

Why Write? A Guide for Students in Canada

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This textbook is dedicated to University of Victoria students, past, present, and future, especially to those who use their education to make the world a better place.

PART I

WRITING IS A PROCESS, NOT A PRODUCT

1.1. Learning Goals

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

LEARNING GOALS

You will learn how to focus on a purpose for writing.

Sometimes narrowing down a purpose for writing can be the most difficult task to achieve. As a student, you might think that writing should come to you naturally, but nothing could be further from the truth. Writing can be a manageable (and maybe even rewarding) experience if it's treated as a series of steps rather than a one and done exercise. Much like building a house, writing begins with a plan, a foundation, a frame, and so on (but not necessarily in that order).

You will learn how to approach writing as a process.

Think of this chapter as the first step to planning your writing and, in turn, drafting. If you work up an outline and then draft your paper, revise and polish it, then you might be surprised by the outcome. Each of these elements are described in some detail in this chapter. However, it is vital to understand that there is more than one way to plan and draft, and this chapter will help you discover your writing process. Please feel free to jump down to [1.8 Your Own Process](#) to learn more.

You will learn why feedback is a crucial part of the writing process.

A major part of learning to write in academic settings is to get comfortable with having others read your work. In your academic and professional lives, you will be writing for an audience. We (in academia and beyond) often write within our own headspace, which means we may not recognize what works in our writing and what doesn't. Another pair of eyes can help you recognize what you're doing well and where you can improve. In turn, you can help others. You'll discover that feedback is one of the most important aspects of the writing process.

1.2 Indigenizing the Writing Process

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

The [Four Feathers Writing Guide](#) respectfully presents Coast Salish Traditional Knowledge to support Indigenous students to learn more about themselves as academic writers, as well as provide a pathway for students to develop their writing skills. The guide is shared with permission from the co-authors: Elder Shirley Alphonse (THE-LA-ME-YÉ), who is from Hul'q'umi'num People of Cowichan Nation and is a spiritual leader of the T'Sou-ke Nation; the late Scia'new Nation Elder Nadine Charles (TEAŁIE); and Theresa Bell, Manager, Blended Learning Success, at Royal Roads University. While the guide is designed specifically to support Coast Salish students, the co-authors, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers who contributed to the guide hoped the Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous philosophies of learning and teaching would provide opportunities for learning about academic writing to Indigenous students from other communities as well as non-Indigenous students.¹

1. Please note that the Traditional Knowledge presented in [the Four Feathers Writing Guide] guide remains the intellectual property of the Indigenous Knowledge Keepers who generously shared their knowledge. The ownership of Traditional Knowledge remains in perpetuity with the appropriate Nation, and [the co-authors] obtained the necessary permissions to include the teachings in this guide. The Traditional Knowledge

Because we all live on Indigenous land in Canada, it is our responsibility as visitors or settler-colonists to respect Indigenous knowledge. Non-Indigenous readers can learn lessons from this resource as long as they remain aware of their responsibilities. If you would like to learn more about your responsibilities if you are a visitor/settler, please read this [short essay by Tim Manuel](#).²

The First Peoples Principles of learning offer fruitful ways to approach writing. We can all benefit from understanding:

- Learning to write involves patience and time.
- Learning to write requires an exploration of one's identity.
- Learning to write involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning to write is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational.

We will say this many times in this chapter (and other chapters) but there is more than one type of writing process. Your writing process may be culturally based. You may not have written academically in English or French before. Perhaps writing seems like an insurmountable and even frightening task. You might be surprised to learn that even professors and graduate students struggle with academic writing.

In [an essay](#) we encourage you to read in its entirety (it's really

should therefore not be re-used in any way without obtaining explicit permission from the Nation.

(Alphonse, Charles, & Bell, n.d., Preface section)

2. Tim Manuel, "Cultural Teachings: Welcome to Territory & Land Acknowledgments," *Reconciliation Canada*, February 4, 2019, <https://reconciliationcanada.ca/cultural-teachings-welcome-to-territory-land-acknowledgments/>.

quite entertaining and will very likely give you a new perspective on academic writing), Dr. Sarah Allen explains that there are myths about academic writing that need to be exposed and never heard from again.³ One such myth is that those who are experienced writers find writing a simple task – this is simply not true:

I confess that I find myself to be genuinely surprised when some well-respected scholar in my field admits to struggling with his writing. For example, David Bartholomae (a very successful scholar in the field of Rhetoric and Composition) confesses that he didn't learn to write until after he completed his undergraduate studies, and that he learned it through what must have been at least one particularly traumatic experience: his dissertation was rejected for being "poorly written" (22–23).

If at first glance the rejection of a dissertation means little to you, let me explain: imagine spending years (literally, years) on a piece of writing (a very long piece of writing), for which you've sacrificed more than you ever thought

3. Sarah Allen, "The Inspired Writer vs. the Real Writer," in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, eds. Charles Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky, vol. 1 (West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2010), 34–44, <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces1/allen--the-inspired-writing-vs-the-real-writer.pdf>.

you'd sacrifice for anything (your time, your freedom, sleep, relationships, and even, at times, your sanity), only to have it rejected. And worse, it's rejected for being "poorly written," which is like being booted off of a pro-league baseball team for not being able to tie your shoes properly. We're talking basics here, or so we (writers) like to think. And yet, if writing were nothing more than "practicing the basics," why's it so hard—hard even for one of the best of the best in my field?⁴

This is an excellent question that Dr. Allen asks and linguist John McWhorter has given an insightful answer in [a TED Talk](#) he gave in 2013.⁵ If we put language on a clock, writing shows up at around 11:07pm.⁶ This means language has predominantly been oral for thousands of years and writing is the new kid on the block. What does this mean? Well, for one thing, we are not built to write but speak. So writing does not come easily for the majority of us. Hopefully this insight tells you that you are not a "bad" writer. No one is a natural writer (or if such a creature exists, we have yet to meet them) and we all need to fix errors in our writing in a process called revision.

Sure, sometimes writing is easy (or easier) and sometimes it's

4. Allen, "The Inspired Writer vs. the Real Writer," 35.
5. John McWhorter, "Txtng is Killing Language. JK!!!" filmed February 2013. TED video, 13:35, https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk.
6. McWhorter, "Txtng is Killing Language. JK!!!" 1:13.

hard but either way, it can be rewarding, particularly once you understand that it is a process. If you go through the process, we hope you will find writing to be much like learning any other skill. Perhaps you're now asking what do we mean by "writing is a process."

Glad you asked, let's see.

1.3 Writing Processes

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

At some point you have probably been taught a writing process. Take a minute and jot down what your writing process is or what you learned from a teacher or even another writer. To get started, you might choose from this list:

- Do you review your writing project or assignment?
- Do you think about it for a while?
- Do you draw a mind map?
- Do you create an outline?
- When do you write a first draft?
- When do you start fixing “mistakes” or polishing sentences?

You might include all or some of the above processes, but even if you chose two, you have a writing process. In secondary and post-secondary schools your process may have been provided for you. If you'd like to check out some ways to get started writing, jump to the section [1.4 Getting Started](#).

For a large research paper, the process assigned to you likely went something like this:

1. You were asked to draft and hand in a position you have taken on a topic (sometimes called a claim or thesis) for feedback.
2. Once that thesis was approved, you took notes, maybe in the format of a journal or on notecards. You might have then created an outline (possibly with different levels of ideas designated by roman numerals, capital letters, or even wee numbers).
3. Only after all those steps did you create a complete draft, which you then edited and proofread.

There's nothing wrong with this writing process – but it's important to know it's not appropriate for all writing situations and won't work for every writer. If you'd like to learn more about your own writing process, jump to the section [1.8 Your Own Process](#).

In other words, if you have ever written an outline after having created a complete draft of an essay, **you're not doing it wrong**. Changing a thesis statement (sometimes called a claim or a position on a topic) several times throughout the drafting process or even writing it near the end isn't necessarily a problem. And some texts should be produced all in one go – there's no need to write and revise several drafts of an email and no time to do so for an exam.

The goal of this section is not to teach you one writing process but help you to develop a variety of writing processes. When you find yourself facing a new writing project, you should have a repertoire of tools and strategies to try. Put another way, think of your writing skills as tools in a toolbox: you want to have a number of tools to choose from rather than just one, such as a hammer, so to speak. A hammer fixes lots of things but isn't very good at fixing others. Similarly, if you only have one writing tool (like the hammer that was just mentioned), then your writing simply won't work as well as if you had an array of tools (like a hammer, nails, monkey wrench... and so on). But before you can choose how and what you will write, you probably need to start with thinking (**there is no hard and fast rule about where to start**, but this is a common way to begin the writing process).

1.4 Getting Started

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

Let's start with the assumption that writing doesn't begin when you put pen to paper (or fingers on a keyboard). Rather, it starts when you think about what you want to write. Time you spend thinking about a possible essay topic while you are in the shower counts as part of your writing process. So does a moment of pondering while looking out the bus window on your morning commute. And so does reading a blog post or listening to a podcast episode that sparks a new idea. Thinking about writing is writing, and this section offers some suggestions for how you can spark some good thinking.

[The Writing Centre at the University of North Carolina](#) has a method for getting the writing process started, which you can use when you feel like you just can't think of anything to write:

When you've got nothing: You might need a storm to approach when you feel "blank" about the topic, devoid of inspiration, full of anxiety about the topic, or just too tired to craft an orderly outline. In this case, brainstorming stirs up the dust, whips some air into our stilled pools of thought, and gets the breeze of inspiration moving again.

When you've got too much: There are times when you have too much chaos in your brain and need to bring in some conscious order. In this case, brainstorming forces the mental chaos and random thoughts to rain out onto the page,

giving you some concrete words or schemas that you can then arrange according to their logical relations.¹

That being said, ideas have a way of disappearing if we don't make a record of them. For that reason, most descriptions of a writing process start by encouraging you to get something down on paper. This section suggests a number of ways you can keep track of your thinking and make it possible to archive your ideas. Remember, these are only suggestions and not a prescription for “good” writing.

Here are a couple ways you can begin the process of getting your ideas down:

Freewriting

When you freewrite, you let your thoughts flow as they will, putting pen to paper and writing down whatever comes into your mind. You don't judge the quality of what you write and you don't worry about style or any surface-level issues, like spelling, grammar, or punctuation. If you can't think of what to say, you write that

1. “Brainstorming,” Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/brainstorming/>.

down—really. The advantage of this technique is that you free up your internal critic and allow yourself to write things you might not write if you were being too self-conscious.

When you freewrite you can set a time limit (“I’ll write for 15 minutes!”) and even use a kitchen timer or alarm clock or you can set a space limit (“I’ll write until I fill four full notebook pages, no matter what tries to interrupt me!”) and just write until you reach that goal. You might do this on the computer or on paper, and you can even try it with your eyes shut or the monitor off, which encourages speed and freedom of thought.

The crucial point is that you keep on writing even if you believe you are saying nothing. Word must follow word, no matter the relevance. Your freewriting might even look like this:

“This paper is supposed to be on the politics of tobacco production but even though I went to all the lectures and read the book I can’t think of what to say and I’ve felt this way for four minutes now and I have 11 minutes left and I wonder if I’ll keep thinking nothing during every minute but I’m not sure if it matters that I am babbling and I don’t know what else to say about this topic and it is rainy today and I never noticed the number of cracks in that wall before and those cracks remind me of the walls in my grandfather’s study and he smoked and he

farmed and I wonder why he didn't farm tobacco..."

When you're done with your set number of minutes or have reached your page goal, read back over the text. Yes, there will be a lot of filler and unusable thoughts but there also will be little gems, discoveries, and insights. When you find these gems, highlight them or cut and paste them into your draft or onto an "ideas" sheet so you can use them in your paper. Even if you don't find any diamonds in there, you will have either quieted some of the noisy chaos or greased the writing gears so that you can now face the assigned paper topic.

....

Consider purpose and audience

Think about the parts of communication involved in any writing or speaking act: purpose and audience.

What is your purpose?

What are you trying to do? What verb captures your intent? Are you trying to inform? Convince? Describe? Each purpose will lead you to a different set of information and help you shape material to include and exclude in a draft. Write about why you are writing this draft in this form.

Who is your audience?

Who are you communicating with (beyond the person who's going to put a grade on this assignment)? What does that audience need to know? What do they already know? What information does that audience need first, second, third? Write about who you are writing to and what they need. For more on audience, see our [handout](#) on audience.²

Some folks are reluctant to devote time to this pre-writing work, and it is possible to create an effective piece of writing just by leaping in (especially if you allow time for rewriting, revision, and reworking your text). But if you have a big project to tackle, deliberate thinking offers a low-pressure way to get started and will likely save you time in the long run.

2. Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “Brainstorming.”

1.5 Reading to Write

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

For the purpose of illustration, let's assume you have an assignment to write an essay that records your reaction to a class reading, such as an academic article about restorative justice programs for first-time offenders (If you would like to practice, please do open this "[Youth Outcomes in a Community Collaboration Model](#)"¹ and then follow along). You have read the article, and now you can get started in a number of different ways.

You can start with what's in your head already. Try writing down all your thoughts and questions. Try to imagine yourself having a conversation with the author of the article – what would you ask her about? Pretend that you are an individual who has been charged and found guilty of having stolen a bike – what story could you tell about this situation, and what would you want to happen next? Next imagine that you are the person whose bike was stolen – what would you want to see happen to the person who took your property? **Your thoughts and imagination can generate lots of material for a writing project.** And there is a long tradition of writers talking about the experience of being inspired, feeling that an idea has come to them and that they only have to write it down.

But we can't always count on inspiration to get a job done. (The painter Pablo Picasso once said, "Inspiration exists, but it has to

1. Cynthia Zubritsky, Holly Wald and Nancy Jaquette, "Youth Outcomes in a Community Collaboration Model," *Sociology and Criminology-Open Access* 4, no. 2 (2016): 142, <https://www.longdom.org/open-access/youth-outcomes-in-a-community-collaboration-model-2375-4435-1000142.pdf>.

find you working.”) To get started, you can also look around and collect what seems like it might prove useful. An ancient term for the earliest stage of the writing process is *inventio* – which doesn’t align with our sense of the word invention (to make something that didn’t exist previously). *Inventio* means to find, come upon, or discover something already there (read more about “*inventio*” on the [Silva Rhetoricae – or “Forest of Rhetoric”](#) website).²

In other words, you can start the process of looking for and collecting what’s available. In the case of this essay assignment, you could re-read the original article and take notes on the points that seem most important to you or points that relate to what the assignment asks of you. For example, if you are asked to write an annotated bibliography (see chapter two for details on what an annotated bibliography is!), then you would read for the article’s arguments and evidence. Actually, this approach works well no matter what kind of academic article you are reading: read for the argument and you really can’t go wrong. If you have time, maybe try this out with [the article](#) we provided for you to practice with?

Once you have found the main argument (and the supporting arguments and evidence), then you could write down a couple of sentences recording whether you agree or disagree with the author’s ideas or arguments and why. You could also do a bit of reading around. (When such reading around occurs in a more formal way, **we call it research.**)

Now go and watch videos on YouTube that have something to do with the topic of restorative justice. What did you find? Even when you’re not writing a formal research essay, you should keep track of all the sources of information you look at and what you learned from them. For now, though, this can be a pretty loose set of notes.

2. Silva Rhetoricae: The Forest of Rhetoric (website), Brigham Young University, accessed May 25, 2020, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu>.

(In Chapter Four we will get into how you can keep track of the resources you find and acknowledge them in a piece of writing by following a set of formal conventions.)

And remember that you can find great material for an essay by talking to other people. Set yourself the task of talking to a couple of friends or classmates about this topic to see what they think – their ideas can push your thinking in a lot of new directions.

Depending on the assignment, you might be tempted to streamline this thinking process and come up with just one idea. You might be surprised to learn that this is not the most productive way to produce a first draft. That is, if you only have 250 words to write, you may think it unnecessary or a waste of time to write up 1000 words of notes and ideas. But if you only write to the word count, then you will have a problem revising your work. Write for the meaning first and then worry about the word count, not the other way around. Trust us. Write more, not less and then revise.

While there is such a thing as too much, think about setting a quota for your pre-thinking work, remembering that more is often better. In fact, there's a long tradition (starting with [Erasmus of Rotterdam](#) in the early sixteenth century³) of teaching students to write well by encouraging them to make much more than is needed.

We would say that if you need 250 words, it's a good idea to generate at least a couple of pages of notes from your own head, by collecting ideas from other sources, or through a combination of these approaches (see the [list of brainstorming techniques](#) in [1.4 Getting Started](#) for how to get started writing out your ideas). You're likely to find that making more will give you ample choices of what content is most appropriate and effective for your project – and the best choice is not always the first idea that pops into your head.

3. Eric MacPhail, “Desiderius Erasmus (1468?–1536),” in The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/erasmus/>.

If you would like to know more about Erasmus of Rotterdam's concept of copia in writing, but really do not want to read a 16th century text (if you do, please look up Erasmus' *de Copia* in any university library), then check out this [handout from Dr. Gideon Burton](#). You will see just how many variations there are to express ONE idea.⁴ Each variation has a slightly different meaning and as you practice, you will pick up these skills too.

4. Gideon Burton, "A Short Guide to Copia," Brigham Young University, accessed May 25, 2020, <http://burton.byu.edu/Composition/CopiaGuide.pdf>.

1.6 Drafting

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

Drafting is an important step in the writing process. You might start by drafting, then think, then draft or you might do the opposite or some other process. There is no one right way to engage the writing process – **the main point is to have one**. The following gives some suggestions for how and when to draft and where to start. Of course, everyone's process will be different – so there's no need to feel limited by what's listed here.

Where to Begin

By this point, you'll have done the necessary preparatory work: be that simply thinking carefully about your assignment prompt or reading sources and making notes. Whether you're writing a response paper or a research essay, most writing assignments will require you to make an argument or claim of some kind.

Let's think about the example from earlier: you've read an article on restorative justice programs for first-time offenders and are being asked to respond. In this case, you're being asked to describe your reaction to the article and support your reactions with reasons and evidence from the text. In a more formal assignment like a research paper, your instructor will expect you to summarize your argument in one to two sentences. These few sentences are referred to as a "thesis statement." (For more on thesis statements, check out this webpage on ["Thesis Statements" from the Writing](#)

[Center at UNC](#)¹ or read about and/or watch a video on “[Creating a Thesis Statement](#)” from [The Learning Portal](#).²)

Though, as we’ve said above, there are many ways in which to draft your paper, few people begin without a working thesis – in other words, a rough idea of the argument they plan to make. I say “working” because it’s not uncommon for our ideas to shift as we write. As award-winning teacher and rhetorician [Wayne C. Booth](#) tells us, one of the reasons we write is to understand: “When you arrange and rearrange the results of your research in new ways, you discover new implications, connections, and complications.”³ In other words, we (and Booth) would like you to ask questions of your writing (e.g., “Does this belong here? Does this make sense? What if I moved this over here?”). We’ll talk more about revision later in the book.

Outlining and Writing Your Assignment

Many writers will draft an outline or “map” of their paper. **This**

1. “Thesis Statements,” Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/thesis-statements/>.
2. “Creating a Thesis Statement,” The Learning Portal, College Libraries Ontario, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://tlp-lpa.ca/writing/creating-a-thesis>. (*Note that there is a transcription of this video available on this webpage.)
3. Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 11.

outline might be basic or it might be incredibly detailed. A basic outline may, for example, include a working thesis and rough sketch of what you plan to cover in each paragraph. A detailed outline may include topic or transitional sentences, excerpts from or summaries of the evidence you plan to use, and word counts for each paragraph. The type of outline you come up with will depend on several factors, including the length of the assignment and your own writing process.

Once you have drafted your outline, it's time to commit fingers to keyboard and content to page. You may wish to write the introductory paragraph first, but you don't have to. Many experienced writers leave writing the introduction until after they have written the body of the paper (or report or response or whatever the writing assignment might be). This experience is similar to introducing a guest speaker. To introduce a speaker you don't really know, you need some background before you can make the introduction. In a similar way, you can better introduce your paper after you are acquainted with the content. Perhaps try writing the introduction to your paper last. Give it a try!

Now you need to think strategically about your writing. How are you going to produce a clearly organized, cohesive draft? Your drafting may normally involve stopping and starting, writing and backspacing as you agonize over your word choices, wonder about your comma use, or worry about your citations. ("I know I found that somewhere; where is my source?") Stopping and starting can be frustrating. When drafting, don't worry about perfecting your text:

- Highlight words you want to change; bold commas you are unsure about.
- Use comments in your word processor to add notes, ask questions, and write reminders.
- Keep writing without pausing.
- Use a [pomodoro technique](#)⁴ to help you write continuously for a period of time.

Drafting without stopping enables you to flesh out your paper. You will see your ideas emerge, and soon full pages are complete. While the writing itself may not be polished, you are making progress, knowing that you can revise and polish the draft later.

What does it mean to revise and edit a draft? Revision can refer to making improvements in content and organization, while editing may refer to making changes with sentences and grammar. A short discussion of [revising and editing and their differences](#) is available at the OWL at Purdue.⁵

When revising, focus on the assignment task, the overall organization, and the content development. It's a good idea to review your instructor's marking rubric or guidelines. If you are not familiar with the word "rubric," then we can help: rubrics are guidelines instructors use to help them allocate marks fairly. Begin by carefully reading the rubric; then, return to your assignment and check that you have achieved the task. Here's a handy set of questions to ask when you are revising your writing assignment (**Remember! Keep your reader in mind!**):

- Have you explained your key points?
 - Have you provided examples/data to support your point of view?
 - Have you cited sources?
 - Have you added concluding sentences that wrap up the
4. "Pomodoro Technique," Wikimedia Foundation, last modified May 20, 2020, 14:42, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique.
 5. "Steps for Revising Your Paper," Purdue Online Writing Lab, Purdue University, accessed May 25, 2020, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/proofreading/steps_for_revising.html.

discussion and hint at the next point you're discussing?

Now you might be ready to add your introduction and conclusion (or maybe you are the type of writer whose process involves writing the conclusion first? **Remember, there are many writing processes, not just one**). We have a suggestion for you: you might want to write them together. If this seems odd, hear us out. If you are starting with historical context on your topic, end your essay with a conclusion that offers a prediction. If you are starting with a quotation relating to your topic, return to the quotation in your conclusion: Does it still ring true? Please see this resource for [helpful tips on writing the introduction and conclusion](#).⁶

By connecting your introduction and conclusion, you complete the circle for your reader. Your reader experiences a sense of closure or completion when the end links back to the beginning. For additional tips on introductions and conclusions, see [a helpful resource from Ashford University](#).⁷

6. Leora Freedman and Jarry Plotnick, "Introductions and Conclusions," University College Writing Centre, University of Toronto, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/intros-and-conclusions.pdf>.
7. "Introductions and Conclusions," Writing Center, Ashford University, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://writingcenter.ashford.edu/introductions-conclusions>.

1.7 Feedback: No One Writes Alone

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

Writing can be easier when you get help from others. Your course instructor may include a “peer review” activity in your classes. To improve your writing (and to help others improve), you may wish to seek feedback on both your writing process and what you are ready to submit to your instructors.

When we write, we may actually forget our reader. We write from inside our heads and know exactly what we mean. However, when others read our writing, they may find there are gaps in content. They may not be able to follow the logic or order of the ideas. They are not “inside” so may be missing the critical information that lends meaning to the text. Now what? Peer review to the rescue!

When we receive feedback from course instructors, teaching assistants, writing centre staff or peers, we become aware of what we are missing in our writing and can respond.

Please do watch this handy [video about the peer review process and what it looks like to give effective feedback](#) (the video is called “No One Writes Alone” and it provided the inspiration for the title of this section).¹ You’ll note that [Suzanne Lane, the Associate Director of Writing at MIT](#), gives excellent advice we can all benefit from: **be sure you review your peer’s work from a reader’s perspective.**

1. “No One Writes Alone: Peer Review in the Classroom – A Guide for Students,” MIT Comparative Media Studies/ Writing, uploaded on January 31, 2017. YouTube video, 6:33, <https://youtu.be/tY8CX0J3ILc>.

You are giving the writer your experience as a reader and that's invaluable.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/whywriteguide/?p=60>

What kind of feedback should you ask for?

You may have received a grading rubric or checklist which clarifies your course instructor's expectations. You may see these expectations grouped in possible categories such as organization, content, sentences/grammar, and format. Each category may include specific criteria (e.g., "strong thesis statement" or "argument clarity") with accompanying marks for fulfilling this criteria.

Do you have an assignment that requires writing? Maybe take it

out now and see if you can find the rubric or how your writing will be marked. **You could ask for feedback in areas included on the rubric/checklist**, focusing on particular points that you feel unsure about. You might also ask for input on an area you've had feedback on before, if you'd like to know whether you're improving.

Sometimes receiving feedback is hard. You may feel hurt by what you hear. Remembering that feedback is a gift helps reduce that sting. Respond to feedback by thanking the person who gave it to you and carefully listening to (or reading) the advice. You may wish to ask questions for clarification so that you are sure you understand what you might do to improve. You may also wish to ignore the feedback if it does not make sense or departs from your course instructor's expectations. As the writer, you are in the driver's seat and can choose whether or not to implement the suggestions you receive.

How should you offer feedback?

American writer and cartoonist Frank A. Clark says, "Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots."² In offering feedback, your goal is to help your peer improve. To help your peer, you need to deliver your feedback in a way that your peer will hear.

First, you want to emphasize what is working well in your peer's writing using scripts like these: "I really like the interesting anecdote you include in your introduction" or "Your sentences are easy to understand."

Second, you can highlight opportunities for growth. You may want to try asking questions:

2. <http://www.greatthoughtstreasury.com/author/frank-clark>

- “Are you sure that ‘contemplation’ is a word?” or “What do you mean when you say, ‘the be all is sublime’?”
- You can offer suggestions from your writing experience: “When I find one of my paragraphs is going on for several pages, I consider breaking it down into shorter paragraphs.”
- You can speak to your experience reading the text: “I am getting sleepy as I read your middle section. I’m having trouble following your main point.”
- Finally, you can point your peer to resources you’ve found helpful: “When I need help with writing paragraphs, I look at what our instructor’s posted on the CS site. I also use the Purdue Online Writing Lab” (visit the OWL’s page “[On Paragraphs](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paragraphs_and_paragraphing/index.html)”³). Hearing about the resources you’re using might inspire your peer to check them out.

Reading others’ writing opens our eyes to our own strengths and challenges as writers. When we read our peer’s writing and find gaps between ideas, we are reminded of our own need to ensure that connections are clear. Struggling to locate key points in long, repetitious sentences shows us the need to write clear sentences in plain language. Scrutinizing facts our peers share and wondering about sources highlights the importance of citing sources. Reading the writing of others is a window to improving our processes and products.

3. “On Paragraphs,” Purdue Online Writing Lab, Purdue University, accessed May 25, 2020, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paragraphs_and_paragraphing/index.html.

Getting feedback from Writing Centre staff

You can get feedback on your writing and access helpful resources when you visit your university writing centre. Most universities provide academic writing support for students through writing centres, which may be located in libraries, in departments, or in centres dedicated to student academic success. Please jump down to the [Resources](#) section for information about the [Centre for Academic Communication](#).

See your writing course and writing centre as communities that YOU belong to.

Writing is complex work, and the best writers rely on others for constructive feedback. Seeking feedback on your writing through peer review, course instructor comments, and writing centre appointments draws you into a community of writing practice. Think of writing as a craft, something that is learned over time, an activity that has no ceiling on its performance.

1.8 Your Own Process

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

As stated previously, there are many different writing processes. While the stages of a writing process that are described previously (pre-writing; drafting; and getting feedback) are appropriate for some writing situations, you might find they aren't necessary or practical for every piece of writing you want to produce. Here are some alternate ways to think about your writing process:

If you don't know what to do, do something.

That is, if you find yourself faced with a writing situation that intimidates you or that makes you feel stuck, know that you can start writing in whatever way feels most comfortable.

- Maybe that involves pre-writing by summarizing and then responding to an article written by an expert on the subject you want to discuss. The couple of paragraphs you generate might not appear in your finished essay, but they could be enough to turn into a rough outline.
- Alternately, you can set yourself the task of writing a to do list. What are all the pieces you need to create for this piece of writing? What actions do you need to take to complete each of these pieces (for example, reading your assignment sheet, re-reading the article assigned in class, looking up that term you don't understand, visiting the library to get advice from a librarian about sources, etc.)? Then start tackling items on your list in an order that makes sense to you.

There are lots of ways to get started and keep going.

Keep looping back

In some cases it will make sense for you to move through a series of steps – but always keep in mind that it's okay (and sometimes necessary!) to return to and repeat an earlier step. You might be

in the drafting stage and discover that you should probably include an additional section that provides your readers with important background information – and that new section will require a bit of research and maybe even some outlining before you can go back to drafting. As you carry out this research, you could come across an example that's perfect for your conclusion, which you now want to revise. And changing that conclusion makes you see that you need to rework your thesis to make the significance of your argument clear. And so on. Moving between and back to different stages of a writing process is perfectly normal – it's sometimes called “iterative,” something that repeats and builds upon earlier repetition. This type of writing process is particularly appropriate when you are discovering new ideas and learning new things while writing – something that is likely to happen when you tackle complex assignments for upper-level classes.

In a hurry

That said, there are other types of writing situations when it's normal to skip entire stages of what might have once been presented to you as a complete writing process. For instance, when you write an essay as part of a timed exam, you don't have time for pre-writing and planning, much less for getting feedback, revising, and polishing. In such cases, you might spend a few minutes jotting down a list of ideas that functions as a combination between brainstorming and a rough outline. Then you start to write. And you try to catch and correct sentence-level errors as you go along.

This approach makes a lot of sense when you are being asked to write something you know a lot about (such as during an exam). And it can work well when you start with a strong sense of both the content you want to communicate and the form it needs to take – such as when you are writing an email to a professor explaining why you could benefit from an extended deadline for an assignment.

One way to get a better sense of the forms you might follow in academic writing situations is to learn more about genre – and that's the topic of the next chapter.

1.9 In Summary

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, AND ERIN KELLY

When we write, we are doing something very complicated, so it makes sense to think of writing as a process. You might think of the essay you hand in as a meal and the process of writing it as including steps such as [picking out recipes, shopping for or gathering ingredients, cooking food, setting a table, etc.](#) You know that it might be appropriate to prepare breakfast for yourself and a friend by cutting up some fruit and making toast, but that same meal wouldn't seem as fitting for a big family feast celebrating a birthday or holiday – and the amount of planning and preparation that would go into both of these meals varies widely. Writing situations also vary, so it's good for you to have a number of steps and processes you can use. After reading this chapter, we encourage you to experiment with your writing process, to try some steps you never used before. In doing so, you expand your writing abilities – and maybe you'll find something you want to add to your regular rotation of ways into a writing assignment.

We included excerpts from some fantastic writing resources, which you can find in their entirety at the end of this book in a section aptly titled “[Resources](#).”

HAPPY WRITING!

PART II

WRITING PROJECTS

2.1 Learning Goals

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

LEARNING GOALS

You will learn how to summarize, paraphrase and quote effectively.

Summary writing is a key skill used consistently in academic writing. We can't think of a day when we haven't had to summarize information of some kind. You will be consistently tasked with summarizing major concepts, articles, projects and then asked to respond. Of course, paraphrasing and quoting what others say is part and parcel of academic writing: all three skills involve condensing others' work and representing it faithfully. All three are found in the majority of academic writing projects and assignments.

You will develop reading and writing strategies to comprehend challenging texts.

One of the ways to build effective reading and writing skills is to learn about genre. As readers, we have certain expectations of the documents we read. For example, when you read an essay, you expect an introduction and, usually, a thesis statement followed by supporting arguments. In an email, you expect some elements of a business letter, such as an opening salutation. When you understand the norms

or conventions inherent to certain genres, you can not only write to those expectations but also be aware of your own expectations as a reader.

You will be prepared for writing in courses across the curriculum.

Readers have expectations for writing, and writers can better understand those expectations if they learn what they are. Genres map out expectations for each act of communication you perform. This is exciting because once you understand how genre conventions work for one major type of communication, you can apply those rules or conventions everywhere. It's like learning to drive: you learn the rules of the road, which means you can pretty much drive anywhere in the world. If you learn the "rules of the road" or "academic conventions," then you can "drive" or write across disciplines.

2.2 Genres, Stories, and Academic Writing

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

The title of this chapter is *Writing Projects*, which would seem unrelated to genre, but for many undergraduate students, academic writing is understood not in terms of academic genres but as a series of writing projects or assignments. That is, the essays, lab reports, discussion forum posts, reports, and other types of common academic writing you do for your classes often get listed on a course syllabus as assignments or projects. So why do we want you to start thinking of them as genres? Because once you understand types of academic writing as examples of different genres and learn how genre works as a concept, you will be able to read and write much more effectively (It's true!).

You might have been introduced to the word **genre** in high school as a way to classify a literary text, such as a novel, a sonnet, or a play. But genres are more than literary categories; they are the communication norms that allow us to make sense of social situations. Think of a genre as a kind of program or perhaps even a highly sophisticated algorithm that runs in the background during every act of communication, providing guidance about form, content, and interpretation. Put another way, genres are dynamic structures of communication that tell us how to behave in a variety of situations. [Dr. Amy Devitt](#), [Dr. Carolyn Miller](#), and [Dr. Kerry Dirk](#) explain that genre is a word we use to describe repeated patterns of communication.¹ What's surprising is that these “repeated patterns”

1. For further reading, see Devitt, A. *Writing Genres* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004);

or genres tell us how to interact with each other in certain communication situations. An example might be helpful here, so let's talk about coffee.

In Canada, there are many different coffee cultures, but for the sake of argument, let's talk about two corporate giants, Tim Hortons and Starbucks, as genres. Specifically, certain phrases used when ordering coffee have built entrenched expectations for communication standards. Let's call these "entrenched expectations" conventions (because that's what they are!). Here's a quick exercise you can do before moving on:

- How do you order a large coffee at Starbucks? How many options for modifying that coffee can you choose?
- How do you order a large coffee at Tim Hortons? How many options for modifying that coffee can you choose?

I think you can see that each coffee chain has a language that their patrons need to learn. This language is now common, and those who know it are part of that "coffee community" (as an aside, linking a communication genre to a brand is like winning Olympic Gold for advertisers). This is a fairly innocuous example. Genres can also reinforce stereotypes and are not without their problems. The central idea we'd like you to take away from this example is that genres are composed of conventions, and because of these conventions, we can make assumptions about the communication situations we find ourselves in (from ordering coffee to essay writing).

Miller, C. "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 2 (1984): 151-67; Dirk, K. "Navigating Genre," in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, ed. Charles Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky, vol. 1 (West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2010), 249-62.

These conventions are created through repetition. As certain communication genres are repeated, they become habitual. This repetition of certain forms of communication creates assumptions and expectations. For example, a quick nod or even a vocal form of greeting is expected in many cultures when you pass someone in close proximity (like when you are walking down the street).

In this chapter, we are mainly concerned with genres you will encounter in primarily English speaking, post-secondary schools in Canada, but genres definitely vary from one culture to another. For example, essay writing is not ubiquitous or traditional in many cultures, but there is an assumption in Canadian post-secondary education that the essay is an important means of evaluation. That is, the essay enables a student to show an instructor that they not only understand course material but can also apply it. But what if your culture does not value essay writing as much as post-secondary institutions in Canada do?

The [Four Feathers Writing Guide](#) provides a way for Indigenous students, specifically Coast Salish students, to understand what academic writing is (a massive genre in and of itself) and how it works by approaching academic writing through Indigenous knowledge. The perspective on academic writing offered by the [Four Feathers Writing Guide](#) provides good advice for all of us.

While it may seem that there are few connections between oral teachings and academic writing, both tell a story and explain why the story is important. For example, Elders share teachings to help listeners learn specific information (Alphonse & Charles, 2018), and your academic writing will explain what you think about a topic, which is a story that only you can tell. Also, both oral teachings and academic

writing aim to increase their audiences' understanding. Each time an Elder shares a teaching, listeners have new opportunities to learn by adding information to knowledge gained from previous teachings (Alphonse & Charles, 2018). Similarly, your academic writing will help readers increase their knowledge by reading your discussion. Finally, in both oral teachings and academic writing, the audience's familiarity with the topic determines what information will be shared. For instance, in First Nations' culture, there is a shared understanding of Traditional Knowledge, though each family has their own teachings or family laws that incorporate Traditional Knowledge (Alphonse & Charles, 2018). For example, Traditional Knowledge emphasizes manners, but each family may have a slightly different understanding of which manners are important (Alphonse & Charles, 2018). Family laws are understood as Traditional Knowledge, so people who are familiar with Traditional Knowledge would recognize the importance of the family laws and would not need their importance explained (Alphonse & Charles, 2018). However, people from other cultures may not have the same understanding, so they would need the connections between family laws and Traditional Knowledge to be explained to ensure a correct interpretation (Alphonse & Charles, 2018). In a similar way, your intended audience will determine how much explanation you provide to readers. If you are

writing for a specialized audience, you likely will not need to provide detailed explanations. However, if you cannot guarantee what knowledge, understanding, or perspective your readers already possess, you may instead focus readers' attention on the significant information in your work by demonstrating the relationships between details, such as how research evidence supports a claim in a paragraph. By making the connections clear to readers, you can ensure readers correctly understand the key messages.²

In academic writing, we are telling a type of story for a particular audience. Sometimes it's a story about history; sometimes it's a data story (where the numbers tell you a story, such as statistics); and at other times, it's a story about families, economics, or water pollution. In each case, as readers, you may or may not know what to expect in each type of story, and if you are a first-year student, some of these stories may be baffling. As you learn how the genres that these stories belong to work, you will not need their importance explained again. Becoming more knowledgeable about genres and their cultural importance is a responsibility we take on as academic writers. As Métis scholar, Chelsea Vowel

2. Shirley R. Alphonse (THE-LA-ME-YÉ), Theresa Bell and Nadine Charles (TÀLIE), "Connecting Oral Traditions with Academic Writing," in *Four Feathers Writing Guide*, Royal Roads University, updated April 29, 2020, <https://library.royalroads.ca/four-feathers-writing-guide>.

(âpihtawikosisân) explains it, stories (including academic stories) are based on cultural knowledge and context. You aren't always going to have your beliefs reinforced, but if you put the work in to understand these stories and the genres they belong to, then you will become a more knowledgeable and responsible citizen and community member.³

We really packed a lot of information into a relatively short space here, but we wanted to give you insight into what is [an entire field of study](#).⁴ You may even want to major or minor in this field (if you take Linguistics, Rhetoric, or English, you can!). The rest of the chapter is more focused on the different types – or genres – of writing assignments you will likely be asked to complete in your post-secondary career. Truly, this chapter should give you insight into what to expect when you are asked to write a research essay, a forum post, a blog, or any other type of academic writing project.

3. Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations & Inuit Issues in Canada* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2016). See, esp., Chapter 9: “What is Cultural Appropriation,” pp. 80–91 and Chapter 10: “Check the Tag on That ‘Indian’ Story,” pp. 92–98. To learn more about the book or Chelsea Vowel’s work, visit <https://apihtawikosisan.com>.
4. “Genre Studies,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified June 2, 2020, 13:13, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre_studies.

2.3 Academic Writing as a Genre

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

Let's start big and think of academic writing as a massive or umbrella genre, under which there are lots of sub-genres. The flow-chart below gives some idea of what we mean by a massive or "umbrella" genre.

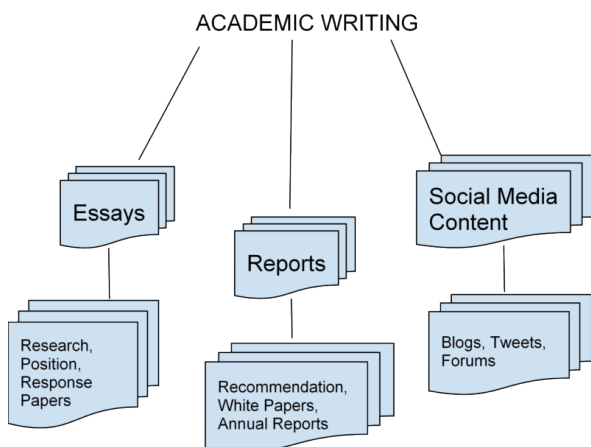


Figure 2.1: Academic writing as a genre: flow chart.

To explain by way of metaphor, if academic writing is a container ship, then all of the containers on that ship are the sub-genres. Remember at the very [start of the chapter](#), when we discussed conventions and how genres are formed? You already know what the expectations and conventions are for lots of social situations.

For example, you could easily explain whether you are expected in your culture to nod, wave, shake hands, bow, or hug when you greet someone – and you probably understand that the ways in which you greet a peer aren't exactly the same as how you address your professor or a respected elder.

For some everyday writing situations, you might have a lot of familiarity with expectations and conventions. If you text your friends, you know that it's appropriate to write just a few words, to abbreviate, and maybe even to use emojis. When texting, spelling doesn't matter much since everyone understands typing on a small phone keyboard with your thumbs can lead to errors and speed matters when texting. **If you text quickly and effectively, you are familiar with that genre of writing.** You have internalized the formal expectations and conventions.

Why not try another experiment? Take out your phone or open a chat window and start texting a message to your best friend (you can send it or not). Now, text a parent or an employer (maybe don't send this one?). Take a look at your texts: How are they different? How are they the same? Did you notice that you wrote differently for two different audiences? You probably did so without even realizing that you were trying to meet your reader's expectations, which means **you were writing to align your writing with certain CONVENTIONS.** Aha! Now you are learning that your writing (and really any act of communication) is guided by genre conventions.

But you also know that the features of a great text (or tweet or Instagram post) aren't exactly the same as what we expect to see in a piece of academic writing. There are some conventions that you can expect across multiple genres of academic writing produced across a range of academic disciplines – but there are also some variations worth keeping in mind.

Like we've said before: understanding genres of academic writing enables you to be a more effective academic writer. Becoming more familiar with academic writing genres you will very likely need to produce again and again in a variety of classes will make that work

seem easier, maybe even feel more akin to how you think (as texting probably does).

But before we launch into a detailed discussion of some common features, it's worth taking a moment to cover a few myths about the conventions of academic writing.

- **Academic writing isn't better than any other type of writing.**

Sometimes academic writing in the form of essays produced for high school and university classes gets discussed as though it is the only “real” writing that counts. Certainly, in academic communities (including classrooms), writing that aligns with a particular set of conventions for length, content, style, organization, and mechanical correctness is highly valued. But these aren't the only communities that exist or even the only set of conventions that matter. A journalist who communicates to the general public complex information – about, say, important medical research – might violate lots of the expectations for formal academic writing while producing an article that is stylish, memorable, clear, and effective. And please don't try to write a love letter or a heartfelt thank you note in the form of a formal academic essay. Our main point here is that there are lots of ways to write effectively that are not academic.

- **Academic writing isn't worse than any other type of writing.**

On the other extreme, there are regular complaints that academic writing is, well, bad. Some academic journal articles can be long, dense, and uninviting. Academic writers sometimes use jargon and phrases that are off-putting to anyone who isn't part of a very small community of experts. And since the content of a piece of academic writing can have so much importance – communicating a new discovery or invention or argument – there may not be much value placed on style. But remember that sometimes a piece of writing can seem “bad” because you're simply not part of the intended audience. The words and phrases you find off-putting in a

chemistry journal article could be perfectly clear to someone with a PhD in biochemistry. And, believe it or not, there are academic writers who work hard to make their writing as clear and elegant as possible as well as some who experiment with style. (Look at Dr. Helen Sword's book for professional academic writers [Stylish Academic Writing](#) for some notable examples.)¹

- **Academic writing isn't anyone's native language.** You might suspect that some people are naturally better at writing essays than others. While it is true that some individuals seem to have a knack for noticing and replicating conventions, you should understand that no one can produce a successful example of academic writing without having encountered examples of the genre they are trying to write – and maybe not even without some explicit guidance (which is why academic writing courses are often required). We are going to make a radical claim here informed by the [work of Dr. Vershawn Ashanti Young](#): there is no such thing as “good” or “bad” academic writing.² There is only effective writing or writing that does the job of getting its point across. Language functions differently based on cultural context, which means that you do not need to memorize a bunch of rules about ‘Standard English’ but instead have some understanding that academic writing is just another form of communication with its own set of actions and conventions. Some of your classmates might have more experience or

1. Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
2. Vershawn Ashanti Young, *Performing Anti-Racist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*, ed. Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2017), <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/atd/antiracist/>.

practice with some types of academic writing, but [all of us – even your instructors – struggle when faced with a new writing situation](#), especially one that forces us to work within an unfamiliar set of generic conventions. Like we said previously, you learn to be a more effective academic writer by reviewing genres of academic writing and by practicing a range of genres.

- **Academic writers don't all agree about what constitutes good academic writing.** Even so, the end goal is not to have everyone write in exactly the same way. Chemists write journal articles differently than do historians – and that makes sense because these two types of scholars work to communicate different types of information to different audiences. Even among those in an academic field – say, sociologists – you might find one writer who uses first-person voice and includes vivid descriptions and another who creates an impression of objectivity through stylistic and content choices. Reading a wide range of academic writing in a field that interests you can help you see what's possible – and you might even choose to put your own spin on some of the conventions of a particular academic writing genre. Certainly the aforementioned Dr. Kerry Dirk does so in her essay, [Navigating Genres](#), and discusses her process to write in a new way within a common genre: the academic essay.

In summary, there isn't one set of rules to follow to produce an effective and successful piece of academic writing – and, even if there were, we would encourage you to learn those rules so that you could think about when it might be appropriate and effective to change some of them. As you familiarize yourself with conventions and genres of academic writing, keep in mind that you still need to make choices about what will work best given your purpose, audience, and subject matter.

Now that you have a good idea of what genre is and why it

matters, let's talk about writing in genres that are completely new to you.

2.4 How to Use Genre to Help You Write

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

As Dr. Kerry Dirk notes, genre is less a matter of “filling in the blanks” and more a matter of responding to a particular context or *rhetorical situation*.¹ For example, if I were to attend a basketball game in a ball gown or a three-piece suit, it’s likely that my wardrobe choices would confuse the other people there to enjoy the game. People might whisper or point; they may even ask me why I dressed in formal attire to attend a sports event. Probably, I would spend most of the game feeling uncomfortable. If, on the other hand, I walked into the stadium wearing my team’s colours and a foam finger, no one would think me strange or out-of-place. In fact, I may even receive high fives from fans who are at the game supporting the same team. In the former scenario, I responded inappropriately to the situation (a basketball game). In the latter scenario, I responded appropriately – and likely enjoyed the game (my purpose) quite a lot more.

The same, or something similar, is true of writing. When your instructors are asking you to write a lab report, a research paper, an annotated bibliography, or some other assignment in their class, they are expecting you to submit an assignment that follows a pre-existing set of conventions. Your awareness of those conventions will help you fulfill the purpose of your writing assignment. It will also make the assignment easier for you to complete since, as Dr. Dirk notes, you’re not starting from scratch.²

1. Dirk, “Navigating Genres,” 251-52.
2. Dirk, “Navigating Genres,” 252.

Now the big question is how do we approach a new writing situation? How can you successfully navigate writing a formal research essay (which is like wearing a tuxedo) or a forum post (which is more business casual)? The answer is to call upon your genre knowledge or mine past writing situations and experiences for information on how to proceed.³ For example, you likely wrote a five paragraph essay in high school (and we talk about that form of essay in [Section 2.7 The Essay](#)) – guess what? That means you have genre knowledge! You know that an essay needs a thesis and supporting argument. See? You already know what to put in a basic essay. You can now add to that knowledge.

If you are still a little confused, that's just fine. If you just want some simple directions that you can use when faced with a new writing task, assignment, or project, then you may find the following quite helpful:

Try to figure out what the genre is used for. An example Dr. Dirk gives is the genre of the Facebook status update – the outcome the author wants is for “friends” to like the status.⁴ But what action does an essay perform besides possibly giving you anxiety? Its purpose at the undergraduate level is to show your instructor that you have the skills to pay the bills. The essay is a genre where readers expect authors to disseminate or share complex information effectively, argue a point, and support that point with relevant and high quality arguments and evidence. This is why essays are valued as assignments. If you have a writing assignment that you are unfamiliar with, do some sleuthing by asking your instructor, looking up examples of that type of writing, or chat with a librarian, or your friendly, neighbourhood [Writing Centre](#) tutors. What are the readerly expectations for that writing assignment or genre? That's a question we suggest you try to answer (check your

3. Dirk, “Navigating Genres,” 251.

4. Dirk, “Navigating Genres,” 253.

assignment, the answer is usually there for post-secondary writing assignments).

Your writing assignments might have the same name in different classes (essay, response paper, position paper, forum post) **but have different descriptions.** As Dr. Dirk explains, genre is tricky, because “two texts ... might fit into the same genre” but look quite different.⁵ Your instructor’s expectations will change how a particular academic genre works. The discipline will also change the conventions of an essay (we discussed [this issue](#) above). An essay on a close reading of a literary work will have many direct quotations and likely no discussion section while an essay about pollution affecting mollusk populations will likely have charts, statistics and a discussion section. However, both have an introduction, a thesis, evidence, and a conclusion. Therefore, you know the basics, but the context or location of the essay makes a difference.⁶

What you’ll discover is that the more investigative work you do about any new type of writing, the better off you will be. If you have to write a resume, you look up samples to see what others included. If you are writing a cover letter, you investigate the company. If you are writing a forum post, maybe you’ll consult this book or ask your instructor for a sample.

That’s enough about writing for the moment, let’s turn to academic reading.

5. Dirk, “Navigating Genres,” 255.

6. Dirk, “Navigating Genres,” 255.

2.5 Reading Academic Writing

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

As undergraduate students (or whoever you may be, but we assume you are an undergraduate student), you will be asked to read different types of academic writing. We're sure you're not surprised by this assertion. What might surprise you is that reading academic writing doesn't have to be a miserable chore, if you know how to approach the task. Academic reading can take a number of different forms, but you will most likely be reading peer-reviewed articles to collect ideas and opinions that support the paper you're writing. Here's another tidbit you might not have known: these are called academic sources.

What Am I Looking For When Reading Academic Sources?

Put another way, what are the reader's expectations? Remember when we discussed academic writing as an umbrella (or MASSIVE) genre in [Section 2.3 Academic Writing as a Genre](#)? In this section we will predominantly discuss the structure of primary and secondary sources that you will need to read as an undergraduate student (for more explanation of sources, head to chapter four) and cover the conventions that you will need to be mindful of when reading.

Understanding these conventions will allow you to make better choices when drafting and revising your own academic writing assignments, which are **apprentice versions of published academic writing**. Yes, that's right: as an undergraduate student, you are

a type of apprenticeship, learning the ropes. The great thing is that when you learn how to navigate academic writing, you'll find these techniques (reading critically, arguing a point, etc.) are commonplace in the kind of reading and writing you'll be doing in your professional life.

Let's briefly discuss peer-reviewed journals, which contain the peer-reviewed articles you will be reading a lot of in any discipline you major or minor in. Every discipline (music, biology, chemistry) has its own journals in which current research is published. They are regarded as reliable sources of information because the articles are peer reviewed, and most libraries, including those [at the University of Victoria](#), explain what that means.¹

For many of you, you are approaching peer reviewed articles cold, and by that, we mean you have literally no expectations of a peer-reviewed article, except maybe some anxiety that such an article will be difficult to read. However, once you understand the conventions of peer-reviewed articles, we think you'll feel better about reading them.

The content of peer-reviewed articles is vast and varied, but the purpose is generally the same. Academic writers often write with the purpose of conveying information to their peers (other academics in the same field) and persuading these readers that this information has value. The specifics of the argument might vary – for example, a chemist might be arguing that her lab team's experiment suggests a new concept is true while an art historian might be arguing that the patron who paid for a sculpture had an important influence on its contents. Those outside of a field could have a bit of trouble telling what's being argued. But the basic expectation is always present: the ideas offered in this piece of writing are true, accurate, and to be taken seriously.

To persuade their readers, academic writers put a lot of

1. <https://libanswers.uvic.ca/friendly.php?slug=faq/198676>.

emphasis on evidence in the form of facts, statistics, and discoveries. Much of this evidence derives from the writer's research (which can take a range of forms, from a lab experiment to a mathematical proof to quotes derived from an archival document). You can expect to find careful analysis and explanation of the evidence being presented. Academic writers assume their readers place enormous value on research and information. (By the way, in chapter three, you'll see that this way of persuading readers is an example of one of the rhetorical appeals, the appeal to logos.)

Peer-reviewed articles often include an acknowledgement of limitations to the argument, perhaps even an overview of possible shortcomings. Some academic writers even recognize that not all readers will agree with their points by fairly representing and respectfully engaging with those who have or are likely to oppose their arguments. In academic writing, it's not a weakness to admit you might not have the last word on a particular topic. In fact, open-mindedness makes you seem more reasonable. This is an aspect of academic writing you might want to include in your own essays.

Published academic writing in different fields can vary greatly in length and form. Many scientists share their research mostly in academic journal articles, and these articles are often less than ten pages long. In contrast, while historians write journal articles too, these essays might be up to forty pages long. As well, many historians share their research in books that are two or three hundred pages in length. But don't let these differences confuse you – there are still common organizational features across most examples of academic writing, such as sophisticated arguments and high-quality evidence.

Most academic arguments make explicit their key point somewhere near the opening (first couple of pages). Readers expect to see this central idea early on and then presume the rest of the essay will develop and support that idea. You might have learned this practice by being taught that an essay needs a thesis statement and that the thesis statement should always appear in the first paragraph of an essay. In professional academic writing, you

might not find a simple thesis statement, and the declaration of an article's main point might show up in an opening section rather than an initial paragraph – but the key idea will almost always be stated explicitly before the article, essay, or book gets very far along.

Also relatively near the beginning, you will usually see a summary and explanation of other relevant, published academic work on related topics. This is where authors situate their argument with what's going on in the field at that time. You are likely to even see the writer suggesting how that existing work is being responded to with their new research. Sometimes this section of an academic essay is called a 'literature review.' You might have to write a [literature review](#) in your own papers or even as a standalone assignment.

Academic writers also tend to make explicit their methodology – their approach to gathering and building an argument out of their research. In a science article, this will be very explicit – you're likely to see a section labeled Methodology that talks about exactly how an experiment was set up and carried out. In other fields, the discussion of methodology might be more abstract, featuring definitions of key terms and indications of what foundational theories or approaches are being relied upon.

The conclusion or last section of a piece of academic writing is vital to read. It might do a lot more than summarize main points – this is the place to look for a discussion of larger implications or significance, as well as perhaps a sketch of future directions for research. It's generally written for a non-specialist audience, unlike the data or methodology section, which is usually for specialists in the field.

So there you have it, these are the readerly expectations that you should have when you read peer-reviewed articles. But you will be doing more than reading in your classes: you'll be writing.

2.6 Common Sub-Genres of Academic Writing or What You'll Be Writing

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

As promised and at long last, here is an overview of the major conventions of common academic subgenres. You will probably notice similarities and crossovers between the conventions of these sub-genres. Good! If you do, this means you are learning how to navigate genres. As an undergraduate student, much of the writing you do will be academic writing, but it won't be exactly like the published academic writing (including journal articles, books, or even textbooks) associated with your field of study. It's helpful to think of academic writing assignments for courses as pieces of, steps toward, or even simplified models of published academic writing. Expect to see more commonalities between your own academic writing and what experts in the field publish as you move into more advanced work in a particular discipline.

But before we get to the sub-genres of academic writing, there are conventional components of these sub-genres that you should get to know: summary writing, paraphrasing, and quoting. If you can manage to follow these conventions, you'll be well on your way to being an effective academic writer.

Convention One: Summary Writing

Almost every sub-genre of academic writing includes summary writing. The process of summarizing a longer text involves moving

“from big to small,” as a [University of Victoria Centre for Academic Communication](#) tutor beautifully puts it. Indeed, a summary is like a movie trailer or sports reel version of a longer work. When crafting summaries, writers distill and explain main ideas themselves, using their own phrasing and sentence structure but always citing the source for these ideas.

When Will I Summarize?

In most cases, there are two key goals for a summary:

1. Inform readers who haven't previously read the text you are summarizing its main ideas.
2. Offer an accurate and fair overview of those main ideas.

Even so, you will see some variation in summary assignments:

Sometimes, you will be asked to summarize the main ideas of a complex article in a long paragraph (or even the main ideas of a book in a few pages).

Sometimes, you will be asked to write a very brief summary of a long text to help readers decide if it's worth their time. (This is a common type of summary in the context of an annotated bibliography.)

Sometimes, you summarize to set up your own response to an argument by another writer. In this case, you probably want to make your summary as brief as possible without sacrificing accuracy to allow space for your own ideas.

And sometimes you need to summarize your own longer piece of work – that's how abstracts for journal articles get written.

So, once you have a draft summary, make sure you fully understand what type of summary your finished product needs to be – and revise accordingly.

What Should I Avoid When Summarizing?

Because the job of a summary is to put another writer's ideas into your own words – in the process, translating those ideas to meet the needs of your readers – it's not appropriate or effective to replicate the original language or even sentence structure and overall organizational plan of the original.

When a writer takes sentences from the original document and substitutes synonyms for some words, changes the order of others, and maybe reworks a few phrases, this person isn't creating a successful summary. **Instead, this way of replicating features of the original text too closely is called patch-writing.** Even when the source is cited, patch-writing is usually considered plagiarism because the writer is implying they reworked the original text more than they did. A thorough discussion of patchwriting is featured in this [Merriam-Webster post](#).¹

The best way to avoid patch-writing is to follow the how-to instructions (below) while keeping in mind the purpose of your summary. If your aim is to give your reader an understanding of something you read, then you can see why patch-writing won't get the job done. To avoid patch-writing, perhaps follow the advice given here.

1. "Words We're Watching: 'Patchwriting'. Paraphrasing in a Cut-and-Paste World," Merriam-Webster, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/words-were-watching-patchwriting>.

When you summarize, you cannot rely on the language the author has used to develop his or her points, and you must find a way to give an overview of these points without your own sentences becoming too general. You must also make decisions about which concepts to leave in and which to omit, taking into consideration your purposes in summarizing and also your view of what is important in this text. Here are some methods for summarizing: First, prior to skimming, use some of the **previewing** techniques.

1. Include the **title** and identify the **author** in your first sentence.
2. The first sentence or two of your summary should contain the author's **thesis**, or central concept, stated in your own words. This is the idea that runs through the entire text—the one you'd mention if someone asked you: "What is this piece/article about?" Unlike student essays, the main idea in a primary document or an academic article may not be stated in one location at the beginning. Instead, it may be gradually developed throughout the piece or it may become fully apparent only at the end.
3. When summarizing a longer article, try

to see how the various **stages** in the explanation or argument are built up in **groups** of related paragraphs. **Divide** the article into sections if it isn't done in the published form. Then, write a sentence or two to cover the key ideas in each section.

4. **Omit** ideas that are not really central to the text. Don't feel that you must reproduce the author's exact progression of thought. (On the other hand, be careful not to misrepresent ideas by omitting important aspects of the author's discussion).
5. In general, omit minor **details** and specific **examples**. (In some texts, an extended example may be a key part of the argument, so you would want to mention it).
6. **Avoid** writing **opinions** or personal responses in your summaries (save these for active reading responses or tutorial discussions).
7. Be careful not to plagiarize the author's words. If you do use **even a few** of the author's words, they must appear in **quotation marks**. To avoid plagiarism, try writing the first draft of your summary

without looking back at the original text.²

We suggest paying close attention to number seven in the advice given above. **This is your best bet not to patch-write, which can be construed as plagiarism.** Nobody wants that to happen!

Convention Number Two: Paraphrasing

Interestingly, the word “paraphrase” is both a verb and a noun:

When we paraphrase (verb), we explain a concept ourselves. We use our words, our way, to restate an idea. Paraphrasing also occurs when we write a summary. We use our words, our way, moving from big to small, to distill the main points from a longer text to a short text, citing the source.

When we write a paraphrase (noun), we use our words, our way, moving from small to small, to restate an idea from an original sentence/sentences to our own sentence/sentences, citing the source.

To write a paraphrase, focus on the original short excerpt and take note of key ideas. **Look away from the original text.** Notice the similarities with summary writing? There, too, you need to use

2. Leora Freedman, “Summarizing,” *Writing Advice*, University of Toronto, 2012, <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/researching/summarize/>.

your notes to rewrite the original, changing the sentence structure, reordering ideas, and using your words to explain the idea. As with summary writing, integrate the information into your paragraph by introducing the idea, **citing the source**, and indicating how the paraphrased information fits with the key idea in your paragraph.

Convention Number Three: Quoting

We suggest using quotations sparingly, selecting to quote only when the original writer's words are so unique and memorable that they can't be paraphrased. Placing a relevant (yet brief) quotation in your introduction can pique your reader's interest in the topic you are writing about. You also may want to include an authority's words as evidence for your claim. Another reason to quote is to respond to those who may disagree with your ideas (naysayers) by quoting them first. Quotes can be powerful additions to your writing.

Here are a few grammatical considerations when quoting (that may save your grade):

- Copy the original words accurately, enclosing them in double quotation marks.
- If you need to omit words to smoothly integrate the quote into a sentence, use ellipses.
- If you wish to add words to integrate the quote seamlessly into a sentence, use square brackets.
- Always, always introduce the quotation and explain its significance: Why are you including this quote?

When Do I Use Direct Quotes and When Do I Paraphrase?

We strongly suggest limiting the number of quotes you use because you want to present your ideas in your own words. If you include too many quotations, your voice can be drowned out. In many disciplines, writers use quotations sparingly (like salt) to support their claims. A little bit of salt makes a dish more appealing, but too much salt makes it inedible. The same can be true with quotations. In fact, in some disciplines, writers almost never quote from original documents.

When writing from sources, you will routinely summarize, paraphrase, and quote, citing your sources every time you draw on others' ideas. And where will you be summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting? In lots of different academic sub-genres: reports, blogs, forums, book reviews and (drum roll, please), essays.

2.7 The Essay

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

Let's start with perhaps the most common (and dreaded?) of academic sub-genres (and assignments), the essay. There are so many variations of the essay in academic writing that it's impossible to include all of them here. We have supplied the basic conventions of any essay here. Once you understand the basics, you'll then be able to better understand how to write a position paper, research essay, or any kind of essay, really.

But first, it might help to remember what you learned at the beginning of the chapter about academic writing and stories. The essay is a type of story you are telling your reader:

Every essay has a story that leads the reader through the discussion. To help identify the story of your essay, think about how you would verbally explain your focus to someone who is not familiar with your topic. What is the beginning, middle, and end of the story that is the focus of your essay? Once the story is in place, consider what information you can provide to help your reader understand the story and why it's important, even if they don't share your background knowledge. Filling in those details will highlight the relationships between ideas and give you the opportunity to demonstrate your critical thinking on your topic.¹

Thanks to Elder Shirley Alphonse (THE-LA-ME-YÉ), Elder Nadine Charles (TEĀĪE), and Theresa Bell for this insightful explanation of how essay writing works.

As Elders Alphonse and Charles and Manager of Blended Learning Success Theresa Bell [make clear](#), the audience is key to writing your essay. Let's say that one more time: understanding your reader makes all the difference in essay writing (and, let's face it, in all writing). This might be a new concept for you. In fact, we are fairly sure your first essay was the good, old five paragraph essay. That's completely fine – we all have to start somewhere.

Starting Where You Are – The Five-Paragraph Essay

It's likely you've already been taught one genre of writing that is appropriate for many high school classroom writing assignments but doesn't work as well for the type of complex topics and research you need to engage with at the post-secondary level. The five-paragraph essay is an effective formula for organizing and structuring an argument when you are writing to readers who expect to find information presented in a certain way.

At its most basic, a five-paragraph essay looks something like this:

- Paragraph one: An introduction to the essay; starts broad and

1. Shirley R. Alphonse (THE-LA-ME-YÉ), Theresa Bell and Nadine Charles (TEĀĪE), "Connecting Oral Traditions with Academic Writing," in *Four Feathers Writing Guide*, Royal Roads University, updated April 29, 2020, <https://library.royalroads.ca/four-feathers-writing-guide>.

narrows down; last sentence is a one-sentence thesis statement that offers an overview of the content that follows.

- Paragraph two: Point number one supporting or developing the thesis; the key idea gets presented in a topic sentence at the start of the paragraph; three to five sentences of evidence, support, and explanation follow.
- Paragraph three: Point number two supporting or developing the thesis; the key idea gets presented in a topic sentence at the start of the paragraph; three to five sentences of evidence, support, and explanation follow.
- Paragraph four: Point number three supporting or developing the thesis; the key idea gets presented in a topic sentence at the start of the paragraph; three to five sentences of evidence, support, and explanation follow.
- Paragraph five: A conclusion to the essay; reminds readers of all the main points that have just been presented.

There's nothing inherently wrong with the five-paragraph essay. This formula is really handy when you need to write an essay as part of a timed exam since its rigid structure allows you to focus on what you want to say more than how to arrange your ideas. But most students quickly realize that the five-paragraph essay won't work for a lot of writing situations. It's not at all suitable for a lab report, a long, complex research-based argument, a blog post, a summary and analysis, or a literature review. Rather, the academic essay requires a more sophisticated format to handle the argumentation, evidence, and exposition you will need to engage in your post-secondary classes.

Academic essays are a form of exploration and mind-training. They allow academic writers (you and us) to try out ideas, but too often, as [Paul Lynch explains](#), the essay is perceived as simply a tool to measure your understanding of concepts; measure your retention of ideas; measure your writing skills; and, well, just a way 'to measure.' This means the very word conjures up all kinds of anxiety and dread for students as a form of evaluation (or

measurement). However, what if we take Paul Lynch's advice and return, as much as we can, to the [original intention of the essay](#), by its inventor sixteenth-century French philosopher, Michel de Montaigne.²

Montaigne was a sixteenth-century Frenchman who, upon his retirement, began writing short prose pieces in which he explored his thoughts and feelings on whatever subject occurred to him. He called them his *essais*, which comes from the French word for "try" or "attempt." It is, of course, the root of our word "essay." Originally, then, essay meant something like an experiment or an exploration. Montaigne's titles include "On Idleness," "On Liars," "On a Monstrous Child," "On Sadness," "On Sleep," "On Drunkenness," and so on. Often his main focus was himself. "Reader," he writes in his introduction to the *Essays*, "I myself am the subject of my book" (1). He called them *essais* because he knew that he was simply testing out ideas. Later essayists would think of essays like going for walks, walks where the destination doesn't really matter. Virginia Woolf, a great

2. "Reading Montaigne: Why a 16th Century Writer Still Matters Today," CBC Radio, last modified June 4, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/reading-montaigne-why-a-16th-century-writer-still-matters-today-1.5014283>.

novelist and essayist, wrote, “We should start without any fixed idea where we are going to spend the night, or when we propose to come back; the journey is everything” (65). In school essays, the destination is usually what matters. Personal essays, however, begin without a destination in mind. Basically, essayists like Montaigne and Woolf tried to understand the subjects that caught their interest by understanding their own thoughts and feelings about them. Today, we call this “writing to learn.”³

“Writing to learn” is what the essay is all about, although we understand the stress that comes from writing to achieve a grade, which is also part of an academic essay. It’s true that personal essay writing (like Montaigne and [Virginia Woolf](#) wrote) is a rarity in academic essay writing; however, you can change your perspective on essay writing to one of exploration rather than existential dread. Perhaps consider your own thoughts and feelings about your essay project and consider what you can learn rather than worry about the grade. See what happens.

3. Paul Lynch, “The Sixth Paragraph: A Re-Vision of the Essay,” in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, vol. 2 (West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2011), 290-91.

Your Opinion Matters

When, instead of requiring you to summarize a text, an academic assignment, like an academic essay, asks you to share your opinion of it (or to explain whether you agree or disagree with it and why), you need to produce a response (even if that isn't what it's called). In the context of academic writing, you will find there are some common expectations for responding to a text.

First, offer a fair and accurate summary of the original document's main points. Doing so lets your reader know what you are responding to and establishes that you are taking the original writer's ideas seriously. This might seem redundant or even rude if you are writing a response to something your professor assigned to the class – shouldn't your prof know this work/essay/report (and so on) already, and might they be insulted if you review the main ideas? Remember, response in academic writing – whether as a stand-alone assignment or as part of a larger project – has conventions. We expect to see a brief summary of even familiar texts because, if nothing else, the summary establishes clearly what the person writing the response is reacting to.

Second, clarify whether you agree or disagree with whatever you are responding to – or possibly agree in some ways and disagree in others. Making your own position EXPLICIT rather than hinting at it is a convention of academic writing, particularly in western cultures. Consider how this is different from the way you engage with other people in conversation. If you just watched a video with a friend, you might hedge about saying you hated it before finding out the other person's opinion. Academic writing tends to be more direct than interpersonal encounters.

Sometimes a response (described above) is a stand-alone assignment. Quite often, however, a response can be part of a larger argument, like those found in academic essays.

But what comprises an argument? We are glad you asked. Many

assignments use language that really references what we call **an argument**:

- In a class focused on literature, you could be asked to produce a **close reading**.
- In a class focused on economics, you could be asked to **take a position** on a controversial issue and defend it.
- In a class focused on psychology, you might be asked to **explain why** your diagnosis of a fictional person is correct.
- In a class focused on business, you might be asked to **recommend a course of action** to an imaginary client.

All of these assignments are asking that the student present an argument; in other words, the student needs to lay out a claim that others might potentially disagree with and to show (with evidence and explanation of that evidence) the claim is correct (or at least defensible). We discuss the concept and practice of argumentation more fully in chapter three.

2.8 Other Common Academic Writing Sub-Genre You Will Encounter

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

Annotated Bibliography

In upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses, you may be asked to complete an annotated bibliography, which is a list of citations, followed by a brief summary and evaluation of each source. This assignment involves finding, synthesizing, and critically analyzing relevant journal articles and books. You may be asked to complete an annotated bibliography to prepare for writing a major research paper assignment, for example.

Annotated bibliographies are helpful before writing a research paper because you do the hard work of critically reading what others have said on the topic before you begin drafting your own paper.

Creating an annotated bibliography draws on key intellectual skills: informed library research, concise exposition, and succinct analysis:

- First, locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and documents that may contain useful information on your topic. Briefly examine and review the actual items. Then, choose those works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.
- Cite the book, article, or document using the appropriate style.
- Write a concise annotation that summarizes the central theme

of the book or article. Include sentences that (a) evaluate the authority or background of the author, (b) comment on the intended audience, (c) compare or contrast this work with another you have cited, or (d) explain how this work illuminates your bibliography topic.¹

An annotated bibliography is an assignment powerhouse that builds your research and summary skills.

Wait, did you see that? **A major part of creating the Annotated Bibliography is writing summaries.** Summary writing is everywhere in academic writing. If you skipped over how to write an effective summary, then head back to “[Convention One: Summary Writing](#).”

Scientific Reports

Scientific writing may differ from essay writing in process, organization and style. The [Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) provides very helpful information about writing lab reports.² We have summarized key features of scientific reports for you here.

Scientific research entails formulating a research question, developing a hypothesis based on research in the field, testing it,

1. This overview was adapted from Cornell University Library’s guide “How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography,” last modified May 15, 2020, <https://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography/home>.
2. <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/scientific-reports/>.

and determining whether the findings support the hypothesis. Researchers carefully consider their purpose, their procedure, rationale for their choice, and the benefits of the study. When beginning their experiment, they create a detailed plan for the experiment and for recording the data. They work collaboratively with other researchers on their procedure, data collection, and findings. After conducting their scientific experiment, researchers write their report.

Scientific reports may vary depending on the discipline, but typically follow a consistent pattern of organization: introduction, methods and materials, results, and discussion, which is [followed quite methodically](#).³

The **introduction** presents the purpose of the study, background on the research area, the hypothesis, and reasons for the hypothesis.

As the **methods and materials section** can be complex, writers must choose what procedural details to highlight. Writers typically describe how they have tested their hypothesis and provide a clear rationale for their procedure. Scientific writers outline their procedure in chronological order, using the past tense and passive voice (emphasizing what was done, not who was doing it).

Once scientific writers have completed their methods and materials section, they include a shorter **results section**, where they present raw data, often through visual aides. Through the **discussion section**, writers highlight data trends and explore the extent to which the hypothesis was supported. This section also

3. See, for example, this CAC resource prepared by Dustin Van Gerven: <https://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/assets/docs/instructors/for-review/Information%20for%20Students/Organizing%20a%20research%20report.DVG.FINAL.pdf>.

presents the implications of the findings and explores limitations with the experimental design.

Did you notice similarities between the essay and the lab report? Well, both have a type of thesis. A scientific report shows how a hypothesis was supported (or not) by data while a formal research essay develops a thesis supported (or not) by arguments. The research essay tells a story to build an argument, and a scientific report tells a data story to confirm a hypothesis. Additional tips on effective scientific writing can be found in “[Essential elements for high-impact scientific writing](#).”⁴

Timed and Take-Home Exams

Timed writing for predetermined and limited periods will occur throughout your post-secondary career – likely in the context of mid-term and final exams and/or in-class essays. The ability to recall and record information quickly is a desirable skill, and timed writing exercises can help enhance your ability to remember information and write under pressure.

There is another benefit to timed writing: For those of us who are overly concerned with choosing just the right word or ensuring that our commas appear in just the right place, timed writing can be an opportunity to let loose and engage less self-consciously with our ideas and those of others. **In a timed writing environment, you may find that it is more difficult to write “stylishly” and that’s okay!** It’s important to remember that, while there are expectations that come with timed writing, these expectations for in-class writing

4. Eric J. Buenz, “Essential Elements for High-Impact Scientific Writing,” *Nature*, February 11, 2019, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-00546-7>.

differ from the expectations for the writing assignments you complete outside of class.

This is not to say that style and format aren't important, but your course instructor *knows* that you are limited in terms of time and, therefore, that you may not be able to edit your work as thoroughly as you would a research paper that you have had weeks to write.

Even so, many of us will still find timed writing daunting. We may forget or freeze under pressure, even if we're familiar with the material we've been asked to write about. When writing in exam situations, have a "game plan" so that you can optimize your time. Reviewing, pre-writing (i.e., timed practice), and outlining are all effective strategies for timed writing situations. For a more comprehensive guide to preparing for in-class writing, you can read Kate Stericker's blog post "[9 Tips to Ace That Timed Essay](https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre/blog/post/9-tips-ace-timed-essay)."⁵

5. Kate Stericker, "9 Tips to Ace That Timed Essay," Writing and Communication Centre, University of Waterloo, November 3, 2016, <https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre/blog/post/9-tips-ace-timed-essay>.

2.9 Online Writing and Academic Writing

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

As the world of digital media evolves, so too does the world of digital academic scholarship. Today, academics are sharing their work in the form of blogs and online forums like Twitter. These types of platforms are making it increasingly easy for scholars from different disciplines to interact. Psychologists can read and respond to philosophers; biologists can correspond with sociologists; and so on.

Sharing knowledge also means that scholars don't need to start from scratch and make unnecessary mistakes. Rather, they can share the research and build on the work of their colleagues in both their own and different disciplines (in other words, two – or more! – heads are better than one). As you write and research, it's good to remember that you can bring concepts and terms from other disciplines to bear on your own research. Likewise, you too can add your voice to the dynamic conversations taking place online.

Forums

Forums are online discussions similar to class discussions. Course instructors assign forum posts (sometimes called discussion posts) to encourage students to engage with course content, respond to and question key issues, and thoughtfully engage with others. Tips on writing forums are included in [this helpful resource](#) at the

University of Waterloo.¹ But we'd like to weigh in with our own advice:

- Begin by considering course content, selecting a topic, and making a claim.
- Start new threads in the discussion instead of responding to lengthy chains.
- Consider evidence for support: What have you learned from course readings, scholarly sources, and social media?
- What personal experiences might you share to support your view?
- When creating a title, think “newspaper headline.” Write your title choosing phrases that clearly represent the key point of your post.
- Write one or two paragraphs, using an engaging style with short, concise sentences and clear vocabulary.

Your instructor may provide a prompt or question or may require a particular structure. Some course instructors ask students to summarize a scholarly article in their first paragraph and then respond in their following paragraphs.

Participating in a forum involves responding to others. When reading others' posts, look for opportunities to affirm content shared, ask questions, build on ideas, and disagree. Start with a reference to the original post; then, offer a quote or summarize the key point and respond. If you agree, offer reasons for supporting the

1. “Online Discussions: Tips for Students,” Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/blended-learning/online-discussions-tips-students>.

writer's main idea. While you may feel uncomfortable disagreeing with a writer, presenting a different opinion in a constructive, polite manner can strengthen the discussion. If you find yourself reacting emotionally to a post, draft your response and wait before posting. Taking a brief time away will help you respond in a calm, professional manner. JWU's Kellie Nappa offers [additional tips](#) for online discussions.²

While participating in forums can be daunting at the beginning, with some practice, you will enhance your writing skills and learn much in the process.

Academic Blog

You may already be familiar with the concept of blogs. Numerous internet users, including celebrities, use this form of digital media to share their interests and represent their thoughts on political issues, for example [LGBTQ2S+ rights](#).³ However, you may be asked to disseminate your research ideas and opinions through a blog as a course requirement. Additionally, the academic blog helps you connect with other academics in your field, either by reading their blogs or creating your own. [The Guardian](#) newspaper offers insight

2. Kellie Nappa, "How to Write a Strong Discussion Post," Johnson and Wales University Online, May 23, 2018, <https://online.jwu.edu/blog/how-write-strong-discussion-post-infographic>.
3. Monica Roberts, "TransGriot Texas Democratice Party Runoff Endorsement Post," TransGriot (blog) June 28, 2020, <https://transgriot.blogspot.com/2020/06/transgriot-texas-runoff-endorsement-post.html>.

into the research behind academic blogging and its purpose: to bridge the gap between academia and the mainstream.

Academics can get to print early, share ideas which are still being cooked and stake a claim in part of a conversation without waiting to appear in print. On blogs we can offer commentary on the work of others in a more relaxed – or opinionated – way than we might do in conventional journals, where we will be subjected to the normalising gaze of peer reviewers.⁴

So how can you structure your academic blog? What is important to include? Who is the target audience? What do you want to achieve by writing an academic blog? The [Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center](#) has a great resource for what you need to consider when writing

4. Pat Thomson and Inger Mewburn, “Why Do Academics Blog? It’s Not For Public Outreach, Research Shows,” The Guardian, December 2, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/dec/02/why-do-academics-blog-research>.

an academic blog.⁵ We decided to share the neatly condensed checklist for blog writing by our colleagues at [Dawson College](#):

- A blog is a short piece of writing about a specific topic.
- It includes relevant links and information to other places you can read about your topic online.
- A blog includes images or videos related to the topic that can draw readers in.
- Illustrations of complex ideas can help readers understand the topic.
- Interactivity is a must as you can receive feedback or begin a discussion with your readers about your ideas.
- Essentially, you are putting forward an argument, from a piece of your academic writing, about a topic that is supported by scholarly evidence and logical reasoning.⁶

If you are looking to start building your academic profile, testing your writing or documenting your writing experiences, the [University of Victoria's Online Academic Community](#) is a good place to begin.⁷ While only University of Victoria students can use the Online Academic Community, your school very likely has blog platforms you can use. You can see what other students attending

5. "Writing Academic Blogs," Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center, Hamilton College, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing/writing-resources/writing-academic-blogs>.
6. "How to Write an Academic Blog Post," Humanities Department, Dawson College, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/humanities/2019/11/05/howto/>.
7. <https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca>.

the university are researching and writing about or find an opportunity to build a wider community of study groups. Some students even use blogging (and e-portfolio) platforms to build their portfolio of work, including a CV, writing sample and, if in Fine Arts, documentation of their creative work.

2.10 In Summary

NANCY AMI, NATALIE BOLDT, SARA HUMPHREYS, JEMMA LLEWELLYN, AND ERIN KELLY

You might have noticed something happening as you read through the sub-genres and conventions of academic writing – they overlap and intersect, don't they? For example, a scientific report requires a hypothesis and a research essay requires a thesis. Both are testing ideas and need evidence to prove a point. We hope that what you've gained from this chapter is a healthy appreciation of just how much you already know and an understanding of how to approach assignments and projects that ask you to write in a new and unfamiliar way.

HAPPY WRITING!

PART III

WHY WE WRITE

3.1 Learning Goals

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

LEARNING GOALS

You will engage rhetorical strategies to comprehend challenging texts.

You might feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the amount of reading in your courses as well as the content. Rhetoric offers strategies for understanding how arguments are arranged and how language works, which translates into you becoming a more skillful reader.

You will identify the main and supporting ideas in what you read.

That is, you will be able to locate the thesis, supporting arguments, and evidence in whatever you read. This is a crucial academic skill we cover in this chapter that can improve your ability to understand the point of what you read and perhaps even in your everyday life.

You will analyze academic writing in terms of rhetorical purpose, audience, and content.

Rhetoric gives you the ability to step back and take a good look at your own writing and the writing of others for its rhetorical intent and motives. To paraphrase rhetorician and award winning teacher [Dr. Wayne Booth](#), we can't choose to use rhetoric, only what kind. This chapter will

help you to identify and assess rhetorical writing situations.

You will analyze the reasoning behind an argument.

You may think arguments are a negative way to communicate, but in academic writing, ideas are debated in a respectful manner (99% of the time, anyways). “Argument” is the word we use to describe these debates, and they follow a logical order and line of reasoning. Rhetorical practice gives you a means to both understand and describe the reasoning behind an argument.

3.2 Language as Equipment for Living

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

Let's turn to Elder Shirley Alphonse (THE-LA-ME-YÉ), Elder Nadine Charles (TEĀĻIE), and the Manager for Blended Learning Success, Theresa Bell, at [Royal Roads University](#) for their insight:

Teaching: Never-Ending Learning

As explained by Elders Shirley Alphonse and Nadine Charles (2018), in First Nations communities, different Elders share the same stories many times with people as doing so gives people many opportunities to learn. Each telling will bring meaning to someone in the room, and each time someone hears a teaching, different information is added to their understanding, even if the teaching is the same. The same teaching may be presented slightly differently by different Elders, either by adding new information to a teaching or providing more detail if listeners are ready to learn more, so each telling presents the opportunity to learn something new every time.

Share Your Voice

It's not unusual for students to feel that they have nothing unique to say on a topic. Students

may also feel that their ideas are insignificant since they're not yet experts on a topic. While the specific topic might be new to you, your writing is an opportunity to explain your relationship to the topic, including how your experiences connect with the topic, why you think the topic is important or relevant, and how you can apply the subject matter to other uses. You might share other people's understanding of material, but only you can explain exactly how you think about it. The academic community is like a vast conversation with scholars bringing their own voices to discussions, and as a student, your writing is one way for you to bring your voice to that conversation. Even though readers may have some familiarity with the topic, hearing your distinctive voice through

your writing will give readers the opportunity to learn something new.¹²

The above advice holds special significance for those who belong to Coast Salish communities. We would not presume to try and interpret these teachings for you. However, the idea that academic conversations are shared with learners, teachers, families, administrators, and more is significant for all of us.

In western cultures, specific types of knowledge tend to be

1. The Manager of Blended Learning Success at Royal Roads University, Theresa Bell, has generously given permission to share [The Four Feathers Writing Guide](#) with you. While it is designed specifically to support Coast Salish students, there may be elements of the resource that will help many Indigenous students to develop a process for writing in academic settings. While we include The Four Feathers Writing Guide to mainly serve Indigenous students, we also recognize that Indigenous philosophies of learning and teaching are beneficial for all students and teachers.
2. “Shirley R. Alphonse (THE-LA-ME-YÉ), Theresa Bell and Nadine Charles (TÆLIE), “Share Your Voice: Communicate Your Knowledge,” in Four Feathers Writing Guide, Royal Roads University, updated April 29, 2020, <https://library.royalroads.ca/four-feathers-writing-guide>.

divided into different subjects, such as science, humanities, and social sciences, but that does not mean that we don't converse and debate with each other across disciplinary boundaries. The study of how, what, when, why, and where we communicate with each other is the **domain of an ancient discipline called Rhetoric**. Wherever communication happens, rhetoric is in play and is often cross-cultural. By "cross-cultural," we mean that rhetorical situations occur between people of differing backgrounds and cultures (or contexts) and those backgrounds and cultures (or contexts) are part of every rhetorical situation. You might be thinking, wait, what does this have to do with writing?

We hear you. Here's a quick example to clarify. In an [article](#) by [Dr. Eve Tuck](#) – who is Unangaʻan and is an enrolled member of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Alaska – and [Dr. K. Wayne Yang](#), they astutely argue that decolonization is not a metaphor but an action or way of being.³ The idea we want to get across here is that this article analyzes a key rhetorical figure, metaphor, and makes an argument regarding its use in particular rhetorical situations (by the way, you reading this chapter is a type of rhetorical situation). In other words, Tuck and Yang are making a point about the ways in which words powerfully impact how we think, fantasize, and behave in the world.

Rhetorician [Kenneth Burke](#) might say that the words and, in turn, the stories we share with each other give us "equipment for living."⁴

3. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>.
4. Kenneth Burke, "Literature as Equipment for Living," in *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic*

If you read [Section 2.2 Genres, Stories, and Academic Writing](#), then you know that all we do is tell stories to each other: sometimes these stories are factual and data based (academic). Sometimes they are fictional (literature). Sometimes they are numerical (mathematics). Rhetoric helps us to understand what “equipment” these stories give us.

Perhaps you didn’t even realize that every act of communication, whether speaking, listening, reading, or writing offers some type of equipment. To explain by way of example, have you ever dressed as a favourite literary, film, historical, or video game character (aka cos-play)? Even if you haven’t, you may have seen fans dressed as figures from popular culture, such as Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen, Thor, or Wynonna Earp. This is an overt example of people quite literally taking on the traits, attitudes, and even appearance of their favourite characters as a way to show everyone: I relate to this character! This character gives me the equipment I need to make it through life!

A less overt example is this book. We hope that as you read it, you are able to take some equipment from this chapter (and others) that will prove relevant to you in your classes and maybe even your life.

The equipment you gain from your interactions with what you read and within your communities can help or hinder. Rhetoric helps you to know the difference between what heals and what harms and then make sound choices. Rhetoric gives you the tools to assess a topic you want to write about and explain what you think about that topic. As Elder Shirley Alphonse (THE-LA-ME-YÉ) and Elder Nadine Charles (TEA-LIE) assure you, your voice matters and even a basic understanding of rhetoric can give you greater insight into how your voice works in the world.

Action, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 293-304.

3.3 The Basics: The Rhetorical Triangle as Communication Formula

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

There are lots of elements that make up any communication situation, some of which have come up in the previous two chapters. In [Section 2.2 Genres, Stories, and Academic Writing](#) we discussed conventions as repeated acts of communication in a specific rhetorical situation (and we explained why that's important). In this chapter, we are going to move beyond the conventions of communication forms (such as emails and essays) and dive into the elemental aspects of communication. Did you know any act of communication (even this one!) is shaped by three key factors? Here they are:

The subject of your communication: The subject matter you are writing or speaking about always affects your communication. Some subjects need longer discussions, and others require only brief consideration. Some seem important and worthy of investigation, and others might require certain forms of language or design to drum up interest. (This [government initiative](#) to warn about vaping uses slick graphics, for example.) And a writer or speaker might appear to have the authority to address some subjects more than others. Effective communication is built around thoughtfully chosen subject matter.¹

1. “Consider the Consequences of Vaping,” Government of Canada, last modified March 5, 2020

The audience you are addressing: How you discuss a subject depends on the audience of readers or listeners being addressed. Those familiar with a subject won't need as much background information. Those who basically agree with your key points won't require as much explanation or supporting evidence. Audiences can be swayed by their sense of who is presenting the subject matter. Effective communication takes the intended audience into consideration. We pay special attention to the concept of audience in this chapter because, for most undergraduate students in Canada, this concept is unfamiliar.

The author or speaker (that's you): Sometimes the person presenting subject matter to an audience has personal experience related to that topic. Perhaps you are writing an essay about skateboarding as an Olympic sport and you skateboard. You can probably share an anecdote about learning to skateboard that would build your credibility on the subject matter as a person with experience. Sometimes a writer or speaker is well-known by the audience and would seem trustworthy discussing almost any topic. For example, [Dr. Roberta Bondar](#) is a well-respected Canadian scientist and astronaut who is often asked to share her wisdom. Sometimes a writer or speaker expresses themselves in a way that makes the audience feel skeptical about whether the writer is sufficiently informed. In all cases, the speaker or writer plays an important role in effective communication.

You can already see how the above elements of communication are interrelated. For this reason, these elements are often represented as a triangle (see Figure 3.1), but not just any type of triangle.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/campaigns/vaping.html>.

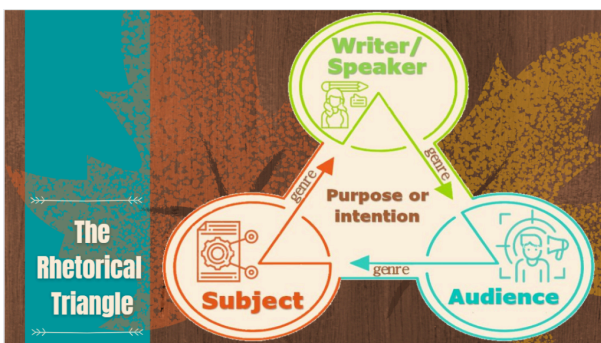


Figure 3.1.
The
rhetorical
triangle
diagram.

The writer/speaker, the subject matter, and the audience are mapped onto an equilateral triangle aptly called the **rhetorical triangle** to show that each of these elements are inextricably interrelated as well as illustrate that they operate best when in balance with each other (more on this in [Section 3.5 Everything's Persuasion](#)). This communication formula emerges from ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric, and it still can help anyone who wants to communicate effectively.²

In each and every act of communication, the elements of the rhetorical triangle are in play. This textbook, though, is not about each and every act of communication, but is meant to help you be the best academic writer you can be. Therefore, the next three

2. If you'd like to read Aristotle's treatise in full, you can check your university library for a copy of *Rhetoric* or read W. Rhys Roberts' translation available online through the Internet Classics Archive: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.html>. You'll find the material on which the rhetorical triangle is based under "Part 2" of Book I.

sections explicitly explore the audience for academic writing, because this aspect of the rhetorical triangle can be tricky.

3.4 Knowing Your Audience: Values and Beliefs

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

Most people know intuitively that the same type of writing isn't appropriate for every situation. To use a simple example, you might write a text to a friend that looks something like this:

Hey, that assignment for POLI 202 when is it due LOL?

This text seems fine. That is, your friend would likely see “Hey” as an appropriate greeting, maybe even as a polite way to begin a text. The LOL isn't meant to express laughter but show camaraderie. The basic idea here is that you want to confirm the deadline for an upcoming assignment for a political science class. You have reached out to someone in that class for clarification. In fact, this text respects your friend by assuming they are busy and would appreciate a quick message rather than an email or some other form of communication. You have made it easy for this friend to send back the due date, to which you might reply “Thx” as an expression of appreciation. Maybe you could even reply with a smiley-face emoji.

But if you want information about a deadline from your course instructor, it would be less fitting to email the same text. In this situation, you would more likely write something like the following:

Dear Professor Mirza,

I am a student in your 10:30 am section of POLI 202 (Intro to Political Theory). I know that our second essay assignment is due next week, but I need to ask for clarification about the deadline. The course syllabus I have says this assignment needs to be submitted on Monday at noon, but the course site says the submission date is Wednesday at noon. Would you please tell me the actual deadline? Thank you for your help.

Stu Dent

Notice the difference between the text and the email? The formal greeting and use of complete sentences signal that you are aware this email is being exchanged in a professional and academic context. **This email also makes some assumptions about its reader.** Because this person (an instructor who might teach several courses and hundreds of students in a term) might not know who you are, which class you're asking about, or which assignment you are asking about, you need to offer that information. Since this instructor and you are likely busy, you keep your email reasonably brief and to the point – but you also need to show respect for the instructor's time by suggesting you have tried other ways of getting the information you need before asking for help. **This all builds your credibility with your instructor, and shows that you have understood the rhetorical situation.**

This is all well and good, but audiences for academic assignments can be, as we said earlier, tricky.

3.4.1 Who Is the Audience for My Academic

Writing Assignments?

When you think about the audience for an academic assignment that you need to write for a class, it might seem obvious who your reader is: The instructor who will be grading the assignment. Indeed, the person marking your work will be reading it with great care and attention. But that doesn't mean the instructor **as an individual person** is identical to your audience.

More often, **your course instructor stands in for a larger audience**. Depending on the course level and subject matter and the assignment parameters, your instructor could be a representative of one of these groups of readers:

An educated audience with some interest in the topic you are writing about. This type of audience is not made up of specialists in a field, such as biology or political science. They want an overview of a topic with little to no jargon. These types of assignments are often the domain of survey courses, which are usually found in the first and second year of study.

An audience of specialists in the field you are writing about. This audience has expertise in a particular area and more specialized language and knowledge is expected. These types of assignments are found in upper year courses or even graduate school (think dissertation chapters or an honours essay).

In either case, the person grading isn't going to think primarily about whether they **personally agree with or like your work**. Instead, they are considering how this piece of writing fits within disciplinary norms and standards. In a history research essay, for example, your reader likely expects to see notes and a bibliography. That is, the person grading your assignment is looking to see how your work meets academic audience expectations.

Of course "academic" is a big category, and not all academic audiences are the same. Historians tend to produce lengthy articles and even entire books so that they have space to replicate and analyze the details of primary source documents. Physicists write

and publish much shorter articles packed with tables, numbers, and graphs that convey a lot of information in a condensed space (to those who know how to understand them). Both groups care about truth and accuracy and highly value new knowledge, but the writing they produce takes different forms. If this is at all confusing to you, then please return to [Section 2.3 Academic Writing as a Genre](#) for a refresher.

So, how might you better understand the instructor who will be reading your work as a stand-in for a larger audience? The answer is to visit their office hours and ask for samples of student essays that met their expectations. You might also ask what journals or readings your instructor recommends as examples of writing in that particular field. Your instructor is an expert in whatever field you might be majoring in – they are your best source for an academic audience analysis.

Academic writing around the world differs in terms of style and conventions but shares a key feature: **careful consideration of audience**. As you gain an understanding of your readers, drawing on the guidelines, steps, and perspectives we've shared here, you will be better equipped for your next steps with your composition.

3.4.2 Audience Analysis for Writing

Even if you get comfortable with the idea that your course instructor stands in for a larger audience, there will be times in your academic career that require you to write for a different type of audience. Perhaps you have applied for a bursary or scholarship or you may have applied for co-op positions or internships. In these situations, thinking about who you were writing for likely helped your application along. Audience matters.

Right now, we (the authors of this textbook) are writing to undergraduate students, primarily those in the first year of university. Most of us have taught or supported first year students

for a shocking number of years (a combined total of over one hundred). Therefore, we have some understanding of our audience, but we don't make assumptions. We read current research about the first year writing experience. We also ask students to tell us what they think of this textbook. In other words, we analyze our audience so we can meet their needs. We hope you feel included in this textbook rather than disappointed, alienated, or even bored, which is what happens when writers do not consider their audience.

Here's your opportunity to learn a crucial skill to becoming an effective writer: audience analysis. The questions listed here will help you to analyze an audience so that you can, in turn, tailor your writing to suit your intended readers. In some ways, you are being asked to think creatively in order to position yourself as different types of people who make up an audience. Putting yourself in others' shoes in an informed manner is an important part of rhetorical practice. Let's give it a try by engaging with the following questions (if you really want to get the most from this exercise, write down your answers):

Can you imagine your writing being published in a particular venue (like a magazine, a newspaper, a trade newsletter, a website, an academic journal, etc.)? If so, who are the readers of this publication?

Can you imagine your writing being presented orally as a talk at a conference or convention? If so, what is the focus of the conference or convention? What sorts of people are likely to attend this event?

Can you imagine your writing being assigned as a reading for a university class? If so, what class? In what department, at what level? What sorts of people would teach this class, and who might take it?

If your writing was published on a general news website (like [CBC.ca](https://www.cbc.ca)), under what section would it be filed (local news, national news, world news, sports, science and technology, entertainment, arts, health, or what)? What sorts of people read that section of a news website?

If your writing were a post on [Reddit](https://www.reddit.com), what would be the name

of the subreddit in which it appears? What sorts of people or communities post in this subreddit? Is there specialized language (such as slang) that they use?

Once you define the audience for the above rhetorical situations, then use your answers to define a target group. Try to be as specific as possible. What did you come up with?

Now you are ready for the next step. You are going to refine your audience even further. (Again, you might want to write down your answers to these questions.) You might be surprised what you discover about audiences (your readers) and their expectations! Based on the target group you defined above think about what the demographics are for this group or the economic profile. What type of education do they have? What other relevant information can you think of to better define this group?

If you've answered the above questions, you likely have a good idea of who your target audience is for your assignment or written work. But there are still some questions that need to be answered about your target audience before you can start writing. Don't worry, this won't take long but WILL improve your writing:

What does your audience already know about the topic on which you are writing? What will be new to them? What might be difficult for them to understand?

Does your audience already have a position on the topic you are addressing? Do they basically agree with the argument you want to make, or will they disagree (or might they even be hostile)?

Does your audience have particular values or interests to which you can appeal? What do they seem likely to think is important or trivial, fascinating or boring?

Does your audience expect the sort of piece you are writing to follow particular conventions? If so, what conventions might those be (for example, if you are writing a blog post, perhaps your audience expects links, headings and other online writing conventions).

Does your audience know anything about you? Is there anything you can do to build credibility with this audience?

Want to be a more effective writer? You help yourself make sound choices about how to shape a piece of writing for its intended readers if you **jot down answers to these questions before you start drafting (or at least revising)**. And simply thinking about these questions can help to guide your decisions about what to put in, what to emphasize, and what to leave out in your writing.

3.4.3 Audience & Context: Observations from a Writing Centre

What does it mean to write for an audience in differing cultural contexts? The way you fashion an argument for an audience can stem from the cultures you and your audiences were raised within. Writing centres are a good place to turn to when thinking about audience and context. Writing centre staff work with writers from a variety of cultures. Here we want to give you some insight into the many ways that academic writing is practiced in cultural contexts to meet readers' expectations. In almost every cultural context encountered at a writing centre (and there are many), writers need to understand the expectations of their readers.

What do we mean when we say writers have cultural knowledge of their readers? How does this knowledge of their readers shape writers' expectations and influence their writing? Let's look at three hypothetical examples that might speak to cultural differences in academic writing.

Before expressing a particular argument, some writers provide extensive historical background on their topics. They present pages of contextual information highlighting key researchers and their findings. These writers do not cite any sources for the information they have written. They know their readers respect traditions and value research done before; they expect their readers to know the sources. Writers do not need to explain where the information

comes from. If they did, they would be dismissing their readers' expertise.

Another group of writers present their argument near the beginning of their text. In their paragraphs, these writers explore topics related to their argument. The paragraphs start off with a sentence or two on the related topic. Then, the paragraphs grow longer as writers explore background information, draw in related narratives, and perhaps share a joke or two to keep the readers engaged. The paragraphs may be pages in length and are chock full of fascinating information. While some of this information relates to the initial claim, much of it is tangential. The writers know their readers want to be engaged and entertained while they are tracing the argument. These writers expect the reader to appreciate the lengthy discussion and colorful, creative material included. They trust their readers will pull out the argument snippets as they meander through the copious text sections.

Other writers place their argument at their paper's beginning and offer support through paragraphs. These writers assume their readers are acquainted with paragraph formatting routines and so do not need to identify new paragraphs. Writers align their text with the left margin. They do not indent where they start a new paragraph nor do they double-space after each paragraph. These writers expect their readers to closely read their paragraphs and track where the main ideas change without relying on changes in format or spacing to help them.

As you read the descriptions above, **did you find yourself nodding in agreement** with an approach or two? What have you noticed about academic writers' routines and assumptions when writing for North American readers, particularly course instructors as representative readers?

As writers, we (that's all of us who write academically) want our readers to be able to follow our ideas. In the North American context, **the burden is on writers to clearly convey ideas to readers**, so the university's writing centre staff will often urge you to research your reader. What can you assume your reader knows?

How hard will your reader need to work on understanding your argument? What (if any) changes will you need to make in your academic writing? Again, the [guidelines above for audience analysis](#) help you investigate your reader and carefully consider how knowing your reader impacts your writing – your process and your product.

3.5 Everything's Persuasion

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

When it comes to academic writing, one can assume that the purpose of every piece of writing is to make an argument – although the term “argument” in this context might need some definition. The title of this particular section is a play on the title of a well-known and widely used writing textbook by Drs. Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruskiewicz titled *Everything's an Argument*.¹ Lunsford and Ruskiewicz's title relies on a rhetorician's understanding of argument. They recognize that the term argument doesn't only mean getting into a fight with someone. Rather, their point is that in academic writing, debates or arguments over ideas are common. While Lunsford and Ruskiewicz's textbook is excellent, perhaps there is another way to understand persuasion that's more suitable for undergraduate students studying in Canada.

Remember back in [Section 3.3](#), we introduced you to the [rhetorical triangle](#)? If you take a look at the rhetorical triangle, you will see that in the midst of audience, subject, and writer/speaker is the word **purpose**. Everyone writes for a variety of purposes but generally the goals are to inform, persuade, and perhaps entertain. In academic writing, it's much more important to inform and persuade (with an emphasis on inform). The triangle doesn't represent one form of balanced communication but all the ways

1. Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruskiewicz, *Everything's an Argument*, 8th ed., with 2020 APA update (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2019). You can visit the following website to learn more:

<https://store.macmillanlearning.com/ca/product/Everything-s-an-Argument/p/131905627X>.

balance can occur within specific contexts (and those are vast and plentiful). In the context of academic writing, rhetorical balance can take many forms but most often, it's an emphasis on sharing credible, well-tested data that is explained with clarity of purpose and audience engagement.

Easy, right? Well, academic writing can be made much less of a mystery once you grasp both the concept of genre (covered in [chapter two](#)) and the basics of rhetorical practice. One of those basics is the [rhetorical triangle](#), which we introduced you to earlier in this chapter. As a brief refresher, the rhetorical triangle maps out how persuasion operates (see [Fig. 3.1](#)).

Let's turn to the idea of persuasion rather than argument just for a minute and think about the persuader and those who the persuader wants to persuade (otherwise known as the rhetor and the audience). Rhetorician [Kenneth Burke](#) redefined the concepts of argument and persuasion to better suit Western culture. In Western cultures, relationships are often unequal and so Burke argued that persuasion is more akin to a historical idea of courtship rather than an argument between equal parties:

An audience's degree of adherence to the rhetor's argument can vary greatly. By contrast, courtship focuses primarily on the unequal relationship between the persuader and those being persuaded, rather than employ means generally considered "persuasive." Through courtship, the "courtier" already commands a certain "captivation" of the audience. This "courted" audience thus yearns to transcend the gap of social estrangement to unite with the persuader.²

Now, the idea here isn't to court someone literally (the word "courtship" is a rather outmoded way to define dating). By "courtship," Burke refers specifically to courtiers, who had permission to enter the court where they might receive audience with a monarch and other noblemen. Courtiers (like lobbyists, in a way) "court" those in power for various benefits for themselves, their communities, families and so on. This relationship, in some ways, is not unlike when a professor submits a paper for publication and must write a letter (or email of introduction) courting the press with persuasive language (and a certain amount of deference) so that they consider the paper for publication.

Extending Burke's analogy a little more, when you are writing an assignment, you might feel anxious. This anxiety occurs, in part, because you are working to show a person in authority (your instructor) that you possess certain knowledge. You are "courting" a person who has some authority in order to gain something. In this case, a grade. Luckily, you are not a courtier and your instructor is certainly there to support you. This analogy, though, serves as a means to consider the relationship between rhetor and audience (who are often, but not always, unequal).

When you engage in acts of persuasion, you are hoping to induce action in others. To show you just how common persuasion is in communication, here are a few common examples you might recognize where students want to persuade or induce action:

2. John Ramage, Michael Callaway, Jennifer Clary-Lemon, and Zachary Waggoner, "Glossary of Terms" in *Argument in Composition* (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2009), 201. You can access this entire book online and for free through the WAC Clearinghouse:
<https://wac.colostate.edu/books/referenceguides/ramage-argument/>.

- You write an email to one of your instructors asking them to grant you an extended deadline for your next essay assignment. In doing so, you are **persuading your instructor to give you something**.
- One of your friends says that your favourite movie is boring, so you present all the reasons you can think of why this film is interesting. In this case, you are **trying to change someone's mind**.
- Your brother is sure that vaping is much safer than smoking cigarettes. You are increasingly convinced that vaping can cause serious health problems. When you show your brother pamphlets and news articles that discuss the dangers of vaping, you are **working to change someone's perspective**.
- You and your group members need to pick a topic for your class presentation. Some of you want to create a presentation about the need for better mass transit in your community. Others want to learn and talk about how to design more fuel-efficient cars. And others want to do work on the effects of dedicated bike lanes. As you help everyone decide on and agree to focus on a single topic, you are **getting those in disagreement to come to consensus**.
- You are asked to give a speech at your friend's surprise birthday party. Everyone at the party – other friends and family members – thinks your friend is a terrific person. You try to craft a speech that gets everyone to remember and reflect on how much they like your friend. With this speech, you are **trying to reinforce ideas that people already have**.
- You know a lot about local birds and find them fascinating. You write a post that will be posted on a community blog. Those who read it haven't given much thought to birds. As you share your knowledge, you are **trying to get people to think what you are saying is correct**.

If you take nothing else from the above discussion, we want you to remember this: persuasion is a fact of human communication.

It functions differently in different cultures but it is always there. Persuasion is about making connections with your audience to induce some kind of action. But how can you persuade your audience? We'd like to introduce you to the fundamental (but not only) means by which we induce action in others: the appeals

3.5.1 Persuasion 101: The Three Appeals

Even if you are trying to achieve the same end-goal with an argument, you likely know from experience that you wouldn't make an argument in the same way to every person you encounter. For example, let's say you are a cinephile (someone who LOVES movies). You want to get the friends and family members who have gathered together for a holiday meal to end the day by going out to see a particular classic movie that is showing at your local independent cinema.

For your mom, who thinks movies are too expensive so it's always best to wait for them to be available via streaming or broadcast, you can show that the ticket prices at the local independent cinema are much cheaper than at a movie theatre chain. You can then follow up by saying you can save money by bringing your own snacks.

For your uncle, who thinks spending time with family is important, you could stress how this outing will offer a fun experience for everyone to bond over.

For your cousin, who loves funny movies, you could stress that you have seen this film and think it's a great – plus well-respected critics recognize it as a ground-breaking comedy.

None of these approaches is better or worse than the others – but one might be more or less appropriate or effective for a particular audience or rhetorical situation. In all of these cases, the appeals are in play.

Aristotle proposed some labels for the major approaches regularly used to persuade audiences. Knowing these terms can make it

easier for you to think and talk about the strategies you are using – and they certainly will enable you to more precisely analyze arguments made by others.

The three major strategies proposed by Aristotle are as follows:

You can make an argument based on logic. That is, you can offer facts and evidence. Then you can explain the logic of how these facts and evidence support your position. (In the example above, you might be using logic to persuade your mom that going to the movies won't cost as much as she thinks.)

But you can also make an argument based on emotion. Sometimes you can get someone to act by explaining how great they will feel if they do – or how guilty they will feel if they don't. (In the [example](#) above, connecting what you want to your uncle's desire for family time connects to his emotions.)

You can make an argument based on credibility – sometimes on your own authority but also the reputation or credibility of someone else. We are often more likely to believe claims coming from someone who is recognized as an expert or who we know to be trustworthy or even who we like. (In the [example](#) above, when you tell your cousin that you and well-known critics think a movie is a successful comedy, you are asking her to trust you based on authority.)

Because Aristotle lived in fourth-century BCE Athens, the terms he used – still part of the technical vocabulary of the field of rhetoric – are Greek:

Logos: Arguments that appeal primarily to an audience's sense of logic make appeals to logos, logical appeals.

Pathos: Arguments that appeal primarily to an audience's emotions make appeals to pathos, pathetic appeals.

Ethos: Arguments that appeal primarily to an audience's reliance on the authority of the person delivering the argument make appeals to ethos, ethical appeals.

You don't necessarily have to memorize these ancient Greek terms, but it's a good idea to understand the appeals and what they do. When you do, you will be more conscious and, therefore, in

control of whatever argument you are making or whatever action you want to induce.

These concepts are more complicated in practice than in theory. In real-world arguments, appeals can be quite subtle or even combined with one another in an attempt to persuade an audience. The definitions supplied above are rather simplistic. Here are some more in-depth aspects of each appeal that you might want to keep in mind.

Logos

When Aristotle wrote about appeals to logos (logical arguments), he was expressing a set of values associated with his overall worldview – that, ideally, we would only be persuaded by facts, information, and objective arguments. Logos is the effective use and ordering of good reasons to support an argument. In the simplest terms, a rational argument must show more than tell; the strength of an argument is based on its proof and organization; an effective argument will be logical, which means the argument must be ordered in a fashion deemed appropriate.

To explain by way of example, Booth famously argued that literature uses rhetorical argumentation to communicate its purposes. Readers desire completion of an argument and/or chain of events in literary and non-literary works, explains Booth, and this desire can only be fulfilled if the author has managed to effectively prove or support their storyline with good reasons.³ If not, then the reader will likely state that the work is silly or illogical, even if the work is set in a fantastical context in the first place (e.g.

3. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

science fiction must use logos effectively to convince the reader of the story's plausibility).

This example illustrates that logic isn't just the domain of sciences or philosophy, but each disciplinary context or major has its own means of organizing and proving an argument. In Visual Arts, a student may need to express certain means of visual representation in a logical manner. In Law, students may study a more classical form of logic that demands a specific order of argumentation. In Indigenous Studies, students may study entirely new knowledge systems that follow the logic of Traditional Knowledge.

This is all to say there is more than one form of logic, but if pressed to provide a clear definition of logic, it's the good reasons or premise for any action you undertake, even academic writing. The word "good" can be deceptive here, so let's define it as the good of your community and not for selfish interests – that's antithetical to rhetorical practice and balance. The logic of your communication includes ordering your points in a way that is both readable and appropriate to the communication. It means supporting those points with relevant evidence appropriate to the rhetorical situation. If you are feeling a little confused, just return to the [definitions](#) listed above.

It's important to point out that less than scrupulous speakers or writers can create the impression of a logical argument by using the structures of logical argumentation to present highly selective or unrepresentative evidence or even unsupported claims. As someone who encounters arguments everyday, you can be on the lookout for attempts to sway your thinking that are masquerading as logical arguments. Knowledge of the subject matter can help you perceive when what seem like solid claims aren't well-supported or when what at first glance appears to be ample evidence has been cherry-picked or even falsified. And you can also be on the lookout for problems with argumentation that crop up so often they have labels. These problematic ways of making arguments are known as **logical fallacies** (see Fig 3.2).

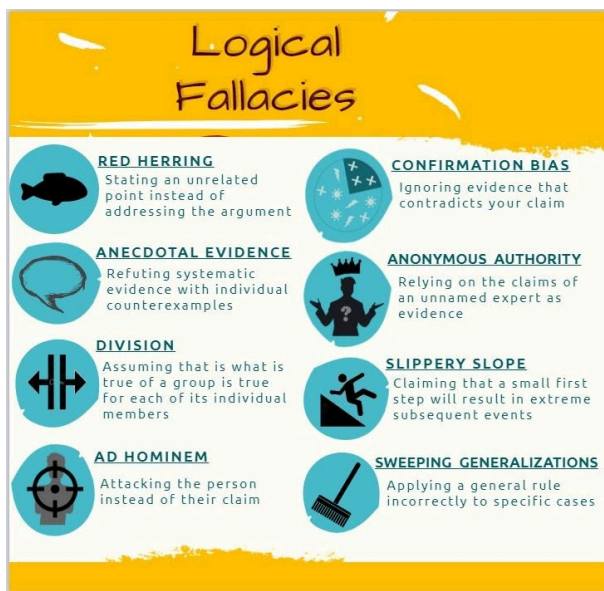


Fig. 3.2.
Common
Logical
Fallacies

You can probably think of examples of logical fallacies you have encountered in advertising, in political speeches, or even in conversations with friends. If logical fallacies aren't logical, why do some writers and speakers use them? A cynical answer is that they work. More importantly, the prevalence of logical fallacies demonstrates something Aristotle recognized – that logic isn't the only effective strategy for persuasion. Keep an eye out for these when you are scrolling through your social media feeds – can you find examples of logical fallacies? If so, you are well on your way to gaining that keen rhetorical eye that will protect you from unethical forms of argumentation.

Pathos

Aristotle advises that good rhetoricians will appeal to the emotions

to stir the audience in order to create the right kind of emotional conditions such that the audience will be persuaded of the speaker's argument. Most rhetoricians agree that the appeal to emotions is perhaps the most dangerous of the three appeals. Audiences can be induced to actions that are detrimental to them or others. A blatant example are political speeches that brand one cultural group as a danger to another cultural group.

In Booth's book, *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me*, he outlines Neo-Aristotelian criteria for ethical use of emotional appeal. Simply put, any act of communication must have a balance of ethos, pathos, and logos; otherwise, the speaker/writer misuses rhetoric.⁴ A good example of unbalanced, pathos-laden rhetoric is the smear campaigns used by politicians to discredit one another. This approach produces over-generalization and shrill exposé as opposed to a balance of reason, character, and emotional appeal designed to attract and influence ethical, rational, and critical readers.

Human beings are emotional and embodied beings, so it's not surprising that their thinking can be affected by their feelings. You can probably come up with an example of when someone told you about an event in the world that aroused some emotion and consequently made you want to take action.

For example, imagine that you see your neighbour at the grocery store, and she tells you her ten-year-old daughter Mona is struggling in school ever since funding cuts led to increased class sizes. When you were Mona's babysitter, you thought she was really bright, and she told you how much she loved school. You are upset

4. Booth, W.C. *Now Don't Try to Reason With Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). You can visit the following website to learn more: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/N/bo5971339.html>.

that this kid you like a lot is having a bad experience. If the larger class size is affecting Mona negatively, you conclude, then this is a situation that can't be allowed to continue. You decide to write to your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) to say that schools need more funding.

In this case, you're not being entirely logical. In fact, you could be accused of relying on anecdotal evidence or being biased or even sentimental – it is possible that every child except for Mona is thriving in larger classes. But that doesn't automatically mean you are wrong or that your neighbour is trying to trick you. This is simply an indication that you are not investigating the information in terms of logic (logos) and credibility (ethos).

To demonstrate what can be a positive relationship between emotions and persuasion, we can imagine a slightly different scenario. Let's say that instead of hearing about Mona's experience, while you were in the grocery store line, you read a news story online reporting funding cuts to local schools and resulting larger class sizes. Later the same day, while working on a research assignment for a class, you come across a scholarly study showing that larger class sizes have a negative impact on student achievement among grade five students. These two texts might offer more reliable evidence that a problem exists – but they would probably not motivate you to take the time to write to your MLA.

Arguments that invoke an audience's emotions in order to persuade them more effectively are said to make **appeals to pathos** or to use **pathetic appeals**. Here “pathetic” doesn't mean something you should feel sorry for because it's inadequate – rather, it just means having to do with emotions. And there can be a variety of emotions brought up by pathetic appeals.

The most obvious appeals to pathos arouse big, clear emotions. For example, an advertisement by a charitable organization that helps to feed hungry children might prominently present a photo of a malnourished, crying infant. That image would likely make audiences feel a strong sense of **sadness**, **pity**, and perhaps even **guilt** – emotions that might more directly lead someone to make a

donation than would a page full of statistics about the number of children affected by food shortages.

Politicians can win over voters by presenting thoughtful, detailed plans – but they can also get supporters to act by invoking **fear** or **anger**. It is not logical or ethical to say that an opponent’s plan to pilot a restorative justice program for juvenile offenders will lead to senior citizens being murdered in their beds, but offering up such a frightening possibility stirs up strong feelings.

But note that appeals to pathos can be much more subtle. A company that presents its product in a funny advertisement is getting the audience to associate the product with **laughter** and **feeling good**. A politician who tells a story about a hometown hockey player who made it to the big leagues gets the audience to feel **civic pride**, feelings that could lead someone to make a donation or volunteer for a campaign. And even subtle language choices can make appeals to pathos – the authors of this textbook use “we” constructions a lot to try to invoke a **sense of belonging** in readers. This use of “we” is a rhetorical strategy to connect with our readers in order to further our goal to persuade them (you) to see academic writing as an important and interesting subject.

Academic writing tends to emphasize appeals to logos, but that doesn’t mean there are no appeals to pathos present. When you read an academic article, note places where the authors use “we” constructions or otherwise attempt to build a sense of community for readers. See if the writers have included jokes or witty turns of phrase. And especially watch for case studies or examples that invoke big emotions that are situated in the context of well-supported, highly logical arguments.

As you craft your own arguments, it’s worth reflecting on when it might actually be inappropriate to avoid appeals to emotion in an effort to seem scholarly and authoritative. Some subjects arouse strong emotions in people for very good reasons, and an entirely logical argument about those subjects will likely bore or irritate your readers.

Ethos

The appeal to ethos might appear to be the least logical of all persuasive strategies. Ethical appeals (appeals to ethos) rely on the authority or character of the speaker or writer. That is, an audience is more likely to be persuaded by the same argument being presented by one speaker rather than another. An ad hominem attack (which was identified [above](#) as an example of a logical fallacy) is an attack on a writer's ethos rather than on their argument and thus isn't logical – but proving that a writer is a habitual liar will make it more difficult to believe that person's evidence and claims are correct.

Because it can be difficult to distinguish between when an argument is truly logical or merely appears logical, and because emotions regularly influence thinking, Aristotle and other early rhetorical theorists pointed to ethos as a safeguard against problematic arguments. Roman rhetorician Quintilian actually defined an effective argument as involving “A good man speaking well.” Why a good man? In the ancient world, an audience would know the public reputation and maybe the private actions of the individual speaking in a law court or the Senate (a person who would certainly be male), and the audience could reasonably assume a person they know to be of good character – known to be smart or just or level-headed – would probably make an argument that is in the public interest. And this context is part of why the rhetorical triangle identifies the speaker (or writer) as one of the key elements in any act of communication.

The identity of a speaker or writer still affects how persuasive a text will be for its intended audience. You likely hope a politician is true to their word. If they aren't, then you probably won't respond to their fundraising letter with a donation. You probably should be skeptical of speeches about getting “tough on crime” made by a politician who was recently involved in a bribery scandal. **They lack credibility.** Most of the time, you are assessing others' credibility.

Perhaps a friend who boasts about a Fortnite win streak but then doesn't show that same skill when you are playing with them loses credibility. Maybe you win a scholarship, which results in your credibility increasing in the eyes of university admissions. But what about academic writing?

In academic writing, ethos more commonly involves our sense of whether the writer is an authority on the subject being discussed more so than whether the writer is "a good man." When you read a peer-reviewed journal article written by an award-winning scientist who works at a prestigious university, it is reasonable to believe this person has the knowledge and expertise to make a good argument. For example, if an epidemiologist who teaches in the medical school at the University of Toronto writes that wearing masks decreases the spread of COVID-19, this argument seems worth taking seriously.

In contrast, when you get advice from a public figure, a corporation, or someone's uncle's neighbour's tweet that gargling with hydrogen peroxide keeps individuals from contracting COVID-19, you should probably reflect on how much they know about the subject. Put another way, a celebrity might have the expertise to tell you how to make a delicious green smoothie – but that same person isn't credible as an authority to claim that drinking two green smoothies a day will keep individuals from catching any particular disease.

While our sense of a speaker or writer's authority can be a good way to begin distinguishing between truthful and highly problematic arguments, **appeals to ethos can also lead us astray.** For instance, because people tend to believe doctors have a lot of medical knowledge and strongly value their patients' health, an individual doctor who endorses a treatment might be able to persuade a lot of people to try it. But an individual doctor can be unethical – say, motivated by the financial benefit of recommending a treatment their office happens to offer for a fee. The term "conman" is a contraction of "confidence man," and people in whom we have confidence have the power to swindle or trick us.

And even when people aren't trying to deceive, **ethos can be problematically linked to stereotypes and even prejudice.** Numerous studies of class evaluations of college and university courses show that students are inclined to perceive (white) male professors to be knowledgeable and authoritative while they are more likely to describe female professors (particularly Black women, women of color and Indigenous women) as incompetent and lacking expertise.⁵ This trend might be explained by the cultural assumption that the stereotypical university professor is white and male, while the stereotypical K-12 teacher is female.⁶

5. See, for example, the following scholarly articles on this topic: Amish Bavishi, Juan M. Madera, and Michelle R. Hebl, "The Effect of Professor Ethnicity and Gender on Student Evaluations: Judged Before Met," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 3, no. 4 (December 2010): 245-56, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1037/a0020763>; Anne Boring, "Gender Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching," *Journal of Public Economics* 145 (January 2017): 27-41, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2016.11.006>; John A. Centra and Noreen B. Gaubatz, "Is There Gender Bias in Student Evaluations of Teaching?" *Journal of Higher Education* 71, no. 1 (January/February 2000): 17-33, <https://www.jstor-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/2649280>.
6. See, for example, Alia Wong's article in *The Atlantic* on the way this teacher stereotype has shifted over time in the United States: Wong, "The U.S. Teaching Population Is Getting Bigger, and More Female," *The Atlantic*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>

There's no reason why professors of differing races, genders, and sexualities with the same educational experience and job experience should be seen as differently authoritative, but this dynamic is common.

In some situations, young people can be perceived as lacking the life experience necessary to have an informed opinion about issues that directly affect their lives. A speaker or writer's various identity categories (including an individual's sexuality, race, gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, and/or religion) can lead audience members to perceive that person as too ill-informed or too biased to make a reasonable argument. **Appeals to ethos are not always made on a level playing field.**

That said, there are some important ways in which appeals to ethos are in the control of a speaker or writer. **Following the conventions of the genre in which one is communicating implies that a writer belongs to the same community as the audience and thus is worth listening to.** Note that this dynamic helps to explain why many teachers harp on spelling and punctuation errors in student writing – they perceive, rightly or wrongly, that these sorts of mistakes damage the writer's scholarly ethos since one of the conventions of academic essays is adherence to a set of language rules. Through stylistic choices and selection of

[education/archive/2019/02/the-explosion-of-women-teachers/582622/](https://www.education/archive/2019/02/the-explosion-of-women-teachers/582622/). Note, too, that while Wong writes specifically about the United States, her general claims are relevant in our Canadian context – as evidenced by the following report from the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF): *Teachers in British Columbia: A Feminized Workforce* (BCTF Research, 2018), <https://bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=52009>.

compelling evidence, a writer can create the impression of themselves as smart, well-informed, or even witty, which are qualities that will make an audience more likely to believe their conclusions.

Most notably, writers can make strong appeals to ethos in some situations by sharing their personal experiences. A student who is a member of the Songhees Nation and grew up on Songhees territory has more authority to speak about the need for reform in the local educational system than a professor of education with a PhD from Oxford University who works at the University of Saskatchewan. Our own identities, backgrounds, and histories aren't always directly relevant to the subject matter of an academic essay, but if you can bring yourself explicitly into your writing, then you have an opportunity to make very strong appeals to ethos.

3.6 In Summary

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

After reading this chapter, you now have some idea of the importance of rhetoric to your academic career and life. You are also now equipped with a set of terms (logos, pathos, ethos, as well as audience, purpose, and context) that you can add to your writer's toolbox. **What you shouldn't have is anxiety about your ability to use the terms and concepts covered here.** Many of the strategies for effective communication discussed in this chapter are ones that you already use in everyday conversation and have no doubt learned to appreciate in the media that you consume (including books, speeches, essays, Twitter threads, etc). Our hope is that having names for these strategies will make it possible for you to do a couple of things: (1) to recognize them in the writing and communications of others and (2) to mobilize them in order to contribute your own arguments effectively and with integrity in a range of rhetorical situations and communities of thought.

HAPPY WRITING!

PART IV

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF RESEARCH

I. 4.I Learning Goals

JEMMA LLEWELLYN, ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, TINA BEBBINGTON, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

LEARNING GOALS

You will be able to develop research questions.

Research is a journey to find answers and to find those answers, you need to start with a question. It can be daunting to try and figure out a research topic to investigate, formulating questions can help with this process. This chapter will give you ways to develop research questions so you can find what you need.

You will learn to determine appropriate sources.

Different projects require different types of sources. Sometimes you might need to cite a musical score or a news article while at other times, you will need to search for peer-reviewed sources. How can you determine when a source is reliable, reputable, and accurate? This chapter will help you to become a more discerning researcher.

You will be able to use library resources to locate and retrieve a variety of information sources.

A great deal of research is performed online (particularly during the pandemic), but the choices offered by library resources can be overwhelming. Here you will learn how to

sift through different types of sources to find what you need to complete any assignment.

You will learn why academic integrity is a defining principle of academic communication.

You have probably been told to avoid cheating and plagiarism. You were likely given examples of what cheating and plagiarism looked like and told to avoid these serious errors at all costs. Were you ever told why academic integrity is so important? It's more than giving credit or sharing resources. This chapter will introduce you to the fascinating world of citational practice.

4.2 Knowledges and Traditions

JEMMA LLEWELLYN, ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, TINA BEBBINGTON, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

When you think of the word “research,” what kind of images come to mind? Rows and rows of books? A person, perhaps a student, wearing glasses, sitting at a mahogany table, piled with books and notebooks, pen in hand, ready to take notes? There is some truth to these stereotypical images, but the origin of much of the research you use in your assignments often involves real human subjects participating in complex studies. Other types of research involve observing phenomena or tracking outcomes. Yet other forms of research test facts for accuracy or fill a social or cultural need.

Our point here is that research involves gathering data, which often requires researchers to interact with human subjects. If they are doing this type of research, then researchers have to apply for permission to study human subjects through what is often called an **Ethics Office**, which every university in Canada has and which operates under the strict direction of the federal government. **If a researcher or research team violates codes of research ethics, they can lose their funding or worse.** You may have already received official looking letters asking you to fill out a survey or participate in interviews or some other method of data collection! These letters often contain a statement that the study has been given approval by the Ethics Office. This means the study follows strict protocols (explained more fully below). Once the data has been gathered, then researchers write up what they found and publish it after rigorous review processes. These publications are the articles and books that you look up in library databases and catalogues. So far so good, this all seems pretty benign.

The truth is that research has the potential to be highly

invasive, unethical, and occasionally criminal. Prior to intervention, protest, and resistance predominantly by unrepresented academic communities (such as, Black-Canadian, South Asian, or Indigenous scholars whose communities often suffered from unethical research practices), academic research did not undergo the type of rigorous scrutiny and review that it does now. This lack of intensive oversight meant that certain research projects caused serious, long-lasting damage. One horrific example of such crimes were the nutrition experiments performed in Residential Schools between 1948 and 1952.

Please note that this story contains details that may be upsetting. These experiments used Indigenous children as subjects to study the effects of malnutrition. Residential School survivor Russel Moses described his experience as being in constant hunger to the point where children hunted for food in pig swill.¹ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission discovered that the Federal Government endorsed this research, and the consequences for Indigenous health have been far-reaching and inter-generational:

The full cost of that decision has yet to be reckoned. Take the diet described by Russel Moses which, we estimate, describes a maximum of 1260 kcal/day. The same is true of other survivor accounts we have analyzed, which

1. Ian Mosby and Tracey Galloway, “‘Hunger was never absent’: How Residential School Diets Shaped Current Patterns of Diabetes Among Indigenous Peoples in Canada,” CMAJ 189, no. 32 (2017): e1043, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.170448>.

suggest that well-fed students were the exception – not the rule – at these schools and that, for most of their history, the average daily caloric intake tended to range between 1000 and 1450 kcal/day at a typical residential school.²

There are other examples of academic research violating research ethics. Famous cases include the [government funded Tuskegee public health study](#)³ that left Black men in the U.S. infected with syphilis and untreated without their knowledge or the [Milgram obedience studies](#)⁴ that did not brief participants fully enough on what to expect. These abuses caused public outrage and as a result, strict ethical guidelines have been established to ensure that such abuse does not happen again.

The following are the minimum guidelines that all researchers, including you, need to know and adhere to whether you are conducting research with human subjects or not [#1]:

2. Mosby and Galloway, “Hunger was never absent,” e1044, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.170448>.
3. “The Tuskegee Timeline,” U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last reviewed March 2, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/timeline.htm>.
4. Stephen Behnke, “A Classic Study, Revisited,” *Monitor on Psychology* 40, no. 5 (May 2009): 76, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/05/ethics>.

Researchers shall strive to follow the best research practices honestly, accountably, openly and fairly in the search for and in the dissemination of knowledge. In addition, researchers shall follow the requirements of applicable institutional policies and professional or disciplinary standards and shall comply with applicable laws and regulations. At a minimum, researchers are responsible for the following:

- Rigour: Scholarly and scientific rigour in proposing and performing research; in recording, analyzing, and interpreting data; and in reporting and publishing data and findings.
- Record keeping: Keeping complete and accurate records of data, methodologies and findings, including graphs and images, in accordance with the applicable funding agreement, institutional policies, laws, regulations, and professional or disciplinary standards in a manner that will allow verification or replication of the work by others.
- Accurate referencing: Referencing and, where applicable, obtaining permission for the use of all published and unpublished work, including theories, concepts, data, source material, methodologies, findings, graphs and images.
- Authorship: Including as authors, with

their consent, all those and only those who have made a substantial contribution to, and who accept responsibility for, the contents of the publication or document. The substantial contribution may be conceptual or material.

- Acknowledgement: Acknowledging appropriately all those and only those who have contributed to research, including funders and sponsors.⁵

Don't let this list intimidate you. **And especially do not let the opening discussion of research violations dampen your enthusiasm for research.** We all conduct research each and every day—from looking up where to eat to investigating the latest game console. Academic research is a more specialized form of research where the stakes can be quite high, **but the rewards—both personally and socially—are many.** The standards listed above should add clarity to your work as an undergraduate student. All researchers, at every level, are expected to follow responsible

5. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research* (Ottawa: Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, 2016), <https://rcr.ethics.gc.ca/eng/framework-cadre.html>.

conduct for research, such as giving credit through accurate citational practice and honest representation of research.

Ethical research practices mean that academics and students, like the authors of this textbook, need to listen when scholars tell them (us) how to engage with not only Indigenous scholarship, knowledge, research, history, language, and understanding but also any knowledge outside of our own communities.⁶ To explain by way of example, when the late and much missed editor and scholar, [Dr. Greg Younging](#), a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, explains why Canadian publishing needs to consult with Indigenous peoples when they are going to be represented in various academic and non-academic genres, the academy needs to listen:

Indigenous writers, editors, and publishers have asserted that the experience of being an Indigenous person is profoundly different from that of other people in North America. Many

6. While we are specifically focused on including in a respectful manner Indigenous ways of knowing, we also recognize that any culture other than the one you belong to requires you to be respectful and thoughtful. If you are not Black, for example, but you are studying the history of Black-Canadian culture in Nova Scotia, then you should turn to scholarship by Black-Canadians and/or scholars who are cited by and respected in the Black-Canadian community. This is where chatting with your instructor and a relevant research librarian is a good idea.

Indigenous Peoples and authors have cited cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and lack of respect for Indigenous cultural Protocols as significant problems in Canadian publishing. Indigenous Peoples have frequently taken the stand that they are best capable of, and morally empowered to, transmit information about themselves. They have the right to tell their own story. When an author is writing about them—even in established genres such as anthropological studies, history, and political commentary—Indigenous Peoples would at least like the opportunity for input into how they are represented on the page.⁷

And when Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Ngāti Awa Ngāti Porou, explains that Indigenous ways of knowing are not vanishing or of the past, rather, myths about communities and culture disappearing were largely spread through academic research, all non-Indigenous peoples need to listen:

While Western theories and academics were describing, defining and explaining cultural

7. Greg Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* (Edmonton: Brush Education, 2018), 2.

demise, however, indigenous peoples were having their lands and resources systematically stripped by the state; were becoming ever more marginalized; and were subjected to the layers of colonialism imposed through economic and social policies. This failure of research, and of the academic community, to address the real social issues of Maori was recalled in later times when indigenous disquiet became more politicized and sophisticated.⁸

As settler academics, librarians, writing centre staff, and university administrators, those of us who have created this textbook are listening (and still learning to be effective allies to students, our own communities, and those from communities other than our own). As you work your way through this chapter, your course, and even your life, remember that research of any kind is not innocuous and benign. It's an ever evolving process and you are now a part of this process as a researcher.

8. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London, UK: Zed Books, 2012), 161.

4.3 Why Do You Learn to Research?

JEMMA LLEWELLYN, ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, TINA BEBBINGTON, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

As a student, you're likely to hear the term “research” in the context of an assignment for a class. That is, you might be told that the assignment you need to complete will require “research.” This word might seem intimidating and mysterious. You might have seen announcements around campus for research presentations, conferences, symposiums or roundtables. This is where faculty (many of whom are also researchers) talk about their current research, which may include working with books and journal articles in the library, but also (depending on their field of expertise) might involve observing the life-cycle of fruit flies, interviewing hospital patients, running computer models to solve problems, or examining the night sky. **In all of these cases, research can seem separate from your everyday life.**

But that assumption falls apart when you recognize that research is the term we all use to describe a systematic process for learning more about a topic or, more colloquially, looking stuff up. Let's start by talking about the research you might have performed to buy a phone. Did you simply walk up to a kiosk in a mall and buy the first phone you put your hands on? Probably not. Maybe you asked friends about their experiences with their phones, using their recommendations to eliminate some choices. Possibly, you went online to read reviews of the latest phone from a company several of your friends recommended. These reviews might help you narrow your list to a top three. Maybe you also did a bit of searching—and perhaps visited or called some shops—to see if your preferred phones were in stock or, better yet, on sale. And only then did you make a purchase. That's all a form of research.

Sometimes, as when you are buying something relatively expensive (like a phone), research is a way of guiding a choice. Research can help you make choices about which political party to support or whether a proposed law aligns with your values. It might lead you to change your behaviour; for example, learning more about the health impacts of smoking could lead you to quit, while finding out that partner dancing improves long-term health outcomes could motivate you to learn how to tango. And sometimes you might want to research a topic simply because you find it fascinating. Perhaps you are interested in Ava DuVernay's work: how many movies has she directed? And how did she get her start in film making (see Fig. 4.1)? And what does a film director do anyway?

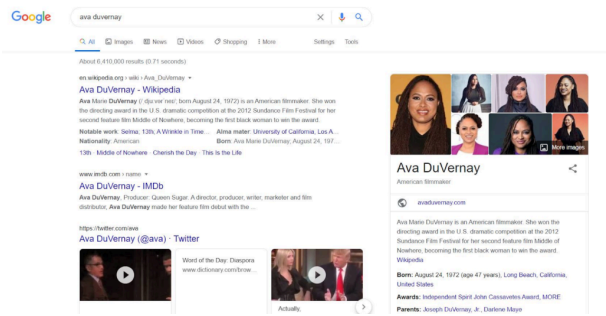


Fig. 4.1. Screenshot of a Google Search for Ava DuVernay. Google and the Google logo are registered trademarks of Google LLC, used with permission.

Search engines, such as Google, can help you to answer a question when you are looking for everyday information. As an aside, Google lists ads first in a search and also collects your data—this is [how they make their money](#).¹ Be very careful about what you click on when

1. Shoshana Zuboff, “Shoshana Zuboff: ‘Surveillance

you are using Google and many other search engines (except if you search using the [Firefox address bar in the Firefox browser](#))—a link might be an ad selling you something rather than the source you wanted. By the way, you can use a pseudonym when you sign up for Google or most online services listed as “free.” You do not owe any company your personal information for using their services. Also note that most university and college libraries have excellent search engines; please do use them rather than Google. Now, back to our discussion about everyday research and post-secondary research.

In Fig. 4.1 you can see two of the top choices for reading about Ava DuVernay’s work. Neither are scholarly, but they are sites with fairly good reputations (Wikipedia and the Internet Movie Database, respectively). These sites are perfectly fine when you are simply curious and want to look something up. They are even fine when you are just starting to think about a research topic. But maybe they aren’t so fine when you need peer-reviewed or even more reputable, reliable sources to support claims you are making in a research paper.

There is a difference between the everyday research you perform and the research that goes on in a university or college setting. Whether in assignments for classes or when scholars on campus perform lab experiments, well-designed human studies, or exploration of archival materials, post-secondary research has to do with standards of and systems for getting to reliable answers. This more academic type of research assumes that some sources are more reliable than others. There are more and less ethical ways of gathering, analyzing, and representing information (see [section 4.2](#)

Capitalism is an Assault on Human Autonomy,” interview by Joanna Kavenna, *The Guardian*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/oct/04/shoshana-zuboff-surveillance-capitalism-assault-human-autonomy-digital-privacy>.

[Knowledges and Traditions](#)). And there are approaches to research that are more or less likely to lead to an accurate answer. Furthermore, each discipline has its own conventions, standards, methods, and language, which help situate that research within scholarly conversations.

To explain by way of example, when you are looking to buy a new pair of sunglasses, it's okay to do research by seeing what brand most of your favourite singers wear when they are snapped by the paparazzi. Worst case scenario, you buy a too-expensive pair of sunglasses that don't fit you well. But a medical researcher who is trying to figure out whether most sunglasses currently on the market offer sufficient UV protection to help prevent cataracts must look at different evidence and analyze it, because public health is at stake.

In other words, **it's a misconception that academic research is only for graduate students and faculty members.** The research skills you develop while you are in university courses will be transferable to your profession or any other schooling you might want to continue with. Actually, there aren't many professional positions that don't ask for some kind of research skills and activity. And the habits of critical thinking about sources and information you develop through research projects will serve you well whenever you need to teach yourself something, figure out a problem, or determine a course of action. By and large most North American universities and colleges are committed to supporting undergraduate research. Many have clear statements about the benefits of undergraduate research, such as these from the University of Montana and the University of Victoria, respectively:

Research allows you to pursue your interests, to learn something new, to hone your problem-solving skills and to challenge yourself in new

ways. Working on a faculty-initiated research project gives you the opportunity to work closely with a mentor—a faculty member or other experienced researcher.²

In addition to the opportunity to create knowledge, research will **develop your analytical skills and boost your success** in course work and career achievement. Participating in research may inspire you to pursue a particular academic discipline, further your education with graduate studies or focus you on a fascinating career path.³

So now you know **how important research really is to your everyday life, your academic life and then, very likely, down the**

2. “Why Do Research?” Undergraduate Research Experiential Learning and Career Success, University of Montana, accessed September 28, 2020, <http://www.umt.edu/ugresearch/research/why-research.php>.
3. “Student Research Opportunities,” Research, University of Victoria, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.uvic.ca/research/learnabout/home/studentopps/index.php>.

line in your chosen profession. Much of the research you will perform is online, but that wasn't always the case. During the pandemic we are all faced in academia with the need to perform even more research, teaching, and learning online. This way of working can seem rather discombobulating, but library research, on the other hand, has slowly moved online over the past twenty years. Perhaps we all know more about online learning than we think?

Research Then and Now

Not that long ago, there was no internet. There were only print-based indexes and journals, no research databases, no online journals, no ebooks, and no video chats with librarians. Students had to learn how to use these tools and resources to find an article using an index, how to find the article in order to read it, and how to read the article effectively. Students then learned how to analyze citations to find related information, look up definitions and facts in reference books, and order print materials from other libraries when they had no other options.

The card catalogue pictured in Fig. 4.2 was the key tool students and instructors alike used to look up the research materials they needed. Believe us, there were very long lines at photocopiers in libraries in those days.



Fig. 4.2. Card Catalogue. Rick Payette, The Index, August 2012, photograph, Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/catzrule/7890187202/>. Licensed under CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Moving all of these resources online was a lengthy process and resulted in a major shift in how scholars and students currently do research. As resources gradually moved online, they were refined and updated over time. Universities adapted and embraced these new tools and methods. Even now, not everything is online. But card catalogues have gone by the wayside as online library search engines have taken over as the means by which you will find what you need at your university or college library.

In the pre-pandemic world, you could stroll into the library, chat with a librarian about your project, and get the help you need. **All those services are currently fully available online (as they have been for the last decade or so).** While you can't access physical libraries with their variety of services and print sources fully during the pandemic, you certainly can chat with librarians online or by phone; find resources in a number of library databases; and download the materials you need with no paywalls (meaning you need to pay to access the materials).

However, the skills you need to do research remain the same as they were in that print-only era:

- curiosity, planning, and critical thinking;
- a willingness to engage in scholarly conversation;
- reading skills, note taking, and information literacy.

Your library support team is still here to help you at all stages of research and writing, and can advise on how to navigate research when you're relying on online sources. Research tools and methodologies are always evolving and adapting as new technologies and needs arise. Scholars adapt and evolve with them and so will you!

4.4 Your Research Journey

JEMMA LLEWELLYN, ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, TINA BEBBINGTON, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

Imagine you have your task in hand for a particular course. Perhaps you need to find articles for an annotated bibliography. Maybe you need to find resources for a paper of some kind. You may want to research a topic for an upcoming presentation. Whatever you need to do, the library website is the place to start.

Familiarize yourself with your library's website. Every university and college library has a website where you will find a rich array of resources. However, we know that when you first enter that website, it can be intimidating. Where should you start? First, we want to assure you that the resources you need will become much more familiar the more you use your library's site, particularly if you ask for help. You will find that most university and college library sites are quite similar. First, let's take a look at the University of Toronto's Library home page.

On the University of Toronto main library page (Fig. 4.3), you can see a search engine that is titled “Start your search”; you can chat with a librarian (see “chat with a librarian” in the lower left-hand corner); there are research and teaching supports listed.

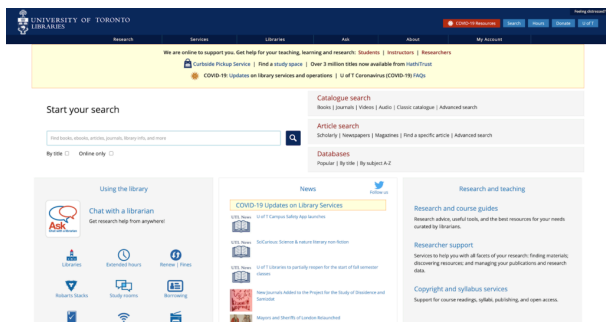


Fig. 4.3. The University of Toronto Main Library Page

Next, let's check out the main library page for the University of Victoria Libraries (Uvic Libraries). In Fig. 4.4 you can see a search engine that is titled “Find articles, books, videos, and more”; you can chat with a librarian (see “chat with a librarian” in the upper right-hand corner); there are also research and teaching supports listed.

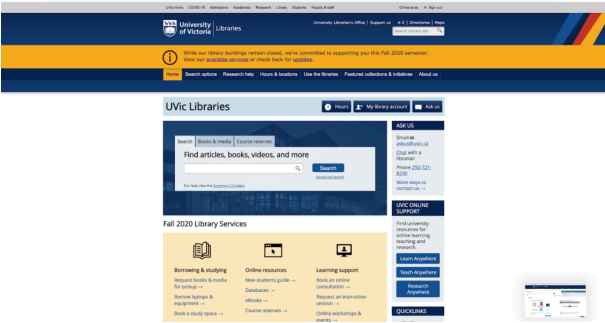


Fig. 4.4. The University of Victoria Libraries Main Page

The main library page for Simon Fraser University Library offers the same tools in a different order. In Fig. 4.5 you can see a search engine that is titled “Library search”; you can chat with a librarian (see “Ask a librarian” in the “Top Links” menu); there are research and teaching supports listed.

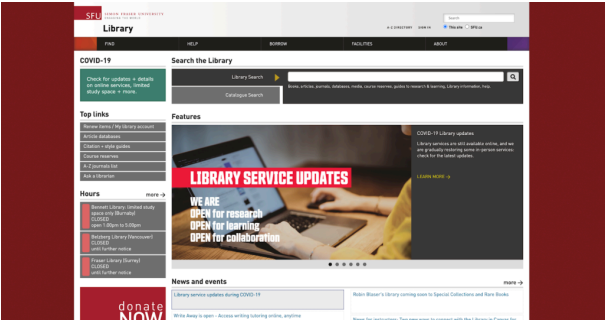


Fig. 4.5. The Simon Fraser University Library Main Page

Finally, college libraries also offer similar research tools, such as the main library page for Camosun College. On the college's main library page (Fig. 4.6), you can see a search engine that is titled “Search for articles, books, DVDs, and more”; you can chat with a librarian (see “Ask A Librarian” on the main menu bar); and there are research and teaching supports listed.

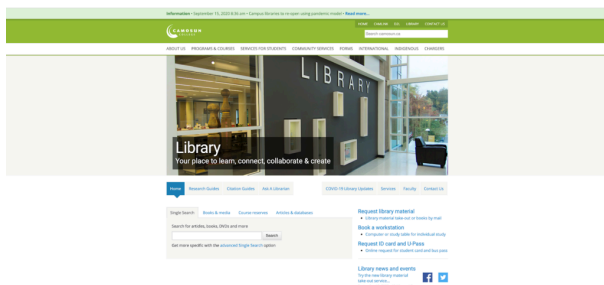


Fig. 4.6. The Camosun College Main Library Page

You get the point: Library sites tend to be laid out in a similar fashion with the **library's search engine prominently displayed**, access to librarians clearly placed, and links to resources you may need listed. Now that you can see just how easy it is to navigate your library from the home page, let's go through the initial steps for researching for a project. (Spoiler: research is rarely a solo enterprise.)

Check who your subject librarian is at your institution. Another feature you'll find at most university and college libraries is a librarian who specializes in certain fields. There is a librarian specialist for engineering, one for fine arts, one for history, one for English, one for math and computer science, and so on. You can ask any librarian about research, but you will be given specific help on your projects by one of these highly trained specialists. How much easier will your life be if you can contact a specialist about your project?

Look at the subject guides. Subject guides (usually found on your

library's home page) help you find tools, resources, and methods for your research. Often the subject librarian will have compiled resources for your specific discipline, which means you don't have to go hunting around.

Contact the library and ask for assistance. The rule we generally follow for researching is this: if we spend more than five minutes looking for anything and we can't find it, we contact a librarian (and you can see how easy that really is based on the above images!). Please remember that no scholar works alone. You might recall that in [chapter one](#) we referenced how important it is to get feedback on your writing? Similarly, we suggest chatting with your peers about your research work, taking advantage of your instructor's office hours, or meeting with a librarian or writing centre staff. There are friendly experts ready to help you at any stage of a research project, whether you're feeling stuck or excited or somewhere in-between.

The scholarly conversation is always happening, knows no boundaries, and is constantly evolving as new research, information, and conclusions develop. Each scholar builds on the work of those who came before, and that interaction occurs through citations and references. (More on this in [section 4.5](#).) Just remember that every time you read and write in a scholarly context, you are part of, and adding to, that conversation!

4.5 Quick Guide to Undergraduate Research for an Assignment

JEMMA LLEWELLYN, ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, TINA BEBBINGTON, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

Defining and understanding your goals or purpose for research is an important step. Your writing has a purpose; therefore your research has a purpose. Instead of looking at research as a boring, difficult task, see it as an opportunity to learn. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, look to your topic and know that you have a mission. With that in mind, follow these steps if you do feel lost and overwhelmed by a research task (and, of course, contact a librarian!):

First, take out your assignment to note any requirements set by your instructor: in addition to the content, format, and genre of your paper, look for advice on how many sources, what kinds of sources, and what type of citations are required. These and other expectations will impact your research and writing.

Next, underline these expectations and guidelines or make a list of these requirements and criteria, and refer to your notes and assignment often; they'll help you as you work. Keep your assignment instructions handy. Then, checking the assignment criteria again before submitting your final paper will ensure that you haven't missed anything important. Most importantly, make sure you understand the purpose of the assignment, as that will direct your research and writing.

Developing your topic is usually the next step. You may have been given topics to choose from or the freedom to create your own. Either way, your topic needs to be arguable and be the right size to fit your assignment. If you are expected to hand in a ten page paper,

you don't want to have done enough research to write a book. Work smart, not harder.

When you have a specific and arguable topic, **turn it into a research question**. Your research question is your starting point. It should include your topic, what you want to learn about that topic, and some boundaries to keep your research focussed. For example, if your topic is information science, then you can narrow down that research area by formulating questions: "What is information science?"; "What makes it a science?"; "Why is library funding cut when we all need libraries?"; "How did libraries originate?" and so on.

Okay, you have your research question, now what? Start by answering it yourself in a 15 minute writing spree. Seriously, time yourself and just write and don't worry about making mistakes. This "zero-drafting" or starting from zero (a common technique) gives you a baseline to start from and provides insight about your own perspectives on your topic. That said, you need to be prepared to shift gears or change your mind if your future work shows that your perspective on a topic is not supported by research. For example, your topic may be about poverty and homelessness. You may think that homeless folks don't have jobs. But then you discover by reading peer-reviewed studies and journalistic interviews that [up to a quarter of homeless folks have jobs and struggle to keep those jobs](#)¹—many for reasons directly related to the precariousness of their living situations. As a result of finding this information from a variety of sources, you change what you originally thought. **This**

1. Emma Woolley, "How Many People Experiencing Homelessness are Employed?" Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/Homeless Hub, York University, July 15, 2016, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/how-many-people-experiencing-homelessness-are-employed>

is the value of research: not to necessarily reinforce your point of view but **verify, challenge, or change your point of view.**

4.5.1 Let's Talk about Sources

There's a whole world of sources that may be useful to your writing. Usually a scholarly paper relies mostly on scholarly sources, but there may be a reason to use other kinds of sources. Different sources contain different types of information, and some can be found using different tools than those typically used to find scholarly sources. (We break down levels of sources in [section 4.6 Citational Practice: Writing from Sources](#).)

In the pre-research, or investigation phase of your work, you likely start with broad internet searches and reference works like encyclopedias or dictionaries. Scholarly articles and books provide specific evidence and conclusions that support your hypothesis and thesis. Popular news sources can show the currency of your topic or how your topic is discussed more generally and publicly. Corporate websites, museum or university and college websites, and government publications can complete your evidence with statistics, primary sources, and more.

Understanding the categories of scholarly, popular, and news sources can help you consider your evidence, plan a helpful search, and assess and use the sources you find.

Table 4.1 Types of Sources

Scholarly Sources	Written by and for scholars or experts. Reviewed by scholars if peer reviewed.	Based in a specific discipline, for a specific community of scholars.	Uses conventions of scholarly writing in that discipline: citation, format, sections, etc.	Identifies all sources via appropriate citations.	May take 1 to 5 years to reach publication. Scholarly journals are published monthly or less frequently.
Popular Sources	May be written by journalists or experts, for everyone. Reviewed by editors, possibly specialist editors.	Written for a general and broad audience, often with a special interest.	Uses conventions of that specific magazine and format (print or online).	May reference sources in text, usually no citations.	Published monthly or more frequently; may include background information.
News Sources	Written by journalists for a wide range of people. Reviewed by generalist editors.	Written for a general and broad audience.	Uses conventions of journalism: often short articles, written for ease and speed of reading. May reflect political bias of the source publication.	Brief mentions of sources in text; sources may or may not be experts; frequently incorporate the opinions of laypeople or community members; commonly makes use of interviews (rather than published research)	Published daily or more frequently; little perspective over time or background information. Focus is on the moment, what's happened today, currency is key.

Note that any of these types of sources can exist in a variety of formats, and that the term “scholarly” references a spectrum, not an absolute. How you assess the *scholarly*-ness of a source depends

on many things, including how you intend to use it. Each source needs to be read critically, and each can be useful in your writing. Consider your sources carefully, and be prepared to defend their use if challenged—or to use different sources if what you found at first isn't working well.

Every kind of source, even scholarly sources, needs to be assessed critically, regardless of type or format. Consider the source itself (what it says, how it says it), its context (the journal it's found in, the citations it's using), and how you can use it to further your argument. We know all of this information can be a little overwhelming, but as an undergraduate student, you are supported and can seek help.

Research and writing are complex, recursive activities. Remember that the process may take time, perhaps a little more time than you anticipate! One reason you should allow for this additional time is the need to read and write together. You may start by locating and reading sources that help you select and narrow your topic. As you narrow your topic, you might need to go back and look for additional sources. Additional sources may help you flesh out your understanding of your topic and build the structure of your paper. As you begin drafting, you may find your content shifts and new ideas emerge. As you work through these reading and writing processes, you may have questions. Who might you go to for support as you move through your research and writing journey?

Remember, you can check in with your course instructor and Teaching Assistant about an assignment and contact university or college librarians for help with identifying key search terms, finding and selecting sources, and citing sources. You can also visit your writing centre for assistance with getting started, narrowing your topic, and drawing from outside sources. Speaking of sources, what exactly does it mean to use sources?

4.6 Citational Practice: Writing from Sources

JEMMA LLEWELLYN, ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, TINA
BEBBINGTON, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

The word “source” can seem a bit intimidating or mysterious, so let’s define what is meant when your instructor asks you to find sources. There are three different types of sources that you need to consider when you are performing academic research: primary sources, secondary sources and tertiary sources.

Primary Sources: Primary source material is generally raw data that is under analysis. Primary source material can include, but is certainly not limited to, original manuscripts, archival documents, measurement of phenomena, survey results, lab results, data others have gathered, and a myriad of other forms and types of materials that define your topic. For example, if your topic is pine beetle infestations, then your data will likely come from what academic researchers have found in specific geographical areas.

Secondary Sources: These source materials interpret and discuss primary source materials. These can be used to assist in the problem solving of a research question and to provide commentary about a field of interest. Secondary sources often generalize, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate the original primary sources. As an undergraduate student, you will likely spend most of your time finding, reading, and analyzing secondary materials, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, for your research.

Tertiary Sources: These are general or popular forms of information that synthesize primary and secondary sources, usually in a way that will be understood by an audience that doesn’t have expertise in the field. These sources may come in the form of blogs, popular books, magazine and newspaper articles, encyclopedia articles (think Wikipedia), or links from a Google search. Use these

sources as a way to investigate your interests in a topic area; they can help you find out exactly what it is you want to discuss in your research. These sources, however, are not the best options to support a scholarly argument as the information in these sources tends to be generalized and (over)simplified.

Once you have found your primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, you then need to cite those sources in your writing. In many classes, the sources you will consult when researching will be recorded in some kind of form, most often in written form. Using sources in a way that both respects the source and your own work requires understanding citational practice. You might have never heard this phrase before in your life. Here's a rather technical definition that we will unpack:

Citation is a constitutive dimension of human language and social life in the sense that we constantly reproduce what we hear in order to fashion ourselves. Found everywhere to different “degrees and kinds” (Barber 2008, p. 209), citation occurs across all media and in virtually every type of linguistic performance and must be considered “a perpetual rather than secondary dimension of human living” (Finnegan 2011, p. 264). All of language can be understood as citational—from grammatical structure to particular phrases, genres, or registers to implicit metapragmatic frames.¹

1. Jane E. Goodman, Matt Tomlinson, and Justin B. Richland, “Citational Practices: Knowledge, Personhood,

This quotation might seem a little dense, but we include it to show you that citation is a consistent linguistic practice. Here's what this quotation is getting at: We are consistently citing when we speak with each other.

In everyday conversation, you might reference what “they” say without ever identifying “they.” That is a form of citation—it’s not reliable, but it doesn’t have to be when you are hanging out with your friends. This reference to “they” marks that you are reproducing what you might have heard from somewhere else in order to share information and also to express who you are.

If you are urging your friends to go to a new Thai place where you want to eat, you might mention good online reviews from a reliable resource to prove your point. Here you are showing your friends that you know what you are talking about and that you can be trusted. Voila, this is a form of citational practice.

In university and college classes, we also cite our sources to show what we are talking about, but we also cite to build upon the knowledge of others, correct and test facts, counter ideas, and solve problems. This is all to say that citational practice in post-secondary research has a lot of work to do and is, therefore, more standardized and exacting. Why? Because oftentimes, we (in academia) are the “they” others cite in the popular press, popular culture, and everyday life, so we better know what we are talking about!

As an undergraduate student, you are now a researcher and part of a community that relies upon this academic form of citational practice. In [section 2.5 Reading Academic Writing](#), we said you are like an apprentice, learning the ropes of academic research and writing. In your career, you may well become one of those “theys” that are cited widely, so by learning academic citational practices, you are also learning to be a reliable researcher and communicator.

There are a number of different ways to cite your sources, but

and Subjectivity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43
(2014): 450, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43049585>.

cite them you must. If you don't then your work will be seen as committing an academic integrity violation. We realize that phrase "academic integrity" can seem quite strange to those outside of the academic sphere. It might conjure ideas of punishment and fear, but nothing could be further from the truth. Academic integrity is part of citational practice and ethics, which we discussed earlier in the chapter [#4]. Let's have a chat about academic integrity, shall we?

4.6.1 Academic Integrity: The Core Values of Research

Most of the time, students think of academic integrity as plagiarism and cheating. These two words may well cause anxiety as you complete your assignments. A common question we often hear from students is: How do I know if I have violated the rules? What if we told you that plagiarism and cheating are just two relatively small aspects of what academic integrity is? Would you be surprised?

Academic integrity is the practice of "honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage" in your academic work.² We are all members of an academic community, and part of a larger scholarly conversation. As part of this community, we adhere to shared values and ethical behaviour. This common ground is important because it allows your work to be evaluated fairly, ensures that you're really learning and developing skills needed for your future careers, and addresses the many kinds of value that everyone's work holds.

2. Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity," International Center for Academic Integrity, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.academicintegrity.org/fundamental-values/>.

The fact is that information has value. This value is contextual (in our Canadian jurisdiction and within an academic context).

Information possesses several dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world. Legal and socioeconomic interests influence information production and dissemination.³

At its heart, all this passage means is that information has different types of value depending on who you are. If you are working in a research and development division for a corporation, then research is a commodity. If you are just about anyone else, research can help you influence others and convince them that your opinion is correct. If you are a student, you are learning how to be an ethical researcher, and there are guidelines to learn and new ways of knowing.

This new experience of engaging with research in complex ways can be overwhelming, but worth it. Believe us, learning to be information literate is perhaps one of the most important skills in your post-secondary career. Research is about learning to learn, and that is a skill prized both in and out of school.

Part of being a skilled researcher is respecting others' work and

3. Association of College and Research Libraries, Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, February 2, 2015, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#value>.

intellectual property in a number of specific ways. Academic integrity policies in every post-secondary context reflect the standards understood across Canada. Post-secondary institutions have a list of precepts (or principles) and practices aimed at ensuring the lines of communication between researchers and readers remain open.

For example, the [University of Victoria's Academic Integrity Policy](#) states that student researchers must “cite all ideas or excerpts from the work of others” and that they cannot submit for evaluation work or a paper that has been written by someone else or extensively revised by someone else. Why are these guidelines in place? Well, for one thing, as a student you are being evaluated on the work that you submit, which means that your instructors need to know which parts of your submissions are your voice—your unique ideas!—and which belong to other researchers in your field.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't incorporate ideas from elsewhere. Not by a long shot. In fact, as rhetoricians Gerald Graff and Kathy Birkenstein remind us, “[a]cademic writing in particular calls upon writers not simply to express their own ideas, but to do so as a response to what others have said.”⁴ In other words, academic writers make it clear that they are joining an ongoing conversation on a particular topic. A major part of academic integrity is ensuring that this conversation—your conversation with the other researchers in your field—remains clear.

Neglecting to cite the work or ideas of others (fellow researchers, friends, colleagues, etc.) means that you are depriving them of deserved recognition. (And in the world of research and scholarship, this lack of recognition can have dire consequences for a researcher's career.) A lack of citations also serves to obscure the

4. Gerald Graff and Kathy Birkenstein, *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), xiii.

scholarly conversation we mentioned above, which means that your reader is likely to be confused and frustrated since (1) they're unable to fulfill their curiosity by following up with your sources and (2) they can't confirm your findings. For these reasons (and more!) it is important to practice what some folks call good "research hygiene"—meaning you need to keep careful track of (and cite!) your sources.

"Hygiene" generally means maintaining cleanliness to avoid disease. What happens if you don't brush and floss your teeth? Gum disease and tooth decay. What happens if you do not keep track of your research? It becomes unhealthy in the sense that page numbers might get mixed up or you might lose a source. Taking care to quote, paraphrase, and summarize your sources accurately ensures that the conversation you're joining can continue in a respectful, accurate, relevant, and productive way. Even in instances where you intend to disagree with someone, you want to ensure that you're not misrepresenting someone's work. If you pay attention to detail as you gather sources and cite them, you will save yourself a lot of headaches down the road.

You might be tempted to skip some of this work in the hope that no one finds out. We know that life can get busy. You may feel overwhelmed by your workload or assignments that are difficult. Instead of buying an assignment, having someone edit your work (by changing your words and writing in their own words), or cutting and pasting, please ask your instructor for help. **If you feel you can't approach your instructor, then go to your writing centre. The staff there are incredibly helpful.**

Before we move on from citational practice and good research hygiene, we want to save you even more headaches by covering an academic integrity issue that we see quite often: patch-writing. Read the following section carefully so you can avoid this issue!

4.6.2 Writing from Sources Versus Writing from

Sentences

Once you have found your sources, you need to read them and write about them. This can be a difficult process, although if you read the advice about [summarizing, quoting, and paraphrasing](#) in chapter two, then you understand that there are basic conventions for using parts of a written text in the context of academic writing. **One of the major rules is that ideas from the sources you summarize and paraphrase must be reframed in your own words, and these sources must be cited.**

Let's talk about the reframing process a bit more. In chapter two we explained that patch-writing involves taking a chunk of text from [an original source without changing its language enough to make it your own](#). Examples of not changing the language enough include using synonyms for a few words or simply rearranging the original order of words and phrases. Presenting such minimally reworked passages as your own writing, even if you cite the original, is a problem. In fact, it's a type of academic integrity violation because you're basically passing off another writer's words and sentence structures as your own original text. Accurate citations are simply not enough to change the fact that you have patch-written—a type of problem that occurs when you use sources by focusing on sentences instead of the source as a whole.

In an excellent article by Rebecca Moore Howard, Tricia Serviss, and Tanya K. Rodrigues, "[Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentences](#),"⁵ the authors explain that many students (and, yes,

5. Rebecca Moore Howard, Tricia Serviss, and Tanya K. Rodrigues, "Writing from Sources, Writing from Sentences," *Writing & Pedagogy* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 177-192, <https://doi.org/10.1558/wap.v2i2.177>; <http://www.citationproject.net/wp-content/uploads/>

professors) tend to write by trying to rework certain *sentences* they find in an article rather than encapsulating the idea of the *source* in their own words. Picture it: you have your peer-reviewed source beside you. Your fingers are poised on the keyboard, and you start looking at the highlighted sections of the article. You find a great quotation and start to paraphrase. You shift a few words around, add a synonym or two, add a citation, and then move on to the next highlighted section of the article.

If you approach paraphrasing or summarizing in this fashion, then you are likely writing from sentences. You risk patch-writing with this method. Instead follow this method (or any similar method) to avoid patch-writing :

- Read the source.
- Take notes and then put it aside.
- Write a draft of your paraphrase or summary without looking at the original.
- Now, return to the original and your notes.
- Correct any factual discrepancies and cite.

This is a time-tested method to avoid writing from sentences and instead to write from sources. If you follow this practice, you will very likely avoid patch-writing, follow the principles of academic integrity, and best of all, represent your source ethically.

4.6.3 Style Guides

When you write as an undergraduate student, you are expected to follow a certain academic style. Different academic disciplines

[2018/03/HowardServissRodrigue-2010-writing-from-sentences.pdf](https://www.howardseattle.edu/2018/03/HowardServissRodrigue-2010-writing-from-sentences.pdf).

follow different style guides to format and present information about sources that need to be cited. These style guides also offer advice about how to format a document and even about certain punctuation and grammar rules. If you're not sure how to present your written work or which rules you need to follow, figure out the style guide that's normally used in the discipline in which you are writing, and follow the instructions given. Every course you take is part of a certain field or discipline. For example:

- Academic writing about English literature and literary texts in other modern languages usually use [MLA style](#),
- Academic writing in psychology, sociology, and the social sciences usually use [APA style](#),
- Academic writing in engineering usually uses [IEEE style](#),
- Academic writing in biology, chemistry, and other science fields usually use [CSE style](#) and
- Academic writing in history, art history, and theatre history usually use [Chicago style](#).

Even so, you might find that instructors provide formatting and style instructions for you to follow. Sometimes this is a matter of personal preference. For instance, an instructor who happens to think sentences with active verbs are more effective might say that students must avoid passive voice. Another might provide a title page template that all students are asked to follow. In these cases, follow these instructions.

But take into consideration that sometimes instructors offer additional guidelines not because of their preferences but because the nature of an assignment or topic or project requires some additional features to be clarified. This isn't different from what happens when academic writing gets published—although most journals and book publishers tell authors to follow a style manual (such as the [17th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style](#) or the

[7th edition of APA](#)⁶), they also provide information about what is called a “house style,” the particular formatting and style guidelines a publication or press follows. Often, these guides answer questions about very specific issues that will only come up when trying to write about specialized subject matter.

A good example is that only a journal that specializes in the works and history of William Shakespeare is likely to tell its authors that it requires the name of one of the characters in *Cymbeline* to be spelled Innogen, not Imogen. Another example is that only a medical journal would specify that only generic names of drugs should be used in the text of an article while brand names should be included, if necessary, in a methodology section. And note that these house style guides are one reason why you will sometimes see formatting, style, or citation practices in published work that don’t align with a standard style guide.

Following a style guide when putting the final touches on an assignment you are about to submit is the final step you can take to help build your scholarly ethos and to make your work easy for readers to access and understand. Therefore, this step is worth allowing time for—it’s the last bit of polishing that makes a draft really finished.

6. Visit the following link to check out Chicago Style <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/book/ed17/frontmatter/toc.html> and <https://apastyle.apa.org/products/publication-manual-7th-edition> to learn more about APA. *Remember, too, that university libraries will often have these style guides available in full and for free in their collection. Most libraries also pay for a subscription to these style guides, which means that you, as a student, will have access to up-to-date online content as well.

4.6.4 Citation Generators

Citation generators are handy tools that convert an article's metadata (information about the article or other source) into a properly formatted citation. More colloquially, they create a citation for you—but nothing in life is free, so there are downsides to using citation generators. These programs are only as good as the data that goes into them, and they can easily introduce mistakes. Whenever you use a citation generator, you need to proofread any output carefully so that you don't publish avoidable errors. (Pay close attention to spacing, punctuation, capitalization, and the formatting of names, as these are where you'll typically find errors.)

The citation generators you find inside scholarly article databases are similar to one another, but can also add the permanent URLs that some citation styles require. Again, these tools are also only smart enough to use the data provided to them, so you should still proofread everything and correct as needed. Most libraries have approved citation generators listed on their web pages and if you can't find them, **you know what to do: ask a librarian!**

Both types of generators are useful to show you what a citation in your preferred style should look like, and these tools can save you time in formatting citations, but they will not add page numbers or create the in-text citations that you'll need when following some documentation styles to point to specific information you've used from your sources. In other words, you need to know what your style guide for your discipline says about citational practices. Citation generators save time, but they are not replacements for knowing what you are doing.

You may consider using a citation management platform to format your citations, manage your research findings, and act as a virtual filing cabinet for the sources you've discovered. Programs like [Zotero](#), [Mendeley](#), or [Endnote](#) are much more than citation generators; they not only house pdfs and images, but also allow you to create your own database of books, articles, and more, as well

as to annotate, share, edit, sort, and repurpose these sources. Talk to your librarian about which tool is right for you, and how to get started with these useful research tools.

4.7 In Summary

JEMMA LLEWELLYN, ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, TINA BEBBINGTON, NANCY AMI, AND NATALIE BOLDT

We hope you now understand that research and citing are common practices in your everyday life. You look up what you want to know and prove what you are saying by citing sources, in a range of situations. For example:

- You use Google to look up where the latest Bond movie is playing. You find out that it's at a drive in. You text a friend to tell them the location of the drive in and show times, and you say you found out this information from a website. You just did research and cited a source.
- You and a couple of friends want to live in Fernwood (a funky neighbourhood in Victoria, B.C.), so you decide to look up the rents on a reliable website. You discover the rents are quite pricey and you tell your friends. You just did research and cited a source.

The research and citation practices associated with academic writing aren't completely different from these everyday functions of research and citation. That said, because academic research has important implications in academic communities and for society at large, it requires more exactness and depth. If we were to take the Fernwood example and apply an academic approach, then you might decide to investigate rent increases in Fernwood in the past thirty years and cite statistics. Then you could look up information about rent control advocacy in Victoria in a library database. Your findings based on these sources are more reliable than the everyday research you usually perform because academia produces reliable, ethical, and authoritative information. Academic research is trusted and cited by a wide-range of stakeholders—from journalists to

politicians to everyday folk. We hope you now have an understanding of why research and citation practice is vital to both your everyday and academic lives.

HAPPY RESEARCHING!

PART V

GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

5.1 Learning Goals

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

LEARNING GOALS

You will understand why it is important to be able to write what is seen as correct, clear, cohesive, and effective English in certain contexts.

There are many different ways to understand “correctness” and if you’ve read [Chapter Three](#), you know that “correctness” is related to context. That is, sometimes, such as when you text, a certain type of grammar is used. When you email your professor or manager (at work) another form of correctness comes into play. In this case, a good deal of academic writing requires a certain type of formality and style. This chapter gives you insight into this function.

You will develop strategies for familiarizing yourself with and following the rules for academic written English.

By “strategies,” we mean you will be given skill sets or tools that will enable you to use Academic English effectively. In this chapter you will learn the basic rules for academic writing, which are not as intimidating as you might think (really!). You will also learn when these rules can be bent and how they are changing (grammar is always evolving).

You will be able to make strategic choices about your writing style while keeping in mind its relevance to purpose and audience.

Once you have a grasp of what grammar is and the basic rules for Academic English, then you can start working on your writing style. By the time you reach this chapter, we hope you have a [writing process](#); you understand the importance of your [audience, purpose, and context](#) when writing. Now you are ready to work on style, a key element for any writer.

5.2 Grammar as a Situated Practice

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

The word “grammar” can strike fear into the hearts of students (or anyone, except applied linguists) everywhere. Perhaps you are someone who loves grammar and enjoys [sentence diagramming](#).¹ If you are, then we are willing to bet that you are in the minority. Whether you know it or not, you really are knowledgeable about grammar, because you are able to use language in such a way that others understand you. That is, if grammar is the operating rules of English, then you understand those rules, at least implicitly. You also know that certain types of grammar are used in certain situations. This is what we mean when we say that **grammar is a situated practice**. You use certain words and sentence structures and tenses (and so on) in certain communication and rhetorical situations and not in others.

All of this means that there is more than one way to speak English in any given context. Dr. Greg Younging, member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, provides [grammatical and stylistic](#)

1. To learn more about sentence diagramming, read this short article by Juana Summers, “A Picture of Language: The Fading Art of Sentence Diagramming,” NPR Ed, How Learning Happens, August 22, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2014/08/22/341898975/a-picture-of-language-the-fading-art-of-diagramming-sentences>.

[guidelines](#)² for referring to Indigenous Peoples and also for when Indigenous Peoples write in English. Here are a few of the rules he lists that we thought you might find useful:

Terms that Should Be Capitalized

Terms for Indigenous identities; Indigenous governmental, social, spiritual, and religious institutions; and Indigenous collective rights should be capitalized.

Indigenous Colloquial English

Indigenous style recognizes Indigenous colloquial English as a legitimate literary device that should not be edited into “proper” English.

....

The Métis Resistances

The appropriate terms for events in the history of the Métis and Canada in 1869-70 and 1885 are the *Red River Resistance* and the *Riel Resistance*.

Inappropriate Possessives

Indigenous Peoples are independent sovereign nations that predate Euro-colonial states and are not “owned” by Euro-colonial states.

2. Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous People* (Edmonton: Brush Education, 2018).

Indigenous style therefore avoids the use of possessives that imply this, such as “Canada’s Indigenous Peoples,” or “our Indigenous Peoples,” and “the Indigenous Peoples of Canada.”³

As you can see, grammar or the rules of language have been used as a means to oppress others. For example, by using possessives to define the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples, a whole cultural group is designated as “owned” or “possessed” by another group. Grammar is powerful, which is why it’s vital to be aware of how language is assembled and operated. Let’s start with defining grammar, a notoriously loose and baggy term.

3. Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style*, 81–91.

5.3 What is Grammar?

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

It's difficult to come up with a definition of the term grammar because people use it to mean different things. As we explained in section [5.2 Grammar as a Situated Practice](#), grammar is situated or contextual, and so grammar as a concept changes meaning depending on where, when, and how it's used. The most basic distinctions are as follows:

Grammar includes the rules for putting together words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that speakers and writers of a language should follow. This type of grammar can be called **prescriptive**—it indicates what is good and bad, what is correct and incorrect, what is right and what counts as a mistake.

Grammar is a description of the patterns and structures that speakers and writers of a language actually use. This type of grammar can be called **descriptive**—it attempts to capture what is going on in the real world without judgement about right or wrong. Although folks interested in the academic study of descriptive grammar are often delighted when they come across unexpected patterns.

Clearly, these two areas of concern with grammar aren't the same, so it's important to know which is being stressed before you start working through a lesson on grammar or reading a textbook chapter like this one.

Here we are taking a descriptive approach to prescriptive grammar. We are trying to describe the rules about “right and wrong” you are likely to encounter in academic writing contexts, rather than assuming there are absolute right and wrong ways to use language. We recognize that language rules aren't exactly the same in all situations. They aren't fixed across time. Not to mention these rules might even be broken strategically and to good effect.

The rules for correctness in academic writing aren't natural. That

of using the English language.

- Instead, the goal of writing teachers should be to help all students to learn to use language effectively, skillfully, and in a variety of ways.
- One way that students may learn to use language is in alignment with the expectations of edited Academic English – and this is a version of English that students will need to be taught.
- That said, edited Academic English doesn't need to replace other ways of using English with which a student might have facility (in writing or in speaking).
- In fact, students can and should be taught that edited Academic English isn't suitable or necessary for all situations.³

So, in this chapter when we talk about rules for academic writing (or about correctness or even errors), we're not saying you ought to follow all of these rules all of the time. As with all other aspects of your writing, you need to think critically about what's likely to be appropriate and effective for a given [rhetorical situation](#).

All Languages Have Grammar and “Rules”

Someone who learns English as their first language develops an intuitive sense that some words go together and others don't. For example, let's use the word “freedom” in a number of sentences, all of which seem “correct.”

3. Committee on CCCC Language Statement, “Students' Right to Their Own Language,” <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/srtolsummary>.

The Canadian Charter of Human Rights and **Freedoms** guarantees Canadian citizens “**freedom** of conscience and religion.”⁴

- The freedom to assemble is also guaranteed in this document.
- A freedom that some people don't understand has limits is the ability to peacefully assemble as a group – there are times when the health or safety of a community allows government officials to set “reasonable limits.”

Here we see the word treated in ways that signal one thing (**freedom**) and more than one thing (**freedoms**) as well as something general (**a freedom**) and something specific (**the freedom**).

That seems like a rather clear set of instructions for using a word in different ways in English, but then we bump into a word like “sugar.” Similar uses of the word “sugar” can seem odd. Note in these examples how the word sugar is used:

- This pound cake recipe combines **sugars** with butter.
- For smooth icing, sift **the sugar** before combining it with the other ingredients.
- **Sugar** should be put into your mug before

4. *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 2a, Part 1 of *The Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c. 11*. You can also find an online version of the Charter here:

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/index.html>.

pouring in coffee.

- Give me **a sugar**.

For those who bake, it might be easy to see how there can be more than one sugar—“sugars” could include powdered sugar, caster sugar, brown sugar, demerara sugar, and so on. Those who do not bake might find this construction strange. And the phrase “a sugar” might take some imagination to seem right—this phrasing might be used when asking for one sugar [packet] from a bowl.

Why is English like this? To get a full answer, you would need to understand the history of the English language, which we are not going to get into here (it is a fascinating subject, though). All languages are culturally based and change across history. Therefore, every language has a grammar (operating instructions), but these operating instructions are not usually applied uniformly. We realize this fact can be annoying but there is not much we can do about it. For example, almost all English-as-first-language speakers will hear the following as incorrect:

- The counsellor offered good **advices**.
- The **bloods** of patriots ran through the street after the battle.
- He always completed **a homework** before allowing himself to check Twitter.
- **A money** in her wallet got stolen after she left her purse on the bus.

Fluent speakers of English can hear that these sentences are wrong, but only someone who has studied English as a foreign language (or who has studied the grammar of English as an academic subject) could tell you the words above are examples of **non-count nouns** and that **non-count nouns** in English generally can't be made plural or take an **indefinite article**. Note that in English **indefinite articles** are “**a**” and “**an**.” People who grow up speaking English use articles like “**the**” and “**a**” all the time and without much thought, but anyone who learns English as a foreign language knows that **article usage** can be frustratingly idiosyncratic. However, this set of examples might confuse some readers in light of the earlier words used in sentences because “sugar” (as a **mass noun**) and “freedom” (as an **abstract concept**) sometimes show up on lists of **non-count nouns**. That's what we mean when we say English can be annoying and frustrating.

The last couple of sentences in the paragraph above might have made you nervous. That jitteriness could arise because you're not sure how to define **nouns**, much less **non-count nouns**, **mass nouns**, or **articles**. You might also worry that although you know these rules by heart, you find it tricky to apply them in the real world. It's okay. What these examples are meant to show is the following:

So-called native speakers of any language (or those who develop facility with a language as a young child, usually in their home environments) learn patterns of how words do and don't go together by speaking and listening to the language. They also learn that there are some predictable patterns—let's call these “rules.” But they also learn that there are numerous cases in which the rules get bent or broken.

Meanwhile, **anyone studying a foreign language** gets introduced to the most common rules of that language. Following those rules will allow a person to communicate in a lot of situations.

But very soon the learner discovers there are cases when the

rules don't work. There are lots of exceptions and special cases that simply need to be memorized.

Determining and defining the rules of how a language works makes it possible to teach it to people who didn't learn to speak that language as small children. It's for this reason Indigenous language revitalization projects (and efforts to record, preserve, and teach a range of endangered and extinct languages) involve: (1) studying the language of fluent speakers; (2) determining the grammatical patterns of their language; and then (3) offering instruction in this grammar to those who want to learn and teach the language. Learning some of the typical (and sometimes seemingly illogical or artificial) rules of a language empowers you to do things with words, such as write in Academic English.

5.4 The Rules for Academic Writing in English

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

English grammar for academic writing is a special subset of the English language. There are some grammatical conventions you will see in almost all examples of Academic English – and that you should expect to follow in written work for your classes. These conventions include the following, most of the time:

- Ideas are usually expressed in complete sentences. Sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a final piece of punctuation (most often a period but sometimes a question mark or exclamation mark).
- Words that make up sentences are expected to be spelled correctly according to the agreed-upon spellings provided in a standard dictionary.
- Verb tenses won't change (from past to present or present to future) unless there is a reason for them to do so and normally such shifts will be signalled explicitly.
- Punctuation will follow a standard set of rules for when, where, and why to use commas, hyphens, dashes, and other punctuation marks.
- Word choices will be precise and might even be quite technical.
- Vocabulary and phrasing is likely to be formal rather than colloquial.
- A set of specially formatted elements (headings, page numbers, lists of sources, references to sources, graphs, abbreviations, etc.) allow readers familiar with the conventions of a field to find and use complicated information quickly and easily.

In other words, academic writing generally follows a set of rules for what is sometimes called “correctness” or simply “standards” for more formal written English. Here are some good reasons to get to know and follow these rules for Academic English.

Clarity and precision: Using language in ways that follow agreed-upon rules can lead to greater clarity for readers familiar with these rules. Here’s an analogous case: at its most basic, mathematics is a language. When everyone agrees about what mathematical symbols mean, especially when they are put into a particular order, it becomes possible to convey an enormous amount of information clearly and precisely in a concise formula. Sentences and paragraphs can’t be as straightforward as a mathematical equation in the ways they convey information to an audience, but written language that follows rules is likely to be clear and precise for an academic audience.

Ease of reading: When a piece of writing aligns with a set of standards that readers find familiar, they’re not distracted by errors or stylistic experimentation as they try to understand the ideas the essay or article is trying to convey. The ideas in your own academic writing will be easier for your intended audience to comprehend and engage with the more closely your work follows the rules for academic writing.

Audience awareness: Remember that the audience for academic writing is usually most interested in the ideas and information being conveyed – and given this set of priorities, your readers don’t want to have to work hard to decipher a sentence or understand a turn of phrase. When you read poetry, creative nonfiction, or even your friends’ social media posts, it can be pleasurable to figure out if a sentence includes a purposeful error because it’s creating an interesting pattern, making a joke, or imitating a celebrity’s gaffe – but readers don’t usually want to do this sort of reading when they are encountering complex academic information and arguments.

Building scholarly ethos: Following grammar rules associated with academic writing demonstrates that you understand the conventions of the genre of academic writing and thus suggests

your ideas should be taken seriously. Is it entirely logical to believe that a person who hands in an essay with a spelling mistake in the title doesn't have great ideas? No, but this sort of violation of rules concerning "correctness" will damage a [writer's scholarly authority or credibility](#), and thus potentially weaken the impact of the essay.

All that said, it is possible to communicate effectively with other types of audiences in different rhetorical situations without following these sorts of rules. For example, it would be inappropriate and ineffective to write a resume or a love letter according to the guidelines for formal academic writing. There's nothing natural about grammatical rules for writing in Academic English. You simply need to learn and follow them ([most of the time](#)) if you want to produce readable academic writing.

Note that there are some conventions you will see only in certain specialized examples of academic writing. We think you'll benefit from knowing certain rules, such as the following:

When **scholars of literature write about events in literary texts** (such as novels, short stories, plays, and poems), they use present tense, such as "In the novel *The Marrow Thieves*, Frenchie **watches** his brother Mitch being brutalized and kidnapped by Recruiters" (not "Frenchie **watched** his brother Mitch being brutalized...").

When **scientists write about lab experiments**, they regularly make invisible the people doing the experiment. They sometimes write as though objects are doing things to and by themselves ("Compound A mixed with Compound B produced enough heat to ignite the hydrogen") and sometimes use passive voice in ways that obscures the researcher doing the work ("Compound A was mixed by Compound B"). You're unlikely to read in a scientific paper that "Lab Assistant Chunhua Wang mixed Compound A with Compound B." We talk about this effect more fully in [Section 5.8 Voice](#).

Learning these more specialized rules – and following them in your writing – helps to build your [scholarly ethos](#) as someone who has authority and expertise in a particular academic field.

Basic Rules for Academic Writing and How to Master Them

Even if you're convinced that learning the basic grammar rules for academic writing is a good idea, you might still be worried. Grammar as a term can be intimidating. Perhaps you feel like grammar is something you should have learned before graduating from high school. And what if you find that even though you know grammar rules, you still submit essays in which your teachers identify errors? What are you supposed to do after getting an essay handed back marked up with terms like "agreement problem" or "comma splice"? How are you supposed to know what that means and more importantly, how to fix these problems?

Let's start with what we hope will be some reassurance. It's true that some individuals grow up speaking English as a first language and happen to be familiar with a dialect of English that is somewhat aligned with the patterns of Academic English; those people might find it a bit easier to follow standard grammar rules in their writing. Others may have a knack for noticing and following language patterns. These individuals might more quickly understand and be able to put into action grammar rules. But even for such individuals, there's no way to follow the rules for formal written English without studying said rules. (There isn't a magic grammar fairy who visited some people in their cradles and gave them the gift of always being able to punctuate sentences perfectly – a fairy who you might suspect skipped you.)

No matter what you have been told, you can't always tell when a sentence needs a comma by thinking hard about whether it sounds right or has a place where you need to breathe. Reading a text aloud might help you identify strings of words that sound odd, but that doesn't mean you'll be able to make them better. All the logic and common sense and smart thinking in the world won't necessarily make it obvious to you that a reader will have a hard time figuring out what a **pronoun** in your sentence refers to. If you want to be

able to follow standard grammar rules, you need to learn them and practice putting them into action in your own writing.

There are lots of ways to learn these rules, and we will suggest some. But it seems important to say first that research shows there are some not-very-effective ways to learn grammar so that you don't waste your time. Beyond the point of basic language acquisition (or learning a second language to the point of being able to function at the university level in speaking, reading, and writing), rote grammar exercises have been shown to have little ability to improve student writing.¹ That is, multiple choice quizzes or online exercises that ask you to correct a single type of error across a lot of sentences are more likely to make you better at completing quizzes and exercises than being able to eliminate grammar problems in your writing. That said, if you love taking online grammar quizzes, go for it. Some people do find these sorts of exercises helpful and entertaining.

More commonly, though, studies suggest that students develop facility with the rules of grammar by reading a lot.² We suggest you not only read other writers' work but also try to notice how they put together their phrases and sentences. This is not copying, but imitating another's writing style. You might even want to try

1. For a good overview of this research (and links to scholarly articles), check out Michelle Navarre Cleary's *Atlantic* article "The Wrong Way to Teach Grammar" (February 25, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/the-wrong-way-to-teach-grammar/284014/>).
2. See, for example, Stephen D. Krashen's *The Power of Reading*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004).

imitating³ another writer's way of structuring and punctuating sentences.

As well, there is research that suggests students can improve their understanding of English grammar rules through exercises that involve sentence combining.⁴ If you want to try this sort of exercise, try writing an entire paragraph made up of very simple, basic sentences:

Most places in Canada get hot summers. Summer should be hot. Victoria, BC is not hot. Today is 6 August. The sky is cloudy. A breeze is blowing. Customers at an outdoor cafe look chilly. People are wearing sweaters. A cup of hot tea would be good. No one wants lemonade.

Then combine these sentences while trying to figure out ways to express and connect up the same basic points:

Canadians living in most of Canada reasonably assume

3. You can find information about imitation and a sample imitation exercise on Brian Jackson and Jon Ostenson's Style Academy website: <https://styleacademy.byu.edu/about/>.
4. For an example, read Bruce Saddler's "Improving Sentences via Sentence Combining Instruction," *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* 16 (2006): 27-32, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1071604.pdf>.

that summer days will be hot, but in Victoria, BC, however, customers at an outdoor cafe on 6 August are glad to be wearing sweaters and drinking hot tea (not lemonade) as they watch a breeze blow clouds across the sky.

Sentence combining lets you practice various ways of structuring and punctuating sentences, and experimenting with sentences helps you master grammar rules while writing. Please do give sentence combining a try.

You can also be strategic about teaching yourself the rules that are most relevant to the kinds of academic writing you are doing. [Andrea Lunsford and Karen Lunsford's 2008 study](#)⁵ of undergraduate essays submitted in academic writing classes in the United States identified the twenty errors that showed up in undergraduate student writing. Although there isn't a similar study of Canadian undergraduate writing yet, focusing on these particular types of errors is an efficient way to develop your familiarity with some important rules for formal academic writing.

Finally, rely on your course instructors to guide your study of rules for academic written English. If the person marking an essay you have submitted for a grade adds commas to your sentences and

5. Lunsford and Lunsford, "Top Twenty Errors in Undergraduate Writing," Hume Center for Writing and Speaking, Stanford University, accessed September 9, 2020, <https://undergrad.stanford.edu/tutoring-support/hume-center/resources/student-resources/grammar-resources-writers/top-twenty-errors-undergraduate-writing>.

suggests you need to work on comma usage rules, then you might want to head over to [The Online Writing Lab website at Purdue University](#). Often simply called “Owl Purdue,” this site has clear explanations of Mechanics, Grammar, and Punctuation issues that crop up frequently in student writing. Similarly, if your Teaching Assistant notes that your work includes sentence fragments or run on sentences, look up those terms online to learn more about why these sorts of sentence-level issues are seen as errors – and learn how to fix them. If you’re not at all sure where to start, make an appointment with a tutor at your university’s [Writing Centre](#)⁶ – it’s a great use of half an hour to have an expert identify which writing rules you need to work on and to recommend high-quality resources.

6. Most universities will have a designated place where you can get help with your writing and research skills. These spaces are often called simply “Writing Centres” but they also appear under other names—like, for example, at the University of Victoria where we have the [Centre for Academic Communication](#). If you’re unsure where your university Writing Centre is located, check with someone in your university’s Student Services Department or ask at the library.

5.5 Using Algorithms to Correct Your Writing

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

Note that grammar and spell-check programs (including the ones built into word processing software like [Microsoft Word](#) and applications like [Grammarly](#)) do a good job of identifying potential errors—but they won’t catch all problems, nor will they always suggest the ideal fix. Algorithms simply aren’t sophisticated enough to understand the context or situation you are writing within (remember, grammar is a situated practice!). Let’s see what happens when a few spelling and grammar algorithms are asked to fix a sentence:

After they were eating the hole pie. Neither Carols nor
Silas have an appetite for uum ali. Desert will be
seeming out of the question for a friend who stuffed.

According to Microsoft’s spelling and grammar program, the only problem here is the word “uum ali,” which is actually an accepted spelling of the name of an Egyptian version of bread pudding. According to Google Docs, “ali” is fine, but “uum” is misspelled; additionally “were eating” might be changed to “ate,” and “hole” might be changed to “whole.” No program catches that the second sentence needs to be corrected to “Neither Carlos nor Silas **has**” since the neither/nor construction sets up a **singular subject**. The opening “sentence” is actually a dependent clause, not really a complete English sentence according to the rules of formal written English. “Desert” is a perfectly spelled example of the English word

for a dry, empty place, but probably doesn't apply to "pie" or "uum ali" (which are examples of dessert, a sweet food customarily eaten at the end of a meal). And the phrase "a friend who stuffed" may not be grammatically incorrect, but it doesn't make much sense.

Instead of using grammar and spell-check programs to find and fix **all of the errors** in your writing, think of them as useful tools, but not replacements for your keen eye. Sometimes they will point out that a word is misspelled or a sentence that is badly formed. Even in those cases, you will need to think critically about the program's evaluation and suggestion—is it right or wrong? In addition, you will still need to have human readers—including you!—work their way through the text.

Online Translators

Online translation programs have similar problems of not being able to tell when a word or phrase isn't right. The opening lines of Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* are as follows:

I seem to have trouble dying. By all rights, I should not have lived this long. But I still can smell trouble riding on any wind, just as surely as I could tell you whether it is a stew of chicken necks or pigs' feet bubbling in the iron pot on the fire.¹

1. Lawrence Hill, *The Book of Negroes* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2007), 1.

Running this chunk of text through a translator into French and then Japanese and then back into English yields this:

I have a hard time dying. Obviously, I shouldn't have lived so long. But you can feel the problem no matter how you ride it, as you can clearly see if it's a chicken neck stew or a pork leg is frothing in an iron pan.

The first two sentences are more-or-less comparable to the first two sentences of the original excerpt. But you can see that by the third sentence, something has gone awry. In the original, the first-person narrator is suggesting that their senses are still sharp despite their age: their eyes and nose can differentiate between two similar types of food simmering over a fire. In the translation, the metaphorical language has been misinterpreted in such a way that the narrator appears to be suggesting something quite different: that a chicken neck stew and a frothing pork leg are somehow “problems” in need of solving. The resulting sentence is virtually nonsensical.

The above isn't an isolated case. The opening lines of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* provides another good example of the phenomenon described above:

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, he told me, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.²

Running this second chunk of text through a translator into French and then Japanese and then back into English yields this:

In my younger and more vulnerable years, my
dad gave me the advice that he relied on.
Whenever you want to criticize someone,
remember that he told me, not all people in this
world have the perks you have.

The grammar doesn't go wrong until the second sentence here ("remember that he told me"), but the sense is certainly different. "Perks" and "advantages" are actually quite different concepts. Not to mention "remember that he told me" simply does not make sense.

To date, no algorithm is as effective as real human beings at reading a piece of writing and finding places where the language needs to be adjusted for correctness or clarity. It's normal to have difficulty spotting errors in your own writing because you get used to looking at your work, eventually seeing past any mistakes and perceiving only what you meant to write. It's a type of tunnel vision. That's why even professional academic writers who submit an article or book chapter for publication will regularly get a set of corrections sent to them by a copy-editor whose job it is to catch and suggest fixes for errors and inconsistencies. Even so, an eagle-eyed reader will sometimes spot a spelling or punctuation mistake that made it into print!

While you will never learn to improve your own writing if you let others fix mistakes for you—that is, if you have someone edit your writing—it's a great idea to ask a classmate, roommate, family

2. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ed. James L. W. West (New York: Scribner, 2018), 1.

member, or writing centre staff to help you find places in your text that seem like errors or just not-the-best-way-of-expressing-an-idea. You are then completely responsible for figuring out what's wrong (if there really is something wrong!) and coming up with a good solution. The best way to make sure you're not getting the wrong kind of help is to ensure that **no one else actually writes or types into your writing assignment**. Writing Centre staff, course instructors, and teaching assistants have experience and training that makes them especially good at identifying examples of one type of error, explaining why it's a problem, and demonstrating how you might address that problem.

Sometimes trying to edit your own work can be intimidating. Where should you start? We've provided a few tips to get you started. We can't stress enough how important it is to read through your own work slowly and carefully. Sentence by sentence, go through your work and see if you can find any errors. Whether you spend hours or fifteen minutes before your assignment is due, you may save yourself not just precious marks but you may just build credibility as well. You might be wondering how you should go about editing your own work. We definitely have some ways you can approach this task:

Some people like to **print out a hard copy** of a written text and mark errors by hand with a pen or pencil. If you're looking for sentence-level problems, it can be very effective to read an essay draft out of order—from the last sentence to the first sentence or from a middle paragraph to the first paragraph—to stay focused on mechanics rather than getting caught up in ideas.

Other people find it helpful to **read their work aloud** to themselves or to have their computers read the text aloud—it can be easier to hear when something is “wrong” than to see it on the page.

Still others **read a text several times** looking for a different type of grammar or punctuation issue each time, starting with basic mechanics like whether every sentence starts

with a capital letter and ends with a period and moving up to sentence-level concerns.

Experiment with different strategies, and eventually you will find you have the ability to write with style while staying in control and making choices about correctness.

5.6 Inclusive Grammar "Rules"

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

Other complicated rules to consider are those that vary not just based on the particular group to whom you are writing, but also those that are open to debate. A good example of this sort of rule is the case of what is now called “singular they.”

If you were learning English grammar in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries (the 1700s or the 1800s), you would have been taught that a **pronoun** must agree with its antecedent. In plain English: a **pronoun** is a word that stands in for a **noun**—it needs to match that noun in some important ways. This rule leads to the following sorts of examples:

- CORRECT: The **box** is heavy, so **it** will break the table. (“It” agrees with “box” in that it is singular in number—there is ONE box—and it stands in for things, like boxes but not people.)
- CORRECT: **Students** must bring **their** books to class. (“Their” agrees with “students” in that there is more than one student and they/their/them stands in for people.)
- CORRECT: **Thomas** doesn’t like to read; **he** prefers to play cricket. (“He” agrees with “Thomas” in that it is singular in number and gender. Thomas is traditionally a male name, and he is a pronoun for male people.)

So far, so good. But what if you want to refer to one person in a

group that includes both men and women and some non-binary people?

According to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rules, you would be given the following examples:

- ERROR: **Each writer** must bring to the act of writing poetry **their** wit and imagination.
- CORRECT: **Each writer** must bring to the act of writing poetry **his** wit and imagination.
- ERROR: **Each writer** must bring to the act of writing poetry **her** wit and imagination.

The logic underpinning these examples is that “each writer” is singular (one writer), so “their” is a mistake because it doesn’t agree in number. But what’s wrong with “her”? After all, there were male and female poets in the 1600s and 1700s. Had you asked this question, a teacher might have patiently explained to you that the **male singular pronoun (he/his)** is universal—it can stand in for a singular male person (like Thomas) or for a generic, neutral human being who might happen to be male or female. The **female singular pronoun** can’t do the same thing. Popular thinking at the time was that gender doesn’t matter when it comes to **pronouns** in the same way it does in relation to people. “He” can stand in for any person.

By the twentieth century, feminists had persuaded a lot of people that it is problematic to see the **male pronoun** as “universal.” If it’s okay to have a singular pronoun stand in for any example of a person, some asked, why does it need to always and only be the male pronoun? Doesn’t this sort of language suggest to women that they don’t really count (much in the same way that terms like “fireman” or “chairman” imply that the jobs we now more commonly refer to as “firefighter” or “chair” are only for men)? In their efforts

to create more **gender inclusive** (sometimes also called **gender neutral**) language, they offered the following alternatives:

- CORRECT: Each writer must bring to the act of writing poetry **his or her** wit and imagination. (Adding “or her” makes the sentence more gender inclusive, and both “his” and “her” are singular, just like “Each writer.”)
- CORRECT: Each writer must bring to the act of writing poetry **his/her** wit and imagination. (The slash in “his/her” here stands in for “or” and thus conveys the same meaning as the previous example—but in a more concise way.)
- CORRECT: Each writer must bring to the act of writing poetry **her/his** wit and imagination. (The slash in “her/his” here stands in for “or” and has the same significance as in the previous example—but putting “her” first implies that the male pronoun doesn’t always need to take precedence, much less be seen as universal.)
- CORRECT: Each writer must bring to the act of writing poetry **her** wit and imagination. (Here the pronoun matches the referent in number; both are singular. And if the “gender” of a pronoun doesn’t really matter, then why not use “her”?)
- CORRECT: **All writers** must bring to the act of writing poetry **their** wit and imagination. (An easy way to make English sentences more gender inclusive is to revise to make the nouns being referred to plural—that way, one can use “they/their”: a pronoun that is not only plural but also

doesn't indicate gender. A group of men, a group of women, or a group of men and women can all be referred to as "they.")

For most readers, gender-biased language (such as referring to all people as "he") seems odd, maybe even wrong. But there may still be some debates about which of the "correct" options above is best—some find **"his or her"** unnecessarily wordy while others find **"his/her"** awkward.

And in the past twenty years or so, truly **gender-neutral** singular pronouns have been suggested as a way of allowing writers and speakers to refer to an individual person whose gender is not known or who identifies as non-binary. You might see or hear the following:

- Ze, xe, se, ey, vey, ver, tey, e, ou (instead of he or she)
- Zim, xem, sie, em, ver, ter, eir, hir (instead of him or her)¹

1. If you want to see more options and learn more about the history, dating back at least to the nineteenth century, to create a widely accepted gender-neutral singular pronoun in English, read Dennis E. Barron's article "The Epicene Pronoun: The Word that Failed" in *American Speech* 56, no. 2 (1981): 83–97, DOI: 10.2307/455007 or his more recent article in *The Globe and Mail*: "The Canadian Politics—and History—of 'He,' 'She' and 'They,'" February 21, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-canadian-politics-and-history-of-he-she-and->

The development that seems most likely to stick is the use of the **existing pronoun “they”** as a **gender-neutral singular**. This change means seeing the following examples as correct:

- CORRECT: **Each writer** must bring to the act of writing poetry **their** wit and imagination.
- CORRECT: When **a student** writes a successful essay, the instructor will ask **them** to submit this piece of work for the annual writing award.
- CORRECT: **A scientist** can get into trouble by being too sure of what **they** can do alone.
- CORRECT: My friend **Blake** takes **their** schoolwork very seriously.

In all of these cases, the **pronoun “they”** (or variations on it like “their” and “them”) refers back to a person (singular) whose gender is unknown and/or to a person who identifies as non-binary. Depending on your reading experiences, these sentences might seem unremarkable, strange, or even examples of grammatical errors.

But **singular they** is not only becoming more widely accepted but also allowed (and increasingly endorsed) by some important style guides for academic and journalistic writing such as [APA](#), [AP](#),

[they/](#).

and [MLA](#).² A further example is that most [university style guides](#)³ (for writing internal memos, marketing materials and so on) follow inclusive grammar protocols. Of course, you need to make your decisions based on the rhetorical situation and context. This is where your rhetorical skills come into play along with your knowledge of grammar.

2. See, for example, the following statements issued by these organisations: “Singular They,” APA Style, American Psychological Association, accessed September 14, 2020, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/grammar/singular-they>; Karen Hare, “AP Style Change: Singular They is Acceptable in ‘Limited Cases,’” Poynter, March 24, 2017, <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2017/ap-style-change-singular-they-is-acceptable-in-limited-cases/>; “How Do I Use Singular They?” MLA Style Center, Modern Language Association, March 4, 2020, <https://style.mla.org/using-singular-they/>.
3. By way of example, check out the University of Victoria’s “Editorial Style Guide”: <https://www.uvic.ca/communicationsmarketing/assets/docs/style-guide-web.pdf>

5.7 Breaking Rules (With a Purpose)

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

Students often come to university having learned a number of rules about academic writing (or maybe about “writing” in general). Some of the ones we hear students repeat most frequently are the following:

- Never use “I” in academic writing.
- Never start a sentence with “because.”
- Paragraphs must have at least three sentences.
- Sentence fragments are wrong.
- Don’t use slang or colloquial language in an essay. Be formal.

Yet, students who pay attention to the texts they are assigned to read for their classes readily notice that professional writers and academic writers violate these so-called “rules” in work that is published and highly respected. A famous scholar who writes about Shakespeare started a book with the sentence “I began with the desire to speak with the dead.”¹ An important linguist has titled a book about online language [Because Internet](#).² Journalists writing for [The New Yorker](#) produce paragraphs as short as one sentence long. Advertisers and politicians make frequent, effective use of

1. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulations of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1.
2. Gretchen McCulloch, *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language* (New York: Riverhead Books).

sentence fragments: “Real change”; “One nation, one flag, one leader”; “A Canada that works.” And one of the most important articles published on English renaissance drama features as part of its title the colloquial phrase “Nobody’s perfect” (Stephen Orgel).³

Let’s use as an example an academic text that breaks a number of commonly taught rules: Andrea Riley-Mukavetz’s article “[Developing a Relational Scholarly Practice: Snakes, Dreams, and Grandmothers](#),”⁴ which was published in one of the most important academic journals in the field of writing studies, [College Composition and Communication](#). The first sentence of Riley-Mukavetz’s piece is “I come to you with a good heart.” The author then writes a paragraph about her experiences of ophidiophobia (the technical term for a fear of snakes)—but she does so through vivid descriptions of moments from her childhood. Only a bit later in her essay does she make explicit how this material connects to the goals of the article:

These stories are snake stories and are used to theorize a relational scholarly practice that draws from the decolonial option in cultural and Indigenous rhetorics. By reflecting on the

3. Stephen Orgel, “Nobody’s Perfect: Or, Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 7–29.
4. Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, “Developing a Relational Scholarly Practice: Snakes, Dreams, and Grandmothers,” *College Composition and Communication* 71, no. 4 (2020): 545–65, <https://library.ncte.org/journals/cc/ccc/issues/v71-4/30723>.

complicated and somewhat obsessive relationship to snakes, I articulate a relationship to land-based practices and land-based methodologies in my writing. It is easy to write joyfully about the practices that are easy and uncomplicated (are there practices that are easy and uncomplicated?), but what about the practices that scare us, challenge us, leave us with few answers or unarticulated meanings? Like my relationship with snakes, I am, in fact, somewhat obsessed with the concept of relationality—a core practice and worldview that guides and frames my orientation to knowledge making.⁵

This author uses first-person voice (I statements). She includes a number of grammatically simple sentences (as when she describes that in response to seeing a snake, “I retreat indoors”). Some of her phrasing is colloquial—the phrase in parentheses that interrupts one of the sentences above sounds like speech, doesn’t it? And at times she uses some slangy terms, for example, sharing that this article emerged from the “B-sides” of her PhD thesis. And, most importantly, she links her argument to stories, telling about her personal experiences including details about her childhood, her family members, and her dreams in lucid (and not at all formal-sounding) sentences. None of this rule-breaking makes Riley-Mukavetz’s article seem un-academic; indeed, her ability to shift between very thoughtful analysis of complex and technical

5. Riley-Mukavetz, “Developing a Relational Scholarly Practice,” 546.

concepts (like “the subfield of cultural rhetorics” and “relational scholarly practice”) and vivid personal narratives—as well as between long, complex sentences and short, punchy ones—results in an effective, memorable, and powerful scholarly argument.

When a writer violates rules for no apparent reason, we may say that what we’re seeing is an error. But academic writers can make strategic choices to break what are seen as the rules of academic writing to create interesting effects—to get readers’ attention or to get an audience to think about a complex topic from a new perspective or even to be playful.

In your own writing, think about the results you might get if you choose to break a rule. Will you lose credibility if you use an obscenity in the first sentence of your essay, or will that deliberate inclusion of an unexpected and shocking word more strongly communicate your idea? (Philosopher [Harry G. Frankfurt](#) could have titled his book length study *Miscommunication and Misrepresentation in the Modern World*, but instead he called it [On Bullshit](#).) Is writing a sentence or two in an English essay in another language a sign that you don’t know how to write, or might it help readers see that you have authority to speak about a topic closely linked to people who speak that language. (Rhetorician [Victor Villanueva](#) includes passages of poetry and of Spanish in an English-language article about scholarly writing to explore how a writer’s experience of their skin colour and racial identity affects their relationship to academic discourse.⁶) Sometimes when you are working on a piece of academic writing, you will want to follow the “rules” and play it safe—but try to keep in mind that writers

6. Victor Villanueva, “Memoria is a Friend of Ours: On the Discourse of Color,” *College English* 67, no. 1 (2004): 9–19, reprinted in *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*, 3rd edition, NCTE (2011): 567–77.

create interesting results when they thoughtfully go beyond what is expected.

5.8 Voice

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

One of the most common “rules” many university students learned in high school is that they shouldn’t use “I” in academic writing—or, at least, that they should ask permission to do so. To explain why this isn’t really a rule, we need to talk a bit about how the term “voice” gets used in literary studies and then in the context of grammar.

Literary studies has some specialized terms for talking about who seems to be the narrator (the implied speaker) in a text. If that narrator is a single person speaking as themselves—using **I pronouns** and limited to an individual’s perspective—we say the text is written using a first-person singular narrative voice. **First person** means that the voice of the speaker is as close as possible to the things being spoken about, and singular means there is only one speaker. (If we had more than one speaker relating a common point of view—using the **pronoun we** to reflect a collective experience—that would be **first-person plural** narration.) First-person narration differs from third-person narration, the tendency to write about experience in a more distanced way by using he, she, and they pronouns thus creating a sense that the speaker is separated from the experience being described.

It is a common convention for academic writing to use third-person voice and, in turn, avoid **I pronouns**—because it is generally the case that third-person voice is seen as more formal. It is definitely the case that **third-person voice** can create an impression of objectivity, that the implied speaker (the author) of the text is unbiased. And since the readers of academic writing are usually most interested in the information and ideas being presented, they might not find a first-person speaker’s personal experiences directly relevant to the purpose and context of the text. For example, if your readers mostly want to hear your ideas about

campus security, you don't need to write "I conducted a lot of research to determine what I think about possible campus security reforms"—you can simply tell your readers what you think about campus security reforms. All this is why some teachers simply say that students shouldn't use I (**first-person pronouns**) in academic writing.

But note that **first-person voice** isn't necessarily informal any more than **third-person voice** is necessarily formal. You can be flashy, formal, or ornate while writing about your personal experience, or really casual and colloquial while describing something from a distance. More importantly, sometimes personal experience is directly relevant to a subject being discussed. (See the [academic article](#) by Riley-Mukavetz for a good example.) If you are writing an academic essay about attempts by scientists to eradicate the facial tumor disease affecting Tasmanian devils, it probably doesn't make sense for you to share your personal experiences and thus use first-person voice. But if, for instance, you have been skiing competitively since you were a child and have seen friends and competitors struggling to recover from concussions caused by skiing accidents, it could be very effective for you to share your personal experiences (and use the pronoun I) in an academic essay arguing for a public health campaign to get skiers to wear helmets. A rule that tells you to always or never use "I" in your essays isn't necessary – instead, you should think about what will be appropriate given the [larger rhetorical situation](#).

Active and Passive Voice

You will also hear the word "voice" used by teachers in a way that links to the study of grammar—specifically references to **active voice** and **passive voice**. In this context, voice has something to do not with who is speaking but with **verbs** (the words in English sentences that communicate something about action) and the word

order (English requires that words must be in a particular order to make sense). You may have been told that **active voice** is “good” and **passive voice** is “bad.” Neither of these statements are completely true, but before we get into a discussion of why that is so, let’s take a look at the grammar of the active and passive voice.

Briefly, if the **subject** of the sentence (the words before the verb) is the same as the person or thing doing the action, then the sentence is said to be in **active voice**.

The girl kicked the soccer ball.

“Kicked” is the action here. The girl is the one doing the kicking, and “The girl” happens to be the subject of the sentence. This is an example of active voice.

But we can make this information into a grammatically correct sentence that doesn’t work in the same way:

The soccer ball was kicked by the girl.

Here “was kicked” is the **verb**, the action part of the sentence, and the subject, the words that come before the verb, is “The soccer ball.” Who kicked the soccer ball? Still “the girl,” but now the person carrying out the action isn’t the same as the grammatical subject. This is an example of passive voice.

And sentences in the passive voice can work as sentences without including any information about the person or thing carrying out the action.

The soccer ball was kicked.

That's a handy thing when who or what did the action isn't as important as the action itself.

The solution was poured from beaker A into beaker B.
[The solution is more important than who poured it.]

While I was studying in a cafe, my purse was stolen.
[The thief is unknown.]

Remember when we said that the first person pronoun ("I") is often discouraged in many fields of academic writing (such as in the sciences)? The **passive voice** is more common in these fields because the **passive voice** "hides" the person doing the research, experiment or whatever action is being discussed. However, the **passive voice** has its pitfalls and here's why.

English is a language where the words need to be in a certain order. If you learn English as your first language then you cognitively process English in certain ways unconsciously (that is, you don't even think about it). If the word order is off or mixed up, then you might feel confused because you can't cognitively process English if it is out of order, so to speak. Put another way, English wants to be in the **active voice**. This is the most common word order in English:

1. the subject first;
2. the action the subject is doing next;
3. and then the object of the sentence.

The girl (subject) kicked (action) the soccer ball (object).

In order to change the order of the above sentence into the **passive voice**, the subject of the sentence has to be dislodged from its place at the beginning of the sentence and put where the object is. Then the **object** is placed first. The **object**, in turn, becomes the most important part of the sentence. It's still the **object**, but its position where the **subject** *was* flags the **object** as important (cognitively).

The soccer ball (object) **was** kicked (action) **by** the girl (subject).

Do you see a major difference between the sentence in the **active voice** and the sentence in the **passive voice**? The **passive sentence** requires a new grammatical construction to place the **object** in the **subject's** place. Yes, there are technical grammatical terms to describe the grammatical construction of a passive sentence (the **verb** “to be” is an **auxiliary verb** that is used with a **participle**), but it really doesn't matter if you know those terms. What we really want you to get from all of this is the difference between the **active** and **passive** voice, so you can make informed decisions about your writing.

Here's another issue with using the passive voice: If you need more words to create the **passive** voice, then your reader needs to work that much harder to access your meaning. For example, let's rewrite the previous sentence in the **passive** voice: “The passive voice is created by adding more words, which means that your meaning is much harder to access by the reader.” The sentence is

grammatically correct, but it's awkward. The sentence is harder to read.

This is all to say that the passive voice is not “bad” and [recent research](#)¹ suggests that the passive voice does read as objective due to the distance created between the reader and the subject of the sentence. Your professor and your major as a whole may require that you write in the passive voice. However, you should be wary of complex, lengthy sentences in the passive voice. They can easily become awkward and more difficult to read than the active voice.

This potential awkwardness of the passive voice is where the third person is your friend. For example, instead of saying “Compound A was poured into an acid bath creating an explosion the likes of which have not been seen before.” You could write “The researcher poured... (and so on)” or you could choose the passive construction. The point is that you need to use voice consciously, making choices that help your reader to understand what you want to say. Think about the effects you want to create while keeping in mind your intended readers, the context for a piece of writing, expected conventions, and the subject matter under discussion.

Overall, as you make choices about your writing at the level of individual words and sentences, note that you are—whether you intend to or not—engaged in the work of experimenting with not just grammatical voice, but the stylistic qualities that make a writer's work seem unique to that individual. In other words, **your voice**.

You might find that you favour a voice in your academic writing that is very refined and formal or that you prefer to use every opportunity you can to punch up a point with some colloquial

1. Eugene Y. Chan and Sam J. Maglio, “The Voice of Cognition: Active and Passive Voice Influence Distance and Construal,” *Personality and Psychology Bulletin* 46, no. 4 (2020): 547–58, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0146167219867784>.

language. You might decide in one piece of writing to strive for a voice that is clear and straightforward and in another for a voice that is playful and funny. Even as academic writing generally favours a more formal style and the “voice” of a scholarly expert, there is a lot of room within those parameters to create some stylistic effects that express **who you are as a writer and as a person.**

5.9 In Summary

ERIN KELLY, SARA HUMPHREYS, NATALIE BOLDT, AND NANCY AMI

There are people who seem to think that “good writing” is exactly the same thing as “good grammar.” We hope that by reading this chapter – as well as earlier chapters in this book – you understand why that doesn’t make much sense. Writing as an act of communication involves much more than sentence-level details of word order and phrasing and punctuation. More importantly, since all language follows a grammar of some kind, there isn’t such a thing as “good grammar” or, for that matter, “bad grammar.” References to so-called correct grammar might be thought of as actually referring to “correct for this particular audience given this genre and this rhetorical situation.”

Yet grammar and style are worth paying attention to because they affect how audiences will interact with your writing. Readers expecting formal language might be turned off by colloquial phrasing. Those who don’t want to be distracted might see unusual phrasing as annoying. And those who associate formal correctness with the conventions of academic writing might not think much of your scholarly ethos if you seem not to have proofread an essay to eliminate spelling errors.

At the same time, we hope you see from some of the examples discussed here that grammar and style are also connected to much bigger ideas about writers’ identities, voices, and points of view. Skillful writers can break so-called “rules” and, in the process, make their writing even more powerful.

In sum, the reason to learn about grammar isn’t to be “correct” – it’s to empower yourself to make choices about details of your writing that get readers to pay attention to and understand what you’re trying to say.

HAPPY WRITING!

PART VI

CHAPTER SIX: INSPIRING WORDS AND GOOD ADVICE

2. Section title

Resources

[Handout about Brainstorming](#)

This handout discusses techniques that will help you start writing a paper and continue writing through the challenges of the revising process. Brainstorming can help you choose a topic, develop an approach to a topic, or deepen your understanding of the topic's potential.

[The Centre for Academic Communication](#)

The Centre for Academic Communication (CAC) offers one-on-one tutorials, workshops and more. These free services are available to all University of Victoria students. They are available to support you with reading, writing, speaking, understanding academic expectations, and other aspects of academic communication.