruiz 3-4). To complement this increase, many schools have implemented minority student clubs to provide safe and comfortable environments where minority students can thrive academically and socially with peers from similar backgrounds. However, do these minority groups amplify students' tendency to interact only with those who are similar to themselves? Put another way, do these groups inhibit students from engaging in diverse relationships?

She's going to consider more views. I like that.

I wonder who these students are and how she found them. What does she mean by "minority" students?

Looks like her stance will be to take the middle ground in this debate. Let's see if this holds true.

Many view such programs to be positive and integral to minority students' college experience; some, however, feel that these clubs are not productive for promoting cross-cultural interaction. While minority clubs have proven to be beneficial to minority students in some cases, particularly on campuses that are not very diverse, my research suggests that colleges would enrich the educational experience for all students by introducing multicultural clubs as well. To frame my discussion, I will use an article from *College Student Journal* that distinguishes between two types of students: one who believes minority clubs are essential for helping minority students stay connected with their cultures, and another who believes these clubs isolate minorities and work against diverse interaction among students. To pursue the question of whether or not such groups segregate minorities from the rest of the student body and even discourage cultural awareness, I will use perspectives from minority students at Notre Dame to show that these programs are especially helpful for first-year students. I will also use other student testimonials to show that when taken too far, minority groups can lead to self-segregation and defy what most universities claim to be their diversity goals. Findings from research will contribute to a better understanding of the role minority clubs play on college campuses and offer a complete answer to my question about the importance of minority programs.

—GABRIELA MORO, "Minority Student Clubs: Integration or Segregation?"

Consider the larger context

All texts are part of some larger conversation, and one reason academic writers document their sources is to acknowledge an awareness of that conversation. Considering that larger context will help you understand the text and shed light on issues that you may not have known about.

When Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) stand tall as “pioneers of school choice,” her words sounded like a compliment and testimony to the work of HBCUs. But putting that claim into context helps to assess—or reassess—what she said. After all, HBCUs arose in response to Jim Crow segregation at many colleges and universities, from which Black students were excluded. Putting DeVos’s statement in context, then, calls it into question, revealing that in fact students of color had very few choices in terms of higher education.

Here are some tips to help you consider the larger context of texts you read:

- What else has been said about this topic? What’s the larger conversation surrounding it, and how does this text fit into that conversation?
- Is the writer’s point confirmed (or challenged) by what others say?
- Is the author responding to what someone else has said—and if so, what?
- Who’s cited, and what does that tell you about the author’s STANCE ?
- Does the text consider COUNTERARGUMENTS and multiple PERSPECTIVES on the topic fairly and respectfully?
- Who cares about this topic, and why does this topic matter in the first place?
- How does the larger context inform your thinking about the topic?

Glossary

CLAIM, 84-85, 103-5

A statement of a belief or POSITION . In an ARGUMENT , a claim needs to be stated in a THESIS or clearly implied, and requires support by REASONS and EVIDENCE .

THESIS, 84-85

A statement that identifies the topic and main point of a piece of writing, giving readers an idea of what the text will cover.

REASONS, 105-8

Support for a CLAIM or a POSITION . A reason, in turn, requires its own support.

EVIDENCE, 85-90

In ARGUMENT , the data you present to support your REASONS . Such data may include statistics, calculations, examples, ANECDOTES , QUOTATIONS , case studies, or anything else that will convince your readers that your reasons are compelling. Evidence should be *sufficient* (enough to show that the reasons have merit) and *relevant* (appropriate to the argument you’re making).

DEFINITION, 88

A STRATEGY that says what something is. *Formal definitions* identify the category that something belongs to and tell what distinguishes it from other things in that category: A worm is an invertebrate (a category) with a long, rounded body and no appendages (distinguishing features). *Extended definitions* go into more detail: a paragraph or even an essay explaining why a character in a story is tragic. *Stipulative definitions* give a writer's own use of a term, one not found in a dictionary. Definition can serve as the organizing principle for a paragraph or whole text.

AUTHORITY, 57, 112-13, 142-43

A person or text that is cited as support for an ARGUMENT . A structural engineer may be quoted as an authority on bridge construction, for example. Authority also refers to a quality conveyed by writers who are knowledgeable about their subjects.

STANCE, 17-19, 26-27

A writer's attitude toward the subject—for example, reasonable, neutral, angry, curious. Stance is conveyed through TONE and word choice.

STYLE, 210, 406-7

The particular way something is written, designed, or communicated—its sentence structure, TONE , DESIGN , and word choice—that make it distinctive and get attention.

TONE, 27, 96

The way a writer's or speaker's STANCE is reflected in the text.

COUNTERARGUMENT, 16, 90-91, 265

In ARGUMENT , an alternative POSITION or objection to the writer's position. The writer of an argument should not only acknowledge counterarguments but also, if at all possible, accept, accommodate, or refute each counterargument.

FACT-CHECKING, 266-69

The process of verifying the accuracy of FACTS and CLAIMS presented in a piece of writing, a speech, or elsewhere—by READING LATERALLY, TRIANGULATING , or consulting various fact-checking sites.

DESIGN, 96-97, 448-58

The way a text is arranged and presented visually. Elements of design include FONTS , colors, illustrations, LAYOUT , and white space.

VISUALS, 455-57, 459-67

Photos, graphs, maps, diagrams, pie charts, tables, videos, and other images. Visuals can be used to support or illustrate a point and also to present information that is easier to understand in a chart or graph than it would be in a paragraph.

STANCE, 17-19, 26-27

A writer's attitude toward the subject—for example, reasonable, neutral, angry, curious. Stance is conveyed through TONE and word choice.

COUNTERARGUMENT, 16, 90-91, 265

In ARGUMENT , an alternative POSITION or objection to the writer's position. The writer of an argument should not only acknowledge counterarguments but also, if at all possible, accept, accommodate, or refute each counterargument.

PERSPECTIVES, 90-91, 29-41

Viewpoints, an important part of a writer's STANCE . As a writer and a researcher, you should always strive to seek, think about, and work to understand multiple perspectives.

Endnotes

- *Good question! What's the answer?* Return to text
- *Is this her thesis?* Return to text
- *I need to check out this source—are these real students or just stereotypes?* Return to text

RESPONDING TO WHAT YOU READ

Whenever you actively engage with a text, annotating and "stomping around" in it, you are already responding, talking back to it, questioning it, assessing its claims, and coming to conclusions about whether or not you accept them. There are many ways to respond more explicitly—from jotting a quick reply to a blog post, to writing in the comment space following a news article, to writing a full-blown review. Following are three kinds of writing you may be assigned to do when responding to something you've read.

Summarize

Summarizing something you've read in your own words can help you understand and remember its main points. Following are some tips for doing so:

- Keep your summary short and sweet, capturing the text's main ideas but leaving out its supporting information.

- Take care that your summary is fair and accurate—and uses neutral, nonjudgmental language.
- Use your own words and sentence structure; if you do QUOTE any words from the original text, be sure to enclose them in quotation marks.
- DOCUMENT any texts you summarize in academic writing of your own.

Here's a summary of Gabriela Moro's essay:

In a time of increasing diversity on US college campuses, Gabriela Moro asks whether minority student clubs and programs help minority students succeed and have a good "college experience," or whether they result in separation and even segregation. Moro considers the pros and cons of each position and concludes that while these clubs and programs are "especially helpful for first-year students," they can work against college goals for inclusiveness.

See Moro's full essay on p. 123 .

If you're assigned to write a SUMMARY/RESPONSE essay, there are various ways to respond. Two ways that are often assigned are by arguing with what the text says and analyzing the way it says it.

Respond to what the text says

Agree or disagree—or even agree with some parts and disagree with others. However you respond, you'll be making an ARGUMENT for what you say. Following are some tips to help you do so:

- What does the text CLAIM , and is it stated explicitly in a THESIS ? Does the claim need to be QUALIFIED —or stated more strongly?
- What REASONS and EVIDENCE does the author provide? Are they sufficient?
- Does the author acknowledge any COUNTERARGUMENTS or other positions? If not, what other views should be addressed?
- Has the author cited any sources—and if so, how trustworthy are they?
- Do you agree with the author's position? disagree? both agree and disagree? Why?
- See an essay that responds to an op-ed on p. 217 .

Analyze the way the text is written

How does the text work? What makes it tick? ANALYZING how a text is written can help you to understand what it's saying. Here are some questions to consider:

- What does the author CLAIM about the text? Is it stated explicitly in a THESIS —and if not, should it be?
- Is the text DESCRIBED or SUMMARIZED in enough detail?

- What EVIDENCE is provided in support of the claim? Is it sufficient? If not, what additional evidence would help?
- What insight does your analysis lead to? How does the way it's written affect the way you understand it?
- See an essay that analyzes a magazine on p. 148 .

Glossary

QUOTE, 285-90

To cite someone else's words exactly as they were said or written. Quotation is most effective when the wording is worth repeating or makes a point so well that no rewording will do it justice or when you want to cite someone's exact words. Quotations in academic writing need to be acknowledged with DOCUMENTATION .

DOCUMENTATION, 309-44, 360-86

Publication information about the sources cited in a text. IN-TEXT DOCUMENTATION usually appears in parentheses at the point where it's cited or in an endnote or a footnote. Complete documentation usually appears as a list of WORKS CITED or REFERENCES at the end of the text. Documentation styles vary by discipline. *See also* APA STYLE ; MLA STYLE

SUMMARY/RESPONSE, 203-22

A GENRE of writing that conveys a text's main ideas in condensed form and engages with those ideas by ARGUING a position, ANALYZING the text, or REFLECTING on what it says. Key Features: identification of the author and title • a concise summary • an explicit response • support for your response

ARGUMENT, 99-131

Any text that makes a CLAIM supported by REASONS and EVIDENCE . A GENRE that uses REASONS and EVIDENCE to support a CLAIM . Key Features: an explicit POSITION • a response to what others have said • appropriate background information • a clear indication of why the topic matters • good REASONS and EVIDENCE • attention to more than one POINT OF VIEW • an authoritative TONE • an appeal to readers' values

CLAIM, 84-85, 103-5

A statement of a belief or POSITION . In an ARGUMENT , a claim needs to be stated in a THESIS or clearly implied, and requires support by REASONS and EVIDENCE .

THESIS, 84-85

A statement that identifies the topic and main point of a piece of writing, giving readers an idea of what the text will cover.

QUALIFY, 84, 104-5

To limit a CLAIM —saying, for example, that most people like cake rather than people like cake. Words like *frequently, often, generally* , or *sometimes* can help you qualify what you claim—and make it something you'll be able to support.

REASONS, 105-8

Support for a CLAIM or a POSITION . A reason, in turn, requires its own support.

EVIDENCE, 85-90

In ARGUMENT , the data you present to support your REASONS . Such data may include statistics, calculations, examples, ANECDOTES , QUOTATIONS , case studies, or anything else that will convince your readers that your reasons are compelling. Evidence should be *sufficient* (enough to show that the reasons have merit) and *relevant* (appropriate to the argument you're making).

COUNTERARGUMENT, 16, 90-91, 265

In ARGUMENT , an alternative POSITION or objection to the writer's position. The writer of an argument should not only acknowledge counterarguments but also, if at all possible, accept, accommodate, or refute each counterargument.

ANALYSIS, 132-56

A GENRE of writing in which you look at what a text says and how it says it. Key Features: a SUMMARY of a text or other subject • attention to CONTEXT • a clear INTERPRETATION or judgment • reasonable support for your conclusions

CLAIM, 84-85, 103-5

A statement of a belief or POSITION . In an ARGUMENT , a claim needs to be stated in a THESIS or clearly implied, and requires support by REASONS and EVIDENCE .

THESIS, 84-85

A statement that identifies the topic and main point of a piece of writing, giving readers an idea of what the text will cover.

DESCRIPTION, 86

A STRATEGY that tells how something looks, sounds, smells, feels, or tastes. Effective description creates a clear DOMINANT IMPRESSION built from specific details. Description can

be *objective, subjective* , or both. Description can serve as the organizing principle for a paragraph or whole text.

SUMMARIZE

To use your own words and sentence structure to condense someone else's text into a version that gives the main ideas of the original. In academic writing, summarizing requires DOCUMENTATION . *See* PATCHWRITING

EVIDENCE, 85-90

In ARGUMENT , the data you present to support your REASONS . Such data may include statistics, calculations, examples, ANECDOTES , QUOTATIONS , case studies, or anything else that will convince your readers that your reasons are compelling. Evidence should be *sufficient* (enough to show that the reasons have merit) and *relevant* (appropriate to the argument you're making).

READING ON-SCREEN AND OFF

Once upon a time "reading" meant attending to words on paper. But today we often encounter texts that convey information in images and in sound as well—and they may be on- or off-screen. Whatever texts you're reading, be sure to think carefully about how the medium may affect your understanding, engagement, and response.

Researchers have found that we often take shortcuts when we read online, searching and scanning and jumping around in a text or leaping from link to link. This kind of reading is very helpful for finding answers and information quickly, but it can blur your focus and make it difficult to attend to the text carefully and purposefully. Here are a few tips to help you when reading on a screen:

- Be clear about your PURPOSE for reading. If you need to remember the text, remind yourself to read very carefully and to avoid skimming or skipping around.
- Close *Facebook* or any other pages that may distract you.
- Try taking notes on PDFs or Word documents so that you can jot down questions and comments as you read. Alternatively, print out the text and take notes on paper.
- Look up unfamiliar terms as you read, making a note of definitions you may need later.
- For really high-stakes reading, consider printing out the text to read and take notes on.

The pervasiveness of reading on-screen may suggest that many readers prefer to read that way. But current research suggests that most students still prefer to read print, especially if the reading is important and needs to be internalized and remembered. Print texts, it's worth remembering, are easy to navigate—you can tell at a glance how much you've read and how much you still have to go, and you can move back and forth in the text to find something important.

In addition, researchers have found that students who read on-screen are less likely to reflect on what they read or to make connections in ways that bind learning to memory. It's important to note, however, that studies like these almost always end with a caveat: reading practices are changing, and technology is making it easier to read on-screen.

It's also important to note that online texts often blend written words with audio, video, links, charts and graphs, and other elements that can be attended to in any order you choose. In reading such texts, you'll need to make decisions carefully. When exactly should you click on a link, for example? The first moment it comes up? Or should you make a note to check it out later, since doing so now may break your concentration—and you might not be able to get back easily to what you were reading? Links can be a good thing in that they lead to more information, but following them can interrupt your train of thought. In addition, scrolling seems to encourage skimming and to make us read more rapidly. In short, it can be harder to stay on task. So you may well need to make a special effort with digital texts—to read them attentively, and to pay close attention to what you're reading.

We are clearly in a time of flux where reading is concerned, so the best advice is to think very carefully about *why* you're reading. If you want to find some information quickly, to follow a conversation on *Twitter* , or to look for online sources on a topic you're researching, reading on-screen is the way to go. But if you need to fully comprehend and retain the information, you may want to stick with print.

Glossary

PURPOSE, 25

In writing, your goal: to explore a topic, to express an opinion, to entertain, to report information, to persuade, and so on. Purpose is one element of the RHETORICAL SITUATION .

READING VISUALS

Visual texts present their own opportunities and challenges. As new technologies bring images into our phones and lives on a minute-by-minute basis, visual texts have become so familiar and pervasive that it may seem that "reading" them is just natural. But reading visual texts with a critical eye takes time and patience—and attention.

Take a look at the advertisement for a Shinola watch on page 64 . You may know that Shinola is a Detroit-based watchmaker proud that its watches are "built in America"; if not, a quick look at Shinola.com will fill in this part of the ad's CONTEXT . But there's a lot more going on in terms of its particular rhetorical situation. The ad first ran in 2015, when it was clearly responding to smart watches in general and to the launch of the Apple Watch in particular, with its full panoply of futuristic bells and whistles. "Hey," the Shinola ad writers seemed to be saying, "our watch is just smart enough."

Thinking through the rhetorical situation tells us something about the ad's purpose and audience. Of course its major PURPOSE is to sell watches; but one other goal seems to be to poke a little fun at all the high-tech, super-smart watches on the market. And what about its AUDIENCE —who do you think the ad addresses most directly? Perhaps Americans who think of themselves as solid "no frills" folks?

Reading a visual begins, then, with studying its purpose, audience, message, and context. But there's a lot more you can do to understand a visual. You can look closely, for instance, at its DESIGN . In the Shinola ad, the stark, high-contrast, black-and-white image takes center stage, drawing our eyes to it and its accompanying captions. There are no other distracting elements, no other colors, no glitz. The simplicity gives the watch a retro look, which is emphasized by its sturdy straps, open face, and clear numerals, its old-fashioned wind-up button and second hand.

You'll also want to take a close look at any words. In this case, the Shinola ad includes a large headline right above the image, three lines of all-caps, sans serif type that match the simplicity of the image itself. And it's hard to miss the mocking TONE : "A WATCH SO SMART THAT IT CAN TELL YOU THE TIME JUST BY LOOKING AT IT ." The small caption below the image underscores this message: "THE RUNWELL . IT 'S JUST SMART ENOUGH ." Take that, Apple!

Glossary

CONTEXT, 17, 27-28, 59

Part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION , conditions affecting the text such as what else has been said about a topic; social, economic, and other factors; and any constants such as due date and length.

PURPOSE, 25

In writing, your goal: to explore a topic, to express an opinion, to entertain, to report information, to persuade, and so on. Purpose is one element of the RHETORICAL SITUATION .

AUDIENCE, 25-26

Those to whom a text is directed—the people who read, listen to, or view the text. Audience is a key part of any RHETORICAL SITUATION .

DESIGN, 96-97, 448-58

The way a text is arranged and presented visually. Elements of design include FONTS , colors, illustrations, LAYOUT , and white space.

TONE, 27, 96

The way a writer's or speaker's STANCE is reflected in the text.

READING ACROSS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES

Differences in disciplines can make for some challenging reading tasks, as you encounter texts that seem almost to be written in foreign languages. As with most new things, however, new disciplines and their texts will become familiar to you the more you work with them. So don't be put off if texts in fields like psychology or physics seem hard to read: the more you read such texts, the more familiar they'll become until, eventually, you'll be able to "talk the talk" of that discipline yourself.

Pay attention to terminology

It's especially important to read carefully when encountering texts in different academic fields. Take the word *analysis* , for instance. That little word has a wide range of definitions as it moves from one field to another. In *philosophy* , analysis has traditionally meant breaking down a topic into its constituent parts in order to understand them—and the whole text—more completely. In the *sciences* , analysis often involves the scientific method of observing a phenomenon, formulating a hypothesis about it, and experimenting to see whether the hypothesis holds up. In *business* , analysis often refers to assessing needs and finding ways to meet them. And in *literary studies* , analysis usually calls for close reading in order to interpret a passage of text. When you're assigned to carry out an analysis, then, it's important to know what the particular field of study expects you to do and to ask your instructors if you aren't sure.

Know what counts as evidence

Beyond knowing what particular words mean from field to field, you should note that what counts as EVIDENCE can differ across academic disciplines. In literature and other fields in the *humanities* , textual evidence is often the most important: your job as a reader is to focus on the text itself. For the *sciences* , you'll most often focus on evidence gathered through experimentation, on facts and figures. Some of the *social sciences* also favor the use of "hard" evidence or data, while others are more likely to use evidence drawn from interviews, oral histories, or even anecdotes. As a reader, you'll need to be aware of what counts as credible evidence in the fields you study.

Be aware of how information is presented

Finally, pay attention to the way various disciplines format and present their information. You'll probably find that articles and books in *literature* and *history* present their information in

paragraphs, sometimes with illustrations. *Physics* texts present much important information in equations, while those in *psychology* and *political science* rely on charts, graphs, and other visual representations of quantitative data. In *art history* , you can expect to see extensive use of images, while much of the work in *music* will rely on notation and sound.

So reading calls for some real effort. Whether you're reading words or images or bar graphs, literary analysis or musical notation, in a print book or on a screen, you need to read attentively and intentionally and with an open mind. On top of all that, you need to be an active participant with what you read. As Toni Morrison says: "The words on the page are only half the story. The rest is what you bring to the party."

REFLECT! The next time you read a text online, pay attention to your process. Do you go straight through, or do you stop often? Do you take notes? Do you turn away from what you're reading to look at or attend to something else? What do you do if you don't understand a passage? How long can you read at a stretch and maintain full concentration? Then answer the same questions the next time you read a print text. What differences do you notice in the way you read each kind of text? What conclusions can you draw about how to be a more effective reader, both on- and off-screen?

Glossary

EVIDENCE, 85-90

In ARGUMENT , the data you present to support your REASONS . Such data may include statistics, calculations, examples, ANECDOTES , QUOTATIONS , case studies, or anything else that will convince your readers that your reasons are compelling. Evidence should be *sufficient* (enough to show that the reasons have merit) and *relevant* (appropriate to the argument you're making).

PART 2 READING / GET THE MESSAGE

Chapter 6 Recognizing Facts, Misinformation &Lies

FACTS ARE FACTS AND WILL NOT DISAPPEAR ON ACCOUNT OF YOUR LIKES.

—JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

YOU KNOW WHERE I'M COMING FROM, BUT YOU CAN FACT-CHECK ANYTHING I SAY.

—RACHEL MADDOW

Palestinians Recognize Texas as Part of Mexico." "Pope Francis: God Has Instructed Me to Revise the Ten Commandments." "Canada Bans Beyoncé after Her Superbowl Performance." Really? Well, no. While these are in fact actual headlines, none is anywhere near the truth. But being false hasn't kept them from being widely shared—and not as jokes, but as facts. With so many people spreading misinformation, unsubstantiated claims, and even outright lies today, it can be hard to know who and what to trust, or whether to trust anything at all. The good news, however, is that you don't have to be taken in by such claims. This chapter provides strategies for navigating today's choppy waters of news and information so that you can make confident decisions about what to trust—and what not to.

Facts, misinformation, fake news, and lies

Some say we're living in a "post-truth" era, that the loudest voices take up so much airtime that they can sometimes be seen as telling the "truth" no matter what they say. A 2018 study by MIT scholars examined tweets about 126,000 major news stories in English and came to the conclusion that "the truth simply can't compete with hoax and rumor." In fact, the study says, "fake news and false rumors reach more people, penetrate deeper into the social network, and spread much faster than accurate stories."

> A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.
>
> —MARK TWAIN

It's worth asking why misinformation and even lies outperform real news. While it is notoriously difficult to establish an airtight cause-and-effect relationship, these researchers suspect that several reasons account for their "success." First, they're often outlandish and novel in a way that attracts attention. Second, the content of such stories is often negative and tends to arouse very strong emotions. Third, they use language that evokes surprise or disgust, and seems to lead to the information going viral. Accurate tweets, the researchers found, use words associated with trust or sadness rather than surprise or disgust—and as they note, "the truth simply does not compete."

Lies and misinformation are nothing new. What's new is that anyone with an internet connection can post whatever they think (or want others to think) online, where it can easily reach a wide audience. And unlike mainstream newspapers and other such publications, online postings go out without being vetted by editors or fact-checkers.

Perhaps it's time to step back, take a deep breath, and attend to some basic definitions. Just what is a fact? What's fake news? And what about misinformation and lies? Both misinformation and lies give false or inaccurate information. The difference is that *misinformation* is not necessarily intended to deceive, whereas *lies* are always told deliberately, for the purpose of giving false information. *Fake news* stories are fabricated and false articles are made to look authentic. Often they're used to spread conspiracy theories or deliberate hoaxes—the more

bizarre, the better. In addition, many people simply dismiss anything they don't like or agree with as fake news. *Facts* , on the other hand, can be verified and backed up by reliable evidence—that the Washington Capitals won the 2018 Stanley Cup, for example, or that the consumption of soft drinks in the United States has declined in the last five years. Unlike claims about what God has instructed Pope Francis to do, these statements can be checked and verified; we can then trust them.

Think about your own beliefs

It's one thing to be able to spot misinformation, unsubstantiated claims, and exaggerations in the words of others, but it's another thing entirely to spot them in our own thinking and writing. So we need to take a good look at our own assumptions and biases. We all have them!

Attribution bias is the tendency to think that our motives for believing, say, that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is crucially important for keeping our air and water clean are objective or good, while the motives of those who believe the EPA is unnecessary are dubious or suspect. We all have this kind of bias naturally, tending to believe that what we think must be right. When you're thinking about an argument you strongly disagree with, then, it's a good idea to ask yourself *why* you disagree—and why you believe you're right. What is that belief based on? Have you considered that your own bias may be keeping you from seeing all sides of the issue fairly, or at all?

Confirmation bias is the tendency to favor and seek out information that confirms what we already believe and to reject and ignore information that contradicts those beliefs. Many studies have documented this phenomenon, including a university experiment with student participants, half of whom favored capital punishment and thought it was a deterrent to crime and half of whom thought just the opposite. Researchers then asked the students to respond to two studies: one provided data that supported capital punishment as a deterrent to crime; the other provided data that called this conclusion into question. And sure enough, the students who were pro capital punishment rated the study showing evidence that it was a deterrent as "more highly credible," while the students who were against capital punishment rated the study showing evidence that it didn't deter crime as "more highly credible"—in spite of the fact that both studies had been made up by the researchers and were equally compelling in terms of their evidence. Moreover, by the end of the experiment, each side had doubled down on its original beliefs.

That's confirmation bias at work, and it works on all of us. It affects the way we search for information and what we pay attention to, how we interpret it, and even what we remember. That's all to say you shouldn't assume a news story is trustworthy just because it confirms what you already think. Ask yourself if you're seeing what you want to see. And look for confirmation bias in your sources; do they acknowledge viewpoints other than their own?

REFLECT! Where do you get the news? Whatever your sources, what do you pay attention to, and why? What are you most likely to click on? What, on the other hand, are you likely to skip, or ignore? Can you see confirmation bias at work in the choices you make?

Read defensively

Well over 2,000 years ago, the philosopher Aristotle said that one reason people need rhetoric is for self-defense, for making sure we aren't being manipulated or lied to. Today, the need for such caution may be more important than ever—especially in social media and elsewhere online, where false stories may look authentic and appear right next to accurate, factual information. These times call, then, for *defensive reading* —that is, the kind of reading that doesn't take things at face value, that questions underlying assumptions, that scrutinizes claims carefully, and that doesn't rush to judgment. This is the kind of reading that media and technology critic Howard Rheingold calls "crap detection." Crap, he says sardonically, is a "technical term" he uses to describe information "tainted by ignorance or deliberate deception." He warns us not to give in to such misinformation. As Rheingold and many others note, there is no single foolproof way to identify lies and misinformation. But the following discussion offers some specific strategies for determining whether—or not—a source can be trusted.

Triangulate—and use your judgment

If you have any doubts, find three different ways to check on whether a story can be trusted. Google the author or the sponsor. Consult fact-checking sites such as *Snopes.com* or *FactCheck.org* . Look for other sources that are reporting the same story, especially if you first saw it on social media. If it's true and important, you should find a number of other reputable sources reporting on it. But however carefully you check, and whatever facts and evidence you uncover, it's up to you to sort the accurate information from the misinformation—and often as not that will call on you to use your own judgment to do that. See p. 269 for more tips on triangulating.

Before reading an unfamiliar source, determine whether it can be trusted

Take a tip from professional fact-checkers, who don't even start to read an unfamiliar website until they've determined that it's a trustworthy site. If you have any doubts, here are some ways to proceed:

Do a search about the author or sponsor. If there's an author, what's their expertise? Do they belong to any organizations you don't know or trust? Be wary if there's no author. And do a search about the site's sponsor. If it's run by an organization you've never heard of, find out what it is—and whether it actually exists. What do reliable sources say about it? Read the site's About page, but check up on what it says.

> If an organization can game what they are, they can certainly game their About page!
>
> —SAM WINEBURG

Check any links to see who sponsors them and whether they are trustworthy sources. Do the same for works cited in print sources.

Be careful of over-the-top headlines, which often serve as CLICKBAIT to draw you in. Check to see that the story and the headline actually match. Question any that are over the top: look for words like *amazing* , *epic* , *incredible* , or *unbelievable* . (In general, don't believe anything that's said to be "unbelievable!")

Pay attention to design. Be wary if it looks amateurish, but don't assume that a professional-looking design means the source is accurate or trustworthy. Those who create fake news sites are careful to make them to look like authentic news sites.

Recognize satire. Remember that some authors make a living by writing satirical fake news. Here's one: "China Slaps Two-Thousand-Per-Cent Tariff on Tanning Beds." This comes from Andy Borowitz, who writes political satire in the *New Yorker* , which tips us off not to take it seriously by labeling it "not the news." The *Onion* is another source that pokes fun at gullible readers. Try this: "Genealogists Find 99% of People Are Not Related to Anyone Cool." This one's silly enough that it can't possibly be true. But if you're not sure, better check.

Ask questions, check evidence

Double-check things that too neatly support what you yourself think, or that seem too good to be true.

What's the CLAIM , and what EVIDENCE is provided? What motivated the author to write, and what's their PURPOSE ? To provide information? Make you laugh? Convince you of something?

Check facts and claims using nonpartisan sites that confirm truths and identify lies. *FactCheck.org* , *Snopes.com* , and *AllSides.com* are three such sites. Copy and paste the basics of the statement into the search field; if it's information the site has in its database, you'll find out whether it's a confirmed fact or a lie. If you use *Google* to check on a stated fact, keep in mind that you'll need to check on any sources it turns up—and that even if the statement brings up many hits, that doesn't make it accurate. See p. 266 for more on fact-checking sites.

If you think a story is too good to be true , you're probably right to be skeptical. And don't assume that it must be true because no one could make up such a story. They can. Check out stories that are so outrageous that you don't believe them; if they're true, they'll be widely reported. That said, double-check stories that confirm your own beliefs as well; that might be confirmation bias at work.

Look up any research that's cited. You may find that the research has been taken out of context or misquoted—or that it doesn't actually exist. Is the research itself reliable? Pay close attention to QUOTATIONS : Who said it, and when? Is it believable? If not, copy and paste the quotation into *Google* or check *FactCheck.org* to verify that it's real.

Check any comments. If several say the article sounds fake, it may well be. But remember that given the presence of BOTS and TROLLS —not to mention people with malicious intent—comments, too, may be fake.

Fact-check photos and videos

Is a picture really worth a thousand words? In some cases, yes—but only if the picture is an accurate depiction. Today, it's never been easier to falsify photographs. Take the often-repeated, retweeted, and repurposed story of a shark swimming down a highway whenever a hurricane strikes or some other natural disaster causes flooding. A couple years ago, someone tweeted: "Believe it or not, this is a shark on the freeway in New Burn, North Carolina. #HurricaneFlorence"—a message that was retweeted 88,000 times. But the same shark popped up on Twitter swimming down a road in Houston, Texas, and in many other cities. Easily done with *Photoshop* .

This 2017 photo looks real—but one of these men was photoshopped in.

And see the photo on page 75 that went viral in 2017, showing President Trump, Vladimir Putin, and others in conversation. A little investigation, however, showed that Putin had been photoshopped into the image; he wasn't actually at the table.

Again, there are no simple, foolproof ways to identify doctored photos, but experts in digital forensics recommend various steps we can take. Here's advice from Hany Farid, a computer science professor at the University of California at Berkeley:

- ***Do a reverse image search*** using *Google Images* or *Tin Eye* to see if an image has been recirculated or repurposed from another website. Both sites allow you to drag an image or paste a link to an image into a search bar to learn more about its source and see where it appears online.
- ***Check Snopes.com*** , where altered images are often identified, by typing a brief description of the image into the site's search box.
- ***Look carefully at shadows:*** an image may have been altered if you find shadows where you don't expect them or don't see them where you do expect them.

Farid goes on to say that the best defense against fabricated photos is "to stop and think about the source"—especially before you share it on social media. After a shooter killed seventeen people at a Florida school in 2018, an altered photo of Emma González, one of the students who protested the mass shooting, went viral, showing her tearing up a page of the US Constitution. In fact, she was actually tearing up a shooting target as part of her advocacy for gun control; the Constitution had been photoshopped in.

The same advice holds true for video, which is all too easy to falsify. Videos that flicker constantly or that consist of just one short clip are often questionable, as are videos of famous people doing things that are highly suspicious. How likely is it that Kobe Bryant could jump over a speeding Aston Martin? Not very—but a lot of us were fooled by a fake video made for Nike.

Such fabricated videos proliferate daily, especially on *YouTube* , now an extremely popular source of news. As *YouTube* has found in trying to control or ban fake videos, those who make them are getting more and more sophisticated. As the *Guardian* reports, artificial intelligence

and computer graphics now make it possible to create “realistic looking footage of public figures appearing to say, well, anything.”

Thanks to the internet, there’s a lot of misinformation and fake news out there. But the fact-finding and defensive-reading strategies described in this chapter will help you sort out fiction from fact, falsehood from truth—and determine with confidence who and what you can trust. You may have to dig a little, but truth and the “good stuff” are out there. Take it from Elvis Presley: “Truth is like the sun. You can shut it out for a time, but it ain’t goin’ away.”

REFLECT! Look for something that has been sent to you on social media—retweeted, forwarded, “liked,” whatever. Then take the time to check out its source, using the help provided in this chapter on page 74 . After checking, do you find that the information in the source holds up as credible and trustworthy? Why—or why not?

Glossary

CLICKBAIT, 408

On the internet, headlines or links designed to get readers to read something or to increase page views.

CLAIM, 84-85, 103-5

A statement of a belief or POSITION . In an ARGUMENT , a claim needs to be stated in a THESIS or clearly implied, and requires support by REASONS and EVIDENCE .

EVIDENCE, 85-90

In ARGUMENT , the data you present to support your REASONS . Such data may include statistics, calculations, examples, ANECDOTES , QUOTATIONS , case studies, or anything else that will convince your readers that your reasons are compelling. Evidence should be *sufficient* (enough to show that the reasons have merit) and *relevant* (appropriate to the argument you’re making).

PURPOSE, 25

In writing, your goal: to explore a topic, to express an opinion, to entertain, to report information, to persuade, and so on. Purpose is one element of the RHETORICAL SITUATION .

QUOTE, 285-90

To cite someone else’s words exactly as they were said or written. Quotation is most effective when the wording is worth repeating or makes a point so well that no rewording will do it justice or when you want to cite someone’s exact words. Quotations in academic writing need to be acknowledged with DOCUMENTATION .

BOT, 75

An automated program on the internet, often used to advocate ideas—and sometimes used for malicious purposes, for example, to capture email addresses for a spam mailing list.

TROLL, 75

On the internet, someone who says something provocative or disruptive.